

Under attack

Moscow accuses Kyiv of stepping up 'terrorist activities' amid election

WORLD, PAGE 7



New dinosaur species found in Jiangxi province

CHINA, PAGE 4



Impressive style

Retired physician prepared to shine at Paris Fashion Week

LIFE, PAGE 14

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

Foreign firms upbeat about China market

Nation is increasingly attractive as it has become a global hub for innovation

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China's complete manufacturing clusters, strategic position in the Asia-Pacific region and numerous free trade agreements with various countries will remain beneficial for multinational corporations aiming to capitalize on growth opportunities, said business executives and experts.

They added that China, the biggest trading partner for more than 120 countries and regions, is not only the world's major manufacturing powerhouse, but has also become a global hub for innovation, particularly in industrial technology, digital services and green energy.

The country's well-developed supporting industries, free trade deals, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the China-South Korea FTA, as well as the tangible growth of the Belt and Road Initiative, have facilitated multinationals in exporting products manufactured at their plants in China to other parts of the world, said Cui Weijie, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

Sharing a similar outlook, Lyu Yue, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics' Academy of China Open Economy Studies in Beijing, said that China's strong manufacturing capabilities, along with its favorable business environment, will keep providing multinationals with improved conditions. This setting not only promotes production efficiency and cost reduction, but also

offers vast opportunities for global companies aiming to promote their international presence.

According to data from the General Administration of Customs, the import and export value of foreign businesses in China reached 12.61 trillion yuan (\$1.75 trillion) in 2023, accounting for 30.2 percent of the nation's total foreign trade.

Hubert de Haan, senior vice-president and chief sales and marketing officer for China at BSH Home Appliances Group, said the German manufacturing company is expecting double-digit growth in its sales revenue in the Chinese market this year, and it will continue to bring the latest global products to China and promote the nation's innovative products to the global market.

"Three decades ago, we only had a few products manufactured in China, with most being imported. Today, the vast majority of our products are developed and manufactured in China," he said, stressing that this trend will gain even more momentum in the coming years.

Currently, all BSH Home Appliances' localized products are developed and produced in seven factories across China, with a number of them exported to global markets each year.

Also upbeat about the Chinese market, United States-based Good-year Tire and Rubber Co will complete the second phase of its factory in Kunshan, Jiangsu province, by the end of this year. This project is expected to yield annual operating revenue of 700 million yuan, based on a \$200 million investment.

See **Hub**, page 3

Journey to the East



High school students from the US state of Washington pose for a group photo on Saturday at San Francisco International Airport in the United States, before embarking on their trip to China. The students will visit Beijing and Hubei and Guangdong provinces before returning to the US on March 27. LIU GUANGUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE See story, page 3

Global educator seeks more US-China exchanges

By YIFAN XU in Washington
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

The head of an international association of thousands of educators said that her organization fully supports more US-China educational exchanges and cooperation.

"There is no substitute for people-to-people exchange, and China-US relations are very, very important," Panta Aw, CEO of NAFSA: The Association of International Educators, told China Daily. "The world needs those relationships to be strong. And the students, faculty, and scholars — we all benefit when we have those kinds of exchanges."

Aw said there has been a long history of a "very robust" relationship between the two countries while coming out of COVID-19. In recent times, it has experienced some bumps.

"I'm one who believes that given the long history of exchanges, there will be goodwill on both sides and that we both realize — all sides realize — that it is in everyone's interest. It is in the interests of the world, the US, and China to maintain strong and good relationships. Healthy relationships and exchanges are very important to that," she said.

Aw was named executive director and CEO this year of the nonprofit membership-based association dedicated to international education and exchange. NAFSA's 10,000 members are at more than 3,500 higher education institutions worldwide, in more than 150 countries.

The original name of the organization was National Association of Foreign Students (NAFSA). In 1990, the membership formally renamed the organization NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Aw said that international education exchange "is vitally important".

"Education abroad is one of the ways that we could have a deeper appreciation of each other's culture," she said, emphasizing the significance of exchanges in the educational area, especially for people at a young age, to see the whole picture of US-China relations.

She praised China for "having done quite a lot" to encourage Chinese students to learn English. She noted the trend of more bilingual education programs in US primary and secondary schools, including the English-Mandarin programs.

"I think that's wonderful because those students in primary and secondary school may have picked up

Mandarin, and then chances are that when they come to college, they will want to continue. Chances are that they're going to be the students most likely wanting to say, I want to go to China and study," Aw said. "When they basically are working in different parts of societies, there will be wonderful cultural translators. There will be wonderful ambassadors because they will be able to speak to issues with much more of an understanding of the culture and appreciation of the nuances of the culture."

"In the same way that there are so many Chinese students who told me about their host family's experiences, and they've stayed in touch with their host families in different parts of the US, and they know about American life through their host families or their experiences with universities, that is incredibly important for that kind of lifelong bonds and friendships," she added.

Aw said that the language gap is one of the challenges in the US-China educational cooperation and exchanges, while there are others. For example, part of the difficulties has to do sometimes with the coverage of what is happening.

"There's often coverage that tends to depict China-US relations as

competitors and as very tense. What they don't often speak about is how, yes, there may be some tensions in government-to-government, but the people-to-people remain," she said. "We still have many people who go to China. We have still many people who come from China to the US. We don't talk enough about that."

Aw related the concept of "people-to-people exchange" to "education". "A lot of what I find as barriers have to do with education and ignorance. When people are ignorant, you always fear what you don't know. The more you're educated about it, the more you realize that we have so much more in common than what makes us so separate," she said. "Awareness is very important. Experiencing it for yourself becomes very important. People-to-people exchange also happens through sports and entertainment. People-to-people exchange is education."

"So, for us at NAFSA, part of the way we want to be helpful is to ensure that universities are very aware of that. We want to ensure that we all work with the embassies, the different stakeholders, the universities, and all our partners to understand what will help facilitate that," she said.

River of fire



An image released by the Icelandic Coast Guard on Saturday shows a surveillance flight near the site of a new volcanic eruption on the outskirts of the evacuated town of Grindavik. The eruption, which started on the Reykjanes Peninsula in southwestern Iceland on Thursday, is the third to hit the area since December, authorities said. AFP

Lancang-Mekong cooperation continues to flourish

The Lancang-Mekong River, originating in China and stretching for nearly 5,000 kilometers, flows through the highest number of riparian countries in Asia. The six riparian countries "enjoying the same river" are a community with a shared future featuring "equality, sincerity,



mutual assistance and kinship". The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism, named after this

river, has been warmly received and responded to by all relevant countries since its initiation.

This year marks the eighth anniversary of the launch of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism. Guided by the Lancang-Mekong spirit of "development first, equal consultation,

pragmatism and efficiency, and openness and inclusiveness", the six countries have promoted the cooperation mechanism from sprouting to flourishing, with the mechanism increasingly becoming an important platform for fostering regional

See **Region**, page 3

YOUNG PEOPLE INCREASINGLY DRAWN TO CHERISHED TRADITIONS

Social media platforms spread awareness of intangible cultural heritage

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang
zhaorunan@chinadaily.com.cn



In October, Bie Chuancheng left her job to begin visiting guardians of intangible cultural heritage and producing short videos featuring these artisans.

Bie, a member of the post-1995 generation, had worked at a fashion

company in Shanghai. Her ambitious goal is to visit 100 inheritors of such heritage to advocate for 100 Chinese intangible cultural heritage items and skills in her own way.

"I want to present the nation's cultural heritage in an engaging, trendy, practical and modern way. I want to bridge the gap between intangible cultural heritage and modern life from my perspective, enabling young people to experience the practical application of this heritage in their daily lives," she said.

The first inheritor she visited was Wang Rulan, a national-level inheritor specializing in crafting frameless lanterns in Taizhou, East China's Zhejiang province. In February, Wang took part in a China Central Television program highlighting traditional Chinese crafts.

In her video, which received more

than 40,000 likes, Bie states: "The frameless lanterns are made entirely from mulberry paper without any supporting structure. A total of 72 procedures are required to produce a single piece of the paper, and tens of thousands of needles are used to complete a lantern."

See **Heritage**, page 2

INSIDE
EU facing
identity crisis
Global Views, page 13

www.chinadailyglobal.com

Member of ANN China Daily Global ©2024 All Rights Reserved

Newstand prices:
US \$1 Canada C\$1
UK 1.5 EU 1.6
Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

PAGE TWO



From page 1

Wang, 87, who has spent more than 60 years making these intricate lanterns, was recognized in 2018 as an inheritor of the fifth batch of national-level intangible cultural heritage.

Bie said: "Wang's dedication to this craft is unwavering. During holidays, she warmly welcomes anyone interested in visiting her home to see the lanterns. She has been incredibly supportive of my efforts. Making these lanterns is time-consuming, and she even prepares steamed sweet potatoes for me to eat and invites me to stay at her home."

Intangible cultural heritage artisans are always willing to share and spread their knowledge to young audiences, Bie said. More important, she said there is a growing interest among the younger generation in learning about such heritage through social media.

Within a few months, Bie's account on Xiaohongshu, the Chinese lifestyle platform, had attracted more than 40,000 followers and over 170,000 likes and saves.

"Over 90 percent of my followers are younger than 35. Many young people are genuinely interested in intangible cultural heritage, but previously, there were only a limited number of ways in which people could learn about this ancient craft," she said.

"Over the past year or two, there has been a surge in related content on social media, leading to a heightened awareness of traditional culture among young people."

The 2023 Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report released by the Douyin short-video platform shows the platform aired an average of 19,000 livestream broadcasts on intangible cultural heritage every day, with an average of 13 new items per minute that included content related to this topic.

Furthermore, in 2021 and 2022, the total number of views of videos related to national-level intangible cultural heritage projects shown on the platform reached 372.6 billion.

The 2019 Digital New Youth Research Report indicated that nearly 90 percent of the young people surveyed expressed an interest in traditional culture.

When it comes to learning about traditional culture, 80.5 percent of young people rely on online media as their primary source of knowledge, the report said.

Gao Lu, a lecturer at Nanjing Normal University's School of Journalism and Communication, said social media platforms, especially those showing short videos, have become the main way in which young people obtain information about traditional culture.

Official data indicate that as of December 2022, the number of short-video users in China reached 1 billion. Gao added that new media technologies present traditional culture to young people in unprecedented ways, leading to increased interest and a deeper understanding of this subject.

Interest triggered

Cao Lei, a 31-year-old white-collar worker from Nanchang, Jiangxi province, is testament to this trend.

Her interest in traditional Chinese culture was kindled after she watched short videos featuring Yingge Dance, a folk dance with a 300-year history from the Chaoshan region of Guangdong province.

This interest sparked Cao's quest to explore traditional cultures from different parts of the country.

"I initially delved into traditional culture out of curiosity. Over time, I sensed the festive atmosphere was fading during the

Heritage: Museums see huge rise in visitors



Wei Lizhong (second from left) instructs students at Hangzhou Guancheng Experimental School in engraving on Sept 28. LI AN / XINHUA



A Yingge dance troupe from Shantou, Guangdong province, performs in the city on Feb 14. YAO JUN / XINHUA



Two young women wearing traditional Chinese hanfu visit a street in Xiangyang, Hubei province, on Oct 10. YANG DONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Spring Festival. To understand how people in these areas celebrate Chinese New Year, I trawled online platforms to seek traditional customs that have been preserved," she said.

After watching short videos extensively online, Cao became well-versed in the intricacies of Yingge Dance.

"It has a strong sense of tradition. Performers undergo rigorous training from a young age, and during Spring Festival, performance teams in every village dance to celebrate the occasion, creating a lively atmosphere," Cao said.

This year during the holiday, she began watching videos of Youshen, a Spring Festival custom from Southeast China, and quickly warmed to the talent of the young performers.

Youshen, which translates as "wandering gods", is a folk tradition from rural areas of Fujian province that dates to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Villages hold joyous parades and other celebrations to welcome the start of spring, and pray to local gods and deities. Every year, they carry large sculptures of deities through streets and alleys to dispel evil, avert disaster, and seek blessings.

"I never thought traditional customs and performances could be so attractive and interesting," Cao said.

The online world has prompted young people such as Cao to explore traditional cultures and history.

"Last year, I visited an exhibition at Jiangxi Provincial Museum that showcased paintings of porcelain in Jiangxi alongside Dunhuang murals from Gansu province," Cao said.

Latest statistics released by the National Cultural Heritage Administration show that during Spring Festival this year (from Feb 10 to 17), museums nationwide received a total of 73.58 million visitors, a 98.6 percent year-on-year rise.

Su Qin, 34, a freelance guide at Liaoning Provincial Museum, said that in recent years, there has been a noticeable surge in the number of young visitors to the institution.

"The internet has played a significant role. The popularity of the summer destination of Zibo in Shandong province, the winter attractions of Harbin, Heilongjiang province, and the recent enthusiasm for cultural and historical relics are the combined result of young people's pursuit of China-chic (fancy designs mixed with elements of traditional culture), and promotion through social media," he said.

Su identified three main types of visitors to Liaoning Provincial Museum.

First, there are those who visit casually just to take photos and tick the venue off on their list. Second, some visit to attend specific exhibitions. The final group consists of visitors who, after browsing, develop an interest in history and culture before returning for a second or third visit, he said.

"It's not just the post-90s and post-00s generations who are flocking to museums, but even younger visitors. Many of the tour groups I've recently guided consist of young people who bring their children. Since the children need places to explore, museums and art galleries are the perfect solution. They are safe, the kids can learn, and admission is free," he added.

Rich history

Su believes the younger generation's love of traditional culture is not a random occurrence, but a natural result of their pursuit of a cultural life.

"After the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China's economy took a step forward, but cultural advancement temporarily lagged behind. Now that people have more money, they have started to turn their

attention to cultural pursuits," he said.

Su added that young people are also attracted by the intrinsic and unique charm of Chinese culture.

"China boasts a long and rich history, with countless traditional cultural treasures waiting to be discovered by the younger generation," he said.

Moreover, since the 2000s, the post-80s and post-90s age groups have gradually become the main force in society, with higher levels of education and greater cultural acceptance, Su said, adding that they also pursue novelty and individuality, so it's no surprise that young people are focusing on traditional culture.

He said institutions, including museums, have also launched cultural and creative products, attracting numerous young people to line up for purchases, and even scalpers selling refrigerator magnets.

"This situation could not have been imagined in the past. Museums are now also releasing short videos and conducting live broadcasts online," he said.

Social media platforms have become vital for museums to promote themselves. Douyin's 2023 Museum Data Report states that the total number of views of museum-related videos on the platform last year reached about 51.3 billion, 66 times the annual number of museum visitors nationwide.

Yuan Shuwu, an art theory researcher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, attributes the recent rise in the popularity of traditional culture on social media to government promotion and extensive coverage by mainstream media.

"In the past few years, a series of documentaries and television programs have brought cultural relics and museums into public view, including *Masters In Forbidden City* in 2016 and *The Nation's Greatest Treasures* in 2017," Yuan said.

"Since then, there has been a gradual rise in the popularity of traditional culture. I have developed a strong interest in such culture, and after watching the two video series, decided to pursue graduate studies in art at the Central Academy of Fine Arts."

Around the same time, Chinese

food blogger Li Ziqi gained fame on YouTube for short videos she made that showcase her traditional and idyllic lifestyle in the Chinese countryside.

In turn, traditional culture has been revitalized due to the increased attention. Yuan said that in Fushan county, Linfen city, Shanxi province, where she now lives, intangible cultural heritage such as paper-cutting has benefited greatly from online dissemination through social media.

"Previously, little attention was paid to these cultural elements, but now it's different. There are many media reports, and inheritors of intangible cultural heritage now talk widely about their work. This has indirectly encouraged more young people to learn about and carry on these traditions," she said.

Kong Dejun, from Zhangxi town, Ganzhou city, Jiangxi, said he and his daughter are enthusiastic about inheriting and promoting their hometown's cultural folk art — the wooden-bench dragon dance.

"Our village has a bench dragon dance team, which includes many young people. I now live with my family in Guangdong, but whenever the village's dance team needs us, we return to take part in practice sessions and performances," he said.

During traditional holidays and summer vacations, Kong, 33, takes his daughter to Zhangxi to watch the performances and learn the dragon dance.

"Children who grow up in cities rarely see such lively and interesting things, so they really like the dance team and are eager to learn about the performances. This is probably the significance of inheritance," he said.

Gao, the lecturer, said young people's enthusiasm for traditional culture shows that historical and cultural confidence has been significantly enhanced in China.

She called for the further integration of intangible cultural heritage with digital new media.

"We should invite more inheritors of this heritage to the internet, to allow more young people to access high-quality cultural content and products through diverse technological means," Gao added.

A primary school student from Erdos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, performs Ansai waist drum at their school. WANG ZHENG / XINHUA

TOP NEWS

Star of the show

A dragon dance performance is held on Saturday during the 27th Astronomy Festival in the town of Leyva, Colombia. China's significant global influence in the fields of astronomy and astronautics led to it being invited as the guest country for the annual festival, which started on Friday and concluded on Sunday.

IVAN VALENCIA / AP



Region: Nations dedicated to forging powerful growth engine

From page 1

economic integration, maintaining regional peace and stability, and bolstering the well-being of the people in the region.

The six countries are dedicated to creating a powerful engine for development. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation architecture has been constantly improved, with deepening cooperation in agriculture, production capacity, connectivity, green energy, innovation and other fields. More than 700 Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund projects have been launched one after another, injecting strong impetus into the economic development of countries in the region and basin.

The six countries are committed to accelerating the construction of a strong shield for common security. Practical cooperation in the field of nontraditional security and law enforcement has been further strengthened, with in-depth advancement made in the operation of "the safety of the Lancang-

Mekong region", while significant progress has been achieved in combating cross-border online gambling and scams, drug trafficking and other criminal activities, and social stability more effectively guaranteed in the subregion and for the safety and security of people's lives and property.

The six countries have further grown amicable ties of mutual understanding and friendship. People-benefiting projects such as the Plan on Lancang-Mekong Water Resources, the LMC Bumper Harvest Projects and the Green Lancang-Mekong Initiative have been successfully implemented. The international video week, media summit, think tank forum and the "Lancang-Mekong Adventure" media group and other events have produced fruitful results month after month. Tourism cooperation and people-to-people exchanges are making progress every day, and the friendship between the peoples of the six countries are being enhanced year after year.

Thailand is a main initiator of

and important participant in the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism and, as a co-chair this year, is playing an increasingly prominent role as a partner with in the mechanism. In November 2022, President Xi Jinping visited Thailand, and the two countries announced entering a new era of building a China-Thailand community with a shared future.

In October last year, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin visited China and attended the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Under the strategic guidance of the leaders of our two countries, the political mutual trust between China and Thailand has been constantly deepened, practical cooperation has been upgraded, and the public support for "China and Thailand are as close as one family" has been more solid.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 72nd birthday of King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochao-yuhua of the Kingdom of Thailand.

The next year will greet the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Thailand when the China-Thailand relationship will be standing at a historically new starting point.

China will firmly implement the principle of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness" in neighborhood diplomacy put forward by President Xi, work with Thailand and other countries along the Lancang-Mekong River to share development opportunities, accelerate the building of an even closer community with a shared future of the Lancang-Mekong countries, support each other and work together on the path to modernization, and jointly forge a brighter future for the Lancang-Mekong River Basin.

