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Xi: Further energize central region

President calls for alignment with major national strategies

By XU WEI xuwe@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping called on Wednesday for concrete steps to propel the rise of China's central region as the country forges ahead with its own path to modernization, in another significant move to advance the nation's coordinated regional development.

While presiding over a high-level symposium in Changsha, Hunan province, Xi underscored the central region's vital role in the nation's economy as a major hub for food production, energy and raw materials, as well as a burgeoning center for modern equipment manufacturing, high-tech industries and comprehensive transportation.

Xi stressed the need to lead industrial innovation with technological innovation and proactively cultivate and develop new quality productive forces.

The gathering, aimed at propelling the rise of the central region in the new era, saw the participation of top officials including Premier Li Qiang.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the GDP of China's central region, comprising Shanxi, Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Hunan and Jiangxi provinces, grew 4.9 percent year-on-year to 26.99 trillion yuan (\$3.75 trillion) in 2023, accounting for 21.4 percent of the national total. The growth rate is lower than the national average rate of 5.2 percent last year.

The president, who last chaired a similar meeting in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, in 2019, noted on Wednesday that the region has seen stronger momentum for innovative development, significant improvements in its industrial foundations, and new strides in reform and opening-up over the past five years.

He also acknowledged the difficulties and challenges in promoting the rise of the central region, saying this requires pragmatic research and solutions.

According to the NBS, the region's fixed-asset investment grew 0.3 percent year-on-year in 2023, com-



President Xi Jinping learns about local efforts to manage historical and cultural blocks and urban water environment on Tuesday during an inspection tour to Changde, Hunan province. WANG YE / XINHUA

pared with the national average of 2.8 percent.

Going forward, Xi called for the region to build on the foundation of the real economy to strengthen its advanced manufacturing sector, saying that proactive steps must be adopted to advance new industrialization, and to transform and upgrade traditional industries, while nurturing emerging sectors.

He underscored the need for the deeper integration of sci-tech innovation with industrial innovation, strengthening major technological breakthroughs and reinforcing the principal role of enterprises in innovation.

To invigorate the region's traditional sectors, it is important to put in place projects for the transformation and upgrading of technologies in the manufacturing sector and for upgrading large-scale projects, he said.

He called for better alignment with major national strategies and regional development initiatives, including integration with the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The president highlighted the need for the region to undertake industrial transfers, optimize the planning of its industries and beef up the development of a modern transportation infrastructure system.

Setting out his vision for the six provinces to advance reform and opening-up, Xi urged steps to make the region an area with stronger competitiveness in the nation's opening-up drive, advance reforms on the market-based allocation of production factors and improve the fundamental systems of the market economy.

He called for authorities to "correct local protectionist behavior

across the board", steadily expand institutional opening-up and further integrate with the joint building of the Belt and Road.

Moreover, the region should enhance its attractiveness to domestic and foreign resource elements, stay committed to supporting State-owned enterprises in becoming stronger, better and bigger, and further optimize the development environment for private enterprises, he added.

The region's green development was highlighted by Xi during the session, in which he laid out requirements for authorities to coordinate ecological and environmental protection and green, low-carbon development.

To build a beautiful central region, he stressed that authorities must ramp up the battle against pollution, strengthen comprehensive and collaborative management of

the ecology and environment of major rivers and lakes, and enhance the collection and treatment of urban and rural sewage.

The president underlined the significance of the central region in guaranteeing China's food, energy and resource security. According to the National Development and Reform Commission, the grain production volume of central China reached 200 million metric tons in 2023, accounting for 28.8 percent of the national total.

A number of green agricultural product manufacturing, processing and supply bases should be established to ensure the stable and secure supply of grain and other important agricultural products, he said.

Additionally, efforts should be made to further improve the development and utilization levels of coal, rare-earth elements and other resources, Xi added.

Apple CEO: China's supply chain most critical to firm

By MA SI masi@chinadaily.com.cn

There's no supply chain in the world more critical to Apple than that of China, Apple CEO Tim Cook said in an interview with China Daily in Shanghai on Wednesday, as the senior executive highlighted the importance of the world's second-largest economy to the United States company's global business.

Cook's comments showed that, despite challenges including external uncertainties, China remains an indispensable part of Apple's global supply chains, due to the nation's manufacturing prowess, as well as its growing research and development capabilities and highly efficient logistics system, experts said.

Looking back over the almost three decades since Apple started cooperating with Chinese suppliers, Cook said, "We've been building up and investing more and more here."

The Apple CEO stressed the importance of the company's "long-time, win-win relationship" with Chinese suppliers.

"We make it where one plus one equals three, instead of two," said Cook, who is scheduled to open Apple's eighth store in Shanghai on Thursday and attend the China Development Forum over the upcoming weekend.

When asked about how he views China's latest emphasis on cultivating new quality productive forces, Cook said, "I think it is essential and it is the future."

He recalled that 30 years ago when he first came to China, local factories were not that automated and there was not much focus on green manufacturing.

But now it is a different picture. "If you look at the automation level, it's not just off-the-shelf automation. It is customized automation," Cook said,

referring to a string of product exhibits he saw from Chinese suppliers such as BYD, Lens and Everwin at Apple's office in Shanghai on Wednesday.

"They have robotics, automatic guided vehicles and very precise vision systems. It is the most advanced manufacturing in the world," he said.

Wang Chuanfu, chairman and president of Chinese carmaker BYD, said its subsidiary BYD Electronics has been cooperating with Apple for 15 years on products such as the iPhone, iPad and Vision Pro.

Wang said the company is willing to continue leveraging its research and development capabilities, manufacturing edge and high-quality services to deepen its cooperation with Apple.

According to Apple, 151 of its 200 major suppliers, including foreign and Chinese ones, have manufacturing bases in China.

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said China has unparalleled advantages in manufacturing, and its innovation-driven development strategy will help the nation become more important to the growth of global tech giants, such as Apple.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China has the most complete industrial system in the world. It ranked as the world's largest manufacturing country for the 14th consecutive year in 2023, when its manufacturing output accounted for nearly 30 percent of the world's total.

There are more than 570 Chinese industrial companies among the global top 2,500 companies in terms of R&D investment, boosting their ability to support supply chains, the ministry said.

Cooperation with Africa to remain deeply rooted

The 13th meeting of the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum was recently held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and over 300 Chinese and African scholars jointly issued the Consensus Among African and Chinese Think Tanks on Deepening Global Development Cooperation.

The consensus, also known as the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus, urges the international community to deepen development

WORLD WATCH By Liu Hongwu and Li Dongsheng

cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, solidarity, win-win cooperation, openness and common prosperity. Its aim is to foster knowledge sharing, intellectual exchange and cultural prosperity.

"If you are not at the table in the international system, you're going to be on the menu," United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken remarked during a public forum at the Munich Security Conference in February. The analogy reflected the weak-and-strong mentality that is prevalent in the world order.

"Independence, mutual respect and mutual learning, people-oriented development philosophy,

and sharing of development dividends" are key words and phrases in the eight major initiatives of the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus. They represent the voices of unity, independence and innovation from the Global South countries as articulated by think tank scholars from China and Africa.

China-Africa cooperation and development have always been

driven by a shared commitment and mutual understanding. Common development, shared interests, joint promotion of industries, collaborative ecological initiatives, mutual well-being, cultural co-prosperity, joint protection of security, and open, win-win cooperation, as called for in the consensus, not only vividly depict the current state of China-Africa cooperation, but also represent a promising prospect for China-Africa cooperation in the future.

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EXPERTS CONFIDENT NATION CAN CLOSE SINO-US GAP ON AI

Established advantages should be leveraged to create unique opportunities

By CHENG YU chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

In-depth

"AI anxiety" swept across netizens and industries in China last month, when OpenAI, the United States company that developed the AI-powered language model ChatGPT, launched Sora — a text-to-video model that allows users to create photorealistic videos based on prompts they've written.

Why weren't groundbreaking technologies such as Sora and ChatGPT created in China? How

long will it be before China's equivalent of Sora comes out? Is the AI gap between China and the US widening? These were typical of some of the questions being asked across the nation.

While some people in China are concerned about falling behind the US in frontier AI technologies, leading company executives and industry experts believe that the

nation's AI large model — a type of AI algorithm that uses deep learning and data sets to understand, summarize, generate and predict new content — has developed quicker than expected and has unique advantages over its US counterpart.

They did concede, however, that more joint efforts are needed to develop underlying AI technologies such as GPT-4 as well as computing power to close the gap with the US.

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Global warming 'red alert'



Celeste Saulo, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, displays the WMO's State of the Global Climate 2023 report before a news conference in Geneva, Switzerland, on Tuesday. The United Nations weather agency sounded a "red alert" for global warming, citing last year's record-smashing increases in greenhouse gas emissions, land and water temperatures, and melting of glaciers and sea ice. FABRICE COFFRIN / AFP



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"There is no need to be overly anxious about the launch of Sora," said Liu Qingfeng, chairman of Chinese AI company iFlytek Co Ltd. "Sora is just a successful implementation of basic capabilities of GPT-4 in the video sector, in other words, the underlying competitiveness of such tech still lies in GPT-4."

Liu, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, said that the main focus of the current AI competition between the US and China is still over the capability of the base of the AI large model. "In terms of such a foundation, Chinese companies have the confidence to develop it quite well. It is impossible for the country to be left with a huge gap to the US in AI development," he said.

Zhou Chengxiang, a researcher from the Institutes of Science and Development of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said while most of the current breakthroughs in AI technology are emerging from US companies, latecomers also have advantages. For instance, they have fewer risks and uncertainties during the progress in development.

"In addition, Chinese companies have developed AI large models and related technologies in a profitable way over the past year and have already accumulated basic infrastructure and technologies needed to develop the equivalent of Sora and ChatGPT," Zhou said.

He added that, "China still has a huge opportunity to be at the forefront of the world in the application of AI technologies in the future."

**Steady progress**

As of October, China had developed 254 AI large models with a parameter of at least a billion tokens each, according to a report released by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission. Tokens are chunks of text that AI learns from, while a parameter is used for evaluating numeric data.

From December to February, more than 10 A-share companies, including Wondershare, BroadV, Eclittech and Hanvon Technology disclosed their investment and progress made in their text-to-video models.

Well aware of the opportunities, Chinese tech companies such as Alibaba Group, Tencent Holdings, Baidu Inc, ByteDance and Huawei Technologies as well as thousands of startups are scrambling to develop AI large models. Many of them have gained momentum over the past year.

Liu's iFlytek, based in Hefei, Anhui

province, unveiled its SparkDesk AI large model in May. The company said in January that its upgraded version outperformed GPT-4 Turbo — the latest generation of ChatGPT — in metrics including language understanding and math.

Its capability in multimodal understanding had reached 91 percent of that of OpenAI's most advanced model. The company said that SparkDesk is expected to reach the level of GPT-4 Turbo "in an all-around way" in the first half of this year.

Liu said Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei had sent the company's highest-level team to Hefei to work on co-development of the model.

"Through continuous optimization of software and hardware like chips, the training efficiency has increased from 20 to 30 percent to the current 90 percent," Liu said of the advances made in SparkDesk's development.

Domestic tech giant Tencent Holdings debuted its AI large model, Hunyuan, in September. Hunyuan has so far been connected to more than 50 of Tencent's products and services, such as WeChat search, cloud, advertising, gaming, financial technology, online meetings and documents.

In June, Tencent Cloud, the company's cloud subsidiary, also launched an industry-specific large model. Compared with general large models like ChatGPT, industry-specific large models are industrial versions of ChatGPT focused on niche sectors.

**Landmark year**

Zhou Hongyi, founder and chairman of 360 Security Technology and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, said that 2024 should be the "year of application" for Chinese AI development.

"China can follow a development path of large models with Chinese characteristics that will support the development of large models in the direction of vertical sectors and industrialization to help accelerate the formation of new quality productive forces," he said.

Compared with traditional productive tools that are driven by factors such as labor, land and capital, new quality pro-

ductive forces refer to technological innovation, data and smart or intelligent technologies.

"Developing a universal large model that surpasses GPT-4 in an all-around way may be challenging at the moment, but GPT-4 currently knows everything, yet (it is) not specialized," he explained.

"If we can excel in a particular business domain by training a large model with unique business data — and integrate it with many business tools within that vertical — such a large model will not only have intelligence but also possess unique knowledge," he said. "It is entirely possible for China to surpass its US counterparts in a year or two."

Zhou Yu, chairman of Beijing Fanyu Technology Co, a startup specializing in natural language processing products and services, said Chinese and US startups appear to be adopting different approaches to developing large models that drive generative AI.

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

"China focuses more on applications, and those launching these startups are better at adapting technology to various industries, and commercializing different applications. Chinese companies are also

more flexible in creating personalized products and innovations," she added.

Zhou Hongyi from 360 Security Technology suggested at the two sessions in Beijing earlier this month that the government and State-owned enterprises take the lead in opening up more application development scenarios, so that large models can drive the digitalization of enterprises and various industries.

The Government Work Report released at the two sessions said China will step up research and development, applications of big data and AI, launch an AI Plus initiative, and build internationally competitive digital industry clusters.

The country will also strive to modernize its industrial system and develop new quality productive forces at a faster pace, give full rein to the leading role of innovation, spur industrial innovation through innovations in science and technology, and press ahead with new industrialization, according to the report.

**Regional role**

Several provincial-level regions across China identified new quality productive forces like AI as their top priorities at meetings in February, where they released their blueprint and action plans for 2024.

Huang Kunming, Party chief of Guangdong province, said that as a pacesetter, Guangdong should take the lead in reaching the level of a moderately developed and innovative economy by 2035.

But, he added, there are still large gaps and deficiencies. The key to achieving these goals is technological innovation, industrial development, and the continuous unleashing and development of new quality productive forces such as AI.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said intensified and joint efforts by the central government, local governments and companies will create more opportunities for China.

He noted that China unveiled a new-generation AI development plan back in 2017. This helped the country accumulate technical reserves and organize teams in the field of cognitive intelligence, making China an important player in the global AI arena.

"Now, AI has been put even higher on the agenda. It is entirely possible for Chi-

na to leverage existing resources to gain a lead in AI development in the new round of global technological competition," he said.

**Smarter approach**

Though China has quickly developed AI large models and related areas, Wu Hequan, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said that greater efforts are needed to close the gaps in computing power and key underlying technologies.

AI large model training requires a huge amount of computation, he said, so expanding the supply of computing power has become increasingly important in the global race for AI leadership.

As the US continues to restrict exports to China of high-end processors, such efforts are more urgent than ever.

China aims to boost its aggregate computing power by more than 30 percent by 2025. The nation's computing power last year touched 197 Eflops — a measure of the performance of a supercomputer — and it ranked second globally behind the US, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology data showed.

Wang Xiaochuan, founder of Baichuan AI, has said that OpenAI is currently attempting to connect 10 million graphics processing units. By comparison, China has far less amount of GPUs, an indication that core resources needed in the country's AI development are lacking, Wang said.

Zhang Feng, deputy director of the Institutes of Science and Development of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, pointed out that China also faces security challenges in its development of AI large models.

"More efforts are needed to strengthen the safety evaluation of large model technology, develop security specifications and standards applicable to large models, and conduct security assessments and vulnerability detection on large model data privacy protection," she said.

Zhang said the lack of openness in regard to high-quality data sets was also a problem. "Due to unclear data ownership and sharing specifications, it is difficult to publicly obtain large-scale, high-quality data, which will hinder the collaborative development of AI large model technology and applications," Zhang said.

She added that China should make coordinated efforts to construct large-scale data sets, promote greater openness of high-quality public data, and gradually open up such data to leading companies for their use and further development.

# AI: Nation leads in application of tech

"China still has a huge opportunity to be at the forefront of the world in the application of AI technologies in the future."

Zhou Chengxiang, a researcher from the Institutes of Science and Development of the Chinese Academy of Sciences

## TOP NEWS

## Sino-Australian links set for boost

Two sides agree to resume dialogues, advance cooperation in various fields

By ZHANG YUNBI  
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

China-Australia relations are back on the right track, and there should be no further hesitation, no derailment and no backpedaling in advancing bilateral ties, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Wednesday.

He made the remark in Canberra during the seventh China-Australia Foreign and Strategic Dialogue with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

Observers said one of the highlights of the meeting was that the two sides agreed to resume and establish dialogues in various fields and let them work effectively. They said that Wang's remark is a reminder of how much Beijing values the hard-won rebound in China-Australia ties.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Beijing and Canberra Comment, "agreed to advance more cooperation between the two countries' departments in charge of areas such as foreign affairs, economy and trade, science and technology, education as well as law enforcement, and to keenly consider dialogues on maritime affairs".

The two sides also agreed to take further measures to facilitate people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

Wang said the ups and downs in China-Australia relations over the past 10 years have left behind lessons to be learned and cherished, which include upholding mutual respect, seeking common ground while shelving differences, and adhering to mutual benefit, self-independence and autonomy.

Since the two countries have a clear direction to advance their relations, they should try to move far, steadily



Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong at Parliament House in Canberra, Australia, on Wednesday. CHU CHEN / XINHUA

and nicely, in that direction, he said.

"This is in the common interest of the two peoples and the common expectation of the region's countries," he added.

Wong said the two countries share close ties in history, trade and culture, they are comprehensive strategic partners and are located in the same region, and they should not allow differences to define the entire China-Australia relationship.

Wang elaborated on China's position on issues ranging from Taiwan, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Xinjiang Uygur and Xizang autonomous regions, to the South China Sea.

He emphasized that there are no grudges in history or conflicts of interest between China and Australia, and their common interests far outweigh their differences.

Observers noted that joint efforts

of both sides in the past two years allowed China and Australia to break the ice and let their relationship set sail again. Exchanges and cooperation in various fields have been gradually restored.

When meeting with Wang on Wednesday, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese underlined the need to identify as many areas of common interest as possible.

Australia speaks highly of China's achievements in development and poverty relief, and is willing to bolster high-level exchanges with China and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields, he said.

The ruling Australian Labor Party made a historic contribution to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Labor Party government will continue its efforts to advance the constructive

development of Australia-China relations, Albanese said.

Chen Hong, professor and director of the Australian Studies Centre of East China Normal University in Shanghai, said, "Beijing asks for no backpedaling in the relations as bilateral ties hit a record low under the previous Australian administration, which inflicted damages that spilled from the political sphere into economic aspects."

The incumbent government is expected to further offset pressures from anti-China politicians as well as the United States to keep the relationship afloat, Chen said. "The two-way dialogues in various areas, if resumed as pledged on Wednesday, will mark a major improvement of the ties," he added.

Wang said that Beijing is willing to further prepare for high-level exchanges between the two countries.

## Ties: Consensus advocates independent growth paths

From page 1

We are not "food" on the dining table, but food producers for the entire world. China-Africa collaboration should be a broader "dining table". It is high time to put an end to the "table and menu" approach that seeks to divide and pick sides.

Regardless of how turbulent the world is, genuine and friendly relations between China and Africa will remain deeply rooted. China-Africa cooperation, characterized by mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, will persist in uniting people to navigate challenges and successes together.

The core proposition of the China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus is to encourage all countries to pursue a development path characterized by independence, mutual respect, mutual learning, and people-centered development. It aims to promote the establishment of an equal, orderly, multipolar world, foster an inclusive global economy, and enhance social productivity by activating the market through the synergy of efficient markets and effective governments.

Against the backdrop of a sluggish global economy and the turbulent geopolitical landscape, as well as rampant unilateralism, protectionism and hegemonism, the emergence of this consensus is timely. It fully reflects the expectations of Chinese and African think tank scholars for future development and the strengthening of the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, bringing greater certainty and stability to a world of turmoil and chaos.

The China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus does not promote a singular model, but instead emphasizes subjectivity and autonomy, advocating that countries independently choose

their development paths based on their own civilization and development needs. In this sense, the consensus stands as the most resounding declaration of shared prosperity, shared global responsibilities, fair market competition, and the establishment of a standardized financial order. It embodies the essence of the common wisdom of the people of China and Africa.

The unveiling of the consensus reflects the broadest consensus on global development among Chinese and African think tank scholars, demonstrating the unity of moral principles and rationality, as well as the alignment of interests and righteousness between the Chinese and African peoples.

Both sides firmly support the exploration of a development model suitable for their respective national circumstances, a pursuit that is poised to propel and guide the modernization process in the Global South. Furthermore, it will advance the implementation of the Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization, the Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization, and the Plan for China-Africa Cooperation on Talent Development.

Together, by aligning our words with consistent actions, we will build a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future, and a community with a shared future for mankind that will unite the world.

Liu Hongwu is a Changjiang Scholar appointed by the Ministry of Education and director of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University.

Li Dongsheng is deputy director of talent training and think tank services at the Institute of African Studies. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## UnionPay optimizes payment services in China with Project Excellence 2024

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On Friday, the launch ceremony for Explore China Your Way with UnionPay: UnionPay Payment Service Optimization — Project Excellence 2024 was held in Shanghai. Zhang Qingsong, member of the People's Bank of China Committee of the Communist Party of China and vice-governor of the PBOC, and Xie Dong, vice-mayor of Shanghai, attended the ceremony and delivered remarks. The event was also attended by Wang Ping, deputy secretary-general of the Shanghai government, Jin Penghui and Liu Xingya, deputy directors of the Shanghai Head Office of the PBOC, and Wang Sheng, deputy director-general of the PBOC Payment and Settlement Department, as well as the leadership from UnionPay, including Dong Junfeng, as well as Shao Fujun, chairman and Cai Jianbo, president. Other members of the audience included representatives from the Shanghai municipal authorities, major Chinese commercial banks, acquirers, merchants, overseas regulators, international partners and other global card schemes.

The State Council recently issued guidelines to further optimize payment services in China. The document aims to address the bottlenecks in payment services and improve a multilayered and diversified payment service system in line with the payment preferences of different user groups.

The release of the guidelines demonstrates the significance attached by the central government to the development of the payment industry and serves as a road map for the future growth of the industry. It is essential for building a payment service system where different payment options develop in parallel and complement each other, and for creating an inclusive and convenient payment environment to facilitate the high-quality development of the payment industry.

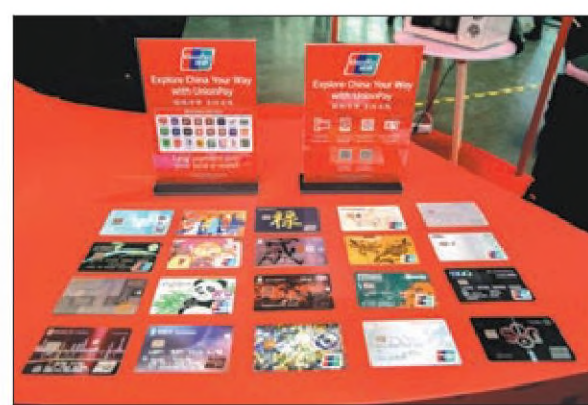
In order to fully implement the requirements provided by the guidelines, UnionPay has taken the

initiative to launch Project Excellence 2024 to fully participate in the campaign to improve payment convenience for senior residents and international visitors to China. With the goal of delivering full solutions for all use cases across China, Project Excellence 2024 will be jointly implemented and cofunded by industry participants. Specifically, UnionPay will take the lead and direct 3 billion yuan (\$416 million) toward a focus on acceptance terminal upgrades, signage placement and publicity, etc. in key cities and use cases.

At the same time, led by government authorities in specific sectors, UnionPay will encourage other industry players to pool their resources. The efforts will cover 41 key cities nationwide and 26 high-frequency use cases in eight major categories — food and beverage, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, entertainment, healthcare and education. By providing comprehensive payment solutions that include cards, QR codes, OEM pay products and cash withdrawal, the undertaking will drive the parallel and complementary development of mobile, card and cash payments. Project Excellence 2024 will start in Shanghai with marketing campaigns throughout the year under the theme of Explore China Your Way with UnionPay, aiming to provide more discounts and options as well as a better experience.

During the event, Zhang said that the rapid development and accelerated penetration of mobile payment in China in recent years have been pivotal to reducing transaction costs and promoting financial inclusion; however, new challenges have also emerged, such as the digital divide for the elderly population and barriers for international visitors to China. To implement the decision and arrangements by the central government, the PBOC has promptly set up a dedicated working group to put in place a series of measures in line with the State Council guidelines.

Zhang acknowledged Union-



Diverse UnionPay products and broad acceptance facilitate global visitors' travel in China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pay's quick action to pool resources with other parties and encouraged all entities to strengthen synergy and provide the resources necessary to achieve substantial results in making payments more convenient. Shanghai, as one of the main destinations for inbound travelers, has gained valuable experience in supporting the China International Import Expo. He said he hopes that the city can continue to set a good example of effectively implementing more measures aimed at increasing payment convenience. The PBOC will work with relevant parties, further develop payment use cases and coordinate efforts to address any shortcomings and weaknesses. It will make payment services more convenient and engaging, and go some way to contributing to China's high-standard opening-up and optimized business environment.

Xie said that payment is the foundation of economy and finance and plays a crucial role in facilitating people's lives, optimizing the business environment and building a thriving consumer market. The PBOC has guided all parties in the payment industry to establish a multilayered and broadly-covering acceptance network, which enables China to become a global leader in payment services. Shanghai is the

largest clearing center in the world for card-based transactions, where UnionPay has attracted numerous businesses upstream and downstream of the industry chain to form a cluster. As the city receives a large number of international visitors each year and is also one of the first in China to enter an era of aging society, choosing Shanghai as the first stop for Project Excellence 2024 holds special significance. Xie said she believes that Project Excellence can enable senior residents and international travelers among others to feel accepted and welcomed and make payment services in Shanghai more accommodating. The Shanghai municipal government will fully support the project and it stands ready to work with all parties including the PBOC to implement the requirements listed in the State Council guidelines, aiming to develop the Shanghai Solution that bridges the digital divide and improves the multilayered as well as diversified payment service system. Together, all parties can contribute to the optimization of the business environment and high-quality social and economic development.

Dong said that payment service optimization is a national policy and a shared responsibility of all industry participants. UnionPay

has been implementing the strategic decisions by the central government and the work arrangements of the PBOC by fulfilling its pivotal role as a card scheme. He said he hopes that through Project Excellence 2024, UnionPay can inspire other industry stakeholders to contribute their resources, promote the parallel and complementary development of card, mobile and cash payments and respect and support customer's rights to choose payment tools. Project Excellence 2024 is a major initiative that connects different links of the payment industry as well as a systematic one that calls for consensus and coordination across the payment industry both domestically and internationally. Under the leadership of the PBOC and local governments, UnionPay will team up with banks, China UnionPay Merchant Services and acquirers in and outside the Chinese mainland and strive for extensive availability of full solutions in all use cases across China. Furthermore, UnionPay will enhance collaboration with banks and payment institutions, expedite payment code interoperability, strengthen partnerships with Chinese clearing institutions and further engage in consultations with other international card schemes to jointly establish a convenient, open and inclusive payment ecosystem. Ultimately, UnionPay products will be easy to use in every use case, offering a superior experience, more options and higher value for the elderly and international visitors to China.

During the ceremony, UnionPay released 29 business achievements, covering international card issuance, overseas e-wallets and acceptance in China, among which were agreements signed with partners from the Philippines, Australia and Pakistan to issue 3 million UnionPay cards. Ten major wallets, including AEON in Hong Kong, OCBC in Singapore and the LPB e-wallet in Vietnam, now support UnionPay QR payments, which are estimated to cover 60 million

potential customers. More than 10 well-known online and physical merchants, including Meituan, Trip.com, Pinduoduo, JD.com and Shouqianba, accept international UnionPay payment products. Hong Kong and Macao vehicles traveling to the Chinese mainland can enjoy seamless payments at multiple parking lots and tollgates in Guangdong province.

At the event, UnionPay also signed collaboration agreements with Ctrip Financial Services and China Tourism Group to provide more user-friendly cross-border payment services for international visitors to China. Themed marketing campaigns targeting these travelers have also been launched, available at visa centers, airlines, online travel agencies and more than 100,000 merchants. Nearly 20 issuers from countries such as South Korea, Thailand and Kazakhstan will offer up to 12 percent cashback to their cardholders who use UnionPay cards in China. Additionally, UnionPay's Travel Mate Asia, a card featuring popular destinations in the Chinese mainland, will be upgraded.

As a key financial infrastructure in China and one of the major card schemes in the world, UnionPay has been strengthening collaboration with other industry stakeholders. With its comprehensive solutions that cover all sorts of payments, UnionPay continues to make payments easier for groups such as senior residents and international visitors to China. While improving services such as card acceptance and ATM cash withdrawal, UnionPay has rolled out the senior-friendly version of the UnionPay App, allowing the elderly to enjoy the benefits brought by the era of digital payment. In addition, UnionPay has issued more than 230 million cards outside the Chinese mainland, launched nearly 200 UnionPay-powered e-wallets and extended the acceptance network to 183 countries and regions, transforming UnionPay into a global payment solution that services cardholders across the world.

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## Nation opens up wider to foreign investors

Key catalog revision, shorter negative list herald fresh opportunities

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China is expanding its investment scope for foreign investors with steps to revise the encouraged industries catalog and shorten the negative list for foreign investment, offering more business opportunities for global stakeholders, officials said on Wednesday.

Hua Zhong, an official with the Department of Foreign Capital and Overseas Investment at the National Development and Reform Commission, said the commission has started the work of revising the catalog of industries in which foreign investment is encouraged.

In terms of the revision of the national catalog, the focus will be on encouraging foreign investors' participation in the manufacturing sector, and more efforts will be made to promote the integrated development of the services and manufacturing sectors, and increase support for advanced manufacturing, modern services, high-tech, energy conservation and environmental protection, he said.

"Multinational corporations are encouraged to expand their investments in pertinent sectors within China, forging robust partnerships with both upstream and downstream enterprises to realize mutual benefits and shared growth," he said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

As for the revision of the encouraged industries catalog that covers the central, western and northeastern regions, tailored support will be provided for fields like basic manufacturing, applicable technologies and consumption of items related to people's livelihoods, Hua said.

"The development landscape in those regions is becoming increasingly favorable, with abundant resources, broad markets and sufficient talent," he said. "We welcome multinational companies worldwide to direct their attention toward these regions, expand-

ing their business footprint and operations therein."

Foreign direct investment in China, in terms of actual use, fell 8 percent year-on-year to 1.13 trillion yuan (\$157 billion) in 2023. Yet, it remained at a historically elevated level, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

According to the key finding of the 46th Global Investment Trends Monitor by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, global foreign direct investment flows in 2023, at an estimated \$1.37 trillion, showed a marginal increase of 3 percent over 2022. The headline increase was due largely to higher values in a few European conduit economies. Excluding these conduits, global FDI flows were 18 percent lower, the monitor stated.

Looking ahead, Wu Hao, secretary-general of the NDRC, said China enjoys obvious advantages and huge development space in terms of attracting foreign investment, given its many features like the ultra-large market, rising demand across sectors like advanced manufacturing, urban development, consumption upgrade, stable policy environment, the world's most complete industrial system, burgeoning infrastructure network, an abundant talent pool and dynamic innovation ecosystems.

Official data showed the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises in China rose to 53,766 in 2023, up nearly 40 percent over 2022.

Wu said the NDRC will collaborate closely with local authorities and relevant departments to advance high-standard opening-up. Key priorities include the following: expanding institutional opening-up across rules, governance and standards; shortening the negative list for foreign investment; removing all restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector; optimizing the business environment; and launching a new batch of foreign-funded flagship projects.



CREC employees work on a bridge project in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. ZHANG BOWEN / XINHUA

## BRI propelling CREC's innovative engineering machine order book

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China Railway Group Ltd (CREC), one of the world's largest construction and engineering contractors by revenue, will deploy more resources to develop high-end equipment like tunnel boring machines (TBMs) and rail transit switches to capitalize on growth opportunities both at home and abroad this year, said its top executive.

Numerous opportunities can be found both domestically and internationally, particularly within economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, as demand for specialized construction machinery and tunnel boring equipment surges.

The Beijing-based centrally administered State-owned enterprise has bagged a number of contracts for the upgrade and renewal of infrastructure, including subway projects, water conservation efforts and underground passages globally in recent years. The group will ship several giant TBMs to its clients in Singapore and South Korea this year.

TBMs are used to excavate tunnels, subway tubes and sewer lines. Compared with traditional tunnel boring methods like drilling and blasting for manual digs, the use of such giant TBMs could minimize impacts on the surroundings and produce smoother tunnel walls,

helping certain tunnel projects better negotiate unstable geological and seismic conditions.

"We will continuously push the limits in terms of increasing boring diameters, accelerating boring speeds, deepening boring depths and handling more intricate conditions," said Chen Yun, CREC's chairman.

Due to the extensive accumulation of technology over the years, the group has lately been able to introduce to the market an average of two TBM product variants annually. These encompass pioneering full-section hard rock shaft boring machines as well as its groundbreaking horseshoe-shaped shield machines.

CREC to date has received over 1,600 orders for its TBMs from around the world. It has exported TBMs to more than 30 countries and regions including Australia, Denmark, Qatar and Italy.

In addition to exporting TBMs, CREC ships rail transit switches to more than 30 countries. Its steel structure products and bridge girder erection machines have also been used in big-ticket projects such as the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway in Indonesia, the China-Laos Railway and the Peljesac Bridge in Croatia.

Supported by 290,000 employees globally, CREC has built a large number of projects in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America and Oceania. At present, it has representative

offices and manages projects in more than 90 countries and regions worldwide.

With China creating more favorable conditions to cultivate new quality productive forces, Chen said high-end products are crucial to the national economy and strategic security, serving as a key support for industrial upgrading and technological advancement.

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

Chen said that new quality productive forces involve digital and green productivity, which will pave the way for expanded growth prospects in China.

Zhou Lisha, a researcher at the Institute for State-owned Enterprises of Tsinghua University, said that the growth of China's industrial economy is being bolstered by emerging industries, manufacturers' intelligent transformation and the development of digital infrastructure.

China has already demonstrated remarkable progress in various domains, including electric vehicles, TBMs, liquefied natural gas carriers, energy storage, aerospace, photovoltaics and wind energy, said Zhou.

### Briefly

#### Power use up 11% in January-February

China's electricity consumption, a key barometer of economic activity, logged robust expansion in the first two months, said the National Energy Administration on Wednesday. Power use climbed 11 percent year-

on-year to 1.53 trillion kilowatt-hours during the period.

#### Loan prime rates remain unchanged

China's one-year loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate, stood at 3.45 percent on

Wednesday, unchanged from the previous month. The over-five-year LPR, upon which many lenders base their mortgage rates, also held steady from the previous reading of 3.95 percent, said the National Interbank Funding Center.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## EVs spur global interest in battery field

By ZHENG XIN  
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's battery industry continues to enthrall foreign investors, buoyed by the country's robust demand for electric vehicles and its leading position in battery technologies, said industry experts.

Despite global economic uncertainties, China's battery sector remains attractive to investors, driven by a rapid expansion of the EV market and fueled by government incentives, environmental regulations and growing consumer preferences for cleaner transportation, said Shi Jiayan, an energy storage analyst at BloombergNEF.

"China is currently leading in the commissioned capacity of battery metal refining and battery material manufacturing, and foreign companies, including major automakers and tech giants, are actively seeking opportunities to invest in China's battery industry to capitalize on its growth potential," she said.

The comments came after Chinese President Xi Jinping visited a joint venture of German chemical giant BASF on Monday, a trip that is expected to buoy the confidence of businesses operating in the country.

Xi toured BASF Shanshan Battery Materials Co during a fact-finding trip in Changsha, Hunan province, the first such trip after the annual sessions of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies earlier this month.

According to Shi, overseas companies can benefit from collaborating with Chinese ones by leveraging the country's mature battery manufacturing technology and better commercializing their new battery technologies and products at competitive costs.

While technology was controlled by foreign enterprises in the era of fuel-powered vehicles, China could contribute only cheap labor and raw materials. Sino-foreign cooperation is equal with complementary advantages in today's NEV and power battery industries, said Ma Yinqiong, a senior analyst covering the metals and materials supply chain with Rystad Energy.

"The joint venture between BASF and Shanshan will help the latter quickly integrate into and seize the global market in the global wave of new energy development by taking advantage of BASF's global industrial layout," she said. "At the same time, it will effectively

make up for the shortage of production capacity in China of BASF's cathode materials business, and meet the actual needs of its global market footprint of battery materials business."

According to Ma, the NEV sector is a strategic emerging industry in China and promoting innovation and widespread adoption of NEVs is one of the most important pathways for China to achieve its dual-carbon goals.

China has been comprehensively supporting the development of the NEV industry since 2009 and has been at the forefront globally in terms of production capacity and technological innovation, she said.

The nation's top leadership has underlined new quality productive forces, characterized by high technology, high efficiency and high quality, in underpinning China's high-quality development and reinvigorating the world's second-largest economy.

Accelerating the establishment of a new development pattern and enhancing the level of foreign investment utilization are crucial while the key is to enhance the attractiveness of China's vast market to global investors and optimize



A technician checks battery products at an industrial park in Yichang, Hubei province. ZHANG GUORONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

the environment for foreign investment, said Cui Fan, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

Analysts predict that China's battery market will continue to attract significant foreign investment as the country reaffirms its commitment to green energy and technological advancement and as EV adoption accelerates globally.

China's dominance in battery production positions it as a key player in shaping the future of transportation, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Areas like high-end manufacturing, digital transformation and efforts toward decarbonization remain attractive for global companies in finding new growth opportunities, as China continues to progress in implementing policies for high-level economic openness and fostering new quality productive forces, said Luo.

Many multinational chemical corporations, including BASF, are committed to deepening their presence in China, motivated by the massive market potential and continuous endeavors to accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, he said.

## China may pare its US debt holdings

By LIU ZHIHUA in Beijing and  
JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo

China may continue to reduce the share of US debt in its overall foreign exchange reserves amid its ramped-up efforts to diversify foreign asset portfolios, experts said on Wednesday.

In the short term, factors like changes in monetary policies by the United States and Japan may create more opportunities for profit from transactions in US Treasury bonds, leaving a reasonable range of fluctuations in China's holdings of the US assets, they said.

Their comments came as the latest data from the US Treasury Department showed that China, the second-biggest foreign holder of US Treasury securities, cut its holdings by \$18.6 billion to \$797.7 billion as of the end of January from December.

Since April 2022, China's holdings of US Treasury bonds have always been below \$1 trillion.

Tang Yao, an associate professor of applied economics at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, said that China will likely increase holdings of gold and other assets to further diversify its foreign exchange reserves, therefore ensuring safety and stability of its foreign exchange reserve market.

"In the long run, if there is no major change in China-US relations, I believe China's holdings of US debt will likely be kept around \$800 billion. As its holdings of other foreign assets are expected to increase, the weight of US debt in China's overall foreign assets will likely decline," Tang said.

"However, considering opportunities of trading US treasury bonds created by macroeconomic factors such as the paths of the monetary policy of the US and Japan, professionals at China's central bank might be instructed to buy and sell the US treasury bonds from time to time. Such trades would result in temporary increases or reductions in its holdings of the assets."

On Tuesday, the Bank of Japan announced its decision to end negative interest rates, marking a major shift from years of unprecedented monetary easing.

At a two-day monetary policy meeting that began on Monday, the BOJ announced its first benchmark rate hike in 17 years, guiding overnight lending rates to 0 percent to 0.1 percent, up a fraction from minus 0.1 percent to 0 percent. The bank also decided to end its yield curve control policy.

"These changes are symbolic of the normalization of the BOJ's monetary policy away from an unconventional ultra-easing stance," said Kyohei Morita, chief Japan economist at Nomura Securities, in a research report.

Nomura analysts hold a view that Japan's inflation based on the core consumer price index will remain above 2 percent year-on-year toward the middle of 2025.

"We remain of the view that the BOJ will make an additional rate hike by raising the target of the unsecured overnight call from the current range of 0.0-0.1 percent to 0.25 percent in October 2024," Morita said.

Tokyo-based Minmetals Japan Corp, a subsidiary of Minmetals Development Co, does business in the Japanese yen while trilateral trade is settled in US dollars.

"Considering the widespread expectations for the yen to appreciate, some Chinese companies in Japan are likely to convert a portion of their dollar assets into yen assets," said Zhang Shuo, president of Minmetals Japan.

"We hope to obtain professional guidance and financial instruments from banks in areas such as settlements involving the Japanese yen, the US dollar and the Chinese yuan, to help us maximize our corporate profits."

Contact the writers at  
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

## BUSINESSFOCUS

## Digital economy leaves imprint despite turbulence

Nation launches various measures to bridge online divide, spur growth

By CHENG YU  
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's digital economy has emerged as a bright spot for both the industry as well as people's livelihoods, at a time when an economic slowdown and impeded globalization have stunted growth worldwide.

The world has become more digitalized than ever, experts said, be it working from home, remote schooling or industrial transformation. However, the digital divide between leading economies and emerging markets has widened further, they said.

So, how does one narrow the gap to promote common prosperity around the globe?

China, the experts said, offers a glimpse by placing the development of a digital economy at the top of the agenda and launching various measures to bridge the digital divide.

In December, the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Data Administration jointly launched an implementation plan to facilitate common prosperity by developing a better and greater digital economy.

According to the plan, more efforts will be made to drive the in-depth integration of digital technologies and the real economy, as well as solve the problem of unbalanced and inadequate development through digital means.

To achieve the goal, accelerated steps will be made to drive coordinated regional development through digital economy, advance digital development in rural areas, enhance the digital competence of the public for better employment, and facilitate the inclusive supply of social services through digital means, according to the plan.

#### High-speed development

China's digital economy has accelerated over the past few years.

According to the Asia Digital Economy Report launched by the Boao Forum for Asia and the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, a government think tank, its pace has been "far ahead" of other Asian economies.

Last year, the market scale of China's digital economy hit \$7.47 trillion, topping other major Asian economies. Japan followed with \$2.37 trillion, while South Korea ranked third at \$952.3 billion, the report said.

Li Baodong, secretary-general of the Boao Forum for Asia, said: "With digital economy, emerging economies in Asia grew at a faster pace, demonstrating strong economic resilience and development potential. To some extent, digital economy has effectively promoted the sustained recovery of the global economy."

The report found that the digital



A worker checks on seedlings at a digitalized plantation base in Chongqing on March 14.  
CHEN SHICHUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

economies of 14 Asian economies expanded 3.5 percent year-on-year in nominal terms last year, which was 3.3 percentage points higher than the nominal GDP growth rate over the same period.

Helen Han, founder and chief executive officer of IMT Management Tech Consultancy, said: "China aims to have an 'olive-shaped' society with the bulk of GDP growth benefiting more groups; therefore, common prosperity becomes a very important goal. Investments in modernizing rural agriculture, eco-cultural tourism and the digitalization of infrastructure will further boost the rural township economy."

Han said that entrepreneurship, cultural development and vitalization, beautiful villages, green moun-

tain and emerald waters will further boost the quality of rural vitalization in China, and a bigger middle-income group will emerge from the efforts.

Meanwhile, China is accelerating digitization in all sectors and every economic aspect, particularly smart manufacturing and artificial intelligence in manufacturing, embracing the internet of things, AI, blockchain, cloud, data and 5G.

"New technologies and digital economy are also boosting agriculture and county-level economic development by improving output, reducing costs and commanding higher prices based on brand value as well as improving overall management efficiency," Han said.

China is arguably making the

world's biggest push to reduce the digital divide between rural and urban households. Chinese telecommunications carriers are pouring more resources into ensuring that a greater number of the population can access fast, affordable mobile communication and broadband network services.

Xiong Yulan, 34, from Yunnan province, said one of her enduring childhood memories is that of fierce explosions from the use of gunpowder that once served as a communication means to summon villagers for rallies.

In the early 1990s, gunpowder was the most efficient way to send messages in Xiong's hometown, Dulongjiang town in Gongshan county, Yunnan province, since no



Technicians run tests on manufacturing robots at a workshop in Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu province, in February.  
SHI BAIRONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

phones were available in that area, which is near the Derung River.

It was not until years ago that Xiong and other residents started to see changes in the availability of 5G services as China Mobile, the nation's largest mobile telecom operator, set up a 5G station in the distant township.

Xiong said she was thrilled when she tried 5G mobile services and some frontier 5G-enabled technology gadgets.

Using a pair of 5G-enabled virtual reality glasses, she was happy to see Kunming, Yunnan's provincial capital, about 900 kilometers away, in real time.

#### Overcoming barriers

These developments highlight China's broader efforts to overcome geographical barriers to expand network construction, which, according to industry experts, will greatly drive common prosperity and lessen the gap between the eastern and western regions of the country.

The plan launched in December also pointed out that by 2025, positive progress shall be made in closing the gaps between regions, urban and rural areas, different population groups as well as in basic public services through the development of digital economy.

By 2030, substantial progress will be achieved in promoting common prosperity through the digital economy, with a set of innovative practices on the collaboration between eastern and western regions ready to be replicated and promoted nationwide, it said.

Viewed from a business perspective, China's small and medium-sized enterprises are also reaping several benefits from the ongoing efforts of driving common prosperity through digital economy development.

The global tech industry downturn has deepened amid rising geopolitical tensions, and the smartphone market has been declining for several quarters, posing unprecedented challenges to Chinese supply chain providers.

For instance, Yihong Precision Technology Co Ltd, a type-C adapter maker from Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong province, has been benefiting from its digitalization drive. The small factory of 45 skilled

workers recently decided to leverage WeCom, the communication platform for enterprises developed by Tencent's social media platform WeChat, to digitalize its production processes and management support.

Hua Jiansheng, deputy general manager of Yihong Precision, said: "With such a simple move, repetitive paperwork and communication with external factories have been eliminated from the company's wholesale production processes. It has resulted in a significant reduction in workload for employees, which has also allowed them to focus more on production to improve product quality."

The most direct indicator of such a digitalization effort has been that the company has gained a 1 percent improvement in product yield rates, which refer to the proportion of products that meet quality standards and are considered usable or salable, out of the total number of products manufactured or processed.

"Don't underestimate the 1 percent increase in yield rates. With this 1 percent, we, an SME, are no longer incurring losses. The gross profit margin of the adapter industry is only around 5 to 10 percent, which leaves little room for profit," Hua explained.

Huo Jinjie, president of market research firm International Data Corp China, said in a previous interview that digital resilience will determine whether or not companies worldwide, including those in China, can respond quickly to business disruptions and restore market confidence amid rising economic uncertainties.

Li Baodong from BFA added that amid the ongoing global changes and historic transformation, the world today is increasingly strained by an economic downturn, which has posed multiple challenges to global development.

"China and other Asian economies need to enhance their cooperation in the field of digital economy and align their development strategies in a joint effort to create an open, inclusive, trusted and collaborative digital economy ecosystem that seeks common development, wealth and prosperity for all."

## AI tech comes to the aid of social causes

By CHENG YU

Often, during his formative years, a 500-year-old majestic ginkgo tree that did not sprout leaves for two to three years at a stretch used to be a daily sight for Yang Zhongkai on his way to and from high school.

Since villagers widely regarded it as one that made their wishes come true, they used to kneel down in front of the "lucky" tree and burn offerings under it.

This, Yang recalled, led to prolonged heat exposure at its roots, stunting its growth.

"Millions of such old trees are in urgent need of protection given their importance as vital biological resources and symbols of ecological civilization," said Yang, the initiator of a team — Zhiyue — dedicated to protecting ancient trees.

"But the recording and management of ancient and famous trees nationwide commonly rely on Excel spreadsheets, which are plagued by information silos, lack of real-time updates and

incomplete content," he said. However, things have changed of late.

Yang and his team now leverage the artificial intelligence technology developed by Tencent Cloud, the cloud subsidiary of technology company Tencent Holdings, to identify and register trees accurately, based on individual traits and GPS tracking.

Yang and his team members are part of the fourth Light Technology Public Welfare Creation Camp, a science and technology public welfare platform launched by Tencent Holdings.

As one of the most influential technology public welfare platforms in China, the activity aims to encourage more people to solve social problems using scientific and technological know-how and open up more than 300 AI functions of Tencent Cloud to participants.

More than 3,600 teams and 18,000 developers have participated in this influential tech philanthropy platform since its establishment in 2020.

"With the acceleration of a new generation of technological revolution and industrial transformation, new technologies bring more excitement to philanthropy with emerging innovative scenarios. The boundaries of philanthropy have been significantly expanded," said Guo Kaitian, senior vice-president of Tencent.

"Digital technologies, represented by AI, large models, and virtual reality, will deeply impact philanthropy through platforms like the camp. Such efforts will create greater value for social development and human progress," he said.

Wu Yunsheng, vice-president of Tencent Cloud and head of Tencent YouTu Lab, said this year's camp has boosted access to Tencent Cloud's leading technological capabilities for developers, including digital tools ranging from AI, security, audio and video, smart customer service, intelligent translation, to open-source technologies.

"In addition to applying cutting-



The fourth Light Technology Public Welfare Creation Camp, a science and technology public welfare platform launched by Tencent Holdings, kicks off in Lijiang, Yunnan province, in February.  
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

edge technologies such as AI and large models to assist in the development of traditional industries, the company also strives to promote the development of social philan-

thropy through technological and platform advantages," Wu said, adding that "the power of technology can change the world".

More developers, philanthrop-

ic organizations, and enterprises will participate in and jointly promote the innovation and development of philanthropy in China, Wu added.

## WORLD

# Subianto wins election in Indonesia

Victory for running mate Raka too; swearing-in ceremony in October

By LEONARDUS JEGHO in Jakarta and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

Indonesia's election body has officially declared Prabowo Subianto, the country's defense minister, as the winner in the Feb 14 presidential election.

The General Election Commission concluded the national vote tally on Wednesday.

Subianto's running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, former mayor of Solo in Central Java and the eldest son of incumbent president Joko Widodo, was also declared as the winner of the vice-presidential race.

The commission's official announcement validated the results of the quick count held in February that showed a huge lead for the Subianto-Raka duo over their two rivals. The winners will take their oath of office in October.

Their triumph is expected to result in a continuity in Widodo's policies, analysts said.

"It is still a bit early but given his previous statements that he would be a continuity candidate, we do expect Subianto to retain (Widodo's) policy regarding relations with China," Nicholas Mapa, a senior economist at ING, a Dutch investment bank, said.

China is Indonesia's biggest trading partner and Widodo, as Indonesia's leader for the past 10 years, has sought to deepen trade cooperation between the two countries.

One of Widodo's legacies is the China-funded high-speed railway that connects the capital city of Jakarta with West Java province. The bullet train, a first in Southeast Asia, is one of the most prominent projects under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Muhammad Habib Abiyon Dzakwan, a researcher at the Department of International Relations of the Jakarta-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that Indonesia's foreign policy "will unlikely change" under the Subianto-Raka government.

"Under their administration, Indonesia will remain a friend with everybody else — China, the

US, Europe, Australia, and so on," Dzakwan said, alluding to Indonesia's *bebas dan aktif* (independent and active) foreign policy.

Subianto had said in previous press briefings that Indonesia's GDP may hit 8 percent in the next three to five years, which would be a sharp rise from the 5.05 percent growth in 2023, and the official 5.3 percent GDP target for this year.

Mapa of ING said that in order to realize the 8 percent growth rate, Subianto needs to find other sources of investment.

## Fiscal discipline

"He has also vowed to practice fiscal discipline while chasing this growth aspiration," Mapa added.

Tauhid Ahmad, executive director of the Jakarta-based Institute for Development of Economics and Finance, said Subianto's growth target may be "difficult to realize".

"It is likely that he (Subianto) has not yet understood the main problems (faced by Indonesia)," he said.

Ahmad is cautious about the future development of the *hilirisasi* (mineral downstreaming) policy that Widodo has championed and which Subianto has vowed to continue under his leadership.

Ahmad cited the global market for minerals and mineral products, noting that Subianto might want to rethink about *hilirisasi*. "Hilirisasi is not enough to support our economy," he said, adding that the government might need to also focus more on other industries such as textiles, steel and furniture to achieve its growth target.

The announcement by the election commission took place amid protests from the camps of Subianto-Raka's two rivals in the election, former provincial governors Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. Their supporters held street demonstrations while their legal teams said they were fully prepared to lodge their complaints with the Constitutional Court about alleged electoral rigging.

Leonardus Jegho is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Contact the writers at [prime@chinadaily.com](mailto:prime@chinadaily.com).



Indonesia's presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto addresses a campaign rally in Jakarta on Feb 10. The election commission has declared him the winner of the Feb 14 poll. KIM KYUNG-HOON / REUTERS

## Clean sweep



Iraqi men clear muddy water from a building following heavy rains in Duhok in the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan on Tuesday. Two people were killed and more than 100 were rescued in a wave of torrential rain that hit the city. ISMAEL ADNAN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Biden, Trump triumphant in more primaries

TEMPE, Arizona — As Joe Biden and Donald Trump moved closer to a November rematch, primary voters around the country on Tuesday urged their favored candidates to keep up the fight and worried about what might happen if their side loses this fall.

There was little suspense about Tuesday's results as both candidates are already their parties' presumptive nominees. Trump easily won Republican primaries in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Kansas and Ohio. Biden did the same except in Florida, where Democrats had canceled their primary and opted to award all 224 of their delegates to Biden.

Instead, the primaries and key down-ballot races became a reflection of the national political mood. With many US citizens unenthusiastic about 2024's choice for the White House, both Biden and Trump campaigns are working to fire up their bases by tearing into each other and warning of the perils of the opponent.

Those who did turn out to vote on Tuesday wanted to prove otherwise.

Pat Shackelford, an 84-year-old caregiver in Mesa, Arizona, said she voted for Trump in Arizona's primary to send the former president a message.

"I wanted to encourage him that the fight has been worthwhile, that more of us are behind him than maybe the media tells you," Shackelford said.

Jamie and Cassandra Neal, sisters who both live in Phoenix, said they were unenthusiastic Biden supporters until they saw the vigor the president brought to his State of the Union speech. It fired them up for the coming election.

"Beforehand it was like, 'Well, he's the only decent one there,'" said Cassandra Neal, 42. "After his address, it was like, 'OK, let's do it!'"

Jamie Neal, 45, said Biden had been "way too nice" before and needed to match Trump, whom she described as "vicious".

"I hate to say it, sometimes you need to equal the looniness to get the person out," she said. "Sometimes you have to fight fire with fire."

Trump on Saturday rallied in Ohio, which has for several years been reliably Republican after once being a national bellwether in presidential elections. Trump won the state by about 8 percentage points in 2016 and 2020. But there are signs the state could be more competitive in 2024. Last year, Ohio voted overwhelmingly to protect abortion rights in its constitution and voted to legalize marijuana.

## Priority states

Biden, meanwhile, visited Nevada and Arizona on Tuesday, two states that were among the closest in 2020 and remain top priorities for both campaigns.

Trump and Republicans have hammered Biden on the influx of

migrants crossing the US-Mexico border in recent years, seeking to capitalize on the issue well beyond border states.

Biden has ratcheted up a counteroffensive in recent weeks after Senate Republicans killed a migration compromise they had negotiated with the White House, withholding their support only after Trump said he opposed the deal. Biden has used the circumstances to argue that Trump and Republicans have no interest in solving the issue but instead want to inflame voters in an election year.

Trump has coupled his campaign with his legal challenges, including dozens of criminal counts and civil cases in which he faces more than \$500 million in fines.

His first criminal trial was scheduled to start Monday in New York on allegations he falsified business records to cover up hush money payments. But a judge delayed the trial for 30 days after the recent disclosure of new evidence that Trump's lawyers said they needed time to review.

In a January poll conducted by Ipsos, two-thirds of respondents indicated they were "tired of seeing the same candidates in presidential elections and want someone new". The survey also revealed that only a quarter of US citizens are "satisfied" with the two-party system.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Beijing slams Washington for spreading false info

By ZHOU JIN [zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn)

Beijing hit back at Washington's slandering of China by spreading disinformation on Wednesday, saying the United States is the biggest source and spreader of false information in the world.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian made the remarks after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken cited a US State Department report released last year as saying the Chinese government has invested billions of dollars to spread propaganda and twist the global information environment.

Blinken said at the third "Summit for Democracy" in Seoul on Monday that China bought cable TV platforms in Africa and used local subsidiaries to surreptitiously purchase media companies in Southeast Asia to run pro-China news.

"Hyping up democracy versus authoritarianism at the so-called 'Summit for Democracy' is a false narrative, while accusing China of spreading disinformation is in itself disinformation," Lin told a news conference.

China strongly deplores and firmly opposes Blinken's remarks, and has made solemn representations to the US side, Lin said.

## Rhetoric denounced

Lin cited several examples, including chanting the "collapse of the Chinese economy", hyping up the "debt trap" under the Belt and Road Initiative, and labeling "forced labor" and "genocide" in Xinjiang, to prove that well-organized and well-planned moves for a long time to spread China-related disinformation is an important approach for Washington in the battle of perception against Beijing.

US politicians, including the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, on multiple occasions, have acknowledged their covert tactics such as bribing the media to spread remarks that smear China, Lin said.

"Lies and conspiracy will only end up backfiring. The harder the US strives to scheme rumors and mislead the public, the clearer the international community will see the credibility deficit of the US," he said.

What will be left with is a notorious image that cannot be whitewashed, he added.

## Putin calls for measures to counter Western sanctions

By REN QI in Moscow [renqi@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:renqi@chinadaily.com.cn)

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday told the Federal Security Service, known by the acronym FSB, to help Russian companies bust Western sanctions and expand their clout into new markets around the world.

In a speech at the FSB annual meeting at Lubyanka in central Moscow following his landslide victory in Sunday's presidential election, Putin says Russia's "wartime economy" has thrived despite the sanctions, with the manufacture of artillery shells far exceeding the West's and the Russian economy growing 3.6 percent last year.

Putin said the FSB should work with other agencies to increase the security of the banking and financial systems, and "to provide support to our companies that are actively developing despite the obstacles created for them and which are exploring new markets but are faced with openly hostile actions" from the West.

Putin also discussed the cross-border incursions during the meeting with FSB officials, saying the Kremlin wants to create a buffer zone to help protect border regions from long-range Ukrainian strikes and cross-border raids that have occurred with more frequency in recent months.

Meanwhile, the new head of Russia's Navy was formally presented in his new role for the first time on Tuesday at a pomp-filled ceremony, the state RIA news agency reported, confirming the appointment of Admiral Alexander Moiseev as acting head of the Navy.

RIA showed a video of the ceremony at the Port of Kronstadt near St. Petersburg where it said Moiseev was presented as acting head of the Navy.

His appointment follows a series of sustained Ukrainian attacks on Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which is traditionally based in Crimea.

Moiseev served on nuclear submarines for more than 29 years and has been decorated as a Hero of Russia, the country's top military award. He was appointed acting commander and then commander of the Black Sea Fleet in 2018. Moiseev was also appointed commander of the Northern Fleet in 2019 before taking up his current role.

Separately, the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell proposed on Tuesday the bloc should take 90 percent of revenues from Russian assets frozen in

Europe and transfer them to an EU-run fund that finances weapons for Ukraine.

Borrell told reporters in Brussels he would submit a formal proposal to the EU's 27 member countries on Wednesday, ahead of a summit of the bloc's leaders on Thursday and Friday.

Under Borrell's plan, proceeds from the assets such as interest payments would go to the European Peace Facility, an off-budget fund that provides military aid to countries outside the EU and has been used mainly for Ukraine.

Some 70 percent of all Russian assets immobilized in the West are held in the Belgian central securities depository Euroclear, which has the equivalent of \$206.1 billion worth of various Russian central bank securities and cash.

## Extended outdoor bar hours for Olympics anger Parisians

PARIS — Several associations representing residents in Paris on Tuesday denounced plans to allow bars and restaurants to keep their outdoor summer terraces open later than usual during the Olympics, saying the change would impact the locals.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo announced last Friday that temporary summer terraces could be used for food and drinks until midnight, instead of 10 pm, from July 1 until the end of the Olympics and Paralympics on Sept 8.

Around one in five venues in Paris — 3,000 out of 15,000 — has a license for a summer terrace, according to city hall figures.

A joint statement from two residents' associations, Droit au Sommeil and Vivre Paris, said they were "alarmed" that the mayor's office was "supporting in an over-the-top way the revenues of restaurant owners to the detriment of the health and sleep of the people it administers."

Noise complaints are a common feature of life in densely populated Paris, with the temporary summer terraces introduced by Hidalgo during the COVID-19 pandemic becoming a new source of friction.

The regulations put in place in 2021 have previously been criticized by residents and elected representatives as some establishments have

not respected the rules regarding the opening times and locations of their terraces.

But supporters say vibrant street life is part of the capital's character.

The summer terraces are seen as an extension of the historic pavement seating areas that have been a feature of Parisian bars and restaurants for centuries.

Frederic Hocquard, the deputy mayor in charge of the nighttime economy, said the city had made a "social and festive choice" in allowing the terraces to stay open later than usual during the Olympics, which begin on July 28.

He added that they helped "regu-

late public space at night" and made streets safer.

The Paris Games, the first time the Olympics are being held in the City of Light in a century, have been hit by controversies in recent months over the price of tickets and transport.

French organizers and the International Olympic Committee have played them down as typical issues before the event. "It's obvious that the months preceding the Olympic Games are not the easiest," said the IOC executive in charge of coordination for the Paris Games, Pierre-Olivier Beckers-Vieujant.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



The temporary venue for the basketball and skateboard for the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games at Place de la Concorde in Paris on Tuesday. JULIE SEBADELHA / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## WORLDUS

## Major role for China in sustainability seen

'Climate Challenge' seeks solutions at intersection of agriculture, energy

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco  
lizhu@chinadailyusa.com

As the world grapples with the twin challenges of feeding a growing population and combating climate change, a new initiative is calling on innovators, including those from China, to develop solutions at the intersection of agriculture and energy.

Climate Challenge, launched by a Silicon Valley incubator, seeks to harness the power of technology to create a more sustainable future by finding the best entrepreneurs and scaling those technologies.

"We need to think big to drive transformation, and we believe that innovators, entrepreneurs and breakthrough technology will lead this transformation," said John Hartnett, CEO and founder of SVG Ventures (Thrive, an innovation and investment platform in Silicon Valley).

"Just like (former Apple CEO) Steve Jobs transformed the way we communicate through our smartphones or (CEO of Tesla) Elon Musk transformed the car industry with Tesla, China has played a major role in both these industries," he said.

With global energy demands soaring and the clock ticking on climate action, Hartnett saw the convergence of agriculture and

energy as a critical battleground. Climate change is the greatest challenge that the world faces in the 21st century, he said, and last year was the warmest year since records began in 1850.

Left unchecked, the economic cost could reach \$178 trillion over the next 50 years. Conversely, a rapid shift to renewable energy could inject \$43 trillion into the global economy, according to a recent Deloitte report.

This is where Climate Challenge comes in. Partnering with Alberta Innovates, a Canadian funding agency, the initiative aims to identify and support innovators from across the globe who are developing solutions at the nexus of agriculture and energy.

The focus is on three key areas: advancing biofuels, promoting on-farm energy generation and fostering water stewardship. Ten finalists will have the chance to showcase their innovations to a global audience, competing for significant prizes and growth opportunities, the organizers said.

The initiative recognizes China's leadership in clean energy technology, particularly electric vehicle and solar technologies in developing on-farm efficiency.

## Clean energy innovation

China has the world's highest number of patent applications for solar cells, demonstrating its commitment to developing and manufacturing renewable energy solutions. Similarly, China is emerging as a leader in electric vehicle battery technology, underscoring its comprehensive approach to clean

energy innovation.

China has filed 126,400 global patent applications for solar cells, ranking first in the world, according to data released by the country's National Intellectual Property Administration. In the area of EV powertrain batteries, China is also emerging as the largest source for patents applied for and granted.

As to the on-farm energy, Hartnett said there is opportunity in this space to upgrade production opportunities and adopt best management practices using innovation.

"We recognize that there are technologies employed in other parts of the world, China included, that have relevance in Canada," he said. "We are eager to attract these innovators to apply to Climate Challenge and to consider how they might deploy their technologies on farms in a new region."

The rationale behind focusing on the intersection of agriculture and energy is clear, as those sectors are intricately linked, he said.

Modern agriculture is heavily reliant on energy for everything from powering equipment and buildings to irrigation, refrigeration and transportation. Agriculture and food systems consume nearly one-third of the world's energy, he said.

"Clean energy offers a sustainable alternative to meeting agricultural demand. New technologies and processes from China certainly have global relevance and potential for adoption that addresses current production and processing challenges."

## NYC's Chinatown to get a makeover

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
in New York

belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

New York City's iconic Chinatown will undergo a \$56 million makeover under plans unveiled by Mayor Eric Adams, who will use investments from both the city and state to dramatically improve the public space.

The initiative, called "Chinatown Connections", will use \$44.3 million in city capital funding and \$11.5 million from New York state's Downtown Revitalization Initiative awards. Work will start in 2027 and is scheduled to be completed by 2029.

Around \$5 million of the \$11.5 million will go toward the redesign of Kimlau Square, home to a memorial honoring Chinese American veterans of World War II.

The plaza is named in honor of Lieutenant Benjamin Ralph Kimlau, a Chinese American from New York who served as an Air Force bomber pilot in World War II. In 1944, he was shot down in combat and died at age 26.

Adams said last month in a statement: "Our \$56 million joint investment with the state in 'Chinatown Connections' will allow us to reimagine the square with shortened street crossings, more public space, simpler intersections, and direct cyclist connections — making our streets even safer for all New Yorkers to share."

"At every step of the way, we will work hand-in-hand with the local Chinatown community so that the

project reflects what the community wants and needs from our city," he said.

Manhattan's Chinatown, in the heart of Lower Manhattan, was established by immigrants primarily from Toisan (Taishan), in Canton (Guangdong province) of China, in the 1870s. Today its businesses and culture span more than 55 square blocks.

The upgrade to the historic area comes as it experiences demographic changes including gentrification, new buildings and a younger generation of Chinese taking over family businesses.

Data from the city's 2022 Chinatown Manhattan Commercial District Needs Assessment report shows that out of 57,159 residents, 60 percent (34,295) were Asian, 18 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent African American. Around 24 percent of residents are 65 or older.

Between 2010 and 2020, Chinatown's Asian population fell by 10 percent, the report said. But around 80 percent of local businesses still cater to the community.

Part of the city's plan includes installing a large Chinatown Welcome Gateway sign near Kimlau Square to "commemorate the cultural heritage of the neighborhood and draw visitors to local businesses."

The sign will depend on private fundraising to supplement \$2.5 million of the \$11.5 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative award.

US Congressman Dan Goldman, a representative for New York's 10th

District, said in a statement: "Manhattan's Historic Chinatown is one of the oldest and most important Chinese American communities in America and has long been a hub of cultural and economic activities."

Some of the other planned changes will redesign Kimlau Square from a dangerous five-point intersection to a standard, four-way intersection.

Kimlau Square was previously named Chatham Square. It was changed in the early 1960s when the Kimlau Memorial Arch was erected by the American Legion.

Designed by architect Poy Gum Lee, a New Yorker, the monument has both a Chinese and English inscription on it that states: "In memory of Americans of Chinese ancestry who lost their lives in the defense of freedom and democracy."

Wellington Chen, executive director of Chinatown Partnership, said in a statement: "Kimlau Square has historically been an important place for open air markets or for the public to use the elevated train station."

"It is also where we remember the veterans and honor those who served and paid the ultimate sacrifice as it is the vital key connection where streets converge. We look forward to having a better and proper setting for future commemorations and communal gatherings for generations to come."

An area known as Park Row, connected to a pedestrian and bike route connecting Lower Manhattan, Chinatown, the Brooklyn Bridge and the new public space at the Brooklyn Bridge Arches, will also undergo a \$4 million facelift.

New York state Assembly Member Grace Lee said in a statement: "Despite being one of the most historic neighborhoods in New York City, Chinatown has a long history of being underfunded and underserved; projects like this show we are finally starting to receive the support and recognition we deserve."



Kelly (left) and Kitty Van Dries talk about their participation in a rodeo show produced for Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 at Kitty's ranch in Wallis, Texas. MAY ZHOU/CHINA DAILY

## Visit recalled deep in heart of Texas

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Kelly Van Dries remembers the moment as if it were yesterday, when she presented the 10-gallon Stetson cowboy hat to Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping 45 years ago in a private rodeo show especially set up for Deng and his entourage when he visited Simonton, Texas, on Feb. 2, 1979.

"Oh my god, we had to do this on a horse and trying to get the horse over to him close enough to present him that. My hands were just shaking," Kelly said.

Speaking to China Daily on the ranch of Kitty Van Dries, the two sisters recalled that historic event, and mused about the current state of the bilateral relations. They both are still making a living ranching.

Kitty's ranch is only minutes away from the site of the Roundup Rodeo, the venue where a special rodeo show was held in 1979. Located about an hour to the west of Houston, it was owned by their father Louie Van Dries at that time. The venue stopped operation in 1997 as rodeo became less and less popular as a pastime. Some years later, the site was sold and turned into an industrial factory.

Despite all the changes with the venue, the sisters and others present in Simonton on that day still remember the big event. There is a Facebook group dedicated to Roundup Rodeo and people still talk about the event today, said the two sisters.

It started about six months before Deng's visit when the Roundup Rodeo was contracted by the Department of State to prepare for a private rodeo show for Deng. They wanted to treat him to an authentic experience of American West with a rodeo show

and barbecue when he came to Texas.

The sisters, who were about 15 and 16 years old at that time, didn't realize how big the event was until the day came. Not only was the interstate highway 10 shut down, every bridge on the back road leading to the arena had secret service agents posted.

## 'Hectic, exciting'

"(It was) hectic and exciting because there was so many people there," said Kelly. "One side was the dignitaries where Deng Xiaoping was going to be and then the rest the other side was all the reporters. And the more cameras showed up and the more light showed up. It was almost blinding."

In fact, there were more reporters, more than 700, than Chinese dignitaries and accompanying US hosts.

Kitty and Kelly, carrying US and Chinese flags respectively, were responsible for leading the grand entry with all the contestants. Kitty was arranged to present the hat to Deng after posting the flags.

"I had just had my knee operated on and wasn't really supposed to be riding yet. As we crossed on the far end, my horse slipped and went down completely," said Kitty. She fell off the horse and was lying on the ground for a moment.

Kelly curbed her urge to jump down to help her sister because as a rule she shouldn't let the Chinese flag touch the ground. Before she could find someone to take the flag out of her hands, Kitty was carried out on a stretcher.

Kelly ended up being the one to present the hat to Deng. "I was so nervous because he was a very famous person. That's a big deal, especially for someone so young," Kelly said.

Deng accepted the hat, put it on, took it off, and waved the hat toward the crowd. Then, he got into a Western stagecoach, wearing the hat at one moment, taking it off and waving it toward the crowd at another. Deng rode in the stagecoach and circled the arena once before going back to the stand to watch the rodeo show.

"They really enjoyed the rodeo so much, and they enjoyed the barbecue, and everything," Kitty said.

Deng also visited Atlanta, Seattle and Washington, DC, during his eight-day state visit to the United States in 1979, but the image of him with the cowboy hat became the most recognizable symbol of that visit.

Only years later did the two sisters realize what an important moment that was in the US-China relations when Deng put on the cowboy hat in Roundup Rodeo. Looking back, Kelly said the Roundup Rodeo was perfect for hosting Deng.

"I think it was perfect for the time and what was going on with the United States and China when the negotiations were happening. It was kind of a pinnacle situation where we were all as one in that building. It was something fun to do and it was televised everywhere."

"I read afterward that was a real pivotal moment for our relationship," said Kitty.

Both sisters said they felt very special to have been part of the rodeo show when Deng visited the Roundup 45 years ago. "It's history, it really did happen and I carry that on forever. I am very proud of it," said Kelly.

They both wish things could be different today. "We're very divided right now and we need to go back to simplistic times," said Kelly.

## Report: US drops from list of 20 happiest countries for first time

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

The United States has fallen out of the top 20 happiest countries primarily due to a decline in happiness among younger adults, a report shows.

The World Happiness Report, released on Wednesday to commemorate the United Nations' International Day of Happiness, reveals that the US has dropped from 15th place in 2023 to 23rd this year. This is the first time the US has fallen out of the top 20 since the report was launched in 2022.

The decrease in happiness has shown a gap among age groups, as individuals under the age of 30 ranked 62nd out of 143 countries for happiness, while US adults aged 60 and above ranked 10th. Similar to the US, Canada, ranked 15th overall but 58th among young people this year.

Nordic countries still dominate the top 10 countries on the list, with Finland at the top for the seventh year in a row, followed by Denmark, Iceland and Sweden. Afghanistan retains its position as last in the overall happiness ranking.

Data for the report is from Gallup World Poll surveys from 2021 to 2023 and analyzed by some of the world's leading experts on well-being.

Around 1,000 people from each country usually respond to the surveys each year and rate their current life satisfaction on a scale from zero to 10. The happiness report is then

based on a three-year average of those figures.

To further analyze the self-reporting satisfaction, researchers also considered six factors: the nation's healthy life expectancy, economy (GDP per capita), levels of corruption, social support, generosity and freedom.

The latest findings suggest happiness has declined among 15-to-24-year-olds in North America, Western Europe, the Middle East/North Africa and South Asia since 2019, and young females recorded lower scores than males.

"In North America, and the US in particular, youth now start lower than the adults in terms of well-being," Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, director of the University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Center and an editor of the report, said in an interview. "And that's very disconcerting, because essentially it means that they're at the level of their midlife crisis today, and obviously begs the question of what's next for them?"

"Youth well-being and mental health is highly predictive of a whole host of subjective and objective indicators of quality of life as people age and go through the course of life," he said.

There is a change from a decade ago, when young Americans considered themselves happier than those in the midlife groups, and about as happy as those age 60 and over, said economist John Helliwell, a founding editor of the World Happiness

Report. Now, those 30 and under are the country's least-happy age group, a decline attributed partly to feeling worse about their lives.

De Neve said the findings for youth in the United States in particular were "really striking." He said questions remain about the reasons behind the trend, with possible reasons polarization, social media use and growing health and income disparities.

"In the US, happiness or subjective wellbeing has decreased in all age groups, but especially for young adults," Gallup Managing Director Iana Ron Levey told CBS News in a statement, adding that social connections are one key factor contributing to generational disparities in happiness.

"The World Happiness Report and the Gallup/Meta social connectedness data show peak loneliness for younger Americans. It's widely recognized that social support and feelings of loneliness are influential factors in determining overall happiness, and these dynamics differ across various age groups," she said. "The quality of interpersonal relationships may impact the well-being of younger and older individuals in distinct ways."

"This increase in benevolence has been large for all generations," the report said, but the increase was especially large "for the Millennials and Generation Z, who are even more likely than their predecessors to help others in need."

## CHINA DAILY USA

## NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

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## WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108  
529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

## SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

## SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100  
Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100  
Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

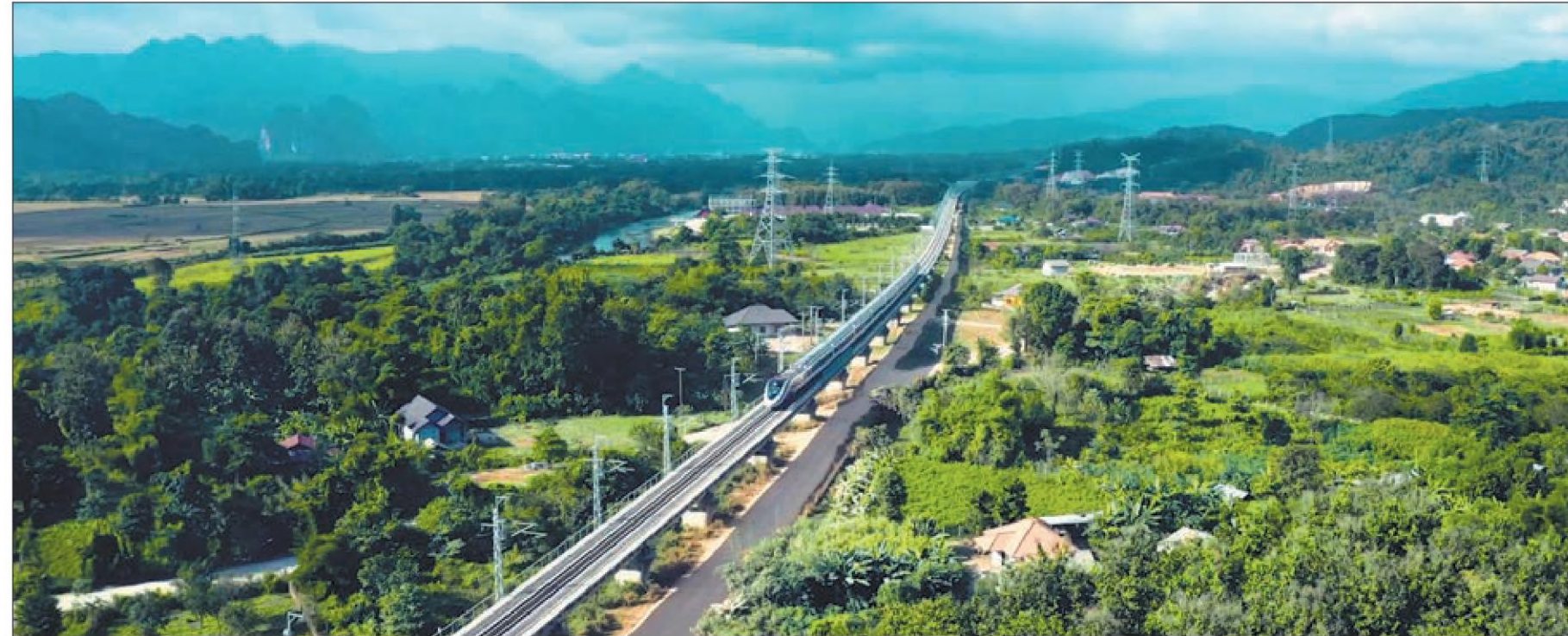
## CANADA | TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

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# BELT & ROAD UNLOCKED



Clockwise from top left: Guanacos gather near NK-JC hydropower station at the Santa Cruz River basin in Argentina. China Daily reporter Xu-Pan Yiru (left) joins climbers on the Perito Moreno Glacier and explores near the hydro power station in Santa Cruz province, Argentina last year. A train runs on the China-Laos Railway, which is a major infrastructure project under the Belt and Road Initiative offering connectivity to once-remote areas. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**Editor's note:** The China-led Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to enhance global trade routes and economic cooperation, has sparked a mix of optimism, skepticism and controversy. Through extensive field research and interviews, China Daily's Media Unlocked Studio delves into the multifaceted impact of the BRI, shedding light on its implications for global development, diplomacy and the geopolitical landscape.

## OLD WORLD & NEW ROAD UNVEILING BRI REALITIES

Alarm by West far from truth with beneficiaries of transformative investments clear

By KE RONGYI  
kerongyi@chinadaily.com.cn

Criticism of the BRI often centers on so-called debt-trap diplomacy with some in the West arguing that China is ensnaring developing nations in unsustainable financial obligations. But a closer look revealed a complex reality. Many recipient countries of BRI investments, from Laos to Argentina, argue that these projects are vital lifelines, driving economic growth and modernization. On the ground, the narrative is markedly different from the discourse in the West. In Laos, a China-Lao railway is hailed as a transformative project bringing unprecedented connectivity to a once-remote region. It is estimated that Laos took out loans of \$480 million from China and Western media claimed that the investment was unlikely to be profitable given its expense. "I think maybe they don't have enough information or data related to it. The project could create a lot of

economic benefits. If you calculate EIRR (the economic internal rate of return, a measure of the profitability of an investment), we can gain around 18.5 percent," said Sithixay Xayavong, director of the Chinese Studies Center at the National University of Laos. Poised to ride the growth, the people in Laos are already seeing more economic opportunities. Wu Aqiang is a liaison for a local mineral company responsible for booking freight cars from the railway and he draws a competitive salary due to the increased trade volume. Chinese technicians have also brought advanced railway technology to Laos. In tourist city Luang Prabang, guide Suli said his income has been boosted by the railway because it has brought more tourists. Ong Tee Keat, former transport minister of Malaysia, said the BRI project has reshaped the outlook of Laos from being a landlocked country into a land-linked country, and it helps not just economically but also contributes to the social fabric.

**18.5 percent**

Estimated gain via economic internal rate of return, a measure of the profitability of an investment, for China-Laos BRI project

### Behind the disinformation

The term "debt-trap diplomacy" can be traced to Indian scholar Brahma Chellaney, who introduced it via the Project Syndicate platform in 2017. In the following years, various US institutions actively adopted the term and published reports alleging the BRI's "debt traps". But they are hardly neutral and objective. China's "debtbook diplomacy" was a term used in a report produced by Harvard Kennedy School and commissioned by the US State Department. It was subsequently used as propaganda material for the West-centric and white-dominated global media. Over the past 10 years, more than

4,000 reports on the word "debt trap" have emerged, essentially forming a disinformation campaign. Censorship in Western media will not allow accurate discussion of the Belt and Road Initiative, said Stephen Brawner, chairman of the Belt and Road Institute in Sweden. The BRI poses challenges to the existing global order through its alternative model of development finance so the Western media is trying to maintain its exploitative economic model by starting the disinformation campaigns, said Fred M'membe, president of the Socialist Party in Zambia. US officials have become frequent visitors to Africa in recent years and they have warned about the "dangers of Chinese debt" in their featured speeches. Accusations around "debt-trap diplomacy" often revolve around Africa-China cooperation. Harry Verhoeven, a researcher on African debt at Columbia University, argued that China has not been the only factor in African countries. The debt in these countries that has

expanded the most in the last 15 years is to private bondholders, with many of them based in the West. The BRI is the only program of its kind in magnitude to help transform the structural basis of African economies. The US, European Union and Gulf countries have not made available any such amount of capital and have not paid attention to African infrastructure in the ways that the BRI has, Verhoeven said. BRI projects are built on the principle of mutual benefit, with a focus on creating sustainable economic pathways for all involved. In contrast, the Western model has historically been predicated on conditions and policies that favor the lender, often at the expense of the sovereign economic future of the recipient countries, which is arguably the true debt trap, analysts said.

### Alternative model

The BRI impact is not limited to Africa. In Latin America, the BRI is making significant strides with pro-

jects like the Nestor Kirchner-Jorge Cepernic hydropower stations in Santa Cruz in Argentina highlighting China's approach to development — one that emphasizes cooperation over coercion and long-term growth over short-term gains. Through investments, China is offering an alternative model of development financing, one that contrasts sharply with the conditional loans of institutions like the International Monetary Fund. Many countries in the Global South are in permanent debt traps because of these global financial institutions. The economic troubles in Argentina have led many to be skeptical about the impact of IMF loans and Western creditors. They not only owe lots of money but also have loans that come with tremendous strings attached, allowing for the value of their economies to basically be extracted back to Western bankers, said Argentine economist Gisela Cernadas. BRI projects are built on the principle of mutual benefit, with a focus on creating sustainable economic pathways for all involved. In contrast, the Western model has historically been predicated on conditions and policies that favor the lender, often at the expense of the sovereign economic future of the recipient countries, which is arguably the true debt trap, analysts said.

concern. "People who try to explain what is going on in China are often seen as apologizing for China rather than explaining China."



Online See the video by scanning the code.

## Reporters' log: Connecting, not dividing, lifts spirits amid unfounded claims

By MENG ZHE and XU-PAN YIRU  
xupanyiru@chinadaily.com.cn

Looking back on what we experienced during our reporting assignments, we find ourselves deeply troubled yet profoundly moved. Troubled by the unfounded claims of "debt traps", politically motivated environmental criticisms and confrontational rhetoric that threaten the very fabric of our shared humanity. Yet, amid these challenges, there are moving moments of undeniable beauty and connection that lift our spirits and remind us of

the true essence of the Belt and Road Initiative — to connect, not to divide. Receiving flowers on the fast train to Laos, witnessing the mesmerizing sunset in Patagonia and sharing laughter with our Global South family have been highlights of this journey. These moments serve as a powerful rebuttal to accusations of "debt-trap diplomacy", revealing a deeper truth about the profound interconnectedness of people across the globe. As a new world order begins to unfold, it is clear that agreeing on everything isn't always possible.

But it is essential to engage in conversations about practical matters, setting aside constructed notions of rivalry. Our journey underscores the importance of understanding the challenges and misconceptions. The BRI represents more than just a grand infrastructure project. It has not only redefined China's role on the international stage but has also amplified the voices of the Global South, casting a spotlight on the hegemonic nature of the existing West-dominated global order. No matter how

the BRI is criticized, one undeniable fact stands out: China has chosen a path starkly different from the historical patterns of foreign aggression adopted by the West. Instead of colonization, wars and refugees, the BRI has ushered in an era of increased trade, goods exchange, surging tourism, infrastructure development and cultural enrichment. This initiative stands as a testament to China's unique approach to global engagement — one that builds bridges between diverse worlds and fosters a more interconnected and inclusive global community.



China Daily reporters Meng Zhe (left) and Xu-Pan Yiru review the photos they took during their tour last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Positive results trump politics of competition

Concerns over rising Chinese influence mar pioneering efforts for development

By XU-PAN YIRU  
xupanyiru@chinadaily.com.cn

US President Joe Biden has been vocal about intensifying competition with China, declaring that the United States is in "the strongest position in decades to compete with China". A focal point of contention is the China-led Belt and Road Initiative, which has elicited a spectrum of reactions globally. Some see it as a pioneering effort toward global development, while others view it as a strategic move by China to expand its geopolitical influence. What are the forces behind the competition and what is at stake?

### Hydropower boost

Argentina has been attempting to harness the hydroelectric power of Santa Cruz to address a shortage of energy in the country for decades. The development of the BRI Nestor Kirchner-Jorge Cepernic power stations in Santa Cruz is expected to boost the country's development by about 6.5 percent and save up to \$1.1 billion annually, even enabling electricity exports to neighboring countries. Despite uplifting news for Argentina, Western media fervently attacked the project, casting it as China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative buying influence in America's backyard.

"Projects like the one in Santa Cruz are very important for us to reach a new level on our production of energy," said Ramiro Ordoqui, the former undersecretary for economic negotiations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Argentina, on BRI hydropower project. Critics argue that the belligerent attitude toward the BRI has come at US cost. "The US is probably right now the worst in terms of this massive anti-China propaganda. They become victims for this kind of propaganda that wants to define China as a threat," said Stephen Brawner, chairman of the Belt and Road Institute in Sweden. The US has proposed alternatives to the BRI from the Trump administration's Blue Dot Network, to Biden's Build Back Better framework. But the effectiveness and commitment behind these moves remain subjects of scrutiny. "Every year, they come up with another acronym like the PGI, then the B3W, the Foreign Affairs in Argentina don't even make sense in English," said Tings Chak, a researcher at think tank Tricontinental.

"They are trying to talk about building back a better world... when they can't even maintain their own bridges," she said.

### Explaining the narrative

Arnaud Bertrand is a long-time observer of China-US relations and a social media influencer. He shared his candid observations about why the West attacks the BRI. "Our own population doesn't know anything basically about this country," he said. The West has lived in an information cocoon that Western media create to get people scared about China. Faced with accusations about how he was receiving Chinese money for speaking up for China, he clarified that the only people who have paid him to give a speech or write articles are Douglas Paal, a former US diplomat and a distinguished fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, expressed the same

## Potential for China-US collaboration highlighted despite ongoing challenges

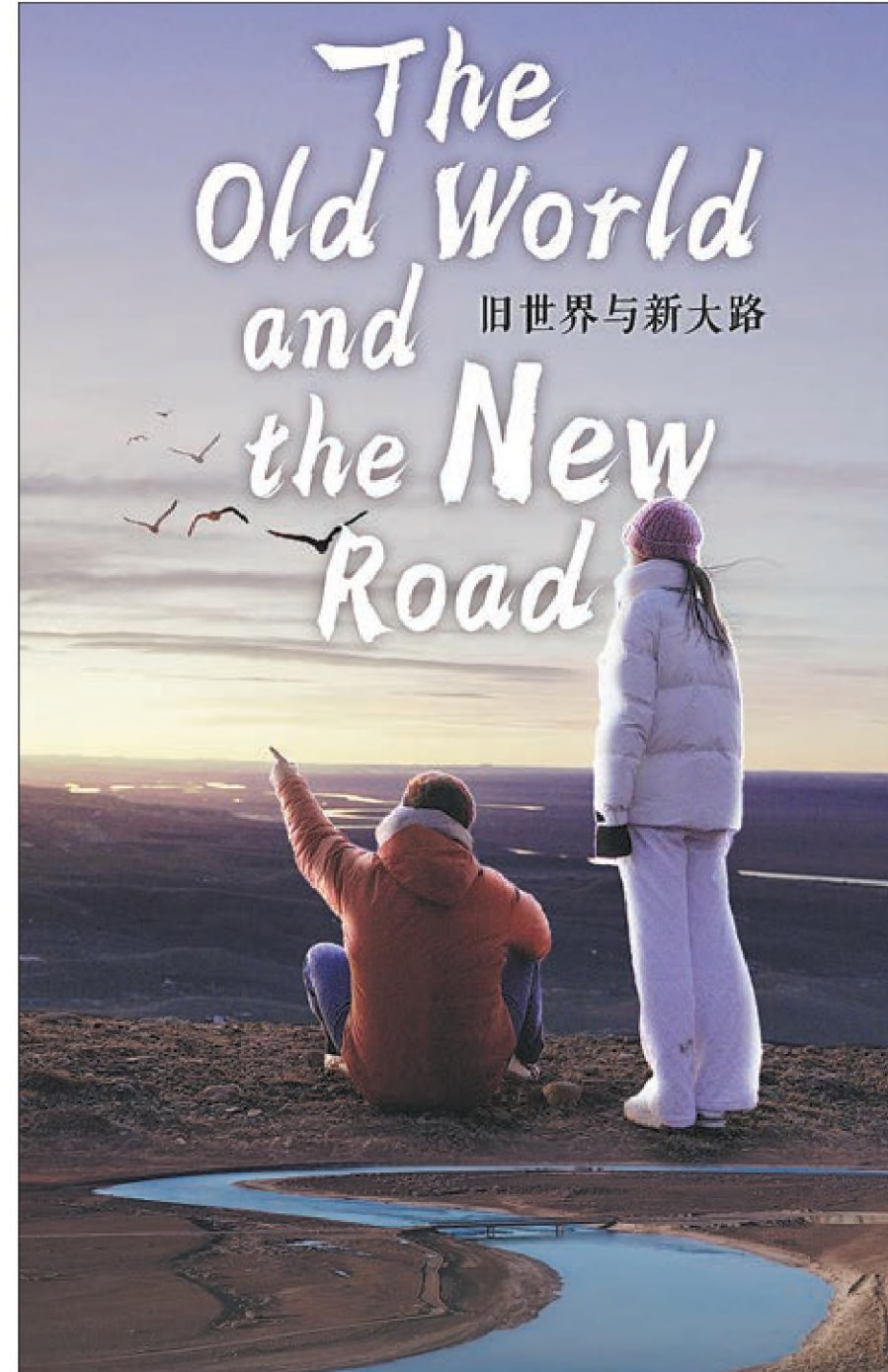
By MENG ZHE  
mengzhe@chinadaily.com.cn

Daniel Russel, a former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs with deep insights into the intricacies of China-US interactions, shared his thoughts on the Belt and Road Initiative and the current state and future prospects of the critical bilateral relationship. According to Russel, all kinds of economies, such as China, the United States, Japan and Europe, invest in infrastructure in the developing world. Amid a huge global infrastructure gap, he said China deserves great credit for BRI projects that have been successful and have met local needs. But he also highlighted the initiative for its mixed outcomes and expressed concern over its strategic implications. In comparing the Belt and Road Initiative with US-proposed infra-



Daniel Russel

structure plans like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment and the Build Back Better World, he argued that they have the advantage of leveraging private capital but called for more. "No, neither the Belt and Road nor the PGI are enough. We all need to do more," said Russel. Russel contrasted the policies toward China across different US administrations, highlighting a consistent blend of defensive and affirmative agendas regardless of the administration. He noted a significant shift in the perception of China as a threat, growing from Barack Obama's first presidential term through to Joe Biden's presidency. Efforts to find constructive pathways for engagement have persisted despite these changes, he said. "The dialogue serves as a reminder of the ongoing challenges and the potential for collaboration between the US and China. As both nations stand at a crossroads, the path they choose will significantly impact not only their futures but also the broader global community. The closer that we get to November of 2024, the more that American politics will affect and influence what the administration can say and what the administration can do with respect to China," Russel said. "That's just a reality of the US political system. So it doesn't mean that nothing is possible, but it does mean that time is of the essence that things that are possible today, even though they're going to be difficult, become much more difficult as we approach a presidential election."



A poster of the documentary, 'The Old World and the New Road', by China Daily's Media Unlocked Studio. PHOTOS BY MEDIA UNLOCKED STUDIO



A screenshot of the documentary, 'The Old World and the New Road', by China Daily's Media Unlocked Studio.

concern. "People who try to explain what is going on in China are often seen as apologizing for China rather than explaining China."

### Choosing cooperation

Seeking out a path of cooperation rather than confrontation remains a formidable challenge.



Online See the video by scanning the code.

## Improved infrastructure redefining growth, says scholar

By XU-PAN YIRU  
xupanyiru@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese affairs scholar Zheng Yongnian shed light on the transformative impact of the China-led Belt and Road Initiative on global development. Launched a decade ago, the BRI has evolved from a concept into a sprawling network of infrastructure projects spanning continents, seeking to redefine development paradigms across the developing world.



Zheng characterized the BRI as a departure from notions of imperialism, emphasizing China's commitment to fostering development through infrastructure. Unlike historical endeavors aimed at exerting geopolitical dominance, China's approach, according to Zheng, is predicated on mutual growth and sustainability. This ethos is manifested in the construction of schools, hospitals and highways across BRI countries, highlighting a development model that prioritizes local needs over geopolitical ambitions.

Despite the initiative's successes, Zheng acknowledged the challenges it faces particularly in financing such ambitious projects. He suggested that the next phase of the BRI will involve greater inclusivity, with a more significant role for the private sector and international partners, enhancing its sustainability and impact.

Addressing criticisms of the BRI, notably from Western countries, Zheng argued that such criticisms often stem from geopolitical concerns rather than the initiative's merits. He contrasted the tangible outcomes of China's investments with the unfulfilled promises of Western initiatives, asserting that local stakeholders' approval is the ultimate measure of the BRI's success.

Zheng's insights extended beyond the BRI, touching on broader themes of global order and China's role on the world stage. He advocated for an inclusive multilateralism, contrasting it with what he perceived as the exclusive approaches of other global powers. This philosophy, he believed, not only underpins the BRI but also guides China's broader engagement with the world, promoting peace and development over confrontation.

In terms of China-US relations, Zheng expressed optimism for future engagement, stressing the importance of patience and strategic dialogue. He underscored the need for China to adhere to its principles of peaceful development and inclusivity, despite the fluctuating dynamics of international politics.

## Diplomacy, mutual understanding urged

By XU-PAN YIRU  
xupanyiru@chinadaily.com.cn

Douglas Paal, a former US diplomat and a distinguished fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, addressed the West's accusations against the Belt and Road Initiative. He called for diplomacy and mutual understanding in an era where US-China relations are often characterized by tension and mistrust. Paal suggested that the "debt trap" narrative concerning the BRI has proved to be an overstatement and mischaracterization. He acknowledged that the US takes significant responsibility for the debt problems faced by many countries, as do other major developed countries with their credit policies toward less developed nations. "I think we've all gotten smarter over time, but sometimes you have to make a mistake before you can correct it," Paal said. As to whether the BRI is a comple-



Douglas Paal

tion between China and the US, Paal said it should not have been structured that way. He urged the US to join the BRI, even if the US would not contribute capital. It could still contribute significantly to financial arrangements, environmental impact assessments and scientific work, where knowledge and the power of knowledge can be leveraged to make BRI activities more successful, he said. Discussing the differences in the US approach toward China across recent administrations, Paal highlighted a negative feeling toward China that really picked up during the Trump administration. Donald Trump was frustrated for a variety of reasons and sought to take advantage of a strong anti-China posture, Paal said. He said that people in the US who

try to explain what is happening in China are often seen as apologizing for China rather than simply explaining the situation. Paal said he strives to stay on the side of explaining, not apologizing for China.

On a note of cautious optimism, Paal pointed to the potential for positive change through diplomatic engagement and mutual respect for each nation's interests and aspirations. In a climate where headlines often focus on conflict and competition, comprehensive dialogue serves as a reminder of the importance of diplomacy, strategic cooperation and the enduring need for understanding between the world's two largest economies. "We don't have borders next to each other. We don't have intrusions into each other's territory. We ought to be able to find ways of managing these areas where we have differences so that we don't feel that our survival is at stake," Paal said.

**Editor's Note:** As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

# Fish farms turn murky waters clear in Liaoning



A panoramic view of the Guanying Reservoir in Benxi, Liaoning province, in October. HUANG JINKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By LI LEI in Beijing and WU YONG in Shenyang

The once murky waters found in lakes and reservoirs across Northeast China's Liaoning province are being made clear again thanks to the help of a partner found in Mother Nature — fish.

The State-owned Liaoning Water Resource Management Group in 2016 began implementing a plan introduced by the then-ministry of agriculture to establish fish farms in algae-plagued water bodies to improve water quality and provide a secondary source of revenue.

Algal blooms emerge as nitrogen and phosphorus build up in lakes, reservoirs and other slow-moving waters due to agricultural runoff and contamination from untreated urban sewage.

The blooms endanger the ecosystem of freshwater lakes and can cause taste and odor problems in waters used for drinking.

The water management group, which operates 16 reservoirs across Liaoning and supplies nearly 70 percent of the province's water, has long wrestled with algae.

By introducing fish into water bodies, the water resource group is able to control algal blooms, clean up the water and then re-catch the fish to sell on the market once they've reached maturity, bringing in revenue and bolstering the nation's food security.

In recent years, provinces such as Yunnan, Anhui and Shandong, where freshwater lakes are abundant, have also rolled out similar programs.

However, these programs' custodians have warned the process is not as simple as it seems.

"Not all fish can thrive in reservoirs," said Guan Wankai, who oversees the group's operations at Guanying Reservoir in Benxi, southeast Liaoning.

Guan said to make the program work, the group has looked to filter-feeding fish including carp and types of catfish, that guzzle particles

suspended in the water.

He said the fish in Guanying Reservoir are mostly silver and bighead carp.

Citing research data, the official said harvesting a kilogram of carp is equivalent to removing about 20 grams of nitrogen, 1.5 grams of phosphorus and 118 grams of carbon from the water. When calculated by the biomass of algae, 40 kg are eliminated from the water with every kilogram of fish caught.

In a written response to China Daily's request for comment, the group said it had released 7,945 metric tons of carp and other species across Liaoning by last year, and the harvest amounted to 28,100 tons.

In 2023, 4,600 tons of fish were caught, with the group raking in an additional 71 million yuan (\$9.86 million), it said.

## Double harvest

Local media have hailed the approach as a win-win solution, which realizes the "double harvest" for the ecology and economy.

The group refers to the practice as "green ecological fish farming," meaning no feed or fertilizers are used throughout the fish life cycle.

"The biggest feature of this approach is people release fish and allow them to grow naturally," said Yan Weian, another official working at Guanying Reservoir.

Official figures show that 52 percent of the country's freshwater aquaculture areas are lakes and reservoirs, which produce about one-fifth of China's freshwater catch.

These fish, especially those from reservoirs, are commonly referred to as "ecological fish" due to their health benefits.

China is the world's fourth largest organic food producer by growing area, and sales of such food reached 87.7 billion yuan in 2022, according to a report by the State Administration of Market Regulation.

The group said many of its fish products had been certified organic and have proved to be a hit in mar-

## Province winning battle against algal blooms in its lakes and reservoirs with solution that also generates commercial revenue



Farmed fish are netted from the Guanying Reservoir in Benxi, Liaoning province, in May. The reservoir uses farmed fish to help curb algal blooms caused by eutrophication and improve water quality. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

kets including Beijing, Tianjin and Guangzhou of Guangdong province. The organic status is reviewed every year.

Fish raised in reservoirs, accord-

ing to the group, are richer in protein and have a lower fat content due to the province's lengthy winter. When caught in spring, the fat stores of the fish have almost depleted, meaning

the flesh is firm and chewy.

Carp, the group's signature product, are nutritious containing potassium, sodium and calcium, it said.

## Urbanization

March 22 marks the 32nd World Water Day, and the week starting March 22 is China's 37th China Water Week.

Established by the United Nations, World Water Day aims to raise awareness about the global water crisis and the need for access to clean water for all. Each year, the day focuses on a specific aspect of fresh water, such as water scarcity, water pollution or water conservation, in order to promote action and international cooperation to address water-related challenges.

Liaoning's approach is a departure from conventional methods used to handle algal outbreaks such as through costly mechanical removals, or using chemicals including algicides or herbicides.

Algal blooms surged in China as it rapidly industrialized, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

The expansion of populous urban areas around lakes and reservoirs has in some cases led to sewage discharged untreated, causing eutrophication. Nitrogen, phosphorus and other pollutants from fish farming have also contributed to the process.

A major instance was an algal outbreak in 2007 in Jiangsu province's Taihu Lake, the third largest freshwater lake in China that supplies drinking water to hundreds of thousands of households in the city of Wuxi. The water quality deteriorated so much that it began to smell and could not be used. Bottled water was quickly snapped up in the city despite price gouging.

Liaoning's practice has come on the back of China stepping up its national food security efforts by diversifying its food sources. In 2017, the central authorities urged at the annual rural work conference that officials establish a "macro food per-

spective" and seek food supplies from outside conventional areas of agriculture. Grassland, forests, the ocean and even microorganisms, are listed as potential food sources to meet the country's growing need for nutritious sustenance.

The push to develop a "macro food perspective" and diversify the country's food sources was reiterated at the most recent central rural work conference held in December.

The group said raising fish in its reservoirs is in line with the central government's directive, and is a newly gained duty in the new era. However, it stressed that environmental protection is the absolute priority, and it will attempt to foster a fish farming business that will not strain the environment or interfere with its main tasks. The group noted it had selected species that live in zones of different depths so that waterborne pollutants are fully utilized and not a single area could become overcrowded.

As the financial outlook of reservoir fish farming brightens, the group has run into new problems such as a rise in illegal fishing due to insufficient monitoring. Some vendors have even passed off inferior quality products as reservoir catches, hurting the reputation of the genuine article.

To make the fish business sustainable, the group has worked with police to combat the illegal fishing. It has also worked with research bodies to introduce new species with higher added value, which makes counterfeits easier to spot while boosting revenue. The group said it is aiming to go beyond 4,000 tons of fish caught a year and increase the annual revenue to no less than 60 million yuan.

"With living standards increasing, consumers now prefer organic fish raised in open waters," the group said.

"Our fish business has a bright future ahead."

Contact the writers at [lilei@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:lilei@chinadaily.com.cn)

# Legislators call for high-tech curbs on pollution

By LI LEI

During the annual legislative session that ended on March 11, deputies to the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, called for stepped-up efforts to curb pollution that endangers the health of China's mother rivers.

Li Haisheng, an NPC deputy and president of the Chinese Research Academy of Environmental Sciences, submitted a suggestion to the legislature, calling for a more tech-driven approach to tackling environmental problems facing the Yellow River, the second-longest river in the country and considered a cradle of Chinese civilization.

In an interview with the newspaper Science and Technology Daily, he said technology is key to

addressing the weak points in managing the Yellow River.

The environmental scientist called for a drive to develop technologies and equipment that can help repair the river's ecology and tackle existing pollution. Research hubs and observatories should also be built to collect relevant data, which in turn can be used to simulate ecological disasters and other risks to improve preparedness, he said.

"In recent years, the ecology of the Yellow River has kept improving," he said, referring to the better water quality and decreased exposure to industrial waste.

"However, there remains a long way to go," he said.

The Yellow River flows across several agricultural heartlands such as Shaanxi province, and the Ningxia Hui and Inner Mongolia

autonomous regions, where agricultural runoff has long been a threat to the river's health. The demand for irrigation water has also strained the river's flow.

Li advised the regions to reshuffle their agricultural structures to curb water demand as well as pollution, and upgrade energy-intensive legacy industries to greener ones.

Another NPC deputy, Wang Qiong, suggested moving the Yangtze finless porpoise, a critically endangered species, back to its native habitat in the Yangtze River as water quality has significantly improved in the longest river in China.

The porpoise has faced significant threats due to pollution, overfishing, habitat destruction and boat traffic in the Yangtze River. These factors led to a drastic

decline in their population in the 1980s. Authorities have created reserves away from the Yangtze to conserve the species.

Wang, a water quality inspector from Wuhan, Hubei province, told China Environment News that in recent years, the population of the mammal had rebounded and even surpassed the capacity of their adopted habitats.

She said releasing the porpoises back into the Yangtze is crucial. "If they only live within protected areas, their predatory and evasion capabilities will gradually degrade due to the lack of external threats." Also, relocating the animals helps with their genetic diversity.

Data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs showed that China had 1,249 Yangtze finless porpoises in 2022, the first



Workers clean water lettuce from a section of the Yihe River in Yinan, Shandong province, in October. The plant is considered an invasive species to waterways in China. WANG YANBING / XINHUA

rebound on record.

Citing the example of four Yangtze finless porpoises relocated from a reserve in Hubei province back to the Yangtze in April last year, Wang said surveillance data

showed that they are all safe and have successfully adapted back to living in the wild.

"That has laid a solid foundation for follow-up release efforts," she said.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Washington the only party that can stop Israel's finger pulling Rafah trigger

Palestinians in the north of the Gaza Strip were forced to flee to the south after Israel launched its military operation in response to the Hamas-led attacks on the country on Oct 7. The continuation of the brutal Israeli offensive and its evacuation orders have now pushed more than 1 million people into a small corner in the southernmost part of Gaza, where the Rafah governorate has become a "pressure cooker of despair", as Jens Laerke, a spokesman for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has warned.

Despite there being nowhere left for them to go, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists a major military operation will be launched against Rafah, where the population density is now more than three times that of Tokyo. Before the war, Rafah was home to an estimated 275,000 people. The UN says that there are now more than 1.4 million people there, most of whom are taking refuge in tents and under tarpaulins or in whatever makeshift shelters they can make.

UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric has warned an Israeli onslaught on Rafah would be "catastrophic". The European Union has said it is "very concerned" about the planned offensive, and called on Israel not to take military action that would worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Rafah.

Even US President Joe Biden has warned an assault on Rafah would be a "mistake". But despite all the strong opposition, Netanyahu has remained firm, insisting there is "no alternative".

"We cannot go around it; neither can we say 'we will destroy 80 percent of Hamas and leave 20 percent', because from that 20 percent, they will reorganize and take over the Strip again and — of course — constitute a new threat to Israel," Netanyahu said on Monday, saying that Israel was determined to eliminate the "remaining battalions (of Hamas) in Rafah and, of course, the 1.5 battalions in the camps in the center".

Considering the reports that Israeli troops deployed 150-mm artillery guns in fields along the border with Gaza, a few meters apart, firing every 30 seconds in late 2023, and that it dropped hundreds of 2,000-pound bombs on Gaza with a density described by a former US defense intelligence analyst as "not seen since Vietnam", as well as its heavy reliance on lower-accuracy unguided munitions, the civilian death toll, which is already in the tens of thousands, will soar even higher.

The humanitarian tragedy in Gaza will worsen once its new military operation begins because Israel, reported by Oxfam to be "deliberately" blocking aid to Gaza, will not allow more aid into it during its assault.

If there is a power in the world responsible for the situation today it is the US, which has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions on Gaza and has been the main munitions supplier to Israel.

It was not until dissatisfaction with Israel became so evident in the US as to ignite a protest vote in Michigan with the message "No cease-fire. No vote" in late February that President Biden began to voice concerns.

Netanyahu has said that "out of respect to the president" he will wait to hear the proposals from the US about the ways to protect the civilian population in Rafah before ordering the operation to go ahead. As the primary and by far the staunchest supporter of Israel, the US is the only country that can stay its hand.

The US now has a genuine reason to assert itself. It should do so before Israel's finger pulls the Rafah trigger.

## Youths hold future of Sino-US ties

The ongoing tour of China by 24 students from Lincoln High School and Steilacoom High School in Washington state will not only provide them with lifelong memories of a country that is widely different from their own, but also demonstrate how people-to-people exchanges can help create a proper atmosphere for the repairing of Sino-US relations.

The students' 11-day itinerary, which will see them visit Beijing, and Hubei and Guangdong provinces before they return to the United States on March 27, is an opportunity for them to gain a better understanding of both historical and contemporary China. They are to visit iconic landmarks such as the Great Wall and the Palace Museum in Beijing and Wudang Mountain in Hubei, and engage in academic exchanges at prestigious institutions, including Peking University.

This tour is part of a larger initiative on prioritizing cultural and people-to-people exchanges, particularly among young people, between the US and China as agreed by the leaders of the two countries during their meeting in San Francisco in November. The Chinese side said it would invite 50,000 young people from the US to visit China on exchange and study programs over the next five years.

Most of the students have not traveled out of the US before. The palpable excitement they expressed before boarding the plane to China at San Francisco International Airport on Saturday, as well as their heartfelt longing to know more about China, speak volumes of the fact that, unlike some China-bashing politicians' claim that the US people have seen through what kind of country China is, US citizens generally lack an understanding of China due to the absence of diverse information sources about it.

The firsthand experience of interacting with their peers and people from all walks of life in different places in China can allow the US youths to discover firsthand what the country and the Chinese people are like. That can also prompt them to reflect on their previous views on the nation, if not a stereotyped image of it, that the US information cocoon promotes.

The warm welcome they have received so far from the Chinese people, along with the joys and challenges their Chinese peers share with them about their daily life, should contribute to deepening their understanding of different facets of the dynamic country, which is of a similar size as the US but with a population four times larger, a much longer history, and different culture and social system.

Their experience in China is in stark contrast to the US government's unfair treatment of some Chinese students in recent years. Quite a few students have been groundlessly detained and interrogated for hours at US airports while trying to enter the country with valid visas for further education, before their visas were canceled and they deported. Also, it is not rare these years for Chinese students and researchers, including those who have studied at US schools and worked at US labs and institutes for a long time, to be subjected to frequent harassment and baseless investigations by US security and intelligence departments.

Despite the negative influences of these Chinese-targeting witch hunts, the Chinese people still maintain a friendly and open attitude toward their US counterparts, and look forward to promoting people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

The hope and foundation for better ties between the two countries lie in such subnational level relations. China and the US have established 284 pairs of sister provinces/states and cities, and many more cooperation mechanisms at different levels of schools, institutes, organizations and labs. The more difficulties bilateral ties face, the more these relations should be cherished.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Going all out to attract investment will help high-quality development

The authorities issued a policy document on Tuesday, emphasizing that foreign investment is an important force for China's modernization drive, and vowing to make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment, and create a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment to consolidate the confidence of foreign investors.

According to the action plan, China will further shorten the negative list for foreign investment and implement pilot programs to ease global companies' access to the fields of scientific and technological innovation. To increase foreign investment, restrictions on foreign participation in the manufacturing sector will be removed and openness in sectors such as telecommunications and healthcare will be further increased. Foreign financial entities will also be granted greater access to China's

banking and insurance sectors, and the operational scope for foreign financial institutions will be expanded in China's bond market. At the same time, the country will optimize a level playing field and provide better services for foreign-invested enterprises.

Relevant departments are urged to formulate timetables and road maps to promote the implementation of these policy measures.

Many international institutions hold an optimistic outlook on China's economy and, seeing it gain a more solid footing in January and February, they believe it will remain the largest engine of global growth in 2024.

A survey conducted by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in the fourth quarter of 2023 showed that nearly 70 percent of 600 foreign inves-

tors were optimistic about the Chinese market in the next five years and want to increase their investment in China.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce also showed that in the first 11 months of 2023, China registered a historical high in foreign investment, especially in the service and high-tech manufacturing sectors, which saw the establishment of 48,078 new foreign-invested enterprises, an increase of 36.2 percent year-on-year.

A series of new policy measures taken by the authorities to promote high-level opening up and make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment will not only promote the high-quality development of China's economy, but also build up the confidence of multinational enterprises in China and facilitate their greater presence in the Chinese market.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

## Global AI competition is a marathon, not a sprint

At the NVIDIA GPU Technology Conference on Monday, NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang unveiled a series of artificial intelligence innovations, including the latest generation GPU architecture "Blackwell" and a series of products based on it. Some media outlets have dubbed it "the world's most powerful AI chip".

According to Huang, the new products will improve the performance of large model inference workloads 30 times over, while significantly reducing costs and energy consumption. While it took 8,000 Hopper GPUs and 15 megawatts of power to train a model with 1.8 trillion parameters in the past, the same task can now be completed with just 2,000 Blackwell GPUs consuming only 4 megawatts.

The significant increase in computing power is exciting. As more developers of AI and large models emerge, computing resources are becoming increasingly scarce, creating a bottleneck for AI driven by computing power. The launch of the B200 has eased that bottleneck.

However, the arrival of B200 increases the pressure for China's AI industry, which will have to step on the gas. With its world-class internet industry and massive data resources, China's AI industry has risen rapidly in recent years. Together with the US, they are called the world's Top 2 in AI. However, with the emergence of ChatGPT, China's AI practitioners have faced the risk of widening gaps.

It's OpenAI that supports ChatGPT, and

behind OpenAI are infrastructure providers like NVIDIA. In other words, the world-class competition in AI is in essence a competition in infrastructure.

China urgently needs leading companies at the infrastructure level to address the bottlenecks. As one of the world's largest semiconductor markets and also one of the largest AI application markets, China can offer ample support to leading domestic companies to progress.

High energy consumption is a problem with AI. China leads the world in the fields of new energy and renewable resources. If the global competition in AI is compared to a marathon, now is far from being a decisive moment.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Strengthened consumer protections spur for consumption

Chinese Premier Li Qiang recently signed a State Council decree, unveiling revised regulations for the implementation of the Law on the Protection of Consumer Rights and Interests.

Effective from July 1, 2024, the regulations have detailed provisions on the obligations of business operators, including the protection of consumers' life and property, the handling of defective products, avoiding fraudulent advertisements, price transparency, quality guarantees, and protection of consumers' personal information. These are all the major complaints of consumers today with the development of e-commerce.

The regulations add provisions on operators' obligations regarding the protection of the rights and interests of the elderly and minors as consumers.

The regulations also include refined provisions regarding online consumption and stipulate operators' obligations concerning

prepaid consumption, urging them to provide goods or services in accordance with the agreement made with consumers.

The regulations also standardize consumer complaints and compensation claims, stipulating that complaints and reports must abide by the law, regulations and relevant provisions. Furthermore, they should not be used to seek improper benefits, infringe on the legitimate rights and interests of operators, or disrupt the market order.

By effectively addressing the major concerns of consumers, these regulations are conducive to improving the overall consumption environment of the country and they will help spur consumption, a major growth driver.

In the first two months of this year, the total retail sales of consumer goods in China increased by 5.5 percent year-on-year. Online retail sales of physical goods saw an increase of 14.4 percent, accounting for 22.4 percent of the total retail sales of consumer goods. Supermarket retail sales increased by only 0.9 percent year-on-year, while department store sales decreased by 3.0 percent.

From January to February, investment in

real estate development fell by 9.0 percent. The sales area of newly built commercial housing nationwide fell by 20.5 percent year-on-year; the sales volume of newly built commercial housing fell by 29.3 percent.

But thanks to the series of policies introduced by the central government, property market sales in many cities have shown signs of stabilization and recovery since March. As the overall macro economy stabilizes and warms up, the property market adjustment is expected to bottom out.

At present, it is necessary to further improve policies and mechanisms to release more space for consumption in the service industry. The factors affecting China's service industry consumption are mainly shortcomings in service quality, service innovation and consumer rights protection.

Vigorously promoting high-quality innovative development of the service industry can help create more jobs and increase household income. Only by making the service industry better can the country promote a virtuous cycle of industrial upgrading and the expansion of domestic demand in a more balanced way.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

**China Daily**  
15 Huxin 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 Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan  
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong  
+852 2518 5111  
editor@chinadailyhk.com  
editor@chinadailyasia.com

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

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

## COMMENT



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

## Climate change an alarming health threat

If our planet were a patient, it would be admitted to intensive care. Its vital signs are alarming.

It is running a fever, with each of the last nine months the hottest on record, as we hurtle towards the 1.5 degree threshold.

Its lung capacity is compromised, with the destruction of forests that absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen.

And many of the earth's water sources — its lifeblood — are contaminated.

Most concerning of all, its condition is deteriorating rapidly.

Is it any wonder, then, that human health is suffering, when the health of the planet on which we depend is in peril?

The health of humans, animals and our environment are woven together in a bond that is inextricable, yet fragile. We belong to the same unique, finely balanced ecosystem.

This is not a new realization. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, wrote in the 5th century BCE that, "The physician treats, but nature heals."

We are now re-learning what humans have always known, but which, since the industrial revolution, we have forgotten or ignored — that when we harm our environment, we harm ourselves.

For centuries we have plundered our planet. Now we are paying the price, with a triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

There is, of course, the immediate impact of more frequent and severe weather events, which cause deaths and injuries, and damage to health facilities and other essential infrastructure.

Then there are the medium- and long-term sequelae:

More heatwaves contribute to more cardiovascular disease; air pollution drives lung cancer, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease;

Chemicals such as lead cause intellectual disability, cardiovascular and kidney disease; Certain pesticides are associated with higher rates of suicide in countries where they are readily available;

And drought and water scarcity affect food production, making healthy diets less affordable.

Small island developing states are especial-

**And as UN agencies, we must do better at breaking out of our siloed mindsets and working together for effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral action — because we have no other choice.**

ly at risk, as land becomes less arable and oceans encroach.

Meanwhile, climate change is leading to shifts in the behavior, distribution, movement, range and intensity of mosquitoes, birds and other animals that are spreading infectious diseases such as dengue and malaria to new areas.

Since the turn of the century, the number of reported cases of dengue has increased eightfold, now affecting over 130 countries.

Illegal wildlife trading also increases the risk of zoonotic spillover that can trigger a pandemic, highlighting the importance of primary prevention to reduce risk.

The threats to health from climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss are not hypothetical risks in the future. They are right here and right now, which makes health the most compelling reason for climate action.

And yet, almost 30 years since the first UN Climate Change Conference, COP28 in Dubai last year was the first COP to include a day dedicated to health.

WHO estimates that pollution, waste and chemicals account for an estimated 14 million deaths a year, or about a quarter of the global disease burden.

The impacts are not equal. People in low- and middle-income countries bear the brunt of the health consequences, especially those in rapidly developing urban areas.

Around the world, the WHO is supporting countries to prepare for and respond to these threats, by making their health systems more climate-friendly and climate-resilient, and by providing the evidence to tools to address the health impacts of pollution, waste and chemicals.

But no single agency can do this alone. The causes of this crisis are multisectoral. So too

are its impacts, and so too must be the response. Collectively, we got ourselves into this mess. Collectively, we must get ourselves out of it.

That's why the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Organisation for Animal Health are working together in a group called the Quadripartite to support countries to take a "One Health" approach, recognizing that policies on human health, animal health, agriculture and the environment must be mutually informed, and mutually reinforcing.

At the recent United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, countries adopted important resolutions on air quality, chemicals and waste, sustainable lifestyles, hazardous pesticides, and water policy that are important for driving sustained, multisectoral action to protect the health of people and the planet.

They also committed to continue work on the negotiation of an international legally-binding instrument on plastic pollution.

One Health is likewise an important element of the legally-binding pandemic agreement that WHO's member states are now negotiating.

The patient is in peril. Band-Aid solutions will not do. At the national, regional and global levels, we need transformative action in energy and transport systems, food systems and health systems. And as UN agencies, we must do better at breaking out of our siloed mindsets and working together for effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral action — because we have no other choice.

On Christmas Eve 1967, less than four months before his assassination, Martin Luther King said, "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one destiny, affects all indirectly."

For everything that makes us different, we are one species, sharing the same DNA, and the same planet. We have no future but a common future.

*The author is WHO director-general. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

Qin Sheng

## Australia should adhere to independent China policy to bolster trade

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Zealand and Australia from Sunday to Thursday indicates an improvement in political mutual trust between China and the two countries, especially between China and Australia.

Sino-Australian relations have undergone several recalibrations in recent years since former Australian prime minister Scott Morrison took office in 2018. Due to the Morrison government's anti-China policy, Sino-Australian relations hit rock bottom, with bilateral economic and trade ties suffering a major setback. Bilateral relations took a turn for the better only after Anthony Albanese became Australian prime minister in 2022, particularly after the new government expressed its willingness to improve Sino-Australian relations and vowed to settle the trade issues through talks.

Over the past year, Australian officials, including the prime minister and the foreign minister, have engaged in pragmatic diplomacy, sticking to the principles of mutual respect and win-win cooperation, and respecting China's core interests. Such efforts eased the tensions and guided bilateral ties toward normalization, facilitating the resumption of economic and trade cooperation.

While bilateral trade is returning to normal, and Chinese investment in Australia has been gradually recovering, some trade issues remain to be resolved, including the issue of extra tariffs on Australian wine. But given the risks faced by the global supply chains and the world economy, the sooner the two sides resolve their disputes, the sooner people on the two sides will benefit.

Nevertheless, whether all the trade issues can be resolved depends mainly on Australia's attitude and actions. First, Canberra should treat Chinese enterprises' investment in Australia fairly. This is very important, because the United States has been using national security to view economic issues and has been strictly scrutinizing the activities of Chinese companies. And to counter China, the US has roped in the rest of the Western countries, including Australia, in its anti-China campaigns.

As a result, the normal business activities of Chinese enterprises in Australia, such as mergers and acquisitions, have faced excessive scrutiny in the name of national security, which has dampened the Chinese enterprises' enthusiasm to invest in Australia and impeded the development of Sino-Australian trade. As such, whether Australia can create a fair, transparent and predictable business environment and whether the legitimate interests of Chinese companies in Australia can be protected have become major concerns for the Chinese government.

Second, Australia needs to base its China policy on its own national interests, without allowing the US to hold Sino-Australian trade relations hostage, in order to fulfill its narrow political goals. Since China is Australia's largest trading partner, and the two countries have a highly complementary economic structure, deeper bilateral trade can bring more tangible benefits to the people on both sides. So despite being an ally of the US, Australia needs to distinguish between its own interests and those of the US. By confusing US-Australia alliance interests as its own national interests, Canberra stands to lose the

chance of benefitting from growing China-Australia trade and people-to-people exchanges.

And third, Australia should follow an independent foreign policy. The Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts have widened the rifts in the international community, giving rise to confrontations and triggering an arms race.

Only by deepening cooperation and avoiding confrontation can differences be resolved and misunderstandings cleared. The development of China-Australia relations over the past 50 years show countries benefit from win-win cooperation, not confrontation. In this regard, the negative effects of the Morrison government's anti-China policy should serve as a reminder to Australia that sticking to a stable China policy and strengthening trade relations are beneficial to Canberra.

**The two sides, for instance, can deepen cooperation in the fight against climate change, and secure new energy industry chains.**

Also, China-Australia economic and trade cooperation lags far behind that between China and New Zealand. For example, in 2016, China and New Zealand started talks on upgrading their free trade agreement and signed the Upgrade Protocol in 2021. The upgraded FTA not only promoted the liberalization of bilateral trade and investment but also bolstered the China-New Zealand comprehensive strategic partnership. And during Wang's visit to New Zealand, the two sides pledged to further deepen economic and trade cooperation.

On the other hand, Beijing and Canberra agreed to hold talks to upgrade their FTA in 2017, but the process was stalled due to the Morrison government's anti-China policy. With the emergence of new technologies and new industries, and the rapid growth of the digital economy, China and Australia need to take measures to unleash the full potential of their cooperation.

The two sides, for instance, can deepen cooperation in the fight against climate change, and secure new energy industry chains. Australia can also play a role in China joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, whose membership China has applied for.

Moreover, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership, thus this is the right time for the two sides to write a new chapter in bilateral relations. With geopolitical competitions, regional conflicts and lack of trust among countries intensifying, Wang's visit to Australia sends a message that Beijing and Canberra are willing to resolve their differences through talks and seek common ground to jointly contribute to regional peace and development.

*The author is a research fellow at the Center for Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

# GLOBAL VIEWS

ENDALKACHEW SIME

## Holistic development

Greater North-South cooperation would promote global growth and progress for the good of all humanity

During the past 50 years, many encouraging results were recorded in global development efforts spearheaded by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in areas such as poverty reduction, gender equality, renewable energy, under-5 mortality rate, reduction of school dropouts and the like. Nations committed to these global agendas have played a key role in these successes.



The current global economic and political architecture, dominated by the Western developed nations, is the result of the post-World War II and post-colonialization histories of nations and their interactions. After the middle of the 20th century, the newly independent developing countries of the Global South, started to come together to oppose the neocolonialism of the Western dominated global system. The concept of South-South Cooperation emerged and evolved. Having the principles of solidarity, mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty and non-interference as its core values, South-South Cooperation aims to promote the development of the Global South and contribute to the transformation of the world order toward a shared-interest growth at the global level.

The Global North represents economically developed nations, while the Global South includes developing and least developed countries. These terms are not strictly based on geographical location but rather on socioeconomic factors.

Global development efforts cannot bring about the desired results with the current North-South divided architecture.

Even though some positive results have been recorded, questions remain about the inclusiveness and participatory nature of global development endeavors.

It is high time for the Global North and the Global South to work together to maximize the dividend of global development endeavors. Global development that leaves no nation behind will only be materialized through the holistic and ownership-level

inclusive engagement of all parts of the world, North and South, West and East.

From the perspective of the Global South, the best thing global development can offer for developing nations is to help and facilitate their growth. Development through homegrown capacity is development that benefits the population today and in the future. South-South Cooperation is in principle, a homegrown initiative of the Global South countries to help each other in their development efforts through win-win cooperation. Encouraging and nurturing South-South Cooperation can potentially leverage global development by complementing the development of the Global North.

Global development has a long road of reform to live up to its name. One opportunity of its reform should be sharing the development aspiration of the growing South-South Cooperation in a global context. South-South Cooperation does not aspire to be an instrument of certain ideologies or the interests of certain groups. With its clear principles of solidarity, mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty and non-interference, which are valued assets of global development, it is up to all the global development stakeholders to correct and shape whatever is against these principles in the overall activities of South-South Cooperation.

Therefore, the development endeavors of the Global South should not be perceived as a competing force by the Global North, but a complementing partner for the common interest of global development. Then efforts under the name of global development will result in true global effects and benefits.

In the current reality, there are many frictions as well as misunderstandings between the Global North and the Global South. For example, some Western media have expressed concern about the geopolitical and economic implications of the recent membership expansion of BRICS, especially in challenging the Western dominance and leadership in global affairs. But the truth is partial dominance in leadership of global affairs has to be challenged empirically to exercise true global development that leaves no one behind.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

It is up to both parties to shape this reality toward the basic principles of collaborative global development. Moreover, this needs genuine and persistent efforts by both sides. Persistence is the key word here. Because just as the competition, we observe today between the Global South and the Global North took a long time to grow, the solution of forging a complementary partnership between the two requires consistent and sustained hard work in order to see results.

To sum up, till now, the current global development architecture has delivered what it can with the polarized dominance of the Global North. It is up to us to reform

and raise its concepts and practices to a higher level to foster better global development efforts. As the Global North and the Global South work jointly to reform the inclusiveness of global development, it is wise to view South-South Cooperation as an opportunity rather than a threat. The Global North should take it as an opportunity to maximize the equitable and inclusive dividends of global development from which it too will benefit. Ensuring that South-South Cooperation lives up to its promises and principles and is not used as a tool of ideology impositions and group interests should be seen as an integral part of its maturing process and something that

needs the engagement of all stakeholders. A culture of open and honest dialogue on the details of South-South Cooperation in global development can help guarantee that global development lives up to that descriptor.

*The author is a PhD student at Peking University, ex-state minister of planning and development of Ethiopia and ex-secretary general of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations. 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.*

ZOU ZHIBO

## Collective advance

Developing countries were left behind in the first three industrial revolutions, but the fourth one gives them a chance to rapidly catch up

The rise of the Global South in recent years is attracting widespread attention, but the world has not agreed on its positioning. The unity of Global South countries is being challenged, as the West is constantly trying to divide the group.

To understand the Global South, it is necessary to enunciate its identity, aspirations, and interests.



Global South countries share a history of being invaded and colonized. Today their development and modernization are facing obstacles from the stronger powers. This shared identity is not only prerequisite for clarifying the origin and destination of the Global South, but also why the Global South countries should wake up to the reality of profound changes and unite to help each other.

Global South countries now have a growing awareness of seeking reparations for their tragic history and pursuing international justice. During a summit in Ghana in November 2023, the African Union and the Caribbean Community released a proclamation urging Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Spain to formally apologize and pay for historic mass crimes such as colonial atrocities and the slave trade. They also announced they would explore "litigation options" and establish a "global reparations fund" to accelerate the campaign.

Global South countries have always shared the same aspirations. During the colonial period, they sought an end to imperialism and colonialism. After World War II, especially during the Cold War, they were unanimously against hegemony, dominance and interference, and sought the defense of national sovereignty and independence. Today, they object to bullying, sanctions and double standards, and seek democratic international relations.

As their economies and strengths grow, Global South countries are becoming an

important and increasingly independent political force to defend their own rights and promote international fairness and justice.

In the Ukraine crisis, despite strong pressure from the United States and its Western allies, the Global South did not succumb to Western sanctions against Russia on multilateral platforms such as the United Nations, evidence of their growing independence and capabilities.

Global South countries share common interests. In international politics, strength determines power. The 21st century has offered developing countries opportunities for collective advancement. The Global South should leverage its growing strengths to push for a fairer and more equitable international order.

Under the right to development, every nation is entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in political, economic, social and cultural development and to fairly enjoy the benefits of development. However, developing countries have long been constrained or even deprived of this right, resulting in a huge development gap between the North and the South.

In the new world order, developing countries need to uphold their legitimate development interests in major issues such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, climate change and global governance.

The Global South should strengthen its political self-reliance. Today, Global South countries are unwilling to succumb to pressure from the West, led by the US, and are pursuing independence and autonomy.

The Global South should be more proactive: it should voice its own opinions on international affairs and major global issues; it should enhance its influence in the reform of the UN and the three major international economic and financial institutions, advocating for a fairer and more equitable international order; it should autonomously establish multilateral organizations to increase its initiative and inject new energy into global governance.

However, the Global South is challenged by internal unity issues and external dividing forces.

With continuous efforts to divide the group, the US and its Western allies have stepped up their political and diplomatic investment in the Global South, launching

infrastructure and aid projects, and attempt to separate China from the group. What they are planning is not to help the Global South countries, but rather to contain China's development and curtail the cohesion and influence of the Global South.

Unfortunately, to serve their self-interests and geopolitical schemes, some Global South countries have taken exclusionary measures at the expense of the unity of the group and have received support from Western countries.

In this era of unprecedented changes, Global South countries, especially the major ones, should have a sense of community of shared future. They should uphold the unity of the group and work together to promote its growth, so that the Global South will become a defender of the interests of developing countries, an advocate of a new fairer international order, and a supporter of the development of developing countries.

Western countries have dominated the first three industrial revolutions and left developing countries to play a passive role, but the fourth industrial revolution presents an opportunity for developing countries to rapidly catch up. China, for example, is now leading the world in new energy vehicle technology and renewable energy.

As the world undergoes an energy and economic transition to address climate change, developing countries should seize the opportunity to upgrade their economies and rapidly narrow the gap with Western countries. The Global South should work together to achieve breakthrough development and common prosperity.

*The author is deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a committee member of the National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

## SCIENCE

Chloroplasts are the essential components of plant cells responsible for photosynthesis, a process that plays a crucial role in producing oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide and which is thus vital to the Earth's ecosystems and atmosphere.

Additionally, chloroplasts are central to the food chain, serving as the primary producers of organic matter upon which nearly every other organism depends, directly or indirectly.

During chloroplast biogenesis, an important enzyme, known as plastid (membrane-bound organelle) encoded RNA polymerase (PEP), plays an essential role in controlling the development of chloroplasts and also of gene expression in mature chloroplasts.

However, the structure of PEP, essentially the chloroplast's gene transcription machinery, had remained elusive, posing a globally recognized challenge to the scientific community, until Chinese scientists recently revealed its workings.

Two Chinese teams detailed PEP's extremely complex structure in a cover article for the international academic journal *Cell*.

On Earth, life exists in three forms: bacteria, archaea (single-celled organisms), and eukaryotes (any cell or organism with a nucleus and organelles), each of which has its own different genetic transcription machinery, says Zhang Yu, the researcher who led the team from the Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Transcription is a method of reading genetic information, which is written in DNA and must first be transcribed into RNA before it can be translated into the proteins that ultimately give rise to life functions, Zhang explains.

Chloroplasts are the sites of photosynthesis in plants. Approximately 1.5 billion years ago, primitive eukaryotic cells engulfed cyanobacteria — also known as blue-green algae — and evolved into eukaryotic single-celled algae, before eventually evolving into higher plants. As the transcription machinery for chloroplast DNA, chloroplast PEP is responsible for the development and functioning of chloroplasts.

"The lengthy process of evolution made the structure of chloroplast PEP exceedingly complex, and largely unknown," Zhang says. "The successful deciphering of the chloroplast PEP structure fills in the final blank in this puzzle."

One tricky part the researchers had to overcome was separating and purifying endogenous PEP complexes with transcriptional activity, because they appear in extremely low amounts, says Zhou Fei, associate professor at the Huazhong Agricultural University, the other team on the research.

"Traditional methods are difficult to use for extraction and purification, which made it impossible to further analyze the structure," Zhou explains.

To deal with this issue, the research team used chloroplast transformation technology, which allows for site-specific insertion of DNA fragments through homologous recombination, a type of genetic recombination in which nucleotide sequences are exchanged between two similar or identical molecules of DNA.

This enabled the researchers to obtain a peptide or protein fused and expressed together with the target protein, with a very small molecular weight, for the detection and purification of the target protein.

"To put it more simply, we can add a DNA sequence as a tag to the gene sequence of PEP. Then, through purification, we can 'pull' PEP out from the complex components, obtaining the chloroplast gene transcription



**Above:** Chinese scientists have revealed the extremely complex structure of PEP, which plays an essential role in controlling the development of chloroplasts and gene expression in mature chloroplasts, getting them a cover article for the international academic journal *Cell*. **Left:** An illustration of the evolution of a chloroplast. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

protein complex," Zhang explains.

After obtaining chloroplast-transformed plants with tags, it was necessary to establish a stable purification process.

"A single cell can contain thousands of different proteins, which may further form large protein complexes, some of which are abundant, while others are present in low amounts. In order to study a specific protein or protein complex, it must first be separated and purified from other proteins and nonprotein molecules," Zhou explains.

She adds that in this study, purification was achieved through multiple steps, including through exchange and molecular-exclusion chromatography, an isolation method that creates a kind of filter out of beads with tiny "tunnels" in them. Molecules above a certain molecular weight will not fit into the tunnels and pass through the filter relatively quickly by making their way between the beads. Smaller molecules take a longer path and pass through more slowly.

This method allows for the separation of molecules by size, ultimately yielding an extremely pure

PEP mega-complex with transcriptional catalytic activity. Zhou likens the process to fishing for a particular type of fish from the ocean.

"We need to identify the specific type of 'fish' (using the tagged proteins), and then use specific tools to attract them," Zhou says.

Molecular-exclusion chromatography can be imagined as using a fishing net with a specific-sized mesh to catch the fish, she adds.

It wasn't until 2022 that the bottleneck in obtaining PEP proteins was finally overcome, according to Wu Xiaoxian, the first author of the

study, who is attached to the Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences.

Afterward, single-particle cryo-electron microscopy (cryo-EM) technology was used. This involves rapidly freezing large biological molecules and imaging identical structurally homogeneous and dispersed particle samples at low temperatures using transmission electron microscopy. Through subsequent image processing and reconstruction calculations, a three-dimensional structure of the sample is obtained.

"Its role is analogous to a tool for analyzing the 3D structure of the chloroplast gene transcription machinery and for understanding its architecture," Wu says.

It turns out the PEP-centered transcription apparatus comprises a bacterial-origin PEP core and more than a dozen eukaryotic-origin PEP-associated proteins (PAPs) encoded in its nucleus.

"Here, we determined the cryo-EM structures of a *Nicotiana tabacum* (tobacco) PEP-PAP apoenzyme (the protein part of an enzyme) and PEP-PAP transcription elongation complexes at near-atomic resolution," Zhou says.

The data show the PEP core adopts the typical fold of bacterial RNA polymerase. Fifteen PAPs bind at the periphery of the PEP core, which the experts say facilitates the assembling of the PEP-PAP super-complex, protecting it from oxidation damage, and likely coupling gene transcription with RNA processing.

"Our results report the high-resolution architecture of the chloroplast transcription apparatus and provide the structural basis for the mechanistic and functional study of transcription regulation in chloroplasts," Zhou says.

The elucidation of the structure and function of PEPs has lagged behind other polymerase complexes, partly because of the greater technical challenges of isolating transcriptionally active protein complexes from plants compared to other systems, according to F. Vanessa Loiacono and Ralph Bock, two experts from Germany's Max Planck Institute of Molecular Plant Physiology.

"Moreover, PEP is significantly larger than bacterial RNA polymerases due to the addition of numerous plant-specific proteins (PEP-associated proteins, PAPs) at the periphery of the catalytic core," they wrote in *Cell*.

They point out that for the first time, the high-resolution cryo-EM structures show the precise localization of all known PAPs within the transcribing complex, enabling the assignment of roles to these proteins in the transcription cycle, and finally resolving some of the long-standing uncertainties about the unusual features of chloroplast RNA polymerase.

They state that "the studies represent a significant breakthrough in the field of organellar transcription."

At the fundamental research level, this study lays the groundwork for further exploration of the working mode of the chloroplast gene transcription machinery, and for understanding and redesigning the regulation of gene expression in chloroplasts, experts say.

In terms of the application of synthetic biology — a field of research in which the main objective is to create fully operational biological systems from the smallest constituent parts possible, including DNA, proteins, and other organic molecules — this research provides a starting point for improving the efficiency of plant chloroplast bioreactors, thereby facilitating the production of recombinant vaccines, recombinant protein drugs and natural products, Zhou says.

In terms of China's goals of reaching peak carbon emissions by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, the research provides new ideas for improving the gene expression levels of photosynthetic systems, helping plants become more efficient carbon sinks that accumulate and store carbon-containing chemical compounds, thereby removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, Zhou says.

Contact the writers at [yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn)

## Study examines behavior of human brain activity in space

How does the environment in space affect human brain function, and how does the brain adapt to it? Chinese scientists hope to find answers to these questions by using China's Tiangong space station, which is orbiting about 400 kilometers above Earth. As China's space station enters the application and development stage, one of the crew's main tasks is to carry out scientific experiments. Among them is the in-orbit electroencephalogram (EEG) test, which focuses on the operation of the human brain in space.

According to Wang Bo, a researcher from the China Astronaut Research and Training Center, an in-orbit EEG test platform has recently

been established. As a safe, reliable, portable and easy-to-use platform, it can be used to carry out all kinds of EEG research experiments.

"Starting from the Shenzhou XI mission, we carried out the first EEG experiments and verified the applicability of brain-computer interaction technology in orbit using robots," says Wang. "We then carried out dozens of in-orbit EEG tests, built a platform, developed several research paradigms and realized some model tests."

In collaboration with several batches of astronauts, researchers from the China Astronaut Research and Training Center have developed a series of standard procedures for

EEG testing through ground screening and in-orbit validation.

According to Wang, there are three research objectives. "We hope to learn what kind of effect the environment in space has on the human brain, how the brain adapts to the environment and remodels its nerves and, finally, we want to develop or validate some brain enhancement techniques."

He adds that in the long run, the in-orbit EEG test could explore the mysteries of brain evolution and provide new ideas for the development of "brain-like intelligence".

Some breakthroughs have already been made. For example, the research team has developed a

brain load classification model of multiple dimensions that integrates physiological, performance and behavioral data, improving the classification accuracy. The team has also made some achievements in modeling data on brain fatigue, brain load and alertness.

In addition to academic research, EEG testing in a space station also supports the crew's long-term stay in space, helping them maintain a good state of brain function and carry out their work efficiently.

Astronauts perform many complex and delicate operations in space, so it is important to maintain good brain function, Wang explains. "We expect to enhance this ability

through brain stimulation and other technologies, in order to maximize the roles of people in space."

Cao Yong, a researcher from the China Astronaut Research and Training Center says that at first, the astronauts are guided into a resting state, where we collect data from a relatively smooth period that serves as a baseline.

"Then, after resting, the astronauts will carry out a series of operations, generating new response data. We will combine the EEG data to comprehensively determine the astronauts' brain load status."

In order to find better ways to enhance the astronauts' brain function, the researchers have done a

great deal of work in the design of the experimental process, acquisition hardware, and analysis algorithms, Cao says. Furthermore, brain-computer interaction is a hot topic on the frontier of science and technology.

This technology will transform human thinking into an operation instruction, which is beneficial for multithreaded and remote operations, Wang says.

It is expected to be applied in some complex extravehicular activities, as well as human-machine cooperation, to ultimately improve the overall efficiency of the crew and the station's operation, he adds.

XINHUA

# LIFE

There was still a slight chill in the air in Beijing in early spring. On the day of her interview with China Daily, He Saifei had a cold, so she wrapped herself in a black down jacket, her voice carrying the hint of nasal congestion. But the actress approached each question as seriously as she does her work.

In late 2021, He took on one of the most challenging roles of her life, portraying a former Yueju Opera star in the art-house movie, *Off the Stage*. The opera is originated in Zhejiang province during the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The character is obsessively focused on pursuing success to the neglect of her family, and is portrayed as a somewhat selfish mother.

Although she initially hesitated to accept the role due to the stark contrast in personality, He eventually found a connection to the character as she listened to the songs of the late *pingtan* (Suzhou ballad) musician Xu Lixian, who, like her character in the movie, died of cancer.

"I have been studying *pingtan* for over two years. It's hard to describe the moment I suddenly grasped my character, but it was the passion and dedication in Xu's voice that helped me understand the enthusiasm of a traditional opera actress for the art," says He.

Born in Zhoushan in Zhejiang province in 1963, He was recruited by a local troupe in 1982 before rising to fame in the popular Yueju Opera film *Five Daughters Celebrating a Grand Birthday* in 1984. Since then, she has performed on opera stages and in dozens of movies and TV dramas, and became well-known for acting in a series of blockbusters, including Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007).

*Off the Stage*, He's first lead role in a feature-length movie in the last decade, won the Best Actress award at the 36th Golden Rooster Awards last November.

For her vivid portrayal, He — who was 58 years old at the time of the shoot — overcame a number of challenges, from wearing a *qipao* dress and walking barefoot across a beach in the winter, to holding ice in her mouth as she delivered lines to prevent her breath from steaming. "As an actor, I believe these are the least things that we should complain about. This is normal in the film industry, and I think I should treat every role seriously," she says.

The film is 123 minutes in length and also stars Yuan Wenkang and Lou Yujian as her character's eldest and second sons, and was given its domestic release on March 8, International Women's Day.

It is adapted from Ai Wei's *Guo Wang* (Past), one of five winners of the Best Novella Award at the 8th Lu Xun Literature Prize — one of China's top honors for literature — in 2022.

Set in a small southern city, the story revolves around Ms Qi, a former Yueju Opera actress, who returns home after being diagnosed with advanced-stage cancer. Her eldest son, a successful businessman, refuses to reconcile with his long-estranged mother because she left her family to pursue stardom in the provincial capital when they were young.

During a particularly hard time, his youngest sister becomes pregnant after an affair with a married man. Qi remains indifferent to her daughter's fate, even after her eldest son rides a bicycle to her home in



He Saifei's role won her a Golden Rooster and forced her to find a way to connect to a character unlike any she'd played before. **Xu Fan** reports.

the city to ask her for help. In frustration, the son ends up severely beating the married man, earning himself a six-year prison sentence and causing his sister to suffer a mental collapse.

The gentle second son, who is a Yueju Opera actor in a local troupe, is the first to accept their mother, and despite her scheme to steal his girlfriend's debut, her mesmerizing performance wins over them all. In a final act of sacrifice to save her eldest son, Qi succeeds in killing the hitman who's hired to murder the son, upon knowing her own late-stage cancer diagnosis. Thus she reconciles with all her children.

Director Qiao Liang, a professor at the Beijing Film Academy, says that the academy's president recommended he read Ai Wei's novel in early 2021, and that he was quickly hooked up by the unlikely protagonist.

Saying that the role reminded him of independent female figures like Nora Helmer in Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Qiao says he believes Qi represents the dilemma of contemporary women after liberation — even in modern society, women are still scrutinized from a male perspective.

A native of Jilin province, Qiao spent most of his childhood time backstage of the Jilin Opera troupe to which his father belonged.

"I refused to go to kindergarten, so my father took me to the troupe when he was working. There were other children there whose parents were also in the troupe. Because the adults were busy with their own work, we entertained ourselves by putting on wigs for fun and using prop swords as toys," he recalls.

"I still remember my father searching everywhere for me and finally finding me asleep in a large wooden trunk, which I had turned into a makeshift bed because I was too tired after playing," he adds, with a smile.



Under the direction of Qiao Liang (above), the art-house film *Off the Stage* has earned He Saifei (in scenes from the movie and poster) the best actress award at the 36th Golden Rooster Awards. It features her as a former Yueju Opera star who yearns to reconcile with her long-estranged son, portrayed by actor Yuan Wenkang (the left one top above). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I feel this moment is magical, and this is what I wanted to express in the movie."

Qiao Liang, director of *Off the Stage*

Life backstage left a deep impression on Qiao's childhood memories. He was captivated by its drama and by the ordinary "aunties and uncles" who ate with them casually in the canteen, but once in makeup and onstage, transformed into great heroes, emperors, and nobles, shining brightly and beyond reach.

"I feel this moment is magical, and this is what I wanted to express in the movie," the director says.

In an attempt to capture the nuances of Yueju Opera, the film was entirely spoken in the dialect of the provincial capital, Hangzhou. Principal scenes were filmed in Shaoxing and Shengzhou in Zhejiang, with the seaside scenes shot in Fujian province.

Late last December, Qiao organized a personal film exhibition in Seoul, where he screened *Off the Stage* and *Crested Ibis*, a film about a Chinese journalist's investigation into air pollution, that drew the attention of South Korean industry insiders.

"It was my first time in front of a foreign audience in person since the pandemic. I was delighted by the strong interest shown by the South Korean viewers in the films. A few even recognized that *Off the Stage* is spoken in dialect. I was proud to promote Chinese culture and traditional art overseas," Qiao recalls.

Contact the writer at [xufan@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:xufan@chinadaily.com.cn)

ANKARA — "When we think of the Silk Road, the first thing that pops into people's minds is trade. However, trade isn't limited to goods, it encompasses culture," says Berkant Demir, a young puppeteer at the Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum in the Turkish capital Ankara.

Demir, who is a practitioner of Turkey's traditional shadow puppetry tradition Karagoz, highlighted how cultural exchange along the Silk Road over the centuries forged strong connections between peoples and nations, notably between the Chinese and the Turkish people.

Taking the Turkish art that was recorded by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 as an example, some historians trace the origins of Karagoz back to Central Asia, who drew inspiration from Chinese shadow puppetry, a form of cultural heritage that is well-preserved in China to this day.

"Shadow puppetry exists in most of the countries on the ancient Silk

## Turkish shadow play has ties to Silk Road

Road," Demir says in a recent interview.

Preserved in Ankara's Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, the art form stands as a testament to Turkey's commitment to preserving its folklore, artistic practices, and storytelling traditions.

Demir explains that shadow puppetry is a dramatic form of storytelling, in which silhouettes made of animal leather are projected onto a white screen. Multitasking performers sing the tunes and words of the story, while the lead puppeteer manipulates the movement of the puppets and the light sources behind the screen.

"Karagoz is a slightly more primitive version of television and cinema. There is a light in the background and moving pictures on the screen. ... Karagoz was the starting point of cinema," Ibrahim



Children play with the shadow puppets in a classroom in Guang'an, Sichuan province, in late February. ZHANG QIFU / XINHUA

Oztahtali, a scholar from Turkey's Bursa Uludag University, told *Hurriyet Daily News* in January.

Karagoz is derived from the name of one of the two leads, a character who is known for being lower class and for having coarse manners. His protagonist is Hacivat, a refined and educated person who engages in lively debates with Karagoz. According to legend, the characters were real individuals, but there is no historical record to prove this is true.

The plays, initially staged by nomadic people in Central Asia in their tents, found its place in Ottoman theater about 700 years ago in Bursa, a city located in northwestern Turkey that was the seat of the Ottoman Empire in the early 14th century, and where shadow puppetry first rose to popularity in the 16th century, says Oztahtali.

With performances inspired by social events, daily life, political affairs, and romantic tales, Karagoz not only sheds light on the political and social events of the time but also reflects public criticism, says Demir, adding that the tradition's primary objective was to educate people via entertainment.

"Historically, Karagoz performances were not only epic, but also served as an educational tool for people of all classes," he says.

In the past, peak performance season coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan as fasting people needed entertainment until dinner-time. Nowadays, shadow puppetry performances can be enjoyed throughout the year, he says.

Demir attributes the tradition's enduring popularity in modern Turkey to people's sense of nostalgia.

"As societies progress, there is often a tendency to reconnect with the past," he says.

XINHUA

# LIFE

**W**u Weishan, director of the National Art Museum of China, vividly remembers a trip to his ancestral home, Shiyan town in Dongtai, Jiangsu province, back in 1972. He saw Gao Ershi, a distant uncle of his father, and a calligrapher and scholar, walking alone on the street.

"He was dressed in a Zhongshan suit (Chinese tunic suit), and holding a stick while he walked," he recalls. "His scholarly charisma impressed me a lot. He looked so much like a man of wisdom and virtue from ancient times, like those portrayed in classic poems and paintings."

Wu says that, in his early teens, he often heard from his father about the amount of effort Gao had invested in calligraphy and the study of Chinese classics, and years afterward, he saw a lot of Gao's calligraphic works, which showed an integrated accumulation of literature and classic art.

"He was such an extraordinary man," Wu says.

Today, Gao is highly regarded as an outstanding scholar, poet and calligrapher of the 20th century. In his lifetime, he mostly lived in his native Jiangsu province, and his accomplishments were known largely among cultural circles. In recent years, however, his reputation has spread to the wider public, thanks to donated works and their display in art museums, inspiring research into his life and legacy.

One latest example is an exhibition of Gao's calligraphy at the Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy. Running until Sunday, *A Trace of Lanting* brings together dozens of Gao's calligraphy works, as well as some by esteemed scholars and calligraphers in his close circle. There are also selected examples from the oeuvre of contemporary calligraphers in Jiangsu, which show Gao's long-standing influence.

The exhibition has been touring across China since it was initiated last year to mark the 120th anniversary of Gao's birth. It was first shown at Zhejiang Art Museum, in the provincial capital Hangzhou, and then Zhengzhou Museum of Art, in Henan province, which in total received some 200,000 visitors. It will travel back to Jiangsu — to Suzhou Art Museum — after the Beijing show.

Works on display are from the collections of public institutions and private collectors. It shows the enduring vigor of calligraphy as an important part of Chinese civilization, Wu says, linking the past and present. He adds that it also demonstrates the precious spiritual legacy Gao left to the world through his inheritance of various Chinese calligraphic



## A BRUSH with GREATNESS

Calligraphy exhibition pays tribute to 20th-century sage of integrity and virtue, **Lin Qi** reports.

ic scripts and efforts to reform the art and point out a direction for its future.

Gao was particularly renowned for ushering *caoshu*, the cursive script, into a new realm through his own innovative approach. He is hailed in calligraphy circles as a "modern *caoshu* sage", partly owing to his mastery of the unique *zhangcao* style, a preliminary form of the cursive *caoshu* script, but blending the strokes of the clerical *lishu* script.

Wu Hongliang, director of Beijing Fine Art Academy, says Gao's calligraphy is grounded in his masterful command of the solemnity of *zhangcao* script, but, meanwhile, is imbued with the reckless temperament of the writings of father and son Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, the celebrated fourth-century calligraphers. Gao's long-term commitment to the studies of these ancient masters allowed him to create an even more artistic, highly expressive style of his own in the later stages of his life.

Gao (Ershi) lived up to the fulfillment of art, and led a life of distinction and integrity."

**Lin Sanzhi**, master calligrapher

Gao is also respected for his rigorous approach toward academic study. A famed example is his avid involvement in an academic discussion in the 1960s pertaining to *Lanting Xu* (Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion), a great piece by Wang Xizhi. Gao showed critical thinking, intensive learning and self-confidence, even when he had opposing views to experts in the field that were senior to him.

Gao fulfilled his commitment to carrying on the cultural lineage through cultivating a younger generation of scholar-calligraphers. He would invite students to his home, and give lectures on Chinese classic texts and art.

In 1987, an exhibition of Gao's work, in memory of the 10th anniversary of his passing, was held at Jiangsu Art Museum, in the provincial capital Nanjing, where Gao lived for decades. Lin Sanzhi, master calligrapher and a close friend of Gao, visited the show and, afterward, the 89-year-old wrote that, "Gao lived up to the fulfillment of art, and led a life of distinction and integrity."

Contact the writer at [linqi@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:linqi@chinadaily.com.cn)



**Top:** A *Comment on Lu Yanshao's Landscape Painting*, a calligraphy work on a fan by Gao Ershi. **Above and left:** A calligraphy exhibition at the Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy celebrates calligraphy master Gao. **Far left:** A couplet by Gao. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# NPC deputy proposes more support for grassroots museums

By **WANG RU** in Beijing and **LI YINGQING** in Kunming

Grassroots museums should be given more support to improve their scientific research functionality and cultivation of staff, according to Guo Jin, a deputy to the National People's Congress of the second session of the 14th NPC.

Guo, who is also deputy director of the Chengjiang Fossil Site Natural History Museum in Yuxi, Yunnan province, has been engaged in paleontology, especially the fossils found at Chengjiang, for nearly two decades. The site presents a complete record of an early Cambrian marine community. He participated in the application of the Chengjiang Fossil Site to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012, and the whole process of establishing the museum there.

He notes that the museum has upgraded from a place solely collecting and displaying artifacts to somewhere people can receive education. Such a transition, he says, requires an improvement in the museum's research and science popularization functionality.

As a result, last year he proposed the improvement of science popularization functionality in grassroots

museums and, at this year's two sessions, proposed enhancements to their research functionality.

"Research is the source of a museum's dynamism. Without updated knowledge, a museum cannot design good exhibitions to attract visitors," says Guo.

He adds that demand for museums has changed over the years. "In the past, many people only visited museums to have fun, but now, they attend in order to learn something new. That requires better research to generate new knowledge for them to learn," says Guo.

"To be successful in such an endeavor, it is also important to cultivate talented people, he says.

"It's very difficult for a grassroots museum to attract talent," says Guo. "The aggregation of talent is just like an inverted triangle. The higher-level museums can easily attract the best people since they offer more funding and other resources for scientific research, but at the grassroots level, it is much less appealing.

"As a result, I believe grassroots museums should look to cultivate the people they already have, and provide better conditions for their growth," he says.

Right now, due to the limited con-



**Left:** Guo Jin, deputy director of the Chengjiang Fossil Site Natural History Museum in Yuxi, Yunnan province, examines a fossil at the museum. **Right:** Guo, who is also a deputy to the National People's Congress, at the second session of the 14th NPC in Beijing this month. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ditions at grassroots level museums, few people have the capacity or conditions to perform good research. "But, this year's Government Work Report mentions the need to develop a systematic protection of cultural relics, and that can only be achieved through systematic studies. This is what lower-level museums fail to complete," says Guo.

As a geology major at Kunming University of Science and Technology, Guo was attracted to Chengjiang fossils at a paleontological geology lesson in 2006. He was keen to learn about the fossils, which are the traces of one of the earliest groups of living beings in the world.

After graduation, he was recruited by the administrative committee of Chengjiang Fossil Site nature reserve to be engaged with protec-

tion and management of the site. At the same time, he was admitted to Yunnan University as a postgraduate student to learn more about Chengjiang fossils from his tutor Hou Xiangguang, a researcher who discovered the fossil group in 1984.

In 2014, when the Chengjiang Fossil Site Natural History Museum was being planned, Guo participated in the whole process from fund collec-

tion, appearance and exhibition design to artifact collection and the museum's operation.

Guo says his ideas pertaining to grassroots museums were formed during this process.

When the museum was officially opened in 2020, despite being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it still attracted 2 million visits. "It has played an important role in the education of primary and middle school students. Many schools have organized extracurricular activities at our museum, which have been welcomed by the students," says Guo.

He also mentions that, as well as cultural heritage-themed museums, which enjoyed a huge spike in interest in the past few years, nature-themed museums are also very popular. "Several years ago, culture-themed museums were distributed in an uneven way, mostly in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai and coastal areas. But, in recent years, they have been built in less-developed cities and gained huge popularity among the wider public," says Guo.

Contact the writers at [wangru@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:wangru@chinadaily.com.cn)