

Feathered wonders

Bird experts survey Metog to better understand biodiversity

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Descendants of Flying Tigers, Chinese civilians tell their stories of friendship

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CHINA DAILY

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US youths' visit refreshes ties of several decades

Muscatine High School students express good wishes with Chinese peers

By ZHANG YUNBI and ZHANG YU in Zhengding, Hebei

At many tourist attractions in China, red ribbons that bear visitors' signatures and auspicious phrases, such as wishes for career success or a healthy family, are tied to trees, handrails and other objects for good luck.

The red ribbons proved popular on Saturday among a United States delegation of students from Muscatine High School in the US state of Iowa and their Chinese peers from Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School in Hebei province.

While gathering around a kiosk selling the red ribbons at Longxing Temple in Zhengding county, Hebei, the high-spirited students could be heard exclaiming "Look what I've got", "Put it here", or "I love this one!" Known for its outstanding architecture, frescoes and stone sculptures, the famous Buddhist temple is a national-level cultural heritage protection site.

It has been well preserved, thanks to the efforts of people including President Xi Jinping when he was deputy secretary of the Communist Party of China's Zhengding county committee in 1982-83 and secretary from 1983 to 1985.

At that time, Xi spent a great deal of time and energy to get a special fund allocated to the county for the restoration of ancient buildings and sites, including Longxing Temple.

Xi was also among those who worked on building the bonds between Zhengding and the Iowa city of Muscatine, as he led a five-person delegation to places including Muscatine during a visit to the US in 1985.

During the students' short stay at the serene temple before dinnertime on Saturday, the young people from China and the US were able to leave a mark of their new friendship.

"We have gained a brand-new understanding of this place by traveling alongside our American friends and being their tour guides."

Lin Yihang, a Chinese girl in the group of six friends

Three of the US students partnered with three Chinese girls to buy a red ribbon.

Yuan Yifan, one of the three third-year high school girls from Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School, paid for the red ribbon, which cost her 10 yuan (\$1.38).

Printed in yellow on the ribbon were two phrases in Chinese — "splendid future" and "accomplishments in career". Red and yellow are auspicious colors that are frequently used in Chinese art.

The six girls got along well during their trip in recent days, so they all signed their names on the same red ribbon and used their phones to take some photos, and then Yuan tied the ribbon to one of the large trees in the temple's courtyard.

"I just made a wish for health and good luck and to be happy in future college years for every one of us," said Yuan.

The three girls from the US knew one another before the visit, as did their three Chinese peers.

"The six of us got acquainted with and knew one another better in a natural process," Yuan said.

Lelah Marie Loddell, one of the girls from Muscatine, said, "We have grown close in little time. They are all amazing people."

Lin Yihang, another Chinese girl in the group of six friends, noted that she had visited the temple when she was younger.

"We had not anticipated that we could be such great friends as facilitated by this tour," she added.

Caydn Alexys Caliger, another girl from Muscatine High School, said the Buddhist statues and frescoes in the temple were a little strange to her.

"It (the temple) was very beautiful. I saw a lot of interesting things and I wanted to learn more about the culture here," Caliger added.

The US student delegation is the second one sent by Muscatine High School this year. The first delegation visited in January.

The visits are part of a program announced by President Xi in November in San Francisco to invite 50,000 young people from the US to China over the following five years for exchange and study.

Xi wrote a reply letter to the first Muscatine High School delegation in February and sent them a Chinese New Year greeting card.

The second delegation arrived in Beijing on Wednesday before going to Hebei, and the trip will also take them to Shanghai on Monday, the last leg of their China tour.

Culture, nature and friendship were among the highlights of their visit to Hebei from Friday to Monday.

They went to the Shijiazhuang Zoo to see the giant pandas, toured the Hebei Museum to experience ancient Chinese culture and watched the China Impression multimedia musical performance presented by teachers and students from Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School.

Students from both nations witnessed the inauguration of the China-US Friendship Youth Woods on Saturday at a park in Zhengding and planted trees, including American red maples.

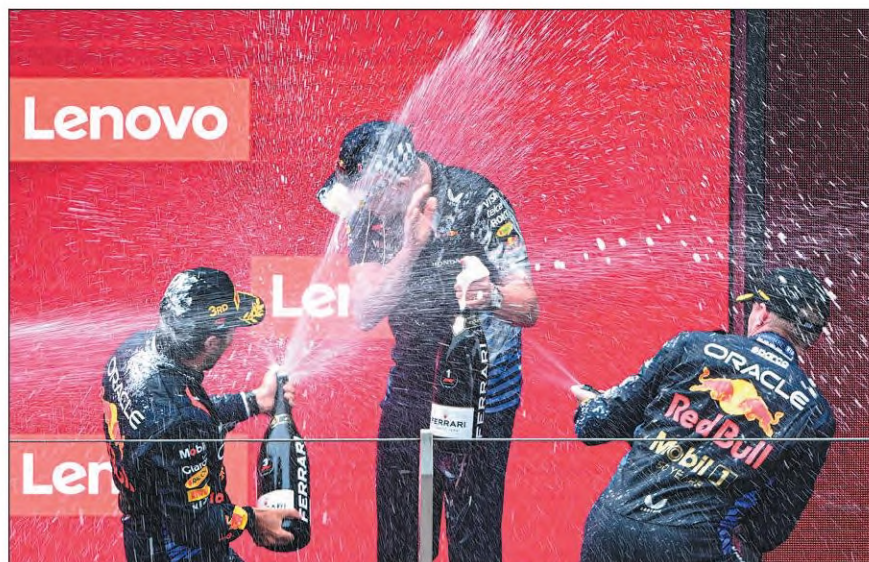
"I was greatly amazed by the creative idea of planting the woods. The trees will grow, and so will the kids," said William Zhang, a professor of English language studies at Des Moines Area Community College in Iowa and chair of the Iowa Sister States Hebei Committee.

"I told the American students, 'Don't forget to travel back here after you grow up and have another look at the trees you planted,'" he added.

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Students from Muscatine High School and Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School pose on Saturday under a tree with red ribbons bearing auspicious phrases at Longxing Temple in Zhengding county, Hebei province. ZHANG YUNBI / CHINA DAILY



Winning formula

Above: Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix winner Red Bull's Max Verstappen is sprayed with champagne on Sunday by runners-up Lando Norris of McLaren and second runners-up Sergio Perez of Red Bull on the podium at the Shanghai International Circuit in Shanghai.

Left: Fans pose with cutouts of Chinese Formula 1 driver Zhou Guanyu on Sunday. HECTOR RETAMAL / AFP WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Experts, executives dismiss 'overcapacity' narrative

By WANG KEJU, LIU ZHIHUA and MA SI

China holds a significant position in the global supply chain, although that's not due to Chinese policy, but rather the result of companies and consumers worldwide making their own decisions, experts and executives said.

After all, they added, China, as the world's second-largest economy, has a comparative advantage in its economic model — one that makes it the go-to manufacturing hub of the world.

The so-called "China overcapacity" narrative has been employed by certain Western countries, primarily the United States, as a political tool to tarnish and suppress the Chinese economy, the observers said.

Behind the slander lies an agenda of anti-globalization and protectionism that ultimately hinders normal global trade and undermines the common

interests of nations, they said.

During US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's trip to China in early April, her second visit to the country in nine months, she made the comment that China is flooding global markets with cheap goods, particularly in new green industries.

The narrative has been translated into concrete actions such as probes launched by the US and the European Union into China's electric vehicles, based on unfounded allegations of state subsidies and aiming to choke the role of China's green product supply.

The notion of excess capacity should not be simplified or attributed solely to one country, Premier Li Qiang said during talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Beijing last week.

From a market perspective, the amount of production capacity is determined by the relationship between supply and demand, and having production moderately great-

er than demand is conducive to full market competition and promoting the survival of the fittest, Li said.

Taking a global view, each nation focuses on developing industries where it holds a comparative advantage, while relying on other countries for sectors where it lacks capacity. By recognizing and leveraging their respective strengths, countries can collaborate for shared development, Li added.

Lan Foan, minister of finance, said at a meeting held by the Development Committee of the World Bank Group in Washington on Friday that, going forward, China will accelerate the development of new quality productive forces and promote a sustainable green transformation. The country aims to share its development opportunities and dividends with the world, he added.

Albert Park, chief economist at the Asian Development Bank, said concerns about Chinese exports in terms of overcapacity are not supported well by evidence, noting that the World Trade Organization addresses noncompetitive practices with anti-dumping and countervailing duties,

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CHINA'S ANCIENT ARTWORKS IN THE INTERNATIONAL FRAME

Collection on display at Venice Biennale inspired by project to compile and catalog cultural treasures

Editor's note: China, a country with a long and splendid cultural history, demonstrates its exceptional achievements via numerous heritage sites, intangible cultural heritage items, tourism attractions and old neighborhoods. Follow China Daily's reporters as they travel across the nation to explore these inspiring legacies.

By DENG ZHANGYU dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Hundreds of ancient paintings and large contemporary artworks have undertaken a special train journey across two continents, leaving Zhengzhou in Henan province in March and arriving in Italy in April for their debut at the Venice Art Biennale.

Atlas: Harmony in Diversity, the exhibition at China's National Pavilion,



which opened on Thursday, features prints, videos, sculptures, installations and performances.

All the works are from or are inspired by A Comprehensive Collection of Ancient Chinese Paintings, a large book project that has systematically compiled images of paint-

ings, some of which date back 2,000 years.

The exhibition is divided into two sections. One is an archive displaying 100 high-fidelity prints of treasured Chinese paintings in the collections of museums outside China, as well as documents recording how these ancient treasures were created, left China, and eventually entered the collections of museums around the world.

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Online See more by scanning the code.



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Earth Day a reminder of our shared obligation

April 22 is Earth Day and people all around the world will be celebrating the bounties that earth provides for all life. This is a good time to consider what does living "a green life" mean to us?

How can we live green from a holistic systems perspective? China's pursuit of an "ecological civilization", an enabling philosophy for green life, is now written into the Chinese Constitution as the basis for the country's environmental policies, laws and education. It articulates the primary principles of environmental management, ecological restoration and green development. It has deep cultural roots in Lao Tzu's Taoist notion of "uniting humans and the universe". So we look to China for leadership in accomplishing this vision of nature-hu-

WORLD WATCH By Paul Shrivastava

man harmony. This harmony implies preserving the places we love and making our own behaviors, particularly consumption, more mindful and intentional, while transforming the infrastructural systems that we live in.

We can be preserving places both far and near to us. About eight years ago I visited the city of Xiamen and sat by the seaside enjoying the beautiful ocean views and mild weather. It changed my impression of China,

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PAGE TWO



China Daily's digital employee Yuanxi (left) travels into the digital version of the book project *A Comprehensive Collection of Ancient Chinese Paintings*. She and a noblewoman from the classic figure painting, *Court Ladies Wearing Floral Headdresses*, enjoy the beauty of nature in a landscape painting. A SCREENSHOT FROM A CHINA DAILY VIDEO

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The other section comprises seven contemporary works by established artists. They focus on subjects frequently depicted in ancient Chinese paintings, such as architecture, landscapes, figures, birds and gardens.

Wang Xiaosong, curator of the exhibition, said that the aim is to show the beauty and cultural essence of Chinese ink paintings through archives and contemporary art.

"Because of cultural differences, Western audiences have difficulty in understanding some ancient Chinese paintings. We try to use an art language that is easier for them to understand, to help them appreciate Chinese art," Wang said.

Zhu Jinshi's installation *Rice Paper Pagoda* uses more than 3,000 pieces of rice paper, as well as steel pipes and cotton threads to create a tall paper pagoda, a symbol of Buddhism depicted in many Chinese paintings, and which are regarded as a symbol of the spiritual world. Next to the rice paper model is a board displaying pictures of pagodas around the world.

"Our show is one big archive. Viewers see clearly how the image of the same object varies in different cultures and situations," Wang added.

In the video installation *Pavilion* by Che Jianquan, 10 sets of televisions display a pavilion on Lushan mountain, Jiangxi province, filmed for over two decades by the artist. Hundreds of images of pavilions across the world are also shown together.

Qiu Zhenzhong's *Status Series* sculptures are placed in the national pavilion's garden and reproduce the brush strokes of calligraphy in the concrete lines of the sculptures. In the curator's words, calligraphy is the origin of Chinese ink paintings.

There's also performance art by Wang Zhenghong, who has made 10,000 bird-shaped accessories and plans to wear them as she walks around the exhibition, interacting with visitors. She also attended the celebration dinner after the opening ceremony on Thursday, where singers performed songs inspired by Chinese poems.

Poems, birds, pavilions and pagodas are common elements in ancient Chinese paintings that can all be easily seen in the images of well-known ancient paintings displayed either in print or video in the archive section.

Inspired by collection

The entire exhibition draws on the book project, *A Comprehensive Collection of*



Show: Art bridges East and West



The book project *A Comprehensive Collection of Ancient Chinese Paintings* consists of 226 books and catalogs ancient Chinese paintings spanning 2,000 years of China's art history. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ancient Chinese Paintings. The project consists of 226 books, and catalogs 12,405 artworks from the pre-Qin period (before 221 BC) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), housed in 263 museums, galleries and cultural institutions both in and outside China.

"It's the first time the book project is being exhibited at such a big international art event. It is a comprehensive collection of Chinese art, and the exhibition is a good platform for showing Chinese culture to a wider audience," said Wang, who is also deputy dean of the School of Art and Archaeology at Zhejiang University.

Since 2022, touring exhibitions based on the project, which took 17 years to complete, have been held in various countries includ-

ing the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Malaysia and Singapore.

"Chinese painting reflects Chinese people's aesthetics, their relationship with nature and values. It shows their respect for nature and contains their philosophy," said the curator.

"It's the first time the country has systematically compiled all these artworks scattered around the world", said Jin Xiaoming, a professor at the School of Art and Archaeology at Zhejiang University, and also a member of the team responsible for the book project.

Since it began in 2005, with President Xi Jinping's support and encouragement, the

project has brought together thousands of paintings from museums and cultural institutions across the world through digital technology. Experts involved launched three international campaigns to collect images of ancient Chinese paintings. About 3,000 digital images owned by museums overseas have been "returned" to China as a result of the project.

Jin and his team have been in communication with museums outside China for more than a decade. In order to get a single image, they often had to visit a museum several times, and persuade experts to authorize the use of the image.

"Although the long work of compilation has been very hard, it has paid off," Jin said.

First viewings

High-resolution versions of many classic paintings in the collections of overseas institutions have been shown to the public in their entirety for the first time. For instance, *Five Old Men of Suixiang*, a group portrait that was divided into several sections that now belong to the collections of different museums abroad, has once again become a complete scroll through digital imaging.

In 2021, the project began touring China to give the public a full overview of ancient paintings. The biggest exhibition was held at the National Museum of China in Beijing in 2022, and featured 1,700 paintings from the project. It was very well attended, attracting about 4 million visitors over the course of a year, making it the most popular show so far held at the museum, according to Wang Xiaosong, who is also in charge of the touring exhibitions.

Apart from Beijing, the project has been exhibited in many other cities, including Ningbo and Jiaxing in Zhejiang province, Shijiazhuang in Hebei province, and Shanghai.

"We combine each city's unique culture with our project. That's why these shows are so popular with the public," Wang said.

In Ningbo, a port city on the ancient Maritime Silk Road, the exhibition displayed art centering on silk, exported goods and prosperous port scenes. In Jiaxing, a city that has a long history of making clothes, the show included a section focusing on the development of Chinese clothing through paintings.

Wang said that the number of visitors to the show at Shijiazhuang peaked at 20,000 a day. "You know the city's population is just several million," he added.

"The attraction is that one can see all these precious pieces from different museums and spanning 2,000 years in a single day in high-resolution versions; it's very convenient."

Wang said that the book project also serves as a good academic archive for the use of scholars, experts and researchers.

Wang Shu, a Pritzker Architecture Prize winner, said that he often visited museums abroad to see ancient Chinese paintings to find inspiration for his architecture, but seldom had the opportunity to inspect them at close quarters. Now, the project allows him to see the paintings clearly in a high-fidelity print without the need to travel.

"It's really a meaningful and great job. It's like a painting library. And art needs this kind of compilation," said Wang Shu.



Left and right: Contemporary artworks based on the book project are on display at China's National Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale, including Wang Zhenghong's *Symphony of Birds* (left) and Qiu Zhenzhong's *Status Series* sculptures (right). Middle: Visitors enjoy a high-resolution version of a Chinese painting at Ningbo Art Museum in Ningbo, Zhejiang province in July, where the show *Compilation of Classics in the Flourishing Age* based on the book project was held. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Regional studies key to serving national strategies

By LIU XIA and SONG PING

There is urgent need for more regional studies and talents to support the national strategies that are dealing with an evolving global landscape, experts said.

They made the remarks on Saturday at a two-day seminar titled "Centennial Changes and International Studies" at Weihai, Shandong province, organized by the Institute of International Studies at Shandong University to celebrate its fifth anniversary.

Huang Renwei, executive vice-president of the Fudan Institute of Belt and Road & Global Governance, highlighted the importance of regional studies that focus on specific countries or regions in assisting China in navigating its foreign relations amid unprecedented global transformations.

"Universities and research institutions are responsible for cultivating talents through concrete projects and delving into specific fields within countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative," Huang said.

He said it is essential to conduct in-depth research, covering aspects such as economic development, historical and cultural backgrounds, social structures, foreign policies, ecological environments, customs and traditions of specific regions. "Academics should contribute to the mission of building a community with a shared future for mankind," he added.

During the seminar, more than 100 experts and scholars from various domestic universities and research institutions discussed aspects of country and area-specific studies as well as international studies. Experts agreed that there is currently a shortage of knowledge and experience in the field of regional studies, which also offers unprecedented opportunities for talent development in this field.

Ni Feng, director of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that a key requirement is to expand a well-structured research team of considerable size.

Using his research experience on China-United States relations as an example, Ni stressed that capacity building is key to serving national strategies. "In order to conduct thorough and effective research on American studies, it is

Even amid escalating suspicion and competition between the US and China, the two countries have still engaged in significant cooperation through international organizations."

Qin Yaqing, chair professor at Shandong University

necessary to expand the research teams, which are currently understaffed."

In a parallel discussion, Qin Yaqing, one of China's leading scholars, said multilateralism will continue to be relevant in the face of global governance failure represented by the revival of power politics.

Qin, chair professor at Shandong University, stressed the importance of international organizations in addressing global challenges and emphasized China's commitment to cooperation, which opens up possibilities for global governance.

"Even amid escalating suspicion and competition between the US and China, the two countries have still engaged in significant cooperation through international organizations, for example, in the field of climate change," he said.

He added that regional and sub-regional multilateral governance play a part in global governance, especially when the latter is faced with governance deficits and failure. "Regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the European Union and Association of South East Asian Nations, have demonstrated their dynamism."

As domestic and foreign policies are intertwined and affect each other, the diplomacy of each country is quite different, said Zhao Kejin, professor and deputy dean of the School of Social Sciences of Tsinghua University. "Still, countries should find ways to coordinate," he added.

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Flying high

China's 100-meter-long kite takes flight on Saturday at the 37th International Kite Festival in Berck-sur-Mer, France. The nine-day event, in which China is the guest country of honor, runs through April 28.

LI YANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Tibetan woman makes history, flies fighter jet

Student clears solo test flight, dreams of becoming combat pilot

By ZHAO LEI
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Over the years, Tibetan women have driven battle tanks, maneuvered warships and served in missile units of the People's Liberation Army. Now, 23-year-old Kelsang Pedron has become the first Tibetan woman to fly a fighter jet.

Born in May 2000 in Lhokha city in the Xizang autonomous region, Kelsang Pedron was studying at the Beijing Tibet Middle School in 2017 when she heard that a senior student of the school had secured a place at the Air Force Aviation University to learn how to fly military aircraft.

That nugget of information planted the seeds of what then seemed like an unattainable dream in the young girl's mind. After all, no Tibetan woman had ever flown a military aircraft in China till then.

"Becoming an Air Force aviator is glorious and I wanted to try so that I

could safeguard the motherland's blue skies. But flying appeared to be a distant dream for me, an ordinary girl, at that time," Kelsang Pedron said, adding that it all changed when she saw China's first two female astronauts, Liu Yang and Wang Yaping, on television.

"I wanted to become as smart and cool as they are," she recalled, adding that the female astronauts' stories inspired her to pursue her dreams with courage and determination.

Two years later, opportunity came knocking when her teacher announced that the PLA Air Force was recruiting female flight cadets, and encouraged interested students to apply.

An excited Kelsang Pedron immediately turned to her parents, seeking their permission and support.

"My dad said yes without hesitation. He also encouraged me to bravely give it a shot. So I told my teacher that I would apply and soon

began to prepare for the initial selection tests," she said.

After the initial tests, the teenager was shortlisted with more than 200 other schoolgirls from across the country for the last round of the process, which would see 40 applicants being accepted at the Air Force Aviation University in Changchun, Jilin province.

Kelsang Pedron passed all the tests. What's more, she also secured a high score in the National College Entrance Examination.

In August 2019, Kelsang Pedron reported at the Air Force Aviation University, becoming the first-ever Tibetan woman to start learning combat aircraft operation. Tibetan aviators have been part of the Chinese armed forces since the mid-1970s, but all of them have been male.

According to her instructors, Kelsang Pedron has trained very hard to excel in her chosen career as an aviator.

So far, she has flown basic and advanced jet trainers and recently passed a solo flight test in a fighter jet.

"Now I have my wings. Passing the solo flight test marked a step closer to my goal of becoming a real combat pilot one day," the Tibetan woman said. "In the Tibetan language, Kelsang sometimes refers to a kind of a beautiful flower that represents the Tibetan people's desire for happiness and luck. I will continue to train hard so I can fly above this nation to safeguard the people's happiness and luck."

The PLA admitted its first female pilots in 1951. Since then, hundreds of women have flown for the force. The PLA Air Force started recruiting female fighter pilots in 2005 and has since then turned dozens into combat aviators at frontline units.

"Flying a fighter jet is high risk and very challenging. It requires not only superlative technical skills but also high mental agility and aptitude. In this regard, it makes no difference whether you are male or female," said Lieutenant Colonel He Xiaoli, one of the country's first female fighter pilots who has served in the PLA Air Force for nearly 20 years.

In addition to the Air Force, the PLA Navy has also begun to recruit female flight cadets from last year, aiming to send those who will successfully graduate to operate combat planes on aircraft carriers.

Green life: Mindfulness is need of hour

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which was originally formed by visits to crowded and busy Beijing and Shanghai. China has many amazingly beautiful places worth preserving — the Zhangjiajie Floating peaks, the Lijiang River, the Great Wall, Mount Qomolangma, Tiger Leaping Gorge on the Yangtze River, the Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon, among many others. But on Earth Day, the most amazing places to focus on are our own backyards, our neighborhoods, our community spaces.

There is great potential for treating these local spaces with greater respect, keeping them clean and green, even improving their biodiversity with new plantings and establishing pollinator and bird habitats. Many communities are experimenting with converting impersonal urban spaces into more social community places, by planting trees or bushes in unused lots, in back alleys, in parking areas, creating farmers' markets, rooftop farms and vertical farming, and repurposing abandoned or underutilized buildings for community activities.

Second, we should focus on changing human behaviors. Earth Day is a reminder that Earth systems today are more impacted by human social and economic behaviors than by natural processes and

cycles. We are living in a time when human activities dominate the natural hydrological, carbon and nitrogen cycles. How can we make human impacts less harmful to nature? Yes, part of the answer is reducing consumption, but that is only a partial answer that applies mostly to wealthy people. People can do a lot to improve their own consumption behaviors, by reducing waste, recycling, sharing rather than buying, walking, cycling to work, and avoiding single-use plastics. A more encompassing way to moderate our collective impacts on earth is to become more mindful and intentional in all that we do.

Human self-actualization and happiness are not all about consumption. Humans are an integral part of nature, and we must come to see ourselves in this unitary way. There are many ways of being human in relation to our environments.

Mindfulness and intentionality open possibilities of satisfaction, finding meaning and happiness, while reducing the material impacts. They can diffuse our focus from material acquisition and consumption, to spiritual, psychic, social and transcendent satisfactions. Mindful activities can rejuvenate community, kinship and joy through connection and empathy. Many people are adopting tai chi, yoga, meditation, journaling, deep-

listening, expressing gratitude, reading, silence and other contemplative practices to find purpose and meaning in life. These practices can have profound influence on improving individual's well-being and self-esteem and deflecting from habitual consumptive behaviors.

Third, green living by individuals depends on the availability of green infrastructures and systems. There are limits to how much individual personal changes can improve Earth systems. Many impacts are determined by the systems and infrastructures that surround us, systems that supply electricity, water and food, transportation, healthcare and education. Many of these systems are aging and were designed in times of older and less efficient technologies. They are often just taken for granted. We don't personally own them, so they drop out of sight and out of mind.

Earth Day is a good time to remind us of our responsibilities toward making these lifestyle enabling systems to be ecologically efficient and regenerative of life on earth. Regenerative agriculture, renewable energy, nature-based infrastructure are ways of ensuring the long-term conservation of Earth systems and ecological services. Citizens can influence these systems by demanding such green systems. They can engage the government institutions, corporations

and nongovernmental organizations responsible for maintaining such services.

Citizen engagement in civic decision-making is a potent way for systems transformation toward sustainability. Positive approaches to engagement can enrich local government bodies with innovative ideas, understanding of their clients' needs and opportunities for collaboration. Citizen engagement is also a way to ensuring that the benefits of green infrastructure are distributed in a socially just and inclusive manner.

Working toward a holistic systemic green life is a worthy way of celebrating Earth Day this year and every year. If pursued collectively, it can slow down the global collapse of ecosystems and climate change. A green lifestyle can bring joy and connection to nature and connection to neighbors and communities. Let us not just watch and lament the devastation to nature that we witness every day.

There is a lot that we can act on locally, and small acts accumulate to big changes. Let us act in small and local ways as a Chinese proverb advises: "Before preparing to improve the world first look around your own home three times."

The author is co-president of the Club of Rome and professor at Pennsylvania State University. 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.

Boat tragedy



The debris of a wrecked boat is salvaged on Friday from the Mpoko River in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic. At least 58 people died and many others were reported missing or wounded after the overloaded vessel capsized. XINHUA

Trade: US concerns not supported by evidence

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and there is no strong evidence that either applies to China.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said, "It is unfair to specifically mention China's industrial policies and imply that China's competitive advantage is subsidized by the government", as many countries are allocating gov-

ernment subsidies and introducing industrial policies to boost strategic industries and productivity.

For instance, the US Inflation Reduction Act — the largest US investment ever in clean energy and climate action — was signed into law by US President Joe Biden, and the White House has awarded billions of dollars in subsidies for advanced semiconductor manufacturing.

In the lead-up to the US presidential election in November, politicians are increasingly using issues of overcapacity and the trade imbalance with other countries for political leverage, with political considerations taking precedence over genuine economic concerns, observers said.

Yao Yang, director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University, said: "The Biden

administration claims to uphold a worker-centered trade policy, and its recent moves, from raising the capacity issue to launching a trade probe against China, are more like gestures to please and curry favor with certain groups of voters, rather than pursuing any economic considerations.

"The US government is likely to adopt an even tougher stance on Chi-

na as the 2024 presidential election approaches," Yao added. "However, China exports few electric vehicles or steel and aluminum products directly or indirectly to the US, and if the US increases tariffs on those products, it will not bring any economic benefits to itself, while disrupting the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains."

Furthermore, Yao said that "if the US is really concerned about the issue it is hyping, it should open its door wider for Chinese investors, instead of imposing various restrictions on

them. That way, Chinese enterprises with advanced EV and green technologies can invest in the country and set up factories to contribute to local employment and tax revenue."

On the contrary, a critical issue facing the world today is not an oversupply of green energy capacity, but rather a severe shortage.

Ouyang Shijia contributed to this story.

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BUSINESS

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The world is young domestic firms' oyster

Infrastructure, technology, talent catapult local enterprises into global league

By MA SI
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In 2014, a group of experts in smart manufacturing, each of them boasting around 15 years of work experience, gathered in a three-bedroom apartment in Beijing and decided to start up with Beijing Roborock Technology Co Ltd. What was extraordinary was their clear and simple ambition: to develop the world's best robotic vacuum cleaner.

Ten years on, their dream has come true. Roborock is a leading player in its sector and, in terms of global sales in 2023, the top-selling brand among smart vacuum cleaners worldwide, according to Euromonitor International, a market research firm.

Its products are available in more than 170 countries and regions, with nearly half of its revenue coming from overseas markets.

Quan Gang, president of Roborock, summed up the success story. "From day one, our eyes were set on the global market. From the very beginning, we have sought to meet the demands of global users. Our product design, production and marketing efforts have been tailored to meet their demands from the outset."

That helped the startup to remain flexible and nimble while preserving its unique technology. Corporate executives and experts said Roborock is the epitome of new-age Chinese enterprises that see the world as their oyster right from day one.

Such companies are quick to recognize that growing globally competitive brands in their respective segments is critical to success these days. They rely on both China's manufacturing prowess and their own strengths in research and development.

What distinguishes them from the previous generation of globally known Chinese enterprises is their global vision and clarity on goals. While the previous lot went global only when they had grown big enough in the domestic market, the new bunch target the global market from the very beginning, experts said.

Huang Chenhong, president of German software and cloud giant SAP Greater China, who has witnessed the transformation of Chinese companies in their global expansion over the past three decades, said, "Despite challenges such as lackluster global demand and geopolitical uncertainties, Chinese companies have not slowed down their pace of going global."

Data from China's Ministry of Commerce prove his point. Chinese enterprises' outbound direct investment grew 5.7 percent year-on-year last year to exceed 1.04 trillion yuan (\$143.7 billion), highlighting their continued expansion overseas.

"I think globalization is now entering a new stage. Globalization today involves more Chinese companies expanding their business



A view of the booth of Huawei at the 2024 Mobile World Congress Barcelona in Spain earlier this year. GAO JING / XINHUA



Overseas consumers look at Roborock's products at the IFA consumer tech fair in Berlin, Germany, on Jan. 12. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A Xiaomi vehicle is on display at the 2024 Mobile World Congress Barcelona in Spain earlier this year. GAO JING / XINHUA

overseas," Huang said. "We can see many enterprises, whether State-owned, private or even small and medium-sized enterprises, have 30 to 50 percent of their business overseas. Some companies are even born to serve overseas markets and have never considered doing business domestically."

Chinese companies have attained a stage of technological innovation where they are starting to embody the spirit of multinational corporations.

"In the past, when we talked about MNCs, we thought of German or American companies. Today, Chinese companies come to mind naturally," Huang said, adding that SAP has helped many Chinese companies such as Lenovo, BYD and Mindray navigate the international waters over the past three decades.

Agreed Wang Wei, general manager of AppsFlyer Greater China, an Israeli mobile marketing analytics company. "Chinese companies' foot-

prints are all over the world. There is no place where Chinese firms do not venture."

The outcome of such spirited forays into global markets is that Chinese brands are becoming well-known, the preferred choices for many consumers worldwide. BrandZ China Top 50 Global Brands report, co-released by Kantar, a market research firm, and Google in 2023, underscored this trend by analyzing perceptions and evaluations of Chinese brands across 11 countries.

The report surveyed consumers' opinions on Chinese brands. It disclosed that at least 70 percent of interviewees were willing to consider more than 90 percent of the total 234 Chinese brands involved in the research.

Notably, the most significant indicator for domestic brands — being considered "top-of-the-mind" among consumers — grew 7 percent year-on-year. Chinese brands now

significantly influence buying choices abroad.

At the peak of Kantar's list is ByteDance's TikTok, followed by Xiaomi, Lenovo, Shein, Aliexpress, Huawei, Oppo, Haier, Hisense and Vivo. Chinese drone brand DJI ranked 16th and BYD, which makes electric cars, ranked 22nd.

Technology and innovation have served as growth engines, powering Chinese brands going global, said Doreen Wang, CEO of Kantar Greater China and global chair of Kantar BrandZ, adding that Chinese brands have made technology and innovation central to brand-building, improved brand competitiveness and enhanced consumer experience.

Focusing solely on price will weaken a brand's competitiveness and waste the opportunity to attract new consumers. Chinese brands expanding overseas should transition from a "cheap substitute" to a brand that enhances consumers'

quality of life, Wang said.

Many Chinese companies are already doing that. They have been expanding their presence in the high-end market, which used to be seen as the top challenge for their overseas expansion, but is now well within their grasp. This is particularly true of Chinese labels operating in certain niches, thanks to growing R&D prowess, company executives and experts said.

For instance, in the robotic vacuum cleaner segment, Roborock has notched up a solid sales performance in the United States, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. According to data from International Data Corp, a market research firm, Roborock leads the market in sales volume in Northern Europe and holds the top market share in Germany where consumers prefer high-quality products. Meanwhile, the company's products have outcompeted those of US-based iRobot, which invented robotic vacuum cleaners

"In the past, when we talked about MNCs, we thought of German or American companies. Today, Chinese companies come to mind naturally."

Huang Chenhong, president of German software and cloud giant SAP Greater China

in the early 2000s.

"Technological innovation is the cornerstone of Roborock. From the very beginning, we have hired outstanding talent from around the world, and we have made breakthroughs in sectors such as radar laser technology and indoor navigation technology," Quan said.

Roborock, he said, has invested over 1.9 billion yuan in R&D and established three major research facilities dedicated to AI, electromechanical engineering and optoelectronics.

Even in product categories that boast bigger market size, like smartphones and electric vehicles, Chinese companies are doubling down on R&D.

Lei Jun, chairman and CEO of Xiaomi, said "cracking the high-end market is the only way for Xiaomi to grow" and has described it as "a battle of life and death".

The Beijing-based company is working hard to sharpen its technological strength in areas like mobile imaging and AI. Its AI research since July 2016 encouraged it to set up a team in April 2023 to research and develop AI large language model, a key technology behind generative AI applications such as ChatGPT. Xiaomi now has over 3,000 employees working on AI-related research.

BYD (an abbreviation for Build Your Dreams), which dethroned Tesla as the world's best-selling EV-maker in the fourth quarter of 2023, is also working to expand its global presence.

In March, it surpassed Tesla's China branch in terms of NEVs exported from the country. BYD exported more than 38,000 vehicles, followed by Tesla China's 27,000, according to data from the China Passenger Car Association. BYD models have entered 78 countries and regions, including Japan, Germany and Australia.

The Chinese automaker has promoted new energy buses and taxis in international markets under its strategy of promoting the electrification of urban public transportation. The strategy has been implemented in more than 400 cities in over 70 countries and regions.

"The current era presents the best opportunities for Chinese companies to go global, because our infrastructure is among the best in the world, our supply chain system is the most comprehensive, and our scientific and technological talent pool is on a par with the most advanced technology in the world," Quan of Roborock said.

Protecting Chinese inventions with smart patent moves

REPORTER'S LOG

By Ma Si

I started reporting on the tech industry in 2015 and since then I've noticed that patents have always been a key topic of interest for my interviewees, readers and myself.

After all, patents speak volumes about a country's or a company's technological strength or weakness. Over the past decade, I've witnessed how patents shifted from being the biggest obstacle for Chinese companies seeking to go global to being the biggest source of confidence for them as they navigate the international waters amid challenges.

Nothing proves this point better than the recent case of Oppo inking a global patent cross-license agreement with Nokia, ending a yearslong legal battle over cellular patent rates that spanned continents.

The two companies had been engaged in multiple patent lawsuits across 12 countries since 2021, as they failed to agree on the price for Oppo to use Nokia's 5G patent portfolios on the Chinese firm's smartphones. In some markets, court rulings in favor of Nokia led to bans on Oppo from selling to local consumers.

But the two companies finally ended their legal battles in January, with a global patent cross-license agreement covering standard-essential patents in 5G and other cellular technologies. SEPs are essential for products to comply with global industry standards.

The agreement came after a December ruling from the Chongqing First Intermediate People's Court. The court decided that the fair licensing fees should be \$1.151 per 5G handset in developed markets, including Europe, and \$0.707 per device in other countries, including China. It means that the Chinese court supported Oppo's petition to set lower royalty rates for Nokia's SEPs for 2G to 5G technologies.

Such progress came after Oppo had invested big resources to build up its own patent portfolios. As of Dec 31, 2023, Oppo had deployed 5G communication standard patents in over 40 countries and regions, with more than 5,900 patent families globally, and more than 11,000 standard documents submitted to 3GPP, an international telecom standardization body.

According to a report from German patent analytics company IPLYtics in October, Oppo ranks among the top eight companies globally in terms of 5G standard-essential patent strength.

This is not an easy outcome for Chinese companies that, for years, have lost their legal battles against foreign companies.

Jenni Lukander, president of Nokia Technologies, said in a statement: "We are delighted to have reached a cross-license agreement with Oppo that reflects the mutual respect for each other's intellectual property ... Oppo is one of the leading companies in the global smartphone market and we look forward to working together to bring further innovation to their users around the world."

Oppo's progress is similar to that of a group of Chinese companies

that traditionally didn't boast much tech prowess but have worked hard to beef up their tech muscle.

Chinese big names such as Huawei have been known for heavy R&D for decades, which have helped them to evolve into tech giants.

Over the past decade, Huawei's cumulative investment in R&D surpassed 1.11 trillion yuan (\$153.3 billion). Even as the US government's restrictions crimped Huawei's revenue over the past three years, the Chinese company had not reduced but increased its R&D budget.

Huawei has been the top applicant at the European Patent Office in five of the past seven years, and there are seven Chinese companies among the Top 50 applicants at the EPO, including Huawei, ZTE, Contemporary Amperex, Oppo Mobile, Vivo Mobile, Xiaomi and Honor

Device, data from the EPO showed.

In interviews over the last two years, Aidan Kendrick, chief business analyst at the EPO, told me he was quite impressed by the strides Chinese companies have made in patents as they aim for a bigger European presence.

Chinese patent applications at the EPO grew by 8.8 percent year-on-year in 2023. That came as part of a broad trend of patent filings from China at the EPO more than doubling over the past five years, Kendrick said.

"The country's remarkable growth in terms of patent applications shows that Chinese companies are increasingly protecting their inventions," Kendrick said.

"It's always difficult to make forecasts, but if one were to extrapolate the trends of patent applications from China and the next higher-ranked countries, China could move up a spot to overtake Japan and become the third-largest patents filer at the EPO in 2024."

BUSINESS

WeRide taps world mkt for driverless tech

Autonomous driving company eyes Europe, wider Asia, Africa, Americas

By CHENG YU
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Autonomous driving company WeRide said it is expanding its global footprint, following the approval of autonomous driving permits in Singapore and the United Arab Emirates last year.

Earlier this month, the company, based in Guangzhou, capital of South China's Guangdong province, announced the launch of its latest driverless road sweeper SL, saying the product had received an order worth nearly \$10 million on the very first day of launch.

The company also disclosed that the product had been sold in overseas markets.

"As Singapore serves as WeRide's starting point into the Southeast Asian market, WeRide is also looking to expand to developed economies with advanced information infrastructure and sound transportation, such as Europe, Japan and South Korea," said Tony Han Xu, founder and CEO of WeRide, in an interview.

"We are also looking to explore markets that are potentially lucrative, including Argentina, Brazil and other South American economies. We've already started in the Middle East and are considering North African markets, including Morocco, as it is close to the Middle East," Han said.

WeRide, founded in 2017, is one of the leaders in Level 4 autonomous driving technology. The company

mainly offers solutions for autonomous taxis, minibuses, freight vehicles, sanitation vehicles and advanced intelligent driving.

In December, WeRide officially announced that it had successfully obtained the M1 license and T1 license from the Land Transport Authority of Singapore. M1 refers to a milestone testing regime level 1 license for autonomous vehicles on public roads, while T1 refers to T1 assessment license for autonomous vehicles on public paths.

With these two licenses, WeRide's robobus will be able to conduct tests on a larger scale on public roads in Singapore, covering important areas such as One North and National University of Singapore.

This followed WeRide's achievement five months ago when it obtained a self-driving license for testing various vehicles, including robotaxis, on open roads in the UAE. This was the first such license for WeRide globally.

Chinese autonomous driving companies have achieved significant momentum in terms of self-driving technologies and commercialization. They are increasingly recognized by enterprises and governments the world over for their overall capacity to make self-driving on roads a reality.

"From a global perspective, Chinese autonomous driving companies have demonstrated strong technological innovation capabilities and can cope with various driving scenarios in different climates,



Visitors check out WeRide's Robobus at the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in April 2023. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

China's intelligent connected vehicles have achieved positive results in terms of industrial scale, key technologies and demonstration applications."

Guo Shougang, an official at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology

environments and urban roads," said Regan Luo, director of business development for WeRide's Middle East and North Africa markets.

In the UAE, for instance, high temperatures easily lead to the failure of electronic components in self-driving cars. In response to this challenge, WeRide quickly developed a thermal management system that can effectively perform

heat recovery and cold emission management, Luo said.

Luo added that WeRide is one of the first global autonomous driving firms to launch robotaxis in Abu Dhabi, capital of the UAE.

By the beginning of this year, the company had conducted research, testing and operations in over 26 cities globally. It has become the only tech company in the world to simul-

taneously hold autonomous driving permits in China, the United States, the UAE and Singapore.

For years, carmakers around the world, especially in the US and Europe, have promised a world of self-driving vehicles — it increasingly appears that China will likely make it happen.

According to a report from global management consulting firm McKinsey & Co, China will become the world's largest market for autonomous vehicles, with revenue from such vehicles and mobility services expected to exceed \$500 billion by 2030.

It is predicted that by 2030, total sales of autonomous vehicles are expected to hit \$230 billion and autonomous vehicle-based services will generate around \$260 billion in sales.

More than 15,000 kilometers of testing roads for intelligent connected vehicles, most being self-driving cars, had been opened nationwide by mid-September, with a total road-testing mileage of over 70 million km, latest data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed.

Guo Shougang, an official at the MII, said at a recent news conference: "China's intelligent connected vehicles have achieved positive results in terms of industrial scale, key technologies and demonstration applications."

"In particular, a batch of key technologies, including the new generation of electronic and electrical architecture, car operating systems and high-power computing chips, has been applied on a large scale in vehicles."

China seen as indispensable to global supply chain

BEIJING — China is indispensable to the global supply chain and closer cooperation is a win-win choice, executives of multinational corporations, economists and officials said.

Airbus, for example, said its cooperation with Chinese companies covers the entire industrial chain, from procurement, production and installation of large components to aircraft final assembly and delivery, and the company has benefited from such close ties in its business expansion.

George Xu, CEO of Airbus China, said in an exclusive interview last month: "In the past, we had to ship all the big parts from Europe, which took 60 days. (Later), we worked with a Chinese partner, the Aviation Industry Corp of China, to produce

the parts locally and deliver them 'door to door' to our Tianjin final assembly line."

"The locally made parts are comparable to those made in Europe in terms of both quality and costs," said Xu.

Currently, Airbus has about 200 suppliers in China, and components produced by Chinese companies are found on all Airbus commercial jetliner types.

Thanks to strong local suppliers and a stable regulatory environment, the building of the second line of the Airbus A320 family Final Assembly Line Asia in North China's major industrial port city of Tianjin is in full swing.

Juan Tubio, general manager of

FALA, said: "(There is) a very stable regulatory environment around us. The Tianjin Free Trade Zone umbrella is helping us to work in very close collaboration and discussion with Tianjin Port and Tianjin Customs."

"We are now building the second assembly line that will be entering into service in late 2025, and in theory, doubling our capacity in Tianjin," he said.

Apple CEO Tim Cook also reiterated the company's long-term commitment to the Chinese market during his visit to Shanghai last month.

"There's no supply chain in the world that's more critical to us than China," Cook said, noting that Apple will strengthen its long-term cooper-

ation with its Chinese supply chain partners and work closely with them on green and smart manufacturing to achieve win-win results.

Data showed that 151 of Apple's 200 major suppliers have production activities in China.

Earlier in March, Apple announced that it would expand its applied research lab in Shanghai and establish a new lab in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, later this year.

To boost global supply chain cooperation, China will hold the second China International Supply Chain Expo in November this year after the first CISCE was successfully held in Beijing last year.

Ren Hongbin, head of the China Council for the Promotion of Interna-

tional Trade, said that an exhibition area for advanced manufacturing would be added to the second CISCE.

The new exhibition area will focus on new quality productive forces from perspectives including front-end research and development and design, application of new materials, processing of key components and smart manufacturing, said Ren.

Besides the new exhibition area, the second CISCE will also have exhibition booths categorized into various sections, including clean energy, smart vehicles, digital technology, healthy lifestyles, green agriculture and services for supply chains.

"Today, China is indispensable for the world. It is impossible to isolate China, although there are such attempts," Kresimir Macan, a Croatian political and economic expert, said in a recent interview.

"Attempts to decouple or de-risk

from China will eventually backfire on those who impose them," said Macan.

China remains a crucial trading partner for most countries worldwide despite so-called decoupling from China, according to the Asian Development Bank.

"China's still probably the number one trading partner for the majority of countries in the world," ADB Chief Economist Albert Park was quoted as saying by CNBC. "The story of China being delinked from the global economy, I think those are probably generally very overdone or very partial."

China's gross domestic product grew 5.2 percent year-on-year to a new high of 126.06 trillion yuan (\$17.4 trillion) last year, and the country seeks to achieve a GDP growth rate of around 5 percent this year.

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**Between heaven and earth,
together with other sentient beings, I live.**

—Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一

——《庄子·齐物论》

BUSINESSINSIGHT

New quality forces crucial to industrial, tech transformation

EAGLE EYE

By Zhao Zhongxiu

During the first group study session held by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee this year, President Xi Jinping said that, with innovation playing a leading role, new quality productive forces mean advanced productivity that is freed from traditional economic growth mode and productivity development paths; they feature high-tech, high efficiency and high quality, and are in line with China's new development philosophy.

New quality productive forces are fundamentally characterized by the significant optimization of workers, means of production, objects of labor, and their combination.

The difference between new quality productive forces and traditional productive forces lies in the former's greater suitability to China's current stage of development and future development direction, as they are associated with fields that are better updated with high technology and greater knowledge density. Moreover, new quality productive forces align with the primary task of high-quality development in the new era and the goal of building a modern industrial system featuring smart, green and integrated industrial development.

Over the past four decades, China has achieved high-speed economic growth, not only satisfying the ever-growing material and cultural demands of the Chinese people, but also making significant contributions to the economic development of the world.

Beyond that is the Communist Party of China's adherence to the fundamental task of liberating and developing productive forces, as well as its constant improvement of the top-level design of policies in accordance with the domestic economic development stage and changes in the external environment, ensuring that its policies are suited to the times.

Currently, developing new quality productive forces is being stressed because economic development and international competition have deeply integrated with the development and competition of a new generation of cutting-edge technologies.

Think about the three major technological revolutions in modern history, from steam engines and electricity to information technology. Each time, it was the application of

disruptive technologies that led to a leap in production efficiency, thereby driving significant transformations in global economic and social development. No economy was able to stand on the sidelines, and the landscape of major country competition underwent profound changes as well.

The idea of fostering new quality productive forces, put forward at this stage, is an important judgment made by the Party's central leadership based on a profound understanding of the laws governing the development of productive forces in human society. It is also a major strategic choice to actively respond to the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation, which is of considerable urgency and necessity.

Innovation is key

The core element for developing new quality productive forces is scientific and technological innovation, which is crucial for China to promote development, improve its competitiveness, determine the potential of future development, maintain its global position and ensure its voice in the field of science and technology.

The development of new quality productive forces has shown upward momentum with increasing investment in scientific research and innovation, yielding significant achievements.

According to data from the World Bank, China's total R&D expenditure reached 3.09 trillion yuan (\$426.8 billion) in 2022, which was three times that of 2012, firmly placing it as the world's second-largest spender on R&D. The proportion of China's R&D expenditure in its GDP was only 0.56 percent in 1996, but the figure had increased to 2.43 percent as of 2021, making China the developing economy with the highest R&D expenditure as a proportion of its GDP.

Besides, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization, China surpassed the United States in 2011 to become the economy with the highest number of patent applications. Additionally, in the field of standard-essential patents, China's declarations in 5G technologies had reached 42 percent of the global share by September 2023, actively contributing to the development of global 5G standards with Chinese solutions.

Major economies have been stepping up efforts to develop next-generation technologies, and China is determined to make innovation the primary driving force for development, clarifying its core position in the Chinese modernization drive.

In areas such as 5G, e-commerce, large-scale infrastructure construction, new energy vehicles and high-

speed railways, China leads the world in the applications of the technologies. In the fields of nanotechnology, cloud storage, artificial intelligence and smart medical technology, cutting-edge research in China is also gaining momentum.

To further develop new quality productive forces going forward, China should continue to increase investment in scientific research and pay more attention to fundamental research.

While China's total R&D expenditure and the proportion of R&D in GDP are continuously increasing, they still lag behind the US and some developed economies in Europe. Although China has the world's largest number of patent applications, the originality of these applications still has to be enhanced, and there is a need to strengthen China's influence in setting international standards across a broader range of industry categories.

From an external perspective, the international situation is volatile, with some developed economies employing unconventional restrictive competitive measures against China in the economic, technological and military domains.

China must strengthen its fundamental research, or those with zero-to-one research, focusing on solving key bottleneck issues, and seek "singularity" (the point of disruption) in technological and industrial transformation in areas such as new energy, big data, advanced artificial intelligence, precision medicine, new materials and advanced manufacturing, through continuous efforts.

In the areas of advanced manufacturing, nanomaterials, artificial intelligence, internet information services, and low-carbon technologies, China is moving toward higher-quality supplies. To cope with the unprecedented changes in the world, it is even more necessary for China to strengthen original innovation to consolidate existing advantages and continuously expand its advantages in more fields.

China should continuously increase support for scientific research, while also deepening cooperation among industry, academia and research.

First, in the field of basic sciences such as mathematics, physics and chemistry, the authorities should increase investment in basic research and provide long-term and stable support for basic disciplines, cross-discipline research and disciplines that are niche but important.

Second, the science and technology authorities should select certain universities and research institutes with outstanding research advantages, and provide them with more long-term, stable and concentrated sup-



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port in key areas and for key teams.

Third, the country should encourage interdisciplinary research and provide a platform for the deep integration of the three major academic sectors of information, life, and material sciences, and organize experts from different fields to forecast upgrade and transformation trends in key areas and industries.

It should encourage researchers from universities and research institutions to carry out industrial applications, improve the diversified evaluation system, enhance the benefits and treatment of front-line scientific research personnel in key research areas, and encourage scientific and technological talent to propose new theories, open up new fields, and explore new paths in the face of urgent needs and long-term demands from the country's development.

China should also enhance the education, training and services systems for scientific and technological talent, thereby actively cultivating new forces for scientific research.

First, the country should accelerate the training of workers who can master modern technologies, and rely on platforms such as industry-education integration training bas-

es and corporate training centers, to cultivate high-quality skilled talent.

Second, the country should build a practical and efficient domestic cross-regional talent communication and cooperation platform, improve the coordination mechanism for domestic mobility and cross-regional introduction of high-quality skilled talent, and free the flow of new labor elements within the domestic huge market.

Third, since high-quality education will provide a continuous stream of new momentum for scientific development, it is necessary for China to further strengthen the connection between primary and higher education, enhance the scientific literacy of young people and, in particular, guide public opinions and encourage outstanding young people to engage in scientific research work.

Moreover, China's participation in global value chains has shifted from relying initially on low-cost labor to utilizing technology, capital, data and other factors more broadly.

To further develop new quality productive forces against the background of opening-up at a higher level and building a unified domestic market, it is necessary to coordinate efforts to promote the positive

interaction between domestic and international circulations led by scientific and technological innovation, while safeguarding national economic security.

China should continue to introduce cutting-edge technologies from outside, without over-reliance, and this should focus on providing experiences for breakthroughs in original technologies.

We should also continue to advance high-standard opening-up and high-quality international cooperation and enhance the interplay of domestic and international markets and resources. Through that, we should improve the allocation efficiency of knowledge-intensive resources to promote innovative allocation of production factors, and optimize China's production capacity and industrial upgrades, so that industries with comparative advantages will move toward high-value-added stages in the global value chains.

The writer is president of the University of International Business and Economics, and vice-president of the China Society of World Economics.

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

Technology innovation key to steady economic growth

MAIN STREET

By Liu Xiaoguang

After China's GDP grew 5.2 percent last year and 5.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, it is expected to continue to expand at a relatively high rate over the long run. Endowed with abundant resources and a huge domestic market, the country is well-positioned to further promote institutional and technological innovation, as well as high-standard opening-up, thereby injecting fresh impetus into the economy and embarking on a road of sustainable development.

Policy adjustments

China began to optimize its economic structure and improve the quality of growth in 2012. The country expects to shift the main driving force behind GDP growth from expanding investment to promoting technological development. The COVID-19 pandemic has also taken a toll on the Chinese economy. Luckily, after years of policy adjustments, the economic

slowdown in China is about to end and its economy is expected to grow steadily in the coming years.

The country has carried out a series of market-oriented reforms on its pricing system, property rights, labor market, capital market and commercial property sector, aiming to reach a relative balance between supply and demand, and laying solid institutional foundations for economic growth. It has also properly adjusted the industrial structure and market access rules, which has significantly alleviated the long-standing challenges in production.

Meanwhile, China has improved its income distribution, especially by addressing gaps in household incomes, which has reduced income inequalities between urban and rural workers, and further advanced consumption upgrading. Eyeing all-round development, the country has also continuously optimized public services such as education, healthcare, housing and eldercare.

As for the development of emerging technologies, China has remained ahead of the curve. The country has been a member of the Patent Cooperation Treaty for 30 years and, since 2019, the number of

its PCT international patent applications has ranked first in the world for four consecutive years.

Under the authorities' firm support, enterprises and research institutions have made significant achievements in sectors such as internet, biotech and new materials, with relevant capital markets and industrial chains gradually taking shape in the country.

In addition, a variety of monetary and fiscal policies have been issued to reduce burdens on enterprises and ensure a favorable business environment. The country has implemented inclusive tax exemption and reduction policies for small and micro enterprises, while further deepening value-added tax reform in real sectors including manufacturing, construction and transportation.

China has also promoted the development of the securities market, including the science and technology innovation board — the STAR Market. When it comes to indirect financing, the country has improved the lending capacity of commercial banks.

Promising future

China has set an economic growth target of around 5 percent

for this year. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the Chinese economy is very likely to achieve an average annual growth rate of more than 4.8 percent over the next 15 years, with the total GDP doubled and per capita GDP and gross national income reaching levels of a moderately developed country.

Endowed with abundant factors of production, China has built the most comprehensive and largest industrial system in the world and has huge potential to further boost productivity. Among more than 500 major industrial products, China ranks first in the world in terms of the output of more than 220 products.

China is largely self-sufficient in agricultural products and natural resources. It is able to efficiently utilize various human and material resources to cope with economic problems and natural disasters, thus ensuring the sustainable development of the economy.

The country also possesses an extremely large domestic market and has realized the proper division of labor. It not only has the world's second-largest population of 1.4 billion, but also has the world's largest

middle-income population of 400 million.

In addition, with China further enhancing its overall strength and improving people's livelihoods, both domestic demand and total retail sales of consumer goods will continue to increase. Therefore, even if there is a sharp drop in external demand, the country will still be able to safeguard its economy by promoting domestic circulation.

Under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many industrial and market entities have stepped up efforts to develop new business models, such as livestream shopping and employee sharing, aimed at expanding to new sales channels, improving productivity and lowering operating costs. These new models will significantly contribute to the vigor and vitality of China's business performance in the long run.

According to this year's Government Work Report, China will continue to attract more foreign direct investment by completely removing restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector, and relaxing market access for services such as telecommunications and medical care. It will be more convenient for foreigners to work, study and travel in China, and reform and innovation in the free trade zones will be further advanced, so as to

promote high-standard opening-up in all respects.

Meanwhile, with competitive products continuously exported to other economies, China has turned into a world manufacturing center. The proportion of high-tech products and large equipment among exported goods is increasing. However, there is still a gap between China and Western countries in terms of core technologies, which requires further efforts to promote technological and scientific innovation.

Moreover, the value-added of China's primary and tertiary industries accounted for 71 percent and 54.6 percent of the GDP last year, respectively, while in most developed countries, the corresponding figures are less than 5 percent and more than 60 percent.

In order to further narrow the gaps, China needs to ensure full employment and promote the transfer of agricultural labor to nonagricultural industries, especially the tertiary sector. As a result, the country's industrial structure will be more modernized, thereby creating better conditions for further economic growth.

The writer is a professor at the National Academy of Development and Strategy, Renmin University of China.

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

WORLD

Editor's note: As April 18 marked the 82nd anniversary of the Doolittle Shangrao Rescue Operation, China Daily delves into the rich history of China-US friendship forged during World War II, capturing the personal experiences of those who served, their families and the Chinese civilians who risked their lives to help them.

Flying Tigers: Connecting past and present

Descendants of legendary pilots and Chinese civilians tell stories of courage, sacrifice and friendship

By MINGMEI LI in Dayton, Ohio
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"Just off the coast of California," Edward Stiles Jr's father told his mother where he was going before their marriage, but the real story was that his father was heading to China to fight against the Japanese invasion.

His father, Edward Stiles, was one of the first 27 men who joined the American Volunteer Group, nicknamed the Flying Tigers, and arrived in Toungoo, Burma, in 1941, serving as crew chief of the third squadron of the group.

"My father told me that being a part of the Flying Tigers was a great part of his life," Stiles told China Daily, saying his father had often talked to him about his going to China, saying it was an adventure because he and the squadron had to fake visas to enter China.

"The more I learned about my dad's time, the more I found out about the importance of what he did because it was important (not only) to Chinese people, but also to the United States at that particular time. It showed Americans were really fighting back."

When people fight in a common cause they can work together and help each other, and today the two countries can still work together on common goals, he said.

Traveling from Florida, he attended the Flying Tigers and Doolittle Raiders photo exhibition in Dayton, Ohio, and the Fifth US-China Second World War Friendship Conference with his family and friends, including the nephew of the Flying Tiger fighter pilot Jack Newkirk.

In the photo exhibition at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, put together by the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation and the museum, more than 40 panels and 150 photos provided by Flying Tigers' descendants are exhibited. It runs until October.

April 18 marked the 82nd anniversary of the Doolittle Raid by the US on Tokyo and the largest Japanese island, Honshu, in World War II. It was the first US air operation and retaliation to strike mainland Japan after the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941.

The exhibition records the story of how the Flying Tigers helped Chinese people fight the Japanese invaders together, and demonstrates how Chinese people rescued and saved US pilots.

The exhibition, representing people-to-people friendship between Chinese and US people more than 80 years ago, also attracts people who care about the relationship and want to extend the friendship from generation to generation to evoke memories to tell their story or their families' stories.

"I was born three weeks after my father arrived in the China Burma India Theater to begin training Chinese mechanics on how to work on the American B-25 airplanes," said Margaret Mills Kincannon, daughter of James Mills, a B-25 bomber crew chief of the Flying Tigers.

"He was away for all that time, and so I didn't get to be with him when I was a child until I was old enough to walk when he came home for Thanksgiving."

"He didn't tell me much about the war, but he told me about some friends of his who were also mechanics he worked with."

Kincannon said she was highly impressed when she heard her father pronounce some of his Chinese friends' names.

"He remembered their names 70 years later, and he also remembered some of the words and phrases that they taught him in Chinese."

"It was a complicated time, a different time than now because China was being invaded by Japan, and people in the United States were upset about that, but they didn't know exactly what to do about it short of declaring war on Japan," Molesworth said. "But a certain number of pilots were willing to leave the American armed forces and go to China to fly in defense of China."

He told of young men who went to China to support the Chinese against Japanese aggression.

"Bill Reed, for example, joined the original Flying Tigers and even rejoined the US Army Air Force and came back to China again. Unfortunately, he was killed in December 1944."



Descendants of Doolittle Raiders who were rescued by Chinese people during World War II present a souvenir to villagers of Fangyuan in Quzhou, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday. HUANG ZONGZHI / XINHUA



Descendants of Doolittle Raiders visit the landing site of pilot Ross Wilder in Fangyuan village, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday. HUANG ZONGZHI / XINHUA



A visitor at the photo exhibition honoring the Flying Tigers at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, Ohio, on Friday. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

good relationship. And striving toward a common goal is what they did back during World War II."

Her father's generation did that 80 years ago, and "so could people today — pass the spirit of the Flying Tigers to promote the current relationship between China and the US", she said.

Her father passed on the indomitable spirit of the Flying Tigers to her. She continues to pass on this legacy through her writing, preserving the history and memories of that era. Her book *The Spray and Pray Squadron* identifies 120 men who served with her father in the same bomb squadron, and she contacted their families. "I just feel that I must continue that legacy that he established," she said.

Kincannon visited China in October and some of the cities where her father was stationed or visited during the war.

"I was so grateful to be able to have that experience. I hope to be the one to preserve the history and pass on the Flying Tigers' spirit."

Carl Molesworth is also an author who specializes in World War II and has documented the story of the Flying Tigers.

His book *Sharks Over China* tells the story of the US Army Air Corps unit that continued the fight in China when General Claire Lee Chennault's Flying Tigers disbanded.

Genuine willingness

"It was a complicated time, a different time than now because China was being invaded by Japan, and people in the United States were upset about that, but they didn't know exactly what to do about it short of declaring war on Japan," Molesworth said. "But a certain number of pilots were willing to leave the American armed forces and go to China to fly in defense of China."

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"Bill Reed, for example, joined the original Flying Tigers and even rejoined the US Army Air Force and came back to China again. Unfortunately, he was killed in December 1944."

Reed was a fighter pilot with nine confirmed aerial shootdowns, but died in defense of both countries he loved, Molesworth said, and during that time so many young men like Reed went to China, and returned to China to fight with Chinese soldiers and never made it back.

More than 2,000 Flying Tigers' airmen devoted their lives to the war. Thousands of stories of the Flying Tigers are waiting to be told, and people today are exploring their history, turning a name into a vivid story and retelling that Chinese and US pilots were working together, working across the Burma Road or hanging out in villages in Yunnan province, Molesworth said.

"It wasn't just the Doolittle Raiders, because all of the American pilots who were in China were subject to getting brought down behind enemy lines, and many of them were helped back to safety by Chinese civilians in the villages where they came down."

"The spirit of the Flying Tigers can help the two countries become closer, and we are at a beginning stage right now."

"The more of that the better the two countries are connected and the better that has to be for everyone."

Chinese civilians provided US pilots with assistance at all costs, as more than 200 pilots of the Flying Tigers in distress were rescued by Chinese people.

Zhu Hongyou, director of Beijing New Fourth Army Research, said his father was one of the Chinese who helped US pilots.

In 1944, after carrying out the bombing of Hachiman iron and steel plant in Japan, a B-29 heavy bomber of the US 20th Air Force crashed into a lake in northern Jiangsu province, and the pilots, including Lieutenant Colonel Savoy, parachuted. The crash was on the edge of his father's base, and to rescue those pilots took a direct fight between the third division of the army and the Japanese army.

Hiding the pilots under raincoats and covering their faces with makeup, Chinese civilians and the army managed to get the pilots to safety.

"We all know they were here to help and we must treat them as guests," Zhu said. "That was a valuable friendship during wartime that people should never forget."

Jeffery Greene, chairman of the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation, said: "Chinese people and American people fought, flew together, supporting each other and dying for each other. Americans and Chinese are indeed good friends."

Younger generations

Greene and his foundation have worked for 30 years to explore the stories of the Flying Tigers and have established the Flying Tigers Friendship School Program to promote communication between younger generations.

"American people don't know much about that history. Chinese people do not know the entire story either. But we intend to co-unite the Flying Tigers' legacy."

The Flying Tigers Friendship School Program allows US teenagers to travel to China for two weeks, exploring the country, especially airfields at which their ancestors had fought, and also the Flying Tigers Museum in China. Chinese students travel to the US to see NASA in Florida and NBA games, he said.

The program has more than 20 schools in China and the US, he said. Recently two schools in Yunnan province joined the program and will connect with schools in Texas.

Two students of a middle school in Zhijiang Dong autonomous county, Huaihua city, Hunan province, traveled to Dayton to take part in the exhibition and conference.

"We had learned a lot from General Chennault and his Flying Tigers," Shu Zihan, 15, said. "Fighting bravely and uniting in friendship is the spirit of the Flying Tigers, and we hope the spirit and such friendship can endure."

Zhang Zhixiang, also 15, said, "They contributed a lot in the victory of the Chinese people's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression."

Zhang said he is excited to explore the US. Learning the history of the

Flying Tigers at his school was inspiring, and seeing all the pictures of the US was touching, he said.

School officials and delegations from many provinces are in talks with principals of Flying Tigers Friendship Schools in California, Iowa, Texas and other states to explore the opportunity to sign a memorandum of cooperation and launch the second round of pairing of a school program.

Both China and the US are working to promote people-to-people communication, especially after the presidents of the two countries reached the San Francisco Vision in November.

"It is a great opportunity for kids from both countries to learn about the history and culture," Erik Lutz, mayor of Pico Rivera in Los Angeles County, said. He is exploring pairing with a sister school program in his city to promote communication between young people, he said.

Now it is important for future generations to appreciate each other, so the countries can then learn to collaborate on future projects, he said.

Wartime rescue honored amid calls for amity

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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Nearly 200 guests, including the delegation of Jiangxi province, descendants of Doolittle Raid pilots and representatives from US government departments, universities and media, attended a film screening event on Friday held by the Chinese embassy in Washington to commemorate the 82nd anniversary of the Doolittle Shangrao Rescue Operation.

The Doolittle Raid, a US air attack on Japan in retaliation for the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, resulted in US pilots landing in the bordering area of Jiangxi, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces because of fuel shortages. The Chinese people's efforts to rescue these pilots solidified a significant moment of cooperation during World War II.

Hu Zhiyang, deputy director of Jiangxi Provincial Foreign Affairs Office, provided historical context for the Doolittle Raid and the rescue in Shangrao in the province's east. He also introduced the documentary *Across Time and Space: Memories and Searches*, which explores the lasting effect of this wartime collaboration between the United States and China and the deep friendship between the two peoples.

The screening featured documentaries chronicling the Chinese people's rescue efforts for pilots in the Doolittle Raid.

Jing Quan, charge d'affaires of the Chinese embassy, said he had a long experience of taking part in the China-US cooperative search for the remains of missing US soldiers who had assisted the Chinese during World War II.

He shared the story of ordinary Chinese people searching at their own expense for the remains of US pilots who opened up the Hump Route, along which the Allied pilots followed over the eastern Himalayas, flying military transport planes from India to China to supply the Chinese Army and the units of the US Army Air Forces based in China to fight the Japanese invaders.

Jing highlighted the enduring China-US friendship, citing historical chapters such as the Doolittle Raid rescue, the Flying Tigers' alliance and ping-pong diplomacy. He emphasized the importance of people-to-people exchange and mutual respect for building a better future for both countries.

Descendants of the Doolittle Raid pilots, including Thomas Marcia, shared personal stories of their fathers' rescue by Chinese villagers. Marcia pledged to preserve the memory of this operation and promote continued positive relations between the US and China.

"May our ancestors' friendships and comradeship in a time of common peril serve as an inspiration to us to maintain our friendship and to our mutual national leadership to preserve a peaceful competition between our two great nations," he said.

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PAKISTAN RAILWAYS
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Bird experts survey Metog to better understand county's biodiversity

Blood samples taken in unspoiled Xizang could unlock details surrounding future discoveries of new and unique species in the area

Remote region a hive of natural wonders

Nestled in the middle and lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, Metog county in the southeastern part of the Xizang autonomous region boasts a unique vertical climate encompassing tropical, subtropical, temperate and alpine zones, and has long been considered one of the country's top biodiversity hot spots.

It is renowned for its abundant wildlife and plants, with 110 species of mammals, 554 species of birds, 61 species of reptiles, 61 species of amphibians and over 4,500 species of vascular plants, including more than 500 wild orchid species.

"The checklist of its birds is longer than that of many provinces in East China," said Que Pinjia, an ornithologist from the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding and the Sichuan Key Laboratory of Conservation Biology and Endangered Wildlife.

According to the local forestry bureau, 147 animal species and 144 plant species have been placed under State protection. A total of 34 species have been listed as national first-class protected animals, including the clouded leopard, sun bear, large Indian civet, Nepal gray langur and black musk deer.

New vertebrate species and even new animal genera have been discovered in Metog in recent years. In 2015, Chinese scientists found the white-cheeked macaque (*Macaca leucogenys*) there. In 2021, *Alpicapulus medogensis*, a mole belonging to a new genus *Alpicapulus*, was discovered in Metog, and more than 80 plant species and variants have been named after the county. Almost every year, there are a few species originally found in the area that are described and published as new species. Last year, there were two new animal species discovered, *Soriculus medogensis* and *Soriculus nivatus*, five new orchid species and one new primrose, *Primula medogensis*.

CHEN LIANG



Chestnut-bellied nuthatch.



Streak-throated barwing.



Crested serpent eagle. QUE PINJIA / FOR CHINA DAILY



Fire-tailed myzornis.



Assamese macaque. QUE PINJIA / FOR CHINA DAILY



Calanthe orchid.

By CHEN LIANG in Metog, Xizang chenliang@chinadaily.com.cn

The remote Metog county on the southeastern edge of the Xizang autonomous region is known for being the very last county in China to be connected by road. The rugged area is also known for its rich and somewhat untapped biodiversity, and this is why ornithologists like Chen De and Que Pinjia visit to conduct wildlife surveys.

Inclement weather hampered their most recent fortnight-long survey last month, but despite the rain and the fog, the team of eight cracked on with their task in the hope of discovering unique species never before observed by humankind.

For Chen, an associate professor from Beijing Normal University, the rain and colder weather meant that fewer birds would be in the area this time, and that they'd have to react faster in the cold when catching each bird. Despite this, he set up his wafer-thin "mist nets" around various sites in the hope of snagging a first.

The nets are practically invisible to the human eye and are designed to minimize harm to the birds.

"The cold weather might have led to more casualties in the nets," said a concerned Chen. "So we had to visit the net sites more frequently to extract birds from them."

For Que, a researcher from the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding and the Sichuan Key Laboratory of Conservation Biology and Endangered Wildlife, the bad weather was also going to impede this year's survey.

"Birds hide in bad weather and become silent," Que said. "In such conditions, you can often wonder where all the birds have gone."

According to Chen, using mist nets is an essential method in conducting avian studies as it enables researchers to closely inspect and gather data on birds' health condition, age and gender and blood samples for further research.

Chen's research primarily centers on employing genomic and molecular methods to

Long-term interest

The pair has focused on Metog, an area known for its rich biodiversity, since studying for their doctorates at Beijing Normal University, inspired by their mentor, Zhang Zhengwang, one of the country's leading ornithologists.

Researchers from the university, including the two, have made several discoveries in Metog, including uncovering new records of birds for the country and the region, and have published research papers on the area's avian wildlife. "Metog is truly at the front line of discovery for us," Chen said. "It has a great potential to add new members to the country's family of birds."

Joining Chen and Que were three of their students and three freelance surveyors. To make sure that their two-week survey made the best of a bad situation, various methods were employed to survey the skies.

Besides using mist nets for catching, measuring and collecting DNA samples of wild birds, they also counted birds along roads.

The team, split into two, and traveling in four-wheel drives, set out on their respective tasks. Chen and the students focused their work on using mist nets for the survey. The three surveyors, Guo Dongsheng, Huang Ke and Li Bin, drove to different elevations along different routes to conduct their bird surveys.

Correct classification of a species is highly important to conservation, he added.

For example, after researchers upgraded the peacock pheasant distributed in Hainan province to a full species, named the Hainan peacock pheasant, based on genetic evidence in 2008, conservationists found it was already extremely rare on the island and immediately put the bird into the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List as an endangered species.

The decision was made to base the survey in Drepung township, about 30 kilometers



From left: Chen De (right) measures a green-backed tit while student Wang Hui (middle) prepares the equipment to draw blood, as fellow student Chen records the information in a log book in Metog, Xizang autonomous region, on March 16. Que Pinjia (left) and Guo Dongsheng travel to a mist net site in Metog on March 16. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY



Metog is truly at the front line of discovery for us. It has a great potential to add new members to the country's family of birds.

Chen De, associate professor from Beijing Normal University

address various ornithological questions such as speciation and species divergence.

"Many bird species distributed in southeastern Xizang show distinctions from their counterparts in other parts of the country," he said. "Histori-

cally, ornithologists would often classify a bird species found in the area as the southeastern Xizang subspecies of the species, mainly based on morphological variations.

"Genetic analysis allows us to determine whether two birds of the same species, previously regarded as distinct subspecies might still be lingering in the warmer, lower elevation areas, delaying their altitudinal migration to higher terrains," Chen said.

From Drepung, Chen and his students drove to different areas to find survey sites — usually remote corners not far from roads but with few humans — to set up mist nets. They inspected every site regularly, eagerly anticipating the capture of wild birds in the nets and promptly extracting them.

"We monitored four net sites a day," said Wang Hui, a post-doctoral student. "More and it would have been too much work to handle."

They got up every morning at 7, and after breakfast, they visited the net sites in turn. Each site would be visited four times a day, once in the morning, once around noon, once in the afternoon and once in the early evening.

Upon arriving at a net site,



From left: Chen De (right) measures a green-backed tit while student Wang Hui (middle) prepares the equipment to draw blood, as fellow student Chen records the information in a log book in Metog, Xizang autonomous region, on March 16. Que Pinjia (left) and Guo Dongsheng travel to a mist net site in Metog on March 16. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

they would try to release the birds trapped in the nets as soon as possible and safely put them into sacks.

After a tour of the four net sites, they would return to their hotel and identify the birds, measure them, write their information in a log book and collect blood samples before releasing them.

"It was a truly tight schedule," Chen said. "Sometimes, we actually felt fortunate to see only several birds trapped in the nets at a site."

As well as having to work as quickly as possible to extract the birds from the nets was no easy task. "One day, there was a whole troop of white-breasted parrots, nearly 20, trapped in nets at a site," Wang said. The sparrows-sized birds move in groups and are known for their robust beaks.

"When we tried to free the birds from the nets, they pecked at us, which was truly painful," she said.

During their stay in Metog, the team set up mist nets at 10 locations, caught more than 70 species and collected blood samples from each species.

Roadside lookouts Arriving in Metog on March 12, Que joined the three survey-

ors in the second unit for their fieldwork. To make it easier to find birds, he brought with him two thermal scopes.

While driving, Que would use one to scan forest canopies from the front seat, and Huang would use another to scan from the back.

Upon finding something that looked like a bird or a mammal, they would stop and search the canopy carefully.

Despite the help of the devices, the bird count was still quite tricky. "This is one of the targets I'd been hoping to find during the survey," Que said. "It's a small reward for our long and exhausting survey."

Despite managing to count more than 130 bird species during the survey, Que said, the list was considerably shorter compared to those recorded in the previous surveys.

Wetter and colder days, disruptions caused by road construction and the clearing of roadside thickets were probably the main reasons behind the lower bird count, he said.

"Next time, in another season and after the road construction is finished and the thickets return along the roads, the count might be quite different," Que said. "That's why we expect to find funding support to continue our work in the area in the future."

Chen advocates for the establishment of a permanent bird tagging station in Metog, highlighting its significance for ongoing avian research. According to him, bird tagging is one of the oldest but most important techniques used for studying and identifying individual birds.

"By engaging in year-round bird tagging and recapturing a large number of birds, for example here, I'm sure we will achieve many more discoveries," he said.

Chen and Que visited the local forestry bureau. A female official met them in her office.

There, the two were surprised to learn that despite the entire county being designated as part of the National Yarlung

Zangbo Grand Canyon Nature Reserve since 2000, only six people are currently managing the county's conservation work.

"We have a permanent staff of 11, but some are studying in the inland provinces, and some are sick or on maternity leave," she explained. "We are truly short of hands."

"That explains why we still feel a lack of comprehensive understanding of the area's fauna and flora," Que said.

"Almost all data on the area have been collected by various scientific expeditions over the years," he said. "They are discontinuous and irregular, and therefore, incomplete."

As a result, the two ornithologists said that they would surely return to the area and continue to try to fill the research gap in the area's avian life.

Contact the writer at chenliang@chinadaily.com.cn

Team assembles for avian research

By CHEN LIANG in Metog, Xizang

For a comprehensive bird survey in an area nearly twice the size of Beijing, a team of eight is "certainly not enough," according to Chen De, an associate professor from Beijing Normal University.

The professor led an eight-strong team to conduct a bird survey in Metog county, Xizang autonomous region, last month. "I had to find as many versatile helpers as possible to maximize our efficiency," he said.

Guo Dongsheng, 61, was the most senior member of the team. Having retired just a year earlier from his position as a biology professor at Beijing Normal University, he actually taught Chen, three of Chen's students and doctor Que Pinjia, who was the technical adviser on the team, when they were students at the university.

It wasn't the first time the retired teacher had been invited to help his former students with field research.

"I love staying in the wilderness," Guo said. "These jobs suit me."

In Metog, he was part of the team responsible for bird counting while on the road. He also helped Chen and his three students, who formed another group of the survey, visit some of the mist net sites they had set up to catch birds for measurements and blood samples once or twice a day during the survey.

"We typically visit four mist net sites four times a day," Chen explained. "The distance between any two sites is often more than 10 kilometers. If a large number of birds, for example 20 or more, are trapped at a net site, we need a lot of time to release them. Then we might be

running late on our schedule. So we send the satellite positioning information of a site to another team and see whether they can help us tour the site along their survey route. They usually could."

For Guo, releasing birds from the entanglement on the nets is easier than finding birds in forest canopies. "The only problem is my eyes become a little blurry because of farsightedness," he said. "It gets worse especially in



Que Pinjia (left) and Guo Dongsheng free a bird from a mist net on March 17. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

Our days in the field are long and exhausting. ... But we have Huang (Ke). He is always on the watch.

Que Pinjia, researcher from the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding

When the ever-vigilant Huang would call out "stop," the car pulled over. There was usually something out there in the tree canopy, such as a family of macaques sitting in the branches, a flock of takins standing on a sheer rocky slope or even a black bear napping on a treetop.

At the end of the survey, the team met a group of conservationists who were making a wildlife inspection in Metog. After learning what the team sighted during the survey, they asked Que whether they could borrow one of his secret weapons — a thermal scope. So Que left one for them.

"Do you want to go with them and continue staying in Metog?" Que asked Huang. "If you want, I can tell them that our secret weapon is actually not the equipment, but you."

the darkness. So it takes me more time to release a bird from the net."

Fortunately, he had helpers, too. Huang Ke, a freelance surveyor from Chengdu, Sichuan province, assisted Guo with his net site visits in the first week of the survey. After Que joined, he visited the sites with Ren.

Huang is another Renaissance man in the group.

According to Que, who has hired Huang for a few projects over the years, Huang can work not only on bird surveys, but also on surveys of plants, mammals or even reptiles. Known for his sharp eyes and energy in the wild, he is called "Master Huang" by his teammates.

Upon Que giving him a thermal scope, Huang became his group's "man of discovery."

Sitting in the backseat of the car, he scanned forests along the roads using the device. Every day from 8 am to 9 pm, he hardly lost his focus and was always searching for something.

"Our days in the field are long and exhausting," Que said. "Sometimes we get drowsy and lose our focus. But we have Huang. He is always on the watch."

When the ever-vigilant Huang would call out "stop," the car pulled over. There was usually something out there in the tree canopy, such as a family of macaques sitting in the branches, a flock of takins standing on a sheer rocky slope or even a black bear napping on a treetop.

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From left: A thermal scope is used during the survey in Metog. Que Pinjia (left) and Huang Ke use binoculars to search for birds on a slope overlooking the Yarlung Zangbo River in Metog on March 13. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

WORLDUS

China focused on developing, but works for 'shared future'

In speech at Harvard, ambassador also details five points on relations with US

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

In a world beset with conflict, China has chosen to pursue modernization in its own country while forging "a community with a shared future for mankind" internationally, said its ambassador to the US in a weekend speech.

Ambassador Xie Feng attended the opening ceremony of the Harvard Kennedy School China Conference 2024 on Saturday and delivered the speech, "Chinese Modernization, A Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, and China-US Relations".

Xie said that he hoped that the US side will work with China and find the right way to get along in a new era, based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

The ambassador said that a lot has changed in the world, and "we are now living in a turbulent time".

He cited the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine.

"It seems that everywhere we look, we see powder kegs that can explode anytime," Xie said. "Energy, food and debt crises keep emerging. More than 100 million people are displaced, and 700 million are grappling with hunger."

"Non-traditional security challenges such as artificial intelligence, climate change and biosecurity are on the rise," he said. "Worries grow that we may find ourselves in another 'Oppenheimer moment,' and the very survival of human civilization is at stake."

The ambassador said that the world is again at a crossroads.

"Amidst the raging torrents, we need to pull together, not pull apart. China's choice is clear and firm: At home, we will focus on achieving Chinese modernization; internationally, we will forge a community with a shared future for mankind," he said.

Xie said that a developing China will keep making contributions to building a world of lasting peace, and a China making constant progress will keep serving as a bridge for building an open and inclusive world.

A green China will keep injecting momentum into building a clean and beautiful world, he said. And a peaceful China will fulfill its responsibilities for building a world of universal security.

"At present, we are facing grave challenges in China-US relations. Whether the younger generation can continue to enjoy the eight-decade-long peace and development as their parents did largely depends on whether China and the United States can find a right way to get along in the new era," Xie said.

He said that China is "ready to take concrete actions to implement the important consensus reached" between the nations' presidents in November, so as to turn the "San

Francisco vision" into reality.

Xie said that both sides need to first jointly develop the right perception toward each other.

"China never bets against the United States and never interferes in its internal affairs, including elections," he said. "We are willing to be partners and friends with the United States. Is the US side also ready to do the same?"

Second, he said that disagreements must be managed effectively.

"If the US side keeps interfering with China's internal affairs and damaging China's interests on issues related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Xizang and the South China Sea, how could the two sides ever put a floor under the relationship, no matter how many guardrails there may be?" Xie asked.

Third, he said that mutually beneficial cooperation must be advanced.

"If the two sides had focused solely on differences and competition half a century ago, how could we have reopened our doors to each other?" Xie said.

"Some people, though, stress the importance of a free market when they get the upper hand but resort to protectionism when they are outperformed. Is this fair?"

Fourth, he called for jointly shouldering responsibilities as major countries.

"We are willing to coordinate with the United States and jointly explore third-party market cooperation. Will the US side also welcome China to be part of its multilateral initiatives?" Xie asked.

Fifth, he said there is a need to jointly promote people-to-people exchanges.

"Now that our leaders have agreed to increase people-to-people exchanges, why should all the barriers in travel, visa and border policies still be there? During the era of mutual estrangement and antagonism from 1949 to 1971, trade between China and the United States was almost zero, and our citizens had to get stapled visas to visit each other's country," he said.

"In a globalized world today, why should we backpedal and return to the past?"

The ambassador said that the bilateral relationship "cannot go back to the old days, but we can jointly usher in a brighter future for it. The hope lies in the youth, who are known for vitality, creativity and the will to act."

Xie encouraged Americans to "travel the expanse of China with their own feet, and see a true, dynamic and panoramic China; to put their heads together, and contribute wisdom to how our two countries can get along well on this planet; and to spring into action, promote exchanges and cooperation between China and the United States, so as to create a future of lasting peace and prosperity for all".

Antiwar protest in DC



Pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrate outside the US Capitol after the House of Representatives voted on legislation providing \$95 billion in security assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, at Capitol Hill in Washington on Saturday. KEN CEDENO / REUTERS

Province looks for an extra stateside boost

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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The Chinese province Shaanxi is pursuing international cooperation in the United States and fostering trade relations with various states, including California, New York and Utah.

"Shaanxi and the US are far away, but the two sides have close economic and trade relationship, as well as extensive people-to-people exchanges," said Sun Jinghu, deputy director at the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Commerce, during a Shaanxi Province-California Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference in Los Angeles on Friday.

The US is Shaanxi's fourth-largest trading partner and seventh-largest source of foreign capital. In 2023, the trade volume between Shaanxi and the US exceeded \$3.92 billion, and 16 US enterprises set up operations in Shaanxi.

"We would like to enhance cooperation with California in the fields of investment and trade, scientific and technical innovation, education, and financial services," Sun said.

The province has adopted policies in the manufacturing and export-oriented sectors to improve the investment environment and

encourage enterprises to invest in Shaanxi, Sun noted.

This year, Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, will host the 8th Silk Road International Exposition.

"We sincerely invite all guests and entrepreneurs to participate in the exhibition in Shaanxi, and make more friends with us, to further understand the history, culture and natural scenery of Shaanxi," Sun added.

Wang Taiyu, the Chinese cultural counselor in Los Angeles, said there is "no way" to fully understand the history and culture of Shaanxi, and China as a whole, without experiencing them through a personal visit.

Remain optimistic

Despite the uncertainties in bilateral relations, members of the US business community remain optimistic about the future of business ties between the US and China.

"I firmly feel that the United States and China have to get together not only culturally, but also economically and politically. It's so important to the future of the world," Lessing Gold, a partner at MSK LLP and board director of the American-Chinese CEO Society, told China Daily.

While expressing disappointment over the decline in the number of flights between Los Angeles and

Beijing, which he believes was detrimental to the cultural and political ties between the two countries, Gold believes that by working together, the US and China could strengthen their relationship and create a brighter future for both nations.

As an organization dedicated to bridging CEOs between the US and China, the society encourages trade and investment between the two countries and further promotes friendship and cultural awareness. It has worked closely with Chinese companies that have decided to do business in the US, according to him.

"I have been to China many times, and I love the Chinese people. My experiences in China have always been fantastic," Gold said.

"Having visited China over 30 times, I've always felt welcomed," shared Timothy Kelley, president of the Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation, as he recounted his experiences in developing business relationships there.

Wang Lei, executive vice-president for strategic management and operations at Gemdale USA Corporation, told China Daily that China and the US can cooperate more with each other no matter how their political relations are.

"Business is business," he said. "We can find the opportunities to cooperate deeply with each other."

Briefly

INDONESIA 2,100 evacuated as volcano spews ash

More than 2,100 people living near an erupting volcano on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island were evacuated on Friday due to the dangers of spreading ash, falling rocks, hot volcanic clouds and the possibility of a tsunami. Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation recorded at least three eruptions from Friday afternoon, with the maximum height of the

eruption column reaching 1,200 meters. An international airport in Manado city, less than 100 kilometers from the erupting Mount Ruang, was closed as volcanic ash spewed into the air.

UNITED STATES 2 killed as car crashes into birthday party

Two children were killed and 15 others were injured after a car crashed into a children's birthday party on Saturday in Berlin Township in

Monroe County of the US state of Michigan, 48 kilometers south of Detroit. An eight-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy, who were siblings, were pronounced dead at the scene, Monroe County Sheriff Troy Goodnough said on Saturday night. First aid was given to 15 victims. Of them, three children and six adults were hospitalized with life-threatening injuries. The car driver, a 66-year-old female, has been in police custody for suspected drunk driving.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Billions in Ukraine aid approved by House

WASHINGTON — US lawmakers passed a massive aid package on Saturday as Kyiv and Moscow denounced each other over the latest exchange of deadly airstrikes.

The \$61 billion package for supporting Ukraine's fight against Russia has now moved to the US Senate. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said on X that he was "grateful" to both parties in the House.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel also welcomed the news.

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the vote had been expected.

He said the decision to provide military aid to Ukraine would make the United States richer and further ruin Ukraine, Peskov said on Saturday.

Predictable decision

"The decision to provide assistance to Ukraine was expected and was predictable. This will further enrich the United States of America and further ruin Ukraine, causing more Ukrainians to die," Peskov was quoted by Russia's TASS news agency as saying.

The US House of Representatives on Saturday approved a series of foreign aid bills allocating a combined \$95 billion for Ukraine, Israel and allies in the "Indo-Pacific". The bills included measures for confiscating frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine.

"If we are really talking about confiscating our assets, this will cause irreparable damage to the image of the United States of America. This will force many investors in this country to protect their funds because the inviolability of private property will be violated, especially state property," Peskov said.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also took to social media to speak against the aid.

Leonid Slutsky, head of the Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs, wrote on Telegram: "The new aid package will not save, but, on the contrary, will kill thousands and thousands more people, prolong the conflict, and bring even more grief and devastation."

On the battlefield, Kyiv and Moscow earlier on Saturday accused each other of deadly strikes on civilians overnight.

Russian strikes killed three people in central and northeast Ukraine, according to local officials.

In Russia's western Belgorod region, cross-border Ukrainian attacks killed three people, said the local governor.

Ukrainian drones killed two people in Russia's Belgorod border region, its governor said early on Saturday, while shelling later in the day killed a pregnant woman.

AGENCIES XINHUA

Conference leaders call for improved ties

By BELINDA ROBINSON

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The United States and China must continue to have constructive open dialogue between its top diplomats, or geopolitics could pose new challenges to bilateral business, direct foreign investment, education and diplomatic ties, participants in a conference in New York have warned.

The annual conference and gala of the Committee of 100 in Manhattan on Friday covered a range of topics on the state and future of US-China relations.

The event celebrated the committee's 35th anniversary and focused on foreign relations, especially the state of US-China relations and what is needed to reduce tensions.

The participants, including former ambassadors, academics, policymakers, philanthropists, influencers and cultural figures, stressed the importance of continued dialogue between the world's two largest economies to minimize any potential misunderstandings.

The former US ambassador to China Max Baucus told China Daily:

"The more people talk to each other more frequently, the more they begin to understand each other, therefore they begin to trust each other more."

"Much more needs to be done (to smooth relations) in dialogue, communication, back and forth meetings, between American people and Chinese people."

US senators should visit China because personal communication is vital, he said. He also said students from both countries can benefit from cultural exchanges.

Also taking part in the conference were two other former US ambassadors to China, J. Stapleton Roy (1991-95), by video link, and Gary Locke (2011-14). Thirteen people have acted as US ambassadors to China over the past 35 years.

Roy and Locke looked at US-China relations while they were ambassadors and noted the differences today as they assessed what is needed for the future.

The conference also examined domestic issues that Chinese Americans in the US face.

A summit in November of President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden

alongside the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting was hailed as a monumental step forward on various key issues, most participants said.

However, Stephen Roach, an economist and senior fellow in the Jackson Institute for Global Affairs at Yale University, a senior lecturer in the Yale School of Management and former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, said that greater effort is needed.

The spin was positive after the summit, but there are a lot of issues that still need to be addressed, Roach told China Daily on the state of US-China relations.

"You can always be hopeful."

A discussion on the state of foreign direct investment in China by US companies and vice versa pointed to geopolitics dampening the flow.

Pin Ni, president of Wanxiang America Corporation, who has been doing business in the US since he set up the company 30 years ago, said the annual revenue of the company, involved in automotive, clean energy, investment and industrial markets, and with operations in 23 US states, has grown from zero to \$4 billion. Pin said he has seen

geopolitical tensions flare up.

Still, he encouraged businesses to "stay focused".

Ganesh Iyer, chief executive of Nio US, an electric vehicle maker, said events such as this conference are a positive way of looking at key bilateral concerns.

"All such events are always welcome," he told China Daily. "The more we communicate, the more misunderstandings go away. The better that we understand each other, the better we will collaborate."

The conference also looked at the economic outlook for China and increased bilateral competition, days after Biden called for more tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum products.

Yasheng Huang, a professor of global economics and management at the Sloan School of Management at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, told China Daily that while there is intense competition between the world's two largest economies, "competition itself does not destroy relationships. Economic competition makes countries strong. I worry about geopolitical conflict."

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COMMENT

Editorials

Aid bills' intention to contain China belies US' commitment to repairing bilateral ties

Although the two military aid bills regarding Ukraine and Israel caught the attention of the world, the two other bills in the aid package the United States House of Representatives passed on Saturday also deserve attention as they concern the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

The so-called "Indo-Pacific" Security Supplemental Bill includes \$8.1 billion to counter Beijing's "actions" in the "Indo-Pacific" region, \$3.3 billion to develop submarine infrastructure, \$2 billion in military financing for Taiwan and other key allies, and \$1.9 billion to replenish defense items and services provided to Taiwan and regional partners.

The so-called 21st Century Peace through Strength Act, meanwhile, includes a measure that could lead to a nationwide ban in the US on TikTok, a short-form video hosting service owned by Chinese internet company ByteDance.

In his speech on the aid package on Saturday shortly after its passing, House Speaker Mike Johnson didn't mince his words in claiming that China is one of the three primary "adversaries" to the US, along with Russia and Iran, that threatens the "free world".

Both the content of the two China-related bills and the remarks of Johnson constitute grave violations of the series of statements the Joe Biden administration has made on Sino-US relations, and threatens to ruin the efforts that are being made to repair the fraught relationship.

In their talk by telephone on April 2, US President Joe Biden reiterated to his Chinese counterpart that the US does not seek a new Cold War, its objective is not to change China's system, its alliances are not targeted against China, it does not support "Taiwan independence", it adheres to the one-China policy and it does not seek conflict with China.

President Biden also stressed that it is in the interest of the world for China to succeed. The US does not want to curtail China's development, and does not seek "decoupling" from China, calling relations with China the most "consequential" bilateral ties in the world.

As agreed by the two leaders, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen concluded her second China trip since July earlier this month, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is the next senior member of the Biden administration due to visit China to strengthen dialogue and communication, avoid miscalculation and promote cooperation, so as to advance the relationship on a stable path and jointly respond to global challenges.

Yet, with the Taiwan separatists hailing the US side's "rock solid" commitment to their cause and Chinese companies complaining about politicized and unfair treatment, the onus is on the US side to explain how the two China-related bills conform to Biden's multiple "does not", and how they can help the US manage differences with China "in a responsible way", as President Biden has vowed to.

The bills are highly likely to be passed in the US Senate and signed by President Biden into law. If so, almost all aforementioned China-related statements the US leader has kept reiterating since his first exchange with the Chinese leader will prove to be empty talk, and the Sino-US relations will suffer a heavy blow rendering the efforts the two sides have made together to promote communications since the two leaders' meeting in San Francisco in November in vain.

Those in the US holding the view that the US can cooperate with China where they should, keep communication where they can, and confront China where it has no choice should realize that the Taiwan question concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and core interests, and any careless move by Washington would lead to catastrophic consequences.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson quoted an old US military adage to conclude his speech on the aid package: "We would rather send bullets to the conflicts overseas than our own boys or troops." That should be a direct reminder to the intended receivers of the aid to Taiwan of what their US ally is asking from them in return.

Forlorn attempt to keep G7's claws in HK

The G7 foreign ministers' latest remarks on Hong Kong reveal a collective inability to come to terms with the simple fact that they have no say in the special administrative region's affairs.

Many institutional arrangements, from the Sino-British Joint Declaration to the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, were worked out to make sure Hong Kong retained order and prosperity after its return to full Chinese jurisdiction.

But the post-1997 changes have, being charitable, obviously been too fast and dramatic for the G7 members to easily adapt to or, more to the point in the case of some of the group's members, they are being distorted to serve other agendas in the form of manufactured quarrels with the Chinese government.

In either case, whether as an attempt to hold back time or to create mischief, the "concerns" expressed by the G7 ministers about Hong Kong will gain no real traction because they are not born of any genuine regard for Hong Kong or its residents.

The G7 foreign ministers' so-called concerns are either a reminder of what they regard as better days or a thorn with which they hope to prick the skin of Beijing.

Thus, although the G7 foreign ministers went to great lengths to mourn the situation in Hong Kong in the joint statement they released on Friday, it was nothing more than a display of crocodile tears.

In their "Statement on Addressing Global Challenges, Fostering Partnership", they first expressed concern about the deterioration of pluralism and civil and political rights in the SAR since the introduction of the 2020 National Security Law. They then protested that the latest Safeguarding National Security Ordinance under Article 23 of the Basic Law will further erode the autonomy of the SAR and its fundamental freedoms, claiming that the new law will "make it harder to live, work and do business in Hong Kong".

Since that claim is patently untrue, it only serves to make it clear that what they are really lamenting is that the new additions to the SAR's legal framework will make their lives more difficult by making it harder for them to engage in the kind of troublemaking with regard to China that some of them have become so fond of.

Like a dog worrying a bone, the ministers urged China to "uphold its commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law" and the authorities in Beijing and the SAR "to act in accordance with their international commitments and applicable legal obligations".

But fulfilling their legal obligations is of course exactly what the central and SAR governments have done in introducing the legislation.

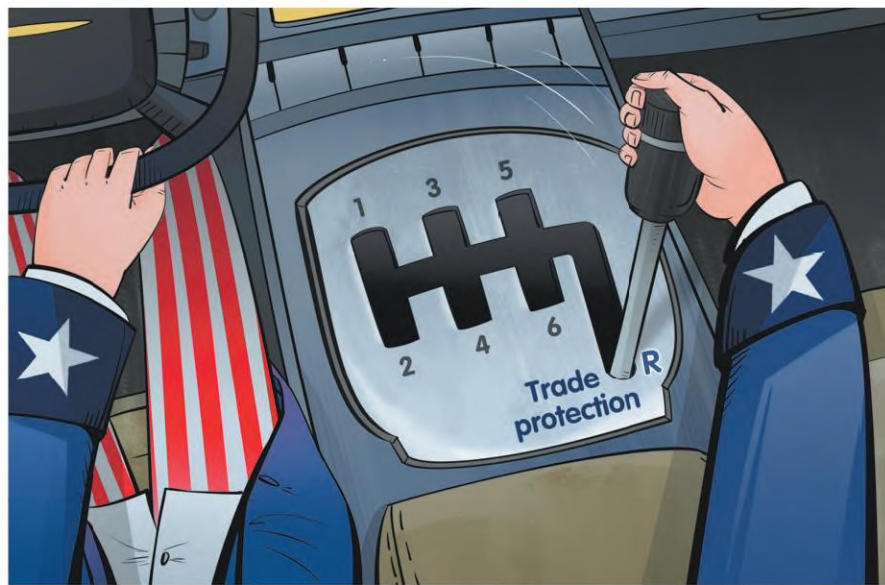
Expressing its strong condemnation of the G7 foreign ministers' malicious denigration of the new Hong Kong legislation, the Commissioner's Office of China's Foreign Ministry in the Hong Kong SAR said in a statement that not only did the legislation safeguard national security, it was also a "turning point" from overall "chaos" to "orderliness" in the SAR.

In their joint statement, the G7 foreign ministers claimed they "recognize the importance of constructive and stable relations with China". But the attempts by some of the G7 countries to use Hong Kong as a means to cause trouble for Beijing, if not a fuse for a color revolution, call into question the sincerity of those words.

Any constructive relations are built on mutual respect, which in international relations includes respect for national sovereignty.

Those Western powers that are fantasizing about living in the old colonial era in which they got to call the shots in territories where their gunboat diplomacy made the law should wake up to the reality that Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China and Hong Kong affairs are Chinese domestic affairs. As such, they are no concern of theirs.

Cao Yi



Opinion Line

New opening-up policies encourage foreign investment in hi-tech sector

In the first quarter of this year, the number of newly established foreign-funded enterprises in China reached 12,000, an increase of 20.7 percent year-on-year, continuing the rapid growth trend of newly established enterprises since last year. The growth of the number of newly established foreign-funded enterprises serves as a weather vane for future foreign capital arrival.

The country's continuous opening-up and supportive policies are among the key reasons that China continues to be attractive to foreign businesses, despite the United States' intensified attempts at "decoupling" or "de-risking".

In its latest move to this effect, China published measures on Friday that are aimed at promoting overseas investment in the country's technology sector. The country will support overseas institutions to issue yuan bonds and also encourage high-tech companies, including foreign-invested ones, to raise money via bond issu-

ance, the Ministry of Commerce said in a statement.

It is noteworthy that in terms of investment structure, the proportion of investment in high-tech manufacturing reached 12.5 percent during this period, an increase of 2.2 percentage points year-on-year. Meanwhile, investment in the service industry, which is closely related to residents' lives, also witnessed rapid growth. That demonstrates the continuous optimization of China's investment structure.

In terms of investment scale, the actual use of foreign capital reached 301.67 billion yuan (\$41.67 billion) in the first quarter of this year, which was still at a high level.

To attract more foreign investment, the MOC and other relevant departments will make efforts in the following aspects: relaxing foreign investment access, strengthening investment promotion, strengthening

service guarantees, creating an open platform, and optimizing the investment environment.

The negative lists for foreign investment access will be rationally shortened, with access restrictions in the manufacturing sector comprehensive canceled, market access for medical, telecommunications and other service industries relaxed; and the catalogue of industries that welcomes foreign investment revised.

It can be said that the basic trend of the long-term improvement of the Chinese economy has not changed. As China continues to advance the development of new quality productive forces and to implement a series of policies to stabilize the economy, promote opening-up, and attract foreign investment, the conditions and environment for the development of foreign investment in the country will become better and better.

—INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DAILY

Price probe raises more questions than answers

According to an initial investigation carried out by the Chongqing government after local residents complained about markedly higher natural gas fees, between January and April this year, "mistakes" on 1,085 accounts led to excessive charges for 190,500 cubic meters of gas. In a news conference on Friday, the municipal government said it will continue to carry out a probe into the overcharging.

Chongqing Gas Group has said it will refund all the overcharged gas fees

from recent months to users, which the local government said was mainly due to meter reading "mistakes". That excuse has only raised questions about the objectivity of its investigation and whether it is qualified to probe the incident as CGG is a State-owned enterprise.

The municipal government's news release also failed to explain where the overcharged fees have gone and the reason why the SOE supervisory system, which is part of the government system itself, failed to spot such large-

scale overcharging.

Notably, the incident also prompted residents of other cities, including neighboring Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, to cast doubts on their natural gas fees and utility bills, as the charges have become markedly higher after the meters were "digitalized".

It remains to be seen if the incident can help promote a new round of institutional reform to address the issue at the fundamental level.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Washington dumps latest scaremongering on the world

Some US analysts link China's "overcapacity" with its international trade and believe that "lots of exported goods mean overcapacity". But this argument does not hold water.

The United States has created the false narrative that China is dumping goods on the international market. This is its latest scaremongering after its calls for "decoupling" and "de-risking" on the grounds that dependency on China created a security risk. With this latest cry of alarm, Washington is trying to dissuade other countries from buying Chinese products.

In this way, the Joe Biden administration is trying to curry favor with voters.

By sticking the "overcapacity" label on China, the US government is trying to create the necessary atmosphere to enable it to better support domestic manufacturing through protectionist policies. Recently, it proposed raising tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum imports from 7.5 percent to 22.5 percent to gain support in the key swing state of Pennsylvania. In fact, only 3 percent of US imports of steel prod-

ucts from February 2022 to February 2023 came from China. Chinese steel products do not have much impact on the US' steel industry.

The true problems US manufacturers face are high production costs, lack of skilled workers and the fact that the strong dollar has led to the lack of international competitiveness of US products.

The narrative defines China's production capacity that exceeds its domestic demand as "overcapacity". But there would be no global trade in the world if countries produced only to meet domestic demand. US aircraft, chips, finance, film and television, etc. occupy most of the global market share. According to Washington's definition, these should be defined as "US overcapacity".

As long as competitive advantages are not obtained through unfair means, free trade and economic globalization should be encouraged. If there are trade disputes, they should be resolved through the World Trade Organization dispute settlement mechanism.

China does face the problem of low

capacity utilization, but this is caused by the structural transformation of its economy combined with the scarring effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, due to the relative sluggishness of the real estate industry, many upstream industries also face the challenge of increasing capacity utilization. In response, China is introducing policies to expand domestic demand to absorb production capacity.

The US side is using the claim that China is dumping its excess capacity to smear China's competitive products, such as electric vehicles. The popularity of Chinese EVs is not due to the price — in overseas markets, Chinese EVs sell for about double the domestic price — but mainly their leading technology, novel design and reliable quality, which originate from the long-term inputs of Chinese EV manufacturers.

The economic logic of China weaponizing "overcapacity" in global trade is totally absurd, reflecting that US armchair strategists are coming to their wit's end when it comes to their assigned task of slinging mud at China.

—21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Economy

Editor's note: As China advances its modernization drive through high-quality development, it stands ready to overcome obstacles and challenges with a continued focus on turning development potential into quality growth. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Louise Loo

Policies can create growth momentum

Foreign investments have had a long history of facilitating industrialization in China. In the early 1980s, China expanded its preferential policies to attract foreign investment, and the inflow of much-needed foreign equipment and capital at that time helped expand China's industrial capacity and sophistication.

That could be the case again, but to a much lesser extent, as senior Chinese officials embark on a reinvigorated mission to develop "new quality productive forces" through innovation this time round.

Why to a lesser extent? Historically, foreign capital was able to generate higher returns on industrial projects, and there was also significant productive technology transfer in the process. Over the past decade, however, the "pull" of foreign capital has diminished.

For one, Chinese domestic enterprises have increased in numbers and improved in terms of management and product sophistication, and Chinese manufacturers (for the most part) remain competitive in exports and international markets. Also, the domestic financial markets have matured, allowing domestic enterprises to raise their own funds rather than rely on foreign capital.

Besides, manufacturing supply chains are becoming more indigenous, as authorities seek to "onshore" key intermediate production processes. For example, in their current manufacturing push, Chinese authorities are encouraging companies to buy Chinese parts — as industry processes are to be driven, to the best possible extent, by "local resources" and "local demand needs".

Across the new industries of alternative energy vehicles, batteries and renewables, China has developed its own indigenous brands that are increasingly capturing bigger market shares both domestically and abroad. These include BYD, CATL and Huawei.



The author is lead economist at Oxford Economics.

Finally, in industries involving data security, such as high-tech areas of science, artificial intelligence and cloud computing, domestic substitution, rather than relying on foreign-funded enterprises, appear to be the way forward.

In that context, China's need for foreign investments for pushing forward new quality productive forces is much smaller than in previous industrial cycles. Consequently, we (at Oxford Economics) are less concerned by the decline in net foreign direct investment to a record low of \$33 billion in 2023.

Yet the authorities clearly understand the need for a market-driven, globally-competitive industrial base. In March, Premier Li Qiang pledged to allow greater market access to foreign companies, including decisions to relax some data transfer restrictions for cross-border payments and

trade. The follow-through on these concrete measures will be critical in restoring the confidence of foreign investors.

To continue to attract foreign capital to propel China's manufacturing drive, there needs to be greater policy predictability in the country's regulatory environment, particularly for private enterprises.

On the one hand, the authorities have successfully played a big role in safeguarding issues of public and social welfare over the years, thus ensuring broad social stability. On the other hand, they have been far less successful at leveling the playing field on market entry and resources for the private sector, with recent policies on tech, education and healthcare compounding investor unease.

Our recent analysis shows anecdotal company intent to diversify and reconfigure supply chains for multinational companies operating onshore, which ultimately could undermine China's pace of capital accumulation.

Further financial liberalization, continuing the trend of the past two decades in liberalizing financial services and opening up the market to foreign investors, would be hugely beneficial. The use of capital controls to manage the currency has at times deterred foreign investments, while cyclically, fierce headwinds for domestic sentiment — including lingering uncertainties surrounding policy stimulus, rising disinflationary pressures and the extent of macro spillovers from real estate — have dampened private sector confidence and compounded capital outflow pressures.

Where private confidence remains weak, the onus falls on public investment to decisively stabilize domestic economic fundamentals and successfully pivot toward higher-value adding and strategic growth drivers. Doing so may improve the medium-term outlook of the economy, thereby crowding in private foreign investments more sustainably.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Liu Yingqi

Private firms can play bigger role in quality growth

The latest data for the Chinese economy presents a complex picture. Despite showing clear signs of recovery, the economy faces pressure in some sectors along with the usual challenges and opportunities. It is important therefore to break down both visible and invisible barriers to shape a new developmental paradigm. This makes it essential for private enterprises to climb up the advanced industrial sector's ladder and boost their confidence in order to achieve success.

Confidence is a belief in oneself, the conviction that one has the ability to meet the challenges and to succeed, and the will to act accordingly. It comprises three elements: belief, expectation and the perceived likelihood of success. Strong confidence is a firm belief in achieving success, while a lack of confidence indicates doubts about succeeding in an endeavor. More than just influencing a company's capacity for innovation and engagement, confidence is needed to realize the full growth potential. Indeed, "confidence is more valuable than gold".

Confidence is underpinned by self-assurance, which can be both conditional and unconditional. Conditional confidence depends on external conditions and the environment for success, while unconditional confidence is rooted in one's inherent ability, independent of external circumstances.

To bolster their confidence, private enterprises need to first get rid

of their dependency on external conditions which often lurks deep within entrepreneurs. To do that, private enterprises have to enhance and consolidate their unconditional self-confidence. That does not mean ignoring external factors but rather transforming them into internal strength. This approach will ensure that, irrespective of the challenges and setbacks, private enterprises can remain steadfast and proactive while continuously striving to outdo themselves to achieve higher-quality growth.

Enhancing unconditional confidence, by default, reinforces conditional confidence, making it more robust and effective. As a result, private enterprises become more self-assured and confident of achieving greater heights of development. The dynamic mix of unconditional confidence and conditional confidence in entrepreneurs enhances their capability to discover, innovate and execute high-quality, high-tech projects. This heightened capability allows them to rapidly and accurately secure leading positions in high-tech industries, fostering higher-quality development.

The pioneering generation of China's private entrepreneurs after the launch of reform and opening-up provides a vital lesson in this regard: they had strong unconditional confidence, along with conditional confidence, which helped them achieve success and facilitated their rapid growth. This blend of confidence not only made them



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"bosses by the day and sleep on the floor at night" but also enabled their businesses to thrive and grow healthily.

In today's China, reinforcing the confidence of private entrepreneurs is critical for blending their conditional confidence with unconditional self-belief. Some key initiatives are essential to achieve this blend and stimulate the healthy growth of private enterprises.

Based on enhancing research and promoting a correct understanding of the significant contributions and role of the private economy in China's economic progress, it is necessary to ensure the policies and guidelines from the Party and the State Council encouraging, supporting, and guiding the healthy development of the private economy are fully implemented.

Recognizing the nature of the private economy's development, a unified national market is essential for protecting and encouraging fair competition and thus fosters overall growth.

Past policy constraints that led to some problems and division in macroeconomic management must be

analyzed to see how macroeconomic policies can be strengthened and made consistent. This will ensure synchronized efforts, create positive synergy and enhance the effectiveness of high-quality macroeconomic policy combinations.

By implementing all the strategic plans and requirements set forth by the central authorities, such as ensuring equal treatment for State-owned and private enterprises, the authorities should improve the laws that promote the private economy. This approach will consolidate policies, public opinion and legal support for the development and growth of private enterprises.

By safeguarding the private property rights of entrepreneurs and market operators, and aligning them with their commitment to lawful and focused growth, and by synchronizing people's desire for prosperity provided they follow the law and promote innovation in entrepreneurship, China can integrate individual short-term benefits with the long-term development of the national economy.

With continued enhancement of entrepreneurs' confidence, more enterprises can become leaders in the advanced technology sector, and make greater contributions to China's modernization and the sustained, healthy and high-quality development of the national economy.

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

Liu Xiangdong

Unified market will tap economic potential

The Chinese government has reiterated the necessity to accelerate the construction of a unified national market by dismantling local protectionist and market barriers, and creating an environment characterized by high efficiency, fairness and openness. These efforts are necessary for transitioning from a large to a strong market, optimizing resource allocation, enhancing supply quality and boosting domestic demand.

Markets play a crucial role in resource distribution, primarily dictated by their scale and the balance between supply and demand. A sufficiently large market can generate economies of scale and scope, satisfying consumer needs at affordable prices. However, a market's effectiveness depends on a robust system that ensures fair and voluntary transactions. Without these, market mechanisms falter, leading to inefficient zero-sum outcomes.

Economic globalization, represented by free trade, has facilitated global trade activities, allowing even smaller economies to reap the benefits of larger market scales.

But recent de-globalization attempts by some countries are slowing global economic growth and exacerbating scarcity in the markets. By setting up trade barriers, some developed economies have fragmented the global market, increasing transaction costs and reducing economies of scale. And geopolitical conflicts and protectionism resorted to by some economies have prompted

countries to secure their supply chains, further straining global resources such as oil and gas, and fostering monopolistic market structures.

To counter these global shifts and promote high-quality growth at home, China needs to address the problem of market scarcity and strike a more dynamic balance between supply and demand. A unified national market can address this problem, but a holistic approach to production and market systems is required to build it. A unified market can also ensure the free flow of goods and resources throughout the production, distribution, circulation and consumption cycles by eliminating closed and segmented small markets and isolated economic loops.

By connecting the domestic and global markets, and leveraging global resources, Chinese authorities can strengthen internal and external linkages and optimize resource allocation. And by capitalizing on the scale and agglomeration effects of a large market, the authorities can vigorously promote innovation, reduce the cost of innovations, and ensure innovations yield better fruits. This in turn will promote competition, deepen specialization and support the growth of businesses, raise household incomes, increase labor productivity, improve supply quality and upgrade consumer demand.

The construction of a unified national market is also necessary to establish a new development pattern, facilitate the efficient and free flow of goods and resources, leverage the vast economic landscape to unlock domestic market potential, and inject new vitality into high-quality economic development.

First, the focus should be on pushing forward the "dual circulation development paradigm" which allows the domestic and overseas markets to reinforce each other, with the domestic market as the mainstay. Economic activities rely on the seamless integration and circulation of various production factors across manufacturing, distribution, circulation and consumption. A unified national market can significantly reduce the costs of research and development, as well as manufacturing, logistics, marketing and labor. It can better promote technological innovation and industrial upgrading, and steer the economy toward higher-quality circulation and efficiency.

On the other hand, continuously optimizing the business environment, expanding high-level opening-up and building a strong gravitational field for global resources will establish efficient linkages between domestic and overseas markets, and enable the Chinese economy to gain new advantages in global competition.

Second, a unified national market will boost domestic demand and deepen supply-side structural reforms. It will also nurture high-quality supply, and meet high-quality demand. The immediate priority is to integrate the strategy for expanding domestic demand with deepening supply-side structural reforms.

And third, the aim should be to meet the people's growing aspiration for a better life. In 2023, China's total retail sales of consumer goods reached 47.1 trillion yuan (\$6.51 trillion), making it the world's second-largest goods consumption market, with the continuous increase in urban and rural disposable incomes and upgrading of the national consumption structure indicating a shift toward higher-quality, diverse and personalized consumer demands.

While significant progress has been made in building China's market system, there remains a gap between the mechanisms for the efficient aggregation and rational flow of various elements, with persisting regional market barriers still hindering domestic market circulation.

Therefore, it is necessary to build an efficient and standardized unified national market to strengthen unified market institutional rules, better protect property rights, increase market access, promote fair competition and develop an efficient social credit system.

It is also necessary to ensure the market is based on fair competition. While adhering to market principles and the rule of law, it is necessary to make certain the market plays the decisive role in resource allocation with the government playing a guiding role and intervening wherever necessary. Further, better protecting intellectual property rights and improving the regulatory system by assigning clear responsibilities to various government departments will further standardize market competition and interventions, creating a stable, predictable business environment for all.

By deepening reform and widening opening-up, China can help build an open global market system that increases transparency and openness. In addition, by expanding institutionally open systems with efficient rules, regulations and management, China can build a high-standard global free trade zone network, which in turn will generate new foreign trade dynamics, boost foreign trade and investment, strengthen mutually beneficial industry and supply chains, and create broader development opportunities for domestic and international businesses.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

LIU HONGWU

Developing Africa

China, South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt can lead cooperation under the BRICS framework to transform China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 into reality

The world has entered a period of volatility with the Russia-Ukraine crisis dragging on and a new round of the Palestine-Israel conflict flaring up. Despite the impact from geopolitical tensions, Africa has been pressing ahead with the African Union's 2063 Agenda.

Looking back at 2023, Africa has been walking on its own path of development, affecting global advancement as a whole. The development of Africa has shown several distinctive features.



First, despite the frequent outbreaks of local conflicts, countries such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Libya, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Madagascar have seen a peaceful transfer of power after the elections, laying a foundation for the peaceful development of the continent.

Second, despite slower economic growth, the continent still boasts huge investment potential. The 36th AU summit set a priority on "accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Zone", aiming to boost intra-African trade and attract foreign investment. According to the 2023 Africa Financial Markets Index released by Absa Group, South Africa was the region's largest destination for investment, with countries such as Mauritius and Nigeria also having enormous investment potential.

Third, the region was hit hard by climate change in 2023, with droughts, floods, and locust infestations plaguing the Horn of Africa, and extreme weather events exacerbating the food crisis in Somalia. Natural disasters have displaced millions of people, posing a grave threat to life.

In the face of mounting challenges in security, climate and health-

care, Africa has demonstrated the willingness and determination to participate in the global governance through collective action. At the inaugural Africa Climate Summit held in September, leaders of African countries called for enhanced technological and financial assistance to boost its climate response and green transition.

Fourth, China-Africa cooperation has reached a new level. With the entry of Egypt and Ethiopia, the BRICS grouping now has three members from Africa, which will drive the continent's development in the next decade and boost China-Africa cooperation. Additionally, 10 years after its inception, the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative has greatly facilitated the modernization drive in the Global South, especially African countries.

The new edition of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation to be held this year, as well as the BRI, which has embarked on its second decade, will deepen China-Africa partnership and align the development achievements of China with the huge potential and growth demand of other developing countries, creating vast development opportunities. This is reflected in four aspects.

First, this year will be an election year, with Algeria, Botswana, Gha-



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

na, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa and Tunisia to hold presidential and legislative elections. In other parts of the world, countries such as the US, India and Japan will also have general elections. Amid the turbulent world, it is crucial for African countries to ensure a peaceful transfer of power. It is also important for Africa to proactively participate in global governance, and advance modernization through the China-Africa partnership, South-South cooperation, and the BRICS framework, thus contributing to the creation of a new global political order and safeguarding world peace.

Second, to deliver on the vision outlined in the AU's 2063 Agenda, the continent needs to double down on infrastructure building to upgrade its economy. It is also imperative for African nations to address food security by scaling up agricultural development and promoting industrial construction. China will continue aligning the BRI with the AU 2063 Agenda and help Africa foster new growth engines in fields such as the digital economy.

Some landmark projects, such as the Lagos Rail Mass Transit Blue Line and the Lekki Port in Nigeria, the Kilwa Masoko Fishing Port in Tanzania and the headquarters of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (first phase) will further unleash the development potential of Africa and facilitate intra-African trade and investment.

Third, Africa faces a pressing need to bolster its healthcare system by cultivating local talents, introducing advanced health-related technologies and ramping up investment in disease prevention. In addition, regional countries should promote international cooperation on healthcare and tackle shared health problems by accelerating the construction of cooperation mechanisms in this field.

Fourth, Africa needs to join hands with China to drive continental integration and modernization. Africa holds immense potential for development thanks to its rich natural resources, vast land, young population and huge market. At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue held in August, President Xi Jinping announced China's blueprints for supporting Africa's industrialization, agricultural modernization and the training of personnel. The two sides are expected to put forward detailed action plans at this year's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, and align China-aided infrastructure projects with the three assistance programs to jointly advance their modernization.

China, South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt, four of the BRICS member states, can lead China-Africa cooperation under the framework of BRICS to transform the blueprint drawn up in the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 into reality, and strengthen political trust, economic and cultural exchanges, and talent cultivation, thereby jointly working for the China-Africa community with a shared future.

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JIANG FANGFEI

Damage limitation

US is reinforcing the roles of Japan and the ROK in its 'hub-and-spoke' alliance system heightening tensions in East Asia

Since the Cold War, Japan and the Republic of Korea have been the two most crucial pillars in the United States-led "hub-and-spoke" alliance system in Asia-Pacific, regardless of Japan-ROK relations remaining strained.

The 2023 trilateral summit at Camp David witnessed a "historic qualitative change" in US-Japan-ROK cooperation.



The first change is the diversification of strategic goals among the three parties. During the Cold War, US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation mainly focused on the Soviet Union and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, while their renewed trilateral alliance simultaneously focuses on three perceived threats. The intensified "nuclear threat" from the DPRK and the Russia-Ukraine crisis are undoubtedly major contributing factors for the strengthening of the trilateral alliance, especially for the Japan-ROK rapprochement. But with the Joe Biden administration positioning China as the US' predominant long-term strategic rival, strategically containing China and economically out-competing China has become another major motivation for the renewal of the trilateral cooperation.

The second change is reflected in the content and essence of the trilateral cooperation. Besides committing themselves to more frequent consultations between their leaders and senior officials, raising the tempo and sophistication of joint military exercises, and establishing the real-time sharing of intelligence on missile threats, the three countries also pledged to collaborate in areas such as build-

ing resilient supply chains, protecting emerging technologies and increasing economic security in the "Indo-Pacific" region. It demonstrates that the essence of their cooperation has been upgraded from a defensive military alliance to a more comprehensive and offensive alliance involving pragmatic cooperation in various fields targeting China.

The third change is the transformation of their cooperation structure. Since the Cold War, bilateral cooperation between the US and the other two countries has prevailed in the US-Japan-ROK alliance. However, with substantial progress in the Japan-ROK rapprochement and the construction of trilateral cooperation mechanisms, the alliance has transformed into a "strengthened multilateral network" that could be further nested and interact with other US-led multilateral and multilateral mechanisms such as the Quadrilateral Dialogue, Chip 4, G7, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, Maritime Security Program and so forth. In this way, the three parties can further expand and deepen their cooperation, while the US still maintains a leadership advantage in the trilateral alliance.

Many analysts think the prospects of the trilateral cooperation aren't so rosy, because of deep contradictions in Japan-ROK relations, uncertainties in the 2024 US presidential elections, as well as domestic divisions in the ROK regarding its relations with the US, Japan and China. Still, the Camp David Summit represents a perilous gambit to resurrect the specter of the Cold War and profoundly exert a series of adverse impacts on regional peace, stability and prosperity in East Asia.

First, it might further exacerbate geopolitical tensions in East Asia,

especially on the Korean Peninsula. In recent years, both the frequency of the DPRK's missile tests and the heightened tensions on the Taiwan question are directly proportional to the degree of US involvement in East Asian affairs and the tremendous increase of its strategic deployment in Asia-Pacific. Further strengthening of US-Japan-ROK military cooperation, especially the US deployment of offensive weapons in Japan and the ROK will only make the situation even worse, escalate the regional arms race, and make East Asia a more fiercely contested theater for the major powers, resulting in a spiraling risk of conflict in the region.

Second, it might further impede regional economic integration in East Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, China, Japan and the ROK have been increasingly closer in trade and supply chain cooperation under a series of frameworks such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, 10+3 and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The three parties also declared they would accelerate negotiations on a trilateral free trade agreement after the RCEP came into effect. However, as the US keeps tying the Taiwan question to the Russia-Ukraine conflict to monger the "China threat", and is wooing its regional allies to build an anti-China economic circle in the "Indo-Pacific", both Japan and the ROK have become less motivated to advance the China-Japan-ROK FTA negotiations and more active in "decoupling" from China, leading to a sharp decline in their trade volume with China, tremendous mutual economic losses, and more fragmented supply chains in the region.

Third, it has caused more diffi-



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culty for China's regional diplomacy. The US' reckless call for a coordinated stance with Japan and the ROK against Russia, the DPRK and China is creating opposing camps, and sowing discord between China and its neighboring countries. Consequently, China is not only facing a dilemma of appeasement or counter-balance, but also suffering from more strategic suspicions from neighboring countries, with pragmatic cooperation in various areas encountering greater challenges.

Therefore, in order to build a peaceful and prosperous East Asia in the right way, all regional stakeholders, especially the US, Japan and the ROK need to abandon the Cold War mentality, jointly develop their security and development concepts based on "equal consultations, constructive dialogues and win-win coop-

eration", rather than provoke confrontations and impede cooperation via the counterproductive "collective strategic deterrence".

First, all stakeholders need to jointly promote multilateral talks to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Especially, the US and its allies need to stop imposing more economic sanctions, political pressure and military deterrence toward the DPRK, and deploying offensive weapons in the region, but cooperate with China in persuading the DPRK back to the negotiation table through alleviating its economic difficulties and security concerns.

Second, Japan and the ROK need to avoid becoming a pawn of the US in containing China, prevent the trend of over-securitization in their China policy, and enhance strategic trust with China through pragmat-

cally promoting the China-Japan-ROK FTA negotiations, implementation and upgrading of the RCEP, and constructive dialogues with the DPRK.

Third, China should contribute to regional peace and prosperity by promoting multilateral talks on the Korean Peninsula, improving risk management in its surrounding waters, making every effort to stabilize China-US relations and seek peaceful reunification of Taiwan, and propelling its high-level institutional opening-up.

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LIFE



Zhao Jia, owner of Lamdre, a vegetarian restaurant in Beijing.

Health, nature and sustainability are three concepts that find tangible expression through the art of cuisine in a courtyard nestled in Beijing's vibrant Sanlitun area.

Lamdre, a vegetarian fine dining restaurant, turns fresh, seasonal ingredients into an art form, aligning the healthy, culinary experience with the natural environments from which these ingredients are sourced. The eatery, which only opened in late 2022, has risen to prominence both at home and abroad for its delectable offerings and innovative philosophy.

According to owner Zhao Jia, its philosophy lies in "advocating a lifestyle that aims to infuse the beauty of nature into the lives of those who embrace mindfulness".

In October, Lamdre earned a star in this year's Beijing Michelin Guide. Then in January, it received a diamond rating in the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide, making it one of the few restaurants in Beijing to achieve recognition from both prestigious lists.

Adding to the accolades, Lamdre's star also shone at the recent awards ceremony for Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, clinching this year's American Express One to Watch Award.

"The dining experience at Lamdre is exquisite — from the serene ambience to the refined dishes that pay homage to nature's abundance. Chef Dai Jun and owner Zhao have introduced a concept that is refreshingly distinct and this accolade is well-deserved," said William Drew, director of content for Asia's 50 Best Restaurants.

Food blogger Li Xiaonan, who has 734,000 followers on micro-blogging platform Sina Weibo, commented that the restaurant is a pioneer for its lifestyle philosophy, and focuses on selecting the finest seasonal vegetables. "By skillfully cooking these ingredients to highlight their natural flavors, the restaurant offers ... an experience of nature's true essence," he says.

Two years ago, Zhao started planning for the restaurant, watching it grow from an idea to reality. During the setup and design process, her vision became clear: to create a restaurant focused on healthy, natural and sustainable plant-based cuisine.

"Our plant-based cuisine goes beyond traditional Chinese vegetarian food, focusing on the pure flavors of ingredients and capturing the essence of the seasons," Zhao says, adding that other than boasting a fixed culinary style, the dishes reflect their "deep concern for the connection between humans, the environment, and nature".

Food is presented with simplicity. "Some ingredients may not look perfect, but I find nature's offerings already beautiful, so we present ingredients in their natural state, without fancy packaging," Zhao says.

The eggplant dish on its opening menu, created by chef Dai, is an example of preserving the natural shape of the vegetable in an artistic fashion. It featured thumb-sized eggplants, marinated and topped with ground black sesame for flavor. The addition of homemade Sichuan pepper and black sesame paste enhanced the aroma, capturing the essence of Beijing's autumn and winter, a simple and rustic approach that vividly conveyed the natural terror.

"Food awakens our memories. Take the tofu on our seasonal menu. It tastes like the tofu my grandmother made when I was young, instantly bringing those memories back," Zhao says.

"It's not about intricate techniques, but about the care we put into our dishes. All our sauces are homemade. This approach has made the tofu a favorite among our guests."

Zhao designed her restaurant around the principle of sustainability, as is shown in many objects from the menu to the furniture. She uses



An appetizing approach to food

Natural delights of vegetarian cuisine allowed to shine through by chef who knows the roots of success. **Li Yingxue** reports.



Above: Zhao and her chef Dai Jun (fifth from left, front row), with the restaurant's service and cooking team. **Top:** This sweet pepper dish is served with a sauce. **Clockwise from middle top:** Jerusalem artichoke mousse with edible moss crisps, sun-dried tomatoes and glasswort flowers. Yunnan eggplants are presented in their natural form. Sea mushrooms bring a taste of the ocean to the table. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

digital menus and cloth napkins to minimize paper use, and any paper that is used is recyclable.

She chooses local, seasonal and organic ingredients to reduce transportation and packaging. She also employs energy-efficient cooking methods and aims to minimize emissions. The menu is thoughtfully designed to use ingredients completely and avoid waste, even repurposing fruit peels into appetizers.

The eatery has become a popular destination for tourists visiting Beijing and a favorite spot for residents celebrating special occasions. Zhao has noticed that it's not just about being a vegetarian restaurant for young guests; many come to celebrate events with friends, such as after finishing exams. "We see a lot of young people, and for them, coming here is about trying out a new restaurant," she says.

Having received multiple honors in a row, Zhao feels thankful. "While we value these accolades, our guests remain our top priority. However, these honors have boosted our confidence and improved the team's morale," she says.

Zhao mentions that the restaurant might introduce afternoon tea, especially Chinese tea, to more guests.

She says that Dai, who has over 30 years experience, including more than a decade specializing in vegetarian cuisine, is passionate about crafting new dishes, and is a chef with the creativity and skill to realize her vision.

Dai says: "Before, when I cooked Cantonese cuisine, it was about mastering handed-down techniques. But with vegetarian dishes, it's about starting from scratch. It's incredibly rewarding to create something from nothing."

Dai believes that creating vegetarian dishes is much more challenging than meat-based ones, as they require not only understanding techniques for cooking meat, but also ways to innovate upon them. He explains that some ingredients, like the vegetables used as garnishes, are often overlooked in meat-based cuisine. But now, he not only needs to understand their characteristics but also fully comprehend their nuances.

"The taste of radishes, for example, varies between the parts exposed to sunlight and those underground due to differences in sunlight, soil, temperature and humidity," he says.

Changing the menu every three months can be stressful for many chefs, but Dai finds joy in it. Since his previous restaurant job, he's been creating new menus each season. Even if some dishes receive great feedback, he is always ready to move on. After several seasons of menus, he sees them as a record of his culinary style.

"To stay fresh, you have to reset, learn new things, and create something new," he says.

Many diners have followed Dai's menus over the seasons. They often share long feedback, which the chef takes seriously and finds inspiring. "It's because of them that I keep going," he says.

Looking back on the past decade, he sees three distinct phases of change in his approach to cooking. At first, he began adapting meat-based dishes to vegetarian versions. For example, he turned Kungpao chicken into vegetarian versions by using similar seasonings, but tofu or mushrooms in place of the chicken. He remained in this phase for many years.

Later, he began refining vegetarian dishes, making them more intricate and complex. "I wanted to create things others couldn't," he says.

After being hired by Zhao for her new restaurant, Dai catered to her demands by adopting simplicity as a new approach, removing elaborate decorations and focusing on the essence of the ingredients.

Now, he uses no more than three ingredients per dish, and although they look simple, there's a lot of effort behind the scenes to bring out the rich flavors, he says.

"The concept of plant-based cuisine took shape in my mind, and I developed my own style," Dai says. "Without the experiences of the past, today's dishes wouldn't have their current style."

The chef finds vegetarian cooking intriguing because it's not bound by culinary traditions. With good ingredients and creative ideas, anything is possible.

"Plant-based cuisine may sound limiting, but it's actually vast, with endless possibilities," he says.

AI playing vital role in shaping student minds

TIANJIN — Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly prevalent in primary and middle school classrooms across China, providing a modern approach to education while fostering scientific thinking and innovative skills among students.

Huiwen Middle School in Tianjin is one of the pioneers incorporating AI into education in the city. It was named one of 184 AI education bases by the Ministry of Education in February.

"Maintain your speed and avoid obstacles," Ning Zhao-hong, a technology project adviser and head of the school's innovation center, said as he taught students during a robotics class.

The project began almost seven years ago. In 2017, the school formed the Huiwen Singularity Club to enhance extracurricular experiences and provide opportunities to students interested in AI, Ning says.

"At the beginning, as we were all newcomers to building, operating and programming robots, we relied heavily on research and teaching ourselves," Ning says. "Initially, most members joined for the robot competitions."

During their spare time, students and teachers teamed up to travel with the robots to attend competitions. Although they initially faced challenges, they soon began winning championships.

After years of dedicated effort, the club became popular for its regular robot demonstrations and drone operations, attracting an increasing number of students.

In 2022, the school officially incorporated Huiwen Singularity as an after-school program, providing every student with a chance to participate. It also launched technology innovation courses for students.

Ning has witnessed the club's journey from a niche interest group to widespread student participation, from a single instructor to a cohesive team, and from basic tech exercises to comprehensive AI education.

"AI courses should be an essential element of education in primary and middle schools," says Qu Wei, principal of the school, adding that learning about robots should not be limited to just understanding their capabilities at chess or assembly line work, but that students should also engage in basic programming to develop scientific thinking.

As hardware facilities improve and teachers and students gain a deeper understanding of AI, the technology is emerging as a popular and effective tool in various classroom subjects.

Before each class, the in-class AI Assistant reviews key points from the previous day and assesses the students' ability to read English. Physical education teachers use robots to provide real-time feedback and assistance in refining middle-distance running techniques.

From an interest group to the integration of AI into teaching, Huiwen Middle School's journey in AI education reflects the paths taken by many other primary and middle schools across China.

At the Beijing 101 Middle School, an AI-based listening and speaking system has been incorporated into English classes. Similarly, in Fujian province, teachers use AI and big data technology to pique students' interest in learning.

"AI in classrooms has already initiated transformations for both students and teachers. In the future, we will continue to improve teacher proficiency at using AI to enrich and refine courses," Qu says.

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XINHUA

LIFE

To think ink

An exhibition reveals how a French philosophy professor explores thoughts beyond aesthetics through his Chinese paintings, **Wang Xin** reports in Shanghai.

Benoit Vermander, a French professor at Fudan University's School of Philosophy in Shanghai, has found a liberatory mode of self-expression in Chinese ink paintings. Under the artist name of Bendu, Vermander — who is also known by his Chinese name Wei Mingde — is exhibiting more than 60 Chinese ink paintings, most of which he created over the past decade.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and France. The exhibition, which is part of the university's celebration of this occasion, will run through Thursday on Fudan's campus.

Through the art at the exhibition, which focuses on themes such as animals, landscapes and people, visitors can learn about the artist's intimate relationship with nature and daily life, and see the integration of Western composition and Chinese ink painting skills.

Vermander's story with Chinese ink painting dates back three decades.

He was born in France in 1960, and has been fond of painting since childhood. However, vision and hearing losses made it hard for him to advance his painting skills, as his brushwork was often criticized as not being "clear".

The turning point came in 1987, when Vermander made his first visit to China and was enchanted by Chinese calligraphy.

"When I first came to China, I was shown calligraphic works. I was really astounded, both by the meanings and the dynamics of the inscriptions," he recalls.

"I was very impressed by calligraphy as an art in which finally I could find my own way of expression. I also realized that I could create much more freely than in classical Western painting,

as even the 'not clean' part of my works can be a good part of a creation with ink. So, I decided to study classical Chinese and calligraphy."

After three to four years of study, Vermander developed steady penmanship, which is a critical skill in both calligraphy and ink painting. From 1994, he shifted his focus to Chinese ink painting.

"It was, for me, a change of life. I came from France, but China gave me the biggest present — that is, the courage to create. It allowed me to find a way of immersing myself in another culture, philosophy and in another art practice," he says.

Vermander has visited many places across China over the past three decades, including Sichuan province in Southwest China, where he studied Chinese painting and met his mentor and closest friend, painter Li Jinyuan.

Vermander says that Li asked him to draw subjects from his childhood in France, because his memories would not be the same.

"He gave me pencils and paper and asked me to quickly draw the memories of my childhood. And when I had done that, he said he respected who I am, my past, my sensitivity, and he showed me how to express them with ink according to the method of Chinese painting."

This may also explain the integration of Western and Chinese painting styles in Vermander's works.

Shen Yubing, another professor at the university's School of Philosophy, says that the Chinese ink paintings at the exhibition reflect the influences of Western painters, such as Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), as well as of Chinese elements such as folk arts.



Above: Professor Benoit Vermander and Shen Yubing, another professor at Fudan University's School of Philosophy, at the opening ceremony of the exhibition on April 10. **Below:** Vermander introduces more than 60 ink paintings created over the past decade at the exhibition. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY



"I came from France, but China gave me the biggest present — that is, the courage to create."

Benoit Vermander, French professor, School of Philosophy at Fudan University in Shanghai

Vermander's research focuses on Chinese religions. He is committed to interpreting Chinese classics to promote cultural exchange between China and the West. Although philosophy and Chinese ink painting might seem disparate at first glance, Vermander says that they are actually closely connected.

"Philosophy is not about data or information but about thinking. You have to be able to confront yourself, to look at yourself and go into yourself. Thinking about problems, especially philosophical problems, is not the work of the brain but involves the participation of the whole being, including your creativity, physical experiences, senses, imagination, emotions and bodily feelings," he says.

"Every one of my Chinese ink paintings is also a philosophical article."

He adds that a good work — of

either art or philosophy — should allow diversity in meaning, as each one can have a different connection to his work.

Vermander says that he regards his paintings as integrated expressions of himself with daily life. Through the ink brush, he hopes to freely show his inner explorations, dynamics and the movement of his heart.

"What I like most in Chinese ink painting is the dynamism, mobility and freedom it allows you. I am not skilled in Western painting as I have bad eyes, and it is not my character to be cautious, careful and plan everything. With Chinese calligraphy and ink painting, I could liberate my inner wildness. My only future goal is to have more time for writing and painting — that's it," he says, laughing.

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URUMQI — Among the greatest historical mysteries in the world, one draws the eyes of archaeologists and historians worldwide to the middle of nowhere in Northwest China — the legendary Loulan.

As one of the many oasis states in ancient China's western regions, roughly today's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Loulan witnessed hundreds of years of splendor around the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) before fading out of history, its cities vanishing into endless sand.

Not until the start of the 20th century did Loulan, also known as Kroraina, reappear to the world in an accidental discovery in the Taklimakan Desert by Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, which has since set off a global craze for Loulan studies.

Now with more findings coming out of the millennia-old ruins, the once mysterious Loulan offers a rare glimpse into the history of Xinjiang, the close relations between the western and central regions of ancient China, as well as the shared cultural identity of Chinese civilization.

A deserted desert

The Loulan Ruins comprise a number of archaeological sites scattered on the eastern fringe of the Taklimakan near the now-desiccated Lop Nur salt lake, among which the jewel in the crown is the ancient city of Loulan.

Dubbed the "Oriental Pompeii", the city of Loulan, presumably the capital of the Loulan Kingdom, was situated at the juncture of the southern and northern routes of the ancient Silk Road.

Today, the once flourishing city is a heap of ruins hidden in sand dunes to the northeast of Xinjiang's Ruoqiang county.

Seen from above, the large settlement was basically square, covering an area of about 108,000 square meters. In its northeast stands the tallest structure in the city — a dilapidated Buddhist stupa about 10.4 meters high.

Not far away is the well-known "three-room house", the remains of



Left: A technical expert uses a 3D laser scanning device at the Buddhist stupa of the Loulan Ruins to create a digital archive of the site. **Right:** A relief of the Beauty of Loulan, a 3,800-year-old mummy found in the ruins, adorns the exterior of the Loulan Museum in Ruoqiang county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. CAI GUODONG / XINHUA

a structure deemed to be a government office, where a treasure trove of inscribed wooden slips and paper documents was found.

"Everything here is a cultural relic and has great value," says 19-year-old Adiljan Jilir, the youngest of the rangers tasked with protecting the Loulan Ruins.

Due in no small part to the lasting fame of Loulan, the ancient city and nearby tombs have become a hot spot for uninvited tourists and even a target of cultural relic theft, despite their far-flung location.

To keep the ruins safe, Adiljan and his teammates make regular patrols around the ruins every day. In addition to the intruders, they have bigger challenges to deal with — the dreadful weather and the no less dreadful loneliness.

Gusty winds and sandstorms commonly occur for most of the year, and in summer the surface temperature can reach 70 C. Apart from those harsh elements, only sand and silence keep them company.

"We are guardians of the Loulan Ruins. We have to put up with the

loneliness, the sandstorms and the searing heat," says Ma Zhuang, a 42-year-old ranger.

He says he knew little about Loulan before taking the job, but has now developed a profound bond with the ancient ruins after reading a lot of history books.

"Life here is bitter, indeed, but now I enjoy it like sugar," Ma says.

Sands of time

Since its rediscovery over 120 years ago, Loulan has fascinated explorers, archaeologists and historians both inside and outside of China, which provides detailed new information on its location, scale, layout and history.

The latest major outcome is *The Report on Archaeological Investigation and Excavation of Loulan*, a book published in 2022 by late Chinese archaeologist Hou Can, which provides detailed new information on its location, scale, layout and history.

Given its important location along the Silk Road, Loulan used to be a bustling hub of economic and cultural exchange between the East

and the West. Exotic adornments made of seashells and corals were found here, thousands of miles from the nearest seashore.

The position and size of the stupa indicate its importance in the city, says Pan Pan, an assistant professor at the School of Sociology and Anthropology at Sun Yat-sen University.

"It proves that Buddhism was quite popular back then after it had entered ancient China's western regions."

However, in the eyes of many historical researchers, the most striking feature of this remote local kingdom is its strong bond with the central regions of China.

"From the inscribed wooden slips and paper documents found near the three-room house, we can determine that the city of Loulan used to be the seat of the office of the top official dispatched by the central government to govern the western regions," says Feng Jing, curator of the Loulan Museum.

Exquisite brocades uncovered here showcase the close cultural and emotional attachment between

the central and western regions of ancient China. Many of them are embroidered with good wishes in traditional Chinese characters or auspicious creatures like dragons and tigers.

"The embroidered brocades reflect the broad mind of ancient China during the Han Dynasty," says Li Wenying, director of the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

"They also convey the beautiful wish for national prosperity. Loulan witnessed and participated in Silk Road exchanges. It is a symbol of Chinese culture shared by all ethnic groups of the Chinese nation."

Cultural conservation

To preserve this outstanding cultural symbol, a broad array of endeavors has been made by authorities and communities at both national and local levels.

The latest major protection and restoration project for the Loulan Ruins was carried out in 2020, during which an expert team worked for about 170 days to repair the stupa and three-room house in defi-

ance of scorching heat and suffocating sandstorms.

In order to better present the hard-to-access site to the public, the Loulan Museum, the only Loulan-related museum in the world, was built in Ruoqiang and officially opened in 2011.

Greeting visitors at the entrance to the ancient Loulan-style structure is a relief of the Beauty of Loulan, a 3,800-year-old mummy that was found in 1980.

There are 5,717 cultural relics in the museum's collection, including mummies, woodenware, bronze items, pottery, embroidery and documents, of which six are classified as first-class cultural relics, says Feng.

In a corner inside the museum, a variety of products with distinctive Loulan features are on sale, such as bookmarks, flash drives, pillows, cushions, water cups and handbags.

"The brocade fragments uncovered in Loulan are the source of our inspiration," says Sun Hu, owner of the booth. "Tourists like our products very much."

To the north of the museum lies a Loulan-themed cultural park, where a host of embossed walls, inscribed columns, sculptures and pavilions display various aspects of the rich Loulan culture. It has become a must-go destination for visitors to the county.

In addition, Feng says that with government support, the museum regularly organizes training courses, outreach programs, cultural symposiums and other activities to further encourage exchanges and studies and enable more people to know about the real history of this mysterious site.

"The Loulan Ruins offer an important window for the world to understand China," says Meng Xianshi, a professor of history at Renmin University of China and longtime Loulan researcher.

With studies gaining more attention and going deeper, the cultural and historical value of ancient Loulan will be further decoded and better understood, he adds.

XINHUA

CULTURE

Creating something special

Artists turn neglected neighborhoods into vibrant creative communities, **Cai Hong** reports in Beijing.

Huge tower standing at the center of Xiaopu village in Tongzhou district on the eastern outskirts of Beijing looks strikingly odd. From its bottom to the top are the colors of mud, brick, ceramic, iron, bronze, silver and gold that is synonymous with wealth and power.

The iconic artwork, created by the well-known Chinese avant-garde artist Fang Lijun, is believed to signify what the artists in the area are.

Xiaopu is one of 27 villages where artists including Fang live and work, among 47 villages belonging to Songzhuang town in Tongzhou 20 kilometers from downtown Beijing.

Sun Guanghua, an exponent of pop art in Renzhuang village of Songzhuang, is now metaphorically on the top of that tower after struggling in the most famous and biggest artist community in China for 30 years.

"My paintings sold well overseas for many years. Now I am set for life," the artist said with a faint look of satisfaction on his face.

Sun's sense of contemporary art started with a village in the Yuanmingyuan, or the Old Summer Palace, in the northwest suburb of Beijing. In the late 1980s the former farming village of brick huts and dirt streets became a bustling magnet for Chinese avant-garde artists who could rent cheap accommodation from local residents and hope to sell their artwork in Beijing's growing foreign community.

Painters, sculptors, musicians and poets worked and lived in cluttered huts, sharing meals and partying until late. Cultural figures such as Mang Ke, Bei Dao and Chen Kaige — later a prominent filmmaker — held literary salons at the Yuanmingyuan village.

Sun was attracted to this Bohemian-style existence in this artist commune. "I was so fascinated with how the artists did there that I frequented the place when I studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in the 1980s," he recalled.

Sun was assigned to Beijing University of Agriculture (BUA) in 1987 when he graduated from CAFA. "I didn't have a big teaching load at the BUA, and its climate was relaxed," Sun said. "But I couldn't stand attending all the sessions and meetings."

Transitional time

In 1993, the artists were not allowed to stay in the Yuanmingyuan area. They learned of Cui Dawei, Xiaopu village's Communist Party secretary, who said artists were welcome.

Songzhuang was in a state of virtual penury at that time. Its energy-consuming foundry businesses went bust one after another in the aftermath of an industrial park being built in the town. Seventy percent of the factory buildings were abandoned.

Young farmers left the rural part of Songzhuang for cities to

make a living, leaving 46 percent of the residential houses vacant.

Some artists started to either rent a farmer's house as their studio or purchase a piece of disused land to build a studio. The first group of artists moving to Songzhuang included the contemporary art heavyweights such as Li Xianting, Yue Minjun and Fang Lijun.

By renting land to artists, local residents could make up to 10 times their annual income, according to Cui.

The artists also helped pay for road building, street lighting and tree planting. Villagers eventually embraced them.

Sun resigned from his job at Beijing University of Agriculture in 1998, moving from downtown Beijing to a house he rented in Songzhuang.

"He had my back when he decided to move to Songzhuang," Sun's ex-wife Zhang Xiaoyun said. "I know that artists prefer to stay in a community of their counterparts."

"At that time, the local villagers took us as social outcasts living far from hometown. They had no idea of what artists do," Sun said. "Chinese artists were marginalized. They were fringe members of society."

He bought a vacant lot in Renzhuang village in 2004 and built a large studio that he is still using.

"We have a freer way of life here, listening to our own heart and exploring the artistic way to express ourselves truly," Sun said.

The life of local residents in Songzhuang has been changed. Some of them are working for artists as cleaners or construction workers. Others have opened restaurants or shops catering to the artists.

"But artists live in their studios, not necessarily hanging out with the villagers. Studio or working space is their living room as well as salon and showing space," Sun said.

Festival origins

The first inauguration of Songzhuang Art Festival in 2005 was a roaring success, winning both domestic and international praise and recognition. Since then, the events have been held annually and have strengthened the already famous reputation of Songzhuang as being a unique phenomenon of artists and art lovers in China and abroad.

Now it is a vibrant community of an estimated 7,000 painters, poets, filmmakers, calligraphers, photographers and musicians. "It is open to everyone as long as he or she can survive here," Sun said.

Wang Bo, a 36-year-old artist painting with acrylics and taking photos, is one of the recent arrivals who also want to try their luck in Songzhuang. When painting, he attempts to find a link between his contemporary artwork and ancient Chinese landscape painting.

Wang is still climbing the artistic ladder.

He worked at an art training institute in Xi'an, the capital of



From top: A sculpture in Xiaopu village, in Songzhuang, Beijing; The entrance to China's largest artist community in Songzhuang, on the eastern outskirts of Beijing; The Sunshine International Art Museum in Songzhuang. PHOTOS BY CAI HONG / CHINA DAILY

northwest China's Shaanxi province after graduating from Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in 2012. Following in the footsteps of his college mates one year later, he came to Beijing for more inspirations for artistic creation.

"I was bored with what I was teaching at the training school. I did almost the same thing day in and day out," Wang said.

He quickly settled down in Songzhuang's Xiaopu village, renting a studio for painting and a house for living.

"Compared with other artists' communes in Beijing such as Caochangdi and 798, the artist colony in Songzhuang is more affordable and convenient for artistic creation," Wang said.

Caochangdi developed into a thriving arts and cultural hub in Beijing when artists began to move into the area in 2000, attracting international attention similar to the nearby 798 Art Zone. He attributed Songzhuang's appeal to artists to the "whole industrial chain support". "We have everything we need here. Painting medium, framing, picture mounting and delivery; you name it."

With the dramatic influx of artists and demand for working and living space artists, much construction is underway in Songzhuang's villages.

Xiaopu village committee raised money for building the Songzhuang Art Museum, which was open to the public in October 2006. It is the first village-run gallery in China.

Art dealers and investors have been building museums and galleries in Songzhuang. They offer the artists more space to show their artwork. In the 4-square-kilometer artist community in Songzhuang, there are 35 museums that cover more than 3,000 square meters respectively, 220 galleries and 5,000 studios.

Reaching people

Still, live streaming has made great strides in the community. A base where art pieces are live sold via the Chinese short-form video hosting service Douyin, the Chinese counterpart of TikTok, was in operation in Songzhuang in 2021.

For Qian Lingping, who produces traditional Chinese painting, Songzhuang is a community in which artists can know about "the developments at the frontiers of art". Qian has been in the community for 10 years.

She hailed the live selling as "an opportunity not to be missed" as it helps artwork reach many people in one go. She has found a large online market.

Things are looking up in Songzhuang.

The Beijing municipal government declared Songzhuang a "cultural industry base" in 2006. Art-related businesses were enticed by cheap land, bringing revenue. Studios, galleries and other structures continue to mushroom out of the surrounding countryside, filling local government coffers.

In 2015, Beijing announced



We have everything we need here. Painting medium, framing, picture mounting, and delivery; you name it."

Wang Bo, artist from Songzhuang, Beijing

that it plans to gradually relocate some non-capital functions of the municipal government to Tongzhou, which would serve as the capital's subsidiary administrative center. According to Beijing's ambitious plan, 400,000 to 500,000 people will move from the capital's central areas to Tongzhou by the end of 2035. Its permanent population will be kept within 1.3 million residents. "The mammoth project will have a huge effect on Songzhuang, or to be more exact, the artist community," Sun said.

Prices rising

As studios and houses increase in price, some artists have moved to Yanjiao in neighboring Hebei province. Yanjiao is a low-cost alternative for people wanting large living and working space that is still within convenient reach of Beijing.

Zhang Haitao, an art critic and curator, has lived in Songzhuang since 1999. He is worried that rapid urbanization will push up land and house prices in the artist community. As a result, it will not be affordable for newcomers.

Meng Jingwei, head of Tongzhou district, said the authorities of Songzhuang are helping the artists stay.

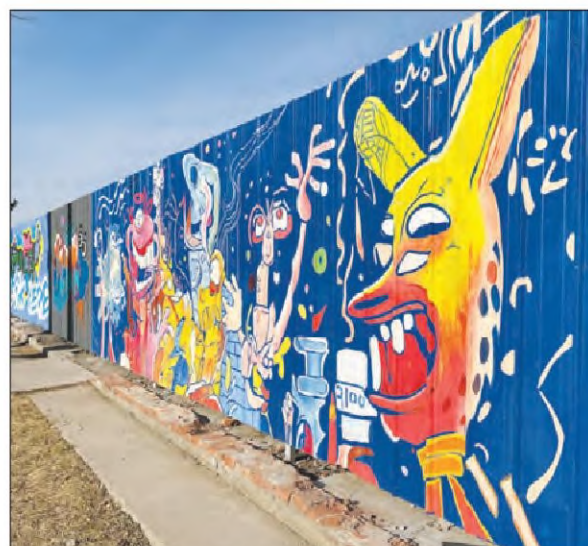
"The artists deserve respect and assistance. More should be lured to have a hand in the development of the town, in which its cultural milieu will be improved."

Songzhuang authorities have rolled out nine projects that are expected to improve the living and working conditions of the art community. The infrastructures include an outlet of Sam's Club — Walmart Inc's high-end membership retail unit, a workshop for young artists, a creative hub for auto art, and low-cost housing.

Fancy and arty as it is, Songzhuang is not appealing to Hu Zhongsheng, a CAFA trained artist producing classical oil painting. He turned his nose up at the artist community in Songzhuang.

Hu taught oil painting at a school in Beijing after graduating from the CAFA in the 1980s. "Songzhuang is a mixture of good and bad artists," he said. "It is a temporary haven where those who try to duck out of their problems and difficulties in their life can dream an artist's dream, release their personality and extend their individuality."

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From left: Street art in Songzhuang, Beijing. CAI HONG / CHINA DAILY; A strikingly huge tower, which is believed to signify the status of the artists in Songzhuang art colony, sits at the center of Xiaopu village, Beijing. SUN GUANGHUA / PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY; Artist Sun Guanghua at his studio in Songzhuang, Beijing; A solo exhibition of the work of artist Wang Bo in Macao in 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY