

Unbreakable bond

Enduring friendship between Wuhan, Duisburg continues

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Innovations drive growth in TCM sector

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Trip offers US high school students chance to get true experience of China

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# CHINA DAILY

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## German chancellor begins visit with Chongqing tour

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz explored Chongqing on Sunday to experience the charm of the mountainous industrial city in southwest China.

The tour included a visit to a factory, interaction with local young people, a city walk and a visit to an exhibition of a Sino-German scientific project.

Scholz is the first western leader to visit China this year. His high-profile delegation includes three government ministers and top business leaders. It is his second visit to China following a one-day trip in November 2022 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the first stop of his three-day official visit to the country, Scholz visited Bosch Hydrogen Powertrain Systems (Chongqing) Co Ltd, a joint venture between German engineering and technology company Bosch and Chongqing-based premium commercial vehicle manufacturer Qingling Motors. The company was set up in 2021 to develop, assemble and sell fuel cell systems in China.

Guided by the factory technician, Scholz assembled a hydrogen power module during his tour of the facility.

The joint venture has introduced 76kW, 134kW and 190kW fuel cell power modules to the market. The portfolio caters to various classic commercial vehicle applications such as cold-chain logistics, sanitation and medium to heavy-duty long-haul transportation.

After a lunch meeting with local officials, Scholz met with student representatives from Chongqing University, which boasts long-standing cooperation with German universities and research institutes. He then walked through the downtown area of the city to experience the unique landscape, rich history and vibrant business atmosphere.

On the banks of the Yangtze River, Scholz learned about a water quality monitoring and pollutants detection system, developed by Chinese and German research institutes and a highlight of Sino-German technological cooperation.

Chongqing, a mega city on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River with a population of nearly 32 million, is a traditional industrial powerhouse which has a long history of cooperation and exchanges with Germany.

As the gateway to Southwest China, it boasts one of the world's largest IT industrial clusters and one of China's biggest auto manufacturing bases.

Germany has several major investment projects in Chongqing. BASF SE Asia-Pacific, a German chemical giant, invested 8 billion yuan (\$1.14 billion) in a project in Changshou district and started its methylene diphenyl diisocyanate production in 2015 with an annual capacity of 400,000 metric tons.

MDI is an important component of polyurethane, a plastic material used to improve insulation, which helps save energy in buildings and make cars lighter.

For years, the bilateral relationship between China and Germany has witnessed high level development thanks to close exchanges between the leaders of the two countries. China has been Germany's biggest trading partner for eight consecutive years and Germany has been China's biggest trading partner in Europe for the past 49 years, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

After Chongqing, the German delegation will head to Shanghai on Monday before meeting with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang respectively to discuss Sino-German ties and issues of common concern, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz uses a cordless screwdriver on Sunday while visiting Bosch's hydrogen drive production facility in Chongqing. MICHAEL KAPPELER / DPA PICTURE-ALLIANCE / AP



An Israeli missile-defense system intercepts drones and missiles launched by Iran, as seen on Sunday from Ashkelon, Israel. AMIR COHEN / REUTERS

## Beijing urges restraint after strikes on Israel

Reprisals by Iran bring call for calm to prevent further escalation of tension

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong and ZHOU JIN in Beijing

The Foreign Ministry said in an online statement on Sunday that Beijing has expressed deep concern over the situation in the Middle East following Iran's drone and missile strikes on Israel, and has called for relevant parties to exercise calm and restraint to prevent further escalation of tension.

The strikes started late Saturday were in retaliation for an airstrike on April 1 that hit an Iranian diplo-

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matic building in the Syrian capital of Damascus, killing at least one senior figure in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and several other officers.

Noting that the situation is the latest increase in hostilities related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza, the ministry said that there should be no more delays in imple-

menting United Nations Security Council Resolution 2728, which calls for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

Beijing called on the international community, especially countries with influence, to play a constructive role in maintaining peace and stability in the region, the ministry added.

The Israel Defense Forces said on its X social media account that its multilayered Aerial Defense Array system, "together with Israel's strategic allies", successfully intercepted the majority of the missiles and

drones before they crossed into Israeli territory, where small hits were identified, including at an IDF base in southern Israel.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said Israeli military targets were hit.

After the launches, Iran's mission to the UN said on its X social media account that Iran's military action was "conducted on the strength of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter" pertaining to legitimate defense, in response to "the Zionist regime's aggression against our diplomatic premises in Damascus".

"The matter can be deemed concluded," it said.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz, in an interview with Israeli Army Radio, said: "We said that if Iran attacks Israel, we will attack it back and this is still effective. We need to deepen our cooperation with our allies. I will lead a political attack against Iran."

See *Strikes*, page 3

## FROM CREAM CAKES TO COUTURE, PAMPERED PETS A GROWING BREED

Owners' willingness to spend big on animal companions sees boom in sector

By ZHENG ZHENG in Shanghai [zhengzheng@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhengzheng@chinadaily.com.cn)

In a bakery in Shanghai, Xu Ling beams as she picks up a cake decorated with bone-shaped cheese. It's not for one of her human friends, but to celebrate the birthday of her beloved border collie, Laksa.

The cake, weighing 350 grams and costing 168 yuan (\$23), is made with quality ingredients

### In-depth

including chicken, duck and egg yolks. For Xu, it's worthwhile splurging on the treat to make her dog's birthday special.

The increased pampering of animal companions in China has given rise to a booming economy catering to pets' every need, with premium

food products, accessories, health-care services and experiences previously reserved for humans.

At the forefront is the emerging haute cuisine craze, with owners enthusiastically serving their pets multicourse meals tailored to the pets' tastes.

While pet bakeries have been popping up over the past decade to meet this burgeoning demand, large mainstream brands' entering the market speaks volumes about

how hot pet care has become.

Traditional bakery chains are riding this wave, with Holland recently launching pet cakes decorated with edible prints and animal-safe cream. The cakes, which cost 168 to 218 yuan, have attracted a large number of pet owners seeking to make their furry companions' birthday a memorable occasion.

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## Consider facts, not the 'opinions' of global credit rating agencies

Despite ideologues linked to "mainstream" currents trying to convince ordinary people otherwise, economics is not an exact science.

Neoliberal economists use projections such as graphs, equations and correlations to support their arguments, which may be motivated by political objectives or to swell the exorbitant profits of the financial market and multinational corporations. This system is a large, well-oiled machine comprising banks, investment funds, brokers, stock and futures exchanges, public servants, economics professors, economic journalists and rating agencies. The filtering of information passed on to the public is subordinate to these interests.

The 2008 financial crisis offers a prime example of such manipulation, in which real estate securities

### WORLD WATCH

By Marcos Cordreto Pires

with terrible liquidity were wrapped in gold paper, called collateralized debt obligation, and sold on the global financial market as if they were gold bars. The leading rating agencies, Standard & Poor's, Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings, classified those collateralized debt obligations with the best credit rating: AAA. Banks and investment funds worldwide suffered huge losses because this risk classification was fraudulent.

On April 9, Fitch Ratings cut its outlook on China's sovereign credit rating to negative, citing risks to public finances due to the economy fac-

ing increasing uncertainty in its shift to new growth models in the face of real estate and demographic problems, state debts, and the drop in the growth rate, resulting in worsening prospects for China's economy.

When a rating agency issues a rating, it generally becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: a prediction that comes true, at least partly due to people's belief or expectation that the forecast is accurate. Merely applying a label to someone or something can affect the perception of the person or thing and create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Considering the herd behavior of market agents, a negative note can initiate a speculative movement against a company or a country.

However, despite this being part of an attempt to shake the market's confidence in the Chinese economy, the nation's economy will continue to

demonstrate that it is unstoppable. There are sectors in which the Chinese industry has created a vast comparative advantage, such as hybrid/electric vehicles and clean energy generation equipment. No other country is advancing faster in decarbonizing its economy. Last year, Huawei managed to circumvent external sanctions on semiconductors and launched a high-end smartphone with locally produced chips.

No economy is free from challenges. Faced with new contradictions arising in China due to its new level of development, the Chinese government is launching an extensive, advanced manufacturing program, which will qualitatively transform the country's industry. Difficulties are becoming opportunities. Therefore, there is no ground in which the pessimism the rating agencies

are seeking to sow can take root.

To understand this mechanism, it is worth mentioning the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who in 2004 published the book *The Economics of Innocent Fraud: Truth for Our Time*, in which he analyzed the foundations of the financial crisis of 2000 and 2001 in the United States. In it, Galbraith says that "in the economic and especially the financial world, prediction of the unknown and unknowable is a cherished and often well-rewarded occupation. Because what is predicted is what others wish to hear and what they wish to profit or have some return from, hope or need covers reality. Thus, in the financial markets we celebrate, even welcome, essential error."

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# PAGE TWO



From left: Passersby walk down a street with pet-themed walls in Shanghai in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A dog waits to dine at a pet-friendly restaurant in Beijing in July. LIU ZHE / CHINA DAILY Residents with their pets pose for photos during a pet party held by a shopping mall in Tianjin in July. TONG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Pets: Sector rises with luxury, greater rights

From page 1

Since their introduction in February, the special cakes have been in short supply and pet owners now need to make an order one day in advance. On HollandPet's official shop on the online shopping platform Taobao, sales records showed that more than 2,000 people bought the cakes in the last month. Most buyers are content with their purchase and are pleased the big-name brand endorses the safety of the cakes.

"When I learned such a big brand had begun making cakes for pets, I couldn't wait to let my baby have a taste," said Xu. "I've made cakes for Laksa myself, and I know how hard it is to make a well-balanced cake that suits a pet's taste. The money was well spent. My pet taught me how to love again, and I want to give him a better life."

### Animal attraction

Although a luxurious pet lifestyle may seem excessive to some people, it reflects a large cultural shift in modern Chinese society toward treating animal companions as members of the family.

Beyond haute cuisine, this phenomenon has expanded into designer pet apparel, home customization services, and even pet fashion shows.

During a recent pet fashion show in Shanghai, over 300 cats and dogs dressed in glamorous outfits were paraded on a runway by their owners when 12 pet brands launched their newest collections at the Shanghai Fashion Center in Yangpu district.

"We found that the emotional connections between modern urban pet owners and their animal companions have deepened immensely. Pet owners have begun to pay more attention to their pets' spiritual demands in addition to their basic physiological needs. So we tried to integrate the pets and fashion," said Zhang Xin, executive deputy manager of the Shanghai Fashion Center.

The center intends to attract more upstream and downstream brands in the pet industry in the future, so that the pet "ecosystem" can congregate in Yangpu, Zhang added.

Wu Haiping, the founder of PetMrWu pet clothing, sees a vast untapped market as people's demand for pet companionship grows.

Wu is a costume designer and owns a dog and a cat. He set up the brand and commercialized it in 2021, initially because he was not satisfied with the majority of pet clothing available in the market.

"At first, pet clothing was just smaller versions of what humans were wearing. I could see pets were uncomfortable wearing such clothes," Wu said.

His custom-made pet clothing, which sells for 300 yuan to thousands, uses antimicrobial and natural fabrics and takes into consideration animal exercise habits that differ from humans, or even between species.

Shanghai-based design and development company Dingchong provides services to customize home environments so pets can live more comfortably.



Pet owners shop with their dogs at a pet store in a Beijing shopping mall in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Customers check the menu at a pet-friendly restaurant in Shanghai in February, 2023. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

The company said it specializes in high-end homes for pets.

"Our customers are mainly singles, newly married couples, DINK (double income no kids) families, and those whose children have grown up and moved out. They own large living spaces, and they're willing to spend on customized living spaces to make their pets more comfortable," said co-founder Qiu Limin.

The brand works on creating independent spaces dedicated to the pets' needs that include medical areas, isolation zones, and play areas. The designs are made after doing research on aspects such as feline ergonomics, with "customer unit prices" running to at least five-figure sums.

"For example, we'll make lower furniture for Munchkin cats who can't jump as high, or install more vertical climbing structures for

active breeds like the Devon Rex," Qiu said.

Pet food makers, apparel designers, and service providers have also found profitable niche markets catering to owners' indulgence of their animal companions. On Xiaohongshu, the Chinese lifestyle platform, videos of unboxing pet supplies or reviewing pet food garner millions of views.

### Stepping out

Beyond high-end experiences, pets worldwide have been granted more accessibility and are being welcomed in public spaces that were previously off-limits. Many cities have made concerted efforts to upgrade parks, plazas, and other public places to be pet-friendly with amenities such as drinking fountains, dedicated pet zones, and waste disposal stations.

Shops have also followed suit by designating pet-friendly outdoor seating areas and offering specialized menus or treats for canine and feline patrons.

Starbucks is one of the pioneers in this area, introducing Puppucinos — whipped cream in an espresso cup — for dogs at their pet-friendly spaces. The coffee giant has also collaborated with pet lifestyle brands on accessories like the popular cat paw-shaped tumblers. Manner Coffee, HeyTea, KFC, and Shake Shack have also launched stores that welcome pets with tailored products and pet toy promotions.

Pets' access to public spaces, legal protection of their rights and welfare, and education and raised awareness of people's responsibilities toward them are core elements and indicators of a pet-friendly society, said Zhou Chunhua, secretary-general of the China Pet Industry Association.

The number of pet dogs and cats in China is estimated to grow from 190 million last year to 210 million in five years, according to the APA Institute's China Pet Industry Annual Report 2023.

The increasing pet population and diverse demands for services are driving the expansion of the pet market.

In 2023, the scale of China's pet market increased to nearly 250 billion yuan with a compound growth rate of 13.1 percent in the past five years, the report said. Food supplies accounted for more than half of the pet market, medical care nearly 30 percent, while services such as grooming and training accounted for 16 percent.

As societies increasingly care about pets, the pet economy will grow even further and embrace more specialized and lavish products and services, Zhou said. Pet veterinary care, intelligent devices, social platforms, eco-friendly food supplies, and sustainable lifestyles catering to pets are also expected to fuel expansion.

However, even as the sector booms, some questions have been raised about the growing number of premium pet products on offer. Animal welfare advocates have voiced concerns that profits are being put ahead of safety issues and consideration of the pets' well-being.

Zhou said as living standards have improved, owners have become more conscious about their pets' health and welfare and are willing to spend on quality food, medical care, and pampering services. She added that the pet industry has developed full life cycle supply chains around a pet's eating, living, medical and other needs.

However, Zhou believes that regulatory oversight is still insufficient with legal frameworks incomplete. Other areas of concern in the pet industry include a shortage of quality standards, fragmented multiagency governance, unregulated breeding and sales of pets, and a lack of social responsibility about pet ownership.

Addressing these issues and others will require government regulation, industry self-discipline, and public education, she said.

## Shanghai unleashes festival to celebrate four-legged friends

By HE QI in Shanghai  
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As Shanghai experiences a surge in pet-friendly activities and services, a growing number of commercial spaces are opening their doors to four-legged companions and offering entertainment.

A pet carnival with a fun playground will open in Shanghai Times Square from the end of April to June. Activities such as dog yoga, a pet fashion show, skateboarding, and cycling will be available for pets and their owners.

"Pets are becoming more like children to their owners rather than their good friends, which has led to increasing demand for pet entertainment," said Chen Xi, senior promotions manager at the shopping center.

Entitled "Woof! It's My World", the carnival will feature different themes every week, and is expected to attract 300 to 500 participants and bringing in over 10,000 visitors to the mall during the event.

"We will start with pet fashion shows and then launch a pet skateboarding activity, and invite the French bulldog community to take the lead in experiencing skateboarding."

"Doga, which enables dogs to practice yoga with their owners, and a cycling activity that uses our customized bicycles to ride with pets, have all attracted many applicants," said Chen, adding that a pet adoption event will be held as well.

A pet art exhibition, designed from a pet's perspective, will also be included. Chen said that all the paintings will be placed on the ground so that pets can view and enjoy them.

The carnival is intended to announce the transformation of the shopping center into a pet-friendly environment at a time

the pet economy is booming.

"We believe that the pet-friendly atmosphere in Shanghai's business community is among the best in the country," Chen said. "We plan to keep creating similar pet carnivals because we have always had a vision that every pet owner working in the CBD area will be able to leave their pets in a park when they are at work, pick them up after work and go home together."

As early as 2017, some local business with sufficient outdoor space began proposing pet-friendly measures.

Shanghai Suhewan Mix World, a shopping center beside Suzhou Creek that opened in 2022, features a floor dedicated to pet-related stores. The photo studio HIMO, for instance, has customized its operations in the mall to take artistic photos of pets.

There are more than 50 pet-friendly stores in the mall offering service packages for pets that include grooming, spa, day care, hand-painted custom dog tags, baked goods and pet birthday parties.

Pet owners can also rent carts, raincoats, backpacks, drinking cups and leashes at the mall, while temporary pet care services charge between 25 and 40 yuan (\$3.5 and \$5.6) per hour.

The Bund Finance Center shopping mall now has over 90 pet-friendly shops and over 30 pet-friendly restaurants.

"In a recent survey of international talent recruitment and retention, we found that a city's pet friendliness is an important consideration for many young international talents when choosing a place to work and live," Lu Huiwen, a member of the Shanghai Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference told China-news.com.



Left: Wu Haiping, founder of PetMrWu pet clothing, walks on a runway along with a dog wearing his custom-made pet clothing during a pet fashion show in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Right: A model poses with dogs during a pet fashion show in Shanghai on March 23. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Connectivity overcomes even mighty mountains

By HOU CHENCHEN  
and LI YINGQING

A year or so ago, Phachoumphon Thongmy could rightly complain that something was coming between him and his wife. The obstacle wasn't a typical domestic difference, however, but rather a mighty mountain range.

Thongmy lives in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, while his wife, who is Chinese, and their son live in the Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Yunnan province. In the middle stand rugged mountains that, until recently, could be negotiated only by using 1,600 kilometers of winding roads.

Each time the two got together, one of them faced an arduous journey that could easily take two days.

But that changed last year, with the opening of a passenger rail link connecting Vientiane and Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, which transformed the couple's lives.

"Thanks to the railway, our family can finally be together," Thongmy said recently. "It used to take me two days to get from Laos to China to meet my wife and son. Now, by train, it takes just five hours, and it's easy and comfortable."

Since the rail service opened, he has returned home once a month, and he plans to start a business trading between China and Laos.

The China-Laos Railway began operations in December 2021, and cross-border passenger service started on April 13, 2023.

Since the inaugural high-speed train departed from Kunming South Railway Station a year ago, similar passenger trains, all of which are painted a distinctive green, have traveled the route hundreds of times, covering the 1,035 kilometers between Vientiane and Kunming.

Yang Xueqin, a police officer at the Mohan checkpoint, said, "When it comes to the weekend and holidays, people from cities in Laos, such as Vientiane and Luang Prabang, take the train to cities in Yunnan, including Jinghong and Kunming."

"This mode of travel has become a new choice for many residents of both countries," she added.

Over the past year, a total of 6,200 inbound and outbound trains have used the rail line, transporting more than 50 million metric tons of goods and carrying more than 183,000 passengers from 87 countries and regions, according to the Mohan checkpoint.

Non-Chinese passengers come mainly from Laos, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, and their travel is primarily for tourism, visiting relatives or conducting business.



Crew members perform for passengers on Saturday onboard a train running from Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province to Luang Prabang in Laos. WANG JINGYI / XINHUA

Zou Wennian, a Chinese business owner engaged in the farm products trade between Laos and China, praised the convenience of the new rail link.

"Before the service opened, traveling from Kunming to Vientiane by road was just too long. In fact, I used to make the journey only once every two or three months. With the railway, I can arrive the same day, and I now do the trip once or twice a week. It's made doing business a lot easier."

Another business owner named Wu, who imports iron ore from Laos, said it is 30 percent cheaper to transport the commodity by rail rather than road. In addition to cutting costs, the safety and ease of railway transportation have greatly benefited him and his company, he said.

Also over the past year, the railway's international service has improved its operations, saving time and increasing seat capacity. For example, it used to take 90 minutes to clear customs, but it now takes around 50 minutes, and the number of seats per train has been increased from 250 to 350. The average number of passengers carried each day has surged from 300 in the beginning to about 700 now.

Zhang Hao, an immigration officer at the Mohan checkpoint, said that starting on Saturday, which was the one-year anniversary of the launch of cross-border service on the line, an additional pair of international passenger trains

In the year since its launch, China-Laos Railway has brought countries, and people, closer together

were to run from Xishuangbanna in Yunnan to Luang Prabang in Laos. This will double the number of trains to four a day, and the number of passengers arriving daily at the Mohan railway port is projected to reach 1,000.

Before the rail link, landlocked Laos had long struggled with expensive transportation that limited the country's trade and development.

The China-Laos Railway does far more than merely connecting the two countries, according to Chindavong Xaiyasin, counselor of education and culture at the Laos embassy in China. It also fulfills Laos' strategy to transform the country from landlocked to land-linked, he said.

Ever since the country became independent in the 1960s, a railway network has been a demand of the people of Laos. In 2015, their calls were heeded when the leaders of the two countries decided to build the railway.

"With the railway, the mountain from Kunming to Vientiane is no longer high, and the road no longer long," President Xi Jinping said in December 2021 during the rail line's opening ceremony. He expressed the hope that the railway would become "a golden line for the benefit of the people of both countries."

At 12:37 am on March 18, a special train for tourism departed from Beijing with more than 400 passengers ready to start their journey along the line. The cross-border tour connects China's domestic

railway and international cross-border railway, traveling from North China to Southeast Asia.

Going to China by train has also become popular among Southeast Asian tourists.

"The journey is convenient and comfortable. With the railway, we can visit China frequently and explore various destinations," said Kittsak Doungin, who is from Thailand, when entering China via the China-Laos Railway with a visa waiver.

Yan Xiangha, a tour guide with Yunnan International Travel Service Agency, said, "In fact, the railway is so popular that there's a shortage of tour guides who speak Thai."

Trips to China for Thai tourists are fully booked through October, Yan said.

The source of passengers has risen from an initial count of 27 countries and regions when the service began, to encompass 87 countries and regions, according to the Mohan checkpoint.

Inbound and outbound goods carried on the line are distributed to 12 countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, with China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam included.

"The China-Laos Railway has become a critical intermediate point connecting the world," said Xaiyasin, the Laos embassy counselor.

"The railway connects Laos to the broader transportation networks," he added. "It is fueling Laos' growth and revitalizing trade and economy in Southeast Asia."

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## President of Suriname hails China's growth

Belt and Road Initiative helped turn country into key hub in South America, he says

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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President of Suriname Chandrikapersad Santokhi revisited his childhood links with China during an exclusive interview with China Daily on Sunday in Beijing.

"When I was a little kid of three or four, my mother used to work in a Chinese supermarket," Santokhi said, adding that today he is familiar with Chinese traditions, culture and cuisine because of it.

He said his childhood interactions with the Chinese community have helped him understand and communicate with the Chinese people better.

The largest concentration of overseas Chinese living in the Caribbean is in Suriname, a scenic country situated on the northern coast of South America.

Last year, the government of Suriname celebrated the 170th anniversary of Chinese settlement in the country as a national event.

Santokhi praised "the strength of the Chinese community in Suriname", and noted that even in remote areas of his country, there are "the Chinese groceries, Chinese supermarkets and Chinese businesses to serve the community."

"They're always one of (those) supporting the economic growth," he said.

China and Suriname established diplomatic ties 48 years ago, with Suriname being one of the first countries in the region to build diplomatic relations with China.

Santokhi reiterated the pledge his nation made at that time about the Taiwan question and underscored Suriname's adherence to the one-China principle.

"We are reiterating that China is a big country, that China is in a process of reunification, and that we are supporting that reunification process," he said.

Santokhi arrived in Beijing on Thursday for his first state visit to China. The visit is scheduled to end on Wednesday. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the China-Suriname strategic cooperative partnership, which was established in 2019.

President Xi Jinping held a welcoming ceremony for Santokhi on Friday in Beijing. They held talks and witnessed the signing of cooperation agreements in areas such as economy, trade, investment, green development, the digital economy and education.

Santokhi referred to food security as a promising area of cooperation because the world is confronted with the challenge of food scarcity while the world population is increasing.

"In Suriname, we have a lot of fertile land, and here is China with modern technology in the area of

The Belt and Road Initiative is one that is playing a very important role in bringing development for a lot of nations and people, and we are making good use of it and we're benefiting from BRI."

Surinamese President Chandrikapersad Santokhi



food production, food processing and food security. We can cooperate and deliver our contribution to food security for the world."

He also hailed China's role "in the area of supporting the regional integration" and boosting connectivity in terms of roads and bridges in South America.

The two governments signed a cooperation plan in 2019 to jointly advance the construction of the Belt and Road.

In contrast to voices of suspicion and smear campaigns against the Belt and Road Initiative, Santokhi said, "The Belt and Road Initiative is one that is playing a very important role in bringing development for a lot of nations and people, and we are making good use of it and we're benefiting from the BRI."

Santokhi hailed the roads built in Suriname to help villagers in remote areas and hospitals that served to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

He added that the BRI has helped boost connectivity in the region and made his country an economic hub in South America.

During his ongoing China tour, Santokhi said he is getting a better understanding about China's past and present, including the achievements made since 1978, when the process of reform and opening-up started.

He said that "hard work" and "unity" were the driving forces behind China's success.

China's technical assistance programs and financial aid are very important, but the philosophy "is more important to learn," he said. "I hope that we can learn a lot from China based on its history and spirit, and we can become a country which can be also very influential," Santokhi said, adding that he hoped Suriname would become a strong and developed country.

## Strikes: Nations close airspace amid rising tension

From page 1

Israeli media quoted Immigration Minister Ofir Sofer as telling Army Radio that "Iran's audacity in such an attack must be erased".

Iran's mission to the UN warned that, "should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe. It is a conflict between Iran and the rogue Israeli regime, from which the US must stay away."

In a statement, United States President Joe Biden praised US forces, which he said "helped Israel take down nearly all" the drones and missiles. Biden also condemned the attacks, and was joined by French President Emmanuel Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Iran's UN mission said, "Iran's invocation of Article 51 of the UN Charter occurred following a 13-day period marked by the Security Council's inaction and silence, coupled with its failure to condemn the Israeli regime's aggressions."

"Certain countries' precipitous condemnation of Iran's exercise of its legitimate right suggests a reversal of roles, equating the victim with the criminal," it added.

The UN Security Council said it had scheduled an open emergency

meeting under the agenda item "the situation in the Middle East," to consider the drone and missile attacks by Iran on Israel, according to Vanessa Frazier, permanent representative of Malta to the UN.

The increase in tensions has also prompted Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and even Iran to temporarily close their airspace after reports of interference with the GPS navigation system, Al Jazeera reported.

Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi, secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, said in a statement that all relevant parties should commit to upholding regional and global security and peace in the Middle East, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

He urged all parties involved to exercise maximum self-restraint to prevent further escalation that could threaten regional stability and the safety of civilians.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia expressed deep concern over the developments in the region and called for all parties to exercise maximum restraint "and to protect the region and its people from the dangers of war".

Ali Khansari, an international affairs analyst and graduate of regional studies at Allameh Tabataba'i University in Teheran, told China Daily that Iran's strikes on Israeli military facilities were "unprecedented".

"It can be said that Iran's military action was not an attack but a response to Israel's actions to prevent future Israeli attacks. Iranian authorities consider it a punishment, not a military attack," said Khansari.

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## Credit rating: Biased information can betray us

From page 1

It is important to reflect on this opinion because it points to the essence of the hidden logic of studies and projections made by neoliberal "mainstream" economists. Behind the "empirical evidence", there is always a well-established political and financial interest. Thus, it is worth closely observing the actions of credit rating agencies.

In practical terms, risk agencies wash their hands of their responsibilities by claiming their risk analyses are "opinions". Journalist Michael M. Lewis drew attention to this fact when researching the role of these agencies in the subprime crisis. He said: "In 2008, when the ratings of a giant pile of subprime-related bonds proved meaningless, their intended meanings were hotly disputed. Wall Street investors had long interpreted them to mean the odds of default. For instance, a bond rated Triple-A historically had less than a 1-in-10,000 chance of defaulting in its first year of existence. A bond that is rated Double-A — the next highest rating — stood less than a 1-in-1,000 chance of default, and a bond rated triple-B, less than a 1-in-500 chance of default. In 2008, the rating agencies would claim that they never intended for their ratings to be taken as such precise measurements. Ratings were

Behind the "empirical evidence", there is always a well-established political and financial interest. Thus, it is worth closely observing the actions of credit rating agencies.

merely the agencies' best guess at a rank ordering of risk."

When we are faced with the "opinions" of risk agencies, we need to be very careful with the information disclosed. There are always interests behind the graphs, models and equations they present. Furthermore, we need to analyze reality carefully and not let ourselves be betrayed by biased information. In all cases, but specifically with Fitch's note on China's credit, it is worth reinforcing an old lesson once again: Seek truth from facts, not opinions.

The author is a professor of international political economy at Sao Paulo State University in Brazil. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Horror in the hills



Rescue and emergency personnel rush to the aid on Friday of stranded passengers of a cable car transportation system outside Antalya, southern Turkey. One person was killed and seven injured when a cable car pod hit a pole and burst open, sending passengers plummeting onto the ground below. DIA IMAGES VIA AP

## BUSINESS

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A view of a traditional Chinese herbal medicine market in Bozhou, Anhui province. ZHANG YANLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Ramping up innovations in TCM research

Integration with new technologies spurs industry's growth

By LIU ZHIHUA  
and LIU ZIZHENG

Utilizing extracts from the common herb chicory, a research team from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine has developed a product that can help manage metabolic disorders such as hyperlipidemia, diabetes, hyperuricemia and metabolic syndrome.

"The chicory health product we developed has been highly recognized by consumers," said Liu Wei, director of the Research Transformation Center at BUCM. "Sales have already reached 50 million yuan (\$6.91 million)."

That success is just one example of how universities and enterprises in China are ramping up efforts to promote innovation in the traditional Chinese medicine sector, which has significantly contributed to the evolution of the industry and improved people's livelihoods amid the country's pursuit of high-quality development.

Liu said BUCM and its research team are committed to the inheritance and innovation of TCM. Cooperating with Zhiqi Health Industry (Shandong) Group, an innovation-oriented company on TCM technologies, they are also utilizing chicory to develop a medicine that is expected to help lower uric acid levels and reduce the risk of gout attacks.

Zhang Bing, a celebrated professor at BUCM and leader of the research team, said hyperuricemia (excessive uric acid levels) affects about 13.3 percent of Chinese population and is an independent risk factor for cardiovascular diseases.

The use of chicory in TCM can be traced to the eighth century, and extracts from different parts of the herb have unique pharmacological properties for various diseases,

Zhang said. While continuing to research the plant's biological components, the team explores medicinal applications for relevant diseases, which can help them develop new drugs and health products more efficiently, she added.

TCM, an integral part of China's culture and heritage, has played a significant role in the healthcare of the nation's people for thousands of years. It emphasizes holistic healing and preventive care, focusing on a comprehensive system of healthcare that includes modalities such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, *tuina* (Chinese medical massage), and dietary therapy.

Nowadays, TCM is practiced alongside modern medicine in hospitals and clinics across the country and has gained recognition internationally, with acupuncture and herbal medicine being used by practitioners worldwide.

Data from the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine show that under China's three-tiered public hospital system, about 89 percent of the secondary and higher-grade public comprehensive hospitals and 62.8 percent of maternity and child health hospitals have TCM departments or clinics. Outpatient visits to TCM medical facilities are estimated to have reached 12.8 billion in 2023.

According to healthcare research institute VCBeat Research, the market of TCM healthcare services is expected to reach 7.13 trillion yuan in 2026, with an average annual compound growth rate of 6.2 percent since 2022. To support development of the expanding market, experts say a modern TCM industry system must be constructed.

"The development of TCM has been deeply integrated with new technologies including big data,



Top: Pharmacists fill prescriptions at a hospital in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province. ZHANG ZHENGYOU / FOR CHINA DAILY Above: Zhang Bing (right), a professor at Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, shows chicory roots to Guan Qinglei (center), chairman of Zhiqi Health Industry (Shandong) Group, in her lab. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

internet of things, and artificial intelligence," said Geng Funeng, vice-president of the China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and chairman of Good Doctor Group, a major enterprise with businesses across TCM research, production and trade. "The modernization of TCM has been accelerating, and sci-tech innovation has become a new engine for its inheritance and development."

Good Doctor Group has embarked on digital upgrades to ensure large-scale and high-quality production of key materials for its flagship TCM patent medicines, including Kanggan Granule, a signature TCM cold treatment, and Kangfuxin Liquid, which uses an extract from American cockroaches to treat bleeding stomach pain, wounds, injuries, and ulcers.

The company has invested 860 million yuan in the construction of a digital smart factory, which includes facilities for the large-scale cultivation of the bugs and production lines for Kangfuxin Liquid and Kanggan Granule.

Geng said the aim is to improve production efficiency and product quality supervision through advanced digital technologies, adding that compared to traditional production methods, the digital smart factory boasts a higher level of automation and stricter quality control for a large-scale production capacity.

"We employ digital means to monitor and manage every aspect of the production process, ensuring that every single medicinal product meets stringent quality standards," he said.

Through its digital platform, Good Doctor Group has achieved integration of the entire industry

chain, from raw material procurement to product sales, forming a complete supply chain system. This has increased efficiency and reduced costs while also providing consumers with more convenient and high-quality services.

Liu of the Research Transformation Center at BUCM, likewise stressed efforts to empower the TCM industry's development with advanced technologies. He cited the use of artificial intelligence in areas such as drug manufacturing, testing, quality analysis and clinical care aimed at improving work efficiency and enhancing TCM efficacy. As well, the standards for market access need to be adjusted in accordance with the characteristics of the science and technologies in the TCM sector, Liu added.

"The COVID-19 pandemic greatly raised people's awareness about health. This can serve as a great opportunity for us to further promote the innovation and high-quality development of TCM, such as the chicory products," said Liu, noting that as demand for those products increases, cultivation of the herb will continue to expand while the manufacturing technology and product quality become more standardized.

Zhang, the BUCM professor, said carrying out research on the chicory projects has greatly promoted development of relevant industries in the herb's major producing areas, such as Inner Mongolia autonomous region and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, making a significant contribution to China's rural vitalization.

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## Traditional treatment options are not for everyone

### REPORTER'S LOG

By Liu Zhihua

Last winter I began seeing a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner once a week.

While I was certain I had not contracted any severe ailment, I had no

appetite and felt a constant need to wrap myself in a heavy coat to stay warm.

On my first visit, the doctor checked my pulse, asked me to stick out my tongue and inquired about my self-perception of symptoms. After that, she asked if I had any other conditions, like itchiness in the throat or constipation. Then she formulated a diagnosis and prescribed an assortment of herbal medicines. I decided to brew the medicine in

my own kitchen as suggested by my friend, instead of taking prepared herbal medicine soup the hospital can provide. It usually took one hour to brew the medicine, and because I did not have the time, most of that work fell on my mother.

For the first two weeks, I felt no obvious improvement to my health. But about one month later, I started eating well and sleeping better, and not feeling so cold. It was beyond my expectations!

For years, I was quite skeptical about seeking advice from a TCM doctor. Although I believed TCM is effective in treating illness, I was not convinced I would be lucky enough to run into a responsible and well-experienced practitioner — a feeling that was reinforced by memories of a negative encounter more than 10 years ago.

I had a menstrual condition, which in Western medicine is not considered an illness. At the sugges-

tion of a friend, I sought medical advice from a TCM doctor once a week. The problem was that after every visit the doctor prescribed a large number of herbal medicines and Chinese patent medicines, and after a month, while the menstrual condition improved, I developed stomach discomfort. I stopped seeing the doctor, and resorted to exercise, which proved to be more effective than the TCM medication.

My mother, a firm believer in TCM, told me that not every TCM practitioner is talented enough to treat illness effectively. She used to visit a private TCM doctor in my home-

town, but after he retired and his son took over to the clinic, the quality of care and service greatly declined. I also asked friends for their impressions of TCM. Some said they have been exposed to more modern medical concepts and cannot stop being skeptical, while others perceive it as more time-consuming compared to Western medicine.

In my case, after two months of treatment and the improvement to my health, I find myself reluctant to visit the TCM doctor again — but now the fatigue and lack of appetite have returned, and I am considering seeking another treatment.

# BUSINESS



A medical worker explains moxibustion knowledge to elementary school students in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, in October. CAO JIANXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Chinese make use of ancient medical therapy to stay healthy

Moxibustion involves burning moxa to heat acupuncture points, treat illnesses

By LIU ZHIHUA  
liuzh@chinadaily.com.cn

**88.66 billion yuan** expected market value of moxibustion sector by the end of 2024, said a report by marketing consultancy Zhiyanzhan

When Kang Liguo opened a moxibustion unit in Beijing in 2007, little did he know that his company would go on to operate several such traditional Chinese medicine therapy centers in the future.

The therapy, which uses burning moxa, or mugwort herb, to heat acupuncture points in the body to improve health and treat illnesses, is finding favor among the Chinese, especially the young, and driving up allied sectors such as wellness services.

"Thanks to people's increased awareness about health after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the growing recognition of traditional Chinese medicine, we are seeing more interest in TCM methods for better health in recent years," said Kang, who now operates 13 moxibustion centers in the city.

"Moxibustion is gaining popularity. Our centers target high-end groups, and we see hundreds of customers each day."

During a typical session at a moxibustion center, a moxibustionist will

light one end of a moxa stick, or dried mugwort herb roughly the shape and size of a cigar, and hold it close to the skin of a client to heat several acupuncture points one after the other.

Most customers are middle-aged people who suffer from conditions such as lumbar pain and are willing to pay significantly for each session. There are also a growing number of busy young people seeking help from the time-honored health-improvement method, Kang said.

Previously a sales manager at a major IT company, Kang himself once led a busy work and social life, but soon his health started deteriorating. Following a course of moxibustion therapy, Kang was pleasantly surprised to find that his condition had much improved with the therapy that predates even Chinese acupuncture.

Inspired by the business opportunities, Kang quit his job to develop a career in the moxibustion industry.

He also opened a factory in Beijing to produce moxa sticks and other moxa health products, including a waist protection belt filled with moxa.

According to a report by marketing consultancy Zhiyanzhan last year, there are more than 2 million moxibustion facilities in China, providing more than 10 million jobs and servicing more than 200 million people.

It estimates that the moxibustion market will reach 88.66 billion yuan (\$12.26 billion) by the end of 2024.

Ai Dandan started using moxa health products in 2016, when, as a young mother, she used to suffer from intense colds as well as frequent perspiration. She soon started wearing a *dudou* — traditional Chinese underwear — and a waist belt filled with layers of moxa. After her health improved, she bought the moxibustion products for her family because of their proven efficacy.

Ai, a mother of two, also became an agent of moxa health products, developing in the process a new career.

"At first, I just thought as an agent I could buy the products for my family and friends at discounted prices,"

Ai said, adding that she soon figured out that the products were quite popular.

"Most of my customers are young people who want to improve their health through TCM methods, but do not have the luxury of visiting TCM hospitals and clinics regularly," she said.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that moxibustion as a TCM therapy has played a positive role historically in managing disease and improving life quality, and that its growing popularity demonstrates people's increased awareness of how TCM can help improve health without medication.

The popularity of moxibustion and moxa health products will boost the development of a slew of sectors, from cultivation to logistics as well as services, which will in turn increase the convenience of using moxibustion and moxa health products and add to their popularity, he said.

Kang, however, pointed out that despite their popularity, moxibustion services and moxa health products currently lack uniform national standards. This, he said, needs to be addressed to promote the fast development of the sector.

## Land-sea corridor aiding trade between China, ASEAN

NANNING — After an eight-day voyage, a cargo ship loaded with 68 metric tons of mangosteens docked at Qinzhou Port in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. Having cleared Customs swiftly, the fruits imported from Indonesia were transported to nearby provinces, as well as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Yangtze River Delta.

As a pivotal hub along the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, Qinzhou Port witnesses the daily hustle and bustle of rail-sea intermodal trains delivering cargo from member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to China's inland regions.

Launched in 2017, the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor is a trade and logistics passage jointly built by provincial-level regions in western China and ASEAN members. Today, thanks to the corridor, more fruits from Southeast Asia can reach the Chinese market to meet the growing and diversified needs of Chinese consumers.

"In the past, our imported fruits were unloaded at Nansha district of Guangzhou," said Huang Liangsong, a staff member of Guangxi Zhengfan International Logistics Co Ltd.

But, nowadays, the import logistics of Qinzhou Port are faster and more cost-effective thanks to the continuous expansion of foreign trade routes. "With the arrival of the fruit season, an assortment of ASEAN fruits will be shipped to the port this year," he added.

To further spur the flow of agricultural products from ASEAN countries to the Chinese market, Qinzhou Port has established several tropical fruit express lines as well as optimized cold chain, cold storage, and other supporting infrastructure.

"We launched an express line from Laem Chabang of Thailand to Qinzhou, which runs four times a week, and the fruits can reach China within three days," said Zuo Kongtian, an official with the Qinzhou Port area of the Guangxi Free Trade Zone.

According to Customs statistics, from January to February this year, fruit imports through Qinzhou Port — mostly longan, coconut, mango and mangosteen — totaled more than 3,300 tons, with a total value of 25.43 million yuan (\$3.5 million), up 178.4 percent and 292.5 percent year-on-year, respectively.

In addition, the establishment of a fruit trade center in collaboration with ASEAN countries in Qinzhou has also contributed to the efficiency of Customs clearance. "We have set up an inbound fruit 'green channel' to largely

“We have set up an inbound fruit 'green channel' to largely reduce waiting times and to ensure streamlined Customs clearance processes.”

Cao Teng, an officer at Qinzhou Port Customs

**25.43 million yuan** fruit import value through Qinzhou Port amid Jan-Feb period

reduce waiting times and to ensure streamlined Customs clearance processes," said Cao Teng, an officer at Qinzhou Port Customs.

Youyi Pass, over 200 kilometers from Qinzhou Port, is nestled on the China-Vietnam border in Guangxi. It saw 23.88 billion yuan worth of fruits imported in 2023, reflecting a 262.3 percent year-on-year increase, according to local Customs statistics.

Early April marks the first peak of the massive influx of tropical fruits via Youyi Pass, China's major land route to Vietnam and Southeast Asia, where trucks loaded with ripe durians and jackfruit form queues for Customs clearance at this time of year.

According to Wang Zhengbo, president of a Guangxi-based supply chain management company, business collaboration opportunities between China and ASEAN have continued to grow in recent years, boosting the demand for and the quantity and variety of goods in cross-border trade, as well as seeing continuous increases in freight volume.

The New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor is also an economic corridor featuring in-depth integration of transportation, logistics, commerce and industry, thereby creating significant opportunities for industrial cooperation among countries.

"With the effective implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the accelerated construction of the land-sea trade corridor, economic and trade cooperation between China and the ASEAN will bring about new opportunities," said Zuo.

XINHUA

## The Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative, reflecting common ideals and the pursuit of fairer, more connected human societies, endeavors to seek new models of international cooperation and inject a new sense of positivity into efforts aimed at promoting world peace and development.



## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Financial de-risking remains key focus in future

## EAGLE EYE

By Li Guangzi

China's financial risks have been converging of late, but de-risking in the future will fundamentally depend on the stabilization and recovery of the economy.

As the economy further improves, there will be greater room for resolving financial risks in key areas, and such risks are expected to remain within control this year.

To start with, the country's small and medium-sized financial institutions have made positive progress in reforming and reducing risks. This is significant since they are a fragile part of the country's financial system.

Their risk indicators are showing steady improvement.

The nonperforming loan ratio of the country's commercial banks was 1.59 percent at the end of 2023, a decrease of 0.04 percentage point from the previous year. It has continued to trend downward since 2019.

The nonperforming loan ratio of rural commercial banks was 3.34 percent, an increase of 0.12 percentage point from the end of 2022. Although this has increased due to the relatively lower proportion of assets in the banking system, its impact on the overall risk of the industry is relatively limited.

The nonperforming loan balance of rural commercial banks at the end of 2023 was \$62.3 billion yuan (\$119 billion), accounting for about a quarter, of the total.

In recent years, China's financial institutions in the banking sector, including small and medium-sized lenders, have continued to increase their efforts to dispose of nonperforming assets, which is another effective means to resolve financial risks.

From 2020 to 2023, they disposed of nonperforming assets totaling 3.02 trillion yuan, 3.13 trillion yuan, 3.1 trillion yuan, and 3 trillion yuan, respectively.

The scale of such disposals has been high for several years and is roughly equivalent to the size of the balance of nonperforming loans.

## Effective hedge

These efforts have effectively hedged the impact of external adverse factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and macroeconomic downturn on small and medium-sized financial institutions, and helped keep their nonperforming loan ratio at a low level in general.

Since the beginning of this year, the capital replenishment of small and medium-sized banks has also maintained a relatively faster pace. Many banks have increased their registered capital through profit conversion, raising shares, and issuing secondary capital bonds.

At the end of 2023, the capital adequacy ratio of the country's commercial banks was 15.06 percent, and that of urban commercial banks and rural commercial banks was 12.63 percent and 12.22 percent, respectively. These three indicators all remain at a relatively high level.

From 2020 to 2022, small and medium-

sized banks issued special bonds of 50.6 billion yuan, 159.4 billion yuan, and 63 billion yuan, respectively. In 2023, a total of 218.28 billion yuan of special bonds were issued to supplement the capital of small and medium-sized banks.

In addition, the restructuring and integration of small and medium-sized financial institutions are progressing in an orderly manner. Mergers and reorganizations have become one of the main ways for small and medium-sized banks to reform and reduce risks.

Since 2023, more than 10 rural banks have been approved for dissolution, and they were mainly absorbed and merged by large

banks that have direct or indirect equity participation.

In June last year, Chinese authorities proposed to formulate and implement a package of debt reduction plans and expanded the scope of debt risk prevention and resolution from "local government debt" to "local debt".

With the implementation of a series of such policies, local debt has declined in terms of both the existing scale and issuance price, and the overall risks have been alleviated.

In terms of fiscal policy, local governments have restarted the issuance of special refinancing bonds to replace the existing

implicit debts and repay government arrears to enterprises.

As of the end of 2023, at least 27 provincial-level regions have issued special refinancing bonds worth a total of 1.39 trillion yuan. A variety of measures had also been taken to resolve local debts.

In particular, with the implementation of a package of debt reduction plans, more urban investment bonds have been repaid since the fourth quarter, and this trend is expected to continue this year.

Against the backdrop of an overall downward trend in financing costs, the issuance interest rate of urban investment bonds has declined since December 2022.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

This trend has been particularly evident since the implementation of a package of debt reduction plans. Such reductions play an important role in reducing the interest burden of urban investment companies.

Although the country's real estate market is still weak, its financial risks have improved to a certain extent, instead of worsening.

First, the country has increased policy support on both supply and demand sides. As of February, 276 cities across the country had established urban financing coordination mechanisms, and a total of 6,000 real estate projects had been proposed. The nation's commercial banks had quickly approved loans exceeding 200 billion yuan.

In terms of demand, various areas, as represented by first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, have relaxed housing purchase restrictions.

**With more bailout policies, many real estate companies that were in danger have recently accelerated their debt repayment and basically completed the restructuring or extension of domestic and overseas debts, thus avoiding risk contagion to the financial system.**

Such efforts include relaxing the standards for ordinary residences, lowering the down payment ratio and a lower limit of mortgage interest rates, relaxing the conditions for home purchase and settlement, and increasing home purchase subsidies.

Second, it is expected that the number of defaulting entities and the scale of defaults on real estate corporate bonds will further decline.

With more bailout policies, many real estate companies that were in danger have recently accelerated their debt repayment and basically completed the restructuring or extension of domestic and overseas debts, thus avoiding risk contagion to the financial system.

Third, the real estate industry currently does not account for a high proportion of loan investments of financial institutions; thus, its overall risk impact on financial institutions is limited.

As of the end of 2023, the balance of loans of financial institutions was 237.59 trillion yuan. In comparison, the balances of real estate development loans, personal housing loans, and real estate loans were 12.88 trillion yuan, 38.17 trillion yuan, and 52.63 trillion yuan, respectively.

They accounted for 5.42 percent, 16.07 percent and 22.15 percent, respectively, of the total loan balances of financial institutions, all of which had decreased compared with that of 2022.

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

## Let misjudgements be, China is still on a growth track

## MAIN STREET

By Liang Jin

The Chinese economy withstood pressures both at home and overseas to grow 5.2 percent year-on-year in 2023. The additional economic girth exceeded 6 trillion yuan (\$830 billion), equivalent to the yearly GDP of a medium-sized economy.

The international environment was complex and challenging in 2023, and domestic tasks for reform, development and stability were also arduous and heavy. Pessimistic views of the Chinese economy and those calling for so-called de-risking gained stronger voices, which exaggerated the problems of the Chinese economy's post-pandemic recovery and ignored its strong resilience, great potential and clear vitality.

Some people have blindly applied international precedents to China's reality and focus more on "quantity" than on "quality" of economic development. This has led to many misjudgments about China's economy.

Miscalculation 1: China's post-pandemic economic recovery is slowing.

Last year witnessed a good start for the Chinese economy in the first quarter. However, affected by factors such as holdover effects of the pandemic, some economic indicators fell slightly in the second quarter.

Some foreign institutions therefore predicted that China's economic recovery would be weak and could not achieve the GDP growth target of around 5 percent for 2023.

Shortly after the release of economic data for the first half of the year, the central leadership made the judgment that economic recovery would feature a wave-by-wave development process with twists and turns, and China's economy enjoyed great resilience and potential for long-term growth.

In the face of the downward pressure on the economy, many government departments took quick action to launch a combination of policy measures. In the third quarter of 2023, many sectors and multiple economic indicators showed positive changes, and international institutions raised their forecast for China's economic growth for full-year 2023.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics clearly showed the trajectory of China's economic recovery last year. The year-on-year GDP growth rates in the four quarters were 4.5 percent, 6.3 percent, 4.9 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively.

The 5.2 percent annual GDP growth last year was not only higher than the estimated global growth of about 3 percent, but also made China one of the largest driving forces for global economic growth.

Miscalculation 2: Foreign capital no longer favors the Chinese market.

At the beginning of last year, some Western politicians advocated for "de-risking", "decoupling" and "China plus N" strategies,

which worsened geopolitical risks in economic globalization and disrupted market layouts of some multinational companies.

**Choosing China means embracing opportunities, and investing in China means investing in the future.**

In 2023, the actual use of foreign capital in China fell from a year ago, and pessimists took the opportunity to hype theories like "a large number of foreign investors are withdrawing from China", and "the Chinese market is not investable", ignoring the fact of a record high comparison base in 2022 and a gloomy global foreign investment sentiment.

In fact, foreign companies that know the Chinese market intimately are well aware of its irreplaceability. Since spring 2023, executives from many multinational corporations have made visits to China.

The sixth China International Import Expo welcomed the largest and highest-level delegation from the United States in the event's history, and the first China International Supply Chain Expo attracted more than 500 companies and institutions from 55 countries and regions. Last year, China established 48,078 new foreign-invested enterprises, increasing 36.2 percent year-on-year.

In the past five years, the rate of return on

foreign direct investment in China has been relatively high relative to other investment destinations. Choosing China means embracing opportunities, and investing in China means investing in the future. Against the backdrop of multiple uncertainties facing the global economy, many foreign companies are casting "votes of confidence" in China's economy through their actions.

Miscalculation 3: China's economy is mired in deflation.

The year-on-year growth rate of China's consumer price index is an important indicator of inflation levels. With the low-level and even negative CPI growth rates since the second quarter, pessimists quickly labeled China's economy as "deflationary" and even speculated that China might follow the steps of Japan's long-time deflation.

As a matter of fact, the low-level or negative CPI growth rates were due to structural and temporal factors. Energy prices surged in 2022 and then fell in 2023. Pork prices rose rapidly in 2022, while the decrease in pork prices was significant in 2023, driving the index down.

"We don't expect to see a general deflation trend in China," said Gita Gopinath, first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, at a news conference in November.

Miscalculation 4: The prospects of China's economic transformation are bleak.

With significant changes in market supply and demand dynamics, the real estate sector has entered a period of correction

and transformation, which has caused disruptions to China's economic operations.

Such a challenge has been depicted by pessimists as a "crisis" that will lead China's economy into a recession.

In fact, different regions and government departments are adjusting and optimizing real estate policies in a timely fashion.

Over the long term, demand for new housing from urban residents and the urgent demand for improved housing from a growing number of Chinese households will form an important driving force for the real estate market.

Although the property sector's contribution to economic growth has weakened, development of new growth engines such as the services sector and high-tech manufacturing driving the high-quality development of the Chinese economy, is accelerating. In 2023, the value added of the services sector accounted for 54.6 percent of GDP, up 1.2 percentage points from that of the previous year. Investment in high-tech industries grew by 10.3 percent.

Currently, China's middle-income group exceeds 400 million people, and is expected to reach 800 million in the next decade or so, forming strong momentum for consumption upgrades.

Only by expanding the horizons of views and conducting a panoramic observation can one have an objective and comprehensive understanding of the current situation and long-term trends of the Chinese economy.

*The writer is a researcher at the Xinhua Institute, the think tank of Xinhua News Agency.*

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

## WORLDUS

## A new world opens up with bias left at the door

Trip gives US students chance to get true experience and ideas about China

By LINDA DENG  
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"I think that's how my mind has changed ... by leaving preconceived notions, leaving biases at the door," says Isaiah Long, a student from the United States who visited China recently.

"Going in head first and getting true experiences and opinions," is the way to go, said Long, an 11th grader at Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Washington state.

Long made his remarks after returning from an 11-day trip from March 17 to March 27 to China with 23 other high school students. They visited Beijing, Shiyuan in Hubei province and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province.

"When I had any biases or preconceived notions about China out of the way, it allowed me to experience China better," Long said. "The best way to experience the country and learn knowledge about a country is going to the country itself and meeting the people."

In November President Xi Jinping announced that China would invite 50,000 young people from the United States to visit over the next five years.

All 24 students, 10 from Lincoln High School and 14 from nearby Steilacoom High School, were visiting China for the first time.

In Beijing they visited landmarks such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City as well as venues that hosted the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and the Winter Olympics in 2022.

The students also visited the campuses of several Chinese schools, including Tsinghua University High School and Capital University of Physical Education and Sports, both in Beijing, and Shenzhen Nanshan Foreign Language Senior High School in Shenzhen.

"I like China and I think it's very beautiful," said Annaliese Colbaugh, an 11th grader at Lincoln High School. "I loved seeing all the landmarks and ... the people are really welcoming and kind."

Colbaugh said her grandfather had thought it would be unsafe for her to go to China.

"I did hear some negative stuff while I was here (at home), but I went there and it opened my eyes ... After I came back then I just ... explained to him about the whole trip and about how it's probably one of the safest places I've been to. ... It really changed his perspective on China."

Her favorite part of the trip, she said, was visiting the schools and seeing how they are run. She still talks to a lot of her friends in China on WeChat, she said.

"I definitely probably would go to China again with my family. I told (them) it was such a good place, and I would love to go back there. But it would be with them."

#### 'Like home'

Jersey Jefferson, an 11th grader at Lincoln High School, said her stay in Beijing was "like home."

"The weather was more like Washington, so it didn't feel like I was really far, far away from home.

Everyone was super kind, and I felt accepted out there, so I definitely enjoyed myself."

Jefferson said her favorite place was the Capital University of Physical Education and Sports in Beijing, where the US student delegation was welcomed with a lion dance and *wushu* performance. She also enjoyed the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, she said, saying it was like "walking on history."

"I never thought I would ever get to walk on the Great Wall. ... I was, I would assume, one of the first people in my family to go to China. My grandmother was really excited. She wants to see all the pictures, she wants to hear all the things, she wants to see all the gifts."

Since her return she has encouraged many of her school friends to follow in her footsteps, she said.

Montserrat Romero-Rocha, a 12th-grade student at Lincoln High School, said: "We got so many unique opportunities, and it's just amazing. ... It has changed my life."

It was her first time in China, but her older sister Abranna, who was also a student at Lincoln High School, was one of more than 100 students and teachers invited to China after Xi visited the school during his first state visit to the US as Chinese president in 2015.

"I think the trip to China (in 2016) really influenced her. Ever since then, she's been exploring the world. China was her first avenue to see that. She was influenced and has continued to be influenced to go and see other places."

Abranna Romero-Rocha now works in Spokane as a college adviser and recently started law school.

The younger sister said one of her favorite parts of her own China trip was being involved in everyday



Chinese students teach a high school student from the US state of Washington how to play *guqin*, a classical Chinese instrument, at Peking University, in Beijing on March 20. YIN GANG / XINHUA

school life, and she told her family and friends about her more than five hours of interactions with Chinese peers at Shenzhen Nanshan Foreign Language Senior High School.

The school was the last stop before the delegation left China. Activities the US students and their Chinese peers took part in included painting, dancing, singing and volleyball.

"(The Shenzhen visit) had a lot of impact on me because it was the last group of people that I was able to interact with before I left (China)," Montserrat Romero-Rocha said. "Everybody was just so sweet and kind and nice. And I have friends now from different schools that I talk to and keep up with."

She wants to return to China and stay at least six months or a year, she said.

Karl Hoseth, principal of Lincoln High School, said: "To see them

interact in a positive way with the students in China was just really heartwarming. It was such a fantastic, once-in-a-lifetime experience. I'm really hopeful for this type of thing in terms of how it can impact future generations."

#### Huge help

Hoseth was at a banquet in San Francisco in November when Xi announced the initiative to have 50,000 US students visit China.

"That was a huge help," Hoseth said. "I heard it in the audience and I thought that seems like that would be a great opportunity for our students at Lincoln. But I didn't have any idea that we would be among the very first to go and then have some more opportunities to send students here in the next several months."

From 2016 to 2019 three trips were made from Lincoln High School to China.

"Then it went on pause for a while when the pandemic occurred, and so I'm just so grateful that we are now able to do it again and thankful for this initiative and those who have really helped us make this happen for our students," Hoseth said.

He would encourage people to visit China, he said, and thinks being exposed to different cultures, countries, ways of life and histories is invaluable.

"As a school, one of the things that I'm really excited about is that there is this long-standing connection between China and Lincoln High School, and in particular with President Xi, who visited in 2015.

"And so with that, there have been a number of groups that have wanted to help support having some of our students go back to China. So there is a possibility coming up in the summer where we'll be able to send some students to China again."

## Fast-fashion brand Shein opens supply chain to others

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
in New York  
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The popular online fast-fashion retailer Shein will open up and market its unique supply chain operation to other brands, which will be able to learn from its slick operations to design, make and deliver fashionable clothes at top speed.

The company, with headquarters in Singapore, built its hugely successful store by using goods made in China and local suppliers and manufacturers, which created a lightning-fast supply chain.

However, in its next phase it will change gears and give outside designers and brands the chance to use its design teams, which create in small batches to test a product's popularity with consumers while creating less wasted inventory.

Shein's executive chairman, Donald Tang, told investors in a letter last month that the new initiative would be dubbed "supply chain as a service". The Wall Street Journal reported. The aim is to keep the company one step ahead of the competition.

George Yip, emeritus professor at Imperial College London and distinguished visiting professor

Today with everything online, the Chinese just spot whatever trends there are."

George Yip, emeritus professor at Imperial College London

at Northeastern University in Boston, said: "Today with everything online, the Chinese just spot whatever trends there are. And, of course, they're able to send out hundreds of stocks, keeping units of hundreds of designs and see what sticks, and then respond very quickly. They have low-cost manufacturing capability."

Shein made its US debut in 2015, and its sales soared amid the pandemic. The company had a revenue of about \$22.7 billion in 2022.

The e-commerce company's revolutionary approach to fashion manufacturing means that it has contracts with more than 5,400 third-party factories in China that make tens of thousands of items of clothing each day.

Even though its website features a lot of stock, it makes goods only in small batches.

When customers browse the site, Shein monitors what they look at, put in their cart, hover over, or click on, allowing the company immediately to see what is popular. It then creates new designs based on what customers like.

Once Shein places an order with a supplier it can be delivered in days. Managers rely on real-time data to determine what is in demand and order more as needed.

This approach cuts the cost for storage, a primary reason for its ultralow prices such as a \$10 dress and a \$2 T-shirt, which have proved popular with consumers in more than 150 countries.

As Shein enters the new phase, it has given some emerging designers access to its technology under its Shein X incubator program.

Under the partnership with independent designers more than 4,600 designers worldwide have displayed 41,000 original designs.

Shein's new approach comes as it faces growing pressure from Western regulators and politicians over its business practices.

Shein filed an application for a US stock listing in November, but the Securities and Exchange

Commission has yet to make a ruling.

The basis of Shein's business has been remaking fashion from the runways by houses of high couture more cheaply and selling it to fashion-conscious consumers, especially young, social media-savvy young women.

Shein has outpaced well-known European fast-fashion companies such as H&M, Primark and Zara even though they have had a solid online presence, and brick-and-mortar stores for decades and are considered the pioneers of fast fashion.

#### Making inroads

Over the past few years Shein has also made inroads into the Western market by buying a stake in Spare Group, operator of the US brand Forever 21. It also bought the online British fashion brand Missguided.

Shein's approach puts it in direct competition with Amazon of the US, which wants to fend off the new rival.

Amazon is reportedly trying to offer consumers a broader selection of goods and improve its delivery speed, especially for same-day items, to regain consumers lost to both Shein and Temu, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Temu has quickly become popular in the US and is the second-most popular shopping app in the country by monthly users.

Last year Shein launched a marketplace in the US, Brazil, Europe and Mexico. It gives third parties the ability to sell different types of goods such as fashion, home goods and electronics, much like Amazon.

## A taste of Chinese, with or without the tricky sticks

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

From Wall Street to Lincoln Center, whether it's in the Financial District or the heart of the arts scene, Chinese cuisine permeates almost every corner of New York.

However, the Dragon Fest, the largest outdoor Chinese food and culture festival, on until October, is bringing together all authentic local foods from many provinces of China to Manhattan.

"We hope that Chinese food and food culture can serve as a bridge connecting people from different countries," the founder of Dragon Fest, Xu Biubiu, said. "Food-tasting could be a good start."

Food has not only facilitated connections between people but also created a culinary diplomacy between China and the United States recently.

In a visit to China that concluded last week, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen did not limit herself to exchanging views on international economics, current financial situations and cooperation in addressing global challenges with Chinese officials. While traveling from Guangzhou to Beijing she tried a wide range of Chinese dishes, including Sichuan dumplings, Peking duck, mouthwatering chicken and craft beer.

Internet users have been captivated by what Yellen ate, as well as her proficient use of chopsticks, seen in a video of her dining at Taotao Ju, a restaurant in Guangzhou with a 144-year history.

"Many cuisines are indeed more convenient to eat with chopsticks, which appears more Chinese," Xu said.

"I've noticed many foreigners at our Dragon Fest using chopsticks, and many are exceptionally skilled at it.

"This creates a more relaxed dining atmosphere for everyone and facilitates cultural exchange through the shared experience of dining."

Many more vendors are offering chopsticks in addition to knives and forks to cater to preferences for

eating certain types of food, Xu said.

"I love using chopsticks when I eat Chinese food or other Asian cuisines," Helen Pfeffer, 58, told China Daily. "Using chopsticks feels 100 percent more authentic to me.

"You know what they're really great for? ... You can enjoy snacks like buttered popcorn or Cheetos with chopsticks. It's very neat."

The practice of combining Chinese utensils with US snacks serves as a fun symbol of cultural exchanges, she said.

"Things like noodles are easier to eat with chopsticks than with anything else. I think it's generally one of those situations where if you're in a restaurant and everybody's using a certain utensil, you feel like you should be using it, too," she said, adding that it helps immerse her in the food experience.

Alexandria Pryce, 24, said: "I really hope more people come out and truly enjoy the culture and try different things that they might not be used to trying on a daily basis."

Pryce said she likes Asian food and enjoyed trying different dishes at the Dragon Fest, appreciating not only the food but also the cultures.

Eating Chinese food from local vendors at the Dragon Fest is also a way of supporting small businesses, she said.

"I honestly don't know how I learned to use chopsticks; it took me a minute to pick things up, but now it's not that hard," she said.

"I don't want to settle for Americanized Chinese food because it's important to preserve the true culture."

Holding three boxes of xiaolongbao (steamed dumplings) and noodles and three pairs of chopsticks, Jackie Maragh, 28, said: "I think using chopsticks makes the experience more authentic, and it's better to eat the food the way that people traditionally eat it. It adds to the experience as well."

Her friend Alicia Forbes, 33, holding a freshly brewed fruit tea, said she liked it and was ready to try the food that they had just bought.

"I'm still practicing using chopsticks, though. And I'll be practicing more."

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Editor's note: Amity between the people holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. China Daily will come out with a series of stories highlighting Chinese cities' special connections with sister cities, mutual understanding, trust and friendship between peoples of different countries and cultural backgrounds, and shining light on "city diplomacy".

# UNBREAKABLE BOND SPANS DECADES



From Wuhan's Yellow Crane Tower to a modern art museum in Duisburg, these landmark buildings narrate stories of the history of the sister cities. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By CHEN YINGQUN and LIU KUN in Wuhan and XING YI in Duisburg

The Chinese city of Wuhan and the German city of Duisburg joined hands in 1982 to become the first pair of sister cities between China and Germany. Decades have passed, and people still remember that this enduring friendship originated from a letter written by a German woman.

significant industrial city in the Ruhr area of western Germany. Situated at the confluence of the Ruhr River and the Rhine River, it is a crucial water and land transportation hub in Europe. Additionally, Duisburg is home to the world's largest inland port — the Port of Duisburg.



The China-Europe Railway Express bound for Duisburg departs from Wuhan. XIAO YUJU / XINHUA

high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative and to enhancing the friendship between China and Germany.

technical consultation for the Wuhan Diesel Engine Factory, a State-owned enterprise. He was later appointed as its director, becoming the first "foreign factory director" in China after the reform and opening-up.

Ruhr area "Wuhan China Express", the first time in its history that it named a passenger train after a foreign city. Duisburg also named a street and the largest conference hall after Wuhan.

Deep impression For some Germans, the living experience in Wuhan has left a deep impression. Andrea Hoecker, a 30-year-old who has lived and studied in both Wuhan and Duisburg, said that Wuhan boasts many beautiful tourist attractions and stunning night views.

"The city is vibrant at night, offering opportunities to dine out, watch movies, participate in square dancing, sing karaoke, play mahjong, go shopping, get a haircut, and more. There are places to eat and drink around the clock, an experience she had never encountered before in Germany," she said.

### Wuhan and Duisburg share cooperation in various fields, enhancing relations between China, Germany

A mark of Wuhan is carved on the plaza in front of the city railway station in Duisburg. XING YI / CHINA DAILY



"A warm night, having a cocktail and trying all kinds of foods that I never even saw in my life before was one of the greatest things I was able to experience in my life," he said.

As industrial cities, Wuhan and Duisburg have both made efforts to seek economic transformation and high-quality development. The China-Europe Railway Express, an important project under the Belt and Road Initiative, has become a significant driving force for their development and cooperation, especially after Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to the city 10 years ago.

Xi visited Duisburg on March 29, 2014, during his trip to Germany. While welcoming the arrival of a freight train from China, Xi expressed hope that Duisburg would play a greater role in promoting cooperation between China and Germany, and China and Europe.

Link, who greeted Xi directly the visit, said that with the train connections, Duisburg benefits directly from the Chinese projects and involvement in the region.



A worker walks past a stack of containers in Duisburg Intermodal Terminal, a logistics hub where goods come in and out through rail, the Rhine River and highway. XING YI / CHINA DAILY

eration with China," he said.

In 2015, the express starting from Wuhan extended its European terminal to Duisburg. Over the past decade, Duisburg has become the node with the widest coverage, the most frequent trains, and the highest volume and value of goods among the Western European routes for the China-Europe Railway Express.

At present, a majority of China-Europe freight trains run into the Duisburg Intermodal Terminal, where containers with signs of China-Europe Railway Express are loaded by gantry cranes between trains, trucks, and barges every day, before setting

off on the next leg of their journeys. Li Zhao, who is in charge of Chinese business development at Contargo Group, the company that operates the terminal, said the "good location" of Duisburg and the flexibility of different transport methods has made more Chinese clients choose Duisburg as their logistics transfer hub.

Sha Pengjun, general manager of Wuhan Asia-Europe Logistics, said that in July 2015, the China-Europe Railway Express (Wuhan) was inaugurated with regular services to Duisburg, and has since maintained stable and regular operations. Until

now, a total of 797 trains have been operated, carrying 65,400 20-foot equivalent units, including 426 outbound trains and 371 inbound trains. Currently, outbound shipments mainly consist of optoelectronic products, mechanical equipment and components, automotive parts, and clothing, while inbound shipments mainly include cosmetics, auto parts, mechanical equipment, complete vehicles, and milk powder, she said.

The China-Europe Railway Express (Wuhan) to Duisburg leverages the stable and efficient advantages of railway transportation, promoting the clustering and development of industries such as optoelectronics, clothing, and timber in Wuhan, she said.

Living in Germany for years, Wu Min has witnessed the development brought to Duisburg by the express.

"At first, the German side did not expect the China-Europe Railway Express to develop so well. However, over the past decade, the China-Europe Railway Express has been thriving. Many Chinese companies have since settled in Duisburg, creating new economic development opportunities," Wu Min said.

He believes that Duisburg's unique transportation conditions by sea, land, and air will make it a distinctive logistics center. With the development of Internet of Things technology, the integration of artificial intelligence with logistics enterprises will lead to the rapid development of industrial enterprises, forming an interconnected ecosystem in the surrounding areas.

Moreover, both Duisburg and Wuhan consider the hydrogen energy industry as one of the emerging development directions, which will create opportunities for cooperation between the two sides, he said.

Contact the writers at chenyingqun@chinadaily.com.cn.



## Rhine hub set to play bigger role in bilateral collaboration

By CHEN YINGQUN and LIU KUN in Wuhan

Due to its extensive collaboration with Wuhan and its role in being an important transportation hub in Europe, Duisburg is poised to play a significant role in enhancing bilateral relations between China and Germany, the mayor of Duisburg said.

Moreover, the Port of Duisburg is the largest inland port in the world and has become the core of Europe's logistics hub, he added.

est advancements in Wuhan's smart logistics, observe the green and low-carbon evolution of the steel sector, and visit educational institutions to seek out possibilities for youth exchanges and collaborative efforts.

Numerous parallels Duisburg and Wuhan have numerous parallels regarding their benefits and unique characteristics. For instance, each city serves as a central point for the steel sector while simultaneously navigating a shift toward sustainable economic practices. In terms of city development, they are both exploring ways to enhance urban living standards by fostering greener, more eco-friendly and energy-efficient urban growth, aiming to offer improved living environments for their residents.



The high quality and efficiency of our partnership with China positioned us as a highly effective collaborator."

Soren Link, mayor of Duisburg

crucial roles as logistical centers, he said. "We have many connections, and there are many areas such as culture, education, and urban planning, where we can learn from and cooperate with each other," he said.

German and Chinese students of the Confucius Institute Metropolis Ruhr hold a concert at the University of Duisburg-Essen to celebrate Chinese New Year in February. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Since Xi's visit, Duisburg has evolved into a crucial center for logistics, witnessing a surge in investments from Chinese firms, Link said. He is convinced that going forward, Duisburg's collaborative prospects with China will only expand further.

Link said the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative "essentially applies the traditional concept of the Silk Road to modern practices". This initiative facilitates the exchange and learning of cultures among different countries and their peoples, promotes trade relations, and makes a significant contribution to world peace. It has also had a positive impact on the Port of Duisburg.



Top: Local families visit Yingqu Garden, which is located in Duisburg Zoo. Right: A statue of a lion decorates the stone bridge over a pond in the garden. XING YI / CHINA DAILY

## Friendship blossoms in Chinese garden

By CHEN YINGQUN and LIU KUN in Wuhan and XING YI in Duisburg

Jiang Donghua, 67, has kept two goats from Duisburg that he values a lot. A pair of gardening shears from an old friend remembering his participation in the construction of a Chinese garden in Duisburg decades ago, and a cup symbolizing the long-lasting friendship between China and Germany.

Wuhan and Duisburg became sister cities in 1982, and Wuhan, decided to present Duisburg with a Chu-style garden. Nevertheless, the creation of the garden was a challenging endeavor.

From left: Yingqu Garden in Duisburg consists of a pavilion and a kiosk in traditional Chinese architecture style; The Yingqu Garden at Wuhan Zoo. XING YI / CHINA DAILY; ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ertheless, the creation of the garden was a challenging endeavor. Originally constructed at the Wuhan Zoo, it was subsequently dismantled, packed into 14 containers and transported to Duisburg. Meanwhile, Wuhan sent a team of 10 people, including carpenters, construction workers, a painter, a design engineer, an interpreter and managers to Duisburg to assemble the garden.

From left: Yingqu Garden in Duisburg consists of a pavilion and a kiosk in traditional Chinese architecture style; The Yingqu Garden at Wuhan Zoo. XING YI / CHINA DAILY; ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

structures adorned with stone lions, pathways, waterways and rock formations. Within the garden, one can find a variety of plant species such as bamboo, weeping willows, water lilies, metasequoia and wintersweet trees, which represent Wuhan.

From left: Yingqu Garden in Duisburg consists of a pavilion and a kiosk in traditional Chinese architecture style; The Yingqu Garden at Wuhan Zoo. XING YI / CHINA DAILY; ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

completed its first large-scale renovation in more than 30 years and reopened to the public. On that day, Duisburg Zoo welcomed in excess of 8,000 visitors, four times its usual attendance, Hu said.

From left: Yingqu Garden in Duisburg consists of a pavilion and a kiosk in traditional Chinese architecture style; The Yingqu Garden at Wuhan Zoo. XING YI / CHINA DAILY; ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

"This garden has a history of more than 30 years and holds certain historical value. Therefore, the German workers exercise great care and precision during their restoration efforts," he said.

# WORLD



Dai Bing, the charge d'affaires of China's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, speaks at an emergency meeting of the Security Council at UN headquarters in New York on Sunday. MINLU ZHANG / CHINA DAILY

## Envoy: Iran's attacks 'spillover' from Gaza

By MINLU ZHANG  
at the United Nations  
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China's ambassador to the United Nations on Sunday called Iran's retaliatory attacks on Israel the "latest spillover of the Gaza conflict" and he called for an implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 and an immediate end of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The ongoing situation shows that the Palestinian question "remains central to the Middle East issue and bears on the peace, stability and long-term security in the region," Dai Bing, the charge d'affaires of China's permanent mission to the UN, said at an emergency Security Council meeting.

Dai warned that if "the flames of the Gaza conflict are allowed to continue raging, then the adverse spillover is set to spread still further, making the region even more unstable," he said.

"Countries and peoples in the Middle East have no desire for, nor can they afford a larger conflict or war," Iran and allied armed groups

launched coordinated drone and missile attacks on Israel late Saturday in retaliation for Israel's April 1 assault on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria. The attack resulted in the deaths of seven Iranians, including high-ranking military advisers, and several Syrian civilians.

The Israeli assault was "a grave violation of the UN Charter and international law and a breach of the sovereignty of both Syria and Iran. The attack is of an extremely vicious nature," Dai said.

Dai said China also has noted that Iran said that its military action was "in response to Israel's aggression against its diplomatic premises and the matter can be deemed concluded".

Iran's mission to the United Nations on Saturday said that with the strikes toward Israel, Tehran viewed its retaliation for the attack on its diplomatic compound in Damascus as concluded.

"The matter can be deemed concluded," the mission said on social media platform X. "However, should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be

considerably more severe."

The Iranian mission said it is a conflict between Iran and "the rogue Israeli regime", from which the US must stay away.

"China calls on relevant parties to exercise maximum calm and restraint and resolve their differences and disputes in accordance with the purposes of the UN Charter and international law to prevent further escalations," Dai said.

"Ultimately, there is no alternative to the full implementation of the two-state solution, the only way to end the vicious circle of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict once and for all. China calls on the international community, especially countries with influence, to play a constructive role for the peace and stability of the region," Dai said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday called for maximum restraint and said the Middle East is "on the brink".

"The people of the region are confronting a real danger of a devastating full-scale conflict. Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate," he said.

# EU probe into China EV makers 'unfair'

Car representatives say move a breach of WTO rules and poses threat to jobs

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The European Commission's anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese electric vehicle makers is unfair, amounts to double standards and violates World Trade Organization rules, a Chinese industry body says.

The China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products and its legal adviser in Brussels, VVGB, an international law firm specializing in EU trade and competition law, on Friday called on the European Commission not to impose any measures as a result of the investigation.

The chamber, which represents 12 Chinese EV makers, including BYD, Geely and SAIC, which were selected by the commission as samples in the investigation, had a hearing with the commission in Brussels on Thursday.

Shi Yonghong, vice-president of the chamber, said the investigation was initiated by the commission in the absence of a complaint from the EU industry and based on an allegation of threat of injury, something he described as rare, especially in the EU.

The German Automobile Industry Association and several EV makers and industry representatives in the EU have expressed opposition to the investigation, he said.

The head of the German association, Hildegard Mueller, told German media last week that the association opposes any EU tariffs on EV imports from China, and that they pose a risk of starting a trade war and threaten German jobs.

The European Commission should support the trade and investment partnership of Chinese and European auto industries."



Shi Yonghong, vice-president of The China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products

Shi described the case against Chinese EVs as "a perfect example of the EU's double standards".

The European Commission's complaints about Chinese EV subsidies are made in the face of billions of euros of subsidies that the EU provides to its own battery and EV makers, and the huge amount of subsidies the US government has earmarked for EVs in the Inflation Reduction Act.

The commission's sample selection was unfair because it excluded the top two EV exporters from China, Shi said, without naming the companies, but which are widely known to be Tesla and Renault, both of which make EVs in China for export to the EU.

### Technological advances

Chinese EVs thrived because of the country's early start, technological advances, economy of scale,

robust supply chains and fierce domestic competition, Shi said, rather than on the back of subsidies alleged by the European Commission.

Chinese companies are being treated unfairly and not objectively in the investigation, he said.

"In any event, it is not being conducted in accordance with the WTO rules."

Trade defense measures will harm all those involved, he said.

"The strength and growth of EV industries in EU and China lie in collaboration, not conflict. The Chinese side is still open to, and hopeful of, a balanced outcome in the investigation."

Edwin Vermulst, a VVGB Law partner, echoed the views, saying there are two notable inconsistencies in the European Commission investigation.

The largest exporter should normally be sampled but in this case was excluded by the commission, he said.

He also accused the commission of a lack of transparency in the investigation.

At an event in Paris recently, China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao said China's EV industry has helped greatly in global efforts to tackle climate change and the transition to a green and low-carbon world.

China will support its EV makers in defending their rights and interests, Wang said.

Shi said: "The European Commission should support the trade and investment partnership of Chinese and European auto industries and work to promote a healthy market environment for Chinese and EU companies to jointly tackle the challenges of climate change through the green transformation of our economies."

### Briefly

#### INDONESIA 15 dead, two missing after landslide

At least 15 people have been found dead and two more are missing after a landslide in central Indonesia, local authorities said on Sunday. The dead and two survivors were evacuated from the affected area in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi Province, on Saturday evening, said local disaster agency head Sulaiman Maila. The landslide impacted two villages, burying four houses, the National Disaster Management Agency said in a written statement.

#### UNITED STATES Trump attacks judge as criminal trial looms

Donald Trump again criticized the judge overseeing his first criminal trial during a rally in Pennsylvania on Saturday, comments that portend a rough-and-tumble several weeks ahead as the former president gears up for court. Trump is expected to be in Manhattan on Monday for the beginning of the trial, a case involving alleged hush money payments to adult film star Stormy Daniels. The former president has frequently attacked Justice Juan Merchan and Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, accusing both of exhibiting political bias against him.

#### Oldest conjoined twins die at 62

Conjoined twins Lori and George Schappell, who pursued separate careers, interests and relationships during lives that defied medical expectations, have died in Pennsylvania, according to funeral home officials. The Associated Press reported on Saturday. They were 62. The twins, born Sept 18, 1961, in West Reading, Pennsylvania, had distinct brains but were joined at the skull. Despite each having to go where the other went, it was "very important" to both "to live as independently as possible," the obituary said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Trilateral summit raising regional tension: Experts

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong  
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The first-ever trilateral summit among the Philippines, Japan and the United States has escalated, rather than defused, tensions over the South China Sea, and even "hardened" the stance of the parties involved in the disputed but otherwise calm waterway, analysts say.

The Philippines' involvement in the "provocative" April 11 summit has also made the country an "outlier" in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as member states of the regional bloc prefer a "nuanced" approach in resolving the dispute over the South China Sea, they said.

US President Joe Biden hosted a summit in Washington, DC, where he met Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the summit, the three leaders committed to developing a partnership on inclusive growth, infrastructure and emerging technologies, clean energy and security.

However, a readout issued after the summit quoted Biden as saying the summit reinforced the ironclad US-led alliance's commitment to the Philippines under the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty and that this "extends to armed attacks on Philip-

pine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft — to include those of its Coast Guard — in the Pacific, including anywhere in the South China Sea".

Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, research fellow at the Manila-based Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, said the trilateral summit did not aid in de-escalating tensions but rather contributed to hardening the positions of the parties to the dispute.

Pitlo cited the joint maritime exercise held on April 7 in the South China Sea by Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the US, and how China announced it would undertake similar drills.

### Provocative alliance

Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy, vice-president for external affairs of the Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute, said the trilateral alliance is "in many ways, provocative". She said it could exacerbate regional tensions, spur an arms race and threaten peace and stability in Asia-Pacific.

Bilveer Singh, associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, said that by joining the summit, the Philippines has "militarized" its position over the South China Sea.

Malindog-Uy said the Philippines is being viewed by other ASEAN countries as a "pawn of US interests in the region" owing to its "belligerent stance and approach" toward China and its involvement in the alliance.

### US, Japan 'Cold War mentality' slammed

The US and Japan, with their Cold War mentality and small group politics, have smeared China on the Taiwan question, maritime issues and policy on nuclear weapons, grossly interfered in China's domestic affairs and violated the basic norms in international relations, a spokesperson from the Chinese embassy in the US said on Friday.

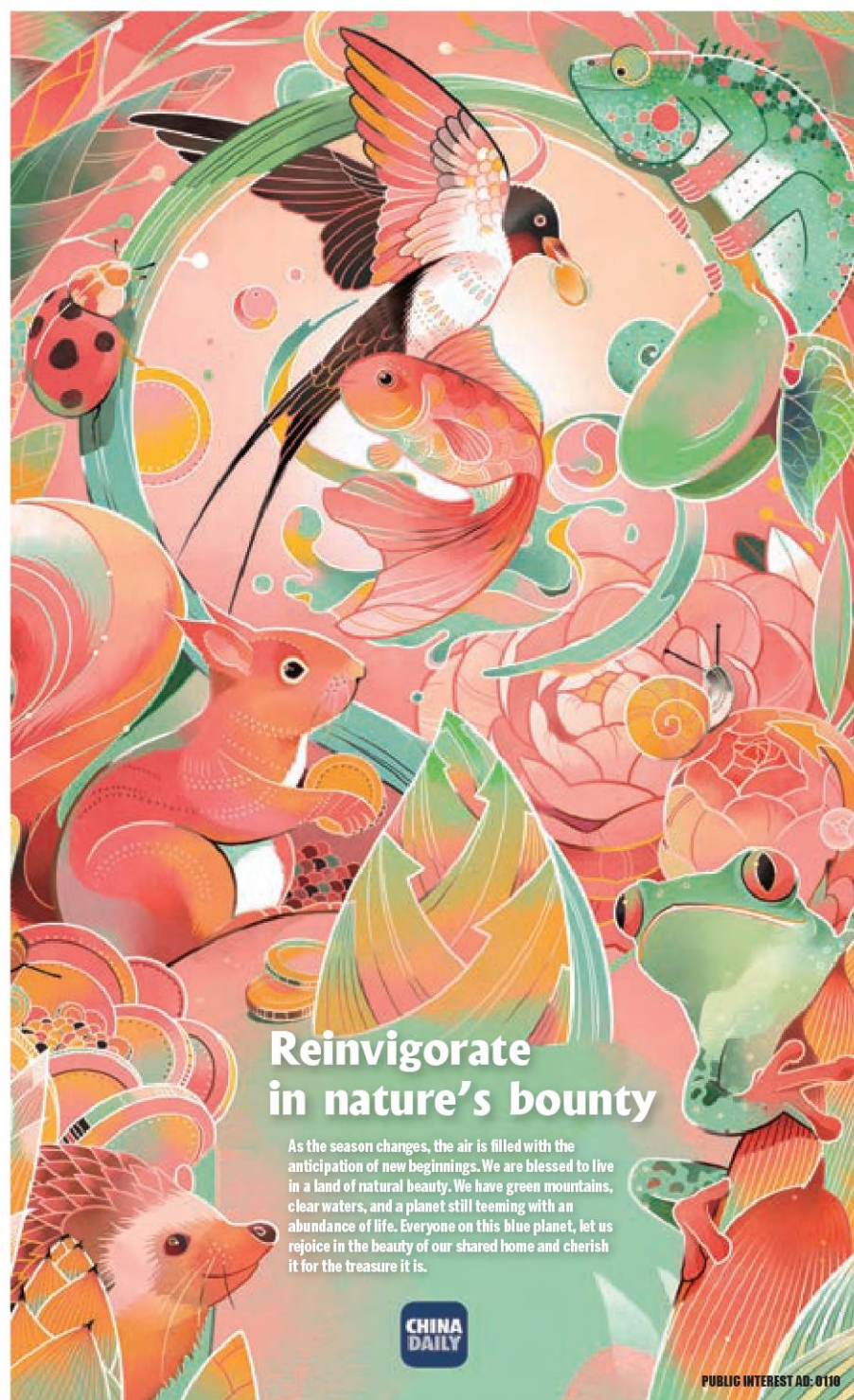
The spokesperson said China deplores and opposes such moves and that the embassy has made serious demarches to the US.

The remarks came after US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime

Minister Fumio Kishida held a summit on Wednesday and unveiled plans for military cooperation and projects with a primary focus on countering China.

"We urge the US and Japan to meet the trend of the times, abandon the Cold War mentality, immediately stop interfering in China's internal affairs, stop forming anti-China cliques, and stop undermining regional peace and stability. China will resolutely defend its sovereignty, security and development interests," the spokesperson said.

YIFAN XU



## Reinvigorate in nature's bounty

As the season changes, the air is filled with the anticipation of new beginnings. We are blessed to live in a land of natural beauty. We have green mountains, clear waters, and a planet still teeming with an abundance of life. Everyone on this blue planet, let us rejoice in the beauty of our shared home and cherish it for the treasure it is.



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## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Trilateral statement a firm commitment to troublemaking in the Asia-Pacific region

The "historic" first summit of the leaders of the United States, Japan and the Philippines produced a "Joint Vision Statement" that laid out an expansive framework for the trilateral partnership.

But the statement makes headlines owing more to its undistinguished geopolitical intentions. As international observers pointed out, it represents a substantial new step in the US-led attempt to contain China.

Just as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida unprecedentedly called China out while addressing the US House of Representatives, the joint statement made no secret of the countries' strategic definition of China as a common threat. As a result, the entire scope of their proposed cooperation appears tailored with that in mind.

Aside from its immediate desire for outsider support for its provocative activities in the South China Sea, an important factor driving the Philippines into the grouping is its bid to acquire development assistance. But there is no development for development's sake here. The statement's narrative about development, from critical and emerging technologies to supply chain resilience, seems copied and pasted from Washington's geopolitical playbook for the "Indo-Pacific". The Luzon Economic Corridor that was announced, for instance, is not simply a connectivity project that connects the Philippines' Subic Bay, Clark, Manila and Batangas areas. It is, as the statement says, the first such project under the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, and a part of the Partnership for Global Infra-

structure and Investment — "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework Accelerator. Both the partnership and framework are mechanisms designed to bolster the US-led strategic competition with China.

The rhetoric sounds more confrontational on security, portraying Beijing in explicit terms as the troublemaker in the East and South China seas and in the Taiwan Strait. The world can see clearly that China is a defender of peace and stability in the region. It is the US gang that is calling white black by accusing China of "dangerous and aggressive behavior".

The US' collusion with Japan and the Philippines threatens common development of the region and harms common interests of the countries, while China is a steadfast contributor to regional peace and prosperity.

Tellingly, the trilateral statement tries to pin the blame on China for "dangerous and destabilizing conduct" at Huangyan Island. And it calls on China to abide by what the latter has repeatedly declared as illegitimate — the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal decision — calling it "final and legally binding".

Some may see in the trilateral partnership an additional insurance along with the QUAD, AUKUS and the US-Japan-Republic of Korea alliance. But it certainly wouldn't bring the "free and open 'Indo-Pacific' that is connected, prosperous, secure, inclusive, and resilient" the statement pledged. The three countries are obviously at odds with regional efforts to maintain peace and prosperity, as their approach is inherently dividing, exclusive and confrontational.

## Visit opportunity to reinforce common ground

Strengthening Sino-German economic cooperation, rebalancing the trade relations between the European Union and China, and seeking solutions to hotspot issues are reportedly the three goals of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ongoing visit to China from Sunday to Tuesday.

Although Berlin last year unveiled its first ever Strategy on China aimed at reducing Germany's dependence on the Chinese market in critical areas and aligning Germany with the EU's push for "de-risking", Scholz, during his reception of visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang in June last year, reiterated that the German side welcomes China's development and prosperity, noting that Germany rejects all forms of decoupling and that "de-risking" should not be "de-sinicization".

That Germany is not looking to sever its links with China is also proved by the fast increase of German investment in the country, which is its largest trading partner. German direct investment in China reached nearly €12 billion (\$12.77 billion) in 2023, a record high. As a matter of fact, Germany invested more in China between 2021 and 2023 than in the five-year period between 2015 and 2020, according to the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, a leading economics institute of Germany.

The German economy shrank by 0.3 percent last year, battered by inflation, high interest rates and cooling exports, and this year, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action of Germany expects anaemic growth of 0.2 percent.

The large-scale high-level business delegation

that is accompanying Scholz on his second trip to China since November 2022 — when he also led a big team of representatives of leading German companies — as well as the presence of three major Cabinet ministers in his entourage speak volumes of the Scholz government looking to deepen economic and trade relations with the world's second-largest economy. Given their common belief in free trade, economic globalization and multilateral global governance, China and Germany are natural partners in many sectors.

That Scholz talked with French President Emmanuel Macron via video link two days before departing for China shows that the German and French leaders want to coordinate their stance and take advantage of such face-to-face exchanges with Beijing to effectively lubricate ties that may be in danger of faltering due to the EU's anti-subsidy probes into China-made electric vehicles and solar panels.

That the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Middle East crisis were also covered in the virtual meeting between Scholz and Macron on Friday reflects the great significance Germany and France attach to the important role China is playing in seeking solutions to these hotspot issues, as well as the tremendous potential of the three countries' closer coordination and cooperation in this regard.

Scholz's visit therefore will not only help China and Germany enhance their mutual understanding and trust and deepen their practical cooperation, it also provides an opportunity to help steer China-EU relations on a more steady and stable course.

## Restraint required to stop Gaza crisis spreading

In a new development that marks a worrying escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles toward Israel early Sunday morning in what Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps described as a "large-scale military operation" against multiple targets inside Israel.

According to an Israeli military spokesman, more than 300 projectiles were fired at Israel, the "vast majority" of which were shot down by Israel's anti-missile defense system and US forces in the region.

Iran had previously vowed to retaliate after an air strike on an Iranian consulate in Syria earlier this month killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite overseas wing.

Sunday's attack has been condemned by the US as being "reckless and unprecedented", with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin calling on Teheran to halt any further strikes. "We do not seek conflict with Iran, but we will not hesitate to act to protect our forces and support the defense of Israel".

US President Joe Biden convened a meeting of the G7 leaders on Sunday to develop what he called a united diplomatic response to Iran's "brazen attack".

But it is Israel's brazen attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus that the group should be first addressing — for as Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said, it was a "gross

violation of international conventions", which protect diplomatic missions — as well as Israel's continued escalating of air strikes on Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria and Lebanon.

Of course, this is unlikely to happen as the US has given its wholehearted support to Israel's military campaign, making it a proxy for its strategy of aggression in the Middle East.

Since an Israeli air strike on a charity convoy in Gaza on April 1 resulted in the deaths of seven aid workers, including US, Australian and United Kingdom citizens, the US has softened its pro-Israeli rhetoric to some extent. But it has continued to give Israel its unwavering support.

Its hard-line stance in support of Israel is driven by the hegemonic view of global relations that is driving the US' foreign policy in pursuit of a US-centered world in which the US will emerge unscathed to build the world anew. It is imperative that countries do not fall into the trap of the US' design.

All the parties concerned in the region should remain calm and exercise restraint to avoid any further escalation of tensions. As the Chinese Foreign Ministry said, the pressing task now is to earnestly implement UN Security Council Resolution 2728 and end the conflict in Gaza as soon as possible.

Cai Meng

PEACE TO THE WORLD



## Opinion Line

## Institutional safeguard of healthy development of capital market

On Friday, the State Council released a guideline for the high-quality development of the capital market, which is the third guideline document issued on the nation's capital market in the past two decades, following the ones in 2014 and 2004. It is focused on creating a safe, standardized, transparent, open, dynamic, and resilient capital market. It proposes development goals for the capital market to the middle of this century. It also makes systematic deployments in areas such as investor protection, the quality of listed companies, the development of industry institutions, regulatory capabilities and governance system construction.

The guideline sets out detailed deployments for building a comprehensive capital market regulatory system and implementing full-chain supervision. For example in the issuance sector, it requires further improvements to the issuance and

listing system, strengthening the responsibility throughout the entire chain of issuance and listing, increasing the supervision on issuance and underwriting, and strictly controlling access to issuance and listing.

The guideline also emphasizes strengthening the continuous supervision of listed companies, stresses the establishment of a comprehensive punishment and prevention system for preventing and combating fraud in the capital market, and seriously rectifying illegal behaviors in key areas such as financial fraud and misappropriation of funds. For example, the guideline pays attention to protecting the legitimate rights and interests of relevant investors when a company delists, improving the compensation and relief mechanism for investors during the delisting process, and requires controlling shareholders, actual controllers, directors, senior executives, and others responsible

for major illegal delistings to compensate investors for their losses according to the law. On stabilizing market transactions and development, the guideline also proposes building strategic reserve and stabilization mechanisms, and enhancing the inherent stability of the capital market.

After the release of the guideline, relevant departments have successively introduced some supporting measures and regulations, and it is believed that the revision of laws and regulations is also underway. The policy system will provide protection for the healthy development of the capital market and the interests of investors like a net, helping to address the deep-seated contradictions accumulated in the capital market over the long term and accelerating the construction of a safe, standardized, transparent, open, dynamic and resilient capital market.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## 'Trial of the Century' still divides opinion

O.J. Simpson, the former American professional football player and defendant in the famous "Trial of the Century", died of cancer at the age of 76 on Wednesday.

Charged with the murder of his former wife, who was killed in June 1994, Simpson assembled a team of top-notch lawyers to mount a defense. Nine out of the 12-member jury were African Americans, and ultimately, the jury found Simpson not guilty. When the verdict was finally read out, up to 140 million Americans, including then US president Bill Clinton, watched the live

broadcast on TV.

Despite Simpson's acquittal in the criminal trial, he was still ordered to pay \$33.5 million in damages in a subsequent civil lawsuit. This judgment greatly reduced his wealth.

Perhaps more noteworthy are the ripple effects from the murder case. After his acquittal, some believed it demonstrated the victory of procedural justice, while others argued that it was a failure of judicial fairness. Prosecutors and police personnel involved in the case always believed that Simpson was the killer.

Moreover, following the Simpson verdict, many African Americans celebrated, believing that Simpson was a victim of police paranoia and biased enforcement. In contrast, many white Americans were shocked by his acquittal.

The Simpson case may continue to be shrouded in mystery and become a footnote in history, but the litigation disputes and opposing opinions it sparked among different ethnic groups in the United States can still be clearly seen in other cases today.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Positive data inspire confidence in economy

Although the report released by Fitch Ratings on Wednesday, which downgraded China's sovereign credit rating outlook from "stable" to "negative" made a buzz largely because it supports the claims of those trying to present the scenario of China's imminent "collapse", the report is only a very small part of the whole sector.

For example, Goldman Sachs published a research report the same day revising upward its forecast for China's GDP growth in the first quarter from 4.5 to 5 percent and for the whole year from 4.8 to 5 percent.

Morgan Stanley also raised its GDP forecast for China in 2024 from the previously estimated 4.2 to 4.8 percent, based on similar reasons as those cited by Goldman Sachs, namely strong international demand and better-than-expected Chinese exports. Besides, Morgan Stanley also said that the Chinese government's increasing focus on upgrading the supply chain is expected to drive increased capital expenditure in the

manufacturing sector. Even Fitch Ratings didn't change its sovereign credit rating of China but just its outlook.

Thus the rating agency is just bad-mouthing China's economy. The majority of the rating agencies don't agree with Fitch's outlook, and even that agency was careful not to give such an impression.

Besides the subjective judgement of analysts, the objective data also says something. The General Administration of Customs released data on Friday showing that the total value of China's import and export of goods in the first quarter of the year reached 10.17 trillion yuan (\$1.41 trillion), an increase of 5 percent year-on-year. Despite the uncertainty in the current global economic situation, the monetary policies of major developed economies, and the decline in the momentum of global trade liberalization, China's total import and export value of goods broke the 10 trillion

yuan mark for the first time in history during the first quarter, setting a solid foundation for the stable development of foreign trade this year.

The Caixin Purchasing Managers' Index also showed that China's manufacturing sector expanded for the fifth consecutive month in March, while the official PMI data also indicated that the manufacturing sector was rebounding. As global demand for technology goods increases, China's exports have also grown. Its these data that have inspired confidence in China's economic growth trend and the upward adjustments to forecasts for China's GDP growth.

Further, China's monetary policy still has ample policy space and abundant tools in reserve, making it convenient for China to adjust its policies and maintain the growth momentum throughout the year. Therefore, there is every reason to have confidence in the Chinese economy.

— ZHANG ZHOU XIANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

## Dialogues with Thinkers

**Editor's note:** This year marks the 10th anniversary since a comprehensive national security outlook was proposed. How does the outlook help China strengthen national security against the background of increasingly complex domestic and external challenges? And how should one view the recent developments related to national security? Tao Jian, former president of the University of International Relations, shares his views on the issue with China Daily's Zhu Ping. Excerpts follow:

# China justified in bolstering national security

**Question 1: In the 10 years since it was proposed, what have been the most important achievements of the national security outlook compared with the traditional outlook that existed before?**

A1: According to China's National Security Law, national security means the State not facing any danger or threat internally or externally to its sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, or the welfare of the people, sustainable socioeconomic development, or the capability to maintain security.

The overall national security outlook has developed in the new era. On April 15, 2014, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, proposed the "overall national security outlook" at the first meeting of the Central National Security Commission of the CPC, pointed out the necessity to adhere to the overall national security outlook, treat the people as the purpose, political security as fundamental, economic security as the cornerstone, military, cultural and social security as the guarantee, and the promotion of international security, to embark on a national security path with Chinese characteristics.

This exposition established the "five-in-one" framework of the overall national security outlook.

In the decade since the proposal, the overall national security outlook has expanded to cover as many as 20 areas — political, military, territorial, economic, financial, cultural, social, technological, cyber, food, ecological, resources, nuclear, overseas interests, space, deep sea, polar regions, biological, artificial intelligence, and data security — embodying the concept of "comprehensive security".

However, not all the problems the 20 sectors face should be classified as national security threats until they reach a significant scale. For example, an individual telephone scam does not represent a national security problem. But the more than 437,000 tele scams cracked down nationwide in 2023 do present a challenge to national security.

Also, equal efforts are not needed to deal with each of the problems faced by the 20 sectors. Yet it would be wrong to deal with national security issues in a particular sector and ignore the others.

In light of the unprecedented complexity and challenges, the achievements of the outlook have been threefold. First, China has safeguarded national security and maintained political stability, as well as advanced scientific development and helped intertwined high-quality development with high-level security.

Second, the overall nature of the outlook surpasses traditional security concept and thinking. It is tailored to China's real conditions. Over the past decade, China has been facing an unprecedented challenging external environment due to some Western countries' China-containment policy. On the domestic front, China's main contradiction, that is, the contradiction between people's increasing aspiration for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development is evident in income disparities, urban-rural gaps, regional differences and the levels of productivity in different sectors and regions. In this context, the national security outlook addresses a series of major issues.

And third, the outlook highlights the idea of putting people's security first. It makes clear that security is an important part of the people's aspiration for a better life.

**Q2: How do you evaluate China's national security situation now? What are the biggest challenges facing China?**

A2: China's national security situation is undergoing significant changes. From an international perspective, China's current external environment is "extremely complex".

China's economic and technological development and international competitive environment are



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

undergoing drastic changes, with major power competition becoming even more severe. The current state and future direction of China-US relations are key variables affecting China's external security environment.

Beijing's main geopolitical risks lie along the Taiwan Strait, as well as with the common challenges of climate change and international financing, which could pose a threat to the country's security. Besides, the political and security situations of small and medium-sized countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts require close attention. And the threat of terrorism remains a security issue that China needs to take into serious consideration, as the recent terrorist attacks on the outskirts of Moscow and on Chinese personnel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan have once again reminded us.

In other words, global economic recovery is weak, geopolitical conflicts are intensifying, and protectionism and unilateralism rising, slowing China's growth rate.

It is an arduous task, in such a situation, to simultaneously implement reform, advance development and maintain stability. Boosting economic recovery and development in itself is a tough job, especially at a time when deep-seated contradictions accumulated over the long term are becoming more complex.

In addition, following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the technological and financial war (the freezing of \$300 billion of assets of the Central Bank of Russia by the United States and the European Union), and the food, energy and cyber information war waged by the US and other Western economies against Russia have sent a warning to China to prepare for extreme scenarios.

China should therefore strengthen its national security work in key areas such as political security, territorial security, economic security, social security, cybersecurity and external security. There is also a need for China to expedite the construction of a new development pattern to boost its economic resilience, competitiveness and development capability in the face of foreseeable and unforeseeable storms.

**Q3: Some foreign media reports claim the recent enactment of the Safeguarding National Security Bill will stifle Hong Kong's vitality. What**

**is your opinion on the issue?**

A3: The passage of the Safeguarding National Security Bill in the Hong Kong Legislative Council on March 19 fulfills the constitutional responsibility and historic mission of enacting a law based on Article 23 of the Basic Law 26 years after Hong Kong's return to the motherland. Fortifying the "protective wall" for the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong, the law is a big milestone in the development of "one country, two systems" in the new era.

Neglecting security in the pursuit of economic development carries hidden risks. If the foundation of security is not solid, the edifice of development will be shaky. As a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong witnessed rampant violent demonstrations in 2019, leading to the withering of various industries, making it impossible to guarantee even the basic livelihood of the people, let alone boosting economic development.

The bill will help balance the maintenance of national security with the protection of rights, freedoms and economic development, enable Hong Kong to better leverage its status as a global logistics and financial hub to integrate with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and deepen its open and close exchanges and cooperation with various countries and regions.

The implementation of the bill will not impact normal business activities and international exchanges and cooperation. But it will no longer allow foreign forces that have used Hong Kong as both a financial paradise and a bridgehead for anti-China and anti-communist activists to continue with their activities. The bill, however, will make real foreign investors more confident to invest in Hong Kong.

**Q4: Many security issues are now intertwined, coupled with rapid technological developments. How should China improve security governance and address emerging challenges?**

A4: China needs to strengthen national security coordination, improve the legal, policy, risk-monitoring and early-warning systems,

as well as the national emergency management system for national security, and improve the security guarantee in areas such as the economy, major infrastructure, financing, data, resources, nuclear, outer space and oceans. It also needs to improve the layout of national security forces, and build a comprehensive, efficient national security protection system.

In the new era, the national security policy should address not only common security issues in the field of development but also special security issues during the process of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

That some Western powers are trying to sow discord between the Chinese government and the people is not new. They have been trying to do so for decades using various mediums including the radio, television, newspapers and books to feed the Chinese people, especially the younger generation, with anti-Party and anti-government rhetoric. The Western powers have now shifted their focus to online media, which proves that "political security is the foundation of national security".

Political security determines the state of security in fields such as economic security, military security and social security. Without political security, security cannot be guaranteed in other fields. In fact, security issues in other fields will reflect the strength of political security. Therefore, it is necessary to promote national security with the ultimate goal of strengthening political security, making the maintenance of political security the primary task in responding to security risks and challenges in various fields, and fully leveraging its role as a fulcrum of the mechanism coordinating security in various fields.

**Q5: Some foreign media reports claim the revised laws such as Counter-Espionage Law could accelerate the exodus of foreign enterprises from and decline in foreign investments in China. Are such reports misleading?**

A5: Espionage poses a big threat to national security and undermines the interests of a country. It is an internationally recognized practice of sovereign nations to enact legislation to prevent and combat

espionage activities and safeguard national security.

The United States' Espionage Act of 1917, the National Security Act in the early days of the Cold War, the Homeland Security Act following the Sept 11, 2001, attacks, the Foreign Investment and National Security Act, the Enhanced Intelligence Act of 2002, and the periodic release of "counterintelligence strategies" all show the US' efforts to better safeguard national security through legislation. In fact, China's anti-espionage legislation lags behind that of Western countries. As such, China needs to strengthen the legal and operational systems to better safeguard national security.

Intelligence agencies of dozens of countries have been conducting espionage activities against China. And the considerable number of espionage cases China's national security agencies uncover every year represent only the "tip of the iceberg". Espionage activities pose a significant threat to China, as they target the core departments of the Party, the government and the military, as well as new fields such as biological and genetic information.

In addition to traditional methods such as recruitment and subversion, espionage activities now include cyber theft and intelligence gathering. This is a crucial reason why China revised the Counter-Espionage Law last year.

The Ministry of State Security has said on its official WeChat account that China's anti-espionage legal framework is clear and transparent, and will not affect the legitimate operations, investments, work, studies and life of foreign enterprises and individuals in China. Addressing concerns about expanded enforcement powers under the Counter-Espionage Law, and foreign enterprises and individuals being subjected to "data collection" and "arbitrary detention", the ministry made it clear that the law strictly limits the powers and processes involved in anti-espionage work.

The law also regulates the conditions, procedures and scope for national security agencies to access data, and safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of citizens and organizations.

To be sure, the espionage cases China pursues are generally solid and can withstand scrutiny, and national security agencies are disciplined and professional enough to enforce the law rigorously and effectively.

The revised Counter-Espionage Law incorporates the principle of coordinated development and security into relevant articles. This prin-

ciple is reflected throughout the entire law. By clearly defining the boundaries and redlines of security, the law better promotes development, and is conducive to creating an environment that is open and secure, as well as vibrant and orderly.

China welcomes foreign enterprises to develop in the country as long as they operate in compliance with the law and have no ulterior motives.

It is important to guard against foreign powers using the Counter-Espionage Law as a tool to undermine China's business environment. Premier Li Qiang recently emphasized that China will continue to build a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, based on the rule of law, internationalized, and protects the legitimate rights and interests of all types of enterprises in accordance with the law.

**Q6: Why do some Western governments abuse the concept of national security? For example, the US administration has falsely accused China of using Chinese-made smartphones to steal user information, and claims that the cranes used in ports and electric vehicles pose a threat to US national security. Does this, by extension of the US' logic, mean foreign products in China, too, pose a security risk? What are the dangers of the misuse of national security for economic and technological decoupling?**

A6: From Wikileaks to former US National Security Agency agent Edward Snowden, security-related incidents have long proved that the US spies on all countries — not only its adversaries but even on its staunchest allies. This time, the US administration's accusations inadvertently make it clear that it intends to showcase its capability to control everything, from Boeing aircraft to computer systems to smartphones, which serves as a forceful warning to countries using US products and services to increase vigilance and enhance precautions.

The US politicization, weaponization and securitization of issues related to trade, technology and even personnel exchanges are driven by its strategic decision to view China as the "only competitor with the intention and capability to reshape the international order" and outcompete China.

For example, in the field of chips, perhaps the US knows that it is violating the market laws, and not only suppressing the rights and interests of Chinese enterprises but also disrupting the semiconductor ecosystem, thereby harming its own interests. The US' obsession with "harming others without benefiting itself" is evident especially in the field of technology, in which it frequently resorts to tricks, and gets entangled in the "broad securitization trap" it believes it has dug for others.

In response to some Western countries' efforts to "decouple" from the Chinese economy, China says it does not engage in broad securitization nor does it intend to close the door to the world; instead, it aims to further expand its opening-up.

China's position is clear: on the one hand, it is against hegemony of any kind; on the other hand, it attaches great importance to safeguarding national technological security and promoting new quality productive forces.

China is pursuing high-quality development, which means it has taken technological innovation as the logical starting point for promoting development, cultivating talents advancing technologies, boosting the economy and strengthening national security.

All of this will be reflected in the new quality productive forces that are driven by advanced technology in line with the new development concept.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ERIK SOLHEIM

## Shining light

The restoration of the Dianchi Lake is a wonderful example of China's efforts to protect and cherish nature

During the early years of industrialization and urbanization, Dianchi Lake in Kunming, Yunnan province, was one of the most polluted lakes in China. There are nearly 30 rivers flowing into Dianchi, but there is only one outlet, so pollutants easily built up.

Nearly 60 percent of Kunming's more than 8.6 million residents live in Dianchi Lake basin. The density of the population and concentration of industry posed an environmental threat to the lake.



When I visited Dianchi a few years ago, I saw a lake completely transformed. Kunming has spent billions of dollars restoring the lake. The city launched a program to protect the wetlands and forests, reviving ponds, relocating residents and dismantling buildings. I was pleased to visit a lake surrounded with green lush nature and wetlands full of birds. There are beautiful walking paths and bike lanes. When I get time I would love to go biking around the amazingly restored Dianchi Lake.

Stepping off the plane in Kunming, the first thing that struck me was the crisp mountain air, tinged with the scent of exotic flowers. I immediately felt warmly welcomed by the "City of Eternal Spring", with its moderate climate and stunning natural beauty.

Yunnan is renowned for its rich biodiversity. It is home to a diverse array of ecosystems, including tropical rainforests, temperate forests, alpine meadows and wetlands. Hosting the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Kunming provided an opportunity to showcase China's efforts in biodiversity conservation and to highlight the importance of preserving this ecologically significant region.

With partners, China can lead the

**As China now moves determinedly to protect nature and help develop Southeast Asia, beautiful Yunnan will be center stage. The wonderful restoration of the Dianchi Lake shows us the road ahead.**

world toward a nature positive future in the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Few, if any countries, host such a variety of nature forms as China. It spans the world's tallest mountains in Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region to the plains in Central China, which were the cradle of the Chinese civilization. China varies from the ice cold winters of Heilongjiang province to the year-round summer of Guangdong province, from the deserts in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region to the dense rainforests in Yunnan.

The diverse landscapes of China provide a wide variety of habitats for different species to thrive. China is also one of the most biodiverse countries. Creating a beautiful China is not only critical for China, but for the world.

Yunnan boasts the best preserved tropical ecosystem in China. Some 2,273 vertebrate species or 52.1 percent of China's total, inhabit this region, while more than 19,000 high plant species or 50.2 percent of China's total are native to it.

The restoration of Dianchi Lake in Kunming and the West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, the 10-year fishing ban in the Yangtze River, the ambitious tree planting plans, the successful conservation of giant pandas in Sichuan province and snow leopards in western China, the greening of the Kubuqi Desert in Inner Mongolia, the



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

effective river clean-ups in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, and the national parks — China has a lot of best practice on nature conservation to share with the world.

Most recently China has unveiled guidelines to strengthen environmental management by tailoring regulations to specific regions, providing a framework for nature protection with individual characteristics for the different regions of China. The central government sets targets, based on the

varied nature of ecosystems in the provinces. This unified national system is one of the best global practices to be shared worldwide. And Yunnan province holds significant strategic importance as an integral part of the building of a "Beautiful China".

From a regional point of view, Yunnan province is situated in southwestern China, bordering several Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Yunnan is connected to major

transportation arteries, including railways, highways and international airports, facilitating the flow of goods, people, and capital between China and neighboring countries. The province serves as a conduit for Chinese exports to Southeast Asia and a gateway for Southeast Asian products to access the vast Chinese market.

Yunnan's diverse ethnic composition and rich cultural heritage make it an ideal platform for promoting people-to-people exchanges and cultural cooperation.

Yunnan is home to several cross-border infrastructure projects, railways, highways, and pipelines linking Yunnan with neighboring countries.

The China-Laos Railway, inaugurated in December 2021, has emerged as a vital transportation corridor, facilitating freight and passenger traffic between Vientiane, the capital of Laos, and Kunming. This 1,035-kilometer railway has surpassed expectations. It transported over 19 million passengers and 24 million metric tonnes of freight within 20 months of starting operations. For Laos, historically constrained by limited connections, the railway represents a game-changer, enabling greater economic opportunities and connectivity within the region. Through China, Laos is connected to the huge Asia-European rail network.

The railway has revitalized Laos' tourism sector. In the first nine months after its launch of passenger services, Laos welcomed over 1.6 million tourists from other member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a significant increase from previous years. The Lao government anticipates a continued uptick in Chinese tourist arrivals. Overall, the China-Laos Railway has not only enhanced connectivity and trade cooperation between the two countries but also catalyzed economic development and tourism growth.

The next decade of China's Belt and Road Initiative may bring an even bigger and more integrated high-speed railway network, connecting China and Southeast Asia, all the way to Singapore.

As China now moves determinedly to protect nature and help develop Southeast Asia, beautiful Yunnan will be center stage. The wonderful restoration of Dianchi Lake shows us the road ahead.

*The author is vice-president of the Green Belt and Road Coalition and former executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

ONG TEE KEAT

## A new turf for collaboration

The untapped potential of Southeast Asia's blue economy warrants multilateral collaboration

While widely acknowledging the blue economy as the upcoming driver of sustainable economic development for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in pursuit of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework undeniably stands out as a timely blueprint for the regional bloc to advance the blue economy. The huge untapped economic potential of ASEAN water resources are well positioned



to enhance regional economic integration both inclusively and sustainably, albeit not without challenges.

Despite that blue economy's contribution to the GDP of the member states of ASEAN varying widely, ranging from 1 percent to as high as 30 percent, the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the Blue Economy set the right tone with foresight at the ASEAN Summit in 2021, amid the pandemic-induced economic headwinds. The framework, prioritized as one of the economic deliverables under Indonesia's 2023 ASEAN chairmanship, sets out to move the blue economy in the region from the current sectoral approach to a multilateral, integrated and participatory approach at multiple levels in ASEAN.

According to PPN/Bappenas, the National Development Planning Agency of Indonesia, ASEAN waters, making up about 2.5 percent of the world's oceans, contribute about 15 percent to the global fisheries, while providing a vast source of employment to approximately 625 million people in the related sectors.

An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report portrays a promising scenario where the value-added global ocean economy's output could double from \$1.5 trillion in 2010 to over \$3 trillion in 2030.

Taking cognizance of the geographical edge that water makes up over 66 percent of the ASEAN region, alongside the centrality of ASEAN in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the relatively underdeveloped blue economy in Southeast Asia is set to soar in the RCEP tailwind, if the complementarity between this 15-nation collective free trade agreement and the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework can be strategically harnessed.

The tailwind is further compounded by the China-ASEAN blue economy cooperation, which is one of the important goals set forth in the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Vision 2030.

In this context, China remains proactive

in engaging with ASEAN on blue economy initiatives. Its experience and expertise in such sectors as shipbuilding, fishery and aquaculture management, maritime logistics, port construction and management, to cite just a few, are sufficient to empower its Southeast Asian neighbors to build up their respective blue economy architecture.

Capacity building and upskilling remain the common challenges to the bloc's aspiration to develop a sustainable blue economy. The China Institute for Reform and Development has hit the nail on the head by conducting inaugural training courses for

stakeholders from China and ASEAN. More industrial players and entrepreneurs are anticipated to take up the offer. Perhaps, more courses should also be conducted outside China, with specific target sectors and enterprises identified.

Drawing from the past experience of collaboration in the infrastructure development projects in ASEAN under the auspices of the Belt and Road Initiative, the development of the multi-sector blue economy makes an ideal fit for the Chinese-sponsored Global Development Initiative in the region. While the sharing of hard skills is imperative for the development of the blue

economy, confidence building is by no means to be neglected. More so, in the midst of the widening trust deficit across the world.

Of the myriad anticipated challenges, the finance gap confronting the bloc's endeavor is set to be the major hurdle to cross. While hailing the inception of the Blue SEA (Southeast Asia) Finance Hub in November 2021 under the Asian Development Bank's Oceans Financing Initiative, the flow of capital from both the public and private sources into the identified blue projects will largely depend on the "investability" of the individual projects.

In this context, the Finance Hub promised to help ASEAN countries develop and finance blue projects with a target of creating bankable projects worth \$300 million by 2024, funded by the ADB to catalyze a multiple of at least three times the capital from other sources, including development financial institutions, philanthropies, and private, institutional and commercial financiers.

This reminds us of the uncertainties confronting the infrastructure development projects which are influenced by investors' interests under the framework of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment and the Global Gateway. Both were designed to rival the Chinese-initiated BRI. Yet, their traction and headway remain unimpressive.

All in all, the blue economy is an emerging multi-sector economic turf that warrants multilateral collaboration to better manage the many aspects of oceanic sustainability, ranging from sustainable fisheries to ecosystem health to preventing pollution.

Against the prevailing backdrop of rising geopolitical tension across the world, this is indeed an undisputed tall order to the sagging global governance.

Nonetheless, the intangible returns accrued from a sustainable blue economy appear enormous and are stretching far beyond the direct contribution to a nation's GDP. The social and economic benefits brought to current and future generations will significantly contribute to addressing such concerns as food security, livelihoods, poverty eradication and health. All these constitute the achievable deliverables under a coherent system of global governance where all nations are allowed to be seated at the table, leaving no one on the menu. This runs contrary to the binary-choice remarks made by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken.

Having taken the world by storm with its successive roll-out of global endeavors, ranging from the BRI to the three global initiatives, all eyes, notably those of the Global South, have naturally turned to China.

Will reshaping the paradigm of the blue economy stand out as another opportunity for China to offer a public good, such as the BRI, is perhaps everybody's guess.

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SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

## CULTURE

## The keys to global success

Passionate pianist maintains a busy schedule as he thrills audiences on world tour in support of new album, **Chen Nan** reports.



For those who attend one of Lang Lang's concerts, the pianist suggests that they fasten their seat belts. "I often get overexcited during my concerts and I want my audience to feel the same," says the 42-year-old pianist. "It's different from listening to my recordings that can't show a full picture about me. While onstage, people have an idea of who I am as a pianist, much more thoroughly and directly."

The pianist shared the viewpoint on the day before a concert in Monaco, on March 24. He embarked on a tour in February, which kicked off in Rome, and will take him to concert halls, opera houses and music festivals around the world.

"Usually, I get my tour schedules two years in advance. I am getting used to that pace," he says in an interview with China Daily. "In my 20s, I wanted to be the busiest pianist, with lots of shows and events scheduled, but now, I want to perform at the best venues and with the top symphony orchestras and musicians in the world."

Most of the places that he is going to perform at are not new to him. "I have played at those venues — such as Carnegie Hall, New York and Musikverein Vienna — at least 50 times. I am lucky that my concerts sell out fast and the audiences show me a warm welcome," says Lang, adding that he will perform in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, for the first time this year.

The repertoires he has chosen to play during the tour cover a wide range of composers, including Schumann's *Kreutzeriana*, Op 16, an eight-movement composition for solo piano, which as Lang says is "very dramatic". He also plays Chopin's eight mazurkas, which bring Polish folk dance to life. In his recitals, Lang will perform Gabriel Faure's *Pavane*, Op 50, and Chopin's *Polonaise in F-sharp Minor*, Op 44.

Besides working with top troupes, such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden and the Philharmonie de Paris, he will perform during Carnegie Hall's opening night 2024-25 season gala with conductor Gustavo Dudamel, and perform Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No 2* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

As one of the four curators of the Carnegie Hall's Perspectives series, he will give seven concerts in the season, "marking a new chapter in his long and illustrious history at Carnegie Hall", as the venue's website notes.

"It is an interesting project, an artistic initiative, in which I will participate for two seasons at Carnegie Hall, sharing my



**Top:** Pianist Lang Lang is touring worldwide, with stops in major concert halls, and performing with top symphony orchestras. **Above:** In June 2023, he played with conductor Andris Nelsons and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra at Concertgebouw, one of the world's most renowned concert halls, in Amsterdam. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

own musical individuality and creating a personal concert series," Lang says.

The prolific recording artist released his latest album, *Lang Lang — Saint-Saens*, in March. During the world tour, he will play *Piano Concerto No 2* by the French composer from the album by working with the Cleveland Orchestra and conductor Franz Welser-Moest.

Lang adapts to traveling around the world, under a hectic schedule, naturally.

"I never go out for fun at nightclubs and bars after concerts. I just go back home and have a good time with my family. The only place that relaxes me is wherever my family is. I am happy and feel refreshed when playing with my son," says Lang, who married German pianist Gina Alice Redlinger in 2019. Their son was born in 2021. "My son is always happy and was born with an optimistic personality. He brings me so much joy and I feel like I'm growing up again when I'm with him. I also love reading books and enjoying art, which allow me to think."

Lang's bittersweet story of a hard journey learning music is well-known, especially that of the high expectations from his father.

One day, after watching an episode of *Tom and Jerry*, the American animated cartoon series, which features Franz Liszt's

“  
Now we have over 200 charity schools in the world. ... We also donated more than 100,000 pianos to people.”

Lang Lang, pianist



*Hungarian Rhapsody No 2*, Lang was inspired and became interested in the piano, which he started to play at 3 years old. As a child, he practiced for hours hoping to gain complete mastery of the instrument. His father, a former musician, quit his job to spend time with his son to help him pursue a career as a pianist.

"My goal was clear when I learned to play piano: to surpass the best pianist and to become the best myself," Lang recalls. "I want my parents to feel proud of me, but the core of the matter is that I enjoy music and I want to become the best pianist. That goal has never changed."

"Now, I am in my 40s and my parents are older. My father is half-retired and we have a good relationship," he says, noting that he started to manage his own life and study after he left China and was enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia in the United States in 1997.

"Because my father cannot speak English, at that point, I became independent," Lang says, adding that he would not become a pushy father himself.

Lang saw his career take off and became an overnight sensation after playing Tchaikovsky's *First Piano Concerto* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra when he was just 17.

In 2008, he performed at the Opening

Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, and teamed up with jazz legend Herbie Hancock, performing at the Grammy Awards. In 2020, he fulfilled a lifelong dream of recording Bach's monumental *Goldberg Variations*, a landmark achievement for any pianist.

"Now, I am living the dream that I had as a child, even better," Lang says. "You have to work very hard, because that's the only way you prepare yourself well enough to get the opportunity."

Besides his goal of being the world's top pianist, what is also unchanged is the joy that music brings him. Even when he took a long break after injuring his left hand in 2017, he tried to rethink his approach to music by practicing the instrument in his head.

"I don't want to do anything else but play piano. I play much better and I know how to play, compared to my days of learning piano as a child. However, the pleasant feeling and the power that music gives me, and the fulfillment of completing a piece of music, never changes," he says. "It has nothing to do with age or experience. What I gain by playing piano cannot be obtained by anything else in the world."

Lang's success story has inspired millions of young people in China to take up the piano — a phenomenon known as "The Lang Lang Effect". He also created the Lang Lang International Music Foundation in 2008, which upholds the belief that more children can have access to music education and opportunities.

"Now we have over 200 charity schools in the world, including over 110 in China. We also donated more than 100,000 pianos to people who may not have the opportunity to learn music," he says.

To enable more people to have a better understanding and realize the pleasure of listening to classical music, he released the album *Piano Book* in 2019, in which he reinterpreted the classical music repertoires he learned as child, and *The Disney Book* in 2022, celebrating 100 years of Disney and featuring iconic movie melodies.

"For those who want to become a pianist, and who are learning the instrument, I want to tell them to dream big and focus on what they are doing. The world is changing fast with advanced technology and so many options; you need to work hard and stick to your goal," Lang says. "If I had another chance to live again, I would choose the same path. I would make the same effort I always did."

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## Auckland salon celebrates traditions with artistic spectacle

AUCKLAND — In a vibrant celebration of Chinese culture, the Lanting Cultural Salon took place in New Zealand's largest city this month. Hosted by the China Culture Center in Auckland, the event brought together an audience of art enthusiasts, scholars and community leaders.

Mike Dawson, president of the Auckland branch of the New Zealand China Friendship Society, shared his passion for Chinese culture. "When I was a child, I first

saw calligraphy in Chinese restaurants and I was fascinated," says Dawson, who has recently begun to practice Chinese writing and calligraphy.

Carlos Cheung, a New Zealand member of parliament, said in his speech that calligraphy is important to Chinese culture.

"It represents history and is an important window for people to know the country of China. This event also provides an opportunity for more New Zealanders to under-

stand Chinese culture," Cheung says.

Both speakers emphasized the importance of cultural exchange and understanding between the two countries.

Attendees were treated to a feast of artistic expression. A replica of *Lanting Xu* (Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion), Wang Xizhi's masterpiece of ancient calligraphy from the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), was displayed and discussed. Participants marveled at the delicate brushwork and

timeless elegance of the iconic work.

Additionally, exquisite replicas of paintings by Italian missionary Giuseppe Castiglione, who was known in China as Lang Shining, were also displayed and discussed. Visitors immersed themselves in the rich fusion of Italian and Chinese art.

Yuan Zong, founder of the Auckland International Gallery, presented a thought-provoking analysis of work by Maori artists, highlighting the interconnectedness of artistic expression across cultures.

The event was not limited to visual arts. The enchanting sounds of the *guzheng* (a zither-like stringed instrument) filled the air as a talented musician performed classic melodies, and attendees witnessed a captivating Song Dynasty (960-1279) tea ceremony.

Guests were also invited to interactive sessions to play friendly games of *weiqi* (Go) and to try their hand with brushes and ink in a calligraphy workshop.

Among them was Tiana MacDo-

nald, a University of Auckland student, who discovered her passion for Chinese culture during her summer school studies.

She found the experience both fascinating and rewarding. "I wish I could have a chance to visit China and learn more Chinese," she says.

To complete the cultural exchange, delicate traditional Chinese pastries were served to delight the palate.

XINHUA

# LIFE

If you drop by Chang'an town as a guest, residents are most likely to serve *yanqiu* — a special type of meatball — to show the best of their hospitality.

According to local folklore, the origin of the dish dates back to a visit by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) Emperor Qianlong to the town in Haining city, Jiaxing, in the northern part of East China's Zhejiang province.

"He was on a secret patrol of Haining, and tasted the local delicacy made from fish, pork and pork skin at an ordinary farmhouse," says Tan Xiaofeng, a local who has made a business out of selling *yanqiu*.

"Because it tasted so good, he named it *yanqiu*, meaning 'banquet ball', suggesting that the dish could be served at official functions," Tan explains.

Ever since, *yanqiu* has become an indispensable local dish to celebrate festivals and is also a popular gift for friends and relatives, as, in China, the circular shape represents completeness and a sense of safety.

At Tan's production facility, workers dressed in white uniforms work in groups of three, with one skillfully scooping out the meat paste from a large basin with his left hand. As if performing a magic trick, he shapes it into a meatball in a split second, tosses it onto a spoon in his right hand, before throwing it onto a large plate.

The other two workers then gently roll the meatballs, evenly coating them with a layer of shredded pork skin, and a *yanqiu* is created. They are then delivered to customers, who steam them for eating.

They can make 400 *yanqiu*, each weighing 40 to 60 grams, in 10 minutes.

"Business has been very good," Tan says.

In 2010, the *yanqiu* craft was named an intangible cultural heritage in Jiaxing city.

Although Chang'an *yanqiu* has a long-established reputation, local families used to make it only for special occasions.

"It was too troublesome to make, and to have both fish and pork was expensive. Ordinary families couldn't afford it," says Tan, who is in his 40s.

After careful preparation, only 30 percent of a fish can be used to make *yanqiu*, he says.

While the general recipe has been passed down among families, and the ingredients have mostly remained the same, each family has come up with its own preparation method.

Yet, for centuries, no one thought to sell *yanqiu* at the market.

Tan says that the commercial popularization of the local specialty started with Xie Yifei, his father-in-law, when the latter tried to sell the product to fellow villagers in the 1990s.

"It was on a whim," says the 70-year-old Xie, who was a professional carpenter, and who picked up the *yanqiu* craft from his father.

Production is complicated, with one of the main ingredients being fish, preferably silver carp. Each one weighs around 1.5 kilograms.

Another main ingredient is fatty pork, which distinguishes Chang'an *yanqiu* from ordinary fish balls.

"Adding fatty pork makes it more fragrant and gives it a richer and more substantial taste," Xie explains.

After the meatball is fashioned by hand out of mashed fish and pork, it is rolled over shredded pork skin, which will stick to and wrap the outside of the meatball.

"It is then crispy on the outside and soft in the middle, providing a



rich mouthfeel," Xie says. To his surprise, the first 28 *yanqiu* meatballs he made using three fish drew the attention of villagers he met on the way to the local central food market, and they sold out before he even got there.

It gave Xie a glimpse of the potential business opportunity, and thus encouraged him to run with his idea of selling *yanqiu*.

"In the beginning, I just sold it during major holidays, but business started to take off, with many placing orders ahead of time," Xie says.

It prompted him to set up a stand at the central food market.

In fact, Xie's move was so groundbreaking that he struggled to get a sales license.

"*Yanqiu* didn't really belong to the deli or the non-deli sections that were all there were then," he says.

After he got things straightened out, people couldn't get enough, with 2,000 *yanqiu* being sold on a good business day.

As Xie started to make a name for himself, he had customers who came all the way from other cities to buy his *yanqiu*.

Tan realized the business potential after seeing his father-in-law doing so well.

He says he was impressed by his *yanqiu* the first time he visited him.

"My father-in-law was one heck of a cook, and people obviously loved the *yanqiu* he made. More importantly, people's financial situations were improving," Tan says, explaining the signs he recognized that led to him scaling up the business.

Tan had developed a certain business acumen by selling clothes and realized that a lot needed to be upgraded before it would be possible to industrialize *yanqiu* production.

"The fish meat was inconsistently chopped, and the ingredients were

## Roll model

Tan Xiaofeng has transformed the traditional cultural heritage of making *yanqiu*, or "banquet balls", into a roaring commercial success, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



From above: Xie Yafen, Tan Xiaofeng's wife, introduces *yanqiu* to guests during an exhibition in Jiaxing in 2022; employees at Tan's factory in Chang'an town, Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, make *yanqiu*; and Tan receives a "time-honored brand" certification for his business from the Jiaxing government in 2021.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“Adding fatty pork makes it more fragrant and gives it a richer and more substantial taste. It is then crispy on the outside and soft in the middle, providing a rich mouthfeel.”

Xie Yifei, *yanqiu* businessman

added based on experience, leading to inconsistency in the flavor," Tan says.

After inheriting the traditional method of making *yanqiu*, in 2007, Tan knuckled down to the business of building a factory, investing more than 400,000 yuan (\$55,272) into the project.

"The money back then could have bought a three-story building in our area, and many relatives and friends didn't understand the decision, asking me how many *yanqiu* we would have to sell just to break even," Tan recalls.

It was only thanks to support from his wife, Xie Yafen, and other family members, that he got through the growing pains of the business.

Ground rules were laid from the beginning, including using only fresh fish meat and traditional craft, especially during the manual steps.

"For example, the pieces of fish are soaked in water for a while to get rid of the blood, ensuring there is absolutely no fishy smell," Tan says.

"Ginger is used to complement the taste, but it has to be 'hidden' so the guests won't notice its existence," he adds.

Moreover, machines have been introduced to better churn the deboned fish chunks to the degree that an elastic texture is acquired.

Additionally, ingredient amounts have all been standardized after fine-tuning, based on feedback from multiple big tasting events.

More flavors have also been offered to cater to the diverse preferences of customers.

"Some have bamboo shoots and ham added to them," Tan says.

Initially, Tan and his wife drove a secondhand van to peddle *yanqiu* in neighboring areas, and participated in food expos in big cities like Shanghai.

Gradually, though, they have made their presence felt in the market across the country.

In turn, the booming company has created business and job opportunities for locals.

Ma Fuli, a local fish dealer, has a steady order for hundreds of kilograms of fish from Tan on a daily basis, and has supplied him for years.

"I have the fish ready the way he has requested and deliver it at 3 am every day," Ma says.

Earlier this year, Tan moved into a much bigger facility in Chang'an to expand his business further, and hired dozens of villagers in their 50s and 60s.

One of Tan Xiaofeng's employees, Tan Xiaoqian has been making *yanqiu* for almost a decade, and earns more than 5,000 yuan a month.

Years of experience has enabled him to produce *yanqiu* at the required size within a very small margin of error.

Currently, the family factory can produce approximately 40,000 *yanqiu* a day, without any leftover stock.

At the new facility, a museum recounting the history of *yanqiu* has been set up and is open to visitors.

For Tan Xiaofeng, *yanqiu* is not just a business anymore. He has taken being named an intangible heritage inheritor by the Haining government as a mission to promote the local dish to a national audience, which he does through livestreaming.

"Customers from Beijing and Xi'an (capital of Shaanxi province) often come to us to buy in wholesale quantities," he notes. "Maybe one day we will sell our *yanqiu* overseas."

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## Archaeologists unearth the ancient past of a 'city of the future'

SHIJIAZHUANG — Ruins of eight ancient cities, dating back to more than 2,000 years ago, have been uncovered in the Xiong'an New Area, suggesting that the site of China's "city of the future" boasts a long history.

The earliest ruins, namely Nanyang, included two city sites from the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). The Nanyang ruins and their surrounding areas cover nearly 18 square kilometers, with cultural relics spanning nearly 3,000 years from the Neolithic Age to the Song (960-1279) and Jin (1115-1234) dynasties.

Xiong'an was named after two counties — Xiongqian and Anxin, where the ruins of the two cities were found. The Xiongzhou ancient city in Xiongqian was built during the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907-960), and a few sections of the city walls from that time still remain.



Left: Lei Jianhong, head of an archaeology team from the Hebei provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology, sorts out cultural relics unearthed at the Nanyang ruins in the Xiong'an New Area last month. Right: An aerial view of the Nanyang archaeological excavation site. PHOTOS BY MOU YU / XINHUA

Anxin was home to the Anzhou ancient city that was established during the Song Dynasty, where up to 3 kilometers of city walls, some 1.5 to 2 meters tall, still stand.



In April 2017, China announced a plan to establish the Xiong'an New Area, which includes Rongcheng, Anxin and Xiongqian counties, as well as some adjacent areas in North China's Hebei province.

A team of archaeologists from the Hebei provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology started work in May that year, conducting a thorough investigation covering

1,770 sq km to survey cultural relics in the area. To date, they have excavated more than 20,000 square meters, unearthing more than 4,000 items, including bronzeware, jade articles, stoneware, porcelain, and mostly, pottery. They have also identified 263 immovable cultural relics.

Lei Jianhong, head of the archaeology team, says that although Xiong'an is under construction and known as the "city of the future", the findings show that it was not conceived on a blank piece of paper. "Rather, this area boasts a long history and rich culture," Lei says.

Song Shaojun, deputy head of the Institute for Advanced Study of Yan-zhao Culture at Hebei University, says that he believes the relics unearthed at the site are a testament to the integration and exchanges between multiple cultures in Xiong'an.

XINHUA

# CULTURE

By ZHENG WANYIN  
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Sitting on a lounge chair in her studio in northwest London, Duan Yiran, the founder of Yi Crafts, a handicrafts workshop that focuses on promoting the traditional indigo dyeing technique practiced by the Chinese Bai ethnic group, admits she used to "hate" the craft.

"I grew up with it, but it wasn't something you felt cool about when you were a teenager. So, I never really liked it," she recalls.

Duan, a member of the Bai ethnic group, was born and raised in Zhoucheng village, in Dali city, Southwest China's Yunnan province.

At one time, in Zhoucheng, nearly every household boasted members who had mastered the tie-dyeing technique. Duan's family also ran an indigo farm that dated back five generations, alongside a business that produced handwoven, hand-dyed fabrics.

To tie-dye pieces of cloth, the craftsman uses needles and threads to create different folds in the fabrics before putting them in dye vats several times. Typically, the dye vats contain sky-blue-colored dye extracted from plants.

Unfolding the fabrics reveals beautiful patterns, such as geometric shapes and flowers. The areas stitched and bound by threads remain white because they were not immersed in the dye, while other areas turn blue.

In 2006, the tie-dyeing technique of the Bai ethnic group was listed as a form of national intangible cultural heritage in China.

The 29-year-old Duan, who spent her childhood helping out by cutting the threads after cloth had been dyed, never thought about inheriting the craft until she moved to London in 2015 and enrolled at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, to study costume design.

"I learned a lot of Western techniques at the school, like making a suit, a Victorian dress, a corset, but I lost that connection because I don't have a history associated with (those garments)," she says. "And when making the Victorian-style costumes, I found myself unconsciously apply-



## Workshops breathe life into traditional crafts

Artisans keep techniques alive despite the distance.

ing the Chinese embroidery stitching and knotting techniques that I learned from my grandmother."

It was at that moment Duan realized that a person may not be entirely separated from the land they were raised on and the cultural imprints that come with it.

"There are things that are always with me, I just tried to hide them. But no matter how hard I've tried to escape from the culture or try to be what's considered cool or edgy, I am still a girl from Dali," she says.

After graduating in 2019, Duan decided to set up her own handicrafts studio. In the five years since she launched her business, she has

"We are merely bridges, the important part is the people on both sides of the bridge."

Duan Yiran, founder of Yi Crafts

organized more than 500 online and in-person workshops, with in excess of 10,000 participants.

With more UK-based young Chinese people, dedicated to showcasing their motherland's culture, joining Yi Crafts, the studio has evolved into a space where various types of Chinese handicrafts, including embroidery, lantern making, paper-cutting, bamboo weaving, and more, have been shared.

Yi Crafts also collaborated with some of the mainstream cultural organizations in the UK, including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, to host Chinese handicraft workshops.

### Burning passion

Unlike Duan, Lu Yinkai has been enamored with traditional Chinese culture since a young age and now dreams of sharing with the world the details of Chinese incense culture, a centuries-old art that has almost vanished.

The 25-year-old moved to London for his master's degree in 2022 and set up his studio, named Timeless-moon, last year.

Chinese incense culture dates back more than 4,000 years, when fragrant herbs were first burned, primarily during rituals to worship ancestors, Lu says.

During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), culturally one of the most brilliant eras in Chinese history, the use of incense reached its peak as the upper classes regarded incense as an elegant pursuit, and ancient scholars, poets, and artists of that period burned it while composing poetry, playing the *guqin* (a traditional Chinese plucked-string zither), appreciating flowers, and hosting guests, Lu explains.

However, during the later Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) when Chinese people faced internal troubles and external aggression, the culture inevitably faced preservation challenges. Fast-forward to today, Chinese incense does not hold a prominent position internationally, Lu adds.

He has been apprenticing under experts who have long studied Chinese incense, delving into ancient texts, and learning about the tools, materials, and methods involved in using incense.

His studio regularly organizes workshops where participants can learn to appreciate the timeless tradition while experiencing Chinese incense or making incense sachets.

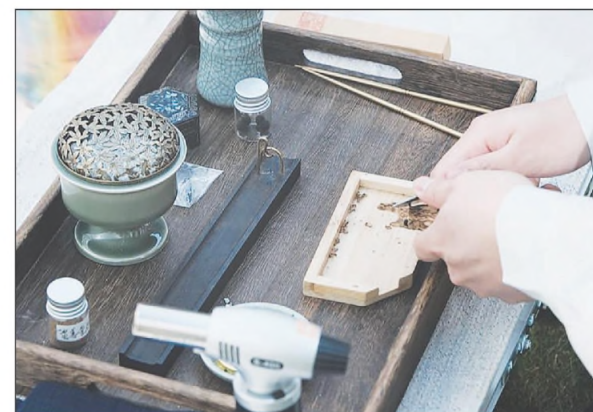
Although their specialties differ, the two young Chinese artisans share similar views on spreading Chinese culture overseas. They both express a desire for their events to serve as a space that transcends borders, where people of all nationalities, races, genders, and ages can freely share.

"There are always commonalities between cultures because we are all human beings," says Lu.

Duan adds: "We are merely bridges, the important part is the people on both sides of the bridge."



Main photo: Duan Yiran poses with tourists from the UK and local artisans in Dali city, Southwest China's Yunnan province, during a trip she organized in March to showcase the Bai ethnic group's handicrafts. Above from left: Two participants at one of Duan's tie-dyeing workshops pose with completed work in London in March 2023. Duan and a British artisan pose in London in August 2023 with clothes that were hand-dyed using traditional tie-dyeing techniques. Lu Yinkai cuts agarwood into shreds for incense burning during a workshop in London in June 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## Jewelry designer lights up London with filigree inlay pieces

By XING YI in London  
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Imagine transforming gold and silver into threads as delicate as a strand of hair, meticulously knitting them into intricate lace that represents a blooming flower, with precious gems carefully inset onto the delicate petals — this is the art of filigree inlay, a traditional Chinese court jewelry technique also known as "fine gold art."

Zou Xuewen, a young jewelry designer and inheritor of the filigree inlay technique, a designated intangible cultural heritage in China, has been introducing this ancient craft to the United Kingdom through workshops, lectures, and exhibitions.

"Many of today's Western jewelry-making techniques have royal court origins and are employed by renowned brands such as Van Cleef & Arpels and Buccellati," remarked Zou, who established her brand, Zoey Filigree, in 2021. "I aspire to showcase Chinese jewelry techniques to the world through my creations."

In January, Zou unveiled a new collection featuring jewelry pieces that combine Chinese calligraphy characters meaning "today" and "far-away" with floral designs.

"It is an exploration of the balance between the practical and the ideal," she explained, expressing her inten-

tion to incorporate more Chinese calligraphic characters into filigree jewelry.

Crafting a piece of jewelry with filigree inlay is a time-consuming process, taking months to complete. It involves a series of intricate steps such as nipping, plaiting, jointing, piling, filling, and knitting delicate gold or silver threads.

The history of filigree inlay dates back to China's Warring States Period (475-221 BC). With advancements in techniques for creating thin gold and silver threads, the art matured during the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties, reaching its zenith during the Qing (1644-1911) Dynasty.

Zou's fascination with traditional Chinese filigree inlay jewelry began during a master's program in jewelry design in London that she began in 2018. Amid a curriculum focused on modern jewelry design, Zou found herself drawn to traditional techniques, discovering filigree inlay through an online video featuring Zhao Yunliang, an esteemed master of the technique in Beijing.

"When I got into the college, I wasn't so sure what I liked so I studied different jewelry-making techniques on my own until I came across the filigree inlay in the online video," she recalled.

In the video, Zhao, whose teachers inherited the technique from the



Top: A set of filigree inlay jewelry by Zou Xuewen, called Fang Fei Ji, which draws inspiration from the traditional Chinese motif of flower and butterfly. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. Above: Zou Xuewen (on right) poses for a photo with participants at a workshop on Chinese jewelry techniques in London in 2023.

Qing court's jewelry studio, reflected his career such as his participation in making national jewelry presents in the 1990s and creating jewelry props for films.

"I was so impressed by the artisan spirit of the masters in passing on the centuries-old technique and wanted to study filigree inlay with him," said Zou, adding that through several connections she finally got in contact with Zhao who was very pleased with her determination and agreed to take her as an apprentice in 2019.

Zou then suspended her study in London and went back to Beijing to learn the filigree inlay technique.

"But the technique was much harder to learn than I imagined. I started from making the gold thread, which is so thin that a small mistake in soldering could ruin one week's work," recalled Zou.

Zou achieved the status of intangible heritage inheritor of the filigree inlay technique in 2022 with the first of her major works — a set of filigree inlay jewelry called *Fang Fei Ji*, including a ring, a bracelet and a necklace, which draws inspiration from the traditional Chinese motif of flower and butterfly.

The jewelry piece participated in the London Design Festival in 2022 and Milan Fashion Week in 2023, during which Zou's jewelry garnered the interest of many people in the

exhibition, and she then opened a workshop providing courses and experience in jewelry-making for the public at the workspace for creative entrepreneurs at Hotel Elephant in London.

"After five years of studying this technique, I still dare not say that I have mastered it," she said. "I remain a humble student in this trade but I want to introduce this ancient technique to today's people."

To make the ancient skill more accessible to modern tastes, Zou incorporates modern designs and techniques into her workshops, teaching customers enamel and lacquer bead jewelry techniques. During the past two years, she has taught more than 100 individuals and delivered lectures on various occasions.

"The art of jewelry embodies the aesthetics and values of a nation, and filigree inlay technique reflects the meticulous and inclusive nature of Chinese people," said Zou.

She also highlighted the importance of cross-cultural exchange, noting how exhibitions in London exposed her to concepts and designs from other nations.

"The heritage of one nation can be appreciated by the world," Zou said. "With the continuous efforts of our overseas Chinese artists, the traditional filigree inlay technique will cast its unique light onto the world."