

Competitive 'aunties'

Women's basketball tournament draws villagers, tourists in Guizhou

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Capital market set for sound development

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Emergency response

Over 4,000 Russians evacuated after dam bursts in Orenburg

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# CHINA DAILY

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Premier Li Qiang shakes hands with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Sunday. Yellen began high-level talks in Beijing that will take place over two days. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

## Stable Sino-US trade ties urged

Premier Li says stronger cooperation will boost both nations' development, global growth

By CAO DESHENG, LIU ZHIHUA and ZHONG NAN

Premier Li Qiang underlined on Sunday, during a meeting with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in Beijing, the need for China and the United States to work as partners instead of rivals, and he urged Washington to "objectively" view China's production capacity.

It is hoped that the US will abide by the basic norms of market economy, including fair competition and open cooperation, and refrain from turning economic and trade issues into political or security issues, Li said.

Regarding the so-called "overcapacity" concerns of Washington, the premier said the US should view the issue of production capacity objectively from a market-oriented and

global perspective. The development of China's new energy sector will make significant contributions to the global green and low-carbon transition, he added.

Noting that China and the US, as the world's two largest economies, have deeply converging economic interests, Li said that strengthening bilateral economic and trade cooperation is of great significance for their respective development and also for global economic growth.

Both sides should enhance communication to find ways to manage and resolve differences, and to make China-US economic and trade cooperation stable, smooth and efficient, Li said.

The premier also said that China is willing to strengthen policy coordination with the US in addressing climate change and jointly tackle

global challenges.

Yellen arrived in China on Thursday, with her first stop being Guangzhou, Guangdong province, where she met with Vice-Premier He Lifeng. Both exchanged views on the macroeconomic situations of the two countries and the world, as well as China-US economic relations and global challenges.

Yellen's China visit comes following a phone conversation between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden on Tuesday, when both sides agreed to strengthen dialogue, manage differences, promote cooperation and work toward the stable development of bilateral ties.

During Sunday's meeting with the Chinese premier, Yellen said that with the joint efforts of both sides, US-China relations have become

more stable.

The US commends the progress made in US-China economic dialogue and cooperation, and it does not seek decoupling from China, she said.

The US is willing to work with China to implement the common understanding reached between the leaders of the two countries during their meeting in San Francisco in November, and to engage in candid communication to avoid misunderstandings, Yellen added.

She also expressed the US' willingness to deepen exchanges and cooperation with China, properly manage their differences, jointly address pressing global challenges and promote stable development of bilateral ties.

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## Domestic tourism market gets big boost from three-day holiday

By CHENG SI chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

The just-concluded Tomb Sweeping Day holiday proved to be a boon for the tourism industry in the country, with both the number of travelers and tourism revenue soaring as people made the most of the short break.

Figures from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on Saturday showed that domestic destinations witnessed about 119 million visits during the three-day holiday, which started on Thursday, the Tomb Sweeping Day, up 11.5 percent compared with 2019. There was only one day off for the occasion last year, and it resulted in 23.77 million domestic visits.

The travel boom during the holiday generated revenue of about 54 billion yuan (\$7.47 billion), up 12.7 percent compared with 2019, the ministry said.

Reports and figures from travel agencies and local government departments also paint a positive picture. Travel portal Trip.com Group said that over the holiday, bookings for short-distance tours to destinations within cities customers live in grew 211 percent year-on-year, and bookings to neighboring destinations located outside the cities they live in skyrocketed 350 percent year-on-year.

The top attractions among users of the travel portal were places well known for flower blossoms at this time of the year. Ticket bookings for such attractions surged 391 percent year-on-year.

Luoyang, a city famous for peony flowers in Central China's Henan province, Nyingchi in the Xizang autonomous region with its peach blossom-covered mountains and Nanjing with plum blossoms in the eastern province of Jiangsu, were among the popular destinations for nature lovers during the holiday.

“People have shown a strong desire to travel this holiday, and the tourism market is in continuous recovery.”

Qi Chunguang, vice-president of online travel agency Tuniu

**\$7.47 billion**

Revenue generated during the three-day Tomb Sweeping Day holiday, a rise of 12.7 percent over 2019

“People have shown a strong desire to travel this holiday, and the tourism market is in continuous recovery,” said Qi Chunguang, vice-president of online travel agency Tuniu.

He said the platform saw hotel bookings grow 68 percent year-on-year, and the number of self-driving travelers using Tuniu's services increased 61 percent year-on-year. “The results meet our expectations,” he added.

In addition to traditionally popular destinations such as Beijing and Shanghai, lesser-known places also saw huge tourist influx afters local food and unique folk activities found viral online fame.

Quanzhou, a city in the southeastern province of Fujian, welcomed a huge number of travelers attracted by its traditional “head-pinned flowers”. Qunar, an online travel agency, said that hotel bookings to Quanzhou grew 3.3-fold during the holiday.

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## Protesters rally in Israel



People protest on Saturday in Tel Aviv, Israel, against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and call for the release of Hamas-held hostages. JACK GUEZ / AFP See story, page 6

## Fruitful outcomes expected from high-level exchanges

There has been a notable increase in visits to China by European leaders and business figures recently.

French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stéphane Sejourne made a trip to China on April 1, Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte visited China on March 26 and 27, and Markus Soeder, minister-president of Bavaria, Germany, commenced his journey to China on March 23. These visits are expected to pave the way for more high-level politi-

WORLD WATCH By Zhang Lihua

cal and business delegations from Europe to China in the near future.

In recent years, Europe's view of China has become increasingly critical, prompting adjustments in its policy toward China. Some European politicians have called for a reduction in economic dependency on China and advocated for

“de-risking” from China. However, the recent flurry of visits suggests a shift toward a more rational stance on China by Europe, signaling a positive outlook for the future of China-Europe relations.

Currently, the global economy is facing headwinds, with a rise in economic nationalism and protectionism. There is an increase in politicized actions such as decoupling and “building walls and barriers”, with unilateralism and deglobalization trends prevailing. China and Europe maintain

their status as each other's second-largest trading partner, with their economic and trade relations characterized by strong complementarity. In Europe, there is a high demand for China's affordable daily consumer goods and light-industry products, while European agricultural products, specialty items and technological products find a welcoming market in China. This exchange not only enhances the quality of life for people on

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## RED SEA CRISIS HIGHLIGHTS VITAL ROLE OF CHINA-EUROPE RAIL FREIGHT

Interest in cross-border services increases due to concerns over shipping delays, costs

By LUO WANGSHU luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

in-depth

Freight forwarders have turned to rail services between China and Europe, backed by the Belt and Road Initiative, as a transportation alternative in light of disruption to international shipping caused by the Red Sea attacks, emphasizing the rail route's strategic importance in sta-

bilizing global supply chains. Houthis in Yemen have been attacking commercial ships “affiliated with and bound for Israel” since November in what they described as an act of solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Their actions have raised the risks for transportation companies moving cargo through one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, resulting in a surge in rates and lengthy delays.

Some smaller-volume goods have shifted to rail transportation, notably on the China-Europe railway line, where the capacity to transport goods from China to the continent has increased significantly from the pre-crisis level, according

to a recent report by Fitch Ratings. “Since January, the number of inquiries (about the China-Europe freight train service) has soared by more than tenfold, and the actual export volume of goods has increased by three to four times,” said Kong Weidong, head of the Zhengzhou branch of the T.H.I. Group (Shanghai) Ltd, a freight forwarder.

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## Rail: Lifeline for China-Europe trade



Gantry cranes hoist China-Europe freight train containers in Xilin Gol League in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Oct 18, 2023. YANG JINYE / FOR CHINA DAILY

From page 1

The cross-border rail freight service takes about 12 to 18 days to reach European destinations from Chinese cities at a cost of about \$6,500 per container, Kong said.

Kang Yingfeng, deputy general manager of China Railway International Multimodal Transportation, said there had been a significant increase in inquiries about the China-Europe freight train service since the beginning of this year. CRIMT is the national operator of the China-Europe freight train service and a subsidiary of China Railway Container Transport.

A new China-Europe freight route combining rail and ocean transportation that crosses the Caspian and Black seas has attracted strong interest, he said. The service also passes through countries such as Kazakhstan and Georgia before reaching European countries.

"Chinese, European, and American customers, as well as large international logistics companies such as DHL and Kuehne+Nagel, have shown strong interest in the new route passing the transcontinental maritime routes, attracting freight from China to Georgia, Turkey, and Central and Eastern Europe," he said.

DHL said requests to move goods on the rail service to Russia had increased by about 40 percent since container ships began diverting via a longer route in December, The Financial Times reported last month.

### Troubled waters

The Red Sea is an essential part of the ocean freight passage linking Europe and Asia. About 60 percent of Chinese trade with Europe transits through the Suez Canal, which involves passing through the Red Sea, according to the Fitch Ratings report. Shipping costs have increased by more than 150 percent since December, the global credit ratings firm reported in late February.

Freight forwarders have opted to detour around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, which adds 10 to 14 days to transportation times compared with the direct route through the Red Sea and Suez Canal. The detour takes the total shipping time from the Far East to Europe to about 60 days.

The crisis has also raised uncertainty about the length of shipping times.

Major ocean freight carriers have paused some or all transits through the Suez Canal and begun diverting ships away from the Red Sea, according to a recent report from Xeneta, a freight rate data platform. This has triggered nearly a month of shipping uncertainty and raised ocean freight shipping rates. With logistics company A.P. Moller Maersk recently announcing the extension of its pause on transits "for the foreseeable future", this uncertainty shows no

sign of slowing down, the report said.

The overall cost to the international supply chain has also been driven up by the Red Sea crisis, said Wang Yangkun, head of the Transport Technology Development Research Center at the National Development and Reform Commission's Institute of Comprehensive Transportation.

While the costs of international transportation, overseas warehousing, and supply chain management have all risen, other risks have been exacerbated by spillover effects, Wang said. "Inflation, exchange rates, insurance, settlements, and financing will also elevate the overall cost of the international supply chain," he said.

He Yun, an associate professor at Hunan University's School of Public Administration said the Red Sea crisis had led to significant disruptions in global supply chains.

"As much as 30 percent of global container trade transits through the Suez Canal, meaning the crisis is disrupting a significant portion of international commerce," she said.

"These shifts underscore the fragile nature of global supply

### New route of the China-Europe freight train



**17,000** freight trains were operated between China and Europe last year.

**1.9 million** containers were operated between China and Europe in 2023.

chains and the importance of alternative routes and modes of transportation, such as the China-Europe Railway Express."

### Reliable route

The importance of the China-Europe freight train service is gaining credence as a strategic alternative to facilitate the flow of goods between China and the continent.

Fu Cong, China's former ambassador to the European Union, called the freight service "a flag-

ship project of China-EU Belt and Road cooperation that has stood out as a land-based alternative that provides rapid, stable, and reliable solutions to the massive flow of goods between both sides" amid "the complex and turbulent geopolitical situation, especially since the outbreak of the Red Sea crisis".

He made the remarks in March in a signed article published on Euractiv, a European news website focused on EU policy issues. "It is

fair to say that the China-Europe Railway Express has become a lifeline for China-EU trade at this critical moment," he said.

The China-Europe freight train service began in 2011. As of February, it had operated more than 85,000 trips connecting 120 Chinese cities with 219 destinations in 25 European countries, according to China State Railway Group, the company that oversees the China-Europe freight train service.

Last year, about 17,000 China-Europe freight train services were operated, carrying 1.9 million containers.

In January and February, 2,928 freight trains operated between China and Europe, carrying 317,000 containers, a year-on-year increase of 9 and 10 percent, respectively, the latest data showed.

In addition to increased capacity, the quality of the service has been improved.

Kang, from China Railway International Multimodal Transportation, said the types of goods carried by the China-Europe freight train have expanded from 53 items when the service started to over 50,000 products today. "Many cities have

launched tailored services, such as an entire train carrying ketchup, timber, tea, edible oil and new energy vehicles," he said.

To improve service quality, trains have been running to set schedules since October 2022, Kang said. Unlike regular cargo carriers, the trains adhere to a set schedule along the entire route, further reducing transport time and also allowing customers to calculate journey times between cities, thus improving service quality.

So far, five scheduled services have been operated, which have reduced 30 percent of travel time compared with regular China-Europe freight train services.

The scheduled services arrive at destinations on time. For example, the service from Xi'an, Shaanxi province, to Duisburg in Germany takes 300 hours and seven minutes.

### Resilient service

Wang, from the NDRC, said the freight service emerged in response to the steady growth in trade between China and Europe, and it has shown its resilience amid the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis and other factors.

"It has grown into a vital component of the transcontinental transportation logistics corridor across Asia and Europe, and is also an indispensable part of the international transportation and logistics system," he said.

The China-Europe freight train service is economically advantageous to products with more added value, Wang said, adding that the service network covers vast areas and is continuing to grow.

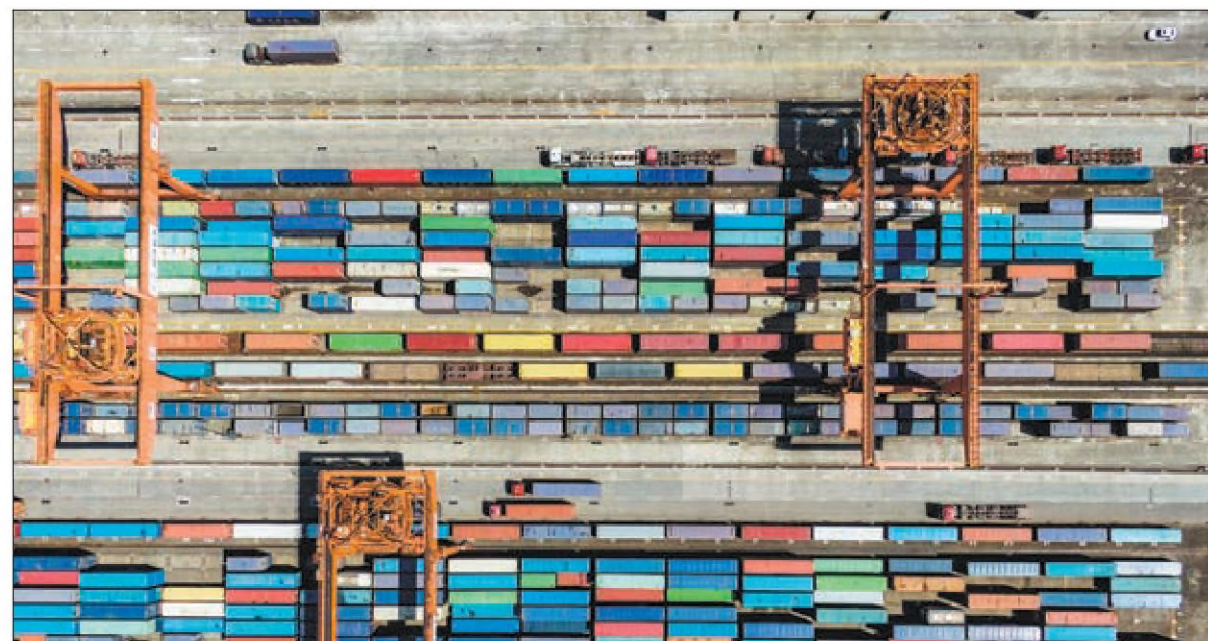
With monthly volume of about 150,000 containers, the service has a large transport and supplementary emergency capability, Wang said. "The geopolitical environment along the main route is generally safe and stable, and the diversification of routes is deepening, which can effectively meet certain emergency logistics needs," he said.

He, from Hunan University, said that in times of maritime disruptions like the one in the Red Sea, the China-Europe Railway Express is crucial in maintaining the flow of goods amid geopolitical tension and natural challenges.

"By providing a stable and reliable alternative, the rail service can help mitigate some of the supply chain instabilities caused by such maritime disruptions," she said.

Despite the growing recognition of the rail corridor's role, Wang said the transportation capacity of freight trains accounted for only a small portion of the entire international trade transportation market. Maritime shipping remains the dominant mode of such transportation, he said.

"In the short term, it (the railway service) can play a limited role in emergency supplementary support for maritime shipping, enhancing the resilience and security level of related industrial and supply chains," he said.



Clockwise from top left: A ship transits the Suez Canal toward the Red Sea on Jan 10 in Ismailia, Egypt. SAYED HASSAN/GETTY IMAGES A fully loaded China-Europe freight train departs from the Alashankou, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to Poland on Feb 21. The bustling railway container central station in Chongqing is seen on March 25. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS



Visitors watch a performance on Friday at the Hetou Old Street in Tangshan, Hebei province, which attracts travelers from all over the country during the Tomb Sweeping Day holiday every year. YANG BO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Efforts urged to uphold peace and stability

Nations in South China Sea region called upon to manage disputes amid tensions

By ZHOU JIN  
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Amid escalating tensions, countries in the South China Sea region share common ground, and an open conflict would serve no one's interests, according to observers, who called for more efforts to manage disputes and form a constructive regional order.

Scholars from countries in the region, including China, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam, said in a panel discussion on the South China Sea during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 that recent incidents between Beijing and Manila on China's Ren'ai Reef of the Nansha Islands have raised concerns that the situation in the South China Sea is moving from overall stability to unpredictable risks.

Wu Shicun, chairman of the Huayang Research Center for Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance and founding president of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said, "If the situation deteriorates further or gets out of control, the only victims would be the countries along the waters."

The Philippines and other countries in the South China Sea region should return to their commitments to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea by refraining from practices that would complicate the situation and intensify conflicts, Wu said.

Underlining that no country wants to see an all-out conflict in the South China Sea, Shafiah Muhibat, deputy executive director for research at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, said, "Increased tensions, more incidents and anything that may lead to an open conflict are definitely not in any party's interests."

Repeated calls for dialogues and



Increased tensions, more incidents and anything that may lead to an open conflict are definitely not in any party's interests."

**Shafiah Muhibat**, deputy executive director for research at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies

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consultation have shown that people in the region want peace and stability, Muhibat said.

Continuing with engagements and accelerating regional cooperation are indispensable, she added, calling on countries in the region to work on "existing opportunities and creating new ones" in order to deal with these challenges.

Maria Lourdes Tiquia, founder and CEO of PUBLICUS Asia, a think tank in the Philippines, said, "Let us calm the sea first. Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding."

Channels should be established for talks, Tiquia said, adding that the friendship from frequent talks could lead to solutions to the issues.

"The process becomes more important than the outcomes, as process is how we break the impasse," she said.

Regarding external forces' involvement, especially the United States' interference, in the South China Sea, Tiquia said that involvement by such parties may not necessarily be good for the region, and solutions should be left to those who are in the region.

## Tourism: Young people are main consumption driver

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"I was stunned by the online short videos of girls wearing well-arranged flowers on their heads. I told my boyfriend that I must try that and take pictures," said Yan Nan, a 27-year-old from Beijing, who traveled to Quanzhou on Wednesday, a day before the holiday began, and returned on Saturday.

Yan said she went to Xunpu vil-

lage, considered the birthplace of "head-pinned flowers", on Thursday afternoon, and it was crowded. "I booked the service online, which cost 40 yuan. The auntie was very nice and patient, and did the flower arrangement in about half an hour. It was a good experience and I will visit the place again in the near future but avoid the peak travel periods," she said.

Xiao Peng, a researcher from Qunar, said that young people,

who are the main drivers of tourism consumption, prefer diverse or unique traveling experiences. "An ancient street or a delicious cuisine may attract a large number of travelers to a place," he said.

The inbound and outbound tourism market also showed good performance over the holiday. According to the National Immigration Administration, the Chinese mainland saw about 5.19 million entries and exits, up 69.6

percent year-on-year.

Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu, said: "Thailand, Japan, the Maldives, Egypt and New Zealand were popular among our customers. Some tailored tour products to Southeast Asian destinations including Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand were also popular, especially among young people, age 25 to 35, as the three countries are visa-free for Chinese citizens."

## Ties: Mutual benefits key amid challenges

From page 1

both sides, but also forms the cornerstone of the relationship between the two sides.

In 2022, trade between China and the European Union reached \$847.3 billion, averaging \$2.3 billion per day. In 2023, the China-Europe Railway Express operated 17,000 trains, linking 219 cities across 25 European countries and driving economic development and the improvement of living standards along its routes.

Both China and Europe, as large and open economies, have significantly benefited from globalization. They recognize that their development hinges on a stable and open global economic environment. Thus, trends toward anti-globalization or deglobalization are counterproductive to their interests.

Together, China and the EU contribute one-third of global economic output. Their robust economic ties and mutually beneficial collaboration not only bring advantages to their peoples, but also set a model for global economic interactions. Committed to furthering its economic openness,

**Both China and Europe, as large and open economies, have significantly benefited from globalization. They recognize that their development hinges on a stable and open global economic environment.**

China continues to implement a series of major measures for high-level opening-up that are poised to generate new development opportunities for countries and regions worldwide, including the EU and its member states.

Although economic and trade relations between China and European countries face challenges, including trade deficits, barriers and friction, it is hoped that by adhering to the principles of mutual benefit, reciprocity and win-win cooperation, both sides can surmount these obstacles

and achieve shared development. There exists a profound desire for friendly exchanges between the peoples of China and Europe, alongside a significant complementarity in their trade relations. These factors serve as a fundamental driving force for navigating through the challenges in China-Europe relations.

China and Europe have certain divergences in the fields of politics, economy and ideology, because of their differences in history, culture, social systems and economic structures. But as long as both sides treat each other with mutual respect, set aside biases, find common ground while acknowledging differences, engage actively, and avoid third-party interference, they can pave the way for mutually beneficial and win-win collaboration that serves the interests of both parties.

The arguments advocating for the decoupling of China-Europe trade not only contradict the trends of economic globalization, but also fail to represent the true interests of the peoples of China and Europe. The rise in rational voices within Europe, as well as their increasing prominence, is a

positive development for Europe itself, for China-Europe relations, and for the global community.

China and Europe both have rich histories and profound cultural heritages. At the heart of both Chinese and Western cultures lie the ideals of peace and harmony, which hold significant value for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and friendly interactions between the peoples of China and Europe. It is essential for both sides to amplify positive dynamics, mitigate negative ones, and enhance official as well as people-to-people exchanges.

Engaging in multilevel and multidisciplinary dialogues, exchanges and cooperation will enable both sides to learn from each other's strengths and promote mutual enrichment. We warmly welcome more Europeans to visit China and encourage more students from European countries to come to China for study or exchange. We eagerly anticipate more fruitful outcomes from China-Europe exchanges and cooperation.

*The author is a professor in the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University's School of Social Sciences. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## Trade: Links can't be cut, expert says

From page 1

Experts said that China and the US should strengthen economic and trade cooperation, thereby promoting upgrades and transformation of their respective economies as well as safeguarding the capability of the world economy to address challenges and pursue development.

Zhang Monan, deputy director of the Institute of American and European Studies at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said the US has pursued a policy of containment and suppression of China as a strategic competitor in recent years. Yet bilateral economic

and trade ties are deeply integrated, and even if the US intends to reduce its dependence on China, the connections cannot be severed, she said.

"Most industries in the US are poised to enter a restocking cycle this year, and import demand is expected to expand in terms of consumer electronics, furniture, building materials, food, agricultural products, textiles, clothing and other commodities," Zhang said.

"At the same time, China's strategy of expanding domestic demand and advancing high-level opening-up will further unleash the potential of its ultra-large market, which will help strengthen its economic and trade ties with the US," she added.

Zhang also said that the top priority for the two countries to improve economic and trade ties should be to repeal the extra US tariffs imposed on Chinese goods.

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## Taiwan youth delegation in Beijing after inspiring Shaanxi visit

By JIANG CHENGLONG in Xi'an  
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Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, underscored the importance of preserving ancient texts and cultural relics in inheriting Chinese culture, as he and members of a Taiwan youth delegation concluded their four-day visit to Shaanxi province on Sunday.

The youth delegation, which is visiting the Chinese mainland, arrived in South China's Guangdong province on April 1.

During their trip to Shaanxi, which is known for its rich cultural heritage, they attended a ceremony on Thursday to pay tribute to Emperor Huangdi, also known as the Yellow Emperor, the legendary common ancestor of all Chinese people.

Ma and members of the delegation also toured significant cultural sites, including the Xi'an branch of the China National Archives of Publications and Culture, the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum and the Shaanxi History Museum.

After visiting the Shaanxi History Museum on Sunday, Ma said they were delighted to see the splendid collection of cultural relics that offer a glimpse into the 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization.

The visit has been an enriching experience for the young people from Taiwan, he said, adding that witnessing the depth and continuity of Chinese culture in Shaanxi would profoundly affect their future.

"The Chinese civilization is the only ancient civilization in the world that has not been interrupted," Ma said. "The texts that have been passed down for thousands of years can still be read by us, the descend-

ants of Emperor Yandi and Emperor Huangdi. It's truly marvelous."

Efforts to preserve historical texts and cultural relics are a "common task" for people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, Ma said. "That is the shared experience of people from both sides of the Strait and showcases the importance of cultural exchanges."

Liu Ping-jui, head of the youth delegation, said he found the Terracotta Warriors at the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum awe-inspiring, adding that visitors, after taking a tour of the museum, can imagine how mighty the emperor's army was.

"As descendants of Emperor Yandi and Emperor Huangdi, we are deeply moved by these artifacts. We are touched by the wisdom that has been passed down by our ancestors, who left for us such profound cultural heritage," Liu said.

During their visit to the Xi'an branch of the China National



Ma Ying-jeou (front, second from left), former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, visits the Xi'an branch of the China National Archives of Publications and Culture in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Saturday. CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA

Archives of Publications and Culture on Saturday. Ma and members of the youth delegation explored the world's first encyclopedia, the *Yongle*

*Dadian*, which was completed in 1408 after being commissioned in 1403 by Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

When Ma read *Shi Liu Qiu Lu*, or *Records of the Imperial Title-Confering Envoys to Liuqiu*, written in 1534 by Chen Kan, an imperial title-confering envoy from the Ming court, he said, "(This ancient text) has proved that the Diaoyu Islands do not belong to Liuqiu."

The delegation also visited an exhibition on the Silk Road, the ancient city wall of Xi'an and other historical sites.

Wan Bing-han, a member of the delegation, said: "I was deeply touched. We have seen exhibitions tracing the cultural journey from the Tang Dynasty to the present, and understood the significance of the Silk Road and economic development."

On Sunday afternoon, Ma and the Taiwan youth delegation arrived in Beijing by high-speed train and visited the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

On Monday, they are scheduled to visit the Museum of the War of the Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression as well as the Palace Museum.

# CHINA



**Clockwise from top:** A tour guide introduces the stories of Dazu Rock Carvings to foreign visitors in Chongqing on March 27. TANG YI / XINHUA Foreign tourists dress up in traditional Chinese clothing in front of the Forbidden City in Beijing on March 22. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Foreign tourists take pictures in front of the terracotta warriors at Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on March 9. ZHANG TIANZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Chongli rides Olympic wave to gain reputation as top Asian ski destination

By DJ CLARK in Hong Kong  
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In an upmarket Hong Kong sports club, there is a buzz around the bar. Over the last ski season, more Hong Kong families have opted to forgo the usual destinations in Japan, South Korea and Europe for their winter vacation to try a resort in China.

Of the 697 ski resorts currently listed in China, there is one area that is quickly gaining an international reputation. Nestled in the heart of Hebei province, just a 90-minute train ride from Beijing, lies Chongli district — a burgeoning winter sports haven that has seen an astronomical rise in popularity over the past decade.

"The ski quality is consistent here," French skier Thibault Subtil explains. "It is different from other places because they have many snow cannons and cold temperatures that means they can guarantee the same level of snow every day. It is good for families of different levels wanting a winter sports vacation."

There are seven ski resorts all within a 30-minute drive of the main town, providing different options for enthusiasts of all levels. This transformation is not just a testament to China's growing love affair with skiing but also marks Chongli as a formidable competitor to the traditional ski destinations scattered across Asia.

Much of the growth in the sport has happened in the last 10 years, spurred by the country's drive to get 300 million people involved in winter sports — a key feature of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics bid. Winter sports have been on the rise since. The General Administration of Sport reported that visitors to 19 national ski resorts had reached 9.43 million in the first two months of the 2023/24 ski season, up 316 percent year-on-year, with revenue also up 543 percent year-on-year.

"The skiing here is a very different experience to Europe," says French ski instructor Matteo Lucattelli, who has been working in Hebei this season. "Here you have very little snowfall in the winter, so there is very little opportunity to ski off-piste or go backcountry. But for learning to ski, racing and performance, it is excellent as you can ski the whole day with the same snow quality."

There are seven public ski resorts in Chongli, all of which cater to different needs. Cuiyunshan (also known as Galaxy) and Shixuechuan (also known as Anaya) only have a few easy runs and are designed more for a first-time ski experience.

Dolomiti Ski Resort, one of the smaller resorts, has matured into a family-friendly destination known for its attractive deals and New Zealand ski school. Despite its compact size, Dolomiti boasts 9 kilometers of slopes, predominantly catering to beginners and intermediates.

Thirteen-year-old Ju Yantian comes to Dolomiti regularly from Beijing to hone his snowboarding skills and take advantage of the international ski instructors. "This place does not have many people, so it is good for training. I prefer to ski in Wanlong, but here I can do more runs in a day."

Contrasting the quaint charm of Dolomiti, Fulong Ski Resort is a lively hub at the edge of Chongli town. With 25 km of ski runs and a distinct favor toward blue and black slopes, Fulong caters to a younger, more experienced crowd while still offering options for beginners.

Standing in the massive ski hall surrounded by local and international ski equipment, outdoor clothing stores and fast-food restaurants, Fulong Resort marketing

manager Yan Sun explains: "Fulong offers the full package. We have full-service hotels catering to a wide variety of budgets and tastes, as well as a broad range of slopes for all levels."

The resort's proximity to the town enriches the apres-ski experience with a plethora of dining and entertainment choices. A ticket to the on-site circus is often included in a package deal. Notably, Fulong prides itself on housing Asia's largest snow park and offers night skiing (free for ladies on Tuesdays), making it a magnet for young snowboarders. Yan claims that 80 percent of visitors prefer the board to a pair of skis.

A short drive outside the town center, Wanlong Ski Resort stands out as Chongli's largest. Opening its doors in 2003, Wanlong was the first resort in town and has seen significant investment, boasting extensive snow-making capabilities that ensure a long ski season.

"We were the first resort so we picked the best spot," says Yu Liu, Wanlong's public relations officer, referring to the northern-facing slopes that shield them from the sun and extend the ski season.

A hop over the hill from Wanlong, Genting, also known as Secret Garden, offers the prestige of skiing on an Olympic slope. Despite the expected crowds and higher prices, the resort ensures a smooth experience with English-speaking staff and international signage. There are of course extra bragging rights to say you have taken on an Olympic ski run, and those that have the ability can also have a go at the Olympic half pipe that is also open to the public.

Opened in 2016, Thaiwoo Ski Resort is uniquely positioned against the backdrop of the Great Wall and has traditionally been the most popular with international guests.

International Manager of the Swiss Ski School in Thaiwoo, Thierry le Bigot explains the attraction. "Thaiwoo is the closest of the Chongli resorts to Beijing. Getting here is very simple, and it offers everything you would expect from an international quality ski resort."

Thaiwoo distinguishes itself with 20 km of diverse runs and a vibrant ski village built on a model of Whistler in Canada, which adds a touch of charm.

Each resort is set up for short-term stays, with most booking apps offering a hotel room packaged with two breakfasts and two ski passes. Ski equipment, including clothing and helmets, can be added to the hotel packages. The two reporters working on this story skied in five of the resorts in Chongli and found each extremely efficient in picking up passes, boots and skis, making it quite possible to ski at more than one resort in one visit. One reporter, who only speaks a little Chinese, had to visit the local hospital after a bad fall and found they, too, were well set up for international visitors.

Back in the Hong Kong sports club, the secret is out. China's ski resorts have developed significantly during the last few years, partly because of the Olympic push. With fast trains and expressways directly from Beijing combined with new hotels and expanded ski slopes, Chongli now competes favorably with any of its competition in Asia, and at a significantly cheaper rate.

Jack Yao contributed to this story.



Online See more by scanning the code.

## Efforts to make travel to China easier result in uptick in visits

Insider bullish on intl tourism rebound with streamlined payment, visa-free entry

By CHENG SI  
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British travel vloggers the Hutchinsons said China "shocked" them, after embarking on a three-month tour of the country.

The family, which has 52,000 subscribers on YouTube, made their first stop on their inaugural trip to China in Guangzhou, capital of the southern province of Guangdong, in mid-March.

In their videos, they've explored cities including Guangzhou, Foshan and Xiamen in Fujian province and tasted some authentic Chinese food. They evaluated the cities as being "safe, beautiful and amazing", and have learned to use some online payment tools such as WeChat Pay.

"When visiting China, you'll realize that cashless pay is a part of everyday life, from local fruit stores to bars, restaurants, cafes and shops. Everybody uses it, and it provides smooth and convenient transactions for your day, including shopping, dining, ordering take-outs, or even transport," said Chris Hutchinson, father of the family, in one of the videos.

China's inbound tourism has steadily recovered in recent months after the central government stepped up efforts to optimize entry policies from the end of last year.

The nation started a visa-free policy for six countries, including France, Germany and Italy, from Dec 1 to Nov 30 this year, with people from these countries allowed to stay on the mainland for up to 15 days for business, tourism, family trips or transit without a visa.

The visa-free policy was extended to another six countries: Switzerland, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg, from March 14 to Nov 30 to further boost inbound tourism.



Passengers from the *Mein Schiff 5* international cruise ship are greeted as they arrive at a port in Shanghai on Saturday. The ship carried some 2,500 passengers and is the largest single inbound tour group to enter Shanghai this year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

According to the National Immigration Administration, the mainland saw about 2.95 million inbound and outbound visits by international travelers from January to February. The number is 2.3 times higher than the previous two months, and about 41.5 percent of the level before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sanya, a tropical spot in the southern province of Hainan, had 64,000 international travelers spend nights there in January, a year-on-year increase of 329 percent, according to China Central Television.

Zhangjiajie in Hunan province, whose scenery is often said to have inspired the movie *Avatar*, received 98,462 visits by international travelers from January to Feb 27, a figure 34 times higher than the same period last year, CCTV said.

Ngoc Pho Chau Cao, a 25-year-old Vietnamese woman living in

Germany, said her travels in China have been amazing so far. She arrived at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing on Jan 29 for an exchange program and will stay on the mainland until mid-July.

She has traveled to Tianjin, Harbin in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, and Datong in the northern province of Shanxi. She has a long travel list for her stay over the next few months.

"So far, I like Beijing the most. The buildings are beautiful and impressive, and people here are more open to each other. I wanted to visit the Palace Museum, but the tickets were always sold out. People in China love to advertise and market Chinese culture to the world."

She said she had some problems at the very beginning in terms of language, traffic and online payment, but got help from other international students and learned to get used to life in China. "I sent

pictures to my friends and they said 'China is so cool! I'd like to introduce China to my friends after I finish my trip to the country!'"

To improve the travel experience for international tourists, the central government has released some guidelines to optimize online payments, tour products and accommodation bookings in recent months. Tourism industry insiders and experts are optimistic about China's inbound tourism development thanks to these policies and measures.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is also working with other departments and online payment platforms to streamline e-payment verification procedures for international travelers.

Yang Jinsong, director of the International Institute at the China Tourism Academy, said though the inbound tourism market has improved, it still needs time to see sustainable growth.

"International travelers prefer early trip planning rather than taking impromptu trips. The government has done much work to facilitate international travelers with visas and payment, but more promotions and advertisements can be done to attract travelers from around the world."

"I'm bullish on the market as our country is more open to the world, and we will organize more international cultural and tourism events this year. The cost for visas and flights will also be lowered," he said.

He added that talent is key to boosting inbound tourism. "Many tourism workers, especially tour guides speaking foreign languages, transferred to other industries in the past few years due to the pandemic. We need to channel more resources to train talent and give them better career prospects."



A young British skier tries snowboarding at Thaiwoo Ski Resort in Chongli, Hebei province, in December. ZHAI YUJIA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

# CHINA

## 'AUNTIES' SHOOT FOR SUCCESS

Female basketball tournament draws villagers, tourists to Leishan county in Guizhou

By CHINA DAILY

In a plaza encircled by traditional Miao and Dong ethnic group buildings in the southwestern province of Guizhou, a unique event was unfolding.

Clad in traditional ethnic attire, women dashed across a basketball court, their laughter and determination echoing through the air. They were engaged in an unconventional game, running across the court while holding the basketball in their arms, passing the ball, scoring and eliciting thunderous cheers from the onlooking villagers and tourists.

It was a common scene during the first Guizhou Qiongdongnan Prefecture Auntie Basketball Invitational Tournament held last month in the prefecture's Leishan county.

The tournament, divided into two categories — one for the general public and another for villagers — drew 19 teams from across the prefecture. Among them, two teams from Leishan performed exceptionally, claiming victory in their respective categories.

Shi Fang, director of the Leishan Sports Management Center, explained the origins of the term "auntie basketball". In the local culture, women who marry outside a village are lovingly referred to as "aunties".

Though named after these women, the tournament welcomed all female participants.

The venue for the event was a local scenic area in Leishan. The matches started around 9 am and concluded by 10 pm, each game consisting of two halves of 15 minutes each.

Auntie basketball has a set of unique rules. Li Xia, general manager of Guizhou Nongdongbao Sports, Travel, and Culture Development Co explained that players don't have to dribble the ball and are allowed to run with it in their arms. Moreover, intentional fouls are the only ones that are called.

During breaks, the spectators were treated to a variety of performances, including wooden drum dances, bronze drum dances and traditional performances put on by people from the Miao and Dong ethnic groups, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the prefecture.

While visiting Leishan, a visitor surnamed Liu said she and her family were drawn to the lively atmosphere and the exciting scenes of an auntie basketball game.

"We had no idea about this tour-



An aerial photo shows the venue of the first Guizhou Qiongdongnan Prefecture Auntie Basketball Invitational Tournament in Leishan county, Guizhou province, on March 8. PHOTOS BY YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

namment before coming here," she said. "It's so intriguing. The aunties are full of love and unity."

Auntie basketball has garnered a significant following online. During this year's Spring Festival, Miao women from Leishan organized an auntie basketball tournament, attracting 75 teams from across the county. The delightful video clips from the event have captivated numerous netizens, with total online views exceeding 2.5 billion.

Shi believes that the sport not only brings joy to the lives of local women, but also provides them with a platform to showcase themselves. Chinese national basketball team player Han Xu once shared a video of an auntie basketball game, praising the beauty and confidence of the female participants.

Pan Yongyin, a player from Kaili city, Guizhou, said: "I've never played in such a basketball match before. It's so much fun, and it's also nice to have a meal together with our opponents after the game."

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Villagers stage a folk dance performance during the halftime break of a game during the tournament on March 8.



From left: A villager beats a drum to cheer for players during an "auntie basketball" game on March 8. Players jump for the basketball during a game on March 9.



Two teams compete during the basketball tournament on March 9.



From left: "Auntie basketball" players don't have to dribble the ball and are allowed to run with it in their arms. Villagers perform during the halftime break of a game on March 8.



## WORLD

# Israel pulls troops out of southern Gaza

As bloody conflict passes half-year mark, pressure mounts on Netanyahu for truce

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong  
jan@chinadaily.com

Israel on Sunday pulled its troops out of southern Gaza, including from the city of Khan Younis, after six months of fierce fighting with Hamas that left the area devastated. But the military said a "significant force" will continue to operate in the rest of the besieged Gaza Strip.

"The 98th commando division has concluded its mission in Khan Younis," the army said in a statement to Agence France-Presse.

"The division left the Gaza Strip in order to recuperate and prepare for future operations."

Israeli security expert Omer Dostri said the withdrawal was purely tactical and did not mean the conflict was anywhere near over.

In a cabinet meeting on Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was "one step away from victory" in the Gaza conflict and vowed there would be no truce until Hamas frees all hostages.

"We are one step away from victory," Netanyahu said. "But the price we paid is painful and heartbreaking."

As the bloodiest conflict between Israel and Palestine passed the half-year mark, Israel's government has faced a growing international backlash against its military campaign.

## Total deaths

Palestinians killed in Gaza: 33,137, including more than 13,000 children;  
People killed in Israel: about 1,200;  
Palestinians killed in the West Bank: 456;  
People killed in Lebanon: at least 343.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Arab states and aid groups are demanding that Israel comply with a United Nations cease-fire resolution and end atrocities that have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as its operation has ignored UN Security Council Resolution 2728.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths lamented on Saturday that "we have arrived at a terrible milestone" and that "the end of this war is long overdue."

"It is not enough for six months of war to be a moment of remembrance and mourning. It must also spur a collective determination that

there be a reckoning for this betrayal of humanity."

On Friday, Abdulaziz Al-Wasil, Saudi Arabia's permanent representative to the UN, called on the Security Council to adopt a resolution "to ensure that Israel, the occupying power, abide by a cease-fire, and to give access to humanitarian aid and 'put an end to the evil aggression on the Palestinian people and provide protection for them'."

Months of stop-start cease-fire talks have made no headway since a weeklong truce in November in which some hostages were exchanged for Palestinian prisoners detained by Israel.

In a new push in Cairo, CIA Director Bill Burns and Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani were expected to join Egyptian officials for indirect talks from Sunday between the Israeli and Hamas delegations, Egypt's Al-Qahera News said.

The attempt came after Israel's military made a rare admission of wrongdoing and said it was dismissing two officers over the killing of seven aid workers in Gaza last week.

During previous rounds of indirect talks, Hamas demanded a complete cessation of the conflict, and Israel agreed only to a temporary cease-fire and rejected Hamas' request to allow displaced civilians to return home.

Resolution 2728, adopted by the Security Council on March 25, demands an immediate cease-fire for Ramadan respected by all parties, leading to a sustainable cease-fire.

Under the UN Charter, the Security Council can order military action and nonmilitary measures such as sanctions to ensure its resolutions are implemented and to restore international peace and security.

In a terse phone call with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday, US President Joe Biden demanded vastly greater aid deliveries into the territory now threatened by famine.

Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak demanded that "this terrible conflict must end".

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.



Rola Saqer sits beside her baby Masa Mohammad Zaqout at her parents' home in the neighborhood of Zawaida on Thursday. Zaqout was born on Oct 7, the day the conflict erupted. Mothers who gave birth in the Gaza Strip that day fret that their 6-month-old babies have known nothing but brutal fighting. ABDEL KAREEM HANA/AP

## Protesters in Tel Aviv demand fresh elections

Tens of thousands of Israelis protested against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday as the Gaza conflict reached its half-year mark.

Organizers said about 100,000 people converged at a Tel Aviv crossroads renamed "Democracy Square" since mass protests against controversial judicial reforms last year.

Chanting "Elections now," protesters called for his resignation as the conflict in Gaza entered its seventh month on Sunday, Agence France-Presse reported.

Rallies were also held in other cities, with Israel's opposition leader Yair Lapid taking part in one in Kfar Saba before his departure for talks in Washington.

"They haven't learned anything, they haven't changed," he said at that rally. "Until we send them home, they won't give this country a chance to move forward."

Israeli media said clashes had broken out between protesters and police at the Tel Aviv rally and police said one protester had been arrested.

Later, the protesters in Tel Aviv were joined by families of Gaza hostages and their supporters.

Demonstrators were to take to the streets again on Sunday, with a rally planned in Jerusalem.

Thousands of people protested in Morocco's commercial capital Casablanca late on Friday against "massacres" in the Gaza Strip and against the country's normalization of ties with Israel.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Iran set to retaliate for attack in Syria

TEHERAN — Iran is set to retaliate for Israel's attack on the Iranian consulate building in Syria last week, but the method, severity and timing of the response remain to be seen, Iranian experts say.

Israel launched a missile strike on the consular section of the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital Damascus on Monday, killing seven Iranians, including two veteran commanders of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and a number of Syrian civilians.

Following the attack, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said the country's "brave men" would inflict "a regret-inducing punishment" on Israel for its "criminal" attack. Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi also said the "cowardly crime will not go unanswered".

Seyed Reza Sadr al-Hosseini, a Tehran-based expert on West Asia issues, said Israel was acting like a "drunk person" as it hit a "strategic dead end" on the issue of Palestine, especially in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza Strip, where Israel has been engaged in a military campaign to wipe out Hamas since October.

Israel's moves, backed by the

United States and a number of European members of NATO, "have crossed all possible humane red lines", Sadr al-Hosseini said.

He cited Israel's killing of more than 33,000 people in Gaza and the attack on the Iranian consulate building in Syria as among the "red lines" Israel has breached.

In an analysis published by the semi-official Mehr news agency on Wednesday, Asghar Zarei, a foreign policy affairs expert in Teheran, said the Israeli attack was an "adventurist and dangerous" move taken because of Israel's failure to reach its targets in Gaza as well as the unprecedented economic losses and casualties it has suffered in the conflict.

By attacking the Iranian consulate, Israel aimed to divert media attention and global public opinion away from "Israeli crimes committed in Gaza," he said.

In an analysis published by Iran's official news agency IRNA on Tuesday, Ahmad Sadat, a regional affairs expert in Teheran, said the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also facing deepening internal differences among the cabinet, rising inflation,

and the fatigue of Israeli soldiers in Gaza, which have led to calls for Netanyahu to resign.

On the possible response to Israel's attack, Sadr al-Hosseini said Iran would use all its diplomatic capacities and moves, including filing a complaint to the UN Security Council and raising the issue at the General Assembly, while reserving the right to give a proportionate response to the Israeli attack "at the right time and place".

It was impossible to predict the timing, method and level of Iran's retaliation against Israel, or if Teheran's retaliation would be taken through a direct move or done by its friends in the resistance front, he said.

Zarei said Israel would receive "a fitting response" for its attacks, because Iran had previously shown that it could deal a "deterrent" blow to Israel.

"This time Teheran's response to the Israeli aggression would be costly and painful for Israel," he said, adding that any Israeli diplomatic missions could be targeted for attacks by resistance groups in the region and those against Israel.

XINHUA



Emergency workers evacuate residents of the flooded city of Orsk following the dam breach in Orenburg region, Russia, on Saturday. SERGEY NIKIFOROV / SPUTNIK

## 4,000 Russians evacuated after dam burst

MOSCOW — Russia had evacuated more than 4,000 people in the Orenburg region, in the southern Urals near Kazakhstan, due to flooding after a dam burst.

Emergency services had been working through the night after a dam burst in the city of Orsk, near the border with Kazakhstan.

The news service of the Orenburg governor said on Saturday that "4,208 people, including 1,019 children" had been evacuated and more than 2,500 homes were affected by flooding after a dam burst on Friday following torrential rain.

On Sunday, Russia's government declared flood-hit areas in the Orenburg region a federal emergency, state media reported.

Russia opened a criminal case for "negligence and violation of construction safety rules" over the burst dam, which was built in 2014.

Orenburg regional governor Denis Pasler said specialists assessed that the dam was built

"for a different weight" and that the level of rainfall was "exceptional".

Authorities said the situation was difficult throughout the region, warning of a dangerous water level on the Ural river in the main city of Orenburg.

The mayor of the city of 500,000 people, Sergey Salmin, said authorities would forcibly evacuate people from flooded zones if they refused orders to leave.

### High water level

The situation around flooding in the city remained "critical", and water levels would continue to rise in the coming days, he said on Sunday.

He had named several districts of the city and nearby villages likely to be affected.

"The situation leaves you no choice. At night, the river can reach a critical level," he said. "I call on everyone in the flooded zone to leave their houses immediately."

"There is no time for convincing," he added, saying that "those who refuse to leave the danger zone voluntarily, we will forcibly evacuate with the help of police officers".

The Ural mountain region of Orenburg, along with other nearby Russian provinces and parts of neighboring Kazakhstan, has been hit hard by flooding along the Ural river in recent days, forcing at least 2,000 people to evacuate their homes.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said the floods were one of the worst natural disasters in Kazakhstan in 80 years.

He called for authorities in the Central Asian country to be ready to help those affected.

Russian emergency services published images of rescue workers going through villages on boats and hovercraft.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Documentary shines light on Yangtze River

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo  
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The documentary film *The Yangtze River*, supervised by Japanese documentary director Ryo Takeuchi, will be released in Japan starting on Friday.

From 2010 to 2011, Takeuchi filmed a documentary about the Yangtze River for the Japanese public broadcaster NHK. Ten years later, starting in 2021, he spent about two years retracing the 6,300-kilometer-long river and revisiting some of the people living along the river whom he filmed 10 years ago.

"The portrayal of China in the Japanese media is not objective. I want to show real China to Japanese audiences, neither exaggerating nor criticizing China," said Takeuchi at a screening and media exchange event jointly hosted by his culture communication company and the Chinese embassy in Japan in Tokyo on Sunday.

Most Japanese who have been to China will like China, and most Chinese who have been to Japan will also like Japan, he said. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the past few years and the state of Sino-Japanese relations, fewer and fewer Japanese people are going to China now. Takeuchi said he hopes that

exchanges between the two peoples will increase.

"After watching this movie, I'm sure many Japanese will want to visit China. I hope my movie will be the first step for them to understand China, providing them with an opportunity to visit the country in person. Don't blindly criticize China without ever having been there," he said.

Chinese Ambassador to Japan Wu Jianghao also expressed hope that more Japanese people could visit China and that people-to-people exchanges between the two countries would be further promoted.

Takeuchi, 45, was born in Chiba Prefecture. His family moved to China in 2013 and settled in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, his wife's hometown.

### Sentimental attachment

"I live in Nanjing and have a sentimental attachment to the Yangtze River. I like *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (by 14th-century Chinese writer Luo Guanzhong). There are many places along the Yangtze River related to the Three Kingdoms... Along the river, there are also cities such as Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Chongqing, which are relatively familiar to Japanese people," he said.

He had filmed the Yangtze River before but was not satisfied with

the work because at that time, he could not speak Chinese and did not understand the real life of the Chinese people. He always had an obsession with learning Chinese and understanding China before filming the Yangtze River again.

"I'm very much looking forward to seeing the reaction of ordinary Japanese audiences to this film. Not only will Japanese people interested in China go to see it, but also those who like documentaries and movies," Takeuchi said.

In addition, he has also made documentaries such as *The Reason I Live Here*, which introduces the lives and customs of Chinese people living overseas and foreigners living in China. His works also include *Beyond the Mountain*, *Nanjing's Anti-epidemic Scene*, *Long Time No See*, *Wuhan*, and *The Post-Pandemic Era*.

He has now begun to film the stories of Japanese orphans left behind in China. After Japan's defeat in World War II, they were abandoned by the Japanese and adopted by Chinese families. These people are now in their 80s, and he is filming their stories.

Next year marks the 80th anniversary of Japan's defeat, and he expects this documentary to be broadcast in China and Japan then.



## Operation cleanup

People clean up a damaged house in a village affected by the eruption of Mount Marapi, West Sumatra, Indonesia, on Saturday. The mountain is part of the Ring of Fire — a long, horseshoe-shaped, seismically active belt that fringes the Pacific basin. YORRI FARLI / XINHUA

## WORLD US

## Briefly

## PAKISTAN

## 5 officials face action over terrorist attack

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ordered that at least five senior police officials be punished for negligence after a suicide bomber killed five Chinese engineers at a major dam site last month, the country's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said on Saturday. The attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province forced Power China and the China Gezhouba Company to suspend work on two dam projects after the bombing. Hundreds of Chinese are employed at the Dasu and Diamer Bhasha dam construction sites, located about 100 kilometers apart in the mountainous region.

## SLOVAKIA

## Pellegrini winner of presidential election

Slovakia's incumbent speaker of the National Council Peter Pellegrini won the country's second round of the presidential election on Saturday, according to preliminary results published by the country's Statistical Office. Results from 99.47 percent of votes showed Pellegrini had 53.38 percent, and former foreign minister Ivan Korcook 46.61 percent. Pellegrini, 48, served as Slovakia's prime minister in 2018-20. Korcook served as the country's foreign minister from 2020 to 2022.

## NETHERLANDS

## Greta Thunberg held during protest march

Dutch police twice detained climate activist Greta Thunberg on Saturday after a group of marchers blocked a main road in The Hague to protest against fossil fuel subsidies. Police said more than 400 people were arrested, including 12 for incitement. Activists said Thunberg had been freed. The march was organized by the environmental group Extinction Rebellion, which previously swarmed the A12 highway and blocked traffic for hours before being sprayed by police water cannons and taken away.

## SUDAN

## Paramilitary attack on village kills 20

Sudan's Rapid Support Forces paramilitary group has killed at least 20 people in an attack on a village south of capital Khartoum, a local activists' committee said on Sunday. The RSF "attacked the village of Um Adam", 150 kilometers south of the city, on Saturday, said a statement from the local resistance committee, one of many pro-democracy groups that coordinate aid. Sudan's civil conflict began almost a year ago.

## UNITED KINGDOM

## World's oldest man: Long life just luck

The world's oldest living man, 111-year-old Briton John Tinniswood, said his longevity was "just luck" and there was no special secret to his diet, though his favorite food was fish and chips every Friday. Tinniswood inherited the Guinness World Records title from Venezuelan Juan Vicente Perez Mora, 114, whose death was announced last week. Born on Aug 26, 1912, a few months after the sinking of the *Titanic*, Tinniswood lived through two world wars, serving in the British Army Pay Corps in World War II.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Veteran of eclipse



Anthony Tam shows off his "Twice in a Lifetime" shirt at the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland on Sunday. He saw the 2017 eclipse in Casper, Wyoming, and traveled to Cleveland with his wife, Tamara, from Los Angeles because his son Joshua is a college student here. STEPHANIE NANO / AP

## A US economist cautions against downplaying China's economy

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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A prominent US economist cited China's solid economic data to dismiss the notion that the country could enter a long recession.

"While its growth has slowed in recent years, China is likely to expand at twice the rate of the United States in the years ahead," Nicholas Lardy, a nonresident senior fellow at the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), wrote in an April 2 article in *Foreign Affairs* titled "China is still rising."

He said that China overcame even greater challenges when it started on the path of economic reform in the late 1970s.

Lardy contended that much of the gloomy outlook on the Chinese economy is based on data misconceptions.

A "widely held misconception," he wrote, was that "the Chinese economy's progress in converging with the size of the US economy has stalled."

"It is true that from 2021 to 2023, China's GDP fell from 76 percent of US GDP to 67 percent," Lardy noted. "Yet it is also true that by 2023, China's GDP was 20 percent bigger than it had been in 2019, the eve of the global pandemic, while the United States' was only 8 percent bigger."

Lardy explained two factors for the "apparent paradox."

First, China's nominal GDP grew 4.6 percent last year, trailing behind the 6.3 percent increase seen in the US. However, the narrative shifts when factoring in inflation for each nation, or in China's case, disinflation. In that calculation, China's GDP would exceed that of the US, with 5.2 percent and 2.5 percent growth rates, respectively.

Second, the US Federal Reserve has raised interest rates aggressively from 0.25 percent to 5.5 percent since March 2022, while the Chinese central bank has done the opposite, easing the interest rate from 3.70 percent to 3.45 percent.

What the People's Bank of China has done with the base interest rates led to a devaluation of China's yuan, diminishing the value of the nation's GDP when totaled in dollars.

Lardy said the divergence is likely to be "transitory." The Fed is

expected to ease rates this year, and the renminbi is set to appreciate soon.

Chinese prices will rise in 2024, according to forecasts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). "Its nominal GDP measured in US dollars will almost certainly resume converging toward that of the United States this year and is likely to surpass it in about a decade," wrote Lardy.

Another misconception, Lardy said, was that China's household income, internal spending and consumer confidence were weak. He rebutted that view with data, pointing out that real per capita income rose by 6 percent in 2023, more than double the growth rate in 2022, while per capita consumption increased by 9 percent.

Lardy noted that Chinese consumption grew more than income, which happened only when the households reduced the savings share of their income, showing that consumer confidence was not weak.

"China will likely continue to contribute about a third of the world's economic growth while increasing its economic footprint," Lardy added.

Lardy wrote about a third misconception — that stubborn deflation put China on a course toward recession. In his retort, Lardy mentioned that core consumer prices, excluding food and energy, rose by 0.7 percent last year.

He also mentioned that Chinese businesses escalated borrowing, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of GDP; investment in manufacturing, mining, utilities and services experienced an uptick. "No recession appears on the horizon," Lardy wrote.

The fourth misconception, Lardy said, was concerns about "the potential for a collapse in property investment." He said that the fear was not entirely mistaken but was exaggerated.

Despite a noticeable decline in housing starts in China since 2021, it's crucial to recognize that the shift isn't solely indicative of capital flight, he said. Rather, developers are focused on completing housing projects, buoyed by supportive government initiatives.

"Completions expanded to 7.8

percent in 2023, eclipsing housing starts for the first time," Lardy wrote.

Lardy said the notion "that Chinese entrepreneurs are discouraged and moving their money out of the country" is the fifth misconception, pointing out that "the pessimism is not supported by the data."

"Almost all the decline in the private share of total investment after 2014 resulted from a correction in the property market, which is dominated by private companies," he wrote. "When real estate is excluded, private investment rose by almost 10 percent in 2023."

Lardy also said that the number of businesses was climbing: a total of 124 million enterprises employing about 300 million people.

Despite the "well-documented headwinds" China is facing, including a housing market slump; restrictions imposed by the US on access to some advanced technologies; and a shrinking working-age population, Lardy warned the West, particularly the US, to not write off China, saying that "exaggerating these problems serves no one."

"Demographics are negative, but they could be greatly alleviated if the government gradually raised the retirement age for workers," Lardy told *China Daily*. "On one calculation, that could lead to a working-age population roughly constant for the next decade rather than continuing the decline that has been underway for several years."

Gary Huffbauer, also a nonresident senior fellow at PIIE, told *China Daily* that he agrees with Lardy's positive evaluation of the state quo and outlook for the Chinese economy.

Jack Midgley, the principal of global consultancy Midgley & Co, also expressed optimism about the Chinese economy to *China Daily*.

"China's performance continues to be strong, not perfect, not unchallenged," he said. "The fact is, if you zoom out, China has lifted more people from poverty in a shorter period of time than any economy in the history of the world."

"There's nothing structural there. The population is still growing, productivity is still growing, and exports are still growing," Midgley said. "All of the economic signs are positive."

## US uses small strategic groups to get its way

With allies Japan and Philippines, it aims to encircle China, intensifying instability

By YANG RAN

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The United States is forming small coalitions around China, aiming to economically decouple from it and encircle it in terms of security, experts say. This approach could heighten division and fuel confrontation in the Asia-Pacific, potentially disrupting regional peace and development, they said.

For the first time the US, Japan and the Philippines will hold a trilateral summit at the White House on Thursday, at which talks are expected to focus on economic collaboration, energy supply chains and security, the White House said last month.

Security collaboration within this new grouping has drawn a lot of attention, and the three countries, with Australia, held their first joint naval exercises in the South China Sea on Sunday. There are also reports indicating that the three parties will launch joint naval patrols in the South China Sea this year.

Zhang Jie, a researcher at the National Institute of International Strategy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, said such moves will introduce the risk of military conflict and breed confrontation and disrupt peace and development in the Asia-Pacific.

"Manila might be encouraged to take reckless measures that could heighten the risk in the maritime front line with Beijing. Additionally, the risk of accidental friction increases because of the concentration of vessels in a confined sea area."

The formation of the US, Japan and the Philippines grouping also signifies a shift in Washington's alliance structure as it uses Tokyo and Manila as subcenters of its so-called Indo-Pacific strategy, in addition to its core alliances through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; AUKUS, comprising Australia, the United Kingdom and the US; and the G7, Zhang said.

This maneuver is part of a broader US strategy to reinforce its maritime blockade against China, she said. As Japan and the Philippines locate near the crucial Taiwan Strait, the group's ultimate aim is to strategically

position itself over the strait, she said.

Zhou Yongsheng, a professor in the Institute of International Relations of China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, said the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea and the South China Sea are strategically interconnected.

Japan is showing a tendency to view China as a potential threat as the latter continues its rapid growth and development, Zhou said.

"Japan, recognizing its limitations in directly curbing China's growth, has strategically aligned itself with the US and is utilizing the Philippines as a pivotal leverage point in its efforts to contain China's expansion."

Full-scale participation by Japan's Self-Defense Forces is being considered for the annual joint military exercises named Balikatan conducted by US and Philippine forces, the Japan News reported.

"Japan aims to reduce the pressure it may face in the East China Sea by creating disturbances elsewhere," Zhou said. "This dual approach from the north and south increases the potential of risks in the Taiwan Strait."

## Rising military spending

In addition, Japan has significantly increased its military spending in recent years. Its defense budget this year is about 8 trillion yen (\$53 billion), about 16.6 percent more than for fiscal 2023, and a record high.

"Japan's substantial increase in military spending evidently disrupts the balance in East Asia, potentially triggering a new round of the arms race," Zhou said, adding that Tokyo's increasingly vigorous military ambitions will add to the instability of the regional situation.

Compared with Japan, which has been playing an active role in US-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific in recent years, the Philippines has emerged as a new key player in Washington's core alliance circle, primarily because of the current South China Sea disputes that can continuously provoke China, Zhang said.

The Philippines' recent bold actions are largely supported by the US and its allies, she said.

The Philippines should realize that the support of forces outside the region comes at a price and will take it down a dangerous path, Zhou warned.

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## Mounting pile of debt worries experts

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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How much is the United States spending on interest payments to finance its national debt?

Enough that the outlays this year will exceed the defense budget, which is the largest in the world, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office said.

The federal government will spend \$870 billion on interest payments this year — and \$850 billion on defense, according to *The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2024 to 2034*, published by the office.

"Interest is projected this year to be the second-largest federal program — it means your tax dollars are going to interest instead of going to everything else," said Marc Goldwein, senior policy director at the bipartisan think tank Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, CBS News reported. "As far as I know, interest has never been larger than the defense budget."

Debt held by the public is projected to rise each year relative to the size of the economy, reaching 116 percent of GDP in 2034, more than at any time in US history.

The CBO estimated that without changes to existing laws, the

debt-to-GDP ratio will reach 129 percent by 2033, and 192 percent by 2053.

Interest payments will rise rapidly throughout the next decade — from \$951 billion in 2025 to \$1.6 trillion in 2034. Net interest payments will total \$12.4 trillion over the next decade, it forecast.

The previous high for interest payments relative to GDP in the post-World War II era was 3.2 percent in 1991; that ratio is on course to be exceeded next year.

For the first time, the US national debt this year has exceeded \$34 trillion.

In an investor letter posted last

week, hedge fund billionaire Ken Griffin criticized the US government over the mounting debt, warning that future generations will face dire consequences.

## 'Growing concern'

"The surging US public debt is a growing concern that cannot be overlooked," Griffin, founder and CEO of Citadel, wrote in his 2023 year-end investor letter.

"It is irresponsible for the US government to incur a deficit of 6.4 percent when unemployment is hovering around 3.75 percent. We must stop borrowing at the expense of future generations."

An analysis published on Tuesday by Bloomberg ran a million simulations on the US debt outlook and found that

88 percent of them showed borrowing is on an "unsustainable path."

Last year, The Conference Board, a nonprofit business membership and research group organization in New York, surveyed 1,247 C-suite executives across the globe, including 630 CEOs, to identify the most critical issues they face.

"US CEOs say the geopolitical risk that concerns them the most regarding business operations is homegrown — the burgeoning US national debt and deficits," said Lori Esposito Murray, president of the Committee for Economic Development, the public policy center of the board.

"The cost of servicing the debt is rapidly rising due to inflation and rising interest rates, consuming as much of the federal budget as defense

spending and crowding out national priorities," Esposito Murray said.

The issuance of US Treasury securities to finance deficits and debt puts a heavy strain on the financial system, potentially raising business borrowing costs, limiting access to capital and lowering living standards, she said.

"The congressional debate this year over fiscal year 2024 spending levels has contributed to a historic collapse of governance in the US Congress, a broken budget process, the brink of a national default, a looming government shutdown and the potential downgrading of the US credit rating. US global leadership and national security are at risk," she said.

"The debt crisis is here — not down the road. As a nation, we must act now."

## BUSINESS

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## Capital market set for sound development

With 600m investors buying fund products, sustainability, society enter bourses' lexicon

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

Now that the first quarter of this year is history, insiders of China's A-share market are convinced the challenges and chaos that seemed daunting at the beginning of the new year remain stiff, with quick solutions appearing unlikely.

Investors' nerve was initially shaken by the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index sinking to below 2,700 points. The bumpy trading eventually ended in early February with the "national team" — mainly the sovereign wealth fund's investment arm Central Huijin — injecting more liquidity and regulators straightening up trading rules. This helped the SCI regain the psychological fulcrum of 3,000 points shortly after Spring Festival in early February.

While trading becomes active again as indexes rise, talk on the high-quality development of the A shares, on which will depend a sustained long-term bull market, has picked up heat again.

Looking back at the chaos at the beginning of the year, market mavens blamed it all on inadequate market liquidity. The collective redemption of mutual fund products due to their declining net asset value, the collective knock-in of auto-callable notes (meaning investors needed to increase investment or confront forced closing of positions for this structured product) and the closing positions for many margin trading-based products, had dragged down the SCI and seriously impaired market sentiment, resulting in panic and a sell-off.

Now, the focus has shifted to the anticipated introduction of a stock market stabilization fund.

Liu Yuhui, a council member of the China Chief Economist Forum, compared today's Chinese stock market to a "voting machine" that reflects investor confidence. The anticipated market stabilization fund, or even a simple announcement about its introduction, will likely profoundly improve investor sentiment, he said.

"When the market is jittery, the stabilization fund may not make any move at all. The fund itself serves as a symbol of bolstered confidence. People do not really care about how much money is poured into the stabilization fund. The felt solid government presence behind the fund is what investors truly value," he said.

Market entities, nevertheless, have their own expectations of the fund's corpus. CITIC Securities estimates that a stabilization fund valued between 2 trillion yuan (\$277 billion) and 5 trillion yuan will be enough as such a fund usually takes up 3 percent to 6 percent of the stock market value in other mature markets.

"The introduction of a stabilization fund is quite necessary and China is ready for that," said Li Xunlei, chief economist of Zhongtai Securities.



Stock index levels are seen on an overpass in Shanghai. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



A view of the China Securities Regulatory Commission headquarters in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Investors check stock prices at a securities brokerage in Tongling, Anhui province. GUO SHINING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Another hot topic to figure in market buzz is the possible replacement of the current T+1 trading mechanism with a T+0 mechanism after the A-share market stabilizes. The T+0 system will allow purchase and sale of the same shares within the day.

Independent stock market analyst Pi Haizhou said one major merit of the T+0 mechanism is that it can largely increase investors' capital efficiency and boost trading activity.

He Qiang, a professor of the School of Finance at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said the T+0 mechanism can help retail investors to reduce losses by taking prompt corrective action upon wrong moves. Trials can be first undertaken for trading blue-chip large-caps or at the Beijing Stock Exchange, the youngest of the bourses on the Chinese mainland, he said.

"Futures trading, which entails higher risks, is conducted under the

T+0 mechanism all over the world, only to avoid risks by reducing loss on a daily basis," he said.

Tian Xuan, associate dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, said that the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses are the only two exchanges using the T+1 trading mechanism. The T+0 mechanism is adopted at 42 stock exchanges across the world.

"Under the T+1 mechanism, institutional investors can use stock index futures, exchange-traded fund arbitrage and reverse margin trading to cover losses or even seek gains on days of higher market fluctuations. But retail investors are deprived of such choices. They are not able to make up for or reduce their losses under the current T+1 mechanism within the day once they make mistakes," said Tian.

"This is contrary to the principle of market fairness, and is not conducive to the financial market's stability."

Tian further said China briefly

used the T+0 mechanism at the beginning of its modern-era stock market. But it shifted to T+1 in 1995 due to the then inadequate supervision and legal system and the limited choices in the stock market.

"But the Chinese capital market has made substantial progress over the past decade. The supervision, legal system, investable target and financial tools have all been completed. I think it is time to talk about restoring the T+0 mechanism," he said.

Voices are growing that China should improve its listed companies' quality. Part of regulators' efforts to address such concerns has been to tighten their grip over IPOs. This, many market mavens said, can help control the quality at the very beginning.

One month after taking over as chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, Wu Qing was outspoken in his criticism of questionable market practices. During a news conference at this

year's two sessions in early March, he said "profiteering should not be the purpose of IPOs". That was in keeping with his reputation of being a no-nonsense official: Wu was known for his stern attitude toward violations and illegal activities during his earlier stints at the top market watchdog.

"While adhering to laws and regulations, stricter evaluation of IPO registration must be taken," said Wu.

On Aug 27, the CSRC had announced that it will tighten the pace of IPOs. Only 26 IPOs had been reported as of March 22, down nearly 50 percent year-on-year. But at least 670 companies have been waiting for the CSRC's evaluation of their IPO applications. In an unprecedented development, at least 75 companies have withdrawn their IPO applications on their own till date.

"In some cases, IPO had come to mean large-scale profit distribution.

Under such circumstances, self-discipline will not suffice as stakeholders will be easily enticed by huge profits," said Xue Hongyan, deputy director of the Star Atlas Institute of Finance.

In this sense, a tighter grip over who enters the Chinese stock market is quite important. It is with a clearer accountability mechanism and strengthened punishment that people violating laws and regulations may eventually face the results of bankruptcy. Only serious crackdowns can deter fraudulent issuances or financial frauds, said Xue.

Both entry into and exit from the A-share market should be improved, experts said. At the March news conference during the two sessions, Wu of the CSRC said that stricter delisting standards will be adopted to ensure that the disqualified ones will be removed from the market. The regulator will also encourage weak or unhealthy companies to delist voluntarily, he said.

By March 29, six companies had delisted this year, on a par with the quarterly high reached in the first quarter of 2021.

Yang Chengzhang, chief economist of Shenwan Hongyuan Securities, said delisting criteria should be differentiated for different A-share boards. Private equity firms and secondary funds should be more actively included in the regional equity trading markets so that over-the-counter market can receive delisted companies.

"Delisting is of much importance in advancing the high-quality development of the Chinese capital market. More attention should be directed to delisting and companies' restructuring so that supply and demand can be more reasonably balanced in the stock market," he said.

"Efforts should be made to help local governments, companies and investors understand delisting in a more comprehensive way. Delisting is just a common practice in the capital market. It should not be considered a smirch on companies' reputation or business."

Regional financial regulators in Beijing and Shanghai were in the spotlight in late March, mainly because of their on-site inspections of a large number of mutual funds. Although they clarified that these were regular inspections, "not raids", their actions were conducted shortly after the CSRC said in a guideline released on March 15 that daily supervision, on-site inspections and law enforcement should be strengthened.

Data from the Asset Management Association of China showed that the size of the Chinese mutual fund market had approached 30 trillion yuan by the end of February. Up to 200 million Chinese had invested in the country's stock market, and 600 million Chinese had accessed the capital market by purchasing fund products sold via various platforms, said Yang Delong, chief economist of Shenzhen-based First Seafont Fund.

"Therefore, the sound development of the Chinese capital market is not only about the wallets of hundreds of millions of Chinese, but also the sustainability of societal development. Supervision should be strengthened and confidence should be consolidated," Yang said.

## Can Chinese stock indexes go the Nikkei way?

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Shi Jing

All eyes, it seems, are on the Japanese stock market (never mind that the Japanese yen plunged to a 34-year low of 151.97 against the US dollar on March 27).

While the A-share market investors are baffled by the Chinese stock market's performance that is incongruent with the country's economic fundamentals, the Japanese stock exchanges are wooing investors from all over the world, publicizing the frequently refreshed Nikkei 225

peak, which stood above 40,000 points in early March and is very likely to top 55,000 points by the end of 2025, if experts' forecasts are to be believed.

The question is, what is the secret behind the galloping Japanese stock market? Can its performance be replicated in China? Is China's capital market adopting any practices similar to that of its Japanese counterpart?

The extremely relaxed monetary policy adopted in Japan for a decade has ensured liquidity for the Japanese stock market. But that cannot be directly copied in China given the different monetary and fiscal environments of the two countries. And, to look at the bright side, liquidity is not an issue now in the A-share market.

The institutional improvement that has been steadily advancing in Japan may be a good reference point. In 2015, the Tokyo Stock Exchange introduced a corporate governance guideline. Listed companies were required to use IPO proceeds prudently, to issue dividends, repurchase companies' own shares, conduct mergers and acquisitions, or undertake R&D activities. Listed companies that don't toe the line will face the risk of delisting.

In March 2023, even stricter rules were introduced. If the ratio of the company's share price to book value is below 1, the company concerned will be treated as one that has not used its capital efficiently. Such companies may be delisted as early as 2026.

Similar examples can be seen in China. On Jan 24, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, which operates under the aegis of the State Council, China's Cabinet, said that market value management will be included in the performance assessment of executives of State-owned enterprises.

The SOEs, which are usually market large-caps, can, of course, contribute more to the indexes, once their share prices rise. Hopefully, corporate governance will improve among all A-share companies with SOEs making the first moves.

Another reason propping up the Japanese stock market is the introduction of long-term capital.

On the one hand, the Bank of Japan, the Japanese central bank,

has been purchasing exchange-traded funds for more than a decade since 2010, especially when the market was sluggish. On the other hand, the Government Pension Investment Fund, the manager of Japan's public pension founded in 2001, has also directed important long-term capital flows into the Japanese stock market.

Equity investment takes up nearly half of the GPIF's asset allocation, and the trend of it increasing the ratio of stock investment both at home and abroad has been quite noticeable. Undervalued stocks, market large-caps and companies with stable business performance and high dividends are more favored by the GPIF.

Foreign institutions have also served as an important force driving up the Japanese stock market over the past two years. After legendary investor Warren Buffett vouched for

the investment value of the Japanese companies in April 2023, especially *sogo shoshas* or traditional trading houses such as Mitsubishi Corp, Itochu, Mitsui & Co, Marubeni and Sumitomo Corp, hot money from all over the world flooded the Japanese stock market, lifting the Nikkei 225.

China has been adopting healthy practices of late. Market regulators have stressed from time to time the importance of introducing long-term capital. More international asset managers have entered China as the country further opens up its capital market. Social security fund and insurance capital have also served as important indicators as they usually eye the industries with growth potential in the long run.

In this sense, all the necessary preparations for a long-term bull run have been made in China. All we need, probably, is a little bit of patience.

# BUSINESS



Autowise.ai's autonomous sweeper cleans the area in front of a distribution center of supermarket chain store SPAR in England in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Chinese high-tech helps sweep world off its feet

### GOING GLOBAL |

Autonomous vehicles improve work efficiency, safety in city sanitation tasks

By ZHENG YIRAN  
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China-made autonomous sweepers are grabbing attention all over the globe, as the country uses its technological expertise to unleash new quality productive forces in the field of sanitation.

"We specialize in autonomous sweepers. Demand has surged in recent years and we have started to export our products," said Tang Yan-ye, vice-president of product and operations, and partner at Autowise.ai, a Shanghai-based high-tech company that is among many "little giant" firms in the city.

The company has received the world's first road testing license for autonomous sweepers and is the first in China to achieve commercialization of autonomous sweepers overseas.

"I was just on a business trip in Dubai, where we brought our autonomous sweeper to local clients. While they had seen autonomous vehicles and traditional sweepers,

this was the first time that they had seen the two combined, and they were amazed," said Tang.

The company's latest product, launched in March, integrates three sanitation tasks — sweeping, road spraying, and garbage transportation — and is able to cut overall sanitation operation costs by up to 70 percent.

One of its autonomous sweepers, which has been operating along the Jumeirah Beach bikeway in Dubai, cleans the road, dumps trash and returns to the parking space automatically.

Equipped with technologies including LIDAR, millimeter-wave radars, cameras and high-precision positioning, it can achieve precise edge fitting, safe obstacle avoidance, emergency avoidance, flexible turning and direction switching during operation.

In fact, its advanced technology and features have attracted the attention of several local residents as well as visitors.

Meanwhile, in Preston, England, Autowise.ai's autonomous sweeper is helping James Hall — a major local supermarket chain — improve efficiency and save costs.

The vehicles operate efficiently at James Hall's logistics distribution center, especially during extreme weather. After completing the daily cleaning tasks, the vehicles autonomously drive to the garbage collection area and complete dumping task by themselves.

Autowise.ai has realized commercialization in more than 30 cities, including Wilhelmshaven and Duisburg in Germany, Phoenix in the United States, Dubai and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

"What we are witnessing is a surge in demand for the application of autonomous sweepers, and we are driven by this market demand," Tang said.

He cited the example of the outdoor temperatures in the UAE in March, which go up to more than 40 C on average, and touch 50 to 60 C during peak summer.

"These conditions make it hard for sanitation workers out in such extreme weather. The issue of an aging population in Europe also causes difficulties in the recruitment of sanitation workers, and high labor costs," Tang said.

Apart from Autowise.ai, several other companies have also stepped into the autonomous sanitation sector, including Wuhu, Anhui province-based Cowarobot, US-based firm Electric Power Steering and Germany's ATR International AG.

Based on data from the National Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Beijing-based think tank EqualOcean estimates that the market size of autonomous sweepers in China will reach 270 billion yuan (\$37.34 billion) by 2025, and the penetration rate will

climb to 5 percent.

Liang Haiming, dean of Hainan University's Belt and Road Research Institute, said that unmanned sweepers made in China have advantages in automation technology, smart management and the application of new energy, which helps improve work efficiency, safety and the sustainability of city sanitation.

Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, said: "China's unmanned sweepers have effectively saved labor costs, improved operational efficiency, and reduced safety hazards and pollutant emissions, becoming a strong support for the sanitation industry. In addition, the application scope and scale of unmanned sweepers is showing an upward trend."

In addition to sanitation, the field of autonomous driving includes limited and low-speed environments such as logistics distribution, shared travel, public transportation, ports and terminals, and mining operations, Zhan said.

"There is huge potential in the market. Next, we plan to enhance research and development that leads to the development of more products to liberate people from redundant, repetitive work, further unleashing the potential of autonomous driving," said Tang of Autowise.ai, referring to the company's business plans for the near future.

## BRI paves way for shared prosperity in Central Africa

YAOUNDE, Cameroon — Central African leaders met in March in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, a regional bloc, in hopes of highlighting past achievements and defining a roadmap for strengthening regional integration, while focusing on economic challenges and growth opportunities.

When CEMAC was set up in 1994, its members — Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo and Chad — aimed to enhance economic development through regional integration. The March event also offered the leaders an opportunity to consider how regional integration and development can be achieved under the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

Since its launch in 2013, the BRI has been welcomed by all CEMAC countries as a model for cooperation with China in infrastructure development and socioeconomic transformation, said Elvis Ngolle Ngolle, an international relations expert and former Cabinet member of the Cameroonian government.

"Once you arrive in the CEMAC subregion, you will see plenty of Chinese company investment projects," said Ngolle.

### Road to wealth

Thanks in large part to Chinese investments and expertise, CEMAC states have been blessed with the construction of some major mega-infrastructure projects in the transport sector.

A good example is the Kribi Deepwater Port, built by China Harbour Engineering Co Ltd in Cameroon's southern town of Kribi. While the new seaport, which is strategically positioned in the center of the Gulf of Guinea, has stimulated the country's economy, it has become a regional hub for the African Atlantic coast.

"With the Kribi port, Cameroon has once again placed herself as the port entry to the subregion. This (the port) has added more value to certain industrial projects in Chad, the Central African Republic and Congo," said Alain Patrick Mpila Ayissi, manager of the Land Development and Environment Department of the Port Authority of Kribi.

Currently, CHEC is busy constructing the Kribi Deepwater Port Phase II. After the completion of the project, it is expected to become a large container transit port and comprehensive hub port in Central and West Africa.

As part of the project, CHEC

also constructed the Kribi-Lo-labe highway, which will cater to the requirements of port transportation and logistics and contribute to local prosperity just like the road linking Cameroon to Congo.

The Cameroon-Congo road, constructed by contractors including Sinohydro, a Chinese civil engineering construction company, stretches 1,600 kilometers from Yaounde, capital of Cameroon, to Brazzaville, the Congolese capital. It has been nicknamed the "road of regional integration" by authorities.

James Essomba, who has been selling merchandise in the border town of Ntam, Cameroon's East Region, said that the new road is a game changer.

"At first, it was difficult to get goods from Congo. Now, both countries that have long traded with others outside the subregion are trading with each other. We have seen a remarkable increase in trade and profit," said the 65-year-old.

### Clean water, energy

Laurence Wandji, 41, is a primary schoolteacher in Bafoussam, Cameroon's third-largest city. A big water tower stands just a few meters from Wandji's home. The tower was contracted by Chinese construction company CGCO Group. In 2014, CGCO Group arrived and set out to construct a water treatment plant and related facilities that could process 10,000 cubic meters of water daily in the city. It was part of a project to provide water to nine cities in Cameroon.

Currently, residents can enjoy round-the-clock water supply, thanks to the project.

"We can now take good showers even in the dry season thanks to China," said Wandji. "We can easily manage our daily activities which require water. Children no longer trek long distances to fetch water."

China has also emerged as a collaborator in furthering CEMAC energy generation goals. The subregion struggles with low energy generation and high tariff costs. Constructed by Sinohydro, Memve'e Hydroelectric Power Station, a 211-megawatt hydroelectric power station in the Ntem Valley locality in Cameroon's South Region, could offer a sustainable solution.

"Once the dam is fully operational, the problem of electricity will be greatly reduced. It is also capable of supplying electricity to neighboring countries in CEMAC because of the strong flow of the river," said Augustine Mbah, an energy consultant.

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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## EAGLE EYE

By Liu Shijin

Catch-up potential,  
digital tech vital for growth

China's growth potential, ongoing as well as in the foreseeable future, depends on two vital factors.

First, its ability to play catch up with major economies and next, upon new possibilities unleashed by digital technology through a fresh tech revolution and green transition.

## Two potentials

The catch-up potential refers to the nation's efforts to keep abreast with what developed economies have accomplished so far, one that China still has room to achieve.

For example, the country's current per capita income is around \$13,000, and its target is to reach the per capita income level of moderately developed countries by 2035. This represents an additional potential growth of about \$20,000 in per capita income.

To fill the gap, China will primarily rely on the growth of its services sectors, driven by an upgrade to its consumption structures and traditional industries such as manufacturing and agriculture. It is more realistic and feasible for China to focus on achieving its catch-up potential.

However, from a perspective of new potential derived from digital technology and green transformation, the gap between China and its developed counterparts is not that big. In certain areas, China is keeping pace or even leading the race.

It is essential to note that the two potentials are not separate but intertwined. This constitutes a significant advantage for China. Its vast market size and relatively lower income levels provide ample room for growth. Economies of scale can help the country lower costs quickly, while new technologies and industries can help it gain a competitive edge in a relatively short period, as evidenced by China's recent development in areas such as the internet, mobile communication and new energy vehicles.

## Balance is key

Of late, there have been increasing calls to loosen macroeconomic policies following insufficient demand and weakening growth momentum. This year's government work report has emphasized the need to intensify macroeconomic regulation while coordinating the expansion of domestic demand with deepening supply-side structural reforms.

Regarding the effect of macroeconomic policies on the economy, it is crucial to recognize the significant differences between China and developed economies, which are in a mature stage of development featuring slow growth. They generally lack new growth drivers. Therefore, macroeconomic policies can, to a large extent, determine their overall economic growth trends.

But China still holds potential to grow by at least 5 percent, and has yet to enter a phase of slow growth. Since China is still in a medium growth phase, its macroeconomic policies primarily play a stabilizing role and cannot have as big an impact on growth as in developed countries.

It is estimated that the impact of macroeconomic policies on GDP growth stands at about one percentage point in China, while the remaining four percentage points come from technological conditions and the policy environment. The 1:4 ratio aptly answers the question of which factor —



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

macroeconomic policy or structural reform — is more important.

In this sense, as China pursues stable growth, it is essential for policymakers to properly handle macroeconomic policies, making them appropriately loose and proactive. However, we should not focus solely on macroeconomic policies without paying adequate attention to the promotion of structural reforms.

## Role of spending

The most basic way of expanding domestic demand is to increase incomes. As China approaches the threshold of a high-income country, international experiences show that the proportion of consumption or worker wage income to the entire economy will rise significantly.

To begin with, we need to differentiate between two types of consumption: survival-oriented consumption and developmental consumption.

Survival-oriented consumption, primarily focused on basic daily needs such as food and clothing, has largely stabilized in the

country due to its economic development. Therefore, the current growth in consumption is predominantly driven by developmental consumption, which includes consumption related to social security, healthcare, education, sports and entertainment, financial services, transportation and communication.

These two types of consumption are hugely different.

Survival-based consumption is primarily individual-based, while developmental consumption is closely tied to government public services. A substantial portion of the latter is supported by government expenditure on basic public services, which makes it, in essence, a combination of government and household consumption. Currently, there are considerable gaps in developmental consumption, with the need to address unmet basic public services for nearly 300 million migrant workers in cities, being a major one.

In short, the current focus on expanding consumption should address two key issues. First, it is general developmental consumption

based on basic public services, and second, the access of middle- and low-income groups, mainly rural migrant workers, to basic public services.

## Three equalities

From the demand-side perspective, promoting structural reforms essentially boils down to the issue of urban-rural relations. The "three equalities" — equal identity, equal rights to access basic public services, and equal property rights regarding land and real estate — should be advocated in the development of rural-urban integration.

Equal identity pertains to the reform of the household registration, or *hukou*, system. In this regard, the household registration policy should be loosened and the separate treatment arising from a difference in urban-rural resident identity be eliminated, excepting a few areas with special needs and conditions.

Regarding equal rights to access basic public services, a new action plan focusing on the housing needs of the nearly 300 million rural migrant workers in cities should

be mapped out and implemented; the government can acquire some commercial apartments and convert them into public housing for these workers.

The unequal distribution of land rights, meanwhile, contributes significantly to low rural incomes. Urban residents can freely trade their commercial housing, while sales of rural buildings, which are built on collective land, face many restrictions.

The low rural incomes stem primarily from the restriction on property rights, especially that on the transfer or trade of land.

The 3rd plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, held in late 2013, touched on the issue of rural land system reform. But in reality, progress in this respect has been very slow. My suggestion is that the authorities should consider allowing rural collective construction land in urban-rural fringe areas to enter the market for transactions at the same price as State-owned land.

## Embracing entrepreneurship

China is facing many challenges, such as overcoming the middle-income trap, fostering new quality productive forces, and promoting high technologies; and resolving those challenges requires entrepreneurial spirit.

First, we should differentiate between entrepreneurs and capitalists. Entrepreneurs possess qualities such as curiosity, foresight, insight, adventurous exploration, resilience, organizational coordination and execution, which are even scarcer than the combination of resources, including capital, labor, land and technology.

A capitalist, on the other hand, refers to a provider of capital. Since the reform and opening-up policy was initiated more than 40 years ago, the development of the private sector in China has largely been driven by a large group of private business owners, known as entrepreneurs, who possess the above-mentioned qualities.

Moreover, Chinese enterprises used to be categorized by ownership, but nowadays, enterprises with diversified ownership have become normal, and purely State-owned enterprises are fewer. Such a categorization is no longer in alignment with corporate and market realities and, more importantly, it undervalues the entrepreneurship of business owners, because entrepreneurship is the most important factor behind the performance of an enterprise.

Therefore, we should readjust the classification of enterprises based on their size, technology and employment, among others, and formulate corresponding policies.

This is not to say that ownership is no longer relevant, but rather that it is the investing entities that should be categorized based on ownership. For instance, enterprises can be categorized as central State-owned, local State-owned, institutional, individual, or foreign-invested, among others, and all enterprises should be treated equally despite their ownership.

Solid headway should be made in rectifying ownership discrimination, and platform enterprises and large technology companies, for example, should be encouraged to invest and actively engage in innovation activities.

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## Consumption maintains healthy momentum

## MAIN STREET

By Yi Shaohua and Song Yuru

China's consumption sector got off to a good start in 2024, showcasing the country's huge potential and underscoring growing spending appetites among households, official data showed.

As a supersized economy, China possesses substantial consumption potential, high demand and market vitality. These factors not only promise further growth and expansion of household spending, but also provide a solid foundation for advancing the high-quality development of the country's economy. Most importantly, they serve as a reliable confidence booster for sustained economic progress over the long run.

The cheery beginning to the year helps build on a consumption recovery witnessed last year, said the National Bureau of Statistics. Total retail sales of consumer goods reached 47 trillion yuan (\$6.5 trillion) last year, marking a 7.2 percent increase from the previous year and a significant 15.6 percent rise compared to the same period in pre-pandemic 2019.

The contribution rate of final consumer spending to economic growth also reached 82.5 percent, driving GDP growth by 4.3 percentage points, which all showed that the fundamental role of consumption in driving

economic growth has been further enhanced.

First, the basic consumer goods market. The sector has consistently maintained a high growth rate, leading to the continuous expansion of consumption activity.

In 2023, the total consumption of grains, edible oils, foodstuffs, beverages, tobacco and alcohol increased greatly. Total purchases of clothing, shoes, hats and knitted textiles soared 10.9 percent year-on-year, while the buying of gold, silver and jewelry increased 13.3 percent.

Looking at 2024, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that during the Chinese New Year holiday, sales of key retail and catering companies across the country increased 11 percent year-on-year.

Sales of gold, silver and other jewelry; sports and entertainment-related goods and services; and telecommunication equipment increased by 23.8 percent, 15.6 percent, and 10.4 percent, respectively, year-on-year.

Sales during an annual online shopping festival, from Jan 18 to Feb 17, hit approximately 1.2 trillion yuan, which is a nearly 9 percent rise compared with a year earlier.

These are all positive indicators that mark a strong start to the year and emphasize the vast potential of the country's consumer market.

Second, the scale of services consumption continues to expand and has become a new engine driving consumption growth.

Since 2023, services consumption has shown a rapid rise. Annual retail sales of services consumption last year increased 20 percent year-on-year, which is 14.2 percentage

points higher than the growth rate of commodity retail sales.

Catering consumption has grown significantly, with catering revenue reaching 5.29 billion yuan throughout the year, a year-on-year increase of 20 percent. During the Spring Festival holiday, the national average daily sales revenue of catering services increased 31.5 percent year-on-year.

In addition, entertainment and tourism consumption have shown explosive growth. During the New Year's Day holiday, more than 135 million people traveled nationwide, driving domestic tourism revenue to reach 79.73 billion yuan, more than double compared with the previous year.

During the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, the number of domestic tourists reached 474 million, a year-on-year increase of 34.3 percent. The total domestic tourism expenditure was 632.69 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 47.3 percent.

Box office performance was also strong, with domestic box office receipts during the holiday exceeding 1.5 billion yuan, 2.7 times that of the previous year.

As households' living standards improve and individuals strive to enhance their quality of life, services consumption is thriving.

Third, green, healthy and smart consumption remain hot topics, unleashing more potential demand.

As technological breakthroughs and living standards improve, the importance of health and environmental protection becomes more firmly ingrained in society. Consequently, demand for green consumer products is on the rise.

Smart homes are now integrating various features like artificial intelligence, the internet of things and everyday necessities, enhancing the convenience, safety and energy efficiency of family life.

As a result, smart home appliances have gained popularity among consumers. In 2023, the value of the country's smart home market reached 7.16 trillion yuan. Additionally, sales of green and healthy products are thriving in consumption promotion activities organized by various entities.

During the Spring Festival holiday this year, the Ministry of Commerce said that sales of instant retailing on e-commerce platforms surged, as did purchases of green and organic foods in some large supermarket chains.

The data reflects the role of the "holiday economy" in driving green and healthy consumption, while highlighting the increasing potential for expanded consumption of green products.

Fourth, new consumption patterns and scenarios are rapidly evolving, further growing the potential of the consumer market.

Driven by the new generation of information technology, consumer carriers or platforms continue to innovate with various business patterns and consumption scenarios around different themes and geographical spaces.

Since 2023, many new consumption spots have emerged. For instance, in the summer, Zibo, Shandong province gained popularity for its barbecue offerings, sparking a nationwide tourism craze. Similarly, during the winter, Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, garnered attention through online platforms due to its captivating ice and snow activities.

During the 2024 New Year's Day holiday which began on Dec 21, 2023, Harbin is

reported to have ushered in 3.05 million tourists and generated revenue of 5.91 billion yuan, the most in its history.

Simultaneously, major brands and intellectual properties, or IPs, have initiated collaborations, leading to the emergence of numerous popular consumer IPs.

For example, coffee brand Luckin cooperated with Korean sticker memes Line Puppy and jointly launched new products and peripheral products on Aug 22 — Chinese Valentine's Day — last year.

Milk tea chain Heytea and Korean cartoon Loopy also launched new products and limited peripheral products during the Christmas season.

Notably, various cities across the country, including Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing, have made efforts to build themselves into international consumption cities, by driving new patterns like hotpot festivals and night economies.

Rural consumption also experienced a recovery and surged as many individuals returned to their hometowns during the Spring Festival holiday. This influx of people sparked increased activity in catering, tourism and demand for agricultural products in rural areas.

The Ministry of Commerce said online retail sales in rural areas witnessed a year-on-year increase of 16.1 percent during the Spring Festival holiday. This trend exemplifies the synchronized progress of consumption in both urban and rural areas, as they advance hand-in-hand.

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

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Ditching the lecturing in favor of listening may open the way to less strained relations

While it is undoubtedly an encouraging sign of serious shared interest in stabilizing their relations, as well as the pragmatism present in both sides' approaches to the rocky China-United States relationship, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's ongoing visit may also indicate bilateral ties are on the threshold of a challenging new stage.

If the consensus on stabilizing bilateral ties by keeping lines of communication open represents the first stage of a strategic reset, the two sides now face a new one that will put their claims of responsibly managing bilateral ties to the test. It is a test that will prove tough for both, because, increasingly, they are getting to the roots of the problems that have strained bilateral ties, where neither sees much room for compromise.

Before she embarked on the trip, on her way to China, and then in Guangzhou, Yellen's remarks centered on Chinese "manufacturing overcapacity", whose economic fallout she said would hurt the US, the rest of the world, and finally China itself. This line is expected to continue in Beijing until the end of her visit.

Yellen brought with her Washington's growing worries about alleged Chinese overproduction of electric vehicles, solar panels, semiconductors and other goods allegedly flooding global markets. Its request is Beijing shift away from what it claims is Beijing's subsidy-driven economic model and return to market-oriented reforms.

This will prove an extremely hard sell, because it is fundamentally at odds with Beijing's view, which is that it is Washington that is using subsidies and other

measures to distort the market. Beijing sees no need for such a "return" considering its present path is a "higher degree of opening-up", which by its very nature requires further reforms. As for China's alleged "unfair trade practices", Washington is simply employing a double standard. Yellen's Chinese hosts have complained about US tariffs on Chinese imports, sanctions on Chinese companies, and especially the punitive moves against TikTok.

Yellen has won Chinese friends for repeatedly arguing against the "decoupling" of the two economies, which is why many have seen her as being the best messenger to convey Washington's appeal for a "level playing field".

Her July 2023 China visit led to the forming of economic and financial "working groups" in both governments. But things are different this time. While in Washington's eyes they are a growing threat, China-made EVs, power batteries and solar panels happen to be among the leading wave of the country's new quality productive forces. No country should seek to suppress another's development, as the Chinese leader has told his US audiences on multiple recent occasions.

The differences between the two sides are "not going to be solved in an afternoon or a month", as Yellen rightly said.

But continuous communication may provide "a structured way" in which the two sides can "continue to listen to one another and see if we can find a way forward that will avoid conflict".

That is certainly a foundation to build on that needs reinforcing with solid means of support.

## Military exchanges conducive to risk reduction

According to a Chinese Defense Ministry readout on Saturday, a China-US Military Maritime Consultative Agreement Working Group meeting was held in Hawaii from Wednesday to Thursday with the aim of promoting the healthy, stable and sustainable development of military ties between the two nations.

The latest maritime consultation between the Chinese and the United States' militaries shows that the two countries are taking concrete steps to implement the two heads of state's agreement on the importance of military-to-military exchanges being resumed.

Given that the previous such meeting took place in December 2021 via a video link, the first offline MMCA meeting in two years, reportedly with the participation of senior representatives of the military and civilian officials from each side, is a long-called-for revival of direct China-US military exchanges.

With the strains that have appeared in the two countries' relations in that intervening period there is much air to be cleared to ensure the two sides are on the same page and there is no misreading of the tense situation.

While military-to-military communication was maintained through diplomatic channels, the suspension of the maritime mechanism by Beijing — as part of its series of measures in response to then US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's brazenly provocative visit to Taipei in August 2022 — raised fears of the two militaries inadvertently stumbling into conflict. The agreement on the resumption of the mechanism, announced after the summit between the two heads of state in San Fran-

cisco in November last year, was therefore widely welcomed as a much-needed step in the right direction.

Keeping the channels of direct communication open is vital at a time when the US' strategy to contain China is bloating the US' military footprint in the region and it is increasing the frequency of its nearshore operations, heightening the risks of an incident.

That the mechanism is operational once again has led to hopes that the US will strive to temper the over-aggressive pursuit of its adversarial approach to "competition". China made it clear at last week's consultation that its military will continue to lawfully respond to any and all provocations.

In a latest example of the provocations that the US is now routinely engaging in, it held joint maritime exercises in the South China Sea on Sunday with the Philippines, Australia and Japan. In a joint statement, the four countries said the exercises, the first of their kind, were "to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight" in the South China Sea, the spurious excuse the US gives for the constant parading of its muscles on China's doorstep.

The US clearly wants to send the message that it will throw its weight behind the Philippines' increasing reckless testing of China's patience.

While the resumption of the dialogue mechanism is to be welcomed, the US should appreciate that the best way for it to avoid triggering an explosive situation is for it not to play with explosives. It should stop creating risk-laden situations with its military posturing and make efforts to reduce the risks by behaving more responsibly and maturely.

## NATO's menu leaves much to be desired

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization celebrated the 75th anniversary of its founding on Thursday in Brussels.

Any international organization of its size, with that long a history, should have plenty to say on such an occasion. However, what the main speakers said has only proved the bloc is still living in the Cold War era in which it was born.

A de facto military extension of the Marshall Plan, NATO has been used as a tool of the United States to defend the latter's hegemony, even after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, its supposed raison d'être. The so-called transatlantic collective security mechanism is just a fig leaf covering up NATO's true role as a roughneck of the US.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called it "a defensive alliance with no designs on the territory of any other country". But what he did not bother to mention is that the US uses NATO to prop up puppet regimes to wield its influence in other countries.

With no perceivable security threats, the bloc's continuous expansion from 12 founding members to 32 as of last month, which has not only ended its honeymoon period with Russia, but also directly resulted in the ongoing Ukraine crisis, is proof of the US' insatiable appetite for power.

That all major US "Indo-Pacific" allies, including Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, were invited to attend the NATO Foreign Minis-

ters' Meeting in Brussels on Wednesday and Thursday should serve to alert the world to the bloc accelerating its expansion to the Asia-Pacific — a key part of the Joe Biden administration's plans for NATO. It is attempting to cojoin its bilateral security alliances and regional security mechanisms, including AUKUS, with NATO.

With Europe facing its largest military conflict since World War II, a shock therapy to resurrect the "brain dead" NATO, all regional countries should be vigilant to the US' attempts to make the Asia-Pacific grist to its war mill.

It is shame on the NATO members that instead of the organization seeking to help the world address real security threats, such as terrorism, it is hyping up the US-fabricated threat from China.

To enliven the atmosphere of a reception for the NATO foreign ministers, US ambassador to NATO, Julianne Smith, showed the bloc's first cookbook published in 1957, as well as a menu for the reception that day featuring "the specialties and a special food" of each of NATO's 12 founding members.

That was a not so subtle reminder of Blinken's remarks at the Munich Security Conference two months ago, when he said, "If you are not at the table in the international system, you're gonna be on the menu".

It also reinforced the point that the US war machine, and by extension NATO, need some to not be at the table, so that they have a menu for their chow down of the United Nations order.

## Li Min



## Opinion Line

## Drivers of holiday economy have broader potential to tap

The economic data related to the just-concluded three-day Qingming Festival, or Tomb Sweeping Day holiday, that ended on Saturday should offer policymakers some food for thought.

Chinese people made about 119 million trips at home during the holiday spending 53.95 billion yuan (\$7.46 billion), according to the estimates of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The two figures rose 11.5 percent and 12.7 percent respectively from those of 2019, demonstrating the potential of the country's holiday economy.

Domestic local travel and peripheral travel orders in travel agencies increased by 2.11 and 3.5 times respectively year-on-year; the tradition of people returning to their hometown to worship ancestors gave a big boom to rural tourism, as rural tour orders increased by 2.39 times year-on-year.

It is worth mentioning that

some cities, such as Kaifeng in Henan province and Tianshui in Gansu province, that gained tremendous attention on social media networking sites for their local tourist attractions or food shortly before the holiday have seen more tourists than before during the holiday, indicating the benefits of favorable publicity.

Young people aged 18-25 accounted for more than 20 percent of the tourism market during the holiday. Their willingness to voice their personal feelings online and communicate provides a big boost for the holiday economy. The formation of a national 5G network and the convenience of mobile payment and on-the-spot sharing all promote that process.

Trains remain the most popular, economic and reliable transport choice for travelers. During the holiday, the number of passengers transported by railways

reached 49.74 million, up 23 percent from 2019. The fast expansion of the high-speed railway system nationwide has laid a solid foundation for the holiday economy boom.

That the most popular cities during the holiday cover all major city clusters that the country has developed over recent years shows the positive influence of the country's regional development strategies and new type of urbanization on tourism and consumption.

Policymakers should continue to press ahead with the upgrading of the transport and telecommunication infrastructure, explore ways to promote better traveling and consumption experiences for tourists, and prioritize creating jobs for the young people, all of which have proved their indispensable value in the holiday as boosters of the economy.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## Clock ticking on battery-power 'time bomb'

The fast development of the electric vehicle and electric bicycle industries means that the recycling of lithium batteries is becoming an essential downstream industry. This has led to the mushrooming of unqualified and unlicensed small battery recycling workshops. There are even livestreaming anchors selling "courses" on how to dismantle and assemble used lithium batteries to help "gold rushers" realize their "financial freedom" in a short time.

But the recycling and dismantling of lithium batteries poses

flammability and explosion risks, and problems such as pollution may also occur during the process. Because of this, there are strict technical requirements and regulations on it.

Yet the workshops purchase used batteries at much higher prices than the licensed and qualified battery recycling enterprises, as their lack of standards means their costs, if any, are much lower. Also, because of that, they sell "new batteries" they assemble from used batteries at much lower prices than those of the products manufactured by legal

battery companies, dominating the market in some places. Many battery-related fires are attributable to the products produced by these workshops.

The market for lithium batteries is still expanding fast, and the "wave of retirement" for batteries is yet to come, meaning that these illegal recyclers constitute a "time bomb". Relevant watchdog departments are obliged to deal with the issue by intensifying their crackdown on the illegal battery recycling industry and market.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## What They Say

## Sun sets on enterprises that rest on their laurels

Those industries that have existed for a long time but are now making less profit than before are often referred to as sunset industries. However, these industries still have the possibility of thriving if they can adapt to the changing market and technological environment.

The rise and fall of an industry depends on how companies in the industry respond to market changes, rather than the industry itself.

The supposed sunset industries, such as the garment industry and steel industry, can still maintain vitality and achieve sustainable development if the enterprises in these industries can innovate, improve their efficiency and adapt to changing market demands. If a company does not pay attention to maintaining its competitiveness in this way, it may gradually decline even if it is in an emerging industry or a fast-growing market.

Many companies in what are considered to be sunset industries have actually regained their vitality through innovation and transformation.

Some Chinese steel enterprises have stepped up their efforts in digital and intelligent transformation through technological innovation and management optimization, actively exploring machine substitution, unmanned production operations, and 5G+ industrial internet application scenarios, and successfully realized green manufacturing and intelligent manufacturing. Thanks to these efforts, they have not only improved their product quality and production efficiency, but also significantly reduced their energy consumption and emissions.

Traditional industrial enterprises should thus focus on using artificial intelligence technology to make themselves more agile. AI technology can significantly

improve the efficiency of the manufacturing process by optimizing production processes, predicting equipment maintenance needs and automating production lines. It can also help enterprises achieve flexible production and personalized and customized production.

Furthermore, through precise quality inspection and control, human errors can be reduced and product consistency and quality improved. AI technology can also improve the efficiency of material circulation, reduce inventory costs, and respond to changing market demand more quickly.

The evolution of industries is a natural law, and the fate of enterprises is in their own hands. What enterprises need to do is to actively embrace technological and market changes and seek to achieve sustainable development through technological innovation and comprehensive reform.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Ma Ying-jeou visit to mainland

**Editor's note:** Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of Kuomintang, is leading a delegation of students from Taiwan to the Chinese mainland from April 1 to 11, raising hopes that compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait will jointly promote cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation in various sectors, and help realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Two experts share their views on the significance of Ma's visit to the mainland with China Daily.

Zhu Songling

# Ma's tribute to ancestors crucial for present ties

After his visit to his ancestral home in Xiangtan, Hunan province, on a "commemorative journey" to the Chinese mainland last year, Ma Ying-jeou is now leading a group of young students from "Dajiu School" on a visit to the mainland from April 1 to 11. During their travel on the mainland, the former Kuomintang chairman, along with the island's students, are visiting Guangdong and Shaanxi provinces, and Beijing.

With some Western forces continuing their efforts to interfere in the Taiwan question and Lai Ching-te about to take office as the island's leader, Ma's terming his visit to the mainland a "peace journey" assumes great importance.

The highlights and significance of Ma's visit are reflected in the promotion of traditional Chinese culture. During his eight years as the island's leader, Ma paid tribute to the Yellow Emperor six times. The Yellow Emperor, or Huang Emperor, one of the five most ancient, legendary figures, and Emperor Yan are widely considered common ancestors of the Chinese people. The Chinese people are often called as the descendants of Yan and Huang emperors.

This visit marks Ma's first in-person tribute to the Yellow Emperor at his mausoleum as well as the first such in-person tribute by a former Taiwan island leader.

Paying tribute to the Yellow Emperor at his mausoleum is an important tradition of the Chinese people, as it shows reverence for our ancestors and upholds the Chinese civilization.

Ma's visit and his statements prove that Taiwan residents still identify themselves as Chinese people, acknowledge that they are part of the Chinese nation, and recognize that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China. His public tribute to the Yellow Emperor reflects the aspirations and desire of the descendants of Yan and Huang emperors on the island, which is a slap in the face of the "Taiwan independence" forces on the island that refuse to accept they are Chinese and have identified their sinister "de-Sinicization" efforts.

Ma's visit to the mainland is also an opportunity for the accompanying students to physically participate in paying tribute to the Yellow Emperor, experience the feeling of traversing history, identify with Chinese culture, and be overwhelmed with emotion for being the descendants of Yan and Huang emperors.

The transcending of time and space in cultural inheritance is conducive to enhancing cohesion and spiritual harmony among compatriots on



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both sides of the Strait.

Ma's visit also promotes youth exchanges and cooperation across the Strait. Since youths are the future, cross-Strait youth exchanges will not only enhance mutual understanding but also promote peaceful relations between the two sides of the Strait.

It is highly likely that the students may realize they have a greater responsibility in advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation after paying respects to the martyrs of the Huanghuagang Uprising of 1911 in Guangzhou; learning more about the feats of the Chinese nation during the Qin (221-206 BC), Han (206 BC-AD 220) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, and marveling at the achievements of the Yellow Emperor after paying respects to him at his mausoleum in Shaanxi province; and feeling the historical weight of the Palace Museum (Forbidden City) in Beijing.

Direct exchanges and dialogues with students from Sun Yat-sen University, Peking University and other universities, sharing their thoughts and dreams, discussing the possibility of peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, and exploring the themes of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will not only dispel misunderstandings and prejudices but also build bridges of friendship and trust, laying a solid foundation for the peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the motherland.

Ma's visit also highlights the importance of cross-Strait educational exchanges. Thanks to the participation of young students from "Dajiu School", this visit is not only an exchange at the leadership level but also a cultivation of young talents. Strengthening educational exchanges between the two sides of the Strait and jointly cultivating young talents who understand and

respect Chinese culture are conducive to realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Besides, Ma's visit to the mainland is remarkably similar to the 2005 visit by Lien Chan, then chairman of Kuomintang, when the two sides of the Strait agreed to develop peaceful relations. Not only the complex and fast-changing global situation seems the same but also the strained cross-Strait ties appear remarkably similar.

When Lien Chan visited the mainland, the airport in Taiwan was pelted with eggs, but upon his return to Taipei, he was greeted with flowers. His visit to the mainland led to a significant shift in public opinion on the island because, based on the 1992 Consensus that there is only China and the common political foundation of opposing

"Taiwan independence", Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China realized a "common vision for the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations", reversing the crisis situation at the time.

Subsequently, the two parties worked together to promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, ushering in a new era of peaceful development across the Strait in 2008.

Ma's visit to the mainland also shows the positive attitude of Taiwan residents toward the peaceful development of cross-Strait ties and will likely give rise to new ideas and

inspiration for the new era of peaceful development across the Strait, opening a new chapter in cross-Strait relations.

On April 3, a significant earthquake hit off the coast of Hualien county, Taiwan. Despite being on the trip to the mainland at the time, Ma expressed his condolences, extending his well wishes for everyone's safety.

Following the earthquake, Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, stated that the mainland authorities are highly concerned about the situation. They expressed

sincere condolences to the affected compatriots in Taiwan and pledged to closely monitor the disaster and its aftermath. They also expressed willingness to provide assistance for disaster relief.

In the face of natural disasters, the Chinese people should always stand together to overcome challenges.

We hope Ma and his team will succeed in their endeavor, and we look forward to them making significant contributions to the history of cross-Strait relations and the development of the Chinese nation. We also hope Ma's visit will open new paths and create new opportunities for cross-Strait relations, writing a splendid new chapter in Chinese history.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Wilson Lee Flores

## Visit will have impact beyond cross-Strait relations

In a world wracked by geopolitical uncertainties against the backdrop of Washington hosting yet another meeting to strengthen its military alliances and weeks before a change of leadership on the Chinese island of Taiwan, the visit of Ma Ying-jeou, former Kuomintang leader, to the Chinese mainland from April 1 to 11 raises hopes, however slim, for peace across the Taiwan Strait and the region beyond.

Accompanied by students from Taiwan, Ma's schedule includes paying respects to the Yellow Emperor, one of the five ancient, legendary Chinese emperors and widely regarded as the common ancestor of the Chinese people, at his mausoleum near Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Tomb Sweeping Day. Ma's visit to the mainland evokes a profound sense of optimism beyond cross-Strait ties, and raises



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mission in 2023, manifests his steadfast commitment to improving cross-Strait relations.

The importance of Ma's efforts just weeks before the imminent inauguration of new Taiwan lead-

er hopes for a reconfiguration of regional dynamics and stabilizing the region.

Ma's historic visit will help improve cross-Strait relations, foster pragmatism and fortify regional stability.

Ma's second visit to the mainland, following his successful goodwill

visit in 2023, manifests his steadfast commitment to improving cross-Strait relations.

The importance of Ma's efforts just weeks before the imminent inauguration of new Taiwan lead-

er Lai Ching-te can never be overestimated. In this complex environment, Ma's peace overture offers a counterpoint. His visit to the mainland also serves as a poignant reminder to Asians that sustained dialogue and diplomacy are critical to defusing tensions and fostering mutual understanding.

Ma's visit amplifies inclusivity and collaboration. With the Taiwan island set to get a new leader, Ma's proactive efforts serve as a bridge between the past and the present, a bridge that promotes peace, progress and prosperity.

By directly engaging with the mainland in a spirit of openness and pragmatism, Ma has highlighted that constructive dialogue can help resolve political differences and pave the way for peace. His visit has an impact beyond cross-Strait ties, and we Asians are waiting to

see a breakthrough in cross-Strait ties.

At the heart of Ma's mission lies a steadfast commitment to bridging the schism between the mainland and Taiwan. By facilitating direct engagement between young students from the island and their mainland compatriots from Peking University and Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, Ma is laying the groundwork for not only improving mutual understanding but also enhancing mutual trust, dialogue and synergy between mainland and Taiwan youths.

As one of the highlights of his visit to the mainland, Ma paid respects to the Yellow Emperor at his mausoleum on Tomb Sweeping Day, which was a poignant tribute to the rich cultural heritage and shared legacy of all Chinese people.

This solemn Confucian tradition

serves as a powerful reminder of the eternal and intrinsic unity binding the Chinese people, transcending political divides and fostering collaborative harmony. As Ma and the Taiwan students performed the rituals on Tomb Sweeping Day, fulfilling their moral obligation by paying respects to the revered Yellow Emperor, they fostered a deeper sense of kinship across the strait.

Furthermore, Ma's visit has immense potential for enhancing win-win economic cooperation across the Strait, thereby fueling faster pan-Asian economic growth and bolstering investor confidence in the economic potential of the region.

During my recent visit to Taiwan as a guest of the Taipei international bakery show, lots of Taiwan entrepreneurs told me that their economy has not been performing well.

I believe normalization of cross-Strait trade and defusing of tensions can act as catalysts for the island's improved economic performance. And increased people-to-people exchanges like Ma's visit can lead to better economic exchanges, which will benefit the Chinese nation and the region beyond.

Therefore, we should support Ma's efforts to improve cross-Strait ties, and the two sides of the Strait should seize upon this golden opportunity to build a better future for the whole Chinese nation, as well as the global community, a future marked by harmony and progress. Now is the time to chart a mutually beneficial, resolute and enlightened trajectory toward unity, prosperity and enduring peace.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS



STARLET WANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIU LIN

## Wave for the future

China and ASEAN countries should maintain positive interactions on the South China Sea issue

Relations between China and the Philippines have become increasingly tense because of the strengthening of the alliance between the United States and the Philippines and the shift in the South China Sea policy of the Ferdinand Marcos Jr administration. This has once again put the South China Sea in the spotlight.

The US views the Southeast Asian region, especially the South China Sea, as a vital support for advancing its "Indo-Pacific" strategy. It is trying to exploit the differences between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations claimant states and China on the South China Sea issue to influence the actions of ASEAN claimant states and the interactions between China and ASEAN.

In this context, ASEAN claimants are also calculating their own interests and choices, such as the Philippines strengthening its alliance with the United States and defense cooperation with Japan and Australia, frequently staging provocations at Ren'ai Reef, Huangyan Island and Tiexian Reef; Vietnam advancing naval cooperation and defense exchanges with the United States; and Indonesia starting strategic dialogues and expanding joint military exercises with the United States.

ASEAN claimant states are intensifying unilateral actions aimed at consolidating their holdings and bolstering their position in the region, leading to increased contradictions and frictions with China in aspects such as the ownership of islands and reefs, the development of resources, and law enforcement, which adds to the uncertainty of the situation in the South China Sea.

Especially since 2023, the Philippines' provocative actions in the South China Sea have become one of the main factors affecting regional stability. The Philippines is deliberately using the media to distort and hype up the legitimate law enforcement actions of China, implementing a so-called assertive transparency strategy, attempting to confuse international public opinion and provide an excuse for external forces to intervene in the disputes between China and the Philippines.

Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia are intensifying unilateral actions such as island and reef expansion, and oil and gas exploration and development. In addition, ASEAN claimant states continue to strengthen their naval, air force, and coast guard capabilities. In January this year, during Philippine President Marcos' visit to Vietnam, the Philippines and Vietnam signed an agreement to strengthen their coast guard cooperation.

The Joe Biden administration's "Indo-Pacific" strategy emphasizes

shaping the environment around China and using the South China Sea issue to contain China, especially highlighting military and defense cooperation. The US has obtained access rights to nine military bases in the Philippines and has formulated bilateral defense guidelines with the Philippines, restarting joint patrols in the South China Sea.

The US and the Philippines have also accelerated trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, France and others, forming a "US-Philippines+" model. With the support of forces outside the region, the unilateral actions by ASEAN claimant states have become more risky and provocative, which may lead to misunderstandings and misperceptions.

Behind the recent disputes between China and the Philippines, the US not only frequently voices its support for the Philippines, reiterating that the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty applies to the South China Sea and providing support and encouragement to the Philippines, it also provides air and maritime surveillance support for the Philippines' on-site actions, and even directly dispatches littoral combat ships to carry out "freedom of navigation operations" near Ren'ai Reef.

The South China Sea issue remains a highly sensitive issue for China and ASEAN claimant states. On the one hand, the disputes over island and reef sovereignty and maritime demarcation between China and ASEAN claimant states are fundamental contradictions in the South China Sea issue, and it is difficult for all parties to retreat from their existing positions.

Minor contradictions and frictions, if not timely addressed, could easily lead to escalation and loss of control under the incitement of public opinion. The South China Sea currently lacks effective regional crisis management mechanisms, and although there are some bilateral crisis management channels, they often fail to function effectively in the event of incidents.

On the other hand, ASEAN claimant states continue their dual approach to the South China Sea issue, maintaining consultations and dialogues with China while also attempting to take advantage of the opportunity of increased involvement by major powers in the South China Sea affairs, as well as the time window before the Code of Conduct is reached to consolidate and expand their own interests.

Despite the risks and challenges, it is also important to note that the relationships between China and most ASEAN claimant states are generally controllable, and there remains a basic consensus among all parties on the need to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

China maintains high-level dialogues and consultations with Viet-

nam, Malaysia, and other claimants on the South China Sea issue and continues to promote pragmatic maritime cooperation. For example, China and Vietnam regularly conduct joint naval and coast guard patrols in the Beibu Gulf, and the China-Vietnam coast guards hold young officer exchange activities.

Even though there are frictions between China and the Philippines, the two sides have not cut off all communication and exchanges. In January of this year, China and the Philippines held the eighth meeting of the bilateral consultation mechanism on the South China Sea issue, and a Chinese naval training ship also visited the Philippines last year.

Moreover, China and the ASEAN countries are actively advancing consultations on a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. Currently, the two sides have completed the second reading of the draft code and have officially started the third reading, moving a step closer to reaching an effective, substantial, and legally binding Code of Conduct at an early date.

The interaction between China and ASEAN claimant states on the South China Sea issue is a long-term and complex process. Ensuring the overall stability of the regional order and controlling the systemic pressures brought about by major power competition, sovereignty disputes, and other factors are very important for both China and ASEAN countries.

China and the ASEAN claimant states should focus on their common interests and peace and stability in the South China Sea, and maintain positive interactions on the South China Sea issue.

Both sides should adhere to friendly consultations and exchanges within the framework of bilateral consultation mechanisms, enhance their mutual understanding of the maritime situation, handle crises in a timely manner, avoid any escalation and loss of control, and prevent local incidents from undermining the overall situation of bilateral relations and regional peace and stability.

They should accelerate cooperation in areas such as the blue economy, marine ecological construction, and marine culture, enhance communication and exchanges in the military and defense fields to build mutual trust and create favorable conditions for properly handling the maritime disputes and constructing a regional order that aligns with the interests of China and ASEAN countries.

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HERMAN TIU LAUREL

## Global majority remakes mankind's future

Under the leadership of a strong Global South, we will see the emergence of a multipolar world where all nations are equal and there are no wars

The Global South should now be called the "global majority" to do justice to its socio-economic, geopolitical and civilizational impact on the shape of things to come in this world. The Global South is now consolidating around the growing power of BRICS Plus to recreate the world

in the model of a multipolar, just, equitable and democratic new world order.

The consolidation and expansion of BRICS Plus in January has boosted the gravitas of the economic and geopolitical alliance of major developing countries from the representative regions of the world as it overtakes the developed nations of the G7 in economic and resources potential.

With the entry of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from North Africa and the Middle East in January, the BRICS bloc now represents more than 45 percent of the world's population, controls around 45 percent of the world's oil production and accounts for a larger share (nearly 36 percent) of global GDP than the G7 countries (less than 30 percent) when adjusted for purchasing power parity.

Equally impressive are the achievements in economic exchange among member states of the original bloc that are bound to grow with the new membership. Among the bloc's original five members, trade rose 56 percent between 2017 and 2022 to \$422 billion, while BRICS-endorsed trade in local currency among these countries has significantly cut transactions costs.

BRICS also leads global discussion on the "de-dollarization" of the global financial and economic system, and the creation of digital currency and blockchain payment system. The last vestiges of the unipolar

world and the era of Western colonialism are being irreversibly severed to ensure an equitable global system of trade, financial transactions and international commercial relations.

One remarkable BRICS milestone is the establishment of the BRICS bank that has granted loans worth \$33 billion to date for a total of 98 projects in its five founding-member countries. This loan portfolio is clearly destined for even more dramatic growth with its five new members and over 30 other countries that have evinced interest to be part of the bloc in the near future.

While BRICS has acted primarily as an economic bloc, it recently made a welcome move to respond to the exploding humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. In a virtual summit chaired by South Africa, the BRICS group called for an end to Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

The interest in BRICS by some 30 other countries was first indicated by South Africa, the BRICS chair in 2023. Later, Russia, the 2024 chair, re-affirmed it. In President Vladimir Putin's words, "We will spare no effort to ensure that, while preserving traditions and being guided by the experience gained by the association in years past, we facilitate the harmonious integration of new participants in all formats of its activities."

BRICS' rotating leadership demonstrates the democratic spirit of the grouping that is based on the shared values of openness, cooperation and solidarity, all these based on its envisioned multipolar world. The very existence of BRICS and its dramatic growth demonstrates that these values work, hence the growing interest of nations to participate in this new, visionary project to advance the global majority in particular and humanity in general.

In line with its traditional role of supporting the economic development impetus of Global

South countries, China is a major inspiration and moving force behind BRICS. I am continually reminded of the Tanzania-Zambia railway, an inspiring project initiated in the 1970s to begin the development of Africa even when China itself was still rising from poverty.

Today China is connecting the entire world with its Belt and Road Initiative, linking Eurasia with Africa and the world via land, power and digital communications corridors, and the maritime nations through the Maritime Silk Road. As the global majority takes the initiative in this new era, a BRICS and BRI collaboration needs to be established to tighten BRICS solidarity and economic security.

Elements from the unipolar era continue to seek the failure of the global majority, instigating conflict and tensions all over the world and attempting to divide developing nations. One sad example is the Philippines, a country where I am from, that is being turned into a proxy to push conflict between nations in Asia. Fortunately, Association of Southeast Asian Nations remains steadfastly independent and some even contemplate a coalition with BRICS.

There will be bumps on the road to realizing the ultimate vision of the global majority and BRICS but the future is certain: a multipolar world where all nations are equal and "forever wars" of the unipolar moment are forever gone to be replaced by the "forever peace and prosperity" of a remade world order under the leadership of the global majority also known as the Global South. As the global majority speaks and moves, the world now moves with it.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

# LIFE



**Left:** A villager walks past a mural by cartoonist Li Kunwu, 69, who has injected an artistic vibe into Duqu village, Kunming, Yunnan province. **Right:** A cow, part of the village's legendary narrative, is among many inspirations that Li received from residents about rural life. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A wall painting of happy villagers playing musical instruments, accompanied by an attentive dog, draws the eye the moment one sets foot in Duqu village. The mural graces the wall of a power distribution room near the entrance to the village on the banks of Dianchi Lake, about 50 kilometers to the southwest of downtown Kunming, capital of Yunnan province.

Walking a bit farther inside, two larger wall paintings reveal themselves. They face onto the village square, which doubles up as a parking lot and as a place to dance.

One features scenes of residents singing and dancing together, and the other a panoramic view of the village that highlights landmarks, such as its lotus flower pool and an old temple.

Others telling the story of Duqu's origins, the local way of life, as well as folk culture, are scattered around the village.

They are all the work of Li Kunwu, 69, a well-known cartoonist, who won the 2010 best history cartoon award at the Les Rendez-vous de l'Histoire in France, one of the largest historical book fairs in Europe.

"When I was young, I also lived in a village next to Dianchi Lake, and the first time I entered Duqu, I felt its rustic, quaint atmosphere, untouched by commercialization, which I really liked a lot," says Li, from Kunming, who was named a cultural ambassador for Dianchi by local authorities in March last year.

The role has since given him incentives to conduct research and field trips to villages along the banks of the lake.

Li's original plan was simply to hold an art exhibition in Duqu, but upon arriving in the village, he decided to paint directly on its walls, so his work would be better integrated with the village setting.

"I have published many books abroad and organized art exhibitions, in the hopes of making our culture and customs known to more people. But I have always had a wish, which is to bring my comics about nostalgia back to my hometown. So, these murals can be considered as fulfilling that wish," Li says.

The endeavor was something of a challenge, as Li had never painted on walls before. The biggest difficulty was the difference in perspective.

"When I draw on paper, I can see the overall effect at a glance, but with murals, you need some distance to see clearly. It was difficult to grasp this at the beginning, such as how large a figure should be drawn, which required me to adapt constantly," Li says.

Other challenges included needing to rely on his intuition without making drafts, and improvising as he went along.

His goal was to convey a sense of nostalgia, which he says is "a complex, yet rich sentiment that needs diverse content and formats to express."

In order to save time commuting back and forth, Li decided to stay in

## Nostalgic murals help village paint a future

Images depicting rural life have become a tourist attraction, boosting local incomes and pride, **Yang Feiyue** and **Li Yingqing** report.



**Left:** Li works on a mural in Duqu village last year. **Right:** Li welcomes an international guest in front of a mural that features rice planting in spring during Grain Rain, one of the 24 solar terms, last year.

“These things have almost disappeared now, but I have experienced them all in the past. So, if they are not recorded, they will truly be forgotten.”

Li Kunwu, cartoonist

Duqu, immersing himself in the daily lives of the villagers.

"After I arrived, they were very happy and welcomed me with open arms," Li says. "They felt a sense of familiarity seeing their lives depicted on the walls."

At the beginning, he leaned more toward rural landscapes, without much of a narrative, but in the process of painting, he says he came to understand that there were many interesting aspects about the village.

"For example, some people told me about a legendary white cow in their village, which is very rare for locals. The villagers are proud of it, so I painted an image of it," he says.

He also drew inspiration from the villagers themselves.

"While I was painting, an elderly couple holding hands walked past me. I found this very moving, and conveniently, there was a wall near-

by, so I painted this real-life scene on it," he says.

Li takes pride in this mural, since it is a favorite for many villagers.

Additionally, he created a series of Pristine Era-themed murals depicting scenes of livestock roaming without being fenced in, and children carrying baskets to collect manure and using oil lamps to do their homework.

"These things have almost disappeared now, but I have experienced them all in the past. So, if they are not recorded, they will truly be forgotten," he says.

As Li's interactions with the villagers increased, they began to treat him like one of their own.

"They often brought me vegetables and fruit. When I was painting, people passing by would greet me, and even children going to school would shout 'uncle' when

they saw me," he says.

So far, Li has completed just over 100 murals of differing sizes that the villagers have come to view as treasures.

Some are in black and white, some in color, some in the form of comics, and some in the form of ink paintings.

All were created based on Li's understanding of the history of Duqu village through multiple surveys. He wanted his paintings to not only depict the joys and sorrows of its people but also to reflect the development of rural areas along the coast of Dianchi Lake, especially traces of rural vitalization.

Zheng Sicong has grown very attached to Li's murals.

"The things he has painted are really true to life," says the septuagenarian, who has lived in Duqu for more than five decades and for whom the

paintings have been among the great changes over the years.

"In the early years, the village was full of dirt roads. Some people made a living fishing, while others relied on farming to support their families," Zheng says.

In recent years, improved policies have resulted in dirt roads in the village being paved with cement, and clean public toilets built.

"Everything is much cleaner, and now we have these beautiful pictures painted on the walls," he says.

Since the murals were completed in September, the number of visitors to Duqu has risen significantly, says Li Lifen, a village official.

"We had more than 800 visitors one day during Spring Festival, which is rare for Duqu, since no outsiders came to the village unless it was to see relatives or friends," she says.

Li Lifen often shows the wall paintings to visitors, and can tell stories about them, as many characters they depict are real people.

Some historical buildings, now in disrepair, have also been featured in the paintings, and she says they will be restored in the future.

Business owner Shang Ziwen has noticed the emerging boom from rural tourism. The 20-something man with a gardening background has started a plant business in Duqu and sells to customers via livestreaming.

"Now that our village has undergone (infrastructure) upgrades and renovations, I also want to integrate my business with tourism," Shang says.

He is considering changing his business model. "For example, using my existing high-quality plants, I plan to create a landscape attraction in Duqu, and also serve drinks and snacks, to attract more tourists," Shang says.

Duqu is one of 46 villages along the banks of the Dianchi that local authorities have chosen as rural vitalization models.

They are precious resources with unrivaled environmental charm thanks to the extensive wetlands and green belts in the area, says Li Shaojun, a senior official with the Dianchi resort area.

Each of the villages will highlight a distinctive theme based on their own particular characteristics.

Li Shaojun says artists are welcome to join the rural vitalization drive around Dianchi Lake and favorable policies will be offered to facilitate their work.

Even now, Li Kunwu still gets invitations from Duqu residents, asking him to come back and spend time with them.

He is reviewing his murals and doesn't rule out a second round of painting in the village.

"I particularly hope that the younger generation will be interested in these nostalgic paintings. I hope they are able to understand our past lives, the yesterday of our cities, and our nostalgic feelings," says the artist.

Contact the writers at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

## LIFE



# THE SOUND OF A COMEBACK

Ancient painting depicting idyllic scene helps inspire the return of a traditional instrument, **Chen Nan** reports.

When Li Hao went through a book of traditional Chinese paintings, some showing musical instruments, in 2019, he was intrigued by one particular image.

It was a photo of a painting from the Southern Song period (1127-1279) by an unknown artist, titled *Zhulin Boruan Tu*, or "playing the ruan in the bamboo forest". It features three people clad in long robes in a bamboo forest near a creek, who are playing an instrument, the four-stringed ruan.

"The painting was so vivid and I could imagine the sound of the instrument and how beautiful it would be to hear in nature," says Li.

Inspired by the painting, the clerk at a university in Nanning, capital of South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, had a bold idea: to make a ruan just like the one he'd seen in the painting.

He read a lot of books and did research online, and also taught himself to play the modern version of the instrument.

The ruan is a Chinese plucked string instrument with a long neck and a circular body that is more than 2,000 years old.

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, it was reinvented and given different sizes of sound boxes, enlarging the instrument's family into small, medium, large and bass versions. The *zhongruan* (medium) and the *daruan* (large) are mostly seen in Chinese orchestras nowadays.

When Li was a student at the Guangxi Minzu University, he joined the school's Chinese orchestra, playing the *pipa* (a four-stringed lute) and the *guqin* (a seven-stringed zither).

"I had many friends who were students at the university's art school. They taught me to play the *pipa* and the *guqin*," says Li, who majored in Chinese language and literature. "There were also students in the orchestra playing the ruan, but compared to the *pipa* and the *guqin*, the ruan catered relatively to a minority taste."

The 32-year-old started by drawing the ruan when he tried to make his first copy of the instrument.

Born and raised in Nanning, Li says that he has been interested in traditional culture from the time he was a teenager. He recalls vividly that he loved traditional paintings and copying the masterpieces for fun.

However, the ruan of ancient China and those of contemporary times are very different, which required Li to devote a lot of time to research.

"The sound box of the ruan in ancient China was much thinner than today's instruments. Since the instrument can only be seen in museums, I could only do



**Top:** Li Hao, who is devoted to making the ruan, a traditional instrument, works in his studio in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

**Above:** Li tests a ruan he has made. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Since the instrument can only be seen in museums, I could only do research online to get an idea of how the ancient ruan looked.”

**Li Hao**, traditional Chinese ruan craftsman

research online to get an idea of how the ancient ruan looked," says Li.

"In ancient China, musical instruments were made of valuable wood and the strings were made of silk. Today's musical instruments are mostly made of wood that is moisture- and mold-proof, making them sustainable," Li adds.

There are more than 10 main steps in making the instrument, from creating the body, to tuning. Of all those steps, the one that challenged Li the most was to find the right sound. He resorted to the internet to look for sounds produced by the ancient ruan, and found out that contemporary ruan sounds more like the guitar, and makes a wide sound range from bright and

loud, to deep and low. The ancient ruan, which sounded more like a *pipa*, produced short and clean sounds.

"It took me about six months to finalize the sounds that I believe to be similar to those the ruan produced in ancient times," he says. "I am still making adjustments."

Since 2019, Li has made about 100 instruments, each taking about two weeks to finish. He also makes other traditional Chinese instruments, such as the *pipa*.

By showcasing his techniques of making instruments and playing them on his social media platforms, he has gained a fan base and attracted buyers.

He also shares his ideas about the ruan, which resonate with fans.

Many admire and applaud Li's devotion to the instrument while others are inspired, expressing their love for traditional Chinese music.

"It's an old musical instrument but very versatile, and can interpret different music styles, like rock," says Li, who showcases the instrument and how to make it on his social media platform.

"I first saw a ruan in the Dunhuang murals and it's amazing to see the instrument come alive," comments one viewer of Li's online streaming programs.

"Though I cannot play the instrument, I want to buy one and put it on my table; it is beautiful," writes another viewer.

One of Li's customers is Zide Guqin Studio, a popular folk music ensemble incorporating traditional instruments.

The ensemble performed on a TV gala by China Central Television in 2022, reimagining a performance by musicians of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). One of the ensemble's members played a ruan made by Li, which resembled an instrument from the Song era.

"Compared to the instruments of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), which usually had bright colors and valuable jewels as decoration, the ruan of the Song era had a very simple look, pure black and decorated with jade," Li says, adding that he has also received orders from abroad.

With the rising number of orders, he plans to quit his job at the university and work full time on his musical instruments.

"My family had no knowledge of music and they had never heard about the ruan before I made one. But they are very supportive and my parents are also starting to enjoy music now," Li says.

*Shi Ruipeg contributed to this story.*

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## Vlogger serves up image of modern China

KUNMING — Hailing from a remote mountainous village in Shidian county in the city of Baoshan, Southwest China's Yunnan province, Dong Meihua juggles two roles — entrepreneur and food vlogger.

However, it's her passion for the latter that garners the most attention, as her videos not only tantalize taste buds, but also evoke a sense of nostalgia.

Known as Dianxiaxiaoge — or Yunnan foodie — on social media since 2016, the 34-year-old now has around 40 million online followers in China and abroad, with her videos receiving up to 50 million views each.

In the bamboo forests of western Yunnan, she demonstrated the joy of cutting bamboo and making it into different products; in sugarcane fields, she filmed the traditional process of making brown sugar; and wading through deep water, she immersed herself in the joy of harvesting fresh lobsters.

"I film whatever reflects Yunnan's uniqueness," Dong says, while also mentioning her first video documenting the process of harvesting and frying bamboo worms. She often favors short videos that are visually captivating, allowing her to swiftly secure the attention of her viewers.

"When I was young, I was determined to leave my hometown and pursue opportunities in the city," she says.

"However, upon returning after my adventures elsewhere, I discovered a newfound passion for exploring and presenting the beauty of my home province, as Yunnan has a unique cuisine and a wealth of specialties."

Dong's dedication to her rural explorations has driven her to film daily and publish weekly for seven years, resulting in over 600 short videos to date.

"Food isn't just for filling our stomachs. It's also integral to our memories," she says, adding that her audience loves to see the ordinary happiness of her family as they share three meals a day.

In late 2018, Dong's videos began to be posted on overseas video platforms and social media, and many Chinese students abroad volunteered to translate the video subtitles into multiple languages. Currently, she has over 10 million overseas followers.

In late 2019, she was invited to speak at the University of Oxford, where she shared her journey as an ambassador for Yunnan cuisine and culture.

Dong is also devoted to leading more villagers in Yunnan toward shared prosperity. She has collaborated with food factories and promoted over 120 local agricultural products on her social media accounts.

She has also used livestreaming to endorse local delicacies, such as rice noodles, small coffee beans, cured meat, red tea, persimmons and green broad beans.

Dong says that combined daily sales on her platforms reach as much as 200,000 yuan (\$28,200), which in turn supports over 1,000 jobs.

A more diverse and enriched image of contemporary China is presented through numerous engaging online content offerings made by social media influencers such as Dong Meihua, says Wang Ning, secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China, in an address to the opening ceremony of the China Internet Media Forum that kicked off Saturday.

"Life in Yunnan is a lifestyle worth seeing," Dong says. "I will continue to use my camera to capture everything here, truly allowing the world to see my beloved home province, and I also welcome more friends from home and abroad to visit Yunnan and Baoshan."

XINHUA



Dong Meihua, 34, a food vlogger from Baoshan, Yunnan province, prepares for shooting. SCREENSHOT FROM XINHUA VIDEO

## CULTURE

THREADS OF THE PAST  
RUN INTO THE FUTURE

Dazzling Miao embroidery, rich in history, makes a splash in a fashion capital, **Hou Chenchen** and **Yang Jun** report in Guiyang.

Miao embroidery fashion is displayed in the 2024 spring/summer collection of Milan Fashion Week on Sept 24, 2023.

In Milan, a town in which the chic and the modern are seemingly inseparable, this was the aging star that simply stole the show: clothing dating back thousands of years gracing the catwalks and awing audiences from around the world.

That clothing, on display in the spring/summer collection of Milan Fashion Week in September, was emblazoned with intricate, ornate square patterns.

The designs were not simply inspired from the latest trends but also drew on the traditions of the Miao, who migrated across the vast expanses of ancient China, with a mission to safeguard the Miao king's seal. To preserve their identity and connection a rendering of the seal was embroidered onto their garments.

That seal has endured through centuries to find itself in the fashion spotlight, as far away as Milan, Italy.

"Miao embroidery is known as 'wearable history', and the stories of the Miao behind these designs down the centuries truly resonate with me," says Zhao Huizhou, a designer who led the Miao-inspired show in Milan.

The Miao ethnic seal features four vibrant squares, meticulously embroidered onto the chest, back and shoulders of those wear-

ing the traditional attire. Miao communities inhabit areas across China, including in Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan and Guangdong provinces.

In Milan, designs were unveiled that can be traced to the distinctive attire of Miao groups in Guizhou.

The four-square seal is just one facet of Miao embroidery's narrative tapestry. Across intricate patterns, one can discern traces of the Miao migratory odyssey — through winding roads, meandering rivers and rugged terrain — all etched into the rich fabric reminiscent of the challenges their ancestors faced.

"Through these patterns Miao people record myths and epics of migration, enabling memories to be passed on down the generations," says Jiao Hongxiu, a Miao who is a local embroiderer in Kaili, Guizhou.

Liu Rui, a local official dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Miao embroidery and its culture, says embroidery serves as "a unique cultural language" for the Miao people.

"It's not merely clothing; it's a living history, a cartographic narrative and a badge of identity."

The significance of Miao embroidery

includes patterns and stitching techniques in which Miao people can discern between their various communities, Liu says.

For example, a dragon motif symbolizes the Miao connection to Han Chinese culture but with subtle variations, he says. Miao groups living in Shibing county used a dragon design resembling a centipede whereas along the Bala River it took on the likeness of a silkworm.

Over thousands of years the Miao people have also traversed vast territories, from China to Southeast Asia, and later to Europe and the Americas, where they are referred to as Hmong in some areas. Official figures put the global Miao ethnic population at more than 14 million, 11 million of them in China and the rest dispersed across over 10 countries spanning four continents. Embodied in their ethnic attire, Miao culture continues in the diaspora, providing a tangible link to their ancestral heritage.

#### Fashionable tradition

In 2021, when President Xi Jinping visited Huawu Village in Guizhou, one thing that caught his attention was exquisite handmade Miao embroidery on garments and ornaments, and villagers explained the crafting process to him.

"What's traditional is also fashionable," Xi said, calling for Miao embroidery to be promoted, thus helping with rural vitalization.

In the same year, Jiao Hongxiu, the sole university graduate in the village of Luomian in Guizhou, returned home brimming with ideas on how to help Miao womenfolk use their embroidery skills to generate income.

Liu Rui, a local official, also directed his efforts to help fuel the cultural and creative industry related to Miao embroidery, striving to attract investment in the sector.

Before switching to market-oriented Miao embroidery production, the women in the village, mostly housewives, lacked formal employment opportunities. Embroidery, often viewed as a time-consuming hobby, was frequently discouraged by their husbands, Liu and Jiao say.

For Jiao, a member of the Miao community, embroidery is an inherent skill among women in the community, with needles and thread an integral part of their world.

"I grew up observing my mother and grandmother embroider tirelessly. While studying aesthetic design at university, designing Miao embroidery was akin to replacing the pen and paper with needle and thread."

With Jiao's help, Miao women in her village now channel their skills into crafting delicate products such as handbags and shoes, which can help add 3,000 yuan to 4,000 yuan (\$415 to \$553) to each of their monthly incomes.

Meixiang, a secluded Miao village in which more than 130 households have tilled the land for generations, once struggled with poverty. Before poverty alleviation initiatives, average individual income was about 1,000 yuan a year.

In 2015, with the support of the Kaili government and the Soong Ching Ling Foundation, an embroidery rural cooperative was established in Meixiang, helping local women to acquire the skills to promote and innovate their embroidery. At Xiulitao cultural market in Kaili alone the women can get free access to embroidery booths.

Since the project began in 2015, the total value of orders the cooperative has attracted is 1 million yuan. For Meixiang, poverty is now but a memory, with average individual



Models wear clothes with ethnic Miao embroidery seal patterns in the 2024 spring/summer collection of Milan Fashion Week on Sept 24, 2023.

income now exceeding 10,000 yuan.

Other than improved incomes, the local women also enjoy better status in their families and communities, with their husbands encouraging and supporting their ethnic embroidery work, Liu says.

#### Fresh designs

Jiao Hongxiu, who helps promote Miao embroidery through innovation, says it is crucial to tailor Miao embroidery to meet market demand. Cultivating local designers to redesign Miao embroidery plays a pivotal role in empowering rural women in her hometown, she says.

"Certain embroidery techniques, rooted in tradition, often clash with modern fabrics and aesthetic sensibilities. The intricate, densely embroidered patterns that Miao people cherish may not align with the minimalist preferences of today's consumers. This poses a challenge for untrained embroiderers, and they need to adapt their techniques and aesthetic tastes."

Jiao is keen to train local elderly embroiderers to redesign their work as wellsprings of creativity. Through training the women can unleash their creativity and produce innovative designs, she says. "Every woman embroiderer is a great designer. No matter if they're 80 or 90 years old, their designs always possess the freshness and vitality of an 18-year-old, exuding the vibrancy of youth."

An elderly embroiderer's creation resembling a mythical creature is amazing, Jiao says.

Patterns, materials and embroidery techniques need to complement each other, Liu

says, and the suitability and innovation in materials need to be considered in line with modern trends, ensuring that the textures harmonize effectively with chosen patterns.

He once encountered a designer who faced difficulties incorporating her beloved fish-pattern Miao embroidery into a high-end dress, he says.

"Homespun cloth, while traditional, may not meet the standards required for high-end designs. While counted thread embroidery demands a precise understanding of the fabric's warp and weft, silk, being delicate, poses a challenge for discerning these elements with the naked eye."

During Milan Fashion Week, the Chinese singer A Duo, dressed in redesigned four-seal Miao-style clothing, performed an ethnic song for the runway show in an immersive Miao experience.

"What constitutes culture?" the fashion designer Zhao Huizhou asked during the show. "I believe it encompasses clothing, food, transportation and all aspects of daily life."

The transformative potential of contemporary design language in reviving Miao skirts can enable people to directly experience the allure of these cultures, she said.

Underscoring the power of redesigning intangible cultural heritage, Zhao says: "We need to understand the past, and we also need to think about the present and envision the future. As designers, we should consider how to use fashion as a language to reinterpret Miao culture in the contemporary context."

Zhao Yandi and Kuang Hanying contributed to this story.



Above from top: Miao embroiderers inspect decorative work at Xiulitao market in Kaili, Guizhou province, on Sept 15, 2023; Miao embroiderers practice skills at a training base in Kaili, Guizhou province on July 5, 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY