

Removing hurdles

Alipay offers multilingual services to improve e-payment experience

BUSINESS, PAGE 8



More subsidies made available to Xizang students

CHINA, PAGE 5

Eternal blossoms

Time-honored velvet flowers still thrive on many occasions

LIFE, PAGE 15



CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

Xi sends congratulations to Putin

Russian president wins 5th term with record total of votes

By MO JINGXI in Beijing and REN QI in Moscow

President Xi Jinping reiterated on Monday China's commitment to advancing the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era to benefit the two countries and their people as he congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin on his reelection.

In a congratulatory message, Xi said that the Russian people have been united as one to overcome challenges and make steady progress in national development and revitalization in recent years.

Xi told Putin that his reelection fully demonstrated the Russian people's support for him and said he believes Russia will surely make greater achievements in national development and construction under Putin's leadership.

Russia's Central Election Commission said on Monday that Putin had won his fifth term with a record number of votes. With nearly 100 percent of all precincts counted, Putin got 87.29 percent of the vote.

Speaking at a news conference following the completion of the presidential elections early on Monday morning, Putin said the Russia-China relationship is a stabilizing factor in the Eurasian region and expressed his confidence that bilateral collaboration will continue to strengthen in the coming years.

"The most important thing is the coincidence of state interests. This creates a very good tone for solving common problems in the field of international relations," he said.

Putin said China is very active in the international arena, is achieving great success and has a lot of friends all over the world.

On China's economy, Putin said: "China is developing by leaps and bounds, at a fast pace, very confidently, and what is very important is that the structure of China's economy is changing toward innovation, toward making the economy more innovative. And we are trying to do the same within the country. We face exactly the same tasks in Russia."



Russian President Vladimir Putin and his supporters arrive at his campaign headquarters in Moscow on Sunday during the Russian presidential election. Russia's Central Election Commission announced on Monday that Putin has won his fifth term with a record number of votes. GAVRIIL GRIGOROV VIA AFP

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia. The trade volume between the two countries reached a record-breaking \$240 billion in 2023, a year ahead of the time set to reach the target of \$200 billion.

In recent years, Xi and Putin have met on more than 40 occasions. In March 2023, Xi chose Russia as the destination of his first overseas trip of the year. In October, Putin came to Beijing for the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, marking the third consecutive time that he attended the forum.

Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui said, "We are glad to see Mr Putin has gained firm support from the Russian people during the presidential election, and under his leadership, Russia will continue to take the path that suits its national conditions."

Zhang said that China is willing to work together with Russia to firmly implement the strategic consensus of the two heads of state, support and closely cooper-

ate with each other on the road to the modernization of their respective countries, and promote the greater and stronger development of China-Russia relations.

Observers from both countries said that relations between China and Russia will remain close and stable after the reelection of Putin, given their current close cooperation and communication at different levels.

Li Yonghui, a researcher of Russian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the two countries are expected to further strengthen their political mutual trust during Putin's new term.

"China and Russia will also expand their strategic coordination on the global stage, elevate their relations with developing countries and play a bigger role in the Global South," she said.

Alexander Dynkin, president of the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, said trust and mutual understanding between the two leaders facilitate mutual support

on the most important security and development issues between China and Russia.

"Russia-China relations have become a factor of global stability and a true example of a relationship between two major powers. Russia and China are not allies, but they trust each other more than average participants of Western formal alliances," Dynkin said.

Kirill Babaev, director of the Institute of China and Modern Asia at the Russian Academy of Sciences, said China and Russia have maintained close cooperation and communication at different levels.

In the future (after the election), the new administration will continue to coordinate with China in various aspects, especially some nontraditional fields, such as infrastructure construction, biotech and the development of new energy, Babaev said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at majingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

Analysts say Jan-Feb data bodes well for robust 2024

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

Economic momentum gained traction in China during the first two months of the year with better-than-expected performance of both supply and demand, setting a promising tone for a robust 2024.

While expressing strong confidence that the country will meet the annual growth target of around 5 percent, analysts projected a steady growth trajectory for the first quarter, with stimulus policies gradually taking effect.

Meanwhile, they cautioned that the outlook is still clouded by lingering challenges such as continued weakness in the property sector, structural constraints to growth and mounting uncertainties, and said that further policy easing and structural reforms to bolster confidence and reignite growth momentum are needed to achieve the annual growth target.

"The January-February economic performance laid a solid foundation for the year's development," Liu Aihua, a spokeswoman for the National Bureau of Statistics, said on Monday at a news conference in Beijing.

Liu said she believes that the country has the conditions and capabilities to achieve its annual growth target this year, given its solid economic fundamentals, strengthening of factors driving recovery and effective policy measures.

Figures released by the NBS showed that China's January-February economic activity has been above expectations overall.

The country's industrial output grew 7 percent year-on-year during the period after a 6.8 percent rise in December, and fixed-asset investment increased 4.2 percent year-on-year during the same period, compared with 3 percent annual growth for 2023. Retail sales growth slowed to 5.5 percent year-on-year during the period, compared with 7.4 percent in December, roughly in line with market expectations.

Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said the better-than-expected figures point to the stabilization of the economy, adding that the country is expected to make a good start in the first quarter.

He said the momentum of China's economic recovery is poised to undergo further consolidation with further macroeconomic policy adjustment, improvement in domestic demand and gradual stabilization of the property sector.

NBS data showed that property investment fell 9 percent year-on-year in China in the first two months of 2024, narrowing from a 9.6 percent decline in 2023.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said the property data was broadly consistent with the credit data published last week, which showed that credit demand remained worryingly sluggish at the start of the year.

"In particular, we continue to see weak bank lending to households — particularly in property-related medium- to long-term loans — amid a property sector struggling to find a floor and still-awful consumer sentiment," she said.

See Outlook, page 3

Migrants rescued



Rescued migrants arrive in Libya on Saturday. More than 170 European-bound illegal immigrants, including many women and children, were rescued while they were attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. SIMONE BOCCACCIO / NEWS.COM

Landmark ruling a decisive victory for international law

In late December, the government of South Africa, while strongly condemning the brutal Hamas attack on Israel on Oct 7, took the unprecedented step of requesting that the International Court of Justice in The Hague rule on whether the continuing violence and humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Gaza amounts to genocide by Israel.

The background to this request is the long-standing friendship and solidarity between the people of South Africa and Palestine. The salience of the Palestinian cause in South Africa has deep roots. The South African and Palestinian people share a common history of struggle that goes back decades. Former South African president Nelson Mandela saw in Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, the late chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, a fellow "comrade in arms".

The South African government has proved that it will do everything within its power to preserve the existence of the Palestinian people as a group, end any acts of apartheid and genocide against them, and walk with them toward the realization of their collective right to self-determination.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said recently: "As a nation that fought and defeated apartheid, we have a particular obligation to stand up for justice and fundamental human rights for all people, everywhere. It is this obligation that informed our application to the International Court of Justice to halt the violence unleashed by Israel on the Gaza Strip."

Furthermore, as a nation established through diplomacy and negotiation, South Africa is strongly committed to the principle of peaceful resolution of conflicts through diplomacy and to finding solutions that will help

avert further escalation. The International Court of Justice issued an initial ruling on Jan 26 that accepted South Africa's right to bring a lawsuit against Israel accusing it of genocidal acts in Gaza.

The ruling did not call for an immediate cease-fire and also did not rule on the core of the case brought by South Africa. The court's final judgment on whether genocide has or has not occurred in Gaza could take years. But in its interim ruling, the court, with the support of an overwhelming majority of the judges on the 15-member panel, instructed Israel to take provisional measures to prevent any genocidal acts.

This landmark ruling unquestionably marked a decisive victory for the international rule of law and is a significant milestone in the search for justice for the Palestinian people.

South Africa and its many partners around the world are increasingly arguing that the United

Nations Security Council veto power wielded by individual states cannot be permitted to thwart international justice, not least in light of the ever worsening situation in Gaza.

Given the ongoing war in Gaza, and having regard to the court's ruling, there is no credible basis for Israel to continue to claim that its military actions, which are cruel, unacceptable and disproportionate, are in full compliance with international law.

South Africa and its international partners cannot afford to be passive bystanders and should cooperate to ensure the urgent and effective implementation of the international court's provisional measures.

South Africa appreciates China's consistent position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which, among other things, includes condemning all acts against civilians and opposing all moves that violate international law.

See Conflict, page 3

WORLD WATCH By Gert Grobler

Fourteen years ago, Australian cancer sufferer David Ian Burn visited Songshan Mountain in Henan province to learn Zen techniques to try and improve his chances of beating the disease.

While the area is famous around the world for Shaolin Kung Fu, it is also becoming known for other cultural aspects including Chan Wu Yi, which combines Zen meditation, kung fu and traditional Chinese medicine, and has been promoted by Master Shi Dejian for 30 years.

In 2010, Burn stayed for two weeks on the steep mountain and learned about Chan Wu Yi from the master.

"This time was really important to my recovery," said the Australian, now aged 72. "His (Shi Dejian's) counsel and support enabled me to

SHAOLIN PIVOTS TO A FUTURE BEYOND KUNG FU

While mountain temple is globally famous, other cultural attractions are also gaining foothold

By WU YANBO in Dengfeng, Henan wuyanbo@chinadaily.com.cn



Since then, Burn has continued to live as a vegetarian, and still practices Chan Wu Yi.

"Practicing internal cultivation has become a normal part of our lives, and it can be said that Chan Wu Yi is our basic way of life. I am grateful for the connection with the masters and their continuous kindness," he said, adding that he is writing a book to provide an understanding of Chan Wu Yi culture to more Westerners.

See Zen, page 2

INSIDE Negative perceptions of China escalate among US and its allies Global Views, page 13 www.chinadailyglobal.com

PAGE TWO

禪 禪
禪 禪
禪 禪
禪 禪



禪 禪
禪 禪
禪 禪
禪 禪

From page 1

Stretching from east to west for over 60 kilometers, Songshan Mountain is eulogized in folklore as the "origin of all mountains" and according to ancient script has "72 peaks on the mountains and 72 temples below".

Its spectacular, well-preserved angular rock shapes were formed by three violent movements in the earth's crust, the most recent 570 million years ago, when the Himalayas and the entire Qinling Range were submerged under the sea.

However, it is the 1,529-year-old Shaolin Temple, nestled in a mountain forest near Dengfeng, and its style of kung fu that has left the biggest impression on the world. Today, 162 Shaolin cultural centers have been established in over 50 countries and regions, while the Shaolin Temple attracts nearly 7 million Chinese and international tourists and martial arts enthusiasts every year.

But located 8 km from the temple is Songshan Buddhist Academy, the main practice center for *Chan Wu Yi*. *Chan* means Zen, *Wu* means kung fu, while *Yi* means medicine.

In 1994, Master Shi Dejian, under the guidance of his mentor, initiated the restoration of the academy's dilapidated buildings to help promote *Chan Wu Yi*. Eleven years later, the Songshan Chan Wu Yi Research Institute was established near Songshan Buddhist Academy, with Shi Dejian serving as its director.

Shi Xingjia, a disciple of Shi Dejian, said the institute also operates an official website to provide free public education on *Chan Wu Yi* culture, which has attracted nearly 1 million followers.

Chen Ruiyan, a professor and clinical psychologist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who specializes in the brain and nervous system, is one of Master Shi Dejian's disciples. She has set up a research team that has found indications that practicing *dan tian* breathing enhances brain function, and eases emotional, sleep and gastrointestinal problems.

"The practice of *dan tian* breathing is the foundation of Songshan internal cultivation, the basic method of Shaolin Chan practice, and is also a good way to improve people's psychological and physical condition," Chen said.

She has been practicing *Chan Wu Yi* for over 10 years, and her research results have been published in several international

academic journals. Chen has also written two books on the subject — *The Way of Mind Peace* and *Dejian Mind-Body Therapy*.

Songshan Buddhist Academy has established an ecological health culture base at Lingnan Chan Temple in Luhe county, Shanwei, Guangdong province, to provide information on *Chan Wu Yi* culture to the public.

Largest live stage

Every evening from late February to early December, in Daixiangou, 7 km from Shaolin Temple, a large-scale live-action performance captivates thousands of tourists from home and abroad.

The *Shaolin Zen Music Ritual* performance takes place deep in a canyon surrounded by slopes, streams, waterfalls, bridges, boulders, trees and temples.

The performance area covers nearly 3 square km — with the highest point 1,400 meters above sea level — making it one of the largest live stages in the world. The audience members sit on 3,000 cushions provided for them.

The show mainly focuses on Shaolin history, culture and martial arts, and incorporates traditional Chinese music, chess, calligraphy and painting. Eighty-eight traditional zithers are used in the show and nearly 600 martial artists participate. The performance depicts the seasonal changes of spring, summer, autumn and winter, to the accompaniment of Buddhist music.

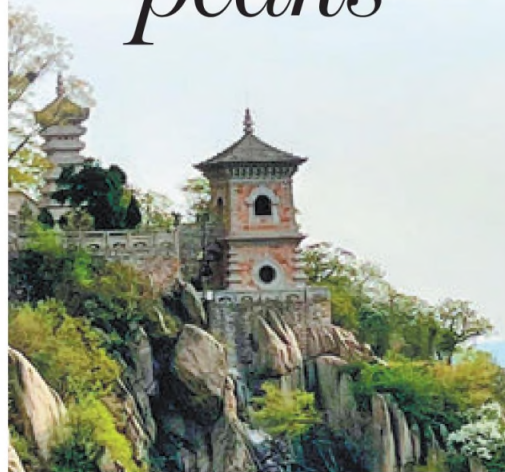
"We need to find a new way to showcase the charm of Songshan Mountain to the world, breaking away from the monotonous tourism concept of 'climbing mountains and visiting temples,'" said Zhou Dingjun, the deputy general manager of the show.

Most of the performers are students from martial arts schools and professional dancers from art schools, along with

Top: A performer demonstrates moves at the *Shaolin Zen Music Ritual* performance; two students practice martial arts at Chanxinju Homestay.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

Zen: Songshan eyes new cultural peaks



some local theater troupes and part-time actors.

Homestay havens

In Yangjiamen village, 5 km from Shaolin Temple, residential courtyards with old brick and mud walls, small bridges, flowing water, and scattered rocks, trees and fields create a picturesque rural landscape.

In 2018, Yangjiamen was listed in the fifth group of China's traditional villages.

Much of the village is now Chanxinju Homestay, or Zen Mind Homestay. Chanxinju has established a traditional cultural study center that integrates food and lodging, Shaolin Kung Fu and a rural lifestyle. It has also co-founded the Qingnong School (Songshan Mountain) Rural Development Research Institute in conjunction with Tsinghua University.

Liu Shaoli, manager of Chanxinju, said before 2011 it was a desolate and abandoned village. Due to its location in a hollow of the mountain and inconvenient transportation access, the villagers had gradually moved out and left behind the dilapidated old buildings.

The founder of Chanxinju, Lu Hailong, is from a rural family in Liyang, Jiangsu. Lu spent over 10 years repairing the old village houses with the idea of preserving the past for future generations to enjoy.

The first completed courtyard, Chongshan Academy, began operations in 2014, offering enrollments to students from Lu's martial arts school and organizing a series of traditional cultural experience courses and summer and winter study programs. The renovated buildings opened in 2018, with 13 guest rooms for visitors.

"The interiors feature simple Zen-style modern facilities, along with a vegetarian restaurant, a cafe, and a camping and barbecue area, attracting many young people from nearby cities such as Zhengzhou and Luoyang to visit, take photos, experience nature,

and enjoy the quiet and old-style rural life," said Liu, the manager.

Historically, the village was an important stop on the way to Shaolin Temple and Luoyang, she added. "The village has a long history, and there are many ancient trees and buildings around it worth exploring. It is even more beautiful on rainy days when the mountain villages are shrouded in clouds, it's like a fairyland," Liu said.

During long holidays like Spring Festival, Chanxinju receives many tourists from across the country. Every summer, Lu Hailong's foreign martial arts disciples bring their friends who love Shaolin Kung Fu to study in the village, said the founder.

Russian disciples

While changes are happening on the ground, Shaolin culture is also strengthening its foothold overseas.

In January, Russian Oleg Gizatullin, or Shi Yanfu by his monastic name, returned to Shaolin Temple to participate in a Shaolin Kung Fu examination. The 56-year-old has practiced kung fu for more than 30 years.

Gizatullin was accompanied by his 36-year-old wife Svetlana Vsemirnova, or Shi Yanbin, who has practiced Shaolin Kung Fu for 13 years. The pair have established the St. Petersburg Shaolin Culture Center at a sports school in St. Petersburg, which currently has over 30 students.

"Every morning we practice Shaolin Kung Fu by the banks of the Volga River, starting with *qigong* and meditation," Gizatullin said.

Vsemirnova, who spent four years studying at the Harbin Institute of Technology and is fluent in Chinese, said Shaolin Kung Fu culture has helped her spiritual cultivation. She said everyone encounters different issues and finds their own way to heal themselves.

"Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, practicing *qigong* regularly has been greatly beneficial in improving our lung and heart functions, enhancing our immunity and alleviating anxiety caused by the pandemic," Vsemirnova said.

"Now, every friend around us has been influenced by Shaolin culture. They come to us for help when facing problems, and we teach them *qigong* to relieve depression and stress, promoting self-cultivation."

She said she hoped to eventually live in Dengfeng for a lengthy period and further her studies of Shaolin culture.

Above: A view of Songshan Buddhist Academy in Henan province. **Left and right:** The heads of the St. Petersburg Shaolin Culture Center practice their moves in the Russian city. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



TOP NEWS



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) meets with New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters in Wellington, New Zealand, on Monday.
HAGEN HOPKINS / POOL PHOTO VIA AP

China, NZ eye more high-level cooperation

Nations to take steps to facilitate people-to-people interactions

By ZHANG YUNBI
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

During Foreign Minister Wang Yi's latest visit to New Zealand, both sides reached fresh consensus over advancing high-level exchanges and collaboration in trade.

In the New Zealand capital on Monday local time, Wang met with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and also held talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters.

"The two sides agreed to further roll out high-level exchanges and hold intergovernmental dialogues in areas such as foreign policy, trade, consular affairs, South Pacific, climate change and human rights," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The two countries also decided to take further measures to facilitate people-to-people exchanges.

Observers noted that the two countries have expressed mutual respect ever since the founding of diplomatic relations, and their relationship has always been at the forefront of China's bilateral ties with developed countries.

This year marks two 10-year anniversaries — President Xi Jinping's visit to New Zealand in 2014 and the two nations establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership the same year.

In New Zealand, Wang said China regards New Zealand as a sensible and mature partner. "The China-New Zealand relationship is of a strategic and long-term nature", and the country is ready to work with

New Zealand to build an upgraded version of their comprehensive strategic partnership, he added.

China welcomes New Zealand's further participation in Belt and Road cooperation and looks forward to exploring new areas of growth in cooperation, including science and technology, the green economy and innovation, Wang said.

The New Zealand prime minister said his country will take the 10th anniversary of their comprehensive strategic partnership as an opportunity for closer high-level exchanges.

Officials noted that on the international stage, both China and New Zealand advocate multilateralism and support the United Nations playing a central role in international affairs.

Wang said China is willing to

work with New Zealand to strengthen unity and cooperation; reject Cold-War era thinking, unilateralism and protectionism; and secure the right direction for humanity's progress.

Peters, the New Zealand foreign minister, said his nation firmly adheres to the one-China principle and is willing to deepen communication and coordination in regional and international affairs.

New Zealand looks to push the relations for greater development in the next 10 and even 50 years, and it also welcomes Chinese students and entrepreneurs to come to stay and thrive, he added.

Chen Hong, a professor and director of the Australian Studies Centre of East China Normal University in Shanghai, said the relations "have not only benefited the two peoples a lot, but also helped shore up peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region".

The two sides agreed to maintain earnest communication on China's proposed accession to the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Wang is scheduled to visit Australia on the second and last leg of his Oceania trip.

China's envoy calls for cooperation on nuclear disarmament

By MINLU ZHANG
at the United Nations
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

China's top ambassador to the United Nations on Monday called on countries to resist Cold War thinking and promote nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation together.

"Nuclear weapons are a product of history, and nuclear disarmament will naturally have a historical process," Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN, told a Security Council meeting on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation on Monday.

Expecting countries with different nuclear policies and number of nuclear weapons to follow identical disarmament and transparency rules "is not consistent with the logic of history and reality, nor is it in line with international consensus, and as such will only lead international nuclear disarmament to a dead end", Zhang added.

The US "should continue to fulfill its special and priority responsibility to further reduce the nuclear arsenals in a drastic and substantive manner, so as to create conditions for other nuclear weapons states to join the nuclear disarmament process and play a lead role by example recognized by all parties," he said.

Zhang noted that in 2022, leaders of the five nuclear-armed countries agreed that nuclear war "cannot be won and must never be fought".

On that basis, said Zhang, nuclear weapons states should explore feasible measures to reduce strategic risks, negotiate and conclude a treaty on no first use of nuclear weapons against each other and provide legally binding, negative security assurances to nonnuclear weapon states.

The countries concerned "should reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national and collective security policies," he said.

The countries concerned should also "renounce the deployment of a global missile defense system, refrain from seeking the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific region or in Europe and stop nuclear sharing and the so-called extended deterrence, so as to maintain the global strategic balance and stability through practical actions," Zhang emphasized.

Zhang urged countries to enhance the controllability of AI

technology and "ensure that relevant weapon systems are under human control at all times".

“Nuclear weapons are a product of history, and nuclear disarmament will naturally have a historical process.”

Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the United Nations

In terms of recent hot spot issues such as the nonproliferation of the Korean Peninsula and Iran, they "have complex historical background and are closely linked to the continuity of the nonproliferation policies of a relevant country", said the ambassador.

"The United States should abandon the threat of use and the use of sanctions and pressure," said Zhang. He said the US nuclear submarine cooperation with certain countries "carries a high risk of nuclear proliferation".

He called such cooperation "a serious violation of the objective and the purpose of" the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and "undermines regional peace and stability".

Zhang said nuclear weapons states "should sign and ratify the protocols to the nuclear weapon-free zone treaties as soon as possible."

He reiterated China's readiness to "take the lead in signing the protocol to the Southeast Asian nuclear weapon-free zone treaty and its firm support for the establishment of a Middle East zone free of" nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday also underscored the urgent need for disarmament to eliminate the looming threat of nuclear conflict. He said that "states possessing nuclear weapons are absent from the table of dialogue".

"There is one path, and one path only, that will vanquish this senseless and suicidal shadow, once and for all. We need disarmament now," Guterres said.

Juvenile crime puts focus on left-behind children

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

The recent arrest of three boys who allegedly killed a middle school student has once again turned public attention on juvenile delinquents, sparking debates and discussions on the plight of left-behind children.

The victim, surnamed Wang, was a seventh-grade student in Feixiang district of Handan, Hebei province. He was killed on March 10, and all suspects were taken into custody the next day, according to an official statement released on Sunday night by the district's joint working group.

Local authorities are making all-out efforts to comfort the bereaved family and handle the aftermath of the killing, and work regarding all aspects is proceeding in an orderly manner, the statement said.

It added that judicial departments will punish the perpetrators of the crime in accordance with the law, and urged residents not to believe or spread rumors, in order to avoid causing further harm to

the involved families and to protect the privacy of the victim.

Details of why and how the killing happened were not disclosed in the statement. It also doesn't mention the exact age of the boys involved, or say whether the suspects in custody include any adults.

According to some Chinese media reports, the victim, age 13, studied in a local middle school and went missing on March 10. His body was found the next day, buried in a vegetable greenhouse in the district's Zhangzhuang village, about 100 meters from the house of one of the three suspects.

It is alleged that the accused, who went to the same school and are all under the age of 14, bullied the victim for a long time. Media reports said they are children of migrant workers.

The story of "a student being killed by his three classmates" went viral on Chinese social media platforms, triggering public concern about juvenile victims as well as offenders.

Xu Hao, a lawyer at Beijing Jingsh Law Firm, said the suspects might not be exempted from criminal

punishment in the case, even if they are minors. He cited the amended Criminal Law to explain that the age of criminal liability in China has been lowered to 12, in order to prevent children from committing serious offenses.

Before the Criminal Law was amended, the age of criminal liability was higher, with offenders ages 14 to 16 held criminally responsible if they committed serious and violent crimes, including intentional homicide, intentional injury, robbery or rape.

The amended law states that offenders ages 12 to 14 will face criminal punishment for intentional homicide, or intentional injury that leads to death or severely disables others, but it clarifies that the decision to prosecute must be approved by the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

Luo Xiang, a professor at China University of Political Science and Law, posted a comment on the case on his personal social media account on Saturday, saying that necessary punishment should be given to minors who commit vio-

lent crimes, because a "transformative effect could only be achieved through punishment".

Zhao Li, another lawyer from Beijing Jingsh Law Firm, said that China decided to lower the age of criminal liability to 12 under special circumstances as it witnessed a number of serious and violent crimes committed by children in recent years.

However, he emphasized that whether the suspects in the Handan case can be held criminally liable still depends on an approval from the procuratorate, as required by law. In other words, Chinese judicial authorities are prudent when handling juvenile crimes, he said.

Highlighting the principle of "education first, punishment second" when handling juvenile offenses, Chinese prosecutors in 2023 approved the arrest of 27,000 juvenile suspects and decided not to arrest 38,000 others. They prosecuted 39,000 minor suspects and decided not to prosecute 40,000 others, according to data from the procuratorate.

Conflict: Rising tension in Mideast a matter of concern

From page 1

China has been steadfast in urging the parties involved in the conflict to work toward a comprehensive cease-fire and the implementation of a two-state solution and a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

A further matter of growing concern is the soaring tension in the Middle East, which has been

threatening to slip toward the precipice of a regional war, ever since the Hamas attack on Oct 7 and the ferocious Israeli response in Gaza. The conflict has had the potential to ignite a disastrous Middle East conflagration, and recent developments have demonstrated just how easily escalation could bring Israel into military conflict with Iran and others.

The situation in the Middle East

is highly complex and volatile, and it is a matter of urgency to find a modicum of common ground through diplomacy between the Israeli government and the Hamas leadership to enable a cease-fire, the release of hostages and peace in the region.

The author is a senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University and a former senior diplomat in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Outlook: Expert says additional easing needed

From page 1

Loo also cautioned about the risk of good initial data prompting policy complacency, delaying decisive easing.

"After all, the year is still young, and local governments and the property sector are both poised for lengthy and bumpy credit cleanup processes," Loo added, saying that further meaningful easing will be needed to achieve China's "around 5 percent" growth target.

Although the broader economy is still facing downward pressures, Li Xuesong, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Quantitative and Technological Economics, said favorable conditions outweigh unfavorable factors in China's development, and the fundamental trend of economic recovery with a long-term positive outlook has not changed.

"China has solid foundations to pursue high-quality economic development, propelled by the ongoing

technological revolution, the nation's strong industrial base and the ultra-large domestic market," Li said.

Li said the country will likely hit a high potential growth rate of around 4.5 percent annually until 2035.

To better pursue high-quality development, Li called for further moves to deepen reforms and expand opening-up to tackle structural issues, including promoting reforms of the market-based allocation of factors and expanding opening-up in the service sector.

CHINA

Chief engineer of mega bridge honored

Nation's construction capabilities make project plans come true, Su Qanke says

By YAN DONGJIE
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Among his many achievements, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the world's longest cross-sea bridge, will be what engineer Su Qanke may be remembered for the most.

The chief engineer behind the megaproject was among 81 individuals bestowed the title of National Outstanding Engineer at a ceremony held in Beijing in January, the highest honor in the field of engineering and technology in China.

Currently chief engineer and professor of practice at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou), Su, who has over 30 years of experience working on some of China's top engineering infrastructure projects, has witnessed the great pace at which the nation has developed.

"When I was at university in the 1980s, engineers wanted to build bridges and roads, but there was a lack of supporting equipment, materials, technology and workers," he said.

"Now the country's construction capabilities have developed, providing the foundation for engineers like us to make achievements such as the HZMB."

Su said that the nation's development has offered him and his peers a key platform to succeed.

The 55-kilometer-long, cross-sea bridge connecting Hong Kong, Macao and Zhuhai, Guangdong province, which Su was chief engineer from 2004 to 2022, has been hailed as a marvel in the history of Chinese architecture.

The megastructure has had an impact on similar projects around the globe.

"The achievements made on the HZMB have been applied in more than 100 bridges in China and in 20 to 30 countries such as Germany, the United States, Norway and Serbia," Su said.

In 2018, the HZMB opened and has since received some of the world's top awards for engineering and construction, including from the International Bridge Association, the International Tunneling Association, the International Institute of Welding, and the International Bridge Conference.

"Before and after the bridge was opened, representatives from over 80 countries came to visit and learn. Subsequently, representatives from more than 100 countries have visited," Su said.

When Su was selected by the Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao governments to be the chief engineer on the HZMB in 2004, he drew upon his experience and active participation in other cross-sea bridge construction projects, such as the Shantou Bay Bridge and Taishan Zhenhai Bay Bridge in Guangdong province, and the Xiamen Haicang Bridge in Fujian province.

According to Su, to ensure the safety and quality of the HZMB, which has a designed life span of 120 years, the engineering team needed to ensure sufficient material performance, robust equipment and precision, and introduce a raft of new standards and specifications.

"In the past, we rarely emphasized the long life span, high quality and aesthetic value of bridges. When planning for the HZMB, we



Su Qanke

thoroughly reviewed these aspects: What do we pursue? What does a world-class bridge look like? What are our shortcomings? From which areas do we need to prepare?" Su said.

In the first seven to eight years of working on the project, Su and his team tackled challenges one by one, studied each subject and repeatedly traveled to Hong Kong, the US, Europe and Japan to learn.

To develop a set of mature methods, Su visited experts in the bridge industry worldwide, observed hundreds of bridges, organized the review of tens of thousands of pieces of technical data and drawings, and repeatedly reviewed hundreds of design and construction plans.

Su said his team's 5,000-plus days and nights on the project resulted in the realization of their construction concept of creating a sea-crossing that was large in scale, factory- and assembly-based and standardized.

As well as multiple spans of bridges, the crossing features offshore artificial islands, immersed tube tunnels and a 120-year durability.

Su explained that in various aspects such as design, construction, management, operation and maintenance, environmental protection, and landscape, the HZMB has established 61 sets of standards.

"These standards not only guarantee the quality of the bridge but also ensure construction safety, optimizing the working environment for laborers," he said.

Currently, Su's team is committed to realizing the digitalization of civil engineering, a cross-disciplinary engineering endeavor.

"Previously, the HZMB was just a physical bridge; in the future, we aim to create an intelligent bridge based on digital twinning," he said, adding that the digitalization of the bridge is almost complete, and the operation and maintenance system standards have been established and are undergoing repeated testing.

Leveraging digital intelligence and big data, Su's team can not only design maintenance and repair solutions in the digital sphere but also improve traffic plans, traffic control and emergency plans.

"The construction of an intelligent bridge has greatly promoted the digital and intelligent development of our country. At the same time, we are also providing a platform for young people, for the next generation of engineers," he said.

Su said that in the future, building longer bridges will require continued strengthening of vocational education for industrial workers, while also using machinery to replace labor and developing intelligent construction.

"All industries are undergoing reform. Regardless of their profession, young people should strive for excellence and become the best in their field. With this goal in mind, they can gradually become people with great aspirations," he said. "With such young people, the Chinese bridge industry can continue to go global and develop healthily."

Luo Jiayuan contributed to this story.



Su Qanke (center) listens to a report on steel structures from fellow engineers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Su Bomin (right) discusses preservation work on a Buddhist statue at the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dunhuang Academy's protection team work to ensure relics not lost to sands of time

By YAN DONGJIE

yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

The Dunhuang Academy's cultural relics protection team was honored with the title of National Outstanding Engineering Team early this year, China's highest honor in the field of engineering.

Su Bomin, the director of the Dunhuang Academy and head of the cultural relics protection team, has been involved in mural protection work for nearly 40 years, while the Dunhuang Academy's cultural relics protection team has expanded from four members in 1992 to over 200 members today.

They have successively rescued and preserved cultural heritage sites in 153 locations across 13 provinces and regions, providing a Chinese solution for the protection of ancient murals and polychrome sculptures worldwide.

"Through the continuous efforts of several generations at the Mogao Grottoes, effective protection and management have been achieved, gradually restoring the site's former glory," Su said.

The Mogao Grottoes stands as the largest and best-preserved Buddhist cave art site in the world, with 735 caves spanning a cliff face 1,700 meters long, containing over 45,000 square meters of murals and more than 2,000 polychrome sculptures.

It is one of only two heritage sites in the world that meet all six criteria for World Cultural Heritage.

The protection and restoration of cultural relics such as the Mogao Grottoes have garnered attention worldwide. The Dunhuang Academy has collaborated with countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, promoting a complete set of techniques for cultural heritage protection.

In the past five years, Dunhuang art exhibitions have been held in dozens of locations both domestically and internationally, leaving a mark in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria.

Enduring more than 1,600 years, the allure of the Mogao Grottoes remains, thanks to efforts made through generations. However, during the restoration and protection process, Su's team has encountered many challenges such as those found in the murals in Cave 85.

Su said that murals typically consist of three layers — a support layer, a ground layer and a pigment layer. Cave 85's 110 sq m of murals exhibit three typical diseases of the Mogao Grottoes — flaking, detachment and efflorescence.

He said that these issues are caused by soluble salts within the murals. As temperature and humidity fluctuate, these salts continuously crystallize and exude through the



From Top: A relic worker restores wall paintings in Cave 55 of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu province, in August. LI HE / XINHUA A student copies a wall painting from the Mogao Grottoes during a study tour in Dunhuang in February last year. ZHANG XIAOLIANG / XINHUA Visitors peruse paintings and scripture scrolls at Dunhuang Art Gallery, which is operated by the academy, in Lanzhou, Gansu province, in April. CHEN BIN / XINHUA

murals, leading to their gradual deterioration.

"At first, after analysis and research in Cave 85, the conclusion was that the problems were unsolvable at that time," Su said.

To find solutions, the cultural relics protection team, in collaboration with experts from the Getty Conservation Institute in the United States, attempted to relocate the soluble salts to the surface and then desalinate them through injection.

After four years and the formulation of 81 different recipes, they finally developed a suitable injection formula through repeated improvements.

With the "prescription" in hand, the next step was how to apply it. Fan Zaixuan, a member of the cultural relics protection team, has been involved in the restoration of ancient murals for 43 years.

He explained that mural restoration demands extremely precise

“There is nothing that can be preserved permanently ... What we, throughout our lives, are doing is resisting destruction, striving to preserve the Mogao Grottoes for a longer time.”

Su Bomin, director of the Dunhuang Academy

work and allows no room for error. Conventional tools are inadequate for mural restoration, so the team designed their own restoration instruments.

They replaced the plunger of a traditional syringe with an ear syringe, creating a device that looks like a needle with a balloon attached at the bottom.

"This was to allow for more injection material and to better control the injection volume," Su explained.

After eight years, the bottleneck issues in Cave 85 had been resolved.

"This was a process of going from zero to one," Su said.

In the early 1990s, China had not yet achieved unified technical protection and site management. This restoration directly prompted the introduction of the Chinese Cultural Relics and Historical Sites Protection Guidelines, providing a set of ideas and methods for the protection of China's cultural relics.

Regarding future development, Su said, "We hope to make Dunhuang better known to the world through our efforts." He added that the digitization of Dunhuang plays an irreplaceable role in this endeavor.

The Dunhuang Academy began exploring digitization in the late 1980s.

On May 1, 2016, Digital Dunhuang was officially launched, allowing people worldwide to appreciate the exquisite murals in 30 caves of the Mogao Grottoes online.

By 2022, they had completed high-precision data collection for 300 caves, more than half of the numbered caves in Dunhuang.

"There is nothing that can be preserved permanently; the ultimate fate of the Mogao Grottoes is continuous degradation. What we, throughout our lives, are doing is resisting destruction, striving to preserve the Mogao Grottoes for a longer time," said Su, remembering the words of Fan Jinshi, the honorary director of the Dunhuang Academy.

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story.

CHINA

Xizang to increase student subsidies

Funds cover school costs for children from financially struggling families

By **PALDEN NYIMA**
and **DAQJONG** in Lhasa

Tsering Drolma said she is very pleased with the central government subsidy she receives that covers all her school costs — including tuition, accommodation and basic study materials — and it is a big help for a rural herding family like hers.

The 17-year-old attends the No 3 Middle School of Nagchu, which is located in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region. She has been benefiting from the regional free education policy since she entered kindergarten.

Tsering Drolma's home is located in a remote village, in a place more than 4,300 meters above sea level. Her family makes a living mainly from herding livestock, and they don't make much money.

"It's so great that my parents don't need to spend money on my schooling because my family's financial situation is not very good," she said.

"Our school even provides us



Left: A Tibetan teacher instructs a student at a primary school in Sernyi district of Nagchu, Xizang autonomous region, in October.



Right: Students play frisbee at the Dongcheng Branch of Lhasa Experimental Primary School in April. PHOTOS BY PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

with daily needs such as bedding, mattresses and cleaning supplies," she added.

The subsidies Tsering Drolma receives are an example of the efforts the region is making in its educational development.

According to the Xizang Education Department, the region will offer a new round of subsidy increases for students this autumn.

It will be the 21st time the region has raised subsidy standards for students since the central government adopted its *sanbao* policy, which pays for children's school meals, lodging and tuition. The sub-

sidies, which are distributed by the Xizang government, cover children from kindergarten through senior high school.

With the next round of subsidy increases, each student will receive 4,620 yuan (\$642) per year beginning this fall, 90 yuan more than last year.

The subsidies will cover more than 714,000 students, including the children of farmers and herdsmen, as well as those from financially struggling urban families.

Meanwhile, the region will improve the quality of basic education by building and expanding

26 inclusive kindergartens and 30 primary and secondary schools this year.

Over the past decades, subsidies have been gradually increased, and with various support measures put in place, they are expected to significantly improve the learning and living conditions of Xizang students.

Gyalsan Dorje, who works in the catering department at the No 3 Middle School, emphasized the significance of *sanbao*.

"This year, the country and the autonomous region have also introduced a number of new people-oriented policies," he said.

"The increase in the subsidy standard is an important policy, and our school is also doing our best to improve the accommodation conditions for our students."

Wangdrön, an official from the regional department of education, told China Media Group, "We plan to implement a 250-million-yuan project to provide heating for 40 schools in compulsory education, and build and renovate 400,000 square meters of school buildings for heating this year."

Contact the writers at palden_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

Migrants find better opportunities back home in Anhui

HEFEI — In their five-story photo studio, Shen Xiaolei and his wife start their day early in the morning, setting up cameras and preparing photo props for clients.

The couple worked in coastal cities before returning to their rural hometown of Yingshang county in Fuyang, Anhui province, in 2015. That year, they opened their first photo studio.

"It is the county's growing demand for photography services and the promising market prospect that made us choose to return to open the photo studio," said Shen, noting that the rural consumer market is expanding. Influenced by social media, many people from rural areas are eager to take personalized and fashionable photos, he added.

63,500

migrant workers have returned to Fuyang, Anhui province, to run businesses since 2008.

Approximately three years later, they opened another studio — the five-story one — in the county. The studio has become a sought-after destination for eager customers, with its average monthly turnover exceeding 180,000 yuan (\$25,400).

"I used to earn 8,000 yuan a month at most while working in the coastal cities, but now my monthly income is 10 times as much," Shen said.

Formerly the hometown of over 2.6 million migrant workers, Fuyang has seen 63,500 migrants return to run businesses since 2008, thanks to the improvement of the business environment and the increasing job opportunities in the city.

Fuyang is not alone. Data shows that the population in Anhui has seen net inflows for four consecutive years since 2020, with a total net inflow of 266,000 people in 2022 and 2023.

With a growing number of returned migrants, institutions engaged in entrepreneurship training in rural areas have gone into overdrive.

At a media company in Fuyang, there are thousands of returned migrants receiving photography and new media skills training every year.

"The number of returned migrant trainees in our company has been skyrocketing over the past few years, and many of them plan to run franchised photo studios of our company," said Yan Hongyu, founder of the company.

According to Yan, his company currently has nearly 400 franchised photo studios in rural areas in Anhui, and about half are run by returned migrants.

With younger and more educated migrants returning to Fuyang, the city has become a more attractive place for those seeking entrepreneurship, Yan noted.

Yang Guangshuo, 37, is one such entrepreneur.

In 2011, he quit his job at a game company in the eastern financial hub of Shanghai and returned to Fuyang. He told Xinhua that the local government helped him reduce the rental cost of land he sought so he could start an agricultural goods company in 2014.

Drawing on the experience he gained working in Shanghai, Yang leveraged internet platforms to expand sales channels for his products. By the end of last year, the annual sales revenue of his company had reached 170 million yuan, providing some 400 jobs for local people.

"Fuyang's growing strength in human resources helps catalyze economic development and create more opportunities in the city," said Hu Yan, deputy dean of the Innovative Development Institute of Anhui University.

Zhejiang museum team seeks island seabird monitors

By **MA ZHENHUAN** in Hangzhou
mazhenhuan@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese crested tern research and conservation team at the Zhejiang Museum of Natural History has reached out to the public to recruit seabird monitors to be stationed on islands off the coast.

The recruitment drive aims to enlist monitors to safeguard the Chinese crested terns, often dubbed "the birds of legend". Twelve positions are up for grabs on islands off the coasts of three cities in Zhejiang province: Ningbo, Wenzhou and Zhoushan.

Successful candidates will have their accommodations and meal costs covered and earn 300 yuan (\$41) per day. Safety measures are in place, and the employees will have access to regular supply shipments, electricity, a mobile phone network and WiFi.

The recruitment announcement has sparked considerable interest among netizens, who have been drawn to the attractive perks and manageable responsibilities. Many see the island assignment as an opportunity for a unique getaway.

The Chinese crested tern was first recorded in Indonesia in 1861, but appeared to vanish after the 1940s. Ornithologists once believed the species might have gone extinct. However, more than 60 years later, the seabird was rediscovered on islands along the coastal areas of the eastern Chinese provinces of Fujian and Zhejiang.

The birds have been the focus of conservation efforts in Zhejiang since 2013. Innovative methods such as audio recordings of tern calls have been employed to attract them so that they stay in the area and breed.

Since 2017, the team has recruited volunteers annually to monitor the birds. Their duties include bird counting and tagging, observing their migration patterns and maintaining facilities.

Critical to the role, monitors are tasked with using binoculars, cameras and other surveillance equipment to observe and record terns' breeding habits, nest locations, egg-laying times, incubation periods and predator interference.

Fan Zhongyong, an official with the Chinese crested tern

research and conservation team, emphasized the importance of applicants having prior experience in bird observation and monitoring. While the job may sound attractive, Fan said that the reality of island life and work is far from simple.

Each breeding season, Fan's team accompanies new monitors to the islands. Transportation is difficult and involves taking ferries and then fishing boats.

Transporting essential supplies, including water, food, gas, cooking utensils and equipment, requires manual labor due to the distance between living quarters and the rocky terrain of the birds' habitat. Supplies are replenished every 10 days, and waste is collected for removal by supply boats.

"Conditions are quite challenging," Fan said. "Though the living quarters on Xiangshan's Jiushan Islands were upgraded last year, the absence of fresh water necessitates supplies being delivered by boat, and electricity depends solely on solar power."

Fan said that Pingyu Island, an uninhabited island off Wenzhou, poses even greater challenges than the other two sites.

"The electricity supply barely meets demand," Fan explained. "As for water, drinking and cooking take priority, but it is hard to take a proper shower."

Despite the hardships, many people are eager for the opportunity, motivated by their love of nature and the ability to safeguard the seabirds.

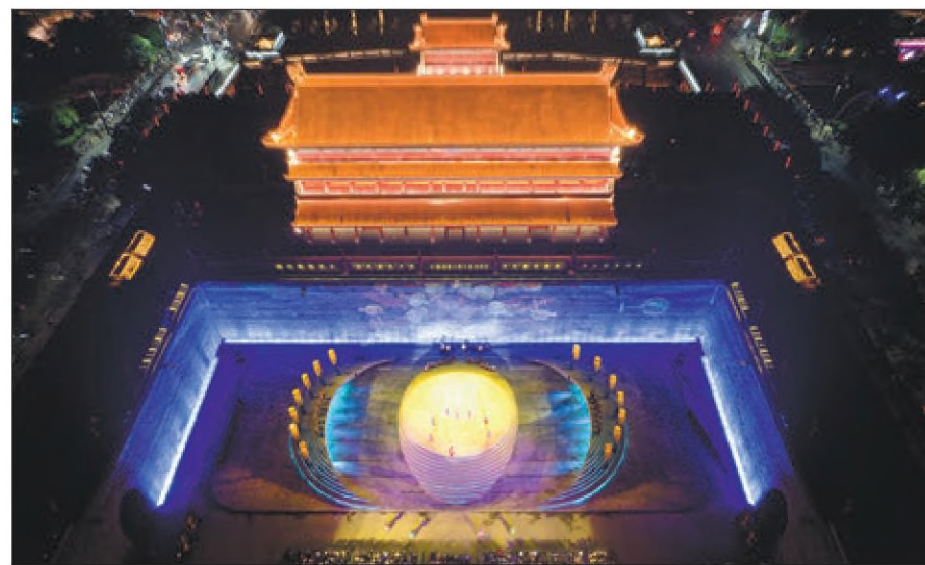
He Jibai is one of the monitors. He said that he has had a lifelong passion for nature and relishes the opportunity to spend four months on the island.

Fan Wenhao, another monitor, recounted a touching moment when she saw Chinese crested tern chicks hatch on Pingyu last July.

"The uncertainty surrounding the chicks' survival kept our emotions in flux for months," he said.

Through years of concerted efforts, the Chinese crested tern population has shown signs of recovery, with their global population estimated to have surpassed 200.

Yu Yin in Ningbo contributed to the story.



Tourists watch an arts performance at the southern gate of the ancient city wall in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in August. SHAO RUI / XINHUA

Technology empowers ancient city wall preservation, tourism innovation

XI'AN — Over the past few years, technology has played an increasingly important role in cultural heritage protection and the innovation of cultural tourism products in China. One of the beneficiaries of this trend is the Xi'an City Wall, China's largest and best-preserved ancient city wall.

Located at the heart of Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, the city wall was built as a military defense system over 600 years ago on the foundation of a prior structure dating back to the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907). The wall is up to 14 meters wide at the top and consists of a series of military facilities, including watchtowers and crenels.

Bearing witness to history, the city wall also integrates seamlessly with modern urban life. Numerous tourists stroll on top of it or in the surrounding scenic area, while streams of vehicles pass through the city gates daily.

However, the city wall has experienced uneven settlement over the years, developing cracks and outward bulging in some parts. This produced the challenge of effectively preserving the ancient treasure without disrupting its modern functions. Conservation experts have responded to this challenge by seeking solutions using advanced technologies.

According to Su Ning, assistant director of the Xi'an City Wall management committee, over 3,000 monitoring spots have been set up along the wall complex, which runs for 13.74 kilometers. Nearly 2,400 of these monitoring spots keep track of wall settlement and more than 400 track horizontal displacements.

Meanwhile, cameras have been installed at the city wall scenic area to detect real-time changes in visitor flow, water levels in the moat, and for security.

All data converge at the information center of the management committee and are displayed on large screens, said Su. Based on the data and the pattern of damage, the committee has set warning thresholds, while using different colors to represent different alert levels and implementing corresponding measures.

"Additionally, we have determined the city wall's static and dynamic load capacities, which are used to coordinate visitor flow to minimize the impact of tourism activities on the wall," said Su.

Last year, muon imaging technology was used in a "physical examination" of the wall, marking the first application of this technology in relic conservation efforts in China.

Conducted by a research team from the School of Nuclear Science and Technology at Lanzhou University, muon imaging allows for high-precision scanning of the inside of the thick body of the wall to discover damage, without any harm to the wall itself — in contrast with traditional methods.

Empowered by such technologies, conservation of the city wall has shifted from reactive repairs to proactive damage monitoring and prevention, Su noted.

Meanwhile, new ways of exploring the wall have emerged for visitors, with the rapid evolution of digital technologies giving birth to a diverse array of tourism products.

Upon entering the Xi'an City Wall scenic area, visitors can follow the

guidance of a tour app that tells them the history of the city wall and shares stories concerning various attractions, while also highlighting popular spots for taking photos.

Once visitors reach the area above the city wall's south gate, a 3-square-meter digital sand table vividly portrays the intricate layout of the city of Chang'an at the time when Xi'an was the capital of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), using state-of-the-art digital projection and visual effects to revive its glory days.

For those who cannot personally get there, a digital museum can offer an immersive tour of an archaeological research museum inside the Xi'an City Wall. The museum houses the remains of the oldest part of the Xi'an City Wall — a city gate built about 1,400 years ago, among other relics.

"Novel digital products can better evoke the public's fondness for history and culture," said Zhao Bin, director of the Xi'an City Wall Digital Industry Innovation Center, adding that the city wall scenic area received over 8.5 million visits in 2023.

In recent years, China has advocated a national cultural digitization strategy to invigorate the cultural sector and cultural industries. The implementation of this strategy was noted in this year's government work report delivered to the second session of the 14th National People's Congress.

The Xi'an City Wall will develop in line with the national cultural digitization strategy, strengthening collaboration with universities and enterprises to cement cultural relic preservation and cultural tourism, said Zhao.

XINHUA

XINHUA

WORLD

Chicago evicts migrants from shelters

By MAYZHOU in Houston
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Citing limited resources, the city of Chicago announced that it began to evict migrants based on a 60-day limit policy to make room for new arrivals.

The city said that 34 migrants would be the first group to be evicted on Sunday, but as of Monday, only three were turned away. The other 31 were given temporary extensions.

The 60-day limit policy has been held off due to the cold winter, and it will be applied to healthy adults first, according to the city. Some exceptions are applied — pregnant women, people with health issues or in the process of securing a place to live can apply for an extension of another 30 days. Families with children in school can stay until June, when school will be out.

About 11,000 migrants are housed in 23 shelters throughout Chicago, according to The New York Times. The city has received more than 37,000 migrants since August 2022.

Chicago officials said that by the end of March, 250 migrants will be evicted, and by the end of April more than 2,000. The city anticipates that more than 2,000 new migrants could stay in shelters through April.

Many volunteers are helping the migrants to enroll their children in school and to fill paperwork for work permission. Some local families — hundreds of them — have also been hosting migrants.

The evicted migrants can reapply for shelters under the policy. However, the city said that 80 percent of evicted adults end up finding solutions elsewhere instead of seeking to remain in the shelters.

Some migrants in the shelter worry about the prospect after their stay at the shelters comes to an end. Many volunteers say this policy isn't a good idea.

"I don't believe the city should be in the business of evicting people," Chicago's 40th Ward Alderman Andre Vasquez told ABC television. "Especially those that don't have shelter, don't have work authorization, don't have rental assistance."



People gather outside of a migrant shelter on March 13 in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. ERIN HOOLEY / AP

“I don't believe the city should be in the business of evicting people.”

Chicago Alderman Andre Vasquez

Even though families with children can have an extension until school is on break, Vasquez asked what happens after school is out? “Now those families are going to be out homeless.”

Other cities with large numbers of migrants also are moving migrants out of shelters.

In New York City on Tuesday, roughly 40 migrant families were moved out of a Midtown Manhattan hotel as part of Mayor Eric Adams' plan to ease the pressure on the city's strained shelter system by imposing a 60-day limit on shelter stays.

The families that left Row NYC,

in the heart of the city's Theater District, are the first of scores of families that are expected to leave city shelters in the coming weeks, The Associated Press reported.

Some of those leaving on Tuesday immediately reapplied for beds, while others said they had managed to find accommodations outside of the system, AP reported.

Adams imposed the limit in October for homeless migrant families, saying it was necessary to relieve a shelter system that houses more than 170,000 migrants, according to officials.

In February, Denver, which has received about 40,000 migrants, began to clear them from hotels that it rented to house them temporarily, according to The Times. That month, it reinstated time limits for city-provided hotels after pausing evictions in November because of the cold. Stays are up to 14 days for adults without children and 42 days for families.

On Monday, the Progressive Reform Caucus of 19 members on the Chicago City Council issued a

statement urging Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson to immediately end the evictions policy.

“It risks contributing to the city's unhoused population and exacerbating social and racial tension at a time when we need to unite,” the caucus said in a statement.

The caucus also wants Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and state lawmakers to provide funding for up to six months of rental assistance for newly arrived migrants and wants President Joe Biden to issue an executive order issuing work permits for all new arrivals.

Meanwhile, a group of Gage Park residents gathered outside a field-house-turned-shelter Sunday to protest that their facility was turned into shelter about six months ago.

“It seems like it's indefinite, and we don't know when we're coming back,” resident Tiffany Stepany-Davis told ABC. “My daughter was a participant in the special recreation program, and she got relocated to McKinley Park. She was at the park for 14 years before the program was relocated.”

Asian comic strips throw light on past

400 works from 20 nations and regions offer insight into continent's rich tradition

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
renali@chinadailyusa.com

When famous Chinese stories such as *Journey to the West*, *Wanderings of Sanmao* and *Mr Wang* were displayed as vibrant comic strips this month at a California museum, they not only brought novelty to the local audience but also served as gateways to Asian culture and history.

As a global touring exhibition curated by the British Barbican Centre, *Asian Comics: Evolution of an Art Form* made its North American debut on March 9. It will be on display until Sept 8 at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, which has displayed fine arts and cultural themes for 80 years.

“This Asian comic exhibition is an artistic journey through time and imagination,” Anne Shih, chairwoman of Bowers Museum, said. “From traditional hand-drawn creations to the most advanced digital interpretations, it brings audiences to explore the origin and development of Asian comics.”

Shih said the exhibition has collected more than 400 pieces of comic art from 20 countries and regions in Asia, 80 of which are from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Spanning more than 200 years (1814-2023), the Asian exhibits highlight an array of original comics, publications, illustrations, animation films and multimedia productions.

Paul Gravett, a guest curator from the British Barbican Centre who has worked on comics publishing and promotion since 1981, said the exhibition is a vivid journey through the art of comics and visual storytelling across Asia.

From its historical roots to the most recent digital innovations, the exhibition looks to popular Japanese manga and beyond, highlighting key creators, characters and publications.

“I'm very excited to bring the *Asian Comics* exhibition to the Bowers Museum,” Gravett said. “The diverse communities of Southern California are the ideal audience for this multi-cultural exhibition. The vibrant comics of Asia can bridge East and West and invite us to discover the realities and dreams of their creators and readers.”

Jiao Tianlong, chief curator and director of the museum's Asian exhibitions, said this inaugural display features a special focus on traditional Chinese art and its captivating influence on the global comics stage.

Encompassing folklore, historical events, self-expression and modern adaptations, the exhibition's content is rich with varied themes. Among them is the famous Chinese comic *Monkey King* — a 20-volume series based on the legendary novel *Journey to the West* — which took 70 people more than six years to complete.

The novel encompasses various genres — comedy, drama, satire, a meditation on faith and discipline, and a fantastical dramatization of China's history — all woven into one remarkable narrative.

“There are various interpretations of the *Monkey King*. Since the novel has been translated into different languages such as English and Japanese, it is not only popular in China but also in the Western world,” Jiao said.

Jiao mentioned another comic

show titled *Mr Wang*, featuring works by Ye Qianyu (1907-95), a legendary figure in Chinese comics.

“This classic *Mr Wang* series drawn by Ye in a satirical way was published in Times Comics in Shanghai for many issues in the 1930s. It reflected some social problems in Shanghai at that time. It is a very classic work in the history of Chinese comics,” Jiao said.

As one of the most popular Chinese comics in the 1930s and 1940s, the comic strip starring two middle- and lower-class Chinese men Mr Wang and his sidekick Xiao Chen later inspired a successful movie franchise.

If *Mr Wang* is the epitome of Chinese comics in the old era, contemporary Chinese comics have absorbed many international animation elements. From *The Return of the Great Sage to Big Fish & Begonia* and *The Wind Guardians*, Chinese-style animation is becoming increasingly popular, driven by the persistence and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture by cartoonists.

Among them is a creative female cartoonist, Zao Dao.

In the past two years, Zao Dao has contracted poster designs for many well-known films, TV series and animations. One of her creations, *Du Gu: The Breath of the Wind Through the Pines*, 2015, has been collected for the *Asian Comics* exhibition.

Making a mark

“Zao Dao's creative journey has left an incredible mark on the world of visual storytelling,” Jiao said. “We are planning to invite her to come from China to our museum to share her artistic exploration.”

Dressed as Miku, an iconic vocaloid character featured in Asian comics, Katie Lowe, a 20-year-old from Newport Beach, California, strolled through the museum wearing a short black jumper.

Pausing in front of Zao Dao's comics, she expressed her admiration for the artist's creations.

“I love these creative pieces; they're amazing,” she said. “And I am also very interested in the magical figures in *Journey to the West*.”

Patrick Moran, acting co-head of the Barbican Immersive program, has expressed his fondness for another iconic Chinese comic character, Sanmao, featured in the exhibition.

Designed by Zhang Leping (1910-92) in 1935 as a daily comic strip, Sanmao's story reflected social changes in China 80 years ago.

“I believe Sanmao is a popular character for Chinese audiences,” Moran said. “His misadventure as an army recruit is sort of a comedy, but the story is very sympathetic.”

“I hope American audiences who don't read or speak Chinese will see these comics and become curious about Chinese history and become fans of Chinese culture.”

Sean O'Harrow, president and CEO of the museum, emphasized the vital role of comics in preserving culture, history and character stories.

“This exhibition features artists from across Asia, including China, who were critical of politics, such as commenting on the Japanese occupation of China. They revealed the historical events that unfolded throughout the 20th century.”

FRIENDS AFAR

Editor's note: *China Daily* presents the series *Friends Afar* to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

A true language of love that was not lost in translation

By YANG RAN
yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn

When she first encountered it, it seemed more like a Western-style dragon than a Chinese one, a beast to run away from rather than a friend to be embraced and respected.

That dragon was the Chinese language, and the person staring into its threatening eyes was a young Uzbek woman, Mirzaakhamedova Dilsora.

It was 2005 and Dilsora was studying at the Uzbekistan State World Languages University in Tashkent. Her major was journalism and Chinese, a language stream her teacher had strongly recommended to her.

“Before heading off to college, I caught an interview on TV featuring an Uzbek student who had studied in China,” she said.

“At the time I couldn't fathom out how one could tackle such a difficult language. Little did I know that this language would be my future major in college.

“Then, when I started studying it at college I found it extremely difficult, to the point that I considered throwing it in and studying another language.”

However, as with many a dragon story, there is a twist in the tail, and Dilsora's despair gave way to nobler principles. “I pressed on with Chinese because I didn't want to abandon my classmates who then had become good friends of mine.”

As time passed by, Dilsora's sense of loyalty and dedication has paid off for her in astonishing ways.

First, her feelings toward Chinese changed in the second year of college after she won a scholarship to study at Northeast Normal University in Changchun, Jilin province, for a year.

“When I first went to China I was totally captivated. The locals were amazingly open and engaging, readily initiating conversations with a warmth that was truly remarkable. From then on I made many local

friends there, fell in love with Chinese and Chinese culture and decided to focus my studies on them.”

Since then Dilsora has obtained master's and doctoral degrees at Chinese universities and is now a teacher at Minzu University of China in Beijing, teaching Uzbek to Chinese students.

As if teaching and being an unofficial ambassador for her country were not enough, Dilsora has answered another high calling: translating Chinese works into Uzbek, including books the Chinese president has written.

Helping to translate and proofread books such as *Narrating China's Governance: Stories in Xi Jinping's Speeches* has given her the opportunity to delve into China's governance philosophies, she said.

The Uzbek edition of Xi's book on poverty relief, *Up and Out of Poverty*, published last year, was translated by Dilsora. “This book reflects Xi's affection for the people and the lofty pursuits of the Communist Party of China, she said.

Ideas on education

She is particularly struck by Xi's emphasis on education and his ideas have deeply touched her as a teacher, she said.

“President Xi emphasizes that we must view the problem of education from the high vantage point of economic and social development strategy. I also strongly agree with his concept of maintaining a keen focus on education as an essential vehicle for moving people out of poverty and toward prosperity.”

Last year, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said at the Central Asia-China Summit that by drawing on China's poverty alleviation practice, his country has been able to remove more than 1 million people from the category deemed as in need in 2022.

Uzbekistan also has much to



Mirzaakhamedova Dilsora stands in front of Minzu University of China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

learn from how China has improved its primary education system, Dilsora said.

“I have read many articles about China's education system. We also translated a book titled *China Road — Primary Education Change in China in the Context of Globalization*. In translating this book I developed a keen interest in finding out more about China's educational development.

“Now Chinese experiences and practice are widely applied in education system reforms in Uzbekistan. Scholars are using this book as a guide to study the reasons why students in Shanghai schools rank high in international student assessment tests.”

In translating and studying the works of Chinese leaders, observing China's growth and contemplating Chinese policies, she said the leaders' foresight has impressed her.

“In President Xi's speeches, he always manages to express his viewpoint using Chinese literary concepts and philosophical ideas, demonstrating his profound knowledge, mastery of culture and history.”

To better understand China, she

has also translated books on China's traditional culture, such as *Confucianism* by Chinese scholar Xu Fancheng.

She believes that whether it is China's governance ideas or its foreign policies, they are good at drawing on the essence of excellent traditional Chinese culture and thoughts.

“The philosophical ideas and cultures of Confucianism are a window to understanding modern China. The principle of ‘valuing peace above all else’ that China emphasizes is exactly the moral principle that Confucianism advocated. The wisdom of traditional Chinese culture also explains why China promotes building a community with a shared future for mankind.”

Dilsora said she hopes China and Uzbekistan will continue to work closely together in many fields, and she has noticed an increasing interest in learning Chinese in Uzbekistan.

“The friendship between China and Uzbekistan has a long history, and since ancient times, they have jointly created a prosperous picture of the Silk Road featuring economic and trade exchanges and cultural integration.

“I hope the two countries can compose a new chapter of cultural exchange, people-to-people connectivity and mutual learning of civilizations in building the Belt and Road (Initiative) together.”

One of those helping her bring the two countries together is her husband, who was Dilsora's classmate in college and is now engaged in China-Uzbekistan trade. Their daughter, who was born in Uzbekistan and lives in Beijing, has become so attached to the city that she regards Beijing as home.

“At work, I've never felt an ounce of regret,” Dilsora said. “I love introducing my own culture and language to my Chinese students. I go to work with a sense of joy every day, and that ... is what happiness is all about.”



Paul Gravett, guest curator from the British Barbican Centre, looks at the comic series at the exhibition on March 7. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Mandarin learning brightens job chances

By OTIATO OPALI
in Nairobi, Kenya
otiato@chinadaily.com.cn

During her undergraduate studies at Kenya's Kenyatta University, Anne Nduta elected to pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology in the hope of becoming a counselor in the future. Incidentally, she learned about the Chinese language studies being offered at the Confucius Institute at Kenyatta University and decided to enroll for the course.

Little did she know this decision would open the door of limitless opportunities for her.

"Learning the Chinese language opened unimaginable opportunities for me," said Nduta, who works as a train dispatcher at Africa Star Railway Operation Company, the company in charge of Kenya's China-built Standard Gauge Railway, which links Kenya's two largest cities, Nairobi and Mombasa, despite having studied humanities at the undergraduate level.

After completing undergraduate studies in 2015, Nduta received a scholarship paid for by the Chinese government to further her studies in Chinese language at Shandong Normal University in China's Jinan city.

Upon her return to Kenya in 2017, she learned about a translator position at the railway company through a newspaper and submitted her application. With her background in Chinese language studies, she was able to get the job.

Nduta is one of the seven Kenyan female employees at Afristar, and they are all alumni of Shandong Normal University.

Her colleague Shalom Njeri would not have believed had she been told during her undergraduate studies that she would end up becoming a passenger locomotive driver. Njeri, who studied for an undergraduate degree in education, also received a scholarship to study Chinese.

Upper hand

"Despite having no background in locomotives and having studied to be a teacher, the fact that I had learned the Chinese language gave me an upper hand to get the training I needed from Afristar to serve as a locomotive driver," Njeri said.

Unlike her colleagues, Alice Gitau, who works as an assistant locomotive dispatcher as well as a passenger locomotive driver at Afristar, began her career as a translator in 2018 at China Road and Bridge Corporation in Kenya after her return from Shandong Normal University, where she studied Chinese language.

"Luckily, Afristar gave us the opportunity to go back to China for the locomotive driver training and that is how I became proficient at my job," Gitau said.

According to Nduta, the fact that she learned the Chinese language presented her with several opportunities to switch careers.

One might think it is a coincidence that the three women studied in the same university at the undergraduate level, pursued further studies at the same university in China and ended up working for the same company back in Kenya.

However, Nduta said that they share the common denominator of having an interest in learning new things and spreading their wings. She also appreciates the opportunity to work in areas that were previously a preserve of men.



Above: Pro-Palestinian demonstrators lie on the ground as they protest against Israeli attacks on Gaza, in San Sebastian, northern Spain, on Sunday. ALVARO BARRIENTOS / AP
Left: Workers ration out flour during the distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza on Sunday. AFP

Netanyahu snaps back against criticism

JERUSALEM/GAZA — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has railed against growing criticism from top ally the United States against his leadership amid the devastating fighting with Hamas, as its military troops raided Gaza's main hospital.

In recent days, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had "lost his way".

US President Joe Biden expressed support for Schumer's "good speech", and earlier accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza.

Netanyahu told Fox News on Sunday that Israel never would have called for a new US election after the Sept 11 attacks in 2001, and denounced Schumer's comments as inappropriate.

"We're not a banana republic," he said. "The people of Israel will choose when they will have elections, and who they'll elect, and it's not something that will be foisted on us."

When asked by CNN whether he would commit to a new election after the conflict ends, Netanyahu said: "I think that's something for the Israeli public to decide."

The US, which has provided key military and diplomatic support to Israel, has also expressed concerns over a planned Israeli assault on

the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

On developments of the mediation efforts, the Israeli delegation to the new round of cease-fire talks was expected to leave for Qatar.

Despite the talks, Netanyahu made it clear he would not back down from the fighting that has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. More than five months have passed since Hamas' attack on southern Israel killed 1,200 people and left another 250 hostages.

Deeply troubled

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, in Washington for St. Patrick's Day, said during a White House reception that the Irish people were "deeply troubled" by what's unfolding in Gaza. He said there was much to learn from Ireland's peace process and the critical US involvement in it.

Varadkar said he is often asked why the Irish are so empathetic to the Palestinians.

"We see our history in their eyes. A story of displacement, dispossession, and national identity questioned and denied forced emigration, discrimination and now hunger," he said.

Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. Famine is expected between now and May in the north of the Gaza Strip, a UN-backed report said on Monday.

Despite mounting calls for a cease-fire, the Israeli military said on Monday its troops raided the compound of Gaza's Al-Shifa Hospital, in an operation Palestinian health authorities said had caused multiple casualties and set off a fierce fire in one of the buildings.

The military said soldiers were conducting a "precise operation" and were fired upon when they entered the compound.

"The troops responded with live fire and hits were identified. Our troops are continuing to operate in the area of the hospital," it added.

"There are casualties, including deaths and injuries, and it's impossible to rescue anyone due to the intensity of the fire and targeting of anyone approaching the windows," Gaza's Health Ministry said, accusing Israeli forces of "another crime against health institutions".

The military said troops had been instructed on the importance of operating cautiously as well as on measures to be taken to avoid harm to patients, civilians, medical staff and medical equipment and said patients were not required to evacuate.

Hamas said in a statement the Israeli military had committed a new crime by directly targeting the hospital buildings without caring about patients, medical staff, or displaced people.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Highway horror

The wreckage of vehicles in Helmand Province, south Afghanistan, are strewn across the road, after an accident left at least 21 commuters dead and 11 others injured in the province on Sunday, spokesman for provincial government Mawlawi Mohammad Qasim Riaz said. AFGHANISTAN'S HELMAND INFORMATION DEPARTMENT / AFP

Investments by China boom in Asia-Pacific

Experts hail Beijing's effort in pushing for modernization and sharing opportunities

By KARL WILSON in Sydney
karl.wilson@chinadailyapac.com

Despite an unsettling global economic and political outlook, Chinese investment in the Asia-Pacific region is defying the pessimists and booming.

A report from the Griffith Asia Institute, part of Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, showed China's engagement in the region through construction and nonfinancial investments last year totaled \$37 billion, up from \$29 billion in 2022.

The report, "China's investment in the Asia-Pacific: 2023", said China's cumulative engagement in Asia and the Pacific over the past 10 years topped \$530 billion in 2023 with \$245 billion in construction and \$285 billion in nonfinancial investments.

Lead author of the report and director of the Griffith Asia Institute Christoph Nedopil said the overall foreign investment landscape "has been challenging".

He wrote the report with Jing Zhang, a research fellow with the institute, and Lili Mi, who heads the institute's China and Regional Hub.

"Despite an overall decline in foreign direct investment, China, however, has been different," said Nedopil. "China shows no sign of cutting back on its foreign investment ... especially in the Asia-Pacific region."

He said China is one of the biggest investors in the region while the Europeans, Australia and the United States are not.

"It is not hard to see why China is heavily involved (economically) in the region," Nedopil said.

He also explained why China focuses on the region. "Trade restrictions with the US means some Chinese companies look for alternative countries."

"China has been a significant investor in Asia-Pacific for some time and is expected to continue to grow."

Nedopil said much of this forms part of China's modernization efforts and shared opportunities.

On March 7, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke of the prospect of building a community with a shared future for mankind during the sessions of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

He said: "Building a community with a shared future for mankind is the core tenet of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy."

"It is China's solution to the

question of what kind of world to build and how to build it.

"Countries should rise above their differences in history, culture, geography and system, and work together to protect the Earth, the only inhabitable planet for us all."

Nedopil said much of China's investment strategy is guided by the president's push for modernization through shared opportunities.

"What is interesting is investment today tends to be more focused on commercial returns rather than political returns," he said.

"The Belt and Road Initiative remains an important policy goal, but we are seeing a more focused investment environment, especially in the areas of green technologies and mining. Green investment is becoming a key part of China's investment strategy."

Nedopil admitted that while China continues to invest in coal-fired power plants, it also invests heavily in green renewables.

Strong growth

According to the report, China's investment last year in green energy and mining saw growth with Southeast Asia receiving around 50 percent of China's regional investment.

"Chinese private companies dominated Asia-Pacific investment, particularly in the energy transition and battery materials, indicating a potential further recovery in Chinese investment and construction in the region this year (2024)," the report said.

It found that much of the investment was focused on countries aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative, with Indonesia receiving the most.

Another example of this was the recent announcement that Cambodia is moving ahead with plans to build a \$1.7 billion, Chinese-funded canal that would directly connect Phnom Penh with Cambodian ports on the Gulf of Thailand.

The canal would bypass Vietnam's traditional hold on the mouth of one of Asia's biggest waterways.

In an interview with William Pesek on March 11 for the Asia Times, the chief Asia economist with HSBC, Frederic Neumann, said that China only started to venture out into the international investment landscape in the mid-2000s.

"However, after rapid increases in the first half of the 2010s, China's stock of overseas direct investment now surpasses that of Japan, Germany, and the UK."

Syria condemns 'destructive policies' of Western nations

DAMASCUS — Syria's Foreign Ministry on Sunday strongly denounced a recent joint statement by the United States, Britain, France and Germany as the perpetuation of "destructive policies".

The ministry said the joint statement was a continuation of the "destructive policies" that these countries have been imposing on Syria for the past 13 years.

On the 13th anniversary of the breakout of the Syrian conflict on March 15, the four countries issued a joint statement accusing the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad of "committing widespread oppression and atrocities" against Syrians.

In a statement, the Syrian Foreign Ministry accused the US, Britain, France and Germany of utilizing various tools of war against Syria, including inciting campaigns, spreading misleading information, supporting terrorist organizations and separatist militias, creating illegitimate alliances, and imposing inhumane unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian people.

This has ultimately led to the direct occupation of parts of Syrian territory, according to the statement.

"The Syrian government sees

these assertions as mere political hypocrisy and a desperate attempt to cover up the catastrophic effects of the coercive measures imposed on the Syrian population," it said.

Additionally, the theft of Syrian national resources by foreign powers has deprived the Syrian people of their wealth and livelihoods, said the statement, regarding the continued occupation of parts of Syrian territory by US forces as a blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty and the United Nations Charter.

Moreover, the ministry called for justice to be served by compensating Syrians for their losses, holding accountable those responsible for the destruction of cities like Raqqa, and ensuring that perpetrators of atrocities are not exempt from punishment.

United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen expressed concerns about the current situation in Syria during his visit to the country on Sunday, emphasizing the importance of de-escalation.

Following a meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, Pedersen highlighted the country's challenges regarding security, economy and the political process.

XINHUA

Japan finishes first-year toxic water release amid concern

TOKYO — Despite opposition and concern from at home and abroad, Japan's crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant has finished its initial year of discharging nuclear-contaminated wastewater into the ocean, according to the plant's operator.

The plant completed the fourth and final round of discharge for the current fiscal year ending in March, Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, said on Sunday.

As per the initial plan, approxi-

mately 31,200 metric tons of wastewater, containing radioactive tritium, was released into the ocean since the discharge started in August 2023, with each round of discharge carried out for about two weeks.

While the Japanese government and TEPCO have asserted the safety and necessity of the discharge, concerns have been raised by neighboring countries and local stakeholders regarding environmental impacts.

"All fishermen are against ocean dumping. The contaminated water has flowed into what we fishermen call 'the sea of treasure', and the process will last for at least 30 years," said Haruo Ono, a fisherman in the town of Shinchi in Fukushima.

"There is no good reason to dump radioactive materials into the ocean. There is no reason to just dilute them and flush them away," said the man in his 70s.

"Is it really necessary, in the first place, to dump what has been

stored in tanks into the sea? How can we say it's 'safe' when the discharged water clearly consists of harmful radioactive substances? I think the government and TEPCO must provide a solid answer," said Chiyo Oda, a resident of Fukushima's Iwaki city.

Concerns were fueled among the Japanese public over the recent leakage of contaminated water from pipes at the Fukushima plant.

XINHUA

BUSINESS

FIND US ON FACEBOOK AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION • CHINA DAILY

HIGHER GROUND

Expert: 'Growth miracle' possible

Total factor productivity gains would undergird GDP objective

By ZHOU LANXU
and OUYANG SHIJIA

China should be able to sustain an economic growth rate of about 5 percent in the coming years by achieving a relatively high growth in total factor productivity (TFP), as the country accelerates efforts to foster new quality productive forces via technological innovation alongside reform and opening-up, said a renowned economist.

Liu Qiao, dean of Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily that "China is an undeniable candidate to make a growth miracle", in contrast to some speculation that the country's economic development has peaked.

Liu said that such speculation stems from a pessimistic estimate of China's TFP growth. The TFP is a measure of productive efficiency, measuring how much output can be produced from a certain amount of aggregate inputs.

Historically, Liu said, it has been difficult for an economy to maintain a high TFP growth after it completes industrialization. Even the United States, which boasts the world's largest investments in basic research, had a TFP growth of below 1 percent over the past 40 years, which led to its long-term economic growth rate being only around 1.5 to 2 percent.

However, there are fundamental differences between China and US economic growth models, Liu added, meaning that China — unlike the US — still has a huge industrial system and enjoys vast investment opportunities brought about by reindustrialization, digital transformation and energy transition.

Official data show that China's



An employee oversees a digital production line at a tech company in Fuzhou, Fujian province.

WANG WANGWANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

manufacturing output accounts for around 27 percent of its GDP, whereas in the US it stands at about 11 percent.

Also, Liu said China's per capita GDP is around \$12,000, which means there is huge development space left.

Therefore, Liu said China should be able to maintain an economic growth rate of around 5 percent in the coming years if it can bring its annual TFP growth from the current level of about 1.8 percent to a level of above 2 percent by boosting technological innovation, deepening reform and opening-up and developing new quality productive forces.

"This will help the country realize basic socialist modernization by 2035."

In an earlier interview with China Daily, Steven Barnett, senior resident representative of the International Monetary Fund in China, also recommended that China should carry out more reforms to give the market a more decisive role in order to lift long-term growth prospects.

Looking at this year, Liu expressed confidence that China will hit its annual economic growth target of about 5 percent, anticipating that China's first-quarter growth rate may come in at around 4.5 percent.

The National Bureau of Statistics said on Monday that China's economic recovery gained further momentum in the first two months of 2024 as industrial output, fixed-asset investment and export growth accelerated, though retail sales slowed.

While external demand improved with the better-than-expected foreign trade performance in the first two months, Liu highlighted the need to bolster domestic demand and boost investment confidence among private enterprises.

He emphasized the country's plan to issue 1 trillion yuan (\$139 billion) in ultra-long-term special government bonds this year as a key fiscal move to bolster the economy, saying it is advisable to issue more such bonds this year and use proceeds raised in areas like fundamental research and sub-

dies to low-income groups.

Liu also cautioned that China still faces a big problem with real estate that will take time to resolve, necessitating the monitoring of key indicators. If such indicators as new housing starts, property sales and housing prices do not substantially improve year-on-year in the first half, more resolute support through macroeconomic and industrial policies, including those to facilitate debt restructuring, would be warranted.

NBS data showed that China's January-February property development investment dropped 9 percent year-on-year, compared with a 9.6 percent drop in 2023.

Contact the writers at
zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn



Online
See more
by scanning
the code.

Economist foresees boost to recovery

By LIU ZHIHUA, OUYANG
SHIJIA and LIU ZIZHENG

China is well on track to boost short-term economic recovery while leaving policy room to solve structural problems, including excessive reliance on the property market and the local government debt issue, a senior economist said on Monday.

"My own calculation shows that China's potential growth rate is still 5.5 percent on average. But (for) this year and also last year, the growth targets were (both set at) around 5 percent. I think the government has intentionally left some room over there for structural adjustments," said Yao Yang, director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University, during an exclusive interview with China Daily.

He made the remarks as data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Monday that China's economy gained more steam in the

first two months with improvement in key indicators, including production and investment.

Data from the General Administration of Customs also showed earlier that the country's exports grew by 10.3 percent year-on-year to 3.75 trillion yuan (\$520 billion) in the January-February period.

Yao dismissed speculation that China's economy has reached its peak. "In the end, the world still needs more Chinese exports. The whole world still needs China. I'm always confident about the fundamentals of the Chinese economy."

The Chinese economy, he said, enjoys a solid foundation, given the notable technological progress in fields like artificial intelligence and alternative energy.

While the broader economy is still facing problems like the continued weakness in the property sector, they will be short-lived as they are a consequence of the government's

deliberate adjustments, since relying on the housing sector is not going to be sustainable, he said.

"You must always balance the long-term goals with short-term fluctuations," he said.

Yao noted the country has made similar moves in terms of tackling local debt issues.

"In the short run, that's going to have a contractionary effect. In the long run, it's going to be good for the Chinese economy," he said.

He said China should take more measures to offset the short-term impact of such deliberate adjustments on the economy.

The central government, he suggested, should allow local governments to issue special bonds to tackle their deficits, as some local governments have accumulated huge deficits over the past several years.

"Issuing such bonds will be equivalent to injecting liquidity into the economy," he said, adding that pro-

duction and demand of private enterprises will be boosted this way because many local governments debts are owed to them.

In addition, he called for a plan designed by the top authorities at the national level to digest the stock of local government debt, as some regions lack adequate financial resources to effectively address the problem themselves.

It is also important to control the expansion of new debt by including local government debt in the public budget that need to be approved by the local legislatures, thereby making the issuance of local government debt more open and transparent, he said.

As for the property sector, he suggested allowing the market to "fully adjust", which means home prices should decline to a certain level where people will feel encouraged to buy new homes. That could be achieved with progress in government-led affordable housing projects, he said.

Contact the writers at
liuzhizheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Multilingual Alipay to enhance foreigners' e-payment experiences

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Alipay, the digital payment arm of Chinese financial technology company Ant Group, is allocating more resources to roll out translation services in 16 languages, to ensure foreigners in China can use mobile payments without any hurdles.

Alipay's move comes amid China's intensified efforts to further improve foreigners' payment experiences in the country.

Alipay has allowed foreigners in China to link their international bank cards, including Visa and Mastercard, to its mobile payment tool, greatly streamlining the payment processes, said Zhu Xugang, director of the cross-border business at Ant Group.

Users of 10 overseas e-wallets are also able to use their familiar home e-wallets on their own phones by scanning Alipay QR codes, to enjoy seamless mobile payment experiences across Alipay's vast merchant network.

According to Alipay, foreigners can use the app to complete payments at restaurants, hotels, scenic spots, convenience stores and supermarkets, as well as for ride-hailing, shared bikes, buses and other public transportation services in China. The newly launched multilingual app includes English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Japanese.

The mobile payment app has also raised the single transaction limit for overseas travelers using mobile payments from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and lifted the annual cumulative transaction limit from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, published a guideline on improving payment services and enhancing payment convenience in early March, a move to better meet the diversified payment needs of the elderly and foreign visitors.

Last week, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, released a payment guide that provides foreigners with text and graphic instructions on using bank cards, cash, mobile payments and e-CNY in China, the latest step



A foreigner pays via Alipay at a shop in Shanghai.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

in the country's push to optimize the payment experience for foreigners.

Wang Pengbo, a senior analyst at market consultancy Botong Analysis, said the intensified efforts to provide convenient payment services will not only significantly improve the living and consumption experience of foreigners in China and attract more of them to the country, but also promote the healthy and sustainable development of the payment industry.

Wang said the move demonstrates the country's resolve to expand high-standard opening-up, adding the online payment scenarios of Alipay are wide enough, with high usage frequency. So, what it should do now is to expand the scope of foreign bank card binding and improve and simplify authentication of new users, to provide more convenient payment services to foreigners.

Jennifer from El Salvador, a university student in China, said she just needed to download the Alipay app and bind it with her international cards, adding the procedure was very simple, which helped her to use Alipay on her smartphone and Apple Watch for online payments. She said she can buy products, book hotels, use ride-hailing services and order takeouts with Alipay.

Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance, said the inconvenience experienced by some foreign visitors can be mainly attributed to the differences in payment habits between China and other countries. People from Europe, the United States and other developed countries tend to use bank cards and cash more for payments, and are not familiar with mobile payments, he said.

Meanwhile, Chinese banks are taking measures to expand the acceptance of overseas bank cards and facilitate their use of cash in the country.

Dong said more efforts are needed to expand the scenarios of various types of payment methods at tourist attractions, sporting events, transportation hubs, healthcare and beauty centers and other daily consumption sites.

MNC chemical firms eye more investments

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Multinational chemical manufacturers are looking at further opportunities to invest in China, business executives and experts said, as the country's commitment to build a modern industrial system and accelerate the development of new quality productive forces inject fresh impetus into its high-quality economic development.

"China has emphasized the significance of expanding high-standard opening up, which provides a boost of confidence for foreign businesses such as AkzoNobel to further grow and expand our presence in China," said Mark Kwok, president of AkzoNobel China.

China's dual carbon goals provide great opportunities to a company like AkzoNobel, as well to diverse segments that it plays vital roles in, such as architecture, transportation, industry and consumer

electronics, he said.

"We firmly believe that China's consistent economic progress will not only highlight its unwavering commitment to high-quality development, but also be one of the key forces to drive the global economic recovery," he added.

The comments came after China set its economic growth target for 2024 at around 5 percent.

Jens Cuntze, president of Clariant Catalysts & Asia-Pacific, shared a similar view. Considering global GDP is expected to slow to around 2.4 percent, with Europe remaining weak at around 0.5 percent and the US likely to soften to around 2 percent, China's GDP growth is well above other regions, he said.

Clariant has made significant investments in the last few years in expanding capacities in China.

"We are now beginning to see the benefits and expect accretive impacts of these investments to be one of the levers that will allow us

to reach our medium-term financial targets," he said.

With China shifting to high-quality development focusing on sustainability, innovation and digitalization, the sustainability-focused specialty chemical company sees a lot of opportunities to contribute, Clariant said.

While these targets will have an impact on all industries, Cuntze believes the biggest growth potential comes from the fast-growing electrical and electronic equipment industries, particularly e-mobility, 5G communications technology and transportation.

"We are now very well positioned to utilize China's huge economic potential in the coming years with high-quality products tailored to our customers in the Chinese market at competitive prices," he said.

Clariant has invested more than \$300 million in the past four years in China, including its facilities in Daya Bay for care chemicals and

the e-mobility industry.

With China seeking high-quality growth in the coming years, Belgium-headquartered chemical firm Syensqo said it has shifted its market focus to high-tech new material research and development, to fuel the industry's robust and ecologically sustainable growth in China. "The Chinese market is strategically important in Syensqo's global strategy. We are looking to supply sustainable solutions to go beyond our previous businesses to enter new fields," said Liu Yang, Syensqo China's country manager.

Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute, said many multinational chemical corporations are committed to deepening their presence in the country, motivated by China's resilience and aspiration levels.

The scale of the industrial footprint and China's demand growth present significant opportunities for multina-

tional chemical companies, and the country's stable economic recovery, sound long-term economic prospects and improving business environment will make it attractive for foreign direct investment while making it a key growth engine for the global economy, he said.

Restrictions have been removed on foreign investment access to the manufacturing sector in the negative list for China's pilot free trade zones, in order to create more favorable conditions for multinational enterprises, according to Ministry of Commerce Spokesman He Yadong.

Ren Xinting, managing director of KraussMaffei China, said the company foresees new growth drivers emerging in the country's economy, particularly in areas such as innovation, technology and sustainability, as China will strive to modernize the industrial system and develop new quality productive forces quickly.

These drivers present exciting new investment opportunities for KraussMaffei, particularly in advancing its technological capabilities and expanding sustainability initiatives, he said.

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 10 billion yuan (\$1.41 billion) in seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system reasonable and ample, the People's Bank of China said in a statement.

Installed capacity of power batteries grows

China's installed capacity of power batteries rose in the first two months, said the China Automotive Battery Innovation Alliance. During the period, installed capacity of the batteries stood at 50.3 gigawatt-hours, up 32 percent year-on-year. Exports of power batteries came in at 16.3 GWh during the January-February period, down 1.9 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Distribution networks seen as key to ensuring increased energy demand

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China should continuously develop urban and rural power distribution networks to ensure a more reliable and efficient energy supply, at a time when renewable sources are becoming more prevalent in the nation's energy mix, said a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

While rural power grids play a crucial role in improving production and living conditions in villages, they also face challenges due to their vast geographical distribution, lengthy power supply lines, dispersed loads and the substantial investments required for construction and maintenance, said Meng Zhenping, who is also chairman of China Southern Power Grid (CSG), during the two sessions earlier this month.

“Further efforts are needed to accelerate the upgrading of rural power grid infrastructure and enhance the digitization of rural power grids.”

Meng Zhenping, chairman of China Southern Power Grid

A modern rural power grid network is necessary as more renewable energy projects, especially solar, go online, he said.

The power grid is a crucial component of the energy sector, and serves as a network that connects power generation sources to consumers. A large proportion of the electricity consumed in the country is traded across provincial boundaries.

Meng called for strengthened planning, coordination and management of the rural grid network, emphasizing the importance of expediting the upgrade of rural power grid infrastructure.

He also called for a digital power grid — a power network that incorporates digital communication technologies and analytics to improve grid efficiency and reliability — to optimize energy flow, balance supply and demand, reduce energy loss and enhance grid resilience against disturbances or disruptions.

Due to continuous economic development, both businesses as well as households require more power supply. Grid network upgrades make it possible to ensure uninterrupted power supply to users, he said.

The fluctuation of renewable energy sources will cause issues

such as voltage instability during power transmission, which will pose additional obstacles to maintaining grid stability, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Grid operators and power generation asset owners have been taking a range of actions to reduce grid load and prevent PV curtailment, Lin said.

Distribution power lines are fundamental power facilities that directly serve users, with a complex network structure and wide coverage, he said.

Some grid operators have been upgrading the distribution network in villages and counties to prevent problems such as long power outages and ensure service quality, he added.

“Further efforts are needed to accelerate the upgrading of rural power grid infrastructure and enhance the digitization of rural power grids. Power grid enterprises can play a major role in building digital power grids, further extending the supply chain, while strengthening weak links along the chain and promoting the high-level development of infrastructure in the energy industry,” said Meng from CSG.

Increased policy support and financial backing in areas such as taxation, finance, and electricity pricing can also help boost investment capacity for the transformation of urban and rural distribution networks to better support their sustainable development, he said.

CSG is in charge of power management in many regions of South China, such as the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, where residents from rural regions account for around 10 percent of the total population, said the company.

The company has been accelerating the construction of digital power grids in recent years to lead the development of green energy in these areas. It has invested more than 470 billion yuan (\$65.3 billion) since the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period in grid network construction, it said.

China's development of digital power grids has been on a fast track in recent years, with total investment in national grid construction projects in 2022 reaching 500.6 billion yuan, up 1.8 percent year-on-year, according to the China Electric Power Planning and Engineering Institute.

The power grid is a crucial platform for optimizing and allocating energy and electrical resources, said Sun Jiani, director of the National Energy Administration's grid department.

The development of grid technology helps meet growing demand for electricity and address global energy transitions, said Sun.



Inbound passengers go through entry procedures at Haikou Meilan International Airport in Hainan province on March 1. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Inbound tour orders from 6 EU nations rise

Number nearly doubles y-o-y on effective day of visa-free policy

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

China has seen growing orders for inbound tours from Switzerland, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg following the implementation of a visa-free policy for these countries starting March 14, industry players have forecast.

China's inbound tourism market is also expected to recover rapidly this year, they said.

From Thursday to Nov 30 this year, ordinary passport holders from these six European countries can enter China visa-free for business, tourism, family visits, or transit for up to 15 days, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On Thursday, the number of travel product orders to China from the six countries nearly doubled year-on-year and grew by about 40 percent from the same period in 2019, or before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency.

Among the six countries, the number of travel product orders to China made by visitors from Switzerland, Belgium, and Hungary more than tripled year-on-year. Popular tourist destinations in China for inbound tours include Shanghai; Beijing; Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province; Chengdu, Sichuan province; Hangzhou, Zhejiang province;

Qingdao, Shandong province; and Xiamen, Fujian province, Trip.com said.

“The expansion of the scope of visa-free policy to different countries, as well as strengthened efforts to improve payment services for foreign visitors, are expected to help promote a fast recovery in inbound tours,” said Qin Jing, vice-president of Trip.com Group.

“People from developed European countries such as Switzerland, Belgium and Austria boast high recognition for visiting China, and the number of travelers from those countries is expected to see rapid growth with further resumption of international flights,” Qin said.

Fueled by the continuous recovery of inbound tourism in China, multiple travel agencies have constantly expanded their inbound tourism products.

Spring Tour Travel Agency said inbound visitors have indicated new travel demand, and domestic travel agencies should introduce more personalized and tailored products to cater to an increasingly diversified segment.

Since China announced the visa-free policy on March 7, searches for China-related keywords from those countries have surged, with hotel-related keyword searches jumping more than threefold year-on-year from March 7 to Thursday, Trip.com found.

The six European countries have frequent business contacts with China. Trip.com said last year, business travel orders to China from those countries recovered to 90 percent of 2019 levels, and the number of orders has continued to grow rapidly this year.

Meanwhile, Hungary recently announced the issuance of long-term visas for Chinese business executives who visit the country for investment and cooperation.

Between Jan 1 and March 6, the number of flights connecting China with Hungary and Luxembourg exceeded 2019 levels. During the same period, the number of flights connecting China and Switzerland, as well as China and Belgium, recovered to 60 percent to 90 percent of 2019 levels, according to Flight Master, a travel services platform in China.

Switzerland, Hungary and Austria operate direct flights to China, and popular routes include flights connecting Beijing and Geneva, and Shanghai and Zurich. The average flight prices from the six European countries to China until April have climbed by about 30 percent to 60 percent over the same period of 2019, Trip.com found.

The online travel agency said it will actively leverage its products and services overseas, optimize its ability to serve consumers outside of China, and thus encourage more foreigners to visit China.

In late November, China announced a 15-day visa-free policy for short-term stays of citizens from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia, and the number of inbound foreign visitors has grown steadily since.

In 2023, China's inbound tourism market recovered to 20 percent to 30 percent of 2019 levels. Following the announcements of favorable visa-free policies to multiple countries, this year's inbound tourism market is expected to rebound to 70 percent to 80 percent of 2019 levels, said CYTS Tours Holding Co in Beijing.

Shopping trend takes retail sector by storm

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

Although fewer and fewer actual customers visit Sun Zhang's convenience stores, he is still going gangbusters with his business, and plans to open his tenth store on Wednesday in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

Partnering with a childhood friend, 35-year-old Sun and his business partner opened their first flash-express warehouse in March last year, naming it Feixiang Convenience Store.

Flash-express warehouses represent an emerging business model, are usually located in a warehouse and essentially sell all their goods online via deliveries.

“The store has no specific location requirements, which may help us save a lot of expenses such as rent and wages. Relying on online platforms such as Meituan for sales and delivery, we can achieve an average delivery time of about half an hour per order, with deliveries covering a radius of about five kilometers. Moreover, unlike most traditional retail stores that close at night, our stores are open 24 hours a day,” Sun said.

After only three months of the first store opening, Sun's business venture began to make a profit.

Then they opened another eight stores in succession, including seven in Harbin and one in Shenyang, Liaoning province, by the end of 2023.

“Big data from online platforms can help us determine the category of goods and the timing of stocking,” said Sun. “The variety of goods in the stores has now expanded to more than 6,000, from sewing kits and hardware accessories, to quilts, electric appliances, breakfast foods and beer. We are trying our best to provide customers with whatever they need. For instance, we finished an order for a printer at 10 pm one day when all shopping malls and large supermarkets had been closed. We will seize market opportunities and provide our customers with good shopping experiences,” he added.

Sun said an online convenience store with an area of around 200 square meters has a daily average turnover of over 10,000 yuan (\$1,389), which is about 10 times that of a 70-square-meter convenience store.

The surge of tourism in Harbin during the past winter season also brought Sun more sales volume, especially for stores near scenic spots and popular business districts.

“We received more orders from tourists, such as hot packs, portable power banks and data cables. And the sales volume of bath towels, swimsuits and suitcases was also quite high. During the period, we introduced new items such as refrigerator magnets and local souvenirs, which were favored by tourists. The order volume during the winter tourism season doubled,” he said.

What surprised Sun was that he had expected a significant decrease in orders after the tourist season, but the reality was different.

“Currently, the order volume keeps steadily increasing with an average volume of 12,000 orders per store every month and 15,000 orders per month during peak periods. I think the new model has been accepted by more customers after the busy tourist season.”

In fact, more people have seen market opportunities and support from the government. In May 2023, the local government released the “Implementation Plan for the Construction of Harbin's 15-Minute Convenient Living Circle”, which encourages the establishment of new types of operating and distribution points represented by front warehouses, and the provision of convenient, rapid logistics and distribution services tailored to different customer needs.

Sun said: “We have plans to open 22 more Feixiang stores in Harbin this year, which will also create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for more people.”

“We also plan to open a central warehouse in Harbin where most of the goods will be stored, thus reducing stocking pressure on individual convenience stores.”

Henan farmers breathe easy as power supply stabilizes irrigation

By ZHUANG QIANG
AND PANG BO

Powered by an electric motor, a pipe pumps out copious amounts of water into Peng Shunli's wheat field in Queshan county, Henan province. “The electric irrigation system is now so convenient there's hardly any need for my manual labor,” Peng, from Pengzhuang village in Liudian town in northeastern Queshan, said.

The irrigation system has raised expectations of a good harvest from a planting area of some 143,000 hectares earmarked for main crops each year.

Queshan is a major grain-producing county with an annual wheat output of above 460,000 metric tons. Chestnuts, tobacco leaves and herbs used in traditional Chinese medicine are other products the county is known for.

“March is a critical time for wheat to grow after irrigation. Sufficient water supply can help wheat seedlings to grow well,” said farmer Liu Jinxin from Jingou village, Shuanghe town in southeastern Queshan. Several electric pumps help irrigate dozens of acres nearby, he said.

The local branch of State Grid, China's power transmitter and distributor, has adopted a two-pronged approach to aid agriculture, enabling farmers such as Peng and Liu to breathe easy these days.

Zhang Yongming, a staff member of State Grid Queshan Power Supply Co, said: “We help irrigate the grain fields and also help farmers grow vegetables. Both these are local farmers' main businesses.”

While visiting wheat fields in Zhulizhuang community, Zhang told local farmers that he had just conducted a thorough examination of their electrical equipment, and found the wiring in the distribution boxes to be normal, which means there would be no hindrance to irrigation work.

Zhang said State Grid's local unit has taken five measures so far: power supply all the way to the fields; equipment investigation to avert any possible hidden dangers; publicity to highlight electricity safety; instant power supply installations; and prompt solutions to electricity consumption problems. This is to ensure sufficient electricity for farmers.

He said the unit is dispatching 16

service teams composed of members from subsidiaries to the farmers, to help solve their problems.

“So far, the service teams have checked 330 agricultural drainage spots and examined 32 kilometers of power lines, helping farmers eliminate 26 hidden dangers for spring irrigation work and solving 21 problems they had red-flagged,” Zhang said.

At Louling village's vegetable planting base in Shuanghe town, vegetable grower Duan Jianling said, “In the past, growing vegetables depended on weather, but now farming relies on electricity, especially during cold snaps.”

He told State Grid's local team, “With your full support, I'll likely have a good harvest this year.”

The vegetable planting base covers some 20 hectares, with 40-plus standardized vegetable and fruit greenhouses, working as a “vegetable basket” for the entire county.

Jiang Guiyin, local government head at Queshan, said besides ensuring a grain output of 580,000 tons this year, the county aims to expand the output of Chinese herbal medicines, chestnuts, tobacco



Employees of State Grid Queshan Power Supply Co check a facility in Queshan county, Henan province. ZHANG YONGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

leaves, sweet potatoes, watermelons and mushrooms.

Zhang Huawei, in charge of corporate work at Queshan Power Supply Co, said the company will provide a network-style service for the growers, offering one-on-one services and safeguarding their use of electricity.

The company's service team will visit every greenhouse, replace aging switches and eliminate risks to shutters and electric irrigation

equipment, so as to ensure reliable electricity supply, he said.

Zhang Gong, director of the Henan Provincial Grain and Material Reserve Bureau, has said previously that the province would raise its buying and reserve capabilities for grain and other important agricultural products this year, and expand its green food industry.

Contact the writers at zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Young buyers snap up snazzy traditional outfits

Web search volumes, sales of Tang suits and *hanfu* have skyrocketed this year, leading to bountiful biz opportunities

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Traditional Chinese attire that incorporates stylish modern designs is becoming popular among consumers this year, driven by the younger generation's fondness for the country's cultural heritage, and thereby fueling more business opportunities for retailers.

During the Spring Festival holiday in February, various traditional Chinese-style outfits containing dragon and phoenix elements became quite the rage among young consumers, as such clothing integrates Chinese design elements into various kinds of daily wear.

In Chinese traditional astrology, which outlines the qualities of 12 zodiac signs, the Year of the Dragon is usually of great significance, as the dragon symbolizes strength, wisdom and good fortune for Chinese people. This has spurred the popularity of traditional Chinese elements.

In addition, an increasing number of Chinese celebrities have frequently chosen locally designed traditional Chinese outfits, encouraging young consumers to wear such garments.

Since the beginning of this year, online search volumes for Tang suits and *hanfu*, two kinds of traditional Chinese-style attire, have skyrocketed.

Horse-faced skirts, or mid-length skirts with a distinguishing pleated design, have become the most popular item in the *hanfu* category, according to Alibaba's e-commerce platform Taobao.

This type of skirt is a key component of *hanfu*, the traditional dress worn by Han Chinese women.

During the Nov 11 online shopping extravaganza last year, more than 730,000 pieces of horse-faced skirts were sold on Taobao.

Meanwhile, more young parents have bought traditional-style Chinese clothing for their children, especially girls. In January, the turnover of children's clothing in the Tang suit style surged more than 330 percent year-on-year, according to Taobao.

"The booming sales growth of traditional Chinese-style clothing comes from young consumers' sense of identification with traditional Chinese culture, which also indicates a rise in national confidence," said Li Lina, director of women's clothing at Taobao.

"Such cultural confidence has fueled more business opportunities for retailers, and the main challenge for designers and retailers lies in how to integrate traditional costumes with different modern scenes," Li added.

Production base

Caoxian, a small county in Heze in East China's Shandong province, is a popular production base for traditional Chinese-style clothing.

The county boasts the highest degree of industrialization in producing cost-effective *hanfu*.

In terms of the design and quality



A staff member (right) of a *hanfu* company arranges attire for a model in Caoxian county, Shandong province, in 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of outfits, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Sichuan and Guangdong provinces have more advantages, according to a report by iResearch Consulting Group, a domestic market research firm.

Han Meng, head of Daji township government in Caoxian, said some 400 college graduates have returned to their hometowns for entrepreneurship. He said the town is known for its e-commerce business, and the first thing that many young people do when they return home is to open an online store on Taobao.

"The town of Daji is a vibrant place. Market demand is reflected online rapidly, and the development of e-commerce businesses has created flexible entrepreneurial ideas for people living in the town," Han said.

Daji has more than 30 villages involved in online businesses. Earlier, the villages were filled with the elderly and children, as young adults went to other places for work. Now, supported by the booming cloth production business, the villages are prosperous, with numerous cars, restaurants and diversified entertainment options.

Liu Shenfeng, who previously worked as a teacher at a fashion design college in Heze, returned to Daji in 2010 and was among the first group of entrepreneurs to start their own business in the town.

Liu now owns three online stores on Tmall, an e-commerce platform



Workers stitch pleats on a horse-faced skirt at an e-commerce industrial park in Caoxian on March 7. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of Alibaba Group, and also operates brick-and-mortar stores.

Sales revenue for a variety of horse-faced skirts at Liu's store exceeded 10 million yuan (\$1.39 million) in the month preceding Spring Festival this year, and employees at his store were extremely busy, pack-

ing and sending express deliveries.

"During the Spring Festival break, we took a few days off, and about 1,000 to 2,000 customers inquired online daily if products were still available," Liu said.

After the Lantern Festival, or the 15th day of the Lunar New Year,

Liu's store was up again. He plans to raise the production volume by three to five fold this year to meet the growing demand.

Mona Hao, a 29-year-old who works at an internet tech firm in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, owns more than 100 sets of *hanfu*, mainly

Apparel ... has exceeded its basic wearing function for a long time and become an important way for consumers to showcase their personalities and preferences."

Lou Lei, executive director of consultancy Frost & Sullivan China

bought online. The price of a single piece ranges between 300 yuan and 500 yuan, or higher.

Since her childhood, Hao has worn Tang suits during Spring Festival. Wearing traditional Chinese attire has increasingly become a daily habit and she wears it to work, too, sometimes.

For this year's Spring Festival holiday, she chose a red winter-style *hanfu*, with fur jackets and fluffy scarves to match.

Besides *hanfu*, Tang suits have incorporated various stylish elements in addition to retaining the look of a traditional jacket and using woven brocade.

For instance, some use silk and genuine leather as fabric, and integrate new elements such as standing collars made of wool, improved style of buckles and other modern patterns.

Designers have been taking elements from traditional culture and the latest trends, such as seasonal trendy colors, betting on some potentially popular styles, industry players have said.

In addition, costumes of ethnic minorities, such as robes of the Xizang and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions, have become more popular among young Chinese.

Such outfits appear frequently during Chinese New Year and are sold throughout the country.

"Apparel, as an indispensable part of people's daily life, has exceeded its basic wearing function for a long time and become an important way for consumers to showcase their personalities and preferences," said Lou Lei, executive director of consultancy Frost & Sullivan China.

From 2017 to 2023, sales of footwear and clothing of domestic brands that integrated Chinese cultural elements grew from 407.1 billion yuan to 992.8 billion yuan, with a compound annual growth rate of nearly 16 percent. It is significantly higher than the overall compound annual growth rate of footwear and clothing during the same period, according to Frost & Sullivan.

"Such fast growth is mainly due to the strong rise of local brands, the continuous growth of China-chic brand competitiveness, and a significant increase in consumers' recognition of domestic products," Lou said.

Online outlets prove boon for smaller retailers

By ZHU WENQIAN

Micro-sized retailers in third-tier or smaller cities are increasingly opening online outlets to grow their businesses, with a greater number of women entrepreneurs operating such stores, according to a recent finding.

Since February, Guangdong, Hunan, Henan, Shandong and Jiangsu provinces have seen the fastest growth in the number of newly registered online retailers, Alibaba Group's e-commerce platform Taobao has found.

For fiscal year 2023, the number of retailers who opened online stores on Taobao exceeded 5.12 million, a new high, with some 1.3 million who registered online stores born after the year 2000, Taobao said.

In particular, the number of female retailers from smaller cities and the western part of China has grown, with young women born after the year 2000 accounting for more than 30 percent of the total

female online retailers as of the end of last year.

Women also formed 80 percent of the total number of anchors who broadcast during livestreaming sessions online.

Among online customer service employees, some 85 percent are women, and this has created job opportunities for many college graduates and young mothers, Taobao found.

"The rapid growth of e-commerce platforms, short-video platforms such as Douyin, and the popularity of livestreaming sessions in China have provided good exposure and promotional channels for online sales of various products," said Lou Lei, executive director of consultancy Frost & Sullivan China.

"E-commerce platforms help solve some pain points of traditional offline sales, such as long sales chains and the distance from consumers," Lou said.

Last year, China had 50 industrial belts whose annual transaction val-

ues on Taobao and Tmall — both Alibaba's e-commerce platforms — exceeded 10 billion yuan (\$1.39 billion), including 16 in third-tier cities and inland cities.

Some traditionally weak industries have seized the new business opportunity to develop and expand with the help of e-commerce platforms, according to Alibaba's Taobao and Tmall Group.

Xu Tianyu has been operating a furniture factory for seven years in Nantong, Jiangsu province. Xu recently opened an online outlet to sell furniture after providing products for a friend's online store earlier.

"Some niche segments have sales growth prospects online. I plan to make some furniture related to online games and e-sports, and my first product will be a height-adjustable desk," Xu said.

The user scale of products related to e-sports has exceeded 100 million on Taobao, and a number of e-sports derivatives have become hot sellers

5.12 million number of retailers who opened online stores on Taobao during fiscal year 2023

online, the platform found.

"The latest consumption trends of young people have indicated some new features and new preferences. Such a diversified demand will provide more business growth potential for the supply side," said Xu Fei, director of the research center at Taobao and Tmall Group.

"For instance, the markets for Chinese-style products, healthcare, pets and sporting goods show significant consumption demand and opportunities for entrepreneurship," Xu said.

Other than newly emerging segments, online platforms also provide faster sales channels for traditional sectors.

Tianyue, a company in Yiyang,



Workers sort packages at a logistics park in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on March 7. ZHANG ZHENGYOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hunan province, is mainly involved in the planting, processing and sale of traditional Chinese medicine herb sealwort, whose planting cycle is typically four years.

The company started planting the herb in 2019, and got its first harvest in 2023, with an estimated output value of over 20 million yuan.

"We operate brick-and-mortar stores and recently launched an online store. Our daily online sales volumes have exceeded 130 orders from just a few in the beginning. We are also preparing to hold livestreaming sessions to further expand sales online," said Tang Juanli, director of e-commerce at Tianyue.

COMMENT

Editorials

US ransoming WTO reform to EU concession shows its true intent

The 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization was held in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, from Feb 26 to March 2, with ministers from across the world attending to review the functioning of the multilateral trading system and discuss the future of the trade body, which has been put in jeopardy as a result of the United States paralyzing its dispute settlement mechanism.

Washington claims the body was overreaching its authority by effectively making new trade rules through litigation. Specifically, it claims that the Appellate Body has added to US obligations and diminished US rights by "addressing issues it has no authority to address, taking actions it has no authority to take". In response, the US has aggressively reshaped its trade policy, making expansive use of claims of the "unfair trade practices" of other economies and alleged national security threats to justify its ramping up of tariffs and quotas.

The lack of an Appellate Body has left trade disputes worth billions of dollars unresolved, and restoring its function has become a pressing issue. At present, countries can still file complaints to a lower body, but if they do not accept its findings, the case ends up in limbo, as has been the fate of 30 unresolved appeals.

But even though Maria Pagan, the US' chief of mission to the WTO, claimed in January 2023 that Washington is "very committed" to WTO reform, with its goal being a fully functioning dispute settlement system by 2024. Its deeds have not matched her words.

In Abu Dhabi on Feb 28, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai ruled out an agreement being reached at the conference on a package of reforms to address the way the WTO adjudicates trade disputes. Despite the convergence among members on improving some aspects of the dispute settlement system "energizing" the membership to "think big" about broader WTO reforms to meet 21st century trade challenges, and the negotiations on the issue showing some progress, Tai said that talks would continue on "much harder issues" after the conference ended.

Her remarks subsequent to the conference make clear that for the US this amounts to holding WTO reform to ransom. Even though "Biden administration officials familiar with the conversation" were reported as saying Tai did not mean it to be a threat, Tai warned her G7 counterparts that if the European Union reopened a WTO case over a Trump-era steel and aluminum dispute, it would risk sinking their efforts of reforming and reviving the WTO's dispute settlement system.

By saying that the US would calibrate its cooperation with the EU based on the bloc's position on WTO reform, Tai has made clear that for the US, it is its way or the highway as far as the WTO reform goes. For the US, a trade dispute should only advance beyond the first nonbinding judgment to the legally-binding Appellate Body stage if both the plaintiff and the defendant agree to move ahead — it should be evident why it is proposing that. Likewise, it wants countries to be able to decide for themselves when they can invoke a national security exception. Again, it should be obvious why.

That is the US stance, and it is saying no to any other proposals.

The EU, along with China and other WTO members, stresses that the normal and effective operation of the dispute settlement mechanism is crucial for maintaining the stability, authority and effectiveness of the multilateral trading system, and for upholding the rules-based world trade order. So far, more than 70 reform ideas have been put forward for discussion. China on its part will continue to support efforts to restore the operation of the WTO's Appellate Body and firmly uphold the rules-based multilateral trading system. No matter how difficult or insurmountable the issues may seem, all WTO members must refrain from putting personal or national trade interests ahead of attempts to come up with a viable solution to get the trade organization fit for purpose.

Israel should negotiate in good faith

The fierce international criticism of the civilian losses caused by its military campaign in Gaza, the looming uncertainties with the approach of US presidential election, as well as the domestic anger over the Benjamin Netanyahu government's inability to have the hostages held by Hamas released should all spur Tel Aviv to cherish the opportunity of negotiations, albeit indirect, with Hamas in Qatar.

Late last week, Hamas presented a new cease-fire plan to end the conflict in Gaza that includes the release of Israeli captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners in the hope that it would be a three-phased truce, with each stage lasting 42 days. Although the Netanyahu government called it "unrealistic", it has still sent negotiators to Doha.

That the Joe Biden administration still backs the Netanyahu government suggests that the talks will not be fruitful. Secretary of State Antony Blinken commenting on Israel's proposed Rafah offensive on Friday even said that the US needed to see a "clear and implementable plan", which includes getting civilians "out of harm's way". That has led to speculation that Tel Aviv's approval on Friday of a plan for a ground offensive against Rafah, a city in the south of the Gaza Strip, where at least 1.4 million Palestinian refugees have taken shelter, is just a bluff to give a leverage to its negotiation team in the talks with Hamas, via mediators of Qatar and Egypt, on Monday.

That seems unlikely. Netanyahu told the media that a potential peace agreement with the Palestinians "that makes Israel so weak and unable to defend itself" would "set peace backward and not forward", indicating as long as he is kept in the post bringing back the hostages is only a secondary goal of the ongoing offensive, and his objective is to enable Israel to have control over the region where Palestinians live. That's why, after the Oct 7 Hamas attack on Israel, he has repeatedly railed against the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, arguing it would be a reward for "terrorism", though much of the international community endorses the idea as the only lasting solution.

Notably, as reported, some of the issues related to the negotiations will still need to be weighed and approved by Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. That means the Netanyahu government will hold a wait-and-see attitude on the talks, presenting it with a means to vent off pressure. What it remains open to is not a cease-fire, or peace based on the two-state solution, but how much progress it can make in getting the hostages released, and more importantly the extent to which it can consolidate and fix its gains as future strategic assets of Israel.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz certainly considers a ground offensive against Rafah a distinct possibility. In his statement after meeting with Netanyahu on Sunday, Scholz said pointedly: "Terrorism cannot be stopped by military means alone, political activity is also needed."

Other Western countries, including the Netherlands and Australia, which resumed its support for the United Nations' aid system in Gaza last week, also expressed similar points of view, telling Tel Aviv enough is enough. US Republican Senate leader Chuck Schumer even called for Israel to hold new elections, sparking an angry pushback from Netanyahu's Likud Party, which said Israel "is not a banana republic".

For the Netanyahu government, therefore, the negotiations with Hamas appear to be a window of opportunity to prepare for the implementation of the Rafah campaign, the last strong foothold of Hamas in Gaza, rather than what they should be: an opportunity to find a way to end the conflict and put a stop to the rising death toll and worsening humanitarian crisis there.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

China must win more overseas markets by improving quality and technology

The European Commission recently announced that it has launched a formal investigation to assess whether Alibaba's AliExpress violated the Digital Services Act, and France and Germany have also introduced or plan to introduce measures targeting Chinese e-commerce platforms.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, people in European countries and the United States turned to online shopping, and the ensuing inflation further stimulated their demand for cheaper goods. During this period, Chinese cross-border e-commerce operators went global in a big way, extending their Chinese goods at competitive prices to consumers around the world. It also facilitated China's transformation from "the world's factory" to "the world's shopping center".

However, when implementing the mature market tactics they have developed in the domestic market and policy environment into foreign markets, China's cross-border e-commerce operators encountered some challenges. At home, they quickly draw

e-commerce users through tactics such as low-price marketing and cheaper goods. Some problems have also emerged in product quality control, the application of user data and digital marketing.

The ballooning cross-border deals via e-commerce platforms have had an impact on the retail ecosystem in the West. In the West's services-dominated economy, small and medium-sized retailers create many jobs and tax revenues, and they have their own trade organizations to defend their interests. Behind them also are a large number of local manufacturers, who have formed a basic business network to counter the external shocks. For example, the French government has decided to impose environmental taxes on cheap textile products because it believes the influx of cheap imported clothing has led to the bankruptcy of some local brands. Therefore, considering potential influences on local employment and concerns about the rise of Chinese e-commerce platforms, even pure commercial issues could be politicized.

At present, a so-called investigation has been launched against China's e-commerce companies in Europe and the US for suspected tax avoidance. In addition, they are also paying attention to the quality and safety of e-commerce goods. Given that Chinese automobile, electronics and other sectors are now making accelerated efforts to go overseas, to win more international market share, they should launch more e-commerce goods that meet safety and quality standards of foreign markets. However, most Chinese e-commerce operators have got accustomed to price competition in the domestic market, and not developed full awareness on quality and safety standards. Also, relevant supervisions are not always put in place.

All this means China should consider establishing a strict export commodity inspection and testing system to help the sustainable and healthy development of its cross-border e-commerce business. Platform enterprises and suppliers should also work hard for their long-term and sustainable development.

—ZIST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Japan's Fukushima PR stunts fooling no one

Tokyo Electric Power Company says it completed the fourth round of nuclear-contaminated water discharges from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea on Sunday. The next round of discharges will start in April.

TEPCO has discharged approximately 31,200 metric tons of nuclear-contaminated water since Aug 24 last year.

Although it was treated with an "advanced" liquid processing system, the nuclear-contaminated water still contains many kinds of radioactive elements. Japan is putting lives and health the world over at risk. Also, there have been a series of accidents in the process. On Feb 7, approximately 1.5 metric tons of nuclear-contaminated

water leaked from the Daiichi nuclear power plant and seeped into the soil, which means 6.6 billion becquerels of radioactive substances were released altogether. In the early hours of Feb 22, a fire alarm went off at a facility in the nuclear power plant used for burning waste, accompanied by the discharge of steam.

TEPCO and the Japanese government are not unaware of the potential damage the discharging of the nuclear-contaminated water can cause. On Aug 21, in the face of protests from fishermen and their associations in and near Fukushima, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida promised they will provide full support to fishing communities during the period of dis-

charge of the nuclear-contaminated water, which might last three decades.

Japan is busy carrying out public relations stunts. Its politicians bow gracefully at news conferences while its ministers eat Fukushima seafood to suggest it is safe for consumption; even US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel visited Fukushima to savor the seafood there.

But none of these PR efforts will prevent irreversible consequences caused by the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water. Japan is obliged to establish a substantive participation mechanism with neighboring countries and other stakeholders to decide the best way to treat the water.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Brotherly bonds lift cooperation to new heights

Angolan President Joao Lourenco's visit to China from Thursday to Sunday was undoubtedly a success, with bilateral economic and trade cooperation gaining a significant boost. Cooperation is to be expanded from the traditional energy and mining sectors to infrastructure, agriculture, trade, new energy and the digital economy under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

This year marks the 41st anniversary of Angola establishing diplomatic relations with China. The two countries have enjoyed a profound traditional friendship and are good brothers and partners who trust each other. Lourenco's

visit to China, following the successful conclusion of China's two sessions — the annual gathering of the country's top legislature and political advisory body — also underscores the strong friendship and exchanges between China and Africa.

The two countries have coordinated with each other on the world stage showing respect to each other's core concerns and strategic interests. Sino-Angolan cooperation has great potential and can help inject new impetus into not only bilateral relations but also broader China-Africa cooperation.

China's support and cooperation have greatly promoted Angola's infrastructure construction and economic and social development, setting an example of mutually beneficial cooperation. Lourenco has been actively promoting reforms in Angola since taking office in 2017, drawing inspiration from China's development experience.

The cooperation between the two countries is not targeted at any third party.

China stands ready to import more quality products from Angola and encourages Chinese enterprises to invest in Angola, and the two sides should also deepen exchanges on medical and health care, human resources development, culture and tourism. The signing of a series of cooperation plans, as well as multiple bilateral cooperation documents means bilateral pragmatic cooperation is mutually beneficial. As the outcomes of Lourenco's visit demonstrate, China is willing to strengthen multilateral coordination with African countries to safeguard the common interests of developing countries, advocate for a multipolar world and inclusive economic globalization, and promote the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

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

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

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wa 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

COMMENT

Cheng Danhong

Educational openness can boost innovation

Education, especially openness in education, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of a nation. And given China's rapidly evolving global engagement, the need for further openness in the education sector couldn't be more urgent. As China navigates unprecedented shifts and chasms in the global landscape and embarks on the journey to achieve national rejuvenation, Chinese universities find themselves at the forefront of promoting China's higher education sector globally.

At the heart of China's strategy of educational openness lies the mission to promote innovation-driven high-quality development, characterized by robust global cooperation. Despite the significant progress made in this regard, there is still room for sharpening the competitive edge of China's higher education sector. While the gross enrollment rate in higher education reached 60.2 percent in 2023, indicating China has reached the stage of massification of education, challenges remain in terms of original academic output, industrial application of the results of research in cutting-edge technologies and measures in attracting top global talents.

To address these challenges, Chinese universities, particularly those in Shanghai, should leverage their regional features and ensure their policies are in line with global trends. By integrating advanced resources from across the globe and continuously providing better, even world-class, education, these institutions can forge a pattern of open cooperation and development. Of course, that would entail proactive engagement with global partners, alignment with projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, and the promotion of collaborative networks to boost knowledge exchange.

Deepening global cooperation is key to promoting innovation and facilitating the high-quality development of different disciplines. So Chinese universities must develop a global perspective in their pursuit of scientific and technological advancement, and collaborate with top-tier institutions globally to establish academic communities at the forefront of knowledge production.

Shanghai University has made serious efforts to integrate into the global innovation network, thereby boosting its research capability by developing advanced technology and interdisciplinary studies, building and consolidating global research platforms to promote innovation, and creating innovative models for collaboration between domestic and foreign educational institutions.

Simultaneously, the cultivation of global talents has become a priority for China in its efforts to take forward its agenda of

educational openness. As China competes on the global stage, talents become the ultimate determinant of success. So universities need to instill a sense of patriotism among students, help them learn the ropes and develop a global perspective needed to gain competency in cross-cultural affairs and acquire global leadership. Institutions should also help expand students' horizons, facilitate knowledge exchange with overseas partners and foster a culture of global citizenship.

In practical terms, this would require the establishment of a global talent cultivation system, comprising elements of training, learning and practical experience. Chinese universities, particularly those in Shanghai, have made significant strides in this regard, forging partnerships with leading global institutions and facilitating student exchange programs and internships on a global scale. Such initiatives not only enhance students' academic and professional development but also cultivate a competent workforce capable of driving China's future growth.

Adhering to the "going out" policy and adopting a comprehensive approach to "training, learning, internship, and practical experience", uni-

versities have established distinctive global education programs, which should help expand students' vision, make them more competent and competitive, enhance their overall quality and raise their innovation capacity.

Shanghai University has collaborated with 58 of the world's top 200 universities for mutual credit recognition, facilitating overseas student exchange programs. In fact, for the past two years, Shanghai University students have been selected for internship at different United Nations organizations, which will cultivate globally competitive young talents.

Also, universities should develop localized international education models, by "bringing in" expertise, putting education resources in the local context across three fields — specialized courses, international faculty and campus culture — expeditiously building a global curriculum system, aligning course content with global standards, and working out a seamless global education

model from the bachelor's to the doctoral degree.

They should also recruit highly qualified faculty members from abroad, help them conduct high-level research in collaboration with leading universities worldwide to boost the innovation capacity of Chinese universities, and organize global cultural and academic events to foster an internationalized atmosphere on the campus.

There is also a need to cultivate talents from among international students studying in China, so they can serve as China's "ambassadors" and narrate China's stories globally. In this regard, Shanghai University, by offering high-quality specialized courses for foreign students, aims to nurture international students who understand and love China, so they can present a credible and adorable image of China to the world. As a matter of fact, an animated cartoon, titled *The Song of New China*, created by a Turkmenistan student at Shanghai University, went viral online, garnering 164 million views, including a large percentage from abroad.

Openness is the anchor of Chinese education's global engagement strategy, offering a path to enhanced competitiveness, innovations and collaborations on the world stage. As Chinese universities embark on the journey of internationalization, they must seize the opportunities presented by globalization and overcome the challenges inherent in cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation. By nurturing global talents, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and embracing digital innovation, Chinese universities can position themselves as leading global institutions, driving forward China's vision for educational excellence and global leadership.

The author is secretary of the Party committee of Shanghai University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

Clean energy powers China's green future

The first time I saw a wind turbine was in the late 1980s when I was on a study tour of Europe with a group of mid-career journalists from developing countries at the invitation of an international organization. I was so impressed by the gigantic fans that helped produce clean electricity that I prayed that someday my country, too, would have such high-end power-generating facilities.

Four decades down the line China has become the world's biggest producer and user of not only wind turbines but also photovoltaic power panels. China's installed capacity of renewable energy exceeded 1.45 billion kilowatts in 2023, accounting for more than 50 percent of the country's total installed power generation capacity, according to data released by the National Energy Administration. More importantly, it accounts for about 40 percent of the world's total.

Behind this remarkable transformation is China's changed attitude toward renewable energy.

Climate change and the threat it poses to the planet have long been a matter of concern for the international community. While agreeing that carbon dioxide emissions must be reduced to mitigate climate change, the developed and developing countries have for years been arguing over the levels of emissions reduction. The developing countries argued that the developed economies should drastically reduce their emissions as well as pay their climate debts for contributing to most of the cumulative historical emissions. They also emphasized that the developing world should not be forced to reduce emissions and thus be deprived of developing their economies. China, of course, was among the latter.

Three strategic considerations have prompted China to expedite its pursuit of clean energy.

Yet over the past decade or so, China has changed its approach to economic development, putting stress on eco-friendly development, with the top leader saying that "clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver". Given its commitment to sustainable development, China, with some other countries, played a key role in getting the Paris Agreement passed at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris 2015. And four years ago, China pledged to peak its carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

These two developments have not only pushed China's renewable energy development onto the fast track but also demonstrated the country's commitment to help reduce global emissions.

Three strategic considerations have prompted China to expedite its pursuit of clean energy. First, the pursuit is in line with China's pledge to help build "a community with a shared future of mankind". China does not believe in zero-sum thinking. Instead, its aim is to build win-win partnerships and achieve common prosperity.

Also, it knows that only when climate change is effectively mitigated can humankind survive. And as the world's second-largest economy, it accepts that it has the obligation of reducing carbon emissions by developing renewable energy.

Second, China takes into consideration environmental protection when drafting its development policy, because increasing renewable energy production can help the country reduce air pollution and check environmental degradation, which have been a major problem associated with economic growth.

In fact, by covering hundreds of square kilometers of deserts in the north and west with photovoltaic panels to generate electricity, China has helped the regeneration of plants in those regions, which incidentally has curbed desertification.

The third strategic consideration is rarely mentioned by observers but is probably high on the decision-makers' agenda — energy security. China has closed an increasing number of coal-powered electricity plants to cut emissions, as well as to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

By developing renewable energy — which already meets one-third of China's consumption requirement — the country can ensure energy security and protect its people from not only the Western sanctions but also the impact of climate change.

Li Jia

A living dilemma that faces elderly people

With the rapid rise in the aging population in China, an increasing number of people are opting to shift to nursing homes after retirement. In response, the government has been continuously improving eldercare services. By the third quarter of 2023, the number of nursing homes and other facilities nationwide had reached 400,000, with more than 8.20 million beds, up about 3.4 times and 1.22 times respectively compared with the end of 2015.

But who are the people opting to live in nursing homes?

First, there are elderly people who need government help, such as those without the ability to work, without a source of income, without caregivers or guardians, and people whose caregivers or guardians are unable to provide for them, and those who are weak or feel lonely. Then there are widows, the disabled, and people who never married. These people often have poor health, low or no income, and lack enough social security to support them. It is such elderly people that are living in or are opting to live in nursing homes.

Second, there are elderly people who don't want to live with their children. Many elderly people feel that living with their children is inconvenient, stressful and emotionally draining, or there is a lack of living space in their offspring's apartment, and thus choose to shift to a nursing home.

And third, some elderly people who are unable to take care of themselves and

And yet there are nursing homes whose charges are relatively low but they provide excellent eldercare services, much better than high-priced nursing homes.

require professional care also choose to live in nursing homes. Traditionally, the Chinese people have been averse to the idea of nursing homes or retired people's homes, or shifting their elderly parents to retired people's homes, as filial piety is one of the biggest virtues in Chinese culture. But since it has become increasingly difficult for working couples with kids to take proper care of the elderly people living with them, especially if they are disabled or have lost their mental faculties, they shift them to nursing homes.

Despite the above circumstances and reasons, however, it is not advisable for elderly people to live in nursing homes. As the saying goes, there is no place like home. Regardless of how good a nursing home may be, the living environment cannot be compared with that in one's own home. Also, in terms of diet, recreation facilities and other requirements of the elderly, the focus is often on meeting the collective needs of the residents, making it difficult for the staff to fulfill their individual or special needs.

In addition, shifting elderly people to

nursing homes means excluding them from society, making them feel isolated. China's aging population is increasing rapidly, with the number of people aged 60 or above increasing from one-tenth of the total population at the end of 1999 to one-seventh by the end of 2012 and one-fifth by the end of last year. This means one in every five people in China is aged 60 or above. Given these facts, can we afford to prioritize the needs of one-fifth of the population separately from the rest of society? The answer is "no".

Nursing homes exhibit a structural contradiction, however, that is, it is "difficult to secure a bed" in a nursing home despite "high vacancy rates". Government-aided nursing homes, or those operated by social welfare institutions, offer good eldercare services at relatively low prices, and thus are high in demand, leading to a shortage of beds, while private nursing homes, despite being expensive, don't provide proper, adequate services, or are located in remote areas, resulting in low occupancy and low utilization rates.

Also, it's important to distinguish between "high-priced" nursing homes and "high-end" nursing homes. Many nursing homes charge a monthly fee of 20,000 yuan (\$2,781) or more, and are thus high-priced facilities but not high-end facilities. High-priced nursing homes are often affiliated with big enterprises or groups, so they provide relatively expensive "hardware facilities", including but not limited to an overall good environment, pretty landscaping

and ample open spaces.

However, many amenities and equipment in such nursing homes are often substandard. For instance, the sofas are not so soft, chairs are either higher or lower than usual, floors are not slip-resistant, furniture has sharp edges, and bathrooms and kitchens are not user-friendly for the elderly. High-priced nursing homes also claim to offer standardized services, but pay little or no attention to details, including understanding the importance of emotional care for the elderly.

And yet there are nursing homes whose charges are relatively low but they provide excellent eldercare services, much better than high-priced nursing homes.

Nursing homes should also be asked to stop classifying themselves as mid-range or even low-end facilities based on their monthly charges and, instead make clear whether they are "high-priced nursing homes" or "high-end nursing homes".

In short, the decision to choose a nursing home should be made after carefully considering all the pros and cons, and taking into account the specific needs of the elderly people. But in spite of nursing homes providing professional care and a supportive environment for the elderly people, the importance of personal attention and the comfort of home should not be overlooked.

The author is deputy head of the Aging Society Research Center at the Pangao Institution. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

CAI CUIHONG AND ZHANG RUOYANG

Countering tech fragmenting

China should address the demands of countries within the 'de-risking' circle, seek targeted cooperation and expand its circle of friends in a positive way

In recent years, the phenomenon of technological innovation being influenced by geopolitical factors has become more common, and technological development has shown a trend toward de-globalization and fragmentation. On the one hand, some countries place greater emphasis on localization and



Cai Cuihong



Zhang Ruoyang

autonomy in innovation and application, viewing technology as a fundamental core capability for maintaining national security, with a focus on reconstructing national security strategies. On the other hand, some countries continue technological blockades, isolation, and decoupling, creating technological

barriers and forming economic blocs while excluding global cooperation, attempting to gain monopolistic advantages in some emerging technological fields.

This has led to systemic differentiation and fragmentation in some fields, and the competition for governance standards and rules has further fragmented the global technology governance system. The trend of geopolitical development goes against the natural laws of sci-tech progress, thus artificially raising barriers and thresholds for technological progress, casting a huge shadow of uncertainty on the prospects of global technological development and governance. Maximizing cooperation and sharing globally, optimizing the allocation of research and development resources worldwide, and deepening cooperation in science and technology are essential requirements for global technological advancement.

At the same time, the explosive development in technology and the rapid flow of talent and resources on a global scale make it difficult for a single country or region to maintain an absolute leading advantage in all high-tech fields. Global technological progress demands communication, exchanges, and complementary strengths on a global basis.

However, with intensifying tensions in the field of technology among countries, especially among major technological powers, the

'de-risking' policy guided by geopolitical thinking will also lead to the division and isolation of the global sci-tech system and the increase of the cost of sci-tech innovation. Meanwhile, the development of different technological systems in major countries will inevitably have a long-term impact on future technology research and development, production, application, and standard setting. Against the backdrop of a profound 'digital divide' that still exists globally, the artificially created inconsistent standards and compatibility will inevitably affect the collaborative supervision and governance of global technological development, increase the difficulty of international cooperation in addressing high cost global issues such as climate change and cybersecurity, hinder the collaborative resolution of global crises, and also have an adverse effect on sustainable growth worldwide.

First, in response to the trend of geopolitical development in global sci-tech advancement, countries should abandon the confrontational thinking toward the global technology system, highlight the common risks faced by all humanity, actively participate in and promote technological globalization and expand their opening-up.

As human society is grappling with common challenges such as climate change, the digital divide and poverty, it is essential for all countries to cooperate and solve these global problems through technological means. As a beneficiary and contributor to technological globalization, China is making efforts to realize the sharing of tech innovation achievements and knowledge experience worldwide. China firmly adheres to its opening-up strategy that features mutually beneficial and win-win outcomes. It continues to intensify its high-level opening-up efforts, expand institutional opening-up, enhance the inclusiveness of China's economic growth and technological progress by promoting international sci-tech exchanges and cooperation with more open thinking and measures and creating an innovation climate with global competitiveness, and working together with other countries to build an open, fair, just, and non-discriminatory environment for the development of science and technology.

Second, in the face of geopolitical development in technology, it is necessary to reform and innovate the content, means, and theories of

national security. Seeking supply chain security does not mean pursuing complete self-sufficiency. The focus of seeking sci-tech independence and safeguarding national security should be on improving the domestic innovation ecosystem, optimizing the structure and transforming the management model of technological innovation, encouraging scientific research organizations to reform models, so as to obtain original and leading achievements in the next generation of sci-tech innovation, and form unique advantages in key links of the global value chain.

Last, it is imperative to accurately analyze the 'de-risking' or 'autonomy' policies of different countries, and strive to seek consensus with more countries on respecting market laws, maintaining fair competition and promoting sci-tech cooperation. Under the influence of uncertain and unstable factors such as the turbulent international political situation, frequent regional conflicts, unstable world energy supply, and the economic slowdown, the international community generally desires to avoid risks. It is normal to reduce the risk of economic dependence by diversifying supply chains. However, the essence of the United States' de-risking policy is far beyond the scope of normal competition among nations; it is about maintaining its own monopoly position in technology, dividing the global technological system, and advocating protectionism, which is not consistent with the interests of other countries, especially those countries from the Global South.

Therefore, China needs to deeply identify the different risk perceptions and demands of various countries, especially those within the 'de-risking' circle, adopt targeted response strategies, actively seek targeted cooperation, consolidate the existing cooperation foundation in trade, investment, talent exchange, and infrastructure construction, and expand its circle of friends in a positive way.

Cai Cuihong is a professor at the Center for American Studies at Fudan University. Zhang Ruoyang is a doctoral student at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



ZHANG YUN

Perception dilemma

In the closed-loop interaction among the US and its allies, negative perceptions of China are continuously strengthened and escalated

The summit between the heads of state of China and the United States in November sent positive signals for the stabilizing of relations between Beijing and Washington. However, the relationship is still confronted with various structural issues, and the deterioration in their perceptions of each other continues.

At the beginning of this year, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan delivered a speech with a stark negative tone toward China at the Council on Foreign Relations, despite having long talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on multiple occasions, including in Vienna and Bangkok.

The key is to improve relations and enhance the quality of communications to reduce negative perceptions. For China-US relations to stabilize and take a turn for the better, emphasis should be given to avoid the two sides' perceptions of each other, especially the US' perception of China, sliding into a dilemma of "internal circulation", mainly manifested in the following three aspects.

First, the dilemma in US' perception of China being reflected in the increasingly domestic nature of its construction of perceptions about China, which has become more of a domestic conversation. In recent years, due to the continuous deterioration of China-US relations, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, direct communication channels between China and the US have been significantly impacted. The China-US relationship used to rely on a rich network of dialogue mechanisms across various levels and fields. These channels not only implied and fostered interdependent interests and friendly exchanges but more importantly constituted an important platform for constructing accurate perceptions of each other.

A dense and direct communication dialogue network offered the possibility for the both sides to construct accurate, rational and pragmatic perceptions of the other, as well as opportunities for correcting negative perceptions. In international relations, the per-

ception of other countries should be a dynamic process constructed through a myriad of interactions. Unfortunately, due to a severe lack of direct, high-quality communication dialogues and the internal pressure formed by the mainstream negative perception of China, the US' perception of China has increasingly evolved into a "domestically circular" mode of self-affirmation of its negative perception of China. In this mode of perception construction, correcting negative perceptions becomes increasingly difficult, and the drawbacks of perception solidification not only make it difficult for the innovation of internal dialogues but also stimulate the escalation of China's negative perception of the US.

Second, the dilemma of the US' perception of China is manifested in the emphasis on synchronized perceptions of China among "like-minded countries". In recent years, "like-minded countries" has become an increasingly frequently used phrase in US and Western diplomacy. After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the theory of expanding and deepening cooperation among "like-minded countries", as a lesson from the Ukraine crisis, has become increasingly popular in the West. This logic has also extended to perceptions of China.

Following this logic, the military deterrence corresponding to China's "aggressiveness" and the "partial decoupling" in economic security have emerged. Once such narratives become mainstream among "like-minded countries", they are continuously repeated and reinforced through summits, joint statements and news conferences. With the negative tone already set, these meetings easily become platforms for competing to identify problems with China, and negative perceptions of China are continuously strengthened and escalated in this closed-loop interaction among allies. This is observable in the interactions within the US' bilateral alliances, the G7, or the AUKUS framework, which, in turn, stimulates the escalation of China's negative perception of the US. However, the international community is a large family composed of nearly 200 countries, and international relations are in a historic period of major changes. It is normal for countries to have diverse and fluid

perceptions of international relations. This means that the stability of international relations requires communication and dialogue among countries with different views, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and achieving consensus for cooperation.

Third, the dilemma of the US' perception of China is also reflected in the discourse system built on a basis of unilateral superiority, which is conveyed through the media to society, leading to a negative perception of China in US society. In recent years, the discourse systems of the US and the West have frequently stressed that the liberal international order is facing unprecedented shocks. Whether it's the National Security Strategy published by Washington, the G7 declarations, or the "Indo-Pacific" strategy, "the liberal international order" is a key term. Within this discourse system, China is directly or indirectly identified as a major challenger to the so-called liberal order, and this perception is continuously replicated through the Western media network, deepening the stereotyped view of the US and Western public.

For China-US relations to achieve sustainable improvement, it is necessary to promptly restore various channels of communication to avoid falling into the dilemma of "domestic circulation" in perception, where negative perceptions of each other are continuously escalated in a closed environment, creating an "echo chamber effect". Otherwise, dialogues will become an endless "spinning of wheels", consuming patience between each other and exacerbating mutual accusations, which in turn causes a negative escalation of perceptions. Pragmatic, rational, friendly, and peaceful mutual perceptions require genuine dialogue, with mutual respect the essential foundation.

The author is an associate professor of international relations at Niigata University in Japan and a non-resident senior fellow at the Center on Contemporary China and the World at the University of Hong Kong. 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

There's an old saying in the West that you should never meet your heroes, they'll only disappoint you. Fortunately, Wang Hedi didn't grow up in the West.

He grew up in Leshan, Sichuan province. It was there, around 15 years ago, as a primary school student, he found himself flicking through a basketball magazine. Inside was the story of a man who would become a sporting legend, LeBron James.

Like the young student, James was born in a small city, in his case Akron, Ohio. Raised by a single mother, James defied the odds by rapidly rising to prominence, from high school success to entering the NBA at the age of 18, before being crowned "King" of the court.

The tale of James' early resilience and triumph deeply moved Wang, who began eagerly tracking his newfound hero's career, only to be further inspired by the fearless manner in which James played.

"The forceful and aggressive way James slams the basketball through the hoop is visually striking, and it really pumps me up," Wang says.

This devoted fan, much like his idol, grew to venture beyond the confines of his hometown, emerging as one of China's hottest young acting prospects.

Fast-forward to a few weeks ago, Wang found himself not only living his childhood dream after being invited to participate in the NBA All-Star Celebrity Game at the Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Feb 16 — scoring 18 points in just 21 minutes, setting a new record for the highest points scored by a Chinese celebrity in the process — but finally got to meet his hero, exchanging first a handshake, then an embrace before finally procuring the highly sought-after autograph of basketball royalty, King James himself.

"That was undoubtedly a dream-come-true journey for me," Wang said during a break at a recent photo shoot in Beijing.

The 25-year-old's display on the NBA court, transitioning from a substitute player to the second-highest scorer for Team Shannon — named after head coach, legendary NFL tight end, Shannon Sharpe — delighted a multitude of Chinese basketball fans, especially when he sunk a spectacular four-point shot to cap his stellar performance.

"Wang really stood out in the game. He became the game's best sixth man," said Su Qun, Tencent Sports' basketball commentator.

While not so proficient in English, Wang sees basketball as a means of cultural communication.

Team Shannon comprised celebrities and sports stars that included NFL linebacker Micah Parsons, Canadian YouTuber and television host Lilly Singh, US actor Quincy Isaiah and Puerto Rican rapper Anuel AA.

"At the first team meeting in the locker room, the native English speakers quickly got acquainted. They sang songs I hadn't heard, and with the language barrier, I couldn't join in the conversation, which initially made me feel a bit reserved," Wang recalls.

"However, when we hit the court for warmups, communication improved through the passing of the ball and by using basketball gestures with them. After scoring during the game, I exchanged high-fives and chest bumps with teammates, and we started to bond."

Later, he arranged to meet up and shoot some hoops with a few of his newly made friends.

Wang's passion for the sport began in primary school, when he enrolled in extracurricular basketball classes every Thursday. Initially, Wang signed up for the badminton class, practicing on the school field with the teacher.

"The area where we practiced badminton was right next to the basketball court, and badminton doubles can only be played with four people. I saw basketball, which is five-on-five, as more lively and high-spirited. I was instantly attracted to it and started playing basketball instead," he says.

From that point on, the game became a regular part of his school life.

"Back then, I was regarded as quite skilled among the players



HOOPS & DREAMS

From Sichuan boy to holding court in the US, heartthrob actor Wang Hedi is forging his own, confident path, **Xing Wen** reports.



Top: Actor Wang Hedi in a pensive moment. **Middle:** In 2022, online fantasy drama, *Love Between Fairy and Devil*, in which Wang played the male protagonist Dongfang Qingcang, was aired and went viral, securing Wang heartthrob status. **Above from left:** He is center of attention both on and off court in the United States. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

in my circle. Teammates were willing to pass me the ball, relying on me to score, and I would always imagine myself as a basketball star," he adds.

"Competitive sports require determination, a sense of belief and a winning mentality."

His confidence on the court has extended beyond the sidelines and into his everyday life.

During his time as a student at Sichuan Southwest College of Civil Aviation, Wang developed an interest in hip-hop culture.

Actively participating in the school's talent competitions and performances, he caught the attention of the school's publicity teacher, leading to a photo shoot for the cover of the school's magazine and promotional materials.

In 2017, at the age of 18, he traveled alone to Changsha, Hunan province, to participate in a talent show as an amateur participant and was the only one not contracted to an entertainment company.

Despite having no prior professional performance experience, his confidence and grit, combined with his open communication and expressive nature, won favor with the judges.

Ultimately, he secured the championship and won the opportunity to become the male lead in the TV series *Meteor Garden* (2018).

This would prove to be his big break.

In the summer of 2022, the online fantasy drama *Love Between Fairy and Devil*, in which Wang played the male protagonist, was aired. The series quickly went viral thanks to its well-executed special effects, innovative character developments and its portrayal of love characterized by independence and mutual respect.

As a result, Wang was propelled to the status of heartthrob, amassing over 20 million followers on the Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo.

In the fantasy drama's fictional world, Wang's character Dongfang Qingcang is a powerhouse, characterized by solitude and reticence. He relinquishes his ability to experience happiness and love in his pursuit of strength.

Yet, in reality, Wang is always enveloped by a circle of friends, exuding liveliness and cheerfulness.

He does not hesitate to proclaim, "I love everything about myself", and he effortlessly forges new friendships on every reality show he has been a part of.

"I find his confidence and relaxed attitude more attractive than his handsome appearance," says Su Gege, a fan of Wang. "Instead of succumbing to self-doubt and dwelling on negative things, he just boldly pursues what he desires. It's a state of being that I aspire to attain."

Wang grew up in a loving one-child family where his parents operated a barbecue restaurant for a living.

"My family provides me with positive values and a healthy framework, within which I can freely develop," Wang says.

During every winter and summer break of his childhood, he would assist his parents in preparing food at their restaurant. After gaining fame, every time he returns to Leshan, he can still be found helping out in the kitchen.

From an outside perspective, two years ago he became a highly sought-after celebrity, but he personally doesn't consider that as a turning point.

"I'm not inclined to use my popular works as milestones in my acting career. I find growth in every project I take on," he says.

During a recent visit to Leshan, he took great pleasure in hanging out with his childhood friends.

He continues to apply the principles of friendship from his childhood to make new friends today.

"I won't try to read people or flatter them. Treating others sincerely is important; it's not that complicated," Wang says.

Wang Yu contributed to this story.

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn



Online
See more by
scanning the
code.

LIFE



When Zhao Shuxian started working at an art and craft factory in Nanjing in Jiangsu province in 1973, the then 19-year-old was given the job of mastering the time-honored craft of making “velvet” flowers from silk. His goal was to be promoted to the designer’s workshop where he would be able to make whatever he wanted, and earn a better living.

Five decades have passed since then. Today, Zhao is recognized as one of the few seasoned makers of this ornament, production of which is still done by hand.

His colorful silk flowers are popular with young women who have turned them into a new urban trend and share pictures on social networks. The undying floral ornaments have also featured in popular period dramas, on red carpet outfits, at fashion shows and in the new collections of luxury brands.

The practice of wearing velvet flowers is believed to date to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). They were sent to imperial palaces as items of tribute during the reign of Wu Zetian, China’s only empress, and became a popular hair embellishment for aristocrats and women serving at the court.

“It was common for court ladies to decorate their hair with flowers,” Zhao says. “But fresh flowers are not available all year around, so gradually fabric flowers became a substitute.”

The trend spread to ordinary people. In Nanjing, the commercial area near Sanshan Street and Changle Road used to be known as the “flower market”, and was a hub of boutiques making and selling velvet flowers. The flowers were often used as hair decorations, brooches and ornaments by opera singers.

The market for velvet flowers prospered in Nanjing and later extended to the rest of Jiangsu province, thanks to a plentiful supply of quality silk and booming textile and handicraft industries involved in the making of sophisticated products like *yunjin* silk brocade.

Velvet flowers are called *ronghua* in Mandarin, a homophone for the characters meaning “prosperity” and “auspiciousness”. Wearing them as a blessing and to ward off evil spirits became customary at wedding ceremonies, Lunar New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival.

Today, Zhao’s customers, who come from all over the world, wear his flowers in their hair, and on the hats, bags and dresses, both as an everyday item and on special occasions.

Flood of orders

Nanjing used to have a number of family-run velvet flower studios in the 1930s and ‘40s. Many of Zhao’s instructors at the factory developed their experience at these private workshops.

Today, he has a studio of his own, as well as a company that designs and manufactures velvet flowers. It is located in a room just over 10 square meters in size at the Nanjing Folk Museum and Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, which is not far from the old flower market and the bustling Qinhuai River scenic area.

The museum is housed in a magnificent compound of classic architecture called Ganxi Mansion or the Gan Family Courtyard. This private estate was first built by a prominent local family about 200 years ago and after several extensions, now occupies a floor area of around 9,500 square meters.

Over the years, the mansion has become a hub for cultural heritage brands and handicraft studios, including Zhao’s.

His studio, which moved there in 2008, is packed with desks, boxes of tools and materials and a demonstration area of finished pieces. It is where Zhao and his proteges deal with the flood of orders, receive visitors and give interviews to media.

It is also in this cramped space where flowers made using “silk as flesh and thin copper wire as bone”, as the local saying goes, emerge from the minds of artisans and their dexterous fingers.

To make a velvet flower, fine threads of silk are first boiled to be softened, then they are dyed, shaped and rolled evenly onto the wire frame. Next, the velvet sticks are trimmed into different shapes, and twisted to create the design that has been ordered.

It is a delicate process that demands great patience and a tranquil heart, as well as a great deal of time.

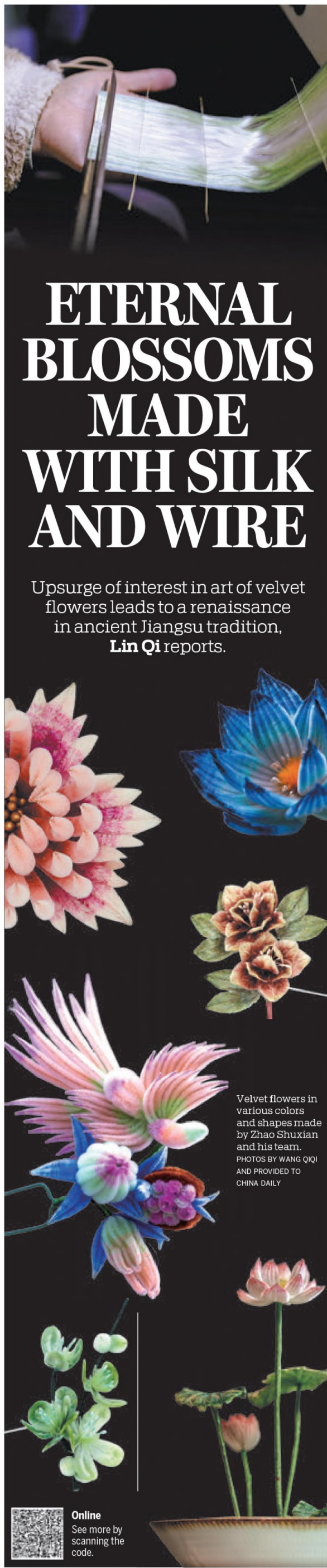
At the factory, it took Zhao about six years to master all the procedures. Today, the boiling and dyeing are outsourced, so his young proteges can focus on designing and crafting.

Mutually inspired

Li Lu, a full-time artisan in her 20s at Zhao’s workshop, stumbled into the trade a few years ago during a visit to the museum. She was



Top: Velvet flowers made by Zhao Shuxian and his team embody a long-standing handicraft tradition in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Above: Silk sticks are arranged to form a floral cluster. Top middle: Soft silk threads are groomed and trimmed for further use. PHOTOS BY LI JIN / CHINA DAILY



ETERNAL BLOSSOMS MADE WITH SILK AND WIRE

Upsurge of interest in art of velvet flowers leads to a renaissance in ancient Jiangsu tradition, Lin Qi reports.

Velvet flowers in various colors and shapes made by Zhao Shuxian and his team. PHOTOS BY WANG QIQI AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Online See more by scanning the code.



That is basically what we can and should do well when we have committed to a career. Then maybe one day, good things will happen, and we will be rewarded.”



Zhao Shuxian, master of velvet flower making, and inheritor of the Jiangsu provincial-level cultural heritage

taken by the magical way hands can turn silk into long-lasting blossoms that are graceful and serene.

“I majored in calligraphy at university, but I was confused about my future career as a professional calligrapher,” she says. “Then one day, an encounter with the velvet flowers made me feel that maybe I could develop a career out of it.”

“Because, you see, practicing calligraphy and making handicrafts are the same in many ways. They both require a peaceful mind, diligent fingers and imagination, in which I had been trained for years.”

Li didn’t know at the time that back in the late 1990s, her future mentor faced a similarly difficult situation. For a time, he made chickens, eggs and other items ordered by clients abroad, mostly in Europe and the Americas, who needed pieces for Christmas and Easter decorations. When business dropped sharply, he left the factory to make a better living and found a job as an editor at a map-publishing house.

Things changed in 2006 when the craft was recognized as part of the cultural heritage of Jiangsu. As a master of the overall process, Zhao was given the accolade of provincial-level inheritor and opened his own studio.

“I threw myself back into the trade,” Zhao says, “not only because I wanted to revive it, but also to train new generations so that young people would fall in love with velvet flowers.”

One of the changes he has made is to replace highly-saturated colors — traditionally favored to create a festive mood — with lighter hues with an undertone of gray that suits the tastes of the younger generation.

He also makes velvet flower paintings in which he infuses the rich palette of oil paintings with the tranquil, poetic mood of Chinese paintings through the use of *liubai*, a technique that introduces areas of blank space to pictures.

The broadcast of the phenomenally successful historical series *The Story of Yanxi Palace* in 2018 placed velvet flowers in the limelight. Several of the female characters wore hair ornaments made by Zhao and his team, which were modeled on original examples found in old photos in the collection of the Palace Museum.

Commissions have since flooded in, and new products in their online store often sell out quickly. The rocketing fame has also introduced Zhao and his work to an international stage: The velvet flowers appeared as hat embellishments in Dior’s men summer 2024 collection and show.

Zhao and his team worked with the Dior atelier to adapt this colorful velvet tradition for haute couture menswear, evoking a sense of crisp, playful modernity, practicality and ease.

“They (Dior) used our velvet flowers in the knit hats,” Zhao says, “which is creative and unique.”

“The use of Chinese elements is a recognition of our traditional culture. Meanwhile, we have also learned new ideas of design, and felt what is happening in the global fashion world. The collaboration is a fruit of people-to-people exchanges.”

Zhao believes that he should continue to work slowly, so that quality and creativity are not sacrificed for quick return.

“I tell young people at the workshop that a lot of seasoned artisans older than me, as well as of my generation, have made velvet flowers their whole lives and have remained unknown.”

“I tell them that we should first have good technique, good designs and quality, then we can carve out a niche in the market and make a living from it. That is basically what we can and should do well when we have committed to a career. Then maybe one day, good things will happen, and we will be rewarded.”

Contact the writer at linqi@chinadaily.com.cn



Top: Zhao Shuxian turns trimmed velvet sticks into flowers. Above: Velvet flowers made by Zhao and his team appear as hat embellishments in Dior men’s summer 2024 collection. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Her hair is neatly pulled back. Her eyes are sharp and firm. Her movements are full of power and strength. Her fists and palms change rapidly between defense and attack.

When Zhang Yashu performed the four-minute dance piece, *Wing Chun*, during China Central Television's Spring Festival Gala — one of the most-watched TV shows in China, which aired on Lunar New Year's Eve — the dancer, clad in a deep red costume, attracted many fans with her performance.

They were deeply impressed by the dance piece, which showcased the essence of kung fu. They also gave Zhang heartfelt applause for her kung fu techniques.

"She is both cool and graceful. I want to learn kung fu after watching the dance piece," one viewer wrote on Sina Weibo.

"Unlike many other roles the female dancers performed in the gala, such as goddesses, who are sweet, delicate and angelic, the female kung fu artist that Zhang played is so different. She is beautiful in a way which is rarely presented onstage," wrote another viewer.

"I read those reviews the day after the gala, which made me very proud. I am glad that people see different sides of women that cannot be limited to certain stereotypes," says Zhang.

The dance was inspired by the dance drama, *Wing Chun*, which premiered in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in December 2022. It has toured nationwide with more than 140 shows so far.

"When we prepared the dance for the TV gala, we practiced our eye expressions. With a dozen female dancers standing in front of mirrors, we trained together," Zhang adds. "Dancing in a theater means we are distant from the audience but performing on TV, we were more aware of how movement shows up on screen, and the angle to the camera becomes important."

In April, the drama will go on a new tour across China, and Zhang is ready to hit the road again.

Choreographed and directed by the duo Zhou Liya and Han Zhen, and produced and performed by dancers of Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre, *Wing Chun* is named after a southern Chinese form of kung fu that originated during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It follows the story of kung fu masters set against the backdrop of a film shoot taking place during the 1990s and combines different types of kung fu, such as *Wing Chun*, tai chi, and *baguazhang*, or eight-diagram palms.

"The dancers not only need to move with grace, but also with speed and strength, as well as pouring a ton of emotion into the characters," said Zhou in an earlier interview.

Zhang not only plays the role of the leader of a *baguazhang* team to fight with other kung fu masters but also the role of the film director in the dance drama.

"The dance we performed on the CCTV Spring Festival Gala is quite different from the dance drama, which is a complete story that com-

Fighting spirit drives dancer's ambition

Performer kicks off the stereotypes as she displays the essence of kung fu, Chen Nan reports.



Top and above: Scenes from the dance drama *Wing Chun*, featuring dancer Zhang Yashu, who has won accolades for her performance in the production by the Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

bines dancing with martial arts," says Zhang. "I believe that more people will come to the theaters to watch the dance drama since it's much more than they saw on the TV show."

When Zhang started to receive martial arts training in 2021 — a year before the dance drama began rehearsals — she had no idea what to expect.

As someone who has been dancing since she was 7 years old, Zhang had to start from scratch, from posing and breathing, to moving her body and learning different types of kung fu.

She would spend the whole day practicing with her training partner — a wooden dummy. Feeling exhausted and sweaty, she would finish her day, but her head would still be preoccupied with thoughts of kung fu movements.

The dancers of the Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre received the same training for the dance drama.

Zhang's effort was recognized, and she was selected to play one of the leading roles.

"Now, practicing kung fu movements is a regular part of my daily routine, just like brushing my teeth," says Zhang. "It's physically consuming and challenging as a dancer performing in *Wing Chun* because I have to do not only my dance training every day, but also kung fu practice."

Kung fu is a form of mindfulness for Zhang, which benefits her body and her mind. With focus, balance and concentration, she says that it takes a long time for her body and her mind to act as one when she practices kung fu.

"The more I practice, the more I realize that kung fu is much more than its fighting styles. It's about wisdom, philosophy, morality and strategy," she says. "Of all the dances I have performed during my career, *Wing Chun* has opened a door for me, introducing me to the world of kung fu, which is very deep and beautiful."

Born in Neijiang city, Sichuan province, Zhang was introduced to the art of dancing by her parents, who are both dancers themselves. However, the first after-school class she took was martial arts.

At 9, she became a student at the Sichuan Dance School (renamed the Sichuan Vocational College of Art in 2005), and won the top prize at the 7th Taoli Cup National Dancing Competition in 2003.

At 15, she had her first big break, playing the lead role in the dance drama, *Shaolin in the Wind*, which also featured elements of martial arts. Unlike *Wing Chun*, which has dancers performing martial arts, *Shaolin in the Wind* had professional martial artists perform with dancers. Zhang also took part in underwater dance performances, exploring new forms of dancing.

Now, besides touring with *Wing Chun*, she also tours in the role of Qin Keqing, one of the characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the dance drama directed by Li Xing and coproduced by Jiangsu Centre for the Performing Arts, which is adapted from the classic 18th-century novel by Cao Xueqin.

Contact the writer at chenman@chinadaily.com.cn

Comedy of errors marks journey and arrival in Beijing

Whenever I think of my arrival in Beijing in 2019, I think of three almost funny things. One took place on the flight from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The in-flight entertainment provided music from around the world. So I plugged in and tried out Classical, Cantopop, Western pop, Western rock, whatever was there on offer. But no matter how many different options I selected, I could hear the same song playing. And it wasn't

even anything I had selected. Frustrated, I gave up. My co-passenger sitting beside me saw me struggling with the buttons and looked at me. But she said nothing. Neither did I. Just when we were about to land in Beijing, I noticed a set of buttons on my right armrest. Those worked. So

all this while I had been fiddling with buttons for my co-passenger's system on the left armrest. Thankfully she wasn't using her headphones.

My first morning in Beijing, someone from HR took me to get a SIM card. At the China Unicom store, she asked for my phone to check the system. Sometime later I noticed my phone was still in her hands. I went nearer to check if she needed help. She seemed to be checking out some photographs in my phone's photo gallery. This is so unethical, I thought.

Why should she do that? I tried to check which photograph had caught her fancy. When I tried to get closer to take a look, she tried to hide the phone from me. The more I tried to look, the more she moved the phone further away. This was getting a bit too much now, I thought. Shouldn't I protest? When I saw her making no effort to return my phone I raised my hand to catch her attention. She was unmoved. Exasperated, I gave up. But just then I noticed another phone lying on a table where we were standing. It was unmistakably mine. The one in her hand was her own phone, the same model as mine, also Made in China.

I had found out that a classmate of mine from India was now my colleague and lived in the same building, albeit on another floor. I devised a plan to go to his place with another colleague and surprise him. The idea was to let my colleague introduce me as Anil — or Manoj, or any other Indian name but my own — from India and see how he reacted, assuming that my face would remind him of someone from two decades ago. Alas, that was not to be. He had gone to bed early as he had to report for work early the next day. So I took solace in making some new acquaintances at his home, thinking I had already had enough brushes with comedy in my first 24 hours in a new country.

Contact the writer at tareq@chinadaily.com.cn



Tareq Zahir
Second Thoughts

Chinese publishers examine AI potential at London Book Fair

LONDON — As the publishing industry embarks on a new era driven by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, Chinese publishers, alongside their international counterparts, delved into the potential of innovative tools to revolutionize their practices at this year's London Book Fair, held from March 12-14.

In a panel talk held in China's exhibition area, professionals discussed the pragmatic application, potential, and inherent constraints of AI technology, which has drawn much attention at the LBF.

Publishers worldwide have been using AI-supported tools for editing, market analysis and online book recommendations for years. However, the recent surge in AI development has prompted the industry to contemplate the issue.

"This marks a shift in the publishing market toward more efficient, personalized and insightful processes and standards," Professor Shen Yang from Tsinghua University's School of Journalism and Communication said during the panel.

Despite his absence at the event, Shen delivered his speech through AI-generated videos, saying that



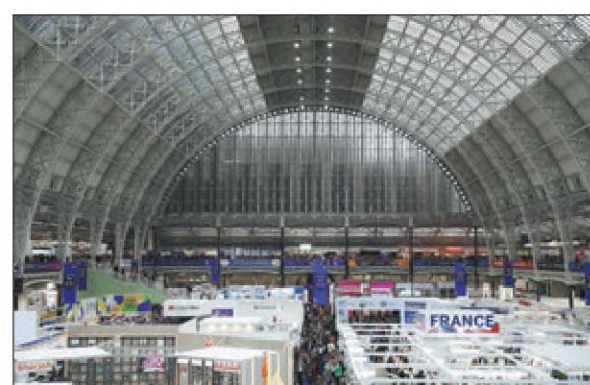
Left: An exhibitor talks with the staff member of a Chinese publishing house at the London Book Fair last week. Right: A panoramic view of the book fair held at Earl's Court in London. PHOTOS BY LI YING / XINHUA

collaborative creation between humans and AI could facilitate automatic text-to-multimedia conversion, thereby opening new revenue streams for the industry.

Paolo Lombardi, director of technology innovation at the Taylor & Francis Group, a British publisher, says his company has been exploring AI integration with professional translation to improve efficiency. He hopes the collaboration between the company and its Chinese partners

would enhance the accessibility of Chinese content for English-speaking readers.

"One of the most exciting things about AI today is it allows us to bridge across countries and improve communication," he adds. Looking ahead, Lombardi emphasizes the "pivotal role" of human authors in content production, highlighting the "ethical responsibility of how to use this technology".



Besides AI taking center stage, the book fair also saw other trending technologies integrate with traditional publishing. Especially noteworthy were explorations by Chinese publishers.

One standout example was an immersive reading experience, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas: An Illustrated Guide to Chinese Mythical Creatures*, where scanning illustrations in the book with a smartphone revealed 3D represen-

tations of 40 creatures from ancient Chinese mythology.

Wang Xubin, president of the Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House, says that advanced printing technology can enhance printing quality and offer readers a clearer view of visual materials such as traditional art.

Having seen some experimentation by Chinese professionals, Lombardi expresses his excitement at their "exceptional minds" and

dedication to understanding and trying new technologies.

At the three-day event, around 50 Chinese publishers displayed more than 3,200 China-themed titles and engaged in some 30 activities focused on international collaboration.

Peng Donglin, deputy editor-in-chief of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, says that his agency has been discussing with major international partners, including Oxford University Press and HarperCollins Publishers, the issue of digital content licensing as part of its digitalization strategy.

Digital content cooperation can not only fuel business growth but also make it easier to bring Chinese publications to the global market, Peng says.

"We're delighted to see an increase (in participation) this year from China," says Gareth Rapley, director of the book fair. "Hopefully, this year is a building block to seeing further expansion of the Chinese participation here at LBF."

This year's LBF attracted more than 30,000 attendees, professionals, and 1,000 exhibitors from across the world.

XINHUA