The author is ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Kingdom of Thailand. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

US students embark on China journey

Eager young people set off on adventure to discover cultural riches and historical depths

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

From indulging in Chinese cuisine and delving into the country's rich history and culture, to forging friendships and memories that may last a lifetime, a group of students from the United States are preparing to explore a whole new world as they set off for a journey to China.

"I really want to see how an average Chinese girl or boy lives their life. I also want to see architecture and historical buildings, because China has a rich culture and a long, significant history," said Montserrat Romero-Rocha, a 12th-grade student at Lincoln High School in the state of Washington.

She's also eager to understand everyday life in China, like trying Chinese food, shopping and finding out the differences between life in the US and China.

But what she's looking forward to the most, she said, is being able to interact with Chinese peers and observe how Chinese schools are run, compared with those in the US.

In September 2015, President Xi Jinping visited Lincoln High School, which is in Tacoma, Washington, during his first state visit to the US as president, and he invited young people from the US to visit China.

Romero-Rocha is one of 10 Lincoln High School students who will visit China. Along with 14 students from Steilacoom High School in Washington, they left for China from San Francisco on Saturday. The visit will take them to Beijing and to Hubei and Guangdong provinces before they return to the US on March 27.

Their itinerary promises an exciting chance for exploration across China's diverse landscape. The students will get a taste of both historical and contemporary China, visiting iconic landmarks like the Great Wall and the Forbidden City in Beijing and Wudang Mountain in Hubei, and engaging in academic exchanges at prestigious institutions like Peking University.

"I want to experience more about the culture and people, and how everything is different and similar to the US," said Luke Kelly, an 11th-grade student at Steilacoom High School.

For Kelly, who has never traveled outside of the US, this tour means "a

once in a lifetime opportunity."

"I'm excited about being able to go and explore architecture. I'm excited about the Great Wall and Forbidden City," he said. Building connections with students in China is also a big reason he is excited about the journey.

"I hope we can bring back the relations and ... carry on and encourage other people to go and do the same," he added.

Song Guoxuan, China's deputy consul general in San Francisco, who saw the students off at San Francisco International Airport, expressed his hope that they will embrace the experience with open minds.

"Taste Chinese cuisine, make Chinese friends, and see a real China," Song encouraged them. He also emphasized the importance of sharing their experiences back home, fostering a spirit of friendship between the two nations.

This tour is part of a larger initiative. In November, President Xi and US President Joe Biden envisioned prioritizing cultural and people-to-people exchanges, particularly among young people. Xi said that China is going to invite 50,000 young people from the US to visit China on exchange and study programs over the next five years.

Lynn Eisenhauer, an arts facilitator who has led previous student trips to China, highlighted the transformative power of these exchanges. "Every trip is different," she said, recounting how past student exchanges changed students' perspective and fostered deeper understanding.

One student was surprised to learn that his Chinese counterpart focused mostly on studying outside of school, and he came home with a changed perspective about his work ethic and became grateful for education.

"Most of them have never traveled out of the United States," Eisenhauer said of the students. "They are going to feel all sorts of different things on this trip, and what I'm excited for is that the things will last a lifetime for them."

Romero-Rocha echoed that sentiment. "The tour is going to change me fundamentally as a person, because I'm going to an entirely new place and will experience an entirely new culture," she said. "And it's going to stick with me for the rest of my life."

Hub: Closer global business ties form

From page 1

Chris Hesel, Goodyear's senior vice-president for global operations and chief technology officer, said that in addition to supplying tires to a large number of car manufacturers in China, such as Tesla Inc, General Motors, BYD, Nio and Geely, the company also takes advantage of low tariff rates under the RCEP framework to

ship tires manufactured at its Chinese plants to Japan and several Southeast Asian countries.

Ministry of Commerce spokesman He Yadong said on Thursday that in order to create more favorable conditions for multinationals, restrictions had been removed on foreign investment access to the manufacturing sector in the negative list for China's pilot free trade zones.

Closer business ties between China and global markets have also led FedEx Express, the US courier service provider, to build its South China operations center at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport in Guangdong province.

Scheduled to start operations in 2027, the facility will be able to sort up to 25,000 packages and documents per hour, three times the efficiency

of the company's current Guangzhou Gateway, which operates more than 240 international flights and 700 trucks per week, reaching over 220 countries and regions.

Eddy Chan, senior vice-president of FedEx Express and president of FedEx China, noted that a significant number of Chinese companies are directing their investments and resources toward manufacturing in Southeast Asia. This shift has led to an increasing need for customized services to maintain the seamless functionality of their supply chains.

Famed tea hub's hillsides now yield rich coffee, too

By HOU CHENCHEN

in Pu'er, Yunnan
houchench@chinadaily.com.cn

Though some coffee enthusiasts in China might never have an opportunity to visit a coffee farm in Ethiopia or Jamaica, a visit to such a farm in Southwest China's Pu'er, Yunnan province, is easily within reach.

That's right — coffee farms in Pu'er.

For although tea has long been Pu'er's cornerstone industry, with 139,000 hectares of tea plantations and 1.1 million tea farmers, and though the name Pu'er has become synonymous with the area's dark tea, coffee is gaining ground, and a name for itself, in the region.

That's because Pu'er, due to its climate and geography, is blessed with a unique combination of factors that make it conducive to growing tea leaves as well as coffee beans. Pu'er, in the remote frontier of Yunnan, which borders Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos, has long been known for its fermented dark tea.

The area has been a tea distribution and trade center since the Tang Dynasty (618-907). In those days, tea was carried by local horse caravans to Lhasa to be exchanged for such things as furs and medicinal ingredients. The caravans would then continue to Nepal, Myanmar and India, and this was how the famed Tea Horse Road came about.

China-Laos Railway



Source: China State Railway Group CHINA DAILY

Today, Pu'er is also a coffee production and trade center, with China's largest coffee-bean growing area, highest output and best quality, according to Yunnan's agriculture and rural affairs department.

"Pu'er is indeed a unique place, where both coffee and tea cultivation thrive," said Wang Changjiang, a former agronomist for the Starbucks coffee farmer support center in Pu'er.

"Pu'er has a warm, humid subtropical highland climate. It is located in the golden area of coffee production, in the same latitude as world-famous coffee production areas like Jamaica and Colombia," Wang said.

"Coffee is typically grown in tropical regions, requiring ample sunlight," Wang added. "Tea, on the other hand, thrives in tropical to subtropical regions but can tolerate shade and does not require intense sunlight, preferring diffused light instead."

Pu'er, it so happens, "lies at the juncture of tropical and subtropical zones," he said.

More than 98 percent of China's domestic coffee is produced in Yunnan, and half of that comes from Pu'er, according to Xinhua News Agency.

The rise of coffee in Pu'er didn't happen overnight, but began in 1892 when a French missionary planted the first coffee seed in a village there. After that, coffee was planted on a small scale, Wang said.

In 1952, experts from the Yunnan Academy of Agricultural Sciences distributed coffee seeds to farmers, marking the beginning of large-scale coffee cultivation in Yunnan.

Then, in the 1980s, as part of poverty alleviation efforts, the United Nations Development Programme introduced a large number of experts to promote coffee cultivation in the province, and international coffee giants such as Nestle and Starbucks arrived.

By 2023, Pu'er had 250,000 coffee farmers and 45,000 hectares of coffee plantations, generating a comprehensive output value of 6.3 billion yuan (\$875.6 million).

Between 2020 and 2022, JD.com said, its sales of Yunnan coffee increased sixfold.

And so, in addition to Pu'er's long-time appeal to tea enthusiasts, the area is now attracting those who are passionate about coffee.

Luo Xiaoshu, a woman from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region who is in her 40s, is a good example of a tourist with a passion for coffee who has journeyed to Pu'er for an immersive cultural experience. In exchange for room and board at the Pu'er Aini coffee plantation, Luo served for one month as a coffee apprentice, picking coffee beans, making coffee and receiving guests.

Pu'er has become a magnet for such travelers by leveraging its rich heritage in both tea and coffee.

During the recent eight-day Spring Festival holiday, a record 2.86 million people visited Pu'er, generating tourism income totaling 3 billion yuan, according to Pu'er authorities.

The inauguration of the China-Laos Railway in December 2021 has made traveling to Pu'er much more convenient.

Previously, reaching Pu'er required a rigorous journey. Visitors would first go to Kunming, followed by a six-hour bus ride to Pu'er. The China-Laos Railway has slashed travel time from Kunming to Pu'er to just over two hours.

In ancient times, horse bells



Barista Wei Yuhang (left) and farmer Lyu Tianlan make coffee at the 2nd Yunnan Pu'er Highland Coffee Harvest Festival in December.

XIONG XUANANG / XINHUA

resounded throughout the rugged terrain as the prized Pu'er tea embarked on its voyage along the Tea Horse Road. Today, the shrill whistle of high-speed trains announces the arrival of global coffee merchants and tourists.

"With the railway in operation, the number of merchants and visitors exploring Pu'er's coffee origins has surged," said He Yuejun, manager of the Pu'er Aini plantation.

Zheng Hongwei, founder of Gushan Cultural-Tourism Technology Co, is among the investors capitalizing on Pu'er's potential. Establishing a Chinese coffee plantation brand and elevating Pu'er coffee's profile are the goals of Zheng and his col-

leagues at the River Valley coffee plantation, at which at least 50 percent of employees are from local communities.

Collaborative efforts with local villagers include providing guests with local fruits, including oranges and tangerines, avocados and pineapples, as well as other agricultural products, and jointly establishing homestays.

This has bolstered residents' income through production, homestay revenue and other tourism-related activities.

"Our ambition is to transform the coffee plantation into a coffee village, infusing rural revitalization with cultural tourism," Zheng said.

CHINA

6-year-old Laotian girl treated in Guangxi

By ZHANG LI in Nanning
zhangli@chinadaily.com.cn

With all checkup indicators found to be normal, Nina was discharged from the hospital in Nanning, capital of Southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on March 7.

Around three months ago, the 6-year-old Laotian girl successfully underwent a hematopoietic stem cell transplantation at the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangxi Medical University in Nanning.

Nina, who only gave her first name, was born in Laos in 2018 and was diagnosed with severe beta-thalassemia.

Thalassemia is an inherited blood disorder that causes the body to have less hemoglobin than normal.

The disease is common in countries along the Mediterranean coast, as well as in India, Southeast Asia and regions of China such as Guangdong, Hainan and Sichuan provinces.

"Patients with severe thalassemia need monthly blood transfusions to sustain their lives. After repeated transfusions, iron deposits in multiple organs, commonly known as 'iron overload', actually represent a form of 'chronic iron poisoning', which can cause serious damage to organ function and even lead to heart failure, endangering life," said Liu Rongrong, chief physician of the hospital's hematology department.

Over the years, Nina has been undergoing regular blood transfusions and iron chelation therapy.

"Allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation is currently the only method to cure severe thalassemia," Liu said.

Since the 1990s, the hospital's hematology department has been conducting hematopoietic stem cell transplants for various blood system diseases. In 2012, it pioneered non-relative hematopoietic stem cell transplantation for thalassemia in the region, and in 2016, it managed to complete the first haploidentical hematopoietic stem cell transplantation for severe thalassemia.

In May 2023, Nina's family contacted Liu to inquire about hematopoietic stem cell transplantation. Later, Nina and her father were found to be a match for the haplotype allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.

On Nov 17, after comprehensive examinations and other pre-transplant preparations,

Guangxi and the ASEAN countries have similar disease profiles, and medical cooperation has unique geographical advantages."

Chen Junqiang, president of the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangxi Medical University

Nina and her father were admitted to the Hematology Stem Cell Transplantation Ward of the hospital.

During this period, Nina experienced gastrointestinal reactions, recurrent high fever, rash and perianal inflammation. But with careful treatment and nursing by the medical staff, she successfully overcame these challenges, and the complications gradually came under control, with all indicators stabilizing.

Nina's hematopoietic stem cell transplantation was the first time such a procedure was performed for a foreign patient with thalassemia in Guangxi.

"The success of Nina's treatment marks a milestone for us as a family. She will grow up like a normal child and is poised to achieve her full potential," said Nina's father.

Zhang Jie, director of the International Medical Department at the hospital, said that in the next phase of the transplant recovery process, the hospital will organize meticulous follow-ups and home management interventions to help Nina grow up healthily.

"Guangxi and the ASEAN countries have similar disease profiles, and medical cooperation has unique geographical advantages," said Chen Junqiang, president of the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangxi Medical University.

According to Chen, the hospital launched the China-ASEAN Cross-border Medical Cooperation Platform in 2020. As an open platform for ASEAN patients, it can provide "one-stop" cross-border medical services, including patient appointments, international remote consultations, cross-border medical transfers and international payment settlements. It also supports the languages of the 10 ASEAN countries.



Bring on the blossoms

Hanfu enthusiasts flaunt their outfits and elegant makeup at the 2024 Shanghai Cherry Blossom Festival on Saturday. Held at Gulf Forest Park, the event runs from Feb 20 to March 24. In that time, thousands are expected to visit to enjoy the over 40,000 plum blossoms in full bloom. Shanghai is hosting this festival for the 11th time this year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

New dinosaur species found

Researchers identify *Datai yingliangis* that roamed China 900m years ago

By YAN DONGJIE
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese and Canadian dinosaur researchers jointly published a paper last month in the professional journal *Vertebrate Anatomy Morphology Palaeontology*, describing two fossils of a new dinosaur species discovered in Huichang county, Jiangxi province, that lived about 900 million years ago.

The discovery of *Datai yingliangis*, as named by the researchers, is an important addition to the fossil record of the early years of the Late Cretaceous period, providing new evidence for understanding the divergence of ankylosaurid dinosaurs within and outside the ankylosaur subfamily, said Xing Lida, co-author of the paper and associate professor from China University of Geosciences in Beijing.

"In the entire Ganzhou area in Jiangxi province, during the Late Cretaceous period, there was likely a very thriving dinosaur fauna," he said, adding that there have been many discoveries, including ovi-

raptorid fossils, lizard fossils, hadrosaurs, tyrannosaurs and saurpods.

"Their living environment was likely lush with vegetation and abundant water sources. The abundant number of dinosaurs is likely why they have been so extensively preserved in the vicinity of rivers and lakes," Xing said.

In 2016, during road excavations along the Gongshui River in Huichang, local villagers noticed some white bone-like objects among scattered reddish-purple rock fragments by the roadside and took photos, posting them on an online forum for identification.

Niu Kecheng, executive curator of the Yingliang Stone Natural History Museum in Fujian province who was the moderator of a fossil forum at the time, suggested that the objects might be dinosaur fossils. Due to the severely fragmented state of the specimen and the lack of cleaning and restoration, it was difficult to determine the specific species.

In 2018, Niu learned that the fossils had been collected and

retained by local villagers. His museum contacted the villagers, who donated the fossils to it.

"Through a lengthy process of assembly and restoration, two overlapping ankylosaurid specimens gradually emerged. As the bone sutures on the vertebrae had not completely fused, researchers believed both specimens to be sub-adult individuals, with a body length of approximately 3.5 to 4 meters," Xing said.

Through phylogenetic analysis, the research team concluded that *Datai yingliangis* represents a derived clade within the Asian ankylosaurid subfamily and formed a sister group with Pinacosaurus, discovered in Mongolia and northern China, according to Xing.

Ankylosaurs are a well-known group of dinosaurs that lived in the Late Cretaceous of North America and Asia.

Ankylosaurids are characterized by extensive bony armor from head to tail, earning them the nickname "tank dinosaurs".

Members of the ankylosaurid subfamily are larger in size, have wide bodies and possess a well-developed tail club.

Datai yingliangis exhibits a

prominent premaxilla, with a cranial ornamentation similar to that of most ankylosaurid subfamily members.

A unique feature of *Datai yingliangis* is the presence of a pair of small jugal or postorbital horns on each side of the cheek, extending outward.

The buried position of the overlapping *Datai yingliangis* specimens also provides additional information on the behavior of ankylosaurids.

Xing mentioned that this burial posture has also been observed in the case of Pinacosaurus found in Mongolia and northern China, where it was interpreted as a rapid burial by in situ windblown sand, indirectly suggesting gregarious behavior in Pinacosaurus. Although the two *Datai yingliangis* specimens were buried in situ in a river or lake environment, it is highly likely that they are also associated with gregarious behavior in ankylosaurids.

"The benefit of juvenile ankylosaurus living in groups is to better perceive danger, increased success in finding food and water sources and an overall improvement in individual survival rates," Xing said.

Hometown of literary greats hosts pickled food expo

By HUANG ZHILING
and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

Visitors to Meishan, Sichuan province, last weekend found the tiny hometown of Su Shi (1037-1101), one of China's greatest poets and gourmets, was transformed into a pickled food paradise.

Tasty treats from famous enterprises in China, countries that are part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and South Korea are available during the three-day 14th China International Pickled Food Expo, which started on Saturday.

The event is being held in the Meishan Convention and Exhibition Center, featuring five professional exhibition halls — the "Belt and Road" international hall, the prefabricated food-themed hall, the pickled-themed pavilion, the district and county specialty hall, and

the science and technology manufacturing pavilion — and the Dongpo Food and Culture Festival Fair, covering about 30,000 square meters.

The expo has invited more than 300 vendors and some 800 domestic and foreign participants. Among them, there are 60 well-known enterprises from ASEAN, South Korea and other Belt and Road Initiative member countries, said Dai Linli, deputy mayor of Meishan.

The expo is organized by the China National Food Industry Association and the China Chamber of Commerce of Import & Export of Foodstuffs, Native Produce and Animal By-Products, and is hosted by the Meishan government.

The raw material base for pickled food in Meishan spans 400 hectares, and the city has more than 50 pickled food enterprises.

Last year, the sales revenue of pickled vegetables in Meishan exceeded 22 billion yuan (\$3.06 billion), accounting for half the market share in Sichuan.

The expo, the largest of its kind in China, is usually held later in the year. This year's expo kicked off earlier to take advantage of the crowds coming for the 110th China Food and Drinks Fair in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, said Zhan Yongchuan, an officer with the Meishan city government information office.

The fair will run from Wednesday to Friday.

Known as the barometer of China's food industry, the 69-year-old fair is held twice a year, in spring and autumn. Chengdu has been the permanent host city of the spring edition since 2011.

According to Shi Dongyan, secretary-general of the fair's organiz-

ing committee, this year's spring edition is expected to draw more than 6,600 vendors from 45 countries and regions, and over 400,000 visitors.

Poet-gourmet Su Shi, known as Su Dongpo, created many dishes that have been named after him such as Dongpo pickled vegetables, Dongpo pork knuckle and Dongpo meat, which are still very popular today.

Su Shi, his father Su Xun (1009-1066) and younger brother Su Zhe (1039-1112) are known as the Three Sus. They are among eight of China's most illustrious literary masters who lived during the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties. Their former home is in the Ancestral Temple of the Three Sus in downtown Meishan.

Contact the writers at
huangzhiling@chinadaily.com.cn



Nina, a 6-year-old Laotian girl diagnosed with severe beta-thalassemia, walks out of the ward after hematopoietic stem cell transplantation treatment in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region on March 7. XINHUA

Infection linked to cancer affects over quarter of urban Chinese, study finds

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

A bacterial infection associated with a higher risk of gastric cancer affects about 27 percent of the urban Chinese population, and around half the population is resistant to common antibiotics for treatment, according to a recent study.

