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# CHINA DAILY

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WORLD WATCH  
By Anthony Moretti

## Principles matter to address Taiwan question

On May 20, Taiwan will inaugurate a new leader. The new leader has a clean slate in which to deal with domestic and international situations. However, that clean slate doesn't come with approval to toss out the foundational rules and laws that support the world order.

We will return to Taiwan, but first we need to look at the most recent US military foray into the South China Sea. There is a connection between Taiwan and the Philippines.

Perhaps it is a coincidence — though anything involving the United States military is — that the US chose to hold naval exercises with the Philippines in the days leading to Lai Ching-Te's inauguration, which takes place on May 20. Granted, the Philippines isn't governed in the same way as Taiwan; nevertheless, one wonders why the US would do anything in the region right now to potentially increase tensions in the South China Sea.

The Navy defended its actions by suggesting the following: "The United States upholds freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle. The United States will continue to defend the rights and freedoms of the sea guaranteed to all. No member of the international community should be intimidated or coerced into giving up their rights and freedoms."

In other words, principles matter. If they do, then the US must also continue to honor the three communiqués relating to the mainland and Taiwan. A brief history lesson: The initial communiqué was written in 1972. In it, the US noted that "there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China". The communiqué also stated: the "United States Government does not challenge that position" and "reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves".

The second communiqué followed in 1979. In it, the US began formal diplomatic relations with China. As part of that decision, the US recognized that the People's Republic of China was the sole legitimate governmental body for all of China, including Taiwan. The US did continue economic and cultural ties with Taiwan and that activity continues today.

The third communiqué was issued in 1982. Its primary feature was the acknowledgment by both countries that they wanted to strengthen cultural, economic, educational and other ties. The communiqué added that the US would continue to sell arms to Taiwan, and the US has proved to be quite proficient at that. The current

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## Against conflict

**Above:** Pro-Palestinian students of University of Michigan and their supporters protest on Saturday on the streets of Dearborn, Michigan, the United States.

**Right:** Children wait in line for hours to receive meals distributed by charity organizations in the city of Deir al-Balah, Gaza, on Saturday.

REBECCA COOK / REUTERS  
ABED RAHIM KHATIB / GETTY IMAGES  
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## NORTHEAST REGION CHARTS NEW COURSE TO REVITALIZATION

Provinces once reliant on traditional industries look to high-tech development, natural advantages

By **TIAN XUEFEI** in Harbin and **LI YANG** in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang

A recent major business event in Yabuli, Heilongjiang province, the total value of investment contracts signed was lower than a year ago — an indication not of fading interest, but of a change in development direction, experts said.

Most of the 125 projects covered by the contracts are in emerging sectors such as the digital economy, biotechnology, the ice and snow industry, new energy, high-end equipment, aerospace and new materials.

The makeup of these contracts underscores the region's determination to capitalize on the ongoing new technology evolution, as

### In-depth

the decline in its old industrial base has not been totally reversed. Local governments' initiatives include reviving the substantial State-owned economy, addressing challenges created by the depletion of natural resources, stopping the brain drain, and dealing with a rapidly aging and dwindling population. All these initiatives need to be done while managing local government debt. None of these tasks is simple, particularly as they are interconnected.

Against this backdrop, the central authorities have vowed to renew their efforts to revitalize

Northeast China — a commitment that began in 2003. The region, covering approximately 1.52 million square kilometers, includes Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces, as well as the eastern part of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The China-Russia Expo and Sub-regional Cooperation Forum convened in Heilongjiang's capital, Harbin, on Friday and was attended by visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin. His attendance indicated the significance the Russian side attaches to deepening economic and trade cooperation with China through Heilongjiang, as well as the border province's potential to further open up.

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## RCEP to bring more vitality, certainty

By **WANG KEJU** in Haikou  
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The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership — a free trade agreement that has created the world's largest trading group — is sending a strong signal in favor of open markets, fair competition and rules-based trade at a time when protectionist tendencies and trade tensions are posing challenges to stable supply chains and global economic recovery, officials and experts said on Sunday.

### Inside

China, as the largest economy within the RCEP framework, will work closely with other member countries to unlock the full potential of the agreement and ensure that its benefits are shared by all for win-win cooperation, they said at the fourth edition of the RCEP Media and Think Tank Forum in Haikou, Hainan province.

The RCEP, with its vast regional population, substantial GDP and significant volume of goods trade, each accounting for approximately 30 percent of the global share, took

full effect in June last year among its 15 signatory countries — China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the 10 member states of the Association of South-east Asian Nations.

Yin Libo, vice-governor of the Hainan provincial government, said the agreement's multiple effects of trade creation, growth promotion and job generation have brought a rare sense of certainty to a world grappling with mounting uncertainties.

Hainan, in particular, will capitalize on the combined advantages of the RCEP and the policies of its free trade port, to foster a base for Chinese companies venturing into international markets and a hub for overseas enterprises seeking entry into the Chinese market, Yin said.

Last year, Chinese enterprises enjoyed a reduction of import duties worth 2.36 billion yuan within the RCEP framework. Importing enterprises based in the RCEP trading partners' economies also benefited immensely from preferential treatment, to the tune of 4.05 billion yuan, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, said the world today is far from being peaceful, with conflicts and disputes arising one after another. Narratives of a new Cold War or confrontation are all too common, and there are those who advocate "decoupling and severing supply chains" and creating "small yard, high fence", he said.

The World Trade Organization said in April that it expected global trade in goods volume to increase 2.6 percent this year, indicating a decrease of 0.7 percentage point compared with the prediction made in October. It warned that geopolitical tensions continue to pose a significant risk to its outlook, as signs of trade fragmentation rise.

The RCEP must further boost the utilization of its rules, upgrade rules and standards, and broaden the scope of cooperation, Qu said. By doing so, it can continue to unleash policy dividends and strengthen the efforts in building a better world, he added.

The RCEP is projected to drive an annual increase of \$186 billion in global GDP by the year 2030,

### VISITS OF VISION

## Chinese tech to light up homes in South Africa

Renewable energy plant nearly ready, to help ease power shortage in 200,000 households

By **WANG XIAODONG** in Cape Town, South Africa  
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In the vast semi-arid area near Postmasburg, in South Africa's Northern Cape Province, construction of one of the country's biggest renewable energy power plants is nearing completion. In about a month's time, the Redstone Concentrated Solar Thermal Power Project is expected to start trial operations, eventually generating enough energy to power 200,000 households in South Africa, thereby greatly alleviating the acute power shortage in the country.

Energy has been a major area of cooperation between China and South Africa over the past years. During President Xi Jinping's visit to South Africa in August, in the presence of Xi and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the two countries signed a number of cooperation deals in the administrative capital Pretoria, including those on emergency power, investment in renewable energy and upgrade of South Africa's power grids.

Since Xi's visit, work on the Redstone power plant has accelerated, with the steam generation system and solar receiving system using solar-heated salt already completed. Trial operations are expected to start in June, and full operation before the end of the year, said Xie Yanjun, deputy director and chief engineer of the project, which is being built by SEPCOIII, a subsidiary of Power China.

"The power plant uses solar thermal, a very clean source of energy, to generate electricity, which conforms to South Africa's environmental protection strategy," he said. "While contributing to reduced carbon emission, it will also significantly ease power shortage in South Africa."

South Africa, which relies on coal to meet around 80 percent of its power needs, has been facing severe power shortage in recent years, caused by aging coal-powered plants, outdated power grids and lack of alternative energy sources.

Frequent load shedding is common across the country. The country has vowed to gradually phase out coal power plants and seek renewable energy as a major means to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

During his visit last year, which was his fourth state visit to the country as Chinese president, Xi stressed intensifying bilateral cooperation in various areas for mutual benefits, including in energy. As the first African country to join the Belt and Road Initiative, South Africa signed a new agreement with China to intensify cooperation under the initiative during the visit.

Nandu Bhula, CEO of the Redstone project, said South Africa-China cooperation in energy under the Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by President Xi in 2013, has strengthened over the past few years and benefited both sides.

"The vision of President Xi (regarding BRI) is a good one, as it supports all countries in development and infrastructure improvement," he said. "I think it's important to have collaborations with countries such as China that can provide expertise in areas where a country is desperately needy."

Regarding the Redstone project, Bhula said that by cooperating with Power China, using cutting-edge technologies to build the power plant, South Africa will improve its ability to build similar renewable energy projects on its own in the future.

"I think the expertise they bring in terms of concentrated solar power is fantastic. It's a huge learning process for us," he said. "With leading edge technology, the Redstone project is actually revolutionary. It can provide 12 hours of energy storage, which means it can run for 24 hours seven days a week if need be."

Bryce Muller, a quality control engineer at the Redstone project who used to work for coal-powered plants in South Africa, said he hopes such major renewable energy projects will also reduce load shedding in the country.

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Guests attend the fourth edition of the RCEP Media and Think Tank Forum on Sunday in Haikou, Hainan province.  
FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

according to the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Chi Fulin, president of the China Institute for Reform and Development, said that due to the short implementation time and low awareness of enterprises, the rate of some members' use of RCEP rules is still low.

Speeding up improvement of the rate of utilization of RCEP rules will further enhance the vitality of the large regional market, he said.

With the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region playing a key role as an international trade center, international financial center and international arbitration center, its accession to the RCEP, if it becomes a reality, will play a unique role in promoting the RCEP regional market, Chi said.

At the same time, research and communication on issues that concern India should be strengthened to attract the South Asian country's interest in rejoining the RCEP, he added.

## PAGE TWO

# Northeast: Neighboring opportunities beckon region

From page 1

This year marks the 21st anniversary of the launch of the Northeast China Revitalization Strategy. Between 2003 and 2022, the central government's total transfer payments to the region reached nearly 12 trillion yuan (\$1.66 trillion), according to a China Business Network report. Although these funds were vital for sustaining local government operations, they were insufficient to fully reinvigorate the local economy.

The region accounts for one-sixth of the country's area and in the 1990s, during its population peak, it made up 9 percent of the national population. By 2022, however, it accounted for 4.8 percent of China's total economy, down from 8.5 percent in 2003.

The continuous contraction of the economy is reflected in the population decline caused by a brain drain, a low birthrate, and an aging society.

According to data from the seventh national census released in 2021, the permanent population of the three northeastern provinces was 98.51 million, a decrease of 11.01 million from the sixth national census in 2010. The provinces' proportion of the national population has also dropped from 8.18 percent in 2010 to 6.98 percent last year.

Nevertheless, the central government's contributions have been indispensable in promoting agricultural industrialization, rescuing some State-owned enterprises from bankruptcy, improving the livelihoods of laid-off workers, and mitigating the decline of resource-depleted cities and industrial and mining areas.

Now, the bailout policy of the central government is focused not only on transfer payments but also on helping the region develop internally generated impetus. This involves encouraging local governments to streamline and reform their administrative systems related to industry, business, and society, which were established during the era of the planned economy.

## Institutional reform

Because State-owned enterprises account for a much larger share of the economy in Northeast China, the region has retained an administrative system that calls for reforms. The private economy sector is still not developed, and the social sector revolves around the cradle-to-tomb welfare system of SOEs.

Although most residents understand that their hometowns will continue to decline if institutional reforms are delayed, the social and economic challenges have made private investors hesitant to invest in Northeast China, despite its resources, institutions, talent, and convenient logistics.

Local governments are being urged to draw lessons from the experience of the Ruhr area in Germany and the revitalization of Pittsburgh in the United States to seize the opportunities of the new technology revolution and transform the region's resource and talent advantages into development advantages.

However, due to the lack of supporting industries related to information, artificial intelligence, and green technology, this remains only a vision for the majority of locals.

## Security importance

According to the central government's latest policy, the region is a key player in safeguarding the country's national security, food security, ecological security, energy security, and industrial security.

After more than 20 years of exploring ideas, the central leadership's requirements for the revitalization of the region have become much clearer. The central govern-

ment's meeting on the implementation of the latest Northeast China Revitalization Strategy at the end of last year identified the directions local efforts should focus on. For example, the region should actively promote industrial innovation through technological innovation and accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system with local characteristics and advantages.

"For the revitalization of Northeast China, the real economy should lay the foundation, technological innovation should serve as the crux, and industrial upgrading represent the direction of relevant work," said a statement from the meeting.

Industrial upgrading is not about starting new industries from scratch, but rather building on the existing industrial strengths of the region to leverage new technologies and management models to accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, it said.

For instance, based on local conditions, Northeast China can focus more on developing emerging industries with local characteristics, such as the ice and snow economy, and the marine economy.

Chi Fulin, president of and a senior researcher with the China Institute for Reform and Development, said that efforts to promote regional economic integration need to coordinate industrial layout, opening-up policies, and the nurturing of a unified market.

"To enhance the overall competitiveness of local industries, the region must promote the multifaceted integration of regional planning, infrastructure construction, industrial development, regional markets, and ecological and environmental protection," Chi said.

In particular, advanced equipment manufacturing, logistics, modern agriculture, tourism, the green economy, and the digital economy should be major focuses of local governments, enterprises, and investors, he said.

They should work together to accelerate the transformation and upgrading of the traditional manufacturing industry toward digitalization, networking, and intelligence by strengthening the in-depth integration of industry, academia, and research led by enterprises, he added.

Meanwhile, subregional coordination among the three provinces and local cities should also be strengthened to avoid competition and protectionism.

Several large cities including Harbin, Shenyang, Changchun, and Dalian, can provide solid foundations for the integrated development of different sectors. These cities should lead the efforts to reform institutions, improve the business environment, promote innovation, and attract talents, setting a good example for the rest of the region.

## Modern agriculture

Northeast China accounts for more than one-fifth of the country's grain output, and Heilongjiang should serve as a "ballast" to ensure national food security, the central government stressed.

The province has been urged to prioritize developing modern agriculture and lead the modernization of agricultural equipment, science and technology, as well as operations and management.

Research and application of digital technology and biotechnology should be reinforced, and agriculture-related science and technology should be given greater prominence. More efforts should be made to create new types of agricultural operations, forge industrial clusters, and accelerate rural revitalization to ensure modern production and living conditions are accessible to rural residents.



WANG JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## AN OPEN WINDOW TO NORTHEAST ASIA



CHINA DAILY

To enhance the overall competitiveness of local industries, the region must promote the multifaceted integration of regional planning, infrastructure construction, industrial development, regional markets, and ecological and environmental protection"

Chi Fulin, president of and a senior researcher with the China Institute for Reform and Development

Heilongjiang, as well as the rest of the region, must adhere to green development and establish a sound economic system that facilitates green, low-carbon, and circular development.

Local governments should vigorously develop tourism with distinctive cultural features and foster the winter economy as a new source of growth, promoting the overall development of sports, culture, equipment, and tourism related to ice and snow.

## Talent is key

Northeast China boasts dozens of prestigious universities, institutes, and research laboratories, including the Harbin Institute of Technology, Jilin University, Harbin Engineering University, and Dalian University of Technology. The central government has significantly increased its investment in these institutions in recent years. They have been encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to further strengthen the construction of first-class academic disciplines and create national talent centers, science and technology centers, and innovation hubs to make greater contributions to the revitalization of Northeast China and the rest of the country.

During his inspection tour of Harbin Engineering University in September last year, President Xi Jinping underscored the impor-

tegic needs, and adapt to the direction of industrial transformation and upgrading.

Guo Hai, Party chief of Northeastern University China, said the revitalization of higher education in the region requires new ideas and greater input. He said universities in the region should focus more on national strategic needs, strengthen advantageous disciplines, and optimize the structure of disciplines to improve their ability to support the high-quality development of the region and the country.

## Opportunities next door

Analysts have urged local governments to seize the strategic window of the next three to five years and use border ports as an important platform to open up to Northeast Asia.

The region should promote integration of its transportation network with regional neighbors, and deepen its industrial cooperation with Russia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, especially in fields related to national security, they said.

Da Zhigang, a researcher on regional development with the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, said the region should be involved in the strategic cooperation between China and Russia. It should also promote mutually beneficial cooperation in the Far East, open up land, sea, and air channels for Northeast Asia, and consolidate connections both domestically and internationally.

Da said the region can utilize the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership to replicate implementation of Southeast Asia's free trade mechanisms in Northeast Asia. In addition, it should explore new opportunities for institutional cooperation between China and Russia, and conduct pilot programs in expanding service trade and producer services, Da said.

The region should develop new subregional models of cooperation between Chinese cities and foreign cities, as well as provincial-level regions, expand connections and cooperation among them, increase cooperation in green and low-carbon fields and expand cooperation between sister cities, he said.

For instance, energy cooperation between China and Russia should be a source of impetus for Heilongjiang's economy, Da added. Thanks to its refineries and transportation facilities in Daqing, the province has the potential to seek a resurgence in the reserve, logistics, and processing industries in the oil and gas sector.

Zhou Huiying in Harbin contributed to this story.

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Gratitude debt owed to once-mighty economic engine room



Li Yang  
Reporter's log

Northeast China has played a special role in the history of the country and beyond. Had the Japanese occupiers discovered oil in Daqing, Heilongjiang province, in the 1930s — which has since contributed 2.5 billion metric tons of crude oil to China after the nation's largest oilfield was discovered there in 1959 — Tokyo might not have risked starting war with the United States to seek oil in Southeast Asia to support its war machine.

Northeast China, a crossroads of Northeast Asia, has witnessed a much larger share of vicissitudes than any other part of the region, serving as a stage not only for the Manchu, Mongolian, and Han peoples but also for the Russians, Koreans, and Japanese from the 16th century to the mid-20th century. This has left it with a rich historical legacy, if not scars, in culture, construction, and industry, that are still visible today. It has also been a religious melting pot over the past 200 years of shamanism, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, Taoism, Catholicism, and the Russian Orthodox Church.

That's why my freshman year at Qiqihar University in Heilongjiang, where I studied geography 24 years ago, was an eye-opening experience. The accent and vocabulary unique to local dialects, the food, weather, and the way people interact, are all different from my hometown of Jinan, Shandong province.

The straightforwardness, which newcomers, especially those from the south of the country, might find a bit rude at first but soon adapt to, and the hospitality and inherent sense of humor of the locals quickly cured me of homesickness. Their warmheartedness helped offset the bitter coldness of the six-month winter to some extent.

My visit late last month to Qiqihar, a heavy industry base, and Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang, as well as a provincial cultural and economic center renowned for its Russian buildings proved to be another thought-provoking experience, compared with my previous impressions of the cities. I had only visited Harbin once before in 2003 to take the Graduate Record Examinations test at Heilongjiang University.

Both cities have expanded to at least twice the size of what they were two decades ago. Most landmark historical buildings left by the Russians and Japanese have now been overshadowed by skyscrapers. Qiqihar now suffers from traffic congestion, which locals seldom experienced 20 years ago.

The locals' heartfelt hospitality and humor instantly gave me a feeling of coming home and they are still proud of their organic food and cuisine, fertile black soil, cool summers, and strong winter sports. However, their concerns about the local economy, the brain drain, and the shrinking and aging population are real.

Few graduates from local prestigious universities choose to find jobs in Northeast China. In the words of the locals, the region had in the past continuously contributed oil, food, wood, coal, iron ore, industrial products, and equipment to the rest of the country. Now, as some of its key natural resources become depleted, it is looking to provide talent to the rest of the country. An unspoken objective for most local straight-A students is to seek jobs in the more prosperous southern parts of the country.

Locals generally hold a wait-and-see attitude toward the latest efforts of local governments to boost the digital and new economy in the region. Many historical debts need to be repaid first to help Northeast China bridge the gap between its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, and today.

## TOP NEWS

Energy:  
Cooperation  
extending to  
more areas

From page 1

Gloria Kgoronyane, a resident of Jroenwatel village located near the project site, said she is eagerly waiting for the Redstone power plant to begin operations, and hopes more power plants can be built to ease the severe power shortage, which has adversely affected her life over the past few years.

"Load shedding has become more frequent since 2022, and nowadays in my village, every day we experience between two and four hours of power cuts," she said. "We cannot watch TV, and sometimes the meat in the fridge rots due to load shedding so I have to throw it out."

Xie, the chief engineer of the project, said with the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, he believes more renewable energy projects will be constructed in South Africa and other countries to meet increasing demand for power and decarbonization efforts.

In addition to renewable energy, China-Africa cooperation has extended to a wide range of areas, including industrial parks and vocational training to support industrialization and modernization of the continent.

During Xi's meeting with Ramaphosa in Pretoria in August, Xi said China is willing to make use of various existing cooperation platforms such as the China-South Africa Vocational Training Alliance to intensify bilateral cooperation in vocational training, promote exchanges and cooperation in youth employment and help South Africa cultivate badly needed talents for economic and social development.

During the meeting, the two presidents also witnessed the signing of cooperation agreements in developing industrial parks and higher education. On Aug 24 in Johannesburg, during a China-Africa Leaders' dialogue co-hosted by President Xi and President Ramaphosa, Xi said China has been firmly supporting Africa's modernization efforts, and proposed to launch initiatives to support Africa's industrialization and agricultural modernization.

In Atlantis, a town about 50 kilometers north of Cape Town, an industrial park set up more than 10 years ago has transformed this once sleepy town into a major manufacturing base for household electrical appliances in South Africa, creating thousands of job

opportunities for locals and injecting new impetus to industrialization of the country.

Hisense South Africa Industrial Park, invested by Chinese appliance and electronics manufacturer Hisense Appliance and China-Africa Development Fund, was established in 2013, the year the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed by Xi. A decade later, the industrial park produces enough television sets and refrigerators to meet nearly a third of South Africa's domestic demand, and exports to countries across Africa and to the United Kingdom.

Jiang Shun, general manager of the industrial park, said that over the past 10 years, the manufacturing base has not only produced high-quality and affordable electrical appliances to meet local demand, it has also cultivated a number of skilled talents that promoted industrial development in Atlantis.

Ivan Hendricks, an engineer at the industrial park's fridge factory, said "made in South Africa" has also promoted technology transfer to locals, which could potentially result in domestic brands being created.

"I know quite a few who previously worked at the factory have started their own business such as fixing television or fridges using the skills they learnt here," Hendricks said. "I hope we could have local production for local brands soon."

Allister Lightburn, a council member of Atlantis, said China and South Africa have maintained close relations ever since the times of apartheid and supported each other. Following President Xi's visit last year, intensified collaboration is expected between the two countries, including on vocational training and talent cultivation as discussed between Xi and Ramaphosa in Pretoria.

Lightburn said the Chinese Embassy in Johannesburg has of late been in touch with officials in Cape Town and discussions are underway to develop vocational training for locals. Some young people in Atlantis may also be selected for internships and other training programs sponsored by China, he said.

Regarding the proposal by President Xi to build a community with a shared future, Lightburn said the vision is widely accepted in South Africa.

"I think we all would like to thrive and be better...there is a way where we can model and learn from one another," Lightburn said. "I think if we have that amount of empathy and courage, it will make the world more powerful, and also more positive."

"China is a very strong partner of South Africa, and the future of South Africa is going to be linked to benefits from cooperation with China," Bhula, CEO of the Redstone project, said. "I can only see improvements going forward."

Path to bright future running  
through rural school canteens

China plays vital role by setting examples in meal programs

By HOU CHENCHEN and ZHAO RUINAN

China has a critical role to play in South-South cooperation, such as building more sustainable school meal programs in developing countries amid post-pandemic economic challenges, climate change and rising food prices, a United Nations official said.

"The Chinese government has put in place good nutrition guidelines, innovations in areas such as food fortification to address anaemia as well as an effective monitoring framework for school meals," said Carmen Burbano de Lara, director of school meals and social protection service of the UN World Food Programme during a visit to China in March.

"What China has done here is inspirational and the scale it reached is very important for other countries to learn from," she said.

Since Burbano's first trip to the country in 2009, she has maintained a strong connection with and passion for China. Her maiden trip coincided with the publication of *Rethinking School Feeding*, which she co-authored and which later became one of the documents that the Chinese nutrition improvement program relied on.

Since 2018, WFP China along with local governments has conducted trial initiatives in improving preschool nutrition in rural China, including in Hunan, Gansu and Sichuan provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, targeting left-behind children and low-income families.

The huge investment made by the Chinese government to ensure children's nutrition in recent years is particularly significant, Burbano said.

"With each visit to China I could see that cooks were trained, the infrastructure in schools was enhanced and foods such as rice and soy sauce were fortified," she said.

In 2022, China joined the School Meals Coalition, a platform to restore school meal programs that had collapsed following the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, China is working with other governments to restore school meals around the world.

In Rwanda, the government has met a commitment announced in 2021 to introduce universal school feeding coverage, according to a WFP report. In 2020, the country provided 400,000 children with school meals and by 2022 that number had risen to four million. In Benin, President Patrice Talon announced a national budget commitment of \$270 million in 2022 to extend the national school feeding program.

"As the global community pays more attention to school meals, to help low-income countries build more sustainable school meal programmes is imperative," she said.

## School feeding

Low-income countries lag behind the rest of the world when it comes to providing meals to children. Around 61 percent of children receive meals in schools in high-income countries but only 18 percent do so in low-income countries, said a WFP report.

Statistics also show that though there has been a recovery overall, the reach of school meals in low-



Students enjoy a free and nutritious lunch on Feb 16, 2023, in Xishan, Congjiang county of Guizhou province. YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

## Simple meals transform lives in remote areas

In a remote town, a simple meal served at a kindergarten canteen table presents the perfect example of how a program has helped rescue a boy and his grandfather — as well as tens of thousands of others — from poverty and hunger.

The primary school student, Tian Zhiping, lives with his 60 something grandfather in Dianfang town, Longshan county, in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture in Central China's Hunan province. His parents live and work in the city.

The town is so remote that it is difficult and costly for schools to obtain fresh produce from large food suppliers. Local schools instead made do with packaged food.

"Local schools often used to rely on starch sausage as meat and probiotic

drinks as milk, but this failed to meet the nutritional needs of the children," a representative of Maoba village kindergarten said.

Things changed in 2018, when the WFP China office, with local governments, set up the Preschool Nutrition Improvement Programme in Xiangxi, encouraging small farmers to play a role in providing school meals.

The boy's grandfather, Tian Qingxiang, became one of 139 farmers chosen to supply vegetables to local schools. The program provided him with fruit and vegetable seeds and organic fertilizers worth 500 yuan (\$70) a year.

"From me, the children get in-season, fresh, safe and healthy food that has been grown in an environ-

ment-friendly way, without the use of pesticides," Tian said.

Tian junior can now enjoy these highly nutritious meals and the boy's school fees have been waived too, giving him that extra incentive to attend classes. With the money made from selling his crops, farmer Tian's income has risen by about 6,000 yuan a year.

Over the past six years, about 8,000 children in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and Hunan, Gansu and Sichuan provinces have benefited from similar programs.

These programs, in line with China's National Nutrition Plan (2017-30) and Healthy China 2030, aim to improve the nutrition and all-round development of rural children, with the ultimate objective of eradicating poverty and vitalizing rural areas.

## Seaward bound



Sea turtles are lined up to be released into the ocean on Saturday during the water purification ritual ceremony for the 10th World Water Forum in Denpasar, the capital of Bali, Indonesia.

FIRDIA LISNAWATI / AP

## Communiques: Actions that put statement into question must cease

From page 1

administration is nearing \$5 billion. And keep in mind, according to one estimate, that there is a backlog of more than \$19 billion in such sales.

These three communiques remain valid, and rarely does a month go by in which either the president of the United States or his secretary of state again state publicly that Washington has no interest in undermining the One-China Principle.

And yet the US continues to provoke China, most especially with the

military drills it holds in the South China Sea. Americans always defend such actions by saying they believe in freedom of the seas for all nations and that they have conducted exercises there for well over a century.

Such an argument seems inconsistent with the US wanting to affirm its role as the champion of peace and prosperity around the world. More importantly, if freedom of the seas is the governing idea, then any nation — friend or foe — can conduct exercises in international waters near the United

States, no? We know what Washington's response to that would be.

With that as the background, we return to Lai's inauguration. He is expected to carry on with his predecessor's policies. Tsai Ing-wen saw nothing wrong with arguing that Taiwan should seek "independence", words defined, justifiably, by the mainland as crossing a red line. Likewise, she saw nothing wrong with inviting top US politicians to the island, knowing full well that the mainland would see this as a provocation. And she sought to

If freedom of the seas is the governing idea, then any nation — friend or foe — can conduct exercises in international waters near the United States, no? We know what Washington's response to that would be.

downgrade cross-strait ties.

But there is an element of caution that can't be forgotten. Lai's party no longer has control of the parliament; it is now in the hands of the Kuomintang, which wants to solidify relations with the mainland. Lai will be restrained, should he want his government to be the thorn in China's side that his predecessor's was.

Will the US show similar restraint?

It is incumbent on the United States to talk the talk and walk the walk when it comes to Taiwan. The

20 percent, the studies showed.

"I would like to see more sustainable food systems that link small farmers to schools and children," Burbano said. "All schools can have clean energy for cooking, and women can have more access to jobs through such systems."

In the case of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture in Central China's Hunan province, a nutritional improvement program launched by WFP China is part of a rural vitalization drive benefiting local farmers and constructing agricultural supply chain.

During her visits to many schools in western China over the years, Burbano has also had the opportunity to share with children the meals they were receiving as part of the programme.

"It was a great experience, eating what the children received at school: the fortified rice, vegetables, eggs and a variety of soups. I found the meals both delicious and nutritious," she said.

"I was happy that, what I strongly believed, what shaped my own life, was really being practiced here in China."

Kuang Hanying contributed to this story.

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One China Principle is part of the (Western-created) world order. Much like President Donald Trump was vilified for removing the US from key international agreements during his term in office, President Joe Biden — and all of his successors — must align words and actions: Taiwan is part of China, and deliberate actions that put that statement into question must cease. Principles matter.

The author is department head and associate professor in the Communication and Organizational Leadership department at Robert Morris University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## Rain drain

A worker opens sewer grates to try to expedite the drainage of floodwater at a roadside in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Sunday. Heavy rainfall engulfed Guangxi from 8 am on Saturday to 10 am on Sunday.

ZHOU HUA / XINHUA



## High tech benefits the disabled

Emerging technologies help people with disabilities better connect with society

By LI LEI

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Technology was the major theme of this year's National Disability Day, which fell on Sunday, as emerging technologies ranging from wearable devices to brain implants help people with disabilities better connect with society, according to the China Disabled Persons' Federation.

National Disability Day cast a spotlight on a range of innovations aimed at helping disabled people lead independent and dignified lives.

These advancements included an artificial intelligence exoskeleton — a wearable, AI-powered robotic frame designed to enhance the physical abilities of the lower body.

The technology could potentially help tens of millions of Chinese with

walking disabilities due to nerve damage caused by a range of conditions such as hemiplegia, paraplegia and cerebral palsy, said Shuai Mei, a Beihang University professor specializing in robotics.

She noted that conventional treatments are time-consuming and often have unsatisfactory results.

However, the exoskeleton technology has presented a shortcut.

"These robots help paralyzed individuals stand, walk and engage in smart rehabilitation training," Shuai said, adding that the devices provide high-intensity, repetitive training that improves walking consistency and effectiveness.

The robots also assist in daily activities by recognizing the users' intentions and aiding in tasks such as walking, climbing stairs and squatting, Shuai added.

Breakthroughs have also been made in individual brain functional

segmentation research, which studies the brain regions responsible for specific cognitive functions or behaviors, according to scientist Liu Hesheng of the Changping Laboratory in Beijing.

Such expertise is crucial for investigating brain disorders, cognitive functions and variations in brain organization, he said.

Neuroscience discoveries offer hope for improving assistive technologies for those with disabilities, and as human knowledge of the brain grows, scientists can develop smarter tools to help those in need.

"Scientists are currently trying out ways to tweak certain brain circuits directly. This has led to some big breakthroughs in treating certain conditions," he said, adding that implanting brain stimulators — which replicate the activity of neurons and synapses in the brain — has shown promise in treating Parkinson's disease.

Brain researchers are also working on non-surgical, noninvasive options to help conditions such as

stroke impairments, cerebral palsy and autism, Liu said.

Other innovations that are improving accessibility for people with disabilities include intelligent speech-to-text technology; home-grown cochlear implants; augmented reality solutions for improved information accessibility for the hearing impaired; Braille and tactile graphic display technology enabling blind individuals to interpret graphics; intelligent prosthetics; and neurostimulation rehabilitation devices that target urinary issues in those with spinal cord injuries.

In recent years, China has increased its efforts in the research, development and application of assistive technologies for people with disabilities.

The Government Work Report by the State Council this year proposed strengthening the research, development and application of technologies in health, elderly care and disability assistance, among others.

## China lauds progress on Intl Museum Day

By WANG RU in Xi'an  
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China opened 268 new museums across the country in the past year, creating a total of 6,833 registered museums nationwide, the National Cultural Heritage Administration announced on Saturday, International Museum Day.

In the past year, more than 40,000 exhibitions and 380,000 educational activities in Chinese museums attracted 1.29 billion visits, surpassing the number for 2019 — 1.23 billion — before the COVID-19 pandemic, said Li Qun, director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

"The museum craze is still gaining momentum. With blockbuster exhibitions, educational activities and exquisite cultural and creative products emerging one after another, museums have become an indispensable part of people's need for a better life in the new era," said Li, adding that during the Labor Day holiday from May 1 to 5, museums in China attracted more than 50 million visits.

The nation's main celebration this year was held at the Shaanxi History Museum Qin-Han Hall in Xixian New Area, Shaanxi province.

The hall was officially opened to the public on Saturday after operating on a trial basis for several months. As a new branch of the

Shaanxi History Museum, it is dedicated to the civilizations of the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasties, a key period during which a united Chinese nation was formed.

International Museum Day has been held on May 18 every year since 1977. China has organized activities on this day since 1983, after it joined the International Council of Museums.

This year's International Museum Day was themed around research and education.

"It is related to some United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure," said ICOM President Emma Nardi.

"In China, with all the blossoming activities that you are organizing, the relationship between museums, educational institutions like schools and universities and local communities will be strengthened," she said.

In Beijing, a museum month activity began on Saturday, with four themed series activities being promoted over the following four weeks.

The first week highlights a wide range of exhibitions, with over 10,000 free tickets to museums being offered to the public every day. Subsequent weeks will spotlight cultural and creative products, films and books.

## Dalian to strengthen ties with Russian city

By ZHANG XIAOMIN

in Dalian, Liaoning

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Dalian, Liaoning province, and the city of Arkhangelsk, Russia, will collaborate in various fields including economics, culture, education, sports and youth activities, according to a memorandum on friendly exchanges signed by the two cities recently.

Chen Shaowang, mayor of Dalian, highlighted the significance of local cooperation between China and Russia and said he hopes the two cities will deepen infrastructure connectivity and promote cooperation between their ports.

Chen, who is also deputy Party chief of Dalian, said the cities aim to strengthen practical cooperation in areas such as energy, minerals, timber, machinery manufacturing, fisheries and the deep processing of marine products.

The two cities also plan to collaborate to construct a platform for marine economic cooperation and promote the development of more high-quality industrial cooperation projects.

Furthermore, they will improve government communication and coordination mechanisms, accelerate the process of establishing a friendly relationship and expand practical cooperation in relevant fields.

"Dalian has been a key city for Sino-Russian cooperation with positive outcomes in trade, regional collaboration and cultural exchanges with Russian regions," Chen said.

The northeastern port city has established friendly relations with Vladivostok and Tomsk, among other Russian cities. The trade representative office of the Primorsky region and the Dalian cooperation center of the Russian Export Center have been set up, and direct flights between Dalian



Dalian has been a key city for Sino-Russian cooperation with positive outcomes in trade, regional collaboration and cultural exchanges with Russian regions."

Chen Shaowang, mayor of Dalian

and Vladivostok have been initiated, facilitating smoother trade and cultural exchanges between the regions.

In addition, events such as the China-Russia (Dalian) Investment and Trade Cooperation Conference and the Russian food culture festival have been held in the city.

According to Chen, bilateral trade volume between Dalian and Russian regions reached 43.6 billion yuan (\$6 billion) last year, with 176 Russian enterprises having established operations in Dalian.

Alexander Tsybulsky, governor of the Arkhangelsk region, praised Dalian for its comprehensive industrial system, strong scientific and technological resources and unique geographical advantages.

He emphasized the mutual benefit of strengthening practical cooperation between the two cities, particularly in areas such as port construction, maritime logistics, marine fisheries, timber processing and higher education, aiming to enhance youth exchanges and contribute to the continuous deepening of traditional Sino-Russian relationships.

## Library features exhibits for visually impaired

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG

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On Saturday — the 48th International Museum Day, which fell the day before the 34th National Day for Helping the Disabled on Sunday — the unveiling ceremony of the Cultural Museum for the Visually Impaired was held at the China Braille Library in Beijing's Xicheng district.

The museum, divided into several zones, features the Cultural Exhibition Hall for the Visually Impaired that focuses on facts about people with little or no vision, including how Braille was developed and the history of care for the visually impaired in China. The Tactile Civilization Exhibition Hall is filled with replicas of items from various civilizations that visitors can touch.

The items displayed in that hall vary, including spears made during the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), Roman swords and shields, and models of satellites and high-speed trains. Each exhibit includes introductory Braille text and is touchable.

The museum also features the Eye Care Exhibition Hall, in which there is a large-scale model of a human



A visually impaired visitor feels a Sphinx statue at the Cultural Museum for the Visually Impaired in Beijing on Saturday.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

eyeball that explains how the sense of sight is formed and offers information on various eye diseases.

In his speech at the ceremony, Lai Wei, director and Party chief of China Braille Press, said that the museum will enhance its service capabilities, develop and create more cultural services for the visually impaired.

Bai Yansong, a renowned news anchor at China Central Television

as well as a cultural ambassador of the museum, also spoke during the ceremony.

"The visually impaired are among the groups that need a museum most, because although they are not able to see the world, they need to feel it and be felt by it," Bai said in his remarks, calling for the public to help the visually impaired remove barriers so they can have better access to the world.

Bai donated 1 million yuan (\$138,422) to the museum.

Cui Liying, a 69-year-old woman, traveled with her companion, Li Weiqi, over 40 kilometers from Changping district to participate in the ceremony.

"It was a wonderful trip," Cui said. "We were very happy to touch so many things here, and this will be an often visited place for us in the future."

In the presence of the guests, Zhu Bing, director of the China Braille Library, and Chen Yanzhou, principal of the Beijing School for the Blind, signed a strategic cooperation agreement.

According to the agreement, both parties will leverage their respective advantages to deepen their collaboration, make positive contributions to improving cultural services for the visually impaired, promote the high-quality development of special education and help the visually impaired community enjoy a better life.



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## Agriculture minister suspected of violating Party disciplines, national laws

By YANG ZEKUN

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Tang Renjian, minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, is undergoing disciplinary review and supervisory investigation, the country's top anti-graft watchdogs announced on Saturday.

The Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline

Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision, the nation's top watchdogs, said in a statement that Tang is suspected of seriously violating Party disciplines and national laws.

Born in 1962 in Chongqing, Tang joined the Party in 1991.

He has served as vice-chairman of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, deputy director of the

Office of the Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs in Beijing, and deputy Party chief, acting governor and governor of Northwest China's Gansu province.

He became minister of agriculture and rural affairs at the end of 2020.

Following the CCDI and NCS's statement, the Party leadership

group of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs held a meeting to convey the watchdogs' decision to place Tang under investigation. All attending members unanimously expressed their resolute support for the decision.

Party organizations, members and cadres at all levels under the administration of the ministry were urged to consider the announce-

ment as a warning to those engaging in improper behavior. They were also asked to establish a correct view of power, achievements and work, and always exercise power impartially, lawfully, for the people and with integrity.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs' official website shows that on May 15, Tang attended and spoke at a national rural talent work

conference in Xianyang, Shaanxi province.

Last month, the 20th CPC Central Committee launched its third round of routine disciplinary inspections covering 34 departments and State-owned companies, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. An inspection team was stationed at the ministry and is expected to complete its work by July.

## RCEP MEDIA &amp; THINK TANK FORUM

## RCEP members encouraged to harmonize rules

Alignment needed to support healthy growth of supply chain, experts say

By ZHONG NAN  
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Members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership can further improve the alignment of operational guidelines across key sectors such as competition policy and trade in services to elevate mutual openness, said trade experts and foreign scholars on Sunday.

Speaking at a forum in Haikou, capital of Hainan province, they said that in the context of the uncertain global geopolitical landscape and trade protectionism, these measures are practical to tackle the weaponization of tariffs and support the growth of a healthy supply chain in the Asia-Pacific region.

Further harmonizing their rules and policies in areas such as government procurement, rules of origin, cross-border e-commerce, customs procedures, financial cooperation and resource flows will help facilitate the free flow of economic elements among member countries, said Yu Hongjun, former deputy head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

"This alignment promotes the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment within the region, enhancing regional economic integration," said Yu, adding it will also drive global investment and trade activities, pushing the international community toward a new era of stable economic globalization.

Sharing similar views, Xue Lan, dean of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University, stressed that fostering the digital economy and establishing robust digital trade frameworks are paramount.

"Enhancing mechanisms for cross-border data flows to improve both efficiency and security are essential," Xue said, noting that while trade agreements significantly bolster the goods trade, easing the exchange of underlying data also plays a critical role and can profoundly influence trade dynamics.

Given the large population and the vast amounts of data in the RCEP region, which includes 15 countries from China to New Zealand, it is essential to proactively develop new digital business models and create international data service industry clusters, he added.

Thanks to favorable tariff policies and simplified customs procedures, along with their complementary trade structures, foreign trade between China and the other 14 RCEP countries amounted to 3.08 trillion yuan (\$425.56 billion) in the first quarter of this year, growing by 2.7 percent year-on-year. This accounted for 30.3 percent of China's total trade value, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Eager to promote substantial economic and trade cooperation with neighboring countries, China

has held a number of talks with related parties on the third version of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area agreement and the China-Japan-South Korea free trade agreement, according to China's Ministry of Commerce.

Yan Liang, deputy secretary-general of the Seoul-based Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, an international organization promoting common prosperity among China, Japan and South Korea, said that all RCEP member countries should collaborate closely and uphold the principles of multilateralism.

This will further enhance the standards and rules for the liberalization and facilitation of goods and services trade and investment, Yan said.

In addition to cooperation in traditional economic sectors, he said there should be a focus on investments in new economic areas, particularly in the digital economy, as well as in the green and blue economies and the wellness industry.



The RCEP can play a significant role in stabilizing economic development, especially as many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are dealing with protectionism and avoiding trade wars."

**Nguyen Huy Hoang**, dean of the faculty of economics at the Vietnam Graduate Academy of Social Sciences

Echoing that sentiment, Kim Heung-chong, a distinguished professor at the College of International Studies of Seoul-based Korea University, said as member economies have many unilateral and bilateral free trade agreements within the RCEP, they need to further increase market openness.

"Sometimes, it involves not only cutting tariffs, but also factors like certifications and subsidies play a role," Kim said.

"The RCEP can play a significant role in stabilizing economic development, especially as many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are dealing with protectionism and avoiding trade wars," said Nguyen Huy Hoang, dean of the faculty of economics at the Vietnam Graduate Academy of Social Sciences.

This mega free trade deal can help member economies achieve post-pandemic recovery and promote long-term economic growth, as well as foster regional peace, stability, harmony and prosperity, he added.



Members of the audience listen to an address on sharing the benefits of the RCEP and advancing international cooperation at the 2024 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum in Haikou, Hainan province, on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Parties of pact urged to address shortcomings

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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Global experts have called for further moves to enhance the effective implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership trade, the world's largest free trade pact, which will offer increasing opportunities for global stakeholders.

The remarks were made at seminars discussing improving the utilization rate of the RCEP's rules and advancing regional economic integration, which were held on Sunday on the sidelines of the RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum in Hainan province.

Ahn Choong-yong, professor emeritus at Chung-Ang University said, "While the RCEP agreement provides unified rules for origin and making progress in certification, it also has obvious shortcomings compared to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership."

According to Ahn, the RCEP agreement lacks certain character-

istics present in the CPTPP, including environmental and labor standards, and intellectual property protection. There is also less emphasis on digital trade in the RCEP agreement as well as a lack of investment protection.

Ahn noted that seven countries — Australia, Brunei, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam — are members of both the RCEP and the CPTPP, and that China has applied to join the latter. He called for more improvement in the RCEP trade deal to align with the level of the Asia-Pacific economic framework.

To make the RCEP more effective, Zhang Yansheng, chief researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, highlighted the importance of adhering to institutional opening-up and implementing existing measures on promoting liberalization and facilitation for trade and investment.

"The major countries in this region need to take responsibility and provide public goods, including capacity building, institutional

development and network construction," he said. "A new opportunity also lies in green and digital transformation; the region must strive for that. And more efforts should also be made to deepen cooperation in various aspects to enhance total factor productivity."

The RCEP is a historic agreement that brings together 15 Asia-Pacific countries: 10 member states of ASEAN and five of their key trading partners — China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand — representing about a third of global economic value.

Masahiro Kawai, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, said while the goals of the RCEP in terms of open trade are not as ambitious as that of the CPTPP, the RCEP members include many developing countries.

"That makes it a very inclusive free trade agreement," the professor said.

Looking to the future, he said more efforts should be made to further reduce tariffs in a shorter time frame to attract more countries to follow RCEP standards.

Zhao Jinping, former director-general of the Department of Foreign Economic Relations at the Development Research Center of the State Council, said one of the key tasks for the RCEP is promoting regional economic integration, with a focus on adding more members.

"Expanding the scope of RCEP membership beyond the region would be very beneficial for enlarging our circle of friends," he said.

Zhao's views were echoed by Chang Ka-mun, managing director of Li & Fung Development (China), which focuses on providing solutions for supply chain problems. Chang said participating governments need to increase efforts and promote the RCEP through various publicity activities, allowing more people and more companies to gain a better understanding of the agreement.

Zhao said he strongly supports the establishment of a secretariat for the RCEP, saying that doing so can encourage member countries to strengthen policy connectivity and coordination.

## Media, think tank cooperation seen as essential

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou  
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Cooperation between think tanks and the media within the framework of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is crucial for promoting mutual understanding, knowledge sharing and informed decision-making, according to experts at the 2024 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum held on Sunday in Hainan province.

"The relationship between think tanks and the media can be likened to a symbiotic partnership, where the media serves as a platform for amplifying the research and analysis produced by think tanks, while the think tanks benefit from the media's ability to reach a wider audience and facilitate meaningful dialogue," said Duan Gang, vice-president of the Yunnan Education Association for International Exchange and former vice-president of Yunnan Minzu University.

Rommel Banlaoi, chairman of the advisory board at the China Studies Center of the School of International Relations at New Era University in the Philippines, said that while think tanks and media participate in international conferences and regional forums to address various issues and perspectives on the RCEP, there remains a critical need to enhance systematic collaboration and to strengthen their partnership to maximize their impact.

He suggested key media outlets reporting on the RCEP should be identified and analyzed, and stressed the importance of understanding how think tanks can play a leading role in clarifying and contextualizing these reports for the public.

"In the context of the RCEP and related issues, cooperation between media organizations and think tanks is essential for increasing public awareness of the goals and intentions of the agreement and facilitating a deeper understanding among

government officials," Banlaoi said.

Traditionally, the media has encompassed print and broadcast outlets as primary sources of news and information dissemination. However, in the digital age, the role of social media has become increasingly significant in shaping public discourse and opinion.

"As such, it is imperative for think tank experts to engage with social media platforms and collaborate with tech giants to ensure the accurate and reliable sharing of information with the public on RCEP-related matters," he added.

Song Yi, associate dean at the School of International Journalism and Communication at Beijing Foreign Studies University, noted that the media, think tanks and universities share common goals and can complement each other in building a network of knowledge production, dissemination and application related to the RCEP.

"It is essential for these entities to

work together to produce and distribute a wide range of educational materials. This can include publishing RCEP-themed paper-based and digital books, articles, social media content, games and databases that cater to different audiences and educational levels," Song said.

In addition, organizing training activities for different cohorts such as policymakers, academics, students and the general public is crucial for enhancing knowledge and capacity building on RCEP-related issues, she added.

Rynith Taing, deputy editor-in-chief of the Khmer Times in Cambodia, noted that engaging young people in the RCEP is vital for ensuring that the next generation is well-informed about the benefits and implications of the agreement.

"In the digital era, with the proliferation of social media and online platforms, leveraging the media and think tanks to reach and educate young people is key," he said.

## What they say



Against the backdrop of declining global openness, rising trade costs and bottlenecks of supply chains in the world, the RCEP could promote the free flow of production factors in a wider scope, realize the optimal allocation of production factors, promote the specialized division of labor and spur more new quality productive forces and innovations, which will help regional cooperation advance toward a more inclusive, modern, comprehensive and mutually beneficial direction.

**Shi Zhongjun**, secretary-general of the ASEAN-China Center



The RCEP must work for all businesses, with a particular focus on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for on average more than 95 percent of registered busi-

nesses and provide between 30 percent and 85 percent of total employment in RCEP economies. The MSMEs must be furnished with the necessary know-how to take advantage of the RCEP and other free trade associations to grow our businesses and economies together and leave no one behind.

**Kao Kim Houn**, secretary-general of ASEAN



We have always supported the development of multilateral trade and the peaceful resolution of trade disputes. We hope to join the RCEP.

This free trade deal would not only promote the development of Hong Kong but also foster common prosperity and development among all member economies.

**Stephen Wong Yuen-shan**, head of the Chief Executive's Policy Unit, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region



RCEP member economies need to strengthen communication between governments and regularly review past developments to ensure that

businesses can adapt to various situations. It is also necessary to establish a permanent secretariat to further enhance cooperation among its members.

**Kim Heung-chong**, distinguished professor at the College of International Studies, Korea University



Facing deglobalization sentiments, every country hopes to enhance its supply chain resilience. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement indeed provides hope. In the wave of protectionism and regional globalization, the RCEP stands out, providing unified rules for origin and making progress in certification. For

instance, China, Japan and South Korea have jointly established a free trade framework within the RCEP framework for the first time.

**Ahn Choong-yong**, professor emeritus at Chung-Ang University, Seoul



To make the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership trade deal more effective, we need to adhere to institutional opening-up and implement existing measures on promoting liberalization and facilitation for trade and investment. Many suggest establishing a secretariat for implementation. Moreover, the major countries in this region need to take responsibility and provide public goods, including capacity building, institutional development and network construction.

**Zhang Yansheng**, chief researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges

## Gathering wisdom



Speakers share their thoughts on the role of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and ideas on further promoting international cooperation at the 2024 RCEP Media & Think Tank Forum in Haikou, Hainan province, on Sunday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

# 800,000 flee Rafah amid heavy clashes

New cracks appear in Israeli governing coalition over handling of Gaza conflict

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Heavy clashes and bombardment rocked the southern Gaza city of Rafah over the weekend, where the United Nations said 800,000 people had been “forced to flee” Israel’s assault on Hamas militants, as new cracks emerged in the Israeli government over the handling of the conflict in Gaza.

Israel’s military said airstrikes hit more than 70 targets across Gaza on Saturday while ground troops conducted “targeted raids” in eastern Rafah, killing 50 militants and locating dozens of tunnel shafts.

Philippe Lazzarini of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said that since Israel’s Rafah operation began, there had been a massive movement of people.

“800,000 people are on the road having been forced to flee since the Israeli forces started the military operation in the area on May 6,” the UNRWA chief said on X.

He said people were fleeing to areas without water supplies or adequate sanitation.

According to US Central Command, about 500 metric tons of aid are expected to be delivered to Gaza through a floating pier.

But UN agencies and humanitarian aid groups have warned sea or air deliveries cannot replace far more efficient truck convoys into Gaza.

The Rafah border crossing, a vital conduit for humanitarian assistance, has been closed since the Israeli Rafah operation began early this month.

At the same time, Israel has conducted renewed military sweeps this month of parts of northern Gaza where it had declared the end of major operations in January. At the time, it also predicted its forces would return to prevent a regrouping by the Palestinian Islamist group that rules Gaza.

One site has been Jabalia, the largest of the Gaza Strip’s eight refugee camps. On Saturday, troops and tanks edged into streets so far spared the ground offensive, residents said. In one strike, medics said 20 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded.

It came as political divisions in Israel’s war cabinet burst into the open on Saturday night, with minister Benny Gantz saying he would

quit unless Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved a postwar plan for the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu has faced criticism at home and abroad for failing to articulate an endgame more than seven months into the conflict.

In a news conference, Gantz said he wanted the cabinet to form a six-point plan in the next three weeks and that if his expectations are not met he would withdraw his centrist party from Netanyahu’s emergency coalition.

Gantz said his proposal would include creating a temporary US-European-Arab-Palestinian system of civil administration for Gaza while Israel retains security control.

## Increased strain

Gantz’s challenge shows increased strain on Israel’s coalition, which is dominated by far-right parties. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Wednesday demanded clarity on postwar plans and for Netanyahu to forswear any military reoccupation of Gaza.

On the diplomatic front, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan was heading to the region.

Sullivan met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud on Saturday to discuss a “semi-final” security deal and Netanyahu on Sunday, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

Saudi state media released no images of Sullivan and Prince Mohammed meeting in Dhahran, a city in the kingdom’s far east home to its state-run oil giant the Saudi Arabian Oil, known as Saudi Aramco.

“The semi-final version of the draft strategic agreements between the kingdom and the United States of America, which are almost being finalized — and what is being worked on the two sides in the Palestinian issue to find a credible path — were discussed,” a statement issued after the talks said.

That included “a two-state solution that meets the aspirations and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people” and “the situation in Gaza,” the statement said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Rain respite



Afghans clear debris and salvage their belongings after flash floods following heavy rains in Firoz Koh, Ghor Province, on Saturday. At least 120 were killed due to the adverse weather in Afghanistan’s northern Faryab Province and western Ghor Province on Friday and Saturday, local officials said. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Joint health program launched in Thailand

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok  
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A Thai minister has announced the launch of a new scientific research program in Thailand in conjunction with China’s leading genome research organization, aiming to improve local people’s life quality and reduce healthcare costs associated with late-stage diseases.

The research conducted by the National Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology of Thailand and the Bangkok Genomics Innovation Public Company, or BKG, a Thai joint venture invested by one of China’s leading genomics companies, BGI, will provide screening for high-risk populations of atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases.

Based on a new biomarker, namely the Trimethylamine N-oxide, or TMAO, the screening can offer risk prediction and intervention plans before symptoms appear.

The collaboration was announced during the 19th annual meeting of the International Conference on Genomics at the Faculty of Medicine of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok over the weekend.

At the opening ceremony, Supamas Isarabhakdi, Thai minister of higher education, science, research and innovation, said the collaboration represents a vital exchange in biotechnology and medical technol-

ogy, particularly in genetic testing, which aims to advance treatments for various diseases.

“Moreover, this partnership emphasizes the use of cutting-edge technology for the prevention and surveillance of diseases before symptoms arise,” she said.

“This is particularly true for the risks of heart disease and cancer, where technology is leading to more detailed examinations and better prevention, in line with global health trends.”

Over 20 years, BGI has launched several programs in Thailand covering a wide range of fields, including public health, gene research, precision medicine, advanced agriculture techniques and talent training to facilitate the development of life sciences in the country and benefit local people through technology.

## Friendly ties

“This year marks the 49th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Thailand. The cooperation in the field of scientific education between the two countries has profound significance and impact on the ‘China-Thailand family’ relationship,” said Isarabhakdi.

According to the ministry, projects supported by BGI have so far involved more than 100,000 participants in Thailand.

Since 2012, BGI has worked closely with the Thai Red Cross

Society and introduced its non-invasive prenatal test at King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital. Nearly 100,000 noninvasive prenatal tests have been carried out, helping parents better understand the health of the fetus and the risk of certain genetic abnormalities.

In addition, BGI and Chulalongkorn University Faculty of Medicine signed a memorandum of understanding last year to jointly build a spatiotemporal omics research center, according to Cao Sujie, general manager of BGI Group Southeast Asia.

BGI was also in the first batch of a key project under the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation and has carried out genetic testing in five Lancang-Mekong countries, helping alleviate poverty caused by disease and improve the well-being of local people.

“In the future, we will expand our services in more countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Vietnam, aiming to establish joint ventures and make our technology localized and benefit their people. Also, we will continue to invest more in personnel training, aiming to cultivate 100 specialists annually for the region,” Cao said.

During the conference, Yang Huanming, an academian of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, called for joint efforts from scientists worldwide to work together to develop life sciences.

## Iraq strives to retrieve plundered antiquities

BAGHDAD — As the world marked International Museum Day on Saturday, Iraq remained haunted by the poignant scars of looted antiquities in the wake of the US-led invasion.

Boasting an ancient civilization of thousands of years, Iraq has abundant archaeological treasures. However, the US invasion of Iraq and the ensuing chaos and instability created an opportunity for robbers and lawbreakers to plunder and smuggle Iraqi antiquities from museums and unprotected archaeological sites.

In the first days of the US-led coalition forces’ occupation of Baghdad in 2003, thousands of priceless artifacts were systematically looted from the Iraq Museum.

Adel al-Mubarak, an archaeologist and history teacher at Baghdad-based al-Iraqia University, told Xinhua the US forces were stationed in the Alawi district in downtown Baghdad, where the museum is located.

“They did not protect the museum from organized gangs and thieves,” al-Mubarak recalled.

According to al-Mubarak, there are about 15,000 lost objects, many of which have yet to be returned.

The irresponsible withdrawal of US forces from Iraq at the end of 2011 led to a sudden security vacuum, allowing the Islamic State extremist group to develop and grow, he said, adding it took control of large swathes of land in northern and western Iraq in 2014.

Following this expansion, media video showed IS fighters destroying the Mosul Cultural Museum and the ancient cities of Hatra and Nimrud in Iraq’s northern province of Nineveh, where they smuggled numerous historical relics.

## Concerted efforts

Through concerted efforts of domestic institutions and coordination with other countries, Iraq managed to regain some of the looted and smuggled antiquities.

“Through effective international cooperation with friendly and brotherly nations and the mobilization of our diplomatic missions in various parts of the world, Iraq has been able to reclaim thousands of archaeological pieces, manuscripts, books and illustrious paintings,” the foreign ministry said.

Despite the achievements made in the past years, al-Mubarak said there are still major challenges facing the Iraqi authorities, including continued thefts and random excavations, especially in archaeological sites far from urban areas or in places unregulated by the government.

“The protection of the archaeological sites also requires financial, personnel, and logistical support from the government,” the archaeologist noted.

XINHUA

## US protesters vent feelings over painful present and past

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of protesters rallied within sight of the US Capitol, chanting pro-Palestinian slogans and voicing criticism of the Israeli and US governments as they marked a painful present, the conflict in Gaza, and past, the exodus of about 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were forced from what is now Israel when the state was created in 1948.

About 400 demonstrators braved steady rain to rally on the National Mall on the 76th anniversary of what is called the Nakba, the Arabic word for catastrophe.

There were calls in support of Palestinian rights and an immediate end to Israeli military operations in Gaza. “No peace on stolen land” and “End the killings, stop the crime/Israel out of Palestine,” echoed through the crowd.

Protesters also focused their anger on President Joe Biden, whom they accuse of feigning concern over the death toll in Gaza.

“Biden, Biden, you will see/genocide’s your legacy,” they said. The Democratic president was in Atlanta on Saturday.

Reem Labadi, a George Washington University second-year student who said she was pepper-sprayed by police this month when they broke up an on-campus protest encampment, said the rain seemed to reduce the numbers.

This year’s commemoration was fueled by anger over the siege of Gaza. The latest conflict began

when Hamas and other militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking about 250 people hostage.

One speaker at the Washington rally, Osama Abuirshad, executive director of American Muslims for Palestine, gestured at the Capitol building dome behind him.

“This Congress does not speak for us. This Congress does not represent the will of the people. We’re paying for the bombs. We’re paying for the F-16s and F-35s. And then we do the poor Palestinians a favor and send some food.”

Speakers also expressed anger over the violent crackdown on many pro-Palestinian protest camps at universities across the country. In recent weeks, long-term encampments have been broken up by police at more than 60 schools, and about 3,000 protesters have been arrested.

“The students are the conscience of America,” said Abuirshad, who compared the university demonstrations to protest movements against the Vietnam War and apartheid-era South Africa.

Several top White House aides say they are confident that protests across campuses will not translate into significantly fewer votes for Joe Biden in the presidential election in November, even though polls show many Democrats are deeply unhappy about Biden’s policy on the conflict.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



## Pedal power

Dozens of amateur and professional athletes and cycling enthusiasts take part in the Spring Bicycle Festival, riding along the Garden Ring route in Moscow on Saturday. ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Tragedy of aged Japanese who meet death alone

TOKYO — A recent survey by Japan’s National Police Agency, or NPA, showed that 17,034 elderly people living alone died at home across the country from January to March.

The survey revealed that 60,466 dead bodies were handled by Japanese police during the first three months of 2024. Of them, 21,716 lived by themselves, including cases of suicide.

Nearly 80 percent of the “lonely deaths”, or 17,034 people, were aged 65 and over, including 2,080 people aged between 65 and 69, 3,204 between 70 and 74, 3,480 between 75 and 79, 3,348 between 80 and 84, and 4,922 aged 85 and over.

A lonely death is defined as one in which a person dies without anyone else witnessing it, with a certain period passing before the body is found, according to an interim

discussion last year by a Cabinet Office working group assigned to look into the issue.

The NPA is expected to continue collecting the data as part of government efforts to tackle the issue of a rapidly graying society.

The total number of deaths at home among elderly people living alone in 2024 is forecast to reach about 68,000, according to the survey.

“The probability of solitary death will certainly increase in society from now on,” Japan’s health minister Keizo Takemi said during the Lower House meeting.

“It is important that we tackle the issue head-on and properly,” he was quoted by The Asahi Shimbun as saying.

Meanwhile, Japan’s economy contracted by a worse-than-expected



An elderly woman at a day care center for senior citizens in Tokyo on April 6, 2022. BEHROUZ MEHRI / AFP

0.5 percent, also in the first three months of the year, official government figures showed on Thursday. GDP in the world’s fourth-biggest economy was expected to have

shrunk by only 0.3 percent from the previous quarter, according to economist forecasts.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## WORLDUS

## New Jersey town has an ever-growing Asian feel

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
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In a small New Jersey community, the old meets the new. Different generations live side by side in an area surrounded by lush green farmland, old farmhouses from the 1700s, 19th century bridges and modern housing.

Belle Mead, an affluent suburb near Princeton University and about 90 kilometers south of New York, is home to the fastest-growing Asian population in the United States.

Most of the new residents are Chinese, Indian or Korean, nearly half are foreign-born, and longtime residents embrace the shift in demographics.

Jessie Haven, the 95-year-old "unofficial historian of Somerset County", has lived in her house for 50 years. The former Somerset Messenger-Gazette newspaper columnist and author of several history books on the area moved to Belle Mead with her family in 1975. She has seen many changes including the wave of new immigrants.

"I'm told that the new (people who move here) think they're going to get a high-class education. It's cheaper than sending your kids to prep school especially if you have more than one child," she said. "This part of New Jersey was really not caught up in the suburban sprawl until 50 years ago. We had calves and chickens and, you know, it was still rural."

The people who first arrived were mostly from New York and were "astounded" at how many "beautiful, marvelous" affordable old farmhouses it still had, she said. A now-defunct train station could be used to commute to the city.

Belle Mead is an unincorporated community in the northern part of Montgomery Township in Somerset County. The average home price is about \$673,300 and can cost more than \$2.2 million, according to the 2020 Census.

The Asian population was 63 percent of the 5,569 residents. More than half the residents speak an Asian language, and the median age is 35.

The average family income is \$206,839, double that of the majority of the Asian American population nationwide.

Large-scale housing developments have enticed new people, local realtors said.

George Lei, 56, said he moved to the area 15 years ago with his family to ensure that his children had access to a good education.

Lei is also principal of Huaxia Chinese School in Montgomery, a nonprofit that offers Chinese language and culture classes for students aged 4 and up. At least 95 percent of his students are Chinese.

## Quiet, peaceful place

"When people migrate to Montgomery Township, they find that there is a large Asian population here," Lei said. "Chinese parents pay much attention to the education of their children. They want somewhere that there are very few distractions, and this is a quiet and peaceful place, good for children."

Montgomery High School ranks 25th in the state, the US News & World Report said. The township's school district runs five schools from prekindergarten to high school.

Belle Mead's history dates back to 1875 when William Van Aken, a wealthy real estate developer from New York, purchased more than 300 hectares of farmland after learning that a local railway was planned.

But his town dubbed Vanaken failed to materialize when it did not get as much traffic and business as expected. Then US senator John McPherson bought the land at a low price. His daughter was named Edna Belle Mead McPherson, which some believe had an influence on the town being renamed.

Haven said the original architects realized that at some point it may be "smothered with suburbanization" so they ensured that plenty of green space was preserved, as it does today.

In the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, the Woods Tavern and hotel were at the heart of the community and served rail travelers who stopped at the Belle Mead depot.

Today, shoppers head to The Grove at Montgomery shopping mall, which has several Asian-owned stores.

For Lei, it is important for Chinese culture to continue wherever residents live.

"A lot of people send their children to our school to do Chinese language classes because it's a way to make sure that our culture does not die out."

Remembering the past, Haven was honored by Bridgewater Township Council in 2022 for her work in preserving local history.

Haven describes how some longtime residents had their "great grandparents and grandparents also living here". "There was a strong community feeling 50 years ago. And there's a new layer over the top of that," she said.

## Graduates protest



A George Washington University student holds a Palestinian flag as students walk out during a pro-Palestinian protest at a commencement ceremony in Washington DC on Sunday. JOSE LUIS MAGANA / AP

## US accused of making China into scapegoat

Concerns voiced as decision to raise tariffs expected to impact businesses

By XING YI in London  
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The new tariffs that the United States has imposed on a series of products from China is a move by US President Joe Biden to make China a scapegoat for the US' own problems and will eventually make businesses suffer, a British business leader and trade expert said.

Jack Perry Jr, chairman of the 48 Group Club, which promotes equal and mutually beneficial trade between the United Kingdom and China, told China Daily he felt strongly over the US decision to impose tariffs on imports from China such as electric vehicles, solar panels, semiconductors and batteries.

"What they're doing is trying to attack China and make themselves look good ... They're trying to point the finger at China, making their

The US is talking about (Chinese products) flooding the market. That's not true."

Jack Perry Jr, chairman of the 48 Group Club

own economy worse, but really they should be looking at themselves," Perry said. "The American businesses are the ones that are going to suffer from this. American people will have to pay more for the retail price, and businesses will have to pay more for the wholesale prices ... It's not about building America better," he said.

Referring to the "overcapacity" claim made by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Perry said it is "about positioning America against China, and don't want China to be strong".

"The US is talking about (Chinese

products) flooding the market. That's not true," he said.

"Someone asked me, where do you think that America is going to have an issue with, in what sector with China next? And my answer was: whatever sector China is strong in, that's where the Americans are going to have an issue," he said. "It's not about EV cars. It's not about overcapacity. It's not about flooding the market. It's not about anything that they're talking about."

"It's about the fact that China has evolved. There's no other country that's taken a billion people out of poverty in 30 years. There's no one (like China) that was the factory to the world, but now is where you go for innovation," he added.

In April, Perry visited southern China's Guangdong province for the China Import and Export Fair, also known as Canton Fair, following a series of business visits to dozens of companies in six provinces across the country.

## Huge possibilities

"Every Chinese enterprise that I speak to out there is looking to do trade. These are successful

businesses looking to trade in foreign markets. There are huge possibilities for Western countries," he said about the recent trip to China.

The 48 Group Club signed an agreement with the China Foreign Trade Centre during the Canton Fair that gives Western companies more access to products at a reduced price, said Perry, who is also the CEO of London Export Corporation, one of the first companies to trade with China in the early 1950s.

"Looking at trade and business cooperation between China and the West, it benefits the West to be able to do business with China," Perry said. "If you don't do business with China, your products are going to cost a lot more. They're going to take a lot more time to get there. It's not going to be manufactured at a high quality. China has evolved. They are spearheading and ahead in innovation in so many different areas."

Perry said the current geopolitical situation is scaring people from trading with China and working with Chinese companies, but "there are huge opportunities and possibilities, huge roads and paths to be able to succeed in times like this".

He said the 48 Group Club will continue to invest in the Chinese market. It will take a delegation consisting of executives of private equities, biotechnology and agriculture companies to visit three or four provinces in China for potential cooperation. "Whenever there's bad weather, there's sun behind it. I believe business can bring the sun out," he said.

## US Chinese walk along an old, familiar path

By RENA LI  
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The United States has been celebrating Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month in May, which has prompted reflection on the challenges Chinese Americans face despite their integration into US society, says Zhou Min, a professor of sociology and Asian American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"Although Chinese Americans are integrating well, they are still affected by dual stereotyping," Zhou said.

In 1882 the US Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was signed by president Chester Arthur, introducing a 10-year ban on Chinese laborers immigrating to the US. The act was the first significant law restricting immigration into the country.

"As we celebrate Asian Heritage Month it's imperative to acknowledge and address the persistent barriers to equality and inclusion faced by Chinese Americans and other Asian communities," Zhou said.

Intertwined with historical discrimination and perpetuated through stereotyping, racial

profiling and hate crimes, "modern exclusion" persists, she said.

"On the one hand, they are lauded as the model minority for their extraordinary achievements. On the other hand, they are considered forever foreigners because of their look."

"And old negative stereotypes, such as the yellow peril, the threat, are often invoked when the US and China are at odds with each other."

For example, in recent years the China Initiative, which focused on alleged Chinese economic espionage, has negatively affected many China-born scientists working in US research universities, she said.

The most prominent case was that of Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Gang Chen, a mechanical engineer and nanotechnologist arrested in 2021 and charged with concealing his affiliations with Chinese government institutions, wire fraud, making a false statement on a tax return and failing to disclose a foreign bank account.

Even though he was ultimately exonerated, the shadow of suspicion lingers, perpetuating narratives of disloyalty and espionage.

"Although all the charges against him were dismissed, damage has

On the one hand, they are lauded as the model minority for their extraordinary achievements. On the other hand, they are considered forever foreigners because of their look."

Zhou Min, professor of sociology and Asian American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles

already been done and is hard to be undone," Zhou said. "Chen's case suggests that Chinese Americans are still suspects of being disloyal Americans, having connections to and spying for China, when China is perceived as America's enemy."

## Broader challenges

Zhou, who last year was elected to the US National Academy of Sciences just as Chen was the same year, identifies deeply with

the broader challenges facing Chinese Americans, as they may still be viewed with suspicion and mistrust, particularly when geopolitical tensions are high.

"Such perceptions not only harm individuals' reputations but also undermine efforts toward genuine inclusion and recognition of their contributions to American society," Zhou said.

The China-US relationship and the experiences of Chinese Americans are deeply intertwined and complex, she said, and geopolitical tensions between the two countries can have significant direct and indirect effects on the lives of Chinese Americans.

"US-China relations are good, we are good. (If) these relations are bad we will be negatively affected."

Worsening US-China relations would hurt the US, and it would lose out in the global competition for foreign talent from China and elsewhere, she said. Poor relations would also reinforce negative societal stereotypes against Chinese Americans and create new barriers for immigrant integration even among the better off, such as in the case of Chen.

"For us, China is our ancestral homeland, and the US is our new

homeland. It's our obligation as Chinese Americans to facilitate communication, understanding and cooperation between our adopted homeland and ancestral homeland."

Chinese Americans have made great contributions to the economic and social development of the US, particularly in science, engineering and medicine, the effect being significant and multifaceted.

The demographics of Chinese Americans have undergone major changes over the past few decades, reflecting a shift toward greater cultural diversity. Chinese Americans today come from a broader range of regions within China compared with what they used to.

Another shift — a wave of highly skilled professionals and investors compared with low-skilled laborers — is diversifying occupations and income levels, creating a more complex Chinese American community.

"These changes were driven by international migration, which was affected by the normalization of US-China relations, China's (reform and opening-up), and US immigration policy," Zhou said.

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## BUSINESS

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## MNCs seek fresh growth points in China

Foreign firms eye long-term returns from nation's green push, high-end manufacturing

By ZHONG NAN  
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In China, Covestro AG, a German chemicals manufacturer, is setting up a new plant in Zhuhai, Guangdong province; Schneider Electric SE, a French industrial conglomerate, will build an industrial park in Xiamen, Fujian province; and Bridgestone Corp, a Japanese tire company, has announced it will invest 562 million yuan (\$77.6 million) in China over the next three years.

These seemingly unconnected corporate developments have one thing in common: they represent a trend of multinational corporations seeking fresh growth points in China's green transformation and rapid development of its high-end manufacturing sector.

Against the backdrop of global economic uncertainties, the idea of ensuring secure and sustainable investments has gained traction worldwide. MNCs, particularly those dealing in high-end materials, industrial parts and components, and green-related industries, are prioritizing long-term returns.

To this end, they are establishing more innovation centers and advanced factories in China to sustain competitiveness while navigating future challenges.

For example, Marelli Holdings Co Ltd, an Italian-Japanese mobility product supplier to the automotive industry, will expand its engineering team in China from 800 to 1,000 soon to meet surging demand for innovation.

David Slump, the group's president and CEO, said Marelli will ride China's electric vehicle wave by supplying products ranging from automotive lighting and electronics to software solutions to its partners in the country.

Dismissing some Western nations' "China overcapacity" narrative, especially in the areas of new energy industries, Slump said that China, recognized globally as a major EV market and home to some of the world's leading EV manufacturers, will create substantial opportunities for global companies aiming to sustain robust growth in this burgeoning sector.

Eager to cut carbon emissions, many countries are building infrastructure like charging facilities, battery swap stations and capable grid systems to facilitate their consumers driving EVs on the road, he said.

With around 50,000 employees and 170 plants and research and development centers across the world, Marelli also ships products manufactured at its plants in China to other parts of the world, including Mexico, Thailand and Germany.

Markus Steilemann, CEO of Covestro, said he opposes the "China has overcapacity" narrative and is not a fan of excessive regulations, especially in markets where free trade is essential.

Excessively prohibitive measures



A view of the booth of Schneider Electric SE during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The booth of Marelli Holdings Co Ltd during an industry expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



German chemicals manufacturer Covestro AG displays its green solutions at an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and restrictions may not effectively boost productivity, and criticizing perceived overcapacity is not the right way to global cooperation, said Steilemann, adding that about 75 percent of Covestro's planned investment in the Asia-Pacific region will be in China over the next three years.

Without revealing the specific investment figure, the German executive said that Covestro is currently building a plant to make thermoplastic polyurethanes in Zhuhai, with an annual production capacity of 120,000 metric tons by 2033.

Pan Yuanyuan, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said China's abundance of innovative application scenarios, supported by favorable policies and a flourishing market, will remain attractive for global investors.

"There will persist enticing investment opportunities, especially within emerging industries and innovative business formats," said Pan.

Latest data from the Ministry of Commerce show China's high-tech manufacturing sector attracted 12.5 percent of the foreign direct investment inflows into China in the first quarter of this year, up 2.2 percentage points year-on-year.

Following China's announcement that it has lifted all restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector and implemented measures to ensure equal treatment for foreign-funded companies, the number of newly established foreign-invested firms in China reached 12,000 in the first quarter of this year, up 20.7 percent year-on-year.

Despite increasing uncertainties, including geopolitics and protectionist steps taken by certain developed countries, Jin Zhuanglong, minister of industry and information technology, said that efforts will be intensified to support foreign businesses in establishing R&D centers in China.

Moreover, collaboration with Chinese companies for technological

research, industrial applications and expanding international cooperation in digital transformation, as well as green and low-carbon development of the manufacturing sector, will be prioritized, he said.

These policy measures will create favorable conditions for overseas businesses to participate in the development of China's new quality productive forces, said Zhu Bing, director-general of the Department of Foreign Investment Administration in the Ministry of Commerce.

New quality productive forces represent advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth modes and productivity development paths. They feature high-tech, high efficiency and high quality, and are in line with the new development philosophy.

Highlighting that the concept of new quality productive forces is fully in line with Schneider Electric's growth strategy, Yin Zheng, its executive vice-president of China and East Asia operations, said the com-

pany will strengthen its "China Hub" strategy this year in all aspects, including talent, innovation, supply chains and ecosystem development.

Apart from the announcement about constructing an industrial park in Xiamen to manufacture medium voltage equipment, the French company plans to initiate the second phase of its electric power experimental innovation project in Shanghai in the second half of this year. This move aims to further enhance its local innovation footprint in China.

Vincent Bruneau, Schneider Electric's vice-president for global supply chain (China), said this new Xiamen industrial park will become a major R&D center, manufacturing and supply hub for Rueil-Malmaison, a France-headquartered group, to supply medium voltage equipment to both Chinese and global markets. This facility is scheduled to start operations in 2025.

Riding the boom in China's auto-

mobile production, Bridgestone announced in early April that it will invest 562 million yuan in the country over the next three years.

This investment will focus on strengthening production base construction and enhancing the proportion of high-performance passenger car tire production. It will aim to better meet the diverse demands of the Chinese consumer market by offering more high-end and diversified products and services, said Agustin Pedroni, president and CEO of Bridgestone (China) Investment Co Ltd.

The Japanese company plans to invest \$26 million in its tire factory in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, this year, expanding high-end passenger car tire production capacity to facilitate comprehensive enhancement and development of the factory.

Bridgestone's investment moves seem justified, given that China's auto sales rose 10.6 percent year-on-year to 6.72 million units in the first quarter. The country's vehicle exports rose 33.2 percent year-on-year to over 1.32 million units, according to the Beijing-based China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

China's comprehensive industrial system and its efficient logistics network position the country as an ideal supplier, said Wang Xiaohong, a researcher specializing in cross-border investment at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing.

"Whether it is simple components, intricate machinery, raw materials or high-tech products, foreign investors can effortlessly find and acquire everything they require," said Wang.

Foreign-invested enterprises' imports and exports amounted to 4.02 trillion yuan in China in the first four months, declining 0.7 percent year-on-year, accounting for 29.1 percent of the country's total foreign trade value, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

During this period, global and domestic companies in China exported 4.62 trillion yuan worth of mechanical and electrical products such as EVs, integrated circuits and smartphones, up 6.9 percent year-on-year, accounting for 59.2 percent of the country's total export value.

Emphasizing that global companies in China are making substantial commitments to localization, engaging with diverse stakeholders, increasing investments and embracing emerging business models, Mohammed Al Ajan, chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council, said the Chinese market will continue to showcase distinctive features, especially in consumption trends and technology adoption.

To attract more foreign capital, China introduced a targeted set of policy measures to facilitate investment by overseas institutions in Chinese technology-oriented companies in late April.

This policy is designed to better accommodate the needs of overseas institutions, who seek enhanced stability and predictability in the business environment, along with expanded investment channels, smoother exit pathways and easier access to tax benefits, according to information released by the Ministry of Commerce.

## Change that brings numerous opportunities for overseas investors

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhong Nan

There was a time when it was said that China would exchange "1 billion shirts for an imported Boeing plane". Now, the country is accelerating the transformation and upgrade of its industrial, energy and transportation structures. Production and lifestyle have changed radically, too. I'd argue this transformation presents numerous opportunities for foreign investments.

From the perspective of global manufacturers, automobile makers, retailers and service providers, the Chinese market has become their

"fitness center". Operating here, they learn from local consumers and make necessary adjustments and improvements. These insights can then be applied to their businesses in other parts of the world.

From my numerous interviews with many MNC executives, I gather that the digitalization and green transformations will propel industries toward greater sophistication, intelligence and sustainability in China. This trend will see demand in the Chinese market becoming more diverse, with higher expectations for service speed and quality.

CEOs of a large number of MNCs visited China in the first four months of this year. More are expected in the rest of the year. Events such as the 135th China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair), the 2024 Beijing International

Automotive Exhibition (Auto China 2024) and various specialized exhibitions have attracted numerous foreign companies for exhibitions, deals and negotiations.

They believe that China has the largest market scale in the world, and with the upgrade of consumption structure, domestic demand in the country will continue to expand. Additionally, the steady advancement of China's industrial transformation and upgrade is a continuous iteration and upgrade of the country's economic growth engine.

Driven by innovation, China's production efficiency will significantly improve, thereby promoting high-quality economic development, said foreign business leaders.

MNCs have been making inroads into the Chinese market for many years. Their business models, opera-

tions teams and supply chains have all been localized, fully leveraging policy benefits and talent advantages.

In the past, China was highly competitive in labor-intensive and other traditional industries, attracting substantial foreign capital to establish production bases in its market to leverage its comparative advantages for exports. Now, it aims to upgrade its industries, promote technological innovation and industrial advancement, utilizing both domestic and foreign capital to jointly enhance its productivity.

While foreign investment in China continues to increase, the structure and focus of these investments are changing. Earlier, foreign firms would think in terms of setting up a single production base. Now, they aim to set up regional headquarters, functional centers, R&D hubs and so

forth. Besides, global companies want to use new investment models to seize development opportunities in China.

In addition to expanding innovative activities in China, many global companies such as the Swiss-Swedish industrial conglomerate ABB Ltd and Harman International, a US-based auto parts manufacturer, export high-end products, like industrial robots and digital cockpits, manufactured at their plants in China to other parts of the world.

China has a stable policy environment and the most complete industrial system in the world, capable of providing a high-efficiency, high-reliability industrial support system for foreign investment. The nation's comprehensive infrastructure network, abundant talent resources and rich innovation application sce-

narios create favorable investment opportunities for foreign businesses in new technologies, industries and business models.

China's decisive move in 2023 to completely remove foreign investment access restrictions in the manufacturing sector will be key to addressing the accelerated restructuring of global industrial and supply chains in the short term, thereby stabilizing the proportion of manufacturing within the country.

Over the long term, this measure is expected to leverage market competition to drive the transformation and development of China's manufacturing sector, while also attracting foreign businesses to the services sector.

In the highly competitive Chinese market, only companies with superior technology, management, data and business models will thrive. The Chinese market has become a premier competitive arena for both domestic and foreign companies.

# BUSINESS



Participants exchange views at a technology event organized by SAS Institute Inc in Las Vegas, the United States, in late April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## SAS Institute to expand market presence in China

Solutions for service-related biz and pharma industry likely to be in focus

By ZHONG NAN  
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SAS Institute Inc, a US-based multinational developer of analytics and artificial intelligence software, will increase investments in strategic and emerging areas like generative AI and solutions for service-related businesses to maintain robust growth in China, said its senior executives.

Generative AI is a form of AI capable of producing diverse data types, including images, video, audio, text and 3D models. It achieves this by analyzing existing data patterns and leveraging this understanding to create fresh and distinct outputs.

Having operated in China for more than two decades, the Cary, North Carolina-based company said it fits in well with the country's digital-related development strategies and industrial upgrade, and is seeing more opportunities from them.

After seeing a 6.3 percent year-on-year growth in the Chinese market last year, the company is certain that many opportunities will be unleashed by the country's fast-growing banking, insurance, healthcare, retail, manufacturing and energy sectors, said Jim Goodnight, SAS CEO.

"More broadly, the financial industry looms large, particularly in terms of risk management, spanning both banking and insurance sectors. Additionally, the pharmaceutical industry holds significant importance, as nearly every pharmaceutical company must analyze its data," said Goodnight.

In late 2023, SAS revealed its plan to invest \$1 billion over the next three years in advancing analytics solutions tailored to the distinct requirements of various industries.

"A portion of this investment will enable us to offer Chinese clients tailored solutions, enhancing the precision and efficiency of their decision-making processes," said Wilson Ho, vice-president and managing director for SAS' China operations.

SAS will continue to strengthen its long-standing commitment to offering customized solutions for industry-specific challenges across various sectors. This dedication to industries, coupled with the swift time-to-value these solutions provide, stands as a distinct advantage for the group, said Jennifer Chase, SAS' chief marketing officer.

She said a growing number of Chinese companies are keen to

make critical use of data, industrial links and green development.

Similar views are shared by John Carey, vice-president for SAS' worldwide alliances and channels operations.

"China has consistently been a channel-focused market for us. The bulk of our transactions have typically been conducted with partners. What made this easier was the pre-existing DNA and muscle memory established in other areas.

"However, we have had to build that from scratch. We have recognized the value of distribution, but the challenge lies in enabling partners swiftly and efficiently. This involves providing localized training to assist partners in quickly catching up with the latest developments."

With new and improved capabilities, including generative AI and data management, SAS saw its sales revenue rise to more than \$3 billion last year, according to its 2023 annual report.

To remain competitive, SAS said it will continue to make strategic, innovative advancements to its products, including its cloud-agnostic data and AI platform, as well as solutions designed to meet the needs of specific industries and cross-industry functional areas like fraud intelligence, risk management and marketing.

Supported by more than 12,000 employees and engineers globally,

the US company runs a number of offices, innovation and technical centers in Chinese cities including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

In addition to strengthening automakers and big manufacturers, AI will play a crucial role in empowering small and medium-sized enterprises, startups and media companies, to minimize their marketing and customer acquisition expenses, amplify brand communication efficiency and revolutionize the entire marketing industry through digital technology, said Sun Fuquan, former vice-president of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

China's investment in AI is forecast to reach \$38.1 billion by 2027, accounting for 9 percent of the world's total, according to a report released by global market research firm International Data Corporation last year.

The IDC report said the AI technology, under government support and accelerating industrial upgrade, will integrate with demands from various industries, and be part of products, services and business modes in the coming years.

The investment in AI software this year is expected to reach nearly \$10 billion, accounting for about 25 percent of China's total AI market investment, up nearly 6 percentage points from 2023.

## Country hastens brain-machine interface R&D

BEIJING — A monkey with soft electrode filaments implanted in its brain controls an isolated robotic arm to grasp a strawberry by simply using its "thoughts".

This innovative achievement in the application of China's brain-machine interface technology was unveiled at the 2024 Zhongguancun Forum (ZGC Forum) in Beijing late last month.

The NeuCyber Array BMI System, which was independently developed by Chinese scientists, fills the gap in high-performance invasive BMI technology in China, said Luo Minmin, director of the Chinese Institute for Brain Research, Beijing, which co-developed the system with NeuCyber NeuroTech (Beijing) Co Ltd.

With the continuous development of technologies such as neuroscience, computational electronics and medicine over the years, BMI — as a frontier technology of human-computer interaction — has been a major force leading the latest round of scientific and technological development along with industrial change.

The innovative progress of multidisciplinary approaches and technologies is accelerating the growth of the BMI industry, and China is becoming not only a major innovation hub, but also a target market for BMI technology, according to experts at the forum.

Currently, BMI technological innovation is being used in about 40 countries and regions, with nearly 80 percent of the results emerging in the past decade, said Gu Xiaosong, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

China is among the countries with the largest number of BMI scientific research projects, with a large scale and fast growth of scientific research output, and its invention patent applications involving BMI account for more than half the global total, Gu said.

"In the past 20 years, BMI technology has developed rapidly, and its application fields are gradually expanding," said Zhao Jizong, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Mainly used in the medical field at this stage, BMI technology can bring new solutions for the diagnosis and treatment of nervous system conditions, such as epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, depression, paralysis, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, sleep disorders and autism.

Industry insiders believe that BMI technological innovation, rich clinical resources and huge demand for brain disease treatment are the advantages driving the development of China's BMI industry.

Hong Bo, a professor at Tsinghua University, said China needs to seize the opportunity by

“BMI technology has broad development prospects and huge market potential in many sectors, and is a typical representative of future industries.”

Jiang Juncheng, deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology

improving its strategic layout and accelerating the innovation of BMI technology to promote its industrial development.

The widespread use of BMI technology is translating into huge market potential.

According to McKinsey & Company, in the medical field alone, the potential global market size of the BMI industry is expected to hit \$40 billion between 2030 and 2040. In addition, BMI has great potential in markets such as healthcare and entertainment.

"BMI technology has broad development prospects and huge market potential in many sectors, and is a typical representative of future industries," said Jiang Juncheng, deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology.

As a rising global sci-tech innovation hub, Beijing — which is strong in BMI R&D — has made major breakthroughs in recent years in the analysis of cognitive brain principles and major disease research, with the influence and scale of BMI playing a leading role in China.

Beijing has recently charted a roadmap for accelerating the development of the BMI industry.

By 2026, it will achieve breakthroughs in core BMI technologies and cultivate a number of leading enterprises. By 2030, with an independently well-developed BMI technology system, hundreds of small and medium-sized enterprises related to the sector will be nurtured in the capital city, forming an industrial cluster.

According to the plan, Beijing will strengthen the integrated innovation of key technologies, enrich the supply of BMI products and build a coordinated development of industrial ecology. It will promote the demonstration application of BMI in five fields, namely medicine, healthcare, industrial safety, education and sports, and smart life.

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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## 'De-Sinicization' by West presents challenges

EAGLE EYE

By Zhang Yansheng

This year, there will be significant economic and political change globally. Influenced by the political cycle, with more than 70 countries and regions holding major elections this year worldwide, the United States economy is expected to decline. US economic growth was 2.5 percent in 2023 and we estimate the growth rate in 2024 will be around 1.7 percent.

Then, what will happen to the Chinese economy this year? It all depends on whether China's macroeconomic policies can be boosted, whether more measures to stabilize expectations, growth and employment can be introduced, and whether economic and noneconomic policies can be effectively coordinated and consistently assessed to bring economic development back to a reasonable range.

Since the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, rule-based globalization has been in trouble, which marked an end to the golden era of global economic and trade growth over the previous 40 years.

Now, major powers have introduced a series of new concepts, among which, the new globalization proposed by Western countries is essentially "de-Sinicization", which will pose certain challenges to the Chinese economy.

China's economy now faces three major challenges: the disruption and long-term negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to personnel exchanges and industrial and supply chains; rising geopolitical tensions; as well as competition among major powers that arise while fighting global climate change.

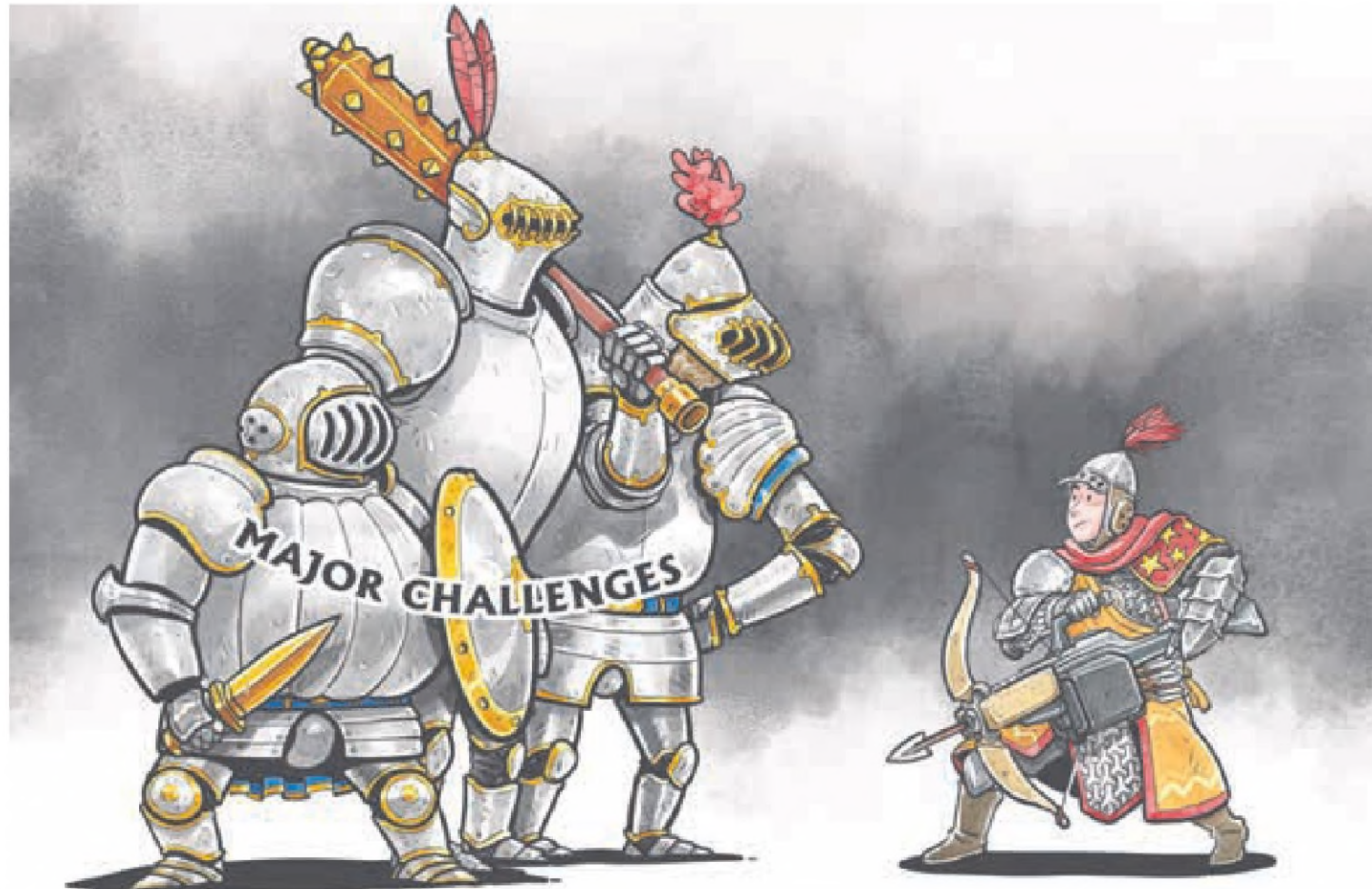
Faced with such challenges, China's foreign trade, foreign investment, foreign economic cooperation, outsourcing and foreign expertise have all undergone significant transformation and changes.

The past 45 years of reform and opening-up progressed amid economic globalization, new technological revolutions, and Sino-US economic and trade cooperation. In the future, however, it is likely that global economic and trade activities will be politicized to be aggressive behaviors in the digital technology sector.

Geopolitics is currently experiencing a tug-of-war, with one side being extremists who hope for "decoupling" and "de-risking", and the other advocating cooperation and eventually achieving a win-win scenario.

The US is promoting "decoupling" and the relocation of industries, and is competing with China in third-party markets. Europe emphasizes "de-risking" and reducing dependence on China's supply chains to achieve industrial "diversification".

The US is continuously changing the rules. Previously, the US promoted free trade globally, but now it



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

believes that free trade benefits China and disadvantages the US. Therefore, the US has shifted away from free trade to initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, setting US rules and standards and aiming to align the countries around China with the US.

At the same time, the US has expanded its restrictions on foreign direct investment, which initially focused on semiconductors, microelectronics, AI and quantum information technology, and now includes new energy, biopharmaceuticals, medical device manufacturing and new materials.

Research on international industrial policies showed that after the outbreak of the financial crisis, there were only 34 industrial policies. But this number rose to 1,594 by 2021. The countries with the most industrial policies are Germany, Japan, Brazil, the US and Canada, with China ranking 11th. From this, it is clear who is using protectionist policies, industrial policies and government intervention.

In recent years, the US has significantly increased its industrial policies, protectionist measures and government intervention, leading to a continuous rise in manufacturing investment and a notable increase in investment from other countries.

Currently, the US' biggest problem is industrial hollowing-out. By

simultaneously employing protectionist measures, over the past three to five years, the US has shown signs of manufacturing returning. Investments in manufacturing and capital equipment have been on the rise. A comparison of unicorn companies and AI companies in China and the US also reveals that the US has had a clear advantage in terms of development in this area.

On the other hand, it still needs to be clarified whether Europe intends to practice "de-Sinicization" or diversification. Research shows that more European companies prefer a normal diversification strategy, insisting on maintaining traditional economic and trade relations with Chinese companies.

Japanese companies do not dare to act like European and US companies, while South Korean companies tend to actively lobby to maximize exemptions. This leaves room for China to deploy more efforts to enhance strategic economic and trade relations.

Amid rising geopolitical tensions and the US' suppression of "new three" industries — new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products — what kind of competition policies, industrial policies and government support should China give to support the transition from low-cost to high-value-added industries?

We believe the effectiveness of

industrial policies depends on their marketization, legalization and internationalization. It depends on whether the policies correct or distort areas such as security, green development, technology, energy and society, and achieve strategic competitive goals. If marketization, legalization and internationalization are poorly implemented, the effects might become generalized, potentially exacerbating market distortions.

Therefore, China needs to comprehensively deepen market-oriented reforms, expand opening-up, and improve the legal system. The fundamental response is, ultimately, to do our own work well.

Our current problem is that once the "new three" industries develop well, various local governments in China will rush to subsidize and introduce the development of their own local "new three" industries. It may eventually lead to overcapacity and price competition in the sector.

Such excessive competition will lead to significant price drops and make it difficult for innovative companies to get sufficient returns to support subsequent innovations.

Overall, we need to continue to deepen reforms, expand opening-up and improve the legal system. It is essential to quickly solidify the foundation of a high-standard market system, a high-level socialist market economy system and a

higher-standard open economic system.

China has introduced various policies to stabilize foreign investment, but still faces several challenges. First, policy measures need to be accompanied by detailed operational guidelines. Second, the country needs to do research and formulate strategies against decoupling, suppression and sanctions.

If we want to attract foreign investment, we need to adopt more effective and targeted measures to counteract US protectionist industrial policies. For instance, the US chip bill provides \$12 billion in subsidies, and the EU and Japan also have corresponding subsidies. Can China also provide subsidies to domestic enterprises in cutting-edge technology fields?

Third, more efforts should be made to implement a more open foreign investment policy. From the perspective of trade, regardless of which country's enterprises have been in local business for more than a year, their trade, value-added and employment situations are all local. From this perspective, there is still much work to be done to attract foreign investment to our country. We need to better understand foreign investors' concerns about conflicts, partiality issues and policy uncertainty.

Over the next two years, macroeconomic policies will be moderately strengthened, and various

policies will be coordinated to mobilize people's enthusiasm. The core issue is how to implement and put policies into practice after they are formulated.

Promoting high-quality development of the Chinese economy from a global perspective is necessary. Chinese-style modernization has entered a new stage. Thus, it is essential to implement the new development concepts of innovation, coordination, green development, openness and sharing.

As a country with a huge population, every word and action of China will have an impact on the world. Therefore, amid the process of Chinese-style modernization, it is necessary to consider mutual relationships between the Chinese economy and the world's economy.

In addition, Chinese-style modernization emphasizes harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, coordination between material civilization and spiritual civilization, as well as pursuing the path of peaceful development. Only by accomplishing these can Chinese-style modernization be distinct from Western models and achieve its objectives.

The writer is chief researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## How boost to silver economy can bolster consumption

MAIN STREET

By Cai Fang

China's demographic development has entered a "new normal" of negative population growth and moderate population aging. Starting from 2022, the country's population growth started to enter negative growth territory, which will become a norm in quite a long time. At the same time, people aged 65 and above account for more than 14 percent of China's population, which means the country has started to become a moderate-level aging society, or perhaps, an aging society outright.

According to United Nations data, by 2034, the proportion of the Chinese people aged 65 and above will reach 21 percent. It means that China will become a highly aging society. This demographic would have huge human

resources and also represent a huge market.

In the era of aging, economic growth will encounter some new challenges. On the one hand, the structure of the three major pillars driving economic growth — investment, consumption and exports — will change, with the role of exports and investment likely to be gradually replaced by consumption. On the other hand, aging itself will have some impact on expansion of consumption.

Since 2012, China's economic growth rate has trended down to drop below 8 percent. At the same time, the composition of its three major growth drivers has also changed, with the contribution of investment and exports to economic growth declining, while the role of consumption, especially household consumption, increased significantly.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the contribution rate of household consumption had reached a relatively high level. According to World Bank data, the proportion of urban and rural household consumption

expenditures in GDP has significantly changed. After the pandemic, which greatly affected the economy, the development trends of consumption in the future will depend on how the country's macroeconomic policies can raise the consumption rate.

## Population vs consumption

Demographic changes affect the population pyramid, or age structure diagram, and population aging changes the shape of the population pyramid. In the 20 years since the fifth, sixth, and seventh national censuses, China's population has gradually moved to converge toward the top of the pyramid, and the total size and proportion of seniors have both been increasing. But at the same time, consumption of older people does not account for a dominant share of the overall consumption.

The proportion of the elderly far exceeds their consumption proportion, because they no longer have labor-based income and the pension program is yet to be sufficient enough, leading to their declining

consumption ability and willingness.

In rural areas, it is worse, as the consumption ability and willingness of rural households are even lower. According to results of the 7th national census, only 10 percent of the rural elderly have pension as their main source of livelihoods. Most of them continue to work or rely on support from other family members to provide for their livelihoods.

## Reform dividends

To solve these problems, China must first innovate theoretical paradigms and change policy models. In terms of macroeconomic policymaking, the focus should be shifted from investors and enterprises to households, and more targeted policy tools should be explored. It should also ensure that household consumption can play a fundamental role in the development pattern to create a new balance among the three growth-driving forces.

Moreover, a welfare system covering the entire life cycle of all people should be built to promote social

mobility and release reproductive potential. And policy adjustments, institutional reforms and system build-up should all rely on reform, and to that end, reform should be included in our normal macroeconomic policy toolbox.

Second, efforts should be made to relieve worries of migrant workers so that they can be more willing to spend more. There are now more than 170 million migrant workers in urban areas, but they do not have household registration in the cities. If all of them have urban household registration, then they will become more willing to increase consumption, creating an estimated extra consumption worth 1.2 trillion yuan (\$166.2 billion). It would be a huge policy bonus.

Household registration itself is also a major institutional obstacle that prevents migrant workers from accessing high-quality employment. Their consumption could be further increased by breaking that barrier.

## Aging rate

China's aging rate, or proportion of the population aged 65 or above, is at least 5 percentage points higher than the world average; at the same

time, its household consumption rate, or the proportion of household consumption expenditures in GDP, is 18 percentage points lower than the global average. While the country's per capita GDP is already higher than the world average, Chinese households have lagged behind compared with the world average. Therefore, it is necessary to not only increase per capita GDP and per capita disposable income, but also make structural adjustments to increase consumption.

The silver economy in China is a sunrise industry. It is not a make-shift measure but a long-term solution. The 300 million elderly, as the main body for meeting market demand, will be an important driving force for the country's dual-circulation development pattern.

The writer is chief expert of the National High-end Think Tank, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. This article is a translation of excerpts of his op-ed piece published on the official WeChat account of the China Macroeconomy Forum, a think tank. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Any challenge to Taiwan's status as part of China doomed to fail

As Lai Ching-te takes office as leader of the Taiwan island authorities on Monday, he and his "pro-independence" Democratic Progressive Party must give a clear answer to the question regarding their choice between peaceful development or confrontation across the Taiwan Strait.

As a spokesperson of the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office pointed out last week, promoting peace across the Taiwan Strait means opposing separatist moves, and the stronger the commitment to the one-China principle, the more peaceful and stable the cross-strait situation will be.

Any misstep will pose a risk to cross-strait peace and stability, and thus jeopardize the well-being of Taiwan compatriots.

Over the past eight years Lai's predecessor Tsai Ing-wen and the DPP have led Taiwan far away from the right path of peaceful development. Their reckless adherence to a "pro-independence" agenda, in collusion with outside forces, especially the United States, has dealt a heavy blow to cross-strait relations. Under Tsai and her DPP authorities, what used to be robust cross-strait exchanges have been brought to a standstill, and the situation in the Taiwan Strait has been increasingly fraught and pushed to near breaking point several times. Lai must close the trust deficit to bolster cross-strait peace and stability, which have been undermined by the words and deeds of Tsai, to avoid the worst-case scenario.

The mainstream public view on the island is in favor of peace not war, development not decline, communication rather than separation, and cooperation instead of confrontation. Lai should heed this sentiment and refrain from further harming cross-strait relations.

Lai should know the damage Tsai has done to cross-strait relations is so big that further provocation over the one-China principle and confrontation with the Chinese mainland will only lead to disastrous consequences. Beijing's determination and resolve to realize national reunification should not be taken lightly. Opting for peace and development is the only viable path for Lai and the DPP. They should discard their "pro-independence" stance and refrain from colluding with outside forces, which have never ceased their malicious intention to contain China's peaceful rise through interfering in the Taiwan question and playing the Taiwan card.

Prior to Lai's inauguration, Washington has intensified its interference in the Taiwan question. Some US officials have blatantly challenged the authority of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 again, calling Taiwan's status "undetermined" and trumpeted calls for Taiwan's "meaningful participation" in the UN system.

As before, the US will fail in its attempts to hype up the Taiwan question in the world arena. In terms of the Taiwan question, it seems some politicians in Europe have a better understanding and a more sober mind than their US peers on the high stakes involved in constantly messing with the one-China principle. Speaking to Foreign Policy magazine last week, Josep Borrell, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said the bloc should be firm about ensuring that a military conflict does not break out over Taiwan, and that "It's one single China. It means that we are not going to recognize the statehood of Taiwan."

Those in Taiwan who still believe they can count on external intervention to separate the island from its motherland should know they have no chance of succeeding. The reunification of China is unstoppable, and any force standing in the way of reunification will only be met with Beijing's resolute and decisive countermeasures.

## Ugly nature of US' hijacking of human rights

A growing number of unilateral sanctions have been imposed against China by the United States since 2017, with the US increasing its pressure on Chinese technology companies with the imposition of export controls and the launch of administrative and civil charges. These moves have been followed by further sanctions and restrictions related to and in connection with Xinjiang and Hong Kong that expand the list of targets to include key sectors of economic activity, including agriculture, construction, trade, new and green technologies, energy, finance, telecommunications and others.

The unilateral sanctions imposed by the US against China do not conform with international legal norms and cannot be justified as countermeasures under the law of international responsibility, as a UN expert has said.

The unilateral coercive measures impact people's full enjoyment of human rights as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and are imposed as a tool to compel the targeted state to act in accordance with the demands of the US.

States such as the US should therefore lift their unilateral coercive sanctions against China, and also take strong action to curb sanction overcompliance by businesses and other actors under their jurisdiction, said Alena Douhan, UN special rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures and human rights, at a news conference in Beijing on Friday, after an official 12-day visit to China.

"A decline in business activities and the significant loss of global markets either due to unilateral sanctions per se or due to overcompliance with such measures by foreign businesses and entities have led to job losses, with consequent disruptions in social protection schemes, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable, particularly in labor-intensive sectors, including women, older persons, and all those in informal employment," Douhan said.

The multifaceted negative impact of sanctions is also showcased in areas such as education and academic/scientific cooperation with the listing of several prominent Chinese universities and research centers, the interruption of exchange programs, scholarships and joint research projects between Chinese and foreign — mainly US and European — institutions, as well as the broader stigmatization of Chinese students and scholars, who may be denied entry visas or subjected to thorough background checks purportedly on national security grounds.

Moreover, as Douhan pointed out, access to justice and the fundamental principles of due process and the presumption of innocence are also seriously undermined by the listing and de-listing procedures. That means the designated individuals and entities are not provided with the evidence that has supposedly provided the grounds for their designation and they have extremely limited capacity to pursue administrative and judicial proceedings before the sanctioning states' court systems, whose procedures are often lengthy, costly, nontransparent and inefficient.

In other words, to protect human rights in Xinjiang or Hong Kong is just an excuse employed by the US to justify its China-targeted sanctions. In practice, these sanctions have not only caused inevitable harm to human rights in China, they may also lead to negative humanitarian consequences elsewhere in the world, as Douhan said, despite China having the capability to mitigate their negative impacts to various extents.

Notably, one day before the UN expert's Beijing news conference, the date of which had been announced before her trip commenced, the US said on Thursday that it was adding another 26 Chinese cotton traders or warehouse facilities to its Entity List citing Xinjiang's "human rights" concerns. This seems to be an unmistakable provocative move in response to Douhan's visit, since she has been highly critical of the US for similar reasons regarding Venezuela, Iran and Zimbabwe before.

The China report based on her visit she will present to the UN Human Rights Council in September, calling on the sanctioning parties to lift and suspend all unilateral sanctions applied to China without the authorization of the UN Security Council, might not affect the US' stance on its coercively intended practices regarding China. But it will at least serve to highlight the ugly nature of these moves to the international community.

It is shameful for the US to hijack humanitarian concerns for politics.

## Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## Museums have important role to play as second classrooms

According to the National Cultural Heritage Administration on the 34th International Museum Day on Saturday, more than 40,000 exhibitions were held in museums across the country in 2023, attracting 1.29 billion visitors, a record high.

"Museums for Education, and Research" was the theme of this year's IMD, which served as a reminder about the role museums should play. In 1905, when Zhang Jian, a local entrepreneur, founded China's first public museum in Nantong, Jiangsu province, his intention was that it be educational. A museum is like a giant school, and to truly run this school well, it is essential to fully leverage its important role in cultivating people through public education related to culture and history.

Museums connect the past, present and future; it's the place where we can gain a deeper understanding of the past, a clearer grasp of the present, and more strength to create the future. In

recent years, more and more museums have been adopting the "child-friendly" mode, allowing children to immerse themselves in the world of cultural relics and artworks, experiencing the charm of history, the brilliance of civilization, and the wonders of nature through immersive experiences that traverse time and space.

By continuing to promote the regular connections between museums and educational institutions, as well as focusing on innovative services, the nation can make museums truly charming and lively, enabling more children to fall in love with museums and gain knowledge and spiritual fulfillment.

Museums can not only spread printed textual knowledge but also offer experiences that cannot be found in books. Literature tells the stories of civilization, which people can obtain through reading. However, museums present a different discourse system. By unleashing people's imagination, museums can bring to life a simple

hand axe, an ancient pottery jar, a gentle jade piece with their users long ago. It is this kind of "reading" that allows people to establish a real connection with the splendid cultural heritage, gain spiritual inspiration, and receive spiritual nourishment accumulated over the years.

Museums nationwide have also organized multiple activities such as holding exhibitions in schools and communities, holding cloud exhibitions and strengthening cloud education, and prolonged their opening hours, even to 24 hours a day in some places. By further enhancing research utilization, enriching educational methods, and broadening their services, the "museum fever" will not only continue but also create more consumption scenarios, intricately blending the humanities and the economy, and promoting society-wide enhancement of historical self-awareness and cultural confidence.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

## Key move at critical moment for property market

On Friday, the People's Bank of China issued several important new real estate policies, including reducing the down payment ratio for home purchases to 15 percent, lowering the interest rates for provident fund loans and mortgages, and providing loans to local governments to buy unsold apartments for indemnificatory housing. The "heavyweight" policies have been hailed as "historic" steps to lift the property sector.

It should also be noted that besides timely policy adjustment, it is crucial to establish a more mature and perfect market mechanism in the long run, and the relationship between govern-

ment and real estate enterprises needs to become more transparent, open, and market-oriented, thus making the price mechanism more fair in the housing market. Besides market-orientation, it is also necessary to provide policy-based and indemnificatory housing and subsidies for disadvantaged groups and low-income families.

China has experienced over 40 years of rapid development, during which the real estate industry has made contributions as well as provided lessons.

As China's economic volume continues to increase, the growth rate is bound to slow down, and the high growth rate of urbanization will also

slow down accordingly, which makes the demand for houses shrink. Actually, besides the realty industry, the overall social and economic development model is undergoing profound adjustment, transformation and upgrading.

Therefore, the lenient policies can only help to solve part of the problem. Finding new driving forces and growth points, achieving higher-quality development, and integrating with the new trend of macroeconomic transformation and upgrading may be the new challenges for China's real estate industry in the future.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Clarion call for development of tourism industry

**Editor's note:** A national meeting on the development of the tourism sector was held in Beijing on Friday. At the meeting, Li Shulei, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, conveyed the top Chinese leader's important instructions on the development of the tourism industry. The following is a digest of the summary of the meeting the Ministry of Culture and Tourism posted on its official WeChat account.

In his instructions on work related to the tourism sector, given at the National Tourism Development Conference held on Friday, the top Chinese leader called for efforts to promote the high-quality development of the tourism sector to bolster economic growth.

He pointed out that since the launch of reform and opening-up, especially since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China has fostered the biggest domestic tourism market in the world and has become the largest source of international tourists and a top tourist destination.

He put forward three principles for the development of the tourism industry. First, scenic sites and his-

torical culture should always be safeguarded. On this basis, only by daring to change can we achieve a comprehensive upgrade of traditional tourism formats, products and services.

Second, the service quality should be improved and efficiency enhanced. The purpose of tourism innovation should always focus on improving quality and efficiency, and it's necessary to rationally develop limited tourism resources to create more high-quality and famous tourism products.

Third, there should be integrated development. More industries, such as education, transportation and sports should be integrated with tourism and they should be developed synergistically. The more integration there is, the

more conducive it is to extending the industry chain, creating new value and fostering new formats.

A holistic approach to government and the market, supply and demand, protection and development, domestic and international markets, as well as adoption and security should be adopted so the tourism industry can seize new opportunities and meet challenges.

With the high attention of the top leadership, the active support of the people, and its rich natural resources, China has the conditions and scope to build a strong tourism industry to further promote economic development, showcase China's image, and enhance exchanges between civilizations.

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Cross-Strait Relations

**Editor's note:** Promoting the peaceful development of cross-strait relations is the correct way to maintain peace, promote common development, and benefit people on both sides of the Strait. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Zhu Songling

## DPP 'independence push' a serious threat to peace

Known for proclaiming himself to be a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence", Lai Ching-te's "swearing-in" as leader of the Chinese island scheduled for Monday has triggered widespread concerns over the future of cross-strait relations. There are fears that Lai may pursue his dream of "Taiwan independence" by leaning on the US' shoulder to counter the Chinese mainland. If he proceeds on this path after taking office, he would pose a serious threat to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party on the island must realize that the path to "independence" is a dead end, doomed to failure. While the United States may use Taiwan as a pawn to check the mainland's peaceful rise and prevent the reunification of Taiwan with the motherland for its own narrow political ends, that does not mean unconditional US support for "Taiwan independence".

Why? Because even according to the US "one-China policy", Taiwan is not a sovereign independent nation, and the US will not be able to establish "diplomatic relations" with Taiwan. Lai's attempts to strengthen ties with the US and establish formal relations with the US by visiting the White House to signal progress in the pursuit of "Taiwan independence" are delusional efforts and could bring disaster to Taiwan.

Although Washington has offered Taiwan some incentives, those are mainly motivated by its strategic competition with Beijing, instead of genuine support for "Taiwan independence".

Second, US politicians should refrain from sending the wrong signals to the Taiwan authorities, cease using Taiwan as a strategic bargaining chip against the mainland, and stop leveraging the Taiwan question to fulfill their political goals.

In recent years, some US politicians, driven by their electoral and other interests, have been using the "Taiwan card" more frequently, sending wrong signals to the Taiwan authorities. This



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



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shortsighted behavior not only exposes their duplicity, damaging the strategic trust between Beijing and Washington, but also gives wings to the DPP's fantasy of seeking "Taiwan independence", thereby escalating cross-strait tensions.

The US should realize that a healthy Sino-US relationship benefits not only both countries and their peoples but also the world at large. There are a thousand reasons for the US to improve bilateral ties and not even one

to worsen them. If the US continues to leverage the "Taiwan card" to push forward its geopolitical agenda, it will, instead of making any gains, plunge the region into greater danger and further deteriorate Sino-US relations.

The actions of the US and its allies in different regions of the globe have proven deeply problematic, significantly threatening peace. The Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts have raised regional tensions, subjecting local people to the horrors of war. And the US is squarely to blame for exacerbating these situations.

The US has not fostered peace in the Ukraine crisis, plunging countless civilians deeper into suffering. Similarly, US intervention in the Israel-Palestine conflict has destabilized multiple governments, spurred terrorism and

brought death and distress to the Palestinian people.

In these times of global instability, the US should reconsider its foreign intervention policies, and stop interfering in cross-strait affairs. The complexity, severity, and sensitivity of the Taiwan question are such that any external interference could lead to severe consequences.

If the US continues to send the wrong signals on the Taiwan question, encouraging the island's pro-independence forces, it would provoke strong countermeasures from the mainland. So it should stop raising tensions over Taiwan and stop supporting pro-independence forces on the island in order to help maintain peace and stability in the region.

As for the DPP, it should face reality, abandon the illusion of achieving "Taiwan independence" with US support, and return to the correct path of promoting exchanges, and seek peaceful development across the Strait, enhancing the well-being of the island's residents. Taiwan's future and welfare can be secure only on the basis of the 1992 Consensus that there is only one China. Conversely, if the DPP relies on the US to seek "Taiwan independence", it will only push the island toward peril, bringing untold suffering upon its residents.

In other words, the DPP should stop daydreaming about achieving independence with the support of the US, because that will remain a daydream, and US politicians should cease sending the wrong signals to Taiwan and raising tensions across the Strait. By attempting to interfere in the Taiwan question, the US and its allies have destabilized the situation and raised the fears of conflict. For peace and stability across the Strait, the US should stop using Taiwan as a tool to confront the mainland. And compatriots on both sides of the Strait should work together to resolve the differences, strengthen cross-strait ties, and contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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

Wang Shacheng

## TSMC's reliance on US bad for island economy

The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co accounts for more than half of the global semiconductor production. Such is the hold of the TSMC on the global market that its revenue in April reached nearly NT\$240 billion (\$7.46 billion), up 20.9 percent month-on-month and 59.6 percent year-on-year. The figure was record high for the period and the second highest in the company's history — its October 2023 revenue was slightly higher.

From January to April, the TSMC's cumulative revenue was NT\$830 billion, up 26.2 percent year-on-year, with the strong demand for 3-nanometer and 5-nanometer advanced chip process technology being the main driver of the revenue surge in April.

As the world's largest contract chip maker, the TSMC's clientele includes tech giants such as Apple and Nvidia. And with Apple launching a new series of iPads on May 7 and ramping up its efforts to develop AI chips, the TSMC stands to benefit significantly.

But since both Apple and Nvidia are US-based companies, their heavy reliance on the TSMC has been a cause of concern for the US administration. So the administration is steering the TSMC into a carefully laid trap. For instance, in early May, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said the US purchases 92 percent of its cutting-edge chips from the TSMC, so losing the company would cause "absolute devastation" to the US economy. One month before that, the Joe Biden administration had already said it would invest up to \$6.6 billion to support the TSMC's \$65 billion investment plan to set up three chip factories in Arizona that would produce the world's most advanced chips.

The administration's funding, despite comprising just 10 percent of the TSMC's total investment, has tied the company to the US, attracting substantial investment to a sector that is critical to the US with minimal financial commitment and embedded political gains.

TSMC Chief Executive Officer C.C. Wei is acutely aware of the global economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions that could further impact consumer confidence and end-market demand. So despite its industrial and technological advantages, the TSMC, constrained by Taiwan's political landscape, has to bow to US political and economic pressures.

Semiconductors remain Taiwan's last competitive stronghold globally. And the shifting of TSMC technology or capacity to the US would shrink this last asset of the island. The US aims to control the TSMC's technologies and hollow out the company by using the CHIPS and Science Act.

Interestingly, the opening of the TSMC's first production unit in the US has been delayed — from this year to the next — ostensibly because local workers don't have the expertise needed to install some sophisticated equipment and for a general lack of skilled workers. The deeper problem is that the TSMC's factories in the US cannot hire skilled workers from abroad to expedite the process, leading to repeated delays. This shows that the setting up of TSMC factories in the US means exploitation of the company by the administration.

The Chinese mainland has for years been one of the largest markets for the TSMC. Official data from the island's financial department show that in the first four months of this year, Taiwan's exports of integrated circuits to the mainland (and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) amounted to \$26.01 billion, which was 15.55 times more than its integrated circuit exports to the US and accounts for 53.1 percent of the island's total global exports. The figure is lower (in relative terms) than that for the same period last year, when exports to the mainland were 27.57 times higher than those to the US.

According to the General Administration of Customs, in the first quarter of this year, the mainland's imports from Taiwan amounted to 320 billion yuan (\$44.33 billion), with a trade deficit of 200 billion yuan. It had a trade deficit of 350 billion yuan in integrated circuits for the whole year. Despite the overall positive trends in the foreign trade economy, the mainland has a trade deficit with Taiwan, including in integrated circuits, underscoring the mainland's role as a stable and major market for the TSMC.

In fact, the mainland's new quality productive forces offer Taiwan enterprises new opportunities and momentum to integrate into and participate in the mainland's high-quality development, which promotes inclusiveness and openness.

The TSMC operates two facilities on the mainland: TSMC Nanjing Company Limited and its Fab 16, and TSMC China Company Limited and its Fab 10. And since the mainland is the TSMC's largest and most stable market, aligning its strategic planning with the development of the mainland's new quality productive forces would be the ideal choice for the company.

Should the Taiwan authorities, driven by political motives, enforce policies that cause the TSMC to overly depend on the US market and disrupt the harmonious economic relationship between the TSMC and the mainland market, the impact on the company and the island's economy as a whole would be catastrophic.

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

Pan Hsi-tang

## Cross-Strait tourism a win-win vision

As the newly-elected leader Lai Ching-te prepares to "take office" on Monday, the Taiwan authorities should seize the opportunity to thaw cross-strait relations, starting with the tourism sector.

The sign of a possible change was evident in the mainland tourism authorities' announcement that residents of Fujian province on the Chinese mainland could again travel to Matsu in Taiwan.

But despite the above initiative being driven by the opposition Kuomintang party on the island, the thawing of cross-strait relations hinges on the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's willingness to reciprocate the goodwill shown by the mainland and agree with Kuomintang.

Beijing will not only allow Fujian residents to travel to Matsu in Taiwan but also further relax travel restrictions, allowing tour groups from Fujian to visit Taiwan contingent upon the resumption of direct sea transport between Fujian's Pingtan county and Taiwan. This gesture from the mainland signifies goodwill, and its further progress hinges on the response from the Taiwan authorities.

However, the Taiwan island's "mainland affairs council" dismissed the move, claiming it does not meet the principle of equivalent openness. Historically, the opening of cross-strait travel has neither been instantaneous nor conducted on the basis of strict reciprocity, especially because of the vast population disparity between the two sides of the Strait — Fujian alone has nearly 40 million people,



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almost double that of Taiwan. For example, if Beijing allowed all mainland residents to visit the island, could Taiwan handle the influx?

The mainland has said the resumption of the Pingtan-Taiwan maritime route is a prerequisite for further easing of travel restrictions, indicating it has a phased plan for the resumption of cross-strait tourism. This careful planning not only aligns with the top Chinese leader's desire to encourage mainland residents to visit Taiwan, and the comments of Song Tao, head of Taiwan Affairs Office, but also reflects astute planning to minimize the political risk should Taiwan reject these overtures.

While progress may seem slight, these steps are crucial to resume cross-strait travel after the cessation of travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the deadlock over resuming talks on cross-strait travel hinges on the DPP lifting the ban on group travel and abandoning its absolute reciprocity term.

Despite the lack of trust between the authorities on both sides, shared intentions and gradual steps can foster goodwill over time, potentially breaking the current stalemate. With Lai taking office, there is hope that cross-strait travel would be normal-

ized, not least because both sides seem interested in expanding people-to-people exchanges. But certain steps should be taken to make that possible.

First, the two sides of the Strait should establish communication channels at multiple levels. Since cross-strait tourism has come to a halt because of the lack of trust between the two sides of the Strait, the DPP should heed the advice of the island's tourism industry and lift the unreasonable ban on group tours to the mainland as a gesture of goodwill.

Further arrangements can be made through platforms such as the island's "Taiwan Strait Tourism Association", the mainland's Association for Tourism Exchange across the Taiwan Strait and other civil channels to build effective communication models in Kinmen in Taiwan or Xiamen in Fujian.

Second, the Taiwan authorities should improve the island's tourism sites, public facilities and transportation services. During extensive cross-strait exchanges in the past, the influx of mainland tourists boosted Taiwan's tourism industry. Yet some subpar low-cost tours prevented tourists from fully enjoying the tourist sites and experiencing the local culture. So the island authorities should collaborate with the private sector to prioritize quality over quantity in the tourism sector so that people pay repeated visits to the island to enjoy the travel experience.

Third, the island authorities should reciprocate the goodwill shown by the mainland. To welcome mainland tourists, Taiwan should ease the

requirements for mainland residents to travel to the island. Also, considering the keen interest of the residents of Kinmen, Matsu and Penghu in Taiwan to resume cross-strait trade, shipping and postal services, a positive response from the mainland could lay the groundwork for resuming full cross-strait exchanges.

The mainland has already extended an olive branch, and the DPP's response is eagerly awaited. It is hoped that the Lai authorities will not let go of this opportunity to use tourism to ease the tensions across the Strait. If Taiwan lifts the ban on travel to the mainland, the latter might respond positively, leading to a resurgence of mainland visitors to Taiwan.

Ideally, if the mainland takes a "small step" by opening its doors to tourists from Taiwan, the island should respond by taking a similar "small step". That would allow cross-strait relations to be influenced by a spirit of mutual understanding and goodwill. Hopefully, Lai could release some signal that can help foster exchanges and build trust between the two sides of the Strait, which would evoke even greater goodwill gestures from the mainland.

"Step-by-step" progress is an ideal way of resuming cross-strait exchanges amid a lack of mutual trust and facilitating low-risk interactions, which would gradually foster mutual trust and understanding, thereby laying the groundwork for more significant, expanded interactions.

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

# GLOBAL VIEWS

LI XING AND JAN OBERG

## Down time

It is the West that has peaked, not China

The world economy perpetually maintains a hierarchical stratification of countries' economic positions, but it is dynamic. That is to say, although not easy, it is possible for countries to change positions within its structural morphology, by taking advantage of global capital mobility and the relocation of production. China's ascent as a new economic force since the 1980s has injected fresh vitality into the world economy, embodying the cyclical nature of global economic leadership.



Li Xing



Jan Oberg

Historically, shifts in global power dynamics have often led to the emergence of new world orders, disorders, or reordered systems. These changes are typically fueled by the rise of new powers challenging established ones, and the resulting frictions between them can reshape the international landscape. The rise of China, the China-US rivalry, the global power rebalance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Russian-Ukraine crisis, China's role in restoring the diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the renewed Israel-Palestine war are good examples of "pivotal moments" in the transformation of the world order and reordering process. History shows that the decline of dominant powers often stems from the incumbent power's failure to adapt to shifts in the global economy and international dynamics triggered by the emergence of new powers.

China's robust economic growth over the past few decades has had a profound impact on the world economy. China's policies regarding finance, currency, trade, military security, environmental issues, resource management, food security, and commodity prices have sparked considerable debate and scrutiny. This is because shifts in China's supply and demand can

have ripple effects on global prices, prompting adjustments in other countries' economies. As a result, China's market size and integration with the world economy have contributed to the West's "uncertainty" about its own economic dominance. China is increasingly seen to have the quality of the United States, as an "indispensable country".

Since 2013, China has proposed a number of global initiatives and these initiatives are perceived by the West as China's blueprint for an "alternative world order" or a grand vision of a world order with Chinese characteristics. It is hard for the West to accept the fact that for the past several hundreds of years the world order has always been dominated by the West with circles of hegemony within West, and now the new ordering power is a non-Western power.

The above are the backdrops against the "peak China" hype stimulated by mainstream Western media and academic outlets. The promotion of the notion of "peak China" reflects the existing powers' psychological fear, emotional hysteria and denial of the success and rise of a non-Western power.

The modern history of relations between China and the West is one of persistent Western efforts to engage China and to change its society and behavior in a way it desires. Early Western missionaries from Europe and America attempted but failed in their efforts of converting China into a Christian country. Despite the willingness of China to study Western technologies and ideas, it remained firmly attached to its own historical and cultural traditions. The "peak China" hype should be seen as a form of cognitive warfare by the West, aiming at influencing global perceptions and conveying the message that China's global ascent under its political system is not sustainable.

One could argue that while traditional political science and international relations theories retain their relevance, they might fall short in times of imperial decline and shifts in the global order. Therefore, supplementing them with disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, religion, cultural studies, and eschatology could enhance our

understanding.

For instance, one thing we repeatedly see these years is the West's psycho-political projections of its own dark sides onto others. It consistently blames others for doing what it does itself to a much larger degree and, thereby, cleans itself from the possibility that the West itself has done, or is doing, anything wrong. Here easily enters paranoia — everybody else is ganging up and is out to get us.

Such a self-view and worldview holds little significance. Despite a decline in its economic, cultural, political and diplomatic influence, the United States remains unrivaled in military strength globally. It strives to uphold its position of world dominance through the hundreds of military bases and its invented exceptionalist "rules-based" order.

The declining power tends to perceive itself as prevailing against these challenges by leveraging its media industry. These platforms consistently amplify accusations against Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, human rights violations, authoritarianism, and other related issues as part of a broader strategy of global propaganda warfare against China. The mantra of decline is: we have nothing to learn, and we only teach. This mindset largely accounts for the repeated predictions, more akin to wishful thinking, that China's rise has already "peaked".

In such times, the most prudent strategy for emerging powers is to exercise patience, and understanding, perhaps even empathy, while refraining from responding to provocations. The reality today is that it is the West that has peaked, not the Global East and South.

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GERT GROBLER

## Model relations

China and South Africa continue to inject momentum into their comprehensive strategic partnership

On April 27, South Africa celebrated 30 years of democracy since the end of apartheid.

Millions of South Africans jubilantly celebrated Freedom Day and Freedom Month, under the theme "30 Years of Democracy, Partnership, and Growth", which reminded South Africans about the first democratic election in 1994.

In celebrating 30 years of freedom and

democracy, South Africans will also continue to reflect on the values that have guided the country thus far: reconciliation, unity, and nation-building. It was only through a commitment to these principles that South Africa could overcome the divisions of the past and forge a common future based on mutual respect and understanding.

From inheriting a divided country, with gross inequalities in every aspect of life, South Africa has done much to bridge this divide. The government, however, remains aware that many challenges remain.

As regards South Africa's foreign policy, the government has firmly focused on the following principles from the outset: the overriding importance of Africa and its development, a commitment to social justice and human rights, a belief in global solidarity, a just world order, international cooperation as well as a pursuit of international peace. As a result, South Africa's active role and growing influence in international and regional affairs have often been praised by the family of nations.

It is a known fact, that South Africa and China share similar views on development, security, the international order and global governance.

Over the past decades, South Africa and China's long standing friendship and cooperation have grown exponentially, delivering many fruitful outcomes across the board. Cooperation between the two countries in various fields still offers great potential and the South African side stands ready to work with China to strengthen political, economic, people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries and achieve greater development and inject further momentum into the mutually beneficial South Africa-China comprehensive strategic partnership.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations approximately

**The growing cooperation between South Africa and China increasingly serves as a source of development and mutual benefit not only between both countries but also regarding China's ongoing commitment to supporting African development.**

twenty-five years ago, bilateral trade volume between South Africa and China stood at about \$1.6 billion; by 2022, the trade volume had grown to \$56.7 billion, which is the largest bilateral trade relationship for South Africa and also accounts for one-fifth of China-Africa trade. During the last 27 years, the exports of South Africa to China have increased at an annualized rate of 16.1 percent, from \$412 million in 1995 to \$23.4 billion in 2022. South Africa is exporting more quality products to China. South African beef, citrus, wine, oysters, rooibos tea and many other products, are now very popular among Chinese consumers. Trade between South Africa and China is set to grow further after the signing of 10 trade and purchasing agreements between South African and Chinese companies at the eighth session of the South Africa-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission in August 2023 which will contribute to job creation, particularly for young people, while boosting the South African economy.

The growing cooperation between South Africa and China increasingly serves as a source of development and mutual benefit not only between both countries but also regarding China's ongoing commitment to supporting African development. Africa is encouraged by China's ongoing commitment to supporting African countries to meet the aspirations contained in the African Union's Agenda 2063, and to the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Despite the solid progress in South Africa over the last 30 years, much more work needs to be done to address the numerous economic and social challenges facing the country and its resilient people. South Africans are, however, thankful to China and its people for their continued constructive and loyal support and look forward to the deepening of the strategic partnership between the two nations as well as the further blossoming of friendship and understanding between the two peoples.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

## CULTURAL JOURNEY

A scene in *Mission Impossible III* involving Tom Cruise running through the small alleys of a picturesque town in China left a deep impression on some of those who watched and propelled Xitang, an ancient town in Jiashan county, Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, where the scene was filmed in 2005, to a leading role in tourism.

Walking along Xitang's canals, visitors may feel like they are in a Chinese ink painting with blue-stone roads, quaint alleys and houses built in the distinctive style of Huizhou, a historical prefecture that straddled the border between southern Anhui province and the north of Jiangxi province, where homes have white walls, dark tiles and layered horse-head gables.

Even after nearly two decades, the water town is still packed with visitors who come to appreciate its scenery and culture.

Over the ages, Xitang's development has been closely related to culture, which has endowed the ancient town with new grandeur, says Han Jinmei, a cultural scholar from Jiashan county, who is also former deputy director of Jiashan's cultural bureau.

He says that three types of culture are interwoven in the town — farming, commerce and the common culture — and adds that Xitang also has a distinctive farming culture that can trace its roots back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Farmers bartered and traded for daily necessities in the town, gradually turning it into a thriving market during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Then in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), as merchants from Huizhou migrated eastward to Xitang, more and more people came to settle in the town to provide services to the farmers, gradually turning it into a commercial center.

"Many of the merchants' ancestors were farmers. The formation, development in scale and improvements to the living facilities of the town are all related to farming. That's why we say it has a deep farming culture," Han explains.

This culture can still vividly be seen in the Jiashan *tiange* (literally "field songs") that farmers sang as they labored in the fields. It has been recognized as a national-level intangible cultural heritage, and is characterized by its clear and melodious style and storytelling.

"Every tour guide in Xitang can sing *tiange*. They often demonstrate the traditional art to tourists so that they can enjoy it," Han says.

In the middle of the Qing Dynasty, some Huizhou merchants brought their aesthetic values and business styles with them, giving rise to a genteel culture in Xitang, Han says.

"Huizhou merchants brought Huizhou-style buildings, with their layered horse-head gables, which Xitang hadn't had previously. Moreover, they were famous for their credibility and benevolence, and brought this spirit of doing business to Xitang, as well."

Han underscores the town's corridor sheds, some of which extend for nearly 1,000 meters. They were the invention of Huizhou merchants, who built the sheds in front of their shops to give customers shelter in bad weather like heavy wind, rain or snow.

"This shows their consideration for customers, and the Xitang corridor shed is viewed as a reflection of its genteel merchant culture," he says.

As few illustrious families lived in Xitang, there are only few high-level architectural complexes left. This is markedly different from other famous ancient towns in Zhejiang, such as Nanxun ancient town in Huzhou. Consequently, Xitang's inhabitants developed their own attitudes and cultural personalities.

"Xitang people prefer to keep a low-key profile. They don't have much demand for luxuries. They are more relaxed about life. They don't care too much about income or social status. They just enjoy living a simple life," Han says, adding that they are also tolerant and open-minded. This can be seen in their acceptance of tourists leaving messages on one of the town's bridges, the Songzi Laifeng Bridge (Bridge of Bringing Sons and Daughters), which is covered in graffiti.

"Residents don't mind the walls of the bridge being covered with graffiti, so tourists can feel free to draw whatever they wish. When they become too heavily covered,



# Sense of history gives Xitang modern appeal

Water town attracts droves of tourists with its historical, relaxing ambience, Wang Ru reports in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province.



**From top:** The picturesque view of the ancient town of Xitang in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, has the typical elements of a traditional landscape painting. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY The *hanfu* cultural week in Xitang sees many visitors don the traditional dress last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A restaurant in the town provides a perfect setting to appreciate the scenery. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

we just whitewash them so that people can continue," Han says.

Local authorities started to develop tourism in 1996. They have tried to protect original features and have developed the area on the basis of protecting old buildings, waterways, bridges and alleys and retaining the original residents.

One side of the town is the prosperous business district, with rows of shops along the water. This scene hasn't changed since the Qing Dynasty. Often located just behind the shops are people's homes.



I fell in love with Xitang during a visit. It was so beautiful and tranquil, far from the hustle and bustle of cities, and I wanted to be here."

Nabil al-Aghbari, shop owner

is inseparable from the rise in wearing *hanfu*, or traditional Chinese clothing.

According to Hang Bin, a town official, since 2013 when Taiwan lyricist Vincent Fang started the first *hanfu* cultural week in Xitang, the annual event, which takes place every October, has attracted more than 1 million visitors.

During the festival, people wearing traditional Chinese clothes get free admission to the town and can take part in activities like re-creations of traditional ceremonies, flower-decorated boat parades and script-based role-playing games.

The cultural week attracts overseas fans as well. Enthusiasts from more than 20 countries and regions, including the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and South Africa, have joined in cultural activities pertaining to *hanfu*.

"*Hanfu* is a reflection of traditional Chinese culture. We believe organizing this event is beneficial both for cultural protection and tourist development. As a result, we continue to develop *hanfu*-making and associated businesses, and the trade has now become prosperous," Hang says.

There are now more than 100 shops offering *hanfu* and customized makeup styling services to tourists at Xitang as a result, Sun says.

One such boutique was opened by Nabil al-Aghbari, a 58-year-old businessman from Yemen and his wife, Yin Hongxia.

"Eight years ago, I fell in love with Xitang during a visit. It was so beautiful and tranquil, far from the hustle and bustle of cities, and I wanted to be here," says the Yemeni businessman, who was involved in foreign trade in Yiwu, Zhejiang, before settling in Xitang.

As he walked around the town during *hanfu* cultural week in 2016, he was amazed. "*Hanfu* dresses are exquisite and match the atmosphere of this old town. As a result, I decided to open a *hanfu* shop here," he says.

He often shows the clothes to international visitors and helps them try them on. "I hope *hanfu* culture spreads so that more people will try the clothes. I believe the more traditional it is, the more global appeal it has," he says.

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Online See more by scanning the code.

## Renovation renews more than roads in Chongqing

CHONGQING — One community in Southwest China leading the local urban renewal revolution is Houbao in Chongqing municipality's Nan'an district. Home to more than 2,000 senior citizens, the community is not only transforming old residential areas, but also the daily lives of residents.

Since 2021, in addition to renovating buildings, streets and other infrastructure, Houbao has welcomed 12 new retailers, from cafes to hotpot restaurants, and has invited 60 volunteers involved in disciplines such as design and media to organize activities like exhibitions, dances and poetry recitals.

In a repurposed building that now serves as the community's "living room", a postcard of Yang Daren, 78, and her friend Huang Lihui, 74, dancing at a retro-style party is on display.

"I loved that party. These creative young people really are a breath of fresh air," says Yang.

Before renewal, the road was uneven, and residents were a little bit afraid to go out for a stroll, she says. Now, the road is flat, there are streetlights and the community has lots of facilities and activities on offer.



I got to know Peng ... during a series of community activities and I felt that our outlooks matched. So when they invited me to join them and open another hotpot restaurant, I had no hesitation."

Liu Zhipeng, restaurant owner

Yang sees many young people every day, which she says makes the neighborhood feel dynamic and provides opportunities to learn new things, like trying coffee or attending poetry readings.

Peng Yin, 34, who is in charge of running the community, is the catalyst behind all this change. "I wanted to create a new pattern of life here in Houbao, which is fun, friendly and relaxing instead of dull, hectic and exhausting. I think that's why so many people are attracted to it."

A 40-year-old cycling enthusiast nicknamed Leilei is among the newcomers, who have decided to open a shop in the community. She worked in real estate for over 10 years but decided to pursue her real love, cycling, in 2022. Her first bold move was funding a cycling club in Chongqing, a mountainous city where bikes are rarely seen.

"I was concerned the club might fail since Chongqing has lots of slopes and hills. However, people showed a surprising interest and my club now has over 4,000 members," says Leilei.

She also introduced the city to the renowned English bike brand Brompton. While many big shopping malls are vying to sell the brand, Leilei chose to sell from this isolated community last November. "Shopping malls eye the commercial value; however, Houbao emphasizes the person. They want to bring together a group of people with enthusiasm, love and passion for life. I am touched by this," she adds.

Liu Zhipeng, a 42-year-old involved in catering, has had a similar experience. After a decade of working in insurance, the Houbao native quit in 2018 and opened a restaurant in the community in 2020, as part of his effort to live a slower life and rekindle memories of childhood.

"I got to know Peng and some of the other people during a series of community activities and I felt that our outlooks matched. So when they invited me to join them and open another hotpot restaurant, I had no hesitation," says Liu.

XINHUA

## CULTURE



# The hidden histories of the 'far country'

Lloyd Suh's play sheds light on the experiences of Asian immigrants arriving at San Francisco's Angel Island, **Mingmei Li** reports in New York.

The narrow confines of a dim interrogation chamber, where the hours stretched into eternity and relentless inquiries abounded were often the first impression Asian immigrants had of that "far country", America.

Undergoing the process over and over again was how they spent their time at San Francisco's Angel Island detention center. The detention facility opened in 1910, with buildings to house and care for detainees, a pier, a hospital, and regular boat service to the mainland.

Returning to the crowded and dark dormitory, immigrants were then brought back to the interrogation chamber, where they answered the same tactical questions again. Under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which persisted until 1943, Chinese immigrants faced even stricter examinations and investigations than other Asian migrants, and Angel Island was the entry point for most of the approximately 175,000 Chinese immigrants who came to the United States between 1910 and 1940.

Recounting the story of a chosen family coming together, carrying invented biographies and poems of longing on an arduous journey from Taishan in Guangdong province to the US, Lloyd Suh's *The Far Country*, one of the finalists for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in Drama, was performed during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month at the Yale Repertory Theatre.

## Telling the story

For Asian Americans, especially Chinese Americans, entering the US and obtaining official documentation during the period of racial discrimination was extremely difficult.

"This story particularly establishes how the Chinese were sort of pushed into the edges of San Francisco, into what became Chinatown," the show's director Ralph B. Pena tells China Daily, saying that he wanted to share the history with the audience.

Pena is an award-winning theater maker based in New York, who has worked with Suh on other productions that explore the history and struggles of Chinese Americans, among them the play, *The Chinese Lady*.

"It's a continuation of the experiences of the early Chinese in America and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882," he says. The play reveals what happened in the detention center, explores the topic of "paper sons" (immigrants who used fake identification papers to "prove" they had relatives who were already US citizens), and depicts the way Chinese immigrants lived marginalized lives in San Francisco's Chinatown. "So it's basically 100 years of Chinese American history," Pena says.

"The play records the journey of a chosen family to San Francisco, along with the representation of thousands of Chinese who migrated to the US for economic reasons."

"It is transactional in the beginning but actually builds a real family



Scenes from *The Far Country*, a drama by Lloyd Suh about Chinese immigrants at San Francisco's Angel Island detention center between 1910 and 1940, performed during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month at the Yale Repertory Theatre. Immigrants are brought from dark dormitories to the interrogation chamber, where they answer the same tactical questions in strict examinations and investigations enforced by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ly in the US. It's another layering of the Chinese American experience — they come here with chosen families, but they end up creating their own," David Shih, who plays Han Sang Gee, tells China Daily. He shares his understanding of the show and how he sees the immigrants suffering during the process but still persevering through hard work and hope.

"Despite all the obstacles, it's about creating better opportunities for future generations. It's not a selfless act," he adds.

"From the beginning, the play analyzes the transactional nature of many relationships in America and how this necessitates putting human relationships on the back burner," David Lee Huynh, one of the actors, says.

"It is showing historically how people came together to create the Asian communities in America that we have now and how they endured," he says, adding that the show also reminded him of his own immigrant family, who would have suffered from financial difficulties if he hadn't helped out at his small family business when he was a child.

## Reflecting on self

"It feels very jarring to me when people say that I am the model minority," Huynh says, reflecting on his understanding of Asian immigrants and the show. "When my parents worked, (they) sacrificed so much to get where we are now. This play is a very honest look at the Asian community. Despite what people may say about being Asian in America, despite what the preconceived notions are, this is a community. This is a group of people that have had to struggle and fight to get to where they are now."

"We're supposed to exemplify the American Dream, but this play reminds me that the American Dream is one thing, but the American reality is a completely different thing," he says. "The history is kind of complex."



"Many of us here with immigrant parents can definitely reflect on that in the same way," says Feng Hao, who is cast as Moon Gyet, one of the main characters, who is incarcerated in the Angel Island Detention Center for 17 months.

Like Gyet, many immigrants waited for an answer, an approval or a denial, as interrogations took a long time to complete, and the play includes a scene in which an immigrant is asked how many steps their house has.

"This is actually based on real interviews conducted at Angel Island," the director says. "One of the questions the immigration officials asked them was 'how many steps', because they were trying to catch them in a lie."

the closure of Angel Island, a park ranger found hundreds of poems carved into the wooden walls of the detention barracks, expressing their feelings.

"A lot of art comes from the self, the soul," says Joyce Meimei Zheng, who plays Yuen, explaining her perspective on the poetry.

"I think for a lot of artists, and I think for people in general, expressing art, expressing poetry is a natural human instinct," she says. "It just pours out of you. And when you're suffering so much, you literally have nothing else."

She says that given their backgrounds, some of the immigrants were writing poetry on the walls to express themselves, but also as a form of entertainment. "Confined in these rooms for the whole day, they had a little bit of time outside, and then they were back inside, and were just there waiting, and they had no idea when they would be, or if they were going to be, released."

"The poems are one of the few written artifacts of these people's experiences," Feng adds. "They wanted to mark that they were there. They were messages to the future."

## Making impact

To tell the history and story vividly, Huynh says dramaturgy is the key to presenting it to the audience, and one of the missions of the play is to combine history and art.

"It is a practice of taking academic research and blending it with storytelling, so that academic history and facts become usable in an artistic sense," he says, explaining how details add depth and emotion to the history presented to the audience.

The Yale Repertory Theatre also staged performances of the play for high school students at New Haven Public Schools between May 14 and 16.

Cast members say that Chinese American history had never been taught to them at school.

"Especially today, I feel like in many communities, there's been a wish to not teach the difficult chapters of our history," Shih says. "If you don't know your history, you're doomed to repeat it."

He says perhaps that is because people are not aware that this has happened before, and when he started off as an actor, there weren't a lot of plays with Asian casts.

"That's changed and continues to change. When you see more Asian faces in shows on TV, in the media, I think that helps to create a sense that we're all here together," he says, adding that greater presence can change the way Asians are perceived onstage and on screen, by audiences, and change how they are perceived in life.

"Empathy, understanding toward something that may be initially perceived as different — but you see these stories, and you start to understand that we have the same struggles, even though it may be under different contexts, that there's much more that we share, than ways in which we differ," Feng says.

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## French singer captures hearts in TV show

CHANGSHA — When Joyce Jonathan sang *Les Champs-Élysées* in both French and Chinese, many people in China learned a new word — chanson, a poetic and romantic genre of music from France.

Jonathan is participating in *Ride the Wind 2024*, and has become the first French singer-songwriter to take part in the hit Chinese music competition formerly known as *Sisters Who Make Waves*. Produced by Mango TV, the show challenges female celebrities, mostly over the age of 30, to stage performances that defy showbiz age stereotypes in China.

Jonathan says that her foray into Chinese reality shows is driven by her love of Chinese culture and wish to "show a possible bridge between French and Chinese cultures".

"I haven't participated in reality shows back in France," she says. "I accepted this invitation because it is a huge challenge, and because I want to learn more Chinese and learn to sing in Chinese."



French singer-songwriter Joyce Jonathan participates in *Ride the Wind 2024*, a reality show featuring music competitions produced by Mango TV. XINHUA

Jonathan's parents both have a love of Chinese culture, and her mother runs a travel agency that began promoting tours to China in the 1990s. She visited China with her mother for the first time when she was 10 and has since formed a lasting bond with the country.

As a child, Johnathan was given her first scooter and guitar in Beijing. As she grew up, she gravitated toward Chinese philosophies like Taoism and Confucianism. Since her first album was released in 2010, she has translated several songs into Chinese and has returned to China regularly to perform.

Now at 34, Jonathan is learning Yueju Opera, a traditional style of opera that features male roles played by women, as part of the competition.

"Even my mother didn't recognize my voice when I sang Yueju Opera. She never imagined that I could do that one day," Jonathan says.

"I really like this image of the modern woman who, at any age, can still learn things and show that she's very strong."

Jonathan already had a sizable following among Chinese students of French before the show, but broader Chinese audiences have since been delighted by her performance.

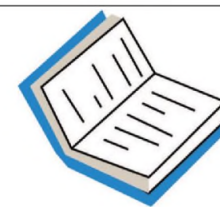
"France and China have a lot in common," she says, remarking on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France. "The 60-year friendship between China and France is just the beginning for a new wave of mutual learning."

XINHUA

# CULTURE

## THE FINE PRINT

Independent, physical bookstores find their niche amid digital trends, other challenges, **Cai Hong** reports.



**Clockwise from top left:** A futuristic branch of Page One bookstore chain in Beijing; The independent bookstore Sound of Books on the historic Qianmen street, a tourist attraction at the central axis of Beijing; A drama-themed independent bookstore in a residential area in Chaoyang district, Beijing; All Sages Bookstore in Haidian district of Beijing is believed to be the cultural landmark of the Chinese capital. PHOTOS BY CAI HONG / CHINA DAILY

In central Beijing, where property prices and rental costs are known for hitting astronomical levels, an independent bookstore is making waves for persisting with what may seem like an improbable business model — poetry.

Peng Mingbang, founder of the bookstore Poetic Books, said he is certainly often asked whether people still write and read poems.

“Being a poet is really an other-worldly interest. Few people can make a living by writing poems,” Peng said.

Most of the poets he deals with come from all walks of life, such as farmers, miners, security guards, deliverymen, police officers, public servants and businesspeople.

In May 2017, Peng decided to resign from a publishing group where he had worked as an editor for 23 years. His bookstore opened in June that year, when he was 53.

Seven years on, Peng continues to sell poetry books. He also published 250 kinds of poetry-related books, including the Good Chinese Poems series.

“Poetic Books has turned out to be a meeting place for poets and writers to chat. New poetry book launch events are often held here,” Peng said.

“It may be a bookshop with the best artistic vibe in Beijing,” said frequent visitor Duan Shihan.

In December 2019, Peng opened a second bookstore, Niche Bookstore, close to the Temple of Earth in the northern part of central Beijing. Thanks to his connections in the publishing world, the store sells signed books by major authors ranging from female poetry sensation Yu Xiuhua to sociologist and sexologist Li Yinhe. Novelist Li Er, best known for his book *Brother Ying Wu* that won the 10th Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2019, signed books at Niche Bookstore a dozen times a year.

Awarded every four years since 1982, the Mao Dun Literature Prize for novels, established in the will of prominent Chinese writer Mao Dun and sponsored by the China Writers Association, is one of the most prestigious literature prizes in China.

“Opening a bookstore can become an addiction,” Peng said.

He co-opened, with a friend, a third bookshop in May 2021. This one, however, did not last long, going out of business in less than a year. Peng called a bookstore a small business, recommending that those who are interested in running bookstores not crave for commercial success in a hurry.

To manage the prices of its books,



**Left:** A young woman finds herself a reading corner at All Sages Bookstore in Haidian district, Beijing. CAI HONG / CHINA DAILY



**Right:** Wu Min, founder of Insight Books, in her beautifully designed bookstore in Beijing. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Niche Bookstore offers direct sales on digital platforms such as JD, Taobao and WeChat.

Still, many other physical bookstores, especially independent ones, are struggling to survive in China.

Cheng Yonghui opened a third bookshop in Hengshui city in the south of Hebei province, focusing on reference books for teachers and students. To make ends meet, he had to reduce the number of employees last year and his plan for a new bookstore in 2024 came to a standstill.

Many industry insiders said the stagnation of China's physical bookshops could be traced to discount sales via livestreaming. But Cheng said publishing houses are responsible for the situation.

Discounts offered by e-commerce platforms are significantly greater and publishers have to raise the prices of books to ensure profits, with a vicious cycle occurring between the two, they said.

### Cultural venues

Twenty years ago, Liu Suli, founder of All Sages Bookstore, rang the warning bells that publishing houses would have no right to set prices if books were sold at discounts online.

China's publishers have since raised the prices of books in recent years in an attempt to deal with e-commerce and livestreaming platforms that sell books cheaply.

The main victims of the situation are readers, Liu said, adding that bookstores then try to find their own way of selling items in an approach that is different from traditional e-commerce and large sales.

In 1996, All Sages Bookstore became a trailblazer by selling books online with the help of Zhang Shuxin, founder of Beijing Information Highway Corp, whose website is believed to be the first internet portal in China.

“Seeing the readers, ranging from teenagers to the elderly, enjoying the books they want, is my reason for soldiering on.”

**Pan Xinze**, founder of Gateway Bookstore

In 1993, the bookstore opened in the northwestern part of Beijing's Third Ring Road. The store was within walking distance of higher learning institutions such as Renmin University of China, Beijing Institute of Technology and Beijing Foreign Studies University.

In 1995, when the Third Ring Road was reconstructed, the All Sages Bookstore found a new location in an alley between Peking University and Tsinghua University, China's top two educational institutions.

Wang Qiang, a graduate of Peking University and co-founder of educational services giant New Oriental Education & Technology Group Inc, is one of the biggest book buyers at the All Sages Bookstore. He frequented the bookshop from 1996, when he returned to Beijing from the United States.

The bookshop paid close attention to social issues by setting aside a special section for topics such as agriculture, farming and rural areas, urbanization and the environment. The topics are what many people in the country, intellectuals in particular, have been concerned about in recent years.

The bookstore had to move again in 2002 when the houses along the alley were demolished. It added new items such as those related to art, literature, audio and video, and business management onto its shelves as its space increased from 80 square meters to 600 square meters. It also

expanded from 14,000 genres of books to 45,000.

After its latest move into a fancy shopping mall in December, All Sages Bookstore is now more spacious, sandwiched by two clothing shops. An amusement arcade is 10 meters away.

Wherever All Sages Bookstore moves, its loyal customers follow. The bookstore has become an influential gathering place for intellectuals. This cultural hub is to Beijing what Shakespeare and Company is to Paris and City Lights bookstore is to New York, according to its fans. The store, which stocks books about humanities and social sciences, is also believed to be a barometer of China's contemporary academic thinking.

### Riding trends

As independent bookstores find it more difficult to sell new books, some of them have figured out that discounts work.

Insight Books, located between the 798 Art Zone and 751 Design Park in northeast Beijing, started putting its books on sale in 2022. Wu Min, founder of the beautifully designed bookstore, joined a small group of independent bookstores stocking its inventory from publishing houses.

“The rivals are nevertheless united by the freemasonry of keeping our bookstores alive,” Wu said. “The group leader is so kind that he always tries hard to take care of the ones that are unable to get copies when a

popular inventory from publishing houses is available.”

Wu was assigned to an aerospace research institute in Beijing after graduating from a university in Hefei, Anhui province, in 1995, but left the position two years later. Before opening Insight Books in 2008, she worked at a foreign company and an internet business. She also ran a Western restaurant.

Insight Books is now where Wu finds her passion and where her management skills work well.

Yan Bing, co-founder of bookstore chain Sound of Books, has a huge warehouse in Hebei's Zhuozhou city, a major hub for China's publishing industry. Many publishing companies and bookstores have depots there.

Yan has four branches in different bustling districts of Beijing and aims to expand the number to 10 in the coming years.

Thanks to his large inventory, the Sound of Books chain is able to upgrade its shelves with about 1,000 new kinds of books every day.

“It is a big workload,” Yan said. “What is more demanding is that you have to get more stock from publishing houses.”

### Changing times

According to an annual report on the publishing industry issued by the Publishers Association of China and the Book and Periodicals Distribution Association of China in February, short-video platforms became the second-largest book sales channel in 2023, following e-commerce platforms. Bookstore sales continued a downward trend.

China's retail sales of books totaled 91.2 billion yuan (\$12.8 billion) in 2023, up 4.72 percent year-on-year.

The total number of active titles, as gauged by ISBNs in the overall retail market, reached 2.37 million,

an increase of 1.55 percent.

The report showed that 180,000 new titles were published in 2023, a rise of 7.3 percent over the previous year.

“It is a mistake to homogenize young people and say they are not reading,” Wu of Insight Books said. “Most of the customers visiting my bookstore are young people.”

She remains optimistic about physical bookstores and an industry survey on the latest reading habits in China is good news for Wu and the brick-and-mortar bookstores in the country.

Almost half of the adult respondents said they preferred reading printed books to other formats as of February 2023. But reading on mobile phones or e-readers has been attracting more Chinese readers.

Pan Xinze, in his 30s, opened Gateway Bookstore in an old residential district in Benxi city of northeast China's Liaoning province four years ago.

“I want to give those who don't read a chance to start picking up a book, and those who read access to more books,” he said. “But that's easier said than done.”

Like many industrial cities in Northeast China, Benxi, previously a steel hub, has seen better days. Young people are leaving the city amid an economic slump and ageing population.

But Pan did not expect his bookstore to fare well in the city of 1.32 million — one of the smallest among Liaoning's cities. His venue has become a “spiritual glue” that holds book lovers together, Pan said.

“The local bookworms usually come to the store every other day to grab a book or a cup of coffee, and those who live in other parts of the country visit the store every time when they return,” Pan said.

During the pandemic, when many small bookshops could hardly make ends meet, Pan's store saw bustling business. Many Benxi residents who used to live and work at other places returned to the city, marking an increase in customers for Pan's bookstore.

Its bestsellers are the literary books about Northeast China, he said.

It is a far cry from the bookstore's early days, when it raked in just 400 yuan in the first month after it opened for business.

“Seeing the readers, ranging from teenagers to the elderly, enjoying the books they want, is my reason for soldiering on,” Pan said.

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