

Neutral stance

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CHINA DAILY

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Editor's note: China Daily is proud to present the fifth "My China Album", which will be celebrated on Thursday at the Chinese embassy in Washington. The album features 12 video episodes centered around the theme of China-US friendship, including features on a World War II Flying Tigers veteran; a family in Iowa that hosted President Xi Jinping in the 1980s; a US high school that has sent students on several trips to China; collaboration on giant panda conservation and research, and much more.

'My China Album' features 100 friendship stories

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco

My China Album — The Fifth —

The fifth edition of "My China Album", which features 12 video episodes collectively themed around "My Impressions of China-100 Stories of China-US Friendship", will be celebrated on Thursday at the Chinese embassy in the United States. Highlighting people-to-people exchanges over the years, the video collection reveals heartwarming anecdotes, captures moments of historical significance, and tells tearjerk stories of wartime comradeship. There are retrospective stories. A story based in Kuliang traces footprints of an American family, detailing how four generations initiated, cultivated, safeguarded and nurtured a profound respect for and understanding of China, its culture and people. Davyd Booth, a violinist with the Philadelphia Orchestra who was in

the troupe during its historic visit to China in 1973, considers music a powerful adhesive that has strongly connected the Chinese and American peoples. He believes the two countries "should become not just friends but great friends". Harry Moyer, 103, is a Flying Tigers veteran. During World War II, he fought shoulder to shoulder with Chinese soldiers to defend against invading Japanese forces. China never forgets American friends and their devotion, Moyer said, because Chinese people are practitioners of, "A drop of water given in need shall be returned with a burst of spring". A family in Muscatine, Iowa, shares firsthand information about

hosting Chinese President Xi Jinping in the 1980s, which led to an enduring friendship of 40 years. When members of an American household opened their doors to a Chinese visitor with hospitality, they sowed the seed of goodwill and kindness, which later blossomed into a much-told tale praised far and wide. There are stories depicting young generations and their cross-border collaborations. Students at Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Washington, have made many tours across China. With their Chinese counterparts, they visited scenic spots, tasted authentic delicacies, learned calligraphy, listened to operas and shot hoops. More importantly, the youth of both nations realized the necessity and urgency of being open-minded, understanding and respectful of cultures other than their own. There are stories documenting ongoing scientific cooperation.

Chinese and American scientists since the 1990s have engaged in extensive collaboration in various fields, including wild panda ecology, genetic structure, monitoring techniques, captive breeding and disease prevention and control. Experts from the National Zoo in Washington and the San Diego Zoo participated in giant panda conservation and research. It's always important to promote such exchanges, more than ever, said Winston Lord, an American diplomat and US ambassador to China in the late 1980s. "My China Album" and programs like that are needed now to increase understanding and relationships between our two peoples," he said. The fifth season of the "My China Album" is jointly produced by the Chinese embassy in the US, the Chinese consulates general in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago, and China Daily.

Visa-free entry now for tourists at cruise ports

By YANGZEKUN

China announced and implemented on Wednesday a policy allowing visa-free entry of foreign tourist groups aboard cruise ships via all cruise ship ports along the country's coastline. Foreign tourist groups comprising two or more individuals and organized or received by China's domestic travel agencies can enter the country visa-free via cruise ship ports in 13 cities and stay for up to 15 days, according to a statement issued by the National Immigration Administration. All members of each group should travel together on the same cruise ship to the next port until the vessel leaves China, with activities limited to coastal provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, as well as Beijing.

The visa-free entry ports are in Tianjin, Shanghai, Dalian in Liaoning province, Lianyungang in Jiangsu province, Wenzhou and Zhoushan in Zhejiang province, Xiamen in Fujian province, Qingdao in Shandong province, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Haikou and Sanya in Hainan province, and Beihai in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. The NIA also announced that seven cruise ports in Dalian, Lianyungang, Wenzhou, Zhoushan, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Beihai have been designated as visa-free transit ports for nationals from 54 countries.

The move facilitates the transfer and departure of foreign travelers from these ports via cruise ships under China's visa-free transit policy, the statement noted. "The full implementation of the visa-free policy for foreign tourist groups arriving by cruise ships will support the development of the cruise industry, attract more foreign tourists to China, and enhance exchanges between Chinese and foreign nationals," said Mao Xu, director of the NIA's Foreigners Management Department. Shanghai has been piloting China's visa-free policy for cruise tourists since October 2016, leading to a 10 percent average annual increase in the number of cruise passengers. Buoyed by the success in Shanghai, the NIA decided to expand the policy to other coastal cities, promoting the intensive development of cruise-related industries in these areas, Mao said. To make cruise port entry and exit procedures more convenient, the NIA has introduced a range of measures facilitating customs clearance for international passengers, easing crew disembarkation and promoting cruise ship maintenance, among other services, he said. Based on cruise ship schedules and passenger numbers, immigration officers will handle border inspection procedures in advance and adopt a convenient clearance certification code to ensure smooth disembarkation and boarding, Mao said. Foreign passengers on the same cruise trip will be exempt from fingerprint collection and stamping of entry and exit permits. Simplified procedures will also be applied to international crew members, he said. During international cruise ship maintenance, immigration authorities will provide services around the clock for handling permits for boarding and mooring foreign vessels. They will also issue nationwide permits for personnel engaged in cruise ship supply, maintenance, inspection and operational services, he added. International cruise transportation to and from Chinese ports fully resumed in September 2023, and China handled over 107,000 cruise passengers last year, according to the Ministry of Transport. Zhu Zhenyu, deputy director of the ministry's Water Transport Bureau, said there are currently 21 international cruise ships operating at Chinese ports. "The cruise transportation market is thriving, and passenger numbers are expected to steadily recover and increase in 2024," he said. Shi Zeyi, deputy director of the International Exchange and Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, noted the positive growth of the inbound cruise tourism market, saying that from February to April, over 14,000 tourists from over 40 countries and regions visited China aboard cruise ships. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism and other departments are streamlining the entire inbound tourism process, addressing issues and optimizing visa and customs policies, improving tourism services, and enhancing the management of and the shopping environment at cultural and tourism sites, Shi said. To address payment difficulties faced by foreign tourists, the ministry, the People's Bank of China, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange and the National Cultural Heritage Administration issued a notice in April requiring all 5A- and 4A-rated tourist destinations, national- and provincial-level tourist resorts, national-level tourist culture streets, and three-star to five-star hotels to accept domestic and international bank cards. Major cultural and tourism places should maintain manned ticket windows and support cash payments, the notice said. Currency exchange services at cultural and tourism venues with a large number of foreign visitors should be enhanced, and mobile payment services should also be optimized, it added.

RECYCLED PRODUCTS SHATTER OLD IDEAS ABOUT CERAMIC WASTE

New approaches, regulations ensure greener, cleaner industry

By ZHAO RUINAN in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi

in-depth

Every two months, Yan Chunyang hauls the accumulated ceramic waste from his studio to two large green bins, which serve as designated recycling points for ceramics.

"It has been about two years since I started taking ceramic waste to the recycling point. Many other studio owners in Jingdezhen

also go there to dispose of their waste ceramics," he said. Yan is a 33-year-old freelance artist who set up his ceramic 3D-printing studio in Jiangxi province's Jingdezhen, the country's porcelain capital, in October 2021. He quickly became a vendor at the Letian Pottery Creative Market, showcasing and selling his products every Saturday along with

other vendors. "When I started making ceramics in Jingdezhen, I couldn't bear to throw away flawed pieces," Yan said. "But as I produced more, I began to have higher standards for product quality, and that's when the need to deal with waste ceramics arose." See Ceramics, page 2



An aerial photo shows the Zuiderdam cruise ship docked at the Dalian Port International Cruise Terminal in Liaoning province in March. This was the first international cruise ship to visit the northeastern province after international cruise transportation resumed fully last September. PAN YULONG / XINHUA

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A tile made of waste ceramics in Jingdezhen. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Hollow bricks made of waste ceramics are used as a backdrop for products at a wool sweater store in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A tile made of recycled ceramics in Jingdezhen. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ceramics: The beauty of sustainable materials

From page 1

Soon after, Yan discovered a ceramic waste recycling point at the market.

After each ceramic-making session, he collects waste materials and fills up a large box. Once the box is full, he takes it to the recycling point. Many other vendors at the market follow the same practice and take their ceramic waste to the recycling point.

Waste into wealth

China has been the world's main producer of traditional ceramics for many years.

In 2017, China produced approximately 10 billion square meters of architectural ceramics, 220 million pieces of sanitary ceramics, and 50 billion pieces of daily-use ceramics, according to research by Wang Yongqing, a professor at Jingdezhen Ceramic School of Materials Science and Engineering.

The Central China region accounted for 25 percent, 55 percent, and 45 percent of these outputs respectively, while Jiangxi was the third-ranked province in traditional ceramic production.

However, the thriving ceramic industry has created a problem: How to deal with the large amount of non-degradable ceramic waste produced by manufacturing companies?

Jingdezhen alone produces more than 60,000 metric tons of ceramic waste annually, with an estimated 18 million tons produced nationwide.

"There are many types of ceramic waste, not just traditional daily-use ceramics, but also architectural ceramics, sanitary ceramics and more," said Wang. "Currently, some ceramic waste is recycled, but many companies still resort to traditional landfilling."

Ceramic production has always been a hit-and-miss process. In the past, wood-fired kilns had a success rate of only 30 percent in ceramic production, and failures were common.

As a result, a significant amount of ceramic waste was dumped as landfill into low-lying areas of Jingdezhen to prevent flooding and waterlogging. This led to the development of densely populated areas with extensive construction after hills and streams were leveled and covered.

Ceramic waste and kiln bricks were also used to construct Jingdezhen's sewers. Even today, walls from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and pools from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), built with discarded ceramics, kiln bricks, and other fragments, can be seen among the ruins of the Imperial Porcelain Factory in Jingdezhen.

However, as industrial ceramics production has grown, it has become necessary to handle ceramic waste in a more environmentally friendly manner.

"In the past, Jingdezhen recycled only a small amount of ceramic waste, while the rest was buried. But because the amount of ceramic waste was small, the environmental impact was far less than it is today," Wang said.



A 'ceramic mountain' of waste collected from several recycling points is seen in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Sockets made of waste ceramics produced in Jingdezhen. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Ceramics are not degradable, and burying them takes up a lot of land. Moreover, some glazed ceramics waste may contain harmful chemicals that can be released over time, posing a threat to the environment," said the professor.

Ceramic waste disposal can also pollute the air and contaminate groundwater quality, he added.

In recent years, China has placed greater emphasis on environmental issues, and attitudes have changed gradually.

The recycling project at the Letian Pottery Creative Market was initiated in 2021 by Yi Design, a Chinese materials company, and the Letian Pottery Workshop.

Caroline Cheng Yi, the founder of the workshop and one of the co-founders of Yi Design, has been advocating sustainable recycling of ceramic waste for a long time.

According to Cheng, when she and her team arrived in Jingdezhen in 2005, they noticed a lot of ceramic waste scattered around the city's garbage bins.

"About 40 percent of the population there was involved in ceramics, but there was no system for recycling the material," Cheng said.

Ceramic 'mountains' cleared

In Chaozhou, Guangdong province, another major ceramic production city in China, steps have been taken in recent years to clean up waste problems.

Due to a wastage rate of 5 to 10 percent during the production process, the accumulation of "ceramic mountains" posed a significant problem for the city's ecology.

Chen Ruihong, deputy director of the city's Ecological Environment Bureau, said that there are over 10,000 ceramic factories in Chaozhou, most of which are small businesses.

"Ceramic waste was often dumped anywhere in the city. Waste disposal was done haphazardly, and nobody cared where it went," he said.

In 2017, Chaozhou officials established a waste disposal site and introduced special operations to

address the problem. They also encouraged larger firms to upgrade their equipment and technology, and use market mechanisms to achieve breakthroughs in comprehensive recycling.

Within 12 months of taking action, Chaozhou had processed 67,000 tons of ceramic waste.

In 2018, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment released a nationwide regulation to establish a system of standards to control pollution emissions. In 2020, another document was issued that specified the basic principles, content, calculation methods, and requirements to strongly account for pollutant sources, including the manufacturing of ceramic products.

At the same time, large domestic ceramic production enterprises also stepped up their efforts to recycle ceramic waste. Chaozhou's ceramic waste recycling and disposal capacity

now meets the needs of the entire city, officials said.

Oceano, a tile manufacturer with factories in Jingdezhen and Foshan, Guangdong, has been researching ways to recycle and utilize ceramics for a couple of years.

"At present, we have established a green recycling system in our factories, and most of the waste generated during production can be recycled internally for use as new building materials," said Rong Liang, deputy general manager of Oceano in Jingdezhen.

At its Jingdezhen factory, Oceano's annual output of ceramic building materials is about 22 million square meters, with a recycled ceramic reuse volume of about 40,000 tons.

In Foshan, the amount is about 5 million square meters, with a recycled ceramic reuse volume of about 10,000 tons.

To increase the recycling of

ceramic waste, Wang, the professor, suggested implementing a "dual-cycle system" for handling waste.

Large ceramic production companies should prioritize internal recycling, where their waste can be treated and reused in production, in order to achieve zero emissions from ceramic waste, Wang said.

"On a larger scale, establishing a circular system for ceramic waste utilization within industrial parks where ceramic production companies are clustered can help consume ceramic waste internally," said the professor.

Local governments should also introduce more regulations, while the ceramics industry can promote green and low-carbon development, Wang said.

Achieving this goal not only saves energy and reduces emissions, but also helps spread the use of environmental protection technologies.

An absorbing idea

Transforming ceramic waste into sustainable building materials is an innovation Yi Design specializes in.

Over the past three years, Yi Design has developed four types of recycled tiles and bricks.

"Our lab focuses on researching ceramic waste and solid waste as primary raw building materials, with an emphasis on art and aesthetics, to develop sustainable and environmentally friendly materials and products for the construction and design sectors," said Deng Peiran, head of the company's design department.

Yin Yi, one of the co-founders of Yi Design, said that building blocks the company has made from ceramic waste can be used as an "absorbent alternative" to conventional cement bricks in various situations.

"The recycled brick's standout features are not only its great water permeability, but also its water storage capacity," said Yin. "When laid in a city, they can absorb condensation water when temperatures are cooler, with each brick capable of holding around 200 milliliters of water."



A cup made of waste ceramics produced by Yi Design. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Queen Maxima of the Netherlands holds a brick made of recycled ceramics by Yi Design during Dutch Design Week in October. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

As the sun rises and temperatures increase, the stored water evaporates from the bricks, helping to cool the environment," Yin said.

In addition to their cooling effect, these bricks can be used to collect rainwater in urban areas.

Pavers laid on city streets use cement, which prevents rainwater from seeping into the soil, Yin said.

However, if permeable eco-friendly bricks are used to collect rainwater, the water can be recycled and reused, he said.

"It's perfect for sponge cities — urban spaces that retain stormwater, before gradually filtering and releasing it — or for outdoor use in paved areas and gardens."

Yin's interest in ceramic waste recycling began in 2018 when he decided to do a master's degree on future materials at Central Saint Martins, a university in the United Kingdom.

Upon returning to China during the COVID-19 pandemic, Yin and Cheng established Yi Design. Yin is responsible for product development and laboratory and factory operations, while Cheng handles external promotions and operations.

Over the past three years, Yi Design's products have won multiple international prizes, including the BLT Built Design Awards Winner 2022 and Red Dot Awards 2022 Winner. In 2023, the company also won the Kering Generation Award.

Practical uses

So far, Yi Design has cooperated with about 60 factories and more than 40 ceramic studios to collect ceramic waste. Over 5,000 tons of ceramic waste has been collected.

The company's products have also been used in several projects, including the tiled wall of fashion company COS's store in Shanghai's Century Plaza shopping mall. Their recycled permeable bricks have been used in the outdoor floor area of a coffee-themed community building jointly established by Tongji University and the coffee chain Starbucks in Shanghai.

Yin said their next step is to reduce costs and explore the possibility of increasing mass production of their materials.

"In the future, we hope to achieve large-scale production and help realize the green development and transformation of the ceramic industry," Yin said.

Yan, the 3D-printing products vendor, said that although Yi Design reuses some ceramic waste to make their products, this may not be the sole solution to the ceramic waste problem. "But they have presented this problem to the public, making people aware of its existence, while also providing a solution," he said.

"People lack imagination when it comes to environmental problems such as the existence of ceramic waste piles the size of mountains outside factories, which few people know about," Yan added.

"But Yi Design's philosophy is changing my thoughts and behavior, as well as those of many other people, making us more respectful of and protective of the environment. I believe that more and more people will make their own changes for the environment in the future."

TOP NEWS

Ties at highest level, Putin says before visit

Two sides set to renew cooperation in key areas for economic growth, global stability

By CAO DESHENG
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President Xi Jinping will roll out the red carpet for Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday, as the latter is set to arrive in Beijing for a state visit to China amid high expectations that the two countries will renew their cooperation and coordination for economic growth and global stability.

Ahead of the two-day visit, Putin highlighted the sound development of Russia-China relations in a written interview with Xinhua News Agency, saying, "Russia-China relations have reached the highest level ever, and despite the difficult global situation, continue to get stronger."

The relationship "has always relied on the principles of equality and trust, mutual respect for the sovereignty and consideration of each other's interests," he said. Putin recalled his interactions with President Xi in the past decade or so, during which, they have met more than 40 times in various bilateral and multilateral settings.

"President Xi maintains a respectful, friendly, open and at the same time business-like style of communication. Our every meeting is not just a dialogue between old friends, which is important, too, just like for everyone, but also a fruitful exchange of views on the most topical issues on the bilateral and international agenda," he said.

The Russian president emphasized that Russia-China ties are free from the influence of either ideology or political trends. Their multidimensional development is an informed strategic choice based on the wide convergence of core national interests, profound mutual trust, strong public support and the

genuine friendship between the peoples of the two countries, he said.

In the past five years, trade between the two countries has doubled, he noted, saying that China has been Russia's largest trading partner for 13 consecutive years, and in 2023, Russia ranked fourth among China's trading partners.

"We are working to contribute to the development and prosperity of Russia and China by enhancing equal, mutually beneficial economic and humanitarian cooperation, and strengthen foreign policy coordination in the interests of building a just multipolar world order," he added.

Putin's visit, his first foreign trip since he was sworn in for a fifth term as Russian president on May 7, mirrors Xi's state visit to Russia in March 2023, when Xi chose Russia for his first visit to a foreign country after being elected as Chinese president at the first session of the 14th National People's Congress.

Putin's visit also comes against the backdrop of the protracted Ukraine crisis. During the interview, he said that Russia is seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means.

Putin commended China's proposals to resolve the crisis, and said that Beijing proposes practicable and constructive steps to achieve peace by refraining from pursuing vested interests and constant escalation of tensions, and minimizing the negative impact of the conflict on the global economy and the stability of global value chains.

"They could therefore lay the groundwork for a political and diplomatic process that would take into account Russia's security concerns and contribute to achieving a long-term and sustainable peace," he said. "Unfortunately, neither Ukraine nor its Western patrons support these initiatives."



Reduced to rubble

Bystanders watch rescue operations on Tuesday at the Mathare informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, where a building collapsed, trapping people inside. Four people had been rescued till reports last came in and search operations continued.

LUIS TATO / AFP

Beijing, Washington take steps to raise awareness on AI

By ZHANG YUNBI
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Analysts said Beijing and Washington have taken a step forward together in a responsible way to boost global awareness and concerted actions on artificial intelligence, as the first meeting of the China-United States intergovernmental dialogue on AI was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on Tuesday.

"The two sides had in-depth, professional and constructive exchange of views on AI science and technology risks, global governance, and other issues of concern," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

At the meeting, both sides acknowledged that the development of AI technology poses both opportunities and risks.

They also reaffirmed their continued commitment to the implementation of the important consensus reached by the two heads of state in San Francisco in November.

Co-chairs of the meeting were Yang Tao, director-general of the Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Seth Center, US State Department's acting special envoy

for critical and emerging technology and Tarun Chhabra, senior director for technology and national security at the White House National Security Council.

"The two sides shed light on their respective views on the risks of AI technology and governance initiatives, as well as measures taken to drive AI to empower economic and social development," the ministry said.

China said it wants to ensure AI technology is "helpful, safe and fair". During the meeting, China also made clear its position on the US side's restrictions and suppression of China in the field of AI.

Yang Mingjie, president of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said China-US cooperation on artificial intelligence is "of paramount importance" in terms of strategic implications.

He said both China and the US, to some extent, are forerunners in the AI sector. "What the meeting conveys is actually the responsible attitude of the two countries toward the next step in the development of AI."

"China and the United States, as major AI countries, have the respon-

sibility to jointly study and think about countermeasures in advance against the risks that may arise in the development of this technology," he said.

Yang pointed out that the current global science and technology community is facing the effects of AI and other new technologies that are like "a double-edged sword", and the disparity is widening among countries in the field of science and technology.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said China is working hard to shorten this gap and enable more countries to grab this opportunity.

"So when it comes to setting rules for AI governance, China underscores important multilateral organizations and tapping the due role of the United Nations to make sure the AI does not end up as a vehicle for some countries to realize their own selfish interests or to suppress, frustrate and encircle other nations," she added.

During Tuesday's meeting, Beijing expressed support for strengthening the global governance of AI

and emphasized the need for utilizing the role of the United Nations as the main channel for the purpose.

China said it is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with the international community, including Washington, to form the global AI governance framework and standards that enjoy broad consensus.

Yang, the CICIR president, said the efforts of developing countries to catch up with and even to overtake richer nations in science and technology may face "systematic crushing" by some leading nations. Yang warned that some nations leading in technology are introducing export control measures and building protectionist "walls" and their own "yards".

At the meeting, the Chinese side was also represented by officials from the Ministry of Science and Technology, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Cyberspace Administration of China and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

The US side was represented by officials from the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Department of Commerce.

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Red carpet look



Chinese actress Tong Liya poses on the red carpet on Tuesday during the opening ceremony of the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in France. The movie she stars in, *Black Dog*, is competing in the Un Certain Regard section of the festival. GAO JING / XINHUA

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Looking beyond the chorus of Chinese overcapacity

Before concluding her recent official visit to China, Treasury Secretary of the United States Janet Yellen's warning to the host not to hobble Western firms by flooding markets with cheap exports was indeed a rude shock that defied the general understanding of modern economics.

Yellen was virtually chiding state actors in the US and Europe— a Union who have been fretting about Beijing's over-investment in its "new triumvirate" of innovations — electric vehicles, solar photovoltaic panels and lithium-ion batteries — that are purportedly driving output levels beyond domestic demand.

This is now framed "the Chinese overcapacity" across the West while entire humanity is still in dire need for more varieties of new innovations deemed conducive to decarbonization.

Yellen was quick to justify her stance by cautioning the world against the potential recurrence of China Shock, referencing the "below-cost dumping" of Chinese steel at the turn of millennium that "flooded the global market and decimated industries across the world, including the United States".

In hindsight, she was playing Jekyll and Hyde for international optics. While the Chinese people were impressed by her unassuming persona while savoring local culinary delights among ordinary diners, little did they expect that hours later the same person would issue a prescient warning that was a harbinger of more sanctions by Washington in the face of so-called "Chinese overcapacity".

Prior to this, innuendoes that the inexpensive Chinese electric vehicle imports are benefiting from state subsidies had been abuzz, but so far remain unsubstantiated. While the European Commission's probe into the "state subsidy" allegations is still inconclusive, Yellen's prophecy of upcoming "China Shock 2.0" is, in itself, an impudent accusation of dumping.

WORLD WATCH

By Ong Tee Keat

Perhaps, Yellen's perception of China is still stuck in a time tunnel, turning a blind eye to the realities of Chinese technological advancement, and the huge domestic market that brings along the dividends of economies of scale that made the competitive pricing possible.

Before the international audience could recover from the bewilderment caused by Yellen's statement, The Wall Street Journal ran an opinion piece of similar argument in lockstep with Yellen's in its online bulletin after May Day.

It argues that "China has the ability to produce some 40 million vehicles a year, though it sells only around 22 million cars domestically. That has led to Tesla and others cutting prices in China, triggering fears in the US and Europe that Chinese automakers will flood other countries with unsold cars, and the question: Why does the country keep making more cars than it needs?"

This is certainly not a question raised out of naivety, but more of a question that defies the conventional norms of international trade. Under the lens of market economy espoused by the West, labeling exports of surplus products as "overcapacity" is an outright breach of the concept of division of labor, introduced by economist Adam Smith in 1776.

For centuries, nations have been exporting products in which they have a comparative advantage and importing those they have a comparative disadvantage in, thereby maximizing overall production and consumption efficiency through international trade.

This has long been the practice across established economies, but why now is China exclusively being discouraged, if not deterred, from ascending the value chain

when it endeavors to transition from conventional manufacturing to a more innovation-driven economy?

From the perspective of the US-led West, this is tantamount to mounting an unprecedented challenge to the West's technological hegemony. In its pushback, Washington and its allies' responses have indeed taken the world by surprise. Instead of picking up the self-perceived gauntlet with their confidence and technological prowess, they resorted to collective bid of suppressing the alleged overcapacity through either sanctions or punitive tariffs.

Put it plainly, this is no different from "goal post shifting" targeting China solely in the dynamics of global trade — a form of prejudicial discrimination likely predicated upon ideological differences.

As the affordable Chinese electric vehicles reach the West, the purported prodigious production capacity of China in the new triumvirate of technological innovations is now the new scapegoat for precipitating a downward spiral pricing of the products, thereby putting the relevant industries in the West at stake. Reading between the lines, the hidden message is conspicuously clear — its market competitiveness is in jeopardy in face of competition from Chinese products. To this end, the alleged "state subsidy" is nothing but a convenient justification framed to invoke global Pavlovian reflex against Chinese products.

Indeed, the nomenclature of overcapacity makes a perfect geopolitical lever deemed usable by the West in stifling the technological rise of China.

In reality, the fact remains that exporting 12 percent of Chinese-made electric vehicles is still relatively a new kid on the block, far lagging behind the 80 percent exports of German automotive products, followed by Japan's 50 percent and the US' 25 percent. Yet, "overcapacity" has never been an issue raised against these nations.

To mitigate the increasingly

pronounced climate crisis, global demand for clean energy and insatiable quest for green sustainable development is poised to remain robust. China, as a responsible international player, has every reason to beef up its own technological prowess and innovativeness to meet the mounting challenges. This is particularly relevant in view of the shaping of a hostile geopolitical environment against China by the West under the garb of de-risking from the so-called security threats.

Against the present global backdrop of Sino-US relations, Beijing is dubbed the systemic challenger and competitor to Washington in all respects, with or without the alleged overcapacity claim. Yet, Beijing has in response been reluctant to acknowledge Washington's framing of Sino-US relations, ostensibly seeking to avoid any outright collision with the unipolar superpower.

Over the years, the Sino-US economic relations have remained tense. China has been incessantly grappling with a seemingly endless chain of hostile and discriminatory actions by the US. The restrictive export controls imposed on cutting edge technologies and the threatening of decoupling and de-risking against China are concerted moves orchestrated by Washington. All converge to the ultimate goal of containing, encircling and subjugating China.

For China, it won't certainly come as a surprise if more rounds of Sino-US rivalry cloaked in the outfit of competition are coming up. In this context, perhaps the present overcapacity claim is just the beginning heralding a new wave of initiatives designed to stymie the rise of China as the US' anguish of holding its waning primacy intensifies.

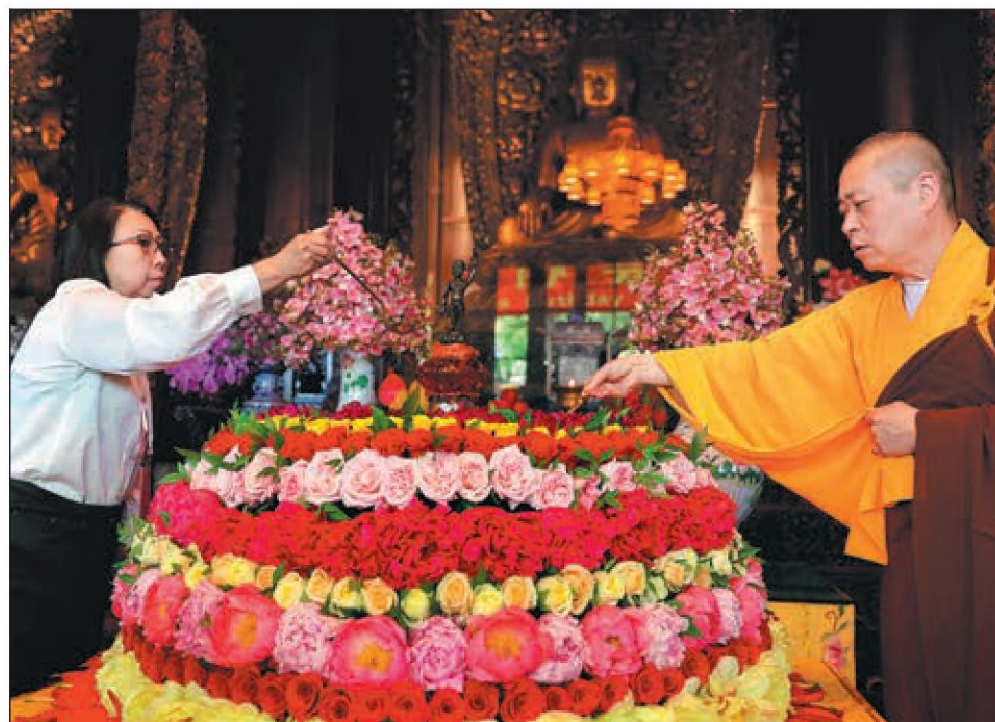
The author is president of the Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for the Asia-Pacific and former transport minister of Malaysia. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Birthday Buddha

Cambodia's Ambassador to China Soeung Rathchavy (left) and Buddhist Master Chang Shun participate in a ceremonial bathing of the Buddha during a celebration for Buddha's birthday held by the Buddhist Association of China at Guangji Temple in Beijing on Wednesday. The Buddha's Birthday is celebrated on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month. Nearly a hundred people, including Buddhist representatives and diplomats from countries including Cambodia, Nepal and South Korea, attended the event.

JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



Chongqing teachers offer help in school hallways

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

A group of senior high school teachers in Southwest China's Chongqing are volunteering their time behind desks in school hallways, where they tutor students ahead of next month's National College Entrance Examination.

"I feel more and more confident that my college dream is about to come true," said Luo Junhao, an 18-year-old student at Chongqing Fengdu Tongwen School in Chongqing's Fengdu county.

A talented athlete, Luo recently finished the final physical examination and is now focusing on literacy, which he is not very good at.

He said he doesn't feel embarrassed asking the teachers questions because the teachers' desks, neatly arranged along the hallway, are always lined with curious schoolmates who can interact with the teachers about any subject every day.

Luo said thanks to this face-to-face tutoring, his grades are gradually improving.

"The 'corridor tutoring' has been going on for three years," said the school's principal, Yuan Tianyong, who added that it was a spontaneous initiative organized by the teachers. "Their goal is to ensure that the students can digest knowledge points effectively and not leave questions unanswered overnight."

He said that whenever the teachers are free, or when they grade assignments or prepare lessons, they prefer to move their desks from their offices to the corridor to make themselves available to answer students' questions and provide guidance.

Fifty-seven teachers from the school's senior grade are assisting about 900 senior students who are set to take this year's National College Entrance Examination.

Last year's National College Entrance Examination, known as the *gaokao*, recorded a record high of 12.91 million students nationwide.

Yuan said the privately-operated school has a large number of students like Luo, whose junior high school entrance examination scores were below average. But through the efforts of the students and teachers, the number of students achieving the minimum required scores for the college entrance exam has been steadily increasing.

"The teachers' companionship helps the students relax as the big exam approaches," Yuan said.

To help the test-takers in the fierce exam, the school also provides free nutritious evening meals and fruit.

Contact the writers at dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

Survey seeks views on allowing pets to travel on high-speed trains

By LUO WANGSHU luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

A survey of people's opinions on allowing pets to ride on China's high-speed trains has ignited a lively discussion online, with some arguing it would greatly benefit pet owners and others raising concerns about hygiene and practicality.

Although pets are currently not allowed on high-speed trains, the railway operator has begun exploring the possibility of permitting small pets to travel under specific conditions.

The China Railway Customer Service Center recently launched a survey to gauge passengers' opinions on the issue. Passengers can scan a QR code on their seat and access the 12306 application, the official railway service platform, to answer 15 questions related to the topic of "Pet Travel on High-Speed Trains". The questions cover the necessity of pet transportation by high-speed train, the types of pets to be transported, the frequency and price of such services, protective measures and suggestions from people who do not own pets.

The survey has spawned a dedicated topic on the Sina Weibo

social media platform that had over 1 million views by Monday.

"In recent years, we have received numerous inquiries from passengers regarding the possibility of pet transportation on high-speed trains," the center said in a statement.

"Based on feedback from the survey, we will further delve into the feasibility of high-speed pet transportation. We welcome suggestions and opinions from the public."

Some netizens support the idea of allowing pets to ride on high-speed trains, citing the revenue potential and the convenience it would offer to pet owners.

A few years ago, a woman named Su faced challenges transporting her two cats from Jiangsu province to Beijing. She resorted to a carpool service, which cost 2,500 yuan (\$350) — more than four times the price of a second-class bullet train ticket. The road trip took around 13 hours, while the bullet train would have taken less than six.

Su struggled to find carpool service providers willing to accommodate her cats. She also explored other options, including air and road transport.

"Cats are sensitive creatures,

akin to little babies. I can't be at ease unless they are with me," Su said, expressing optimism about the survey while acknowledging the practical hurdles that remain.

A resident of Xiamen, Fujian province, surnamed Guo said they preferred driving with pets due to the many practical concerns — such as illness or accidents — during their transportation.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, pets are allowed on certain railway routes under specific conditions. In China, an updated regulation for passenger trains, implemented in July 2022, prohibits the carriage of live chickens and ducks.

Exceptions are made for some slower trains primarily serving less-developed regions.

With the continuous expansion of the railway network, rail travel has become increasingly popular in China. According to China State Railway Group, the national railway operator, there were 3.68 billion trips made last year.

As the demand for pet-friendly travel options grows and discussions around pet policies on high-speed trains persist, there is hope a balanced solution can be found that meets the needs of both pet owners and other passengers.

Shenyang to relax household registration

By WU YONG in Shenyang and ZHOU HUIYING

Shi Jianquan was excited to learn she will be able to apply for *hukou* — household registration — in Shenyang, the capital of Northeast China's Liaoning province, following a recent announcement by the city government that it will remove a number of requirements, making the process easier.

"My daughter will attend primary school in 2025," Shi said. "If I can get Shenyang *hukou*, she can come to Shenyang instead of staying with my parents in Jinzhou."

The 30-year-old insurance saleswoman and her husband arrived in Shenyang in June to seek a better life.

"There are more job opportunities and better pay in Shenyang, but I have to leave my daughter in Jinzhou to receive education," she said. "Now the new policy gives me the chance to live with my daughter, who can enjoy better educational resources."

To promote the development of Shenyang's population, the city government announced 10 measures on Friday that will come into effect in mid-June.

Shenyang will cancel the quota limit for the points-based household registration system, providing an open channel for those from regions outside the city to settle in Shenyang, the announcement said.

Those who rent properties or who obtain a Liaoning province residence permit in Shenyang can

apply for household registration.

Individuals working in Shenyang with employment agreements or related documents, as well as college students studying in Shenyang can also apply for household registration.

The policy also expands the scope of educational qualifications and family members eligible for household registration.

On the Chinese mainland, the *hukou* system identifies an individual as a permanent resident of a particular area and grants them related social benefits, such as access to education, healthcare and the purchase of property.

Shenyang's statistics bureau said the total permanent population of Shenyang at the end of last year was 9.204 million, an increase of 57,000 compared to the end of 2022.

In 2023, Liaoning saw a net population inflow of 86,000, reversing 11 consecutive years of net population outflow, according to a report by Xinhua News Agency.

"Population has increasingly become an important indicator affecting urban competitiveness, and population size has become the engine of urban development," said Wang Yan, a professor of economics at the Shenyang Academy of Governance. "The new policy can help attract the population to flow into Shenyang, which can give full play to the driving force of urban development."

"The expansion of the population can promote the continuous enhancement of urban consump-

tion, revitalize the local consumer market, such as the housing market, and thus stimulate economic development.

"Furthermore, it can increase the policy support for the revitalization of talent, which can better attract and retain talent in Shenyang, as well as enhance the competitiveness of urban talent and promote Shenyang's high-quality development."

Some provincial capitals and large cities in China have begun to relax their *hukou* policies this year.

On Saturday, the Nanjing public security bureau in Jiangsu province said non-local residents who have obtained legal property rights to housing in the city will be allowed to apply for household registration.

In Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, all limits on home purchases were canceled on May 9 and non-locals who own residential properties in the city became eligible to apply for permanent resident status.

In April, the city government in Dongguan, Guangdong province, relaxed household registration restrictions. Non-local residents employed in Dongguan who have been continuously participating in Dongguan social insurance through their employers and have held a Dongguan residence permit for at least a year can now apply for household registration.

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Rumormongers in Taiwan to face sanctions

Political commentators smearing the Chinese mainland will be punished

By ZHANG YI zhangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese mainland will take action against Taiwan political commentators who are spreading rumors to smear the mainland, Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, said on Wednesday.

In recent years, certain political commentators from the island have been fabricating and spreading rumors, including that mainland people cannot afford tea eggs, which often fueled netizens' antagonism on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Chen said that some commentators from Taiwan have disregarded the facts of mainland development and progress, deliberately fabricated false and negative information about the mainland and widely disseminated it through television, the internet, newspapers and other media outlets.

He singled out five Taiwan commentators, including Edward Huang, who mocked mainland residents for being unable to afford *zhacai* — pickled vegetables — a cheap and common food, and Wang Yi-chuan, who claimed there are no backrests on mainland high-speed trains.

"Their erroneous statements have misled some people in Taiwan, fueled hostility and opposition between both sides of the Strait, and harmed the feelings of compatriots," Chen said, adding that the mainland will take measures to sanction the five individuals and their families.

"Silence and indulgence toward evil are injustices and harm goodness," he said. "Public opinion is not beyond the law. Any act of fab-

ricating and spreading rumors, disrupting social order and harming the honor and interests of the country will be punished by the law."

When asked about its response to the fact many members of the island's incoming "government team" are pro-independence, the office said it will introduce legal measures to combat separatist activities seeking "independence" in Taiwan.

Chen said that advocating "independence" goes against the national interest, and stringent legal measures will be implemented to combat activities that seek to split the country or incite separatism.

Taiwan's incoming leader, Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party, will take office on Monday, replacing Tsai Ing-wen. He has previously identified himself as a pragmatic advocate for "Taiwan independence."

He recently nominated several officials who have displayed strong anti-mainland sentiments for various positions, including Wu Jau-shieh, the island's head of external affairs, as the head of the island's security council.

Chen said the new leader of the Taiwan region must seriously address the question of cross-Strait relations in his inauguration speech on Monday and make a clear choice between peaceful development or confrontation across the Taiwan Strait.

Recently, many pro-reunification parties and groups in Taiwan have joined forces with various sectors of society to launch a signature campaign for peace, urging Lai to declare his adherence to the one-China principle and recognize that the majority of Taiwan people want peace.

Popular pyramids



A tourist views pyramid-shaped hills in Anlong county, Guizhou province, on Tuesday. Several naturally formed hills that resemble the pyramids of Egypt in a suburb of Anlong have recently become a popular tourist attraction. LIU XU / XINHUA

Scientists draw map of macaque brain networks

A Chinese research team has drawn a network map of a macaque brain that will help explain the macroscopic organizational patterns of the human brain.

The map, created by researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Automation, divided the macaque brain into 304 distinct regions and quantitatively depicted the anatomical and functional connectivity patterns of each region.

Complex human behavior is driven by different functional networks in the brain — essentially collections of brain regions that communicate with one another through functional connections.

As macaques are highly similar

to humans in terms of genetics, physiology and brain structure, the species is an ideal model for the study of the mechanisms of human cognitive function and can be used in the simulation of human brain diseases, said Jiang Tianzi, a researcher at the institute.

The macaque brain map is important because it can be of use in the study of the human brain, Jiang said, adding that it will aid our understanding of brain function and advance important research fields such as translational medicine, cross-species comparison and the digital modeling of the brain.

XINHUA

Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.



From left: An inspector checks the quality of biodegradable paper bowls at a factory in Haikou, Hainan province, in 2022. The island province has banned all use of nonbiodegradable disposable plastics since 2020. SU BIKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY Workers manufacture biodegradable tableware at a factory in Jiande, Zhejiang province, in March. XU YU / XINHUA A worker processes paper cup lids and forks at a factory in Hefei, Anhui province, in 2020. ZHAO MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Public 'nudged' away from single-use cutlery

Food delivery industry using innovative techniques to move in more environmentally friendly direction

By LI MENGHAN
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At 10 pm on a Wednesday, Wu Xiu finally knocks off work and preorders his late dinner online to be delivered when he arrives at home later.

The 27-year-old programmer is one of many white-collar workers in Shanghai, and across many cities in China, that rely on online platforms for their daily meals.

Shortly after returning home, the doorbell rings heralding his hot meal for the evening — rice noodles.

Taking out his own set of stainless-steel chopsticks and a spoon from the drawer, Wu settles in with his iPad to eat while watching the costume detective drama, *Not Detective Di Renjie*.

Wu ensures that every time he orders he selects not to be given single-use cutlery. Despite this selection, disposable cutlery often comes along anyway to fill up his kitchen drawer.

China is the world's largest producer and consumer of single-use cutlery.

According to a report released by Gonyon.com, an industrial research institute, more than 120 billion sets of single-use cutlery were used and disposed of in China last year.

Despite growing environmental concerns and awareness about the impact and processing of single-use cutlery, its use in China has steadily risen over the past decade.

The problem exists on several fronts in the food delivery industry. Restaurants don't want to mistakenly not provide cutlery when it is required, fearing customer complaints. And customers often need to be encouraged to take action themselves.

As a result, food delivery platforms such as Eleme and Meituan have provided incentives for both customers and restaurants to reduce their use of single-use cutlery.

Eleme has teamed up with Alipay's popular Ant Forest Initiative to provide customers with a "green nudge," and prompt them to not select single-use cutlery on the platform in

exchange for virtual "green energy" — points used in the Ant Forest Initiative that can contribute toward trees being planted in the real world.

Ant Forest won the 2019 Champions of the Earth award from the United Nations Environment Programme for its efforts in promoting greener lifestyles, by inspiring users to reduce carbon emissions in their daily lives and better protect the environment.

"I think my personal tableware is healthier, cleaner and more environmentally friendly anyway," said Wu, who actively participates in the Ant Forest Initiative.

He has planted 16 trees in areas of Gansu province, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, and ranks third in his friend circle.

The secret to Ant Forest's "green nudge" to prompt people into taking green steps has been its gamification — making the initiative addictive and competitive among users.

Environmental threats

The rapid expansion of the country's takeout market, driven by the development of online payment technology and express delivery services, has contributed to a rise in the use of disposable products and waste accumulation.

A set of single-use cutlery typically includes a plastic fork, a plastic spoon, a pair of wooden chopsticks and a napkin.

"China is the world's largest producer and consumer of disposable tableware. The extensive use of such items not only depletes substantial resources but also generates nonbiodegradable solid waste pollution," said Zhou Kang, an assistant professor at the School of Economics at Zhejiang University.

Zhou said manufacturing single-use cutlery uses substantial quantities of petroleum and wood, and transportation-related vehicle emissions have exacerbated greenhouse gas emissions.

He added that the environmental consequences of waste disposal are particularly severe. Yet, the compact size of tableware has posed challenges to recycling, leading to landfill



Lin Zhanxi (second from right), founder of *juncao* technology that utilizes the cultivation of a particular type of grass (*Pennisetum giganteum*) to produce forage, biofuel and improve soil quality, introduces cutlery made from the grass to overseas students at Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University in Fuzhou, Fujian province, in March. LIN SHANGHUI / XINHUA

and incineration becoming the primary disposal methods.

"Given that they are petroleum-based products, their decomposition will yield micro-plastics, which subsequently contaminates water, threatens wildlife and compromises people's health," Zhou said.

However, Meng Qingjun, deputy secretary-general of the China Plastics Processing Industry Association, said that although the public is aware of the environmental consequences, plastic is irreplaceable in today's society.

"Regardless of environmental concerns, plastic is hygienic, waterproof, oil-resistant, convenient and cost-effective. It's the most economical material. In certain fields, the use of plastics is the natural and exclusive choice," Meng said.

"The majority of single-use plastic tableware producers are small and micro-enterprises, prioritizing small profit margins and rapid turnover,

which leaves them with little incentive or impetus to develop more environmentally friendly alternatives."

Concerted efforts

Back in the 1990s, the sight of vast quantities of disposable polystyrene boxes discarded next to train tracks raised awareness among the Chinese population about the severity of "white pollution," leading to the gradual implementation of measures to address plastic waste, Meng said.

In 2009, China outlined a national standard for biodegradable plastic tableware, mitigating the market confusion resulting from the indiscriminate promotion of nonbiodegradable plastic tableware.

In 2020, the Ministry of Commerce proposed a 30-percent reduction in the consumption of single-use cutlery in the food delivery industry in cities at or above the prefectural level by 2025.

It is unclear whether this target will be met.

The country's inaugural national standard for eco-friendly food delivery — the Green Takeout Management Criteria — was launched last year, allocating financial incentives for using safe materials and packaging, and encouraging restaurants to guide their customers to not use single-use cutlery.

Some restaurants have embraced their social responsibility in this matter by allowing customers to opt-out of having single-use cutlery supplied with their meals.

In 2017, Meituan unveiled its Blue Mountain Plan, marking the first-ever dedicated environmental initiative solely aimed at the food delivery industry in China. This involves the platform providing incentives for restaurants to improve their packaging so that they are more environmentally friendly.

In the same year, Eleme added the

"no tableware" option to its checkout interface. It later upgraded it into a default option to cater to differing local regulations, some of which have already banned restaurants from using single-use cutlery unless explicitly requested.

Combined, these "green nudges" could have a considerable impact on environmental outcomes, according to a study in the journal *Science* published last year.

The study, conducted by a group of experts from the University of Hong Kong, Peking University, the Asian Development Bank and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, predicted that if such green nudges are implemented nationwide, they could save more than 21.75 billion sets of single-use cutlery annually, reduce 3.26 million metric tons of plastic waste and save 5.44 million trees, without affecting the revenue of restaurants and food delivery platforms.

Long-term solutions

"While these green nudges exert influence on people's consumption behaviors, the longevity of their influence is worth pondering," said Zhou from Zhejiang University, adding that constantly updated interference measures may be a solution to bring about widespread change.

Zhang Deyuan from the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said, "A sustainable mechanism should be established to reduce the consumption of disposable tableware and improve end-of-life recycling."

This involves diversifying the means of green nudges to ensure continued adoption of environmentally friendly behaviors, reducing the use of composite materials in production to decrease the difficulty and costs of disposal, and setting up a dedicated recycling fund for takeout packaging to address the issue of limited economic efficiency in recycling, Zhang said.

"Collaborative endeavors from producers, restaurateurs, platforms and consumers are essential to tackling this issue, with the need for exploration and discovery of effective solutions still ahead," he said.

Green grocery store gains dedicated customer base

By LI MENGHAN

At a quaint, independent grocery store in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, the beans are stored in large transparent acrylic jars with release valves at the bottom. Vegetables are placed in bamboo baskets free from plastic packaging, and seasonings like cooking wine and soy sauce are kept in half-meter-tall ceramic jars.

This community shop, located in Xihu district, is an attempt by Qiu Li, an ecology teacher from Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, to instill greater environmental awareness in the local community.

She opened her shop three years ago, naming it Chongmingdao, which means an island resonant with the sounds of bugs.

"While bugs are categorized into beneficial and harmful insects, they exhibit the highest diversity of types, each holding inherent value and significance

within nature," she said.

Years of engagement in environmental protection has taught Qiu, 47, that "while everyone knows the importance of environmental protection, ingraining the concept of sustainability into their daily behaviors remains a significant challenge."

Qiu said even though most public facilities such as supermarkets and shopping malls have implemented a ban on providing free plastic bags, the low cost and easy availability of them have hindered the ban from having a greater impact on a larger number of people.

Her original motivation in opening her shop was to address issues of over-packaging and single-use plastics.

She said prolonged exposure to eco-friendly principles and associated practices can be instrumental in shaping people's consciousness.

Qiu's environmental awakening began when she was at university,

after she took part in volunteer activities involving Yangtze River conservation, the preservation of the Hainan gibbon and Tibetan antelope protection. As a result, she switched her major from chemistry to ecology.

When the shop first opened, sales were extremely low. "The items were priced higher because of the absence of pesticides and ripening agents," Qiu said.

The unfamiliar shopping approach also caused many queries.

"Many customers came to the shop, pointed to a jar of whatever and asked if there were smaller packages available," she said, adding that she told each of them patiently that they could use their own bottles or borrow clean but used bottles from the shop and take as much or as little as they want. With the growing presence of the store and its monthly environmental events, an increasing number of residents in the district began

adopting a more sustainable approach to their shopping.

"Although this is a business venture, I prefer to see it as a platform for social responsibility," Qiu said. "The total monthly revenue now totals around 30,000 yuan (\$4,150), merely breaking even."

She added that about four-fifths of sales come from in-person channels, highlighting a more robust promotion of environmental consciousness in offline activities. This is the reason why she has maintained her brick-and-mortar operations despite the significantly higher costs involved.

She is proud to have gradually cultivated a dedicated customer base of her own.

One converted customer is a retired woman from a mining area in Shanxi province who, due to respiratory and lung health concerns, regularly consumed health supplements. Upon Qiu's guidance, the woman reduced her intake of supplements and transi-



A customer browses jars containing green groceries at Chongmingdao shop in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tioned to organic products.

After six months, her medical tests revealed significant improvements in all conditions, especially cirrhosis. The woman is now a regular at Qiu's shop.

In addition, some individuals bring cardboard boxes to the shop for centralized recycling or tempo-

rary use by customers who forget to bring their own bags. There are also people who upcycle old sweat-shirts into fashionable bags to take the items they buy.

"It takes time to change people's thoughts. No matter how little the efforts are, they are meaningful," she said.

WORLDUS

Mini Best in Show



Media gather as Kaz Hosaka, handler of the Westminster Kennel Club dog show's Best in Show winner Sage, a miniature poodle, is interviewed at Bar Boulud New York City on Wednesday. ANDREW KELLY / REUTERS

Importers voice tariff concerns

Question effect new round of duties will have on consumers, supply chains

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The Biden administration's new and continuing tariffs on China are opposed by some US industry groups, which fear they could raise already high prices for American consumers and hamper supply chains.

"Tariffs are regressive taxes that are paid by US importers and US manufacturers and ultimately passed along to US consumers," said Steve Lamar, president and CEO of the American Apparel & Footwear Association, in a statement. "At a time when hardworking American families are struggling with inflation, continued tariffs on consumer necessities are entirely unwelcome."

The fresh levies announced Tuesday are on \$18 billion worth of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles, lithium batteries, photovoltaic cells, critical minerals, semiconductors, steel and aluminum products.

The latest tariffs were the result of a 193-page, four-year review of Section 301 tariffs, released by the Office of the United States Trade Representative on Tuesday. Section 301 is part of the US Trade Act of 1974.

The duties are in addition to those on more than \$300 billion worth of Chinese goods imposed during the Trump administration.

"Over the last five years, US businesses and consumers have paid

more than \$215 billion in higher tariffs for a failed experiment in trade policy," said Blake Harden, vice-president of international trade for the Retail Industry Leaders Association, in a statement.

"Leading retailers have worked hard to bolster their supply chains to be more agile and resilient in the face of uncertain economic conditions, and shield customers from feeling the impact of these high tariffs; but after carrying the weight of Section 301 tariffs for over five years, one thing is abundantly clear: tariffs are taxes ultimately paid by American businesses and consumers — not China," he said.

"Broad-based tariffs are not strategic and will impede US economic growth — ultimately hamstringing American businesses trying to compete globally and negatively impacting the paycheck of American workers," Harden said.

The tariffs are "unfortunate for American consumers, who are still feeling the pain of inflation eating into their annual household earnings," said Yael Ossowski, deputy director of the Consumer Choice Center, a non-partisan advocacy group, to The Washington Times. "This is going to add price inflation across the board all in the name of 'tough guy' election-year politics."

The US Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics announced on Wednesday that the consumer price index increased 3.4 percent in April year-over-year, after rising 3.5 percent in March.

Ryan Hass at the Brookings Institution wrote last month that the trade war with China "came at a heavy cost to the American economy, with job losses, and a regressive tax on consumers from higher

Tariffs are regressive taxes that are paid by US importers and US manufacturers and ultimately passed along to US consumers."

Steve Lamar, president and CEO of the American Apparel & Footwear Association

import costs.

At a briefing at the Chinese embassy in Washington on Tuesday, spokesperson Liu Pengju said that the new tariffs will significantly drive up the cost of imported goods and inflict more losses on American companies and consumers.

He said that the World Trade Organization (WTO) "has drawn a clear conclusion that the Section 301 tariffs violate WTO rules and international law".

"As one of the founders of the WTO, the United States has not only failed to be a role model in complying with WTO rules, but taken the lead in breaching them," he added. "By so doing, the US can hardly embody the 'fair competition' it champions, nor can it keep its credibility in the international community," Liu said.

US Senator Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, expressed concern Tuesday over the tariffs' impact on his Midwestern farming state, which is an exporter of agricultural products.

"I'm for free trade, because Iowa

manufactures and does services, and does agriculture way beyond what we consume domestically, and we must be exporting," Grassley told AgriTalk, a radio show and podcast. "I think that this is going to invite retaliation by China, and it's possible retaliation could be (against) agriculture," he said.

A 2021 working paper, "Trade Protectionism and US Manufacturing Employment" by Chunding Li, Jing Wang and John Whalley found that protectionist measures reduce jobs in manufacturing.

The economists' models showed that in a scenario of unilateral US action against Chinese imports, tariff rates of 30 percent, 45 percent and 60 percent would reduce American manufacturing employment by 1.3 percent, 1.8 percent and 2.15 percent, respectively.

In a bilateral trade standoff scenario with China, tariffs of 30 percent, 45 percent and 60 percent would reduce US manufacturing jobs by 2.6 percent, 3.3 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively. That would translate into between approximately 300,000 to 850,000 jobs lost, the economists found.

"This suggests that the US wanting to save manufacturing employment through trade protection measures may be unachievable," the paper concluded.

"Most economists view tariffs as a bad idea because they prevent a country from reaping the benefits of specialization, disrupt the movement of goods and services, and lead to a misallocation of resources," wrote Ryan Sweet, chief US economist at Oxford Economics, CNN reported.

Agencies contributed to this story.

The German auto industry has higher export figures. We export three out of four cars produced," she said, adding that German carmakers are happy to join the highly competitive Chinese market where three out of every 10 cars worldwide are sold.

Constant investment

Chinese new energy vehicles stand out in the global market and have seen export increases because of constant investment in research and development, comprehensive supply chains and rich human resources.

The recent so-called narrative of overcapacity on Chinese new energy vehicles is "questionable" as "the Chinese numbers do not speak for it," Mueller said, adding that fair competition globally should be welcomed and is good for all.

Last week, a BMW i5 electric car rolled off the assembly line in Shenyang, Liaoning province, marking the 6 millionth car

produced by BMW's joint venture in China since the German carmaker entered the Chinese market 30 years ago.

Volkswagen has also announced the establishment of its largest R&D center outside the German headquarters in Hefei, Anhui province, to focus on intelligent connected vehicles.

Mueller regards the automotive cooperation between China and Germany in green transformation and intelligent connectivity as vitally important, and encourages the two parties to continue to be crucial partners in achieving global climate goals.

"I believe that the two markets should be closely linked," she said, expressing her welcome for Chinese companies coming to Germany. And German carmakers have shown interest in not only exporting but also producing in China, she said.

XINHUA

Chinese display makers shine at global show

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Chinese display manufacturers are making significant strides in the global market, showcasing their commitment to cutting-edge technology and sustainability at a leading industry exhibition.

This year's Display Week, organized by the Society for Information Display in San Jose, California, saw a strong presence from Chinese companies, eager to unveil their latest advancements and expand their international reach.

Chinese companies are now at the forefront of innovation in the global semiconductor display industry, and the driving force is innovation."

BOE Chairman Chen Yanshun

BOE, a Chinese display panel manufacturer and a global leader in the semiconductor display industry, took center stage with more than 50 new products and innovative technologies.

Among the highlights were a 110-inch 16K glasses-free 3D display, which the company billed as the first of its kind in the world. Another innovation combined AI with display technology, reducing power consumption of OLED (organic light-emitting diode) displays by more than 20 percent while enhancing image quality.

BOE also unveiled its first electric flexible cockpit product, comprising a 17-inch central display with a curvature gradient on the driver's side and a 15.05-inch electric foldable screen in the front passenger area.

Sustainability was a key theme for BOE, with a dedicated "green and low-carbon" zone showcasing eco-friendly products like power-efficient laptops, monitors and smartphones.

BOE Chairman Chen Yanshun attributed the company's success and the overall progress of the Chinese display industry to an unwavering commitment to globalization and continuous innovation.

"The semiconductor display industry is a globalized one, with BOE, a company with 30 years of experience in the industry, as an example," Chen told China Daily. He highlighted BOE's global presence, with nearly 60 percent of its market share coming from overseas and seven of its top 10 customers being overseas clients.

The company has 20 subsidiaries and nearly 90,000 employees worldwide, with branches in North and South America, Asia and Europe, and manufacturing bases in Mexico and Vietnam.

Other Chinese display companies echoed BOE's sentiment.

Tianma, a Shenzhen-based display panel maker, reported positive feedback at the exhibition.

At the company's booth, the marketing director, Feng Xiuzhen, was busy introducing their new products to visitors. "We have participated in the exhibition every year,"

Feng told China Daily. "Our primary goal at the exhibition is not to sell our products, but to showcase our technologies and gain insights into customer needs to further expand our global presence."

The global display industry is booming, with a projected market size of \$314.8 billion by 2032, according to a report by Precedence Research. The growth presents opportunities for Chinese companies, both established players and innovative startups.

SeekInk, an e-paper company in Jiangxi province, is riding the "green" wave, capitalizing on the demand for

innovative and environmentally conscious display solutions. It is the first time the company has attended Display Week.

"Our energy-efficient and cost-effective e-paper displays cater to diverse applications, from retail price tags to educational tools and healthcare signage," said Erika Xiao, senior business development manager at SeekInk.

She said the company's products have received a positive reception in Europe and expressed her optimism about the US market, highlighting the potential savings in human labor and energy consumption associated with e-paper technology.

This confidence in Chinese technological prowess is shared by Sun Mingming, regional director of overseas business development for EverFine Corp, a Hangzhou-based company specializing in near-eye display evaluation solutions.

Sun acknowledged China's initial gap in display technology but proudly emphasized the country's rapid progress in catching up and offering competitive solutions at lower costs.

"Chinese companies are now at the forefront of innovation in the global semiconductor display industry, and the driving force is innovation," said BOE's Chen, adding that the company has invested a total of 12.6 billion yuan (about \$1.7 billion) in research and development over the past years.

The commitment to innovation has translated into dominance in the LCD market, with China accounting for two-thirds of global production capacity and more than 60 percent of global shipments, according to Chen.

Chinese companies also are making significant headway in the OLED field. BOE, for example, has experienced rapid growth in just three years, capturing nearly 20 percent of the global market share in 2023, said Chen.

"Chinese companies are also making rapid progress in various new display technologies, such as 3D, light field display, quantum dot, and printing display," he said.



Visitors check BOE's 110-inch 16K glasses-free 3D display screen, which the company billed as the first of its kind in the world, at the Display Week 2024 exhibition, which runs until Friday in San Jose, California. LIA ZHU / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

New Singapore PM highlights neutral stance

Wong to embrace shifting global order, maintain 'hedge diplomacy': Experts

By PRIME SARMIENTO
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Singapore's newly installed Prime Minister Lawrence Wong is set to maintain the city-state's policy of "hedge diplomacy" and neutrality in international relations and focus on sustaining its development, analysts said.

Wong was sworn in as the country's fourth prime minister at the Istana, Singapore's presidential palace, on Wednesday. A member of the fourth generation of the ruling People's Action Party leadership, Wong is expected to continue the party's established policies.

Mustafa Izzuddin, a senior international affairs analyst at Solaris Strategies Singapore, said he expects Wong to continue Singapore's current diplomatic position.

When it comes to the United States and China, this means "not choosing sides in superpower rivalry while practicing hedge diplomacy" to ensure "maximum economic benefits" for Singapore, he said.

Mustafa added that Wong is "a neoclassical realist" and sees both the US and China as "important strategic partners."

Wong, as deputy prime minister and finance minister, said in a May 6 media interview that Singapore is neither pro-China nor pro-US.

"We are pro-Singapore," he said. Wong said the global order is shifting and that the US' "unipolar moment has ended yet it remains a preeminent power in a world that is transiting to a multipolar world."

James Chin, a professor of Asian Studies at the University of Tasmania in Australia, said that with Wong at the helm, Singapore will continue to "see itself as the interlocutor between China and the US."

Wong's ascent to the country's top post has happened at a "time of great crisis in the international arena", Chin said, adding Wong has to respond to the external challenges that Singapore is now facing, including conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, heated disputes over the South China Sea, and US-initiated competition with China.

Oh Ei Sun, a senior fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, said Singapore's stance is

representative of most member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — neutral and adherent to ASEAN centrality.

Prime minister Lee Hsien Loong will remain in Wong's cabinet as a senior minister, while Wong will continue to serve as finance minister. Wong appointed Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong as his deputy prime minister.

Rising costs

Analysts said while economic issues like the rising cost of living will remain a top concern for Singaporeans, Wong also needs to address the changing aspirations of the new generation of citizens.



The relatability of Wong to different segments of the population will be his greatest asset to ensuring that he garners a strong and healthy mandate from the people of Singapore in the next general election."

Mustafa Izzuddin, a senior international affairs analyst at Solaris Strategies Singapore

Singapore's economic success has made it one of the world's most prosperous societies but younger Singaporeans want more in life than material success. This is set to be a key factor in a general election that will be held by 2025.

Mustafa of Solaris said Wong can respond to shifting domestic concerns by adopting an "engaging and consultative style more attuned with a newer generation of voters."

"Given the unpredictability of ground sentiments, the relatability of Wong to different segments of the population will be his greatest asset to ensuring that he garners a strong and healthy mandate from the people of Singapore in the next general election," he said.



Palestinians gather to fill up their jerrycans with water from cisterns in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

Israel pushes deeper into Gaza's south

RAFAH — Israeli tanks pushed deeper into Rafah on Tuesday, reaching some residential areas of the southern Gaza border city where more than a million people had sought shelter, and its forces pounded the enclave's north in some of the fiercest attacks in months.

Clashes have rocked the densely crowded Rafah, but also flared again in northern and central Gaza months after troops and tanks first entered those areas.

Israel's international allies and aid groups have repeatedly warned against a ground incursion into Rafah, where many Palestinians fled and Israel said four Hamas battalions are holed up. Israel says it must root out the remaining fighters.

The White House said US national security adviser Jake Sullivan will visit Israel and Saudi Arabia this weekend. US President Joe Biden's administration declined to comment on a report by news site Axios that Israel agreed not to expand its Rafah operation significantly before Sullivan's visit.

A United States official who declined to be identified told Reuters that Israel promised not to make a major move in Rafah without advising Washington.

Israeli spokesman Daniel Hagari said in a briefing that Israeli forces had killed about 100 militant fighters, located 10 tunnel routes and found many weapons in Rafah since the start of the operation a week ago.

Fighting has intensified elsewhere across the Gaza Strip in recent days, including in the north, with the Israeli military returning to areas where it had claimed to have already dismantled Hamas. The clashes on Tuesday were the fiercest in months, residents and militant sources said.

Nearly 450,000 Palestinians have been displaced from Rafah since May 6, and about 100,000 from northern Gaza, United Nations agencies said.

That means about a quarter of Gaza's population of 2.4 million people have been displaced again in about one week.

UN chief Antonio Guterres is "appalled" by Israel's escalating military activity in and around Rafah, a spokesman said on Tuesday.

Much of Gaza's population is on the brink of famine, the UN said, and desperate for fuel and other essential supplies such as medicine. Relief organizations, the UN

and major powers such as the US have urged Israel to facilitate a massive influx of aid.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on Tuesday that Egypt must be "persuaded" to reopen the Rafah border crossing to "allow the continued delivery of international humanitarian aid" into Gaza.

His comment prompted an angry response from Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, who said in a statement that Israel's seizure of the Rafah crossing and its military operations in the area were the main obstacles to aid entering Gaza.

Israel told merchants in Gaza to retrieve commercial goods that had been stuck at the Kerem Shalom border crossing in Israel since Hamas' Oct 7 attack, residents and Palestinian media said.

On Tuesday, Israel marked Independence Day, commemorating the state's creation in 1948.

Palestinians remember Israel's establishment as the "Nakba", or catastrophe, when around 760,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes during the conflict that led to Israel's creation.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Symbol of siege

Students dismissed from school walk past a makeshift barricade built using a burnt-out vehicle and topped with tires in the Canape Vert area of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Tuesday. The capital city has been under siege for months, with reports suggesting about 200 gangs have seized control of more than 80 percent of the city.

RAMON ESPINOSA / AP

Language skills bridge ties with Kenya

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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Hillary Makokha from Moi University, in Kenya, had never had a chance to practice his public speaking skills until he enrolled in Chinese classes at the university two years ago. The second-year student in information science said he only enrolled for classes at the Confucius Institute out of curiosity but admits he is glad he has acquired extra skills.

Makokha was part of 20 final

contestants from six colleges in Kenya that participated in the 23rd Chinese Bridge-Chinese Proficiency Competition for College Students, held at the University of Nairobi on Tuesday. Like other contestants, Makokha showed his mastery of Chinese by making a three-minute speech in the language and completing a China national knowledge test. The participants also showcased their talents and understanding of Chinese culture in areas such as folk songs and

dances, operas and martial arts.

Makokha who received an award for his performance at the competition, said learning Chinese has not only given him a foreign language skill, but also has given him the opportunity to appreciate the rich Chinese culture, as well as satisfying his curiosity for a mysterious yet rapidly developing country.

According to Stephen Kiama, the vice-chancellor at the University of Nairobi, this year's competition has grown to include 200 students who

participated at the college level before the 20 finalists were selected. He added that the number of colleges taking part in the competition has increased after it opened up to non-Confucius institutes last year.

Wang Shanguo, director of the Confucius Institute, University of Nairobi, said the inclusion of non-Confucius institutes in the competition was necessitated by the improvement of Chinese language skills among Kenyan students in recent years and that is why, since last year, the contest has been opened to all colleges, which offer Chinese language courses in Kenya. "This shows intensifying Chinese

language education in Kenya, and the number of college students studying Chinese has been increasing with an increasing number of schools in Kenya opening Chinese language courses," Wang said.

"The contest has been an incentive for overseas students to study Chinese, and has played an important role in promoting Chinese language learning in Kenya," she said.

Zhang Zhizhong, minister counselor at the Chinese embassy in Kenya, speaking at the opening ceremony of the contests, encouraged the students to take advantage of opportunities presented by learning the Chinese language.

US says Boeing breached 2021 agreement

WASHINGTON — The US Justice Department said on Tuesday that Boeing had breached its obligations in a 2021 agreement that shielded the plane maker from criminal prosecution over fatal 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019 that killed 346 people.

The Justice Department said in a court filing in Texas that the US company had failed to "design, implement, and enforce a compliance and ethics program to prevent and detect violations of the US fraud laws throughout its operations."

Justice Department officials made the finding in the wake of a separate

January in-flight blowout that exposed continuing safety and quality issues at Boeing. A panel blew off a new Boeing 737 MAX 9 jet during a Jan 5 Alaska Airlines flight, just two days before the 2021 agreement shielding Boeing from prosecution over the previous crashes expired.

The determination exposes Boeing to a potential criminal prosecution over the 2018 and 2019 crashes that could carry steep financial penalties and tougher oversight, deepening a corporate crisis and reputational damage stemming from the January blowout.

While Boeing is now subject to

prosecution as a result of breaching the 2021 agreement, the Justice Department said in the court filing, that officials will consider steps the plane maker has taken to address and remediate violation of the pact before determining how to proceed.

The Justice Department directed Boeing to respond by June 13 and intends to decide whether to prosecute Boeing by July 7.

Boeing confirmed it had received word from the Justice Department of its determination that the company breached the 2021 deal.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Fatal crash



A bus is removed after it collided with a pickup truck, killing eight of the more than 50 migrant workers in the bus, on Tuesday, in Ocala, in the US state of Florida. Truck driver Bryan Maclean Howard was charged with eight counts of driving under the influence manslaughter. ALAN YOUNGBLOOD / AP

SE Asia urged to speed up clean energy transition

By PRIME SARMIENTO
in Hong Kong

Southeast Asian countries will need to accelerate their transition to clean energy to limit their dependence on imported fuel and rein in inflationary pressures, analysts said.

Geopolitical tensions such as the Ukraine crisis and the Middle East crisis have disrupted the supply of fossil fuels and caused a spike in prices in the past few months. This has raised consumer prices among net oil and gas importers like the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN imports at least 50 percent of its crude oil requirements from the Middle East.

Putra Adhiguna, the Jakarta-based managing director of the independent think tank Energy Shift Institute, said the geopolitical tensions that are rattling oil prices are "just another reminder" for ASEAN to speed up its shift to renewable energy.

The World Bank said if the conflict in the Middle East were to escalate, benchmark Brent crude oil prices could rise to more than \$100 per barrel. Brent crude futures are trading this week at more than \$80 per barrel.



In recent months, we have geopolitical concerns which are potentially impacting upon oil markets."

David Broadstock, a senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore

"In recent months, we have geopolitical concerns which are potentially impacting upon oil markets," said David Broadstock, a senior research fellow and energy transition research lead with the Sustainable and Green Finance Institute at the National University of Singapore. This is why ASEAN "just fundamentally needs to move away" from its dependence on fossil fuel, said Broadstock.

He said regional cooperation initiatives, such as the Singapore-Indonesia solar power export deal, are also crucial in financing the shift to renewables. By partnering with each other, Broadstock said ASEAN economies can unlock investment opportunities which may not be possible if done individually.

Rachmat Kaimuddin, Indonesia's deputy coordinating minister of marine affairs and investments in infrastructure and transportation, said the Indonesian government has recently given conditional approval to five local companies to export solar power to Singapore.

Rabby Tumiwa, executive director of the Institute for Essential Services Reform think tank in Jakarta, said solar power exports will not only bring in revenues but also help Indonesia reduce its reliance on coal power and fulfill its climate commitments.

"For Indonesia, there is no choice other than decarbonizing," Tumiwa said. He said the local demand for solar power is increasing and that Indonesia can potentially export solar power to other ASEAN countries as well.

Apart from Indonesia, Singapore is also planning to import low-carbon energy from Cambodia and Vietnam. The city-state is currently importing hydropower from Laos via Malaysia and Thailand.

Singapore mainly relies on imported renewable energy as its limited land space prevents it from generating its own clean energy and meeting its goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

According to Adhiguna of Energy Shift Institute, Singapore can promote regional cooperation in renewable energy because it has the financial resources to import clean energy and it is one of the few countries in Asia that has "priced" carbon emissions by imposing a carbon tax.

Other ASEAN countries are also boosting their renewable energy capacity to fulfill their commitment to the UN climate pact.

Leonardus Jegho in Jakarta contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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Huawei's operating system gaining clout

By MA SI
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Huawei Technologies Co announced on Wednesday that more than 800 million devices in China, including its own-branded products as well as devices from third-party companies, have now been equipped with its self-developed operating system HarmonyOS.

The progress showcases Huawei's ambitions to build a robust software ecosystem for hardware, despite the US government's prolonged restrictions on the Chinese tech heavyweight.

Yu Chengdong, chairman of Huawei's consumer business group, which includes smartphones, PCs and other internet of things devices, said 180 types of devices can now be upgraded to HarmonyOS 4.2, the latest version of its in-house operating system, encompassing smartphones, tablets and earphones.

In the automotive sector, Huawei said its new Aito M5, an SUV it developed in collaboration with Chinese automaker Seres, has garnered substantial consumer interest since its April 23 launch, with over 10,000 orders placed within the first 72 hours.

At an online product launch event held on Wednesday, Huawei also unveiled a string of new devices including laptops and tablets, featuring cutting-edge artificial intelligence functions.

The move comes as Huawei surpassed Apple to become the top vendor in the Chinese tablet market in the fourth quarter of 2023, for the first time since 2010, said market research company International Data Corp.

Huawei achieved a market share of 30.8 percent, an increase of 9.6 percentage points year-on-year, while Apple's share declined by 6.7 percentage points to 30.5 percent. Xiaomi, Honor and Lenovo followed in the rankings.

374 million units
phone production volume of China in the first quarter of this year

Gan Miao, senior research manager at IDC China, said the overall performance of China's tablet market in 2023 was within market expectations.

As the market transitions from a phase focused on cost-effectiveness, 2024 is expected to see mainstream brands place greater emphasis on user experience and sustainable development. Tech trends in the Chinese tablet industry are projected to focus on enhancing system software capabilities, leveraging AI-generated content technologies and launching more intelligent system-level integrated products, Gan said.

Meanwhile, after 13 quarters, Huawei returned to the top position in the Chinese smartphone market in the January-March period, capturing a 17 percent market share, driven by the success of its Mate and Nova series, said market research firm Canalys.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said: "It was through arduous efforts that Huawei managed to revive its consumer-oriented business, which was once crippled by the US government's restrictions. Huawei's comeback in the smartphone market coincides with good timing, as AI smartphones are expected to trigger a new round of growth."

According to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China's top industry regulator, phone production volume in the country reached 374 million units in the first quarter, representing a 13.6 percent year-on-year increase and showcasing a steady recovery trend.



An employee works on a solar panel production line in Suqian, Jiangsu province.
CHEN SHAOHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Experts: US tariffs won't hurt too much

Play latest move, call it politically motivated with no link to business

By ZHONG NAN and LIU YUKUN

The United States' additional tariffs on certain Chinese products are unlikely to have a severe impact on the industries concerned in China, said analysts, noting the US move is motivated not by economic factors but by political purpose, designed to demonstrate a tough stance against China.

On top of existing tariffs under the Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974, the US government decided on Tuesday to impose additional tariffs on its imports of Chinese products like electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, solar cells, critical minerals, semiconductor, steel, aluminum, port cranes and personal protective equipment.

Starting this year, the US government will increase tariffs on imported Chinese EVs from 25 percent to 100 percent.

Additionally, the import tax on Chinese solar cells will rise from 25 percent to 50 percent. Tariffs on certain Chinese steel and aluminum imports will also see a significant hike from 7.5 percent to 25 percent.

After China's Ministry of Commerce vowed on Tuesday to take resolute measures to safeguard rights and interests of Chinese companies, market watchers said China has a number of options to respond to this move that might not necessarily target US vehicles but could affect other areas.

Currently, Chinese EVs have a small market share in the US, so the immediate effects of increasing tariffs would be relatively limited, said Dong Chao, head of the insti-

ture of circulation and consumption under the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

However, the rationale behind the US approach is that without intervention, the market share of Chinese EVs in the US would inevitably rise. Taking action after becoming dependent on the Chinese supply chain would entail greater costs, said Sun Lei, a senior partner at Beijing Dacheng Law Offices.

The pressure on Chinese companies to invest and build factories in other parts of the world will increase, accelerating their decision-making processes, said Sun.

Because the automotive supply chain is extensive, relocating car assembly lines and production to other countries could affect the entire supply chain, including steel, aluminum, engine technology and lithium batteries, he said.

"Take lithium batteries for another example. Many global EV brands rely on China's supply chain, from Tesla and Toyota to BMW and Mercedes-Benz. With the new US tariffs, the costs for these automakers' EVs are likely to increase, ultimately affecting consumers," said Ding Rijia, a professor specializing in energy economy at the China University of Mining and Technology in Beijing.

Highlighting that China's steel, aluminum and automobiles currently constitute only a small portion of the US supply chain, Ding said that rather than suppressing niche markets, the latest measures by the US government are more about curbing anticipated import growth.

Sharing similar views, Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University in Fujian province, said that the purpose of the US' additional tariffs on Chinese solar products is still to suppress the industry's development.

China's photovoltaic industry has a significant advantage in technology, prices and after-sales service, thanks to years of large-scale development and technological iterations.

"They are worried that China's PV industry will quickly dominate the global market, leaving limited growth space for them," said Lin.

"However, the direct impact of this move on China's PV industry is limited, as exports to the US are not significant. It may have a certain impact on market expectations though."

According to data from the China Photovoltaic Industry Association, solar modules export market had become more diversified last year. However, in the first 10 months of 2023, the top 10 export markets did not include the US, whose market share was lower than that of Germany's 2.6 percent at No 10.

Liu Yiyang, deputy secretary-general of the CPIA, said the US sees about 40 gigawatts of new installations of solar power facilities each year on average, which is less than 10 percent of the global market share.

Moreover, against the backdrop of global energy transition to the green mode, Chinese solar products have a strong price advantage, and global demand is still strong. The country's solar product exports are developing toward a diversified direction, said Liu.

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Broader AI application boosting biz growth

By FAN FEIFEI
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Fast-developing artificial intelligence technology has the potential to revolutionize various industries and provide strong support for sustainable business growth of major Chinese tech companies, industry experts said.

They added that enterprises can develop new business models, products and services that cater to rapidly changing market demand by leveraging generative AI technology, which is expected to speed up its integration with a wider range of fields and bolster transformation and upgrade of traditional industries.

Their comments came as Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group Holding Ltd reported on Tuesday that revenue from its cloud computing business rose 3 percent year-on-year to 25.6 billion yuan (\$3.5 billion) during the January-March period.

Its core public cloud products recorded double-digit growth in revenue, while AI-related revenue saw accelerated growth and continued to record triple-digit expansion year-on-year.

Wu Yongming, CEO of Alibaba Group, said in an earnings call with investors that this wave of generative AI-driven technological innovation is in the early stages of development and they have seen a rapid increase in customer demand for AI since the beginning of this year.

Alibaba is actively investing in its cloud computing products, especially in AI infrastructure, to capture monumental opportunities, and it will continue to focus on executing a user-first and AI-driven strategy, Wu said.

AI-related revenue was generated from various sectors including foundational model companies, internet firms as well as customers from industries such as financial services and automotive, Alibaba said.

"Going forward, a lot of the incremental growth we can expect to see in the cloud business will be related to investment that customers are making in AI," Wu added.

The company recently slashed prices for over 100 core public cloud products in the Chinese market. Over 90,000 enterprises have adopted Alibaba Cloud's AI-powered large language model Tongyi Qianwen since it debuted a year ago.

Tencent Holdings Ltd announced on Tuesday that its online advertising sales jumped 26 percent year-on-year to 26.5 billion yuan in the first quarter after it upgraded its advertising infrastructure and deployed AI to more precisely target advertisements on its instant messaging platform WeChat.

Jiang Han, a senior analyst at market consultancy Pangoal, said AI technology has made great contributions to the growth of Alibaba's cloud computing business.

"Alibaba Cloud can provide customers with more accurate and personalized services through the introduction of AI technology, which helps the company expand market share and drive business growth."

Jiang added that AI technology is playing a vital role in improving user experience by analyzing customer behaviors and interests and then offering tailor-made content and recommendations, so as to increase user engagement and retention rates.

The technology will also help companies optimize and adjust advertising strategies, and reduce the cost of advertising, thus improving their business performance, he said.

Global market research firm International Data Corp said the IT sector will feel the impact of AI more than any other industry, as every company races to introduce AI-enhanced products or services and to assist their customers with AI implementations. Moreover, Chinese companies respond faster to AI deployments compared to their foreign counterparts.



Yu Chengdong (left), chairman of Huawei's consumer business group, talks with the owner of a Huawei Aito M5 car on Wednesday in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Expo to boost trade in central region

The 13th Expo Central China will be held in Hunan province as part of efforts to facilitate trade and investment in the country's central region, the Ministry of Commerce said. The expo, scheduled to be held from May 31 to June 2, will feature more than 20 activities, including exhibitions, project matchmaking and investment promotion.

Beijing to promote clean energy NEVs

Beijing will vigorously promote clean energy consumption for new energy vehicles amid efforts to boost green development and foster sustainable and low-carbon lifestyles, the municipal development and reform commission said. It will actively support public institutions, enterprises, industrial parks, data centers and charging pile operators to purchase and use clean electricity for charging NEVs.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Brokerages' deal augurs well for capital market recast

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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Regulators' strengthened supervision will help China's capital market to mature toward its high-quality development, domain experts said on Wednesday after reviewing the latest market consolidation deal in the segment of securities brokerages.

They said higher requirements in terms of eligibility criteria for various market entities, and a tighter grip over financial intermediaries like securities brokerages, augur well for the future development of China's capital market.

Their comments emerged after Guolian Securities announced on Tuesday night it will acquire 100 percent of Minsheng Securities by issuing no more than 2 billion yuan (\$260 million) worth of its shares to retail investors in the secondary market. It will also make a private placement of no more than 250 million shares. Industry experts estimated that the deal value may exceed 32 billion yuan.

The deal confirms the trend of restructuring in the Chinese securities industry, which has been accelerating this year.

Guolian Securities, which suspended trading for 10 days prior to the latest announcement, saw its share price surge by the daily limit of 10 percent to 11.51 yuan shortly after it resumed trading on Wednesday. The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closed 0.82 percent lower.

Prior to this ongoing deal, Guolian Securities, based in Wuxi of East China's Jiangsu province, was considered a local securities firm with expertise in wealth management, asset securitization and derivative businesses. Shanghai-headquartered Minsheng Securities has an extensive branch network covering nearly 30 Chinese provincial-level regions and enjoys advantages in investment banking services.

Guolian Securities will seek to "leapfrog" in its development upon the acquisition, it said in its announcement.

On Friday, Hangzhou-based Zhesang Securities announced it is projected to acquire a 34.25 percent stake in Shenzhen-based Guodu Securities based on the recent transfer of shares from the latter's two other major shareholders. In a

business briefing held on March 29, Shi Hua, Founder Securities' chairman, said the brokerage has been advancing its merger with Ping An Securities.

Polaris Bay Group Co Ltd, the parent company of Hua Chuang Securities, announced in December it will take a controlling stake in Pacific Securities. It told its investors in late April that progress has been made under the regulator's guidance.

In a guideline released in April to strengthen supervision and advance the capital market's high-quality development, the State Council, China's cabinet, encouraged industry leaders to step up mergers and acquisitions and restructuring.

For its part, the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog, suggested in a guideline in March that leading securities brokerages should improve their competitiveness via M&A deals and restructuring, which will be conducive to the high-quality development of the entire securities industry.

This followed its note in Novem-

ber, which said that leading securities firms are encouraged to pursue business innovation, corporate operations, M&A deals and restructuring so that "they can grow into first-rate investment banks".

In a news conference during the annual two sessions in early March, Wu Qing, the CSRC's chairman, said the foundation of the Chinese capital market should be further consolidated while tightening supervision.

Different from traditional financial institutions, securities firms are armed with a toolbox that can serve the real economy more deeply, including bond financing and equity financing, said Wang Peng, deputy researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences.

The merger of securities firms can expand their business coverage and enrich their product portfolio. The brokerages can thus provide comprehensive and differentiated wealth management services to investors. In this sense, stronger brokerage firms can better link financing and investment, facilitating China's economic transformation, he said.

BUSINESS

Decathlon plans big expansion in China

French sporting goods retailer to set up innovative concept stores to attract consumers

By ZHONG NAN
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To ride the boom in China's sports market, Decathlon, a French sports equipment and sportswear manufacturer and retailer, plans to open 20 to 30 stores annually in China over the next two years, said its senior executives.

As Chinese consumers, especially the younger generation, have shown a growing passion for buying sports products, the Lille, France-headquartered group also plans to introduce a number of smaller and innovative concept stores, each around 1,000 square meters in size, in various Chinese cities in the coming years.

To further spread awareness of its brand, Decathlon launched several stores with a new brand identity in China as well as around the world this year, offering customers a new and immersive experience.

Barbara Coppola, CEO of Decathlon, said the China market plays a pivotal role in the company's development, and the group is committed to investing in the country.

Coppola noted that China's sports industry, with its significant growth, presents unparalleled opportunities for business expansion.

Government data showed that China's five-year (2021-25) extensive mass fitness program is helping the general public have improved access to physical fitness opportunities. Fitness facilities are fully available in counties, towns and villages. For communities, facilities are accessible within a 15-minute walk. Demand for such facilities is expected to rise further. The sports industry is expected to reach a valuation of 5 trillion yuan (\$690.84 billion) by 2025.

Currently, about 94 percent of Decathlon's products sold in China are made in the country. The retailer has plans to increase this to 100 percent soon.

"I am also impressed by the speed of digitization and its development in China, especially with innovative marketing methods such as TikTok (Douyin in China) and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book). During my visit to China, I discovered how our Chinese colleagues interact with consumers and sell products online," she said.

With this year marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Chi-

"I am also impressed by the speed of digitization and its development in China, especially with innovative marketing methods such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu ..."

Barbara Coppola, CEO of Decathlon

555.11 billion yuan

value of trade between China and France last year, according to Customs data

na and France, Coppola said that Decathlon has been developing in China for decades and the country is distinguished as a major global market with extensive capabilities, encompassing industrial, logistical, product design and retail strengths.

"I think Decathlon can be a unique link to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. We can not only share innovations but also build more win-win business partnerships," she said.

Trade between China and France was worth 555.11 billion yuan in 2023, up 3.1 percent year-on-year. China's imports from France were worth 262.42 billion yuan, surging

10.9 percent year-on-year, statistics from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Supported by more than 101,000 employees globally, Decathlon has built a market presence in 78 countries and regions. It currently runs four factories, 11 intelligent manufacturing and sourcing centers, three logistics parks and over 200 physical stores in more than 100 cities across China.

Committed to long-term development in China, the company sees new growth opportunities as the country has a fairly strong sporting atmosphere where football and cycling are well promoted, said Steve Dykes, Decathlon's chief retail officer.

"Decathlon, as a multi-specialist sports brand, has always encouraged people to become more involved in sports, which is in line with the philosophy of sports promoted in China," said Dykes, adding the company thinks that products like bicycles and outdoor sports equipment have great growth potential in the Chinese market.

Similar views were expressed by Jiang Yiyi, deputy dean of the sport, leisure and tourism school of Beijing Sport University. "The Paris Olympics (from July 26 to Aug 11) will boost interest in niche sports across China and spur the dynamic growth of trend-driven sportswear for categories that have not yet captured significant market share."

Jiang said the Paris Olympics is set to rekindle consumer enthusiasm for sports, being the first Olympics after the COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted, and noted that this resurgence is expected to invigorate the sporting goods market.



A Decathlon employee checks the condition of a bicycle at a store in Beijing on May 1. Decathlon plans to open 20 to 30 stores annually in China over the next two years. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Side by side



A drone image shows the construction site of a highway expansion project in Jingjiang, Jiangsu province, last week. Builders with China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp completed installation of box girders of a major bridge, a milestone in the expansion project of the Pingchao-Guangling section of the Shanghai-Xi'an Expressway, which aims to enhance coastal-inland links. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Solar exec debunks 'overcapacity' claims

By ZHENG XIN
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China's initiatives in advancing photovoltaic imports and exports, along with green technology transfers, have been instrumental in driving the transition toward a more environmentally friendly world, said a solar power company executive.

With persistent emphasis on technological innovation, China has fostered a robust and competitive solar power market, facilitating rapid growth of the new energy industry at home and abroad, said Li Xiande, chairman of JinkoSolar Holding Co Ltd, the world's largest solar panel producer by shipments.

The global new energy industry is currently experiencing a scarcity of high-quality production capacity, rather than "overcapacity", Li said in response to recent claims that China's new energy sector has overcapacity, causing global price distortions.

"The high-quality production capacity is never enough, while the low-quality production capacity is always in surplus," he said.

"With prices and sales of goods determined by global market forces in the era of economic globalization, the theory (of overcapacity) is unfounded with no substantial evidence."

Li added that China's success in green transition is partly due to continuous efforts in technological innovation. JinkoSolar, as a major photovoltaic firm in China as well as on the global stage, has also been stepping up investment in research and development to ensure a robust and competitive market environment for the rapid growth of the new energy sector. JinkoSolar announced in March

the launch of the first of its "Neo Green" modules to be produced with renewable energy. The N-type TOPCon Tiger Neo panels are produced at factories certified as "zero carbon", making it the first company in the industry with factories classified as such for ingot manufacturing, wafer cutting and cell and module manufacturing.

An analyst said China has been providing more choices to the global market and giving everyone equal opportunities to use green energy during the process of promoting the development of green energy worldwide.

"China's sufficient production capacity has helped other countries and regions around the world reduce their burden, in terms of production costs and technological development," said Ma Yinqiong, a senior analyst covering materials supply chains with global consultancy Rystad Energy.

While cost is the biggest bottleneck, especially for underdeveloped regions, China's raw material products have helped them reduce costs with faster green production capacity construction, she said.

The country's large-scale and standardized industrial technology has also helped developed countries and regions accelerate the process of greening, she added.

Li of JinkoSolar currently sees its cumulative shipments exceeding 250 gigawatts, with products sold in 190 countries. It has 12 production bases worldwide, three of which are overseas.

Operating on a global stage is crucial for JinkoSolar with its success hinging on globalization, as it allows for expanded market reach, diversified production bases and access to a broader talent pool, he said.

Globalization enables the scale and efficiency needed to lead in

technology, innovation and distribution, allowing industry leaders to tap into various markets, meet international demand and foster sustainable growth, making it indispensable for their operations and success, he said.

In response to the growing share of renewable energy capacity and the deployment of electric vehicles, JinkoSolar believes energy storage will be a leading technology for energy transition investments over the next three years.

It has been significantly ramping up its efforts in energy storage modalities, investing heavily in the development and deployment of advanced energy storage solutions to complement its robust photovoltaic portfolio.

According to the 2023 Reuters Events Energy Transition Insights report, energy storage is going to be a leading technology for energy transition investments in the coming three years.

Energy storage will become a priority technology during the 2024-26 period. While batteries currently dominate growth in the sector, several other promising alternatives will be deployed commercially in the coming years, it said.

By integrating energy storage with its solar technologies, JinkoSolar aims to optimize energy use and address the intermittency issues associated with solar power, making it a comprehensive provider of renewable energy solutions.

The company is exploring partnerships with leading technology firms and research institutions to drive innovation and efficiency in energy storage systems, including developing high-capacity batteries, improving storage efficiency and reducing costs, thus making energy storage more accessible and scalable.

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NATURE'S FORTUNE

Only through harmonious coexistence can we ensure a shared future filled with peace, prosperity and happiness. Let's share our joy with the world around us, the blossom on the trees, the birds, the bees, all creatures, great and small.

CHINADAILY
中国日报

BUSINESSFOCUS



The roll-off ceremony of the 6 millionth car produced by BMW Brilliance Automotive is held in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on May 8.

German carmakers upbeat on China market, green push

Vehicle production co-op between two nations has long history of success

SHENYANG — A BMW i5 electric car rolled off the assembly line on May 8 in Northeast China's Shenyang, capital of Liaoning province, marking the 6 millionth car produced by BMW Group's joint venture in China, BMW Brilliance Automotive.

This came just 15 months after the JV's 5 millionth car was produced.

About half a month ago, the German auto giant announced an additional investment of 20 billion yuan (\$2.8 billion) in its production base in Shenyang.

The investment will be used for upgrading as well as technological innovation at the Dadong plant of BBA, which is expected to lay the foundation for the localized manufacturing of BMW's new generation of models, known as Neue Klasse, in 2026.

Cementing their market, research and future endeavors in China, an increasing number of overseas-funded enterprises, such as BMW Group, are optimistic about the Chinese new energy vehicle sector, injecting continuous investments and seizing more opportunities in China.

Volkswagen Group has established its largest research and development center outside of Germany in China, focusing on the development of intelligent connected vehicles.

The success of overseas-funded enterprises in China is inseparable from the country's super-large-scale market. China's NEV market is far from saturated and will continue to maintain a faster and stronger growth momentum than Europe and the United States, said Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer, director of the Center Automotive Research Institute in Bochum, Germany.

In 2023, China's automobile production and sales had reached 30.2 million and 30.1 million vehicles, respectively, representing year-on-year increases of 11.6 percent and 12 percent. Among these, the production and sales of NEVs reached 9.6 million and 9.5 million units, respectively, up 35.8 percent and 37.9 percent year-on-year.

China's automobile market has ranked first globally in terms of both production and sales for 15 consecutive years, with the production and sales of NEVs ranking first globally for nine successive years. China also exported a record 4.9 million vehicles in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 57.9 percent.

Given these achievements, the Chinese market clearly shines brightly as a beacon of opportunity on the global stage.

In 2023, BMW managed to deliver over 375,000 electric vehicles worldwide, a year-on-year increase of 74.2

percent, including approximately 100,000 EVs delivered to China. Volkswagen Group delivered approximately 191,800 EVs to the Chinese market in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 23.2 percent.

Currently, China's manufacturing industry is accelerating its transformation and upgrading towards high-end, intelligent and green development, which is creating more development opportunities and attracting foreign investment in high-tech fields.

For many foreign automobile companies, China is not only the world's largest single market, but also an important source of innovation. For example, BMW Group has established its largest research and digitalization system outside of Germany in China.

Likewise, Mercedes-Benz has also made strides with innovation in China. In 2023, Mercedes-Benz's sales in China amounted to 765,000 vehicles, accounting for 29.6 percent of Mercedes-Benz's global sales, and once again making China Mercedes-Benz's largest regional market.

Notably, the first batch of Mercedes-Benz supercharging stations is already in use in China. As of now, Mercedes-Benz's public charging services cover more than 360 cities in the country.

The Chinese market will continue to grow and play a leading role in industry innovation, said Ola Kallén, chairman of the board of

management of Mercedes-Benz Group, who noted that China is not only the world's largest NEV market, but also its innovation center, featuring leading companies and a mature new energy industry supply chain.

The growth and rise of Chinese domestic car manufacturers means that competition in the automotive market continues to intensify. China's commitment to achieving carbon peaking before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060 also means that more and more overseas-funded carmakers in the country are focusing their attention on the fields of intelligent mobility and new energy vehicles.

Located in Changchun, capital of Jilin province, Audi FAW NEV Co Ltd is Audi's first production base in China dedicated to manufacturing EV models.

With an investment planned to exceed 30 billion yuan, the company is accelerating the construction of this NEV project, aiming for production by the end of 2024 and boasting an annual capacity of over 150,000 vehicles.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce showed that in the first quarter of 2024, the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises nationwide had reached 12,000, a year-on-year increase of 20.7 percent.

XINHUA

Country continues to be attractive for MNCs

BELJING — China is becoming even more attractive to foreign investors, as the latest figures from the Ministry of Commerce showed that the number of newly established foreign-invested firms in the country hit 12,000 in the first quarter of 2024, up 20.7 percent year-on-year.

The upbeat sentiment was also evidenced in the 2024 Kearney Foreign Direct Investment Confidence Index, where China jumped from seventh to third place, and retained top position among emerging markets.

What has attracted so many foreign investors, including multinational corporations, to pick China is the country's massive market, premium supply chains, top-class talent pool and sound growth prospects, which were what business executives and academics mentioned the most in recent interviews.

"No company can afford to survive if it does not sell in China," Khairy Tourk, a professor of economics at the Stuart School of Business at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, the United States, said in a recent interview.

For multinational firms, China's vast market represents tremendous opportunities and is essential for them to maintain global competitiveness.

"China has a large population and vast market space, and demand for diversified and high-end consumption is increasing day by day," said Frederico Freire Jardim, Asia president of US food giant Kraft Heinz.

Calling the Chinese market "hugely important," Ola Kaellenius, chairman of the board of management of Mercedes-Benz, said he saw great potential in the Chinese auto market, the world's biggest.

The German automaker is poised to bring into China a total of 15 new models, signaling intensified efforts to consolidate its presence in the increasingly competitive market.

XINHUA



Mercedes-Benz Group unveils its G-Class electric offroad vehicle at the 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition in Beijing in April. CAI YANG / XINHUA

From Shenzhen to Bremen, automotive cooperation takes new steps forward

SHENZHEN — A ro-ro ship under the name *BYD Explorer No 1*, the first of the new energy vehicle giant's "shipping fleet" — with another seven transport ships under construction — arrived at the port of Bremerhaven, Germany, in late February after setting sail from Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

More than 3,000 NEVs manufactured by the automaker were unloaded.

BYD Explorer No 1 is the epitome of the rapid development of China's auto industry and the continuous advancement of globalization in recent years, and also represents the advanced cooperation between China and Germany in automobiles.

For a long time, China has been the world's largest auto market for German auto companies such as Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz and BMW, as well as an important global production, research and development base. In recent years, Chinese cars have developed rapidly with electrification, constantly enriching global supply and expanding cooperation in the Sino-German auto sector.

On Aug 1, 2022, BYD announced a partnership with Hedin Mobility, a leading European dealership group, successfully introducing multiple



A sedan from Chinese carmaker BYD stands in front of car freighter *BYD Explorer No 1* that came to Bremen, Germany, from Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in February. LARS PENNING / AP

NEV models into Germany, marking a promising start to localized operations. As of now, BYD has established stores in 23 cities across Germany, where consumers can test drive and purchase vehicles in cities like Frankfurt, Hamburg and Cologne.

Furthermore, BYD has signed cooperation agreements with SIXT, a leading German car rental company, which will procure at least

100,000 NEVs from BYD in six years. Additionally, BYD inked a global strategic cooperation agreement with Shell to jointly enhance the charging experience for BYD's European users.

According to Motor1.com, an automobile news website in Europe, there was a major change in the European auto market in 2023 as a result of the rise of Chinese auto brands.

On the basis of 23 Chinese car brands, the year 2023 saw another seven new Chinese brands enter the European market. Chinese branded vehicles newly registered in Europe reached 322,000 last year, an increase of 79 percent year-on-year, and its market share reached a record 2.6 percent.

A BYD spokesperson said that the company's performance in the German market is steadily improving, receiving positive affirmation from local mainstream media regarding product innovation design, excellent driving performance, and the safety of battery technology — along with enthusiastic feedback from consumers.

The European market, including Germany, is nurturing the growth of the Chinese auto industry while the Chinese market continues to provide a critical platform for the globalization of the German auto sector. The bilateral cooperation between the two countries' automotive sectors has entered a new phase.

On April 11, Volkswagen Group said it would invest 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) to further expand the production and innovation center in Hefei, Anhui province, reinforcing its local R&D capabilities. It also

plans to manufacture two Volkswagen models co-developed with Xpeng Motors, with the first model being a mid-sized SUV scheduled for production in 2026.

BMW is confident in China's economic prospects and intends to scale up its investment in the country, said BMW Chairman Oliver Zipse in a statement.

For 30 years, BMW has been deeply rooted in China, benefiting from free trade and China's opening-up policy, Zipse said.

Over the past three years, BMW's R&D team in China has tripled in size, and now boasts over 3,000 staff in software development, autonomous driving, UI/UX design development, and participating in projects such as the BMW New Generation Models.

Mercedes-Benz Group Chairman of the Board of Management Ola Kaellenius also expressed his optimism toward China's continued pursuit of high-level opening-up and the potential of the Chinese market.

"We will continue to invest in China, strengthen cooperation with our Chinese partners, promote electrification as well as digital transformation, and continue to contribute to Germany-China economic and

trade cooperation," Kaellenius said.

Sino-German automotive industries have been increasingly complementing each other. Notably, two of the largest shareholders in the Mercedes-Benz Group are Beijing Automotive Group from China, and Li Shufu, chairman of Zhejiang Geely Holding Group. Geely is also the parent company of Swedish luxury automaker Volvo.

In addition, Volkswagen Group has been increasingly relying on large Chinese battery companies like Gotion High-Tech for battery development and manufacturing.

Fu Bingfeng, executive vice-president and secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, said that the automobile industry is a typical global industry. With the improvements in China's automobile production standards, Chinese vehicles, in the process of going global, have brought new technologies, low-carbon products, and unique concepts to international consumers. Concurrently, Chinese automakers establishing factories overseas and configuring supply chains have also contributed to the socioeconomic development of local communities.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Mutual trust provides firm bedrock for neighbors' friendly relationship

Sharing a border that stretches for more than 4,200 kilometers, it is natural that China and Russia should work hard to continually strengthen mutual trust and friendly and cooperative relations.

That this is patently desirable for both countries serves to show the extent to which the United States and some of its allies are going to portray the two countries' relationship through the distorting lens of outdated East-West Cold War division. A perspective that they have again been hyping up ahead of the Russian leader's visit to China on Thursday and Friday.

This will be President Vladimir Putin's second visit to China in less than a year. And it comes just over a week after he took office for a new presidential term, reflecting the close friendship between the two neighbors. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Putin will exchange views on bilateral relations with his Chinese counterpart, and discuss cooperation in various fields, as well as international and regional issues of mutual interest.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia. In recent years, their frequent contacts and cordial exchanges have built up a strong rapport between the two leaders, who have charted the course for the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era together.

Last year, bilateral trade achieved the goal of reaching \$240 billion, which epitomizes the immense

potential and strong momentum of their mutually beneficial cooperation. China-Russia relations, tested by the vicissitudes of times and forged through hardships and challenges, are in their best historical period and have great prospects as the two countries continue to tap the great potential of their cooperation.

The stable and ever-deepening China-Russia relations not only bring tangible benefits to the two countries, but also contribute to global development, through their coordination in platforms such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The development of China-Russia relations adheres to the concepts of permanent good-neighborly friendship, comprehensive strategic coordination, and mutually beneficial cooperation. The two countries have got rid of the zero-sum Cold War mentality of camp confrontation. They insist on non-alliance, non-confrontation and no targeting of third parties. Neither are their relations subject to any third party's influence.

As permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, they have always practiced true multilateralism, pursued universal benefits and win-win results in cooperation, promoted an equal and orderly multipolarity of the world, and jointly opened up a path of mutual trust, mutual benefit, win-win cooperation between major countries and neighboring countries. The new paradigm of exchanges has contributed the wisdom and strength of China-Russia ties to international fairness and justice, injecting positive energy into the international community.

Biden unwisely dons the mantle of 'tariff man'

When asked at a news conference in Stockholm on Tuesday whether they support the European Union following the United States in slapping punitive tariffs on Chinese electric cars, along with other high-tech and new energy products, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the visiting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave a clear answer — No.

"As far as tariffs are concerned, we are in agreement that it is a bad idea to dismantle global trade," Kristersson told reporters on the second day of Scholz's visit to Sweden.

Scholz noted that half of the EVs imported into Europe from China were produced by Western manufacturers, including US EV makers, hinting that considerable parts of the raised tariffs will be paid by Western companies and consumers.

Yet that has not deterred Biden who has done a full 180 on tariffs. Back in 2019, Biden slammed then US president Donald Trump's move to impose tariffs on \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports.

"Trump doesn't get the basics. He thinks his tariffs are being paid by China," Biden said at the time. "Any freshman econ student could tell you that the American people are paying his tariffs." Then in 2020, while campaigning for the White House, Biden vowed to remove Trump's tariffs if elected.

Now Biden has not only maintained most of the broad-based tariffs from the Trump-era that he was

once highly critical of, but also added to them. Touting it as a "smart approach" that precisely targets the products of a selected few industries in which he is "determined to ensure America leads the world."

His trade representative was left racking her brain to try and justify Biden's apparent reversal on the tariffs at a White House news conference on Tuesday.

That US Trade Representative Katherine Tai denied the aforementioned side effects of the China-related tariffs, which she once cited as reasons to press the Biden administration to reexamine and cancel the Trump tariffs, is a telling sign that the Biden administration has introduced the new tariffs for its own political gains.

The US National Retail Federation was more forthcoming, calling on Biden to repeal the tariffs, arguing that "as consumers continue to battle inflation, the last thing the administration should be doing is placing additional taxes on imported products that will be paid by US importers and eventually US consumers."

The reason why Biden has maintained the Trump tariffs and introduced new ones is because he cannot afford to show weakness on China-related issues ahead of the election. But his miscalculation on that is evident. Trump drew scorn in 2018, after declaring, "I am a tariff man." Biden now looks like one too, and he has thrown himself into a pit dug by Trump only to lift the latter out of it.

Commission's sly probes will not benefit EU

As the result of a European Commission probe being allowed by the Foreign Subsidies Regulation, two China-related companies have announced their withdrawal from the procurement procedure of a 110 megawatt solar park in Romania. The park is partially financed by the European Union.

It is the second time such an investigation has prompted a Chinese company's pullout from a tender. At the end of March, a Chinese company had to give up its bid to supply trains to Bulgaria.

The fact that other non-EU entities participating in the same bidding process in the Romanian solar park were not investigated suggests that the FSR is being used to target Chinese companies. Although the text of the FSR is not aimed at specific countries, the European Commission's initial probes have all targeted Chinese enterprises.

Besides, on April 9, the European Commission launched an investigation into Chinese suppliers of wind turbines. The probe focuses on the expansion of wind farms in Bulgaria, France, Greece, Spain and Romania where wind turbines from Chinese manufacturers have been winning orders, allegedly on account of an uneven level playing field.

On April 23, the commission also initiated unannounced inspections in the security equipment sector. Dawn raids were conducted on Chinese companies in EU member states after the commission was reported to have received tipoffs that the companies inspected may have received subsidies from China.

No wonder the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU called the commission's actions selective enforcement against Chinese companies.

That the commission is also demanding sensitive information and data from the targeted Chinese companies relating to their competitive edge has made it impossible for these companies to cooperate with the investigations.

The investigations have therefore left the Chinese companies with no choice but to withdraw their bids. The probes the European Commission has so far launched into Chinese companies have become not so much a scrutiny to ensure fair competition but a means to squeeze them out of the market.

In this sense, the FSR that took effect in January 2023, which was claimed to be a new regime aimed at combating distortions of competition within the EU's internal market caused by foreign subsidies, has turned out to be a political tool to force Chinese companies out of the EU market.

As such, it is a means of protectionism, and the enforcement of the FSR so far has seriously violated World Trade Organization rules as it has created discriminatory conditions in the EU market for Chinese enterprises.

Adopting a discriminatory approach toward Chinese companies will be detrimental to the development of China-EU ties and negatively impact bilateral cooperation in various fields.

The commission is thus only shooting the EU economy in the foot with its actions.

Cai Meng

OVERCAPACITY



Opinion Line

Trade protectionism for the sake of selfish interests will only backfire

Some countries are trying to hype up the claim of "overcapacity" in China, accusing its new energy industry of relying on subsidies for large volumes of exports, and greatly impacting the international market. This argument runs counter to common sense and the facts and is, in essence, a new case of a "double standard" and trade protectionism. China's new energy sector represents advanced production capacity, not only enriching global supply and alleviating global inflationary pressure, but also making great contributions to the global green transition.

International trade is a kind of international division of labor and cooperation among countries based on their comparative advantages.

China's new energy products are widely welcomed in the international market, given that they meet the urgent need to realize a global green transformation and help achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. China exported 1.2 million new energy vehicles in 2023, which can help reduce carbon emissions by about 2 million tons. The price of Chinese-made NEVs exported to Europe is higher than the price of vehicles sold in China, meaning there is no dumping as some in Western countries are alleging.

It is a common practice for countries to use industrial subsidy policies to guide their industrial development and adjust their industrial structure. The key is whether this practice complies with

World Trade Organization rules and is based on the principles of fairness, transparency and nondiscrimination. China's industrial subsidy policies strictly abide by WTO rules. China informed the WTO of its relevant subsidy policies in a timely and comprehensive manner, and there are no prohibitive subsidies as stipulated by the WTO.

In contrast, the United States and Europe have significantly increased their subsidies, which include a large number of exclusive and discriminatory practices. Using "overcapacity" as an excuse to suppress China actually shows their anxiety about their own competitiveness.

Any trade protectionism for the sake of selfish interests will only backfire.

— MINISTRY OF COMMERCE

Free-to-use AI applications form benign cycle

The latest ChatGPT-4o, released on Tuesday, allows users to input audio, image and even documents; earlier versions supported only text input by users. AI models such as Baidu's Wenxin Yiyao allow users to chat with them using images, audio and documents, but OpenAI, the once-leader of the industry, had fallen behind on that front.

That it took timely steps to catch up reaffirms a "human-level response," a term OpenAI CEO and cofounder Sam Altman mentioned as the future of AI technology.

AI is often seen as an information processing assistant that "uses human forms of interaction to com-

municate". The addition of real-time voice interaction functionality undoubtedly makes the user experience of large models more aligned with people's expectations from an "AI assistant".

They can even direct their smartphone camera toward a book or notebook and ask ChatGPT to act on the content that is seen. In fact, according to the OpenAI product release, ChatGPT can even see the user's expression through the camera and comfort him/her if they seem tense.

With these new "screen viewing" and "emotion feeling" features, users will feel like AI is serving

them, unlike in the past when they were serving AI.

ChatGPT-4o offers free services to users. OpenAI Chief Technology Officer Mira Murati and CEO Altman stressed that "free-to-use" strategy is the future of their company. But it should be noted that free services benefit not only users but also the service provider, enabling them to expand their businesses, collecting more data from free users to train their Large Language Model, and then making new high-end products for paid users. That's a benign cycle that makes the free mode sustainable.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Responsible for rocking foundations of world peace

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, making an unannounced visit to Kyiv on Tuesday, apparently tried his best to "rally the spirits of glum Ukrainians facing a fierce new Russian offensive", as the Associated Press observed.

Apart from assuring his audience they are not alone and that the long-delayed military aid from the United States is now on its way and will make a "real difference" on the battlefield, the top US diplomat took to the stage at a local pub to play rhythm guitar and sing Neil Young's 1989 hit *Rockin' in the Free World* with a local band.

The great lengths Blinken has gone to in a bid to boost Ukrainians' morale speaks volumes of how low it has fallen. Analysts have called the current situation in Ukraine one of the most dangerous moments since the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out in February 2022 thanks to new offensive Moscow has recently organized in the northeast of Ukraine.

"We meet at a critical moment," said Blinken, showing the Joe Biden administration also recognizes

the graveness of the situation despite the confidence he has tried to instill in the Ukrainians, when speaking to students at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. "The coming weeks and months will demand a great deal of Ukrainians, who have already sacrificed so much. I've come to Ukraine with a message: You are not alone."

But the lukewarm responses from his audience should remind Blinken that Ukrainians have been fighting for the past 27 months and have heard such words before.

For more and more of them, the conflict is one in which Ukrainians are sacrificing their lives for the US' interests. They see clearly that the majority of the US' aid to Ukraine, as Biden admitted, is invested in the US, creating jobs and upgrading the US arsenal, helping Biden to win support from voters by pleasing the workers, capitalists and championing himself as the leader of a "free world".

After the Gaza conflict started on Oct 7 last year, the US' input in Ukraine has unavoidably been affected, as Israel has a greater

claim on US support than Ukraine, something US lawmakers make no bones of.

Blinken has visited the Middle East seven times since Oct 7, while the Tuesday visit to Kyiv was only his fourth since February 2022, and his last visit to Kyiv was in September.

The other factor Kyiv must have taken into account while receiving Blinken is what will happen if Biden is not reelected in the US presidential election in November. That's a question Blinken cannot answer.

Blinken told Kyiv that the US intends to support Ukrainians beyond the conflict's end helping them build "the strongest possible Ukraine". However, the conflict has to end before any rebuilding takes place, and that is something the Biden administration has been trying to prevent. Instead, it is doing all it can to prolong the conflict, as long as no US blood is shed, of course, believing it serves the US' interests.

For how long will the Ukrainian people be willing to continue to die so that the Biden administration can claim it is rockin' in a free world.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China-Russia Relations

Editor's note: China-Russia relations will embrace new development opportunities in the future, and the two countries have been promoting prosperity through expanded equal and mutually beneficial cooperation in economic and cultural fields. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Sergey Lukonin

Putin's visit signifies high level of cooperation

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to China on Thursday and Friday, his first foreign trip since being elected president in March for the next six years, demonstrates the highest level of Russia-China cooperation.

China is Russia's most important economic and political partner, with their bilateral trade volume exceeding \$240 billion in 2023. Despite the difficult political situation, Chinese companies have not only maintained their presence but also increased their investments in Russia. And Chinese cars, including electric vehicles, and their equipment and components are among the most in-demand products in the Russian market after the "fleeing" of European, US, Japanese and other companies from the country following the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The most important thing is that China's support for Russia during a very difficult period helped the Russian authorities to maintain almost normal economic activity and achieve economic growth, thereby maintaining socio-economic and political stability in the country.

Russia, too, supports China on the world stage, especially in international and regional organizations such as the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS and other forums and associations. It also supports the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative. In fact, Russia will support China even if it faces serious problems, though we do not want such problems to arise at all.

However, given the significant scale, depth and relatively high pace of development of Russia-China cooperation, many often raise the question of distrust between the two countries. For example, some claim that Russia will turn away from China as soon as it re-establishes cooperation with the European Union or the United States, or if Russia's "turning to the East" policy fails. But those making such claims do not take into account the natural and fundamental factors of Sino-Russian cooperation.

First, the Russian policy of "turning to the East" started around 2008 and gained momentum following the crisis in relations with the West in 2014, but it is based on the strategic understanding that the center of economic development is shifting to the Asia-Pacific region and China is the main cause of that shift — and is destined to remain a leading global economy in the long run.

Second, neither the EU nor the US is capable of offering something that could force Russia to abandon its desire to build a truly multipolar world in which China occupies one of the most important places. The ideological contradictions between Russia and the

US-led West, as well as the consequences of the Ukraine crisis are too strong and cannot be overcome even in the long term.

Third, in economics, the term "dependence" is determined by the perspective of the economist or researcher and can be interpreted both as positive and negative. Yes, Russia and China depend on each other, but not in the sense of one imposing its will on the other.

The two countries geographically, politically and economically complement each other, but have vowed never to take advantage of this dependence.



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The foundation of Russian and Chinese foreign policy and the main trends of Russia-China cooperation are strategic and long-term in nature. While the dominant geopolitical factors of the "new era" strengthen it, Putin's re-election and his visit to China underline the continuity of Russian policy toward China.

Of course, as a researcher in Russia-China relations, I would like to emphasize the relationship's special, exclusive and exemplary character, which sets it apart from the diplomatic approaches of certain other countries driven solely by narrow self-interest.

In their interactions with other countries, China and Russia behave like normal, responsible powers that respect legitimate agreements, do not blackmail others, take responsibility for their actions, do not block other countries from pursuing development and, instead, try to find common ground.

According to modern Western diplomacy, such behavior may be unusual, but this is exactly how a normal and responsible power should behave. And by pro-

moting multilateralism, adopting a balanced foreign policy and creating development opportunities for less-developed countries, this is exactly how China behaves. It does not threaten any country and, instead, looks for opportunities for cooperation, and does not isolate itself from the rest of the world by "decoupling" or "de-risking" from other countries.

China's engagements with Russia, the US, Germany, France, Serbia, Hungary, Vietnam, India and many other countries and its membership of organizations such as APEC, BRICS, the SCO and the G20 show China has adopted a balanced foreign policy approach aimed at creating a more equal and fair, multipolar world order.

In this context, Putin's first visit to China after his re-election as Russia's president is another confirmation that China is a responsible global power and Sino-Russian cooperation is strategic and long-term in nature.

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

Yu Sui

China fully justified in maintaining normal trade ties with Russia

China has been criticized for maintaining normal economic and trade relations with Russia after the international community split over the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Normal economic and trade relations based on people's survival and development needs are what drive the overall relations between two countries. True, economic and trade relations overlap political relations. But it is unethical, immoral and diplomatically reprehensible to disrupt or damage the economic and trade ties between two countries for narrow political gains.

The United States and its allies used the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a pretext to announce severe economic sanctions against Russia. But despite creating difficulties for the Russian people and government, the sanctions have not caused the collapse of Russia, as the US-led West had hoped. That is because Russia has abundant energy and food grains, and sufficient forest and other agricultural products, as well as enough livestock and aquatic products. Also, it has implemented beneficial policies for the people in the most important areas of life including education and medical care. No wonder Russia's GDP grew by 3.6 percent in 2023 even in the face of domestic economic constraints and external economic and political pressure.

China and Russia have maintained normal economic and trade cooperation, mainly to improve the livelihoods of the nearly 1.6 billion people on both sides.

When it comes to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China, right from the beginning, has adopted an impartial stance, while trying to broker peace between Moscow and Kyiv. Yet the US has been taking measures to curb China-Russia economic exchanges, claiming that China's economic and trade exchanges are helping Russia in the conflict.

On May 1, the US announced a new round of sanctions against individuals and other entities doing business with or operating in Russia, including more than a dozen Chinese entities. It was another act of frustration and politicization of economic and trade activities.

As major countries and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China and Russia have forged a new type of major-country relationship that differs from the obsolete Cold War approach — it is different from the "brotherhood" between China and the Soviet Union in the past and the US-led "alliances" of the present.

On the basis of non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting of any third party, Beijing and Moscow seek to establish lasting friendship and deepen their comprehensive strategic coordination. It is common interests, similar goals and closer understanding of the global situation, not ideology or socialist system, that have brought China and Russia closer.

Both China and Russia are pursuing development in order to realize national rejuvenation. Both countries are in transition and implementing reforms so they can boost relations with the international community, make their production systems more efficient, sharpen their competitive edge in the field of science and technology, and improve governance, so as to ensure the people lead a better life.

The two countries respect each other's choice of development path and prevent ideology from influencing or souring bilateral ties, while managing their differences and disagreements through consultation on an equal footing. The new type of China-Russia relations have been inscribed in the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation which established the idea of "ever-lasting friendship and never becoming enemies".

The spirit of equality, mutual trust, inclusiveness, mutual learning, cooperation and mutual benefit that marks the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership should be equally applicable to all countries. Fairness, rationality and equality form the basis of Sino-Russian economic and trade relations, and there is no place for discrimination in this relationship.

China's stance on relations with other countries was emphatically reiterated by the Chinese leader during his recent visit to France. While during the China-France meeting, the two sides agreed to uphold multilateralism, promote free trade and economic globalization, and deepen cooperation in emerging areas such as the green energy, green consumption, and scientific and technological innovations, at the trilateral meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on May 6, the Chinese leader said China regards the European Union as an important partner and "hopes that the EU institutions develop the right perception of China and adopt a positive China policy".

In other words, countries should respect each other's core interests and major concerns, and realize that there are no winners in zero-sum games. They should also understand that "decoupling" and "de-risking" will only bring harm to the stakeholders. So for the survival and development of humankind, all countries have to maintain a just and reasonable economic and trade order.

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



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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Xu Wenhong

Sino-Russian ties in the new era benefit global peace

Russian President Vladimir Putin's ongoing visit to China has garnered global attention.

As the Russia-Ukraine conflict has entered its third year, it's no surprise that the United States and the European Union persist on "urging" China to "persuade" Russia to help resolve the crisis. What the US and the EU refuse to accept is that China is a third party, which neither triggered the conflict nor can resolve it. Instead of sitting idly by and waiting for further deterioration, China has been actively engaged in promoting peace. The Chinese envoy is currently conducting his third round of shuttle diplomacy in an effort to reach a political solution to the Ukrainian crisis.

As a nation with a 5,000-year history and culture, China has its own strategic autonomy and behavioral logic. In fact, it made clear its position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict in a document, "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukrainian Crisis", it released on Feb 24 last year. Equally important, it has been trying its best to broker peace between Moscow and Kyiv.

China believes that the most important thing to do now is to make Russia and Ukraine declare truce and hold peace talks, because talks are the only way to resolve the Ukraine crisis. That's why it supports the convening of an international peace conference which

both Russia and Ukraine have agreed to attend to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict. An international conference on Ukrainian issues is scheduled to take place in Switzerland in June. However, the West is reportedly planning to exclude Russia from participation. China advocates for an international conference that includes both Russia and Ukraine.

As for sanctions, China opposes the imposition of unilateral sanctions on any country without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council. So countries, in the interest of global governance, should stop using "long-arm jurisdiction" and abusing their economic and military might to impose unilateral sanctions on other countries.

More important, since the UN Security Council has not passed any resolution preventing countries from conducting economic exchanges with Russia or Ukraine, China has maintained normal economic exchanges



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with both countries. In fact, many Chinese enterprises and individuals are still running their businesses in Ukraine and thus helping meet the daily needs of the Ukrainian people.

Besides, thanks to years of efforts, China and Russia have become each other's most important strategic partners, and their cooperation in different fields has been deepening. The basic principles on which the Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era is based are non-alignment, non-confrontation and non-targeting of third parties.

"Non-alignment" means learning the lessons from major power relations and preventing "hot wars" and "cold wars" now and in the future. "Non-confrontation" is the basic starting point of all diplomacy between China and other countries, especially Russia. The secure and stable Sino-Russian relationship the non-confrontation principle has helped the two sides build its greatest contribution to Eurasia's security and stability. And non-targeting of third parties means not targeting any country, enterprise or individual. By not targeting or being affected by third parties, China and Russia have built a rock solid partnership, shattering the US-led West's dream of seeing "China and Russia part ways".

China has always said unilateral

hegemony and double standard are the root causes of geopolitical upheavals. Hence, upholding multilateralism, which major powers such as China, Russia, France and other countries have been doing, and opposing the use of double standard are the only way to help democratize international relations and achieve long-term peace in the world.

If, as anticipated and promoted by the US-led West, Russia is pushed into a state of isolation or a corner, the protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine actually caused by the US and its allies could become a source of turmoil in the Eurasian continent, potentially escalating into a significant threat to global peace and security.

Before Vladimir Putin's visit to Beijing, President Xi Jinping's visit to France, Serbia and Hungary, and the visits of US and German officials to China, all parties were engaged in exchanges at all levels, with China trying its best to play the role of a mediator to help stabilize the international situation.

In this context, the strategic significance of Putin's visit is unprecedented — it signals a new start for Sino-Russian relations and their efforts to maintain global peace and development.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG MONAN

Legislation to enable theft

US targeting TikTok a 'black box' bid to illegally seize the assets of a foreign company

Last month, United States President Joe Biden signed into law the so-called 21st Century Peace Through Strength Act, which prohibits entities in the US from distributing, updating or maintaining a website or application operated by ByteDance, effectively banning the popular short-video sharing platform TikTok in the US unless it is sold.



The TikTok legislation underscores the US' attempt to maintain its hegemony in the digital realm. That the legislation was fast-tracked through Congress suggests it was a political campaign launched by the US to impede the development of other countries.

An act of robbery under the guise of law, the move against TikTok seriously tramples on international law. Unsubstantiated national security concerns should not be cited to justify attempts to bring down other countries' enterprises. To date, the US government has not presented any evidence that TikTok threatens the US' national security. The move to ban or force the sale of TikTok will have legal repercussions.

First, the TikTok law infringes on the right to free speech in the Constitution's First Amendment.

In the US, any government move to restrict free speech is subject to strict scrutiny by the courts. The TikTok ban not only restricts US citizens' right to express their ideas and receive information, but also restricts ByteDance's freedom to disseminate lawful content on the app.

Second, the "be sold or banned" law also violates the Fifth Amendment.

The legislation requires ByteDance to sell its stake in TikTok within 270 days. If the Chinese company divests itself of TikTok before the ban takes effect, TikTok can continue to access distribution, maintenance, updates and web-hosting services; if ByteDance sells the app after the ban takes effect, the ban will be terminated, and the platform will have to go through the necessary procedures to resume receiving aforementioned services.

This violates the Fifth Amendment, which stipulates that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. Banning TikTok is in fact depriving the app's parent company ByteDance of its property without due process of law.

Third, the US government is abusing its power of censorship to infringe upon Chi-



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

na's digital sovereignty. The new law, which has a broad and vague definition of "apps controlled by foreign adversaries", grants the US president considerable discretionary power. Bypassing the process of administrative approval to label TikTok as an "app controlled by a foreign adversary", the legislation spuriously claims that TikTok may be able to share users' data with Chinese government, and thus threatens US national security.

The US Committee on Foreign Invest-

ment defines TikTok as "a threat to national security"; but it has neither presented evidence to support the allegation, nor has it responded to requests from investors to provide evidence, which means the legislative move is a "black box operation".

In recent years, practicing censorship in the name of protecting digital security has become a new tool for the US to curb China's development. The Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act broadens the scope of security review to include non-

controlling foreign investments in US businesses involved with "critical technologies", "critical infrastructure" and "sensitive personal data".

Therefore, it is not hard to see the rationale behind the TikTok legislation.

China's internet platforms, including TikTok, have grown rapidly in recent years and gained immense success in the US market. According to global data platform Statista, TikTok possessed 26 percent of share in the US social media market in 2023, and its app

revenue share of the market was far ahead of Facebook and Instagram.

Because TikTok is owned by a Chinese company, even though its US data is stored in the US, it is still claimed that the data may end up in the hands of the Chinese government and pose risks to US data security. But it is worth noting that because TikTok is an app created in China, the US government is not able to compel the company to give it access to its data according to the CLOUD Act (Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use and Data Act).

Fourth, the TikTok legislation flagrantly violates the World Trade Organization rule of fair competition, and poisons the US' business environment.

On the one hand, the law disregards the legitimate demand of ByteDance to protect its rights and interests, and violates the principle of nondiscrimination upheld by the WTO.

On the other hand, TikTok provides information services to US consumers, which falls under the jurisdiction of the General Agreement on Trade in Services. The TikTok ban violates the principles of "most favorable nation treatment" and "national treatment" of GATS, as the Peace Through Strength Act gives Chinese enterprise treatment less favorable than that granted to one from the US or from another country.

Furthermore, the TikTok legislation contradicts the principle of free cross-border data flows that the US proposed in the WTO E-commerce Joint Statement Initiative, which is aimed at protecting the right of consumers and enterprises to transfer data across borders without discrimination.

There is no doubt that the TikTok legislation is a blatant example of politicizing economic issues, abusing national power to crack down on a foreign company, and illegally seizing its assets. It seriously breaches the principles of a market economy and fair competition touted by the US. This unilateral and protectionist move will seriously damage the business environment of the US, not least for the 7 million small companies that rely on the app for their business, and undermine the foundations of international law and order.

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LU CHUANYING

No digital strings attached

As the world is mired in turmoil, China-ASEAN cooperation in the virtual space will help stabilize the geopolitical situation in Asia

China and Southeast Asian nations are not only close neighbors geographically, but also have close connections in the digital world. China is a digital powerhouse, next only to the United States, while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations boasts a vast digital market and huge potential for development.

With geopolitical competition in the digital realm escalating, win-win digital cooperation between China and ASEAN holds significance beyond bilateral ties.



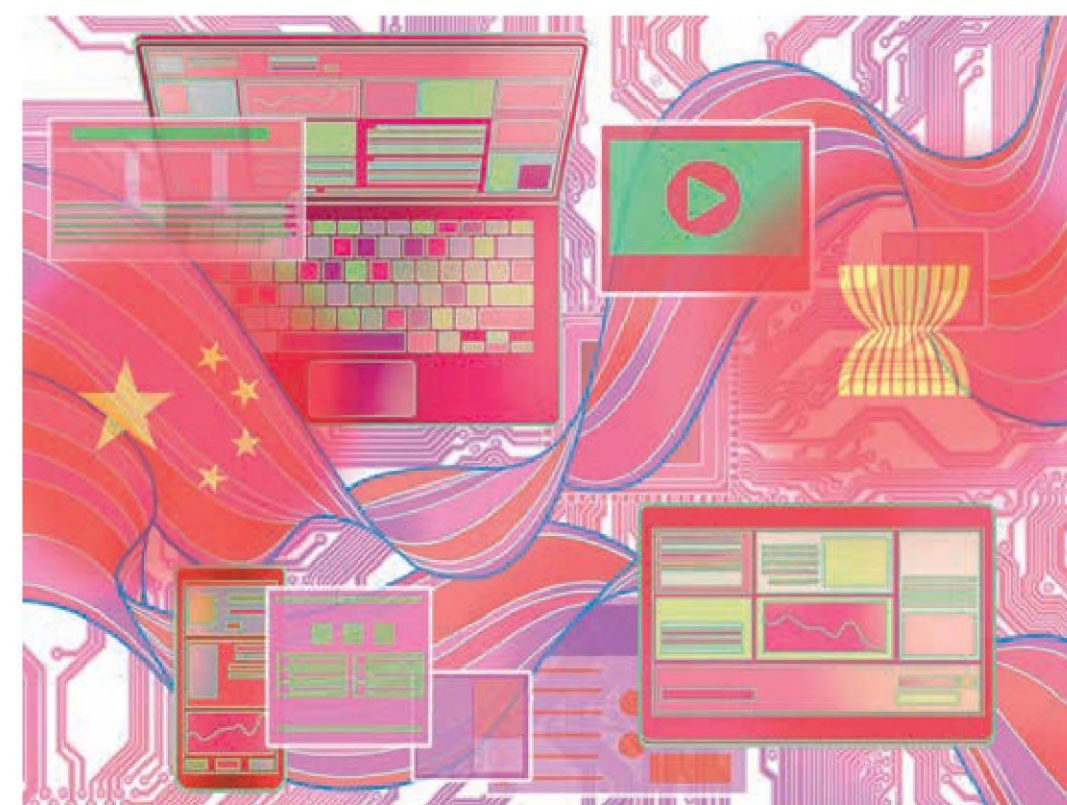
China, while seeking independent development in the digital field, also attaches importance to cooperating with other regions. The country has accumulated a wealth of experience and lessons in the process of its digital development. By sharing its know-how and expertise with ASEAN countries, China can better serve global digital cooperation.

Today, China and ASEAN are close partners in the digital sector. Cooperation with China helps ASEAN find a way to develop its digital economy. China's world-leading digital tech industry and enormous market size can meet ASEAN's increasing demand for digital market and consumers. The win-win cooperation is based on the following two factors.

First, China-ASEAN cooperation in the digital field has solid foundations. China-ASEAN bilateral ties are an example of mutually beneficial relations. As early as in 2003, China started communicating and collaborating with ASEAN in information and communications technology (ICT). At that time, China was at a fledgling stage in the development of information technology, but that did not prevent it from giving support to ASEAN.

Furthermore, China-ASEAN cooperation is driven by both market players and the government. On the one hand, Chinese enterprises have entered the market of ASEAN members, participating in the development of local digital economy. On the other hand, China has established the China-ASEAN Information Harbor in Nanjing, capital of South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, which is designed to support ASEAN in digital technology, industry and personnel.

Second, China-ASEAN digital coopera-



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

tion is complementary and mutually beneficial. The bilateral cooperation is highly aligned with ASEAN's digital development strategies — the ASEAN ICT Masterplan (AIM) and the ASEAN Digital Masterplan (ADM). In recent years, the two sides have achieved fruitful results in building digital infrastructure, such as sea and land optical cables, computing infrastructure, and application of the Beidou navigation system.

It is fair to say China's experience and technology have greatly facilitated the dig-

ital integration of ASEAN. With regard to cybersecurity, the collaboration is focused on the sharing of information, and the joint crackdown on cybercrimes based on an equal footing. In comparison, the US-led West has played the role of provocateur, pushing ASEAN countries to pick a side in its digital development. Cooperation between the United States and ASEAN started in 2017. Since then, the US, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan rushed to enhance cooperation with ASEAN, which occurred during the

Donald Trump administration when the US launched a trade war, and a tech war against China. The timing of increased US-ASEAN cooperation shows hidden motives, a politically-driven movement to counterbalance China's influence in the region.

In contrast, the time-tested cooperation between China and ASEAN in the digital space is based on two important consensus.

First, development is the main theme of cooperation. Both China and ASEAN

believe the digital economy plays a key role in driving economic growth and social progress. China's leapfrog development in e-commerce has brought opportunities for ASEAN countries in terms of technology and market. Likewise, Southeast Asian nations' demand for digitalization and its market potential provide vast space for the development of Chinese enterprises. At the fourth China-ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting, the two sides adopted the ASEAN-China 2024 Digital Work Plan and agreed to jointly develop the China-ASEAN Initiative on Facilitating Cooperation in Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Digital Ecosystem.

Second, China and Southeast Asian countries adhere to the principle of equality and mutually beneficial cooperation. On the one hand, China respects the development paths and policies chosen by ASEAN countries and is committed to preserving the open and inclusive regional cooperation framework with ASEAN at the core. On the other hand, ASEAN countries respect China's development interests and market rules, and aim to enhance digital cooperation based on the two above-mentioned initiatives on an equal footing. This mutual respect has laid a solid foundation for bilateral cooperation.

As the world is mired in turmoil, China-ASEAN cooperation in the digital space will help stabilize geopolitical situation in Asia.

First, China-ASEAN digital cooperation in bilateral or multilateral ways can increase their say in the international arena and help preserve Asia's digital stability and balance.

Second, with their vast population and economic size, China-ASEAN cooperation in e-commerce will inject new vitality into their economies and spur innovation, thereby boosting global economic recovery.

Furthermore, as advocates and practitioners of multilateralism, China and ASEAN can jointly push the restructuring of the global digital order, and help shape a more transparent, fair and inclusive solution in the digital space.

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LIFE



LIVING HERITAGE

Firing up traditional expertise

Porcelain master looks to the past to ignite passion for the craft, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



Over the years, the fame of China's porcelain capital Jingdezhen has drawn potters and artists from all over the country and the world, and they have added their creative touch to the city in Jiangxi province. Some give porcelain a new form to appeal to modern buyers, while others have integrated the craft with the use of oil and watercolor painting.

Modern technology has greatly increased efficiency, which makes life simpler for porcelain makers, but there are a number of Chinese craftsmen, who are not afraid of tedious work and who continue to follow the ways and keep the warmth of traditional craftsmanship, to restore the charm of porcelain from days gone by.

Porcelain-making artist Gong Hua is among them. Gong, in his 60s, had a wood-fired kiln built strictly, in 2003, to the letter of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) designs. "It is elliptical and about four or five meters deep and 1.8 meters at the widest, much smaller than modern kilns," he explains.

Despite the kiln's obvious drawbacks, such as the materials used in its construction not being as resistant to high temperatures as modern ones, it honors the production techniques and materials of Jingdezhen porcelain from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) onward.

Over the years, Gong's kiln has been used to create duplicates of porcelain artifacts for many museums and collectors, to protect the originals.

"Much has been written and recorded about traditional porcelain craftsmanship, but turning the raw materials into physical objects is a cumbersome and laborious process," Gong says. "From the preparation of the materials, the shaping of the porcelain body and painting, to firing in the kiln, every step requires repeated experimentation."

Born and raised in Jingdezhen, Gong grew up with piles of porcelain shards stacked beside old houses. "People casually picked them up, laughing as they threw them into the river to see if they would float. The shards created ripples in the water, and ripples of laughter," he recalls.

This early exposure predisposed him toward porcelain making, and he became involved in its design after finishing art studies at Jingdezhen University in 1984.

As Gong immersed himself in the world of ceramics, his interest in historical porcelain intensified and he frequently wondered how he could recapture the beauty of ancient porcelain.

In 1987, during the urban renewal of Jingdezhen, Gong saw porcelain shards being unearthed at archaeological excavations.

They exposed him to the vast gap



A Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) style vase (top left), featuring auspicious symbols of plum blossoms, pomegranates and litchis, and a blue-and-white porcelain wine vessel (top right) in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) style with lotus flower patterns, by artist Gong Hua and his team.

Above: Gong displays a Ming Dynasty dragon-pattern plate at an exhibition in Beijing last year. **Bottom:** An artisan shaping a clay vase at Gong's workshop in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

between modern ceramic craftsmanship and that of ancient times. "The glaze was as smooth as jade, and their beauty was indescribable," he says.

This set him off on a search for paints, materials and other elements to match historical standards.

More than 1,000 years of porcelain making has left Jingdezhen a rich legacy, which provided Gong with an insight into ancient procedures.

"I was able to find treasures in local households," he says.

In the early 1990s, he spent three years researching and deciphering the craftsmanship of blue-and-white porcelain made during the Ming Emperor Xuande's reign (1426-35).

"I found that the blue and white colors were thanks to the rich trace metal elements in their raw materials, which came from the Middle East and differed greatly from those sourced domestically," Gong says.

In terms of painting techniques, porcelain ware from the Ming Dynasty is mostly characterized by a free and easy expression, while that of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) is known for its more clear-cut strokes.



He then had to rediscover the ancient firing methods, which required repeated experimentation to discover the optimal temperature and the right mix of glaze materials to deliver a porcelain surface akin to jade.

By the end of the 1990s, he also managed to recover the porcelain-making process used during the reign of Emperor Chenghua (1465-87) of the Ming Dynasty.

Since then, Gong has studied hundreds of items of blue-and-white porcelain from ancient imperial kilns, which has allowed him to fully explore and research the evolution of their craftsmanship.

"During the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, the original glaze used on Jingdezhen ceramics was prepared from rice straw ash that had been fermented. Its high iron content explains the brown color," Gong explains, adding that ancient people explored the use of local plant materials and eventually settled on ferns, which grow abundantly in the mountains and fields around Jingdezhen.

"As a result, clear and elegant blue-and-white porcelain was born,"

he says, adding that this plant material is the key to achieving the lustrous jade-like glaze and is ruined by modern electric and gas kiln equipment.

"Although they are hard to control precisely, only traditional wood-fired kilns can process the porcelain in an extraordinary way that may go beyond your imagination," he says.

Gong also found that the formula for the clay went from using only porcelain stone, which can't withstand temperatures in excess of 1,200 C, during the Song Dynasty, to adding kaolinite during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) to achieve a higher firing heat.

In 2008, Gong was entrusted by the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau with replicating a dozen Ming and Qing porcelain items.

Gong and his team studied vital clues from previous eras.

"Every tiny part might hide important information and can't be overlooked," he says.

He could even gauge the psychological state of the ancient craftsmen during the crafting process.

"The way they felt affected their breathing, which can have an effect on the stability of each line being painted," he explains.

In 2008, Gong donated the tools and traditional materials that he had gathered over the years to the Capital Museum in Beijing. More recently, he has been working to expand traditional porcelain craft to modern users, allowing visitors to be part of the process of the traditional porcelain firing in his ancient-style kilns in Jingdezhen. "They can draw patterns on the embryos and have them fired by professional craftsmen," Gong says.

Hu Kai-chun, a Taiwan resident now living in Beijing, was among the 40 people who experienced traditional porcelain making at Gong's place late last month.

"I've read about traditional porcelain making in books, and long wanted to see how it is done," says Hu, who studied East Asian art and who works as an interior designer.

He says he was impressed by the difference between the traditional and modern formulas for glaze, and the way workers placed the firewood in the kiln. "You can actually see the fire, and there were so many people working in tandem, controlling everything based on what they could see and hear," Hu adds.

For Gong, the modern electric and gas-powered kilns are signs of technical progress, and have a high firing success rate. "However, traditional ways should still have a place to create a balance and maintain diversity, cultural protection and inheritance," he says.

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ABBA musical *Mamma Mia!* remains popular

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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The British musical *Mamma Mia!* kicked off its four-month tour of China at the Shanghai Culture Square at the start of this month.

After completing a 22-show run in Shanghai, the production will head to seven cities: Beijing, May 31 to Jun 6; Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, June 11 to 16; Nanjing, Jiangsu province, June 21 to 27; Zhengzhou, Henan province; Zhuhai and Shenzhen, Guangdong province; and finally Hong Kong, according to Jiang Kuan, president of AC Orange, the company responsible for the China tour.

This is the show's second tour of China, the first being in 2007, when it was performed in Shanghai and Beijing. In 2011, a Chinese version toured extensively around the country.

The smash-hit musical was written by British playwright Catherine Johnson and is based on songs by the Swedish supergroup ABBA.

It premiered in London in 1999, and on Broadway in 2001. The international touring production, first staged in 2004, will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year in Dublin.

Over the past 20 years, *Mamma Mia!* has been performed in 42 countries and regions, with 3,500 shows attended by more than 7 million people. It has 50 versions in 16 different languages.

In 2008, the film adaptation, starring Meryl Streep, Colin Firth and Pierce Brosnan, became one of the highest grossing films of the year. A sequel, *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*, was released in 2018, also winning box-office success.

"We've been trying to get back to China for the last five years and we



A scene from British musical *Mamma Mia!* that kicked off its four-month tour of China in Shanghai early this month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

had to postpone twice," Nick Grace, producer of the international touring production of *Mamma Mia!*, told China Daily before the premiere in Shanghai.

"Being here now is just a wonderful experience."

Mamma Mia! is a jukebox musical named after ABBA's 1975 chart-topper of the same name. One of the most popular and successful pop groups of all time, ABBA was active from 1972 to 1982, when it repeatedly topped the charts all over the world, with songs like *Knowing Me, Knowing You*, *Dancing Queen* and *Super Trouper* among others.

Grace says that the musical is what's called a "feel-good" show. "You can come and forget about everything else in your life, and just enjoy fantastic storytelling and have a great time for two and a half hours."

The touring production changes

cast every year, which keeps performances fresh. "There are cast members now who weren't even born when *Mamma Mia!* started, which makes me feel old," Grace says, beaming.

"I think what's magical about the show is that when you come in and play one of the characters, you have the ability to bring some of your own character to the show as well."

He says that he has seen the musical numerous times, but still enjoys it every time, because there is always something new and fresh, and he adds that little has changed since the musical's launch 25 years ago because the secret is the songs' lasting popularity.

"The songs move the story forward. It's not just a tribute show where you just have a couple of well-known songs. The songs are so important to the storytelling," Grace says.

LIFE

Imagine the scenario. A time traveler from say 800 years ago is transplanted to Pingjiang Road in Gusu district, Suzhou, Jiangsu province. The initial shock of new buildings and bustling pavements would soon wear off, but the traveler would not feel a total sense of displacement. The layout of the neighborhood remains much like it was in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), with waterways and streets running parallel. The traveler might even see people dressed similarly in the bustling crowd, especially girls in beautiful *hanfu* taking photos.

The traveler would also find the signs on the old mansion doors interesting — cafes, creative product shops, silk stores, *hanfu* experience halls, and modern bookstores. It's where modern businesses meet traditional streets.

The Pingjiang historic and cultural block, spanning more than 116 hectares, is Suzhou's oldest and most intact historic and cultural area, boasting a history of over 2,500 years. With its quintessential Jiangnan (lower reach of the Yangtze river) water town charm and traditional architecture with white walls and black tiles, it remains a treasure trove of the city's heritage.

On weekends and holidays, the streets of Pingjiang come alive with a diverse array of visitors. Some wander the ancient alleys dressed in *hanfu*, while others relax by the water, enjoying traditional music performances. Many also take delight in exploring the hidden gems of historic residences tucked away in the side streets, immersing themselves in the essence of "Suzhou-style living".

During the period from May 1 to 3 alone, the district welcomed 750,000 visitors.

In recent years, Suzhou has focused on the key word "activation" to preserve its cultural heritage. Through urban renewal projects, historic sites blend seamlessly with modern life. Many restored ancient buildings in the old city are now bustling with new vitality.

Pingjiang Road has evolved into a hub for "comprehensive tourism" and "Suzhou-style living". It's not just a destination for backpackers; it's home to 8,000 families enjoying the convenience of city life within a 15-minute radius.

Lu Jianying, an inheritor of Suzhou embroidery, has called the ancient city home for three decades. She's seen the ancient homes remain unchanged on the outside but witnessed residents enjoying modern comforts inside.

"Pingjiang Road is like Suzhou's 'dual-sided embroidery', showing the city's blend of tradition and modernity, old charm with youthful energy. Preserving these cultural districts not only safeguards our heritage but also sparks new opportunities and vitality for economic growth," Lu says.

Known as the "Jiangnan cultural museum without walls", this neighborhood is a collection of cultural heritage sites. In 2005, the Pingjiang historic and cultural block received an Honorable Mention at the UNESCO 2005 Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. In 2015, it was designated one of China's first historical and cultural districts.

According to Wang Yongfa, director of the planning and protection department of the Gusu district ancient city protection committee in Suzhou, they've preserved the area's unique layout with parallel waterways and maintained the charming riverside atmosphere with small bridges.

Wang emphasizes the importance of not only preserving the district's architecture but also its lively street scenes and way of life.

Wang explains that there's a remarkable cultural awareness among local residents in the neighborhood. People from various backgrounds, driven by their love for the ancient city, passionately explore and contribute to preservation or development efforts.

Wang further states that during the conservation and restoration of cultural relics and traditional residences, they've ensured that the neighborhood's 8,000 original resident families have easy access to essential amenities like shopping, community services, and healthcare, all within a 15-minute walk.

At the same time, the planning and protection department have embraced technology to enhance the protection of the ancient city. They've conducted three-dimensional scans of important cultural buildings and created digital models, preserving them in the cloud as exact replicas. This digital twin approach provides crucial support for future restoration and revitalization projects.

In 2020, Gusu district introduced the innovative ancient city cellular dissection project. Its aim was to thoroughly document every aspect of the 54 neighborhoods spanning 14.2 square kilometers, including houses, ancient wells, trees, and bridges.

This initiative created a new profession: the ancient city cellular dissection expert. These experts meticulously analyzed each building's layout, style, and age, while gathering oral histories from residents to paint a detailed picture of the ancient city's traditional architecture.

According to Wang, this project helps them to understand the ancient city's resources, select preservation priorities, and provides crucial data for planning and renovation efforts.

In recent years, Suzhou has been making the most of its historical areas and old city quarters. The planning and protection

CULTURAL JOURNEY



Woodblock prints in the nationally recognized Suzhou Taohuawu style are showcased at the Pingjiang cultural center in Suzhou. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Suzhou profits from its sense of history

Appealing heritage helps establish foundations for future prosperity, **Li Yingxue** reports.



Above left: Visitors enjoy Pan Zuyin's former residence. **Jiang Dong / China Daily** **Above right:** Qiao Lanrong (center), an inheritor of the print-making, teaches classes for children. **Left:** The center hosts Suzhou Pingtan performances daily. **Below:** A reality show featuring characters from Taohuawu woodblock prints. **Bottom left:** Young people perform songs at the entrance of the center. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Bottom right:** People in *hanfu* stroll the Pingjiang streets. **Jiang Dong / China Daily**



department of the Gusu district is improving living conditions by renovating and preserving old homes while also repurposing spaces to create historical and cultural districts.

"We've shifted from just protecting individual buildings to fully safeguarding entire historical areas. Now, Pingjiang's nine lanes are interconnected, and share public resources," explains Wang.

After restoring buildings in the Pingjiang block, they've repurposed them based on their unique features and historical importance. "Some historical buildings are open to the public for free, while others are hubs for new creative economies, adding to the city's vibrancy," Wang adds.

Reviving structures

Daru Lane is set to become a cultural hub centered around Sanlian Bookstore, and will explore innovative partnerships like bookstore plus intangible cultural heritage and bookstore plus shared space.

The former home of high-ranking Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) official Pan Zuyin (1830-90) has been turned into a boutique hotel, restoring its original layout and features like the main hall, boat and garden. It goes beyond typical hotel offerings by incorporating cultural exhibitions alongside accommodation, dining and meetings. This effort earned it the Award of Excellence in the 2023 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. UNESCO has praised it as a model example of Suzhou style.

"After renovation, the Pan Family Residence has become a showcase and reception area for the city. It not only serves domestic tourists but also allows visitors from outside China to experience the cultural essence of traditional architecture and the beauty of Jiangnan life," Wang explains.

The Zhaoqing Temple at No 38 Daru Lane stands as a shining example of rejuvenated ancient architecture — a model for Suzhou's revival.

Originally built in 1328 with three rows of courtyards, it served as a school during the Qing Dynasty until its restoration began in 2005. Today, it's the Pingjiang cultural center, open to the public as a showcase of cultural and tourism fusion.

The first row hosts exhibitions and sales of Taohuawu woodblock prints; the second row, known as the Hongru Study Room, functions as a branch of the Suzhou Library, offering services with libraries citywide; and the third row hosts events like traditional storytelling.

"Zhaoqing Temple has evolved into a multifaceted space, even housing a studio for advisors who help on heritage conservation efforts," Wang explains. "By using this space fully, we've achieved our goal of revitalizing cultural relics."

Here, ancient Chinese color prints — Taohuawu woodblock prints — take center stage. Among them, the traditional New Year painting *Harmony and Happiness* is a big hit.

According to Xue Yan, director of the activity planning department at the Gusu district public culture center, the characters in *Harmony and Happiness* represent people of all ages and genders, embodying harmony and contentment in family, society and the world.

"We've also created 12 Chinese zodiac woodblock prints, each with its own meaning. For instance, the Year of the Rat symbolizes prosperity, and the Year of the Dragon signifies success," Xue says. "Many visitors are drawn to these symbols of good fortune, eagerly taking photos with their zodiac prints."

"We offer exhibitions and book borrowing for a tranquil experience. While study tours, performances, and intangible cultural heritage experiences provide lively entertainment," she adds.

Suzhou Pingtan storytelling here is a traditional performance that covers one chapter every 15 days. The story unfolds continuously, allowing the audience to follow along like a TV series. Tickets are 10 yuan (\$1.4) each, including a cup of tea, according to Xue.

"With 80 seats per show, they're often packed. Most attendees are local residents, but tourists are also welcome. Even if they don't understand the Suzhou dialect, they can still enjoy the atmosphere and charm of Suzhou Pingtan," she says.

The activity center hosts intangible cultural heritage experience classes throughout the year. "Whenever registration opens online, the classes quickly fill up," Xue says.

Participants include both children and adults interested in experiencing intangible cultural heritage. They can choose from various courses such as making traditional Chinese buttons, playing the *guqin*, a seven-stringed zither, or learning how to make Suzhou-style pastries.

First-grade pupil Li Ziyu from Jinan, Shandong, visited Suzhou during the Spring Festival holiday this year and was greatly impressed by the Pingjiang cultural center.

"I experienced the different customs and cultures of the North and South. Traditional arts like Taohuawu woodblock prints, oil-paper umbrellas, Suzhou embroidery, Kunqu opera, Song brocade, Pingtan storytelling and paper-cutting, allow me to feel the charm of Suzhou's ancient city," Ziyu says.

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LIFE



A new classical sound

Country's youngest symphony orchestra is making its presence felt, **Chen Nan** reports.

About a year after its founding, the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra, the youngest symphony orchestra in China, is set to venture outside its birthplace, Wuxi, Jiangsu province, visiting three cities — namely, Shanghai, and Jiangsu's Suzhou and Yixing — from May 15 to 26.

The orchestra will play such pieces as the overture to the symphonic poem, *Ode to the Land*, by Chinese composer Li Shaosheng and *Symphony No. 9, Op. 95* by Antonin Dvorak. Pianist An Tianxu will join the tour by playing with the orchestra, performing Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 18*.

According to Lin Daye, the principal conductor of the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra, who is also its artistic director, these pieces pose a big challenge for the young orchestra, especially the overture by Li, who is also the orchestra's music director.

"The orchestra will perform that piece for the first time during the upcoming tour. It's a beautiful piece by Li, who has traveled around China and portrays the country's natural scenery with classical music," says Lin.

As Li said in an earlier interview, *Ode to the Land* was inspired by the country's different places, "from northwestern China's Gobi Desert to the reefs in the Nansha Islands in the South China Sea."

"The pieces offer audiences an enjoyable way to visualize those great places in one day, from the sunrise to the sunset," Li says.

Lin says that since the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra's founding, the goal has been very clear — focusing on playing more original Chinese works and infusing Chinese elements into their commissions.

As for the other two Western classical music pieces, Lin says that the audience, especially classical music fans, know those two pieces very well. He tries to lead the



Top: The Wuxi Symphony Orchestra pays homage to Beethoven at the Wuxi Grand Theatre in January. **Above:** The orchestra performs under the baton of conductor and artistic director Lin Daye. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wuxi Symphony Orchestra to bring new interpretations.

Founded in June 2023, and supported by the Wuxi government and the Wuxi National Hi-tech District, the orchestra gave its debut performance at the Wuxi Grand Theatre on Jan 1 this year to celebrate the New Year.

During the concert, the orchestra premiered the original music piece, *Wuxi Overture*, also composed by Li. The work is dedicated to the ancient city of Wuxi, which is known for its long history and rich culture.

Wuxi is bordered by Taihu Lake to the south and the Yangtze River to the north, and is pierced by the ancient Grand Canal.

The orchestra has staged seven concerts in Wuxi after announcing its first performing season early this year.

In 2025, the Wuxi Symphony Hall will open as a new venue for classical music and as the home of the orchestra.

"One of the best ways for a new symphony orchestra to grow fast is to perform as much as possible. With the feedback of the audiences, it makes progress and gradually finds its own voice," says Lin, who is also the music director and principal conductor of the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra.

Li Wei joined the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra as a violinist after Lin invited the 33-year-old to perform with the new orchestra.

"Our first concert on Jan 1 was full of excitement. We performed with many great musicians, such as cellist Wang Jian and soprano Wu Bixia. We could sense the audience's excitement about this concert and this new orchestra," recalls Li Wei, who

joined the China Philharmonic Orchestra when he was a sophomore at the Central Conservatory of Music in 2012.

Horn player Eitaro Sakamoto, from Japan, presented his first rehearsal with the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra on March 18, playing *My Country* by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana, under the baton of conductor Tang Muhai. Without any experience of playing with a Chinese symphony orchestra before, he applied to join the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra because it's a new orchestra.

"The audience seemed to enjoy listening to Western music. It is necessary to actively hold outreach concerts, especially for children and the younger generation, so that the people of the city will become familiar with Western music," says Sakamoto, who started playing the piano at 5 and French horn at 12. He graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts in 2017 and then studied at the Karlsruhe University of Music in Germany.

"The classical music market in China needs new symphony orchestras to bring new sounds to the audiences. We are glad to offer this young symphony orchestra a platform to perform and communicate with audiences," says Zhang Zhaohui, deputy general manager of Poly Theatre Management Co, whose affiliated company, Poly Armstrong International Arts and Communication Co, manages the tour of the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra.

"At the same time, more and more young people enjoy classical music in China," Zhang adds.

"Both young musicians and young audiences are the future of the country's classical music market."

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Summertime is the perfect season ... for cleaning?

Living in an older apartment building in Beijing for over three years, one downside is discovering how drafty the windows are. Each day, at sunset, as the dusky rays flood through the glass, I am a bit horrified at the layer of dust covering the floors and furniture. As a self-proclaimed "clean freak", I find myself vacuuming every surface twice daily.

While I don't take for granted having a roof over my head — a shelter that millions around the world are lacking — I can't help but wonder what I might be breathing into my lungs. A year ago, I had a window repairman come to see if he could seal them better. Alas, the answer was no. They would need to be replaced completely. Having suffered



Kara Schroeder
Second Thoughts

through pneumonia, influenza and bronchitis the past three months prompted me to begin an even deeper inspection of what was traveling through the spaces from the outdoors into my home.

The beginning of summer is upon us and many see this particular part of

the season as one of renewal. So, what better time to move the furniture and appliances from their nests? Imagine my shock when I moved the navy blue sofa away from the wall to see it resembling a chalkboard that had been the bearer of an artist who repeatedly scraped white chalk across it. Or the refrigerator that, once moved, looked like a crime scene that had been outlined around where it had been killed. Being a clean freak, I possess a lot of high-end cleaning products and appliances — an upholstery steam cleaner, an expensive, imported vacuum, lavender-scented sprays, and a high-capacity clothes dryer. Like the spring season and summer when flowers bloom, I wanted my home to blossom with cleanliness and freshness.

Getting to work on such tasks is no easy feat. Just when you start working on scrubbing one thing, you notice another. At least that's how it is for me. I'm an easily distracted clean freak. After hours of vacuuming, dusting, mopping, steam-cleaning and spraying, every surface was like brand-new. However, given the window quality, the freshness disappeared within a couple of days.

All is not lost, though. The late spring/early summer breeze in the air with the sun shining through the windows motivates me to soldier on. Nothing compares to crawling into a clean bed whose clothes have been washed in lavender soap. Sitting on a sofa with newly scrubbed, cozy cushions is one of the best feelings to come home to after a long work day. And seeing the shine of the floors, free of dust and hair, makes you want to take a deep breath ... even if you have to start all over in a few days.

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By XING WEN
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As Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith once famously said: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." That insight still resonates powerfully in today's ever-changing world, according to scholar Xue Zhaofeng.

The economist, who previously worked at Peking University and who has appeared on programs as a guest on talk shows like *Qipa Shuo (U Can U Bibi)* and the reality show *Super Brain*, recently produced a documentary titled *Economics Unbound*.

In it, Xue travels to various cities including Yiwu and Hengdian in Zhejiang province, Beijing, and Dali in Yunnan province, to talk to ordinary people of different ages and from different backgrounds.

He helps them decipher real-life problems from an economic perspective, in the process exposing viewers to rational economic understanding and logical thinking.

"I want to present universal and personally relevant issues through different characters and stories in real-life settings. People usually think economics is about math, accounting or stock trading, but it is actually about choices. Everyone is connected to economics," says Xue.

An economic take on modern realities

In the first episode, Xue visits a young couple who originally worked for an internet company but later chose to start a business in Yiwu.

They gave up their high-paying jobs and started selling Chinese New Year paintings and couplets via e-commerce livestreaming in the hopes of succeeding in Yiwu, the world's largest small commodity wholesale market. However, the harsh reality was that they were only making a daily income of 200 yuan (\$27.6).

After listening to their story, Xue offered the couple advice from an economic perspective while explaining economic principles such as cost efficiency, entrepreneurial factors, business rules and competitive dilemmas to them and by extension, to the audience.

"The so-called 'window of opportunity' in the market has changed over the years. But what really matters when people are making decisions remains unchanged. Ultimately, economics is the study of human nature. What do you want? How can you get what you want? How can we apply human nature to a changing environment? This is very intriguing. Actually, what I really care about are the things that remain unchanged," explains Xue.

Artificial intelligence has become a window of opportunity for many people today. In one episode, Xue visits Lin Youjiang,



Xue Zhaofeng, economist and producer of a recent documentary, *Economics Unbound*, records his experience helping ordinary people decipher economic problems. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

a former freelance painter who felt that AI was depriving him of job opportunities.

In February last year, a client sent Lin AI-generated images for retouching. He was reluctant. On one hand, he did not want to do retouching work because creating and retouching are different. On the other hand, while he could get 8,000 to 10,000 yuan for drawing a picture, he was only offered 2,000 yuan for the retouching.

"The client thought the image had already been generated, so I just needed to do some simple retouching, and they pushed their offer down," Lin explains.

Feeling that the emergence of AI will leave less and less space for artists, for Lin, the future seemed bleak.

After a frank conversation, Xue realized that Lin had not fully understood the future development of AI.

"Once part of his work had been replaced by AI, he did not realize that he needed to work on other parts in order to succeed. When you are faced with new changes, you can embrace and make use of them," says Xue. He took Lin to visit a computer graphic artist, a film and television company that uses AI tools to produce film and television program, and the initiator of a talk show generated by AI, all of whom actively embrace the changes brought about by the technology. Xue set up an experiment, tasking Lin

with drawing a picture on a predetermined theme. At the same time, he described the picture from the perspective of an economist and used AI to generate it. The film director described a picture from the perspective of making films and also used AI to generate it. Finally, the three pictures were compared. Lin's hand-drawing was undoubtedly the most emotionally expressive. The experiment gave Lin fresh confidence for the future.

"Your market value is not a self-perceived value. By discovering the needs of users and providing things others need, your value will increase. This is an eternal truth," says Xue.

He reiterates the applicability of Smith's quote to the present.

"To get what we want, we must anticipate what others want. The most stable job in the world is a job that contributes to others."

Xue believes that in the AI era, a person's ability to learn, communicate, make judgments, be more reliable, seize opportunities, deal with setbacks, and to reflect are particularly important.

The documentary aired on the video-sharing platform Youku.

Han Yun, director of Youku's documentary center, explains why they chose to work with Xue on the documentary.

"We wanted to convey a fresh perspective and viewpoint. The aim of our program was to focus on topics that are of common concern to young people today, to inspire them with insights that could help guide their real-life experience," says Han.