Researchers from the Guangdong Provincial People's Hospital in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and the University of Western Australia enrolled around 4,400 men and 8,500 women from

52 cities in China from March to November last year and tested them for helicobacter pylori, a stomach bacterium that is known to cause ulcers and stomach cancer in some people.

The study, published in the journal *Lancet Microbe* this month, put the prevalence rate of the infection in the nation's urban population at 27.08 percent, lower than the widely accepted global rate of around 50 percent.

Men registered a higher rate of nearly 29 percent compared to women, who reported a positivity rate of about 26 percent. The rate

is highest among those age 30 to 49, at nearly 29 percent, according to the study.

Researchers also examined the infected cases' resistance to two important antibiotics.

They found that the drug resistance rate for clarithromycin stands at 50.8 percent, and the rate for levofloxacin is 47.2 percent.

Drug resistance is most prominent among people age 40 to 60.

"This might be related to increased antibiotic exposure with advancing age and increased susceptibility to respiratory and uri-

nary tract infections," the study said.

It found a heightened prevalence of drug resistance among women, which it said could be driven by the frequent use of the two drugs for curbing gynecological infections.

Liao Wanqing, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering specializing in medical mycology, said that the research highlights the urgency to tackle antibiotic resistance among infected patients. He was not involved in the study.

It is important to deliver treat-

ments oriented toward drug sensitivity so as to boost success in eradicating the infection in patients, he added.

Wang Chuanxin, a professor in laboratory medicine at the Second Hospital of Shandong province, said that the rising drug resistance is linked to the widespread use of antibiotics and poor compliance with recommended regimens such as patients discontinuing their treatment on their own.

According to a white paper on helicobacter pylori released by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the infection's

prevalence rate is around 50 percent worldwide.

In China, the rate also stands at nearly 50 percent and varies between 35 and 66 percent across different populations.

"The infection rate in rural areas is higher than that in cities, and the rate is higher among adults than in children," it said.

The white paper added that poor dietary and personal habits, low education levels, crowded residential environments and unhygienic living conditions can increase the risk of becoming infected.

CHINA



A courier sorts parcels before delivery in Zixing, Hunan province, on Nov 12, as the "Double 11" shopping spree begins. LI KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

By LUO WANGSHU

luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's recent regulatory amendment requiring parcel delivery workers to notify customers exactly where they are delivering their parcels to, has stirred a mixed reaction throughout the sector.

At the heart of the amendment, which came into effect on March 1, is that delivery workers can no longer leave packages at community delivery areas without giving customers prior notification, and instead should deliver packages directly to people's doors.

Many community delivery areas were designated in China during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to limit person-to-person contact and reduce the spread of the virus.

Under the new regulation, couriers or companies leaving packages in community delivery areas without notifying customers in advance could face fines of up to 30,000 yuan (\$4,200).

The rule aims to better protect customers' legal rights, according to a statement released by the Ministry of Transport.

The parcel delivery sector in China has grown at great speed in recent years, handling billions of deliveries annually. Last year, 132 billion packages were handled in China. More than 4,100 parcels are generated every second in the country, adding up to about 360 million each day, according to the ministry.

The volume means that an average person in China received more than 90 packages last year.

While many customers have welcomed the amendment, as it allows parcels to be delivered to their doors upon request, some have expressed confusion and annoyance, preferring the old way.

Couriers, too, have voiced complaints about the change, stating that it has created problems for them.

"Couriers now phone me in advance and I tell them to send the parcels to my door if I am home," said a resident surnamed Lu from Chengdu in Sichuan province, adding that some couriers left her packages in the community delivery area in the past.

"I buy things online a lot and receive parcels almost every day. Sometimes I forget what I've bought and the parcels remain in the delivery area for a long time. Now that everything is delivered to my door directly it's more convenient," she said.

However, the 34-year-old also said the countless phone calls from couriers have become bothersome.

Since March, Hou Qingjuan of Liaocheng in Shandong province has received numerous phone calls from couriers, notifying her that her parcels have been left at the community delivery area.

"I prefer the old way so that I'm not getting called all the time," she said.

Some customers, while acknowledging the change, have expressed empathy for couriers.

A resident surnamed Guo in Zhangzhou, Fujian province, said she recently began receiving phone calls from couriers notifying her of the arrival of her parcels.

"It takes much more effort for couriers to deliver parcels to every doorstep, and the delivery fee is low," she said, adding that she appreciates the couriers who ensure fresh products are delivered to her door directly instead of being left in the community delivery area.

"I'm actually willing to pay more for the extra effort," she said.

Guo said she'd prefer couriers deliver parcels to her parents' door too, instead of placing them in the community area, as her parents are older and live in a building without an elevator.

However, not all customers have noticed the change, with some saying that couriers still place packages in the community delivery area without calling.

Feelings mixed over delivery rule change

New regulation requires couriers to notify customers before dropping off packages



Students pick up their parcels from a delivery station in Nanchang University, Jiangxi province, on Sept 2, as campus delivery stations saw a huge increase of parcels during the first days of the new semester. LIU LIXIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Chongqing resident Fan Jin said that most of her parcels are still delivered to community shelves and lockers, and she prefers it that way.

"I live alone and order a lot of stuff online. Most of the time, I leave a vague address for safety concerns, and couriers usually leave the packages on the shelves downstairs. They don't know my apartment number," she said.

If she orders some heavy or fresh goods, she usually chooses more bespoke parcel delivery options such as SF Express and JD Express, which are known for ensuring deliveries arrive at the doorstep.

For some couriers, the amendment has created more stress.

Xia Guangbiao, a courier in Xiamen, Fujian province, said his challenges include meeting customer demands, unreasonable requests, communication problems and low pay.

"Since the adoption of the new amendment, there are more customers requiring us to deliver parcels to their doorstep instead of leaving them on the shelves, and we willingly do what that want most of the time," he said. "But some requirements are unreasonable. For instance, a customer required us to deliver eight bags of construction materials weighing a total of 200 kilograms to his home recently. In our region of delivery, cars or motorcycles are prohibited. We had to rent a trolley to deliver the bags, and it cost about 60 yuan. What we earned for delivering the bags in total was less than 20 yuan."

"Some clients also don't answer their phones, and telecommunication companies have even banned our numbers if we make too many phone calls, which makes us unable to do our job if we have to call customers before making every delivery," Xia said.

With the stratospheric rise of e-commerce in recent years, the demands placed upon delivery workers have increased accordingly.

Xia said he and his colleagues have discussed with their delivery companies about adding more people to deliver parcels and

also about raising their wages.

He added that many couriers say they are on the brink of quitting their jobs because they think the pay is "worthless."

The rate of pay in the parcel delivery sector ranges from around a high of 2 yuan per parcel delivered, to as little as 0.5 yuan per parcel.

Many couriers have expressed their frustrations online, with some saying they are considering leaving their jobs due to the perceived trivialization and devaluation of their work under the latest regulation.

China launched a guideline to better regulate the parcel delivery sector in 2008 with a revision coming in 2013, which played an important role in strengthening the management of the express delivery market and promoting the healthy development of the industry, according to the State Post Bureau of China, the sector's regulator.

"The newly amended regulation is an add-on from 2013," said Ding Hongtao, director of the legal affairs department at the China Express Association.

He noted that the regulation aims to ensure the quality and safety of express delivery services, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of users, express delivery practitioners, and enterprises engaged in parcel delivery operations, and promote the industry's healthy development.

According to the national bureau, 443 million parcels were collected and delivered in China between March 1 to 14, a year-on-year increase of 16.3 percent.

"From the perspective of delivery volume, the overall operation of the industry is stable," Ding said.

Zhao Guojun, director of the postal development research center at Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, said the new regulation has sparked controversy due to misunderstandings and misinterpretations from various parties.

"With its close relationship to everyday life, any changes within the sector attract

substantial attention," Zhao said.

"The introduction and interpretation of new regulations should be approached from exploring optimal solutions based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit for all parties involved," she said.

"The emphasis of the new regulations is on fostering a spirit of negotiation among couriers, companies and customers, with a focus on reaching consensus based on various circumstances," she added.

For customers, a courier is expected to know their needs. So it is not necessary to always call and inquire about how to make the delivery for every package.

"If clients and couriers have tacitly agreed to leave packages at a designated location, maintaining the existing communication status is sufficient. If there are additional new requirements from either party, they can renegotiate and reach a mutual agreement," she said.

"Due to misunderstandings of the new regulations, some delivery companies and clients have interpreted this provision from only one perspective — insisting on door-to-door delivery."

However, the unsustainable practice of unconditionally meeting clients' door-to-door delivery demands without considering costs is not viable," Zhao said.

She stressed the importance of balancing the interests of all parties involved in the delivery industry, including delivery companies, couriers, customers and upstream entities in the industry chain.

"Sustainable development for all parties is essential to create a mutually beneficial ecosystem within the industry," she said.

Zhao noted the new rule is necessary to standardize service behaviors and strengthen market order.

"The regulation has comprehensively arranged institutional measures for various entities in order to promote and drive the industry toward standardized and high-quality development," she said.

Ding from the China Express Association agreed. "Parcel delivery service is a civil performance act. Whether it is door-to-door delivery or delivery to a designated station or intelligent parcel locker, as long as the express delivery company and the user have reached a consensus, it is acceptable," he said.

He reassured that the new regulation does not require mandatory door-to-door delivery.

"It (the amendment) is aimed at solving the frequent unauthorized delivery of parcels to express delivery stations or intelligent parcel lockers without customers' consent. It requires express delivery companies to enhance their performance awareness, deliver according to the agreed method, and obtain customers' consent before placing the parcel in the locker or station," Ding said.

He also noted that obtaining consent can be achieved through various methods, not just phone calls, but also with pre-confirmation options, such as text messages and intelligent voice calls.

Parcel delivery companies are taking steps to ensure compliance with the latest regulation and to provide necessary training for their employees.

ZTO Express, one of the major parcel delivery companies in China, said the company will implement the requirements of the new regulation, safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of front-line employees.

"According to the new regulation, ZTO will provide delivery services according to customers' needs, and those requiring door-to-door delivery will receive such service," the company said in a statement.

YTO Express, another major parcel delivery company, said it attaches great importance to the new regulation and has organized training sessions within the company to ensure employees' deeper understanding of the rule.

Advisers push for better worker protections in parcel sector

By LUO WANGSHU

National lawmakers and top political advisers called for better protection of couriers' legal rights and interests by improving the insurance system, cutting work hours and amending the Postal Law, at the recently concluded two sessions, China's most important annual political event.

Wang Yong, a manager at delivery enterprise SF Express in Hubei province, and also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said every courier should have accident insurance.

With the rapid development of the e-commerce industry, couriers shuttle through the streets and alleys every day, facing a complex work environment and high work intensity, as well as many potential risks, he said.

"If there is no accident insurance, couriers may incur medical expenses of a large amount of money if they are involved in a traffic accident while on duty. If they are injured, it will also disrupt their normal work and affect their income," Wang said.

Couriers should be provided with medical expenses, disability compensation and even death compensation payments for family members based on specific circumstances for accidents and property losses incurred during work, he said.

"Many big parcel delivery companies buy accident insurance for couriers but there are still some couriers without it," he said.

The way employment in the industry works is a further problem, as some couriers don't sign contracts with the delivery company directly and are employed instead through a third party.

Yao Jinbo, CEO of life services website 58.com and also an NPC deputy, suggested the introduction of a new type of insurance for people working in what he called "new industries", such as couriers in the parcel delivery sector.

Their flexible employment model differs from traditional working practices, which poses challenges to the protection of rights and interests, he said.

"Relevant departments should implement policies to establish a special type of insurance for this group, different from social security," he said, adding that the current social security model is expensive for those employed in the "new industry".

He also noted that if there were a new type of social security that is cheaper than the current one and provides basic protection, both companies and workers would be willing to contribute.

"This type of insurance and social security category can essentially ensure the safety, health and retirement of this group," he said.

Ma Junsheng, former head of the State Post Bureau of China and a member of the Standing Committee of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, suggested amending the Postal Law to "strengthen the top-level design, clarify the legal orientation, improve management empowerment and optimize institutional coordination".

"The development of the postal and express delivery industry faces some governance issues, such as environmental protection and the protection of workers' rights and interests," he said.

Wang from SF Express also suggested parcel delivery companies consider reducing the daily working hours of couriers, lowering the intensity of labor and ensuring that couriers have sufficient time to rest.

China's express delivery sector has seen rapid development in the past 15 years, especially since 2012.

The volume of deliveries has risen more than twentyfold from less than 5.7 billion in 2012 to 132 billion last year, according to the State Post Bureau.

Last year, about 360 million parcels were generated every day in China, which were delivered and collected by more than 4 million couriers across the country.

The advisers agreed their legal rights should be highly valued.

"If a courier can do this job for a long time, his or her rights and interests should be guaranteed accordingly, without any worries for the future," Wang said, adding that it is essential to keep the industry sustainable.



A courier delivers parcels during a cold snap in Tianjin on Dec 12. SUN FANYUE / XINHUA

CHINA



'CITY OF THE FUTURE' RAPIDLY DEVELOPING

Boaters admire Baiyangdian Lake in Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province, on May 28. PHOTOS BY SUN LIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Children play in an amusement park on a commercial street in Xiong'an on Feb 14.



From left: Folk culture performances are staged on a commercial street in Xiong'an on Feb 14. Passengers pose in front of the Millennium Circle statue at the Xiong'an Railway Station on April 18, 2021. Maintenance workers check a Fuxing bullet train at a depot in Xiong'an on Dec 27, 2021.



A robot serves passengers at the Baiyangdian Railway Station on July 10, 2019.



Xiong'an New Area a shining example of modernization in Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region

By CHINA DAILY

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the coordinated development strategy of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, as well as the seventh anniversary of the establishment of Xiong'an New Area.

Over the past decade, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province have collaborated to

create a pioneering and exemplary area for China's modernization, while Xiong'an has been developed as the "city of the future".

Among the area's many construction projects, the Xiong'an Sports Center, with its distinctive architectural features, is taking shape. Once completed, the 180,000-square-meter stadium with 30,000 seats

will be able to host large-scale events.

This year, investment in the development of Xiong'an will again exceed 200 billion yuan (\$27.8 billion), creating conditions for the accommodation of non-capital functions from Beijing.

Over the past seven years, Xiong'an has transformed from a blueprint to a reality, emerging as a high-level modern locale.

Cutting-edge technologies such as 5G, big data, artificial intelligence and autonomous driving are being applied in the city.

Meanwhile, the wetland around Baiyangdian Lake has been steadily improving, attracting a large number of migratory bird species to make it their home.

During the Spring Festival holiday, the

first large-scale commercial street in Xiong'an, Outlets Commercial Street, officially opened and has become a new landmark.

Residents and tourists strolled along the street to enjoy shows, taste delicious food and relax, experiencing a whole new shopping atmosphere that showcased the vitality and future of this city.



A panoramic aerial photo shows Xiong'an Railway Station, which is the largest of its kind in Asia, on May 13.

WORLD

SpaceX making spy satellites for US agency

WASHINGTON — SpaceX is building a network of hundreds of spy satellites under a classified contract with a US intelligence agency, five sources familiar with the program said, demonstrating deepening ties between billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's space company and national security agencies.

The network is being built by SpaceX's Starshield business unit under a \$1.8 billion contract signed in 2021 with the National Reconnaissance Office, or NRO, an intelligence agency that manages spy satellites, Reuters quoted the sources as saying.

The plans show the extent of SpaceX's involvement in US intelligence and military projects and illustrate a deeper Pentagon investment in vast, low-Earth orbiting satellite systems aimed at supporting ground forces.

If successful, the sources said, the program would significantly advance the ability of the US government and military to quickly spot potential targets almost anywhere on the globe.

The contract signals growing trust by the intelligence establishment of a company whose owner has clashed with the administration of President Joe Biden and sparked controversy over the use of Starlink satellite connectivity in the Ukraine conflict, the sources said.

The Wall Street Journal reported in February the existence of a \$1.8 billion classified Starshield contract with an unknown intelligence agency without detailing the purposes of the program.

Reuters disclosed for the first time that the SpaceX contract is for a powerful new spy system with hundreds of satellites bearing Earth-imaging capabilities that can operate as a swarm in low orbits, and that the spy agency Musk's company is working with is the NRO.

Reuters was unable to determine when the new network of satellites would come online and could not establish which other companies were part of the program with their own contracts.

SpaceX, the world's largest satellite operator, did not respond to several requests for comment about the contract, its role in it and details on satellite launches. The Pentagon referred a request for comment to the NRO and SpaceX.

In a statement, the NRO acknowledged its mission to develop a sophisticated satellite system and its partnerships with other government agencies, companies, research institutions and nations, but declined to comment on Reuters' report about the extent of SpaceX's involvement in the effort.

Roughly a dozen prototypes have been launched since 2020, among other satellites on SpaceX's Falcon 9 rockets, three of the sources said.

On Friday, Falcon 9 launched 23 Starlink satellites to low-Earth orbit, media reports said.

All the sources asked to remain anonymous because they were not authorized to discuss the US government program, Reuters said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Big wheels



Physically challenged participants take part in a marathon on the International Wheelchair Day in Kathmandu, Nepal. A total of 250 people joined the event, held to promote sports platforms for differently abled people in the country. PRABIN RANABHAT VIA NEWSOUM

Moscow accuses Kyiv of election sabotage

Russian FM slams 'terrorist activities' while Ukraine launches drone attacks

MOSCOW — Russia accused Ukraine on Saturday of stepping up "terrorist activities" during the Russian presidential election in order to attract more aid and weapons from the West.

"It is obvious that the corrupt regime in Kyiv has intensified its terrorist activities in connection with the ongoing presidential elections in Russia in order to demonstrate its activity to its Western handlers and to beg for even more financial assistance and lethal weapons," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

It said that in one such incident, a Ukrainian drone had dropped a shell on a voting station in the Zaporizhzhia region.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported downing 35 Ukrainian drones overnight, including four in the Moscow region.

Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyanyin said a fifth drone, close to the capital's Domodedovo airport, was downed on Sunday morning. No casualties or damage were reported.

State-run TASS news agency quoted a local election official as reporting no damage or injuries when the explosive device landed five or six meters from a building housing a

polling station before it had opened in a village about 20 kilometers east of the city of Enerhodar.

There was no immediate comment from officials in Ukraine.

Four candidates are registered for the election, namely incumbent Russian President Vladimir Putin, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Leonid Slutsky, Vladislav Davankov from Russia's New People Party, and Nikolai Kharitonov, the Russian Communist Party's candidate.

Russia's governing party, United Russia, said it was facing a wide-spread denial-of-service attack — a form of cyberattack aimed at paralyzing web traffic — and had suspended nonessential services to repel it.

State news agency RIA quoted a senior telecoms official as blaming the cyberattacks on Ukraine and Western countries.

Thwarting attempts

Russian media quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying Putin had been receiving military reports in recent days of attempted attacks by saboteurs in the border regions of Belgorod and Kursk, including several incursion attempts, all of which he was quoted as saying were thwarted.

In the Belgorod region where cross-border attacks from Ukraine have become part of daily life, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov reported the deaths of a man and a woman in a missile attack, and later in the day, one injury, after he said Russian defenses shot down 15 rockets approaching the regional capital.

Dmitry Azarov, governor of the Samara region 850 km southeast of Moscow, said the Syzran refinery was on fire following a drone attack but that an attack on a second refinery had been thwarted.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked his military forces and intelligence for new "long-range capabilities" in his nightly video address on Saturday, without mentioning the reported intensified attacks by his country's forces.

Kyiv's military said on Sunday that Russian air attacks had damaged agricultural companies and destroyed several industrial buildings in the Black Sea port of Odesa overnight.

Under Russia's presidential election law, the president, who serves as the head of state, is elected directly by the populace for a six-year term. Eligible presidential candidates must be Russian Federation citizens who are at least 35 years old, have resided in Russia for more than 25 years, and have never held citizenship of another country.

According to the rules, a candidate who secures more than half the votes will be elected president. If no candidate achieves a majority and there are more than two candidates, a second round of voting is held between the two candidates with the most votes, and the winner of this round will be elected.

The counting of votes will begin once the election concludes and will continue until the results are finalized. The final results will be confirmed no later than March 28 by Russia's Central Election Commission and will be announced within three days of confirmation.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Asian pianist wins raves at NYC event for St. Patrick's Day

By BELINDA ROBINSON

in New York
belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

A celebration of Irish music by Western musicians and gifted Chinese pianist Yifei Xu took place in the heart of New York City in celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

The event Friday, called the St. Patrick's Day Spectacular XXIII, was held for the benefit of the FBI Agents Scholarship Fund at 77 WABC radio station. St. Patrick's Day was Sunday.

Featuring Deni Bonet on violin, Sean Seymour on guitar and Yifei Xu on piano, the artists had the luck of the Irish as they delighted the audience with Irish folk music. Bonet played on a striking blue violin while Seymour played guitar and sang.

Xu, based in New York, showcased her incredible talent on the piano with several renditions of Irish folk songs including *Danny Boy*, *Drunken Sailor* and *Peg o' My Heart*. She then performed *Red Is the Rose* and *Be Thou My Vision*.

Xu told China Daily: "I've always been in love with Irish music, I've heard a lot of Irish folk songs by Irish folk singers, so, today I'll be playing a lot of the piano arrangements of the Irish folk songs."

Tom O'Connor, an American lawyer with Irish roots, tapped his feet to the music while he sat in the audience and watched Xu's performance of *Red Is the Rose*.

O'Connor told China Daily: "This is truly lovely. I've never heard Irish songs played with just a piano before."

Xu, who specializes in a multitude of music traditions including traditional, baroque, classical and romantic repertoires, used her unique style to demonstrate her knowledge of Irish music.

During her performance, she acknowledged the work of John Field, a famous Irish composer from Dublin and played three of his compositions. She also did a piece arranged by British pop singer Ed Sheeran.

Xu believes that honoring her own culture and Irish culture is a positive mix.

"I am Chinese and we all have our famous tunes that we grew up with and this is culturally the same for the Irish people, like their folk songs," she said. "We also grew up listening to some of the very famous tunes too. So, although [East and West] have different styles, the Chinese folk style and Irish folk style is something I'm interested in exploring together."

Xu's performances have crisscrossed multiple countries in Asia,

Europe and America. She has appeared at venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Harvard Club in New York City, Merkin Hall and Lincoln Center.



This is truly lovely. I've never heard Irish songs played with just a piano before."

Tom O'Connor, an Irish American lawyer commenting on pianist Yifei Xu's performance

The master's degree graduate has also played with the Austin Symphony Orchestra, American Modern Orchestra; BargeMusic Eclectic Concert Series, the Aspen Music Festival and for the BlackBox Ensemble as pianist in residency.

Gary Kong, one of the sponsors of the event, is also CEO of The Global Hero Foundation, which "saves lives and honors the work of doctors, nurses and medical professionals".

Kong told China Daily: "I've been in the US for so many years and so have so many other Chinese. I'm trying to get into American culture for the next generation, because they are all here."

Kong expressed his excitement at hearing Xu play as he appreciates the dedication it takes for an artist to learn the piano.

In another performance, Daniel Sprague, a retired detective with the New York Police Department (NYPD) played bagpipes. Born in America, Sprague's grandparents came to the US from Ireland.

The bagpiper, who was dressed in traditional Irish regalia specifically worn by the NYPD, told China Daily: "I think heritage is very important for anyone, you need to embrace where we are, but we need to never lose our heritage."

The former detective has been playing for nearly 40 years. He has played his bagpipe in various different countries including Germany and Normandy France. A band he is in has also played for two popes and at two inaugurations for American presidents.

As Xu looks toward several new future projects, she said: "I love to explore. As a contemporary pianist I love to use all different media for example we may use the inside of the piano, we can use extensive techniques, or my voice to do crazy ideas."



Gary Kong (left), organizer Charles Sullivan (center) and Yifei Xu pose at the St. Patrick's Day Spectacular XXIII held in New York on Friday. BELINDA ROBINSON / CHINA DAILY

Boeing plane found to have missing panel after flight

PORTLAND, Oregon — A post-flight inspection revealed a missing panel on an older Boeing 737-800 that had just arrived at its destination in southern Oregon on Friday after flying from San Francisco, officials said, the latest in a series of recent incidents involving aircraft manufactured by the company.

United Flight 433 left San Francisco and landed at Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport in Medford shortly before noon, according to FlightAware.

The airport's director, Amber Judd, said the plane landed safely without incident and the external panel was discovered missing during a post-flight inspection.

No injuries were reported after pausing operations to check the runway and airfield, Judd said.

Judd said the United ground crew or pilots doing a routine inspection before the next flight were the ones who noticed the missing panel.

A United Airlines spokesperson said via email that the flight was carrying 139 passengers and six crew members, and no emergency was declared because there was no indication of the damage during the flight.

"After the aircraft was parked at the gate, it was discovered to be missing an external panel," the United spokesperson said. "We'll conduct a thorough examination of the plane and perform all the needed repairs before it returns to service. We'll also conduct an investigation to better understand how this damage occurred."

The Federal Aviation Administration also said it would investigate.

The missing panel was on the underside of the aircraft where the wing meets the body next to the landing gear, United said.

The plane made its first flight in April 1998 and was delivered to Continental Airlines in December of that year, according to the FAA. United Airlines has operated it since Nov 30, 2011. It is a 737-824, part of the 737-800 series that was a precursor to the Max.

Multiple mishaps

In January a panel that plugged a space left for an extra emergency door blew off a Boeing Max 9 jet midair just minutes after an Alaska Airlines flight took off from Portland, leaving a gaping hole and

forcing pilots to make an emergency landing. There were no serious injuries.

The door plug was eventually found in the backyard of a high school physics teacher in southwest Portland, along with other debris from the flight scattered nearby. The Department of Justice has launched a criminal investigation.

On March 6, fumes detected in the cabin of a Boeing 737-800 Alaska Airlines flight destined for Phoenix caused pilots to head back to the Portland airport.

At least 50 people were hurt when a Boeing 787 operated by LATAM Airlines dropped abruptly midflight from Sydney to Auckland last week.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

twitter.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by China Daily

Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing,

China. Additional information is on file with the

Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

539 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6R8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published

daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500

Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and

additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send

address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500

Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No. 1295

BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

New bright spots shine in pressured trade scene

Quality products, branding, digital tech seen as key to boosting exports

By OUYANG SHIJIA
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

As Chinese New Year dawned on Feb 10 sparking the Spring Festival celebrations, a freight train bound for Madrid, Spain, departed from Yiwu in East China's Zhejiang province, carrying not just valuable cargo, but also hopes for better transcontinental trade cooperation that could potentially transform the global economy.

As for its material contents, the train was loaded with 110 twenty-foot equivalent units containers of various goods, including industrial products, electronic devices and clothing. It was one among many such China-Europe freight trains on the Yiwu-Xinjiang-Europe route, known as *Yixin'ou* in Chinese. The route spans over 13,000 kilometers and saw its maiden trip back in 2014.

Official data showed as many as 68 *Yixin'ou* trips were made during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday.

"After years of development, the *Yixin'ou* freight trains are now running on over 20 routes reaching over 160 cities in more than 50 countries," said Chen Jinghua, general manager of Yiwu Land Railway Port Development.

Chen highlighted a notable shift in export products from traditional small commodities to high-tech products, saying the trains are supplying more high-value products like solar photovoltaic panels, spare parts for automobiles and electronic devices than others these days.

Official data reflect the marked shift in China's exports with the high-tech "new three" experiencing substantial growth. Exports of the "new three" — passenger EVs, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells — were worth 1.06 trillion yuan (\$147.4 billion) in 2023, up nearly 30 percent year-on-year, according to the General Administration of Customs.

Citing the 2023 export data, Zou Yunhan, deputy director of the macroeconomic research office at the State Information Center's Department of Economic Forecasting, said: "Although foreign trade may continue to face pressure, there are still new bright spots worth noting."

"Foreign trade with countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative is expanding from traditional export markets to broader regions. And exports of the high-tech 'new three' will continue to support stable growth in foreign trade."

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, underscored the importance of the "new three" in driving high-quality development, contrasting them with the more traditional "old three" industries of furniture, clothing and home appliances.

Citing the case of Yiwu, home to the world's largest wholesale market for small manufactured goods, he said it needs to seek new growth opportunities and speed up the upgrade and transformation of manufacturing and foreign trade, offering more high-quality and high-value products for the target markets.



A merchant from Cameroon (right) shops for artificial flowers at Yiwu China Commodity City in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, on Feb 21. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY



Workers prepare a Yiwu-Xinjiang-Europe route China-Europe freight train for departure in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, on March 1. The train is scheduled to arrive in Paris after March 20. HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



An employee works on an intelligent photovoltaic module production line for export orders at a company in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, on Jan 18, 2022. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Regardless of whether engaging in foreign trade or domestic sales, lacking a distinct brand makes survival in this fiercely competitive market a challenge. Branding is the way forward," said toys exporter Chen Meijun, who moved into Yiwu International Trade Market to start her business in 2002.

As of today, Chen said her team has forged partnerships with over 500 domestic manufacturers, supplying various types of toys across the globe, mainly to emerging markets such as the Middle East and South America.

"When I moved into the Yiwu market over 20 years ago, only 5 percent of the market's businesses engaged in foreign trade. After years of development, over 80 percent of the business operators here are doing foreign trade business," she said.

Bai from the CAITEC said it is advisable for exporters to embrace digital technologies to better tap into

the target markets and then offer new quality products in demand.

"We need to build new advantages in foreign trade with more efforts to promote technologies, improve the product quality and services, and build our own brands," he said.

China has adopted policies and measures for improving the structure of foreign trade while keeping its scale stable. China's foreign trade reached a record high of 6.61 trillion yuan in the first two months of the year, up 8.7 percent year-on-year and signaling a strong start for 2024, according to the General Administration of Customs.

During the period, China's foreign trade continued the positive trend that began in the fourth quarter of last year, achieving year-on-year growth for five consecutive months. Exports of certain products like automobiles, home appliances and ships saw significant increases, said Lyu Daliang, director of the GAC's Department of Statistics and Analysis.

ment of Statistics and Analysis.

As for the composition of exports, GAC data showed that electromechanical products constituted nearly 60 percent during the January-February period, with automatic data processing equipment, integrated circuits and automobile exports recording substantial growth rates.

In addition to witnessing a growing trade volume with major trade partners like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the United States and South Korea in the first two months, China's foreign trade with other economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative amounted to 3.13 trillion yuan, up 9 percent year-on-year, according to GAC data.

Experts said the better-than-expected results were driven by factors including the rapid growth in emerging markets and acceleration in the development of "new quality productive forces", which became

key buzzwords during this year's two sessions.

According to the latest Government Work Report, the country will move faster to develop new quality productive forces.

The report noted that while facing new difficulties from a more complicated external environment, the country still enjoys favorable conditions and factors to stabilize foreign trade and investment, including its continued efforts to expand high-standard opening-up, its enormous market and complete industrial chains, and its bilateral and multilateral economic and trade cooperation with BRI countries.

Other factors include the acceleration in new forms of foreign trade such as cross-border e-commerce and stronger efforts made to attract and utilize foreign investment in key fields.

Despite facing pressures from

degloblization sentiment, China and the ASEAN "still have much room for further enhancement of trade and economic ties", said Ong Tee Keat, president of Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific based in Malaysia.

While dismissing some pessimistic views on the Chinese economy propagated by some Western organizations, Mushahid Hussain Sayed, chairman of the Pakistan-China Institute, said, "China's growth has not been as fast as it was in the past 40 years, but it is still progressing very fast."

After years of development, China now boasts a huge market for foreign companies and has become a leader of innovation in high-tech development, especially in emerging fields like EVs, climate change, cyberspace and artificial intelligence, he said.

He further noted the marked shift in China's exports, saying the country is now exporting more high-tech products.

Referring to moves by some countries to seek "de-risking" or decoupling from China, Siyabonga Cyprian Cwele, South African ambassador to China, said: "No one can afford to ignore the growing importance of the Chinese economy, the world's second-largest economy."

"With a very open economy, China is fully embracing globalization. I don't think any smart economic agent or businessman will ever do that (decouple from China) ... It is very unlikely that any country can successfully do that."

Looking ahead, he said he sees huge growth potential in economic and trade cooperation between South Africa and China, especially in the fields of e-commerce, scientific innovation and green development.

Yiwu's transformation is remarkable

REPORTER'S LOG

By Ouyang Shijia

As I stepped into the bustling corridors of Yiwu International Trade Market, the vibrant atmosphere immediately caught my attention. The air was filled with a cacophony of languages, as merchants from around the world mingled with local shop owners, engaged in animated conversations, and negotiated deals.

Yiwu in Zhejiang province, renowned as the world's capital for

small commodities, is undergoing a remarkable transformation. While the bustling trade in buttons, toys and apparel continues unabated, there is a palpable shift toward a new frontier — the new energy sector.

The opening of the country's first specialized market for showcasing and trading in new energy products in Yiwu International Trade Market last year signifies the city's embrace of this burgeoning sector.

Walking through the market, I witnessed the convergence of innovative technologies and sustainable solutions, as sellers now showcase tens of thousands of new energy products including photovoltaic modules and energy storage systems.

What is particularly striking is the

scale of investment and growth in Yiwu's photovoltaic industry. With the establishment of numerous enterprises and the implementation of strategic plans, Yiwu is poised to become one of the key players in China's transition toward renewable energy. The ambitious targets set by local authorities reflect their commitment to fostering a thriving ecosystem for the development of new energy technologies.

The output of Yiwu's photovoltaic industry reached 87.23 billion yuan (\$12.13 billion) in 2022, accounting for over 30 percent of the total output of the photovoltaic industry in Zhejiang province. According to Yiwu's plan, the total output of its photovoltaic industry is expected to

reach 100 billion yuan by the end of 2025, with the formation of five leading enterprises with output value exceeding 10 billion yuan each and several enterprises with output value exceeding 1 billion yuan each.

Yiwu's embrace of photovoltaics symbolizes a broader narrative of transformation within China's manufacturing landscape. It underscores the country's determination to adapt to changing global dynamics, innovate and lead the way toward a more sustainable future.

China's exports have witnessed a marked shift to high-tech and green "new three" products. The export of electric vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products — collectively, they are referred to as the "new three" — increased by close to 30 percent year-on-year last year.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Econom-

ics, highlighted the strategic importance of the "new three" in driving high-quality growth, saying her team estimates that these new industries and their related sectors upstream will make up around 11 percent of China's GDP.

Looking ahead, Loo said these industries will become an alternative growth driver for China, especially once the pain from the property drag plays out over the next few years.

Tian Xuan, associate dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, said China's economy is transitioning away from a high-speed phase to one characterized by high-quality development. "It entails a shift of growth drivers from old to new during the process of economic structural transformation."

He also highlighted the importance of "embracing the new without aban-

doning the old", saying "we should not abandon the old drivers all at once."

According to the latest Government Work Report, the country must adhere to the principles of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, promoting stability through progress, and establishing the new before discarding the old.

"The meaning of 'establishing the new before discarding the old' refers to the process of ensuring a smooth transition from old drivers of growth to new ones," Tian said. "We should not rashly pursue new drivers at the expense of causing oversupply or excess capacity in certain sectors."

He further noted that some traditional sectors still enjoy growth potential and room for upgrade and transformation, and called for more efforts to foster new growth drivers and cultivate new quality productive forces.

BUSINESS



Hotel guests check in at Sofitel Macao at Ponte 16 in Macao. Sofitel is a luxury hotel brand under French hospitality behemoth Accor. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Accor charts ambitious plan for hospitality sector in nation

French firm bets big on pent-up travel demand in booming tourism market

By OUYANG SHIJIA
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

French hospitality company Accor is betting big on the burgeoning Chinese market, anticipating substantial growth in its thriving tourism sector as the country plans to become the world's largest tourism market by 2035.

"China is moving closer to becoming the world's biggest tourism market by 2035," said Gary Rosen, CEO of Accor Greater China.

Pent-up demand for travel after the COVID-19 pandemic has continued among Chinese consumers, he added.

As China gradually shakes off the impact of the pandemic, Accor has witnessed robust growth in its China business, with many areas registering double-digit growth last year, said Rosen.

"Last year, as an example, we signed about 150 new hotels that we added to our pipeline," he told China Daily in an exclusive

interview recently.

According to Accor's full-year 2023 results, hotel room revenue in China accounted for 19 percent of revenues in Accor's Middle East, Africa and Asia-Pacific region. The recovery continued with marked revenue per available room growth in China in the fourth quarter. Business overall in 2023 is slightly higher than the level seen in 2019.

Rosen noted the profound shift in people's perspectives after the pandemic, with an emphasis on seizing the moment to explore the world.

He said today's era is witnessing a transformation where individuals are no longer deferring travel plans for another day, but are embracing the opportunity to immerse themselves in diverse cultures and experiences.

"The younger generation, in particular, is driving this trend, viewing travel not just as leisure activity, but as a means of personal growth and cultural enrichment," he said.

Data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism showed that traveler number as well as tourism-related revenues reached record highs in China during this year's eight-day Spring Festival holiday.

According to the ministry, the domestic tourism market saw 474 million trips during the holiday, up 34.3 percent year-on-year and a 19 percent increase compared with the same holiday period in 2019 before the onset of the pandemic.

Domestic tourism-related revenues reached 632.69 billion yuan (\$87.98 billion) during the holiday, an increase of 47.3 percent year-on-year and up by 7.7 percent from the same holiday period in 2019.

Rosen expressed strong confidence in China's economic prospects, saying the Chinese government is taking effective measures to stimulate the economy.

"People are understanding the stimulus that's being put in the market because we don't see a pull-back in people's decisions to travel," he said. "So that leaves us quite optimistic that 2024 will be even better than 2023."

According to the latest Govern-

ment Work Report, China will strive to foster new areas of consumption including cultural and recreational tourism and hasten the recovery of inbound tourism.

Looking ahead, Rosen said Accor plans to expand its footprint in the country and further diversify business growth in the region, employing more people and investing more resources in its infrastructure in the China market.

"China is one of our top markets in terms of growth around the world," he said. "It plays a significant role for us as a company, and we will always be focused on growth here."

Drawing upon insights from Bain & Co, Rosen said he believes that "China still is the best consumer story in the world".

"As the economy grows ... that opens the door for more companies around the world to have the opportunity to continue to or start to invest in and grow their business in China as a part of their global portfolio," he said. "The market is continuing to rebound from the last couple of years, and I think that only presents great opportunities for foreign companies in the future."

Immense economic potential to spur China's growth target

BEIJING — China has set an economic growth target of around 5 percent for 2024.

In setting the target, the need to boost employment and incomes and prevent and defuse risks has been taken into account, and the growth rate is well aligned with the objectives of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), according to this year's Government Work Report approved by the national legislature.

The target also takes into account of the potential and conditions supporting growth, it said.

Over the past decades, China's economy has overcome odds such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and the global financial crisis, and has managed to maintain consistent growth while invigorating the global economy.

Since 2014, the Chinese economy has reached one milestone after another, with the country's GDP passing the 60-trillion-yuan (\$8.34 trillion), 80-trillion-yuan, and 100-trillion-yuan marks in 2014, 2017 and 2020. More recently, it went on to pass the 110-trillion-yuan and 120-trillion-yuan marks despite the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2023, China's economy grew by 5.2 percent, with the corresponding economic growth in volume exceeding 6 trillion yuan in comparable prices. Such an increase in volume would take a 10 percent annual GDP growth rate to achieve 10 years ago.

For this year, therefore, analysts believe that an economic growth rate of around 5 percent is a goal that can be achieved through hard work, and it shows the enterprising and vigorous state of the Chinese government.

Setting such a target will help boost confidence, guide public expectations, and further build consensus on development, said Zhou Li'an, a professor at Peking University.

Optimism is shown among foreign-funded enterprises as they cast their vote of confidence for the Chinese market by increasing their

investment or operations in the country.

For example, the number of stores operated by fast food chain KFC has grown to surpass 10,000 across China. In January, Airbus opened a service center dedicated to the entire life cycle of an aircraft in Chengdu, Sichuan province, which is the first such center outside Europe for the company.

A survey by the European Chamber of Commerce in China revealed that about 59 percent of surveyed companies view China as one of their top three investment destinations.

"China's economy has sufficient internal driving force and great potential for sustained growth," said Tian Xuan, vice-dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance.

For sure, the country faces challenges, such as external shocks and uncertainties, a lack of effective demand, relatively weak public expectations and overcapacity in certain sectors. Yet, generally speaking, tailwinds outweigh the headwinds.

As a major manufacturing powerhouse, China boasts all the industrial categories listed in the UN industrial classification, and its manufacturing added value accounts for 30 percent of the world's total. It is the world's second-largest consumer market and the largest online retail market. The abundance of high-quality factors also serves as a cushion against shocks.

A series of reform measures have provided growth momentum and vitality. The country has put the development of new quality productive forces high on its agenda.

"The Chinese economy enjoys capability, advantages and opportunities to sustain growth, and the long-term positive trend remains unchanged," said Wang Changlin, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

XINHUA



An aerial drone photo shows a container vessel berthing at the smart zero-carbon terminal of Tianjin Port in North China on Feb 2. ZHAO ZISHUO / XINHUA

KEEP OUR EXISTENCE BEAUTIFUL

PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY

PUBLIC INTEREST AD: 0090

CHINADAILY

中国日报

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Economic expectations up after two sessions

EAGLE EYE

By Guan Tao

China has set its main targets for economic and social development and budget plans in the Government Work Report, presented during the two sessions that ended earlier this month.

It is expected that more policies will gradually be put into practice and the country will fulfill expectations.

Such efforts are actually in line with the country's vision outlined at the Central Economic Work Conference last December, where the leadership vowed to effectively enhance economic vitality, prevent and resolve risks, improve social expectations, and consolidate the positive momentum of economic recovery.

The 5 percent economic growth target for this year set in the Government Work Report is generally in line with market expectations. If consumer prices can rise moderately this year and push the GDP deflator from negative to positive, nominal GDP is expected to exceed real GDP again.

The growth target has sparked heated discussions at home and abroad.

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have forecast the Chinese economy will grow in the range of 4.5 percent to 4.7 percent this year, citing factors such as adjustments in the real estate industry, inadequate social security, weak external demand and tense trade situations.

Though it will not be easy for China to achieve its growth target this year, the Chinese government has a clear roadmap. The Government Work Report, while affirming achievements, has also pointed out difficulties and challenges. The latter part has been elaborated by about 300 words from about 60 words in the Central Economic Work Conference report.

Clear signal

The Government Work Report has sent a clear signal that China's development still faces more favorable conditions than adverse factors and that the basic trend of economic recovery has not changed. It is necessary to both boost confidence and adhere to bottom-line thinking. The country should be fully prepared to deal with various risks and challenges, make good use of favorable conditions, and fully mobilize all aspects.

Some voices have questioned China's economic growth rate last year, but viewed from the perspective of the long-term relationship between commonly used economic indicators and economic growth, this questioning is debatable.

For instance, from 2003 to 2023, the correlation between China's



electricity generation and actual economic growth was 0.753, and for the United States, it was 0.687, which showed a stronger positive correlation between the two indicators in both China and the US.

Specifically, from 2021 to 2023, the correlation in China was highly positive at 0.997, while in the US, it was weak at 0.277. It indicates China's economic fluctuations in recent years, while such a correlation in the US suddenly disappeared.

Last year, China's electricity generation grew by 6.2 percent, an increase of 2.8 percentage points compared with the previous year, corresponding to an economic growth rate of 5.2 percent and an increase of 2.2 percentage points year-on-year.

Electricity generation in the US changed from a 3 percent increase in 2022 to a decrease of 1.2 percent last year. But it didn't correspond to an economic growth rate of 2.5 percent and an increase of 0.6 percentage point year-on-year.

A prosperous job market is believed to be an important manifestation of the resilience of the US economy. However, some analysts have pointed out that official US employment data are based on "income", while unemployment data are based on "per household", which may exaggerate the prosperity of the US job market.

If a person takes three part-time jobs, according to the "per house-

hold" standard, it counts as one person employed, but according to the "income" standard, it counts as three people employed.

Second, the projected deficit rate of China is not high, but the actual fiscal expenditure intensity is not weak either.

According to the Government Work Report, the country's deficit rate is projected at around 3 percent considering its comprehensive development needs and fiscal sustainability. The deficit scale is pegged at 4.06 trillion yuan (\$565 billion), an increase of 180 billion yuan from last year's budget.

The 3 percent deficit rate is the same as last year's, lower than the market's previous expectation of around 3.5 percent. However, considering the following factors, the actual fiscal expenditure intensity is higher than last year's.

First, China plans to issue special long-term national bonds for several years. The plan is aimed at major tasks and the security of key areas. Second, the country plans to arrange 39 trillion yuan of special bonds for local governments, an increase of 100 billion yuan from last year.

Third, 1 trillion yuan of government bonds were issued in the fourth quarter of last year, and 500 billion yuan was carried over for use this year. It is expected that fiscal revenue will continue to recover and grow this year, and coupled

with funds transferred in, the scale of general public budget expenditure will be 28.5 trillion yuan, an increase of 1.1 trillion yuan from last year.

Therefore, after the budget draft was disclosed at the two sessions, the market did not feel disappointed.

Optimized debt

This year's budget still sees an increase in the central government's deficit, while local governments maintain a deficit of 720 billion yuan for the third consecutive year. It reflects the vision of optimizing the structure of central and local government debts.

However, it is still unclear whether the issuance of special long-term national bonds will follow the approach of last year's increase in government bonds, all of which are transferred to local governments through transfer payments, and both the principal and interest are repaid by the central government.

Of course, if last year's approach is adopted, it is necessary to establish a government debt management mechanism compatible with high-quality development within the framework of the new round of fiscal and tax system reform, and make clear the fiscal and administrative powers of central and local governments.

Considering that the current

recovery of consumption in China is still on track, with deep "scar effects" after the COVID-19 pandemic, it may also be important to increase public service consumption expenditures that are provided by government departments to society, as well as net expenditures on goods and services provided free of charge or at low prices to resident households.

Faced with the above challenges, three aspects are critical to improving social expectations.

The first is to launch better-than-expected macroeconomic measures to guide economic operations back to a reasonable range. In recent years, China has remained strategically focused on high-quality development and adhered to structural adjustment as the main focus and policy stimulus as a supplement to cope with downward economic pressure.

However, among the myriad measures, the ones that can stabilize the economy are the most practical and effective. Macroeconomic policies should be forward-looking, enrich the toolbox, and leave room for redundancy, to ensure that timely and effective measures can be introduced when needed.

This year's economic growth rate should not be lower than the compound average growth rate from 2020 to 2023. At the same time, economic growth should be accompa-

nied by moderate price increases and improved employment for key sections of the population.

The second is to launch greater-than-expected risk-prevention policies to guide major risk factors toward convergence. Real estate, local government debt, and small and medium-sized financial institutions are the focus areas for China's current risk-prevention and control.

The country must adhere to both short- and long-term approaches and treat both the symptoms and root causes to ensure that systemic risks do not occur.

The third is to launch more reform and opening-up measures to reshape market confidence with landmark events. Deepening reform and opening-up is a necessary means to do away with institutional obstacles, stimulate the vitality of market entities and enhance the drivers of economic development. Substantive measures need to be implemented to reshape policy credibility.

To this end, it might be dealing properly with some market-focused events or resolving some important issues that are not that eye-catching, but are important bottlenecks for the market.

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

Comprehensive way key to boosting effective demand

MAIN STREET

By Zhang Bin

Advancing countercyclical policy support should have an even more crucial role to play in boosting China's effective demand and economic growth, as well as achieving long-term sustainability of the world's second-largest economy.

It is believed that major challenges faced by current economic operations are the result of insufficient effective demand. For example, based on our estimations, if effective demand reaches a reasonable level with the core CPI at around 2 percent, the nominal GDP growth rate in 2023 should be 3 percentage points higher than the current nominal GDP growth rate — an increase of 3.8 trillion yuan (\$528.6 billion) in nominal GDP, with respective increases of 2.3 trillion yuan, 900 billion yuan and 600 billion yuan in household, business and government incomes.

In this regard, the numbers indicate what a significant role sufficient demand can play in backing employment opportunities, resolving excess capacity, boosting expectations, mitigating various risks and vulnerabilities, and addressing potential external risks.

A comprehensive approach is therefore needed to boost effective demand, which can be achieved through credit growth, which enables expenditures and incomes to rise, followed by profits and investments. To be specific, expanding credit mainly calls for intensified efforts vis-a-vis the following three aspects.

The first involves expanding government borrowing, which should necessitate a total borrowing scale of no less than 11 trillion yuan.

To achieve the 5 percent growth target this year, the required scale of broad fiscal expenditure — government spending and government fund expenditure — stands at about 40 trillion yuan.

Given the current reading, the government needs to borrow at least 11 trillion yuan to have a chance at achieving this goal, which is equivalent to 8.2 percent of GDP

and will thus pose no threat to fiscal sustainability.

As domestic inflation levels are relatively low and private sector savings exceed investment, increasing government borrowing and boosting expenditure can more fully utilize economic resources that the private sector cannot fully absorb. In this sense, the move will not lead to inflation, but will inject, rather than squeeze out, private sector spending.

Looking ahead, if the country's ratio of broad government debt/GDP remains stable at the current level, the corresponding broad deficit rate will be 6-7 percent. With intensified implementation of countercyclical policies, the deficit rate is expected to exceed the current level and reach 8-9 percent — a mild increase that presents no harm to long-term fiscal sustainability.

Second, it is encouraged to further advanced monetary policy support by achieving a social financing scale growth of over 11 percent.

To achieve this goal, it is important to make the inflation target of around 2 percent in core CPI heard by all sectors in order to guide social expectations and increase consump-

tion and investment. Lower actual interest rates are also required to create a favorable environment for private investment and consumption. In addition, the role of pledged supplementary lending policy tools should be fully leveraged to support construction of affordable housing, public infrastructure and urban village renovations.

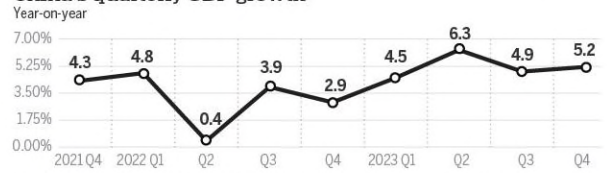
According to our calculations, achieving the 5 percent GDP target requires additional social financing of about 44.8 trillion yuan, with a corresponding stock market growth of 11.4 percent, which also requires around 3 trillion yuan of PSL.

The last aspect calls for a further stabilized real estate market, which is crucial for overall economic stability. On the one hand, it involves assisting property companies to restore their financing channels through government support and regulatory policy adjustments. On the other hand, measures such as loosening purchasing restrictions, lowering mortgage rates and offering preferential loan rates to first-time homebuyers can help developers mitigate risks related to assets such as commercial residential buildings and parking spaces,

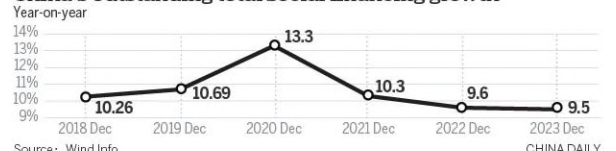
China's monthly core CPI growth



China's quarterly GDP growth



China's outstanding total social financing growth



and improve their cash flow.

The writer is deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics and a member of the 14th

National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

DPP must properly handle Feb 14 incident so relations don't fray more

It is natural that China Coast Guard vessels should conduct regular patrols in waters near Kinmen island.

The Fujian provincial coast guard authority has every reason to do so after the incident on Feb 14 when two fishermen from the Chinese mainland drowned after their fishing boat was chased and bumped by law enforcement vessels of the Kinmen authorities, which claimed their boat was in "restricted waters".

But as the central authorities have made clear there are no so-called "restricted waters" there. It is the misperception of the relations across the Strait by the Democratic Progressive Party authorities on Taiwan island, which exercise local governance of the area, that has given rise to the tension.

The DPP authorities have repeatedly detained mainland fishing boats under various pretexts and treated mainland fishermen in a rude and dangerous manner. The regular patrols by Fujian coast guard vessels are to maintain order in the waters and safeguard the lives and property of fishermen.

The waters near Xiamen and Kinmen have long been traditional fishing grounds for fishermen from both sides of the Strait. It is outrageous for the DPP authorities to beat about the bush on the responsibility of their law enforcement vessels in the incident. There is no reason for the DPP authorities to drag their feet on an investigation into the tragedy. A spokesperson of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council reiterated on Friday that the DPP authorities must respond in a serious and responsible manner to the demands of the relatives of the drowned fishermen, and make clear what really happened in the encounter between the mainland fishing boat and Taiwan coast guard vessels.

If the DPP authorities really cared about the fishermen and had due regard for cross-Strait relations, they should have launched an immediate probe to determine the sequence of events that led to the fatalities and punished any involved who committed actions for which they should be held accountable.

What the DPP authorities have done with their wrongful law enforcement actions and in the wake of the tragedy has made it a necessity for the Fujian coast guard authority to send vessels on regular law enforcement patrols in the waters. It is injudicious for the DPP authorities to risk further sabotaging relations across the Taiwan Strait by not acting responsibly and prevaricating over an investigation.

It is naive and ludicrous for the DPP authorities to believe they can leverage the incident to split the island from its motherland by sowing the seed of animus among people across the Strait. The tension in cross-Strait relations will only result in creating obstacles to exchanges and cooperation between the two sides. In particular, it is those from the island who have been benefiting from their mainland businesses that will suffer and those Taiwan businesses that are making money by receiving tourists from the mainland that will bear the brunt of the incident.

It is no exaggeration to say that the DPP authorities have kidnapped the Taiwan people by denying the 1992 Consensus that there is only one China, and Taiwan is part of China. They are seeking "Taiwan independence" at the expense of the island's future and the interests of Taiwan people. The Feb 14 tragedy is the result of what the DPP authorities have done to the detriment of the cross-Strait relations. The DPP authorities should realize that their attempt to seek "Taiwan independence" is a dead end, and the worsening ties across the Taiwan Strait will only lead to greater damages for the island.

Properly handling the Feb 14 incident is a way to prevent cross-Strait relations from going from bad to worse.

CIA the wellspring of disinformation

According to a Reuters report on Friday, in 2019, the Central Intelligence Agency was authorized by then US president Donald Trump to launch a clandestine campaign on Chinese social media aimed at turning public opinion in China against the Communist Party of China.

CIA spokesperson Chelsea Robinson declined to comment on the existence of the program, its goals or impacts. Kate Waters, a spokesperson for the Joe Biden administration's National Security Council, also declined to comment on the program and whether it is still active. But the report was based on several anonymous former officials "with direct knowledge of the highly classified operation". And as Reuters' interviews with "two intelligence historians" indicate, when the White House grants the CIA covert action authority, through an order known as a presidential finding, it often remains in place across administrations.

The track record of the United States using such programs to win the Cold War and pave the way for "color revolutions" around the world over the past decades gives credence to the report. And the reaction to the report, not just from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, but also some US analysts, as well as third-party observers from other countries, interviewed by Reuters, indicate they all consider the report to be true.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that the report shows "the US has spread China-related disinformation in an organized and well-planned way for a long time and it's America's important approach to wage a battle of perception against China". Wang also referred to the comment by US Republican Senator Rand Paul, who once said that the US government is the biggest propagator of disinformation, and CIA Director William Burns' recent remarks that the CIA has committed substantially more resources toward China-related intelligence collection.

The CIA founded a new China Mission Center in 2021 after the Biden administration identified China as being the No 1 challenge to the US. And the CIA, according to a report of The Wall Street Journal in December last year, is trying to boost its human spy capacities at the agency and its sister spy agencies in China as a part of a massive shift of focus from terrorism to China.

The report by Reuters indicates that the US has been not only spreading disinformation about China's ruling party, but also seeking to "foment paranoia among top leaders there" so the country expends resources "chasing intrusions" into its political network in a bid to cause larger internal strife. As one of the former officials told Reuters: "We wanted them chasing ghosts." The interviewees also said the CIA program involved action in countries where the United States and China are competing for influence, targeting public opinion in Southeast Asia, Africa and the South Pacific.

The US often accuses other countries of spreading disinformation, but as the Reuters report shows it is the US that is the true breeding ground of disinformation. The response of some China hawks to the exposure of the covert propaganda program is a telling sign of the US' shamelessness. Their only concern is that Beijing may take advantage of the report to "proselytize" in a developing world already deeply suspicious of Washington.

Beijing has no need to do that. The US is already alienating itself from the rest of the international community with its actions. Long before the Reuters report appeared, countries around the world knew the sort of nefarious activities the CIA gets up to. Many countries have firsthand experience of the chaos and suffering its troublemaking can cause. If the US side really recognizes the importance of Sino-US relations and intends to manage the risks and uncertainties in a responsible way as it has claimed, it should refrain from these say-one-thing-do-another tricks, and engage with China with reciprocal earnestness and in good faith.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

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

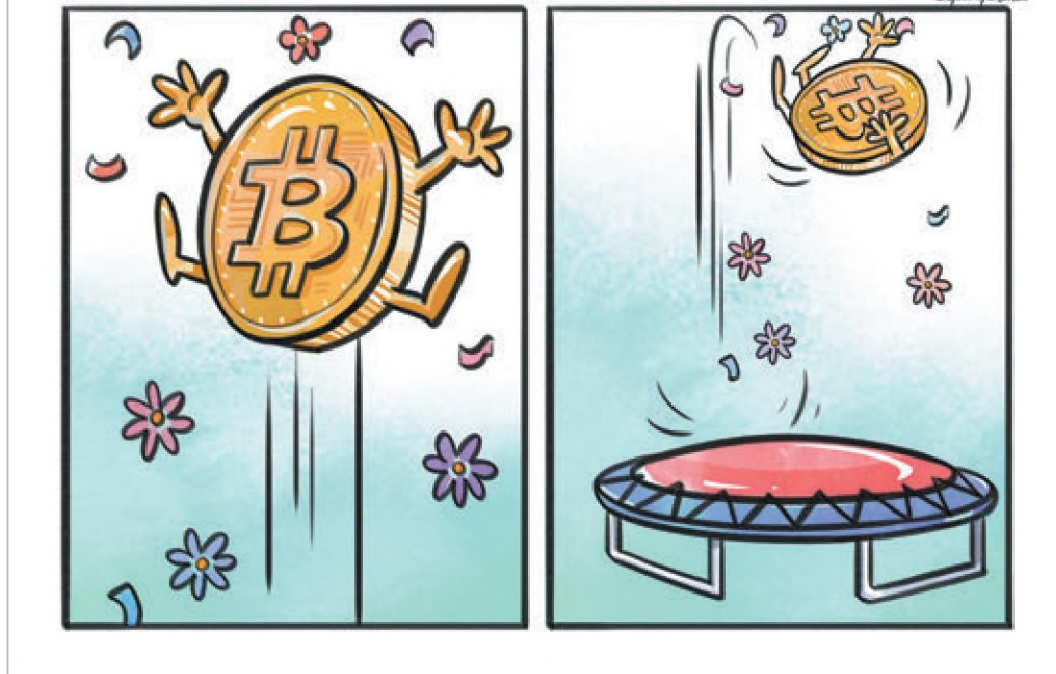
China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

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

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 77281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Li Min



Opinion Line

Manila should respect the historical facts and pursue a reasonable course

At a joint news conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr indicated that the country continues to question China's historical claims based on a 10-dash-line map, saying that "we have not rejected China's proposals but the premise is something that we question".

Manila's questioning of the 10-dash line is worth questioning. China's historical rights in the South China Sea are indisputable. As Beijing has repeatedly reiterated, China was the first country to discover, name, explore and exploit the islands in the South China Sea, or Nanshai Zhudao, and relevant waters, as well as the first nation to exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction over them continuously and effectively.

The islands were illegally occupied by Japan during World War II. After Japan's surrender, according to the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Declaration, the Chinese government resumed its sovereignty over them.

As Wang Wenbin, spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, said, as early as in 1948, the Chinese government officially released

its dotted line map, which has been upheld by successive Chinese governments. For a long time, it has never been questioned by any country. China has never claimed that the whole of the South China Sea belongs to China. The Philippine side accuses China of claiming all waters inside the dotted line as territory, which is not in line with the facts and is a deliberate distortion of China's position. The Philippines should stop misleading the international community.

Wang stressed that China has territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, including that China has sovereignty over Nanshai Zhudao. China has internal waters, territorial sea and contiguous zone, based on Nanshai Zhudao. China has an exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, based on Nanshai Zhudao. And China has historical rights in the South China Sea. The above positions are consistent with relevant international law and practice.

That Marcos made the statement prior to attending a summit with Japan and the United States in Washington in April has exposed his intention to use the South Chi-

na Sea issue to undermine peace and stability in the South China Sea region with the help of external forces such as the US, whose naval vessels travel halfway round the world to China's doorstep just to cause trouble.

But the plots of the Philippines and the external forces that it counts on will be in vain, as China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests brook no infringement and China has the resolve and capability to uphold its sovereignty and territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests.

China stands ready to address the maritime differences with the Philippines and some other regional countries directly concerned through negotiation and consultation on the basis of respecting historical facts.

It's time the Philippines stopped its headlong rush along the wrong path. It and the other relevant nations could achieve win-win results by carrying out maritime cooperation with China, and jointly safeguarding peace and stability in the South China Sea.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Quest for cost-effective space flight continues

SpaceX reportedly came close to completing an hour-long test flight of its Starship rocket on Thursday. For SpaceX, the third spaceflight was already a "partial success". As early as April 2023, during the first launch of one of the mega rockets, Elon Musk, sponsor of the project, said that as long as it didn't explode on the launch pad, no matter how high it flew so long as it got off the ground it would be considered a success.

Instead of spending time on long-term, repetitive demonstrations and testing, SpaceX improves reliability through repeated launch missions, identifies technical vulnerabilities with each failure and addresses them in the next version of the product.

A total of five Starships have been produced in the first batch, and Musk announced that another launch will be

conducted in a few months following the one on Thursday. For the company, the loss of one Starship only provides teaching materials for improving the next one.

In addition, SpaceX produces its manned spacecraft, cargo spacecraft, and rockets, in batches with standardized designs. These mass-produced spacecraft are standardized, which significantly lowers costs by reducing the need for customized design, production and testing.

For instance, SpaceX uses door handles commonly found in daily life as the switches for spacecraft cabin doors. These are much more reliable and cost-effective than engineers designing a specialized door handle for spacecraft. It also purchases low-grade commercial chips from the electronics market, which are much cheaper

than the ones specially designed for astronautics. The company ensures reliability through redundant backup designs using multiple chips. This is why people have demonstrated great interest in the project that heralds a significant reduction in the cost of space travel.

However, the R&D costs of NASA's Artemis Project, to which SpaceX is a contractor, will likely become unbearably high. Besides, it's necessary for SpaceX to ensure the reliability of its Starship rockets because when they finish experimental manned spaceflight and do actual manned spaceflight, there can be no more "partial successes" — that would mean a loss of lives.

Nonetheless, the innovative efforts of SpaceX are worth encouraging.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Trade-in action plan can help boost growth and cut emissions

The State Council, China's Cabinet, recently issued an action plan on large-scale equipment upgrading and the trade-in of consumer goods. Promoting large-scale equipment upgrading and the trade-in of consumer goods can continuously increase the production capacity and market for more high-quality and durable consumer goods. In this way, both consumption and investment will be encouraged, production efficiency improved, energy saved and carbon emissions reduced.

Also aimed at promoting recycling and reuse, the action plan specifies the improvement of the

recycling network for scrapped products and equipment. By 2027, the number of scrapped cars whose usable materials and components can be recycled is expected to double compared to 2023, while the amount of recycled scrapped household appliances is expected to grow by 30 percent compared to 2023. Proper disposal and recycling of retired equipment and various types of waste products are conducive to improving the efficient utilization of resources, and cutting carbon emissions.

The aforementioned action plan proposes to support eligible equipment renewal projects with the government budget and to introduce preferential policies for digital and intelligent transformation. This will further expand the coverage of the policy benefits, effectively reduce enterprise investment costs, and greatly enhance the

enthusiasm and willingness of enterprises to undertake equipment renewal.

Regarding the trade-in of consumer goods, it is necessary to organize and carry out trade-in activities in stages and by product category to create a vibrant and continuously bursting consumer market atmosphere. With convenience and affordability as the guiding principles, various policy tools such as consumption subsidies, consumption vouchers and interest subsidies for consumption loans should be actively promoted. The advantages of internet platforms should be leveraged, policy application processes should be simplified, and special attention should be paid to the needs of the elderly and rural residents, so that all residents will be encouraged to trade in their consumer goods for new models.

—XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Debate on Democracy

Editor's note: The so-called Summit for Democracy, being held in Seoul from Monday to Wednesday, will create divisions in the global community because, instead of advancing the principles of democracy and working for the emancipation of humankind, it aims to build power blocs against certain countries. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Muhammad Asif Noor

China a true upholder of freedom

Seoul will host the third Summit for Democracy, themed "Democracy for Future Generations", from Monday to Wednesday where political leaders, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and civil society and youth organizations from across the world are expected to participate.

This Summit for Democracy which was launched by Biden in 2021 is considered a strategic maneuver within a larger geopolitical game being played out in the Asia-Pacific region where the US' primary focus has been to expand its influence and engage with China on the sub-regional level. The summit is being held to consolidate the historical premise that major powers will continue to export democracy to less-powerful nations, often under the banner of freedom and human rights protection, in order to exert their influence on the latter.

In contrast, China advocates that developing countries have the right to choose a development path and follow a political system that best suits their national interests. "Whole-process people's democracy" is a form of democracy which, despite being different from Western-style democracy, suits China's national conditions. And even in the existing world order, a country has the right to have a governance structure that is good for its people and conducive to its socio-economic development.

The Summit for Democracy, while apparently aimed at strengthening democratic norms across the world, in reality serves as a platform for the United States to expand its influence, and rally its allies against perceived rivals. The summit therefore is not an advocacy for democracy but a strategic tool in the broader geopolitical contestation which allows the US to maintain its global hegemony. The global narrative of democracy has been weaponized by the US and its Western allies to further their geopolitical interests instead of fostering genuine democracy around the world and improving the world order in which at

present chaos reigns supreme.

China's governance model is different from that of the West's in that it approaches democracy holistically and, hence, is called whole-process people's democracy. This governance model is marked by extensive public participation in all facets of governance, and therein lies its difference with the Western model, which lays emphasis on electoral democracy. Whole-process people's democracy reflects China's commitment to socialism with Chinese characteristics and challenges the universality claim of Western-style democracy. Whole-process people's democracy embodies China's endeavor to chart its unique development path, different from the prescriptive norms of Western liberalism.

China's governance model, predicated on whole-process people's democracy, emphasizes people's comprehensive engagement in governance, transcending mere electoral participation. It is an approach to governance that responds to the needs and aspirations of China's population, which comprises 56 ethnic groups, through mechanisms that ensure broad public participation in the decision-making process. The Chinese governance model challenges the



The writer is founder of Friends of Belt and Road Initiative Forum.

notion that Western-style democracy is the sole legitimate form of governance, and advocates for a pluralistic understanding of democracy that respects the sovereignty and different development paths of different countries.

The hosting of the Summit for Democracy by Seoul will have profound implications on regional dynamics, particularly in the context of the competition between the US and China. It places the Republic of Korea at the intersection of competing global powers, and gives it the opportunity to assert its democratic identity while navigating the complexities of its ties with both the US and China.

This delicate diplomatic balancing act, which the ROK is expected to perform, shows how less-powerful countries are caught in the crossfire of major power competition while trying to safeguard their sovereignty and

strategic autonomy in a rapidly changing global landscape. Seoul's engagement with NATO and the likelihood of its joining QUAD (a diplomatic, strategic partnership among the US, India, Japan and Australia), which Chinese people view as a clique formed to contain China.

The Summit for Democracy has raised Beijing's concerns also because the Taiwan island has been "strengthening cooperation" with the US under this framework. By ignoring the fact that the Taiwan island cannot be invited to attend any regional or international meeting as a separate entity, as it is an integral part of China, the US and the ROK have in fact interfered in China's internal affairs and violated the one-China principle.

Therefore, the summit not only reflects the global competition among different governance models but also demonstrates the intricate and delicate ways in which the US and its allies trigger rivalries with other countries and heighten geopolitical tensions.

With the world grappling with many serious challenges, including ongoing military conflicts that have claimed tens of thousands of lives and left many more homeless, the US and its allies are not helping matters by adopting such a confrontational approach toward countries like China.

This is the time to work together and resolve bilateral differences and regional and global disputes, and overcome common challenges.

The Summit for Democracy glorifies the democratic ideals and governance models but the essence of true democracy is in respecting each other's points of view and working together for the betterment of the world.

If the US and its allies are serious about restoring lasting peace and promoting development across the world, they should prioritize constructive engagement with other countries and build a future where diversity would be the norm and development the rule.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Jasna Plevnik

US pursuit of 'democracy' puts world at risk

Democracy, in different forms, is the most followed political system in the world. But there are contrasting views on democracy, with the difference being like those between the two major world powers, China and the United States. The two sides strongly differ on key points of democracy related to social organizations and international relations.

However, no matter how big and worrying these differences are, we should not ignore the fact that the most valuable aspect of democracy is diversity and the right to differ.

For China, democracy belongs to all; it is not the property of any one country, and is related to human values. China's fast-paced economic development and the eradication of extreme poverty show the Chinese government works for the common good of the people. According to an Open Society Barometer survey, published six months ago, many respondents said they believe China's growing global influence would be "a force for good".

Beijing has never been interested in imposing its political system or form of government on other countries, neither by using its soft power nor by triggering a war. China has been reiterating that the world should not be dominated by one country, though.

The United Nations, according to China, should act as a central pole of international democracy, especially when it comes to global decision-making and enforcing international law. In contrast, the United States sees itself in the pole position, not the UN. Washington even wants Beijing to become a neoliberal democracy and pursue the

values in which the US believes.

The US thinks the type of neoliberal democracy it follows has proved to be best for governance, both in theory and praxis, even though many of its important allies think US-style neoliberal democracy is going through a crisis in the US as well as globally.

In the US' foreign policy "democracy" is as significant as military or ecological security. The US' expanded approach to safeguard its national interests and national security, and the balance of power politics, mean Washington could force its model of democracy globally. The US has been pushing in different directions, while desperately pursuing neoliberal policies, which have resulted in economic and geostrategic gains for Washington.

In the interest of neoliberal democracy, the US has taken many anti-democratic actions, and triggered and/or fought wars, in order to engineer regime change in different countries. The results have been a devastated, unstable Iraq, a shambling Libyan society and economy, and a war-ravaged Afghanistan now ruled by the Taliban, whose eradication the US had promised while invading the country in 2001. Yet the US does not see the chaotic and tragic developments as a defeat or debacle of its "global democracy spreading" campaign.

Under the excuse of spreading "democracy", the US in the "Indo-Pacific" region has established new political and military alliances and is even flirting with idea of expanding NATO in the Asia-Pacific, so as to make the region an "open, democratic, peaceful" place governed by rule of law.

Now the US' top geostrategic inter-



The author is president of the Geoeconomic Forum, Croatia.

est is to shield the values of "democracy" in Eastern Europe. That expansive ideology behind protecting "democracy" in Ukraine began 10 years ago when the US supported a coup in that country and decided to make Ukraine a NATO member. The problem for the US is that Russia immediately understood it as *casus belli*.

The US leadership has been sending weapons to Ukraine on the pretext of helping it defend itself against Russia, which has cost the lives of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian people, and billions of dollars in damages. It's another matter that the combined efforts of the US, the European Union and NATO have had no impact on Russia, let alone weaken it.

It seems that no cost for the Russia-Ukraine conflict is too high for them. The conflict has not only forced the civilian population in a life-threatening crisis, and destroyed the economy, cultural institutions and political democracy in Ukraine but also made the EU less democratic and a more propaganda-loving narrative generator.

In many parts of Europe, democracy has been under constant attack. Russian opera singers, conductors, writers, actors and athletes have been banned in much of the West, and historical monuments connected with

Russia demolished. In the political sphere, former German chancellor Gerhard Schroder was almost expelled from Germany's ruling Social Democratic Party over his close ties with Russia. Anybody who does not see the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a way of protecting "democracy" has been called pro-Russia and/or morally corrupt, which perfectly reflects the hypocritical attitude of the US towards democracy in Europe.

In Europe, it is no longer possible to support peace even for Pope Francis and peace organizations, let alone ordinary people, without being attacked as traitors of democracy.

An additional blow to democracy and peace in Europe came when the Swedish government announced that it was ending the peace fund that had provided financial support to peace organizations since the 1920s.

It is strange that to strengthen democracy in Europe, the US decided to invest more than €1 billion in Germany to build the largest American military hospital abroad.

With the Russia-Ukraine conflict entering its third year, the situation has become increasingly different for the EU. What is evident now is that the US has spread the battlefield from Ukraine to the whole of Europe, all in the name of spreading "democracy" while a nuclear Armageddon seems to be looming. The whole world is at risk, and that is a serious threat to the future of democracy. The question is: Can democracy survive without the people?

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

Liu Dongchao

The complexities of a political system cannot be simplified

The political world seems to be caught in an intense debate on the forms and practices of democracy. The debate, largely based on the different viewpoints on and attitude toward democracy, is often characterized by political descriptions, utilitarian considerations, biases and strong emotions.

To begin with, it is necessary to uphold democracy while remaining vigilant against the pitfalls of what can be termed as "democratic idolatry". Democracy can also be described as a fundamental political system and power architecture that ensures the participation of different social groups in a country's political and social affairs, and creates space for individuals and collectives to voice their opinions. Despite its historical significance and positive social characteristics, however, no one form of democracy should be deified as the ultimate political system.

Yet "democratic idolatry" exists, both at the domestic and global level, because democracy is worshipped as an infallible deity, immune to scrutiny and criticism. This approach, often based on Western democratic standards, undermines the exploration of alternative democratic paths by countries, and perpetuates narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness.

Furthermore, a nuanced understanding of the dual nature and contradictions inherent in Western-style democracy is essential. While Western developed countries have mature democratic institutions, these institutions are not without flaws. Despite their logical coherence, institutional integrity and commendable performance, they still exhibit aspects of injustice and hypocrisy. And the manipulation of these institutions and the political system they represent by elite groups to serve their own interests, coupled with the disengagement of marginalized social groups, often results in operational inefficiency and wrong decisions.

Western-style democracy also manifests profound contradictions in its domestic and global practices, oscillating between democratic practices at home and autocratic acts internationally. This inconsistency has become even more evident in recent events, including in the Summit for Democracy that US President Joe Biden launched in Seoul, the Republic of Korea, from March 18 to 20. The summit delineates alliances based on self-interests instead of genuine democratic principles. The invitation to countries with poor democratic records to attend such summits exposes the superficiality of the organizer's claimed democratic values.

That Western-style democracy has built a democratic facade domestically and exhibits autocratic, even tyrannical, tendencies globally becomes clear when analyzing the Summit for Democracy. The summit, which Biden orchestrated, is based on dividing camps and building walls to serve the US' interests. As such, its democratic narrative is nothing but mere rhetoric.

When it comes to China, while recognizing the achievements of its democratic practices, it is essential to approach the subject carefully. China's journey toward democracy is marked by resilience and adaptation to the changing times, which allowed the country to gradually align with global trends since the launch of reform and opening-up.

The Communist Party of China's endorsement of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the emphasis on universal human values, including democracy, signify the country's commitment to nurture and uphold democratic values, and advocate their adoption globally.

China practices a form of democracy, from the top to the grassroots level, which best suits its national conditions. It is called "whole-process people's democracy" and is characterized by people's participation in deliberations and decision-making, as well as supervision of the government.

For instance, deputies to the National People's Congress are elected through democratic votes and are accountable to the people. In China, individuals of any ethnic group, profession, gender or social status can be elected to any political post, and entrusted with the power bestowed by the people to serve the country. All 56 ethnic groups in China elect their deputies to the NPC and members to the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Whole-process people's democracy covers all aspects and stages of the political process, including democratic elections, consultations, decision-making, administration and supervision, with each step closely linked with the rest. Institutions and organizations at all levels practice whole-process people's democracy, yielding significant results in different fields. Although whole-process people's democracy is still evolving, it signifies China's democratic exploration of a governance path distinct from Western-style democracy.

While different people may interpret these fundamental realities differently, only the rabidly biased will deny their existence. By identifying ideological debates on democracy for what they are and exposing political rhetoric masquerading as democratic narrative, we can gain a clearer understanding of the essence of democratic discourse.

As we navigate the complexities of democracy, it is essential to foster an environment conducive to promoting open dialogue, constructive criticism and mutual respect. For that, we need to transcend ideological barriers, embrace diversity of thought, and ensure democratic principles are upheld without falling into the trap of "democratic idolatry". Only through genuine engagement and collaboration can we strive toward a more inclusive and effective democratic framework which would address the needs and aspirations of diverse social groups worldwide.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

AUGUSTO SOTO

To clear the road ahead

Negotiation between the EU and China to agree on EV cooperation and competition should be possible

During the past weeks, giant ships carrying thousands of Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) landing in Europe have created angst among the top European Union policymakers and automobile manufacturers. BYD in particular has been making inroads in the European market by offering competitive and stylish models. With the rising "alarm", the European Commission Directorate-



General for Competition is preparing to launch an investigation into Chinese EVs as part of a probe into state subsidies prohibited by the World Trade Organization. If proved, punitive tariffs will be imposed to protect European EV makers.

But maybe there is a way to manage conflict. After all, as the world decarbonizes, demand for EVs will rise further, and Chinese cars could contribute to speeding up the energy transition.

Authorities in Beijing, including China's ambassador to the EU Fu Cong, have called the EU's probe "unfair" while other Chinese officials and industry watchers say it is "pure protectionism". Regardless, the probe is underway, with scheduled verification visits. Such probes are not unusual. In the not-so-distant past, similar inquiries have been applied to key goods, including solar panels and textiles from China. The EU itself, among other powers, also provides subsidies to semiconductor manufacturers to keep the West ahead of China in the race for cutting-edge technology.

But one can foresee that if punitive measures are taken, China will take counter-measures. Tit-for-tat measures might follow that could escalate into economic confrontation and a subsequent protracted trade war. It would become the second after the US-China trade war, triggering further de-risking or decoupling, sending the wrong signal to each other's consumers and to the rest of the world. That would be a gross mistake at a time of increasing international uncertainties.

In principle, there are viable approaches to resolve the issue. One is the contingency formula ensuring there is enough steam to enable successful European competition

for some time. The "Renault formula" for example proposes designing cheaper models as consumers in Europe seem keen on well-designed and functional EVs without unnecessary frills, and cutting logistic costs, as the French company sees itself able to keep about 80 percent of its supply chain within 300 kilometers of its production sites. Announcing talks to collaborate with another traditional giant such as Volkswagen on a low-cost EV project would enable competition with EVs from China, it has been reported.

But a significant number of the EU car-makers claim that due to Chinese EV makers' exceptional competitive edge, such a strategy might not be enough. The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA), representing the 15 major Europe-based automobile manufacturers, argues that they are insufficiently backed by European governments, whose decarbonization strategy has obliged them to produce the battery vehicles at which their Chinese competitors excel.

It might seem unavoidable for the EU Commission to collide with the Chinese authorities sometime this or next year. But there are some more considerations for maneuvering. The possibility of Donald Trump winning the US presidential election and what that might entail needs to be considered in the equation. It would likely bring disruptive geopolitical unpredictability in free trade and globalization.

Now that the 1990s and early 2000s hyper-globalization period is moving into a post-hyper-globalization era, the need to adjust global rules is apparent. Reforming the World Trade Organization might take a long time as there are many different interests. During the WTO 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, on March 2, there was no agreement to launch deliberations on key challenges (including industrial subsidies and the environment).

One feasible solution is the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) that was concluded in principle on Dec 30, 2020. Following almost seven years of

negotiations, it was saluted as evidence of Europe's strategic autonomy providing the formula for an equilibrated level playing field so often advocated in recent years. Furthermore, it was proclaimed that it was better to have a joint agreement with China and not 27 bilateral investment agreements to avoid the possibility of "divide and rule". But in March 2021, just three months later, EU parliamentary approval for the Agreement was derailed by issues unrelated to trade and investment.

One of the most reasonable ways to move ahead would be to intensify dialogue, particularly at the high and middle levels to address economic, trade and green issues, with a sense of urgency.

Seen from Spain, what could Madrid and Beijing do to inject vitality and confidence into EU-China relations? Having celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations last year and being set to commemorate 20 years of

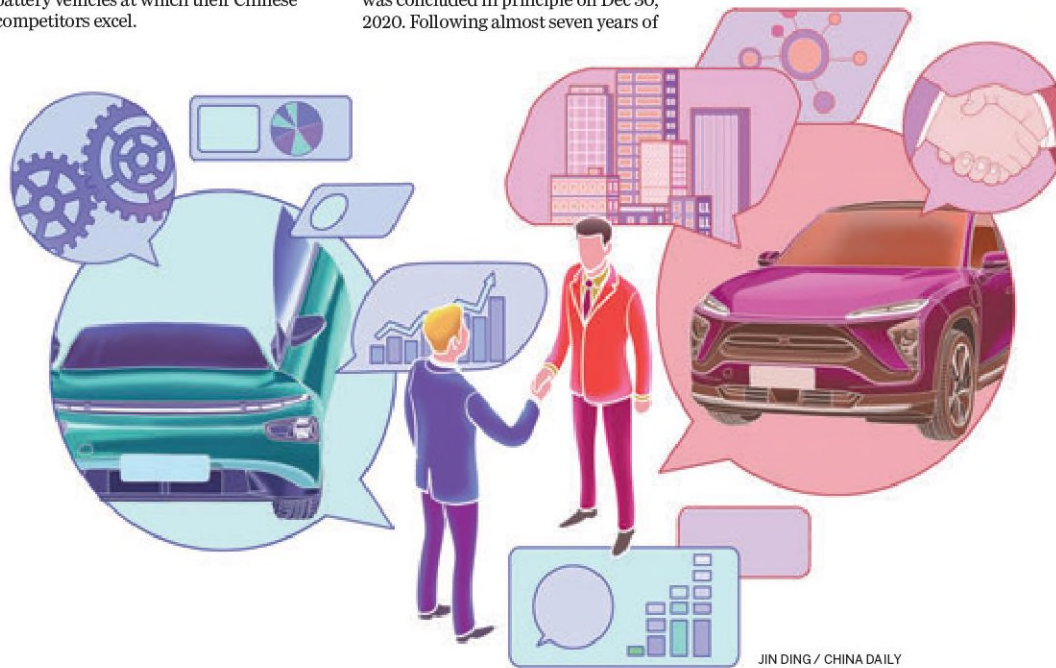
their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2025, the two sides have various fields for cooperation. One case in point to highlight is the Strategic Projects for Economic Recovery and Transformation (PERTE). PERTE's most recent and vanguardist project is the one approved in late February by Madrid to world leading green-tech company Envision Group from Shanghai, one of the beneficiaries of the Electric Vehicle PERTE initiative with 300 million euros (\$328.2 million) in aid, of which 200 million corresponds to subsidies and the remaining 100 million euros is loans. Envision Group has announced it has begun constructing a battery gigafactory in Caceres, Southern Spain, in the first half of the year. Spanish President Pedro Sanchez has saluted the project and his confidence in the investment attractiveness of Spain in the green transition. The Spanish formula deserves study across Europe.

Meanwhile, the more we wait for the EU to properly define what "de-risking" is, the more the risks will lead us to descend into decoupling. One of the various interpretations in Europe is that "de-risking" is indeed a narrative that leads to decoupling rather than to a clear path of managing risks, and in this sense, it is potentially a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The lack of a clear definition translates into investing uncertainties. Let's be clear, Chinese competitive companies, like any competitive enterprises, are always ready to cooperate. Another thing is when top-level action is taken by the EU, without a proper perspective, it sweeps away, like an avalanche, a good part of industries and investments rendering impossible to appreciate the consequences ahead.

Now it is up to Brussels, plus the EU member states' capitals, and Beijing to keep the multidimensional bilateral picture at stake at balance and proceed accordingly. The message should be that there is enough space to compete under heaven.

The author is director of the Dialogue with China Project and former global expert in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

BENYAMIN POGHOSYAN

Identity crisis

The European Union faces a defining choice about its future place and role in the world

A major transition is underway in the global order from a unipolar world to a multipolar security architecture, and the European Union faces strategic choices about its future place and role. The EU may seek to act as an independent player while continuing its strategic transatlantic partnership with the United States, or it may become a part of the US-led Western pole, where all



critical political and economic decisions are to be discussed and agreed upon with the US. In this context, the future trajectory of the EU's relations with China will play a decisive role. As the EU bears the economic implications of the Ukraine crisis and sanctions against Russia, including the decline of the EU competitiveness due to rising energy costs, the EU needs economic cooperation with rising economic giants, such as China, to boost its economic recovery and development.

China has long expressed its readiness to work with the EU in the spirit of cooperation. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during his visit to Spain in February 2024, stated that China was ready to work with the EU to uphold free trade, practice multilateralism, and promote an equal and orderly multipolar world. He emphasized that China regarded the EU as "an important force in the multi-polar pattern" and supported European integration and the development and growth of the EU.

Meanwhile, rising economic competition between major actors creates complications that need to be addressed. The recent policy actions by the US, including the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, provided a significant advantage to the US economy, triggering the influx of capital from Europe to the US. As the EU struggles to keep its economy afloat and continue serving as the best model of a social welfare system, the EU needs to look ahead and reassess its economic relations with its partners.

In this context, the evolution of the electric vehicle market is among the topics that need to be discussed. It is part of the green

transition, the most urgent policy issue as climate change raises concerns among citizens and policymakers. When the EV revolution started, the leading players were European and US companies, which were at the cutting edge of innovative technologies.

Then, many Western companies relocated their production to China. Brands such as Volkswagen, BMW and Honda successfully assembled different models in China. However, soon, the local Chinese companies entered the market. Brands such as BYD, Geely and SAIC are increasing their production lines and looking to expand their exports, including to the EU



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

and other markets. Some European officials have expressed concerns about a potential influx of Chinese EVs into the European market. The European Commission launched a probe in October 2023, which will last 13 months. The primary goal of the probe is to determine whether Chinese-made EVs benefit from state subsidies. According to the EU Commission, investigators should visit China, particularly BYD, Geely and SAIC brands, but they should not visit non-Chinese brands produced in China. As the EU and China look forward to developing bilateral ties further, as was confirmed during the 24th EU-China Sum-

mit, which took place in Beijing in December 2023, economic cooperation and competition are issues requiring significant attention. All states have the right to protect their economy from unfair competition, but it is crucial not to use this as a pretext for politically motivated moves. The history of economic development teaches us that competition is the primary source of development and innovation, and no one should be afraid of competition. Suppose states start to take politically motivated actions to protect national companies from competition. In that case, it will not only undermine the basics of the modern economic structure of the world but will also harm their national companies, making them less prone to producing innovations. In the current era of dominance of digital technologies, artificial intelligence and robotics, only companies succeeding in innovation can have a sustainable future, and here, competition with others is a benefit, not a liability.

Thus, European companies and the EU should not fear competition from Chinese EV makers. In fact, the competition with rapidly growing companies will only make European car producers more robust and more prone to invest heavily in research and development, which will benefit them in the long term. Meanwhile, China should consider the EU's concerns and reassure its partners that it adheres to fair trade rules and healthy competition. The key for the EU is to avoid politicization of this issue, as it will only hamper the development of EU-China relations and harm the competitiveness of EU car producers in the long term. Given the successful experience of EU car producers in operating in the Chinese market, including through joint ventures and production lines, the EV market has the potential to boost mutually beneficial cooperation between the EU and China, which will contribute to the economic development of both countries.

The author is chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan, Armenia. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

Designer doctor captivates on catwalk

Physician, 71, shows healthy attitude on runway as she wows the audience at Paris fashion show, **Chen Nan** reports.

On Feb 14, Valentine's Day, which fell on the fifth day of the first lunar month as the Chinese were celebrating Spring Festival, Shanghai-based showroom interior designer Huang Weilai found himself unable to sleep after receiving a message from the Milan headquarters of women's fashion brand, Miu Miu.

The Italian brand wanted to invite Huang's mother Qin Huilan, who turned 71 in December, to walk their runway show at the Paris Fashion Week for its Fall and Winter 2024 collection show.

"I was so excited and I couldn't believe it," says the 34-year-old. "I've been following fashion news for years and I know that selecting models for runway shows is very important. I am so proud that my mother, a woman in her 70s, was invited."

Qin shared her son's excitement. Born and raised in Liuzhou in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, she is a retired physician. After accepting the invitation, she left for Paris on March 2.

"The 70-year-old wore a long gray coat with silver embellishments, a pair of oversized metallic gloves, a black scarf, a small brown leather bag and a pair of pointy-toe Mary Janes. ... Huilan had plenty of eyes on her while she walked the runway, as the fashion house had a stacked front row. ... But she walked like a pro and brought her love of the house to the forefront," an article on the website of American magazine People said on March 5 after the show.

Qin shared her excitement in an Instagram post afterward. "Who would have thought that at the age of 70, I would be standing here on the runway today? Come on! Look! This is Paris! Look! This is the Miu Miu runway!"

She also posted photos of her on the catwalk and backstage on Xiaohongshu, an Instagram-like social media platform popular in China.

Qin says that she likes Miu Miu and Prada and started to watch their runway shows in 2006. "When I tried on my outfit, the Miu Miu team decided to make some changes. It was originally a simple gray coat but they wanted it to look more like my own clothes — 'Qin style,' as they put it. So I stood for two hours as they sewed on beautiful embellishments by hand," she says.

The brand's news release regarding its Fall and Winter 2024 collection reads: "Concurrent gestures express different moments in life — they coexist within single outfits, just as we each hold simultaneous memories of our own experience. ... Girliness is a word we can revalue, from a pejorative gendered noun, anchored to age, to a universal idiom expressive of the strength of rebellion, a spirit of freedom and individuality, one attribute of a richer whole?"

The gray-haired retiree soon went viral, with her followers increasing drastically. Today, Qin has over 33,000 followers on Xiaohongshu and over 16,000 followers on Instagram.

Wowed by her impressive presence on the runway, fans applauded her inspiring story and the message she delivered, that turning 71 was a new beginning.

"She never gets nervous in front of the camera and is comfortable displaying herself in beautiful outfits. Although there were many people at the show, she enjoyed the spotlight, striding along with confidence," her son Huang says.

"We were overwhelmed by the comments and the likes. We also received emails and messages, including from relatives and friends in Liuzhou."

The trip to Paris was not easy for Qin. She is of Zhuang ethnicity and only speaks the Zhuang language.

The original plan was to have Huang travel



Left: Qin Huilan, 71, a retired physician, takes to the runway at Paris Fashion Week for Italian brand Miu Miu's Fall and Winter 2024 collection show. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Right and top right:** Qin displays fashionable attire, bought by her son Huang Weilai, on social media. PHOTOS BY HUANG WEILAI / FOR CHINA DAILY **Center:** Qin shows an elegant white dress and bag. COURTESY OF WALKING TOWN



“I want to encourage everyone who is confused at a certain point in life, to never give up on your dreams. Before I turned 70, I was focused on caring for my patients as a doctor. Who would have thought that at 70 I would be standing here on the runway today?”

Qin Huilan, a physician-turned influencer

to Paris with his mother, but he was unable to do so, as his visa got delayed.

"I was so worried about her. She cannot speak English and can only communicate through translation apps. Because of the time difference, I almost didn't sleep and I helped her to deal with some emergencies," Huang says, adding that his mother didn't know how to order food on her first day in Paris because she couldn't speak English and that she also got lost in her hotel.

Qin managed to tackle the challenge of preparations despite the intense schedule by using a translation app to overcome the language barrier. She is proud that she took action to prove that age is not a barrier.

"I want to encourage everyone who is confused at a certain point in life, to never give up on your dreams. Before I turned 70, I was focused on caring for my patients as a doctor. Who would have thought that at 70 I would be standing here on the runway today?"

Qin records her life and writes about her

feelings in her posts on social media. In one post, she wrote: "After retirement, I had nothing to do but eat three meals a day. After my parents died, I was depressed and felt like I had no one to talk to anymore."

About two years ago, she and her husband moved from Liuzhou to live with their son in Shanghai.

Since her son helped her sign up to social media accounts and taught her how to post and communicate on those platforms, Qin has been sharing her daily life, especially her personal style, which caught the attention of fashion enthusiasts and led to her being featured on magazines and appearing at fashion events.

All this seems to have opened the door to a new world, says the physician-turned influencer, who is happy that people from all over the world have left her comments and likes, and that they appreciate her outfits. "I hope more people will see me, a 70-year-old woman from China, who likes to wear Miu Miu and Prada," she wrote in one post.

Huang says: "I just wanted to let her have fun with social media. I take her out and take photos of her, and gradually she began to enjoy social media."

Qin's posts often feature her wearing brightly colored outfits, high heels and eye-catching accessories. As she says, during her decadeslong career as a doctor, she only wore a lab coat every day, but she still loves matching white with different colors.

She also dresses her hair in different styles, such as long braids, a tight bun or leaves it loose and decorated with a neat bow.

"My husband once took a business trip to Shanghai during the 1980s. He bought me lots of dresses. When I wore the outfits around my hometown, people's feedback was varied," Qin says. "Nowadays, aesthetics of beauty are quite different and diverse. I am glad that I can wear whatever I like and pursue beauty at 70."

Contact the writer at cheman@chinadaily.com.cn

Space tech gives ground support as robot helps protect relics

China's strides in space technology are now enriching the preservation of cultural relics, as spacecraft engineers have repurposed a robot originally designed for orbital missions to protect tomb artifacts. The China Academy of Space Technology recently announced the development of the robot. Combined with electron beam irradiation technology, it can be used as an intelligent mobile system to eradicate bacteria that thrive on ancient murals in small tombs.

Equipped with a robotic arm mounted on a mobile wheeled chassis, this device can scan tomb walls and domes. Similar to radiation disinfection technology used in medical treatment, the electron beams can

eliminate harmful bacteria that cause murals to fade or chip over time.

The project was initiated by the Dunhuang Academy, an institute for the protection and research of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Mogao Caves, in China. It has accumulated rich experience in cave painting conservation over the decades. From 2020 to 2022, the academy has taken the lead in on-site protection of national tomb murals.

"Tomb mural preservation poses a great challenge," says Yu Zongren, head of the academy's conservation institute.

Being buried deep underground for extended periods exposes tomb murals to

high humidity environments, fostering the proliferation of microorganisms that accelerate their deterioration. Furthermore, given the generally confined space within such tombs, any negligence in cleaning and protection work can result in additional damage to these priceless relics.

The conventional disinfection approach involves the use of chemical agents, which, unfortunately, may pose health risks to the people involved, as well as potentially affecting the murals.

As immovable cultural relics, murals need on-site protection, so using traditional biocide agents is not a sustainable option, Yu says.

In response, researchers from the Insti-

tute of High Energy Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences have undertaken the development of an intelligent mobile irradiation sterilization device. They proposed the requirement of "maintaining a small and precise size while prioritizing safety," and collaborated with engineers from the CAST to develop the robot.

Despite rich experience in developing robotic arms for large space capsules, the brief posed a new set of challenges for the engineers.

"We dedicated much of our effort to reducing size and enhancing the flexibility of the robot, making it more suitable for tomb applications," says Xu Jianping, head of the engineering team.

Laser sensors, installed on the remotely operated robot, can detect and avoid obstacles, ensuring a safe distance between the machine and the murals.

According to Xu, these technologies have been employed on China's spacecraft.

Although most of the engineers had never seen mural artworks before, they take pride in using space technology for the protection of centuries-old cultural relics, Xu says.

The robot was showcased for the first time at a domestic exhibition on cultural relic protection last September. The research team plans to conduct more experiments before putting it into service.

XINHUA

LIFE

A MENAGERIE OF MUSIC

Lang Lang's new album sees the celebrated pianist explore the sometimes whimsical, and often romantic, world of Camille Saint-Saens, **Chen Nan** reports.

Much like a trip to the zoo, French composer Camille Saint-Saens' *The Carnival of the Animals* has enchanted generations of young listeners and introduced millions to classical music.

Written in 1886, it is one of the composer's most popular pieces. However, he was worried that it would harm his reputation as a serious musician, and insisted on performing the piece in private, only allowing the iconic movement, *The Swan*, to be published during his lifetime.

The Carnival of the Animals consists of 14 movements, and was finally published in 1922, a year after the composer's death.

When pianist Lang Lang was preparing to release a new album, he wanted to record every movement of the whimsical work, which he says has captivated him ever since he was a child.

His desire to do so was questioned by his colleagues, who, like many people, consider *The Carnival of the Animals* as "not being serious and only for entertaining kids".

"My wish to record *The Carnival of the Animals* was not fulfilled for many years. However, it's a masterpiece to me, rivaling the great pieces like those of Rachmaninoff or Tchaikovsky. It is more than its humor and fun," says Lang.

On March 1, his latest album, *Lang Lang — Saint-Saens*, was released by Deutsche Grammophon.

Joining forces with his wife, pianist Gina Alice Redlinger, the Gewandhausorchester — a symphony orchestra founded in 1743 and based in Leipzig, Germany — and Grammy Award-winning conductor Andris Nelsons, Lang recorded *The Carnival of the Animals*.

"By recording *The Carnival of the Animals*, like other music which is seen as 'simple', I saw what I could rediscover. I know its movements by heart, from *The Lion's Royal March* and *Hens and Roosters*, to *The Elephant* and *The Swan*. I really had to use my imagination," he says.

Lang adds that the recording also reminded him of his 2019 album, *Piano Book*, on which he plays pieces such as Beethoven's *Fur Elise* and Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, which accompanied him in the first few years of his lifelong love affair with his instrument.

"It's all about the joy that music brings to me. I feel like I know the pieces better now I am much older and experienced as a pianist," he says. "I hope that *The Carnival of the Animals*, just like the compositions I recorded for *Piano Book*, will make more children fall in love with music."

Lang says his 2-year-old son, who has just started to learn to play the piano, loves *The Elephant*, which is written for the bass and the piano, the most.

"He enjoys the way the sounds portray the heavy animal. I also realized that he is drawn to the deep sounds," says Lang. "I won't push him to learn to play the piano. If he loves another instrument, such as cello, I will be happy too."



Pianist Lang Lang joins forces with his wife, pianist Gina Alice Redlinger, the Gewandhausorchester and conductor Andris Nelsons, on a new album featuring music by French composers, including *The Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saens. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Online
See more by
scanning the code.

For his new album, Lang also recorded Saint-Saens' *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No 2 in G Minor, Op 22*, which he describes as "a magnificent but underrated romantic masterpiece".

"I was first drawn to it during my student days. I always liked it. The opening is a tribute to Bach, and the first movement has slow cadenzas, as well as regular fast passages. The second movement is a scherzo, almost like Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the finale is virtuosic, like Bach and Liszt combined. It's almost an organ concerto, but it also has these delicate French elements," he says.

Unlike playing Rachmaninoff or Tchaikovsky, he says that playing French music is quite different, and requires him to capture "a sense of subtle harmony".

He thanks his wife for giving the performances a female touch, which fits the atmosphere of French music.

"It's perfume. In interpreting French music, I let myself imagine that I'm expressing emotions captured in a bottle, which is very poetic," says Lang.

The recording of *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No 2 in G Minor, Op 22* also celebrates the historic association between the Gewandhausorchester and the music of Saint-Saens.

In May 1868, the composer premiered the piece in Paris and the following October, he gave its second performance with the Gewandhausorchester in Leipzig.

"The orchestra has a special connection and approach to Saint-Saens' musical language. Working with Lang Lang is also deeply enriching," says conductor Nelsons.

Lang was also keen to include some well-known and smaller-scale solo or four-hand piano works on the new album, starting with Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante defunte* (*Pavane for a Dead Princess*). He also plays the *Tocatta* from Saint-Saens' *Six Etudes, Op III* and the *Pavane* by Faure, as well as the *Flower Duet* from Delibes' opera *Lakme*.

For Debussy's *Petite Suite* he is again joined by his wife, who describes playing this evocative piece as being like "painting a picture".

Also included on the new album are a dozen works for solo or four-hand piano — a blend of pieces, which Lang describes as "neglected gems by five female French composers".

"In addition to iconic music by Saint-Saens, Ravel, Debussy and Faure, I was able, for the first time, to get better acquainted with music by female French composers," says Lang. "For this recording I have unearthed some beautiful treasures, which I am thrilled to share."

He is performing Saint-Saens' *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No 2 in G Minor, Op 22* throughout the 2023-24 season, which will include a German tour this month.

Contact the writer at
chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Tibetan student brings down the house on the 'roof of the world'

LHASA — As the lights brightened, a young performer took to the stage against the backdrop of a red curtain. Holding the microphone with confidence, he began recounting humorous tales in Tibetan, eliciting laughter and applause from the crowd.

The 22-year-old, currently studying at a university in Beijing, has established a stand-up comedy team called Shwow in Lhasa, the capital of Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, which delights audiences during the summer and winter breaks.

"We hope every Tibetan who loves stand-up comedy will come with anticipation and leave with a smile," he says.

Nyanzin Drakpa decided he wanted to become a stand-up comedian three years ago, after watching a show in Beijing.

"The sets were about elderly people exercising in parks, and they reminded me of similarly funny scenes I encountered in a park in Lhasa," he recalls, adding that his decision to perform stand-up comedy in Tibetan got immediate



Left: The audience reacts to a show by Nyanzin Drakpa and his comedy team. Right: Nyanzin Drakpa (right) goes over details of a show with other members of his comedy team called Shwow. SCREENSHOTS FROM XINHUA VIDEO

support from his father.

In fact, his inclination toward stand-up comedy is greatly influenced by his father, Dorje Drakpa, a well-known cross-talk comedian in Xizang, who participated in the regional gala for the Tibetan New Year.

"When I was a child, I often tagged along with my dad to performances, and watched him bring joy to the audience," Nyanzin Drakpa says.

When he and his high school classmates founded the Shwow team in 2021, stand-up comedy was still a relatively obscure form of performance art in Xizang.

To their surprise, their first show, arranged free of charge at a cafe, drew nearly 300 people — six times the seating capacity — even without any advertising.

"Some people stood on tables and the bar counter. Even the seat of the cafe's boss was taken," Nyan-

zin Drakpa says, adding that those who could not squeeze in were standing on stairways, listening to the show.

With his unique sense of humor and keen observation, Nyanzin Drakpa captures the details of his life, such as his experience of being fined by a traffic policeman, and skillfully turns them into hilarious set pieces.

He insists on performing in Tibetan and, to improve his own

proficiency, he attended extracurricular Tibetan classes during his holidays.

"Some of our sets are linked to Tibetan culture, so performing them in Tibetan will make it easier for them to resonate with the audience," he says.

Many outstanding literary and artistic creators have emerged, amid the flourishing cultural and artistic landscape of Xizang in recent years. As an emerging form

of performance art, Tibetan stand-up comedy is gaining popularity and has become an important source of entertainment for Tibetans, especially the young.

University student Tashi Tseten says that Nyanzin Drakpa skillfully blends traditional themes with a contemporary approach, which he finds very enjoyable. "Stand-up comedy has become a way for me to relieve the pressure of studying."

To date, some 30 comedians have performed as part of the Shwow team, with the revenues of each show exceeding 30,000 yuan (\$4,225) during the Tibetan New Year holiday. Earlier this year, Nyanzin Drakpa staged a series of shows in his hometown, Lhokha city.

Looking forward, he plans to upload videos of their performances with Mandarin subtitles to reach a wider audience.

"I hope our shows will go beyond the plateau and spread joy to even more people," says Nyanzin Drakpa.

XINHUA

CULTURE

Magic bridges East and West

Magicians' special skills heighten understanding, appreciation across cultures, **Oasis Hu** reports in Los Angeles.

Standing center stage, Chinese magician Li Dongjin ingests a dozen sharp needles along with a lengthy thread, then swallows a playing card chosen at random by a volunteer from the audience.

After a moment of silent concentration, he pulls a thread from his mouth, on which all the needles are dangling, along with the selfsame playing card.

Shrieks of amazement accompany a standing ovation and cries of "Amazing!"

The needle-swallowing trick is a classical technique in Eastern acrobatics that has a long history. For two years, Li has updated this classic, combining it with a card trick from modern Western magic, showing the best of East-meets-West to patrons of the Magic Castle in Hollywood, California, the United States.

Located in the heart of the nation's movie-making capital, the Magic Castle is one of the most prestigious magic venues in the world and to be invited to perform there is an honor comparable to a musician being invited to Carnegie Hall in New York.

From Jan 15 to 21, the Magic Castle hosted Asia Magic Week, bringing together 14 top magicians from China, Japan, and South Korea, to showcase the magic of the Orient to an international audience.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Dale Salwak, the producer of Magic Castle's Asia Magic Week, said Asia harbors a wealth of untapped talent and is part of the castle's mission to showcase those skills and gain global recognition.

Salwak said he invited each performer after considering their unique styles, ensuring the event embraced inclusivity and diversity.

The East-meets-West event aimed to bring together different cultures, creating an experience that transcends borders, Salwak said.

Spreading marvels

Hailing from a small town in Anhui, China, Li is the first in his family to pursue a career in the arts.

When he was 16 and still in high school, Li watched a video of the renowned Chinese magician Liu Qian (Lu Chen) in which he appeared to make a mobile phone pass through a sealed water bottle.

This act challenged Li's perception of reality and he asked himself: could magic truly exist in this world?

Propelled by strong curiosity, Li devoted countless hours to uncovering the secrets behind Liu's magic.

After six months of research, Li finally discovered the answers online. It was a pivotal moment for him as a magician.

"People experience a sense of awe when witnessing magic, but once they uncover its secret, the amazement turns into disappointment," Li said. "However, those who are destined to be magicians are different, instead of being disappointed, they are inspired to share the feeling of wonder with more people."

Since that moment, Li immersed himself in magic. He read magic books, searched online, and absorbed every bit of information he could find. He befriended magicians and sought guidance from them, and seized every opportunity to perform. He took part in magic



Clockwise from top left: Li Dongjin showcases his mastery by conjuring smoke from his hand at the Magic Castle's Asia Magic Week event. PHOTO PROVIDED BY LI DONGJIN; South Korean magician I Ryun's electrifying performance combines the energy of K-pop with his mesmerizing manipulation skills as he produces a dazzling array of vibrantly colored CDs. PHOTO PROVIDED BY I RYUN; Kenji Minemura, a magician from Japan, performs on the illustrious stage of the Magic Castle. PHOTO PROVIDED BY MAGIC CASTLE; Chinese magician David Shao Qianwei also took to the stage during magic week. PHOTO PROVIDED BY ACADEMY OF MAGICAL ARTS | LMCAPTURED

competitions and started to win awards.

After graduating from university, he decided to perform magic full-time. His friends and family questioned his choice, but he refused to be swayed.

In 2017, he got a job at the Blackstone Magic Bar in Shanghai, performing three shows a day. During a three-year period, he entertained thousands, not all of whom were cooperative. Some ill-intentioned spectators even tried to spoil his performances deliberately.

But Li remained undaunted. "They pushed me to refine my improvisational skills, and I learned to spin any unexpected scenario to my advantage," Li said.

In 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 temporarily shuttered the bar and Li made a decision to study abroad, meet more magicians, and further hone his skills.

He was admitted to Goldsmiths, University of London, for a master's degree in theater production. And he applied everything he learned about lighting, sound, and programming, to his magic, performed whenever he could, practiced his English, and learning to adapt to a Western audience.

For Li, the invitation from Magic Castle was the natural culmination of his 14-year struggle. Each show there brought rave reviews from diverse crowds, including magic legends, movie stars, and globetrotting patrons who hailed his feats as "beyond imagination" and "unparalleled".

Still, Li's drive was unrestrained, with him dreaming of becoming a regular performer at the castle and curating his customized

Asian magic is evolving and growing faster than at any other time in history. Today, Asian magicians are among the best in the world."

Franz Harary, acclaimed US illusionist

show there one day.

"I will never forget my original intention to perform magic: sharing the feeling of wonder with more people," Li said.

Li's fellow Chinese magician, 23-year-old Shao Qianwei, was also on stage for magic week.

Shao's fascination with magic was also sparked by Li Chen.

Joining his high school magic club at 15, his skills grew quickly and at 17 he relocated to the US to further his studies.

Through the introduction of a fellow magic hobbyist, Shao visited the Magic Castle soon after.

"It was as if I had found my true home," Shao said, noting he was able to connect with top magicians and learn from them and he signed up to be an official magician member of the castle, after passing a rigorous audition process.

In June 2022, he got his first invitation to perform at the Magic Castle. In the second half of the year, he was performing there three or four times a week on open mic nights. He saw each performance as an opportunity to fine-tune his act and study audience reactions.

Tricks that elicited positive responses were kept while less impactful elements were tweaked or discarded.

"The scariest thing is when the

audience doesn't react at all," Shao said, "But you have to carry on." After countless performances, Shao identified ways to maximize audience reaction and discovered his unique style.

Embracing his true self, he crafted a distinct persona, that of an innocent, shy geek without romantic experience who has an unrequited longing for Taylor Swift. Based on this quirky image, he meticulously scripted and refined his act, weaving a comedic touch into his performances.

Shao's Magic Castle full stage debut in 2023 won him praise from audiences and magicians alike and his strong personal style led to another invitation from the castle for Asia Magic Week. Once again, his charisma earned rave reviews.

Asia Magic Week also marked the Magic Castle debut of I Ryun, a 35-year-old magician from South Korea.

First enthralled by magic in 2008, I Ryun cultivated his craft for about 18 years and garnered 31 awards including a world championship.

I Ryun performed what is known as prestidigitation, or sleight of hand routine. The style revolves around hand manipulation in which the magician transforms

objects solely through the nimbleness of hand and fingers, with props that include coins, cards, and ropes.

South Korea excels in the field and has developed some signature finesse and a distinctive flair. A virtuoso in prestidigitation, I Ryun's manipulation act featured high energy K-pop music during which he produced a plethora of colored CDs. In the Palace Theatre, the Magic Castle's biggest and most prestigious stage, dozens of discs seemed to materialize from nowhere via I Ryun's hands, shifting size smoothly from large to small, and back, without a pause.

I Ryun said he believes anyone who witnesses his magic would sense the unique cultural characteristics of Korea.

Kenji Minemura, a master magician from Japan who has been invited to the castle many times before remained eager to share his art during Asia Magic Week.

His magical journey began at 10 when he found upon a children's magic book in his brother's room.

After showing his newfound skills to his classmates, the shy young Kenji discovered a connection with people he had never experienced.

Since then, magic has become his preferred medium of expression. Growing up in the countryside with limited access to resources and no magicians around, Kenji searched the nearest town, only to find one toy shop with a single shelf dedicated to magic-related products.

After that, Kenji saved his money to buy magic books and tricks and his second-floor bedroom became his sanctuary where he could fully immerse himself in the world of

mysteries. A few small balls and thimbles served as his props. While practicing his routines, he would occasionally drop a ball, which would strike the floor with a distinct sound. That sound became his constant companion throughout his youth.

Modest in nature, Kenji said he is "not an ambitious person", yet, his exceptional skills have attracted numerous opportunities and he has competed at the International Federation of Magic Societies, the Olympics of magic, where he became world champion in 2000.

Transcending boundaries

When questioned about the differences in performing for Western and Eastern audiences, Kenji said there are not many, because emotion conveyed through magic can transcend the boundaries of nationality.

During Asia Magic Week, Kenji showcased his signature trick, in which he puts two small balls together and they suddenly become a puppet, which he has named Little Kenji.

The puppet then appears to come to life and walk on Kenji's tie before walking into a small box, its home.

Kenji said that the inspiration for the trick originated from the profound emotions he experienced when he became a parent. The birth of his child evoked a deep sense of warmth whenever he thought about home.

So, he infused the sentiment into his magic. And he believes the desire for a home, a place of protection and belonging, transcends cultural boundaries and resonates deeply with people all over the world.

"It even extends beyond human beings and encompasses all living creatures. We can see that animals have homes too," Kenji said.

Beneath the surface-level differences, people have shared emotions, experiences, and desires, that can unite all human beings, Kenji said.

Acclaimed US illusionist Franz Harary, who is known for his work on Michael Jackson's live concerts and for making a NASA space shuttle appear to vanish, was in the audience during Asia Magic Week.

Harary, a member of the Magic Castle for more than 40 years, said it was the first themed week he had attended, and that he was happy to see the castle showcase magic from Asia that often goes unrecognized in the West.

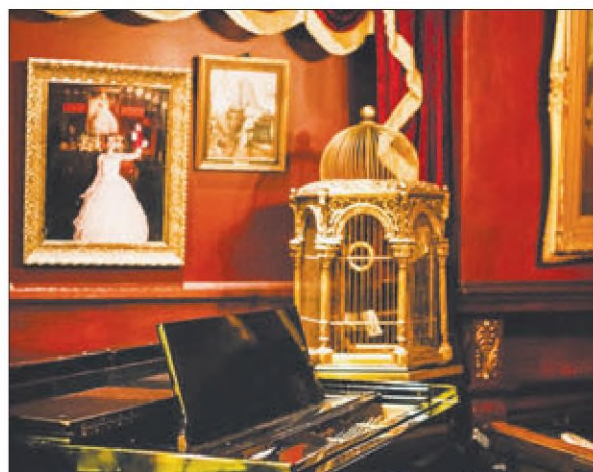
"Asian magic is evolving and growing faster than at any other time in history. Today, Asian magicians are among the best in the world, certainly among the most talented and driven," Harary said. "I believe we will see even stronger and more unique magic coming from the region than ever before."

Salwak said Asia Magic Week at the Magic Castle enjoyed a sold-out week, with reservations and walk-in attendees surpassing 4,000.

In addition to the week's commercial success, Salwak was even more pleased to see the cultural bridges being built because of the event.

Thanks to the applause of the spectators, he said he could sense a heightened understanding and appreciation across cultures and among people.

Contact the writer at oasis@chinadailyhk.com



From left: The audience awaits at the Palace Theatre, the most esteemed stage at the Magic Castle; Performers and crew pose for a group photo during Asia Magic Week. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY I RYUN; The inside of the Magic Castle has an enchanting atmosphere that immerses visitors in a world of wonder and mystery. PHOTO PROVIDED BY MAGIC CASTLE