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CHINA DAILY

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Xi, Macron hail cooperation potential

Nations agree to promote bilateral trade, advance joint research and innovation in various sectors

By XU WEI and PENG YIXUAN in Paris

President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron reached key consensus on ensuring the strategic stability of bilateral relations, tapping into the potential for win-win cooperation and building up people-to-people exchanges during their talks at the Elysee Palace on Monday.

The two leaders held a joint meeting with journalists after their talks in Paris, with both Xi and Macron highlighting the broad potential for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Xi described the talks as "productive", saying that the two nations will be committed to promoting the upward balance of bilateral trade, expanding cooperation in agriculture and finance, and advancing joint research and innovation in aerospace and civil nuclear energy.

The two nations will strengthen alignment in development strategies and explore cooperation in emerging areas, such as green energy, intelligent manufacturing, biomedicine, artificial intelligence and third-party markets, he added.

Beijing and Paris have also reaffirmed mutual respect for each other's core interests, and will make good use of the multi-level and multidimensional communication channels between the two countries to timely communicate and coordinate policy positions, Xi said.

Before the talks, Macron held a grand welcoming ceremony for the Chinese president at Les Invalides, the French military museum, as the two leaders inspected a military band and the guard of honor.

The landmark meeting in Paris



President Xi Jinping and his wife, Peng Liyuan, arrive at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, on Monday, with French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife, Brigitte Macron, after a welcoming ceremony. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

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came more than a year after Xi hosted Macron in Beijing and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in a number of engagements that

saw the two leaders strengthen their personal bonds and reaffirmed both nations' shared commitment to global peace and stability.

Xi told reporters on Monday that China, after having already fully liberalized access to its manufacturing sector, will accelerate the opening-up of its service sectors, such as telecommunications and healthcare.

"China and France encourage the expansion of bilateral investment and are committed to providing a favorable business environment for enterprises from the other side," the Chinese president said.

The two nations signed 18 interdepartmental cooperation agreements, covering fields including aviation, agriculture, people-to-people exchanges,

green development and cooperation over small and medium-sized enterprises.

With both sides celebrating the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism this year, the two nations will use the opportunity to advance cooperation in education, sports, film and television, and youth, as well as at subnational levels.

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EU urged to have a fair perception, adopt positive China policy

By MO JINGXI mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping refuted on Monday the so-called "problem of China's overcapacity", saying that it is a nonexistent thing either from the perspective of comparative advantage or in light of global demand.

It is hoped that European Union institutions will have a fair perception of China and adopt a positive China policy, he said.

Xi, who is on the second day of a state visit to France, made the remarks in Paris at a China-France-EU trilateral meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the Elysee Palace, amid the commission's

investigation into China's electric vehicle makers.

Xi said that China's leading edge in the new energy sector has been gained through openness and competition and represents advanced production capabilities.

It has not only enriched the global supply and eased global inflationary pressures, but also made important contributions to the global response to climate change and the green transition, he said.

Noting that China and the EU have extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation in the green and digital transition, Xi called on the two sides to properly address economic and trade frictions through dialogue and consultation, and accommodate each

other's legitimate concerns.

The Chinese president also told Macron and von der Leyen that the China-EU relationship, which enjoys a strong endogenous driving force and bright development prospects, does not target any third party, nor should it be dependent on or dictated by any third party.

The two sides should respect each other's core interests and major concerns, safeguard the political foundation of their relations, and uphold the basic norms of international relations, he said.

Xi also called for good preparations for a new round of the China-EU summit and high-level dialogues in the strategic, economic and trade, green and digital fields.

It is important to make good use

of China's visa-exemption policy for European countries and encourage people-to-people exchanges as well as cooperation on education and scientific research, in an effort to enhance popular support for and public opinion on China-EU relations, he said.

As the world enters a new period of turbulence and transformation, Xi said that China and the EU should continue to see each other as partners, stay committed to dialogue and cooperation, and work for the steady and sound growth of China-EU ties.

During the meeting, Xi also outlined China's position and proposals on the Ukraine crisis and the Palestine-Israel conflict.

He said that China, France and

the EU all wish to see an early cease-fire and the return of peace in Europe, and all support the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

The three parties need to jointly oppose the spillover and escalation of the conflict, create conditions for peace talks, safeguard international energy and food security, and keep industrial and supply chains stable, Xi said.

Speaking of the Palestine-Israel conflict, Xi said that the pressing task is to realize a comprehensive cease-fire as soon as possible, the key priority is to ensure humanitarian assistance, and the fundamental way out is to implement the two-state solution.

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FAUX FELINES STRUT THE CATWALK FOR LOVE, MONEY

AI images of pets performing human tasks, modeling clothes attract advertisers, companies

By YANG FEIYUE yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Content creators are using artificial intelligence to produce innovative pet images such as chic cat models, attracting advertisers and companies eager to pounce on their thriving popularity.



Since April last year, when he posted images on social media platform Xiaohongshu of cats imitating human behavior, Chen Jian has

seen his number of followers grow rapidly.

One of Chen's posts of an AI-generated cat practicing baduanjin — traditional Chinese fitness exercises combining physical movement with breathing and meditation — has received more than 160,000 likes.

"I was shocked by the figure; after

all, I was a newcomer with only a few hundred fans on my account," he said.

Chen's work is among more than 140,000 posts containing the keywords "AI" and "pets" that pop up on Xiaohongshu.

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WORLD WATCH

By Amr El Henawy

Exhibitions a triumph of Chinese diplomacy

You usually don't visit museums to learn about new global realities. However, exhibitions at Beijing's Palace Museum are teaching cogent lessons about contemporary, real-world developments. The exhibitions are taking place only because geopolitical and economic relationships are changing dramatically.

One exhibition, titled "Historic Encounters: Interaction Between China and West Asia," was the subject of a story in the South China Morning Post on 30 March. The exhibition had on display hundreds of ancient Saudi Arabian and Iranian artifacts, some of which illustrate reciprocal cultural influences in early Sino-Islamic trade along the old Silk Road.

Another exhibition at the Palace Museum, "The Glory of Ancient Persia," explored the rich cultural history of Iran. Yet another exhibition, "AlUla, Wonder of Arabia," displayed artifacts from an ancient oasis city in the Medina Province of Saudi Arabia.

These exhibitions, involving joint loans from Iran and Saudi Arabia, could only take place because of the triumph of Chinese diplomacy. It was only in March 2023 that Foreign Minister Wang Yi was able to broker the restoration of diplomatic relations between Teheran and Riyadh.

The ... exhibitions of Persian, Saudi Arabian and other West Asian artifacts acknowledge China's deepening contemporary engagement with Islam.

But why would the Palace Museum — the repository of the greatest artistic achievements of Chinese civilization — showcase products of ancient Islamic civilization? One immediate stimulus may have been Beijing's official commitment to "enhanced exchanges and understanding" among different cultures, as announced in the Global Civilization Initiative of March 2023.

An event a decade earlier provides a deeper explanation. At Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan on Sept 7, 2013, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech on the "Ancient Silk Road." He spoke of its lessons for peaceful trade and cultural exchange in the contemporary world. The Palace Museum is proving the President's point with exhibitions of goods traded centuries ago and of artifacts illustrative of cultural influences between peoples.

But the Palace Museum's exhibitions are also recognizing a new contemporary reality: China is opening its doors to other civilizations. That speech in Kazakhstan marked the launch of the most significant geopolitical enterprise of the 21st century, the Belt and Road Initiative.

President Xi declared that the BRI was "rooted in the ancient Silk Road", and to a remarkable extent, many of its first major projects were in the Muslim countries traversed by the old road. Today, BRI involves projects in more than 150 countries, including many that are home to some of the world's nearly 2 billion Muslims.

The Palace Museum's exhibitions of Persian, Saudi Arabian and other West Asian artifacts acknowledge China's deepening contemporary engagement with Islam. In the third decade of the 21st century, when two-fifths of the world's population identify with either Chinese or Islamic civilizations, they need to

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XI'S VISIT



This file photo taken in 1972 shows Xi Jinping, then an "educated youth" in the countryside, returning to Beijing to visit his relatives. XINHUA



President Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris, France, on March 27, 2014. YAO DAWEI / XINHUA



President Xi Jinping receives the original French version of *Confucius, or the Science of the Princes*, published in 1688, from French President Emmanuel Macron, as a national gift before their meeting in Nice, France, on March 24, 2019. JU PENG / XINHUA

Xi's deep appreciation of French culture helps advance bilateral exchanges

Every time President Xi Jinping delivers a New Year address, his office bookshelves inside the Zhongnanhai compound are studied by curious bookworms across the country and the world.

As the camera pans, careful viewers can see his collection contains quintessential French masterpieces, including *The Spirit of Laws*, *Les Misérables*, *The Red and The Black*, and *The Human Comedy*.

"I developed a keen interest in French culture and particularly French history, philosophy, literature and art when I was a young man," Xi once recalled.

He is an avid reader and his extensive reading has helped shape his global perspective.

Since taking the helm of China, Xi has made cultural interaction a trademark of his diplomacy, which has enabled a better understanding between China and the wider world.

As China and France celebrate 60 years of diplomatic ties this year, Xi is making his third state visit to the European country. All eyes will be on him, to see how his enthusiasm for French culture will bring the two great civilizations of the East and the West even closer.

From Stendhal to Hugo

During his teenage years in the late 1960s, Xi, an "educated youth", was sent to Liangjiahe, a poor village located on China's Loess Plateau, so he could "learn from the peasants".

Amid the hardships of rural life, reading became Xi's spiritual solace and he consumed every literary classic he could find in the hamlet; among them *The Red and The Black*.

"Stendhal's *The Red and The Black* is very influential," Xi fondly reminisced years later. "But when it comes to portraying the intricacies of the world, works by Balzac and Maupassant are the best, for example, Balzac's *The Human Comedy*."

Classic books by French luminaries have made such a profound impression on Xi that he often quotes them, particularly words from Victor Hugo, in his speeches.

Addressing the landmark 2015 Paris climate change conference, Xi, in calling for a deal, cited a perceptive line from *Les Misérables*: "Supreme resources spring from extreme resolutions."

He also has affection for other French art, and enjoys the work of the composers Georges Bizet and Achille-Claude Debussy.

Over the years, Xi has visited several French cultural sites, from the majestic Arc de Triomphe to the opulent halls of the Palace de Versailles, and deep in his heart, he sees the timeless collections of the Louvre Museum and the revered sanctuary of the Notre Dame Cathedral as enduring treasures of human civilization.

In fact, Xi is not the first Chinese leader to have been fond of French culture. During what is known as the Diligent Work-Frugal Study Movement around the 1920s, the late Chinese leaders Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping both traveled to France for educational sojourns in search of a way out for China, a country that was at the time torn by war, poverty and invasions.



Xi and Macron listen to the composition *High Mountains and Flowing Water*, which was performed using the *qin*, an ancient Chinese instrument, at Baiyun Hall of the Pine Garden in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on April 7, 2023. YUE YUEWEI / XINHUA



Kunqu Opera artists perform in Paris, France, on Sept 13, 2023. GAO JING / XINHUA



A pocket watch is displayed at an exhibition on Sino-French exchanges in the 17th and 18th centuries at the Palace Museum in Beijing on April 1, 2024. JIN LIANGKUI / XINHUA

At the time, many patriotic Chinese youths were inspired by writings about the French Revolution, which was also the backdrop of Hugo's *Les Misérables*, one of Xi's most quoted French masterpieces. As Xi once recalled, one of the episodes that deeply touched him was when Bishop Myriel helps Jean Valjean and encourages him to be a better man.

"Great works possess great power to move readers," he said.

Zhiyin, or bosom friends

Xi's appreciation of French culture explains why cultural exchanges have become increasingly prominent in his interactions with French

leaders and in bilateral exchanges between the two countries.

In 2019, in the French city of Nice, France's President Emmanuel Macron received Xi at Villa Kerylos, a century-old house overlooking the Mediterranean Sea that is seen as a microcosm of European civilization. There, Macron presented Xi with an ancient book: a precious copy of the original French version of *Confucius, or the Science of the Princes*.

Featuring a brownish, marbled calf-hide cover, a golden vignettes-imprinted spine and russet edges, the Confucian work was published in 1688, during the Age of Enlightenment. A few leaves into the book, a line of curly writing in old French

reads: "To readers — the book serves as the key or introduction to reading Confucius."

The early translations of Confucian teachings inspired French thinkers including Montesquieu and Voltaire, Macron told Xi, who gently held the book with its cover flipped open.

"It is a precious gift," Xi said. Later, it became a prized part of the collection of the National Library of China.

During the 17th century, Europe witnessed the emergence of a trend known as Chinoiserie, which surged across the continent in the 18th century, fueled by increased trade with China. Concurrently, French sinologists explored the study of

to grasp the emotions conveyed through Yu's music. When Zhong died, the grief-stricken Yu shattered his instrument and vowed never to play again since he lost his *zhiyin*, which literally means very close friend who understands the other's music.

"Only *zhiyin* can understand this music," Xi told Macron.

Two independents

"There is a prospect greater than the sea, and it is the sky; there is a prospect greater than the sky, and it is the human soul," Xi quoted from Hugo in his landmark speech at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris in 2014.

"Indeed, we need a mind broader than the sky as we approach different civilizations," added the Chinese president, a steadfast advocate for the harmonious coexistence of civilizations in an era of profound change in the international landscape.

Given that Paris is the host city of UNESCO and that Xi views France as a major representative of Western civilization, it is not surprising that he chose the French capital as the venue to expound for the first time his vision of civilization on the world stage.

"I vividly remember his words when he said that today (where) we live, we are representing different cultures, religions, ethnic groups, but we are part of a community of shared destiny," said then UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova. "Ten years later, none of the words President Xi pronounced has aged today. It is more relevant because of the problems we confront nowadays."

Turn the clock back 60 years to 1964. On Jan 27, China and France made history by formally establishing diplomatic relations, which shattered the icy grip of Cold War isolation and catalyzed the transformation of the global situation toward a multipolar world order. In an editorial published the next day, French daily *Le Monde* called the historic moment "the encounter of two independents".

In Xi's words, Chairman Mao Zedong and General Charles de Gaulle, with extraordinary wisdom and courage, opened the door for exchanges and cooperation between China and the West, "bringing hope to the world amid the Cold War".

Cui Hongjian, director of Beijing Foreign Studies University's Center for the European Union and Regional Development Studies, said, "Both China and France are independent civilizations but like-minded."

"Drawing from their rich cultures and histories, the two countries share profound insights on world trends," said Cui. "They don't want to dominate others, and in turn, they don't want to be dominated."

Laurent Fabius, president of the Constitutional Council and a former prime minister of France, said both France and China are committed to multilateralism and peace.

"In this dangerous world of ours, there must be powers of peace and sustainable development," Fabius said. "And this must obviously be, beyond our differences, a major mission of China and France."

XINHUA

XI'S VISIT

China-France energy ties to be upgraded

Partnership set to boost innovation, as nations seek to mitigate climate change

By ZHENG XIN
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China and France are poised to enter a new era of energy cooperation, with a focus on the nuclear and offshore wind sectors, as both countries actively seek ways to enhance energy security and mitigate climate change, said industry experts.

With China's ambitious targets for carbon neutrality and France's expertise in renewable energy and nuclear power, the partnership between the two nations is poised to catalyze innovation and propel sustainable development initiatives, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

In recent years, bilateral energy agreements between the two nations have gained momentum, spanning areas such as renewable energy investment, nuclear technology exchanges and joint research initiatives. This deepening cooperation underscores the shared commitment to address global energy challenges and the transition toward a low-carbon future, said Luo.

As geopolitical dynamics evolve and climate imperatives intensify, the China-France energy partnership has emerged as a beacon of cooperation in addressing pressing global challenges and redefining the landscape of international energy cooperation, he said.

Energy cooperation between China and France dates back to the establishment of the Daya Bay nuclear power plant project in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in the 1980s.

The nuclear power industry in France, one of the first major Western countries to recognize the People's Republic of China, had been enjoying a golden age since the 1970s.

China entrusted France with the responsibility for building the plant and Electricite De France, or EDF, France's state-owned power utility company, undertook to ensure that the plant would be built, Herve Machenaud, former technical director of EDF from 1984 to 1989 on the construction of China's first nuclear power plant, was quoted as saying by Xinhua News Agency.

"EDF put its trust in China, and China put its trust in EDF, a contract of trust that has kept the parties together for 40 years," he said.

The Daya Bay nuclear power plant went into commercial operation in 1995. EDF and its Chinese partner, China General Nuclear Power Group, then launched another project nearby, the Ling Ao nuclear power plant, which began commercial operations in 2002.

In 2008, the two partners set up a joint venture to construct and operate two nuclear reactors based on Euro-

pean Pressurized Reactor technology in Taishan, Guangdong.

Currently, energy cooperation between China and France not only encompasses traditional fields such as oil and gas, but also extends to emerging areas including nuclear and renewable energy, energy storage and electric vehicles.

China Energy Investment Corp signed an agreement with EDF last year to construct an offshore green hydrogen facility for energy storage in Jiangsu province, which will have a total installed capacity of 1.5 gigawatts. The two parties will also expand their cooperation to cover an offshore wind, solar power, hydrogen and energy storage pilot project in the province.

An analyst said the cooperation, holding immense potential not only for expanding renewable energy capacity but also for fostering technological exchanges and driving down costs, will ultimately benefit both nations and the broader international community while furthering EDF's lower carbon energy initiatives in China.

Cooperation between China and France in offshore wind projects signifies a strategic convergence of expertise and resources, with both nations poised to leverage their respective strengths in technology and investment to drive sustainable energy development.

Zhu Yicong, senior analyst in the fields of renewables and power research with global consultancy Rystad Energy, said, "China has been quite cautious in selecting foreign developers for offshore wind projects, due to the consideration of energy security as well as oceanic data security."

"French power company EDF was the first foreign entity to co-invest in offshore wind projects in China and the cooperation, which expanded in scale last year, has proven successful," she said.

"The cooperation between China Energy and EDF further strengthened the two giants' advantages in the offshore wind market, and has also increased the potential for exploring other markets outside China."

Zhu said that offshore wind development plays a crucial role in China's energy transition, as it has the advantages of higher resource availability and higher generation efficiency, and remains closer to the coastal area power demand centers compared to large-scale onshore wind and solar projects. "Offshore wind projects also have the potential to reduce carbon emissions for other oceanic operations, such as providing green power for offshore oil and gas exploration and production, and we have already seen such projects operating in China," she said.



President Xi Jinping (center) walks out of the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, with French President Emmanuel Macron (left) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (right) after a China-France-EU trilateral meeting on Monday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Meeting: Mutual understanding increases

From page 1

China is ready to work with the EU to support the convening of a more broad-based, authoritative and effective international peace conference as soon as possible, he said.

According to a news release from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the three leaders believe that the trilateral meeting has increased mutual understanding, built consensus for cooperation, and identified ways to address problems.

Macron expressed his delight in holding the meeting during Xi's third state visit to France, saying that it is both a continuation of the previous trilateral meetings and also what is urgently needed to address the various international challenges.

He also said that now more than ever, France and the EU need to strengthen cooperation with China, as this bears on the future of Europe.

Von der Leyen said that given China's weight in global affairs, it is important that the EU maintains

good relations with China. This will determine whether global challenges such as climate change and the Ukraine crisis can be better addressed, she said.

She also expressed the EU's wish to work with China in the spirit of mutual respect, seek common ground despite differences, enhance mutual trust, avoid misunderstanding, jointly uphold the international order based on international law, and promote world peace, security and prosperity.

Center in Paris enhances exchanges

By YANG CHUNYA
and WANG MINGJIE in Paris

The China Cultural Center in the heart of Paris epitomizes the thriving relationship between China and France, driving a significant wave of cultural exchanges that have engaged audiences and enriched communities worldwide.

Liu Hongge, the center's director, said that France provides the optimal environment for cultural exchanges, and the interactions between Beijing and Paris not only spearhead developments in relations between China and Western countries, but also advance ties with other nations.

"The compatibility, significance and effectiveness of these exchanges are unmatched. These interactions are uniquely distinctive and exceptionally prominent," he said.

Sino-French cultural exchanges have progressed to a new level since 2002, marked by significant and expansive interactions between the two countries. The China-France mutual cultural years from 2003 to 2005 emerged as milestones, followed by France's establishment of cultural centers across China.

The China Cultural Center in Par-

is, also founded in 2002, has played a vital role in this cultural resurgence. It has been instrumental in coordinating a broad spectrum of activities that showcase the richness and diversity of Chinese culture, continually enhancing the cultural connection between France and China.

Liu said the center organizes about 130 to 140 cultural activities annually, which encompass exhibition openings, diverse performances, salons and daily educational sessions.

Central to the center's mission are the monthly lectures and cultural exchanges that provide in-depth insights into Chinese history, art and society.

"These events act as a bridge between our two cultures, enhancing mutual understanding and friendship," Liu said. "It's about sharing stories and experiences that transcend borders and language barriers."

The center also offers a comprehensive curriculum of Chinese language courses, calligraphy workshops and music lessons, cultivating a deep appreciation for Chinese culture among French people. "Our aim is to create enduring connections and foster a genuine appreciation for Chinese

culture," the director said.

Another key highlight in the cultural exchanges between the two countries is the expanding Chinese Film Festival. Originally spanning seven cities, this year's festival will reach 10 cities, broadening the exposure of French audiences to Chinese film culture through screenings.

This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France, and the center has significantly influenced France's cultural landscape.

A key event of the year was the collaboration with Berck-sur-Mer International Kite Festival, where China was honored as the guest nation, a vital part of the 2024 China-France Cultural Tourism Year.

The integration of Chinese cultural elements into the festival's vibrant atmosphere attracted over 300,000 participants in April, marking a significant milestone in cultural exchanges. "It was a celebration of tradition and innovation, bringing together people from various backgrounds to experience the beauty of Chinese culture," Liu said.

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University strengthens cultural bonds with French schools

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Students and members of the public in the French cities of Paris and Lyon recently got the opportunity to take part in a series of traditional Chinese cultural and sports events hosted by East China Normal University.

The events organized by the Shanghai-based university, held from Thursday to Monday, were aimed to further promote friendly interactions between the two peoples, especially among the younger generation, and to help promote exchanges and mutual learning between the two countries.

On Thursday, students from five French institutions of higher education and middle schools experienced seal carving under the instruction of professors and students from East China Normal University.

Laurent Long, a PhD graduate in Sinology from the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations in Paris, said that some Sino-French cultural exchange institutions

had hosted calligraphy and seal-carving exhibitions and lectures for the people in France, but it was the first time that calligraphy and seal-carving interactions were provided on his campus.

"It's a lovely beginning. I believe such activities will help more French teenagers enhance their understanding of Chinese culture," he said.

Tryston Beck, a 12-year-old middle school student from Lyon, was satisfied with his work in carving a seal bearing the Chinese character *zhong*, or middle. "The teachers from China told me that in addition to the meaning of 'middle', the character can also refer to something excellent and awesome. It was a very cool and fun experience," he said.

A friendly badminton match was held on Sunday between a team of students led by Wang Yihan, the women's singles champion of the 2011 World Championships and a silver medalist at the London 2012 Olympic Games, and student athletes from Lyon. Wang is currently a physical



Students from the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations participate in calligraphy and seal-carving activities in Paris, France, under the guidance of teachers from East China Normal University, on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

education teacher at East China Normal University.

Guillaume Arnould, executive director of the New French-Chinese Institute, said it was the most popular Sino-French people-to-people

exchange event held recently.

"The friendly match allowed Chinese and French youths to improve their competitive skills, enhance friendship, and sow the seeds for future cooperation and exchanges

between the two sides," he said.

Teachers and students from the university also toured three schools in Lyon to exhibit Chinese kung fu and tai chi, which fascinated many local spectators and some of them also had a chance to experience it themselves.

Daniel Valero, the mayor of Genas, the area in Lyon where the schools are located, said the local residents were impressed by the event. "The tai chi practice with a ball, which was devised by the university team, was very creative and artistic," he said.

Ime Courvallain, a physical education teacher from a middle school in Lyon, said that children participating in the activities were particularly fond of the tai chi exercise with a ball.

The movements are graceful, and they ensure greater flexibility of the participants' waist and hips, she said.

Dai Liyi, vice-president of East China Normal University, said he hopes that such activities could help Chinese and French youths improve their international vision and understanding of multiculturalism.

Global reinsurer upbeat on Chinese market

By ZHOU LANXU
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China is expected to become the world's second-largest market for reinsurance in the coming decade, encouraging global reinsurers like SCOR to ramp up investment in the country, the French group's top executive said.

Thierry Leger, CEO of SCOR, which is based in Paris, said the Chinese market offers "incredible growth potential" and is also expected to become SCOR's second-largest market.

Reinsurance is essentially a type of insurance business whereby a reinsurer offers coverage to other insurance companies, allowing them to transfer a portion of their insured risks to it.

Leger told China Daily in an exclusive interview that the sector's growth prospects would be underpinned by China's robust economic growth potential in the next 10 to 20 years, as well as by the current large gap in insurance protection, which will increase the demand for insurance and reinsurance.

In addition, China's aging population will boost the demand for life insurance and health insurance products, while the continued growth of China's industrial sector will require more property coverage, and climate change will fuel demand for coverage related to natural disasters, Leger said.

China's contribution to SCOR's overall business is expected to increase to at least 10 to 15 percent in the coming 10 to 20 years, with income from insurance premiums in China set to double or even triple, he said.

This forecast also applies to the overall size of China's reinsurance sector. "I'm convinced that the Chinese reinsurance market will become No 2 in the world in the next 10 years," said Leger.

"So that shows the importance of the Chinese market and the need for us to continue to invest in our people, in our expertise, in our tools and in our data in the Chinese market."

Leger said that under SCOR's Forward 2026 strategic plan, the company will invest a lot in the modeling and underwriting of cyberspace risks to meet the booming demand in China. It also will "massively" boost investments in China's capital market — which now stands at about \$1 billion — to leverage the country's long-term growth prospects, he said.

Leger said he "disagrees strongly" with arguments that China's economic development has peaked, given that much potential remains, for example in reducing the gap between Chinese consumers and their peers in the United States and Europe in terms of per capita spending, and in deepening digital transformation as a key growth engine.

As China's industrial sector evolves while technology advances, Leger said he sees a growing potential for technological exchanges between Chinese and French companies. He added that it is of particular importance for the two countries to confirm their strong ties amid the headwinds of intensified global geopolitical tensions.

President Xi Jinping arrived in Paris on Sunday for a state visit to France at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron, a trip that coincides with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France.

Leger said that "in a world full of geopolitical tensions and wars, it's very important to send signals that show people that there are long-term relationships and that there is a long-term view of peace and collaboration between (the two) countries."

He added that China has promoted financial opening-up step by step, which has helped shape a high level of confidence, and it is important for the country to continue to build a stable regulatory environment for foreign investors.

XI'S VISIT

Firms confident in bilateral bonds

China-France relationship to deepen in coming years, say company executives

By ZHONG NAN
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Business ties between China and France — two major manufacturing powerhouses and investors for outbound direct investment — will continue to deepen in the coming years through advanced manufacturing and green development, said government officials and company executives.

With this year marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and France, they said that both countries possess economic strengths that are highly complementary, offering extensive opportunities for investment and trade in both goods and services.

China holds a competitive edge in manufacturing electronics, machinery and daily necessities, whereas France is distinguished in sectors such as aerospace, high-end con-

sumer goods, wine and agricultural products, said Lyu Daliang, director of the statistics and analysis department at China's General Administration of Customs.

"As the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and France deepens further, enhanced communication and stronger cooperation are set to elevate bilateral economic and trade relations to new heights," said Lyu.

Total trade volume between China and France reached 555.11 billion yuan (\$76.87 billion) in 2023, up 31 percent year-on-year. China's imports from the Western European country amounted to 262.42 billion yuan, surging 10.9 percent year-on-year, customs data showed.

China's transition from emphasizing the scale and speed of foreign investment to focusing on quality has led to a significant increase in French investment in the high-tech manufacturing,

green and consumer goods sectors, said Zhao Yongsheng, a professor specializing in French economics at the Beijing-based University of International Business and Economics.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Commerce, French investment in China surged 586 percent year-on-year in the first two months of this year.

China's visa-free policy for several European countries, including France and Germany, will also lead to increased business activities between the two sides in the next phase, said Zhao.

Fueled by an automobile production boom and green transformation in China, Michelin Group, the French tire and mobility company, will increase passenger car tire capacity at its factory in Shenyang, Liaoning province, this year to meet soaring market demand.

Matthew Ye, CEO and president of Michelin China and Mongolia, said the company will continue to invest in factories in China to embrace

market and consumer demands.

The group, headquartered in Clermont-Ferrand, France, is advancing its ongoing expansion project, which began in Shanghai in November last year. The project aims to create a green and intelligent future factory with an annual increase in tire production capacity of 1 million units.

Ye said the company will introduce more businesses beyond tires to China such as high-performance adhesives and high-end engineering fabrics and films. These are designed to cater to highly technical segments such as industrial devices, electric vehicles, sports and construction.

Similar views were expressed by Barbara Coppola, CEO of French sporting goods retailer Decathlon. "China is one of the group's key markets, and the company will continue investing in supply chain development and building new stores within the country," she said.

"China is distinguished as a major global market with extensive capabilities, encompassing industrial,

logistical, product design and retail strengths," said Coppola, emphasizing that Decathlon benefits from a fully integrated supply chain within China.

China's importance to Decathlon is both significant and multifaceted, she added.

The increasing demand from many countries for infrastructure enhancements — including next-generation oil refineries, new energy vehicles, modern factories, roads, airports and container ports — presents opportunities for both French and Chinese banks, project design firms, contractors and manufacturers of materials and equipment, said Zhang Xiang, vice-president of the Beijing-based China International Contractors Association, which helps Chinese companies facilitate new business in overseas markets.

"China's proposal for third-party market cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative could benefit both Western and developing economies without leading to a conflict of interests," said Zhang.

Interview: 60 years of ties to grow friendship

"The anniversary will strengthen our bonds in our shared history," said Eric Alauzet in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency, referring to the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-French diplomatic relations.

As president of the France-China Friendship Group of the French National Assembly, and as a practitioner of acupuncture, his personal experiences reflect the history of mutual understanding and cooperation between France and China.

His passion for Chinese culture began with traditional Chinese medicine, particularly acupuncture. At the end of his medical studies in Paris, his university started offering a course called "alternative medicine" that included acupuncture.

"I immediately had a very strong interest in acupuncture. Why? Because I had this sensitivity to consider health from a holistic point of view, meaning our health should not only take into account psychological and physical dimensions, but also the influence of the environment," he said.

He highlighted that unlike the rigid duality of the West, Chinese philosophy sees an interplay and transformation between *yin* and *yang*, creating a harmonious balance through their dynamic relationship.

After 35 years of study and passion for Chinese culture, Alauzet visited China in April 2023 for the first time, accompanying French President Emmanuel Macron during his state visit.

Six months later, he returned to China as the president of the France-China Friendship Group of the French National Assembly. The group focuses on parliamentary diplomacy, distinct from official trips, aiming to enhance mutual understanding and build on dialogues between presidents and ministers.

"We do not engage in formal commitments. Instead, our discussions aim to foster better understanding and to potentially build upon the dialogues initiated between our presidents and ministers," he said.

For Alauzet, this year holds significance for both France and China. "Sixty is an incredibly important milestone in China — it marks the conclusion of one cycle and the commencement of a new era," he said.

He said former French president Charles de Gaulle was a visionary who not only foresaw China's awakening and progress, but also anticipated China's role on the global stage. "Today, China is a heavyweight," he said.

France, for its part as a heavyweight in Europe, can extend its global influence through collaboration with China, Alauzet noted. In a multipolar world, the dominance of a singular Western model is unlikely, he said.

He highlighted that 60 years of ties are an achievement, and the shared festivities offer an opportunity to forge stronger connections. "It enables us to meet more, fostering new friendships," he said.

"I'm optimistic about our success, as it will bolster culture and human relations — the foundation of all relationships, including diplomatic and strategic ones," he added.

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Chinese and French musicians perform at a concert celebrating the ties between the two countries at the Royal Opera of Versailles in Paris, France, in January. GAO JING / XINHUA

Cooperation can address global green challenges

By HOU LIQIANG
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There is significant potential for Sino-French environmental and climate cooperation, and such cooperation can generate synergy that leads to more effective and innovative solutions to global environmental challenges, according to a senior French executive.

Christophe Maquet, senior executive vice-president of French environmental solutions provider Veolia Group, made the remarks in an exclusive interview with China Daily in the lead-up to President Xi Jinping's visit to France, Serbia and Hungary from May 5 to 10.

Maquet, who is also director of Veolia's Asia-Pacific Zone and CEO of Veolia China, noted that the company has been a significant participant in China's environmental sector since the early 1990s.

Cooperation between China and France benefits the two nations and contributes to global efforts to combat climate change and protect the environment for future generations."

Christophe Maquet, senior executive vice-president of Veolia Group

From urban water and waste services, Veolia quickly expanded its scope in the country to include all its business sectors — water, waste, renewable energy and energy management, he said.

With over 11,000 employees in China, Veolia offers comprehensive environmental services across more than 100 sites in over 40 cities for municipal and industrial clients on the Chinese mainland, he said.

In China last year, Veolia provided 15 million people with drinking water, recycled 46,095 metric tons of plastics and treated 55 million tons of industrial wastewater, he said. Through its expertise in water, waste and energy, Veolia avoided carbon emissions in China to the tune of more than 880,000 tons.

Last year, the company signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Center for International Economic and Technological Cooperation, an affiliate of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

The agreement aims to deepen the collaboration between the two entities to accelerate green industry transformation. A key focus of it is to promote industrial green low-carbon transformation, Maquet said. This involves sharing and implementing best practices, tech-

nologies and solutions that enhance energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions in industrial processes.

"The strategic cooperation agreement represents a significant step in leveraging Veolia's global expertise and the Chinese government's commitment to sustainable and green initiatives," he said.

Veolia is also cooperating with Xinhui Industrial Park in Jiangmen, Guangdong province. In March, CIETC supported Veolia and its partners in holding a forum on plastic recycling, sharing their experience in building a green supply chain.

Maquet believes President Xi's visit to France will provide new opportunities for Sino-French cooperation in environmental protection and addressing climate change.

"I am convinced so, especially considering that climate and environment protection have been a priority for both China and France," he noted.

Based on the experience and insights from Veolia's operations in China, he noted several areas that hold significant potential for environmental and climate cooperation between the two countries, including resource recycling and circular economy, carbon reduction and energy.

The two countries' cooperation on resource recycling and the circular economy can include initiatives such as establishing recycling centers and promoting a circular economy, which aligns with both French and Chinese objectives to reduce pollution and increase resource efficiency, he said.

Decarbonization is an important area for both France and China, he continued. This involves deploying innovative technologies and solutions such as CCUS (carbon capture, use and storage) to reduce carbon footprints, aligning with China's climate targets for peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

"In terms of energy, both countries are expected to cooperate further to accelerate the transition toward renewable energy, including biomass, wind power, solar energy, hydrogen, geothermal, etc., to fulfill their promises of carbon neutrality," he said.

"Both China and France are influential global players. Their cooperation on environmental issues can set an example for other nations, particularly in policymaking, technological innovation and commitment to international agreements like the Paris Agreement," Maquet said.

Sino-French cooperation can facilitate green technology exchanges and promote economic growth in the green sector, he said, adding that cooperation can generate synergy that leads to more effective and innovative solutions to global environmental challenges.

"Cooperation between China and France benefits the two nations and contributes to global efforts to combat climate change and protect the environment for future generations," he said.



Tourists from around the world, including some from China, view the Eiffel Tower from the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, France, on Friday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Return of Chinese tourists helps vitalize Europe's tourism market, economy

By CHENG SI
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Deepening tourism cooperation between China and Europe will help vitalize the continent's economy, as tourism is one of its pillar industries.

Figures from travel agencies show that tour products to Europe have become hot sellers since early 2023 after China loosened outbound travel restrictions following the pandemic.

Traditionally popular European destinations such as France, Spain and Greece remain top choices for Chinese travelers, while "niche" destinations like Serbia and Montenegro have also become trendy.

"Some European destinations including Athens, Berlin, Milan and Zurich have seen an upsurge in searches on our platform recently," said online travel agency Qunar.

For example, from April 22 to 28, searches for tour products to Athens nearly tripled, while searches for Berlin-related products almost quadrupled compared with the previous week.

Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu, said that destinations in Central and Eastern Europe have also lured more Chinese travelers because of lower costs and more friendly visa policies.

"A continuous trip to Austria, Czech Republic and Hungary usually costs 25,000 yuan (\$3,500) to 30,000 yuan per person during summer time, while a trip to the United Kingdom and Ireland costs nearly 40,000 yuan per person over the summer," he said.

"Also, adding direct flights from China to destinations in Eastern Europe and more convenient visa application procedures make Central and Eastern

Visa waiver spurs trips by French nationals

China has recorded 104,000 arrivals by French nationals since the beginning of the year, up almost 295 percent compared to the same period in 2023, immigration authorities said.

The primary reasons for the visits include business, tourism and social purposes such as visiting relatives and friends, according to the National Immigration Administration.

During the same period, Chinese mainland residents made 130,000 trips to France, an increase of 215 percent compared to the figure in 2023, with tourism and business being the main reasons for travel, the NIA said.

China implemented a unilateral visa exemption policy for France on Dec 1 last year.

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Europe more attractive."

Tourism industry insiders said that Europe delights in seeing more Chinese travelers, who will inject life into the continent's economy and help boost tourism-related employment.

Data analysis company Statista — founded in Hamburg, Germany — said the total contribution of travel and tourism to Europe's GDP was around \$2.1 trillion in 2019, the year before the pandemic hit, while that dropped to around \$1.9 trillion in 2022.

Travel and tourism account for a great share of some economies in Europe — for example, 24.8 percent of Croatia's GDP came from travel and tourism in 2019, according to Statista.

Sandra Carvao, chief of tourism market intelligence and competi-

tiveness at the World Tourism Organization, told People's Daily in a recent interview that China is one of the world's largest sources of travelers, so the recovery of China's tourism market is key to Europe's tourism industry development.

Eduardo Santander, executive director of the European Travel Commission, told People's Daily that destinations in Europe have made great efforts to attract Chinese travelers, such as deepening cooperation with China's airline companies and organizing tourism exhibitions in China.

He said China had been the second largest source of travelers to Europe before the pandemic, and he hopes to see a growing number of Chinese travelers come to the continent this year.

XI'S VISIT



Left: Founder of Yishu 8 Christine Cayol with French Ambassador to China Bertrand Lortholary appreciate the artworks. **Right:** Yishu 8's China Prize laureate Wang Enlai positions his artwork during residency in France. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Near the Forbidden City lies a quaint courtyard with gray brick walls, crimson columns and old trees that extend branches beyond the compound's walls in Beijing's Dongcheng district.

The courtyard embodies a chapter in the history of friendship and exchange between China and France that goes back 100 years and lasts until today. The Sino-French University was located there since the 1920s. Now, it is home to Yishu 8, an art platform that provides residencies for artists from the two countries.

Every year since 2011, Yishu 8 has awarded its France Prize to three young French artists and invites them for a two- to three-month residency in Beijing. And since 2013, the China Prize has been offered annually to two Chinese artists, who are then invited to Paris for residencies.

French artist Lyes Hammadouche won in 2017 and arrived in Beijing for a two-month residency.

"I was provided with a place to stay and a studio to work in on the second floor of a former Sino-French University building, where the lighting was beautiful," Hammadouche recalls.

"It felt amazing to be here because it's one of the places where there really were exchanges between French and Chinese cultures. That's something that made it unique."

He knew some of the basics about Chinese culture before making the journey. And he is interested in Eastern philosophy. So, after his arrival in Beijing, he started learning Chinese and reading the seminal Taoist work, *Tao Te Ching*.

"I had to come here to dive into the culture and experience it firsthand to understand the book," the 37-year-old says.

"And that was the amazing part of it. When I went back and my friends asked me to tell them about China, there is no word to describe it. You have to live it."

During those two months, he also encountered other artists and art experts, who expressed recognition of his work. Jury member of Yishu 8's China Prize Tony Brown, who is also a guest professor at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, invited him to teach at the academy, which led him to live in Beijing for four years, teaching new media art and design.

Now based in London, he recently came back to Beijing for an exhibition of Yishu 8 prize laureates, titled *Histoire d'Yishu 8 Residence d'Artistes Franco-Chinoise* (History of Yishu 8 French-Chinese Artist Residency).

As this year marks the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and France, Yishu 8 hosted the exhibition from April 20 to 28 at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing.

Displayed on-site are 56 works from various media, including paintings, sculptures, videos and installations, by 34 French and Chinese artists who have



Framing growing cultural connections

Innovative art residency program enhances exchanges between France and China, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.



Clockwise from top: Yishu 8 hosted an exhibition showcasing works by its prize winners in April at Beijing's National Art Museum of China. On exhibit are 56 works created by 34 French and Chinese artists who have participated in the residency program. An artwork by Wang Enlai, titled *Pressure Released — Glass Plate*, adds color, literally, to the exhibition. Wang attended the French residency program twice in 2016 and 2022 respectively.

participated in the residency.

The exhibition's opening ceremony on April 20 was attended by Bertrand Lortholary, French ambassador to China, Wu Weishan, director of the National Art Museum of China, Christine Cayol, founder of Yishu 8, and Su Dan, the exhibition's curator.

"The spirit of Yishu 8 lies in the need of an equal and free dialogue between

China and France," says Cayol, a French writer and philosopher, who has lived in China for more than 20 years and founded Yishu 8 in 2009.

"When this dialogue is led by artists, it resembles a tree bearing fruit. Sometimes, the fruits immediately come into fruition, but at others, they require the artists to delve deeper into their own cultural roots."

Chinese artist Huang Xiaoliang had two of his photography works displayed at the exhibition. Both are early works kept in Yishu 8's collections around 10 years ago, featuring the grayscale hues of Chinese ink paintings, processing techniques in digital art and an exploration of the concept of shadows.

He first heard about Yishu 8 in 2010, when he'd just graduated from universi-

ty. Since then, he has continued collaborating with the organization, hosting solo exhibitions and having his works displayed around the world.

"I think Yishu 8 was a pioneering organization at that time in constructing a nonprofit exchange platform to support artists. It's a difficult endeavor. Young artists especially need more of these kinds of opportunities," Huang says.

He participated in residencies in Paris in 2018 and 2023, each lasting around two months. During these periods, he was provided with a studio at the International City of the Arts, an artist-in-residence building complex near the Seine.

"Apart from its great location in central Paris, the complex was very international and diverse, with artists coming from all around the world, each with their own studios and working on all kinds of art forms, such as music, visual art, film and literature," Huang says.

"Getting to know these artists from different cultural backgrounds allows us to broaden our vision, providing us with abundant information and diverse perspectives for looking at and understanding the world, which is very important for artists."

Chinese artist Wang Enlai, whose works are also featured at the exhibition, likewise says the residencies proved an eye-opening experience. He was granted the China Prize in 2015, when he was a master's student of sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

"New experiences are very important. For artists, creation is based on what they see and what they hear. When life suddenly changes into a very different environment, it spurs new experiences and new stimuli," Wang says.

"Information is easily accessible today, but I think especially when we can smoothly access information, firsthand experience is more important — our senses, our encounters and our connections with other people."

After his initial residency in 2016, he went to France again in 2022 to prepare for his works to be showcased at the 2022 Yishu 8 exhibition centered on the artist residency at the Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts in Paris.

"The recognition of Yishu 8 prize by these two prestigious museums (Guimet and the National Art Museum of China) is crucial," Cayol says.

"It encourages us to continue building cultural, artistic and humanistic bridges. These are spaces of transition and exploration, where people can construct their own identities by getting closer to others."

"These bridges between China and France come to life through the artists. It is they who, in the silence of the studio, hold the future of our civilizations in their hands."

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

The magic of nature comes to life in show

Is it possible to see mushrooms grow, hear flowers bloom, smell a rainforest and feel the air flow beneath the flapping wings of flamingos in a busy shopping mall in Beijing? It seems the answer to those questions is yes, as the latest exhibition at the Keyi Art Museum in Wanda Plaza takes the audience on a sensory journey to different parts of the planet.

Launched by France's Sensory Odyssey Studio and the National Museum of Natural History in Paris as well as the Shanghai-based China Dream Live Entertainment, or CDE Live, *Sensory Odyssey* runs from April 30 to Oct 20. It features videos taken in different habitats,

each accompanied by different sensory effects, such as odor and wind, to create an immersive experience.

Upon first entering the exhibition hall, visitors step into the wilderness of Kenya where they can watch flamingos fly into the sky on a huge screen, as well as hear lions and zebras in the darkness ahead of a savannah thunderstorm, see visualizations of the acoustic signals sent by bats in a rainforest in Peru, and venture underground in video of moles digging tunnels and of mushrooms breaking through the soil. They will be able to immerse themselves in a magnified and amplified world to hear the sounds of ants walking and

flowers blooming and finally, the chance to dive into the sea and witness whales spraying water into the air. The journey ends with a tunnel that leads back to the real world.

Gwenael Allan, CEO and co-founder of Sensory Odyssey Studio, compared the experience to Alice exploring the land of Charles Darwin. "All our content is magnified to allow you to hear, see, smell and feel nature like never before," he says. "We give you a superpower to perceive the world and change the way you relate to it."

Zhu Ranhua, CEO of CDE Live, the company that has brought the exhibition to China, explains fur-

ther. "With this exhibition, we are trying to break the 'screen' between us as observers and the animals and plants, so that visitors can really go into nature. This exhibition is different from those I have seen before," she says.

Zhu adds that she was touched by the production, and hopes that her emotion will be shared by the audience.

Allan says that the idea of creating the exhibition came to him while he was in Brazil, where he found that the presence of nature was strong.

"A lot of the problems we find in society today are the result of disconnection between humans and

nature, and the prevalent view of nature as something you either use, exploit or are afraid of," he says. He hopes that the exhibition will help address that disconnection by helping visitors feel that they are a part of nature.

Sensory Odyssey Studio spent four years preparing before they eventually started filming in 2020. Their team consisted of 300 people, including scientists, artists, designers, engineers and all kinds of sound, lighting and graphic specialists. Filming and production took 18 months, with the team collecting footage and data from six locations in Africa, Europe and South America.

Beijing is the fourth place to host the exhibition, which has previously been held in France, Singapore and Brazil, where it attracted half a million visitors, many of them children. "The children become quiet," says Allan. "They listen. They become really attentive."

He hopes that the exhibition helps visitors better understand the emotions, behavior and needs they have with all nonhuman species to create empathy, thereby encouraging them to care for this planet we all share intimately and to do their best to regenerate it.

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A celebration of civilizations

French writer and curator in Beijing joins a salon with a Chinese cellist trained in France to discuss how art, literature and music translate beyond the cliché of 'universal languages' to traverse intercultural intersections, Erik Nilsson reports.

You need to get lost to find culture. This was an insight French writer and exhibition curator Christine Cayol shared at a recent Embracing Cultures salon China Daily hosted at the Yishu 8 Beijing Art Center, which Cayol founded.

Her counterpart, Chinese cellist Chu Yibing, who was the first student from the Chinese mainland admitted to the Paris Conservatory, agreed.

"I think getting lost is, specifically speaking, part of the French spirit," Chu says. "Because always knowing where you're going is boring. Getting lost and being happy — that's very French."

It was one of many meanderings toward the philosophical and metaphorical during their discussion about synergies between Chinese and French culture. It was, in this case, inspired by a cohort pointing out both countries' capitals are built on a central axis.

"In Beijing, just like in Paris, you have this very vertical and straight way to organize the city," Cayol says. "But most of the time, we have very complicated, narrow streets. When you get lost, most of the time, you don't know the direction. And so you have both this idea of clear order of the space and, at the same time, a sort of disorder, and you easily get lost."

Chu points out he gets lost in Paris but never in Beijing's *hutong* (traditional alleyways), while Cayol says she often gets lost in even the small *hutongs* in which she lives. "It's like a small labyrinth," she says.

From that point, their conversation itself took an unexpected turn from urban planning to how "getting lost" in another country is literally and figuratively a way to stumble upon intercultural intersections.

"Getting lost is a key part of embracing a culture," Cayol says.

"If you want to make everything for sure and certain, and control everybody and everything in your (own) country, well, you don't need to go abroad. If you go abroad, you have to in some way feel a little bit uncomfortable because everything is so new, so strange, that you have this getting lost feeling. If you don't, that means you're not abroad."

Moments before, Chu, who became one of the first Chinese to study classical music in Europe four decades ago, politely interrupted a host when she was introducing him as someone "familiar with both cultures" to interject: "No! No, no. I am still studying."

Learning about learning what the two cultures have learned from each other was precisely the point of the salon, which took place as the two countries are this year celebrating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations, following centuries of contact. Among more expectable themes, such as music, food and art as "universal languages", were less predictable motifs, such as synesthesia, listening and time. And the conversation unfolded from light-hearted banter about favorite foods and funny mishaps to deeper discourses tackling abstract theoretical contemplations on humanity.

A few words

Cayol and Chu began by listing words to describe each country. Chu selected the French words for "thank you", "excuse me" and "goodbye" to describe France.

"These are not just simple words," he says. "They are three big signs of modern, human civilization."

He points out such courtesies function to enrich expansive social bonds.

"Treating your family members and your friends well doesn't mean necessarily you're civilized. Saying 'thank you', 'excuse me' to people you don't know," he says, shows a civilized attitude.

"I'm an artist. My work, my entire lifelong commitment, is for people who I don't know. That, for me, is being civilized."

Cayol selected "art", "Riviera" and "people" for France, and



"movement", "energy" and "sharing" for China.

That's because of "the rhythm to move and change and adapt to situations, this kind of energy that I feel when I come to China, when I am living in Beijing, and sharing good moments with people through gastronomy and life, and very friendly ways of sharing moments with people."

Chu's words for China were his favorite foods — *gulaorou* (sweet-and-sour pork), *baochao yaohua'r* (stir-fried pork kidney) and *cong-youbing* (scallion pancakes). "I come to Beijing for concerts, for family and for these three dishes," he says.

The cellist agrees that cuisine is another universal language and points out that Chinese has the term *jingshen shiliang*, or "spiritual food".

He likewise adores French quiche Lorraine, escargot and seafood.

Table talk

This led to a discussion on how food nourishes culture. Chinese and French societies arguably appreciate mealtimes more than many other countries do.

"We're two cultures that spend the most time at the table. It's as simple as that," Chu says.

"French people can stay at the table and forget they have a concert afterward."

When a cohort asks, "So, you've experienced that, where French people forgot to go to your concert?" Chu replies: "No. Not my concert. Their concert. Any concert!"

Cayol points out both cultures have long-standing gastronomic traditions in which delicacies meet discussions for dinner.

"We are two huge civilizations who have this 'language' in common — how to share quality moments with food. Sharing moments with food, thanks to food, thanks to wine, is also a way to share other topics. We love sharing ideas, dreams and emotions about life," she says.

"French people, above everything, we really like to talk. So, having lunch or having dinner together is a way to share ideas, sometimes in a very dynamic way. And we have free discussions."

"If you never have the time to sit down and to have the possibility to enjoy moments, you don't have this pleasure. It's something linked with time."

Finding time

Cayol says her over 20 years in Beijing have taught her a lot about time, in her own life and across cultures.

"I've had an incredible time in China. This can be summarized with one single topic, which is time," she says.



Top: Cellist Chu Yibing, who was the first student from the Chinese mainland to enroll in the Paris Conservatory, performs at the recent Embracing Cultures salon in Beijing. He was joined by French writer and art curator Christine Cayol (second from left) and China Daily cohorts. **Above:** Chu engages in dialogue at the event. PHOTOS BY WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY



But it's not that easy. You need time. You need a strong will. And you need to feel confident about your own culture to be able to go beyond your own culture."

Christine Cayol, French writer and exhibition curator

This prompted her to publish the book, *Shijian Lide Zhongguoren*, in French and Chinese. The English title translates from Chinese as "Chinese in Time" and from French as, "Why Do the Chinese Have Time?"

"It's also a symbol of a very huge civilization. Chinese have a very specific relationship with time — much more flexible, much more, I'd say, friendly with time," she says.

"This kind of flexibility is not always so easy for foreigners and especially for Europeans. Sometimes, something is very sudden, and you stop — but now I'm very used to this very flexible way of dealing with time."

Cayol points out Chinese people can be "very rapid" in some contexts and "very slow" in others.

"And when we French are rapid, Chinese are slow. And the opposite — when Chinese are slow, we are rapid ... Like tea, you have to infuse a lot of time and to wait, and to wait and to wait."

Her time living in China has also enabled her to learn that tea can teach us about life and time, she says.

She explored these realizations by hosting an exhibition a decade ago featuring a dialogue between Chinese tea and French wine.

"There are many similar approaches. You take time, you discover a lot of things through tea, like through music, like through painting. It's a never-ending process to know more, to have more images in your mind. So, for me, it's a very, very sophisticated way to enjoy life."

Cayol ultimately believes the entire enterprise of cross-cultural engagement is about taking and making time.

"When I came to China, I didn't

know anything about Chinese literature. But my choice has been to dedicate time — and deep time — to learn about some Chinese spirituality, Chinese literature, Chinese music, to take this time to study. So, about boundaries, this is a fact that if you're crossing over these boundaries, there are no boundaries anymore," she says.

"But it's a process. It's not immediately, 'OK, I go to China, I go to France, I go to America, and I have this feeling already that there are no boundaries anymore'. There are. There are a lot of differences between us."

These are surmountable, Cayol says, given time.

"The idea, what's very important to me from a philosophical point of view, is to get into this process, to not avoid these differences, these boundaries, but to go beyond," she says.

"But it's not that easy. You need time. You need a strong will. And you need to feel confident about your own culture to be able to go beyond your own culture."

Points of contact

Chu says such universal languages as art, food and music offer entry points. Not many Chinese had heard French music when he moved to Europe decades ago, he says.

"When I was there, I was listening to the sonata of (Claude) Debussy, and I was shocked!" He then switched to Chinese to explain that he heard the folk music of northwestern China's Loess Plateau region, including the *saxian* (a Chinese three-stringed lute), in Debussy's piece.

"One-hundred years ago, in French paintings, you could see a lot of influence coming from the

East, from China, Japan ... a lot of Asian cultural influences. It's the same with music."

Chu has visited countless cities in his homeland and around the world, yet insists: "I have never traveled in China. I'm traveling only in my music. So, I go there to do concerts. OK, I've been everywhere in my country but for organized concerts or ... cultural events."

"I'm not really traveling because I get in contact with millions of my compatriots through music. And it's already a huge blessing for me. So, I don't need more."

He believes music not only goes beyond language but even extends to senses beyond the auditory, through its synesthetic power.

"Music is the only human language invented that can be used and be loved without any translation," Chu says.

"It's not just that music has sounds. Music has pictures — invisible pictures. And, also, music has flavors. I think the French have composed the most beautiful ancient music ever."

Defining distinctions

Ultimately, the salon about exchanges between the two societies, in particular, and human universalisms, in general, proceeded to scrutinize the definitions of, and distinctions between, civilization and culture.

"For me, civilization is not only one culture, one country," Cayol says.

"Western civilization is many different cultures. Italian culture, French culture, German culture — are all unique, are different. But, of course, those common points can shape what we call Western civilization. And I would say, Asian civilization, it's a way to mix Chinese culture and different cultures. Civilization is made of this huge, whole, comprehensive way of gathering cultures," she explains.

"Culture is memory. You remember all the works, all the artworks of the past ... 100 years ago, 1,000 years ago, and it still remains a very current, dynamic and modern thing. It's about past and present."

Chu views the question through the lenses of his time in China, Europe and the United States.

"It's not which culture has priority, what civilization is right or wrong. It's just the ability to think differently."

All ears

Chu believes listening is crucial to understanding among cultures and civilizations.

"As a musician, I have a huge privilege because music is not an art of speaking. Music is an art of listening," he says.

"If we have the need to have a better understanding between us, the first instinct should not be speaking. The first instinct should be listening. Maybe me first, maybe you first, but somebody should first listen."

Cayol points to the value of meeting in person. That's why she brings French artists to China to experience Beijing for themselves.

"We can talk about very big concepts and directions, but in fact we need to listen to each other. And how do we listen to each other? Again we need to go and to discover: What does it mean, Chinese culture? What does it mean, living in France?" she says.

"Social media plays a key role to spread a lot of wrong ideas about life in China or in France. So, again, artists, they have the key."

Before pulling out his cello, Chu says: "Many people think about listening. No. We don't know how to listen. Listening is not only through ears. It's with your heart, with your mind. We learn through music how to listen."

Then, he played. And everyone listened.

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Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Stronger relations ahead as nation opens up to foreign investment opportunities

China and France celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations and booming trade

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The prosperous economic collaboration between China and France is expected to continue, fueled by an increase in the goods trade and expanded cooperation across key sectors such as aviation, green development and advanced manufacturing, said government officials and business leaders.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1964, trade between China and France has increased more than 800-fold. Today, China is France's largest trading partner in Asia and France ranks as China's third-largest trading partner in the European Union and the third-largest source of actual investment, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

During his meeting with French Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade Franck Riester in Paris in early April, Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao said that over the 60 years of diplomatic relations between China and France, the scale and quality of the two countries' economic and trade cooperation have continuously improved.

The Chinese government is promoting high-quality development, accelerating the development of new quality productive forces, and is actively creating a level playing ground for both domestic and foreign enterprises, which will provide greater market opportunities for French and other European businesses, said Wang.

In 2023, trade between the two nations reached \$78.9 billion, with French imports to China growing by 5.5 percent year-on-year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.



A corner of the Chinese book exhibition area at the Festival du Livre de Paris on April 12. GAO JING / XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

In addition to passenger vehicles and aircraft, water treatment, chemical and pharmaceutical products, France's exports to China include fashion, agricultural and energy infrastructure products. China exports mainly construction machinery, manufacturing equipment, steel, electronics, textiles, garments and household appliances to the European country.

By the end of 2021, France had more than 6,000 companies in China with an investment stock surpassing \$18 billion. These enterprises have been keen on fostering innovative business models in the Chinese market, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Wang also met with a host of French multinational entrepreneurs during his visit to Paris in early April.

During those meetings, he said that openness is a distinctive symbol of China today. The Chinese government is committed to improving the business environment and providing service guarantees for the investment and operation of foreign enterprises, he added.

Meanwhile, senior executives of French companies, including BNP Paribas and Danone, said they are optimistic about China's economic prospects and business environment and will remain committed to long-term development in China.

For instance, French companies like Schneider Electric and Sanofi have not only invested in but also set up research and development centers in China, strengthening the innovation ties between the two countries.

Pointing out that new quality productive forces consist of innovative digital and green forces, Yin Zheng, executive vice-president for China and East Asia operations at French industrial and technology group Schneider Electric, said China's promotion of new quality productive forces will create greater development potential for the country in 2024 and beyond.

New quality productive forces are advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth models and productivity development paths, featuring high technology, high efficiency and high quality, and in line with the new development philosophy.

Highlighting the importance of innovation in cultivating new quali-

ty productive forces, Yin said Schneider Electric will strengthen its "China Hub" strategy this year in all aspects, including talent, innovation, supply chains and ecosystem development.

Apart from being Schneider Electric's most crucial supply chain across the world, China has emerged as the French group's second-largest market globally, boasting 29 factories and distribution centers.

Thierry Weulersse, CEO for China of Thales Group, another French industrial conglomerate, said the company will deploy more resources to invest in sectors such as aerospace, digital identity and security in China to maintain robust growth in the coming years.

"For decades, we have consistently integrated global experience with specific needs of the Chinese market, implementing an innovation-driven development strategy, which is crucial for our steady growth here," said Weulersse.

In terms of fundamental scientific research, Thales is supporting China's endeavors to construct cutting-edge scientific research infrastructure.

"As a major player in ultra-intense lasers and high-precision optics, we have been supporting the Chinese scientific research communities to reach their goals in the construction and development of particle accelerators and next-generation telescopes," he added.

Thales has established three joint ventures in China, with offices in seven cities, including Beijing and Shanghai.

More than 70 percent of foreign companies are optimistic about the development prospects of the Chinese market over the next five years, a quarter-on-quarter increase of 3.8 percentage points, according to a survey released by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in late April.

The study, conducted by the CCPIT and involving more than 600 foreign companies operating in China in the first quarter of 2024, found that more than half of the respondents believe that the attractiveness of the Chinese market is increasing, a rise of about 2.9 percentage points compared to the previous quarter.

Zhao Ping, spokeswoman for the Beijing-headquartered CCPIT, said that the survey underscores the continued appeal of the Chinese market to foreign investment, highlighting its comprehensive advantages.

Bolstered by a range of policies introduced in the first quarter to stabilize the economy, enhance openness and draw foreign investment, China's attractive investment climate and commitment to high-level openness have reinforced foreign enterprises' confidence in investing in the country, she said.

Echoing that sentiment, Zhang Ying, managing director for China at Dassault Systemes, a French industrial software company, said that with an unwavering commitment to advance opening-up, China's influence in global industry, supply and innovation chains has notably increased, providing new opportunities for multinational corporations like Dassault Systemes to tap into its market potential.

"We have significantly benefited from China's optimized business environment during the past few years," said Zhang. "Looking ahead, we will continue to increase investment in the Chinese market, scale up production and boost innovation and R&D."

To attract more foreign capital, China rolled out a package of policy measures to aid investment by overseas institutions in Chinese technology-oriented enterprises in late April. It marked another step by the world's second-largest economy to attract more foreign investment and foster new quality productive forces.

Looking ahead after six decades of China-France friendship

By THOMAS BUBERL

On Jan 27, 2024 we celebrated the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and the People's Republic of China. This year, AXA, as a global leader in insurance with French roots, also celebrates 25 years of its presence in the Chinese market.

Since the determination of our two countries six decades ago to strengthen their ties and cooperation, the world has significantly evolved. As risk management is at the heart of AXA's concerns and expertise as an insurer, we have been keen to use our experience to benefit economic development and the broad ambitions of China and France in their economic cooperation. We share the common objective to understand the new risks our societies are facing and to reinforce protection against them. I am

obviously thinking of climate change.

AXA has been operating in China for more than 25 years and wishes to make use of the tools at its disposal to deploy innovative and high-quality service offerings for the Chinese population and businesses in line with our mission to act for human progress by protecting what matters.

Thus, with a global and mature vision, AXA wishes to represent a unique model of establishment in the Chinese market. Thanks to our long-term commitment strategy and the presence in all the business lines with ICBC-AXA Life, AXA-Tianping P&C, AXA SPDB and AXA XL, supported by our global expertise and resources, we can provide the population with property and casualty, life, health, protection and pension insurance, as well as assets and wealth management, and con-

25 years

how long AXA, a global leader in insurance with French roots, has developed in the Chinese market

tribute to the development of the Chinese market.

Insurance is focused on anticipating and mitigating future risks in order to protect populations in the best possible way. In the context of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and the People's Republic of China, AXA looks forward to using its global experience and deep expertise to contribute to the next phase of China's economic development.

The author is chief executive officer of AXA Group. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Why should the future be a risk?

The world changes and new risks emerge.

We have a responsibility to do more. We must try harder. The journey may be long, but we've already started to take action to prevent and mitigate these risks.

As a world player, with 147,000 employees and agents in 51 countries and regions, we have the means and the ambition to recast our role when acting for individuals, economies and society's progress.

In China, thanks to our long-term commitment strategy and the presence in all the business lines with AXA-Tianping P&C, ICBC-AXA Life, AXA SPDB and AXA XL, we can provide the population with property and casualty, life, health, protection and pension insurance, as well as assets and wealth management, and contribute to the development of the Chinese market.

Know You Can.

Thomas Buberl
AXA Group CEO

畅享未来，无惧风险

世界瞬息万变，新型风险层出不穷。

未雨绸缪，安盛锲而不舍；道长且阻，我们砥砺前行。作为一家全球企业，安盛147000名员工和经代伙伴遍布51个国家和地区，我们有能力和决心保障个体幸福、经济繁荣和社会进步。

在中国，安盛基于长期发展的策略，全面开展业务，通过安盛天平、工银安盛、浦银安盛及安盛信

利等多家实体，践行与中国共同发展的承诺。通过财产险、寿险、健康险、养老金，以及资产和财富管理等多元业务，为人民群众的美好生活保驾护航，为实体经济发展贡献保障力量。

知你致远

Thomas Buberl
安盛集团首席执行官



The headquarters building of AXA Group in Paris. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and France



CHINA

Holding a pose



Teachers and students from Chinese University of Hong Kong pose with their first prize winner work posture at the 10th Tianfu Construction Festival, at Southwest Jiaotong University in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Monday. This year's festival, which was inaugurated on Monday, required participants to design a youth station using materials such as wood and cloth that reflect the vigor and creative vitality of college students. The event drew 24 teams from colleges across the country to compete. ZHANG LANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Four high-speed railways about to adjust prices

By LUO WANGSHU
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Four high-speed railways in China will have fares adjusted after June 15, with higher maximum ticket prices and lower discounted fares, according to railway ticket platform 12306.

The 12306 website recently released notices involving the high-speed railway linking Wuhan and Guangzhou, Shanghai and Hangzhou, Shanghai and Kunming, as well as Hangzhou and Ningbo.

According to the notices, the adjustments will be made to bullet trains operating at 300 kilometers per hour and above. In China, the fastest commercial bullet train travels at 350 km/h. The price will vary based on factors such as season,

date, time slot and seat class.

Maximum ticket prices will be increased by about 20 percent. For example, the second-class seat fare from Wuhan to Guangzhou South will increase from 463.5 yuan (\$64) to 553 yuan.

The current fare of 73 yuan from Shanghai Hongqiao to Hangzhou East will rise to 87 yuan, a 19 percent increase.

Similar increases will also apply to other lines. According to the notice, the lowest ticket price is about 55 percent of the highest fare, meaning the lowest second-class fare from Wuhan to Guangzhou South will be 304 yuan, approximately 34 percent lower than the current fare, which is 463.5. Similar discounted prices will apply on other lines.

The change in prices was among the top 10 trending topics on the Sina Weibo social media platform on Monday.

One main argument is that the high-speed train is a public service, so the price should be affordable for most people. Another argument is that the high-speed train, operated by State-owned enterprise China State Railway Group, should pay more attention to profit, while regular-speed trains with cheaper prices can meet public demand.

Zhao Jian, a professor of rail transportation economics at Beijing Jiaotong University, told China Business Journal that the high-speed railway should establish a flexible and competitive pricing system.

He said that the high-speed train's

pricing mechanism should be even more flexible, such as raising prices on Mondays and Fridays when travel demand is high, and lowering prices at other times.

In addition, Zhao suggested increasing prices during peak hours in the morning and evening, and reducing prices during off-peak hours.

China State Railway Group saw a total revenue of 964 billion yuan in passenger and freight transportation last year, a year-on-year increase of 39 percent, with a net profit of 3.3 billion yuan.

The company said it increased capacity to reach the goal last year, including promoting the modern railway logistics system and implementing a flexible market-based price system.

Job hunters cheer hefty starting pay

Statistics show that employment remained stable in the first quarter

By CHENG SI
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Finance-related jobs were the most sought after in the first quarter of the year thanks to the hefty salaries on offer, while the services sector witnessed a huge jump in starting pay during the same period.

Recruitment portal Zhaopin recently released a report that said 38 major cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, saw the average starting salary settle at around 10,300 yuan (\$1,425) a month in the first quarter. That was an increase of 2.2 percent year-on-year, but a fall of 0.9 percent from the previous quarter.

Among the 38 cities, the starting salaries in some first-tier cities were much higher than those on offer in second-tier or third-tier cities, according to Zhaopin. Shanghai offered the highest remuneration for new recruits in the first quarter — 13,617 yuan a month — closely followed by Beijing with 13,316 yuan a month and Shenzhen at 12,751 yuan.

Average starting pay in some cities in northwestern and northeastern provinces, such as Lanzhou in Gansu province and Harbin in Heilongjiang province, was under 9,000 yuan.

Finance and technology-related jobs were the most attractive for job hunters because of the high salaries. The report said that job openings on the platform in the finance and investment sectors offered an average monthly salary of 13,374 yuan and vacancies in computer science, information technology and new energy sectors saw average starting salaries of around 11,000 to 12,000 yuan a month.

The services sector proved to be the "dark horse" in the first quarter both in terms of the number of jobs on offer and the increase in

pay offered to new recruits. Figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show that from January to February, retail sales of services — mainly in the transport, catering and entertainment business — rose by 12.3 percent year-on-year, driving recruitment growth for services talent and correspondingly high salaries.

According to the Zhaopin report, the starting salary for hotel and catering jobs rose by 10.6 percent in the first quarter, maintaining the continuous growth trend observed in the previous three quarters. Job openings in the tourism and leisure sectors also saw starting salaries increase by 9.3 percent over the quarter.

"Recruiting salaries in the finance sector remain stable. Sectors including smart manufacturing, new energy and professional services and consultancy are offering high and stable payment to their new recruits," said Li Qiang, vice-president of Zhaopin.

He said that starting salaries see periodic ups and downs, but are also influenced by policies, the state of the economy, industrial development and labor supply. He added that the slight drop in salaries from the previous quarter could be due to the trend of many people changing jobs in the first quarter.

The Zhaopin report said China's economy is seeing overall recovery and growth, with some macroeconomic policies bringing good results and people's consumption demand in continuous recovery. This is prompting job seekers to adjust their salary expectations in accordance with market and industry changes.

The nation's job market remained stable in the first quarter. According to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, 3.03 million people landed jobs in urban areas in the first three months, up 60,000 year-on-year.

Cargo drone begins carrying seedlings from Hainan

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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A large cargo drone transported 455 kilograms of seedlings for shrimp plants late last month from Haikou, Hainan province to Zhuhai, Guangdong province in less than three hours — the maiden cross-sea flight of a drone for public cargo logistics between the provinces.

"It's much faster to travel by air than by land. We have experienced the benefits of flying at low altitude," said Yun Yongchao, general manager of Hainan Lutai Marine Biotechnology, owner of the shrimp plant seedlings.

The cultivated seedlings are in high demand, particularly outside the island province. Their transportation was mainly via land, due to the high cost of air express dedicated to the transport of goods from Hainan, which resulted in extended transit times, significant losses, and high packaging and labor costs. Moreover, the unpredictability of civil airliners, including flight delays, added complexity to the process.

The use of a cargo drone saved at least 10 hours in transportation while maintaining a 100 percent survival rate for the seedlings. Yun emphasized that this enables the company to maximize its benefits, as it not only minimizes road crossing and labor costs, but also reduces packaging expenses because of the shorter transportation time.

The FP-98, which carried out the flight, is China's first large-scale fixed-wing unmanned aerial vehicle. Capable of carrying a commercial load of up to 1.5 metric tons, it boasts a maximum navigation time of eight hours and a range of 1,200 kilometers. Equipped with the advanced BeiDou III integrated management platform, the FP-98 is designed to operate day and night, even in challenging weather condi-

“We plan to deploy 300 drones in Hainan for many applications, including logistics and tourism.”

Hu Qingqun, deputy general manager of China General Aviation Holdings

tions such as heavy rain, fog and wind, and function in temperatures from -40C to 55C.

Ding Xiaoliang, co-president of Beijing J&J Group, noted that extreme weather potentially leads to deviations in the flights of drones. However, "the use of control platforms enables real-time monitoring and control of drones from takeoff to flight path, which means that adjustments can be made as necessary, such as managing the flight speed during thunderstorms to prioritize safety", he explained.

"It will play a pivotal role in boosting the distribution of high value-added agricultural products and sideline items from the island," said Wang Kangliang, deputy general manager of Hainan Aerospace City Industrial Investment Holding.

As high value-added agricultural products like leopard coral grouper and seedless litchi are gaining traction in markets beyond the island, Wang said the company aims to strengthen connections between Hainan and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and Beibu Gulf, with a specific focus on implementing consistent transportation services for high value-added agricultural products from Hainan.



An FP-98 cargo drone, China's first large-scale fixed-wing drone, prepares to take off in Haikou, Hainan province, on April 24.

YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

The maiden flight is also expected to inject new vitality into the low-altitude economic development between Hainan and other regions, he added.

Low-altitude economy refers to a diverse economic landscape that operates within the airspace below 1,000 meters. It primarily revolves around the utilization of civilian manned and unmanned aircraft for various low-altitude flight activities, and spans industries from general aviation manufacturing, logistics and tourism to agriculture, emergency rescue and trade.

In 2023, China's low-altitude economy soared past 500 billion yuan (\$69 billion). This year, it was mentioned in the Government Work Report for the first time, showcasing the nation's determination to cultivate this "new growth engine".

Hainan has been at the forefront of low-altitude airspace management reform in China. With over 300 flyable days each year, the province is a prime candidate for the development of general aircraft trade, commercial short-haul trans-

portation, low-altitude tourism consumption, and the advancement of the marine economy, said Liu Chong, director of the Wenchang International Aerospace City Administration.

Hainan unveiled China's inaugural provincial unmanned aerial vehicle flyable airspace map in November, promoting the standardized management and safe operation of UAVs and setting a precedent for domestic low-altitude three-dimensional airspace planning.

"Hainan has established a comprehensive low-altitude management system alongside a highly effective infrastructure service network within the province, thus realizing the goals of affordability and efficient control," noted Hu Qingqun, deputy general manager of China General Aviation Holdings.

"We plan to deploy 300 drones in Hainan for many applications, including logistics and tourism," Hu said. He added that the company will establish a one-hour economic circle for drones across the entire island.

Crucial gene helps crops grow on alkaline land

By LI LEI
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Chinese scientists have identified a crucial gene that allows staple crops to thrive on vast swathes of infertile lands worldwide.

Trials have shown the modification to the gene, AT1, can greatly increase the yields of sorghum, rice, wheat, corn and millet grown on saline-alkaline land.

"There are hundreds of millions of hectares of such land worldwide," said Xie Qi, a lead scientist of the project.

"The cultivation and promotion of high-quality salt-alkali tolerant crop varieties will effectively increase the productivity of saline-alkaline land, which is important to ensuring global food security," he said.

Xie, a researcher at the Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and colleagues from a mix of research institutes, including Professor Yu Feifei from China Agricultural University, and Professor Ouyang Yidan from Huazhong Agricultural University, published the findings last year in the top-notch academic journals Science and National Science Review.

According to Xie, significant progress has been made globally in salt tolerance research in crops, whereas much remained unknown about the mechanisms of alkaline tolerance in crops before their study.

Xie said their unique selection of experimental materials was crucial for the success. Previous studies had used model plants like

Arabidopsis, which originate from non-alkaline environments. The deficiencies in alkaline tolerance genetic information had made breakthroughs hard.

In Xie's study, sorghum was chosen. The crop originates from the infertile lands of Central Africa, where the wide-ranging variations in soil salinity and alkalinity have driven sorghum to evolve as a rich genetic resource for alkaline tolerance.

The research team conducted a whole-genome big data association analysis of sorghum genetic resources and identified AT1 and the molecular mechanism of crop alkaline tolerance. Subsequent research revealed that the regulation mechanism in rice, wheat, corn and millet is highly similar.

Building on these findings, the team used the AT1 gene to improve alkaline tolerance in related crops through breeding and conducted field experiments.

In the saline-alkaline lands of Pingluo, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, sorghum grain yields increased by 20.1 percent, and millet yields increased by 19.5 percent, the researcher said.

In Da'an, Jilin province, rice yields increased by 22.4 to 27.8 percent. The AT1 gene also significantly improved the survival rate of corn on saline-alkaline land.

Reviewers of the Journal Science said this study comprehensively applied various cutting-edge biotechnologies, addressed scientific issues related to alkaline tolerance mechanisms in multiple crops, and represented a significant discovery in the science community.

CHINA

AI pets: Cat couture attracts online fans



Chen Jian has created a series of AI-generated cat images, including felines practising *baduanjin*, traditional Chinese fitness exercises, or dressed in trendy clothes (2,3,4,5,7). The other images are AI-generated cat models made by Luo Yongshuo (1,6,8).

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

The popular posts mainly feature anthropomorphic depictions of pets doing human activities such as wearing clothes, dancing, taking academic tests, participating in fashion shows, or posing for photographs.

Many of these bloggers have positioned themselves as artistic content creators. Some have created AI pets in various styles from different eras, while others have cast them as the protagonists in a range of scenarios.

Hello, kitty

Chen, in his 30s, works as a visual designer at an internet company in Shanghai.

He studied the AI tool Midjourney after it was launched in March 2022. By entering the desired text, Midjourney can generate corresponding images using AI, taking only about a minute to complete the task.

"I picked up related skills in my spare time out of a sense of anxiety about being replaced by AI one day," Chen said.

His original aim was to apply AI tools to improve his professional skills and integrate them into his work.

"I figured this would help me complete tasks more efficiently and enhance the visual impact of my design," he said.

Chen's popular exercising cat was inspired by a real health issue in his own life.

"At that time, I had recurring mouth ulcers and made a special trip to the hospital. The traditional Chinese medicine doctor recommended I practice *baduanjin* daily to boost my immunity," Chen said.

As he tried the exercises, he also encouraged his colleagues to practice with him. He then came up with the idea of using AI to create images of a cat doing the same exercises to promote public awareness about fitness.

"AI tools were just gaining in popularity, and many people had little knowledge of the concept. Moreover, there were hardly any images of anthropomorphic animals crafted by AI, which probably explains why my work sparked

people's strong interest and curiosity," Chen said.

As he dug deeper into the phenomenon, he noticed more than 70 percent of Xiaohongshu users were women, and pets accounted for the fourth biggest amount of the platform's content.

Chen said that interactions with his followers helped him understand that an increasing number of young people love cats as the felines help alleviate anxiety and boredom.

He also tested out other AI-generated cat models, but learned that the anthropomorphic cat was by far the most popular one.

"This revelation made me settle on the theme of my (Xiaohongshu) account and focus my attention on coming up with more works on the anthropomorphic life of AI cats," he said, adding he wanted to take advantage of the "rare opportunity" of high interest in his account.

Since then, Chen has drawn inspiration from TV dramas, films and trending social phenomena.

He has posted two AI cat models where some of their images are set against the backdrop of classic film scenes.

"They have brought me a steady flow of new followers, more than 1,000 a month," Chen said.

To date, he has garnered more than 50,000 fans, which in turn has attracted the attention of advertising agents.

Many cat food advertisers have sought out his services, but Chen said he turned down most of them as he didn't know much about their products.

However, he readily accepted associations with well-known milk tea brands, with car companies and internet app advertisers also knocking on his door. "These brands are renowned, so by assisting their promotions it also serves as brand endorsement of my account, making it win-win cooperation," Chen said.

The most challenging aspect of collaboration is how to integrate the AI cats with the brands, which requires both creativity and technical skills, he said.

As a designer with years of experience in advertising design, Chen said he does not find it difficult to

understand his clients' demands. "In terms of the technology, besides using AI tools, proficiency in other design software is also necessary to create satisfactory works for commercial purposes," he said.

The popularization of AI has enabled everyone to try their ideas out. But the tough part is delivering creative ideas that can strike a chord with the audience, including the advertisers, he said.

Chen said in the future he plans to go beyond text and images to explore video creation through AI.

Model behavior

Luo Yongshuo from Guangzhou, Guangdong province, came comparatively late to the AI-generated pet video business.

In January, Luo, in his 30s, started to use his technical skills and training to produce videos of cats modeling clothes and accessories.

The idea of using felines as fashion models was inspired by his own 3-year-old silver American shorthair cat.

"I had a few designer friends who wanted to promote their new works, so I put them on my cat using AI," Luo said.

With years of experience in computers and digitalization, Luo had kept track of AI development since the launch of ChatGPT. He has also learned multiple AI tools, including Stable Diffusion that generates anime artwork from text prompts.

Through practice and online learning, after about a month Luo managed to produce an AI-generated video of a stylish cat wearing chic clothes moving gracefully to dynamic background music.

The video immediately enchanted Xiaohongshu users and has more than 100,000 views on Luo's account.

He has since dressed his AI cat

models in folk costumes and ancient military robes, which have attracted new online admirers. In almost three months, the number of Luo's Xiaohongshu followers has grown to more than 15,000.

The rising fame of the cat models has also created business opportunities for Luo. Pet clothing businesses, grooming services, pet product companies and even individual pet owners have sought out his services.

A few of his clients have given him specific requirements, but most allow wide scope for improvisation.

"I can get their pets featured in a video through AI, and help pet businesses promote their goods by inserting the cats in an interesting scene or plot," Luo said.

Many clients are also willing to pay Luo to teach them AI skills. Luo said he runs through the whole process with his students, including how to "dress" pets up in an AI image or video. "I don't sell courses, but I offer practical processes," he said.

For those who are considering learning AI skills such as his, Luo said it's important to persevere. "Many of my friends who started AI with me quit after a short time when they thought they'd hit a dead end. There is frustrating work at the beginning," he said.

Stable Diffusion, for example, has many plugins and models. Luo said he spent a lot of time working out how to install and use them.

"My initial works were not good quality. But I watched them over and again to find flaws and explore ways to fix them," he said, adding he frequented art exhibitions to cultivate his tastes.

Expanding reach

Experts said AI-generated pet images also stop the possibility of real animals suffering discomfort during commercial shoots, which prevents any consumer backlash over animal abuse.

Zhao Wei, a researcher from Jiangsu Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, said AI technology won't be confined to products and businesses related to pets, and will have a wider range of applications in the future.

Liu Lin, from Yunge Network Co in Beijing that specializes in pet-related businesses, said in the past, shared videos of pets simply recorded everyday interactions between owners and their animals. However, AI-generated pet images are intended more for commercial purposes.

"Our clients have been paying great attention to the integration of AI applications in the pet industry," she said.

"Not just the producers of canned cat and dog food, but businesses outside this circle have shown preferences for using AI-generated pet images to advertise what they have to offer," Liu added.

Those images tend to be more vivid than real pets and can easily tug at the heartstrings of a target audience, especially the younger generation, she said.

The clients of Liu's company, including KFC, Pizza Hut and car and computer manufacturers, have already used AI pet images in their advertisements, she said.

Using AI pet images makes it easier and cheaper for companies like Liu's to meet clients' requests, which are becoming increasingly imaginative.

"For instance, it would have taken us a lot of time and manual effort to set up a stage for a car commercial featuring a real cat, Chinese lanterns and other festival gifts for Spring Festival," Liu said.

"With AI, all that trouble can be spared, and the sky's the limit for realizing clients' ideas," she added.

Liu's company has developed long-term cooperation with a dozen specialists in the field of AI-based pet image customization. Those specialists all have their own style, technical skills with AI software, and artistic vision.

"They should have tens of thousands of followers at least, which would be recognition of their expertise," Liu said.

Although the market is now flooded with AI content creators, it's still difficult to find those that can meet specific business requirements, she said.

"After all, it's still not easy to inject soul into those lovely pet images," Liu said.



An AI-generated cat depicted in a hot bath. CHEN JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Supplements' quality scandals dampen trust

Consumer confidence shattered as safety issues hang over Japan's pharma industry

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
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Recent quality scandals involving Japanese pharmaceutical companies have raised concerns among many Chinese tourists and business travelers who say such incidents may erode their trust in Japanese drugs and health products.

Li Xiang, a 42-year-old visitor from Shanghai on a business trip in Tokyo, expressed surprise upon learning about kidney disorders linked to Kobayashi Pharmaceutical's dietary supplements containing red yeast rice and Kyokuto's manipulation of test records for the gastrointestinal medicine Seirogan. He noted that Japanese products have long been trusted.

"I'm not entirely surprised. We've seen in the news that in Japan, the older generation is still very dedicated and follows rules diligently, but it seems like the younger generation has changed somewhat," Li said.

"When I buy health products or medicines in Japan, I feel a bit worried that the quality of the products may not be as guaranteed as people imagine."

Before making a purchase, Li does a lot of research, searching for information online and relying on recommendations from friends, so as to ensure the product meets the standards that make him feel comfortable.

Zhao Zhijie, a 60-year-old tourist from Shanghai, also usually buys medicine based on recommendations from friends.

"The scandals involving Japanese pharmaceutical companies will affect my confidence in their products," she said in front of a drugstore in Tokyo's Shibuya district on Saturday.

Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare announced that as of May 1, Kobayashi Pharmaceutical had reported 270 hospitalized patients due to the development of kidney diseases and other issues after taking its dietary supplements containing red yeast rice, or beni-koji.

The Osaka-based drugmaker also reported five deaths linked to such products. Three supplement brands of the company were recalled due to safety concerns.

Furthermore, Toyama Prefecture recently issued a business suspension order to pharmaceutical company Kyokuto in Toyama city. Manufacturing has halted for 23 days starting from April 30, while sale is suspended for 22 days.

The company was found to have falsified test records for Seirogan, making it look like it met approval standards before shipping.

This revelation has deeply concerned Toyama prefectural authorities, prompting disbelief and shock among industry insiders.

The deficiencies came to light during a spot inspection conducted by the prefecture in July and August 2022. Consequently, Kyokuto voluntarily recalled 5.16 million units of the affected Seirogan from pharmacies nationwide.

Kyokuto said an internal investigation discovered falsification of test results, failure to conduct acceptance tests for raw materials, and falsification of manufacturing records during the period from December 2021 to July 2022.

Lack of awareness

The company attributed the causes of the violations in this instance to a lack of compliance awareness among employees and deficiencies in its compliance framework.

"Through our investigation, it became apparent that a corporate culture prioritizing the continuation of manufacturing and shipment over compliance with laws and procedures contributed to the aforementioned violations," said Kyokuto in a news release issued on April 26.

Concerns about fraudulent manufacturing of pharmaceuticals have been raised nationwide. Including this incident, five companies in Toyama Prefecture, renowned for its pharmaceutical sector in Japan, have received administrative penalties involving business suspension orders over the past three years, public broadcaster NHK reported.

Consumers like Li anticipate proactive measures from Japanese companies to address these issues.

Kyokuto has announced its commitment to investigating the root causes of the problem and implementing measures to prevent recurrence. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, restoring consumer trust remains a formidable challenge.

"Once a company loses the trust of consumers, it's very difficult to regain it. Now, in the age of the internet, negative news spreads quickly," Li said. "For me, if a company encounters such problems, I won't trust it anymore and won't consider buying its products again."

Protests outside Met Gala



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators attend a protest outside of the Met Gala, an annual fundraising event held for the benefit of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute with this year's theme, *Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion*, in New York City on Monday. EDUARDO MUNOZ / REUTERS

Lang Lang foundation donates pianos to Cleveland schools after concert

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The Lang Lang International Music Foundation is donating 50 pianos to the 101 Pianists concert at Cuyahoga Community College to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District as part of the Keys of Inspiration to support music education.

The May 3 concert in Northeast Ohio featured international piano legend Lang Lang playing alongside 100 local students between the ages of 6 and 18.

The performance took place at the college's Metropolitan Campus Auditorium and concluded with Lang Lang announcing the partnership between the Lang Lang Foundation and the Cleveland school district.

The Roland FP-30X digital pianos played during that performance are valued at a total of \$55,000. Roland and the foundation have worked together since 2011 supporting Keys of Inspiration programs both in the United States and internationally, providing hundreds of pianos to further music education.

The Cleveland district is the first in Ohio to receive Keys of Inspiration.

"Our district's music programs are going to be transformed by this incredible gift from the Lang Lang International Music Foundation," said Jeffery Allen, director of arts education in the district. "Through this

donation, we'll be able to enhance our music programs and ensure scholars have the best resources to explore and grow their musical talents.

"The CMSD community is thankful for this partnership, which promises to inspire countless young musicians to reach new levels of musical excellence," Allen said.

"We are thrilled to bring our flagship programs to Cleveland in a true celebration of music and music education," said Ariela Rossberg, director of education for the Lang Lang Foundation.

She said, "101 Pianists is such an exciting community-focused event, and we know that the children involved, whether in the audience or on stage, will be inspired and energized by the concert."

"Through our new partnership with Cleveland Metropolitan School District, we're able to continue offering Cleveland's students the joy of music with our Keys of Inspiration program."

"Today's Roland pianos will be donated to three local elementary schools, implementing our groundbreaking music education initiative in CMSD," Rossberg said. "We're excited to continue working with the district to make a difference in their community."

Roland said that through its ongoing work with the Lang Lang Foundation, it remains committed "to

ensuring students around the world can experience the joy of learning and playing the piano on high-quality instruments featuring state-of-the-art technology."

Lang Lang has performed 101 Pianists in 16 cities worldwide, with Roland providing the 50 pianos for students to play alongside him in concert.

Cleveland is the sixth city or area in the US to host 101 Pianists, following Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington DC and Long Island.

The 101 Pianists concert was the fourth and final performance in the 2023-24 season of Cuyahoga Community College's Classical Piano Series, which introduces emerging and established pianists to the Cleveland community.

"The sounds from 100 piano students playing with Lang Lang were beautiful to hear, and it's also heartwarming to know thousands more local students will play these pianos as they grow their love of music," said Emanuela Friscioni, the director of the college's Creative Arts Academy. "This is an exceptional way to support young piano students and celebrate music."

Lang Lang founded his namesake foundation in 2008. The foundation "strives to educate, inspire and motivate the next generation of music lovers and performers."

Relations: Interaction of people a must

From page 1

recognize one another: the Palace Museum is doing exactly that.

But it is in the Arab world of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that BRI projects are achieving their most dramatic real-world results. Although frequently derided by critics as "debt traps", BRI's major infrastructure initiatives in the region have integrated seamlessly with Arab national development plans such as Morocco's Emergence Plan 2020, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Oman's Vision 2040 and Egypt's Vision 2030. Port modernization including Saudi Arabia's Jeddah Islamic Port and the United Arab Emirates' Jebel Ali Port in Dubai have boosted trade and improved logistics for supply chains. New economic zones such as Oman's Duqm Special Economic Zone and Egypt's Suez Canal Economic Zone are stirring economic activity. And Chinese investments have funded developments in energy, infrastructure, manufacturing and technology.

Moreover, China's commitment to the Arab world has been clearly and repeatedly underscored. In December 2022, during President Xi's state visit to Saudi Arabia and attendance at the China-Arab Summit, he urged that "the spirit of China-Arab friendship" be developed into "a closer China-Arab community with a shared future". He reiterated that the BRI would be the guiding principle — the lodestar — for such collaboration.

He described the relationship

between China and the Arab world as a "strategic partnership of comprehensive cooperation and common development". In economic terms, the partnership promises to link China's market of 1.4 billion people with the Arab world's 475 million. In geopolitical terms, it suggests a fundamental, long-term reshaping of relations of the Middle East and North Africa with the rest of the world.

The connectivity encouraged by these developments is not only between the Chinese and Arabs. The Doraleh Multipurpose Port, a major BRI development in Djibouti, is serving as a new gateway from MENA into Africa. In recent years, UAE trade has surpassed US trade with sub-Saharan Africa. As reported by *The Economist* in March, Dubai is now home to more than 26,000 African companies. African businesspeople seeking investment and support now congregate in Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, or Qatar.

Hong Kong's government has been quick to recognize MENA as the 21st century's most rapidly developing new commercial and financial powerhouse. It has done a good job of following up BRI projects with visits and official delegations to key players in the region. It has nimbly mobilized the city's resources to develop a full agenda of cultural and financial mega events.

But official enthusiasm for exploiting the vast untapped potential of MENA has thus far failed to encourage equal efforts from businesses in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The same lack of private initiative is true of

most Arab businesspeople: they know the vast potential of the Chinese market, but they hesitate and falter when it comes to committing resources to it.

Government-to-government contacts alone are never enough to promote commercial and financial development. Always, the effective impetus comes from people-to-people interactions. At first there are small business deals between individuals; later, after gradually building relations of trust, ever larger deals involving more people; and as mutual profits increase, genuine business friendships and partnerships can develop. When people meet to trade, civilizations don't need to clash.

The impressive antiquities from sites in Iran and Saudi Arabia drew the crowds in Beijing. But it is the much humbler, camel-borne objects in the Palace Museum that provided the clearest lessons for us. They were traded centuries ago by individuals who trekked across deserts and mountains to faraway places. Today's Chinese and Arab business leaders need risk neither life nor limb to seize the burgeoning opportunities in each other's markets. The doors have been opened for them.

The writer is a former Egyptian diplomat who is now a permanent resident of Hong Kong. He heads the MENA Chamber of Commerce and actively promotes business ties between Chinese and Arab businesses and advises on cultural and security issues. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Manila urged not to renege on deals

By ZHOU JIN
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Beijing urged Manila on Monday to honor its commitment on the agreements with China regarding the Ren'ai Reef issue, stop provocations and return to the right way of handling differences through dialogue and consultation.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian made the remarks after several senior Philippine officials have denied that there were any such agreements.

China stays committed to managing maritime disputes including Ren'ai Reef with the Philippines through negotiation and communication, the spokesman said.

According to Lin, at the end of 2021, through close communication and coordination, China and the previous Philippine administration struck a "gentlemen's agreement" on Ren'ai Reef, which the current Philippine administration still followed until February 2023.

In September, Beijing invited the special representative of the Philippine president to negotiate in China and the two sides reached an internal understanding on the Ren'ai Reef issue, which was accepted by the leadership of the Philippines and then abandoned after it delivered supplies to the illegally grounded vessel in the reef.

At the beginning of this year, a "new model" on de-escalating tensions in Ren'ai Reef was reached between China and the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command, Lin said.

The "new model" was approved by key figures of the whole chain of command, including the country's national security adviser and the secretary of national defense, he said, adding that the model was abandoned by Manila after a resupply practice on Feb 2.

The "gentlemen's agreement", internal understanding and the "new model" have all reflected the efforts and sincerity of China, Lin said.

The remarks made by the Philippines cannot deny the above arrangements, which have been aimed at dealing with differences, avoiding conflicts and building mutual trust in safeguarding the peace and stability of Ren'ai Reef, he stressed.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Sino-French ties serve to highlight the value of foresight and autonomy

In a signed article published by Le Figaro on Sunday, Chinese President Xi Jinping praised the foresight of General Charles de Gaulle in establishing France's diplomatic ties with China 60 years ago at the height of the Cold War.

By cherishing that "independent decision", Xi sent a clear message to his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, urging Paris to continue to adhere to the country's traditional strategic autonomy in handling its relations with China.

The candid, extensive and in-depth exchanges between the two leaders in Paris the following day carried forward the positive momentum and agenda of their last face-to-face meeting in China last year.

That is an important assurance of not only the richness of the outcomes of the latest meeting between them, but also of the certainty that these outcomes will be transformed into concrete results, as has been done before.

The two countries have spearheaded cooperation in aviation and nuclear energy and in third-party markets; and they have made indispensable contributions to the conclusion of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The complementarity between the Chinese and French economies and their respective development stages mean there is broad space for the two countries to expand their cooperation in clean energy, nuclear energy research, aviation and aerospace, and artificial intelligence.

By doing so, the two countries can set a good example for relations between big countries. Both China and France uphold a United Nations-centered world order, support multilateral global governance and a multipolar world. Neither of them seeks hegemony, instead together they promote mutual learning, win-win cooperation and oppose the efforts of some countries to ride roughshod over the interests of others at the cost of international law. As such, it is natural that they can treat each other on an equal footing with due respect.

Having developed a correct understanding of the cooperative nature of their ties and viewing each other without the blinkers of bias, they don't try to cross each other's redlines, interfere in each other's internal affairs or harm each other's core interests by saying one thing and then doing another.

In this way, they have been able to keep the development of the Sino-French relationship on the right track, immunizing it against any divisive attempts by any third party hoping to drive an ideological wedge between the two countries for its own narrow ends.

As Xi said in his article, China is ready to work with France in the spirit that guided the establishment of diplomatic ties to forge a stronger comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

To that end, China welcomes more quality products from France to meet the ever-growing needs of the Chinese people for a better life. It is also expanding the market access to the telecom, medical and other service industries for foreign companies, including those of France.

Meanwhile, Beijing hopes Paris will encourage Chinese companies to invest and develop in France, and ensure that they operate in a fair and equitable business environment.

In his article, the Chinese leader stated that China did not start the Ukraine crisis, nor is it a party to or a participant in it, but it understands the repercussions of the crisis on the people of Europe. In doing so, he has made it clear that he is willing to respond to President Macron's desire for the issue to be a priority on the agenda and that he would expound on China's pro-peace efforts, and its objective of promoting the formation of a lasting and workable peace mechanism in Europe and the Middle East.

Shouldering unshakable global responsibilities as permanent members of the UN Security Council and key players on the world stage, the two countries can strengthen communication and coordination to uphold world peace and stability by mobilizing the international community in pursuit of proper solutions to these hotspot issues of common concern.

Intransigence blocks progress on cease-fire

There were reports recently quoting an Egyptian official as claiming "significant progress" had been made in negotiations between Israel and Hamas. Hamas negotiators later confirmed "in-depth discussions" had been held in Cairo.

Even Ismail Haniyeh, its most senior political leader, declared on Sunday that Hamas was "keen" to reach a comprehensive cease-fire agreement.

But the negotiations have yet to show signs of a breakthrough as the two sides have continued to exchange fire and Israel threatens to launch an offensive push into Rafah.

The latest development is only additional proof that the Gaza conflict is far from ending, and a permanent solution will be out of the question without all stakeholders coming to terms with the truth of the matter that so long as Israel and Hamas perceive each other to be existential threats, no cease-fire will hold for long. No solution will prove permanent.

Both have made no secret about their goal of erasing the other from the map. For all the negotiations on prisoner-for-hostage swaps or on a cease-fire, no progress has been made in this regard.

But the world is overwhelmingly focusing on the humanitarian tragedy resulting from Israel's military onslaught.

The head of the World Food Program just appealed for an end to the fighting, warning of a "full-blown famine" in northern Gaza. The head of the World Health Organization has also warned that "a full-scale military operation in Rafah ... could lead to a bloodbath". And Rafah happens to be a major logistics hub for humanitarian aid.

Even US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that without a credible plan to protect civilians, the United States could not support "a major military operation going into Rafah because the damage it would do is beyond what's acceptable".

Hamas' latest pro-peace stance following its recent talks with Fatah in Beijing has led many to assume the ball is now in Israel's court.

Hamas' conditions for a cease-fire are that Israel end its "aggression", guarantee the withdrawal of its forces from Gaza, and a hostage-swap deal.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war Cabinet, however, are determined to press ahead with the planned elimination of Hamas, whatever it takes. To them, Hamas' present interest in a cease-fire is only buying time for it to regroup, and that is the last thing Israel wants.

Netanyahu has refused to bow to the international pressure to halt the war, dismissing the key Hamas demand of the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza as being equal to surrender. While claiming that Israel has shown it is willing to make concessions, the Israeli leader stressed that its military operations will continue until it has achieved its goal of eradicating Hamas.

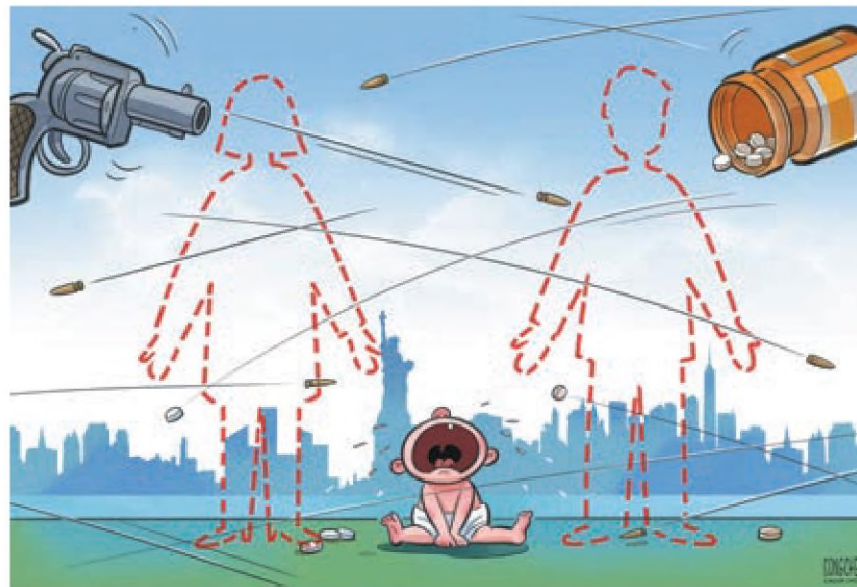
So despite the earlier signs of progress toward a cease-fire, it seems any hopes that one would be forthcoming were just wishful thinking.

According to Arab media, the talks between Hamas and Fatah in late April, hosted by Beijing, successfully bridged their differences and they are expected to hold another round of talks in Beijing in mid-June, with the aim of forming an interim, non-factional, national Palestinian government.

As Beijing has stressed, it is the perpetual denial of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people that is the root cause of the conflict. The establishment of an independent State of Palestine that peacefully coexists with Israel is the only way to end the long cycle of violence between the Israelis and Palestinians.

China will continue to strengthen cooperation with the international community in pursuit of this objective.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

May Day holiday travel boom attests to potential of consumption and tourism

The just-concluded May Day holiday has shown China's prospering tourism industry and improving signs of its economic recovery, with some new characteristics emerging that herald a new trend for the country's tourism sector.

Data released by Ctrip show that travel booking orders in the smaller cities increased by 140 percent during the five-day holiday, significantly higher than in metropolises, reflecting the shift in people's tourism interests from bigger to smaller cities and the increasing attractiveness of some "niche scenic spots". That some local tourist brands have been increasingly favored by people also indicates that people's consumption habits are changing.

During the five-day May Day holiday, local governments, in accordance with the action plan previously issued by multiple departments aimed at promoting the replacement of old consumer goods with new ones, took a series of concrete measures to promote

the replacement of old vehicles with new energy vehicles, and old home appliances with smart ones. Many local governments have successively issued rules for exchanging old consumer goods with new ones, clarifying the scope of support and subsidies for consumers participating in the old-for-new campaign.

The campaign is expected to leverage a "big cake" of 5 trillion yuan (\$693 billion) in the Chinese market. Given that the project includes equipment renovation in manufacturing and automobiles, home decoration, furniture and appliances in the consumer field, it is linked to not only production but also consumption and will play a role in catalyzing the development of new quality productive forces.

The more choices and experiences brought by the "holiday economy" also reflect a more promising Chinese consumer market and more choices for consumption upgrading.

During the May Day holiday, outbound tourism recovered to the level

of the same period in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bloomberg, based on ticket sales in early April, outbound travel from China from April 27 to May 5 exceeded expectations. The recovery of China's outbound tourism has brought new expectations for the global tourism market, which should be ready to receive Chinese tourists with higher expectations.

Even inbound tourism is showing better results. Data show that inbound travel bookings during the May Day holiday increased by 130 percent year-on-year, with many foreign tourists choosing to wear traditional Chinese costumes and speak Chinese to better enjoy Chinese culture.

The May Day holiday not only writes a new chapter of China's "holiday economy", but also shows that China's new quality productive forces are releasing vitality, and its new type of consumption is emerging at a faster pace.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

Success of BYD shows Chinese EVs benefit all

During the annual Berkshire Hathaway shareholders' meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, on Saturday, the company's chairman and CEO Warren Buffett met over 40,000 shareholders, including thousands of investors from China.

At this year's meeting, the first question he took was related to Berkshire's investment in BYD. Since Buffett first invested in the Chinese EV company in 2008, Berkshire's profit from it has exceeded 30 times. It's not just BYD. Buffett, famous for value investing, has always been a long-term investor, known for the concept of "rolling snowballs down a hill in wet snow".

Over a decade after Buffett invested

in BYD, despite the impact of artificial intelligence and autonomous driving, Buffett insists that his investment principles will not change.

Buffett is an example that all investment decisions should be based on investors' deep insights into the future of industries and the value of companies. That's the right path, far superior to short-term behaviors that we are so familiar with in the capital markets, such as storytelling and selling speculative concepts.

More investors need to understand what patient capital is. By discovering valuable companies and sharing in their growth dividends through long-

term investment, patient capital earns more than short-term trading gains. Of course, this demands a high level of investor literacy, on which both domestic and global venture capital still have a long way to go.

The success of BYD also shows that the competitiveness of Chinese electric vehicles in the world market today is a result of multiple factors rather than the Chinese government subsidies, as some Western China-bashing politicians allege. Also the rise of the Chinese EV sector benefits not only the world's green transition but also global investors, including those from the United States.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Interference smear sticks to its maker

The Chinese embassy in Canada has expressed Beijing's strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to the allegation that China poses the "most persistent and sophisticated" foreign interference threat to Canada.

The accusation made by Canada's Foreign Interference Commission in a report released on Friday is groundless, it being nothing more than a fabrication for political purposes.

The smear is common among China-bashing politicians in the West looking to explain their poor performance in an election or find an excuse for their domestic governance failures.

The latest example is that even though the US intelligence community confirms that there is no evidence showing China funding the ongoing student

protests on the Palestinian question in the United States, some US politicians still keep on tirelessly spreading the unfounded claim.

China consistently upholds the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries. China has never meddled in any other country's internal affairs, including those of Canada.

The attempts by certain Canadian and US politicians to shift the blame onto China for their own electoral failures are unfair and unethical, revealing their self-serving and shameless nature.

The report published by the Foreign Interference Commission of Canada is riddled with contradictions and ideological bias and lacks credibility. It uses terms like "may", "might", "potential" and other misleading words. It claims to derive conclusions from

"intelligence" yet also states that the "intelligence is not proven fact". Not all of the information provided below necessarily has been corroborated or fully assessed," it admits.

Such statements suggest that the report is a deliberate attempt to mislead the public, as the spokesperson of the Chinese embassy in Canada pointed out.

Rather than China, it is Canada and the US that continuously try to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. Both Canada and the US are constantly trying to undermine China's security and stability by overtly and covertly condoning and supporting separatist activities in Taiwan, Xinjiang, Xizang and Hong Kong.

These activities are well proven and brook no denial. Canada is doing nothing but a thief crying "stop thief".

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Wang Yiwei

Sino-French ties
bridging East-West
differences

Pandas are a rare species found only in China. But the West first learned about the panda through French missionary Armand David more than 150 years ago. This symbolizes the long history of the exchange of knowledge between the East and the West, which enriched both Oriental and Occidental societies.

In general, three factors characterize the centuries-old cultural exchanges between China and France (and the rest of Europe). The first is complementarity. China's agricultural civilization (embodied by the "Four Great Inventions") inspired Europe to seek technological innovations and break free from feudalism, leading to the Age of Enlightenment and the shaping of modern European society.

Sixty years ago, with the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and France, began the normalization of relations between China and the West, which in turn enabled China to learn and adopt advanced European technologies such as French civil nuclear energy, aerospace and high-speed trains that contributed to China's modernization.

The second factor is asymmetry. Chinese and French societies appreciate and learn from each other, whether actively or passively, showcasing a diverse, non-equivalent, and asymmetrical relationship.

The third factor is practicality. As French historian Alexis de Tocqueville critiqued Voltaire's fascination with China, the shaping of their respective images stemmed from necessity, and was aimed at addressing deficiencies and forming a certain imagination of the other.

More important, late leader Deng Xiaoping's experience of studying and working in France could have infused in him the idea of reform and opening-up. In the new era of digital and ecological civilizations, the dialogues between Chinese and French societies have entered a phase of competitive and cooperative exchanges. So what's the new significance of the dialogues between Chinese and French societies?

The dialogues between the two societies transcend the distinctions between the East and the West, form and function, understanding the essence and its utility to make common achievements. Through their cooperation and competition in new energy and the digital economy, China and France promote the digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy of the European Union, advocate for a multipolar digital world and oppose digital imperialism. And while Beijing (as the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Olympics) embodies the modern Olympic spirit, joint Sino-French development efforts in Africa are facilitating collaboration in Belt and Road projects.

Sino-French complementarity and dia-

logue are especially evident in fields such as climate change and artificial intelligence, and are helping shape a new era of "Chinoiserie" (Chinese style). Both China and France (and many other EU members) are supporters of multilateralism and the international order centered on the United Nations. And being the world's second-largest maritime nation, France is a natural "blue partner" in building a maritime community with a shared future.

The two sides are also using their interactions and exchanges to build a better future for humankind, thus initiating a cultural renaissance — from the European Community and a community with a shared future for mankind to modern European society, which France played a key role in shaping, and Chinese modernization. China embraced Marxism from Europe and con-

tinues to contribute to the industrial digital civilization, leading the field in ecological civilization with the implementation of concepts such as "new quality productive forces".

As long as China and Europe engage in mutually beneficial cooperation, the rise of bloc confrontations can be avoided, and as long as they improve mutual understanding and pursue mutual benefit, they can check the "de-globalization" trend. This profound understanding underscores the increasingly prominent strategic significance of China-EU relations in the face of a world fraught with complexity.

China and Europe should support each other and strengthen the development of Chinese modernization and European integration, including aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with the EU's "Global Gate-

way" plan. As two major forces, markets and civilizations, China and Europe play a crucial role in shaping a new human, digital and ecological civilization.

For China, the EU is a very crucial valued partner. This is due to the alignment of China's vision of modernization, including a low-carbon lifestyle and the green economy, with the aspirations of Europeans to develop a better world. This fact has remained unchanged since the launch of reform and opening-up in China more than four decades ago.

The author is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Global and Area Studies, Renmin University of China and the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing-based think tank. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY



Kang Bing

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Big city diseases
should be cured
one at a time

China has nearly 20 cities with a population of more than 10 million, with Chongqing, Shanghai and Beijing being the top three — each has more than 20 million residents. However, China's urbanization rate is only about 67 percent, which means nearly 500 million people still live and work in rural areas.

The government is pursuing urbanization to ensure the rural population leads a better life. China's urbanization rate had been increasing by about 1 percentage point a year for the past few decades, with even cities with a population of more than 10 million being required to open their doors wider to rural migrants. Only Beijing and Shanghai have been exceptions. The shortage of resources, and increasing traffic jams and pollution have prompted the two cities to strengthen city regulations.

Besides, reports say nearly 70 percent of the water consumed by Beijing residents is diverted from southern China through a number of channels, and the 7.54 million vehicles in Beijing are causing massive traffic jams while rising human activities are harming the local environment and increasing air pollution.

In fact, the moves to relocate non-capital functions out of Beijing, along with other measures such as building more subways and encouraging the use of electric cars, have eased the city's traffic problem and improved its air quality.

To treat the big city diseases, a decision was made about 10 years ago to move some non-capital functions out of urban Beijing. A modern sub-center has been built in eastern Beijing to accommodate local municipal departments and institutions, and by the end of last year some 30,000 municipal staff members had been moved there.

Besides, a new city, Xiongan New Area, about 100 kilometers south of Beijing is being built to accommodate the headquarters of big companies, branches of universities, research institutions and other organizations, and house about 1 million people in the early stage. Over the past decade, more than 1,000 logistics centers and wholesale-cum-retail markets have been moved out of Beijing, including the well-known Zoo Wholesale Market, whose original site has been turned into a scientific innovation center.

These measures have worked because Beijing has managed to keep its population at 21 million for some years. In fact, the moves to relocate non-capital functions out of Beijing, along with other measures such as building more subways and encouraging the use of electric cars, have eased the city's traffic problem and improved its air quality.

But now that other cities are luring talents with preferential policies, the capital should try to maintain its luster by introducing more policies that are attractive to both domestic and overseas talents.

Having lived in Beijing for more than four decades and being used to the hustle and bustle of the city, I cannot afford to imagine a day when I, as an old man, am walking alone in a street, trying to find someone to ask my way back home. This is something I actually experienced in the Australian capital of Canberra.

I hope that doesn't happen in Beijing.

David Gosset

Not too late for a shift in Western perceptions of China

The possibility of a change in the leadership at the White House has sparked discussions, particularly on its potential impact on China-US relations. Yet in the United States, one prevailing sentiment looms large: the persistent apprehension of China.

While the US election could make its ties with China more complicated, it is improbable that it would result in any significant change in the nature of Sino-US relationship. The underlying components of the ecosystem surrounding both incumbent President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump remain intact, thereby sustaining the US' established strategy of upholding dominance in global affairs, encompassing areas ranging from finance to military matters.

In the corridors of Washington, there is a palpable fear of China, one deeply entrenched in the notion that China harbors ambitions for global dominance akin to those of the US. Analysts across US institutions and organizations, from the Office of Net Assessment in the Department of Defense to the CIA, the FBI and the Department of State, appear steadfast in their conviction that China's exercise of power will closely parallel that of the US.

Essentially, the assumption suggests that if China possessed the resources currently held by the US, it would aspire to exercise comparable levels of dominance. However, I argue that if China were hypothetically the

A prosperous China and a confident West possess the collective talent and creativity to address the pressing challenges facing humanity.

most materially powerful country on Earth, it would utilize its power differently.

For years, I have maintained that China's quest for what is best termed "centrality" should not be conflated with hegemonic actions. In essence, China's goals diverge from those of the US, and it is within this disparity of intentions that lies the potential to sidestep the "Thucydides trap". It's imperative for the US and the West to recognize the nuances of China's approach to power, as by doing so they could avert the perils of a zero-sum game that could potentially plunge the world into unprecedented crises.

China's ascent on the global stage is indisputable, marked by its accumulation of power and influence. However, this need not spell the decline of the US and other Western countries. Rather than viewing China's success as a threat, they could embrace it as an opportunity for collaboration and mutual prosperity. The primary causes of Western decline would be evidently internal, primarily stemming from an

inability to maintain cohesion and a lack of collective will.

Acknowledging the distinctiveness of China's trajectory is key. Unlike the ambitions of an expansive hegemon, China's pursuit of centrality is determined by a necessity to maintain harmony within its own mega-society. It is also driven by the quest for economic development in order to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. China is not seeking to Sinicize other cultures, in contrast to the West's history of Westernizing the newly encountered and later colonized regions of the world.

Furthermore, China does not embody a revolutionary force aiming to disrupt the existing status quo. Instead, its primary focus lies in advancing its extensive society toward modernization on its own terms. The accomplishment of this objective, combined with China's considerable scale, undeniably exerts a substantial influence on the global stage.

There is still ample opportunity for the US and the rest of the West to reassess their perceptions of China. Embracing a more nuanced understanding of China's re-emergence would not only mitigate tensions but also unlock new avenues for collaboration. A prosperous China and a confident West possess the collective talent and creativity to address the pressing challenges facing humanity.

Rather than perceiving China's resur-

gence as a challenge to their dominance, the US and other Western countries can regard it as an opportunity to construct a more inclusive and fair global system. The aim of genuine leaders from China, Europe and the US should not be to undercut each other, but rather to nurture a global mindset that promotes collaborative value creation, whether material or otherwise. While some may dismiss this perspective as naive, it remains the sole path toward achieving peace and harmony.

The trajectory of China-US relations in the coming years hinges on a fundamental shift in perspective. In an era of uncertainty, further marred by the emergence of perilous conflicts, it may seem paradoxical to emphasize trust in progress. However, if the US and other Western countries acknowledge China's unique approach to power and prioritize collaboration over competition, while China remains guided by its traditional wisdom, the world could usher in an unprecedented era of progress. It would be a time where human dignity is elevated to new heights across the globe.

The author is the founder of the China-Europe-America Global Initiative. He is the editor of the three-volume China and the World, and the creator of the Inspiring Series, a collection of books that aims to introduce China to the world. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

LEVENTE HORVATH

Holding firm

Hungary does not approach relations with China from an ideological point of view and views it as a friendly cooperative partner

The most important issue of the 21st century is the transformation of the world order from a unipolar to a multipolar world order, in which China and the European Union will play a leading role alongside several other poles. In order to develop genuine cooperation between the two parties, it is important to get to know each other's cultures, traditions and ways of thinking. Only in this way will

it be possible to forge mutually beneficial cooperation based on mutual respect and understanding and avoid bloc formation based on misperceptions.



While the leaders of the European Union are increasingly pushing for ideologically motivated decoupling, which is not in the EU's interests, and misinterpreting China's goals, EU member states are increasingly engaging in closer economic cooperation with China. For example, Germany's trade with China was worth 253.1 billion euros (\$270.6 billion) in 2023, making China Germany's most important trading partner for the eighth year in a row.

The EU and China are major trading partners. In 2022, the bilateral trade in goods increased by 23 percent year-on-year to a record level of 857 billion euros. EU exports to China rose by 3.1 percent to 230 billion euros, while EU imports from China increased by 32 percent to 626 billion euros. In 2022, the trade volume amounted to more than 2 billion euros per day, making China the third-largest partner for EU exports of goods (about 9 percent), and the largest partner for EU imports of goods (about 20.8 percent).

The German chancellor visited Beijing last month with a large business delegation, and the Spanish, Belgian and Dutch prime ministers have also made recent trips to China. French President Emmanuel Macron visited China last year and several European heads of state are planning official visits to China this year, including Italy's.

Interestingly, however, these member states remain critical of China at the communication level while seeking serious cooperation in the background. Hungary,



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

on the other hand, stands out among the EU member states in this respect, as it negotiates with China in a spirit of mutual respect, without any Western hypocrisy. This is also due to the fact that Hungary does not approach the country from an ideological point of view, but works to build friendly relations with China, respecting China's history, culture and traditions, and

its internal affairs. The two countries share a similar vision of international relations and economic cooperation and both sides support connectivity and peaceful negotiations and reject warmongering. Thanks to this similar mindset, mutual respect and a stable political and economic environment in Hungary, Hungarian imports and exports have soared since the announce-

ment of Hungary's "Opening to the East" policy in 2010, making China Hungary's largest trading partner outside Europe, accounting for 4 percent of its total foreign trade. In terms of foreign direct investment, China was the largest investor in Hungary in 2022 and 2023, creating more than 20,000 new jobs in Hungary. Chinese investments accounted for 9 percent of

Hungary's total FDI by the end of 2023. In addition, direct flights from seven Chinese cities to Budapest are already available this year. Hungarian-Chinese relations have not only reached a high level in recent years, but have also become of high quality. For example, with the Chinese investments in the field of the lithium-ion batteries, Hungary already ranks third in the world, with a 4 percent global market share after the second, the United States (6 percent). China's share of global lithium-ion battery production capacity is an astonishing 79 percent, so with its high-quality cooperation with China, Hungary expects to overtake the US in this field soon.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Chinese President Xi Jinping will celebrate the 75th anniversary of Hungarian-Chinese diplomatic relations in Budapest in early May, as President Xi will pay an official visit to Hungary after his visits to France and Serbia. Hungary and China signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in 2017, and the meeting between the two countries' leaders is expected to raise the partnership to a higher level.

Following President Xi's visit to Europe, we are looking ahead to the EU elections in June, where one of the issues at stake is whether the European Parliament should support economic cooperation, peace and connectivity, or whether sanctions, protectionist policies and bloc confrontation will be the order of the day. The latter do not serve the EU's interests, and EU member states know this, the question is whether the new European Parliament will be able to decide independently.

In the second half of the year, Hungary will take over the rotating presidency of the EU, under which EU-China relations can hopefully also take a turn for the better and fit into the new multipolar world order in a mutually reinforcing and supportive way.

The author is director of the Eurasia Center at John von Neumann University in Hungary and former consul general of Hungary in Shanghai. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LING SHENGLI

A three-pronged Northeast Asia strategy

China has to compete with the US, properly handle its ties with Japan and the ROK, and strive to prevent the formation of an anti-China bloc in the region

With the United States pushing for an "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the trilateral cooperation among the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea has been significantly strengthened and become a crucial part of Washington's plan for transforming its Asia-Pacific alliance into a military one similar to NATO. This enhancement in cooperation is poised to significantly impact China's external environment.

Recently, the trilateral cooperation between Washington, Tokyo and Seoul has been moving forward, with progress made in high-level interactions, strategic coordination, security

collaboration, economic cooperation, and institutional development, making their cooperation increasingly robust.

First, high-level interactions between the three sides have become more frequent. Shortly after taking office, ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol met with the leaders of the US and Japan at the NATO summit in Madrid. Subsequently, the leaders met during the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh, the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, the G20 Summit in New Delhi, and the APEC Summit. In August 2023, the Camp David summit marked their first trilateral meeting outside of large international conferences, symbolizing a significant enhancement in US-Japan-ROK cooperation.

Second, the trilateral strategic coordination has notably increased. The US, Japan and the ROK have continuously strengthened their strategic coordination, especially in implementing the US "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which was laid out by the White House in 2022 and highlighted the need for close cooperation among the three countries. Japan and the ROK have actively aligned with the Biden administration and adjusted their policies accordingly. In addition to the trilateral cooperation, it has become more common for the US and Japan, and the US and the ROK to develop partnerships with third-party countries, with increased cross-domain strategic coordination. Interaction between the US-ROK alliance and the NATO has also intensified,

further enhancing the strategic coordination among the three countries and advancing the expansion of NATO in the Asia-Pacific region.

Third, the security cooperation among the three countries continues to deepen. The US, Japan and the ROK have intensified their security collaboration across multiple areas, increasing high-level defense interactions, conducting targeted trilateral joint military exercises and strengthening intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Vincent Brooks, the former commander of US Forces Korea, has publicly suggested that the US consider merging its forces in the ROK and Japan into a "Far East Command" to adapt to the strengthening trilateral military security cooperation.

Fourth, the economic cooperation among the three countries is gradually being strengthened. The US places high importance on enhancing cooperation with Japan and the ROK in technology research and innovation and has actively encouraged their participation in its export control framework. The three countries also engage in trilateral economic cooperation within regional or global frameworks, including establishing the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity to compete for regional economic cooperation leadership and participating in the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment to counter the Belt and Road Initiative.

Stronger US-Japan-ROK cooperation will deteriorate the situation not only in Northeast Asia but also in the Asia-Pacific region and globally.

First, it intensifies bloc confrontation in Northeast Asia. As US-Japan-ROK cooperation deepens, the bloc confrontation in the region becomes more pronounced and the US-led triangle of US-Japan-ROK is increasing the risk of regional conflicts.

Second, it further weakens the momentum for integration among China, Japan and the ROK. This trilateral cooperation has stalled over the years. As US-Japan-ROK cooperation deepens, Tokyo and Seoul are gradually participating in the US-led technology and economic decoupling from China. Both countries have joined US-led initiatives such as the IPEF, the Quadilat-

eral Security Dialogue, commonly known as the Quad, and Minerals Security Partnership, which dealt blows to economic and trade cooperation with China and weakened the internal integration dynamics in Northeast Asia.

Third, security risks on the Korean Peninsula have also increased. Traditionally, peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula have relied on coordination among major powers and between the DPRK and the ROK. The enhancement of US-Japan-ROK cooperation greatly complicates these coordination mechanisms. The operation of major power coordination mechanisms depends on stable relations among major powers, and the strengthening of US-Japan-ROK cooperation reduces the US' readiness to coordinate with other major powers. The US increasingly relies on strengthened relations with Japan and the ROK to implement its policy toward the DPRK, rather than coordinating with China and Russia. Deteriorating relations between the DPRK and the ROK also heightens security risks on the peninsula, significantly weakening the inter-Korean coordination mechanism, deepening hostilities, and intensifying confrontations. Deeper US-Japan-ROK cooperation and their collective tough stance have led Pyongyang to perceive increased threats, prompting it to respond with tough measures.

Fourth, the Taiwan question faces mounting external intervention pressure. The primary goal of Washington in promoting trilateral cooperation with Tokyo and Seoul is to counterbalance Beijing. The US hopes that Japan and the ROK will closely follow its lead on the Taiwan question, increasing their involvement and complicating the situation. The US, Japan and the ROK have issued multiple statements concerning Taiwan, which complicates the Taiwan question and increases the risk of external intervention.

Although the US, Japan and the ROK are continuously strengthening their trilateral relationship, striving to establish strategic alliances, value alliances and quasi-military alliances, their cooperation also faces challenges, such as difficulties in achieving interoperability in security cooperation,



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

changes in their domestic political landscape, and divergent perceptions of regional affairs, adding uncertainty to the deepening process.

For China, it is necessary to recognize that the trend of deeper US-Japan-ROK cooperation will not be altered in the short term, and also to understand that their China policies are not monolithic but show significant differences. China needs to reposition its Northeast Asia strategy under the overarching strategy of competing with the US, properly handling its relationships with Japan and the ROK and striving to prevent the formation of a stable anti-China bloc in Northeast Asia.

First, China should advance pragmatic cooperation with Japan and the ROK. Economic cooperation among the three countries remains close and serves the interests of all three parties. Enhancing pragmatic cooperation among the three countries can help constrain US-Japan-ROK cooperation to some extent. Second, it is important to strengthen security cooperation in North-

east Asia to alleviate the regional security tensions and prevent the situation on the Korean Peninsula from spiraling out of control. The intensification of US-Japan-ROK cooperation has raised security risks in Northeast Asia, making it more necessary for China, Japan and the ROK to enhance their security cooperation and communication. Third, China, Japan and the ROK should scale up cooperation on multiple levels and channels, not only maintaining communication with the governments of the other two countries but also enhancing interactions with their political and business circles as well as civil groups to improve mutual understanding and mitigate the negative impacts of US-Japan-ROK cooperation.

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BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

As realty shares rally, housing hopes rise

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Strong positive sentiment lifted Chinese real estate shares on Monday, prompting experts to express confidence that the recovering capital market confidence, coupled with local-level optimized property policies, will help stabilize the housing market.

Property shares rose 0.67 percent on average, led by HuaYuan Property that surged by maximum 10 percent, according to Stockstar, a provider of financial information.

"The stock market's performance was in line with the central government's guidance as well as the latest policies at the local level," said Chen Jie, director of the Center for Housing and Urban-Rural Development with Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

On April 30, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee stressed that it is necessary to continue to take precautions and resolve risks in key areas. While implementing their respective local policy, key stakeholders in each city, including local governments, real estate enterprises and financial institutions, will take responsibility for ensuring the delivery of property projects to homebuyers and protect the latter's legitimate rights and interests.

"The (April 30) meeting



Potential homebuyers look at a property model in Taiyuan, Shanxi province.

WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

stressed that the delivered housing projects should be livable, equipped with all the supporting facilities, which will create related demand along the industry chain," said Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center.

On supply and demand, the meeting said Chinese people's expectations for high-quality housing, measures for the market's absorption of property inventory and optimization of new demand should be coordinated.

The meeting also said close attention should be paid to building a new model for real estate development and promoting the high-quality development of the

property industry.

Beijing and Shanghai were among the first big cities to grasp the significance of the meeting. Several other cities are expected to further optimize their housing policies this month, said Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution.

On April 30 itself, Beijing's municipal government said eligible households or single adults living in the national capital will be allowed to buy an additional apartment outside the Fifth Ring Road. On Friday, Shanghai launched a trade-in initiative for commercial real estate.

For people mulling sale of their

existing property to buy new homes, Shanghai proposed that potential homebuyers should first sign an expression of interest with developers of new housing projects, so that their existing homes can be given priority by real estate agencies in the secondary trading market. The transaction for a new home can be completed after the sale of the old home.

More than 30 residential projects in Shanghai regions, including Jiading, Songjiang, Qingpu, Fengxian and Lin-gang Special Area, became the first batch of participants in the new initiative, according to Shanghai Observer, a Chinese-language news website.

Overcapacity talk won't affect MNCs' commitment

Foreign orders placed at expos latest proof that there's no 'surplus' output

By ZHONG NAN
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Exaggerating the "China overcapacity" narrative will impede the advancement of high-quality production capacity globally but will not discourage multinational corporations from expanding their presence in the country, said market watchers and foreign business executives.

They said the active participation of foreign automakers and parts suppliers in the 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition, or Auto China 2024, and the 135th session of the China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair), held in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, along with the significant rise in signed contracts, are compelling rebuttals of the "China overcapacity" narrative.

Wang Jinbin, vice-dean at the Renmin University of China's School of Economics, said the view that China extensively exports low-priced new energy products is not in line with reality. In fact, the prices of Chinese new energy vehicles overseas are generally higher than those in the domestic market.

Yet, their sales are increasing rapidly, indicating that the prices and sales are determined by market forces like supply and demand, said Wang.

From the perspective of domestic conditions in China, apart from exports, there remains significant demand in both urban and rural markets, providing long-term stable demand for Chinese new energy products, said Ding Rijia, a professor specializing in energy economy at the China University of Mining and Technology in Beijing.

"The production capacity in China's new energy sector is far from being surplus," said Ding.

Dismissing the "China overcapacity" narrative, Markus Steilemann, CEO of German chemicals manufacturer Covestro AG, said he is not a fan of excessive regulations, especially in markets where free trade is essential.

Excessive prohibitive measures and restrictions may not effectively boost productivity; criticizing overcapacity is not the right way (to global cooperation), said Steilemann.

With China entering a new era of green and innovation-led growth, MNCs are fairly optimistic about China's long-term growth potential and see abundant opportunities arising from the country's focus on the high-end manufacturing industry and digital economy, said Mohammed Al Ajlan, chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council and deputy chairman of Ajlan & Bros Holding, a Saudi Arabia-based conglomerate.

This will not only benefit global trade but also create more growth points for foreign companies to build their global supply chains and a consumer base in China, he said.

Echoing similar sentiments, Rui Coelho, CEO for China unit at Air Liquide SA, a French provider of industrial and medical gases, said that China's comprehensive and reliable industrial chains play a crucial role in stabilizing the global supply chain and are indispensable.

"The country's economic development model and market environment are continually evolving, offering opportunities and valuable experiences for our business expansion and enhancement," said Coelho.

Apart from running more than 120 plants across China, the French company will set up a large-scale hydrogen filling center in Shanghai in the second half of this year. It will accelerate the deployment of hydrogen energy in Shanghai and the Yangtze River Delta region.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, more than 12,000 foreign-invested companies started operations in China in the first quarter, up 20.7 percent year-on-year, with actual investment amounting to 301.67 billion yuan (\$41.8 billion), up 41.7 percent compared to the fourth quarter of 2023, statistics from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Canton Fair visitors surge 25%, export orders leap

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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An increased number of overseas buyers joining the 135th China Import and Export Fair, one of the biggest trade events in China, has helped greatly boost orders for Chinese export-oriented companies, the fair's organizers said.

"In addition to on-site contract signings, overseas buyers have visited factories during the fair, assessing production capacity and making future appointments, indicating the potential for further orders to be achieved," said Zhou Shanqing, deputy director of the China Foreign Trade Center.

According to the fair's organizers, 246,000 overseas buyers from 215 countries and regions have visited the fair, widely known as the Canton Fair, which concluded on Sunday in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

The number represents a year-on-year increase of 24.5 percent, compared to the last session in October, according to the organizers.

Of the overseas buyers, 160,000 and 61,000 were from countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and member countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, marking year-on-year increases of 25.1 percent and 25.5 percent, respectively.

A continuous series of new products, technologies, materials, pro-

cesses and innovations have emerged during the fair, showcasing high-end, intelligent, green and low-carbon products that embody the achievements of China's new quality productive forces, according to the organizers.

"These products have been warmly welcomed and favored in the international market, demonstrating the solid capabilities of 'Made in China' and injecting new vitality into foreign trade development," said Zhou.

The increased visits by overseas buyers have led to a sharp increase in on-site transactions. As of Saturday, the offline export turnover during the fair reached \$24.7 billion, representing a 10.7 percent increase compared with the previous session, the organizers said. Buyers from emerging markets have clinched active transactions, with deals amounting to \$13.86 billion with countries and regions involved in the BRI, marking a 13 percent increase from the previous session.

"Buyers from traditional European and American markets have shown higher average transaction values," said Zhou.

The fair's online platforms have also seen increased trading activities, with export transactions reaching \$3.03 billion, a growth of 33.1 percent compared to the previous session.

"We have added exclusive agents from more than 20 countries, open-



Overseas buyers look at vehicle models using blocks with remote control function during the 135th Canton Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. HONG ZHEJIA / XINHUA

ing up new markets in Europe, South America and other regions," said Sun Guo, sales director of Changzhou Air-wheel Technology Co Ltd.

Smart suitcases produced by the company have become one of the hottest selling items during the fair. "We have achieved great success, with over 30,000 units sold, totaling over \$8 million in sales," Sun said.

Overseas buyers have given high praise to the fair, saying China has the best supply chain and the event has become an ideal platform for achieving one-stop procurements.

"China is the place I look to when

I want to buy and create partners," said James Atanga, who runs a trading company in Cameroon's commercial hub of Douala.

Atanga, 55, is the manager of Tang Enterprise Co Ltd, which deals in household utensils, furniture, electronics, clothes, shoes, toys and auto parts.

"Almost everything in my shop is imported from China," he said during a visit to the fair's first phase in mid-April. In 2010, Atanga forged connections in China and began traveling to Guangdong's Guangzhou and Shenzhen to purchase goods.

Briefly

Shanghai lithium-ion battery exports up

Foreign-invested enterprises have played a pivotal role in propelling the surge in lithium-ion battery exports from Shanghai in the first quarter of this year, according to data from Shanghai Customs. They exported lithium-ion batteries worth 10.68 billion yuan (\$1.5 billion), up 31 percent year-on-year.

SOE revenues grow 3% in first quarter

Chinese State-owned enterprises' first-quarter operating revenue increased 3.2 percent year-on-year to 19.81 trillion yuan (\$2.79 trillion), data from the Ministry of Finance showed. Their combined first-quarter profit rose nearly 3 percent year-on-year to 1.08 trillion yuan.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Minmetals solidifies copper supplies with new deal

By ZHENG XIN
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China Minmetals Corp's acquisition of a large-scale copper mine in southern Africa's Botswana is expected to help meet enduring strong demand for the metal in China, said industry analysts.

MMG Ltd, a unit of mining giant China Minmetals, has finalized acquisition of the Khoemacau copper mine, located in the Kalahari Copper Belt, the company said late last month.

China Minmetals Corp clinched the mine with a deal worth \$1.875 billion in November.

The Khoemacau mine was put into operation in June 2021, target-

ing an annual output of 60,000 tons of copper and 1.6 million ounces of silver. It added that the long-life mine has both cost-competitive advantages and rich mineral resource potential.

The project, with copper reserves of over 6 million metric tons and mining rights covering an area of more than 4,000 square kilometers, is the largest overseas copper mine acquisition by a Chinese company since 2018. It is also the largest single investment by a Chinese enterprise in Botswana to date, it said.

China Minmetals said the rapid development of emerging industries such as new energy vehicles, clean energy and artificial intelligence continues to drive copper

resource consumption amid increasing demand for the base metal at home and abroad.

The acquisition is a critical move amid the company's resolve to improve its ability to ensure the supply of strategic resources and vigorously promote the increase of reserves and production, the company said.

Currently, China is the world's largest consumer and importer of copper resources, with a dependency rate of over 70 percent. More than 60 percent of copper ore imports come from Chile and Peru, it said.

An analyst said copper, as one of the critical metals for the transition to low-carbon energy, is ideal for electrical uses due to its combina-

tion of conductivity and ductility.

There is fast-growing demand from the electric vehicle and renewable energy sectors for copper, which is also widely used in power, transportation and construction, said Zhao Xiangbin, chief strategist at Beijing Gold and Forex Fortune Investment Management.

"The acquisition will also ensure the corporation's leading position in the nonferrous sector and the strategic security of nonferrous resources such as copper in China," he said.

Zhao said China relies heavily on Chile and Peru for copper imports, so the African deal will further diversify import channels and bet-

ter secure supplies of strategic resources.

The rapid expansion of Chinese smelters pushed the country's refined copper output up 13.5 percent last year to a record 13 million metric tons. Imports of copper ore and concentrate were 9.1 percent higher than a year earlier at 27.5 million tons, also a record high, according to official data.

According to forecasts, world copper consumption is likely to rise about 24 percent between 2023 and 2033, to reach some 32 million tons a year.

To get on course for net zero emissions by around 2050, copper supplies would have to increase even faster, it said.

Low-carbon technologies often require more metal than their higher-carbon counterparts.

Offshore wind, for example,

uses about three times as much copper as coal-fired power generation in terms of tons per gigawatt of capacity. An upper-end electric vehicle might include about 78 kilograms of copper per vehicle, compared to about 22 kg in an equivalent gasoline-powered model, said Ed Crooks, vice-chairman of energy for Americas at consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

Copper production in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has soared over the past two decades, hitting about 3 million tons a year, largely the result of investment by Chinese companies, Crooks said.

The consultancy estimates that the share of global copper demand coming from green sectors — including renewables and EVs — is on course to double over the next 10 years, from about 8 percent to about 16 percent.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Virtual humans helping spur e-commerce

Avatars able of livestreaming sessions 24/7 save big bucks for enterprises

By FAN FEIFEI
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An artificial intelligence-powered digital doppelganger of Liu Qiangdong, Chinese e-commerce giant JD's founder and chairman, appeared in two of the firm's livestreaming rooms in April to promote a variety of products including meats, edible oil, eggs, milk, air conditioners and televisions.

Powered by JD's large language model ChatRhino, the virtual avatar almost perfectly replicates Liu's facial expressions, body language, gestures, voice and accent, capturing even the subtlest movements of his fingers.

Nicknamed "procurement and sales manager Brother Dong", Liu's avatar generated over 20 million views within the first hour, and landed 50 million yuan (\$6.9 million) in sales throughout the entire real-time broadcasted sessions.

Liu's virtual replica even shared his own feelings about healthy diets, cooking experiences, fitness and exercise methods.

Equipped with 50,000 hours of voice data, JD's LLM technology enables digital avatars to intelligently adapt to various livestreaming styles dynamically, and answer 70 percent of the frequently asked questions during a livestreaming session, the company said.

The virtual anchors offer a glimpse into China's burgeoning e-commerce sector, which utilizes AI-powered virtual hosts to introduce various products and spur sales. Chinese online retailers and tech companies have ratcheted up efforts to promote the use of digital humans in their livestreaming campaigns.

So far, JD's AI-powered virtual livestreamers have promoted more than 4,000 brands, contributing to a 30 percent increase in order conversion rates during off-peak hours and helping merchants reduce livestreaming costs, enhance operational efficiency and optimize user experience.

The digital avatars boast a 90 percent accuracy rate in offering tailored product recommendations when prompted by customers, and cut costs of hosting livestreaming sessions by 90 percent compared with humans, JD added.

The company recently announced an investment of 1 billion yuan into video content creation, which underscores its commitment to leveraging short videos and livestreaming to improve the online shopping experience for users, and create new growth avenues for brand merchants.



Digital human technologies used for livestreaming sessions are displayed at the 4th China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou, Hainan province, in April. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



The artificial intelligence-powered digital doppelganger of Liu Qiangdong, Chinese e-commerce giant JD's founder and chairman, promotes products during a livestreaming session in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Data from iiMedia Research showed that revenue of China's livestreaming e-commerce sector reached 1.7 trillion yuan last year, up 16 percent year-on-year. This figure is expected to reach 2.14 trillion yuan in 2025.

The size of China's virtual human market is forecast to reach 270 billion yuan by 2030, according to an industry report released by QbitAI, an industry services platform focusing on AI and other cutting-edge technologies.

The application of virtual hosts in livestreaming e-commerce will likely see speedy growth this year fueled by user demand, advances in AI technology and policy support, said Zhang Yi, CEO and chief analyst at consultancy iiMedia Research.

Zhang said the major challenges lie in how to allow virtual anchors to

better interact with users and understand their demands more precisely during livestreaming sessions.

Other major e-commerce platforms have accelerated their layout in the application of digital humans in livestreaming activities. Tmall, Alibaba's business-to-customer e-marketplace, has launched AI virtual models to provide users with a more personalized shopping experience.

With the help of digital human livestreaming technology, Alibaba's online marketplace Taobao offers marketing services concerning real-time broadcasting campaigns for merchants. Online discounter PDD Holdings has carried out a series of product intro events through digital human anchors, so as to attract a large number of users.

Global consultancy Forrester said more B2C brands are using virtual hosts to attract digital-savvy and novelty-seeking young consumers, as they cost less than human hosts and don't create celebrity scandals that could potentially hurt brand image.

Qianxun Holdings, one of China's top livestreaming companies, has unveiled an AI hosting service and a one-stop AI livestreaming service platform.

Tao Yadong, a partner of Qianxun Holdings and CEO of Qianyu Intelligence, said it usually costs about 150,000 to 250,000 yuan each month to run a traditional livestreaming room with a dozen workers and equipment. By comparison, brand owners just need to spend several thousand yuan on operating a virtual livestreaming room helmed by a virtual host.

The performance of virtual hosts in terms of gross merchandise volume, average view duration, number of viewers and transaction rates is better than that of human hosts, he said.

"However, under current technical conditions, the digital anchors can't totally replace real humans as it is difficult for the former to establish trust with fans," Tao added.

Ping Xiaoli, vice-president of Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc and general manager of Baidu's e-commerce business, said compared with humans, the biggest advantage of digital avatars is that they can greatly cut operating costs of livestreaming for merchants, and work 24 hours a day without coffee and restroom breaks, pushing up sales of products.

Baidu has rolled out its digital

avatar platform Xiling, which provides a complete set of services for the creation and operation of virtual hosts, virtual celebrities and virtual brand spokespersons for clients in fields like broadcasting, television, internet, finance and retail.

"An increasing number of brands are looking to use virtual beings in livestreaming and other marketing campaigns, which will help enterprises reduce at least 50 percent of costs by cutting spending on brick-and-mortar livestreaming locations, hardware equipment and hiring human anchors," said Li Shiyao, head of Baidu's digital human and robotics section.

However, the virtual human industry is still in an early stage of development and there are some challenges, such as how to produce low-cost digital assets and digital content, and how to make digital humans interact with real people more naturally, Li said.

The use of virtual hosts in livestreaming sessions can bring a feeling of freshness to users, while brand owners can attract new consumers via this innovative method, said Mo Daiqing, a senior analyst at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy.

Mo said AI-powered digital humans in livestreaming can help improve operating efficiency, enhance consumer shopping experience and promote the development of livestreaming e-commerce industry.

Moreover, virtual humans can play a pivotal role in finishing tedious and repetitive tasks, thus allowing human hosts to devote more time to creative work. However, they will not fully replace real

human hosts, Mo added.

Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said he is optimistic about the business prospects of virtual humans in the e-commerce livestreaming segment.

Pan called for more efforts to improve 3D modeling, rendering and motion capture technologies to bolster development of the country's virtual human sector.

Thanks to technological advancements in AI, digital avatars bearing a close resemblance to real humans in appearance and behavior have been put into service not only in livestreaming e-commerce, but also in a wide range of other segments, such as entertainment, education, fashion, culture and tourism.

Chinese AI pioneer Xiaoice, SenseTime and tech giant Huawei Technologies Co have jumped on the digital human bandwagon. For instance, Xiaoice developed Cui Xiaopan, the first virtual employee of Chinese real estate developer Vanke. The digital human is in charge of reminding employees to pay the company's bills on time and collect bills due.

"Although the digital avatar segment is still nascent, the appearance, gestures and actions of digital humans will be more refined and closer to that of real humans," said Yu Jianing, executive director of the metaverse industry committee at the China Mobile Communications Association, a Beijing-based industry association.

Yu said the accelerated application of 5G and the research and development of 6G — the next-generation wireless technology — will fuel the digital human industry. Virtual humans will become more intelligent and be able to give personalized feedback based on real-time information as a result of technological advancements in AI, he added.

Currently, digital humans have already shown clear commercial value in a number of fields, said Lu Yanxia, research director at market consultancy IDC China, adding that there will be large-scale teams of digital humans coexisting with humans in life and at workplaces in the future.

Chen Duan, director of the Digital Economy Integration Innovation Development Center at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said new problems in the digital human industry have also emerged, such as ethics, data security and personal privacy protection.

More efforts are needed to formulate relevant laws and regulations on the ownership of digital characters and standardization of their behaviors, while all parties engaged in the digital human industry should strengthen cooperation to prevent potential legal and ethical risks in advance, Chen said.

Chinese couriers rapidly expanding global reach

By FAN FEIFEI

Chinese courier companies are ratcheting up resources to enhance the efficiency of cross-border e-commerce logistics and build global delivery networks in a bid to expand their presence in overseas markets and meet growing demand for e-commerce logistics services from local consumers.

Cainiao Group, the logistics arm of Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, recently announced the expansion of its five-workday delivery guarantee for AliExpress, Alibaba's cross-border online retail platform, to encompass several prominent European markets.

With the inclusion of Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom, Cainiao is enhancing the efficiency and reliability of cross-border e-commerce logistics in Europe.

This strategic expansion comes as a response to growing demand for faster and more reliable delivery services among European consumers, the company said.

By leveraging Cainiao's innovative technology and extensive logistics network, AliExpress vendors in China will now be able to offer their customers in these markets a seamless delivery experience with reduced delivery time of just five workdays.

Cainiao first unveiled such a delivery service in September in four European markets — Spain, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium. The service has expanded to Germany, France and Portugal this time in close cooperation with local partners at every link of the logistics process.

"Europe remains a key focus for us as we continue to enhance our global logistics infrastructure and optimize delivery solutions for our customers," said Wan Lin, CEO of Cainiao Group.

"The expansion of our five-workday delivery solution to these additional European markets reflects our commitment to providing faster and more efficient cross-border logistics services, ultimately delivering greater satisfaction to both sellers and consumers."

Cainiao said it will continue to

invest in technology and infrastructure to strengthen its leading position in the global logistics industry. The expansion of its five-workday delivery solution in Europe marks another milestone in its mission to build a more connected and efficient global logistics network.

Zhang Zhouping, a senior analyst tracking business-to-business and cross-border activities at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said establishing logistics infrastructure overseas is conducive to improving the delivery efficiency of cross-border parcels as well as safeguarding the stability and security of supply chains.

Zhang said that overseas warehouses and express delivery networks serve as vital infrastructure that boost the growth of China's cross-border e-commerce sector.

According to the General Administration of Customs, based on preliminary calculations, the import and export scale of the country's cross-border e-commerce transactions reached 577.6 billion yuan (\$79.7 billion) in the first quarter, up 9.6 percent year-on-year.

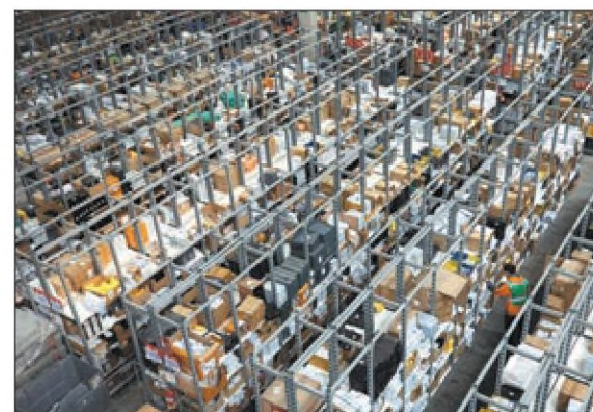
JD Logistics, an arm of Chinese

e-commerce platform JD, announced a significant expansion of its international express delivery service in March.

This expansion extends the service's reach from initial hubs in Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province to nearly every region within China, offering an express delivery experience from China to global destinations for both individuals and businesses.

First launched in December, JD's international express delivery service has been utilized for sending a variety of products including documents and apparel, with the United States, the UK and Germany emerging as the top three destinations. The service not only processes individual orders, but also caters to the needs of overseas consumers and merchants, while offering one-hour doorstep pickups.

JD is actively expanding its international supply chain and logistics capabilities. It has inked a strategic partnership with France-based Geopost, Europe's largest international parcel delivery network, to enhance express services between China and Europe.



Employees sort packages at a warehouse of Cainiao Group in Guadalajara, Spain, in November 2020. MENG DINGBO / XINHUA

It is also accelerating construction of global logistics infrastructure, with plans to build more overseas warehouses in the Americas, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

Currently, JD Logistics' overseas warehousing operations offer same-day fulfillment services in key European markets, including Germany, the Netherlands, France, the UK, Spain and Poland, while ensuring two-to-three-day delivery across 90

percent of regions in the US.

"Chinese logistics companies' intensified push to invest in global delivery networks will not only help enhance the competitiveness of Chinese foreign trade enterprises and bolster their sales in overseas markets, but also introduce a large number of overseas products to Chinese consumers," said Lu Zhenwang, CEO of Wanqing Consultancy, which is based in Shanghai.

CULTURE

Actor discovers his leading role

Former heartthrob singer tunes into movies with style and grace, **Xu Fan** reports.

In late April, a gentle breeze swept across the serene landscape of Yanqi Lake, nestled on the northern outskirts of Beijing. Despite the picturesque view from his hotel room window, Kris Phillips, who is better known as Fei Xiang in China, had just had a hectic week that contrasted sharply with the tranquillity outside.

As a jury member for the 14th Beijing International Film Festival's Tiantan Award, the Chinese-American singer and actor viewed the 15 shortlisted films competing for honors and attended multiple news conferences over the course of a tight 12-day schedule.

Describing himself as a movie lover who re-watched golden era Hollywood films, like those starring Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn, to prepare for his new comedy *Out of Order*, the 63-year-old star says he was fascinated by the opportunity to admire movies from a variety of countries, including Argentina and Israel.

"I think film offers us a window into other people's lives. That's what we want. China has a huge amount of potential in this regard," he tells *China Daily*. "I feel like the Chinese film industry is now at a fascinating moment and entering a golden period of filmmaking. It's going to be like America between the 1970s and 1980s, a period when there was a huge expansion of talent, and dedication to film as an art form."

For Chinese people born in the 1970s and '80s, Phillips was the pop king of their era.

After graduating from Stanford University, the performer, who has an American father and a Chinese mother, returned to Taiwan and began his showbiz career in the TV series *Eleven Women*, paving his way to stardom as a heartthrob in several movies adapted from novels by Chiung Yao, a well-known romance novelist from Taiwan.

However, it was his musical talent — exemplified by the release of a series of albums and a successful tour of 60 sold-out concerts — that catapulted Phillips to fame for millions of fans in the Chinese mainland following his dynamic and charismatic performance of the song, *Dongtian Lide Yibahuo* (Ball of Fire), at China Central Television's 1987 Spring Festival Gala.

Reflecting on his early years, and seemingly experiencing a nostalgic moment, Phillips says that he believed he lacked the experience to excel as an actor at the time, and questioned whether he wanted to settle for being an average actor, or strive to become a top-notch pop singer.

"When I saw my (early) films, I said to myself, 'Well, I'd better just stick to singing.' That was my reaction. And that's exactly what I did. I pulled the plug on my film work. I released album after album, did concerts, and performed in theaters in America," he says.

Over the following two decades, he dedicated himself to music, establishing a presence in the United States

despite the then challenging environment for Asian performers, through a series of high-profile performances, beginning with his role in the original Broadway cast of *Miss Saigon*, and culminating in appearing in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Music of the Night*.

Back to cinema

Fate has once again drawn Phillips, once praised by *The New Yorker* as "the most handsome Chinese man", back into the world of cinema.

In 2011, director Wuershan from Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, confirmed that he would direct *Painted Skin: The Resurrection*, a fantastic romance loosely inspired by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) novelist Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio), and invited him to play the role of a powerful sorcerer.

"I thought, 'well, maybe I'll give film a try again. Who knows what will happen?' After that experience, I've now come full circle back to doing film, which is so fascinating to me," he says, recalling the moment.

After portraying a villainous king in the 2016 film, *The Monkey King 2*, the performer took on his most popular role to date as Yin Shou, the cruel and dangerous ruler in the fantastical trilogy *Creation of the Gods*, a character he describes as a "sociopath".

One of the most expensive franchises ever filmed in the country, the trilogy is based on the 16th-century novel *Fengshen Yanyi* (The Investiture of the Gods), and employed a crew of 8,000 members and took five years to write all three scripts.

The epic blends myth, folklore, and history to depict the turbulent period leading to the collapse of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), when the last of the dynasty's tyrants faces a war launched by an army seeking justice.

After the first installment, *Kingdom of Storms*, raked in more than 2.6 billion yuan (\$358.8 million) and became a phenomenal hit last summer, Phillips made many young fans online, as evidenced by buzzwords discussing a number of topics associated with the star, from his charming accent to his chiseled physique.

He feels that the trilogy exemplifies Wuershan's passion for cinema and his determination to present the Shang Dynasty, an ancient era that has been barely touched by recent TV series or movies, to a global audience.

"I was there for a year and a half during filming. Some of the young actors had been working for more than two or three years to prepare," he says. "I think that kind of scope for a project like *Creation of the Gods* is rare in Hollywood now; they don't undertake it anymore. It's too expensive and too financially risky for investors. Nowadays, film is not only entertainment and an art form, but also more and more a business."

Despite a strict schedule of exercise



Kris Phillips, who is better known as Fei Xiang in China, acting as Yin Shou, the cruel and dangerous ruler in the fantastical trilogy, *Creation of the Gods*, by director Wuershan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"I'm particularly concerned for art. ... It's a communication between humans from the artist's expression, whether it's a film, a painting, or a novel. I don't know that AI-generated art is what I would call art."

Kris Phillips, actor

Bottom left and right: He attends events during the Beijing International Film Festival, as a jury member for its Tiantan Award.

and diet, which Phillips teasingly describes as "tedious and horrible"; he says his biggest challenge was keeping in mind the story arc over the course of the trilogy. In the second and third sequels, his character will undergo significant changes, relying on a fox demon transformed into a beautiful woman to seize absolute power.

"The training was rigorous, but it was kind of mindless. It was like a factory where not only I, but also all the young actors, who play *zhizi* (the sons of lords sent to the dynasty's capital to ensure their fathers' loyalty), had to undergo months of training to gain the musculature and physical shape for the film," he says.

"As long as you complete it, you will lose fat and gain muscles, and the results are guaranteed. So that part is like a scientific procedure and it's simple," adds the self-disciplined star, who woke up at 3 am to have enough time to exercise before starting makeup at 6 am.

Interestingly, the diligent star not only fulfilled his duty as an actor but also helped to write the film's English subtitles, based on which German and French were later translated respectively, as he wanted international audiences to better understand the characters' motivations and be able to follow the fast-paced story.

"It was very challenging to do the subtitles because you have to make choices. You only have limited space for a line, and you also have to convey the dialogue in the characters' voices," he explains, giving the examples of Yin Shou, whose lines are needed to be shaded, and Ji Fa, a *zhizi*, who would speak as a hot-tempered young warrior.

His efforts paid off. When the film was released overseas, including in the US, France and Germany, it was easily understood.

"I understand the importance for China to showcase more of its history, culture, and current film industry, as

well as its entertainment capabilities to the world. I want China to present a multifaceted image to the world. I want my friends in America and Europe to have a better understanding of China, and film is one of the most direct and effective ways to create that emotional connection between people," says the impassioned artist.

Since completing his duties at the Beijing festival, Phillips has continued filming *Out of Order*, an adaptation of the farce by English playwright Ray Cooney, winner of the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Comedy.

The film, which is being produced by Mahua FunAge, a successful Beijing-based comedy production company, is set to be shot just a 10-minute drive from Yanqi Lake.

Phillips says that he plays the role of a famous lawyer in the story, which is set in the 1940s, and who is secretly dating his rival's female assistant at a hotel, only to discover an unidentified male corpse outside the window, setting off a chain of absurd events.

"My character has absolutely no morals, no qualms, no conscience, and he's a sex maniac. In portraying him, I want the audience to watch him and think, 'My goodness, everything he's doing is so horrible, but I still can't help but like him!'" he says as he bursts into laughter.

As a public figure without Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts, and only having a Sina Weibo account, he maintains a cautious stance toward the latest technological developments, such as artificial intelligence.

"I'm particularly concerned for art because art comes out of the human spirit and the human emotional experience. It's a communication between humans from the artist's expression, whether it's a film, a painting, or a novel. I don't know that AI-generated art is what I would call art," he says.

For an icon like Phillips, who has shone for four decades, the conclusion by writer, publisher and host Xu Zhiyuan is perhaps one of the most fitting. Then a fourth-grader at a primary school in Beijing, Xu recalls a strong impression of Phillips wearing black pants, a short red top and black bow tie while performing at the 1987 Spring Festival Gala. In his interview for the online program *Shisan Yao* (Thirteen Invitations), Xu spent three days with Phillips and said that the star resembled a character from a fairy tale, like "someone stepping out of a Woody Allen film, exuding mystery".

Parks breathe new life to key city

CHONGQING — In late spring, when the flowers are in full bloom, the lush greenery of the parks in Chongqing attracts crowds of people eager to enjoy the scenery.

Parks lie scattered around Chongqing, greening the former industrial city. In recent years, several distinctive parks have been opened, not only enhancing the urban environment of the city but also injecting vitality into its economic growth.

Langchao Park, with its undulating ground paved with pump tracks, has become a new sports and leisure destination. Skateboarders, scooter riders and other sports enthusiasts can zoom around its slopes, sharp turns and other challenging obstacles, and the newly opened park has received praise from residents.

"This pump track is impressive, with its vibrant colors and innovative designs. Children have a lot of fun playing here," says resident Zhang Jianping.

The park stands out for its focus on sports and features children's pump-track arenas, parkour playgrounds, skateboard parks and children's development training camps. The tracks are built in green areas, integrating well with nature and offering a unique experience for users of different ages and skill levels.

Such "pocket parks" — so named because of their small scale — can be found throughout Dadukou district of the city. According to the district's urban management bureau, it has renovated many mini squares and small parks in different corners of the city, providing residents with spaces to connect with nature, rest, exercise and to promote travel.

The recently renovated Love Park has become a popular spot for young people on social media. Visitors can stroll through its pink and purple landscapes past trees trimmed into heart shapes to symbolize the park's name. Besides enjoying spring scenery, nearby residents also use the park for exercise and other activities.

"After the renovation, a square was built, and we come here every day to exercise and dance. It's convenient because it's not far from home," says Guo Huizhen, a 56-year-old resident.

The park's romantic theme also attracts couples who come to take wedding photos. To capitalize on the opportunity, park management worked with the Civil Affairs Bureau to set up a marriage registration office, as a convenience for couples seeking to marry there.

Additionally, they organize events like blind dates on special occasions, creating a means for young unmarried people to make connections.

The park's renovation has not only improved the surrounding environment but also created economic benefits.

Dadukou district has recently started promoting the "park plus business" model to stimulate consumption and economic development.

Dadukou Park, the first full-size park in the district, has undergone renovation, including its transformation into open park by removing its former walls, cleaning bodies of water, and adding fitness equipment and children's entertainment facilities. The park has also introduced commercial establishments like bars, teahouses and cafes.

"Dadukou Park is located adjacent to the Jiugongmiao business area. Since the reconstruction and upgrade, it has attracted a large flow of people, making it an ideal location for us to operate," says Zhang Jin, who is in charge of the park's amusement area.

These convenient, user-friendly services have not only revitalized park assets but also increased its popularity.



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