



Seal deal

Two men embark on unique rescue mission in Liaoning **PEOPLE, PAGE 5**

Green drive

Massive afforestation revives Chishui River landscape **IMAGE, PAGE 7**



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Xi hails efforts of Serbian steel workers

President praises role of employees in turning plant into profitable venture

By **MO JINGXI** and **ZHANG YU**

President Xi Jinping has urged Serbian steel workers who are participants and beneficiaries of China-Serbia cooperation to make greater contributions toward consolidating the friendship between the two countries in a reply to workers at a steel plant in the Serbian city of Smederevo on Monday.

Xi, who is scheduled to pay a state visit to Serbia next week, said in his reply letter that he was glad to learn that the plant has rapidly turned losses into gains after receiving a Chinese investment, with the jobs of more than 5,000 employees being guaranteed and thousands of families enjoying a peaceful and happy life.

Xi had met with the workers in person during his previous state visit to the European country in 2016, when he said that he "deeply felt their support for the mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Serbia, and their high expectations for a bright future of the steel plant".

From their letter, Xi said he learned that the plant has taken on a new look and is providing strong support for the development of Smederevo, thanks to the joint efforts of the management teams of both sides and the workers themselves.

The development of the plant, he

said, cannot be achieved without the dedication and hard work of the workers, who have been working diligently for the quick growth of the steel plant and have written a new chapter for the iron-clad friendship between China and Serbia.

I give you "the thumbs up", Xi said. The plant, formerly known as the Smederevo Steelworks, was on the verge of bankruptcy before being purchased by China's Hesteel Group in April 2016, months after China and Serbia signed a memorandum of understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative in November 2015.

Today, Hesteel Serbia is one of Serbia's biggest exporters. It contributed 1.86 percent to the country's GDP in 2022.

In his reply, Xi said the sound development of the plant is a striking epitome of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation between China and Serbia as well as a paradigm of their mutually beneficial cooperation.

It is hoped that the steelworkers, who are participants, witnesses and contributors to and beneficiaries of China-Serbia friendly cooperation, will continue to do their jobs wholeheartedly and dedicate themselves enthusiastically to the operation and development of the steel plant, he said.

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China's third aircraft carrier, the CNS *Fujian*, is towed by a tugboat from the dock at China State Shipbuilding Corp's Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai on Wednesday, on its way to its first sea trial. **PU HAIYANG / XINHUA**

Largest aircraft carrier begins sea trial

By **ZHAO LEI**
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The CNS *Fujian*, China's third aircraft carrier, embarked on its maiden sea trial on Wednesday morning, according to the People's Liberation Army Navy.

The PLA Navy announced the development in a brief statement, without elaborating on details such as schedule and location of the trial.

It said the colossal vessel set sail around 8 am and the sea trial will determine the reliability and stability of the carrier's propulsion and electric power systems.

According to the PLA Navy, the new vessel has successfully completed its mooring tests and equipment installation process and is ready for sea trials.

As one of the most important pieces of military hardware China is working on, the *Fujian* was officially unveiled in June 2022 in Shanghai as it was towed out of China State Shipbuilding Corp's Jiangnan Shipyard.

When sailing, the gigantic vessel will displace more than 80,000 metric tons of water. It will be the largest and mightiest warship any Asian nation has ever built, as well as the world's biggest non-American aircraft carrier.

The ship will use an electromagnetic launch system, or electromagnetic catapult, to launch fixed-wing aircraft. This new system will give the carrier a much greater combat capability than its two predecessors, which use a ramp to launch jets.

A shipbuilding industry insider who spoke to China Daily on condition of anonymity said that the first sea trial is especially crucial for the new carrier's development and construction because it will be used to examine the overall design and actual operational performance.

"The maiden sea trial usually doesn't have to last long and the ship needn't sail far, because designers and engineers usually use this occasion to check how the

power and propulsion systems function in sea waters, which can be done in coastal waters," he said. "Tests on other systems, such as the air-defense or air operation control sections will take place in the next sea trials."

The insider said since the *Fujian* is the largest naval ship and one of the most sophisticated military assets China has ever built, it will undergo a number of sea trials before it can be commissioned for active service.

Currently, the Navy operates two aircraft carriers — the CNS *Liaoning* and the CNS *Shandong*. Both have a standard displacement of around 50,000 tons and a conventional propulsion system, and they use a ski jump method for launching fixed-wing aircraft.

Compared with its two predecessors, the *Fujian* is much bigger and heavier, and has a larger flight deck and smaller superstructure.

The *Liaoning* underwent 10 sea trials before going into service, and the *Shandong* conducted nine before its commissioning.

Three visits boost ties with Latin American nations

By **ZHAO JIA**
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China and Latin American countries will further enhance solidarity and cooperation in order to inject new impetus for future growth of ties and play a bigger role in practicing multilateralism, officials and observers said as foreign ministers of three Latin American countries wrapped up their visits to China.

Over three days starting Sunday, Foreign Minister Wang Yi held separate talks with the foreign ministers of Bolivia, Peru and Argentina. The three visits were the first for all the visiting foreign ministers after taking office.

Wang told a news conference on Tuesday that through the meetings, China, Latin American and Caribbean countries have further strengthened strategic communication.

China and LAC countries, as important emerging economies, are firm upholders of international multilateral system and positive builders of world peace and prosperity, he said.

The two sides would practice true multilateralism and advocate an equal and orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, he added.

Argentine Foreign Minister Diana Mondino concluded her five-day visit on Wednesday, the longest among the three visits.

When meeting with Mondino, Wang stressed the need for China and Argentina to follow a path of mutual support and win-win cooperation.

The pair agreed that China and Argentina would remain unwavering in promoting friendship and shoring up efforts to deepen cooperation, no matter what changes occur in their domestic and international situation, Wang said.

He said the two countries should deepen mutual trust, follow independent foreign policies and eliminate external interference, as bilateral cooperation neither targets a third party nor should it be disrupted by a third party.

Wang also called for China and Argentina to deepen exchanges under multilateral frameworks to promote overall cooperation between China and LAC countries, and advance solidarity and cooperation of the Global South with practical actions.

No matter how Argentina's internal political situation changes, its friendly policy toward China would not change, Mondino said.

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Campus protests broken up



Protesters are taken into custody as law enforcement dismantle an encampment by pro-Palestinian students at the University of Texas at Dallas' Chess Plaza on Wednesday in Richardson. More than a dozen protesters were arrested. **JUAN FIGUEROA / THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS VIA AP**
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NEW CHINESE STYLE GIVES YOUNG PEOPLE A COOL EVERYDAY CHOICE

Innovative, traditional design grows in popularity as more consumers enjoy both its practicality and fashion

By **LI YINGXUE**
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As people walk through the crowd along the buzzing Pingjiang Road in downtown Suzhou, East China's Jiangsu province, they'll often see women clad in various styles of *qipao* (cheongsam) and *hanfu* (traditional Chinese dresses).

Photographer Zhang Xiyan is busy capturing a mother and daughter in pretty *hanfu* outfits. Amid the constant flow of people, she seeks the best angles for her shots. Interestingly, behind the

camera, Zhang herself wears a *qipao* dress.

The 32-year-old photographer wears a *qipao* every day of the year, owning about 20 such dresses. She chooses a piece of different material and thicknesses according to the seasons. "It's convenient for everyday wear," she says.

"I don't feel awkward wearing *qipao* on the streets," Zhang says. "Suzhou is a magical city. Living here, people will start to love the traditional styles of costumes and also enjoy traditional cultural activities like tea drinking and playing

the *guqin* (a traditional seven-stringed zither)."

In cities like Suzhou, Hangzhou of East China's Zhejiang province, and Luoyang of Central China's Henan province, the trend of wearing *hanfu* for photos and social media check-ins is on the rise. New Chinese style (*xinzhongshi*) is becoming a popular everyday choice among young people, who are increasingly adopting this style across various aspects of their lives, from apparel to dining, living, and traveling. The fusion of traditional Chinese elements with modern

design is often referred to as *xinzhongshi*, or the "new Chinese style", which has been gaining popularity both in products and activities.

This spring, women's clothing stores are showcasing a variety of new Chinese-style items, featuring traditional designs like knot buttons, cloud patterns, and horse-face skirts (*mamianqun* in Chinese), a type of traditional Chinese skirt characterized by its distinct pleated design. The trend extends beyond apparel, with a growing market for domestic beauty and cultural prod-

ucts as well as home goods, and food inspired by new Chinese style.

According to last year's Chinese Brand Consumption Trend Report, released by JD Research Institute for Consumption and Industrial Development, the number of Chinese consumers buying *guochao* — "National tide" or "China chic", a consumption trend wherein younger consumers prefer products with Chinese cultural elements — products grew by 74 percent between 2019 and 2022, while sales surged by 355 percent.

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INSIDE

Vincius puts Madrid in pole position

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CHINA

Overcapacity allegation debunked

NDRC says green industries in 'surge' phase that is part of market life cycle

By ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHILIA

The rapid development of China's green industries has made a significant contribution to the global fight against climate change by accelerating the green transition of the automobile industry, providing affordable green energy and promoting green technology cooperation, officials, executives and experts said.

The allegation that China's green industries are hammering global industrial chains with "overcapacity" — a situation where there is too much production capacity relative to demand — is not only flawed and unfair but likely fabricated for selfish purposes, they said.

"Equating supply-demand relationship fluctuations with 'overcapacity' is a fundamental misunderstanding of how a market economy works," the National

Development and Reform Commission said in a column published on Tuesday.

The comments came amid claims of overcapacity put forth by some nations after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's trip to China early last month. She said China is flooding global markets with cheap goods, particularly in new green industries.

From the perspective of the industrial life cycle, emerging industries often see a surge in investment and capacity expansion as companies vie for market share, the NDRC said, describing this as the "surge" phase, where capacity might temporarily exceed demand.

"As market demand continues to grow and the industry matures, competitive enterprises and superior capacities will excel while less advanced ones will exit the market, sending the supply-demand relationship to automatically resume a dynamic equilibrium," it said.

The NDRC said that simply labeling the phenomenon as "overcapacity" overlooks both the dominant role of market mechanisms in adjusting supply and demand and the general laws of an industry's development.

"If experts in the economic field are promoting such views, it might suggest an intentional effort to confuse and distort facts for unspeakable motives," it said.

Timothy Moe, Goldman Sachs' chief Asia-Pacific regional equity strategist and co-head of macro research in Asia, said it is unfair to blame Chinese government support as the sole reason behind the current disputes surrounding overcapacity.

The world needs to understand the causes of the issue better, he added.

Christian Mumenthaler, chief executive officer of Swiss Re Group, a global leader in reinsurance, said China's progress in green transition not only presents Swiss Re with new business opportunities, but also helps the world deal with the serious threat of climate change in a better way.

China has the necessary technology and decisiveness to accelerate its green transition, Mumenthaler said. This positions the country to potentially lead in the production of vital green products like green steel and green aluminum, which are in growing demand worldwide.

The NDRC also said that China has exported renewable energy products — such as lithium batteries and photovoltaic products — to over 200 countries and regions, helping developing countries access clean, reliable and affordable energy and facilitating the global green and low-carbon transition.

It added that the robust growth of China's new energy vehicle industry has met the global demand for quality products and promoted technology collaborations in that field, strongly supporting the transformation of the global automotive industry.

Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz and other international automakers have established global research and development centers in China. Volkswagen joined hands with Chi-

nese electric vehicle maker XPeng last month in developing electrical/electronic architecture to improve its competitive edge in China's EV market.

Guo Kai, executive president of the CF40 Institute — a research institute affiliated with the China Finance 40 Forum, a top think tank — said the United States' allegation that Chinese "overcapacity" is damaging US employment is flawed because the analyses fail to account for the jobs created through trade with China.

The primary cause of the decline in US manufacturing employment is not Chinese exports but increased productivity and the adoption of automation in the US, he said.

However, to cope with intensified global trade protectionism, Guo said China should further bolster domestic demand and shift some exports toward direct overseas investments that can help boost local employment more significantly.

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Letter: Life is better, say plant staff

From page 1

Enad Cvetanovic, who is the head of operation of the hot mill, is one of the 30 representatives of Serbian workers at the plant who wrote a letter to Xi. In the letter, they expounded on the latest development of the plant and its important contribution toward improving the well-being of local residents. They also thanked Xi for showing care for and facilitating the project.

"I got this idea of sending a letter to President Xi with my colleagues in February after I learned that he will come to my country again," he said, adding that the letter was sent to China from Belgrade last month with signatures of colleagues from different departments at the plant.

Then on Monday night, Chinese Ambassador to Serbia Li Ming brought them Xi's reply. "That was something amazing for us, especially for me, because I didn't expect that," Cvetanovic said.

He said that if Xi could visit the plant again, they would share with him all the changes that have taken place over the eight years since the Chinese president's last trip, including equipment renewal and upgrading.

"In particular, the workers are living a much better life and our sense of security has been enhanced after Hesteel Group came here," he said, adding that they believe the future will be even better.

Xinhua contributed to the story.

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Ties: Visits show faith in economy

From page 1

The new Argentine government pursues an open policy and welcomes Chinese enterprises to invest and do business in Argentina, she said, adding that Argentina would continue to cooperate with China in areas such as trade and investment under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

When talking with Wang on Monday, Peruvian Foreign Minister Javier Gonzalez-Olaechea Franco said Peru is willing to enhance unity and mutual trust with China and expand practical cooperation in many fields for more results in bilateral ties.

Bolivian Foreign Minister Celinda Sosa Lunda on Sunday said she hoped for greater cooperation in areas such as economy and trade and better cooperation with China on multilateral platforms such as the BRICS.

The visits came amid a parade of political leaders and business executives headed to China to seek opportunities.

Wang Youming, director of the Department for Developing Countries Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said the visits showed that these Latin American countries had confidence in the Chinese economy and hoped to get out of economic difficulties through cooperation with China, which is still a locomotive for global growth.

He added that the visits showed the urgent desire of Latin American countries to strengthen ties and coordination with China to tackle global challenges.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Forum. Wang said cooperation between China and LAC countries has scored fruitful results and the visits would pave the way for higher level exchanges in the future.

It also helped step up multilateral strategic coordination and safeguard shared interests of countries of the Global South, Wang added.

Speaking of Mondino's visit, he said it was conducive to stabilizing ties between Beijing and Buenos Aires. In particular, it would make the Argentine government more rational and pragmatic in formulating China policies.

Chinese oil company helps to nurture talent in Iraq

By HUANG ZHILING and ZHENG XIN

Sitting in his well-furnished home in Kut, in Iraq's Wasit province, 41-year-old Iraqi oil production engineer Hadi Obaid Mery said he is grateful to China ZhenHua Oil for changing his fate and helping him create a more dignified life for his family.

"I lived in a clay house in a remote village as a child," he told Chinese journalists in a recent online interview. "Dad passed away when I was eight, and my family was in financial straits.

"My brothers had to quit school and work to support the family. Only I continued my schooling at Baghdad University, the highest academic institution in Iraq."

His fortunes turned around in October 2010, when he was employed by the Wasit-based Al Waha Petroleum company, a joint venture between ZhenHua Oil and PetroChina, that is developing the Ahdeb oilfield in Iraq.

He is now a qualified oil extraction engineer, managing over 100 local employees.

Beijing-headquartered ZhenHua Oil, established in 2003, is involved in the operation of two oil fields in Iraq — Ahdeb and East Baghdad.

Located 180 kilometers southeast of Baghdad, Ahdeb has a peak annual crude oil production of more than 7 million metric tons. Jointly operated by ZhenHua Oil and PetroChina, it was officially put into operation in June 2011.

The East Baghdad oilfield, also located southeast of the Iraqi capital, is operated by ZhenHua Oil, which signed its oilfield development and production service contract with Iraq's Ministry of Oil in May 2018. The project is expected to produce 4 million tons of crude oil a year.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said Chinese energy companies have increasingly expanded their operations overseas, driven by the quest for resources to fuel their domestic growth.

By offering job opportunities and training programs in such regions, the companies not only fulfill their

social responsibility but also foster local economic growth, he said.

Ma Cheng, general manager of ZhenHua Oil's East Baghdad oilfield project, said: "In recent years, ZhenHua Oil has continued to promote programs for fostering young Iraqi oil talent through study scholarships and short-term training in China. The aim is to provide them with a comprehensive understanding of China's technical capabilities, enabling them to apply their acquired skills and knowledge to the development of Iraq's oil industry. Simultaneously, this initiative seeks to facilitate the global outreach of Chinese technologies and companies."

In more than a decade of deep involvement in the Iraqi market, ZhenHua Oil has created more than 5,000 local jobs and made positive contributions to local social development and the improvement of people's livelihoods.

Last year, with the support of the Ministry of Education, ZhenHua Oil, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, and Southwest Petroleum University in Chengdu, Sichuan province, launched the ZhenHua Oil Scholarship Program for talented young Iraqis to study in China. It is the first long-term rolling scholarship program in Iraq provided by an international oil company, and more than 30 Iraqi students have now studied in China through it.

The scholarship project has attracted widespread attention and was included in the "People-to-People Connect" achievement list for last year's third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

"China-Iraq cooperation contains unlimited potential," Wang Hehua, general manager of the ZhenHua Oil Research Institute, said.

"Through joint scientific research, talent exchange and cooperation, we have not only promoted the improvement of the technical level of local Iraqi companies, but also enabled ZhenHua Oil and other Chinese companies to introduce more technologies with independent intellectual property rights into the Iraqi market."

Qi Daliang contributed to the story.

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An aerial view of the collapsed section of highway in Meizhou, Guangdong province, that killed 24 people and injured 30 others when it gave way on Wednesday morning. The survivors, none with life-threatening conditions, are receiving treatment in hospitals. XINHUA

Highway collapse kills 24, injures 30

By ZHOU SHUO and LI WENFANG

Twenty-four people died and 30 others were injured after a section of a highway collapsed in Meizhou, Guangdong province, on Wednesday morning, local authorities said.

Twenty cars were trapped in the accident, which happened at 2:10 am, but no passenger buses or vehicles carrying dangerous chemicals were involved.

Almost 18 meters of road, with an area of around 184 square meters, collapsed.

The 30 injured people were rushed to hospital and were not in

critical condition.

Local authorities established a rescue headquarters comprising more than 500 people from sectors including public security, emergency response, fire and rescue, and healthcare.

The Ministry of Emergency Management has sent a working group to the site to guide rescue efforts.

The highway has been closed, and local authorities are looking into the cause of the accident.

A woman surnamed Yang told Beijing Youth Daily that a car driven by her husband's sister fell when the road collapsed. The

driver is in stable condition, but three people from the car are missing and a three-year-old baby is in critical care.

The chasm that opened up when the road collapsed was about three stories high and there was no warning, she said.

A netizen surnamed Cai told the newspaper that his uncle's family, driving from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region to Fujian province, is missing and he is waiting for information from authorities.

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Iraqi oil production engineer Hadi Obaid Mery (left) makes a presentation to Hayyan Abdul-Ghani (center), Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs and Minister of Oil, during Abdul-Ghani's recent visit to the Ahdeb oilfield in Wasit province, Iraq. PROVIDED TO CHIN DAILY

COVER

From page 1

Six years ago, Zhang left her hometown in Fujian province and settled in Suzhou, drawn by her passion for traditional Chinese gardens and ancient architecture. Since then, she has been working as a freelance photographer.

Most of her photo shoots took place on Pingjiang Road and in the Humble Administrator's Garden (Zhuozheng Yuan), first built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

In the past two years, she has witnessed more young women wearing *hanfu* walk on Pingjiang Road, and many of them come to scenic spots clad in the traditional Chinese dresses for photos.

"There are more than 20 rental shops in a small alley near the main lane of Pingjiang Road," Zhang says. "The garments come in various styles, from traditional replicas to more modern interpretations, catering to different tastes."

Zhang meets up regularly with friends, all clad in such dresses, for tea sessions. Apart from enjoying the drink, they also partake in traditional activities, such as incense burning and flower arrangements. Her friends each have different talents pertaining to traditional Chinese culture, some good at playing the *guqin*, while some are flower arrangement masters. "It's a community where we learn and share skills with one another," she says.

Zhang likes *qipao* so much that she even spends her spare time sewing them. She has already made 10 such dresses for herself. She even planned to launch workshops guiding others how to make them in the future or be a tailor herself.

Sold out

Unlike the photographer, 48-year-old Zhang Ying was born into a family of tailors. After graduating from a vocational college in Guangdong province with a degree in fashion design in 2000, she ventured to Shanghai and started her own cheongsam studio.

"My mom and grandma were tailors. Sometimes they would spend days making *qipao* for clients at their homes," Zhang Ying recalls. "I've loved making clothes since I was young. I used to cut up my mom's clothes to make outfits for my younger sister."

Her Shanghai Jianjie *qipao*-making factories, focusing on keywords of *xinzhongshi* and *qipao*, have grown steadily over the past 20 years, employing more than 300 people at its peak. During the pandemic, she closed one factory and now has a tailoring team of over 40 people.

But with the recent surge in demand for new Chinese-style clothing in China, her products are sold out. With an annual turnover reaching 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million), she has decided to further expand her team.

Over the past two decades, while inheriting traditional *qipao*-making techniques from her family, she has continually refined the design and color combinations of her cheongsam, making them more fashionable and convenient for customers.

In recent years, she has also been innovating in fabric development, personally weaving and dyeing all the fabrics used in her clothing.

As of early February, there were over 2.6 million notes on Xiaohongshu social media platform related to the hashtag topic of "new Chinese-style dressing", and the same topic has garnered a total of 10.2 billion views on Douyin, a short-video sharing platform.

Zhang Ying has noticed this sudden boom in the popularity of *xinzhongshi* clothing. She has directly felt this surge through the sales in her Douyin livestreams.

"In these livestreams, customers some-

Talent: Cultural elements see surge in demand



LIANG LUWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

times get into arguments trying to grab a piece of our clothes. I used to plan two livestreaming sessions a day to sell my products, but my team informed me that we had run out of clothes in the warehouse," she says.

She says she found that when customers visit her studio to try on clothes, without paying for them yet, they often hold onto these items they like, for fear that they might get snatched up by someone else.

"Just the other day, a customer from Kunming, Southwest China's Yunnan province, came to my studio, tried on some clothes, and ended up buying 37 pieces at once. Many of my customers are repeat buyers," she adds. Zhang Ying has noticed a trend: Many

people are now buying *xinzhongshi* clothing for everyday wear, and it's becoming common to spot them on the streets of Shanghai. "In the past, most of my orders were for special occasions like weddings, about 80 percent. Only 20 percent were for daily wear. But now, it's the opposite," she says.

Last year, she made a batch of *xinzhongshi* clothing for men, and they sold out quickly. She mentions that there is also a high demand for men's new Chinese-style clothing, but she currently doesn't have enough capacity to meet it.

At the 2024 MODE Shanghai Fashion Trade Show, a key event of the Shanghai Fashion Week held in March, brands

embracing Chinese-style fashion and national trends made up 25 percent of the independent exhibitors this season.

Zhang Ying sees this as a natural trend, stating, "now is the ideal time to showcase *xinzhongshi* clothing because more young people have become more confident in Chinese culture."

Despite the rise of many new brands, she believes the new Chinese-style clothing sector is entering a phase of intense competition.

Tong Jisheng, director of the Shanghai Fashion Week Organizing Committee, says that designers need to produce more innovative *xinzhongshi* garments to lead the fashion trends, while also make products

accessible to greater numbers of ordinary consumers, allowing more people to appreciate and afford them.

Data from the China National Textile and Apparel Council shows that in 2023, China's *xinzhongshi* clothing market surged to a staggering 1 billion yuan, and over the past three years, the total transaction volume of related products has grown at a rate exceeding 100 percent.

More fields

Social media has played a significant role in boosting the popularity of Zhang Ying's new Chinese-style clothing online with more customers knowing about her brand through Douyin. Meanwhile, offline, the allure of new Chinese-style home decor is gradually gaining attention in the homes, stores and office spaces.

In the realm of *xinzhongshi* furniture, there's no exact definition. For today's young consumers, it's about creatively blending Chinese traditional elements with modern aesthetics to suit contemporary tastes, according to many home decor experts.

In Beijing's Daxing district stands the Tianwu Art Center, which was completed just last year. Since its opening, many visitors have been drawn to explore tangible examples of the *xinzhongshi* home decor styles on display.

Ma Yuchen, the center's general manager, explains that it serves as a showcase for their unique Chinese-style design aesthetic and lifestyle. Moreover, it's an open space that hosts exhibitions featuring innovative *guochao* brands and avant-garde artists.

"For years, we've been dedicated to Tianwu, a brand specializing in new Chinese-style furniture," Ma says.

The brand's founder, Zhong Song, infuses his designs with Chinese cultural elements, emphasizing the aesthetic of harmony between people, nature and space.

"Many visitors find our center a tranquil and comfortable space, where they'd feel free and at ease," Ma says.

Ma sees a gradual increase in the customer base for *xinzhongshi* home decor products, with young people, who have just bought their first homes, becoming the main consumers. "After they have their own homes, they hope to create their ideal living spaces and express themselves through their spaces."

In another tantalizing field, new Chinese-style cuisine is also becoming more popular across China, with a variety of offers appearing on diners' tables, including both refined presentations of traditional Chinese dishes and the fusion of Chinese ingredients and flavors into Western cuisine.

After studying Western culinary arts in Switzerland, 34-year-old Cai Jiahao returned to Beijing and opened his restaurant, Les Morilles, in 2017. Over seven years, he's developed his own cooking style by incorporating local Chinese elements into his dishes, creating new combinations.

"Some seasoning methods and ingredients in China are unique and not found abroad," Cai explains, adding that "Chinese diners prefer lighter tastes compared to the rich flavors of traditional Western cuisine."

Les Morilles recently introduced a spring menu named Coucou in French, featuring eight courses. Using ingredients like king crab, scallop, lobster, and Wagyu beef as a base, Cai adds seasonal domestic ingredients and seasonings to highlight the freshness of spring, such as Fujian green asparagus, Shandong white asparagus, and Jiangsu pomelo.

"Lobster pairs well with refreshing pomelo, enriching the dish's flavor," Cai shares.

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Young people increasingly find that tradition is their cup of tea

By LI YINGXUE

In a burst of springtime flavor, new-style Chinese tea chain, Molly Tea, has attracted beverage enthusiasts with its latest creation, Yongchun Foshou. Made from the renowned oolong tea of the same name from Yongchun county, Quanzhou, Fujian province, this new offering has quickly become a hit. Yet, it is merely a highlight in a series of new brands that have taken the tea market by storm.

Data from the food delivery platform Eleme reveals a significant surge in demand: "Longjing (dragon-well green tea) milk tea" orders have quintupled since the start of April compared to March, while deliveries of milk teas crafted with bases of rock tea (a type of oolong) and *bihuo* (a type of green tea) have skyrocketed, recording increases of 100 times and 34 times respectively over the past year.

Young consumers are really getting into new Chinese-style (*xinzhongshi*) tea drinks and desserts. Even though young people have been enjoying milk tea and fruit tea, their interest in traditional Chinese tea keeps growing.

A recent report from the China Tea Marketing Association stated that as young people aged 18 to 30 gradually became the main drinkers of the beverage, such trends as *guochao* ("National tide" or "China chic"), where younger consumers prefer products made innovatively with Chinese elements, such as with aspects of intangible cultural heritage, are gaining traction. Modern Chinese tea-

houses have emerged as a fresh socializing spot for the youth, signaling an upgrade of the drink's consumption.

Wang Qing, president of the China Tea Marketing Association, says that as consumers favor more high-quality drinks, traditional premium teas are becoming the top choice, which is also boosting the consumption and innovation.

Last year, Theatre Tea, a modern chain with five stores in Beijing and Shanghai that was established in 2015, launched a new facility in the capital that differs from others with modern design ideas from inner decor to products — it combines retail and tea-drinking in a new Chinese style.

Sun Xuling, co-founder of Theatre Tea, shared that after years of market exploration, they felt it was time to offer consumers a more genuine tea experience.

"We've been experimenting with various modern interpretations of tea, from cocktails to desserts like cakes. Now, we highlight more of the essence of tea," she explains.

To enhance the tea culture experience, the new store showcases samples and explains the differences between various types.

"We also collaborated with a studio specializing in soil research at Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture to create bricks that were mixed with tea powder or tea leaves with clay for the construction of our teahouse, mixing them without any additives or firing," Sun adds.

The store has three tea masters who



From top: Theatre Tea's new store in Beijing offers a genuine experience. Snacks made of tea elements by chef Hao Jia and her team in a Beijing hotel.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

engage with customers, brewing tea and sharing knowledge. "We've noticed a growing number of enthusiasts who even bring their own tea for our masters to brew," she says.

The new store also offers tea-making workshops, which are popular among young consumers. The latest course focused on making rose tea, pairing petals with black tea. Participants are guided through the process, with tea and snacks provided.

Over 200 participants have taken part in this tea scenting course, which costs 89 yuan (\$12) each. Wu Xuefeng, 44, attended a class on crafting osmanthus oolong tea last year. Guided by the instructor, she made the tea by herself and brought it home in a container.

"Usually, tea in teahouses is pre-prepared. Crafting a floral tea myself felt novel," Wu says.

The teacher simplified the process, making it easy to follow along. Wu says that she gained a clearer understanding of the tea's flavors through the process.

"The whole experience was relaxing and enjoyable. It helped ease my mood," she says.

Sun notices that with more sugar-free tea beverages introduced by tea brands in recent years, the taste of tea itself is gradually being embraced by young consumers. She hopes tea will become a part of everyone's daily life, with various ways to enjoy it, such as cold brewing in the summer.

In addition to the drink, Theatre Tea's tea-

flavored cakes and desserts are also popular.

Chinese tea is increasingly becoming an inspiration for pastry chefs. Hao Jia, the executive sous-chef at China World Summit Wing, Beijing and her team recently introduced a spring-themed tea snack set.

One standout creation involves incorporating Longjing tea, picked before the Qingming Festival, fourth or fifth day of the fourth lunar month on the Chinese calendar, into traditional Italian panna cotta, enhancing it with a fresher, less sweet flavor.

The appearance of the dessert is inspired by the landscapes of Jiangnan (the region south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River), featuring layered colors of dark and light greens like a micro version of the mountains.

Hao, 39, keeps up with dining trends on social media platforms like Xiaohongshu, and she has noticed a rising interest in tea shops and unique tea-related offerings with more and more posts about these topics.

Starting last year, Hao and her team began infusing Chinese cuisine elements into their offerings.

"We've added tea flavors into our desserts, which makes them less sweet than typical Western desserts to cater to the local palate," Hao says.

This approach has resonated well with their clientele. "Our customers enjoy these new-style Chinese desserts, and many female customers recommend this afternoon tea set to their friends," she adds.

WORLD

US universities send police to end protests

Columbia president says university was pushed 'to the brink' by 'drastic escalation'

By AI HEPING in New York
aihaping@chinadailyusa.com

Pro-Palestinian protesters have been arrested at university campuses across the United States as many school administrators ended their tolerance of demonstrations and called in police.

Universities and police have said people unaffiliated with the schools have joined or intensified the demonstrations protesting the Israel-Hamas war.

Columbia University President Minouche Shafik told the campus community in a letter released Wednesday that the "drastic escalation" of monthslong protests "pushed the University to the brink".

Leaders at Columbia and the City College of New York requested police assistance to deal with the protesters on Tuesday night. Shafik said Columbia's Board of Trustees supported her move.

At the White House on Wednesday, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre sought to answer questions from reporters when asked why the country hadn't heard directly from President Joe Biden about the protests.

"No president, no president has spoken more forcefully about combating antisemitism than this president," she said.

On Tuesday, former president Donald Trump blamed Biden for the protests. "Biden is supposed to be the voice of our country and it's certainly not much of a voice," he told Fox News.

Columbia was in a partial lockdown on Wednesday after hundreds of police, many in riot gear, moved on to the Upper Manhattan campus Tuesday night.

They forced demonstrators out of a campus building they had seized and took down the few tents left in an encampment. There were no reports of clashes between demonstrators and police.

Police said they arrested 119 protesters at Columbia and 173 people at



A counter-protester and a pro-Palestinian protester face each other at an encampment on the University of California, Los Angeles campus, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, on Wednesday.

DAVID SWANSON / RETUERS

the City College of New York.

New York Mayor Eric Adams said outside agitators were co-opting the protest movement at Columbia.

The University of Texas at Austin said 45 of the 79 people arrested on campus on Monday weren't associated with the school.

"These numbers validate our concern that much of the disruption on campus over the past week has been orchestrated by people from outside the University," UT Austin said.

Early Wednesday, violence erupted at the pro-Palestinian encampment on the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) campus.

A group of counter-demonstrators, dressed in black and white masks, attempted to dismantle barricades enclosing an encampment.

Los Angeles police officers arrived to assist campus police at about 2 a.m., according to tweets from the agency. The police haven't released details about arrests. CNN reported

15 people were injured and one was hospitalized.

California Governor Gavin Newsom said in a statement Wednesday that the delayed law-enforcement response was "unacceptable and it demands answers".

Tai Min, a 20-year-old sophomore at UCLA who has spent time in the pro-Palestinian encampment, said conflicts with counter-protesters occurred for several nights in a row, though Tuesday

was by far the most violent.

"It's been escalating and escalating," she told The Wall Street Journal.

UCLA canceled all classes for Wednesday.

Schools have de-escalated protests by using threats of arrest and/or suspension.

Yale University said all protesters left their encampment Tuesday morning after the school threatened suspensions and arrests.

Students protesting outside Fordham University's Manhattan campus on Wednesday said they anticipated a police crackdown after other demonstrators erected tents inside an academic building.

Fordham students who are part of an encampment at the school say they have been suspended. University administrators haven't commented, but students showed reporters their suspension letters through windows of a school lobby.

Arrests occurred on Tuesday and Wednesday at many schools, including the University of Arizona in Tucson, Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff and Tulane University in New Orleans. Tulane said the overwhelming majority of the protesters were outsiders.

In what appeared to mark the first time a US college has agreed to vote on divestment in the wake of the protests, Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, said it would close a protesters' encampment in exchange for administrators taking a vote to consider divestment from Israel-linked companies in October.

Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, said it came to an agreement with students to disband their encampment but leave one tent up until June 1. The school pledged to support Palestinian faculty and students and revive its advisory committee on investment responsibility.

In New York, Angus Johnston, a historian of US student activism, explained that the generational divide on Israel is especially pronounced among Democrats.

"On a national level, we have seen this for a while as a disconnect between the values of young voters and most Democratic politicians," Johnston told Al Jazeera.

For example, he said college activism against apartheid in South Africa began in the 1950s and grew over the years.

They're the latest in a Columbia tradition that dates back more than five decades — one that also helped provide inspiration for the anti-apartheid protest of the 1980s and the Iraq war protests.

Rena Li in Los Angeles contributed to this story.

Smoke signal



Smoke rises from the deck of cargo ship *Riv Munte* in Koege, Denmark, on Tuesday. The ship moored in Koege Harbor is at risk of capsizing after a fire broke out on board. According to local media, the ship was leaning precariously toward the harbor quay.

MADS CLAUS RASMUSSEN / RITZAU SCANPIX / AFP

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Dengue sparks concern in Latin America

By JIMENA ESTEBAN
in Buenos Aires, Argentina
For China Daily

The dengue outbreak across Latin America has reached alarming levels with reported cases already surpassing 5.2 million this year.

"We have an emergency situation," Jarbas Barbosa, director of the Pan American Health Organization, or PAHO, told the media recently.

"We call dengue a 'silent epidemic' because the COVID-19 situation somewhat overshadowed the dengue issue as circulation decreased during quarantine measures," Maria Victoria Micieli, lead investigator at Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council and director of the Centre for Parasitological and Vector Studies, said.

The speed at which dengue is spreading across the continent is unprecedented. In 2024, dengue has claimed 1,800 lives, up from 1,000 in the first three months of this year.

Argentina and Brazil have been the hardest hit countries, together accounting for a majority of the cases. In Argentina, a record 57,461 cases were reported in the first eight weeks of 2024.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral disease that is rapidly spread-



A dengue fever patient walks inside a hospital on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, on April 17. JUAN CARLOS CISNEROS / AFP

ing across the globe due to factors such as urbanization and travel.

"In Argentina this year, there was a lot of community movement," said Micieli.

Serious increases are also being seen elsewhere.

Medical authorities in Peru reported that cases and deaths have more than tripled in 2024 compared to the same period last year. The government is struggling particularly in poorer areas to contain the spread, and President Dina Boluarte has approved an "emergency decree" to ramp

up the national response.

Because of the El Niño climate pattern, there is going to be very heavy precipitation this year, creating many more breeding sites for the vector, Micieli noted.

While a vaccine exists, PAHO warned that limited availability means transmission cannot be curbed immediately.

"Getting vaccinated will be important to avoid overwhelming the healthcare system," said Micieli.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Briefly

UNITED KINGDOM

King Charles resumes duties after treatment

King Charles III returned to public duties on Tuesday, visiting a cancer treatment charity and beginning his comeback after the monarch's cancer diagnosis sidelined him for three months. The event was the king's first formal public engagement since Feb 6, when Buckingham Palace announced he would be taking a break from public duties to focus on his treatment for an undisclosed type of cancer. Charles and Queen Camilla met with patients at the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre in London.

UNITED STATES

8 newspapers sue OpenAI, Microsoft

A group of eight US newspapers is suing ChatGPT-maker OpenAI and Microsoft, alleging that the technology companies have been "purloining millions" of copyrighted news articles without permission or payment to train their artificial intelligence chatbots. The New York Daily News, Chicago Tribune, Denver Post and other papers filed the lawsuit on Tuesday in a federal court. Microsoft declined to comment. OpenAI said that it takes care to support news organizations.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Haiti's transitional council names new PM

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Haiti's transitional council chose a former sports minister as the Caribbean country's prime minister on Tuesday as part of its monumental task of trying to establish a stable new government amid stifling violence.

Fritz Belizaire was chosen in a surprise move to replace current interim Prime Minister Michel Patrick Boisvert, gaining the support of four of the seven voting mem-

bers on the nine-member panel.

The council also planned to choose a cabinet as it seeks to quell gang violence that is choking the capital, Port-au-Prince, and beyond. Heavy gunfire was reported in several of the capital's neighborhoods during the council's meeting.

More than 90,000 people have fled the capital in a span of one month. Overall, more than 360,000 people have been left homeless in

recent years as gunmen raze communities in rival territories.

Earlier on Tuesday, the council chose former presidential candidate Edgard Leblanc Fils as the president of the panel.

Fils said the council met on Monday with army and police officials to talk about Haiti's security crisis and how best to resolve it. "We are publicly recognizing the suffering," he said of the population.

Belizaire served as Haiti's sports minister during the second presidency of Rene Preval from 2006 to 2011.

The transitional council will act as the country's presidency until it can arrange a presidential election sometime before it disbands, which must be by February 2026.

Haitians remain divided over whether they believe a transitional government can help calm a troubled country whose capital has been under siege since gangs launched coordinated attacks on Feb 29.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

PEOPLE

They've set their seal on seal protection

This is the story of two men who have been rescuing and treating spotted seals in the Liaodong Bay area for years

By YAN DONGJIE and WU YONG
in Panjin, Liaoning

All baby animals are cute. Seal pups are no exception.

One such pup, a spotted seal pup, about 20 days old, was found on an offshore oil extraction platform in Panjin, Liaoning province, by nearby residents in late February. Among those who rescued the cute, but initially angry and somewhat aggressive, pup was Li Yue, of the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command team, and volunteer Tian Jiguang.

"The seal pup was found with a fishing net entangled around its neck. Seals, even seal pups, have a strong temper. So when we approached it to remove the fishing net from its neck, it thought we would harm it and turned aggressive like an agitated dog. But the more it struggled, the more the net tightened around its neck. Eventually, it realized that we meant no harm, and allowed us to remove the net from around its neck," said Tian, founder of Panjin Wetland Protection Association.

Spotted seals' intelligence is roughly equivalent to that of a four-year-old child and even young seals can survive on their own in the wild, Tian said. But since the rescued pup was just about three weeks old and hence wouldn't have survived the harsh environment of the open sea without its mother, it was not released into the sea.

Spotted seals are relatively shy, difficult to approach and generally solitary, though they are gregarious and form large groups during pupping and molting seasons when they haul out on ice or on land when there is lack of ice, which nowadays is often the case. Perhaps that's why the pup was aggressive when approached, Tian said.

"We took care of it for a day, and then sent it to the Liaoning Ocean and Fisheries Science Research Institute in Dalian for treatment and examination. Only after we were sure the pup had developed the ability to survive in the wild was it returned to the sea," said Li, captain of the FLEC team in Panshan county, Panjin. Li generally rescues several spotted seals from the sea or shore every year.

Over the past decade, Li and his teammates have been patrolling the resting areas of spotted seals in the Liaodong Bay by boat. "There are five landing points that spotted seals favor in the bay area. The seals at different locations belong to different extended families," Li said.

He is familiar with every group of spotted seals in the Liaohe River Estuary National Nature Reserve in Panjin; he knows the heads of the families and those with scars that have been wintering in the bay area for years.

Spotted seals are mainly distrib-



Clockwise from top: Tian Jiguang takes photos of a spotted seal in Panjin, Liaoning province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A group of spotted seals rests on the shore in the Liaohe River Estuary National Nature Reserve in Panjin. Li Yue (right) and a colleague from the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command team survey the water during a regular patrol in the Liaohe nature reserve. PHOTOS BY YAN DONGJIE / CHINA DAILY

uted in the Northwest Pacific region and are the only species of seals that breed in China, spending nearly half the year in the country.

Like migratory birds, they appear around October every year in the Liaodong Bay area, and embark on the long journey back to the Pacific in May after breeding. Although spotted seals have almost no natural enemies in the nature reserve, some are still injured or die every year, Li said.

The actual breeding period of spotted seals, however, is from January to mid-April, with the floating

ice sheets on the sea being the natural maternity ward. Seal pups fatten up on protein- and fat-rich mother's milk on the floating ice for about a month before their white fur gradually sheds and they develop the strength to swim.

Newborn spotted seals are very fragile and have a poor sense of direction. Some may be hit by floating ice sheets or stranded on land after being carried away by tidal waves, leading to their death. That's why so many pups need to be rescued between January and March every year.

Li recalled an experience in early March 2009 when they found a young spotted seal, about 15 days old, with a back injury. Experts said that it must have been hit by a floating ice sheet two or three days after birth.

"When we found it, it was already on its last breath. At the time, our rescue and revival techniques were not so advanced, so we couldn't save it despite our best efforts," Li said with pain in his eyes.

Tian, who has been part of many rescue missions with Li, has made protecting spotted seals his career.

"Spotted seals arrived on this land before humans. Although they cannot speak, they have their own interests and needs. When the 'rights' of spotted seals are violated, I feel I should stand up and speak for them," Tian said.

To monitor and rescue seals, Tian moved into an abandoned white building in the wetland area in the nature reserve and set up the volunteer organization's office and exhibition area there.

"I have been helping protect spotted seals for 17 years and have rescued about 100 of them," he said.

Tian loves all creatures living in this area. For him, spotted seals are more like family. He even named a spotted seal with a scar on its belly Appendicitis. "I saw it for three consecutive years but haven't seen it this year," Tian said.

"It's April now and the spotted seals have started moving back to the Pacific again," he said.

The cycle will start again in October, when the spotted seals will "return home" to the northernmost coastline of China.

Over the years, researchers, environmentalists and wildlife experts have monitored and rescued spotted seals, as well as provided medical treatment for them.

Now, a complete system for rescuing spotted seals has been established, and both the protection and release of spotted seals in the wild have become more scientific, according to the Agricultural and Rural Affairs Bureau of Panshan county.

Spotted seals were included in the "National Key Protected Wild Animals List" in the late 1980s and became a first-class protected animal in 2021. More importantly, the authorities have taken targeted measures, including habitat restoration, to better protect the spotted seals, Tian said.

Panjin is famous for its unique reed beaches and green reeds.

In fact, it boasts the world's largest and best-preserved coastal reed wetlands. Besides, in recent years, Panjin has restored 85,900 acres of coastal wetlands and added 17.6 kilometers of natural coastline by implementing the "returning farmland to wetlands" policy, thus creating a favorable breeding ground for Western Pacific spotted seals, according to the Linye River Wetland Conservation and Management Bureau of Panjin.

With the advancement of technology and better protection of the environment and ecology, the conservation efforts for spotted seals have yielded good results.

According to this year's population survey of spotted seals, nearly 400 individuals were observed in winter in the Liaohe reserve, that is, more than double the number in 2021 and 30 percent more than last year, according to the Linye bureau.

"I count the spotted seals one by one every day using high-definition images from drones. On March 25, we counted 398 spotted seals, the highest number we've seen this year," Tian said, adding that the spotted seals can sense the friendliness of the people here as well as the improvement in the ecological environment.

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story.

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Rescue mission like a red crown on cranes

By YAN DONGJIE

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Zhao Shiwei and his team have bred and rescued more than 200 red-crowned cranes and released them into the wild after ensuring they will be able to survive in the wild. Despite doing this for 30 years and loving every moment of it, Zhao's greatest wish is to see his enclosure in Panjin city, Liaoning province, free of cranes.

The red-crowned crane is a national first-class protected wild-life, with the coastal wetlands of Panjin city being one of its important resting, wintering, and breeding grounds in the East Asia-Australasia Flyway for birds.

But due to environmental and ecological damage, the number of red-crowned cranes migrating to the Liaohe River estuary had been continuously declining when Zhao joined work at the Zhaoquan River Management Station, which is part of the Liaohe River Estuary National Nature Reserve in Panjin, in 1992.

Artificial breeding of red-crowned cranes became an important part of Zhao's work. Three red-crowned crane chicks hatched at the station through artificial insemination in 1996. The sight of red-



Zhao Shiwei tends red-crowned crane chicks bred at the Zhaoquan River Management Station of the Liaohe River Estuary National Nature Reserve in Panjin, Liaoning province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

crowned crane chicks emerging from the eggs was extremely exciting for Zhao. "At that moment ... I felt that I had found something very meaningful in life," Zhao said.

But despite tasting success in 1996 and receiving encouragement from senior officials, Zhao and his team encountered setbacks the following year. In 1997, not a single red-crowned crane chick hatched. And in 1998, only one red-crowned crane chick hatched through artificial

insemination, but it died soon after. "Was I suited for this work? At that time, I had many confusing thoughts," Zhao said.

The station director at the time noticed his emotional state and told him that artificial breeding of red-crowned cranes at the station was pioneering work that required continuous exploration, and asked him, "How could we give up in the face of difficulties?"

In 1999, the station rescued sever-

al injured red-crowned cranes from the wild. That prompted Zhao and his colleagues to check the incubator, brooder, temperature control devices and voltage, go through a huge amount of data, seek advice from experts in Shenyang, the provincial capital, and improve the incubator, hoping to achieve a breakthrough in artificial breeding.

"We tried every possible method, even consulting technicians from

nearby chicken farms," Zhao said.

Thanks to such efforts over the years, the artificial breeding program has continued to improve. Last year, a record 85 red-crowned crane chicks hatched at the station through a combination of artificial insemination and natural breeding methods. Over the past 30 years, Zhao has trained many apprentices, but he has always been personally involved in the hatching process. "This part is the most crucial; there cannot be the slightest mistake," he said.

Zhao has set 12 alarms, one for every two hours, on his phone, because during the incubation period, the eggs have to be turned, and ventilation and temperature checked every two hours, whether it's day or night.

Zhao has extensive experience in feeding red-crowned crane chicks, too. "For chicks aged 1 to 20 days, they are fed five times a day; for those between 21 and 30 days old, they are fed four times a day; and for those more than 30 days old, they are fed three times a day," he said.

In 2005, Zhao realized that with the number of artificially bred red-crowned cranes increasing, the bond between the cranes and humans was growing stronger. But "they are the spirits of nature and hence should return to nature," Zhao said.

Hence, Zhao applied to the higher authorities to provide outdoor

"training" to artificially bred red-crowned cranes in the reserve in order to increase the number of wild red-crowned cranes. "After feeding all the red-crowned cranes every morning, I take the young 'trained' ones 'out for a walk' when they can forage and practice flying, and bring them back to the enclosure in the evening."

Once, due to an emergency rescue of other birds, two cranes "undergoing training" did not return to the enclosure on time. In the evening, Zhao searched for them in the reed marshes for seven hours, and finally found the two lost chicks. And only then he realized that the soles of his shoes had come off during the search.

Starting in 2010, during the bird migration season, stray cranes have been flying into the reserve and staying for a long time. That prompted Zhao to release several artificially bred adult male red-crowned cranes into the wild every year so they could form families with their wild partners and increase the wild crane population in Panjin.

"The method has proved quite effective. We often see two pairs of cranes leisurely foraging by the roadside or riverbank, and they are not as afraid of people as a totally wild pair or flock would be. Sometimes, they even fly with their chicks to visit the station," Zhao said, calling himself not only a trainer of red-crowned cranes but also a matchmaker.

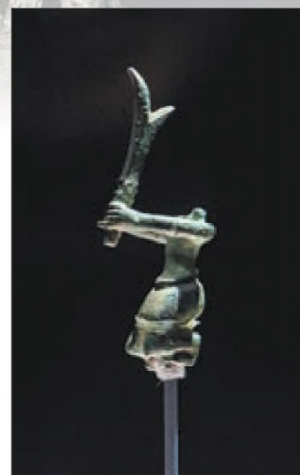
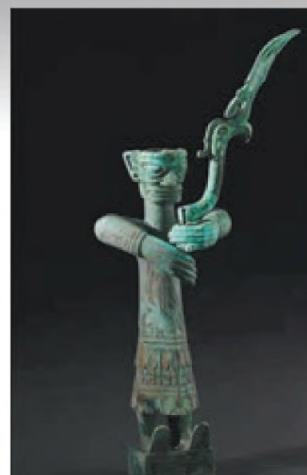
READ

A GRIPPING MYSTERY

One of the biggest questions that still confounds Sanxingdui experts is: What did the bronze standing man once hold in his hands? **Zhao Xu** feels around for answers.



Left: The grand bronze standing man represents one of Sanxingdui's biggest myths. **Above:** A close-up of his gripping hand. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SANXINGDUI MUSEUM AND THE SHANGHAI MUSEUM



From left: A fish-shaped jade *zhang*, with a bird perched at its tip; a bronze figure holding a bird; the gold scepter and its fish pattern; a bronze figure with a missing head holding a forked *zhang*; and a forked *zhang* carved out of jade, all from the archaeological site of Sanxingdui.

What was the man holding? This is an inevitable question for anyone who has ever looked up to the famous bronze standing man, unearthed from a pit in Sanxingdui, an archaeological site located in Guanghan city, southwestern China's Sichuan province. During its heyday between 1600 and 1100 BC, Sanxingdui was capital to the ancient kingdom of Shu — Shu being a modern byword for Sichuan — which built around itself a prosperous Bronze Age civilization that dominated the Upper Yangtze River region.

One of Sanxingdui's most identifiable images, the statue, standing 2.6 meters tall, pedestal included, is also one of its biggest puzzles. Researchers have long suggested that the man's stature demonstrates his elevated status, probably as a king or chief priest, or both. Others believe that it may have once been placed on an altar and worshipped by the awe-struck people of Sanxingdui.

People argue over just about every aspect of him, from his identity and dragon-patterned clothing, to his majestic headpiece and the pedestal, adorned with images of mythical beasts, upon which he proudly stands. Yet nothing has aroused more interest than his gestures. With arms raised in midair and fingers of both hands circled to form a hole in the middle, the man had almost certainly been holding something, something that is likely to have been lost, or has disintegrated over the course of millennia.

But what was it?

The gold scepter

"A gold scepter — this is one of the earliest suggested answers," says Hu Jialin, who's behind a well-researched ongoing exhibition at the newly opened Shanghai Museum East, which takes a deeper look at the myths surrounding the ancient civilization of Sanxingdui.

The reason is simple: barely a month before the discovery of the bronze man in August 1986, a 1.42-meter-long gold scepter was unearthed from the site. Weighing about half a kilogram, the scepter was made up of a layer of gold foil wrapped around a wooden stick. With its wooden core long rotted away, the gold scepter, so rumpled that it was initially thought to be a belt, has proved to be one of the biggest of its kind found in China, as well as the rest of the world.

Together with other gold items, including a giant gold foil mask weighing more than 280 grams that was excavated from the site in 2020, the scepter has fueled speculation that the Sanxingdui culture — and the ancient kingdom behind it — had shared direct ties with the far-flung lands to its west, including ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, where gold was the material of

choice for the ruling class, and scepters were a recognized symbol of power.

"But there's one fundamental problem: If the tradition of gold making and usage had indeed traveled for thousands of kilometers from the Near East to the Chengdu Plain, where the Sanxingdui culture had prospered, it couldn't have done it alone. In other words, there must have been something else, major crops or even written languages for example, that had made the same journey, of which we haven't yet found any evidence," says Hu, referring to the absence in Sanxingdui of archaeological wheat remains, wheat being cultivated in the Near East at the time.

"In sharp contrast, we have discovered the archaeological remains of millet and rice, grown at the time in the Yellow River basin and the Yangtze River Delta region, respectively."

In the 1980s, Chinese archaeologist Tong Enzheng (1935-1997) came up with his model of a crescent-shaped exchange belt extending from China's northeast to its southwest, arching midway toward the Mongolian steppes and the eastern rim of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Along this belt, the decrease of latitude is compensated by the increase of altitude, resulting in a roughly similar annual average temperature, precipitation and vegetation for this long stretch of land.

China's Arc — that is the term used by world-renowned British art historian and Sinologist Jessica Rawson to describe the region, on the lower southwestern section of which Sanxingdui is located.

"Sharing more similarities than differences, the various nomadic cultures dispersed along this extended belt tended to have more exchanges with one another than with the agrarian societies located to their east," says Hu.

"In my view, the gold tradition of Sanxingdui probably had something to do with the steppe cultures in East Asia, which prized gold and had long worked with the material," he says, conveniently pointing out that, although metal casting appeared in the West approximately 1,000 years earlier than it did in China, it was very unlikely to have influenced the bronze-making of Sanxingdui.

"While arsenical bronze — copper with a large percentage of arsenic — was widely used in the West, the Sanxingdui relics were made using leaded tin bronze, which has a lower melting point and therefore higher fluidity, allowing for the casting of intricate details, exemplified by the bronze items created during China's Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC)."

The elephant tusks

Although the nature of the elephant tusks, unearthed in large numbers from several pits on the site, is still open to



Top: Elephant tusks lying inside a pit at Sanxingdui. **Above:** The giant bronze tree unearthed at Sanxingdui, with bronze birds perched on its branches.

debate, their cultural and religious significance is undeniable, making them a possible answer to the question.

"During the time of Sanxingdui, the Yellow River Basin had a subtropical climate. And the Yangtze River Basin to its south, a tropical rainforest climate. So it wouldn't surprise me if researchers, assisted by modern technology, eventually decide that the tusks had come from the surrounding regions, rather than distant lands that, today, have a large elephant population," Hu says.

However, this is not to deny any connection that Sanxingdui might have with those lands, notes the curator. Cowrie shells, as well as small jade and gold pieces, have been found within bronze ritual vessels unearthed from the site, the shells believed to have come from the Indian Ocean.

"Since the late Shang Dynasty between the 12th and 11th century BC, an ancient route had existed that linked the Chengdu

Plains with the land to its south and southwest, including modern-day Myanmar and India," Hu says. "The shells could have journeyed to Sanxingdui via this route."

And the silk fabric, depicted vividly as the giant bronze figure's clothing, had probably traveled the same path to foreign lands, more than a millennium before the opening of the Ancient Silk Road in the 2nd century BC.

The ritual jade

Back in 1986, a kneeling bronze figure holding a forked blade with both hands was unearthed from the site. Despite his missing head, the figure's general posture, most notably his outstretched arms, contains an unmistakable solemnity befitting the atmosphere of a ritual ceremony. The blade constitutes a bronze rendition of a type of ritual jade known as *zhang*, which was being discovered around the same time in relatively large quantities from the site. "Jade *zhang* had been offered by the Sanxingdui people as a form of sacrifice to the mountains," says Hu, pointing to one unearthed from the site that bears the repeating pattern of man and mountain, the latter having a forked *zhang* erected at its foot.

"Given the grand, standing figure's presumed role as a chief priest, it was only natural that he held a piece of ritual jade, *zhang* for example," says Hu.

Possible candidates also include another type of ritual jade known as *cong*. A cylindrical tube encased in a square prism, the shape of *cong*, if it was indeed the missing piece of the puzzle, would have fitted the cavity formed by the man's hands perfectly.

It's interesting to note that the jade *cong* found at Sanxingdui had, in fact, come from at least two disparate cultural traditions — the Neolithic Liangzhu culture centered on the lower Yangtze River Delta, and the early Bronze Age culture of Qijia, which was mainly distributed around the upper Yellow River region in what is modern-day Gansu province.

"Their coexistence at Sanxingdui suggests that the place, rather than being a backwater, was actually a nexus where multiple influences conflated," says Hu.

"To this potent mixture, the Sanxingdui people had added a spoonful of their own cultural ingredients," he continues, pointing to one particular jade *zhang* shaped like a fish, in the open mouth of which sits a bird.

"This bird is no average bird, it is a cormorant, or *fu* in Chinese. The combination of a fish (*yu*) and a cormorant (*fu*) spells Yufu, the name of a legendary king that had ruled the kingdom of Shu," says Hu. "The same combination was repeated by the engraved patterns on the gold scepter."

The bird

One of the few consensuses reached on the Sanxingdui culture is that it worshipped the sun. And one artifact considered central to this belief is a giant 4-meter-tall bronze tree unearthed from the site, upon the branches of which are perched nine bronze birds. (Other bronze trees have also been found, but this is the only one that has been restored so far.)

"A mythic geography book named *Shan Hai Jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas) and dated to before the 4th century BC told about giant trees, upon which sun-carrying black birds reside. Keeping in mind that the words 'Chengdu' appeared multiple times in the book, some have suggested a direct link between the book's description and the bronze trees and birds of Sanxingdui," says Hu.

"There's no denying a bird's place in the cultural and artistic vernacular of Sanxingdui," he says, referring to the many bronze bird sculptures unearthed from the site.

Back in 1986, within the same pit that had yielded the bronze tree — and the grand standing man — archaeologists discovered a bronze bird-man complete with an equine nose, a spread-out tail and talons belonging to a bird of prey.

During more recent excavations between 2020 and 2021, other bird-men were found, one of whom sustains a tall ritual bronze artifact on his head, with his tail dramatically upheld to reach the rim of the bronze.

However, it was the discovery of a small bronze standing man around the same time that had caused a flurry of excitement. Measuring about 20 centimeters high, the man, with similar clothing, facial features and hand gestures, amounts to a miniature version of the giant upright figure, minus the headgear.

Yet, this smaller fellow was holding something: a bird, who had traded its fluffy plume for a more streamlined, easily gripped design, the only whimsical touch of which was a fanciful, ascending decoration on the bird's beak.

"Finally, here's the answer! That was how many people genuinely felt at the time," says Hu, who shares the feeling, if only half-heartedly.

"The smaller figure has certainly provided a key, pointing us in a direction to which little thought had been given previously. But, the discovery has in no way ruled out other possibilities," he says. "In fact, as we speak, a batch of new findings have been made on the site, which hopefully will shed more light on this eternal myth of Sanxingdui."

"Whatever has been, or will be, unearthed from the land always conceals as much as it reveals."

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IMAGE

Afforestation revivifies landscape in Chishui River area



This spring, employees from Sichuan Changjiang Forestation Group planted 6 million saplings of various kinds in Gulin county for water conservation and rocky desertification control in the Chishui River area in Sichuan province of Southwest China.

Rocky desertification is a process of land degradation in karst topography, also known as a kind of "Earth cancer". Rocky desertification land covers 449,300 hectares in Sichuan province, mostly concentrated in Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture, Luzhou city and other areas. The Chishui River area in Sichuan has grappled with karst rocky desertification with severe soil erosion and a fragile ecosystem.

Gulin, a county in Luzhou, has fought rocky desertification for over a decade. Since 2023, 15 villages and towns in Gulin county have taken measures for ecosystem improvement in the local

Chishui River basin, highlighting forest ecosystem restoration, especially rehabilitation of degraded forests which aims to improve forest quality and water conservation capacity in the upper and middle reaches of Chishui River basin.

A tree planting team of more than 800 people planted maple, nanmu, cherry, and other trees in the Chishui River basin to increase biodiversity—there used to be only a single tree species planted—and increase the forest coverage rate. Gulin has introduced more comprehensive environmental management measures such as thickening soil layers, and improving fertilization and water diversion.

Improving the ecological environment in the Chishui River basin can help promote poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, solve the issue of a surplus rural workforce, and increase farmers' income.

Navel orange trees in an industrial park near Chishui River are bearing fruits. Planting fruit trees in stony lands is a local special industry following early-stage abatement of rocky desertification and an important source of extra income for local people.

As the latest progress in China's systematic approach to conserving and improving mountains, waters, forests, farmlands, grasslands, and deserts, nearly 4 million hectares of forest were planted, about 4.38 million hectares of degraded grassland were restored and about 1.91 million hectares of sandy and stony land were treated nationally in 2023, according to a National Greening Commission report. In Sichuan, the government treated more than 3,733 hectares of rocky desertification lands in 2023 and plans to treat about 4,000 hectares in 2024.

-CHINA DAILY



Counterclockwise from top: Foresters carry saplings up a mountain in Zouma village, Taiping town, Gulin county, Sichuan province, in March 2024. Dead pine trees have been cut down in Zouma village, and foresters are ready to plant new saplings in December 2023. A forester uses a navigation app to locate the site for tree planting in March 2024. Foresters carry out restoration work on degraded forests in March 2024. HE HAIYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Counterclockwise from top left: Foresters take care of saplings after heavy snowfall in Guanwen town, Gulin county, in January 2024. Fang Zhan, a 42-year-old local forester of Sichuan Changjiang Forestation Group, stands on a mountain in Taiping town in March 2024, and has confidence about the control of rocky desertification. A bird's-eye view of fields in Fuxing village, Guanwen town in March 2024, where the village completed the control of rocky desertification. Villagers plant navel oranges in a rocky desertification area in March 2024. A forester carries saplings up the mountain in March 2024.

TREND

By MINGMEI LI in New York
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As US hip-hop music combines with Chinese content and culture, the emerging form of Chinese rap is becoming popular in China and the United States.

Hip-hop, a highly popular music genre in the US, predominantly appeals to young people. As a primary mode of expression, rap music provides artists with a fresh avenue to express their thoughts and emotions.

Blending beats, melodies, lyrics and cultural elements, Chinese rap provides audiences with a fresh way not only to enjoy music but also to understand the different musical cultures in different countries and foster exchange between artists.

"I always include Chinese culture in my music, whether it be samples or the things I talk about, because I feel like I can truly represent overseas Chinese people, and I can also relate to people in China," Peter Chen, also known as Castle\$, told China Daily.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Castle\$ began his rap journey in English at the age of 14. During the initial stages few Chinese Americans delved into rap in the US, he said.

"Hip-hop was always big (when I was) growing up."

He was one of few Asian children who rapped on the streets, even in English. "You didn't see too many people like yourself. I was the only one going around with jeans and caps, and people used to say, 'Why do you dress like that' or 'Why do you dress like a black?' I was like, 'How do you dress a race?'"

"I'm just dressing how I want to express myself. And that's how it is with the music, too."

Castle\$ said what brought him into Chinese rap was a TV show, *The Rap of China*, which caught his attention in 2018. He then took part in a reality show in China.

The rap reality TV show first aired in 2017 and featured influential Chinese rappers as well as younger artists. After the show, Chinese rap music transitioned from the underground to the mainstream music scene, attracting more fans and audiences.

"Maybe three months prior to that show, I started to write Chinese lyrics," Castle\$ said. Even though he can speak Chinese very well, he cannot understand some "punchlines" in Chinese because he grew up in the US. However, given his background, he said that could be a start for him. He will travel to China soon to compete in the show's new season, he said.

"It kind of put me in a situation where I must speak Chinese and I must rap Chinese, which is cool. I get to a certain point in China because of what I can do, what I can deliver, whether it be my music or my understanding of the culture."

Understanding two languages and two cultures helped him create more meaningful songs that contained the strength of the music, he said. "I'm respected here. And I feel like I'm never going to lose the Chinese side of myself. And you can see that in my music."

In addition to rapping, Castle\$ has a background in filmmaking and incorporates Chinese-style music from films into his songwriting. Sampling Chinese elements or musical instruments is a common method used by many hip-hop artists, including Chinese rappers such as MC Jin and China Mac, who have greatly inspired him.

The rise of Chinese hip-hop music in recent years reflects the pursuit of self-expression and cultural innovation among Asians in the US, especially young people, and it demonstrates the diversification and internationalization trends in music.

"Because it's not just music, you know, it's culture," Castle\$ said, noting that his style and fluency in both languages can

Chinese rap musicians blend beats across borders

Young artists in US fuse hip-hop with Chinese culture, creating a unique sound that resonates with global audiences



People enjoy hip-hop during the Governors Ball Music Festival at Citi Field in New York. Chinese rap music is becoming popular in the US as hip-hop music combines with Chinese content and culture. TAYLOR HILL / GETTY IMAGES

help attract more audiences worldwide.

"I feel like music always crosses borders. We are made in China, and we may be squeezed in and find a spot in the US music market."

Wu Jiaxuan, also known as Rapeter, the champion of the 2024 *The Rap of China* overseas division, told China Daily: "It turns out that using the familiar tone of Mandarin to create these rap songs can also be done so well. There are some double, triple and quadruple words rhyming in the lyrics."

Wu, born in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, said that was his impression of Chinese rap when he was a high school student, which inspired him to start his own music journey.

"I used to listen to American rapper Eminem (Marshall Bruce Mathers III) and Taiwan rappers like MC Hotdog," he said, and his interest in hip-hop music was affected by international music trends. "And one day I found a playlist called *Underground Chinese Rap* on a music platform and I started to listen to Chinese rap music."

Maturing market

Rapeter said he then began writing songs and became a "school rapper" at his school, but the rap music atmosphere was also just starting and was "impetuous", but he was still in the best era, when the Chinese hip-hop market was maturing.

In 2022 he decided to study at New York University. At the same time he continued to pursue rap as a hobby and a profession, developing his own unique style known as New Boombap.

Drawing inspiration from the traditional subgenre and music production style prominent in East Coast hip-hop during the golden age from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Rapeter blended this style with his own personal flair.

Boombap is a genre in which the lyrics take central place, Rapeter said. He spends a lot



Peter Chen, aka Castle\$, on stage. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of time polishing his lyrics, he said.

"I feel more confident when using the native language, which I'm more familiar with, and have more puns and a lot more punch. After coming to America I (became) particularly mindful of polishing certain lyrics, especially concerning introspection in this new environment and exploring significant societal topics. I want to produce lyrics with greater depth."

His *New York Trilogy* documents themes of family, love and contemplation on life. It explores his journey as an outsider adapting to life in the US, but also critiques anti-Asian hate crimes, and delves into issues such as drug abuse and homelessness. Through his music he wants to capture the "real" essence of the US, he said.

"These are all stories I've truly experienced. I hope my songs can show the audience what America is like, with its bustling metropolises and inclusive culture, but also its societal issues."

"Rap originated in the Bronx of New York, within the context of rap heavily influenced by street culture, but as a native Chinese speaker and participant in cultural exchange we can explore more possibilities of rap music with Chinese wordplay or punchlines."

China's culture is incredibly diverse, and local rappers in the US usually incorporate elements such as Shaolin martial arts and Chinese traditional instrument sound samples into their work, he said, and his songs were presented to one of the members of the influential hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan during the overseas competition.

RZA, one of the group's members, said during a media interview for *Wu-Tang: An American Saga*, a Hulu series that he co-created, "Wu-Tang gets its name from

kung fu films — Shaolin versus Wu-Tang — and Asian culture has been something that helped me grow as a young man coming up in the hood."

The group of rappers was greatly influenced by Asian culture, especially martial arts and Eastern philosophy.

"They also find it incredibly magical because their inspiration comes from Chinese culture, and now they've become our inspiration," Rapeter said. "So it's a blend and gives me a spiraling upward feeling. I think that's particularly wonderful."

"For Americans, they felt that their (rap) culture is respected by young people in China. We appreciate their culture; they respect our Chinese culture as well. The exchange exists and will definitely be maintained between young people of the two cultures."

Boxi Chen, 22, a pop musician and student at Columbia University in New York, told China Daily: "As younger generation musicians we want to try something new. Chinese rap music is gradually aligning with the mainstream market, and we are catching up, with a lot of room for growth."

He is often invited by Chinese rappers who travel to the US to perform, he said.

His work is not limited to hip-hop but also encompasses Chinese pop, electronic music, jazz and R&B in various styles. His idol is Jay Chou, a Chinese pop singer with rap elements, and he is also influenced by many Western artists such as Eminem and Bob Marley, he said.

Chen said he has been influenced by the music cultures of various regions, and rapping is a way that gets people together to talk.

Medium for expression

"Rap songs are very relaxing. You can say whatever you want and express whatever you feel because it's a great medium for expression. It can capture your daily life, even if I just talk about what I ate or did today. With a rhythm, everyone can have a lot of fun, and it's also a great way to make friends."

He takes part in an open mic event every Friday at Musewav, a music group that brings together singers and producers from various countries to make music together.

"Even if we don't understand each other's language, we can still feel the vibe of rap, which feels very cool, and it allows us to communicate and learn from each other."

He often encounters non-Chinese who express appreciation for his music, which also helps him build many personal connections and friendships, he said.

Chinese rap music is highly playful, characterized by its use of Chinese rhymes, poetic and song allusions, and the diverse cultures of various ethnic minorities, which create rich regional variations through their distinct dialects.

The market for Chinese rap is gradually opening up and catching up, he said, as seen with the Higher Brothers of the US media company 88rising that focuses on Asian artists.

Their song *Made in China* has been very popular in mainstream music markets in the West. In the song the Higher Brothers play mahjong and rap about everything being made in China, blending Western style with Sichuan dialect. The track has had billions of views on the internet.

"As long as we make our own unique contributions, many Americans will find Chinese rap cool, different from the stereotypical image of classical music," Chen said.

"For Chinese rap and pop music there is a definite market internationally."

"For me, as a younger generation myself, I've heard excellent American music that has reached China, and we also want to bring our work to the US to let more people hear it. That's a responsibility."



Ma Siwei of the Higher Brothers performs at a music festival in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, on Oct 2. XU PEIQIN / VISUAL CHINA

BIZ LIFE

By LI JIAYING

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China's medical aesthetics industry is undergoing quality upgrades and embarking on the path of high-quality development, with consumers increasingly pursuing self-improvement amid intensified industry competition and heightened regulatory efforts, officials and industry experts said.

When China rolled out its reform and opening-up policies in the late 1970s, the domestic medical aesthetics industry sprouted to ride the era of liberalization, gradually evolving into a dynamic landscape characterized by rapid growth and expansion. It is now on the threshold of another new stage — high-quality development driven by medical expertise and prowess, said Li Bin, founder and chairman of BeauCare Clinics Medical Investment Group Co Ltd.

Sun Lijian, director of the Financial Research Center at Fudan University, said in an earlier interview that as the fundamentals of China's long-term sound growth remain unchanged, the current focus should be on boosting market confidence and exploring new growth drivers, where the medical aesthetics industry — a prime example of new consumption trends — has a role to play.

Potential unleashed

"Owing to improved life quality, development of the industry and rising awareness of consumer demand for beauty enhancement, consumption of services of the medical aesthetics industry has increased strongly, transforming what was once a niche sector for high-income groups into a mainstream business," Li said.

With revenue reaching 200 billion yuan (\$27.6 billion), China's medical aesthetics market expanded by 20 percent in 2023, with the compound annual growth rate expected to be 15 percent in the next four years, thanks to the resilience of the country's economy and growing demand for medical aesthetics, said a report from Deloitte last year.

In addition, China's huge consumer base and relatively low penetration rate are expected to further unleash the potential of the industry. According to online cosmetic treatment platform SoYoung, the consumer base for medical aesthetics in China reached 23.54 million in 2023.

Although the Chinese medical aesthetics market's penetration rate rose to 4.5 percent in 2022 from 3.6 percent in 2019, it still lags behind more developed markets such as Japan, the United States and South Korea, whose penetration rates were 2.5 times, 3.8 times and 4.9 times that of China, respectively, indicating significant room for further development in the future, said Dongguan Securities in a report.

Intensified competition

Data from the National Health Commission showed in January that the number of regulation-compliant specialized medical aesthetics institutions in China reached 18,584 — excluding public institutions and private comprehensive institutions, which account for about 10 percent of the total number based on past data.

Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Beijing, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and



Medical aesthetics market reaches breakout point

Competition, regulation intensify amid sector's push for high-quality development



Top: Visitors pass by a medical aesthetics poster during an expo in Beijing in February 2023. ZHANG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Left: A visitor checks out artificial intelligence-enabled medical equipment during an expo in Beijing in February 2023.

CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Right: Visitors experience services by robotherapists during a healthcare event in Beijing in February 2023. CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanghai are the top five cities that had the most newly established institutions (with 0-5 years of operations) as of January 2023, according to the Deloitte report. Their newly established institutions accounted for 69 percent, 67 percent, 53 percent, 50 percent and 48 percent of the nation's total, respectively.

This propelled medical institutions to embrace new trends such as

online platforms, and attach greater importance to marketing in their development strategy.

During last year's Singles' Day shopping spree around Nov 11, the price of the well-known Juvederm dermal filler collection dropped to as low as 1,999 yuan per syringe during the livestreaming sessions of several medical aesthetics institutions, whereas their market price

typically ranges from 9,000 yuan to 12,000 yuan per syringe.

"Looking back at the past year, the medical aesthetics market has shown a trend of 'strong start but weak finish', with price-oriented competition making revenue fall short of expectations, leading to chaotic development of the industry," said Jin Xing, chairman and CEO of SoYoung.

The overly intense competition and vicious rivalry among private medical aesthetics institutions have triggered a series of issues, posing significant challenges to the healthy and smooth development of the industry, Jin said.

The escalating price war is reducing medical aesthetics to a labor-intensive industry, while it is supposed to be a knowledge-intensive one due

to its knowledge- and expertise-driven nature, said Li of BeauCare Clinics.

"The level of medical prowess, not prices, should always be the core competitive strength of an institution," he said. "If medical treatment is geared toward growth ends and consumer demand, it can easily lead to over-diagnosis and overtreatment."

In addition, upstream material and equipment manufacturers are also adapting to market demand by increasing their promotional efforts and continuously launching simpler-to-use and more effective products to stimulate growth of medical aesthetics consumption, said Wu Wenyun, director of Beijing-based Myoung BeauCare Clinic.

"Although consumers can now access medical aesthetics information through increasingly diverse channels, the information may sometimes be inaccurate or distorted, which may lead to risks and pitfalls in their pursuit of beauty," Wu said.

Medical nature

The medical aesthetics industry has witnessed a series of stricter regulations since the beginning of last year, with measures becoming more specific and systematic, aimed at ensuring the industry returns to its "medical nature".

The Supreme People's Procuratorate issued a document on strengthened regulation of medical aesthetics advertising in January last year, followed by a compilation of opinions — meant to be used as guidance on further strengthening the supervision of the medical aesthetics industry — by the State Administration for Market Regulation and 10 other departments in May last year. They clearly define medical aesthetics services as a kind of medical activity that must comply with relevant laws and regulations on industry access.

In January, the Chinese Association of Plastics and Aesthetics released its annual report on operational risks and early warning of medical aesthetics, which compiled the top 10 operational risks such as illegal purchase and use of non-compliant products, drug and medical device violations, false advertising and illegal practices.

"Whether private or public, medical aesthetics institutions should return to their medical nature, giving the treatment choices taken by front desk consultants and sales staff back to doctors. Pursuing such a change will guide the high-quality development of the industry in the future," said Gao Jianhua, vice-chairman of the CAPA.

Guiding the medical aesthetics industry to return to its "medical nature" involves two key points — medical services and medical quality, with a focus on patient experience and medical safety, respectively, said Cao Dequan, executive secretary-general of the CAPA.

"If medical institutions can leverage their expertise to excel, there will be no need to rely on marketing and low prices to attract patients, which will significantly reduce operational costs," Cao said.

"In pursuit of high-quality development, the medical aesthetics industry is poised to enter a phase of sound growth, which will be led by doctors' expertise," Li of BeauCare Clinics said.

By LI JIAYING

Nonsurgical cosmetic procedures will burgeon into a new growth opportunity for China's medical aesthetics industry, with noninvasive aesthetic techniques increasingly favored by beauty enthusiasts amid advanced regulations, said experts.

"Consumption of nonsurgical aesthetic treatments, which are characterized by high-level safety, short recovery time, low risk and affordable prices, has continued to rise despite lingering COVID-19 impact," said Jin Xing, chairman and CEO of SoYoung, an online cosmetic treatment platform.

The sector, Jin said, will continue to dominate the medical aesthetics market this year, with skin management and anti-aging being the two largest segments in terms of demand.

According to the latest SoYoung data, by 2030, the market size of China's nonsurgical medical aesthetics sector is expected to reach 415.7 billion yuan (\$57.4 billion), nearly double the market size of surgical medical aesthetics.

Specifically, injectable procedures such as botulinum toxin — sometimes referred to as Botox by patients — products, hyaluronic acid fillers, radio frequency and light therapy like Thermage and

Ultherapy, and intense pulsed light (IPL) technologies are gaining traction in the field of nonsurgical treatment, said a report from SoYoung.

"For example, radio frequency and light therapy can penetrate deeper layers of skin tissue to help lift, smooth and rejuvenate the skin without surgery or extensive downtime, yielding significant aesthetic enhancements," said Wang Zhongjie, director of Beijing-based cosmetic surgery chain BeauCare Clinics and T.Mei BeauCare Clinic.

"Nonsurgical methods have offered me alternatives with greater flexibility, minimal trauma, shorter recovery time and lower risks compared to traditional surgical procedures," said a Beijing-based consumer surnamed Chen, who recently underwent IPL treatment.

"I've been a 'surgery-phobe' and I'd still definitely opt for noninvasive measures for cosmetic improvements in the future, if necessary, because I believe them to be much safer," Chen said.

With the aforementioned advantages, the nonsurgical sector is gaining the upper hand in the overall medical aesthetics market.

Noninvasive treatments spur beauty biz



A consumer receives medical aesthetics services in Huizhou, Guangdong province. ZHOU NAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Globally, surgical procedures accounted for 44.3 percent of the total in 2022, while nonsurgical procedures accounted for 55.7 percent, according to a report from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery released in September last year.

As the platform economy thrives in the Chinese market, online orders

for cosmetic procedures also seem to be dominated by nonsurgical ones. According to a November 2023 report from the Qianzhan Industry Research Institute, nonsurgical orders accounted for 84 percent of the online total in 2022, rising from 62 percent in 2017.

However, while emerging trends such as social media and livestream-

ing have broken down information barriers, forming a close connection between the platform economy and the growth of cosmetic treatment, there are also growing concerns about the industry's over-reliance on digital marketing for customer acquisition.

"Some medical aesthetics institutions are leveraging livestreaming to promote their services with attractive prices. This seems to be unreasonable to me because consumers, who lack necessary professional knowledge, may place orders before consulting a doctor, which could prove risky even if they do so for nonsurgical treatment," Chen, the cosmetic procedure consumer, said.

In pursuit of growth, some market entities focus more on brand promotion and sales, with doctors "merely delivering hyaluronic acid products" and having lower participation in the entire diagnosis and treatment process, which is not conducive to the long-term healthy development of the nonsurgical cosmetic sector, said Li Bin, founder and chairman of BeauCare Clinics Medical Investment Group Co Ltd. Li said: "Especially in the cosmetic

injection sector, with the increasing richness of upstream products, the emergence of new materials and technologies may slow down, leading to a greater emphasis on the comprehensive use of existing materials.

"This important market change will further test doctors' skills and expertise in delivering safe and effective treatments, and the importance of doctors in the entire industry chain will be further strengthened."

With the medical aesthetics industry pursuing high-quality development, China is stepping up efforts to advance relevant supervision and regulations. In May 2023, the State Administration for Market Regulation and 10 other departments jointly issued guidance on further strengthening the supervision of the medical aesthetics industry. The document clearly defined medical aesthetics services as a kind of medical activity, and stressed higher-level standards for the regulation of the industry.

"Moving forward, the industry is expected to see the rise of more standardized medical aesthetic institutions, with a focus on professional and advanced medical prowess to deliver high-quality services and drive sustainable growth," said Jing Xuan, vice-secretary-general of the Chinese Association of Plastics and Aesthetics.

TRAVEL

By OTIATO OPALI
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For a popular destination for both local and international tourists, the first thing that strikes visitors to Hell's Gate National Park in Kenya's Rift Valley province is its odd name. Many theories have been put forward to try to explain why the picturesque park was named Hell's Gate.

According to local legend, many years ago, a number of Maasai tribesmen were buried alive at the site when nearby Mount Longonot erupted. The Maasai are a seminomadic and pastoral tribe that occupies East African plains stretching from Kenya to Tanzania.

Charles Nkaiseri, a local guide at the park and a member of the Maasai tribe said that after the tragedy, the Maasai came up with the name Enee Meneng'a which was later translated by European settlers as "Hell".

"The park is situated in a belt rich in volcanic activity and due to powerful volcanic forces, which have shaped the national park from below for centuries, the Maasai felt like evil forces might be responsible for the resultant tragedies," Nkaiseri said.

On the other hand, some oral tales state that the name Hell's Gate was arrived at after Gustav Fischer and Joseph Thompson, two European explorers came up with the name in 1883, which referred to a narrow break in the cliffs that opens up to a clear opening in the plains of the park. According to Nkaiseri, the narrow gorge was once a tributary of a prehistoric lake that fed early humans in the Rift Valley.

However, official records like those held by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention indicate that the name Hell's Gate is derived from the most impressive feature in the park, the Ol Jorowa Gorge, which runs through the middle of the park. The gorge formed the overflow of nearby Lake Naivasha between lower and middle Cambrian times.

The picturesque nature of the gorge was made internationally famous when it was featured in two world-acclaimed movies. In *Tomb Raider 2*, the gorge and the caves around it formed the scenes where part of the movie was shot on location. The gorge and the plains around it also inspired the main setting for *The Lion King* and the movie's animators actually visited the gorge for inspiration.

Situated between Lake Naivasha and the Longonot and Suswa volcanoes, Hell's Gate National Park is the only national park in Kenya that you can explore on foot. Unlike other national parks in Kenya, there are no predators here apart from the occasional leopard sighting. The appeal of this park, which is covered by ashes from the Longonot eruption, occurring more than 100 years ago, comes from the beautiful scenery formed by millions of years of geothermal activity.

Being located about 100 kilometers from Kenya's capital Nairobi, the park is an ideal venue for a day trip from the capital where, in addition to the biodiversity that includes raptors, visitors can enjoy mountain biking, rock climbing and a natural spa.



A couple marvel at the majestic cliffs that are found within the Hell's Gate National Park. Due to volcanic activity that formed the park, features like volcanic walls, hot water geysers and hot springs are abundant in the park. PHOTOS BY OTIATO OPALI / CHINA DAILY

The famous gate to 'hell'

Kenya's treasured national park full of natural beauty, steeped in legend



A visitor enjoys a bicycle ride on one of the trails in the park.

On the way to Naivasha town where the park is located, visitors from Nairobi can spend part of the less than two-hour journey from Nairobi by car admiring the Rift Valley escarpment.

The panoramic vistas of the Rift Valley at Limuru town viewpoint on your way to Naivasha from Nairobi are a geological wonder, which is nothing short of spectacular. The view from this point offers a glimpse into the Earth's incredible history and formation. Standing at the cliff of the valley, you can appreciate its vast expanse, its dramatic cliffs, and the beauty of the surrounding landscape. It is an ideal spot for nature lovers, photographers, and anyone looking for a deep connection with the Earth's geological wonders.

Numerous activities

Once in Naivasha, the Hell's Gate National Park is located 19 kilometers from the city center on a road that runs parallel to the shores of Lake Naivasha, a high-altitude, freshwater lake with sterling blue waters that host hippos and many other aquatic animals.

For foreign tourists, the entrance fee to the park is \$26 for adults and \$17 for children.

Once in the park, there are numerous activities visitors can engage in. Just a kilometer from the gate, visitors are met with the majestic Fischer's Tower, a volcanic plug that stands at an impressive 25 meters tall. It was named after German explorer Gustav Fischer, who

was trying to find a route from Mombasa to Lake Victoria.

According to Nkaiseri, Maasai folklore states that the tower is a Maasai girl who turned to stone after looking back on her home while on the way to her future husband — contrary to tradition. The location is famous worldwide for rock climbing, walking, hiking, biking, game viewing, bird watching, picnics and camping. The spot has become a popular climbing ground and is particularly suitable for climbing enthusiasts including beginners as all routes on the tower can be completed in one rope length.

The unique ability to freely roam anywhere in the park on foot sur-

rounded by zebras, giraffes and the best of Kenya's plains game in the pristine and unspoiled wilderness is hard to match and that is why Hell's Gate is one of the best hiking spots in the country.

There are several trails in the park to choose from, however, a guide is required and as an expert on the park's landscape, history and wildlife, the guide will only enhance the experience. Good walking shoes, light trousers, binoculars, long sleeves, sunglasses, a hat and plenty of water are a necessity for hikers since the park has little shade and can get very hot.

Carved by a prehistoric lake that once fed the Rift Valley, Hell's Gate's

Ol Jorowa Gorge cuts through the park and is one of the many highlights on the walking and cycling trail. Many movie lovers might be aware of the beautiful plains and gorges that feature in the movie *The Lion King*, but few are aware that they were inspired by the beautiful scenery at Hell's Gate National Park. According to the movie makers, in 1991, some of the film's animators traveled to Hell's Gate National Park in Kenya for research and inspiration for the film.

The park also played host to the movie *Tomb Raider 2*, which was shot on location in the beautiful gorges, cliffs and rocks which provide the perfect backdrop for many scenes, including the core scenes in the tomb. In the film, Kenya's tribesmen of the Pokot tribe played the role of a mysterious tribe discovered in Africa by the tomb raider Lara Croft. Movie lovers who visit the park can access these locations with the help of a tour guide.

Another unique feature located on the northern tip of Hell's Gate National Park is the Olkaria Geothermal Spa, a series of geothermal pools made possible by the presence of hot water geysers and hot springs.

The water that flows into the geothermal spa is all natural with no treatments or additives and is rich with several natural minerals. To keep the temperatures of the swimming lagoon user-friendly, there are geothermal technicians who are constantly monitoring the lagoon temperatures.

The all-natural spa features beau-

tiful azure blue waters heated by the Earth's geothermal activity, sun loungers, and a restaurant which makes this the perfect spot to relax and recuperate after cycling or hiking in the park.

Owing to the geothermal activities in this area, Kenya is currently developing the largest geothermal plant in the world named Olkaria VI, within Hell's Gate National Park. The East African country is the world's seventh biggest producer of geothermal energy owing to its geography and the geothermal activities in areas like Hell's Gate National Park.

Spectacular experience

Maya Bilhana, a keen cyclist and Nepalese tourist, who visited the park said: "Once I got into the park, I was soon so blown away by the scenery that it was easy to forget about the cycling. In fact, being able to cycle alone through these incredible valleys and rock formations, surrounded by animals in a vast and silent landscape was a truly spectacular experience."

"I do not know if I can really explain how it felt to be here. The stillness and the silence were really striking. There were occasional cars and mostly just long, dusty roads and animals quietly watching you while grazing in the distance, and the occasional shriek from an eagle circling the cliffs was the only sound for miles. It was majestic, and magical, and indescribable all at once," the student from Nepal added.

Among the animals abundant in the park are giraffes, elands, hartebeest, buffaloes and other small gazelles and antelopes which are common on the grassy plains. There are also small troops of klipspringer and rock hyrax, both living in rocky areas. The rare Chanler's mountain reedbuck is also present here. According to Nkaiseri, the park counts 103 species of birds and the volcanic cliffs are home and nesting places for birds, which are abundant at Lake Naivasha.

"The large white droppings on the rocks indicate nests of vultures and eagles and augur buzzard. Rare species like the hooded vultures have also been recorded," Nkaiseri said.

According to the latest tourism performance report released by the Kenya Tourism Board last year, Hell's Gate National Park was the fifth most popular park in the country in 2022 after receiving more than 150,000 annual visitors.

Before embarking on the journey to Hell's Gate National Park, it is important to note that the park can be reached by road from Nairobi or through a short flight from Nairobi's Wilson Airport to Naivasha Airport where guests can then be transferred by road to the park.

The accommodation in Hell's Gate National Park is quite basic, with local tented options that may not suit all visitors. However, there are many wonderful lodges and hotels to fit any international traveler's budget located at the nearby Lake Naivasha.

Game drives in vehicles can be arranged and conducted in the park. However, with few predators in the park, visitors can access bicycles at the park's entrance which can be rented for about \$5 per person, a fantastic way to explore the park.



Visitors to the park can access the volcanic cliffs in the park by vehicles but most prefer cycling or trekking.



A giraffe is seen in the vast expanse of the park's endless plains. The park is rich in wildlife which flourish due to the scarcity of predators.



A family visiting the park talk to a tour guide while admiring a group of three rock hyrax animals.

African countries can really star on the Big Screen

By OTIATO OPALI
in Naivasha, Kenya

The fact that Hell's Gate National Park in Kenya's Nakuru County played host to the movies *The Lion King* and *Tomb Raider 2* has made the park famous worldwide. According to Charles Nkaiseri, a tour guide at the park, many of the visitors to the park request to be taken to Pride Rock, the place that inspired the scenery in *The Lion King*, or to the Ol Jorowa Gorge where most of the tomb scenes were filmed in the *Tomb Raider* movie.

Elsa Lunani, who is the digital

products manager at Multichoice Kenya, a satellite television service, said that since independence, film tourism has proved to be a powerful tool for attracting visitors to various destinations across the continent.

"In Kenya for instance, award-winning international films like *The Constant Gardener*, *To Walk with Lions*, *Married Bachelor*, *Out of Africa*, *Mountains of the Moon*, *Nowhere in Africa*, and *The Big Cat Diary* shot in the country are among a long list of key success stories," Lunani said.

According to her, physical landscapes like mountains and lakes, wildlife, coastal beaches and Africa's

cultural sites can be featured prominently as perfect filming locations for international productions.

"The physical features that attracted these filmmakers into the country not only showcased Kenya as a perfect cinematic location but also significantly marketed the country as a major global tourism destination," Lunani said.

Recently, the Kenya Tourism Board announced that it was now banking on filming as one of the initiatives to increase the number of international travelers in the country. While initially announcing its partnership with the India International

Film Tourism Conclave in 2018, the Kenya Tourism Board director of marketing Jacinta Nzioka said the country has what it takes to become a global choice for filmmaking. The India International Film Tourism Conclave is a leading location scout for films developed in India and Asia.

Survey results

Lunani said that a recent survey conducted by US-based imaging brand PhotoAiD pertinently shows how important screen tourism is with 96 percent of respondents saying they have visited places associated with their favorite television shows or

movies at least once in their lifetime.

"According to 35 percent of the travelers interviewed, the most common reason to engage in film tourism is to enjoy an immersive experience that lets you live out shows or movies' storylines and follow in the footsteps of famous characters," Lunani said.

Emmanuel Oyier, a communications and advocacy practitioner and co-founder at Seamless Frames video company in Kenya said that film tourism is an excellent vehicle for destination marketing and also creates opportunities for product and community entrepreneur develop-

ment such as location tours or film heritage museums.

"Film-induced tourism and destination branding are some of the fastest growing sectors in tourism currently. However, there are some key issues that need to be addressed in Africa before promoting our locations for film productions and tourism," Oyier said.

He singled out applying responsible tourism practices, creating a film-friendly environment in advance through community participation and awareness campaigns, safety and understanding the impact of destination branding.

SPORTS

OLYMPICS



Botswana sprinter Letsile Tebogo poses for media photographers following a news conference ahead of the fifth edition of the Kip Keino Classic Continental Tour at the Eka Hotel in Nairobi, on April 18, 2024. AFP

Botswana's sprinting gem eyes Olympic gold

Letsile Tebogo hopes to emulate his Jamaican hero, Usain Bolt, in France

Sprint star Letsile Tebogo hails from Botswana, a country famed for its diamonds, but it is gold he is seeking at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games this summer.

The sprinter turns 21 in June, and the perfect belated birthday present would be becoming the first African to win the events once dominated by his idol, Usain Bolt.

Known as the Lightning Bolt, the Jamaican won eight Olympic and 11 world championship gold medals between 2007 and 2017.

After 100-meter silver and 200m bronze medals at the world championships in Budapest last year, Tebogo has his sights set sky high.

"He (Bolt) is my idol — the person I most look up to. What he achieved was truly amazing. Whenever he ran, I watched him on TV.

"Everyone remembers Usain, and I would love them to remember me, too, when I hang up my

running shoes," says the athlete, who is based at the University of Oregon on the west coast of the United States.

"I do not have to be the all-time number one — being among the top three will do just fine," said the star raised in Kanye, a town 68 kilometers south of Gaborone, the Botswana capital.

Lofty ambitions indeed, but his form bears testimony to a sprinter on a mission that goes far beyond Botswana, a sparsely populated and landlocked southern Africa nation.

"The time has come for African athletes to dominate sprint events on the international stage," he said.

No African could boast a top-three 100m finish at a world championships until Tebogo starred last year at a stadium in Budapest on the banks of the river Danube.

He clocked 9.88 seconds — 0.30 seconds outside the world record set by Bolt in 2009 — to finish second



Courtney Lindsey of team USA (left), who placed first, and Letsile Tebogo of Botswana, who placed second, react following the men's 200m event at the Kip Keino Classic 2024 event on April 20. AFP

behind American Noah Lyles in the final.

Lyles also won the 200m in the Hungarian capital, followed by fellow American Erriyon Knighton in second, and Tebogo third, 0.29 of a second behind the champion.

Nervous mother

The two medals were the first won at a world championships by a male from Botswana — his female compatriot Amantle Montsho won the 400m women's gold and silver medals at the 2011 and 2013 events.

Another woman, his mother and former athlete, Seratiwa, plays a continuous key role in the life of Letsile.

Unknown to him, she flew to Budapest for the championships and later told a Gaborone radio station about the pre-race nerves she suffered while watching her son.

"Why was I nervous? There is always the fear of a false start, disqualification, or that he could suffer a pulled muscle or some other injury."

But, while his mother was anxious, Tebogo was relaxed, saying later that "my mind was clear — it has to be, because you cannot run a good race if you're stressed.

"I relax ahead of races by listening to traditional music from my homeland. Apart from the beautiful sounds, it reminds me of where I come from and the people who I am representing."

Seratiwa added: "The way I see it, Letsile is not just running for Botswana, he is carrying the flag for all of Africa. That makes me extremely proud.

"The world probably views Letsile

Tebogo as a rising athletics star, but when he returns to Botswana, he is my humble, respectful son."

Seratiwa noticed that Letsile, from an early age, loved sport. Botswana is similar to most African countries in that soccer is the national sport.

Tebogo dabbled with soccer, but soon realized that athletics was his first love, and developed into a star at back-to-back under-20 world championships.

In the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, in 2021, and in the Colombian city of Cali one year later, he won the 100m finals and finished second in the 200m finals.

Tebogo took a leaf out of the Bolt copybook in Cali, turning to gesticulate and smile at 100m silver medalist Bouwahjgie Nkrumie from Jamaica while cruising to the finish line.

"No disrespect was intended. I just wanted everyone watching at home to enjoy the race — to remind them a little bit about what Usain did back in the day," explained Tebogo.

AFP

Some athletes will be able to cash in on Paris 2024 medal success

NEW YORK — They compete for a trophy, a ring, the chance to be called a champion and, sometimes, a place in history. Most of the world's best athletes in all sorts of sports also compete for cold, hard cash.

After more than 100 years of striving to earn Olympic gold — but nothing else from the folks organizing the event — track and field athletes at the Paris Games will join that money-making club thanks to the sport's governing body, World Athletics.

In a first-of-its-kind development, the runners, throwers and jumpers lining up at the Stade de France in August will be trying to win a \$50,000 check to go with the coveted gold medal. It's a novel — some might say overdue — concept that has athletes in other sports wondering if they can get a piece of that action.

"I mean, who would want to turn down money, you know?" said artistic swimmer Daniella Ramirez, who is a junior at UCLA.

The news last week grabbed attention, not so much because anyone is going to get rich, but because it marked the first instance of someone in charge — someone running

the show — dipping into their coffers for the prizes, something the International Olympic Committee continues to resist.

That hasn't stopped individual countries from paying medal winners across all sports for years. For instance, the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee runs "Project Gold," which doles out \$37,500 for gold, \$22,500 for silver and \$15,000 for bronze.

And this year's host country will give France's gold medalists around \$85,000 apiece.

Those kinds of payments, along with the endorsement deals that have become commonplace in the upper echelon of sports, long ago undercut the old notion the Olympics were founded upon: That athletes should be true amateurs playing strictly for the love of sport.

That has been a relic for at least 40 years.

Not surprisingly, athletes at the recent Team USA media summit in New York followed the latest development with interest.

"I wouldn't say that I'm jealous," said diver Andrew Capobianco, a silver medalist three years ago in Tokyo. "But I'm hopeful that it, kind of, moves into all other sports, as



A Paris 2024 Olympic Games gold medal on display at French jeweler Chaumet. REUTERS

well — that they're the trailblazers for that. More money for Olympic athletes, especially the smaller sports, would be great."

When he made the announcement, World Athletics president Sebastian Coe portrayed the move as one of simple fairness — the Olympics are a multibillion-dollar business; the athletes should get their share.

Sprinter Gabby Thomas said she appreciated the gesture.

"This is really just done off of

hopes and dreams and effort and a lot of people don't have the same opportunity," Thomas said of the mission to compete at the Olympics. "So, to see track and field making a difference in that way is remarkable. I can't wait to see other sports follow suit."

But, some in Coe's world saw the announcement as a calculated play to boost his profile for a potential IOC presidency bid. Others said they were blindsided by the move.

"If we concentrate the money on

only top athletes, only gold (medalists), then of course a lot of opportunities will disappear for athletes all over the world," said David Lappartient, the president of cycling's international federation, who attended the Olympic flame-lighting ceremony in Ancient Olympia on April 16.

Jean-Christophe Rolland, president of World Rowing, said any available funds should instead be spent on developing and promoting Olympic sports.

"Obviously, we need the athletes," he said. "But, we also need to ensure that we will have athletes tomorrow and the day after tomorrow."

Of course, no one needs to tell the people who will be vying for medals this summer that their Olympic journey is not necessarily a path to riches.

"Regardless if there's money involved or not, I'm not too concerned," said sailing's Hans Henken. "But, I think it is great for growing the sport and being able to provide some sort of funding to help athletes continue to train and continue to compete."

There are those like Ramirez, the artistic swimmer, who say that, while a little something extra in the wallet is never a bad thing, they're fine with keeping cash out of the equation.

Striving for a medal is enough. "Using (money) as a motivating factor was not something that I personally want to see in my own (life)," she said. "I just don't think it should be something that's in my mind at all. It should be a plus — like a bonus at the end of the year. I just love the sport, and I think that's my motivating factor."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

SPORTS

SOCCER



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior celebrates scoring a penalty during the UEFA Champions League semifinal first-leg match against Bayern Munich on Tuesday in Munich, Germany. AFP

Vinicius puts Madrid in pole position on road to Wembley

Brazilian's brace piles pressure on Bayern in second leg at Bernabeu

MUNICH, Germany — Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior scored a double, including an 83rd-minute equalizing penalty, to snatch a 2-2 draw away at Bayern Munich on Tuesday, putting the Spanish side in the driving seat for the return leg of the Champions League semifinal.

Vinicius gave Real the lead after 24 minutes, but Bayern scored twice in four second-half minutes to wrest back control.

However, Kim Min-jae fouled Rodrygo in the box with eight minutes remaining and Vinicius stepped up, amid a chorus of boos and whistles, to blast home the leveler.

"In this competition it's important not to lose, and we're here because we haven't lost yet," said Vinicius. "I'm very happy that I was able to score two goals, and now we need to have a magical night at home," he added.

The draw makes Madrid the favorite to progress from next week's return leg at the Santiago Bernabeu, but Bayern, which dominated large parts of the match, will still hope it has enough in the tank to make it to the final at Wembley in June.

"I think it's a good result," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, who

led Bayern to the Bundesliga title in 2017. "It gives us faith and confidence for the second leg, but nothing has been decided yet.

"Bayern have high quality. They have players like Musiala or Sane who can hurt us."

Kane's goal, another penalty, was the England forward's 43rd in 43 games for Bayern this season.

"It felt like the goals were scored when the other team was better," Kroos said. "We're pretty sure that we'll advance at home."

Bayern had appealed to fans to wear red to the game, and the visitors walked into a crimson cauldron as they were greeted by deafening whistles from a majority of the 75,000 fans in the stadium.

"It feels a bit strange," said Bayern manager Thomas Tuchel.

"But, the situation is very clear. Win in Madrid, then we're off to Wembley. The winner takes it all.

"We will be ready and we accept the challenge. We will go to Madrid with self-confidence. We have to be brave."

The winner of the two-leg semifinal will play either Borussia Dortmund or Paris Saint-Germain in the final in London on June 1.

"Real Madrid does this to teams,

so we should not be too disappointed," Bayern coach Tuchel said. "I think we will be able to create chances at the Bernabeu. This is one of the most difficult places to win, yes, but it's a challenge. That's the beauty of it."

Familiar opponents

Before the match, the Bayern fans unveiled a giant banner depicting Franz Beckenbauer, which spanned from the grass to the rafters. It was a fitting tribute to a night featuring the most-played fixture in European Cup history.

Famed for its composure on the competition's big nights, 14-time winner Real struggled early on as Bayern dominated possession, spurred on by a ferocious home crowd.

Sane had a chance after just 40 seconds and another minutes later, while Kane chipped a shot from halfway just over the bar as the visitors struggled to cope.

Madrid's success in the competition this season, including in its quarterfinal win over Manchester City, has been built on absorbing pressure before striking.

Something the visiting side repeated for the opening goal, breaking Bayern's dominance in ruthlessly simple fashion, while showing the host how easy scoring goals can be.

Toni Kroos collected the ball from a corner and drilled a low, defense-splitting pass toward the Bayern goal, which found Vinicius galloping in acres of space on the edge of the area.

Without a Bayern defender in sight, Vinicius calmly slotted the opener past a helpless Manuel Neuer, changing the complexion of the match completely.

Bayern, which has six European Cups of its own, was not awed by Los Blancos, and continued to push, but just could not break through; its best chance of an equalizer in the half came through a free kick, with Kane finding a huge gap in the wall but blasting wide.

With Real seemingly in cruise control, Bayern grabbed hold of the match early in the second-half, scoring twice in four minutes.

Eric Dier found Sane down the right flank. The German winger, who missed several chances in the first half, dribbled into the box before unleashing an unstoppable shot. It was his first goal for Bayern in any competition since October.

Bayern's go-ahead goal came from a Kane spot-kick shortly afterward.

"We have to continue with cool heads, rest until next week, and we will give everything to qualify for London," Vinicius said.

TENNIS

Nadal bids emotional farewell to Caja Magica after fourth-round exit

MADRID — Rafael Nadal had to pause for a few moments, visibly emotional, while addressing the crowd after his loss in the fourth round at the Madrid Open.

As chants of "Rafa, Rafa, Rafa" echoed around the court, the five-time champion in Madrid made a farewell speech following a 7-5, 6-4 loss on Tuesday to world No 31 Jiri Lehecka.

It was likely his last official match at the tournament in the Spanish capital.

"This is a difficult day when it arrives, but it's a reality. My body and my life have been sending me signs for some time," Nadal said. "I was able to say goodbye playing on this court, one of the most emotional ones for me. Madrid, at times, has been more important to me than a Grand Slam. The memories here will stay with me forever."

After the match, tournament organizers unfurled five banners for each of Nadal's titles in Madrid — 2005, '10, '13, '14 and '17. They also showed a video of his highlights, as his wife and sister shed tears in the stands.

"It's been a gift what you've done for me during the 21 years that I've played here," said the 37-year-old Nadal, a winner of 22 Grand Slam singles titles. "All I can say is 'thank you.'"

Nadal had not lost to a player ranked outside the top 20 on clay since falling to Pablo Cuevas in 2016 at Rio de Janeiro. He was seeking his 60th win in Madrid and the 100th ATP 1000 quarterfinal of his career.

Earlier, the player that Spanish fans hope will take over Nadal's reign, Carlos Alcaraz, needed nearly three hours to beat Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-7 (5), 7-6 (4).

Both Spaniards are coming off injuries and are trying to get back in shape ahead of next month's French Open. The 20-year-old Alcaraz missed tournaments in Monte Carlo and Barcelona. Nadal was coming off two matches in Barcelona after not playing com-

petitively in nearly three months.

He arrived in Madrid saying he wasn't fully fit and was worried about his condition, but in the end he won three consecutive matches without showing significant physical limitations.

"Just two days before I left for Barcelona I really didn't know if I was going to be able to play again in an official match," Nadal said, "and, in the end, I've played two weeks."

Lehecka, through to the second Masters 1000 quarterfinal of his career, said it felt "bittersweet" to beat Nadal in his last appearance in Madrid.

"It's amazing for me. To share the court with such a legendary player is a dream come true," said Lehecka.

"All the best to Rafa, it's kind of bittersweet to have such a nice win in front of all these people, with everyone cheering for him."

Nadal is now planning to play in Rome when the tournament starts on May 8, while continuing his preparations for the French Open.

Nadal said Rome, where he won 10 titles, was also going to be emotional for him.

"I want to play well there (in Rome). I want to be competitive," he said. "I want to give myself a chance to play good tennis, and I'm going to keep working hard to try to make that happen."

Second-seeded Alcaraz was coming off two comfortable victories in Madrid, but struggled on Tuesday. He squandered four match points against the 24th-ranked Struff while serving at 5-3, but converted on his first opportunity in the deciding tiebreaker at the Caja Magica center court.

"I wasn't at my best physically toward the end of the match, but I'm happy that, in the end, I found my game," Alcaraz said. "I fought for every ball and didn't get down, despite some difficult moments when things didn't go my way."



Spain's Rafael Nadal waves to the crowd after losing his ATP Madrid Open round-of-16 match against Jiri Lehecka of the Czech Republic at Caja Magica in Madrid on Tuesday. AFP

AGENCIES

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