



### Silent dancers

Octogenarian sculptor creates replicas of ceramic statuettes **READ, PAGE 6**



### Coming of age

Ji Li ceremony observed at NYC Dragon Boat Festival **WORLD, PAGE 4**

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2024

## Charm of culture put in spotlight

Heritage protection, inheritance stressed as relics exhibition opens in Liaoning

By LI YINGXUE and WU YONG in Shenyang

A key exhibition, *The Light of Civilization: Hongshan, Liangzhu and Chinese Civilization*, officially kicked off on Saturday in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning province, to celebrate China's Cultural and Natural Heritage Day.

The exhibition at Shenyang Museum puts 266 relics on display and offers visitors an opportunity to experience the distinctive charm and enduring legacy of early-stage Chinese civilization, dating back more than 5,000 years.

Hongshan culture, which was centered in present-day Liaoning province, and Liangzhu culture, with its core in East China's Zhejiang province, were crucial hubs for sophisticated societies in China that shared an admiration for jade. The exhibits have been chosen to demonstrate the harmonious coexistence of the heavens and the Earth, and to help people better understand the origins of civilizations.

The curtain was also raised on Saturday in Shenyang on an institute dedicated to the research of Hongshan culture. It was jointly launched by the National Cultural Heritage Administration and the Liaoning provincial government.

Cultural and Natural Heritage Day, observed each year on the second Saturday in June, serves as a vital platform for highlighting achievements in the protection and use of cultural relics and the preservation and inheritance of such heritage in China.

At the opening ceremony of the celebration, Li Qun, director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, emphasized the importance of nurturing the foundation of civilization.

He highlighted the need to prioritize protection and inheritance, and to enhance the preservation of historical and cultural heritage in urban and rural development.

"We must effectively build and utilize national cultural parks, and advance the fourth national cultural relics survey," Li said.

"We should make more efforts to

enhance the educational and research roles of museums and memorial halls, uncover the multifaceted value of cultural relics and heritage, and introduce more high-quality exhibitions and cultural treasures," he said.

Also during the opening ceremony, the National Cultural Heritage Administration unveiled 2023's top 10 high-quality development cases of cultural heritage, including the National Library of China's ancient book preservation and revitalization project and the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau's Great Wall national cultural park project.

The 2024 Outstanding Chinese Cultural Heritage New Media Projects and the list of the sixth group of the best cultural relics guardians were also announced. Additionally, the ceremony featured the issuance of the "National Treasure (Enlightenment and Foundation)" series of commemorative coins.

As part of the celebration events, industry experts and scholars gathered at a forum in Shenyang on Saturday to delve into novel strategies and approaches for safeguarding and perpetuating cultural treasures. Another symposium was held in the city on Friday to spotlight the innovative integration of new technology in the realm of cultural heritage preservation.

Shenyang became the first city in Northeast China to host the nation's main celebration activities for Cultural and Natural Heritage Day since its establishment in 2006.

Wang Xinwei, Party secretary of Shenyang, highlighted that Liaoning has nurtured a splendid historical culture, a profound industrial culture and a vibrant ethnic culture.

"We will focus on promoting exchange and mutual learning, advancing the joint application for World Heritage status for Hongshan cultural heritage, and maximizing the value of cultural relics as contemporary treasures, while deeply cultivating Liaoning's rich cultural landscape," Wang said.

Contact the writers at [liyngxue@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:liyngxue@chinadaily.com.cn)

## Head-to-head competition



Teams compete in a dragon boat race on Dongjiang Lake in Zixing, Hunan province, on Saturday. Such races have been organized across China as a tradition of Dragon Boat Festival, which falls on Monday. ZHU XIAORONG / XINHUA **See more, page 4**

### CULTURAL JOURNEY

## Enduring role of 'treasuring the past' hailed

By FANG AIQING and WU YONG in Jinzhou, Liaoning

The enduring legacies of ancient civilizations resonate with those seeking inspiration for the modern world, and Northeast China's Liaoning province appears to be an ideal starting point for such cultural exploration.

The captivating charm of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Liaoning, historically an intersecting point of fishing and hunting, agricultural and nomadic cultures, was demonstrated on Sunday at the Vision China event in Jinzhou, Liaoning.

Jointly organized by China Daily and the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Liaoning Provincial Committee, the event gathered archaeologists, cultural scholars and practitioners from home and abroad, as well as foreign youth representatives in China, to share their experiences and insights under the theme



Qu Yingpu



Liu Huiyan



Liu Kewu



Chang Shana



Lang Lang



Marcella Festa



Zhu Yong



Steve Brown



Zhong Lina



Erik Nilsson

"Treasuring the Past, Enriching the Future?"

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, noted that the event served as a concrete manifestation of thoroughly promoting and implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Culture.

Qu listed some of Liaoning's

well-known unearthed artifacts and relics sites, as well as industrial achievements since the founding of New China in 1949, all the way through to the current time, when the fast-changing traditional industrial area is vigorously developing new quality productive forces. He noted that all of these

demonstrate the five prominent features of Chinese civilization that President Xi Jinping has summarized, namely consistency, originality, uniformity, inclusiveness and peacefulness.

"Against the backdrop of an era where changes on a scale unseen in a century are unfolding at an accelerated pace, we need to tell good stories of China and the Chinese civilization, as well as the glorious chapter of the Chinese path to modernization, to the world, on the basis of vivid practices and diversified cultural heritage on this land, including Liaoning," he said.

Liu Huiyan, head of the publicity department of the CPC Liaoning Provincial Committee, said that revitalization of culture — in Liaoning's case a blending of numerous historical legacies and revolutionary and industrial cultural resources — is an essential aspect of the province's endeavor for comprehensive revitalization.

See *Vision*, page 2

## Saudis join intl digital currency project

By ZHENG YIRAN and ZHOU LANXU

Saudi Arabia has joined Project mBridge — a cross-border platform for experimenting with central bank digital currencies for international trade — as a full participant, which experts said will add resilience to global trade by facilitating renminbi settlement for bulk commodities trade.

Aiming to construct a robust and innovative cross-border payment infrastructure, the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA), said recently that it has joined the mBridge project as a participant in the project's minimum viable product platform.

Project mBridge resulted from collaboration starting in 2021 between the Bank for International Settlements' innovation arm, the Bank of Thailand, the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates, the Digital Currency Institute of the People's Bank of China, and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority.

The mBridge project has now reached the minimum viable product stage, inviting private sector enterprises to propose new solutions that help develop the platform and showcase all of its potential, according to an announcement by the Bank for International Settlements.

Experts said that entering the minimum viable product stage means that mBridge is now available to commercial banks in participating members' areas of jurisdiction for cross-border payment use, marking a breakthrough in facilitation of cross-border payments using central bank digital currencies.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said: "Digital renminbi is an integral part of the global currency system. Including digital renminbi in the settlement of oil trade between China and Saudi Arabia would be beneficial for all parties. For Saudi Arabia, the implementation of renminbi set-

tlement in cross-border trade would optimize the structure of its settlement currency."

Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, said that as Saudi Arabia is a country rich in oil resources, its possible adoption of digital renminbi for oil trade settlement would "greatly promote the convenience and efficiency of bilateral trade."

"Specifically, the immediacy of digital renminbi settlement will make transactions quicker, reducing intermediate links and costs," Zhan said.

"In addition, using digital renminbi settlement can help Saudi Arabia avoid risks caused by fluctuations in the US dollar exchange rate and ensure the stability of trade returns," he added.

According to Zhou, the senior researcher, "The trade of oil, an important part of bulk commodities, has a significant impact on global trade."

See *Project*, page 2



www.chinadailyglobal.com  
A member of ANN China Daily Global ©2024 All Rights Reserved  
Newsstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1 UK 1.1€ EU 1€ Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 THB; Philippines 120 PHP; Myanmar 2000 Kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

## JOURNEYS OF DISCOVERY

Educational tours are surging in popularity, especially among younger travelers

By YANG FEIYUE [yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn)

Yao Xinguo recently landed the sweet gig of sharing his beloved *zongzi* (rice dumpling) techniques with visitors to a new intangible cultural heritage museum.

The museum was opened on May 8 by Wufangzhai, a century-old *zongzi* brand based in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province.

Yao first walks the visitors, mostly families with children, through the history and culture of traditional *zongzi*-making before demonstrating how to wrap the glutinous rice with bamboo leaves.

Two green leaves flutter between his deft fingers, and, in no time, a plump *zongzi* takes shape.

Fifteen families with children signed up for the tour the first day.

The children watched intently, eager to give it a try themselves.

"One hand should hold the leaves, while the other pushes them up. Just a pinch and a fold will do," says Yao, who has been making the traditional specialty for four decades.

The children could see how the different stuffings were made from scratch and how the rice was processed before being boiled. They also tried their hands at wrapping them.

"The experience will show them how *zongzi* are created and help them better appreciate the essence of the traditional craft," Yao says.

The museum has received many tour bookings and inquiries, says Xu Wei, deputy general manager of Wufangzhai.

She expected over 10,000 visitors during the Dragon Boat Festival, which is a traditional time to enjoy these snacks.

See *Exploration*, page 3

## NATION

# Xiamen lauded for marine preservation

Foreign officials impressed during visit to celebrate World Oceans Day

By LI MENGHAN in Beijing and HU MEIDONG in Xiamen

Foreign officials have lauded Xiamen as the epitome of marine ecological preservation and underscored the significance of collaborative international efforts to protect the oceans.

"Back in the 1980s, the situation was absolutely different. What is happening now means that the (Chinese) government has actually made great efforts to restore ecosystems of that area and continued to protect the biodiversity of that area," Raj Kumar, Asia regional membership manager at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, said following a visit to Yundang Lake in Xiamen, a coastal city in Fujian province, on Friday.

China's success in "reversing the situation" could be promoted internationally and help spur the concerted efforts that are required to address global challenges, he added.

Kumar, together with representatives from international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Economic Forum, as well as officials from countries including Norway and Greece, embarked on a tour of Xiamen as part of activities celebrating World Oceans Day, which fell on Saturday this year.

In Xiamen, the once bustling natural harbor of Yundang Lake deteriorated due to land reclamation, embankment construction and a growing population in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Realizing the severity of the situation, the local government rolled out a comprehensive set of measures to restore the lake in 1988, including shutting down or relocating nearby industrial plants, dredging and rebuilding the banks, and channeling seawater into the lake to revitalize the water body. Nearly 40 years of governance has yielded good results.

"This is a very hard project, and it is even harder to keep it alive and sustain it. It requires the active involvement and engagement of each and every citizen," said Petros Varelidis, secretary general for the natural environment and waters at the Greek Ministry of Environment and Energy, adding that he was impressed with the way Xiamen residents have accepted, respected and supported the government's endeavors to bring nature back to the city.

Hailing from a maritime nation, Varelidis emphasized that ocean management requires the collective efforts of different stakeholders, from individual residents' actions to global cooperation.

"We need to exchange good practices and learn from each other," he said.

He cited a memorandum of understanding signed in April between the Hellenic Center for Marine Research and the Third Institute of Oceanography of China's Ministry of Natural Resources. The two sides plan to work in areas such as the conservation of underwater cultural relics,

exploitation and utilization of biological resources, ecological aquaculture, and combating harmful algal blooms and climate change. They also agreed to exchange marine monitoring data to gain a more comprehensive grasp of the state of the world's oceans.

"The ocean delivers great opportunities for value creation and prosperity for our people," said Hege Araldsen, the Norwegian consul general in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. "At the same time, we know that marine life and ecosystems are under pressure."

She said the oceans are intertwined with two critical global challenges — climate change and pollution. The issue of marine plastic waste is a growing concern, while industries associated with the oceans, such as shipping, emit substantial amounts of greenhouse gases, potentially endangering marine biodiversity, ocean ecosystems and human well-being.

**"We need to build an ocean economy which puts sustainability at the center."**

Hege Araldsen, the Norwegian consul general in Guangzhou, Guangdong province

"We need to build an ocean economy which puts sustainability at the center," Araldsen said.

Norway's Minister of Climate and Environment, Andreas Bjelland Eriksen, visited Xiamen University on Friday for a collaborative project between China and Norway focusing on sustainable ocean management.

The goal is to develop an effective and practical policy that considers waste management and maritime industries comprehensively, with the goal of furthering green ocean development.

While underscoring the significance of ocean protection, Beate Trankmann, the UNDP's resident representative in China, said a blue economy is also important globally.

"The preservation of our oceans should not be seen as coming at a cost of economic growth," Trankmann said.

She added that ocean resources now account for 7 percent of global GDP, and it is crucial for all nations to collaborate and promote sustainable development.

"Nature does not have geographic boundaries," she said. "Strengthening cooperation among different sectors and regions to coordinate multinational efforts across both land and sea is vital to maximize income."

Zhong Wanyu contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at limenghan@chinadaily.com.cn



Divers transplant coral in the waters near Fenjiezhou Island, in Hainan province's Lingshui Li autonomous county, on Saturday, which was World Oceans Day and also National Oceans Awareness Day. To mark the day and promote the protection of the marine environment, staff members from the island's tourism sector and diving enthusiasts helped lay the foundation for an offshore reef. YANG GUANYU / XINHUA

## Waterfall wonderment



Tourists view the Hukou Waterfall in Jixian county, Shanxi province, on Saturday. An increase in rainfall upstream has seen the volume of water in the Yellow River at the falls increase significantly in recent days, with the spectacular scene attracting numerous visitors.

LYU GUIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Vision: Mutual learning enhanced

From page 1

The province is seeking coordinated development of culture, sports and tourism, and has garnered unprecedented vitality and opportunities in cultural undertakings and industries, he added.

Party Secretary of Jinzhou Liu Kewu said the Vision China event was, for Jinzhou, a cultural feast that enhanced mutual learning and exchanges, a precious chance to promote the city, and an opportunity to provide strong support for revitalization and development.

On his inspection to Jinzhou in August 2022, President Xi praised it as a heroic city with a distinctive cultural temperament and profound historical and cultural heritage, and he expressed confidence in and expectations for the comprehensive revitalization of Northeast China in the new era.

Liu Kewu said that the city spares no effort to inherit its cultural treasures and prolong its historical lineage, and expressed hope for enhancing friendship and cooperation with experts from all walks of life.

Chang Shana, 93, a respected scholar of Dunhuang arts as well as daughter of Chang Shuhong, founding director of the Dunhuang Academy, sent video congratulations to the event, as did pianist Lang Lang, who was born and raised in Liaoning's provincial capital, Shenyang.

In her keynote speech, Marcella Festa, associate professor at the School of Cultural Heritage at Northwest University in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, highlighted the role of archaeology in enhancing

the understanding of human history, bridging cultural gaps and educating future generations.

She said that recent archaeological efforts have revealed the presence of advanced civilizations beyond the Central Plains of China and demonstrated long-standing connections between various regions of Asia since prehistoric times. With projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, more about these ancient societies is expected to be uncovered.

While speaking of Hongshan culture, a key Neolithic culture known for its exquisite jade ware and emerging ritual traditions that encompassed today's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Liaoning and Hebei provinces, Festa said she found it particularly intriguing that the Hongshan people relied on a mix of farming, hunting and fishing for subsistence, which has challenged the conventional belief that only agricultural societies could produce Neolithic cultures.

Zhu Yong, director of the Palace Museum Cultural Communication Research Institute in Beijing, expounded on the name of his home province: "Liao" represents vastness, openness and entrepreneurship, while "ning" embodies the inner pursuit of peace, harmony and tranquility.

This land of cultural integration has shaped the cultural ethos of the people as dynamic, open-minded and enthusiastic, and its culture shines as an outstanding example of the prominent features of Chinese civilization, he said.

Zhong Lina, dean of the Institute for Tourism and Culture Planning at Beijing International Studies

University, analyzed Liaoning's cultural richness, noting that a visit to Liaoning enables domestic and foreign tourists to witness a more vivid image of China. This richness stems from Liaoning's pivotal location, connecting Northeast China with the Central Plains region and linking Northeast Asia with inland regions of Eurasia, and where nomadic and agrarian cultures converged.

While celebrating the past treasures, Steve Brown, senior research fellow at the University of Canberra's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, also called for attention to everyday family heritage and stories that bear importance for modern society, and Erik Nilsson, an expat at China Daily, emphasized the value of a personal touch that cannot be replaced by digital technology in conserving culture and carrying the heritage through the coming decades.

Four youth representatives, from Russia, Hungary, Belarus and Indonesia, shared their understanding of the inheritance, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage during a following roundtable dialogue.

"Vision China" is a series that China Daily launched in 2018. Held at home and abroad and through online platforms, the events serve as a bridge for dialogues between China and the world by inviting well-known Chinese and overseas opinion leaders to give talks and share their ideas. The event in Jinzhou was the 30th edition of the series.

Contact the writers at jiangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

## Bulletin lists ecological advances in Xizang

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQIONG in Lhasa

The Xizang autonomous region remains one of the best places in the world in terms of ecological quality, according to its 2023 Environmental Bulletin, which was released on Wednesday.

Tsering Gyatso, deputy head of the region's ecology and environment department, said that the water quality in the region's major rivers and lakes was good last year and met the quality standards set by the central government.

"Water quality in the region's key rivers — the Yarlung Zangbo, Lancang, Jinsha and Nujiang — has met Class I surface water quality standards," Tsering Gyatso said, adding that the Rongphu River, near Qomolangma, the world's tallest mountain, which is known as Mount Everest in the West, also met that standard.

Xizang has completed surveys of 50,140 glaciers and 33,518 glacial lakes, and has designated 33 river source protection zones in eight major water systems.

"Strict ecological protection measures have resulted in good water quality," Tsering Gyatso said. "At the same time, Xizang has strengthened biodiversity conservation efforts, leading to significant recovery in the wild population numbers of important species, with new species continuously breaking records."

The population of black-necked cranes, a first-class national protection species in China, has increased from fewer than 3,000 three decades ago to over 10,000, while the number of Tibetan antelopes has increased to more than 300,000.

"The flagship species of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Bengal tiger, has been captured on camera multiple times in the wild, while the black stork, known as the 'giant panda of birds', has also been discovered in the city of Shigatse," he said.

The bulletin said the region had 47 natural reserves by the end of last year, covering a combined land area of more than 412,200 square kilometers — more than a third of the land area in Xizang.

The department said that new energy vehicles now account for 85.3 percent of the region's buses as a result of efforts to promote the use of NEVs. Meanwhile, the proportion of nonfossil energy in total energy consumption has exceeded 50 percent, ranking at the top nationwide.

Contact the writers at palden\_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

## Project: Observing members sign on

From page 1

"Digital renminbi settlement in oil trade would improve the resilience of global trade, reduce global economic fluctuations, and strengthen the resilience of economic development in various global parties," Zhou added.

While the Saudi Central Bank is joining as the sixth "full participant" in mBridge, the Bank for International Settlements said that more than 26 entities, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Central Bank, have signed on as observing members.

"In the context of geopolitical conflicts, some countries around the world are using settlement currencies to achieve their political goals, which still inserts strong economic disruptions into the global economy. With the implementation of projects such as mBridge, participants are

**"Digital renminbi settlement in oil trade would improve the resilience of global trade."**

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation

seeking cooperation between each other," Zhou said.

"Digital renminbi settlement would help reduce differences in trade standards, increase the convenience of trade and investment, and establish necessary institutional guarantees. This is crucial for continuously improving the global financial system, strengthening financial support

for the real economy, and promoting global economic recovery," the senior researcher added.

Jin Ding, a researcher and academic adviser to the China Finance 40 Forum and executive vice-chairman of the academic committee of the China Institute for Innovation and Development Strategy, said that over the next 15 years, with the gradual implementation of renminbi settlement in cross-border trade as well as in bulk commodity imports and Chinese outbound investments, the internationalization of the renminbi is expected to see major progress.

"It has been forecast that the proportion of renminbi in payment settlements will increase by one percentage point each year, reaching around 17 percent by 2035," Jin told China Daily in an earlier interview.

Contact the writers at zhengqirun@chinadaily.com.cn

## COVER

## Exploration: Turning trips into knowledge

From page 1

"People from educational tour operators, institutes of higher learning and trade unions have shown great interest," Xu says.

Other local cultural experiences, including encounters with farmers' paintings and silk embroidery, will be developed to satisfy the growing enthusiasm for educational tours, she adds.

"We will hold various intangible cultural heritage activities and exhibitions, and invite art masters and cultural inheritors to offer on-site lectures, so visitors can gain deeper understandings and experiences of intangible cultural heritage, and feel the unique charm of local folk culture," Xu says.

The new museum's popularity is thanks to the surging public enthusiasm for educational tours. Many tour operators have reported increases in orders over the same period of 2019.

The growth rate is significant, and most educational tours last two to five days, says Miao Qing, deputy general manager of Huana International Travel Service, based in East China's Shandong province.

The province's destinations featuring Confucius and Yellow River elements are popular, Miao says.

Beijing, Shaanxi province's capital, Xi'an, and Jiangsu province's capital, Nanjing, are among the most alluring destinations, Miao adds.

Educational tours proved a hit during the recent May Day holiday from May 1 to 5.

Lin Guodong from Shanghai recently made his third trip to North China's Shanxi province to see ancient buildings. The province boasts several Tang Dynasty (618-907) wooden structures, and more than 500 wooden structures from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) or earlier.

"I have loved history since I was a kid. Compared to reading, educational tours allow me to experience ancient architecture in a multidimensional way and systematize my historical knowledge," Lin says.

He is among a growing number of travelers who take a special shine to historical architecture and have trekked long distances to see them up close.

During the May Day holiday, Yingxian county in the north of Shanxi packed in travelers, who were drawn to its famous wooden pagoda that boasts a history of nearly 1,000 years. The county saw homestay bookings surge by 180 percent year-on-year during the period, the online service platform Meituan reports.

Yang Jie, who's from Shanxi's capital, Taiyuan, loves architecture so much that he quit his job and launched his own educational tour business focusing on ancient Chinese architectural history and culture in 2017.

"As the level of public education has improved, people's affinity for culture has also grown stronger," Yang says.



**Clockwise from top:** Visitors learn about making *zongzi* at the intangible cultural heritage museum recently opened by Wufangzhai, a century-old brand, in Jiaxing, Zhejiang. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Tea farmers show children how to collect tea leaves at a garden in Zaozhuang, Shandong, in April. SUN ZHONGZHE / FOR CHINA DAILY Elementary school students tour the ancient buildings in Jiaxing in April. HUANG ZONGZHI / XINHUA On May 15, students participate in making *xuanzhi* paper where the paper was first invented in Anhui province. DING SHAOLIN / XINHUA In a museum in Erdes, Inner Mongolia, pupils interact with an elk specimen in April. WANG ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

His business took off immediately. He believes he owes this to the national strategy of developing cultural prowess.

"This has led to many people visiting major museums and developing

cultural pride. A lot of people are now paying attention to traditional aesthetics, with ancient architecture being a big attraction," Yang says.

His company now serves nearly

5,000 visitors a year.

"Over 30 percent of the tourists are younger than 30," he says.

"It's evident that an increasing number of young people are interested in ancient architecture, and

there is also a surging demand for professional explanations."

Yang and his team have offered tours at thousands of ancient structures nationwide.

"They are all key national cul-

tural relics under protection. Some are known for their unique characteristics, and some are associated with historical figures," Yang says.

"We have studied their histories and features, and sorted them chronologically, which has been a huge amount of work."

A professional team offers travelers detailed explanations of murals and painted sculptures.

And such on-site activities as recitations of ancient poems depicting the architecture in question will be staged for visitors.

"We have also prepared models and teaching tools to engage our customers in discovering the ingenious touch behind the design and construction of those ancient buildings," Yang says.

He has prepared 16 historical architecture-study routes for the Dragon Boat Festival. Bookings for these were brisk.

Corporate data provider Qichacha reports that about 1,000 new educational tour-related enterprises were registered in the first four months of 2024. There are currently 35,600 related enterprises in China, the tracker reports.

According to a 2023 report on China's educational tours by the Guangdong province-based market consultancy iMedia Research, the sector exceeded 90 billion yuan (\$12.4 billion) in China in 2022.

It was expected to reach 146.9 billion yuan in 2023, with a year-on-year growth of 61.6 percent, and hit 242.2 billion yuan by 2026, the report says.

The iMedia report reveals that primary and middle school and college students are the main consumers.

Most seek to broaden their vision and experience diverse cultures through those tours, and generally prefer short-term trips in China or in neighboring countries and regions. Educational tours ranging from 1,000 to 6,000 yuan are preferred, the report shows.

It predicts that homogenized educational travel services will face increasing difficulties in meeting consumer demand and that outstanding players from various fields, such as technology, manufacturing, energy and the internet, will enter this vast market, contributing to diversification.

"The rise of study tours reflects parents' concerns about their children and changes in family consumption patterns," says Ma Lei, a senior officer with the tourism service provider, Joyu (Lv mama) Group.

Parents hope that the journey is not just about relaxing and enjoying scenery but also about what their children can learn and gain during the trip, he explains.

"Interpersonal relationships are more important in educational tours. After seeing landscapes and historical relics, children can truly benefit from further explanations, interactions and experiences," Ma says.

## Infotainment hits the road where wonder meets wanderlust

By YANG FEIYUE

Since spring, natural and historical destinations have been popular with domestic travelers seeking enjoyment and education.

More than 11,000 students in over 70 educational tour groups from around the country, including such places as Beijing, and Guangdong and Sichuan provinces, arrived in Dunhuang in the first four months of the year.

They accounted for just over one-third of all travelers to the city in northwestern China's Gansu province, the local culture and tourism bureau reported.

Visiting the Mogao Caves, experiencing painted clay, drilling wood to make fire, and studying local history and culture are among the most popular learning experiences for students, according to the bureau.

Qu Ruoxi, a middle schooler from Beijing, appreciated sand bottle art during her trip to Dunhuang at the end of April. The genre features colored sand carefully layered inside a clear glass bottle to create intricate designs and images.

Under the teacher's guidance, she

meticulously drizzled grains into the bottle and then outlined them with a wire. Before long, a seagull appeared to soar above the yellow sand.

"The process of making sand bottle art is very interesting. There are both random and precise parts. I can use different colors, according to my own ideas, before outlining them to create a vivid piece of art," the girl explains.

More than 20 educational programs about local Silk Road culture and wilderness survival skills have been launched at the city's Yangguan Pass scenic area.

They are intended to enrich children's learning experiences, appreciation of ancient wisdom and cultivate kids' spirit of independence, cooperation, inquiry and practical abilities, says Wu Fengping, deputy curator of the Yangguan Museum.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and 10 related departments issued a guideline for promoting educational trips for primary and secondary schools. The guideline states that such trips are aimed at improving educational quality through experiential learning and



A student learns to paint a mural pattern at the international exhibition center in Dunhuang, Gansu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

study, based on research.

In the following years, many regions, including Dunhuang, started to introduce their own policies to boost the educational travel market. Since 2022, the city has launched a cultural study season that lasts from Dec 1 to March 31.

New learning tours with the

themes of culture, art, intangible cultural heritage, folk customs and natural science have been developed to satisfy the diverse learning needs of tourists of different ages, according to local authorities.

"We are making study tour programs one of our main focuses this year," says Wang Qi, a staff member

with a tour service provider in Dunhuang.

Special courses, such as mud painting, and Dunhuang music and dance, will be launched to immerse students in Dunhuang culture and enhance their artistic literacy, Wang adds.

In Shennongjia national park in North China's Hubei province, the pristine ecosystem, rich biodiversity, unique geological and climate conditions, and local customs make it an ideal destination for nature education.

At the park's geological science museum, augmented reality technology is integrated with other technologies, including simulated environments, 3D modeling and real-time video displays, to re-create grand scenes of geological movements millions of years ago.

The park has established multiple educational routes for primary and middle school students, such as those featuring bird watching and natural science popularization.

It has hired more than 50 science education staffers to offer guidance in multiple fields, including biodiversity, natural geography, geologi-

cal formations and environmental protection.

Additionally, it actively collaborates with universities and travel agencies, training and recruiting science education volunteers each year to jointly carry out educational activities.

More than 3,000 participants of educational tours visited last year. "In recent years, Shennongjia has used educational tours to fully showcase its biodiversity, geological features and natural resources, such as its flagship species, the golden snub-nosed monkey," says Tan Yuxuan, a tour guide at Shennongjia.

"Shennongjia's value as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site is highlighted by learning through tourism," Tan adds.

Shennongjia is planning to build a rare plants facility for scientific research, education and tourism.

Efforts will be made to turn Shennongjia into a national natural education classroom, stimulating more people to pay attention to and participate in popular science and education work, says Dai Guangming, deputy director of the park's administration.

# WORLD

## Israel's rescue raid kills 274 Palestinians

4 hostages saved while accompanying bombardment also injures nearly 700

GAZA/CAIRO — Israeli forces pounded central Gaza anew on Sunday, a day after killing 274 Palestinians during a hostage rescue raid, and tanks advanced further into areas of Rafah in a bid to seal off part of the southern city, according to residents and Hamas media.

Palestinians remained in shock over Saturday's death toll, the worst over a 24-hour period of the Palestine-Israel conflict for months that included many women and children, Palestinian medics said.

In an update on Sunday, Gaza's Health Ministry said 274 Palestinians were killed and 698 were injured when Israeli special force commandos stormed into the densely populated Nuseirat refugee camp to rescue four hostages held since October by Hamas militants.

"My child was crying, afraid of the sound of the plane firing at us," Hadeel Radwan, 32, said, recounting how they fled the intense combat as she carried her 7-month-old daughter.

"We all felt that we wouldn't survive," she told Agence France-Presse, condemning "this brutal occupation that will not let us live."

Israel's military said a special forces officer was killed in the exchange of fire with militants emerging from cover in residential blocks, and that it knew of "under 100" Palestinians killed, though not knowing how many of them were militants or civilians.

Egypt condemned "with the strongest terms" Israel's attacks on the Nuseirat camp, with its Foreign Ministry calling it a "flagrant violation of all rules of international law". Jordan also condemned it.

The rescued hostages were taken to hospital for medical checks and were in good health, the Israeli military said. They were all kidnapped during the attack by Hamas militants on Israeli towns and villages

near Gaza on Oct 7, which precipitated the devastating offensive on Gaza.

Hamas' raid killed some 1,200 people, according to Israeli authorities, and Israel's retaliatory bombardment and assault of Gaza has killed at least 37,084 Palestinians, Gaza's Health Ministry said on Sunday.

Abu Ubaida, spokesperson for Hamas' armed al-Qassam Brigades, said some hostages were killed during the rescue operation.

"It's a blatant lie," Israeli military spokesman Peter Lerner told CNN, refuting the claim.

On Sunday, three Palestinians were killed and several hurt in an Israeli airstrike on a house in Bureij in the central Gaza Strip, while tanks shelled parts of nearby Maghazi and Nuseirat. All are built-up, historical refugee camps.

The Israeli military said in a statement its forces were continuing operations east of Bureij and the city of Deir al-Balah in the center of the coastal enclave, killing several Palestinian gunmen and destroying militant infrastructure.

Israel sent forces into Rafah last month in what it called a mission to wipe out Hamas' last intact combat units after eight months of conflict in which Israeli forces have bombed much of the rest of Gaza to rubble while advancing against fierce resistance.

Israeli tank forces have since seized Gaza's entire border strip with Egypt running through Rafah to the Mediterranean coast and invaded several districts of the city, prompting about 1 million displaced people who had been sheltering in Rafah to flee elsewhere.

On Sunday, tanks advanced into two new districts in an apparent effort to complete the encirclement of the eastern side of Rafah, touching off clashes with dug-in Hamas-led armed groups, according to



Top: Clockwise from top left: Former hostages Almog Meir Jan, Noa Argamani, Andrey Kozlov and Shlomi Ziv arrive in Ramat Gan, Israel, on Saturday after being rescued. ISRAELI ARMY VIA REUTERS  
Above: Pro-Palestinian demonstrators rally near the White House in Washington on Saturday to protest against Israel's military campaign in Gaza. MANDEL NGAN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

residents trapped in their homes.

Palestinian medics said an Israeli airstrike on a house in Tel Al-Sultan in western Rafah killed two people.

The conflict in Gaza has destabilized the wider Middle East. Four people were killed on Saturday in Israeli airstrikes in southern Lebanon, Lebanese military sources told Xinhua News Agency.

The sources said an Israeli warplane targeted a house in Houla village, killing two Hezbollah members and injuring three civilians. Another Israeli airstrike targeted a commer-

cial market in Aitaroun village with two air-to-surface missiles, killing two civilians and wounding two others.

Hezbollah said it responded to Israel's raids on Saturday with several attacks in the occupied Shebaa Farms and a number of Israeli sites. In Washington, thousands of protesters held a "red line" rally near the White House on Saturday, voicing anger at what they said is US President Joe Biden's tolerance of Israel's bloody military campaign in the Gaza Strip.

The White House said last month

that a deadly Israeli strike in Rafah did not cross a "red line" that Biden had seemingly set two months earlier when asked about a potential invasion of the southern Gazan city.

"I no longer believe any of the words that Joe Biden says," protester Zaid Mahdawi from Virginia, whose parents are Palestinian, told Agence France-Presse.

"This 'red line' in his rhetoric is rubbish ... it shows his hypocrisy and his cowardice."

AGENCIES—XINHUA

### Briefly

#### EAST EUROPE Ukrainian attacks kill 28 in Kherson, Lugansk

Regional officials in Kherson and Lugansk said Ukrainian attacks left at least 28 people dead as Russia and Ukraine continued to exchange drone attacks overnight into Saturday. A Ukrainian attack on Friday on Sadove town in Kherson killed 22 and wounded 15, Governor Vladimir Saldo said. In Lugansk, regional authorities said on Saturday two more bodies had been pulled from the rubble following Friday's Ukrainian attack, bringing the death toll to six. Officials declared Saturday a day of mourning in Lugansk, and public events would be similarly canceled on Sunday and Monday in Kherson. Also on Saturday, Russian shelling and aerial attacks killed two people in southern and northeastern Ukraine, authorities said.

#### MIDDLE EAST Bahrain requests to normalize ties with Iran

An Iranian official said on Friday that Bahrain has requested to normalize relations with Iran after an eight-year diplomatic freeze. In a televised interview, Mohammad Jamshidi, the Iranian president's deputy chief of staff for political affairs, said Bahrain had sent a direct message to Iran asking for the resumption of bilateral relations and made the same request in a meeting with Russia. In 2016, Bahrain severed diplomatic ties with Iran following Saudi Arabia's decision to cut ties with Tehran. In March last year, Saudi Arabia and Iran reached a groundbreaking agreement in China to restore diplomatic ties and reopen their embassies and missions. A month later, the two countries formally declared the resumption of diplomatic relations with immediate effect.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

### CHINA DAILY USA

#### NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

twitter.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by

China Daily Distribution Corp. on

behalf of China Daily Beijing, China.

Additional information is on file with

the Department of Justice, Washington,

DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San

Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA

TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is

published daily except weekends by

China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway,

Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York,

NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes

to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway,

Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No. 1348

## Traditions celebrated at Dragon Boat Festival

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Under the watchful eyes of guests, Brenda He slowly walked to the center of the stage. Dressed in a turquoise *hanfu* and gradually adorning her head with ornate hairpieces, she completed her coming-of-age ceremony, witnessed by the community she serves.

For her, the event on Saturday was special, as she celebrated the big day with her family and friends in a traditional Chinese Han-style ceremony, coinciding with the Chinese traditional Dragon Boat Festival.

"I really like being a part of the Chinese culture. Honestly, this is my first time working with a *hanfu*, but they've always been part of our event, and I'm grateful for that," the 17-year-old told China Daily. "That's my heritage."

"I plan to wear my *hanfu* for my high school graduation that's in a few weeks," she said. Brenda said *hanfu* is good for big days like graduation and becoming an adult. "*Hanfu* is something that not everyone knows about, so we set up the *hanfu* club to spread our culture more," she said.

As a Chinese American, Brenda has served as a student volunteer for



Brenda He is wearing *hanfu* and is adorned with ornate hairpieces on her head while celebrating her coming-of-age ceremony on Saturday at the Glow Cultural Center in Flushing, Queens, New York, where she has served as a community volunteer for three years. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

three years, promoting Chinese art and culture in the Queens borough of New York City. She is also one of the recipients of the 2020 President's Community Service Award.

"I really love working with the community and with my volunteers," she said. "They're also my motivation to keep going."

Born and raised in the United States, Brenda said she was not that "cultured" at the beginning, but

found that serving the Chinese community is also a path for her to learn about herself, her identity and her community.

"I finally saw our volunteer go through this traditional Chinese coming-of-age ceremony. It means she's taking on a new role, no longer a kid, but someone with more social responsibilities," said Ming Liang, director of programs at the Glow Cultural Center in Flushing, Queens,

where the event was held.

"I hope that children of Chinese descent can revive this coming-of-age ceremony for girls, known as the *Ji Li*, even while living abroad. Also, boys can experience their own *Guan Li* adulthood ceremony," she said. "I want to see this tradition carried on and increasingly observed overseas."

Ming thanked Brenda for her service to the community center. As part of the ceremony, Brenda received a calligraphy scroll with her "official" Chinese name, "Jiayou," chosen by the community for her. She is the third daughter in her family, but the elder who named her siblings unfortunately passed away before she was born.

"It's part of my family name, and there is also a symbolic meaning of 'you,'" she added. The word "you" means "to protect," which is a good blessing before her journey as a pre-med student at Boston University.

US-born Chinese children also performed a self-directed minidrama celebrating the Dragon Boat Festival, telling the tale of Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), whom Chinese people commemorate on this day.

The festival, also called *Duanwu*, falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, which is Monday.

"I thought the children didn't understand our culture, but with our community efforts, we gradually realized that they actually enjoy these activities very much," Ming said. "I'm glad to see everyone deeply attracted to these various aspects of Chinese traditional culture!"

"I really like working here because, even though I might not be part of the Asian community, I feel very welcome," said Brandon Cabrera Gonzalez, an 18-year-old volunteer.

"I like Chinese culture, and I really love it because I've been to many of the events, like the Lunar New Year, the Fall Festival (Mid-Autumn Festival) and the Dragon Boat Festival," he said. "It's very fun to see different aspects of their music, art and food."

The Glow Cultural Center also had small games and crafts as part of the Dragon Boat Festival for families and all ages, such as making *zongzi* (sticky rice dumplings), embroidering five-color lucky bracelets, and shooting down the "five poisons".

"Whether it's these diverse folk games or folk crafts, they are all ways in which people have accumulated a longing for beauty and an expression of a good life throughout our thousand-year heritage of Chinese culture," Ming said. "Bringing these small games, which carry some traditional Chinese wisdom, into our lives has both festival commemorative significance and beautifully adorns everyday life."

## UN passes China's proposal for civilizational dialogue

UNITED NATIONS — The 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted on Friday a China-proposed resolution to establish the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations.

The resolution states that "all civilizational achievements are 'the collective heritage of humankind'." It advocates respecting the diversity of civilizations, emphasizing "the crucial role

of dialogue" among civilizations in maintaining world peace, promoting common development, enhancing human well-being and achieving collective progress.

The resolution calls for "equal dialogue and mutual respect" among different civilizations, fully reflecting the core essence of the Global Civilization Initiative. It decides to designate June 10 as the International Day for

Dialogue among Civilizations.

Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN, introduced the draft resolution at the General Assembly plenary session, stating that in the current context of multiple interlocking crises and challenges, the world has entered a new period of instability and change, placing human society at the cross-roads of history once again. Against this backdrop, China

proposed the establishment of the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations to fully leverage the importance of civilizational dialogue in "eliminating discrimination and prejudice, enhancing understanding and trust, promoting people-to-people connectivity and strengthening solidarity and cooperation." The initiative injects positive energy into the global effort to address common challenges.

It demonstrates "China's firm support for multilateralism" and the work of the UN, highlighting China's responsibility as a major country in a century of unprecedented changes, Fu said.

The resolution invites all member states and UN agencies to commemorate the International Day. China encourages all stakeholders to organize events and activities in observance of the International Day guided by the resolution.

In a news interview after the adoption of the resolution, Fu stressed that

China put forward the Global Civilization Initiative in March last year, making a sincere appeal to the world for in-depth exchanges and mutual understanding among civilizations and the progress of human society.

The international community has warmly received the initiative, he said, noting that the broad support for the establishment of the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations fully demonstrates that the GCI is in line with the trend and needs of the times.

XINHUA

# PEOPLE



From left: A photograph taken sometime around 1936 featuring J.R.R. Tolkien and his four children is included in the Chinese version of the biography; Tolkien (fourth from right in the third row) poses with 14 other members of the first football team of King Edward's School, Birmingham, England, in a photograph taken sometime in 1909 or 1910; in the house, "L-shaped and of pale brick", on Northmoor Road in North Oxford, where the Tolkiens spent 20 years of their lives, starting 1926. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## What these cards say about Tolkien

A new Chinese translation of the author's biography comes with an innovative idea involving a script rediscovered from ancient books and telling the reader how the writer himself was a Hobbit, **Yang Yang** reports.

The Chinese translation of Humphrey Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, published recently by Horizon Books, comes with an unusual set of five cards showcasing an ingenious transcultural design that will be of interest to many readers, at home and abroad.

The cards bear a short self-introduction of Tolkien, English writer and the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The introduction is curiously written in an ancient Chinese calligraphy style. It almost looks like it was photocopied from ancient Chinese books.

Last year, when Dai Guqiu and Mu Dong were working on the Chinese translation of the book, Dai shared with Mu his idea of inserting, in the books, a set of cards, on which they could print a brief introduction of Tolkien in ancient Chinese style.

"Dai has a hobby of collecting photographs from ancient books," says Mu, the 38-year-old translator of the book. "He said we could use ancient Chinese script to write a short introduction of Tolkien and he would find all the ancient Chinese characters of the script from his collection, so that in the end we can put together an entire passage in a style taken from ancient books."

Dai, a Tolkien fan, also revised the translation.

Mu was assigned the task of writing Tolkien's profile. "I was thinking how to write it and it occurred to me that I had come across Tolkien's very famous self-introduction, where he says he was actually a Hobbit, and he liked English cuisine and non-mechanized farmland," he says.

Mu "translated" this self-introduction into ancient Chinese, by referring to *Wuku Xiansheng Zhuan* (The Biography of Master Five Willows), a self-introduction by Tao Yuanming, a poet in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), because he thinks "their spirit and temperament are somewhat similar."

Dai was able to find most of the characters of the ancient Chinese script in photographs of the best-preserved copy of *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, which was engraved and printed in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). But there are several characters that Dai couldn't find in the copy. To keep the style uniform, instead of trying to look for the characters in other versions, Dai took parts from different characters in the same copy of the book to create the ancient Chinese characters including *yan* (smoke or cigarette) in *yandou* (pipe), which did not exist during the Song Dynasty.

After Dai put all the characters on one page, the great visual effect it had urged him to create a version in the style of Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) inscriptions. When he posted it online, it became popular in no time, impressing even calligraphy enthusiasts.

"A lot of people said that since we want to promote and carry forward our traditional culture, it seems to be a right way," Mu says.

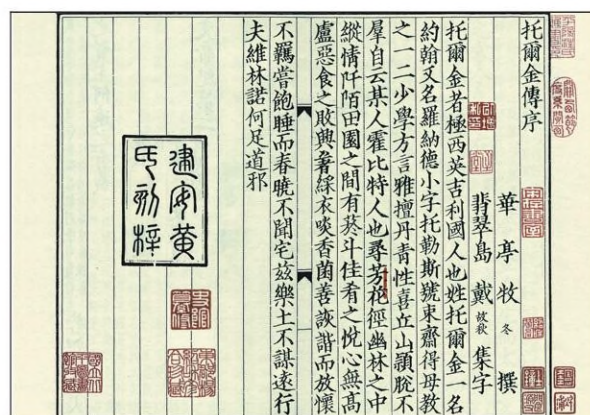
Since there were versions in classic Han and Song styles, it seemed necessary to have a classic Tang Dynasty (618-907) version, so Dai referred to the Buddhist manuscripts found in Mogao Caves in Dunhuang to create a version in classic Tang style. To imitate the signatures of those eminent monks, the two had to invent a lot



Translator of the biography, Mu Dong (middle), editor Lu Ming (left) from the publisher Horizon Books, and Fan Ye, associate professor of Spanish language and literature from Peking University, attend a book event in Beijing in April.



The cover of the card set (left) and the short self-introduction of Tolkien created in classic Song Dynasty style by Dai Guqiu and Mu Dong, which has become a rage online.



of quaint names.

When they posted their creations on international forums for Tolkien fans, they received compliments there too.

Mu says that this set of cards is one of the highlights of the Chinese version of the biography. Another noteworthy content is the more than 100-page annotations they added to the book.

Before translating the book, Mu read the encyclopedic three-volume *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* by Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull. The first volume focuses on Tolkien's life and the remaining two on his creation. Carpenter's biography of Tolkien was first published in 1977, but the last volume of the set came out in 2016, which means it includes many new opinions and discoveries, Mu says.

Based on more research and with the help of Dai, who was familiar with the first several volumes of *The Complete History of Middle-earth*, Mu added the annotations to the original text to provide new and comprehensive information to Chinese readers.

For example, he gives details about the Hobbit party Tolkien organized during a trip to the Neth-



Left: A portrait of Tolkien when he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters by University of Oxford in June 1972.

Right: The book cover of the Chinese translation of *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* written by Humphrey Carpenter, translated by Mu Dong and proofread by Dai Guqiu.

This biography is very engaging because the writer has described an incredibly vivid Tolkien, which lets us see clearly the connection between his daily life and experience and his creation."

Norloth, Douban reviewer

erlands and includes the four reviews by British writer C.S. Lewis on the books of Tolkien. "I'm very proud to say that the annotations in the book are leading in the international Tolkien studies," Mu says.

Besides, they also re-created a map about Tolkien's path of life based on the existing ones and *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*.

As the only biographer who actually interviewed Tolkien and had access to his personal writings, Carpenter's work has been regarded as the most authoritative biography of Tolkien. The Chinese version has also been well received by readers, especially Tolkien fans.

On Douban, a major Chinese review aggregator, a fan named Norloth commented, "I'm not a fan of biographies. However, this biography is very engaging because the writer has described an incredibly vivid Tolkien, which lets us see clearly the connection between his daily life and experience and his creation. ... It's such a refined translation."

For example, Mu says, readers can read what motivated Tolkien to create the Middle-earth.

On July 6, 1916, in the middle of the Battle of Somme, notoriously

the most devastating and protracted battle during World War I, in northern France, 24-year-old Tolkien was "overwhelmingly relieved and delighted" to see one of his best childhood friends Geoffrey Bache Smith, turn up alive and uninjured.

Smith was one of the four members of The Tea Club, Barrovian Society, known as TCBS, an organization that met regularly since Tolkien's middle school years, its members drinking tea, smoking pipes, talking about literature and their aspirations, "to hope that together they might achieve something of value" and "to kindle a new light".

That July, the four, Tolkien, Smith, Christopher Wiseman and Robert Gilson, were sent to the front line.

In northern France, the two old friends, Tolkien and Smith, met and talked as often as they could. They talked about poetry and the future, besides the war. Once they walked into a field and saw poppies flying in the wind, although the battle was turning the countryside into a barren land of mud.

When Mu came across this paragraph, he was deeply moved.

"Even amid what must have been like hell, they longed for the most beautiful things. It brought tears to my eyes, especially when you think that Smith actually died later in the war," he says.

Tolkien survived the war, but lost two close friends. The war, Mu says, became an important turning point in his life, one of the major motives for him to create the legends about the mythical world of the Middle-earth, which has been hailed as one of the greatest creations of the 20th century and been read by generations of readers across the world, inspiring many other writers including American writer George R.R. Martin, the writer of the *A Song of Fire and Ice* series.

According to Mu, in the chapter *The Breaking of the Fellowship*, Smith said in a letter to Tolkien he wrote not long before he died, "My chief consolation is that if I am scuppered tonight — I am off on duty in a few minutes — there will still be left a member of the great TCBS to voice what I dreamed and what we all agreed upon. For the death of one of its members cannot, I am determined, dissolve the TCBS. ... my dear John Ronald (Tolkien), and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them."

Back in late 1914, after a gathering of the TCBS, Tolkien decided to become a poet because the meeting helped him find "a voice for all kind of pent-up things".

Gradually, Tolkien wanted to find a connecting theme for all his poems, which he later wove into a larger story in early 1915. As a language enthusiast, Tolkien invented languages and the more he invented, the more he felt the urgency to create races of people speaking the languages and recording their history in poems.

After the war, in 1917, within a year of losing his two best friends and his experience in the ruthless war, he completed the basic settings for the stories taking place in the Middle-earth, as if "all his inspiration burst forth" henceforth, Ma says.

Contact the writer at yangyang@chinadaily.com.cn

## READ



**Above left and right:** Ceramic figurines made by sculptor and cultural relics restoration specialist Wang Qian that are based on Chinese relics from different dynasties. They have been donated to the Beijing Dance Academy, a top Chinese dance school, and will be used as resources for choreographing and researching. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Dancing, motionlessly, through time

An octogenarian sculptor's childhood experiences with her archaeologist father inspired her to devote her life to creating replicas of ceramic statuettes of women dancers from various dynasties, **Chen Nan** reports.

A female dancer gently bends her knees as her eyes gaze at the floor. Another lifts her heel, raises her arms and tilts her head sideways. They are two clay figurines in a set of eight dancing women created by 80-year-old sculptor and cultural relics restoration specialist Wang Qian.

On May 14, Wang, who previously worked at the Xi'an Beilin Museum — which is home to over 10,000 precious stone carvings and steles — in Xi'an, capital of Northwest China's Shaanxi province, visited the Beijing Dance Academy, a leading dance school in China, founded in 1954.

She has donated 105 sets of dancing figurines, consisting of 353 pieces, which she made from 2015 to 2020, to the institution.

They are replicas of ceramic dancers she saw in museums, books and photos. The originals were sculpted between the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Some of the originals are housed in such institutions as the Shaanxi History Museum, Xi'an Museum and Xuzhou Museum in Jiangsu province. Some others, unfortunately, only exist in books and photos now.

"I've always loved dancing, ever since I was a kid," says Wang, who started making replicas of dancing clay figurines in 2015 with art students at places like the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts.

"I've spent my whole life making clay figurines, and dancers are my favorite type."

Wang believes the Beijing Dance Academy is the ideal venue for her works.

"I hope the teachers and students will bring those dancing sculptures alive onstage, allowing more people to enjoy their unique beauty," she says.

## Family legacy

Wang was born in Xiaoxian county, Suzhou city, East China's Anhui province. She studied at an art school in Xi'an — home to the world-renowned Terracotta Warriors, excavated from Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum. In 1979, she became one of the creators of the first life-size Terracotta Warrior replica.

She also won a number of national and international awards, such as the gold award at the 44th edition of the Brussels-Eureka innovation, research and new technologies exhibition in Brussels, Belgium, in 1995. She retired in 2000.

"Although I was retired, one thing lingered in my mind, which compelled me to work again," Wang says.

She recalls that it was her father, renowned painter, sculptor and pioneer of Chinese art archaeology, Wang Ziyun (1897-1990), who inspired her to devote herself into making replicas of dancing clay figurines.

Her father studied sculpture in France in the 1940s and later returned to China, where he and her mother advocated for the establishment of professional teams in art archaeology as part of cultural preservation efforts.

In 1942, her father went to Luoyang, Central China's Henan province, where he found a group of dancing clay figurines in a mountainside cave. He took photos of these nine sculptures of women in various dance poses.

"I was very excited and intrigued when my dad showed me those photos," Wang Qian recalls.

"Clay figurines of entertainers, such as dancers and musical instrument performers, often accompanied the deceased into the afterlife in ancient China. Those statuettes show the history and culture of their times and are



**Top:** Students from the Beijing Dance Academy perform *Xianghe Ge*, adapted from a traditional Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) dance, in Beijing on May 14. **Top right:** Wang and her student, painter and sculptor Xu Yan, display a ceramic dancer they made at the Beijing Dance Academy on May 14. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY **Above:** The figurines provide a visual representation of the social life and aesthetics of ancient China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

highly valuable as cultural relics.

"Dad was also very excited about those clay figurines, which, sadly, were destroyed in war. He told me he wished to make replicas."

So began her career.

"It's like a promise I made to my father," Wang Qian says.

In 2015, she gave up her relaxing retirement and used her savings to rent a house in the countryside of Xi'an to channel her sculpting skills and restoration experience to produce replicas of ceramic dancers.

## When and where

"These silent clay figurines tell stories," says Wang Qian's student, Xu Yan, a painter and sculptor, who has participated in Wang Qian's replica project.

"Their dresses, hairstyles, facial expressions and dance moves all reflect Chinese history during different periods of time. The ceramic statuettes of musicians and dancers provide visual representations of the social life and aesthetics of ancient China."

Xu says she admires Wang Qian's courage and determination in the face

of difficulties and challenges that have confronted her on her mission.

"Making replicas of dancing ceramic statuettes is a very complicated process," Xu says.

"Actually, it's not difficult to re-create a dancing figurine based on a photo because, as sculptors, we have the skills to fashion figurines. What challenges us most is conveying the history and culture of when and where the pottery figurine came from."

She adds that Wang Qian has brought many students to visit museums to



"I've always loved dancing, ever since I was a kid. I've spent my whole life making clay figurines, and dancers are my favorite type."

**Wang Qian, 80,**  
sculptor and cultural relics  
restoration specialist

observe pieces from different dynasties. Wang Qian explained their characteristics, and analyzed and compared their sculptural features and production techniques.

The scholar's ceramic figurines had been displayed in exhibitions in Xi'an, Beijing and Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province, from 2021 to 2023.

During the exhibition in Beijing in April 2021, Wang Qian met faculty members of the Beijing Dance Academy, who then invited her to visit the school.

The academy's Party secretary, Ba Tu, says the school plans to open a museum on its campus to display her sculptures and tell the story of each set.

Teachers with the school's classical Chinese dance department will work together to do research about these figurines and choreograph new dances based on them.

There are many dance pieces born out of the study of ancient Chinese paintings, murals and clay statues.

One is *Xianghe Ge*, which is adapted from a traditional Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) dance that was often staged during banquets at that time. It was a re-created dance piece performed by female students of the Beijing Dance Academy and by choreographer Sun Ying that later featured in the popular TV show, *Wu Qiannian* (Dancing Through the Millennium), coproduced by Henan TV and Chinese video platform Bilibili in 2021.

In the performance of *Xianghe Ge*, the female dancers, wearing costumes of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), chant poems and dance on and off the tops of drums, creating rhythms with their feet. Since it premiered in 2009, the dance piece has become an excerpt of Sun's dance drama, *Tongque Ji* (Dancing Girl of Tongque Platform).

Such modern presentations of ancient Chinese dances have been gaining popularity among the younger generation. The viral dance piece, *A Tang Dynasty Banquet*, produced and staged by Henan TV in 2021, portrays such national treasures as Tang Dynasty (618-907) clay figurines.

"Those dances bring ancient ceramic statuettes to life and tell their stories onstage, which is a creative approach to showcasing the treasures," says Xu Rui, president of the Beijing Dance Academy.

"Thanks to Wang Qian, we have these dancing figurines, which will inspire us to be creative and imaginative with the choreography."

Contact the writer at  
chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

# IMAGE



From left to right: Duliki helps drive the sheep back to the sheepfold in Wacha township of Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous region, on March 22. Duliki communicates with colleagues through her walkie-talkie at the train station, on April 19. An artist presents his calligraphy work to the crew led by Duliki, on April 19. PHOTOS BY HU HUH/XINHUA

## Tajik train conductor pulls out stops

Airkir Duliki is China's first Tajik train conductor, working for the Chengdu fleet of the China Railway Urumqi Group Co Ltd. Duliki is in charge of services on the train running on the line connecting the Kashgar prefecture of Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to the city of Chengdu, Sichuan province. As an important line, the passenger flow of the train remains high all year round.

Duliki's responsibilities include keeping order, quickly organizing passengers as they enter and leave the train, and keeping daily supplies well stocked. According to her, there are some 25 stations in total between the two locations, and sometimes the time the train spends at a station is only two minutes. Having lived in pastoral areas since childhood, Duliki has developed a warm and optimistic personality. In her view, the essence of providing railway services is the desire to help one another.

Duliki's responsibilities include keeping order, quickly organizing

-CHINA DAILY



Left: Duliki guides passengers to board a train leaving Chengdu for Kashgar, on April 20. Right: Airkir Duliki dances for passengers with folk artists on the train leaving Kashgar for Chengdu, on April 19. HU HUH/XINHUA



Left: Duliki helps her mother carry barrels of water in Wacha township of Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous region, on March 23. Middle: The train timetable is pasted on Duliki's mobile phone case, on April 22. Right: Duliki is on duty at the platform of the train station, on April 20.



From left to right: An older family relative bids farewell to Duliki in Shabuzika village of Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous region, on March 22. Airkir Duliki's father Duliki bairfek dances to celebrate his daughter's return to visit relatives at home in Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous county, on March 23. Duliki inspects luggage on a train, on April 18.

## TREND



# China chic dominates graduation ceremonies

Graduating students' awareness of expressing cultural pride by wearing traditional costumes seen rising

By ZHU WENQIAN

zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Wearing baccalaureate gowns adorned with traditional Chinese-style decorations is all the rage for Chinese and foreign graduates this year. The popularity of traditional Chinese attire is continuing to grow and such a trend has fueled the growth of online retailers.

In late May, the College of Media and International Culture of Zhejiang University held its graduation ceremony. The event was filled with domestic and foreign students wearing traditional Chinese-style outfits and decorations such as horse-faced skirts, or mid-length skirts with a distinct pleated design.

During the graduation gala, some foreign students wore *hanfu* costumes, traditional Chinese clothing of the Han ethnic group, and put on singing and dancing performances.

Other designs that students have worn for graduation photo shoots included floral hairpins, and *yunjian* — a traditional decoration that sits over the shoulders. As a result, a large number of online stores have launched traditional Chinese outfits or decorations such as *yunjian* ahead of graduation season.

"Clothing, as an indispensable part of people's daily life, has long surpassed their basic functions and become an important carrier for consumers to showcase their personality and express their preferences," said Lou Lei, executive director of consultancy Frost & Sullivan China.

"With the revival of traditional Chinese culture in recent years, consumer demand for clothing with local characteristics and cultural heritage is growing, and sales of such clothing have embraced healthy growth," Lou said.

An Xinran, a foreign student from Australia, said she likes traditional Chinese-style clothing in her daily life. She regularly posts photos of herself wearing *hanfu* and *qipao* online.

Some other Chinese students bought academic caps and flowers online, and made academic hats decorated with flowers by themselves. They also posted videos of the construction process online and such videos have become a hit.

"I started to make preparations a long time in advance for the graduation photo shoot in traditional Chinese outfits, and I bought *yunjian* online to match the baccalaureate gown. The photos turned out to be excellent and such special outfits added a sense of ritual to the graduation," said Yang Nan, a Chinese graduate.

As decoration for the shoulders, *yunjian* has long been suitable to wear with such a gown. In addition, oilpaper umbrellas and fans are becoming sought-after accessories that students can match with their gowns.

Double Seventh, an online store that sells *hanfu* on e-commerce platform Taobao, has accumulatively sold more than 3,000 pieces of *yunjian* after the store launched the product in August 2023. On the day of its launch, the store sold more than 1,000 pieces. Their *yunjian* carry a price tag of less than 100 yuan (\$13.8) each.

The company also designed different colors of double-layered *yunjian* for different majors at Zhejiang University. For instance, it designed pink *yunjian* for liberal arts



**Top:** Students wearing traditional Chinese costumes are seen during a graduation photo-taking event at a university in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on May 20.

CHEN SHENGWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Above:** Graduates pose for photographs at a college in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province, on May 31.

YANG YU / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Left:** College students wearing attires featuring Chinese cultural elements, such as gowns and *yunjian*, pose for graduation photos in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

graduates, gray for science graduates and yellow for graduates in engineering majors.

In addition, the store launched a style of academic cap that is decorated with flowers. Sales in May surged more than 200 percent over April, it said.

Young Chinese consumers have demonstrated a growing demand for traditional Chinese attire this year, which is the Year of the Dragon.

In Chinese traditional astrology, which outlines the qualities of 12 zodiac signs, the Year of the Dragon is usually of great significance. The dragon symbolizes strength, wisdom and good fortune for Chinese people. This has spurred the popularity of such traditional Chinese elements.

During the Spring Festival holiday in February, various traditional Chinese-style outfits containing dragons and phoenixes became a hit among young consumers. The popularity of traditional Chinese outfits has continued for spring outings, weddings and graduation ceremonies.

"Young people's love for traditional culture is constantly growing. Traditional Chinese-style outfits have become a major

choice for young graduates this year when they attend graduation ceremonies," said Hao Danyang, operational director of *hanfu* business at Taobao.

"An increasing number of female college students are interested in traditional Chinese culture and would like to demonstrate it through their outfits, indicating national identity and cultural confidence," Hao said.

Founded in 2019, Hangzhou-based Double Seventh achieved sales revenues that ranked among the top three in the traditional Chinese attire online market. The store focuses on developing originally designed *hanfu* which is more suitable for daily wear. It is also considering the potential of opening brick-and-mortar stores in the future.

"I am highly optimistic about the growth prospects of the industry. *Hanfu* carries traditional Chinese culture and the government supports the development of related industry zones. We suffered losses from 2019 to 2022 due to the pandemic. Sales started to pick up in 2023 and jumped significantly this year," said Qing Yun, founder of Double Seventh.

The main customer group is aged between 18 and 25, and they are mainly young female

consumers who like traditional Chinese attire. Most orders come from major cities in Zhejiang, Guangdong, Henan and Sichuan provinces; places that boast cultural relics and sightseeing spots which are suitable for wearing *hanfu*, Qing said.

He added that demand for red *hanfu* for engagement parties and weddings has been quite high. He expects the demand for such attire to increase in the latter half of this year, when it becomes the busy season of couples getting married.

From 2017 to 2023, sales of footwear and clothing of domestic brands that integrate Chinese cultural elements grew from 407.1 billion yuan to 992.8 billion yuan, with a compound annual growth rate reaching nearly 16 percent. The figure is significantly higher than the overall compound annual growth rate of footwear and clothing during the same period, according to consultancy Frost & Sullivan.

*Guochao* — national tide or China chic — is a broad concept that can be integrated with various consumer goods, cultural products, tourism, a city's image and other sectors. China-chic clothing is undoubtedly one of the first fields recognized and accepted by consumers, the consultancy said.

On the other hand, the rapid development of e-commerce platforms, especially the rise of livestreaming sessions, has provided good exposure and sales channels for emerging China-chic brands, the consultancy said.

## Holidaymakers choosing short trips over long-haul journeys

By ZHU WENQIAN

This year's three-day Dragon Boat holiday overlapped with the period of the National College Entrance Examination. As a result, the number of people who took trips and prices of travel products have not increased significantly, industry players found.

The National College Entrance Examination begins on June 7 nationwide annually and the time of its conclusion varies on the arrangements of different provinces. Besides, students of secondary and primary schools have been busy preparing for their final exams.

For this year's holiday, the number of travelers comprising children and their parents declined year-on-year. In 2023, the holiday lasted from June 22 to 24 and demand of graduation trips and family tours was higher as summer was approaching, according to Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

Taking short-distance trips to nearby regions has become the main trend this year. Cities located within a two-hour high-speed train journey remain the most popular destinations for urban travelers. For instance, Tianjin, Shijiazhuang in Hebei province and Jinan in Shandong province are popular destinations for travelers from Beijing, according to Qunar, an online travel agency based in the capital.

"Taking trips to small cities remains popular for this year's Dragon Boat Festival. Taking a major city as the center and going to smaller towns in the surrounding areas has become a popular method of travel for many people," said Xiao Peng, a researcher with the big data research institute of Qunar.

Meanwhile, since China's air travel market entered its summer and autumn flying season, which started on March 31 and will conclude on Oct 26, major airlines have accelerated the pace of recovery and launched more domestic and international flights.

For flight tickets during the Dragon Boat holiday, some routes carry cheaper price tags compared with high-speed trains, even with fuel costs and airport construction fees from departing passengers included, Qunar said.

Following a strong tourism surge during the May Day holiday, it is expected that the market will continue to show resilience, supported by robust leisure and business travel demand, said a research report by Guotai Junan Securities.

Lately, China's new hit TV show *To the Wonder* has made Altay in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region a popular travel destination. It has significantly driven the bookings of local hotels, bed-and-breakfast stays and flights to the prefecture.

Guangzhou-based China Southern Airlines said from mid-May to mid-June, the booking volumes of flights from Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang to Altay, which is located nearly 500 kilometers away, jumped more than 50 percent month-on-month.

"With rising temperatures, the tourism market in Xinjiang is warming up and the passenger flow of flights from other places to Xinjiang is expected to embrace a new wave of peaks," said Zheng Wei, manager of the Altay business office of the Xinjiang branch at China Southern Airlines.

While consumers have indicated robust travel demand, they have been paying attention to the quality and experience of traveling. Particularly, young tourists have been pursuing personalized and high-quality travel experiences, said Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency.

For this year's Dragon Boat Festival, some people chose to take a few days off from work on either side to create a longer holiday and travel abroad.

For international travel, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have become popular destinations during the holiday. For long-haul trips, Spain, Portugal, France, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates are sought-after by Chinese tourists, according to Tuniu.

Hotel prices in Madrid, Spain; Moscow, Russia; Saipan in the United States; and Sydney and Melbourne in Australia stood at a relatively low level before the start of summer, making it more cost-effective to travel in early June, Qunar found.

In addition, Paris is expected to attract a large number of visitors as the French capital is scheduled to host the Olympics in July. Prices of flights to Europe are forecast to climb from mid-June, Qunar said.

## BIZ LIFE



Drivers line up at the starting grid for the Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix 2024 in Shanghai in April. XIA YIFANG / XINHUA

By WANGZHUOQIONG  
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

The Shanghai Longines Global Champions Tour and the Chinese Grand Prix held in the port city recently highlighted the growing appeal of top-level international sporting events in boosting the local cultural, sports and tourism sectors.

Held over three days in early May, the Shanghai Longines Global Champions Tour marked the unveiling of the Shanghai Juss International Equestrian Center, the first permanent professional competition venue in China that meets the standards of top international equestrian events. The event attracted over 22,000 visitors, significantly boosting tourism in the city.

The arrival of the Global Champions Tour in Shanghai 10 years ago opened a window for equestrian sports to enter China.

The horse business boasts a robust industrial chain, including equestrian sports, horse racing, leisure riding and horse breeding.

According to the General Administration of Sport of China, the total output value of China's horse industry chain exceeded 70 billion yuan (\$9.66 billion) in 2019.

As a major horse breeder, China ranks among the top globally in terms of its equine population.

In recent years, equestrian events have emerged as a leisure sport in China, integrating into the lives of Chinese sports lovers and generating considerable social and economic value.

Cheng Keqiang, director of the Shanghai Equestrian Sports Management Center, said there were 270 registered youth athletes in Shanghai in 2018; by 2022, this number had increased to over 670. The number of horses rose from over 1,000 in 2018 to over 3,000 in 2022, according to the Shanghai Observer.

During last year's first National Youth Games, Shanghai's young equestrians excelled, winning three gold medals across six events, rank-

## Top-level draws hold promise for retail, tourism

Equestrian, motor racing events held in Shanghai recently to make it global sports hub; generate huge consumption opportunities

ing tops among all participating teams.

Huang Ming, general manager of Shanghai Juss Sports Event Management Co Ltd, said: "We hope to present the development of equestrian sports in Shanghai and China to the world. Our goal is to build a more comprehensive competition system through this event, including the establishment of youth equestrian competitions."

### Big potential

Formula 1 races returned to Shanghai after five years.

The event, held between April 19 and 21, witnessed a surge in interest, highlighting the city's capacity as a global sports hub and generating consumption opportunities in sectors including retail and tourism.

It was a landmark moment when Zhou Guanyu, 25, became the first driver to compete in front of his home crowd at the Shanghai International Circuit.

Speaking on the fervor surrounding the event, Zhou said: "I think everyone can still get involved, have that as an interest, and that's why I'm here ... and it's great to see a lot of people coming, supporting, notice the racetrack, also off track, to see them there when you have activities. It is great to feel this energy."

The first three days saw an influx of 200,000 visitors, with 150,000



Fans experience virtual car racing during this year's F1 Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. HE CHANGSHAN / XINHUA

attendees on the opening day alone, said Yang Yibin, chairman of Shanghai Juss Sports, which runs Formula 1 in Shanghai.

The number has shattered previous single-day attendance records for sporting events in the country.

Of these, 70 percent were Chinese from places outside Shanghai, and 10 percent were visitors from overseas.

According to online travel platform Ctrip, hotel reservations during the three-day event soared 63 percent year-on-year, marking a 10

percent increase compared to bookings made a week prior to the event.

The surge in demand reflects F1's capacity to draw visitors and drive consumption.

According to the 2019 Shanghai Sports Event Impact Assessment Report jointly released by the Shanghai municipal sports bureau and Shanghai University of Sport, 12 major sports events held in Shanghai in 2019 generated a consumption value of 3.09 billion yuan, propelling industry output exceeding 10.2 billion yuan.

Of these, the Shanghai ATP Masters 1000, F1 Chinese Grand Prix, and Shanghai International Marathon accounted for over 70 percent of the total economic outcome.

According to the 2023 report, a total of 118 sporting events were held in Shanghai last year, driving consumption of 3.71 billion yuan and a related industry driving effect of 12.86 billion yuan.

F1 stood out this year for its fusion of sports and entertainment.

According to Jiemin, a Shanghai-based business media house, ticket sales over the three days rose to more than 100 million yuan. To attract a younger audience, Juss blended motor sports with live concerts, gourmet experiences and interactive attractions.

The fusion transformed the Grand Prix into a carnival, catering to both motor enthusiasts and festivalgoers.

Kathy Shi, a top commentator of F1 on CCTV, said the surge in interest in F1 this year has been unprecedented.

"People are buying tickets this year because they want to immerse themselves in the races. The presence of a Chinese racer on home soil for the first time also added an extra layer of resonance," Shi said.

Shi said many spectators were newcomers to the race.

"They came for the excitement and thrill of the engines, or even for

the concerts held next to the circuit. They may have heard the name of Lewis Hamilton for the first time, but this has been a promising beginning."

Shi emphasized the importance of nurturing and expanding the fan base for the continued growth of motor sports in China.

"It requires joint efforts from F1 and Juss to continue to enhance the entertainment value and excitement of the race, attracting a younger local audience and participants," she said, adding that she hoped Shanghai would join the ranks of iconic F1 destinations such as Miami and Las Vegas to become a global magnet for F1 fans around the world.

"Broadcast in more than 200 countries and regions, the F1 race serves as a platform to showcase the vibrancy and rapid development of Shanghai," Shi said.

Meanwhile, Zhou Guanyu's rise in the world of F1 has not only elevated his status as a racing sensation but also boosted the popularity of the sport in the domestic market, according to Shi.

Hailed as the Yao Ming of motor sports, Zhou's presence on the Shanghai circuit has catalyzed a surge in commercial opportunities since 2022.

Brands across sportswear, electric vehicles and technology, including Lululemon, SenseTime, Hennessy, and Zeekr, have sought out Zhou to become their brand ambassador.

For instance, Lululemon has launched limited edition products dedicated to the racer, as the brand had extended its business into men's products two years ago.

Both on and off the track, the value of an athlete is closely linked to their performance, said Shi.

Zhou said he hoped to enjoy a "long career" in F1.

"Hopefully it's not going to be the only one, because I'm planning hopefully to stay here as long as I can. Everybody loves to have a long career in Formula 1, that's where we dream to be."

By WANGZHUOQIONG

Traditional themes are topping the wish lists of domestic travelers during holidays, particularly the Dragon Boat Festival break between June 8-10 this year.

During the holiday period, the travel market is expected to mainly witness short and medium-distance tours, with strong demand for short trips within the Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, Chengdu-Chongqing city cluster and Central China's city cluster, according to a new report.

People's interest in short-duration (two to four hours) small group and study tours to history museums during Dragon Boat Festival has increased by more than twofold year-on-year, said the 2024 Dragon Boat Festival Travel Trend Report by travel booking platform Tongcheng Travel that was released on May 27.

In terms of emerging features, "new Chinese style" — typically defined as seamlessly integrating traditional Chinese elements with

contemporary styles — has become the leading travel trend among youngsters, the report found.

Young domestic travelers are more interested in various traditional cultural sites, performances, intangible cultural heritage experiences and festive activities, it said.

Domestic destinations are also launching festival-related activities to attract tourists, according to the report.

Popular "new Chinese style" travel activities include visiting history museums, watching dragon boat races, experiencing intangible cultural heritage, checking in at historical and cultural sites, and trying on hanfu costumes, the traditional attire of the Han ethnic group.

Xi'an, Shaanxi province; Hangzhou; Luoyang of Henan province, Suzhou of Jiangsu province, and Chengdu are the most popular cities for hanfu photo check-ins.

Additionally, traditional opera performances in Suzhou and Beijing, tea-picking cultural activities in Fujian province, and the textile

## Culture-rich circuits gain favor among travelers



A visitor (center) experiences archery at the ancient city of Xiangyang in Hubei province, in May. YANG DONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

dyeing culture in Hunan and Yunnan provinces are the most sought-after intangible cultural heritage experiences among tourists.

According to data from Tongcheng Travel, as of May 27, the anticipated top travel destinations for the Dragon Boat Festival holiday include Beijing, Chongqing, Nanjing, Jiangsu province, and Nan-chang of Jiangxi province.

Among these, cities rich in historical and cultural appeal such as Beijing, Nanjing and Xi'an are particularly in favor.

The popular hit TV show "To the Wonder", adapted from "My Altay", a collection of prose by Li Juan, has driven travel interest toward Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, by more than twofold year-on-year, making it a most sought-after tourist destination for the 2024 Dragon Boat Festival.

Relatively niche coastal destinations like Weihai, Shandong province; Beihai of Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and Jinzhou of Liaoning province, have also gar-

nered tourist attention.

Tickets for travel between core and nearby cities during the Dragon Boat Festival holiday are in high demand.

Tongcheng Travel platform data show that, following the start of train ticket bookings for the Dragon Boat Festival holiday, bookings from central cities like Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou to surrounding smaller cities, especially county-level ones, have increased more than twofold compared to the average levels seen previously.

Furthermore, high-speed train tickets between cities in the Yangtze River Delta region, among those in the Pearl River Delta region, and between Chengdu and Chongqing have sold out quickly on some routes.

In terms of accommodation, the overlap of the Dragon Boat Festival holiday with the national college entrance examination has resulted in reduced hotel availability in popular areas of major tourist destinations due to the combined demand for travel and student lodging.

## TRAVEL



A train on the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway passes through the iconic Wujiazhai Railway Bridge in Pingbian Miao autonomous county, Yunnan province, on June 25 last year. The bridge, also known as *renzhiqiao*, is recognized for its unique arch design that resembles the Chinese character for people. HU CHAO / XINHUA

## A journey through the tracks of time

Known as an engineering marvel, a century-old railway in Yunnan province now attracts scores of visitors interested in its history, colonial architecture

By CUI JIA  
cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn

On a hilltop in Yunnan province, campers can frequently hear the whistles and humming of train engines, as trains slowly make their way through the mountainous terrain on the narrow-gauge tracks.

The trains still run on the tracks of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway, which was built over 114 years ago. There is no other railway like this, as it is the only 1-meter-gauge railway still in operation in the Chinese mainland. Described as a wonder of the Industrial Age, an increasing number of visitors have been drawn to the railway's history and many want to embark on the journey through time by hiking along the mustard-colored French-style stations.

The 854-kilometer-long Yunnan-Vietnam Railway connects Yunnan's capital Kunming with Vietnam's port city Haiphong. Backed by French capital and technology, construction of the Chinese part of the railway measuring 465 km started in October 1903 to facilitate France's colonial trade. But due to numerous difficulties in the project, many Chinese workers lost their lives.

After it began operations on March 31, 1910, *The Times*, a newspaper in the United Kingdom, named it one of the "Three Engineering Marvels of the World", along with the Suez Canal and Panama Canal.

In February 1958, the Chinese section of the railway was named the Kunming-Hekou Railway. To this day, it still conducts freight services between China and Vietnam daily.

According to records kept by foreign engineers, Yunnan's high mountains and deep valleys posed huge problems for the railway's constructors. On the Chinese section of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway, there are 274.4 km of curves, accounting for 59.1 percent of its total length. Also, 75 bridges, 155 tunnels and 3,247 culverts were built along the railway with an elevation discrepancy of 1,954 meters.

Although passenger services were ceased in 2003, passenger experience of the train ride has lived on. Locals remember the S-shaped railway, rolling trains, bold drivers and brave travelers.

The most famous and must-see engineering marvel of the railway is the Wujiazhai Railway Bridge, commonly referred to as *renzhiqiao* for its unique arch design that looks like the Chinese character for people, or *ren*.

The bridge, located in Pingbian Miao autonomous county in Honghe Hani and Yi autonomous prefecture, straddles a gorge in between two mountains. As daily train services are very limited and

not fixed, tourists are considered lucky if they are able to see the train come out from a tunnel passing the bridge 102 meters above the roaring Sicha River.

Tourists can hike up to the bridge in 45 minutes and can walk on the bridge to see it up close. To get to the bridge, tourists need to walk through a tunnel after reaching the railway tracks. They are able to see tool marks on the insides of the tunnel, evidence that it was dug out manually and a reminder of the hardships that the workers had to endure during its construction.

After seeing light at the end of the tunnel, the legendary Wujiazhai Railway Bridge will be within sight, reliable and charming as ever more than a century later. Visitors can then gather on viewing platforms on the bridge to admire the beauty of the bridge and watch the train pass by.

To build the 67.15-meter-long bridge connecting the extremely steep cliffs, French engineer Paul Bodin developed a new technique involving lowering two steel triangular trusses, one from each side of the mountain supported by ball-shaped seats of cast steel.

The construction project started in March 1907 and all parts of the bridge were shipped from France and assembled by Chinese workers. An estimated 800 Chinese workers lost their lives during the construction. A French newspaper commented at the time that the construction of the bridge was a "dance above death".

### Comparing past and present

As many pictures and details of the railway's construction have been kept by members of the foreign construction team, many visitors choose to visit the places where the old pictures were taken to see how things have changed.

People can hike to the spot where the cliff above the railway was carved in the shape of the mouth of a roaring tiger, making just enough space for the train to go through.

They can also walk along the railway to reach a waterfall that still flows over the side of the mountain next to the railway track, forming the same stunning view combining the beauty of nature and engineering as captured in photos more than a century ago.

Also, spotting steel sleepers shipped from Europe that are still in use is a surreal and unique experience for travelers hiking along the railway.

Visitors are still able to spot the manufacturers of the railway track from the faded trademarks on the sleepers, such as German company Bochumer Verein Verkehrstechnik that has been



Visitors hike out of a tunnel following the 1-meter-gauge railway track in Yiliang county, Yunnan, on May 1 last year. GAO WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



A passenger poses for a photo on a train car of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway in Kaiyuan, Yunnan, on Feb 11 last year. LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Vibrant bougainvillea blooms along the Lianhuaachi section of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway attract many tourists in Kunming, Yunnan, on April 25. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

### 854 kilometers

total length of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway connecting Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, with Haiphong of Vietnam

manufacturing railway components since the invention of the railway system in Europe.

Moreover, the French-style stations along the railway have become a hit on Chinese social media, especially after the 2017 Chinese movie *Youth* was filmed at the stations, including Zhicun and Bizezhai in Mengzi city, capital of Honghe. They are among 34 stations that were put to use when the Chinese section of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway was open to traffic in 1910.

The ending scene of *Youth* was shot at the platform of Zhicun station, which is still in use. The station has been well preserved with its original features intact, such as the mustard-colored walls and arched doors.

In a century of railway operations, several changes took place, including increasing or decreasing the number of stations, to meet the needs of freight transport and passenger services.

Nine small additional stations were built in 1922 due to increasing needs for transport volume. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, seven more stations were built to expand transport capacity. A total of 62 stations have been used over time.

### Close connection

The lives of locals have been closely connected to the fate of the railway. For a long time, the railway was the only means of transportation for locals to commute in the mountains. But passenger services stopped in 2003 after new transportation infrastructure such as roads and modern railways became available in Honghe, resulting in the sharp drop in the number of people using the narrow-gauge train service, which is much slower. Thus, the glory days of the railway were gone. Many stations had been closed, leaving only 17 still in use.

While freight trains still stop at Zhicun station for services, all operations at Bizezhai station, which was once a vital stop on the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway, ceased in 2010. It has now become a tourist site dubbed "a piece of Paris of the East".

People can walk on the station platform adorned with louvered windows and imported Paul Garnier clocks. One of the century-old water towers, which was essential to the steam locomotives that needed water and coal to function,

still stands next to the main entrance of the station.

Also, iconic buildings at the train station have been well preserved, including the customs building, post office, canteen and engineering offices.

Surprisingly, it even has China's first clay tennis court. The facilities were a reminder of how busy and important the station once was.

In 1940, to prevent Japan's invasion of China via the railway, the railway track between Bizezhai station and Hekou station was deliberately destroyed. The Chinese government later restored the track after taking over operations of the railway in 1950.

People can learn more about the history of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway at the Yunnan Railway Museum built on the old Kunming North Station, the terminus of the railway. The French-style building is right next to the new and futuristic Kunming North Station offering people high-speed rail services, a representation of history meeting modernity.

Many relics of the iconic railway are on display at the museum, such as tools used for surveying and pictures of the construction. Among them, the white Michelin railcar that was put to use in 1914 offering luxury services to distinguished guests is definitely one of the main attractions.

Back then, many goods including machinery parts could be shipped to Kunming because of the railway. With the imported engines, Shilongba Hydropower Station — the first hydropower station in China — started to provide electricity to Kunming in 1912. Also, a water pump station, built in the city with parts and materials shipped via the railway, started to supply water in May 1918, making Kunming locals the first in China to enjoy running water.

More than 114 years on, goods are still shipped between Yunnan to Vietnam via the same railway. According to the China Railway Kunming Bureau, more than 168,500 metric tons of goods, including iron ore and sulfur, have been transported via the narrow-gauge railway during the first four months this year, an increase of over 1.5 times year-on-year.

The Chinese section of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway has seen many ups and downs, standing the test of time through war and turmoil. Although the construction of the railway initially fueled France's ambitions for colonial expansion, it is also an engineering marvel, casting its profound impact on the locals and the land up till today. As for visitors, discovering the stories behind the railway is just as fascinating as following its tracks running through the beautiful terrain in Yunnan.

## SPORTS

## OLYMPICS



Brady Ellison of the United States, who first competed at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, is a three-time medalist who has qualified for his fifth Games. He has won two silver medals, but never gold. At 35 years old, he is not sure how many more chances he will get. AP



**B**rady Ellison wants to further secure his place at the top of archery history. The 35-year-old American has qualified for his fifth Olympics, having first competed in 2008 in Beijing. He has won three Olympic medals and has spent a significant amount of time ranked No 1 in the world in recurve.

He wants more. He's currently ranked No 4 in the world, and feels he's got a legitimate shot at that elusive Olympic gold medal. He earned silver in the team competition in 2012 and 2016 and an individual bronze in 2016.

With all his other accomplishments considered, he believes reaching the top of the podium in Paris would undoubtedly place him among the greatest of the greats.

"It's always been a goal of mine to be one of the best that's ever lived," he said. "I still feel like I'm shooting good. I'm still one of the top archers in the world."

He's had moments where it appeared possible to win gold. He entered the Tokyo Olympics ranked No 1 in the world, but lost to Turkey's Mete Gazoz in the quarterfinals.

"I wouldn't say anything necessarily went wrong," he said. "I missed when I couldn't miss. I had an opportunity, and I should have won the set when I didn't win a set. I thought the wind was blowing, I misread it. Shot one out toward the right, and then, the next arrow I put out left. If either one of those would have hit, then it might have been a different match."

Ellison oozes confidence, and he passes that onto others. He has teamed up with current women's world No 1 Casey Kaufhold to great

## Five Olympics in a row for archer targeting top honors

Brady Ellison is aiming to bag an elusive gold in Paris



Brady Ellison of the United States is currently ranked No 4 in the world in recurve and feels he's got a legitimate shot at that elusive Olympic gold medal at the Paris Games. AP

success. The pair won gold at the Pan-American Games in the mixed team event in 2019, when Kaufhold was 15.

Kaufhold recalls how helpful Ellison was as a mentor in the lead-

up to that competition.

"He could tell that I was, like, hesitant," Kaufhold said. "He could tell I was a little nervous. And he talked to me a lot about making sure, even though this seems huge, to not do

anything special. Just do what you know how to do, shoot your shot and just have fun. So, he's helped me a lot through a lot of things."

Ellison is relatively healthy now after having dealt with painful inju-

ries and medical issues over the years. As a child, he suffered from Legg-Calve-Perthes disease and wore leg braces. He had surgery to stabilize one of his knees so it would stop coming out of the sock-

et just from walking around. He has injured the fingers on his drawing hand and had hip issues.

At the Pan-American Games last year, he injured a shoulder joint and his collarbone.

None of that has caused him to consider scaling back or giving up the sport.

"I'm good at it," he said. "I've been able to stay in the top seven in the world since 2010. I'm the top paid US guy, and this is all I do. This is how I pay my bills and everything like that."

"So, I'll keep fighting and I'll keep rehabbing, and I'll keep getting over everything that I can, so I don't have to go get a real job."

Ellison's outgoing personality mixes well with the energy of the crowds. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no crowds in Tokyo. He looks forward to shooting in front of fans.

"I definitely think that you feed off the crowd," he said.

"I think that's true with any sport. And, it's a lot different when you're shooting the biggest tournament in your life, and there are crickets in the stadium, versus people that can get behind you and cheer you on and make some noise."

Though he'd like to bring home the gold, he understands that a lot must go right for that to happen.

"That's the thing about the Olympics," he said.

"When it comes down to that finals day, that medals day, anybody who's still in it, they get hot, they're going to be really hard to beat, no matter who they're shooting against."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## TENNIS

## Swiatek on a roll as she claims third straight French Open title

PARIS — For a few minutes it seemed as if Iga Swiatek was a bit off in the French Open final against Jasmine Paolini on Saturday. Swiatek kept making mistakes, got broken in the third game and trailed early on at Court Philippe Chatrier.

Might a true surprise be in the offing? Could Paolini not only make a match of this, but actually win it? Um, no. Not even close. Not with the way Swiatek can dominate opponents — especially on red clay.

The top-seeded Swiatek quickly recalibrated her wayward strokes and simply overwhelmed Paolini, grabbing 10 games in a row en route to a 6-2, 6-1 victory that gave her a third consecutive championship at Roland Garros and fourth in five years.

The 23-year-old from Poland had to save a match point in a second-round victory against Naomi Osaka last week, but in the five matches after that three-set escape, Swiatek dropped a total of only 17 games.

"This tournament has been pretty surreal with its beginning and with the second round. Then, I was able to improve my game every match. I'm really proud of myself, because the expectations, obviously, have been pretty high from the outside. The pressure, as well," said Swiatek, who is 35-2 overall at the French Open, including a current streak of 21 straight victories. "I'm

happy that I just went for it, and I was ready to deal with all of this — and that I could win."

She is the first woman to win three trophies in a row in Paris since Justine Henin achieved the feat between 2005 and '07.

The 12th-seeded Paolini, a 28-year-old from Italy appearing in her first Slam final, called facing Swiatek at Roland Garros "the toughest challenge in this sport."

Swiatek also won the French Open in 2020 and the US Open in 2022, and is now 5-0 in major finals.

She added this triumph to those on clay at Madrid and Rome last month, becoming the first woman to win all three events in the same season since Serena Williams did it in 2013.

"I never played a player that has this intensity before in my life," Paolini said. "For me, right now, I think it was the most challenging match I have played in my entire career."

During Saturday's post-match ceremony, Swiatek was flanked by a pair of women who each won 18 Grand Slam singles titles, Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova. Evert said before this French Open that she thinks Swiatek could eventually surpass her women's record of seven championships in Paris.

Paolini, who will rise to a career-best No 7 in the rankings Monday, had never been past the second round at one of the four most

important tennis tournaments until getting to the fourth round at the Australian Open in January. She will play in the French Open women's doubles final on Sunday with partner Sara Errani against 2023 US Open singles champion Coco Gauff and Katerina Siniakova.

Before the final began, a loud chant of "Let's go, Jasmine! Let's go!" arose from Paolini's supporters in the stands, each wearing a T-shirt in one of the colors of the Italian flag: green, white or red.

After Swiatek got the match's first point, a fan yelled in French, "Jasmine, it's not over!"

Swiatek briefly went through a shaky stretch, failing to convert a break point in the second game, then getting broken to trail 2-1 after 13 minutes, when she flubbed a forehand.

It was Swiatek's seventh unforced error of the afternoon; Paolini had made only one. The rest of the way, those numbers changed dramatically: six unforced errors by Swiatek, 17 by Paolini.

Swiatek, who heard plenty of "Iga!" chants, immediately reset herself and began playing the sort of tennis that put her at No 1 for nearly every week since April 2022. The instincts and footwork to get to almost any shot. The intimidating, heavy-spin forehands. The pre-match strategy and mid-match adjustments.

And once Swiatek got going,



Poland's Iga Swiatek poses for a picture with the trophy and the ball boys and girls after winning her French Open final against Italy's Jasmine Paolini in Paris on Saturday. REUTERS

there was nothing Paolini could do to slow her down.

"I got broken at the beginning, so it wasn't maybe perfect," Swiatek said, "but, I think the level was pretty high."

Absolutely. She broke at love for 2-0, capping the game with a return winner off a 140 km/h serve. The following game began with a 25-stroke exchange that Swiatek ended with a backhand winner that Paolini did not even try to chase. Now Swiatek led 3-2 and, in a blink, she owned that set and a 5-0 lead in the second.

"You have to push, push, push every ball," Paolini said, explaining

that Swiatek hits shots much sooner and closer to the baseline, while swinging her racket harder, than most of her foes. "If not, you have no chance."

After just one hour, eight minutes of play, Swiatek was celebrating, dropping to her knees behind the baseline.

Soon, she was sitting on her sideline bench and using her phone to snap a selfie while holding up four fingers to represent her haul of French Open trophies. No one would be shocked if that number keeps rising.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

### Paolini delighted despite defeat

Jasmine Paolini was no match for Iga Swiatek as she was steamrolled in the French Open final on Saturday, but happiness prevailed at the end of the Italian's unexpected run in Paris.

The 12th seed's career took a big uptick this season when she won the Dubai title — one of the tournaments just below Grand Slam level — and at Roland Garros, the 28-year-old beat fourth seed Elena Rybakina on her way to the final.

While others have crumbled under pressure in their first Grand Slam final, the diminutive Paolini showed no signs of nerves in a bright start, as she broke serve for 2-1 with a smile on her face.

Swiatek, however, had too much poise and pace for the Tuscan, who lost 11 of the remaining 12 games on a sun-bathed Court Philippe Chatrier.

"I tried to play my best, but I have never played a player with that intensity before," Paolini told the post-match news conference.

"She already won four titles, and she's 23. These numbers are unbelievable."

Paolini will climb to seventh in the world rankings on Monday.

"I'm really happy. It's a strange feeling. I just lost the final, but I think I have to be happy with these two weeks, and my new ranking," she said.

With the doubles final still to play with compatriot Sara Errani on Sunday, Paolini is enjoying herself.

"Who knows what the future holds, or what my next dream is," she said.

REUTERS

# SPORTS

## FREEDIVING



# HIDDEN DEPTHS

Ning Jingyu isn't your typical record-breaking freediver

By CHEN XUE  
chenxue@121st.cn

**N**ing Jingyu had no intention of becoming a competitive freediver when she first signed up for a beginner's class in July 2019. She was simply drawn to the images of people diving with whales and wanted similar pictures of her own.

However, five years later, on May 14, Ning set a national record in women's CWT (Constant Weight Freediving) at the 2024 CMAS World Cup in the Philippines, reaching a depth of 101 meters.

Freediving is a sport that requires divers to hold their breath while either swimming horizontally as far as possible (in pool competitions) or descending as deep as possible (in depth competitions).

Traditionally, at 40 and a mother of a 9-year-old, Ning might have been considered past the prime age for sports, but she doesn't see age as a barrier in freediving. She explained that freediving is best performed with a low heart rate, because that means the body isn't consuming too much oxygen — a crucial factor when you have only one breath to rely on.

"At 40, I find it easier to maintain a calm state of mind," Ning said. "My slower metabolism also means my body needs less oxygen to function compared to younger athletes."

Ning didn't always possess this zen outlook. When she first took up freediving, she was managing her banquet planning business, a stressful and demanding job that required long hours, late nights, and meticulous attention to detail.

"I was always easily agitated," she recalled. But, freediving required the exact opposite. "Unlike most sports, where you need to stimulate the pump of adrenaline for better performance, in freediving, once you get excited, you're doomed," she said.

This is why Ning began teaching herself meditation. Now, she dedicates about an hour every day to meditation, whether she's working in Beijing or training in the Philippines. "It has become a part of my life, a routine as essential as the three meals of the day," she said.

Meditation helped her to better concentrate on, and enjoy, each dive, at least during the descent, because that is before the urge to breathe strikes, and her thigh muscles start to ache from the continuous kicking of the fins.

She began training with various competitive freedivers in 2022, steadily pushing her boundaries, one meter at a time.

Progressing from 40 to 50, then 60 and 70, by the end of 2022, Ning was able to reach a depth of 80 meters, which prompted her decision to participate in competitions scheduled in the Philippines the following year.

In July 2023, at the AIDA Panglao Depth Games, Ning accomplished a successful dive to 91 meters, propelling her to the position of third-ranked in China — and eighth in the world — in women's CWT.

Ning's path to becoming a record-holder was far from straightforward or easy, because she doesn't have the ideal height or build for a freediver.

Just as taller swimmers enjoy advantages such as longer arms and legs, aiding their speed in the water, many top female freedivers — like Alessia Zecchini from Italy, Alenka Artnik from Slovenia, and Jung A-kim from South Korea — stand at least around 1.7 meters or ever taller, while Ning is only 1.58.

Also, Ning wasn't particularly athletic before she took up freediving. As a result, she lacked the muscle and leg strength typical of many top divers, causing her to tire easily when kicking fast.

To overcome these limitations, she had to train harder. She started practicing free sparring, which not only strengthened her leg muscles and cardiovascular system, but also improved her flexibility. In Beijing, where open water is hard to come by, she made it a habit to train regularly in swimming pools to refine her fin technique and boost her ability to hold her breath.

However, there is still a big difference between pool training and open water training. This is why many professional freedivers choose to live and train year-round in Southeast Asia. But, Ning can only spend a few months in the Philippines every year before having to return to Beijing for her family and business.

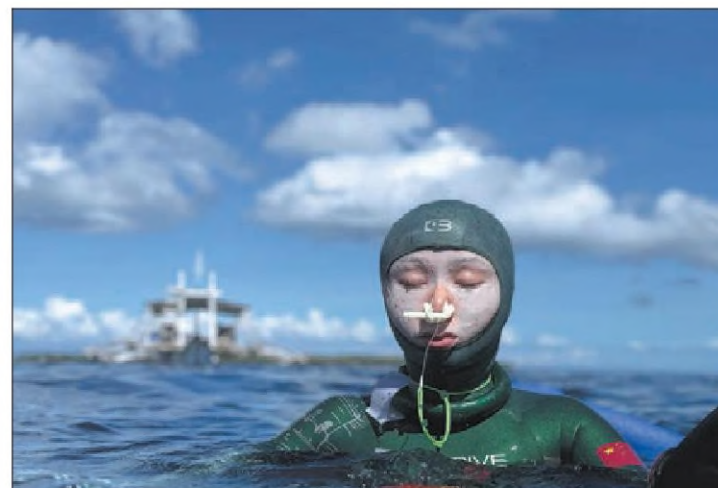
"Every family is different. I don't have to be confined to the traditional expectations of mothers always being present for their children," she said. "Besides, my daughter is proud of me. Although she may not fully understand the significance of a national record, she knows that her mom won first place in a competition."

As for Ning's business, she has been making adjustments since her decision to pursue freediving seriously, by stepping back from the forefront, where she was often on edge.

Ning's goal for next year is to challenge the Asian record for women's CWT, which is 106 meters, currently held by Japanese athlete Hanako Hirose.

But, she added, freediving is not about competing with others, but with oneself.

"I believe that's the essence of freediving. You can't rush it; you can't see others as your rivals; you can only focus on yourself and your own progress," Ning said. "In some other sports, you might be able to push yourself and see quick results, but in freediving, haste won't get you anywhere. You need patience and the right mindset to succeed."



Chinese freediver Ning Jingyu sets a national record in women's Constant Weight Freediving at the 2024 CMAS World Cup in the Philippines in May, reaching a depth of 101 meters. Her next goal is to challenge the Asian record, which is 106 meters and currently held by Japanese athlete Hanako Hirose. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY