

Close to the land

Sustainable farming shows the way to a bright future in Hungary

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Specialists shrug off talk of overcapacity

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Glorious memories

93-year-old recalls protection of the Mogao grottoes in Dunhuang

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Xi stresses efforts to deepen reforms

Ultimate goal is to meet people's need for better life, he says

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping stressed on Thursday the importance of further deepening reform across the board as China is striving to build a modern socialist country in all respects and advance the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at a symposium in Jinan, Shandong province, to solicit opinions from representatives of both domestic and international businesses and academia.

Xi said that efforts must be centered on prioritizing the key tasks, upholding fundamental principles and strengthening coordination among different reform measures.

Noting that the ultimate goal of promoting reforms and development is to meet the people's aspirations for a better life, Xi said that reform measures must take into consideration the overall, fundamental and long-term interests of the people.

He urged efforts to address the pressing concerns of the people in areas such as employment, income, education, healthcare, housing, and child and elderly care, as well as their overall well-being.

The symposium was held ahead of the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee to be held in Beijing in July, which will primarily study issues concerning further comprehensively deepening reform and advancing Chinese modernization.

Nine representatives and experts spoke at the symposium, offering opinions and suggestions on developing venture capital investment, upgrading traditional industries,



President Xi Jinping interacts with workers of Rizhao Port on Wednesday during a visit to Rizhao in Shandong province. He inspected the port and learnt about local efforts to promote the port's smart and green development. JU PENG / XINHUA

improving the corporate governance of private enterprises and optimizing the business environment for foreign enterprises.

Xi told the participants that every time the CPC Central Committee makes major decisions or formulates important documents, it conducts in-depth research and widely solicits opinions from various sectors.

This is an established practice and fine tradition of the Party, he said, urging relevant authorities to seriously study the solicited opinions and suggestions.

Reform is the driving force for

development, Xi said. He noted that to further deepen reform on all fronts, efforts should be focused on the overarching goals of improving and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and modernizing China's governance system and capacity.

Xi also stressed the need to take resolute steps to remove the ideological and institutional barriers hindering the advancement of Chinese modernization, and strengthen efforts to resolve deep-seated institutional challenges and structural issues.

To improve the socialist market economy, Xi said that reform must originate from real needs and address the most urgent issues. He also called for efforts to deepen theoretical innovation and promote institutional innovation during the process of solving practical problems.

Xi said that no matter how reform is carried out, the upholding of fundamental principles, such as the overall leadership of the Party and the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, must never waver.

At the same time, all necessary reforms must proceed without hesitation, he said.

Noting that coordination should be enhanced so that all reform measures are well-aligned and form synergy, Xi said that efforts must be taken to avoid focusing on one single measure to the detriment of others or letting one measure impede another.

Reform needs to focus on planning, but the implementation is more important, Xi said, calling on authorities to carry out reform with a tenacious spirit and in a steady way.

WORLD WATCH By Khalid Taimur Akram

Nation offers hope of sustainable future for the world

China's contribution toward sustainable growth in the world encompasses a transformative journey that illuminates a path of progress for nations across the globe. Yet the manufacturing and fanning of allegations about China's industrial "overcapacity" portends the opposite trend of over-protectionism by some advanced economies.

For decades China struggled to modernize its industries and agriculture. Today it has ascended the value chain and reshaped global supply chains. It has grown into a manufacturing powerhouse that has harnessed the potential of intermediate goods trade and expanded its trade footprint to solidify its position as a global trading giant.

By fostering the development of primary manufacturing industries in partner countries, China is forging stronger ties and unlocking new avenues for mutual prosperity, bringing opportunities not only to the developing countries but also to capital-rich advanced economies. With its steadfast commitment to international development, China stands poised to enhance the collective well-being of humanity and foster a global community with a shared future.

China has taken proactive steps to share its manufacturing capacity and expertise with other nations through projects aimed at improving people's livelihoods. China has assisted numerous developing countries in implementing approximately 6,000 projects focused on livelihood improvement, effectively enhancing the local capacity for sustainable development.

China has emerged as an unparalleled epicenter of economic dynamism, transitioning from a mere potential market to the most robust and accessible market worldwide. This transformation can be seen in the immense number of Chinese goods and products reaching global markets so rapidly in the 21st century.

In the era of rapid scientific and technological advancement and globalization, characterized by easy access to commerce, accelerated capital flows, and the integration of knowledge and ideas on a global scale, China brings its innovation, harmony, ideas and export technologies to countries for new quality growth, offering a beacon of hope and optimism for a sustainable future across the world.

Moreover, the advent of digitalization has emerged as a transformative force in driving global economic progress, with China at the forefront of technological

NATIONAL VISION, LOCAL ACTION

Hebei deepens opening-up to drive high-quality development

By CHEN MEILING in Beijing and ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang

Hebei province is deepening opening-up by promoting foreign trade and outbound investment, as well as by more deeply participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, on its path to high-quality development, according to Ni Yuefeng, secretary of the Hebei Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China.

The province has a coastline stretching 487 kilometers, with the three coastal cities — Qinhuangdao, Tangshan and Cangzhou — serving as hubs of the Circum-Bosphorus Sea region linking Northeast Asia.

Hebei has unique geographical advantages and convenient maritime transportation, with favorable conditions for developing an outward-oriented economy.

The cargo throughput of Tangshan Port exceeded 800 million



Ni Yuefeng

metric tons for the first time in 2023 and exceeded 200 million tons in the first quarter of this year, ranking second in the world.

Hebei has added 10 new domestic container trade routes and four foreign trade routes since last year, opening routes to the Russian Far East, Vietnam and Thailand.

"We will solidly promote the transformation and upgrading of ports and the integration of resources, as well as expand domestic and international trade routes," Ni said.

"In addition, based on platforms such as development zones, free trade zones and comprehensive bonded zones, we've taken measures to make customs clearance quicker and more convenient."

Hebei's imports and exports increased 7.4 percent last year and 15 percent in the first quarter of this year. Exports of new energy vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products increased rapidly.

Major cooperative projects have been carried out between Hebei and regions participating in the BRI.

Hebei Iron and Steel Group Co, one of the world's largest steelmakers, purchased Smederevo Steel Plant in Serbia in 2016, turning it from a loss-making company to a profitable one, and securing more than 5,000 jobs.

This year, Wu'an Xinfeng Circular Economy Industrial Investment Development Co signed a contract for a 2-million-ton hot-rolled coil project in Egypt.

In April, the China-Europe freight train that departed from Shijiazhuang arrived in Belgrade, Serbia, establishing a major land

logistics channel.

Last year, Hebei reached agreements for investments totaling \$480 million with countries involved in the BRI, accounting for 38.1 percent of the province's total outbound investment.

"In the future, we will further comprehensively deepen reforms, promote high-level opening-up, accelerate the construction of a strong economy and a beautiful Hebei, and strive to compose a chapter in the modernization of China with a Hebei perspective," Ni said.

Under the country's move to promote the integrated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Xiong'an New Area in Hebei is a major recipient of non-capital functions from Beijing.

"Xiong'an New Area has entered a phase of large-scale construction and is undertaking non-capital functions from Beijing," Ni said. "We will further improve

relocation policies, optimize institutional mechanisms, and extensively attract domestic and foreign participants and capital to participate in its construction and development, striving to build it into a high-level modern city."

As of now, the number of institutions transferred from Beijing and Tianjin to Hebei exceeds 40,000. Since last year, there has been a historic breakthrough in the introduction of second- and third-tier subsidiaries of State-owned enterprises from Beijing, driving both industry and employment growth, Ni said.

The province also established platforms for the matching of technology, industry and finance, to accelerate incubation of technological achievements and their application in the market, he added.

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DRAGON YEAR EXPECTED TO GIVE 'BABY BUMP' TO FALLING BIRTHRATE

Experts warn, however, long-term population decline will continue in China

By WANG XIAOYU in Beijing, ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang



When she began her in vitro fertility treatment at a hospital in Jiangsu province last year, Ma Li chose the time carefully to try to ensure her baby would be born in the Year of

the Dragon, which started on Feb 10. "Of the 12 animal signs of the Chinese zodiac, my favorites are the dragon and the pig because they symbolize success, wealth and

good fortune," she said. "Besides, my zodiac sign of rooster is the most compatible with either the dragon or the tiger."

Ma initially wanted her first child to be a tiger baby born in 2022, but the COVID-19 pandemic postponed her birth plans.

"I was infected twice during the pandemic and I did not dare take

the risk when it comes to having a baby," said the 31-year-old.

The number of newborns in China has been falling for seven consecutive years, but this year a 'baby bump' is expected as mothers like Ma are eager to give birth to children with an auspicious zodiac sign.

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Left: A nurse takes a newborn baby out of the delivery room at a hospital in Ulanqab, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Feb 10.

Right: Li Xing (center), mother of triplets, holds her babies with her parents in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on April 14.



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The end of the pandemic and a rebound in new marriage registrations for 2023 could further boost the country's birthrate, experts said. "Chinese people have a strong preference for zodiac signs, and we saw a small baby boom in the previous Year of the Dragon in 2012," said Zhai Zhenwu, president of the China Population Association.

The number of newborns in 2012 topped 19.7 million, compared with around 17.8 million for the year before it and the one after, according to National Bureau of Statistics data. "The birthrate for 2024 is expected to increase," Zhai said.

However, despite slight changes in yearly fertility rates, China's total population will keep trending downward at a mild pace, experts said. Last year, the nation recorded the second consecutive annual decline in its total population.

"The Year of the Dragon and the end of COVID-19 will probably ease the decline for 2024, but the die is cast in terms of the nation's total population falling in the long run," said Yuan Xin, a demography professor at Nankai University in Tianjin.

Delays in getting married and having children, coupled with an unwillingness to have babies due to the pressure of raising children, are important factors contributing to decreasing fertility rates.

Obstetricians said the increase in the age of new mothers means more efforts are needed to improve treatment for high-risk mothers and newborns. Meanwhile, demographers have suggested accelerating efforts to build systems to support fertility, and reducing the costs of raising and educating children. This will enable families to better cope, and also help achieve an appropriate national fertility rate.

Roaring numbers

Some hospitals have already reported marked increases in treatment of pregnant women and babies being delivered since late last year. Nannies and postpartum centers are receiving a growing number of inquiries and operating at almost full capacity.

Jiang Haili, an obstetrician at Beijing Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital affiliated to Capital Medical University, said that the number of newborns in their maternity ward has been climbing since last November.

"Nowadays, we deliver around 15 to 20 babies each day, or about 600 each month, compared with 400 during the low period of last year," he said.

"I think the rise has a lot to do with the COVID-19 pandemic," Jiang said, adding that many couples were hesitant about having a baby during the outbreak due to concerns about the virus' impact on pregnant women and the health of newborns.

"Besides that, we have seen the launch of the third-child policy and a series of new measures to support births in recent years, such as the inclusion of fertility treatments in medical insurance programs in some regions," he said. "The dragon zodiac sign is also associated with many positive blessings and many couples are fond of dragon babies."

During the most recent peak in the number of newborns in 2016 — when China implemented the second-child policy that allows all couples to have two children, the ward saw about 15,000 to 17,000 new births a year, he said.

"Our maternity ward is still fully equipped with over 80 medical personnel as it was during the peak, so handling the slight rise in new births this year presents no challenges," he said.

Kang Wenjuan, president of the Children's Hospital of Shanxi, Shanxi province, said the current situation was similar to 2017 when there was a bump in new births in the year after the rollout of the sec-



Medical staff take care of "dragon babies" at the provincial maternal and child health hospital in Lanzhou, Gansu province, on Feb 28. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Babies: 'Auspicious' births an uptick in downward trend

ond-child policy. Shanxi province recorded 400,000 newborns that year, almost double the number for 2023, data shows.

"This year's total number of newborns across the province is estimated to be higher at around 210,000 ... we are already seeing a rise in pregnant women confirmed through pregnancy tests," she said. "To cope with the increase, we have stepped up training of medical personnel and launched remote diagnosis platforms to boost our services."

Zhang Jianlin, manager of the Taiyuan Chimei Postpartum Center in Taiyuan, Shanxi, said the center has seen a surge in requests so far this year. "Our facility has 28 villas and 150 suites. From January to March, our beds were completely full," he said.

Ma Xiaobei, head of the Laikang Maternal and Child Care Center in Langfang, Hebei province, said that the facility is almost fully booked until the end of this year, prompting it to start providing home services.

"Expectant mothers usually make reservations six months ahead of their due date," she said. "During the COVID-19 pandemic, we seldom saw full bookings for an entire month, but this year is different. The volume of orders has gone up by 30 percent compared with the previous year."

She said many couples consider it auspicious to have a dragon baby this year. "The center held an event to cel-



Medical staff including Kang Wenjuan (center), president of Shanxi Children's Hospital, and Ji Yong (left), head of the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit, visit the babies in the neonatal intensive care unit in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on March 29. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

brate the births of the earliest dragon babies coming here," Ma said.

However, she also believes that China's birthrate will continue to decline in the long run. "The focus of our business in the future will be probably serving a smaller number of clients with higher quality services," she said.

Older mothers

The average marriage age of women rose from 22 years in the 1980s to 26.3 in 2020, official data shows. Women are also giving birth

to their first child later in life, at the average age of 27.2.

"My observation is that women usually have their first baby at around 30 years of age. The number of second children is rising, but we seldom see women having a third child," said Kang, the hospital president in Shanxi.

"Mothers who give birth a second time are usually older compared to first-timers, which also poses challenges for doctors to ensure their safety," she said.

Kang said guaranteeing safety

during pregnancy and preventing birth defects are of great significance as the nation has highlighted the high-quality development of the population.

"It is important to determine whether a child might be born with defects early in the pregnancy through comprehensive tests. With the declining birthrates these days, it is even more important to ensure that each baby born is healthy," she said.

Ji Yong, head of the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit, said that nearly all babies in the province born in critical condition are sent to the facility for treatment.

"Unlike adults, infants cannot express their discomfort and can only cry," she said.

"It is crucial for us to provide meticulous management, special care in incubators, and create a womb-like environment for babies. We weigh them daily, measure their length weekly and monitor their medication intake and physical condition every 12 hours," she said.

Zhang Yanling, head of the obstetrics department at Shanxi Provincial People's Hospital, said that the majority of mothers giving birth at the hospital are aged 30 to 35.

"At our hospital, we rarely see pregnant mothers aged 20 to 25. Those aged 25 to 30 make up around 35 percent, and those aged 30 to 40 account for 43 percent," she said.

Zhang added that more than 70 percent of babies are a mother's first child, while second children make up over 20 percent.

Jiang, the obstetrician in Beijing, said that the proportion of high-risk pregnant women — those aged 35 or older with high blood pressure, elevated blood sugar levels, and other existing illnesses — is on the rise.

"The most significant change lies in the number of pregnant women aged above 40. This morning alone, I received five such cases," he added.

Shen Haiping, deputy director of the National Health Commission's Department of Maternal and Child Health, said at a recent news conference that more efforts will be made to carry out pregnancy risk assessments and categorize and manage pregnant women based on their risk levels.

She added it is important to formulate individual treatment plans for at-risk pregnant women.

'Compensatory newborns'

The fertility plans of women of childbearing age in China have remained unchanged despite the announcement of the third-child policy, according to a study released in January by the China Population and Development Research Center and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute for Population and Labor Economics.

The effects of the second-child policy are also waning, the researchers found.

"Due to the COVID-19 pandemic's suppression of fertility from 2020 to 2022, it is estimated that there will be a certain number of compensatory childbirths from 2023 to 2025, and a slight rebound in the fertility rate and the number of newborns," it said. "But the dominant trend of delaying first marriages and child-birth will continue."

The number of "compensatory newborns" — those born to families who postponed having children due to the outbreak — is expected to be no more than 2 million in total, it added.

Policy-makers should focus on the growing average age of people tying the knot and having children for the first time, as well as the rising number of women who never get married and choose to never have children.

A lack of robust fertility supportive policies, delays in first marriages and first child births, along with women choosing to remain single and childless "will have a major impact on fertility levels in the future," the study said.

Declining birthrates are affecting many countries around the world, He Dan, director of the China Population and Development Research Center, said in a signed article in March. In 45 countries and regions, fertility rates had dropped to below 1.5 by 2021, while the rate in China dropped to an extremely low level during the pandemic, she said.

The number of children that women of childbearing age considered ideal was 1.86 in 2022, which was 0.7 higher than the actual fertility rate, He said. Difficulties in their lives, unsure expectations for the future, changing social norms on the value of families to contemporary society, and a tendency among couples to take a wait-and-see attitude toward childbearing, accounted for "80 percent of these unmet fertility intentions", she said.

China has launched a string of measures to encourage births, but it will take time for the effects to show and existing measures are insufficient to meet public expectations, He said. She suggested improving basic services in fertility insurance, infant care and nursery care to help couples strike a balance between career development and building a family. Reforms in education, housing and healthcare also need to be advanced to reduce child care costs, He added.

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Left: Han Yuanhui (left) and her husband Ren Jinliang take care of their newborn baby in the obstetrics and gynecology ward of Shanxi Provincial People's Hospital on March 29. **Right:** Pregnant women use yoga balls for prenatal training at a maternity and postpartum center in Taiyuan, on April 13. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY



TOP NEWS

China, GCC states to pursue closer relations

Economic complementarity between nations lays foundation for new areas of cooperation

By WANG KEJU in Xiamen, Fujian, and WANG QINGYUN in Beijing

President Xi Jinping has said that China stands ready to promote solidarity and pursue cooperation with countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council to write a new chapter in China-GCC relations.

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Xi made the remark in a congratulatory letter sent to the China-GCC Countries Forum on Industrial and Investment Cooperation, which opened on Thursday in Xiamen, Fujian province. The letter was read out at the forum by Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang.

China and GCC countries enjoy a long history of friendly exchanges, Xi said, noting that in 2022, the first China-GCC Summit opened up new prospects for deepening cooperation between the two sides.

Xi said that deepening industrial and investment cooperation between China and GCC countries will help strengthen the alignment between the Belt and Road Initiative and the development strategies, visions and plans of GCC countries.

It will also help China and GCC countries make use of their own advantages to complement each other, jointly foster new growth engines and promote shared prosperity and development, he said.

The GCC is a regional grouping based in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, and comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Formed in 1981, the council makes economic policies across these Gulf nations, some of which are

among the world's top fossil fuel exporters.

The trade value between China and GCC countries reached \$315.8 billion in 2022, solidifying China's position as the council's top trading partner and its pivotal role as the leading destination for petrochemical product exports from within the regional grouping, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Wang Guangda, secretary-general of the China-Arab Research Center on Reform and Development, said the economic complementarity between China and GCC nations has laid a solid foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation.

China boasts a vast consumer market and a well-established industrial system, while the six Gulf nations possess abundant energy resources and are scaling up efforts to diversify their economies and their energy mix, Wang said. Furthermore, there is a growing focus on exploring new areas of cooperation, such as infrastructure development, technology transfer, tourism and financial services, he added.

UAE Vice-President Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan said the strength, scale and level of investment and industrial cooperation between China and GCC countries represent a pillar of a promising and fruitful future. China and GCC nations are together capable of making significant contributions to the future of the global industry and investment, he added.

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Sacred duty

A worker cleans Buddha statues at the Gangaramaya Temple in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Wednesday, a day ahead of the Vesak festival, also known as Buddha Purnima, an annual event that celebrates the Buddha's birth and enlightenment.

ISHARA S. KODIKARA / AFP

Premier Li to meet with Japan, ROK leaders in Seoul

By CAO DESHENG caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China, Japan and the Republic of Korea will hold their first trilateral summit meeting in more than four years from Sunday to Monday, with the hope that they will renew the trilateral dialogue to promote stability and prevent economic and security friction among the East Asian nations.

Premier Li Qiang will attend the ninth Trilateral Summit Meeting in Seoul with ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

The Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that amid complex changes in international and regional situations, China hopes the meeting will inject fresh impetus into trilateral cooperation to achieve more mutually beneficial and win-win results.

Speaking at a regular news briefing, ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin noted that China, Japan and the ROK are neighbors as well

as major economies in Asia and the world.

In the 25 years since they initiated trilateral cooperation to jointly tackle the Asian financial crisis, the three countries have gradually established a cooperation mechanism with the trilateral summit at the center, and with support from ministerial-level meetings, senior officials' meetings and more than 70 working mechanisms, Wang said.

He also said that Li will attend important events, including the China-Japan-ROK Business Summit, together with leaders from Japan and the ROK, and exchange views with them on trilateral cooperation.

China is willing to work with Japan and the ROK to implement the consensus of the China-Japan-ROK Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade, deepen cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, science and technology and culture, and promote regional economic integration in East Asia, contributing to the peace, stability and prosper-

ity of the region and the world, Wang said.

Regarding a question about plans for Li's separate bilateral meetings with the two other leaders, the spokesman said that "we are currently in communication with the relevant parties on this matter".

The ROK currently holds the rotating chairmanship of the trilateral cooperation mechanism. This meeting marks the first trilateral summit among the Asian countries since December 2019, after a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic and strained Seoul-Tokyo relations over historical disputes.

The summit will cover six areas of cooperation — economy and trade, sustainable development, health issues, science and technology, disaster and safety management, and people-to-people exchanges, according to a Yonhap News Agency report on Thursday that quoted the ROK's Principal Deputy National Security Adviser Kim Tae-hyo.

"The summit will serve as a turn-

ing point for fully restoring and normalizing the trilateral cooperation system among the ROK, Japan and China," Kim said. "It will also provide an opportunity to recover future-oriented and practical cooperation momentum, which will allow the people of the three countries to feel the benefits."

The leaders will also discuss regional and international issues and interact with about 80 businesspeople at a welcoming dinner on Sunday and a business forum on Monday, according to Kim.

The eighth China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Summit Meeting at the end of 2019 unveiled the China-Japan-ROK Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade, drawing up a strategic plan to deepen cooperation among the three countries.

However, observers said, in view of the global economic slowdown and intensifying geopolitical and economic friction in the region, difficulties and challenges still lie ahead for the three countries in economic and trade cooperation.



A schematic map shows the area where the two-day joint military drills that started on Thursday are being conducted by the Eastern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army around the Taiwan island. PLA EASTERN THEATER COMMAND

PLA conducts joint military drills around Taiwan region

By JIANG CHENGLONG jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

The People's Liberation Army began two days of joint military drills on Thursday around China's Taiwan island, in a move seen as a stern warning to "Taiwan independence" forces.

In a brief statement released on Thursday morning, the PLA's Eastern Theater Command said the exercises would take place in the Taiwan Strait and to the north, south and east of Taiwan, as well as areas around the islands of Jinmen, Matsu, Wuqiu and Dongyin, which are located in the Taiwan Strait.

Li Xi, spokesman for the theater command, said in another statement that the exercises serve as a "strong punishment" against the separatist acts of the "Taiwan independence" forces and a "stern warning" against interference and provocation by external forces.

He said the drills, code-named Joint Sword-2024A, involve military branches including the PLA's Ground Force, Navy, Air Force and Rocket Force of the eastern theater command.

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The exercises focus on practicing joint maritime and aerial combat readiness patrols, joint seizure of comprehensive battlefield control, and joint precision strikes of key targets, Li said.

The spokesman added that the drills involve the patrol of vessels and planes closing in on areas around Taiwan and integrated operations inside and outside the island chain to test the joint real combat capabilities of theater command forces.

On the same day, China Coast Guard spokesman Gan Yu announced that the coast guard in East China's Fujian province organized a vessel fleet to conduct comprehensive law enforcement drills near the islands of Wuqiu and Dongyin.

The drills are looking to test the capabilities of joint patrols, rapid response and emergency handling, he said.

These actions come in response to a speech on Monday by the new leader of the Taiwan region, Lai

Ching-te, who blatantly advocated "Taiwan independence".

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular news conference on Thursday that the joint exercises are completely in line with international law and practices and are entirely legitimate and necessary.

Wang stressed that "Taiwan is an indivisible part of China's territory, which is both historical fact and the real status quo", saying that the fact will never change and "Taiwan independence" is a dead end.

He warned that "any separatist acts for 'Taiwan independence' will be met with resolute and powerful strikes from the more than 1.4 billion Chinese people, and all separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence' will be crushed in the face of the historical trend of complete reunification of China."

Previously, the Chinese military conducted two separate rounds of exercises around Taiwan after the visit to Taiwan by then United States House speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2022, and former island leader Tsai Ing-wen's stopover in the

United States in 2023.

The exercises this time have included some islands that are to the north of Taiwan island and quite close to the mainland, military expert Zhang Junsheng said, adding, "This represents a further expansion and breakthrough in the exercise area and further squeezes the space for 'Taiwan independence' activities."

According to a China Media Group report, after receiving instructions, multiple fleets of Navy destroyers from the Eastern Theater Command swiftly maneuvered in various directions toward the waters near Taiwan.

Zhang said the exercises aim for achieving comprehensive control of a battlefield, which would include control of the sea, air and electromagnetic spectrum, adding that they have also demonstrated that the PLA is able to precisely strike targets.

This is absolutely a punishment and a warning to figures like Lai, warning them against further promoting separatist activities for "Taiwan independence", he said.

Development: Offering immense opportunities for all countries

From page 1

innovation such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and new energy. And the varied new energy vehicles it is releasing to the world are timely and much needed contributions to the global fight against climate change that should be welcomed rather than impeded.

China is spearheading the development of digital infrastructure in partner countries, laying the groundwork for a more interconnected global digital ecosystem and thus also championing South-South digital cooperation as a catalyst for sustainable development. With a

footprint spanning over 140 countries and regions, China has facilitated unparalleled levels of commerce and serves as a catalyst for bolstering cross-border e-commerce, industrial and supply chain integration worldwide.

Furthermore, China's commitment to promoting well-being in developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, underscores its role as a responsible global stakeholder. Through its development programs in areas such as food security, disaster relief, education and healthcare, China helps out in these areas to foster resilience in the global economy.

Through initiatives such as the

China's endeavors to upgrade transportation infrastructure ... play a crucial role in global development.

Belt and Road Initiative, which was established in 2013 to foster international economic cooperation, China has been offering immense opportunities for all countries and facilitating close economic ties with numerous countries, driving investments, trade and cooperation across regions.

China's endeavors to upgrade transportation infrastructure under

BRI play a crucial role in global development, as the country has established and constructed infrastructure projects such as railways and roads with over 100 countries and regions worldwide, fostering stronger global connections and increasing trade. The expansion of China-Europe freight routes and vast networks of highways and port projects among countries propels global economic recovery and stands as a beacon of hope in an increasingly interconnected world.

With investments reaching up to \$1 trillion and the signing of over 3,000 cooperation projects, the BRI has fostered economic progress across the world by promoting eco-

nomical cooperation and development on a monumental scale. Contrary to empty checks issued occasionally by some Group of Seven economy leaders to the developing South, BRI cooperation has yielded tangible benefits, bolstering economic globalization and enhancing the global governance system aimed at safeguarding our shared planet and fostering a brighter, more prosperous future for all. This initiative sets a new trajectory for modernization and actively promotes the vision of a global community of shared future with fruits of happiness.

China's commitment to multilateral cooperation and global respon-

sibility is evident in its active engagement in the global community, demonstrating its determination and dedication to advancing global dialogue, peace, and cooperation despite increasing protectionist measures against its companies and products by a few American and European economies.

As China strides confidently forward, guided by principles of innovation, harmony, green development, openness and sharing, it leads global economic growth to new heights, offering optimism for a sustainable future.

The author is Executive Director, Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Shanghai rolls out noise control plan

Cacophony created by construction, social gatherings to be addressed

By LIN SHUJUAN in Shanghai
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Shanghai, a bustling metropolis home to nearly 25 million residents, has introduced a comprehensive three-year plan to enhance noise prevention and control.

A key objective outlined in the plan is for Shanghai to meet national nighttime noise compliance standards across all functional zones by 2025. And by 2026, the city aims to make significant strides in its overall noise management to create a peaceful and harmonious social environment for its residents.

Central to the plan are crucial measures such as the implementation of automated noise monitoring and digital management platforms to strengthen the city's ability to address the problem.



By implementing both enforcement and proactive measures, our aim is to reduce decibel levels and enhance the happiness index."

Yan Bo, director of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Ecology and Environment

The plan also emphasizes enforcing noise control measures in urban areas and increasing supervision of noise pollution at construction sites.

In the industrial sector, the plan mandates noise pollution permits for key industrial sources and advocates for source control in industrial parks.

In terms of transportation, measures will focus on curbing noise from vehicles and ships, as well as enhancing noise control along highways, urban roads, railways and aircraft routes.

Efforts to control community noise will concentrate on enhancing regulations for commercial and public spaces, promoting quiet community initiatives and encouraging public self-regulation.

Yan Bo, director of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Ecology and Environment, which formulated the plan in collaboration with multiple departments, highlighted

the importance of public participation in the plan. Initiatives are aimed at integrating noise control into city programs and enhancing public awareness to encourage community involvement, Yan said.

During a live interview on Radio Shanghai on April 17, Yan noted that the highest proportion of noise complaints stems from social noise such as square dances and residential renovations, which make up nearly 70 percent of total complaints. Construction noise, including nighttime construction and road projects, accounts for 25 percent of the complaints.

Yan emphasized the need for a balanced approach in social noise regulation, stressing the importance of grassroots governance alongside enforcement measures. The director said the city's relevant departments are preparing to introduce a regulatory mechanism for managing noise in public spaces to promote social self-governance.

To address the issue of nighttime construction noise complaints, the government plans to collaborate with building departments to reinforce the responsibilities of construction and contracting parties, according to Yan.

Developers will be required to allocate resources for noise reduction measures in the early stages of construction to ensure eco-friendly practices. Failure to declare nighttime construction activities will lead to stringent enforcement actions, according to the plan.

"As per the three-year action plan, we will refine management measures by combining strictness and flexibility, with regulations and laws acting as mutual constraints," Yan said. "By implementing both enforcement and proactive measures, our aim is to reduce decibel levels and enhance the happiness index."

Shanghai implemented its first regulation against noise pollution on March 1, 2013, and has since been updating and revising related management rules to address the evolving circumstances in the city. Notably, in response to complaints about commuters using loudspeakers to view streaming services, Shanghai became the first city in China to restrict the use of loudspeakers on its subway system in December 2020, a measure later extended to the city's buses.

Luo Bin contributed to this story.

Moving to the beat



African youths dance as drummers play at the 8th China-Africa Youth Festival in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on Thursday. The event, held from May 19 to 26 in Beijing and Jinhua, attracted nearly 100 African youths to see the progress China has made since the launch of the nation's reform and opening-up policy, thereby advancing exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa.

HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Concerns raised over stress-relief toys

By YANG ZEKUN
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A type of squishy stress-relief toy called "Nienie" has recently become popular among young people, but some have raised safety concerns such as excessive formaldehyde levels.

The visually appealing toys, made mostly of silicone and resembling various types of food, offer a squishy texture and enhanced malleability. They have attracted a significant following, especially among young women.

Zhou Di, a young woman who discovered the toys on a video platform and promptly ordered several, continues to follow influencers and gets updates on new releases.

Zhou mentioned that due to her frequent computer use, the toys serve as desk ornaments and help alleviate wrist and mental pressure. "Sometimes when work stalls and I need to clear my mind, I just give it a squeeze. The slow rebound feeling is very stress-relieving," she said.

A search for "Nienie" on social

platforms yields over a million related posts. Many people claim to have spent thousands or even tens of thousands of yuan on these toys. Some popular types are being resold for high prices, reaching thousands of yuan, with many highly-priced items originating from popular handmade stores.

Numerous bloggers who craft and sell their own toys have emerged on social platforms, but due to their handmade nature, mass production is not feasible, resulting in longer production cycles and some items being in short supply.

Wang Lili, a professor at Zhejiang University's School of Management, believes that young people are drawn to these malleable and tactile toys to regain a sense of control amidst the complexities of daily work. They also provide an outlet for releasing pent-up emotions, she said.

However, amid the craze for such toys, many users have begun to express safety concerns. This week, a topic about a seller closing their store due to discomfort from

making "Nienie" toys went viral on social media platform Weibo.

Some online sellers claim that the materials they use are "food-grade silicone," but they caution that the toys are not edible and advise against squeezing them outside of their packaging.

Several bloggers and users have issued warnings, noting that many of these toys emit a strong artificial fragrance and release a pungent odor during play, with tests revealing formaldehyde levels exceeding safety limits.

In addition, many netizens have revealed that although many such toys are labeled as using "food-grade" silicone, they often lack proper packaging and only have simple product name labels with unclear origins. There are also concerns that the realistic food-like appearance of the toys might lead to children mistakenly eat them.

Many netizens have called for strengthened product quality regulations, and for ensuring the safety of toy materials and compliance with health standards.

Guangdong to boost nuclear industry

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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Companies signed 12.5 billion yuan (\$1.74 billion) worth of investment agreements to aid the development of the nuclear energy industry in Guangdong province at a conference on Wednesday.

The agreements, which are expected to fuel growth in the region's sector, include nine joint research and development deals, and seven that signal intention to invest.

Representatives from more than 160 nuclear energy companies and industrial chains from around the country attended the conference, which was organized by the Guangdong Provincial Development and Reform Commission and China General Nuclear Power Group.

Yang Changli, chairman of CGN, said that by relying on the construction of various nuclear power projects, the group has achieved the large-scale application of advanced construction technology and has accumulated more than 90 new technologies and products for operation and maintenance over the years, including 19 that have broken foreign monopolies, effectively supporting the high-quality development of Guangdong's nuclear energy industry.

CGN is now the country's largest nuclear power plant operator by installed capacity. The company has invested more than 380 billion yuan in constructing nuclear power and related projects in Guangdong over the past four decades.

16.14 million kilowatts
installed capacity of nuclear power in Guangdong

According to a report in Nanfang Daily, based in the provincial capital Guangzhou, Guangdong is actively promoting the preliminary work for a number of new nuclear projects.

It is expected that by 2060, the installed capacity of nuclear power in Guangdong will exceed 60 million kilowatts, accounting for more than 12 percent of the province's total installed power, the report said.

Nuclear industrial development is expected to bring more than 2 trillion yuan in new investment to Guangdong, providing a broad market for the nuclear energy industry and bringing valuable development opportunities to nuclear energy companies in the following years, it said.

The province has built three nuclear power bases, and another four are either under construction or have been approved, said the report, adding that it still has a lot of space for new sites.

The nuclear energy industry is key to the global manufacturing industry, representing new quality productive forces with strong technological spillover effects, and it has played an important role in cultivating new drivers of economic development and building a strong manufacturing province, the report said.

Guangdong, which started developing its nuclear power industry in the 1980s, has taken the lead in nuclear power industrial development in the country.

It has built nuclear power projects in Shenzhen, Yangjiang, Taishan, Huizhou, Lianjiang and Lufeng. The Shenzhen Daya Bay Nuclear Power Plant, the first large-scale commercial nuclear power plant on the mainland, was put into operation in 1994.

Guangdong has a nuclear power installed capacity of 16.14 million kilowatts, accounting for more than 28 percent of China's total, ranking first in the country.

During the 14th-Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), the province's annual generation of nuclear power exceeded 120 billion kilowatt-hours, accounting for about 8 percent of the province's installed power capacity and contributing about 16 percent of its power generation.

Cultural exhibition opens in Shenzhen

By DENG ZHANGYU
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China's largest cultural exhibition opened on Thursday in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, attracting thousands of visitors from home and abroad. It is expected to showcase the nation's rich cultural products, advanced technologies and achievements in cultural industries and international cultural trade.

The 20th China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair, which runs through Monday, has brought together, both online and offline, more than 6,000 delegations, cultural institutions and companies from 60 countries and regions.

Over 120,000 cultural products are being displayed at the event, and organizers estimate about 90,000 visitors from around the world will attend the fair online and offline.

The exhibition venue, roughly the size of three soccer fields, is comprised of eight halls, with each focusing on a specific theme, such as intangible cultural heritage, tourism and consumption, art and design, and film and television.

The section dedicated to international cultural trade embraced several new participants this year from home and abroad.

The Frankfurt Book Fair — the world's largest trade fair for printed and digital content — made its debut at the exhibition with a booth showcasing children's and architectural books, as well as the 2022 and 2023 series of the "Most Beautiful German Books".

Ole Doering, who is facilitating the introduction of the Frankfurt Book Fair in China, said that books are a powerful medium for connecting people and fostering mutual understanding.

"We look different, eat different foods, speak different languages and live different lifestyles. But underneath, we are so similar. Books are unique products that help people share cultures and learn about each other," he said.

Doering expressed his excitement over the feedback the booth received from Chinese visitors and said he looks forward to bringing the book fair to other Chinese cities.

Tom Bryant, founder of the Edinburgh-based creative animations

and visual effects studio Interference Pattern, said he has brought his studio to China for the first time.

This is Bryant's second visit to the country, during which he aims to explore opportunities for collaboration with his Chinese counterparts. He said he hopes to either introduce his animations to the Chinese market or import technologies from Chinese enterprises.

"It's a good experience here; so many passionate visitors. Chinese companies have good skills, and I really want to find opportunities to work with them," said Bryant, who last visited Shenzhen nine years ago during his first trip to China.

In addition to new international participants, emerging Chinese companies that engage in online dramas, online literature and online games — the new trio of China's cultural exports — have also joined the exhibition.

Miniseries produced by Reelshort, a video-streaming platform of California-based Crazy Maple Studio that is owned by Chinese digital content provider COL Group and made its debut at the exhibition, have garnered a sig-



A women's Yingge dance team dressed as legendary heroines Mu Guiying and Hua Mulan perform at the international cultural industries fair in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Thursday.

XUAN HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

nificant international audience.

Reelshort's love story series, often comprising 50 to 100 episodes, with each episode lasting only one minute, have gained great popularity in North America, particularly among the younger generation.

Jiang Xiezheng, co-founder of Shenzhen-based YoyWow, a company providing overseas content distribution services, said they started investing in miniseries in

foreign markets this year.

"China is producing innovative content in cultural sectors, such as miniseries and online literature. After years of quality development in culture, our nation is confident about its cultural industries. The exhibition is an excellent platform for showcasing our products and engaging with the world," said Jiang, whose company is also participating in the fair for the first time.

WORLD

CHINA LINK

Editor's note: As the People's Republic of China celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding this year, China Daily asked prominent international figures to reflect on their relationship with the country and to talk of the direction in which they see it going.

West should bear in mind China's uniqueness

Having witnessed major changes over past decades, US scholar calls for deeper understanding and open dialogue

By CHEN YINGQUN and LIU JIANQIAO

Although the relations between China and the US are receiving significant attention worldwide, when Kenneth Pomeranz genuinely became interested in China more than 40 years ago, he was actually entering a niche area relatively unexplored compared with the prevailing trends.

With genuine interest, Pomeranz, a history professor at the University of Chicago, has made himself an expert on China. He remains the only two-time winner in the 50-year history of the John K. Fairbank Book Prize — one of the most important honors for a scholar of Asian studies. He also served as president of the American Historical Association in 2013-14.

Pomeranz said the West, while researching China, should bear in mind its uniqueness and let go of stereotypes and prejudices.

The current world has many issues that require cooperation between China and the United States. Adopting an open attitude toward each other, recognizing their differences and engaging in more cultural and academic exchanges are beneficial for both sides, he said.

Pomeranz developed his interest in China as a student at Cornell University in the US state of New York, where he received a bachelor's degree in history in 1980. A course on China prompted his interest in studying comparisons between the societies.

Despite the predominant focus on European history among his peers in the US, China, considered a "niche interest" at the time, was just starting to attract the attention of US researchers since the two countries established diplomatic ties in 1979.

He said part of the appeal of China to him was that it was a wide-open field, and the idea of exploring outside the West and trying to think about a huge part of the world that was very different was really important to him.

The less developed scholarly literature on China provided an opportunity for broader thinking. Additionally, China's unique position as both distinct from and resembling the West allowed for fruitful comparative analysis, he said.

"It offered the opportunity to have something that was outside the West but still resembled the West in certain ways. That made it possible for it to be a comparative or partner."

Pomeranz then became a graduate student at Yale University, where he studied under Jonathan Spence, a world-renowned expert on Chinese history. He started to learn Chinese in the summer of 1981 and did three years of Chinese at Yale, a year and a half of classical Chinese and was then able to read a lot of published material.

"There weren't that many people in the United States who were on the ground ahead of me," Pomeranz said. "There were some, of course, but it wasn't like in European history where there was just enormous establishment already in place."

In 1985, Pomeranz embarked on his initial journey to the Chinese mainland primarily for his dissertation research, which focused on a regional examination of the North China Plain, predominantly in the western part of Shandong province, where he spent an entire autumn, with weeks in the countryside. His trip also covered a few days in Shanghai and nearly a month in Beijing, a city he thought was already "globalized" at that time.

"Part of what was interesting then in an early time in Chinese-Western relations was how eager most of the Chinese I met would talk about the outside world," he said.

"There was a sense of openness and change. It was still early in China's reform and opening-up era. Nobody knew exactly where things were going, but there was a general sense of great possibilities."

Looking back, Pomeranz found it striking how open ordinary people were during that period. They were eager to share and listen to stories, reflecting a mutual desire to learn from each other. Despite visible poverty, there was a prevailing sense of



Students from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the United States visit the Forbidden City in Beijing on May 17. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



US students pose for a selfie in front of the Nine-Dragon Screen at the Forbidden City in Beijing on May 17. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



College students from the United States try on Peeking Opera costumes at Jixiang Theatre in Beijing on May 17. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

optimism and potential, which was truly exciting, he said.

After subsequent visits, he witnessed significant changes in China over the past few decades, particularly in the economic well-being and physical health of its population. This prosperity is coupled with increased connectivity and awareness, both globally and locally, with a notable rise in material wealth and improved environmental quality by some measures.

Comparative studies

Pomeranz's research has focused on three primary areas: reciprocal influences of state, society and economy in late imperial and 20th-century China; the origins of a world economy as the outcome of mutual influences among various regions; and comparative studies of labor, family organization, and economic change in Europe and East Asia.

Another part of his work looks at the long-term significance and global context of environmental change

during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and in 20th and 21st-century China. He has devoted particular attention to water management in China, past and present.

In his works, Pomeranz delves into comparative studies of different societies, offering fresh perspectives on historical questions. In *The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853-1937*, published in 1993, Pomeranz offers a unique reassessment of critical issues in modern Chinese history, focusing on the social, economic and ecological transformations in inland North China in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (2000), a comparative history of China and Europe circa 1800, he provides new insights into the divergence of sustained industrial growth between North-west Europe and advanced areas of Europe and East Asia, despite their apparent similarities.

Although it involves studying the history of the past, Pomeranz said he believes the issues addressed in these historical books remain relevant today, such as those concerning environment, economic development and the increasing power of states globally.

He observed that with China's increasing influence and the deepening of Sino-US relations, there has been a rise in research on China within the US academic community. Nonetheless, in Western discourse on China, there is a tendency for many to overlook China's distinctiveness, continuing to apply their own established concepts and terminology, he said. Rarely do they consider the necessity of reevaluating their system to effectively integrate China, Pomeranz added.

There are several things about China that are really important to bear in mind, he said. First, its immense size sets it apart, being among the largest in terms of land area and population.



Kenneth Pomeranz

History professor at the University of Chicago

Education:

- 1976-80: Bachelor of Arts, Cornell University, United States
- 1980-88: PhD in History, Yale University, United States

Career:

- 1988: Visiting assistant professor at Dartmouth College
- 1988-2012: Professor of History at the University of California, Irvine
- 1991-2012: Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Irvine
- 2012-present: Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago

Books:

- *The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853-1937*
- *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*
- *The World that Trade Created: Society, Politics, and an Emerging World Economy* (Co-authored with Steven Topik)

Favorite Chinese food: Sichuan cuisine

Hobbies: Walking, reading, music (especially jazz) and rowing

"And the complexities that introduces both in terms of how to govern the place, but also what it means to be a member of this society, whether it even makes sense to talk about it as one society," he said.

Encountering challenges

In the past few years, China-US relations have met with challenges and for a certain time hit a historical low point.

While Pomeranz has not experienced any significant personal effect from this environment, he believes the broader academic community has been negatively affected by the strained bilateral relationship, potentially being pressured to align with one country or the other, which he finds "unfortunate."

"Just 10 or 15 years ago, it was common for talented young people in the sciences to think that they would spend their careers going back and forth across the Pacific," he said. "It is much harder now." Pomeranz said there is the possibil-

ity of genuine competition between China and the US in certain areas, where it may be strategically challenging for both parties to share specific types of data and information.

"But that doesn't mean that we have to then stop sharing all sorts of other kinds of information and all sorts of other kinds of conversation that are not strategic at all," he added.

It would take some effort for both sides to work together to rebuild trust in each other, Pomeranz said, and during times of strained state-to-state relations, the need for people-to-people exchanges becomes even more crucial.

Many global issues, spanning from climate change to artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, require collaboration between the two largest economies. It is imperative that dialogue takes place and the involvement of all parties is essential, he said.

China and the US have real disagreements about certain issues, he said, and it is unrealistic for either side to ignore these differences.

"But there are also strange reactions to some of those problems that are exacerbated by long-standing prejudice and by certain kinds of fear. Some things are made worse by a lack of information."

"On the Western front, I believe some of this stems from a sense of apprehension that has been redirected toward China by individuals who recognize that the world is evolving. This transformation may not necessarily be favorable to them, and they are uncertain about the reasons behind it."

"However, due to China's substantial influence, it becomes convenient to attribute the changes to China and label it as the sole explanation."

Less prejudice urged

Even with a really good commitment from both parties to engage in open dialogue, it is evident that not all issues would be resolved, he said. But there could certainly be a lot more openness and a lot less prejudice.

People often mistakenly view openness as a favor they extend to others, he added. However, it should be seen as a self-benefit, because it is not just about helping others understand oneself, but also about gaining insight into oneself through the perspectives of outsiders.

With the state-to-state dialogue not going well, it becomes even more important to have other kinds of dialogue going on, he said. Interactions between individuals, the translation and publication of literature, the exchange of films and popular culture and various other activities can each serve different purposes to varying extents, he said.

Pomeranz is currently writing the book *Why is China So Big?* It tries to explain how and why contemporary China's huge land mass and population have wound up forming a single political unit.

He is also working on some other projects about China, and on a world history textbook for undergraduates, which provides an opportunity to consider historical teaching on a global scale, emphasizing the importance of historical thinking and challenging biases.

"It also involved reading a lot of the kinds of books that are used to teach world history all around the world and sort of trying to figure out how to tell the story in a way that's not just centered on the West, but also a way that will argue with an attempt to overcome some of the prejudices," Pomeranz said.

Critiquing the depiction of continents through symbols and landmarks, such as animals and architecture, he aimed to address and counteract lingering 19th-century racial biases, which persist in seemingly innocuous educational materials.

"So the world history book I'm working on is asking: How do we teach history in a way that doesn't ignore the fact that those prejudices exist, but brings them to the level of surface awareness so that we can argue without them? Because if we just pretend that they're not there, they won't go away," he said.

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WORLDUS

Expo shines light on photos by Corky Lee

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
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A photography exhibition at Duke University showcases the work of Corky Lee, a Chinese-American photojournalist famous for capturing the daily lives, celebrations, activism and struggles of Asian Americans for more than 50 years.



Corky Lee

The pictures, which accompany the late photographer's new book, are available for viewing through June at Duke's

John Hope Franklin Center in Durham, North Carolina. It shows how Asians fought for social justice in the United States and their pivotal role in the country's history.

From the 1970s onward, Lee documented events ranging from the origins of the Asian American and Pacific Island movement, or AAPI, to the more recent activism that arose from the stop-AAPI hate campaign amid a surge in hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lee realized how powerful his documentary work was. He once said: "Every time I take my camera out of my bag, it is like drawing a sword to combat indifference, injustice and discrimination and trying to get rid of stereotypes."

In a new posthumous book, *Corky Lee's Asian America: Fifty Years of Photographic Justice*, more than 200 photos delve into the work of the man called the "undisputed, unofficial Asian American photographer laureate."

It features some of the images that he took of the community's struggle during the pandemic.

And earlier work on the re-enactment of the finished Transcontinental Railroad of 1869, which included descendants of Chinese railroad workers. It also included the protests for Vincent Chin, a Chinese-American man beaten to death by two white autoworkers in 1982.

Storied career

Friends, writers, artists and activists have paid homage to Lee's storied career.

Hua Hsu, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Stay True*, a memoir, wrote in the foreword of Lee's book: "For generations, Corky taught us how to see ourselves — as individuals and as a community."

Mae Ngai, one of the editors of Lee's book, is a professor of Asian American studies and history and co-director of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University.

Ngai attended the opening of the Duke photo exhibit in April and discussed Lee's pivotal work with Eileen Chow, the university's Asian and Middle Eastern studies professor.

She recalled how the legendary photographer's career took off after he scooped the mainstream press by photographing an activist protesting against the police beating of Peter Yew. The image landed on the front page of the *New York Post* and put Lee on the map. She also spoke of his character.

Ngai wrote in the book: "Corky Lee often introduced himself as an 'ABC from NYC' — an American-born Chinese from New York City. In this way, he conveyed a story about himself. Lee was a legendary storyteller."

Born in 1947 in New York to Chinese immigrant parents, Lee was a graduate of the city's Queens College, where he majored in history.

He began work as a community organizer in Chinatown in the 1970s. During a push for civil rights, he realized he wanted to document the everyday lives of those around him. He was instrumental in pushing for mainstream media to include more AAPI culture. Over the next five decades, he photographed numerous cultural events and protests.

While Lee provided a front-row seat to the Chinese-US experience, he also famously photographed other Asian-American communities.

Devastating tornado



People survey tornado-damaged neighborhood on Thursday in Greenfield, Iowa. CHARLIE NEIBERGALL / AP

Reciprocity on trade highlighted at forum

By **RENALI** in Los Angeles
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California and China have maintained a strong partnership, marked by a dynamic economic relationship and deep people-to-people ties. This enduring connection was displayed at the recent China-California Business Forum, where speakers explored potential collaboration, highlighting trade reciprocity between the Golden State and the world's second-largest economy.

In his remarks to the gathering of businesspeople from both sides, Bobby Kotick, founder of Activision Blizzard, emphasized the importance of finding common ground, drawing on his company's two-decade partnership with China.

"Now we've had our most talented, productive, capable engineers and programmers working in the studio in Shanghai," he said. "If you look at the experiences that I've witnessed firsthand, there's just nothing but opportunity for growth and continued collaboration."

Of course, the road ahead is not easy for both sides to get caught up in the rhetoric of "division and distrust," he said.

After more than one year off the market due to the expiration of the previous publishing deal between Blizzard and NetEase in January 2023, Blizzard announced that its games are coming back to China in summer 2024.

"We should focus on embracing the power of collaboration and finding common ground," he stressed. "We need to focus on trade reciprocity, ensuring that the benefits of our academic partnerships are shared."

Jeff Leader, the founder of the Hermes Deployment Corp, who has been to China more than 140 times over the past 15 years, said there is

a "very, very strong" partnership between California and China.

"We've run into difficulties from time to time from both sides, but we have successfully transferred technologies between the US and China; it's difficult, but it's very meaningful," he told *China Daily*.

Dee Dee Myers, senior adviser to the California governor and director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, pointed out that while national governments primarily manage international relations, diplomacy should be practiced at all levels, including cities and states.

"California is the fifth-largest economy in the world. So, we need to continue to find ways to leverage that power and use it to help solve our collective challenges," Myers said. "We're really glad to continue to work with our Chinese partners on some critical issue like climate change."

Stephen Cheung, CEO of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, told the audience that China's economy is strong and will continue to grow in the next few years, and there are a number of different sectors LA wants to collaborate together with China.

"China is the eighth-largest foreign investor in California, primarily in the manufacturing sector. These investments have created 90,000 jobs across the state, with 700 businesses already located throughout California, and have contributed close to \$2 billion in wages every single year," Cheung said.

Richard Swanson, senior adviser to the US Department of Commerce's Pacific South Operations of International Trade Administration, passionately promoted the SelectUSA Investment Summit by sharing personal anecdotes and

historical context.

"I personally invested in China when I found out that my grandfather studied at Peking (Union) Medical College in Beijing. When I first visited Beijing and toured the Forbidden City in 2005, I didn't realize how close the college was. ... Now I am eager to go back and visit my grandfather's college, hopefully very soon," he said, citing the importance of seeing firsthand where one is investing.

In the panel discussion on the Chinese and US market gateway, Jim Doucette, partner and EY Global Retail and Consumer Products leader, indicated a significant trend in both the US and China, with younger consumers particularly interested in ecofriendly products.

"Chinese consumers are consistently across a pretty broad range of goods and services as they want to spend more than the US consumer," he said. "Middle-class growth in China is expected to continue, presenting essentially strong opportunities in both countries over the next five-plus years."

Melissa Hill, an officer from the US Foreign Commercial Service who previously worked in Shanghai to promote American retail brands, expressed her fondness for the city, saying, "I love Shanghai."

Hill shared a story of a promotion program from California to China, which includes seminars on social media branding, online campaigns, a bilingual digital catalog and virtual product displays across various locations in China.

"The program has been highly successful, with a social media campaign garnering about 4.9 million views from potential Chinese consumers. Seventy percent of participating California companies successfully entered the Chinese markets," she said.

Taiwan leader's words on ties decried overseas

By **CHANG JUN** in San Francisco
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Overseas Chinese communities promoting peaceful reunification across the Taiwan Strait denounced the provocative Lai Ching-te, the new administrative chief of China's Taiwan region, and his pro "Taiwan independence" agenda highlighted in his inauguration speech, calling him "a sheer troublemaker that viciously incites cross-strait confrontations".

On Monday, Lai delivered his first flamboyant yet self-deceptive speech, making public narratives for his Democratic Progressive Party on ties with the Chinese mainland.

In his address, Lai adopted a more "sovereignty-affirming" tone by saying, "I hope that China will face the reality of (Taiwan's) existence, (and) respect the choices of the people of Taiwan." He said he would "neither yield nor provoke" Beijing, but would "seek peace".

The words that Lai used to either conceal or sugarcoat his "independence" stance are futile, said Wu Youyi, founding member of the Association for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China in the United States. "His intrigues are unacceptable and doomed to fail. How could a betrayer who refuses to recognize the fundamental 1992 Consensus, the one-China principle, reach peace with the mainland?" Wu asked.

In 2017, Lai drew wide criticism and rebuke from the international community by describing himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence". Although he has deliberately softened his stance since then, Lai used the inauguration to "steal the spotlight and promote his ideology more openly", Wu said.

Anyone following Lai's words and deeds would conclude that his speech "is full of lies and nonsense, and simply revealed his true colors as a hardcore, die-hard 'Taiwan independence' advocate", Wu said. The mainland displayed tremendous goodwill through a meeting in April between President Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Ma Ying-jeou,

former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, in which Beijing emphasized that compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese, said Eric Zou, a member of the Chinese for Peaceful Unification-Northern California.

"The mainland remains very open-minded and candid by saying that there is no problem that cannot be discussed," Zou said. "It has been hoped that Lai could take this opportunity to respond with goodwill and advance the cross-strait relations."

However, Lai stuck to his so-called two-state theory, emphasizing in his speech that he would "defend Taiwan in the face of the many threats and attempts at infiltration from China" by hailing the US passage of the Indo-Pacific Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, which provides \$8.12 billion to continue efforts "to counter Beijing".

"It is insane for Lai to show no sign of apprehension for regional stability and peace in Taiwan by colluding with external forces," Zou said.

Regardless of the leadership change in Taiwan, the fact holds true that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, said Wu, adding that the majority of people in Taiwan are pro-dialogue and pro-reunification.

According to a postelection poll in Taiwan earlier this year, more than 60 percent of those surveyed said they approved consistent and constant communication and exchanges between compatriots across the Taiwan Strait and agreed to friendship-building. "However, Lai is turning a deaf ear to the outcry of the Taiwan people and continues to push forward his 'independence' agenda. He treats the cross-strait relations and public well-being in Taiwan with contempt," Zou said.

Meanwhile, the Taiwan question is China's internal affair and should be left to the Chinese people, said Zhang Kuwei, a community leader in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"If Lai thought he could play a donkey in a lion's hide by exploiting the power of a few Western countries, he'd better stop the attempt immediately," Zhang said. "China will never allow foreign powers to interfere with the Taiwan question."

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Vol. 38 - No.1138

Conference focuses on US-China business relations

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**

The United States and China must strive to maintain their crucial trade relationship, as the partnership is "vital" for the success of both large and small businesses worldwide, according to several attendees of the Canton Fair Conference in New York.

Hu Wei, president and CEO of Bank of China US, told *China Daily*: "Unfortunately, we do see some of the changes of back and forth recently (between the US and China). We do believe that the two governments can solve them properly to provide a level field for both sides and to provide an acceptable atmosphere for business, so that we can have more opportunities for both sides."

The promotional conference, held at the Bank of China tower in Manhattan on Wednesday, saw representatives from the Canton Fair, the Chinese Consulate General in New York, and the China Foreign Trade Centre (CFTC), which organized the fair, along with Bank of China representatives and small and large global importers and exporters.

Hu said the conference was important as it enables both American and Chinese business leaders to "gather and promote trade and investment to China and from China". He said that it was "really a testimony of the intertwined business relationship, which is so important."

Bank of China is working with businesses at the fair to provide a range of investments.

The Canton Fair, also known as the China Import and Export Fair, takes place twice a year in Guangzhou, in the spring and fall.

It is widely seen as a barometer of China's economy, trade and diplomatic friendships and partners.

The fair focuses on technology, production and other industries exporting from China.

The 135th fair, which concluded in April, attracted more than 246,000 visitors from 215 countries. It was estimated that more than 10,000 American companies participated in the event — the largest foreign group.

Big Lots Stores, a US discount retail chain with headquarters in Columbus, Ohio, has worked with Chinese

manufacturers for more than 30 years.

Kevin Kuehl, Big Lots senior vice-president and general merchandise manager of home, apparel and global sourcing, first visited the Canton Fair in the 1990s.

"We still have long-term partnerships with our factories in China and those partnerships go anywhere between 20 and 30 years," he told *China Daily*.

"The political situation regarding trade doesn't typically come into conversation because we work as a business group and we continue to stay very close in that aspect."

Kuehl cautions that the company, like many others, is monitoring whether any additional US tariffs on China will be enacted. If so, he said Big Lots will have to "make adjustments to be thoughtful on how we present bargains to our customer."

The chain buys furniture, home textiles, pet products, outdoor patio furniture and other goods from China. It recently opened buying offices in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Shanghai.

Kuehl acknowledged that while the last couple of years had been challenging, having overseas partners was very important.

"There are certain categories that China just is very efficient and cost-effective at, that even if we wanted to transition product out of China and into other countries, we're not capable of capacity or quality in those categories," he said. "We will continue to partner with China in categories that we know are critically important, and cost is important to our customer."

Other conference attendees included Chu Shijia, chairman of the board and president of CFTC; Kate Sullivan, executive director of the Greater Columbus Chinese Chamber of Commerce; and Abraham Merchant, president and CEO of Merchants Hospitality, which operates restaurants in the US and Middle East, such as the famed eatery Philippe Chow.

Yao Wenliang, economic and commercial counselor for the Chinese Consulate General in New York, told *China Daily* that the conference was "a very good opportunity, because China and the US economies are

closely intertwined. It's vital, as there's great opportunities for both business communities, so, this is a platform."

Chinese Consul General Huang Ping in New York said the fair showed China's strong commitment to opening its market to the world. He said decoupling was not an option, as the two countries "need each other."

Huang was encouraged by the meeting last year between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden, which helped, in part, to stabilize relations, he said.

The next Canton fair, the 136th, will run from Oct 15 to Nov 4. It includes an exhibition hall and convention and business center, covering an estimated 1.1 million square meters with the indoor exhibit at 338,000 square meters and an outdoor area of 43,600 square meters.

Mike Carpenter, originally from England, works for the Global Sourcing Group in the US to get global clients unique products. He visited the fair in China seven or eight times before the COVID-19 pandemic and described it as "fantastic" and "absolutely huge."

"If you go there trying to find, for example, a factory that makes pens, you'll have 5,000 choices," he told *China Daily*.

GLOBAL LENS



Sustainable farming offers hope for Hungarian families



Clockwise from top left: Eco-community members Gabi Varga (left) and Erno Ambrus wash vegetables at Varga's farm in Nagybereny, Hungary, on March 26. Eco-community member Akos Varga checks the lighting system above the vegetables in his underground greenhouse at his farm in Nagybereny, Hungary, on March 26. Eco-community member Andrea Cziko moves a box of onions at Akos Varga's farm in Nagybereny, Hungary, on March 26. Gabi Varga feeds the chickens in her farm in Nagybereny, Hungary, on March 26. PHOTOS BY MARTON MONUS / REUTERS

CLOSE TO THE LAND

Laszlo Kemencei lives as sustainably as possible on his small farm in eastern Hungary. He believes the land is effectively borrowed from his young daughter, so he must do all he can to preserve it for the future.

Kemencei, 28, wife Cintia and daughter Boroka, almost 2, moved to the farm outside Ladanybene three years ago. They keep horses, pigs and chickens on an area of 4.5 hectares, which they partly lease for grazing.

They do not use pesticides, keep their animals free range and dig the land as little as possible to preserve the structure and moisture of the rich soil. They grow their own vegetables and slaughter or barter the meat they need, while trading the rest with families who choose a similar lifestyle.

Kemencei said that while becoming fully self-sufficient seems like an unrealistic goal, they rely minimally on external resources.

"This land, we have not inherited from our fathers, but we have it on a lease from our children ... so we try to live and farm the land in a sustainable way," he said, sitting in their cozy kitchen



Members of an eco-community have lunch at member Istvan David's home in Nagybereny, Hungary, on March 26.

where a chunk of pork sizzles in the oven.

Kemencei estimated there are about 1,000 families trying to embrace some form of sustainability, either alone or as part of informal barter arrangements, or as part of more structured eco-villages.

For Kemencei, the trusted networks matter too. A small pot-bellied pig traded with a friend is eaten from nose to tail. A rooster is swapped with another friend who is a beekeeper.

"We sometimes slaughter chickens for barter trade ... but only from a place where we know the farming is similar to ours," Kemencei said.

Akos Varga and wife Gabi, both in their late 50s, sold their information technology and solar panel business four years ago to live a freer life on a farm in Nagybereny, in western Hungary.

Varga said small, self-sustaining communities where mutual trust matters will spread.

"We thought we had achieved what we wanted and asked ourselves if this is really happiness. And we could not say yes to that," Varga said. "We were seeking being close to nature."

REUTERS



From left: Eco-community member Laszlo Kemencei plays with his daughter Boroka in the underground greenhouse at their farm near Ladanybene, Hungary, on March 7. Eco-community member Andrea Cziko waters vegetables at Akos Varga's farm in Nagybereny, Hungary, on March 26.

BUSINESS

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China, GCC countries to bolster biz relations

Beijing to align policies and plans with Gulf states for shared growth

By WANG KEJU in Xiamen, Fujian
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China and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries will further deepen their partnership by leveraging their respective strengths and capitalizing on emerging opportunities in order to foster long-term collaboration and mutual benefit, officials and experts said on Thursday.

Efforts to forge closer ties between China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative with the development strategies of GCC member states will push ahead toward greater regional connectivity and shared growth, they said at the two-day China-GCC Countries Forum on Industrial and Investment Cooperation in Xiamen, Fujian province.

The strong economic complementarity between China and GCC countries will further solidify their natural partnership, said Zhao Chenxin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission.

With the BRI serving as a key framework, China aims to align policies and plans with GCC nations, paving the way for deeper cooperation and shared development, Zhao said, adding that steps will be taken to facilitate the flow of capital, technology and personnel between the two sides.

As predominantly oil and gas-producing nations, GCC member states have introduced a range of initiatives aimed at nurturing new growth sectors, including manufacturing and green energy, presenting broader prospects for China-GCC economic cooperation, experts said.

The GCC, which has its headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is a political and economic union of six Persian Gulf-fronting Arab states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In the development vision of

GCC countries, revitalizing the manufacturing sector has emerged as a key focus area to drive economic growth. By achieving industrial upgrade, these nations aim to meet local demand while diversifying their export structures, said Wang Guangda, secretary-general of the China-Arab Research Center on Reform and Development.

China's advanced manufacturing technologies, expertise and experience can greatly contribute to the establishment of a robust and sustainable manufacturing ecosystem in the region, and enhance their overall economic competitiveness, Wang added.

According to a study by the World Governments Summit in partnership with Strategy & Middle East released in February, GCC countries could accelerate the region's economic growth by adding more than \$2.5 trillion to GDP over the next decade through productivity performance enhancement.

Moreover, GCC countries are ramping up their efforts to expedite the implementation of green energy transition, and China's manufacturing capabilities and cost-effective renewable energy technologies can contribute to Gulf countries' efforts to establish a robust green energy sector, Wang said.

Efforts should be made to take advantage of the availability of raw materials of aluminum and plastic in GCC countries — and technology and supply chains in China — and to establish joint factories to manufacture electric vehicles, said Basel Shadid, investment specialist of Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting.

Cooperation in areas such as renewable energy, technology and infrastructure can bring about transformative changes that extend beyond the Gulf region to the entire world, said UAE Vice-President Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan.



Customs officials check imported cars in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Experts: Any hike in nation's tariffs on gasoline vehicles would be 'green'

By MA SI, ZHONG NAN and LI JIAYING

China's likely plan to increase temporary tariff rates on imported large-engine gasoline vehicles highlights the country's determination to promote green development and conforms to the rules of the World Trade Organization, officials and experts said on Thursday.

The comments came after the China Chamber of Commerce to the European Union said in a post on microblogging platform X that it was informed by insiders that China may consider increasing temporary tariff rates on imported large-engine vehicles to 25 percent at most.

At a news conference in Beijing on Thursday, He Yadong, a spokesman for the Ministry of Commerce, said China remains steadfast in its commitment to a green and low-carbon development pathway, and will actively promote and support the transformation of all industries, including the automotive industry, toward more sustainable and low-carbon alternatives.

This commitment extends to high-quality development, with experts from various fields engaging in research and devising strategies to tackle global climate change, He said.

He said some countries and regions are currently straying from the principles of green development and violating market economy standards. Additionally, they

are breaching WTO rules by implementing restrictive measures in the new-energy vehicle sector.

"We believe that these measures not only disadvantage consumers in these places but also impede global progress in green transformation and efforts to combat climate change," He said.

Sun Xiaohong, secretary-general of the automotive branch of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products, told China Daily that if China raises the temporary tariff rate on imported large-displacement engine vehicles to 25 percent, it would be in compliance with WTO rules.

In 2018, China voluntarily reduced the tariffs on imported vehicles from 25 percent and 20 percent to 15 percent. Such a move was then aimed at promoting development through openness and meeting the demands of consumption upgrades in a better way, Sun said.

Now, China's reported plan to revert the tariff rates on imported large-engine vehicles to 25 percent, if it comes to pass, would be in line with its goals of energy conservation, environmental protection and green development, Sun said.

Any such move would be reasonable, reflecting China's self-restraint in hiking tariffs.

"The reason for self-restraint is clear. If China and the US endlessly impose tariffs on each other, it is

easy to fall into a more complicated situation," said Sun.

The US Trade Representative's office said on Wednesday that some of the steep US tariff increases on an array of Chinese imports will take effect on Aug 1, including quadrupling import duties on Chinese electric vehicles to over 100 percent and an increase in the tariff rate on lithium-ion batteries used in EVs from 7.5 percent to 25 percent.

The USTR office said in a federal notice that a 30-day public comment period will close on June 28.

"The tariffs unilaterally imposed by the US have exceeded that country's trade and social needs, primarily due to political considerations," Sun said. "For example, lithium-ion batteries are a product that the US actually needs right now. So why impose tariffs? It is possibly a result of bipartisan competition in the US."

The US has been the largest destination for China's lithium-ion battery exports for four consecutive years from 2020 to 2023. In 2023, the worth of lithium-ion batteries exported from China to the US reached \$13.54 billion, accounting for 20.8 percent of the total export value of China's lithium-ion batteries, data from the General Administration of Customs of China showed.

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Specialists shrug off talk of overcapacity

By LIU ZHIHUA and ZHONG NAN

International experts and business leaders have shrugged off the false narrative by the United States about China's "overcapacity" and its recent tariff increases on some Chinese products.

The US, they pointed out, tramples on the principles of the market economy and goes against the international trend of low-carbon transformation just to curb China.

"Basically, what's happening is that China is a threat to the US hegemony. It's not a threat to the US. It's not a threat to you. It's not a threat to me. It's not a threat to take over the United States at all. But it is a threat to the claim that the US runs the world. That is leading to a neurotic reaction," said Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University.

"If you want to see the neurotic reaction, people should look at Foreign Affairs magazine, which is the magazine of the Council on Foreign Relations, the establishment institution."

"Every issue is, are we still number one? What are we going to do? How do we stay ahead of China? How do we contain China? Everything is about China, not because China is threatening us, but because China is showing we don't run the world the way we like to think we run the world," Sachs, who served as an adviser to three United Nations secretaries-general, added.

Refuting the "China overcapacity" narrative, Vaughn Barber, chair of the China-Australia Chamber of Commerce, said Chinese electric vehicles are performing exceptionally well in Australia, benefiting from their technological prowess and economies of scale.

This positions Chinese companies to potentially partner with Australian counterparts in driving energy transformation, Barber said.

He said that leveraging China's technological and cost advantages through collaboration can not only expedite decarbonization efforts in both countries but also serve as a model for joint action against climate change.

Wei Jianguo, China's former vice-minister of commerce, said that the US' false narrative on China's "overcapacity" manifests its escalating anxiety in response to the swift growth of China's new energy industry.

"The claims are used to shift blame for their own inaction while trying to suppress China's tech and industrial progress. The international competitiveness of China's 'new trio' products — new energy vehicles, photovoltaic products and lithium batteries — results from continuous innovation, a robust supply chain and high labor productivity," Wei said.

"Market forces balance supply and demand, and terms like 'overcapacity' defy economic principles," he said, adding that China's focus on progress and innovation will make it a global leader in innovation.

Foreign investors in China have also voiced agreement with their views, while affirming their confidence in the Chinese economy.

Tao Lin, vice-president of Tesla Inc, said the US new energy vehicle maker is a beneficiary and an example of enhanced Sino-US cooperation. It has established its first gigafactory outside the US in Shanghai, which contributed to over half of the company's global output last year.

Over the past decade, Tesla has witnessed a remarkable transformation from solely selling imported vehicles in China to gradually recognizing the immense potential of this market. This has led the company to invest significant resources in the Chinese market, Tao said.

She said this exemplifies how successful cooperation between China and the US can truly improve people's lives on both sides.

Robert Chu, vice-president for operations at FedEx China, said the US logistics provider will continue to invest in network development, digital-related services and key regions in China this year.

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Briefly

Tesla battery factory breaks ground

US carmaker Tesla Inc broke ground on a mega factory in Shanghai on Thursday to manufacture its energy-storage batteries, Megapacks, a project hailed by the company as a "milestone". The new plant spans an area of about 200,000 square meters, with a total investment of around 1.45 billion yuan (\$203.94 million), according to the administration of Lin-gang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone.

DHL opens EV center in Shanghai

Global logistics giant DHL Group has established a center of excellence in Shanghai for electric vehicles (EVs) made in China, aiming to provide end-to-end, integrated logistics services for EV products such as batteries, motors and charging infrastructure. It is the first EV logistics center the group has opened in China. It had previously built such centers in countries including Indonesia, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Housing buzz about easing in more cities grows

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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China's property market is rife with speculation that more cities will announce cuts to mortgage interest rates and down payment ratios, like several cities had done in the past few days.

Market insiders said they expect each city to announce new measures that factor in local conditions. Together, such steps will likely spur housing demand nationwide, potentially aiding the industry's stable and healthy development.

In response to a series of high-profile supportive policies announced by Chinese authorities on May 17, several cities announced new measures to shore up their local housing market.

"Cities including Wuhan in Hubei province and Huzhou in Zhejiang province have reportedly lowered down payment ratios for first-home buyers to as low as 15 percent, suggesting there is high chance for other Chinese cities to guide the ratios down," said Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution.

On May 17, the country removed minimum requirements for commercial mortgage rates for first and second homes nationwide. It also lowered minimum down payment

ratios for first and second homes to 15 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

This adjustment lowered the down payment ratio for commercial housing to a historic low, which will release inelastic demand from both first-home buyers and those willing to upgrade to a better home, property experts said.

"The new down payment ratio will effectively lower the threshold for homebuyers, naturally leading to a rebound in homebuying demand," Wang Yifeng, an analyst at Everbright Securities, was quoted as saying by Shanghai Securities News.

Apart from lowering down payment ratios, cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen in Guangdong province and Hefei in Anhui province also announced other supportive measures, like cutting interest rates of home mortgages and housing provident fund. Such moves followed the central bank announcements on May 17 that it would further lower mortgage interest rates as well as housing provident fund rates.

On Saturday, Shanghai lowered down payment ratios for the housing provident fund, effective Jan 1, 2025.

Some commercial banks in Central China's Wuhan went further by lowering the first-home loan inter-



A view of a property construction site in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. YANG BO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

est rate to as low as 3.25 percent, Yan said.

"The reductions in down payment ratios and mortgage rates will encourage nonlocals and potential homebuyers to make up their mind on whether or not to buy residential properties," said Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center.

The rate cuts mean monthly repayments of home loans will be substantially lower. People may afford a home without sacrificing

too much on daily consumption, Li said.

Prior to the May 17 policies, a majority of Chinese cities had lowered their down payment ratio to between 20 percent and 30 percent (of the total cost of the housing unit). With eight cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, readily implementing the new policies, several other cities are now expected to follow suit, said Chen Wenjing, director of research with the China Index Academy.

BUSINESS

Experts: Plenty of drive in country's economy

Housing sector seen returning on steady track amid nation's urbanization

By **JIANG XUEQING** in Tokyo
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Chinese scholars visiting Tokyo shared their views on the current state and future trajectory of China's economy, refuting claims from some countries that it has peaked and is facing "overcapacity".

During a lecture held by the Chinese embassy in Japan on Wednesday, Chen Weidong, director of the Research Institute of Bank of China, told the audience that based on the current situation, there is still significant growth potential in China's real estate market.

Currently, the per capita housing area in China is 25 square meters. As urbanization progresses and the average housing area per person expands — alongside rigid housing demand from fresh college graduates each year — it is estimated that China will need around 1 billion square meters of new housing annually until 2035, Chen said.

Overall, China's real estate market is seeking a new balance between supply and demand, aiming to maintain stable demand while ensuring housing prices do not experience significant volatility, he added.

Regarding remarks on China's so-called industrial overcapacity, Chen said capacity utilization should be viewed in a global market context rather than limited to a single country.

In 2023, the capacity utilization

rate was approximately 79 percent for the European Union, 78 percent for Canada, 77 percent for the United States and 76 percent for China. Over the long term, China's capacity utilization rate has remained at a stable and reasonable level, he said.

Some countries are claiming that China's new energy vehicle industry is facing "overcapacity". Tu Xinquan, dean of the China Institute for WTO Studies at the University of International Business and Economics, said that from the perspective of the global green transition, NEVs are still in their early stages and there remains significant market potential.

Currently, the global NEV fleet is around 30 million vehicles, with 20 million of these on Chinese roads. However, the total number of vehicles worldwide is 1.45 billion. The share of NEVs is very small. Even converting half of the existing gasoline vehicles to NEVs could take many years, Tu said.

The global penetration rate of NEVs, meaning the proportion of NEVs in new car sales, is only 15.7 percent, indicating significant growth potential, he added.

"The rapid development of China's NEV industry in recent years has raised some concerns, which essentially boil down to discomfort with new competition. This is understandable, but it's important to view the development of this emerging industry with a long-term perspective as it presents numerous possibilities," Tu said.

He said that although Chinese NEV companies do have relatively good first-mover advantages, having a first-mover advantage does not mean they will always lead, nor does it mean that latecomers will never have a chance.

"Thus, some countries are overre-

acting by adopting trade protection measures against China's leading position in the NEV field. Moreover, from the perspective of global climate change mitigation and achieving a green transition, the development of China's NEV industry should be encouraged, not feared," he said.

He further explained that the government does not pick specific companies to support directly with subsidies for NEVs. Instead, subsidies are given to consumers, allowing them to choose the products they prefer.

Moreover, China has significantly opened up market access in the NEV field, allowing many new car manufacturers to enter this sector, including private and foreign companies, rather than reserving market opportunities for State-owned enterprises, Tu said.

Over the past 40 years, China's economic growth has been heavily driven by two key factor inputs — capital and labor. In the future, China's economy is likely to be driven more by total factor productivity, or TFP, growth, said Liu Qiao, dean of the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University, who believes that it is possible for China to maintain a TFP growth rate above 2 percent.

Liu highlighted the importance of sustaining a certain level of investment and investing in key future sectors, such as new infrastructure and strategic emerging industries.

In his opinion, key future areas include technological innovation. This involves creating a high-level circulation of technology, finance and industry, where financial support fuels technological advancements, driving industrial innovation.

Carbon-free current



Employees of State Grid Wenzhou Electric Power Co inspect photovoltaic panels on Nanji Island, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday to ensure reliable clean energy supplies. JIANG SHENAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

PATH TO MODERNIZATION

Baosteel ramps up smart, green output

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**

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Baoshan Iron and Steel Co Ltd, or Baosteel, China's leading steel manufacturer, is optimistic about its financial performance this year, and will double down on its "high-end, smart, and green" strategy to cater to rising demand from electric vehicle manufacturers, a senior executive said.

Bao Ping, chief engineer of Automotive Steel Plate Technical Services at the Shanghai-based company, said despite the domestic steel industry's weak performance since the latter half of 2022, Baosteel has maintained its position at the top in terms of total profit and outperformed its competitors last year.

The sector has been struggling with low downstream demand and supply pressures.

In the first quarter, Baosteel reported a total profit of some 2.8 billion yuan (\$386.5 million), maintaining its leading position in the domestic market. For the full year 2023, the company achieved a total profit of 15.09 billion yuan.

Baosteel's growth in the international market this year has also fueled its better performance, with export order volume exceeding 1.5

million tons in the first quarter.

The company's commitment to building a high-end, smart and green production chain has played a pivotal role in its resilience and continued profitability, it said.

In terms of its premiumization strategy, differentiation serves as its core competence, said the engineer.

This strategy is built around a specialized portfolio family that highlights plates and silicon steel, alongside a range of differentiated products.

In 2023, Baosteel achieved a sales volume of 27.92 million tons within this portfolio, up 10 percent year-on-year. Sales of cold-rolled automotive sheets surpassed 9 million tons, setting a record.

Last year, the company's investment in research and development reached 5.68 percent of total revenue, with trial products accounting for 37 percent of sales, a 4.8 percent year-on-year increase. Baosteel had 10 global product launches in 2023.

On the technological front, Baosteel continues to advance its smart production capabilities. The company introduced 15 new systems, including a digital R&D platform, and smart management and marketing.

The smart factory initiative has

seen the addition of nearly 50 new intelligent production lines and the deployment of over 200 robots, significantly enhancing production efficiency, he said.

"We have positioned 2024 as the first year for Baosteel to promote its AI strategy," said Bao. On April 26, the company signed a cooperation agreement with Huawei, and launched its computing center.

"We will rely on cloud computing and the new generation of AI technology to boost the transformation and implementation of AI," said Bao.

Baosteel's efforts at environmental sustainability have also yielded significant results, said the company. It made strides in ultralow emission transformation last year, with its Dongshan and Baoshan bases receiving the Performance A-level enterprise award for 2022. Additionally, Baosteel has completed the construction of the industry's first carbon management information system.

This system enables scientific management and certification of carbon footprints and carbon assets. The company also increased its participation in green electricity trading, coming second in the 2023 China Enterprise Green Electricity Trading Ranking.

W. China more popular among investors

By **TAN YINGZI** and **DENG RUI**
in Chongqing

China's western region has attracted greater investment from home and abroad, as it intensifies efforts to boost high-quality development and high-standard opening-up.

The ongoing Sixth Western China International Fair for Investment and Trade (WCIFIT), which began in Chongqing on Thursday, has witnessed the signing of 196 projects — including 124 manufacturing projects totaling 198.85 billion yuan (\$274.5 billion) and 58 modern service industry ones totaling 88.42 billion yuan.

The fair — themed "New Western China, New Manufacturing, New Services" — aims to enhance cooperation and opening-up efforts in western China. It highlights modern productive services this year. Belarus is the guest country of honor, and Sichuan is the guest province. The event will run until Sunday.

"Investment enthusiasm to this region continues to rise," Chongqing Economic and Information Commission said in a news release.

"Amid the current sluggish global economic recovery, the investment environment in our city has garnered favor from both domestic and international enterprises. Our investment policies have been praised, leading to a growing willingness among companies to invest in Chongqing."

Last year, Chongqing's GDP reached a record 3 trillion yuan (\$423 billion), up 6.1 percent year-on-year. It is the first city in western China to achieve a GDP that high.

In the first quarter, it has achieved 6.2 percent GDP growth, ranked first in the western region and second in China.

Compared to last year, the fair has seen steady growth in the number and scale of the projects, with 89 projects valued between 1 billion and 5 billion yuan, 12 projects valued between 5 billion and 10 billion yuan, and 4 projects valued over 10 billion yuan.

The investments are mainly from Guangdong, Sichuan, Jiangsu provinces and Beijing, including four Fortune 500 companies.

Overseas investors have also shown interest in the region as 12 foreign-funded projects with a total contracted value of 26.72 billion yuan were signed at the event.

Chongqing, located on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, boasts key geographic advantages as a strategic pivot point in the national development programs for China's western regions and the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle. It also is a connecting point for the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

"The role of Sichuan and Chongqing as a driving force of the high-quality development in the western region is becoming increasingly evident," said Zuo Yongxiang, vice-governor of Sichuan province, at the fair's opening ceremony.

Last year, the economic scale of the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle reached 8.19 trillion yuan, contributing 6.5 percent of the national economy with only 2 percent of the country's land area. The area has established three national advanced manufacturing clusters and four national strategic emerging industry clusters.

Zuo noted that the total scale of the electronic information manufacturing industry in the area has exceeded 1.6 trillion yuan and will become a world-class cluster.

As the guest country of honor at the fair, Belarus highlighted the Great Stone Industrial Park at its pavilion. Located in the capital city of Minsk, it is the largest industrial park established by China overseas.

"At this WCIFIT event, we are going to showcase the cooperation potential of Belarus across various fields to the fullest extent," said Alexander Turchin, chairman of the executive committee, Minsk Region of Belarus, while delivering a speech.

Belarus was one of the first countries to involve itself in the Belt and Road Initiative. In June 2018, Chongqing launched a direct China-Europe Railway Express route to Minsk. By the end of 2023, direct train service between Chongqing and Belarus had operated a total of 756 round trips, transporting nearly 70,000 TEUs of cargo, with a total cargo value of nearly 10.8 billion yuan.

"Chongqing is a benchmark city that exemplifies China's modernization," said Sunny Chai Ngai Chiu, chairman of Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corp and Federation of Hong Kong Industries, at the event's opening ceremony.

He said in the process of technological innovation, both Chongqing and Hong Kong have their unique strengths. Chongqing boasts strong foundational industries and a deep integration of technological and industrial innovation, which has fostered the development of several high-quality foundational industries. Meanwhile, Hong Kong excels in basic research and innovative studies.

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CHINA DAILY

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Clean energy boosted by tech, supply chains

NEVs in particular made efficiently, affordably in cities like Anhui's Hefei

HEFEI — A notion that China's burgeoning clean energy sector is propped up by market-distorting subsidies has been circulating about in Washington's corridors of power. Yet, an on-the-ground investigation of China's industrial powerhouse debunks the argument.

A glimpse into the inner workings of a solar panel facility revolutionized by augmented reality, a highly automated and intelligent assembly line of electric vehicles and a battery manufacturer using smart robotics in warehousing tells a compelling story.

Their cost competitiveness, a boon for global consumers and for initiatives to wean humanity off fossil fuels, is a direct result of tech prowess and the strength of supply chains, rather than a reliance on subsidies.

Automated factory

At new energy vehicle maker Nio's state-of-the-art manufacturing hub in the eastern Chinese city of Hefei, Anhui province, an innovative vehicle storage and retrieval platform, aptly named "Rubik's Cube," efficiently manages over 700 vehicle bodies, facilitating a seamless process for personalized production.

Within the bustling workshop, a fleet of over 800 intelligent robots are operating with high precision. These advanced machines are capable of installing four car doors with remarkable accuracy in a mere 98 seconds, achieving a margin of error that does not exceed 0.5 millimeters.

The entire process, from the moment a customer submits an order to the car's completion on the production line, takes just 14 days.

Hefei is rapidly emerging as a hub for NEV manufacturing. The city is fortifying its NEV industry infrastructure by successfully attracting key industry players, including the headquarters of Nio, Volkswagen's modular electric drive platform factory and BYD's Hefei base.

BYD's 2023 annual report revealed that its research and development expenditure for the year soared to about 39.6 billion yuan (\$5.47 billion), marking a 112 percent year-on-year growth and surpassing Tesla's R&D spending.

China's NEV sector is at the forefront of technological innovation, with a significant upsurge in R&D activities.

According to a report released in February by Patsnap, a global patent database, the emerging industry saw a 21.9 percent year-on-year growth in the number of invention patent applications filed in 2023, with an impressive 54.9 percent year-on-year increase in overseas patent applications.

"China has been taking a proact-



Sungrow Power Supply's new energy tech center is seen in Hefei, Anhui province, in April. CHEN SANHU / FOR CHINA DAILY



Robots operate an automated assembly line of Nio vehicles in Hefei in October. XINHUA

ive approach in the development of new technologies and materials throughout the NEV industry chain, with a multitude of technological innovations emerging from within the country," said Xia Yingsong, chairman of Zhongding Group.

Zhongding, based in Anhui, specializes in a range of automotive components, including sealing solutions, systems for vibration and noise reduction, fluid management and air suspension systems.

"Capitalizing on the benefits of a vast market scale and a diverse array of product types, Chinese manufacturers are verifying the compatibility and stability of automotive components and forging ahead with innovations amid intense market

competition," Xia said.

Smart tech

Tech advancements are also transforming the landscape of solar panel manufacturing in China. At JA Solar's smart photovoltaic module factory in Hefei, an engineer wears 5G-enabled augmented reality glasses and directs his gaze at an assembly machine.

With a simple verbal command to capture an image, the AR system, supported by artificial intelligence algorithms, swiftly presents a detailed equipment inspection report in less than a second, reporting its status: "No vibration, clamping normal, no screw protrusion on the nylon block."

This cutting-edge intelligent system, the brainchild of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province-based startup Rokid, has boosted the production line's efficiency by over 50 percent. This smart assembly line has contributed to half of the factory's overall production output.

Sungrow Power Supply, headquartered in Hefei, is a leading company in China's solar energy sector. It has incorporated large AI language models into its safety warning protocols and launched a pre-diagnostic system designed to elevate the industry's standards of predictive maintenance.

"With this system, we can continuously monitor vital parameters such as voltage, current and temper-

ature for each battery cell," said Xu Sheng, general manager of Sungrow's smart energy product center.

"For a power station capable of generating electricity of 100 megawatt hours, the system can produce a comprehensive diagnostic report in just a minute," said Xu.

This intelligent solution offers proactive alerts up to seven days before the onset of anomalies and has the potential to enhance operational efficiency by 30 percent.

Growing clusters

As China advances in the realm of new quality productive forces, a substantial surge in total factor productivity is recognized as a core hallmark of this progress.

Within the expansive 6,000-square-meter three-dimensional warehouse at PTL's Liyang facility in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, a fleet of 50 intelligent four-way forklifts and 34 transport robots operate tirelessly.

These machines meticulously orchestrate the logistics of raw materials for lithium battery anodes, all under the direction of an AI-driven robotic system.

The warehouse's operational capabilities have seen a remarkable boost, increasing by 70 percent, while its storage density has been optimized by 30 percent. Moreover, compared with traditional stackers, the system achieves a 30 percent reduction in energy consumption.

The improved logistics efficiency is part of a large picture of the robust supply chain ecosystem that bolsters the NEV industry in China's economically brisk Yangtze River Delta region, where industrial cities such as Hefei and Changzhou are situated.

Particularly, Changzhou has risen

to prominence as the nation's hub for the manufacture of power batteries.

Regional specialization, paired with a concentrated pool of industrial expertise, has given rise to a self-reinforcing momentum that spurs innovation and effectively drives down production costs.

In contrast to traditional fuel-powered vehicles, the cycle for updating NEVs has been substantially shortened. Minor updates are usually made on an annual basis, while significant overhauls occur every two years.

Scientists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences have located their research center in Liyang, capitalizing on its proximity to industry chains, which can facilitate the seamless transformation of their research findings into practical applications.

"Over 10 of our suppliers have been relocated here in the wake of our own establishment in the city," said Hua Xia, manager of a power battery plant in Liyang under Contemporary Ampere Technology Co Ltd. CATL has become China's largest automotive lithium-ion battery maker.

A multitude of enterprises within the NEV supply chain, complemented by the region's extensive network of high-speed rail and expressway infrastructure, have created a dynamic industry circle all within a four-hour drive, said Song Tingting, chief analyst in the automotive industry at Huatai Securities Research Institute.

"This approach complies with the principle of local sourcing, which can lead to a significant reduction in transportation costs," Song said.

XINHUA

Low-carbon lifestyles gaining in popularity among today's young Chinese

GUANGZHOU — For Yang Mengming, commuting via electric bus, declining disposable chopsticks from takeout orders and using her own coffee cup instead of disposable ones have all become routine.

The 30-year-old white-collar worker in South China's tech hub of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, has purchased a new energy vehicle for personal use and prefers products with low-carbon labels, even if they are priced slightly higher than others.

"Everyone can contribute to environmental protection within their means, which, in the long run, will benefit everyone," Yang said.

Yang represents a growing number of young Chinese who adopt low-carbon lifestyles, as the country's drive to realize its "dual carbon goals" serves to raise public awareness and nurture an expanding market for green products.

Wang Jingjun, a postdoctoral student in Wuhan, Hubei province, always carries a cloth bag to avoid using plastic bags, and looks out for low-carbon labels on products when shopping.

"I'm glad to find that there are more and more low-carbon products in recent years such as paper towels, sanitary napkins, shampoo, furniture and home appliances,"

said the 31-year-old student at Huazhong University of Science and Technology.

Sustainable market

Many Chinese companies are catering to consumers who are increasingly conscious of their carbon footprint.

Recently, a Shenzhen-based company released a zero-carbon open ear headphone. The Clear ARC 3, produced by Shenzhen Grandsun Electronic Co Ltd, obtained a carbon-neutral certificate by maximizing the use of recyclable materials, green electricity and equipment with low power consumption.

Wu Haiquan, president of the company, said they have been inspired by the nation's dual carbon goals, which aim to peak carbon emissions before 2030 and realize carbon neutrality before 2060.

"Low-carbon consumption will become an inevitable trend as the government rolls out green policies and promotes low-carbon awareness," said Wu. "It's better for companies to act sooner rather than later, seizing the opportunity and staying ahead of the curve."

Shenzhen-based jewelry company Yuepeng Gold last year released its first zero-carbon gold bar product, utilizing recycled gold and tran-

sitioning to energy-saving production.

The zero-carbon gold bars received a warm reception from consumers, and were sold out within minutes during China's mid-year online shopping festival known as the "618" shopping festival, according to the company.

Remarking on the market prospects of carbon-neutral products in China, Mickael Lefebvre, chief technology officer of Grandsun, said an ecosystem of such products is rapidly taking root in China, which benefits the development of new carbon-neutral products.

China is already the largest market for NEVs, with domestic sales reaching 8.29 million units last year. "If consumers have already bought electric cars and fridges that emit less, then it's not a big leap for them to think their other devices need to have smaller carbon footprints," Lefebvre said.

Jiang Zechuan, an official with the ecology and environment bureau of Shenzhen, attributes the increasing popularity of low-carbon lifestyles to governmental guidance, corporate innovation and public participation.

"The government shall first provide guidance and encourage businesses to engage in research and

development of low-carbon products. It shall then encourage consumers to choose such products and form low-carbon consumption habits," said Jiang.

Green lifestyle

Zhao Chengzhu, a 30-year-old Beijing resident, has formed a habit of riding a bike for short-distance commutes.

"In a metropolis like Beijing, riding a bike is often more convenient than driving. Moreover, I hope it can minimize my carbon footprint and help the society reduce its reliance on natural resources," said Zhao.

Hellobike, one of the leading bike-sharing companies in China, said its bike-sharing service covers more than 500 cities in China, with registered users surpassing 600 million.

By the end of 2023, the company had accumulated over 42 billion kilometers in cycling distance, equivalent to reducing carbon emissions by 1.9 million metric tons, said Chu Yiqun, vice-president of Hellobike.

"Our core users are aged between 20 and 45 and the main usage scenarios include commuting, connecting to public transportation, and leisure and entertainment," said Chu.



People ride past a row of Hellobike shared bikes in Beijing in April. HONG ZEHUA / XINHUA

The younger generation has displayed a particular interest in low-carbon lifestyles. According to a 2020 survey by China Youth Climate Action Network, 95 percent of interviewed college students aged between 18 and 24 endorse a low-carbon lifestyle, while 62 percent are willing to pay a higher price for the sake of environmental protection.

"Young Chinese today have a broader worldview, stronger moral and public sense, and as a result, they will care more about carbon emissions and environmental protection," Wang said. "Moreover, our generation is likely to witness the realization of China's dual carbon goals and benefit from it."

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Beijing makes it clear that there is absolutely no space for separatism

As a tried and true radical secessionist, Taiwan's new administrative head Lai Ching-te will have known just how provocative his inauguration speech was.

He will therefore know that he is responsible for Beijing having to signal its resolve to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity by force if necessary.

The People's Liberation Army commenced a military drill around the island shortly after Lai delivered his "pro-independence" peppered speech at his inauguration in Taipei on Monday.

Lai should not be so smitten by the attention lavished on him by Washington as to ignore the differences between these PLA drills and those in August two years ago following then US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's ill-intentioned visit to Taipei at the invitation of his predecessor Tsai Ing-wen.

The military drill demonstrates PLA's powerful joint combat capabilities such as joint sea-air combat readiness patrols, joint seizure of comprehensive battlefield control, and joint precision strikes on key targets. These capabilities are not within the reach of the Taiwan armed forces. Lai should discard the fantasy that any external forces can "come to his rescue".

It is foreseeable that in the early days of the Lai authorities, both sides of the Taiwan Strait will try to express their positions in various ways. But Beijing's bottom line is clear.

Since the island on its own does not have the means to prevent national reunification by force, Lai and his like-minded ilk are betting the well-being of

the island's residents on the US' support for their cause. But Lai surely has enough acumen to know that becoming entangled in the schemes of Washington means falling into the trap of its games. The mess that results from that, whatever the degree, will be beyond their ability to clean up as they will be nothing but puppets on string.

That Lai knows that it will be the Taiwan people that will bear the main brunt of a gamble that is doomed to failure was evident in his inauguration speech as he cited the support of "allies", the island's economic strength and "security" muscle in a bid to boost public confidence in the disastrous course he depicted.

That he spent considerable time and energy covering the fact that the DPP lost in both the island's local elections and the legislative body election exposes his concerns about the extent of popular support for his "pro-independence" cause.

Many Taiwan people see only too clearly the dead end that Lai is leading the island to, and the price they will have to pay to get there. Ultimately, it is the residents on the island who are being asked to stake the secessionist's wager on the island being an exception to the US' hypocrisy and callousness.

The necessary measures Beijing takes to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity are in line with international practice and law.

Beijing hopes to achieve the reunification of the motherland through peaceful means as much as anyone. It is willing to create broad space for peaceful reunification. But Lai and the DPP should realize there is no room for separatist activities, and reunification is inevitable.

Countermeasures against US sanctions called for

The unilateral sanctions Washington has imposed on a number of Chinese entities under the pretext of so-called Russia-related factors are unjustifiable. It is natural that Beijing should respond to such "bullying and economic coercion".

That explains why China took measures on Tuesday against 12 US companies involved in the US arms sales to Taiwan and their senior executives. They include units of Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and General Dynamics. Their assets in China will be frozen and their senior executives banned from entering China.

These companies have seriously infringed on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China. The sanctions are what they deserve.

There is indeed trade between China and Russia, and the trade volume between the two countries is rapidly increasing. There is no reason for the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine to become a factor that prohibits China from doing business with either country. Nor any reason why China should snap to attention at the US' command and cut its normal trade ties with Russia just because Washington tells it to.

China has long taken an objective and impartial position on the Ukraine crisis, and has been doing whatever it can to broker a cease-fire for the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Washington, however, has sought to distort per-

ceptions of China's stand and what it has been doing for the settlement of the conflict.

China is doing business with many countries, including the United States. In doing so, it adheres to the established trade rules and the principle of not harming any third party.

It is Washington that should reflect on what it has done with regard to the Ukraine crisis and what has been taking place in Gaza. Has Washington done anything for the peaceful settlement of the crises? No. Just the opposite.

China treasures bilateral relations with the United States, and it continues to believe that the two largest economies can do a lot of things together for the development of the global economy and world peace. They can work together to address a lot of common challenges the world faces.

However, Washington fears that China's rise will challenge the US' status as the global hegemon, and it has been doing whatever it can to contain the rise of China.

Russia-related factors are nothing but one more excuse Washington has employed to contain the development of China. Even without this excuse, Washington would find another to impose sanctions against Chinese companies.

Yet China's rise is unstoppable. What Washington does will only do a disservice to the development of bilateral relations between the two countries and to the recovery of the global economy.

Israel ostracizing itself from global community

After the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on May 10 reaffirming the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and statehood, with an overwhelming vote of 143 in favor and 9 against, the international consensus that a Palestine people's state should be recognized could not be more evident.

Even the United States, which voted against the resolution, had to explain shortly after that its "vote does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood" and claim that it supports it and seeks "to advance it meaningfully".

Thus when Norway, Ireland and Spain announced they recognized the Palestinian state on Wednesday, saying they believe it is "the best way to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East", they stepped forward to stand on the right side of history.

Israel's response to the move has been to recall its ambassadors from the three countries. That might be precipitous because it may prompt other members of the international community to choose sides and, given the UN General Assembly vote, that choice is unlikely to be in Israel's favor.

The latest round of the Israel-Palestine conflict has stirred the conscience of people around the world. Under the influence of domestic public

opinion shocked by the brutality of Israel's response to the Hamas-led attacks on Israel on Oct 7, it's natural that nations should finally acknowledge Israel's decades-long subjugation of the Palestinians, which doesn't mean any denial of the state of Israel or the Israeli people's own right to security.

The Benjamin Netanyahu administration has been called "the most right-wing government in Israel's history", as it is in the thrall of ultranationalist and extreme religious elements. If it pressures nations, it will only put itself further in debt to Washington for the latter's support, which is factored on it acting as its proxy.

Thus Israel's diplomatic situation will go from bad to worse. Even the US administration is struggling to sustain its stance of unconditional support to Tel Aviv in the face of Israel's use of force against the civilian population in Gaza, which has prompted the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to apply for arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Israel needs to accept it is part of the international community and recognize that the UN General Assembly resolution represents the near unanimous consensus of the community. It is only turning itself into a pariah-puppet of the US by blindly plowing its current furrow.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

People-to-people exchanges key to addressing misunderstanding

The 14th China-US Tourism Leadership Summit that opened in Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, on Wednesday, is expected to serve as an important bridge to further facilitate exchanges and closer understanding between the peoples of China and the United States.

This year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US. A lesson for the two countries is that they benefit from cooperation and lose from confrontation, and bilateral relations can only be based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation. Last November, the heads of state of the two countries reached a series of common understandings on the future development of bilateral ties and launched

the "San Francisco vision", agreeing to take joint actions to strengthen people-to-people exchanges and promote the steady and long-term development of ties.

China and the US differ in history, culture, social systems and development paths, but their people are friendly, hardworking and pragmatic. It is goodwill and friendship between the two peoples that have brought China-US relations back on the right track again and again. However, in recent years, some in the US see China as a strategic rival and make containment a priority in their China policy.

This highlights the greater need for the two countries to build more roads rather than barriers.

China has introduced a series of major policy measures to facilitate people-to-people exchanges and the

US should work with China to reduce policy obstacles on travel, visa and entry, increase direct flights, adjust the travel alert level for China, and encourage and support people from various sectors to strengthen exchanges.

The foundation of China-US relations was built by the people, the door of China-US ties was opened by the people, the story of the relations is written by the people, and the future of the ties will certainly be created by the two peoples. The two countries should respond to the people's desire to strengthen exchanges and cooperation, actively promote people-to-people and cultural exchanges with a long-term vision, and inject a stronger stabilizing force into the development of bilateral relations.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

Unnecessary rush is high speed to nowhere

At least 26 newly-built high-speed railway stations across the country are either not in use or have been shut down due to poor planning or low passenger flow.

New high-speed railway stations in some less-developed regions, where the old railway stations suffice to meet local needs, are seen as vanity projects. It takes certain economic size and population within the service radius of a high-speed railway station to sustain its operation.

The local governments should be practical when it comes to con-

structing high-speed railway stations. The decision-making process should be based on realistic, scientific, and objective assessments of the actual needs, as well as the construction and operating costs.

As urbanization over the past two decades has siphoned about half of the previously rural population to urban areas, and the weak housing market has seriously affected government revenue, worsening the debt pressure on local governments, it takes more scientific and prudent thinking to plan and build large

infrastructure projects to prevent them from becoming a debt trap, not to mention contributing to local socioeconomic development.

Local governments should be aware that it is a strong economy that boosts the upgrading of local public infrastructure, rather than the opposite. Although transportation plays an important role in boosting growth, its marginal effect would be remarkably reduced if the former outpaces the requirements of the latter.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

What They Say

Focus on cultural development and diversity

The second Forum on Building up China's Cultural Strength opened in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Thursday, hosted by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. This year's forum demonstrates the Party's commitment to securing new successes in developing socialist culture and promoting international exchanges.

The Party attaches great importance to culture. Thanks to that, the nation's cultural confidence has been elevated.

Since 2012, the awareness of the fundamental role culture plays in boosting national rejuvenation and developing a modern Chinese civilization has been greatly elevated, inspiring a flowering of cultural creativity and exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations in the spirit of openness and inclusivity.

The topics of this year's forum cover literary and artistic creation, digital publishing, the film industry, historical and cultural heritage protection, the cultural trade, internet copyright protection and innovation in international communication. These represent the focus of the Party for the realization of its vision of cultural devel-

opment in the form of concrete culture-related industrial, technological and institutional projects.

The forum can help all relevant parties better understand how to unleash the potential of China's cultural development, and materialize it into economic progress and governance advances, as well as tangible benefits for the people.

China's openness to foreign capital, talents and businesses in the cultural cause, and the huge demand for cultural products and services of the Chinese market mean rich business and development opportunities for multinational cultural companies and individual talents in the field. By further improving its business environment in the cultural market, the country can foster sustainable vitality in its cultural sector and promote international exchanges.

Prosperous international cultural exchanges can effectively promote mutual learning among different civilizations, help deepen the mutual understanding among different nations, and strengthen the bonds of friendship among different peoples.

This is conducive to reducing the global trust deficit, eliminating cultural bias and easing international

tensions between different cultures, ethnic groups and religions.

The fast advancement of information technology, artificial intelligence and the digital economy has produced both challenges and opportunities. Although the markedly reduced cost of cross-border communication and spreading of virtual and physical cultural factors greatly facilitates cultural exchanges, that process is seriously lopsided in favor of the developed countries.

The rich club members seem to take it for granted that their economic, technological and military prowess represents cultural superiority, and act accordingly, at the cost of global cultural diversity. They do so irrespective of the fact that their cultural bias, if not hegemony, is increasingly recognized as the root cause of many hot-spot issues in the world.

That calls for more countries to join China's efforts to counter the cultural hegemon by spreading more rational cultural views and promoting cultural diversity and mutual learning between civilizations. The ongoing cultural forum in Shenzhen is part of China's efforts to that end.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Harald Brüning

West's 'overcapacity' narrative arrogant

The West has been hyping up its ill-advised "overcapacity" narrative again, this time targeting China.

Four decades ago, the narrative was aimed at Japan. In fact, "Japan bashing" was all the rage in the 1980s, as the island nation was perceived by many in the US as a threat to the US economy. In 1987, several US Congress members, swinging sledgehammers, demolished a Toshiba radio in the Capitol, acting out their anger at allegations that a subsidiary of the Japanese electronics conglomerate had joined a Norwegian company to sell submarine technology to the Soviet Union.

Typically, no such theatrical protest targeted Norwegian products.

The protest took place at a time when many in the West, politicians in particular, feared that Japan would overtake the United States as the world's biggest economy. Of course, it was nothing but mass delusion, similar to the anti-China hysteria that emerged in the late 19th century in response to Chinese laborers arriving in North America and willing to work harder for lower wages than their white counterparts.

EU shouldn't follow in US footsteps

As US political scientist John Mueller said in an article in December last year, the angst over Japan's economic growth and business practices was intense and widespread in the West, in the US in particular, in the 1980s. In the article, headlined "Remember when Japan was going to take over the world?", Mueller quotes US political scientist Samuel Huntington as saying that "economics is the continuation of war by other means" — a variation of German military theorist Carl von Clausewitz's famous aphorism that "war is the continuation of policy with other means".

Besides, economist, public policy analyst and Columbia University professor Jeffrey D. Sachs said "US badmouthing of more competitive China impudent", adding that the latest campaign of the United States against China is the charge that the latter has overcapacity in a range of manufactured goods and so should restrain its exports.

I concur with Sachs' view that truth is simpler: China and other East Asian countries are the low-cost producers of a range of high-quality industrial products that the world urgently needs, including solar pho-

tovoltaic panel, electric vehicles, advanced batteries, wind turbines, 5G and more.

Since the US lags behind China in these sectors, Washington is badmouthing Beijing as if achieving success in these sectors is some kind of bad behavior.

Sachs added that the US approach to China is based on a mix of arrogance, nastiness and naïveté. A toxic cocktail indeed. The Columbia University professor also emphasized that the US wants Europe to partly close its markets to China's goods.

How the European Union responds to this remains to be seen, though much depends on the outcome of the June 9 European Parliament elections that will determine the composition of the 27-nation European Commission, which currently is headed by Ursula von der Leyen. She is running for re-election and seems to have Washington's ear as far as the West's politico-economic relations with Beijing are concerned.

Von der Leyen has echoed US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's repeated claims about China's alleged overcapacity. Considering that both Von der Leyen and Yellen studied economics, I am puzzled that they have been continuously harping upon China's overcapacity narrative. As trained economists, they should know better. Though both are also senior politicians, it is disappointing to see them engaging in the politically motivated "China's overcapacity" narrative.

However, President Xi Jinping told both Von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on May 6 that there is no such thing as "China's overcapacity problem", adding that he hoped EU institutions would develop the right perception about China and adopt a positive China policy.

Overcapacity an old phenomenon

A person with even a modicum of knowledge about economics would know that overcapacity — too many products and too high production capacity with too few buyers — is an age-old phenomenon studied by economists as different in their analyses as Adam Smith and Karl Marx.

Harvard Business School editor Garry



US-China ties are the world's most important bilateral relationship, politically, economically and militarily, as the two sides are working on addressing the climate crisis, resolving regional conflicts, alleviating poverty and tackling other common issues.

Emmons said in a markedly didactical article, headlined "Too Much of a Good Thing?", which was published way back in 1999 that "overcapacity per se isn't necessarily bad. With excess supply, prices go down; that's good for those industries benefiting from low-priced materials or commodities ... In addition, overcapacity often springs from innovation — and an improved product muscles into the market alongside previous versions, now rendered passé."

Also, Emmons reaffirmed that "excess capacity is often in the eyes of the beholder." Large economies such as the US, China, Germany and Japan are tackling the phenomenon all the time on the entrepreneurial level. Thanks to their "overcapacity" the four countries are able to supply the rest of the world with a wide range of goods that much smaller economies are not able or willing to produce and export.

It is in this context that Brussels-based

Chinese diplomat Peng Gang, in his recent article, headlined "The flawed logic behind the so-called 'overcapacity' of China's new energy sector", reaffirmed that "overcapacity" is a comparative concept.

According to Peng, China's new energy competitiveness is not because of subsidies, but due to Chinese enterprises' technological innovations, hard work and market competition. Peng says that in 2023, the production and sales of electric vehicles (EVs) in China reached 9.58 million and 9.49 million units respectively, basically striking a balance between production and sales, of which domestic sales accounted for 87.3 percent and foreign exports only 12.7 percent. In particular, Peng notes that China's EVs are popular among consumers in the EU and other regions of the world.

I share his viewpoint that new energy is the common future for humankind and that "at present, the global new energy capacity is far from enough and still needs to be significantly improved. There is no such overcapacity at all."

The West's "Chinese overcapacity" comes on the heels of the West's "decoupling" and "de-risking" strategy both of which failed to gain traction. The "overcapacity" claim appears to be the West's response to its failures on the EV development front, with the US imposing sky-high tariffs on EVs and some other products from China.

I find it puzzling that the products made to help the world tackle the climate crisis are now subject to huge customs duties. Interestingly, top executives of the German auto industry, which is vital to keeping the EU's economy running, have come out against the tariffs, and so have German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. Both did so to safeguard their respective national interests.

Tariffs on Chinese products misguided

An editorial in the Financial Times, headlined "A misguided move on Chinese tariffs", published last week, says the Joe Biden administration's 100 percent tariff on EVs carries more bark than bite, because the US imports just 2 percent of its EVs from China.

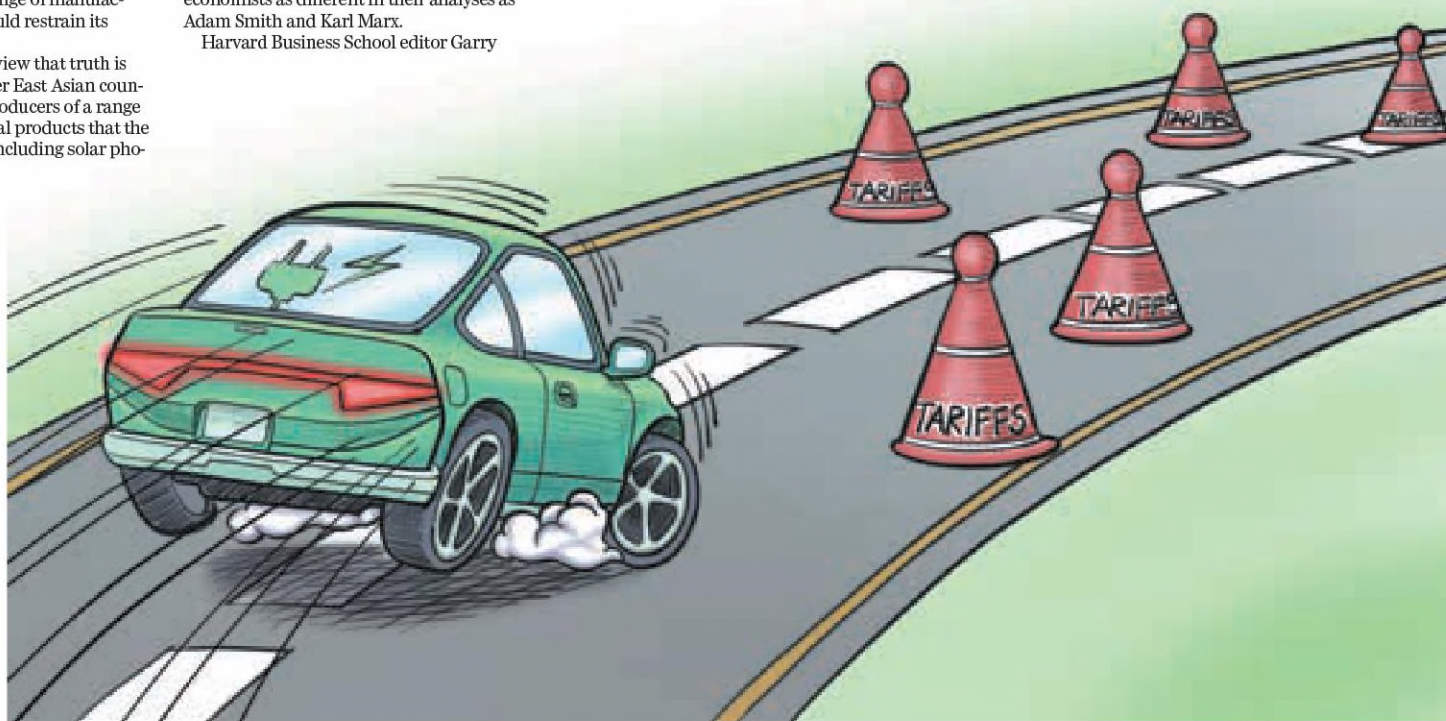
The article also says that in the long run, tariff hikes insulate US industries from competition, stymieing innovation and raising the costs for consumers. And it concludes that Biden's tariff move is mostly about optics, targeted at appeasing voters in the US' industrial belt including the swing states of Pennsylvania and Michigan. According to the FT article, the measures risk turning the US presidential election campaign into a bidding war on China hawkishness.

US-China ties are the world's most important bilateral relationship, politically, economically and militarily, as the two sides are working on addressing the climate crisis, resolving regional conflicts, alleviating poverty and tackling other common issues.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence will celebrate its 70th anniversary next month. And even after seven decades, they offer the right framework for establishing win-win partnership between Beijing and Washington.

Accordingly, the "San Francisco Vision" the Xi-Biden meeting launched last year charted the direction for stable and sustainable China-US relations. But the US' misguided "Chinese overcapacity" narrative and steep tariff hikes on Chinese-made eco-friendly products, including EVs, are incompatible with the San Francisco Vision.

The author is director of the Macau Post Daily. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Days of the US dictating the EU are numbered



Chen Weihua

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The recent announcement of Spain, Ireland and Norway that they will formally recognize the state of Palestine is another strong European rebuke of the US' biased policy in the Middle East, especially regarding Israel and Palestine.

The United States is going berserk trying to drive a wedge between China and the European Union in a bid to divide the world into political blocs, but such a strategy is doomed to failure.

US State Department Deputy Spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters on May 16 that "it (China) can't have it both ways. You can't want to have good, further, stronger, deepened relationships with European and other countries while simultaneously continuing to fuel the biggest threat to European security in a long time."

Such deliberate distortion of facts, however, can no longer fool people. Patel might be speaking for the US administration, but it is absurd that he also tries to speak for the EU and the rest of the world despite the US' habit of hijacking the world.

China, along with India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa and most other developing countries, has been calling for a ceasefire and urging Russia and Ukraine to hold negotiations to resolve the Ukraine conflict. In contrast, the US forced Ukraine to halt the peace talks with Rus-

sia in spring of 2022.

China put forward its position document on the political settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February last year and Chinese special envoy for Eurasian affairs Li Hui has been busy mediating between different parties in an effort to restore peace.

Ukrainian and some EU leaders have responded much more positively to China's efforts to resolve the Ukraine crisis than US politicians. More and more Europeans are waking up to the reality that the US wants to prolong the conflict to serve its own geopolitical interests and boost its military industrial complex.

On Saturday, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev said that "it is unacceptable to present the continuation of the war and the impossible victory over Russia as the only possible solution" — a message aimed at helping Washington and Brussels to take note of the assassination attempt on Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. Fico is also a EU leader who supports a cease-fire and diplomatic solution to the Ukraine conflict. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell was

blunt in his remarks during his visit in California last week, complaining about the US Inflation Reduction Act and the more than 100 percent punitive tariffs on Chinese EVs, decisions on which the EU was not at all consulted.

Moreover, Patel is not alone in sowing discord. Launching a vicious attack against China, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, in a speech at the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management in Germany on Tuesday, tried to rally German and EU support in the "economic war" on China, ignoring the fact that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and German business leaders have publicly opposed the US' punitive tariffs on Chinese-made EVs.

The Europeans are horrified by the prospects of a second Donald Trump presidency, and transatlantic relations are certainly not as close as Washington likes to think.

While US President Joe Biden denounced an International Criminal Court prosecutor for seeking to issue arrest warrants against senior Israeli officials on charges of "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity", and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said

he will work with Congress to issue sanctions against ICC officials, quite a few EU countries including France, Belgium and Slovenia have voiced their support for the ICC ruling.

Ben Rhodes, who served as deputy chief of former US President Barack Obama's White House National Security Council, lamented that "it would be a historic and dangerous mistake for a Democratic Administration to participate in an attack on international law and institutions".

The recent announcement of Spain, Ireland and Norway that they will formally recognize the state of Palestine is another strong European rebuke of the US' biased policy in the Middle East, especially regarding Israel and Palestine.

At the annual United Nations General Assembly, the EU countries opposed the brutal US embargo on Cuba.

The US still wields outsized influence in the EU, but the repeated outcry by French President Emmanuel Macron that the EU should not be a US vassal shows that the days of the US dictating the EU are numbered.

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

LAURENCE TUBIANA

Galvanize into action

China and France can work together to spur world's collective will to enhance and implement climate commitments

COP 28 in Dubai was a critical milestone for the multilateral framework under the historic Paris Agreement, as countries came together with a decision to "transition away from fossil fuels" — directly addressing the main source of emissions and signaling the beginning of the end for the fossil fuel era. It was a testament to the resilience of the global climate



governance system amid a difficult geopolitical context, and of climate objectives being shared, unified goals.

The next two years are a decisive window for climate action. The science tells us the world must reduce greenhouse gas emissions sharply, by 43 percent by 2030 and 60 percent by 2035 — to be on track for 1.5 C. Countries are due to submit their updated climate pledges under the Paris Agreement — Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) — by 2025. The importance of this next round of climate plans cannot be overstated. Despite the significant momentum of the green transition over the past decade, including a rapid expansion of clean technologies, the Global Stocktake undertaken at COP 28 concluded that current NDCs fall short of the needed reductions, even if fully implemented.

The pledges that countries make next year must address this gap. They will need to be backed by detailed sectoral plans and

informed by rigorous analysis of what and where investments are needed, to make for effective plans and close the implementation gap.

Climate action is not a zero-sum game. Nearly 10 years after the Paris Agreement, countries must come together to reaffirm the multilateral spirit, accelerate cooperation and enhance our collective action to put the world back on course to meet our critical climate objectives.

This is a crucial moment for action and global cooperation — in which France and China have important roles to play.

As leading G20 nations, both France and China can lead in upholding the global climate governance system and in advancing collective climate commitments. Drawing on both countries' rich experience with national planning, France and China can show the way by defining ambitious and robust decarbonization trajectories, backed by credible plans for implementation and investment, and demonstrating pathways for climate-resilient and socially-just prosperity.

Such leadership would build on the key contributions both countries have made to the multilateral climate system. The November 2015 China and France Joint Presidential Statement on Climate Change was instrumental in securing the adoption of the Paris Agreement. When the Agreement faced the challenge of the US withdrawal, Europe and China stood strong in support of the Paris Agreement and multilateralism, and raised the ambition for

their respective 2030 targets and long-term goals toward climate/carbon neutrality.

As France and China commemorate the 60th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations this year, the two countries have a key opportunity to deepen climate collaboration and demonstrate once again their vision and leadership to build our collective future.

Joint messages from France and China committing to enhanced action in this critical decade would send a powerful signal to the world:

an unwavering shared commitment to the multilateral processes and institutions.

There would be much to gain from even closer cooperation in areas such as electricity system planning and market reform, low-carbon buildings, industrial decarbonization, methane, green finance, low-carbon standards, as well as adaptation and building a climate-resilient food system. Meanwhile, an open conversation on fostering green and resilient value chains and opportunities for cooperation

can help strengthen a sustainable and just transformation. Stronger involvement of local actors can help deepen concrete collaboration, foster implementation on the ground and support local communities.

France and China can also play key roles in supporting other countries in their transition. Finance is the critical piece for enabling the global transition toward a sustainable future and meeting our climate objectives, particularly as poorer and climate-vulnerable countries face continuous barriers to access

financing and increasingly constrained fiscal space. The issue is too vast and complex to be addressed only within the COP format and important discussions have also been taking place at the G20 and meetings of key international financial institutions.

Building on momentum from the Summit on a New Global Financing Pact in Paris and in light of China's role in the upcoming Finance in Common Summit, the two countries can drive critically needed change in the multilateral financial system, unlocking new sources of financing to support climate goals, and enabling better coordination and transparency across different bilateral and multilateral financing initiatives and their alignment with national transition plans. France and China can also support other countries by sharing their rich experiences and lessons in creating domestic enabling conditions for transition, in particular for accelerating renewable energy deployment.

France and China also have unique roles in advocating for the integration of nature and climate talks, leveraging China's leadership role in the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and France's co-chairship of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People and its hosting of the 2025 UN Ocean Conference.

At this critical juncture, our two countries can set strong examples for international cooperation and demonstrate that collective action is the most effective path to addressing climate change. This partnership can inspire other countries to strengthen their own commitments to a sustainable and collaborative future.

The author is president and CEO of the European Climate Foundation and a key architect of the 2015 Paris Agreement. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

WANG YIMING

Climate finance gaps

As funding for green and low-carbon transition in BRI countries remains inadequate, more efforts should be made to advance international cooperation in this regard

Since its launch 10 years ago, the Belt and Road Initiative has made remarkable progress across various fields. As of June 2023, China has signed over 200 cooperation agreements with 152 countries and 32 international organizations.

As green development continues to be integrated into Belt and Road cooperation, addressing climate change has become an important part of the efforts, supporting participating countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as to accelerate green and low-carbon transitions.

Currently, 146 BRI countries have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Among them, nearly 40 countries have pledged net zero targets: Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates aim to achieve net zero by 2050; Turkey by 2053; and China, Russia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan by 2060.

To achieve these goals, some countries have developed strategies and action plans, implementing specific measures such as improving energy efficiency in the power sector, promoting renewable and clean energy sources, and encouraging the use of clean fuels. Other countries have established carbon markets to drive low-carbon transitions through carbon pricing mechanisms.

Most BRI countries are emerging and developing markets undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization. Their soaring energy demands have thus led to increasing carbon emissions and a growing burden on the environment. Mitigating and adapting to climate change is extremely challenging for them.

According to the United States Energy Information Administration, in 2021, carbon dioxide emissions from BRI countries accounted for approximately 60 percent of the global total. Among them Russia accounted for 5 percent; Iran, Indo-

nesia and Saudi Arabia for 2 percent each; and India accounted for 7 percent.

Although most BRI countries have lower per capita emissions than developed countries and the global average, they are still under high pressure of continued carbon emissions increase. They are vulnerable to climate and biodiversity risks with weaker climate resilience, limited by financial constraints and traditional development approaches.

Climate change has worsened the frequency, intensity and range of extreme weather events and brought more uncertainty regarding when and where those events occur. As rising temperatures and more uneven precipitation severely impact water resources, agricultural production, and biodiversity, these BRI countries will have to struggle with rising climate risks and environmental pressures.

As the world calls for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and limiting high-carbon industries, companies that fail to effectively address climate risks and lag behind in green transitions will face huge risks due to declines in investment willingness and capital outflows.

Therefore, it is critical and urgent to promote international cooperation on climate finance in BRI countries, so as to channel more funds toward climate change adaptation and environmental protection, and enhance these countries' capacity for mitigating and adapt-



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Despite progress in recent years, climate finance for BRI countries is far from adequate to meet the huge demands. More efforts should be made to advance international cooperation on climate finance, promote regulatory alignment and financial innovation, and collaborate with multilateral financial institutions.

ing to climate change.

These efforts need to be supported with substantial financial investments and the funding gaps are quite big. It is roughly estimated that achieving the NDCs of BRI countries requires \$19.2 trillion of investment from 2016 to 2030, which these countries cannot afford.

Some of the countries rely heavily on international support. From 2003 to 2018, multilateral climate funds invested over \$7 billion in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, East Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, supporting 50 countries in mitigation and adaptation projects, including low-carbon transitions in the energy sector, green industrial development and water resource management.

In recent years, as BRI countries accelerate green transformation and develop renewable energy such as photovoltaics and wind power, demands for climate finance have seen a rapid growth. It is thus necessary to urgently diversify climate finance models, by exploring more channels, such as project financing, debt markets and equity markets, instead of relying primarily on public funding.

According to Bloomberg, from 2010 to 2022, BRI countries issued a cumulative \$400 billion in green bonds, which is 20 percent of the global total, and \$193 billion in green loans, 27 percent of the global total. Major sovereign wealth funds in Asia such as Temasek from Singapore, Mubadala Investment Co

from the UAE, and the China Investment Corp are key participants in green equity investments.

In recent years, most developing countries have established public-private partnership policy frameworks to involve private capital in green investments and promote alignment of climate finance standards. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations released the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance in 2021.

Impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, global climate finance has seen a reduction in funding over the past three years. Developed countries, which redirect a large amount of public funds toward economic recovery, are less motivated to increase climate finance. Without government subsidies and financial support, the private sector was less willing to invest in climate-related areas.

In 2020, the East Asia and Pacific region took up nearly half of global climate finance, North America and Western Europe around 25 percent, and the rest of the world less than one-fourth.

In terms of finance sources, 76 percent of global climate funds rely on internal financing, and the number is as high as 93 percent in the East Asia and Pacific regions.

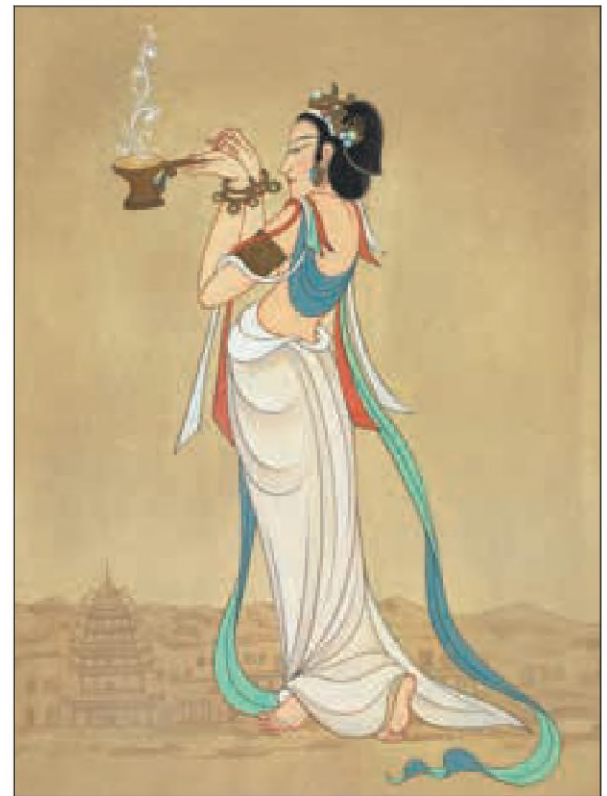
Emerging markets and developing countries usually bear higher financing costs due to a lack of effective tools. Given the high US dollar interest rate now and in the foreseeable future, external climate financing costs for BRI countries are expected to remain high.

Despite progress in recent years, climate finance for BRI countries is far from adequate to meet the huge demands. More efforts should be made to advance international cooperation on climate finance, promote regulatory alignment and financial innovation, and collaborate with multilateral financial institutions.

The author is vice-chairman of China Center for International Economic Exchanges. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

CULTURAL JOURNEY



Career dedicated to sharing glory of caves

A 93-year-old recalls spending her childhood with her father protecting the Mogao grottoes to highlight their legacy with the world, **Lin Qi** reports.

Recalling her bittersweet experiences during her teen years in Dunhuang, Gansu province, 93-year-old Chang Shana can't help but smile while remembering those days. She was 12 when she arrived in Dunhuang in the 1940s. Her father, Chang Shuhong (1904-94), the founding director of the Dunhuang Academy, committed his life to the protection and conservation of the caves and the art inside.

The young girl endured harsh living conditions in the desert while working with her father to copy the murals and Buddhist statues in the Mogao Caves, and forged a lifelong love of Dunhuang that has lasted for several decades until now, through her paintings and design.

"Dunhuang is my hometown. Father often said, 'Shana, don't forget you are from Dunhuang.'"

In 2014, Chang Shana, a prominent designer and scholar of Dunhuang art, initiated a touring exhibition titled *Everlasting Beauty of Dunhuang*. Since premiering at Beijing's Today Art Museum, the show of works, created by her and her father that are inspired by Dunhuang's immense artistic trove, has since traveled around the country, raising awareness of the importance of protecting Dunhuang's legacy.

It recently returned to the capital, with its latest installment running at the Chinese Traditional Culture Museum until Oct 27.

From Paris to promises

The exhibition pays tribute to a family passing on a mission from father to daughter over more than eight decades. The journey began when Chang Shuhong decided to leave behind a Parisian life with good prospects to head toward a dream and mission — and, of course, uncertainties — back in his home country.

He graduated from the well-known Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and won prizes at the prestigious Paris Salon.

He would have pursued his potential as a career artist if he had not picked up Paul Pelliot's *Catalog of Dunhuang Caves* at a street stand selling books on an autumn day in 1935. It contained six volumes featuring photos of over 300 murals and figurines to reveal a remarkable trove of art and cultural exchanges that spanned a millennium.

Many years later, Chang Shuhong recalls feeling awe at seeing those vivid details in the books that revealed a history of his homeland he had not known before.

"The strokes (in the murals) were powerful, even bolder than that of the works of Fauvism, the structures

rendered a feeling of magnificence, and the figures being depicted looked alive and energetic," he once said.

A later visit to the Guimet Museum where he saw cultural objects plundered from Dunhuang by Western explorers further intensified his wish to return to unveil Dunhuang's mysteries to the world.

Chang Shana was born in Lyon and lived in Paris until she was 6. Her family returned to China amid the chaos of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45). They first settled in Chongqing, where she attended primary school — she still remembers some of the local dialect. At the end of 1943, she arrived at Dunhuang after a long, bumpy voyage with frequent layovers and transfers.

She was impressed by the harsh natural environment of the desert there — often harassed by sands and gales. Material comforts were scarce. This was perhaps ironic, considering Dunhuang's legacy as an oasis of art and cultural exchanges along the ancient Silk Road.

She says she'll never forget the first meal she had in Dunhuang: a bowl of noodles with salt and vinegar.

"I remember I then asked, 'How come there is no meat or vegetables?' And, Dad, looking a bit embarrassed, said: 'It's late. There will be mutton tomorrow.' I later realized that was unlikely because there was nothing out there," she recalls.

"To make our life better, my father tried to plant flowers and grow vegetables. He worked really hard."

Yet, Dunhuang did nurture the little girl, in a different way. "The moment I entered the caves, I was dazzled. The caves had no doors and faced east to allow the sunlight in. I had never seen so many murals and statues, bright in color and all over the grottoes," she says.

She then followed in the footsteps of her father and other artists working in the caves. She followed their instructions to also copy the beautiful wall paintings and figurines from different periods of time.

Her daily routine also included practicing calligraphy, learning French, studying Chinese and taking lessons in Chinese and Western art history, taught by artists who worked with her father researching Dunhuang.

"There, I completed the first stage of education in my art career, although without a diploma," Chang Shana says.

Several large copies of *jingbian*, or sutra depictions, on the walls from the 1940s are on show to offer a glimpse of the solid training she received and the understanding of



“Many people said, you are elderly, and you should no longer make yourself busy with things. I always keep in mind father's wishes to carry on the Dunhuang heritage, and for that reason, I always feel energetic.”

Chang Shana, 93, artist

Dunhuang she accumulated, says her son, Cui Donghui, who's deputy director of the School of Architecture of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

"The basic skills she grasped while copying allowed her to understand the compositions and the relations among the figures in the murals," Cui says.

Design for China

At 17, she went to study art and museology in Boston, the United States, for two years. She returned at the end of 1950 to assist her father in staging an exhibition of Dunhuang art at the Palace Museum, where their copies of murals and statues were also displayed.

The works caught the attention of noted architects and scholars Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin.

Touched by Chang Shana's gift and devotion to Dunhuang, Lin helped her land a job as an assistant lecturer at the architecture department of Tsinghua University.

Lin hoped to introduce the young girl to the fields of design and education, where she would develop

new ways to keep alive the heritage of Dunhuang and other traditional art.

Lin was one of the key influences on Chang Shana, who inspired her to integrate Dunhuang elements into many aspects of life. Lin took her to factories that made enamelware and porcelain to get inspiration about new ways to give traditional arts and crafts a modern uplift.

"Lin said you need to make people feel, and live with, the beauty of tradition," Chang Shana says.

Chang Shana later taught at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Central Academy of Arts and Design, now the Academy of Arts and Design of Tsinghua University.

As a designer and design educator, she participated in several national projects in which she incorporated the motifs and patterns from the murals, architecture and Buddhist caves that enriched her teen years.

She designed silk scarves featuring *zaojing* (caisson ceiling) patterns from Dunhuang and white doves, which were chosen as gifts to international delegations attending a conference in Beijing in 1952.

Years later, she became a member of the design team for the interior decoration of the Great Hall of the People, during which time she learned to go beyond aesthetics to also consider other factors such as function and materials.

Decades afterward, she incorporated Dunhuang art into her designs at several landmark venues in Beijing, including the Cultural Palace of Nationalities and the Capital Theater. The *Everlasting Beauty of Dunhuang* exhibition has been her latest effort to carry on her father's commitment.

She recalls the time when she launched the touring exhibition a decade ago. "Many people said, you are elderly, and you should no longer make yourself busy with things. I always keep in mind father's wishes to carry on the Dunhuang heritage, and for that reason, I always feel energetic," she says.

"The exhibition has toured dozens of cities, and I will keep promoting Dunhuang art as long as I can walk and talk. It is a tribute to my father and my mentor, Lin Huiyin, especially in this year that marks the 120th anniversary of both of their births."

Contact the writer at linqi@chinadaily.com.cn



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.



Clockwise from top left: Artist Chang Shana's works on display at a touring exhibition, *Everlasting Beauty of Dunhuang*, in Beijing, including *Bougainvillea and Butterflies*, *Deity and Incense Burner*, *The Guardian King of the South*, *Nine-Color Deer* and *Woman in Xinjiang*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFESHANGHAI



From left: Ke Haiqi (left) and a colleague discuss furniture restoration at his studio in Jiading, Shanghai. Ke poses with painted glass based on a selfie and given by one of his partners. Ke introduces his collection of door handles and locks dating back half a century. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

Ke Haiqi has been captivated by the enduring charm of Shanghai-style furnishings and, consequently, committed to bringing them back into fashion for about two decades.

The 44-year-old was born in Ningbo, East China's Zhejiang province, and came to Shanghai before 2000. He specializes in old Shanghai-style villa restoration and decoration. Shanghai furnishings have continued showcasing the city's unique charm and have remained popular since early last century.

"The old Shanghai-style furniture, typically referring to pieces from the 1920s to '50s, presents a perfect blend of Eastern and Western cultures, and has amalgamated various styles, such as art deco, minimalism and modernism, and such features as practicality and inclusiveness," says Ke.

The development of Shanghai-style furniture is said to date back to 1843, when the city opened its port and Western culture and people poured in, leading to a blend of furniture, ranging from Western imports to local pieces featuring traditional elements. Ke explains that the category is not defined merely by certain materials, patterns, structures, decorations or craftsmanship but is more like a general, overall style.

Its biggest characteristic is the mixture of classic and modern, and Eastern and Western elements.

"Furnishings are usually a reflection of people's lifestyles during a particular period, because furniture is functional and closely related to people's daily lives. Shanghai-style furniture is simple, practical, innovative and integrated, just like the city and people who live here," Ke adds.

Although Shanghai furniture tends to replicate pieces from the first half of the 20th century, it never looks outdated. Instead, it remains fashionable, modern, innovative and functional.

"Art deco is Shanghai-style furniture's most distinctive characteristic," says Ke.

Art deco originated in France in the 1920s. It's a prominent decorative-art genre that emerged in the early 20th century that emphasizes symmetry, geometric shapes, mirror-like effects, bright colors and decorative patterns. It is widely used in various mediums, such as architecture, interior design, jewelry, fashion and visual arts.

"Art deco itself is pretty inclusive, since it features elements from various countries. When it comes to Shanghai-style furnishings, this inclusiveness is expanded more by incorporating traditional Chinese and, specifically, the Shanghai elements," Ke adds.

He points to a folding screen in his studio as an example. He explains that its style probably comes from

Furnishing fashion in functional style

The historical legacy of the country's most internationalized port city continues to imbue its home decor with a unique chic that blends East and West, **Wang Xin** reports.



Japan, while the designs carved using Chinese craftsmanship tell a traditional Chinese story.

In addition to the mixture of cultural elements, art deco features are also presented in the modeling, structural design and patterns of Shanghai-style furniture.

In his studio, Ke showcased an old cupboard with the patterns of the rose and nightingale, which he believes are inspired by Oscar Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose*. Besides, the cupboard is decorated with geometric patterns and layers on the edges, a representative interpretation of art deco style.

Having engaged in old Shanghai-style villa restoration for about two decades, Ke has gotten into the habit of reusing the original furnishings' parts. This not only serves environmental protection and waste reduction but also works well



Top: A corner of Ke's studio yard in Jiading, Shanghai. Above: A number of Shanghai-style furnishings collected, restored and designed by Ke showcased at the studio.

Shanghai-style furniture is simple, practical, innovative and integrated, just like the city and people who live here."

Ke Haiqi, specialist in old villa restoration and decoration

because these pieces are old yet never outdated.

"These components, such as door handles and locks, are closely related to the styles of the furniture and of the whole buildings of previous periods. Then, the buildings, with diverse and blended styles, form a whole Shanghai of that time."

He points to a set of door handles in his studio and says: "Look at these. They actually still look fashionable, modern and lovely, don't they? I myself would still be willing to pick them today."

Ke isn't the only one who shares this notion. Shanghai furniture has been popular with foreign buyers in the city since late last century. And it has likewise been gaining popularity among younger Chinese in recent years.

"In the past, foreign customers in the city were the main consumers of Shanghai-style furniture. They lived in old villas with Western features," Ke explains.

"Nearly all of my early clients were foreigners when I started doing villa restorations around 2000. They tended to purchase more old Shanghai-style furniture because of the blend of international and local elements," Ke recalls. "It is like they were seeking a kind of balance, and such furniture played a role as a 'middleman' to offer them an integrated experience."

Ke has restored more than a hun-

dred local villas over the past two decades and has continued to witness changes among his clientele and new trends in his field.

"The number of local clients (for vernacular villas and furniture) is growing. Most are aged 30 to 50, including both Shanghai natives and 'new' Shanghai people who resettled in the city. We also see clients from across China buying Shanghai-style furnishings, such as people from Zhejiang and Yunnan provinces, as well as Xinjiang Uygur and Xizang autonomous regions."

Client Tang Lei, a 44-year-old business owner from Kunming, Yunnan province, says: "Personally, I especially like antique Shanghai-style furniture, in which you can clearly see the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures. Some traditional Chinese furniture might seem a bit 'heavy' and complicated. The simplicity and delicacy of Shanghai furniture is just right."

"Also, I'm fond of art deco, with its geometric lines and strong sense of adornment. Most importantly, Shanghai-style furniture focuses much on functionality, comfort and a sense of ritual in life," Tang adds.

Ke says that Shanghai-style furniture isn't exclusive to Shanghai but is more of a decorative art that can fit freely into diverse arrangements and styles anywhere.

"After all these years, I would say that clients' demand for furniture has actually remained the same. They make choices based on their aesthetic preferences, lifestyle habits and practical needs. We also receive many customization requests for furniture with modern functionality, just like clients in the past," says Ke.

He has connected with enthusiasts from around the world and hopes to bring greater awareness of the charm of Shanghai-style furniture and its related culture.

Before establishing his current studio in Jiading district, Ke opened Loushi Coffee on Nanchang Road in Huangpu district from 2009 to 2020. The cafe was also a display space for Shanghai furnishings that Ke had collected, restored and designed. It attracted many designers and customers from different countries and walks of life.

Now, he has even greater goals.

"We hope to make our studio more than a private space for display but also a place for exhibitions, experiences, courses, interactive activities and communications to help more people learn more about Shanghai culture," he says.

"And in the long term, instead of 'restoring' Shanghai-style furniture, we hope that we can 'create' Shanghai-style decor and spaces."

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When ancient Egypt comes to China

By ZHANG KUN
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The Shanghai Museum announced on Monday ticket pre-sales for its exhibition, *On Top of the Pyramid: The Civilization of Ancient Egypt*, which it claims is the largest showcase of ancient Egypt civilization in Asia.

Running from July 18 this year to Aug 17, 2025, *On Top of the Pyramid: The Civilization of Ancient Egypt* will feature 492 displays of 788 artifacts from various periods of Egypt's history, says Shanghai Museum director Chu Xiaobo.

Chu introduces such highlights as statues of pharaohs, including those of Tutankhamun, Amenemhat III and Ramses II; a complete set of mummies' coffins; gold jewelry belonging to a queen; and recently

discovered painted coffins, animal mummies and statues from the Saqqara region.

The institution's largest-ever themed exhibition will occupy all three exhibition halls on the ground floor of the Shanghai Museum in People's Square, he says.

Visitors are encouraged to bring their pet cats for special evening events during the exhibition to pay tribute to the cat goddess, Bastet.

In 2020, ruins of a temple dedicated to Bastet dating back to 600 BC were unearthed in Saqqara, 30 kilometers south of Cairo.

The finds, including animal mummies and well-preserved relics from priests' tombs, were so remarkable that the dig was listed among the top 10 archaeological revelations of the year.

The Shanghai exhibition will be

the first systematic showcase of these artifacts, which have been stored in warehouses of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, Chu says.

The Secrets of Saqqara will be shown as the exhibition's second section.

The first is *The Land of the Pharaohs*, which provides an overview of ancient Egyptian history, exploring its cosmology, social hierarchy, writing, craftsmanship and burial traditions. The third section is dedicated to Tutankhamun, a pharaoh who died young. The 1922 discovery of his tomb intrigued the whole world.

The exhibits have been carefully curated from artifacts from seven major Egyptian museums, including the Egyptian Museum, Luxor Museum and Suez Museum, along with the latest findings

in Saqqara, Chu says.

The exhibition marks the first comprehensive collaboration between an official Chinese museum and the Egyptian government.

"It'll witness a great advancement in the golden era of Sino-Egyptian relations," says Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism official Zhong Xiaomin.

Mohamed Ismail Mohamed Khaled, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities under the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, says: "This is one of the largest exhibitions we have sent abroad in the last 20 years."

"China and Egypt have had great relations for several thousands of years, and this exhibition is the result of this long collaboration between Egypt and China," he says.



Left: An animal statue and another artifact of ancient Egyptian civilization to be showcased at the Shanghai exhibition. Above: A statue among the 788 artifacts from various eras of ancient Egyptian civilization to be on display. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

After school classes finish, 17-year-old Khan Sing usually heads to Xinhua School in Luang Prabang, Laos, for his usual Chinese lessons, but today is different. The class welcomes two special guests — Chinese actor Deng Chao and rapper After Journey.

The duo teach the students to sing the Chinese song *Tomorrow Will Be Better*, with some of them quickly learning to sing it fluently.

Khan also has an arm-wrestling match with 45-year-old Deng and wins. "I think Deng was stronger; he was letting me win. Interacting with him was incredibly exciting and made me very happy," Khan says.

This Chinese program is part of the fourth season of the outdoor travel reality show *HAHAHAHAHA*. For the first time, the show has ventured abroad with Laos as its first stop.

Guests traveled along the China-Laos Railway, visiting Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng and Vientiane, the capital of Laos. During the trip, they explored morning and night markets, went rafting and diving, interacted with backpackers from around the globe, chatted with local Chinese merchants, and played basketball with local students learning Chinese.

The show premiered in March on Tencent Video and iQiyi, with weekly updates, and will conclude in June. It features the journeys of actor Deng Chao and Chen He, singer and actor Lu Han, comedian Wang Mian, rapper Dong Baoshi, and former soccer player and coach Fan Zhiyi, as well as occasional guests.

The Laos segment has already aired, and the show topped the GuDuo Media online variety show popularity index in April, making the places that guests visited in Laos popular hot spots for young tourists.

Khan saw his interaction with Deng on the show and recalled the class as an unforgettable one. He has been studying Chinese for two years and is working hard for a chance to study in China.

Although he hasn't been to China yet, Khan hopes to study international business at Wuhan University in the future. "I hope to return to Laos after my studies and work in China-Laos trade," he says.

Khan learned about Xinhua School from his older brother, who, after learning Chinese, started working with Chinese people locally.

"Since the China-Laos Railway started operating, many Chinese have come to Laos for business. I've also taken the China-Laos Railway from Luang Prabang to Vientiane. It used to take six to seven hours but

Hit travel reality show ventures abroad to Laos

HAHAHAHAHA puts spotlight on railway that brings guests between countries with ease, **Li Yingxue** reports.

now takes just over an hour, which is very convenient," he says.

Xinhua School has five international Chinese volunteer teachers from China, who are teaching Chinese through a program by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education.

One of the volunteer teachers, 27-year-old Li Linlin, is teaching in Laos for the second time. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Chinese international education from Anyang Normal University in Henan province in 2019, she spent a year teaching Chinese in Luang Prabang.

Last year, as she was about to complete her master's degree in Chinese minority languages and literature at Kunming University in Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, she decided to return to Luang Prabang.

The first time, she flew from Kunming to Luang Prabang. This time, she traveled by the China-Laos Railway.

Li recalls that, in 2019, few people in Laos spoke Chinese. In 2023, when she walked down the street, people greeted her with *nihao*, which means hello.

She's found that locals are eager to learn Chinese and she teaches students from diverse backgrounds — lawyers, nail technicians, masseuses, cafe owners and others.

"Some are in their 30s or 40s, supporting their families. Speaking Chinese can significantly boost their income, sometimes doubling it or more," she explains.

In addition to teaching Chinese, Li and the other teachers organize various activities to familiarize students with Chinese culture, including food festivals and riddle games.

"The school offers students plenty of chances to interact with people



Top: The fourth season of the outdoor travel reality show *HAHAHAHAHA*, featuring entertainment stars and celebrities, ventures abroad with Laos as its first stop.

Above: Actor Deng Chao on the China-Laos Railway. **Below:** A view of the Mekong River in Luang Prabang, Laos, a famed tourist destination.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

way, noticed that Laotians often use bullet trains for travel, medical treatment and schooling.

"We have many tourists coming to Laos, especially from Thailand, who prefer our railway line. We also have tourists from South Korea, some European countries and the United States," Yang adds.

Yang mentions that this railway line has also boosted economies along its route. For example, Laos' mangoes can now be transported via the China-Laos Railway to Kunming and then distributed to other cities in China.

Director of *HAHAHAHAHA*, Li Lin, traveled on the China-Laos Railway with her colleagues several times before filming. "Apart from Laotian signage, attendants and announcements on the train, it felt just like riding a high-speed train in China," Li Lin recalls.

Impressed by the railway's convenience and the stunning scenery and friendly locals along the route in Laos, she decided to make it the first stop of the new season of the show.

According to Li Lin, *HAHAHAHAHA* is all about exploring unique locations. The team's first trip to Laos for scouting happened in September last year. "Once we got to Laos, it felt like time stood still," she says. "Unlike domestic tourism, where we often find similar things in different places, Laos offers plenty of fresh, undiscovered spots."

Li Lin finds Laos to be incredibly relaxed. "Take Luang Prabang, for instance. It's small, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with no traffic lights. You can stroll around freely and the absence of big malls makes materialism seem to disappear."

She is particularly struck by a tiny village they visited in Vang Vieng. "It's astonishing to see so many young people from all over the world enjoying themselves, seeing it as a utopian paradise.

"It's an ideal destination for recent college graduates to explore abroad without breaking the bank. Laos is relatively unknown, offering a unique travel experience," she says.

As the fourth season of the show aired, Li Lin noticed from audience feedback that it is funnier than ever. With the same cast as the third season, the guests in the fourth season are more familiar with each other, making their travels more relaxed and enjoyable.

"Their bond is really strong. They have fun together during filming and even hang out during breaks. Audiences can feel their camaraderie," she says.

In the show, encounters with people and visits to shops happen spontaneously, without prior planning. In Laos, the guests met many Chinese businessmen.

One businessman from Hunan province even invited them to his restaurant, sharing the story of Hunan businesspeople entering Laos. For over 20 years, a lot of people from the area have come to Laos for business. Today, businesses and shops from Hunan are found all across Laos, dealing in sectors such as infrastructure, steel, automobiles, telecommunications and hardware trading.

"I hope the show spreads some goodwill. I want the encounters between guests and different people to reflect the relationships between individuals," Li Lin says.

Peng Kan, a lecturer at Beijing Normal University's School of Arts and Media, notes that the travel shows *HAHAHAHAHA* and *Divas Hit the Road* have focused on the Belt and Road Initiative in the past two years. This proves that as outdoor travel reality shows resume global journeys, they're also taking on bigger social roles.

Compared to studio-based shows of the same theme, outdoor travel shows offer a more relatable platform, Peng says. For example, following *HAHAHAHAHA*'s guests from Yunnan to Laos via the China-Laos Railway helps viewers understand the project's impact and learn about the Laotian culture.

Content with both Chinese and international elements is popular with overseas audiences because of its intimacy and inclusiveness. The show's influence has even reached overseas, getting local media attention during filming and gaining fans abroad, Peng says.

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Giving China's 'other kung fu' a fighting chance

Chinese martial arts are hiding a secret weapon in plain sight. It's enigmatic enough that I have yet to meet a Chinese layperson who even knows it's Chinese. At the same time, paradoxically, it's an "open secret" that's gaining international prominence.



Erik Nilsson
Second Thoughts

I've come to think of it as the "other kung fu" — *sanda*.

Unlike its superstar sibling, *taolu* kung fu, you won't see it in any martial arts movies but, increasingly, you will likely catch it on international TV broadcasts of actual fights.

Indeed, most English-language videos and articles about *sanda* celebrate its prowess yet lament its obscurity, with headlines like, "Is *sanda* the most underrated of martial arts?" "China's amazing fighting style you've never heard of"; "What's the difference between kung fu and *sanda*?"

Taolu and *sanda* are the only two competitive categories recognized by the International Wushu

Federation, the main global body for Chinese martial arts, known as *wushu* in Chinese.

These disciplines share the same roots but have branched out in very different directions.

My 12- and 8-year-old children have studied both since age 3, and I just finished my first year of *sanda*. While my week is also packed with lessons in Muay Thai, *eskrima* — a Filipino martial art emphasizing stick fighting — and Brazilian jujitsu, I prioritize *sanda*, partly to promote it.

Today's *taolu* is virtually entirely aesthetic.

After the proliferation of firearms following the invention of gunpowder, *taolu* evolved into a visually dazzling folk performance art of choreographed acrobatic routines and stunning stunts, with and without weapons. Competitions are about rehearsing prescribed routines with precision.

Most masters even agree *taolu* wouldn't work in combat, but it sure looks cool!

Sanda is about literally beating an opponent. This applied fighting style, sometimes called "Chinese kickbox-



Jiang Haidong (right) of China beats Arnel Mandal from the Philippines to take gold at the 19th Asian Games' *wushu* men's 56 kg *sanda* final in Hangzhou in 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing", first began as a lethal full-contact combat system in dynastic China. It was adopted and modified by the Kuomintang and Red Army in the first half of the last century, and the People's Liberation Army still trains in it. This often-deadly sub-genre, which features chokes, elbow strikes and joint locks, is known as *junshi sanshou*, which translates as "military freestyle combat".

Following some Western boxers' deaths, China restricted combat

sports for a period in the mid-20th century, until 1979, immediately after the country initiated reform and opening-up.

In a video on the YouTube channel Fight Commentary Breakdowns, heavyweight champion and head coach of China's first Sanda National Team, Qian Renbiao, recalls: "Whenever Chinese martial artists competed abroad back then, we'd be completely destroyed. The question was: Why couldn't Chinese martial arts win? Why weren't they combat-effective?"

This prompted sports authorities to host a national convention in Beijing.

"They invited all the famous kung fu masters. The *changquan* (long-fist), tai chi and *mianquan* (cotton-fist) guys were all at this convention. Everyone had an opinion," recalls Qian, who also attended.

"After much research, we decided to combine the Chinese and non-Chinese techniques and the modern with the old. That became *yandong* (sports) *sanda*.

"We added boxing. The kicks were from kung fu, taekwondo, karate and even Muay Thai. Chinese martial arts have great takedown styles.

So, we codified 24 takedowns and how to do them within two seconds."

As one commentator put it, *sanda* is kung fu but, additionally, "what you'd see if you took really good boxing, really good taekwondo, some savate (French kickboxing), really good hybrid wrestling-judo, and you mashed them all together and created a system that's pretty good at everything and maybe not a specialist at any one thing".

Actually, most agree its signature strike-to-throw takedowns are unmatched.

Former fighter and coach of Beijing's first team Mei Huizhi recalls in a YouTube video that he and other experts systematically collected the most effective fighting moves from each Chinese style and combined these with international combat sports.

"*Sanda* is the son of traditional Chinese martial arts," he explains. By 1982, competition rules and techniques were codified. Sports *sanda* was born, and the first invitational tournament was staged in Beijing. Competitions and teams proliferated throughout the country and the world.

It's now a major sport in such international competitions as the Asian Games, and Dakar marks *wushu*'s debut as a Youth Olympics category. Many people expect it'll become an Olympic event since the International Olympic Committee has officially recognized the IWUF. Concurrently, *sanda* is winning more attention in the MMA world through the likes of UFC champion Zhang Weili and her ilk.

Crowds love its two-minute rounds, which compel frantic battles, fierce takedowns and the spectacle of hurling opponents out of the *leitai* — the raised platform without ropes that has been retained from bygone centuries.

I, too, adore these enough to, along with my kids, put on the gloves and step into the amateur ring, to do our small part to carry this Chinese combat sport a little bit farther around the world and further into the future.

Hopefully, it will soon become appreciated as "another" rather than "the other" kung fu.

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