

'Lunar' Nutcracker

Chinese rendition of ballet headed to Kennedy Center
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Long-haul cargo train popular among exporters
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Testing the waters

Technology lends helping hand to salvage artifacts from shipwrecks
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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 MONDAY, JUNE 24, 2024

Homecoming in Kuliang



Guests from different countries attend the inauguration ceremony of the Kuliang Historical Architecture Exhibition Hall in Fuzhou, Fujian province, on Saturday. Kuliang, or Guling in Mandarin, is situated on the outskirts of Fuzhou. Since 1886, people from more than 20 countries, including the United Kingdom, France and the United States, have built summer holiday homes at Yixia village in Kuliang, where they have fostered a harmonious relationship with local villagers. LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA

XI'S VISION | REFORM AND OPENING-UP

FTZ network brings benefit to foreign firms

Trailblazing Hainan trade zones among nation's models of high-quality growth

By XU WEI in Beijing, ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan and CHEN BOWEN in Haikou

Foreign businesses that have benefited from China's growing openness to the global market and from sound supply and industrial chains, as the nation develops a network of free trade zones.

In 2018, Zeeshan Qasim Khan, a Pakistani student who had just graduated from Hainan Medical University, was planning to start an international trade venture in Guangdong province, China's leading economic powerhouse.

Khan's initial plans, which focused on importing Pakistani rice, carpets and handicrafts into China, and exporting Chinese electronics, medical equipment and marbles to global markets, changed course following a pivotal announcement by President Xi Jinping.

During the 30th anniversary celebration of the founding of Hainan province and the Hainan Special Economic Zone in April 2018, Xi unveiled ambitious plans to transform the entire island into a pilot free trade zone and eventually establish a free trade port with unique Chinese characteristics.

This announcement convinced Khan that he should remain in Hainan and capitalize on the emerging opportunities.

Six years later, his decision stands fully vindicated, Khan said, highlighting the preferential corporate and individual income tax policies as primary advantages of the Hainan Free Trade Port.

"The tax benefits are substantial, and we get more benefits in our businesses," Khan noted, referring to the 15 percent corporate income tax rate for enterprises in encouraged industries within the free trade port, which is significantly lower than the usual 20 percent to 25 percent.

Khan's company, located in the Haikou Fulling Internet Industrial Park, is among the numerous for-

ign businesses that have benefited from China's growing openness to the global market and from sound supply and industrial chains, as the nation develops a network of free trade zones. In September 2013, China launched its first FTZ in Shanghai, a significant milestone in the country's reform and opening-up. The Shanghai FTZ introduced the first negative list for foreign investment, which was a radical departure from the previous method of listing sectors where foreign investment was encouraged. A negative list indicates the areas in which investment is prohibited or restricted; all other areas are presumed to be open.

President Xi, who has been at the helm of these reforms, emphasized the importance of FTZs in driving the nation's economic agenda.

"On this new journey, we must build higher-level free trade zones based on a comprehensive summary of the past decade's experience," he said in an instruction in September, urging continued innovation and exploration in broader and deeper areas.

During the annual session of the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, in 2014, Xi stressed the need for FTZs to align with international investment and trade rules, enhance the institutional system and regulatory model, and balance market-driven resource allocation with effective government intervention.

He called for boldness and innovation, aiming to develop replicable and scalable new systems to facilitate investment and trade, ensure efficient regulation and establish a standardized legal environment.

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WORLD WATCH

By Saud Faisal Malik

Cooperation frameworks serve as guide for Sino-Arab shared future

China and the Arab states have a remarkable history of strategic engagement that has developed over time. The "five cooperation frameworks" put forward by President Xi Jinping in his keynote speech at the 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum on May 30 can serve as more than a thorough guide for Sino-Arab relations going forward.

Focusing on innovation and development, the frameworks include collaborative innovations, finance and trade, new energy and cultures, and demonstrate a dedication to working together on modernization and addressing global concerns.

The two sides are further deepening cooperation and moving forward to step up the building of a China-Arab community with a shared future. At the China-Arab Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 2022, Xi put forward eight major cooperation initiatives, all of which have achieved early harvests.

"Moving forward, China is ready to work with the Arab side on that basis to put in place the following 'five cooperation frameworks' to step up the building of a China-Arab community with a shared future," Xi told the Beijing meeting in May.

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STEM students harassed by border officials in US

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Four Chinese students who recently traveled to the United States to study and participate in academic conferences suffered unwarranted harassment, interrogation and repatriation by the US side, sources said.

The four students have scientific and technical backgrounds, and two of them have research interests in artificial intelligence, the sources familiar with the matter told China Daily on the condition of anonymity.

US Customs and Border Protection officers took the four Chinese individuals to a darkened room for more than 10 hours of continuous interrogation, repeatedly questioning them with a baiting, coercive approach, the sources said.

The officers repeatedly questioned them about their personal and family information, their studies and internships in the US, whether they were members of the Communist Party of China, and whether they had cooperated with the Chinese government.

The officers "paid particular attention to political backgrounds such as CPC membership, and to scientific research backgrounds related to computers," one of the sources said.

The US side also refused to

allow two of the individuals to contact their families and friends, causing one of them to be out of contact with the outside world for more than 30 hours, the source said.

In addition, without evidence or valid warrants, the US side arbitrarily seized the electronic products of one of the Chinese individuals and repatriated the other three students. How the fourth student's case was resolved was not disclosed.

The US side in recent years has unwarrantedly harassed, interrogated and repatriated more than 30 Chinese students majoring in computer-related fields, according to incomplete statistics.

The vast majority of them are master's or doctoral degree candidates, with more than half of them being PhD candidates, and most of them are studying in well-known universities in the US. Their research interests cover fields such as AI, information science, network security, electronics, software engineering and electronic information engineering.

"Mostly, these students were harassed and interrogated by the US side for more than 10 hours upon entering the country, and the longest time of being held was up to five days, and ultimately, without exception, their visas were canceled and they were repatriated," another source said.

The US practice is "far beyond the realm of normal law enforce-

ment, is strongly ideologically biased, and is not aimed at maintaining so-called national border security", the source said, adding that the aim is to hold back China's scientific and technological development and maintain US scientific and technological hegemony.

Such practices will only give rise to a serious "chilling effect" inside and outside the US, poison the public opinion environment for China-US relations, and impede the mutual visits and exchange of talent between the two countries, the sources said.

The US will eventually damage its own international image and innovation vitality, leading to a serious backfire, a third source said.

"Chinese students should assess the risk with great caution and think twice before going to the US to study," the source added.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of China Institute of International Studies' Department of American Studies, said that Washington is sparing no effort to fan competition among major countries and secure its hegemony, and such harassment aims to disrupt and frustrate regular exchanges between the two countries on education, science and technology.

Behind such harassment is the fact that some anti-China forces in the US have constantly hyped the so-called "China threat", and this kind of harassment "serves to build on their anti-China narrative and China-threat narrative", Su said.

"Fundamentally, this is an issue of perception," she said. "When Washington views China as a rival and a threat, it seeks to undermine China in a relentless way."

Anger on the streets



Demonstrators rally on Saturday in Tel Aviv, Israel, demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, a deal for the release of remaining hostages held by Hamas and early elections. CHEN JUNQING / XINHUA

HISTORY OF WWII INTERNMENT CAMP BONDS WESTERNERS, CHINESE FRIENDS

Gratitude still strong for Weifang villagers' support for foreigners held by Japanese invaders

By SUN SHANGWU, JIANG CHENGLONG and ZHAO RUIXUE in Weifang, Shandong

In a 140-year-old cross-shaped building in Weifang, Shandong province, two walls display nearly 50 golden handprints, each inscribed with an English name and some also having a Chinese name. Most of the handprints are those

of people from Europe and North America. Some of them spent more than two years in what was the largest civilian internment camp established by Japanese invasion forces in the Far East during the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and World War II, an experience that profoundly changed their lives. Although they now live in different

In-depth

parts of the world, they have left their names and handprints in China forever.

In the 1940s, a missionary compound was converted into the internment camp. During the final

two years of World War II, over 2,000 Western civilians from 25 countries in Europe and North America endured difficult times in the camp.

Throughout this time, villagers who lived near the camp risked their lives to secretly deliver food, medicine and crucial intelligence to the civilians, aiding some escape efforts. In 1945, with the help of the local Chinese, these expatriates

were successfully liberated by the United States military.

Today, the camp site has been developed into a large hospital, a school and a museum detailing the camp's history.

The camp was originally a mission compound founded by US missionaries in 1882, which served as a church, hospital and school in Weifang, the former name for Weifang.

In 1943, the Japanese invaders turned it into an internment camp to detain over 2,000 Western civilians, including more than 300 children, who had been living in Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong and other places. The oldest was over 85 years old, while some infants were born in the camp.

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Among the detained civilians were notable figures such as Briton Eric Liddell, the 1924 Paris Olympics 400m track champion, and Arthur W. Hummel Jr, who later became the second US ambassador to China.

The camp was surrounded by barbed wire, high walls, watchtowers, and searchlights, with the foreign nationals stripped of their freedom and subjected to forced labor.

Charles A. Stanley, from the US and now aged 83, was sent to the camp with his parents when he was only 10 months old. His memories of staying there come from his parents' recollections and public records.

"Everyone in the camp had to work for the camp to run," he said. "My father was given a job as a baker and had to get up at 4 am every morning to help bake bread for everyone in the camp."

Stanley's father jokingly referred to his son as "seventh-generation Chinese" as his father's family had lived in China for four generations since the 1860s and his mother's family for three generations since the 1910s. Both Stanley and his parents were born in China.

Conditions in the internment camp were extremely harsh, with families crammed into small student dormitories and individual internees living in crowded classrooms, offering no privacy.

Due to poor nutrition and medical care, as well as abuse from Japanese guards, at least 31 internees died during their imprisonment, although 33 babies were also born.

Eighty-year-old Angela Cox Elliott, who holds both British and Canadian passports, was born in the camp. "It must have been difficult for all internees to appear at the frequent roll calls by the Japanese guards. Everyone had to give their number in Japanese when it was called, and they always had to bow to the Japanese as well," she said, recalling her mother's description of events at the camp.

Help from local Chinese

Despite the wartime dangers, local Chinese villagers outside the camp risked their lives to secretly send critical intelligence to the internees, providing "very important information about the course of the war", according to Stanley.

In addition, they also helped form a "black market" that allowed people in the camp to trade some of their belongings for food, such as chicken meat and eggs, as the food supplies in the camp were quite limited.

"The black market was obviously dangerous," he said. "The Chinese people who helped make it work were in grave danger of being shot by the Japanese guards."

In 1944, some Western internees secretly planned an escape. Zhang Xingtai, who cleaned the latrines, and carpenter Liu Tengyun, were among the few non-Japanese allowed to enter and leave the camp. They helped convey messages to nearby Chinese anti-Japanese forces. With their assistance, Brit Laurence Tipton and the Hummel successfully escaped in June 1944.

On Aug 17, 1945, two days after Japan announced its surrender, the US military launched a rescue mission code-named "Operation Duck" and parachuted into Weihshien to liberate the internees.

Chinese translator Wang Chenghan, who is now 99, parachuted with the US soldiers during the rescue operation.

In 2020, Wang donated a piece of parachute cord to the internment camp museum given to him in 2015 by Cox Elliott, who was 2 years old when she left the camp. She said that her mother collected some sturdy parachute cords for packing their belongings as they prepared to leave Weihshien.

These cords were preserved by her family and were not given to Wang until Cox Elliott was 72 years old.

Stanley also recounted unforgettable stories his parents told him of heading to and leaving the camp.

In 1943, it was freezing cold when his family walked with their suitcases along Beijing streets heading to the railway station to get the train to the Weihshien camp. One man emerged from the crowd to give Stanley's father a thick jacket for warmth.

"This act of kindness from a stranger stuck in my father's memory many years later," he said.

Although Stanley was very young, he said he still remembers a group of Chinese boys about his age when he was in the



Below: People are transferred to the internment camp in Weifang, Shandong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A bag (left) and hand-knitting tools (right bottom) used in the internment camp. The camp site has been developed into a hospital and a museum.

Left: Some internees leave the camp after the war ended. Above right: Internees wait in line to get water.

Museum: Memories of hardship and healing



The front gate of the former site of the Weifang Courtyard of the Happy Way in Weifang. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

camp. "They used to climb onto the camp wall where they would tease us and we would tease them back," he said.

At that time, the war had just ended and the electric fence was turned off. Stanley's family had remained in the camp waiting to be transported to Qingdao and board a ship to leave China.

"When we were finally driven out of the camp on army trucks, I saw the Chinese boys sitting by the camp wall watching us leave and looking very sad, as we were too, that we would never get the chance to play together," he said.

Returning to 'mother'

After the liberation of the Weihshien concentration camp, most of the former internees returned to their homelands.



Valentine A. Soltay, a survivor of the Weihshien internment camp, donates historical records of her birth in the camp to the museum in 2015. JU CHUANJIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

However, over the following 80 years, many of them revisited Weifang multiple times, and expressed their special bond with China.

Mary Previte, who was imprisoned in the camp at the age of 9, later became a New Jersey state legislator in the US. When she returned to China in 2005, she knelt down and kissed the ground at Beijing Capital International Airport after her plane touched down.

Previte returned for the 60th anniversary of the camp's liberation. In her speech, she said, "China is our mother. I was born in Kaifeng, Henan. I knelt down and kissed my mother."

"Many of us, friends from around the world, were also born in China. Today, we are back home," she said.



This gives me great hope that the memories of these friendly connections can help as a bridge in any present and future frictions that might arise in the current or future international situation."

Charles A. Stanley, an internee from the United States during WWII

Briton Maida Harris Campbell, 94, was imprisoned in the Weihshien camp between the ages of 13 and 15. She has returned to Weifang five times with her family.

"We would like to thank the Chinese that helped us," she said, adding she hoped the friendship of people from different countries would continue.

"I believe in promoting peace in any way I can," said Campbell, who now resides in Canada.

In 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the camp's liberation, 12 former internees and their descendants, totaling 80 people, gathered at the former camp site, where they left their handprints and their names in English and some even in Chinese.

Due to urban development, most of the site has been replaced by the largest hospital in Weifang.

Xia Baoshu, 93, the former hospital head, has received many former internees visiting the site in the past three to four decades, and has established enduring friendships and trust with many of them.

For decades, he has been dedicated to turning the oral histories of the internees into a book to let more people read about the site's history.

Xia said he and other surviving internees are all willing to record and share the unity and mutual support between the Western civilians and Chinese people.

City of peace

In recognition of the unique wartime bond between over 2,000 Western expatriates and Weifang, and the city's efforts to promote peace through the transformation of the camp site into a museum, Weifang was designated as the world's 308th International City of Peace in 2021.

The honor was approved by International Cities of Peace, a global nonprofit association dedicated to promoting peace worldwide.

J. Frederick Arment, the organization's executive director, said at the time that Weifang had experienced historical hardship and trauma, yet the leaders and citizens of its communities are committed to healing and progress.

Liu Yun, the Party chief of Weifang, said that the camp's history embodies the idea of peace and a humanitarian spirit.

"Weifang city needs to take responsibility and play a role in further promoting this idea and spirit from the perspectives of the country and the Chinese nation," he said.

As the former internees revisit the city multiple times, their memories and knowledge of China are being refreshed.

Stanley returned to China twice, in 1991 and 2019. He found that during his second visit, more Chinese people were aware of and interested in the camp's history and were much friendlier toward him.

"I think this illustrates the close bonds that exist between China and foreign families like mine, with long-standing links to friends among the Chinese people," he said.

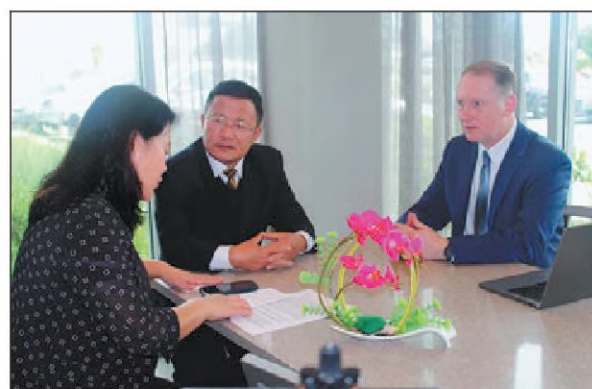
"This gives me great hope that the memories of these friendly connections can help as a bridge in any present and future frictions that might arise in the current or future international situation," he said.

The experience in the camp had not only changed his life forever, but also that of his son, John, sparking his interest in China and playing a big role in him becoming a history professor at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania.

"It's very important to understand what happened in the Weihshien concentration camp. It is a lesson for those who did not experience it," John Stanley said.

"We need to study that history in depth to prevent such things from happening again."

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Left: John Stanley (right), son of internee Charles A. Stanley, gives an interview in San Francisco, California, the US in March. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Middle: A survivor of the internment camp visits the memorial museum with her family members in 2015. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: Local students visit the museum. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

China, France jointly launch SVOM satellite

By ZHAO LEI
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A cutting-edge astronomical spacecraft jointly developed by China and France was launched into its preset orbit on Saturday afternoon to capture and observe gamma-ray bursts — the most distant explosions of stars — the China National Space Administration said.

The Space Variable Objects Monitor spacecraft is a combination of small telescopes. It was placed in a low-Earth orbit by a Chinese Long March 2C carrier rocket launched at 3 pm from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province, the administration said in a news release.

The 930-kilogram spacecraft was built by the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Innovation Academy for Microsatellites in Shanghai. It carries four scientific payloads: the ECLAIRs coded mask camera and the Microchannel X-ray Telescope made by French scientists, and the Gamma-ray Burst Monitor and the Visible Telescope built by the Chinese team.

The best spacecraft ever built for multi-band comprehensive observation of gamma-ray bursts, it is expected to play an important role in space-based astronomical explorations, the CNSA said.

Gamma-ray bursts, immensely energetic explosions in distant galaxies, are the brightest and most extreme explosive events in the universe and the most energetic and luminous electromagnetic events since the Big Bang.

Humanity's first knowledge about gamma-ray bursts came from the serendipitous detection of one such explosion on July 2, 1967, by the United States' Vela-series satellites, which were tasked with detecting gamma radiation pulses emitted by nuclear weapons tests.

In 1973, US scientists published the first research paper about the astronomical phenomenon.

Several spacecraft, including NASA's Compton Gamma Ray Observatory and High Energy Transient Explorer 2, and the Italian-Dutch astronomical satellite BeppoSAX, have been placed into space to detect gamma-ray bursts.

Initiated in 2005, the SVOM project is the result of a long-term collaboration between the CNSA and France's National Center for Space Studies. It has involved scientists and engineers from multiple institutes, including the Research Institute in Astrophysics and Planetology in Toulouse and the Institute of High Energy Physics in Beijing.

Following its orbital deployment, scientists from both China and France will work together to control the satellite, receive scientific data and arrange follow-up observations.

The main scientific objectives of the SVOM mission include searching for and rapidly locating various gamma-ray bursts; comprehensively measuring and studying their electromagnetic radiation properties; using the bursts to study dark energy and the evolution of the universe; and observing electromagnetic signals associated with gravitational waves.

Wei Jianyan, a scientist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' National Astronomical Observatories and the SVOM mission's Chinese principal investigator, said that the state-of-

“We hope that we can ‘see’ the earliest gamma-ray bursts that took place in the farthest parts of the universe, and that will help scientists learn more about the universe’s ‘childhood’ and its evolution.”

Wei Jianyan, scientist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' National Astronomical Observatories

the-art satellite features world-class technologies, a large field of view and is capable of highly precise observations.

“As soon as the satellite spots traces of gamma-ray bursts, it can transmit the information to ground control within about one minute,” he said. “After receiving that notification, ground control will notify ground-based observation stations across the world to use their assets to carry out integrated detection with the spacecraft.”

“We hope that we can ‘see’ the earliest gamma-ray bursts that took place in the farthest parts of the universe, and that will help scientists learn more about the universe’s ‘childhood’ and its evolution.”

In addition, Wei said, the SVOM satellite is specifically suitable for searching for kilonovas, which are bright blasts of electromagnetic radiation that happen when two neutron stars or a neutron star and a stellar-mass black hole collide and merge.

“Such a detection would be of great significance to the study of stellar evolution, and to answering very interesting scientific questions such as where heavy elements like gold and silver come from in the universe,” he said.

The SVOM is the second satellite jointly developed by China and France, following the China-France Oceanography Satellite that was launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China in October 2018.

That satellite has obtained a great deal of data that has been used to study ocean surface winds and waves, predict cyclones and improve scientists' understanding of climate change.

In China's ongoing Chang'e 6 robotic lunar mission, a radon-measuring instrument made by French scientists has been placed on the far side of the moon. The data collected is expected to help study the movement of lunar dust and some volatile chemicals between the lunar regolith, a layer of unconsolidated rocky material, and the lunar exosphere.

Liu Yunfeng, deputy director of the CNSA's international cooperation department, said that both China and France are global space powers and they are determined to advance their collaboration in space science and technology to uncover mysteries in the universe, enrich humanity's knowledge and use their space programs to benefit the world.

Grassroot rockstar



A contestant lifts a rock weighing 125 kilograms on Sunday in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region. The rock-carrying contest was part of the first farmers and herdersmen's sports competition held in Lhasa. A total of over 500 participants are competing in 19 sports during the five-day event. LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Economy set for growth despite trade challenges

Stable, transparent policies needed to keep momentum, says expert

By WU YONG in Dalian, Liaoning province, and CHENG YU and LI JIAYING in Beijing

China's economy will maintain its upward growth trajectory this year amid rising trade protectionism and economic uncertainties, with huge potential in rural consumption, manufacturing and opening-up to be further tapped, according to the World Economic Forum.

Chen Liming, chair of Greater China at the WEF, a Switzerland-based international organization, said that China's positive economic outlook remains unchanged in the long term, given the country's massive market advantage, rich talent pool and complete and stable industrial chain.

“China remains a massive consumer market where regional and rural development represent huge opportunities. The country's production and manufacturing systems are still upgrading, which also represent further significant growth,” Chen told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's retail sales — a key gauge of consumer spending — rose 3.7 percent year-on-year in May, while industrial output grew 5.6 percent during the period.

Chen made the remarks ahead of the upcoming 15th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting of the New Champions, also known as the Summer Davos Forum, which will be held in Dalian, Northeast China's Liaoning province, from Tuesday to Thursday.

He said that more efforts should be made to ensure policies are continuously “stable, transparent and predictable”, in order to further stabilize the nation's growth momentum.

“Such sustainable policies are expected to greatly boost confidence of entrepreneurs, so that growth momentum of vertical industries can be further consolidated,” he added.

Chen said he believes that a longer-term path lies in adhering to the country's reform and opening-up agenda, as it improves its

socialist market economy. “The market is expected to continue to play a decisive role in resource allocation in the country, which will continue to offer a level playing field and a fair policy environment for all businesses.”

For instance, Dalian, where the Summer Davos has been held seven times till now, has striven to build a new frontier for foreign investment in China's northeastern region, Chen said.

“The city and the province have attracted an increasing number of foreign enterprises by improving the business environment and making it more international, convenient and law-abiding,” he said.

In addition, the Summer Davos has provided Liaoning with opportunities for deeper exchanges with the international community and a window for learning new technologies and expertise, according to Chen.

“Dalian city and Liaoning province are also able to showcase their economic development achievements, which will promote the

internationalization of their economy,” he said.

This year, China has taken a series of measures to expand opening-up, including rolling out national and pilot free trade zone versions of the negative list for cross-border trade in services as well as simplifying visa application procedures for foreigners.

However, the world's second-largest economy has recently faced protectionist measures taken by its major trade partners. The European Commission said earlier this month that it would apply additional duties of up to 38.1 percent on imported Chinese electric vehicles starting next month.

The United States has also been trying to suppress China's “new three” industries — new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products — by raising taxes and hyping up the so-called “overcapacity” problem.

“Using a ‘big stick’ of sanctions to deal with trade disputes will not yield good results. Trade disputes arise from trade imbalances and should be resolved through dialogue and negotiations,” Chen said.

He added that it is obviously due to differences in resource endowment, technological levels and worker skills that some countries have gained more competitive advantages than others, not because of the so-called production or capacity problem.

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Ties: Sino-Arab community key for world

From page 1

The first cooperation framework is for innovation and it highlights high-quality development including collaborative labs for health, artificial intelligence and environmental projects, demonstrating a dedication to addressing global concerns together. Establishing monitoring stations for space debris and working together on space missions are brave steps toward a shared future in science research. Here, China shows its willingness to share with others its newly gained technological advantages.

The second is an expanded framework for investment and finance cooperation, with intentions to establish an investment cooperation forum and strengthen interbank associations. A growing degree of financial integration is demonstrated by the invitation extended to Arab states to apply for China's bonds and special loans intended for industrialization in the Middle East. Both areas' economies are expected to grow and stabilize as a result of this financial cooperation.

The third is a more multifaceted framework for energy cooperation, which includes strengthened strategic alliances for renewable energy and oil and gas projects. China's

support for Arab renewable energy projects with over 3 million kilowatt installed capacity demonstrates a shared commitment to energy security and sustainable development, as it has been a leader in new energy development.

The fourth is a more balanced framework for mutually beneficial economic and trade ties. China is expected to accelerate talks for a regional free trade agreement and push for projects worth 3 billion yuan (\$414 million). The Arab states' participation in the China International Import Expo highlights a mutually beneficial and balanced approach to economic cooperation.

The fifth fosters collaboration and understanding based on people-to-people and cultural exchanges. The establishment of the China-Arab Center of the Global Civilization Initiative, think tank development, university collaborations and youth conferences are examples of a comprehensive approach to cultural diplomacy. An additional indication of this commitment to building lasting partnerships is that China will invite 200 leaders of Arab political parties to visit the country every year.

The “five cooperation frameworks” proposed by Xi serve as the foundation for the Sino-Arab coop-

eration ahead, and ultimately represent a substantial advancement in international diplomacy.

Deepening of China-Arab cooperation is propelled by a range of positive motivations, including robust economic partnerships, strong political alliances and shared geopolitical interests. Economically, Arab states, particularly the United Arab Emirates, benefit immensely from their burgeoning trade relationships with China. In turn, China actively pursues a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, which promises to further enhance regional prosperity.

Politically, their mutual understanding extends to advocating peace in the Gaza Strip and promoting the two-state solution, with China incessantly working to de-escalate and end the Palestine-Israel conflict. These cooperative efforts highlight the strategic and diplomatic synergy between China and the Arab world, fostering a partnership that contributes to regional stability and global harmony.

The China-Arab community has significant implications for the world's future. Both sides are not only securing immediate economic and strategic benefits by fortifying their relationships through the “five cooperation frameworks”, they are also laying a foundation for a new

paradigm of international relations. By fostering creativity, financial integration, cooperative energy production and cross-cultural interactions, these frameworks forge a complex relationship that is resistant to outside influences.

The China-Arab partnership also acts as a role model for other countries looking to broaden their foreign partnerships. It shows that strong regional players can work together productively outside of the conventional Western sphere of influence in South America, Africa and Asia. This change may lessen the influence of Western-led organizations and programs, promoting a more inclusive system of global governance, which more accurately represents the needs of emerging economies.

Furthermore, this expanding role of the Global South emphasizes how important it is for the United States and its allies to reevaluate their foreign policy. At a time when the world is becoming more interconnected, the West cannot afford to overlook the justifiable hopes and concerns of other powerful regions. Finding common ground and having constructive conversations with China and the Arab states could help lessen the adversarial tone of the current state of international relations.

The author is editor-in-chief of the Observer Diplomat magazine in Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

The final hurdle



Over 200 foreign students from Tongji University's International School take their final exam on Saturday in Shanghai. The two-day exam assesses the students' progress after a year of preparatory coursework. Students can continue their studies on a scholarship program after passing the exam. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Reconsideration mechanism helps solve business disputes

By YANG ZEKUN
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Multiple authorities and agencies have launched an initiative to strengthen supervision over administrative law enforcement and streamline business dispute resolution.

The six-month operation, involving the Ministry of Justice, National Development and Reform Commission and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, aims to foster a more efficient and fair legal environment for businesses.

A key component of the initiative is to enhance the role of administrative reconsideration, a process allowing companies to challenge government actions they believe violate their rights. The Ministry of Justice has established dedicated channels for handling business-related reconsideration cases and facilitates mediation through industry associations.

"Administrative reconsideration not only ensures government accountability, but also offers a crucial avenue for safeguarding business interests," said Zhou Yuansheng, head of the ministry's Bureau of Administrative Reconsideration and Response. "This system prioritizes convenience, fairness and swift resolution, typically concluding cases within 60 days, with simplified procedures resolving disputes in 30 days."

The initiative emphasizes stronger oversight of business-related administrative enforcement. Authorities will address issues such as excessive

penalties for minor offenses and ensure penalties serve a legitimate purpose. Recommendations will be issued to rectify any identified irregularities discovered during reconsideration proceedings.

The NDRC will focus on establishing standardized mechanisms for communication between government departments regarding concerns about the business environment. This will ensure prompt action on recurring problems and address common needs raised by companies.

"We aim to prioritize non-litigation methods like administrative reconsideration," said Yu Wentao, deputy head of NDRC's Department of Laws and Regulations. "This approach offers a low-cost, multifaceted and one-stop solution for dispute resolution."

The federation will emphasize the growing importance of legal compliance within the private sector, which now boasts over 55 million enterprises. Chambers of commerce play a significant role in facilitating mediation, with a success rate of 68 percent for over 370,000 mediated business disputes in the past four years.

"We will collaborate with the Ministry of Justice and other departments to promote a law-based business environment," said Li Qiang, deputy head of the federation's legal services department. "The focus will be on areas such as compliant employment practices, preventing internal corruption, intellectual property protection and robust internal control mechanisms."

Faster, higher, stronger



Olympic diving champion Zhang Jiaqi tries a special skateboard designed to mimic surfing during an Olympic Day event in Beijing on Sunday. Fourteen locations across the country hosted activities for the day, which celebrates sports, health and togetherness.

LIU PING / FOR CHINA DAILY

African media workers impressed by TV show

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha
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African media professionals visiting China have been impressed by the country's advanced television production techniques, highlighting areas where their own industries can learn and grow.

Following a visit to a rehearsal for the Chinese music competition show *Singer 2024* in Changsha, Hunan province, on Thursday, the 18 media workers were particularly impressed by the show's production values.

They compared it favorably to established programs from the United States such as *The Voice*, *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent*.

Singer 2024, which features both international and local singers, airs live every Friday on Hunan Satellite TV and Mango TV online. The visiting professionals, hailing from seven African countries, including Eritrea, Lesotho and Nigeria, are participating in a 14-day tour organized by the Ministry of Commerce. Their itinerary includes visiting TV stations and media enterprises in Changsha, followed by visits to similar entities in Shanghai and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Abubaker Lubowa, a photographer from Uganda National Media Group, admired the show's technical aspects. "The lighting, sound effects, microphones, musicians and cameras are just on point. This is something I have never seen in my life," he said.

Despite the language barrier,

Lubowa was captivated by the music and particularly enjoyed the performance of Taiwan singer Huang Hsuan. He noted the growth and depth of Chinese music, with artists performing with genuine emotion.

Lubowa emphasized the importance of African TV producers adapting to the shift in viewership away from traditional screens to smartphones and tablets, a trend he has observed in recent years.

Christelle Lebrasse, a senior news editor at Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, praised the show's exceptional lighting design, describing it as being unlike anything she had seen before. She said the experience created by the multidirectional lighting, and the palpable emotions conveyed by the singers, was immersive. Lebrasse noted the seamless synchronization of the hourlong rehearsal, highlighting the show's professionalism. She expressed confidence that *Singer 2024* would be well-received by audiences in Africa and beyond, given growing global interest.

Tiblet Tesfaye Dejene, a senior journalist from Ethiopia's Wazema Radio, described her experience as exhilarating, with the show's energy prompting her to dance and sing along during the rehearsal. She said the experience demonstrated China's growing global influence, exemplified by the show's inclusion of international singers. She commended the Chinese people for their welcoming nature, friendliness and dedication to hard work.



Robo Ronaldo

A soccer robot is put through its paces during the 2024 Robo Cup Asia-Pacific Tianjin Invitational Tournament in Tianjin on Saturday. Organizers staged an open day to encourage people to try smart technologies.

TONG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

1m yuan rewards for papers in top journal spark debate

Universities' generosity questioned as emphasis on publications tuned down

By ZOU SHUO
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Reports that teams led by two Chinese mainland professors have each been awarded 1 million yuan (\$138,000) for publishing papers in *Nature*, a leading international science journal, have sparked heated discussion in academic circles.

While some said universities have the right to reward scholars in any way they want, others questioned whether the practice goes against government efforts to move away from an overemphasis on the publication of papers in academic evaluation.

According to media reports, Zhu Jiapeng, a professor at Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine, and his team were given 1 million yuan by the university for publishing a paper in *Nature*. They became the first people from the university to publish a paper in the journal in 70 years.

Peng Li, who was an associate professor at Guizhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, and his team were also awarded 1 mil-

lion yuan for publishing a paper in *Nature*. They were the first people from Guizhou province to publish a paper in the journal.

Liu Xingde, the president of Guizhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, said the reward was for outstanding academic results and the contribution Peng has made in medicine.

Peng has since been promoted to full professor and deputy director of the hospital affiliated with the university.

Zhu said academic papers were like a "spell" for researchers. Writing papers had given him pain, headaches and also joy, he said, asking people to pay more attention to his studies rather than the fact he had a paper published in a top journal.

According to a notice issued by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology, universities should stop using papers listed in the Science Citation Index as the top criterion in the evaluation of academic research.

However, the notice also stressed that the authorities encourage aca-

demical researchers to publish high-level, high-quality and innovative academic papers in international journals.

Tian Wentao, a PhD candidate at a university in Hunan province, said he knows how hard it is to get papers published in top journals like *Nature*, as they only publish innovative and influential papers that require a massive amount of time-consuming work.

However, the researchers are generally not rewarded enough for their contributions, at least financially, which results in a lack of motivation to work on arduous but pioneering problems, he said.

"Giving high bonuses to such researchers is a great way to pay them back for their hard work and encourage other researchers to work on groundbreaking subjects," Tian said.

A PhD graduate from Central South University in Changsha, Hunan, surnamed Liang said there is nothing wrong with universities giving money to researchers who have published papers in top journals.

"Although the authorities have stressed making academic papers less important in talent evaluation, they are still widely used in getting funds and higher professional

titles," he said. "They are also the proof that your hard-earned academic results are recognized."

Liang said people do not realize how hard it is to publish a paper in *Nature* or *Science*, especially for researchers from lesser known universities, because most academic resources are allocated to China's top universities.

Chu Zhaohui, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences, said publishing in top journals can increase the reputation of a university, increasing its competitiveness in student enrollment and in getting resources and funds from the government, which is why the two universities gave such large cash rewards to the researchers.

Xiong Bingqi, director of 21st Century Education Research, said he disagrees with the universities' practice.

Medical universities and hospitals are notorious for placing too great an emphasis on the publication of academic papers, he said, and many paper retractions and frauds in recent years have happened in the medical sector.

That is why people should not equate academic achievements with publishing papers, Xiong added.

FTZs: Pioneering initiatives boost reform, opening-up

From page 1

China has so far established 22 FTZs, which contributed to about 18.4 percent of the nation's total import and export volume in 2023. The Hainan Free Trade Port has introduced over 120 innovative policies to date.

Some analysts underlined Xi's vision for the FTZs, which served as a springboard for bold experimentation and systemic reform.

Gu Xueming, president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, wrote in a co-authored report in November, "The achievements of the past decade in the pilot FTZs prove that these zones have become pioneering forces of high-level openness, trailblazers of deep-seated reforms, models of high-quality development, and important platforms for serving national strategies."

He explained that the FTZs in China have come up with pioneering initiatives making them bold leaders in the country's reform and opening-up, including the implementation of negative lists for market entry and cross-border trade in services.

The FTZs were also home to China's first wholly foreign-owned public fund management company and its first wholly foreign-owned auto-

mobile manufacturing enterprise.

In the realm of deepening reforms, China's FTZs have consistently embraced bold experimentation and innovation, achieving significant breakthroughs in trade, investment, finance and government functions, he said.

In Shandong province, the establishment of an FTZ has significantly spurred the inflow of foreign investment and boosted efforts to improve the business environment.

Cui Linxian, an executive with SITC International Holdings Co, a Hong Kong-based shipping logistics company, highlighted the alignment of the zone's innovative spirit with the company's entrepreneurial ethos.

The robust port infrastructure in Qingdao, the second-largest foreign trade port in China, provides an ideal environment for business growth, he said.

He added that the Shandong FTZ aims to establish a world-class business environment, which has underpinned the company's efforts to enhance its core competitive edge.

"The authorities in the FTZ have continually simplified procedures and improved efficiency, adhering to a proactive service approach that shortens the path for enterprises to conduct their business," Cui said.

"By focusing on the needs of businesses as both the starting point

and ultimate goal, multiple departments have collaborated to promote the integration of services into a unified one-stop."

Khan, the Pakistani national, also praised the introduction of favorable policies and one-stop services designed to attract and support foreigners living and working in Hainan, particularly those eager to engage in business activities despite language barriers.

"These measures simplify crucial processes like work permits, visas and residency requirements, enhancing overall convenience and efficiency," he added.

Khan said he believes that, as one of the world's largest free trade ports, the Hainan FTP will attract more young talent to the island province, promoting local economic and trade development.

He has shared information about the preferential policies and vast opportunities in the Hainan FTP with friends in Pakistan and other countries, many of whom are considering relocating to Hainan to work and invest.

Wang Ying, a researcher at the Beijing-based University of International Business and Economics' Academy of China Open Economy Studies, underscored the importance of the FTZ strategy in China's high-level opening-up agenda going forward.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said in his report to the 20th CPC National Congress in October 2022 that the nation will work faster to develop the Hainan Free Trade Port, upgrade pilot FTZs, and expand the globally oriented network of high-standard free trade areas.

Wang said the nation's FTZs will take on an even greater historical mission by coordinating deep reforms and high-level openness. "The focus of FTZs should be on exploring deeper and broader reforms in key areas such as trade, investment, finance and cross-border data flows," she said.

By expanding the scope and depth of pioneering reforms, the FTZs will enrich the application of free trade policies and amplify their benefits, Wang added.

By advancing institutional openness through rules, regulations, management and standards, FTZs will serve as comprehensive experimental platforms for reform and opening-up, which will support China's accession to high-standard international trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, she added.

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VISUAL



Editor's Note: Using a blend of words and visuals, this series explores unique communities and reveals the heart of China through food, architecture, craftsmanship, landscapes and traditions.

BEHIND THE LANZHOU BEEF NOODLES

HAND-PULLED PERFECTION



01 KNEADING DOUGH

Penghui water (alkaline): Unique to Lanzhou Noodles, it improves elasticity and color.



Mix salt to flour, stir evenly. Gradually add room temperature water, mixing until a shaggy dough forms (water-to-flour ratio 50%-55%).

02 INITIAL KNEADING



Form a dough and rest 15-20 minutes. Knead for 10-15 minutes, adding alkaline water. Rest for 30 minutes.

03 ROLL INTO STRIPS



Roll each portion into 30-40 cm strips, applying even pressure for uniform thickness, shaping noodles.

LOCATION

Lanzhou is located in the northwest region of China and serves as the capital of Gansu province.



MAKE LANZHOU BEEF NOODLE SOUP

Selecting bones and meat, blanching to remove impurities, simmering with seasonings for 2-3 hours, skimming off fat and debris, and finally adjusting seasoning.



Lanzhou's treasured noodles fusion of tradition, modernity

By MA JINGNA in Lanzhou
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Lanzhou beef noodles, originating from the capital of Gansu province in Northwest China, are not simply a gastronomic delight with a rich historical and cultural legacy, but are also a dish that has garnered widespread acclaim for a distinctive taste and impeccable artistry. Evolving from a humble bowl of noodles over a century ago to becoming the quintessential symbol of Lanzhou today, the narrative around Lanzhou beef noodles epitomizes a fusion of tradition, innovation and meticulous craftsmanship.

A storied legacy

Revered as being "China's first noodles", the history of Lanzhou beef noodles can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The traditional preparation is intricate, involving meticulous ingredient selection, dough kneading, noodle pulling and soup simmering. The noodles, painstakingly hand-pulled to achieve a delicate and elastic texture, are complemented by a robustly flavored beef broth, culminating in a wholesome culinary experience. In 1915, Chef Ma Baozi popularized the dish on the streets of Lanzhou, swiftly captivating diners with his exceptional noodle-pulling prowess and delectable broth.

In the 1980s, Lanzhou beef noodles garnered global recognition as China embraced international engagement, assuming the role of a cultural conduit. In 2021, the exemplary artistry of the dish secured its inclusion on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Harmonizing tradition

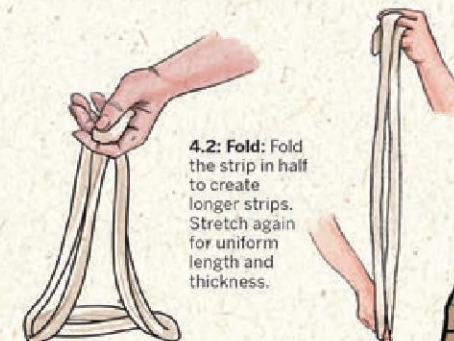
Lanzhou beef noodles have constantly evolved, harmonizing tradition with innovation. With evolving consumer demand and market dynamics, the industry has proactively pursued new avenues for expansion. Through franchising, partnerships and joint ventures, Lanzhou beef noodles have proliferated across various domestic and international locales, serving as a cultural emissary for the city.

The Lanzhou bureau of commerce has formulated a strategic blueprint for developing the industry around Lanzhou beef noodles, emphasizing diversification and global outreach. This blueprint centers on establishing industry clusters via the creation of the Lanzhou Beef Noodles Industrial Park to attract enterprises and foster high-quality advancements. Furthermore, work is underway to elevate brand exposure and increase participation in national exhibitions to augment brand recognition and market penetration.

04 STRETCHING NOODLES



4.1: Initial Stretching: Hold both ends evenly and gently stretch the noodle strip. Ensure even pulling to avoid breaking.



4.2: Fold: Fold the strip in half to create longer strips. Stretch again for uniform length and thickness.



4.3: Repeat Folding and Stretching: Repeat folding and stretching 3-4 times to make thinner, longer noodles. Maintain uniform thickness.



4.4: Adjust Length and Thickness: Stretch carefully for thinner noodles without breaking.
4.5: Handle Finished Noodles: Rest noodles briefly to relax them. Sprinkle with dry flour to prevent sticking.
4.6: Cooking the Noodles: Cooking noodles in boiling water, usually 1-2 minutes depending on their thinness.

PREPARATION TECHNIQUES AND FEATURES

Lanzhou beef noodles are famous for their "five colors", which include "one clear, two white, three red, four green, and five yellow"

One Clear: Clear Soup

The beef broth must be clear, fresh, and not greasy. It is simmered for several hours until the broth has a transparent, shimmering appearance.



Two White: Radish Slices

The white radish slices add a refreshing and crisp texture to the beef noodles.

Three Red: Red Chili Oil

The chili oil is bright red, adding vibrant color and enhancing the flavor of the dish.



Four Green: Cilantro and Scallions

The green cilantro and scallions not only add a splash of color but also enrich the flavor profile with their fresh, aromatic notes.

Five Yellow: Noodles

The handmade noodles are yellow and shiny, offering a chewy and firm texture.



DIFFERENT SIZE OF NOODLES

Thin noodles with a diameter of around 1.5 millimeters.

Hair-thin noodles The thinnest type of Lanzhou beef noodle, similar in thickness to a strand of hair, about 1 millimeter in diameter.

Thin pillar noodles roughly 2.5 millimeters in diameter.

Wide noodles: The widest noodle, generally around 20 millimeters or more in width.

Medium-wide noodles A balanced width and thickness, usually 8 to 10 millimeters wide.

Thin-wide noodles are wide and thin, typically 10 to 12 millimeters in width.

Chive-leaf noodles are as wide as a chive leaf, usually 6 to 7 millimeters wide.

Medium pillar noodles with a diameter of about 3 millimeters.

AVERAGE DAILY SALE IN 2024



800,000 bowls

900,000 bowls

ESTIMATED AVERAGE DAILY SALE IN 2025



SKILLS TRAINING

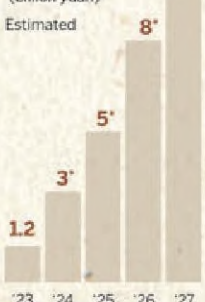
5,000 skilled noodle chefs are trained each year, with a cumulative total of over 70,000 people trained.



More than 60%

of the trained personnel are employed outside the province or abroad.

ANNUAL OUTPUT VALUE (billion yuan)



Source: Lanzhou bureau of commerce

GRAPHIC BY TIAN CHI AND JORGE CORTES / CHINA DAILY; ILLUSTRATIONS BY YANG LIU / CHINA DAILY AND TANG YURU / FOR CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Malaysia diesel subsidy cut seen as key move

By PRIME SARMIENTO
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The Malaysian government's decision to cut the decades-old diesel subsidy program is "a significant milestone" for the administration of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, as such a move is part of long-term reforms to sustain growth in Southeast Asia's third-largest economy, analysts say.

While increased fuel prices are expected to boost inflationary pressures, experts expect headline inflation this year to be within the government's forecast of 2 to 3.5 percent.

The cuts in diesel subsidies kicked in on June 10, with retail prices of the fuel rising by about 55 percent to 3.35 ringgit (\$0.71) a liter. The eastern Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak are exempted from the subsidy cuts.

Cutting fuel subsidies is expected to narrow the country's fiscal deficit and save the government about 4 billion ringgit per year. Anwar said the savings could be redirected to those who need cash assistance, such as rice farmers and small traders.

Yeah Kim Leng, professor of economics at Sunway University in Kuala Lumpur, said Malaysia's shift from blanket to targeted diesel subsidies is "a significant milestone" for Anwar's unity government.

He added that the cuts in subsidies are part of the government's economic reforms to restore fiscal balance, curb smuggling and optimize the use of limited government funds and depleting oil resources.

Yeah noted that businesses where diesel is the primary fuel, such as logistics and transport, have been identified as being eligible for the targeted subsidy program, mitigating the rise in inflation. Inflation had remained low and stable at 1.8 percent in the past few months.

He said the government's commitment to using subsidy savings for "productive spending", such as

on public health and social welfare, can moderate the public backlash against increased prices.

Khor Yu Leng, research head for Southeast Asia of the Singapore-based consultancy Segi Enam Advisors, said cutting the diesel subsidy is "a relatively small fiscal matter" and will serve as a test case for the rationalization of other subsidies, such as for petrol.

"This massive subsidy bill is restricting the government's ability to spend on infrastructure that we need," she said.

There might be a "small spike" in food costs on the back of higher transport prices, Khor said. "This will be temporary as prices will normalize after a few months."

Serina Abdul Rahman, lecturer at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, said that given Malaysia's high national debt, the government has no choice but to cut subsidies. Malaysia's external debt stood at 68.2 percent of its GDP by the end of 2023, according to Bank Negara Malaysia, the central bank.

'Overlooked problem'

Serina said that while the government has promised to extend assistance to farmers and fishers, accessing these subsidies can be difficult for those in rural areas who do not know how to deal with administrative bureaucracy. "This is usually the most overlooked problem," she said.

The Malaysian government provides its citizens with various subsidies, including for fuel, eggs, cooking oil, rice and electricity.

Anwar, who is also the finance minister, said in a statement on June 17 that the government still bears around 7 billion ringgit in subsidies and the diesel subsidy rationalization aims "to ensure that subsidy wastage no longer continues while ensuring that the savings are returned to the wider population."

Kuala Lumpur-based lender Maybank said progress in fiscal consolidation can also have a salutary effect on the ringgit.



People run as smoke billows over the Gaza City's eastern suburb following an Israeli bombardment on Saturday. OMAR AL-QATTA / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Fighting rages as deadly strikes batter north Gaza

Dozens killed in attacks as food piles up at crossing

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Dozens of people were killed in Israeli attacks on districts of Gaza City in the north of the Palestinian enclave on Saturday, as food continued to pile up at a Gaza crossing amid warnings from agencies that they are unable to deliver aid.

One Israeli strike on houses in Al-Shati, one of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps, killed 24 people, Ismail Al-Thawabta, director of the Hamas-run government media office, told Reuters. Another 18 Palestinians were killed in a strike on houses in the Al-Tuffah neighborhood.

The Israeli military issued a statement saying: "A short while ago, IDF fighter jets struck two Hamas military infrastructure sites in the area of Gaza City."

Hamas said the attacks targeted the civilian population and that the perpetrators "will pay the price for their violations against our people."

"People were going about their business" when, suddenly, "the whole area was wiped out" in an airstrike, said Abu Mahmud al-Kariri, a witness in Al-Shati.

The European Union's foreign affairs chief, Josep Borrell, on Saturday called for an "independent investigation" into the shelling that damaged the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Late on Friday, the committee said 22 dead and 45 wounded were taken to a Red Cross field hospital after shelling with "heavy caliber projectiles" near its southern Gaza office.

Gaza's health ministry blamed the shelling on Israel.

The Israel military said on Saturday that an initial inquiry found "there was no direct attack carried out by the IDF against a Red Cross facility", but that the matter was being looked into.

The conflict has led to dire humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip and repeated warnings by the United Nations of famine.

Desperation among Gaza's 2.4 million people has increased as fighting rages, bringing warnings from agencies that they are unable to deliver aid.

"The breakdown of public order and safety is increasingly endangering humanitarian workers and operations in Gaza," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on Friday.

With civil order breaking down in Gaza, the UN says it has been unable to pick up any supplies from Kerem Shalom since Tuesday, leaving crucial aid in limbo.

A deputy UN spokesman said last week that the crossing "is operating with limited functionality, including because of fighting in the area."

Tel Aviv protests

On Saturday, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced what organizers said was the biggest anti-government protest since the conflict began.

Tens of thousands rallied in Tel Aviv. One demonstrator's sign accused Netanyahu of being an "Enemy of Israel".

Supporters and families of the Gaza hostages also rallied, holding their pictures aloft.

Netanyahu said on Sunday that a dispute with the United States over

weapons delays relating to the Gaza conflict would be resolved soon.

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant flew to Washington to discuss the next phase of the war and escalating hostilities on the border with Lebanon.

Exchanges of fire across the Lebanese border between Israel and Hezbollah have also escalated, raising fears of wider conflict.

On Saturday a security source said a leader of the Lebanese group Jamaa Islamiya was killed in an Israeli strike on a vehicle in eastern Lebanon.

Hezbollah said it had targeted a military position in northern Israel "with an attack drone" in response to the killing of a commander of the Jamaa Islamiya group.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said cross-border hostilities must not turn Lebanon into "another Gaza".

"One rash move — one miscalculation — could trigger a catastrophe that goes far beyond the border and, frankly, beyond imagination."

Violence has also soared in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israeli troops tied a wounded Palestinian man to a military vehicle during a raid in the city of Jenin on Saturday, the army said on Sunday, acknowledging that soldiers had violated operational procedures.

Footage of the incident on the internet shows a Jenin resident strapped to the hood of a military jeep as it passes through a narrow alley.

"The incident will be investigated and dealt with accordingly," the military said, adding that the wounded man was transferred to the Palestinian Red Crescent for treatment.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

US aircraft carrier hit by missiles, Houthis say

SANAA, Yemen — Yemen's armed Houthi group said in a statement on Saturday that it had launched ballistic missiles at the US aircraft carrier USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* in the northern Red Sea.

"The missile force in our armed forces carried out an operation targeting the American aircraft carrier *Eisenhower* in the northern Red Sea with several ballistic and cruise missiles, and the operation achieved its goals successfully," Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea said in a statement aired by Houthi-run al-Masirah TV.

However, two US officials told Reuters the Houthi claim is false. "That is incorrect," one of the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

It is the second claimed attack by Houthis targeting the *Eisenhower* in the Red Sea in less than a month. The first attack against the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier was on May 31, on which the US military did not comment.

US officials ordered the aircraft carrier to return home after a twice-extended tour.

The Pentagon announced the aircraft carrier *Theodore Roosevelt* will follow the *Eisenhower*, heading to Middle East waters once it completes an exercise in the Pacific.

Sarea said that the militant group also attacked the merchant vessel *Transworld Navigator* in the Arabian Sea with ballistic missiles, as a response to what Houthi called the vessel owner's violation of their entry ban to Israeli ports.

Earlier in the day, fighter jets of the US-British coalition conducted four airstrikes against Houthi targets northwest of Yemen's Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, according to the Houthi al-Masirah television.

Hours before the coalition airstrikes, the UK Maritime Trade Operations reported explosions in the vicinity of a merchant vessel 126 nautical miles east of Yemen's southern port city of Aden. There were no reports of casualties or damage.

The Houthi group began in November last year to launch attacks targeting what they said were Israeli-linked ships transiting the Red Sea, to show solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

In response, the US-British naval coalition stationed in the waters has since January to deter the group, but this has led to an expansion of Houthi attacks to include US and British commercial vessels and naval ships.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

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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.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0749-6154) 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. 1352

Torrential rains lash C. America, claim at least 30 lives

MEXICO CITY, Mexico — At least 30 people died and thousands were forced to evacuate their homes as storms and heavy rainfall lashed Central America, local officials said, with the downpours flooding rivers, destroying homes, triggering landslides and cutting off communities.

In Mexico, authorities forecast heavy rain across most of the country and torrential downpours across sections of the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, as well as further inland, bringing lightning, strong winds, possible hail and flooding around rivers.

The rains caused authorities to

evacuate about 80 people from a children's hospital in Oaxaca state on Thursday, but also brought welcome replenishment to drought-hit reservoirs across the country, now at about a third of their capacity.

Mexico's Conagua water authority warned of wind speeds of up to 70 kilometers an hour and waves of up to 3 meters around the Gulf and Caribbean coasts. Equally strong winds on the Pacific side could bring tornadoes, it said.

In El Salvador, the death toll had reached 19, among them six children, and more than 3,000 people

were in temporary shelters, authorities said on Friday.

"We must save people's lives," said Luis Amaya, who heads El Salvador's civil protection agency. "Material goods come and go, but now we must focus on protecting lives."

Honduras reported one death and more than 1,200 people evacuated — about 300 in the previous 24 hours. The rains had cut off 180 communities and destroyed 22 homes, authorities said.

The rains were due to low-pressure channels interacting together across much of the country, as well

as a monsoon trough drawing in moist ocean air from well into the North Pacific, the US National Hurricane Center said, boosted by remnants of Alberto, the Atlantic hurricane season's first named tropical storm.

Alberto caused at least four deaths as it passed over northeast Mexico last week.

The continuous rainfall in Central America last week was due to the influence of several low-pressure systems in the region, experts said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



People rescued from a tropical storm are helped from a helicopter in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, on Friday. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Beyond Nvidia: the search for AI's next breakthrough

TORONTO, Canada — For a few days the AI chip juggernaut Nvidia sat on the throne as the world's biggest company, but behind its success are questions on whether new entrants to the artificial intelligence realm can stake a claim in the bonanza.

Nvidia, which makes the processors that are the only way to train generative AI's large language models, is now big technology's newest member, and its stock market take-off has lifted the whole sector.

Even technology's second rung on Wall Street has ridden on Nvidia's coattails with Oracle, Broadcom, HP and a spate of others seeing their stock valuations surge, despite sometimes shaky earnings.

Amid the champagne popping, startups seeking the attention of Silicon Valley venture capitalists are being asked to innovate, but without a clear indication of where the next chapter of AI will be written.

When it comes to generative AI,

doubts persist on what exactly will be left for companies that are not existing model makers, a field dominated by Microsoft-backed OpenAI, Google and Anthropic.

Most agree that competing with them head-on could be a fool's errand.

"I don't think that there's a great opportunity to start a foundational AI company at this point," said Mike Myer, founder and chief executive of the technology firm Quiq, at the Collision technology conference in Toronto.

Some have tried to build applications that use or mimic the powers of the existing big models, but this is being slapped down by Silicon Valley's biggest players.

Vinod Khosla, a venture capital veteran and one of OpenAI's earliest investors, said, "What I find disturbing is that people are not differentiating between those applications which are roadkill for the models as they progress in their capabilities and those that are really adding val-

ue and will be here 10 years from now."

The spelling and grammar checking app Grammarly and companies with similar offerings "won't keep up", Khosla predicted, saying such firms, which put only a "thin wrapper" around what the AI models can offer, are doomed.

One of the fields ripe for the taking is chip design, Khosla said, with AI demanding ever more specialized processors that provide highly specific powers.

Rebecca Parsons, chief technology officer for the technology consultancy Thoughtworks, told

Agence France-Presse, "If you look across the chip history, we really have for the most part focused on more general chips."

Providing more specialized processing for the many demands of AI is an opportunity seized by Groq, a startup that has built chips for the deployment of AI as opposed to its training, or inference, the specialty of Nvidia's world-dominating GPUs.

Groq CEO Jonathan Ross told AFP that Nvidia won't be the best at everything, even if they specialize in generative AI training.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Chinese version of *The Nutcracker* set for Kennedy Center

By ZHAO HUANXIN
in Washington
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The National Ballet of China will stage a Chinese version of *The Nutcracker* at the Kennedy Center during the next Lunar New Year, bringing Spring Festival scenes to Washington with Tchaikovsky's classic soundtrack, said Feng Ying, the head of the cultural company.

"In five days from the first day of the Lunar New Year (which falls on Jan 29), we'll present seven performances of *The Nutcracker*, China style, titled *The Chinese New Year*, at the Kennedy Center," Feng told China Daily on Saturday.

Feng was in Washington to lead a group of young Chinese ballet dancers to participate in *10,000 Dreams: A Celebration of Asian Choreography*, a weeklong celebration recognizing Asian and Asian American creatives, which concluded on Sunday.

The five ballet dancers performed *Ballade*, one of a series of works to honor the legacy of Choo San Goh, the late Singaporean-born choreographer of Chinese descent who served as resident choreographer and associate artistic director for The Washington Ballet and was hailed artistically for his major contributions to the ballet field.

"*The Chinese New Year*, a full-length ballet in two acts, will thrill the audiences — overseas Chinese as well as Americans," said Feng, a well-known ballerina and director of the National Ballet of China.

"It uses the original music by Tchaikovsky and depicts the great joy of Chinese people celebrating the national holiday, which is laden with festive customs and blessings," she added.

The Chinese twist on the all-time ballet favorite is part of the programs that the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has planned for its 2024-2025 dance season, which begins in October.

The season includes a "rich tapestry" of ballet and dance offerings with reimagined classics, forward-facing work from new and master voices, and unexpected collaborations on the center's stages, the Kennedy Center said in a release.

"Audiences will have the chance

to experience two different versions of *The Nutcracker* this season with Philadelphia Ballet in George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker* (Nov 27 and 29-Dec 1) and in celebration of Lunar New Year, National Ballet of China returns with its adaptation of the ballet, *Chinese New Year (A Ballet in Two Acts)* (Jan 29-Feb 2)," it said.

"This colorful, fresh tale is brought to life by vibrant characters and radiant choreography," the center said in a release posted on its website.

Audiences will delight as a scroll of Chinese folklore unfolds, showcasing the legendary monster *Nian*, the elegant and graceful *Fans*, the extravagant dances of *Silk and Spinning Top*, and more wonders in the "ravishing" Porcelain Kingdom, according to the release.

The Chinese New Year, which premiered in China in 2000, is one of the National Ballet of China's repertoires performed often during the Spring Festival.

The Chinese adaption has transformed the traditionally Christmas tale into one set during Chinese New Year, a time for family reunions and good wishes for the New Year.

Feng said the audience will see a bonanza of Chinese elements, including the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, and things bearing good wishes, such as pines and cranes, which are symbols for longevity.

In a 2016 review of the show posted on Bachtrack, the classic music website, Catherine Sutherland, a former dance editor for the site, wrote, "*The Chinese New Year* is an admirable ode to both a western ballet classic and to Chinese culture."

The National Ballet of China made its debut at the Kennedy Center in 1986, presenting the *Yumeiren* (The Mermaid), the first Chinese dance drama to combine Western ballet with traditional Chinese dance moves, according to Feng.

"The cultural exchanges (through performances) are very important for different ballet companies as well as their dancers to understand and appreciate each other's artistic styles," Feng said. "They also offer a venue for the National Ballet of China to demonstrate its artistic standing."



Dancers from the National Ballet of China present *Ballade*, a ballet work by Choo San Goh, the late Singaporean-born choreographer of Chinese descent, at a special event honoring the history and legacy of Goh at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on Friday. Goh created *Ballade* as a heartfelt dedication to his niece, Chan Hon Goh, who directed the show and spoke before the performance. ZHAO HUANXIN / CHINA DAILY

British minister compares betting scandal to Partygate

LONDON — A senior UK minister compared the latest scandal involving Tory candidates accused of betting on the election date to Partygate, a series of pandemic-era parties that brought down former prime minister Boris Johnson.

"It looks like one rule for them and one rule for us ... That's the most potentially damaging thing," Housing Minister Michael Gove said in an interview with the Times newspaper on Saturday.

"That was damaging at the time of Partygate and is damaging here."

Johnson was forced from office in 2022 following public anger at the revelations of parties held in Downing Street when the rest of the country was under lockdown.

Now another senior Conservative Party figure has been caught up in the latest scandal.

Nick Mason, the party's chief data officer, has gone on leave following claims he placed bets on the timing of the election, the PA news agency reported on Saturday.

Mason is being investigated by betting regulators, accused of placing dozens of bets on the election date, the Times reported. He is the fourth Tory figure to be implicated in the affair.

Political bets are allowed in the United Kingdom, including on the date of elections, but using insider knowledge to do so is illegal.

Gove said those involved in the betting scandal were "sucking the oxygen out of the campaign."

"A few individuals end up creating an incredibly damaging atmosphere for the party," he said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Taking flight for planet

Demonstrators held up a giant puppet-style bird in Whitehall in London during the Restore Nature Now gathering on Saturday. About 60,000 people representing more than 300 organizations took over the streets of the English capital, demanding urgent action to restore nature and tackle climate change.

KRISZTIAN ELEK VIA NEWSCOM

Asian Americans poised to play pivotal role in election

Boasting 15m eligible voters, community's influence could sway results in key states

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York
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Asian American voters have become an important voting bloc in the United States and could be decisive in who wins the presidential election in November, analysts say.

There are about 24 million Asian Americans in the country, according to the 2020 Census. At least 15 million are projected to be eligible to vote in the general election.

The Asian American and Pacific Islander community had the largest increase of voters of any racial or ethnic group between the 2016 and 2020 general elections, with turnout rising from 49 percent to 59 percent, the Census Bureau says.

It proved vital for Joe Biden in winning the presidency over Donald Trump in 2020 and is likely to be important again.

The last two presidential elections were decided by a margin of about 100,000 votes. In one of the key battleground states, Georgia, Asian American turnout rose 84 percent on the previous election.

"In 2020 Asian American voters turned out in record numbers, nearly 60 percent," said Christine Chen, executive director of Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, or APIAVote, a group in Washington.

"And this diverse voting bloc is the fastest growing in America, with Asian voter registration outpacing even the rapid population growth from 2000 to 2020 by a wide margin. With many local races decided by slim margins, the impact of AAPI voters can be decisive."

The Georgia Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock produced advertisements in Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese to reach voters in the election to retain his senate seat in 2022. He won 78 percent of the vote in a runoff.

Making a difference

"Asian Americans were nearly unified in their support of Raphael Warnock for Senate and were likely the difference in this extremely close election," Jerry Vattamala, director of the democracy program of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York, said in 2022.

Both Republican and Democratic national committees have announced plans to court the AAPI vote, which will account for 6.1 percent of eligible voters in November's election, the Pew Research Center projected.

The Republican National Committee has made what it calls a "multimillion-dollar commitment" to reach AAPIs in key states.

In March the Biden campaign produced an advertisement aimed at AAPIs. Last month it allocated at least \$1 million of \$14 million in election advertising funds for advertising targeting AAPI, black and Latino voters.

At least four in 10 of those who voted for Biden in 2020 were Asian, black or Hispanic, Pew said. Most AAPI voters live in five states: California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Texas.

California is the state with the highest number of eligible Asian voters at 4.4 million, followed by New York at

1.2 million, then Texas with 1.1 million and Hawaii and New Jersey, which have just more than 500,000 each.

One of their top concerns is inflation, according to a poll published last year by AAPI Data and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Asian voters are mostly Democrats. The party has the support of those of Chinese, Indian, Filipino and Korean descent, Pew said. But Vietnamese tended to vote Republican.

As both parties plan outreach, Chen said, half of those whom APIAVote polled said they had not been contacted by either party. She would

like to see much more done "to bridge this gap, especially as AAPIs become the margin of victory in an increasing number of districts and states", she said.

For more than 10 years APIAVote has worked to ensure the community is engaged in politics even though they have been widely overlooked by the mainstream. It was one of the first to invest in AAPI civic engagement groups in key states such as Georgia, Arizona and Michigan.

The nonpartisan group has said it will spend more than \$5 million as this year's general election approaches, with \$3 million going to subgrants for local partner organizations' civic engagement efforts.

It will hold its National AAPI Leadership Summit next month,

followed by a meeting at which it will unveil its biannual Asian American Voter Survey said to show the top issues for AAPI voters.

In addition, it will have a series of voter education videos to help AAPI voters in 30 states, a voter hotline, and recruit college campus youth ambassadors to implement voter engagement programs. It will also undertake a multilingual direct mail campaign.

The latter is especially crucial because 73 percent of Asian American voters cast their ballots early or by mail in 2022, Chen said. "The direct mail pieces contain vital voter information translated into 16 languages to ensure access for those with limited English proficiency."

Agencies contributed to this story.

**REDUCE
REUSE
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three rules for a better and more sustainable world

Together we can protect the environment by making small changes in daily routine — reducing what we use, allowing products to be used to their fullest extent, buying reusable over disposable items, considering recycling before purchasing.

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BUSINESS

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E-commerce drives China's air cargo market

Fruits, flowers, lithium batteries ... all take wing, pleasing consumers, boosting trade



An employee oversees cargo loading of a Luxembourg-bound aircraft at Xinzheng International Airport in Zhengzhou, Henan province. LI JIANAN / XINHUA

By ZHU WENQIAN

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The rise of cross-border e-commerce is lifting the global air cargo market like never before, with China leading the way, boosted by Air Silk Road or air routes that connect the country with the economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, industry experts said.

From flowers and fruits to consumer electronics containing lithium-ion batteries, all are par for the air cargo course now, they said.

Besides generating cargo business for airlines, this trend has boosted trade in certain niche sectors like smart wearable and electronic products produced by Chinese enterprises. They are now welcomed by overseas consumers, fueled by a boom in cross-border e-commerce that has sent demand for air cargo transportation soaring.

With innovation enhancing consumer products and consumers pursuing lifestyles characterized by increasing use of "intelligent" products, competition in the global consumer electronics market has intensified, giving superior Chinese products, marked by intelligent and personalized designs, a clear edge, industry observers said.

This, in turn, is spurring the air cargo market. Guangzhou-based State-owned carrier China Southern Airlines said that in the past few years, the international air cargo market has experienced significant changes. A large part of traditional bulk trade cargo transportation has been replaced by cross-border e-commerce cargo transportation.

"The air cargo transportation market has been undergoing constant changes, and cross-border

e-commerce business has driven the fast growth of demand for air cargo transportation," said Peter Gao, Boeing's vice-president for China commercial sales and marketing.

In 2023, China's imports and exports of cross-border e-commerce products were worth 2.38 trillion yuan (\$328.3 billion), up 15.6 percent year-on-year. Products exported for cross-border e-commerce alone reached 1.83 trillion yuan, up nearly 20 percent year-on-year, according to the General Administration of Customs.

As e-commerce involves products that were not part of traditional trade, new trade models and transportation methods have arisen, spawning new requirements for China's international air cargo services and boosting the nation's capabilities.

For instance, products that contain lithium-ion batteries were hitherto classified as dangerous goods for air transportation. But now, cross-border e-commerce entails transportation of a large volume of such products.

In early June, China Southern operated its first cross-border chartered cargo flight that transported goods containing lithium-ion batteries from Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to London. Those products included electric fans and Bluetooth earphones, marking a breakthrough in China's air cargo transport.

The robust growth of China's cross-border e-commerce has necessitated new international air cargo routes. In late March, Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport launched a dedicated cross-border international freight route connecting Shenzhen, Guangdong province,



Employees load cargo into an aircraft bound for Chicago at Taoyuan Airport in Shenyang, Liaoning province. LI GANG / XINHUA

with Budapest in Hungary. It is the first such route launched this year.

In early April, Chengdu Tianfu International Airport launched its first international air freight route connecting Chengdu, Sichuan province, with Oslo in Norway. The route focuses on transporting cross-border e-commerce products in small packages.

Such links are expected to boost China's trade with Belt and Road economies, which has been growing steadily. In the first quarter of this year, trade with BRI economies exceeded 4.8 trillion yuan, up 5.5 percent year-on-year and 0.5 percentage point higher than the overall growth rate of foreign trade, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

In the first quarter, China Southern transported nearly 2,800 metric tons of cross-border e-commerce products, electronic products, industrial accessories and agricultural products from Beijing Daxing

International Airport to countries and regions involved in the BRI.

The figure was a record high since the new airport in the capital started operations in 2019. This has further promoted economic and trade exchanges between China and BRI economies, the carrier said.

Since March, demand for air cargo to transport fresh flowers to Central and West Asia expanded. China Southern designed an optimal transportation path and provided cold chain services to transport flowers from Kunming, Yunnan province, to Beijing, and then to Central and West Asia.

The carrier has also transported products like cherries from Chile and Tajikistan, salmon from European countries and red wine from Georgia. It said it will continue to increase investments in the air cargo routes connecting China and BRI economies.

"We are confident that Beijing Daxing International Airport will

develop into a world-class aviation hub and continue to contribute to the development of the BRI," said Wu Rongxin, deputy general manager of China Southern.

One by one, China's various provinces and regions are seeking to boost trade via cross-border e-commerce with enhanced efforts for better air cargo services. For instance, Central China's Henan province, which did not have an established intercontinental freight route network a decade ago, is now focusing on the rapid growth of Air Silk Road through frequent cargo flights between Zhengzhou and Luxembourg. This has made it possible to transport goods from the province to global consumers, and from other countries to Henan.

Luxembourg-based Cargolux Airlines International, the largest all-cargo carrier in Europe, debuted a new flight in late May that connects Luxembourg with Zhengzhou. In the return direction, it connects Chicago and New York.

The first such cargo flight mainly transported automobile parts, electronic products and daily necessities. The weekly flight used a Boeing B747 freighter. Cargolux operates 18 weekly cargo flights that connect Zhengzhou and other overseas cities.

China began supporting the building of a bidirectional Air Silk Road between Zhengzhou and Luxembourg in 2017. The service range of Air Silk Road now covers more than 200 cities in over 20 European countries and some 90 cities across China, said the National Development and Reform Commission.

Roland Reiland, Luxembourg's ambassador to China, said aviation is an important industry in Luxembourg, and the growing friendship

between Luxembourg and Henan has origins in air transportation. He said he believes the two sides will continue to strengthen communications in different sectors.

In addition, Henan has continued to develop its aviation manufacturing sector. With an investment of 1 billion yuan, the first phase of an aviation industrial park in Zhengzhou can manufacture more than 50 sets of simulators annually.

Elsewhere, the International Air Transport Association recently released data on the performance of the global air cargo markets in April, showing strong annual growth in demand into the second quarter.

Total demand, measured in cargo ton-kilometers, rose by 11.1 percent compared to the April 2023 levels. This is the fifth consecutive month of double-digit year-on-year growth. Capacity, measured in available cargo ton-kilometers, increased by 7.1 percent year-on-year, the IATA said.

In particular, Asia-Pacific airlines saw 14 percent year-on-year demand growth for air cargo transportation in April, the strongest in all regions. Demand within the Asia market grew by 13.2 percent year-on-year, and demand on the Asia-Europe route grew by 17.7 percent year-on-year, the IATA said.

"While many economic uncertainties remain, it appears that the roots of air cargo's strong performance are deepening," said Willie Walsh, director-general of the IATA.

"In recent months, air cargo demand grew even when the Purchasing Managers Index was indicating the potential for contraction. With the PMI now indicating growth, the prospects for continued strong demand are even more robust."

Two holiday periods set scene for summer travel boom

REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhu Wenqian

My weeklong annual leave started before this year's Dragon Boat Festival (June 8 to 10), so the longer holiday meant I could travel to Japan, like so

many of my compatriots who, it appears, adopted a similar strategy.

During the holiday, booking volumes of outbound international flights rose 60 percent year-on-year, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

The growth momentum of outbound tourism started during the Spring Festival holiday and continued through the May Day holiday. For instance, booking volumes of flights from China to Malaysia dur-

ing Dragon Boat Festival more than doubled year-on-year, thanks to visa-free entry policy and some newly launched routes.

While the thriving cargo market indicates the vitality of China's foreign trade and economy, the steady recovery of the country's air passenger market after the COVID-19 pandemic is a reflection of the continuously growing travel demand from Chinese consumers.

The steady recovery of the domestic

economy and continued opening-up have also provided strong support for the recovery of demand in the international civil aviation market.

Domestically, both the booking volumes of travel products and per capita consumption amount during the Dragon Boat Festival holiday exceeded the levels seen last year, and it is expected that the market will continue to show resilience this summer, supported by robust leisure and business travel demand.

Besides, Chinese consumers have been paying attention to the quality and experiences of their travels. Young tourists have been particularly pursuing personalized and high-quality travel experiences, and more people have booked luxury hotels and flights in business class, industry players found.

For the two-month period from July 1 to Aug 31, a busy travel season in summer, booking volumes of outbound international flights have already jumped 160 percent year-on-year, and prices of flight tickets declined by about 20 percent year-on-year. Some popular overseas destina-

tions this summer include Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, South Korea and the United States, Qunar found.

The International Air Transport Association found that in April, all regions across the globe showed strong growth year-on-year in international passenger markets.

"Passenger demand has been growing for 36 consecutive months. As we enter the peak northern summer travel season, there is every reason to feel optimistic for a strong summer with airlines offering a wide range of travel options," said Willie Walsh, director general of the IATA.

BUSINESS



A train loaded with China-made goods departs from Jinhua, Zhejiang province, to Europe on June 15. HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Long-haul cargo train turns popular among exporters

Export of home appliances from Shenyang and surrounding areas picks up pace amid rising geopolitical tensions affecting maritime trade

By ZHONG NAN
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6,184
trips

Recently, drivers of forklift trucks were seen busy loading boxes containing 400 televisions into a rail container at the assembly center of China-Europe freight train services in Shenyang, Liaoning province.

The TVs were scheduled to arrive in Moscow in early June, where they will be distributed and sold at various department stores and e-commerce platforms across the country.

"We mainly export home appliances to Europe. There is a risk of component corrosion with maritime transport, and the cost of air-freight for home appliances is too high," said Guan Jun, vice-president of Shenyang Zhicheng Trading Co Ltd, a Shenyang-based foreign trade company.

After comparing various options, Guan said the company chose the China-Europe freight train services in 2022. It takes about 12 days to reach Russia and about 16 days to reach Germany from Shenyang.

This long-haul cargo train service has become a popular option for the export of home appliances from Shenyang and its surrounding areas, with an increasing number of companies choosing the

number of China-Europe freight train services in the first four months, said China State Railway Group Co Ltd (China Railway).

cargo train service, he added.

Data showed that from January to April this year, Liaozhong Customs, a branch of Shenyang Customs, supervised the export of over 3,300 TVs worth more than 9.4 million yuan (\$1.3 million). The majority of them were shipped by the Shenyang-Europe freight train services.

Exporters and business leaders said rising global geopolitical tensions and security concerns in the Red Sea maritime passage will further increase the importance of the China-Europe freight train services, a critical complement to China-Europe trade this year.

The hesitance shown by global shipping companies to use the Suez Canal may continue to impact China-Europe trade this year, putting operational costs for businesses under pressure on both sides, said Lin Meng, director of the Modern Supply Chain Research Institute at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy

of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

In response to disruptions in international shipping due to security concerns in the Red Sea region, many freight forwarders have adopted rail services as an alternative mode of transportation between China and Europe, said Lin.

As these challenges persist, the role of the China-Europe freight train services in supporting international commerce will continue to evolve and expand over the long run, said Li Muiyuan, executive vice-president of the China Container Industry Association in Beijing.

Together with the China-Laos railroad service and China-Central Asia freight trains, regional connectivity and business connections between China and these regions will be further enriched, Li added.

That sentiment is in line with the latest data.

The number of China-Europe freight train services grew by 10 percent year-on-year to 6,184 trips in the first four months of 2024, data from Beijing-based China State Railway Group Co Ltd (China Railway) showed.

About 675,000 20-foot equivalent units of goods were transported via freight trains during this period, up 11 percent on a yearly basis, according to the

country's railroad operator.

By the end of May, about 90,000 China-Europe freight train trips had been completed in total, serving 223 cities across 25 European countries.

Since its inception in 2011, the range of products transported by the China-Europe freight train services has grown significantly, from just 53 items to over 50,000 products by the end of April, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Numerous cities have introduced tailored services, including dedicated trains for transporting specific goods like timber, tea, edible oil and new energy vehicles, said Zhang Tao, deputy director of the GAC's department of port control.

Eager to reach more destinations in Europe and other regions, China Railway has initiated transport testing for the China-Europe freight trains from Xi'an, Shaanxi province, Chongqing, and Yiwu, Zhejiang province to Poti, Georgia, and Istanbul, Turkey, this year.

Other new routes have also been opened.

These include Harbin, Heilongjiang province to Tilburg in the Netherlands; Shijiazhuang, Hebei province to Belgrade, Serbia, and Qingdao, Shandong province to Moscow.

Why world should fret over tariffs on Chinese EVs

BELJING — The European Union's plan to impose additional duties on imports of Chinese electric vehicles, widely criticized as protectionist, will have major implications in multiple spheres.

The move will damage China-EU trade ties, aggravate the consumer burden in Europe, and dampen the global transition to a greener future. Moreover, it may even put the bloc's reputation for fair competition in danger.

Although Chinese-brand EVs account for just a small share of the EU's EV imports, the European Commission on June 12 unveiled provisional tariffs ranging from 17.4 percent to 38.1 percent for Chinese EV makers despite widespread market concerns and China's objections.

In a brief statement, the European Commission accused China of "unfair subsidization" in its EV value chain, but did not provide further information to explain the factual or legal bases for its tariff plan.

China expressed its disappointment and dissatisfaction, rebuking the action as "blatant protectionism" and asserting its right to file lawsuits with the World Trade Organization and take all necessary response measures. It urged the EU to stop moving in the wrong direction and resolve trade frictions through dialogue.

Like a double-edged sword, tariffs cut both ways, with governments, market players and relevant stakeholders voicing concerns over its potential implications that should necessitate second thoughts from the EU.

Ties damaged

The EU's tariff plan, aimed at depressing China's robust EV industry, will cause severe damage to trade ties between China and the EU, both each other's second-largest trading partners.

It could also lead to unwelcome consequences, including countermeasures from China. China's Ministry of Commerce has warned that the EU move could create and escalate trade frictions.

Various EU member states and European automakers have expressed their disapproval of trade barriers and the imposition of additional tariffs on Chinese EVs.

The National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, said the EU auto industry is highly dependent on the international market, creating a trade surplus of nearly 100 billion euros (\$107.2 billion) every year. China accounts for more than 30 percent of sales of European car brands such as Volkswagen, Audi, Mercedes-Benz and BMW, and more than 80 percent of China's fuel-powered cars with large-displacement engines are imported, with many coming from the EU.

"If the EU insists on going its own way, abusing protectionist measures and creating and escalating trade frictions, China will not sit idly by but will take all necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests," the NDRC said in an article.

In response to a media inquiry about whether Chinese industries are lobbying the government to launch an anti-subsidy investigation into EU dairy products or an anti-dumping investigation into pork imports from the EU, MOC spokesperson He Yadong said, "If the conditions for filing a case are met, the investigation agency will start the filing procedure, and disclose and release announcements in accordance with the law."

Higher costs
Under a post from the European Commission on social media platform X about its planned tariff hike against Chinese EVs, commentators doubted the EU move.

"This will hardly improve the unfavorable price/performance ratio of European legacy automakers' EVs compared to the Chinese, Korean and American," commenter Armin Pfeiffer replied.

For consumers, product quality and affordability are important for spending decisions, and Chinese EVs can offer both. However, the planned increased duties will make it more difficult for European consumers to find good value for money.

A recent Reuters report said that every additional 10 percent on top of the existing 10 percent levy would cost EU importers of Chinese EVs about \$1 billion, based on 2023 trade data.

The key to the rapid development of China's auto industry is in its opening-up and fair competition, rather than in subsidies. According to the NDRC, as the world's largest and most open auto market, China ensures fully that Chinese and foreign auto companies compete fairly on the same stage. By 2018, China's average tariff on complete vehicle imports was reduced to 13.8 percent, and its average tariff on imports of parts and components was just 6 percent.

Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao also pointed out that Chinese companies have made significant investments in research and development in the new energy and green transformation fields, and formed their cost advantages amid extremely fierce market competition relying on a fully developed overall supply chain.

Green blow

During the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December last year, negotiators in Dubai came together in a decision on the world's first global stock-take to scale up climate action before the end of the decade. The stock-take calls on COP28 parties to take action to achieve a tripled renewable energy capacity and doubled energy efficiency improvements by 2030.

As concerns over trade and industrial protectionism grow, an analysis from energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie earlier this year warned that if the world's markets are bent on rapidly ridding China-manufactured clean tech products from their market demand, it would result in a 20 percent increase in the costs in energy transition.



We believe these contradictory acts... will ultimately undermine global green and low-carbon development and the realization of the climate goals."

Ding Weishun, deputy director of the policy research department at the Ministry of Commerce

The global clean-tech industry has achieved unimaginable scale and cost reductions in just over a decade, with China's clean-tech industrial capacity expansion at the heart of the story, says the analysis. "Without China at the table, aggressive cost reductions we have become accustomed to are over."

Fair competition

Discrimination against Chinese EVs can be seen in the tariff plan statement, which singles out three major Chinese-brand EV makers — BYD, Geely and SAIC — for different levels of tariffs.

Yet at least 50 percent of the EVs Europe imports from China are from Western brands, according to the NDRC.

By the end of 2022, China's subsidies for new energy vehicle purchases had expired. But the EU and the United States are still implementing large purchase subsidies, and their levels of subsidies are significantly higher than those in China. Based on these facts, the planned tariff hike is clearly discriminatory, the NDRC said.

The West's unfair practices targeting Chinese EVs are an example of double standards, according to Ding Weishun, deputy director of the policy research department at the MOC.

"We believe these contradictory acts are a typical example of double standards, and will ultimately undermine global green and low-carbon development and the realization of the climate goals," he said.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said that China always views its relations with the EU from a strategic and long-term perspective, and regards Europe as an important priority for China's major-country diplomacy.

China and the EU share extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation on green development, and have maintained good dialogue and cooperation in this regard, Lin said.

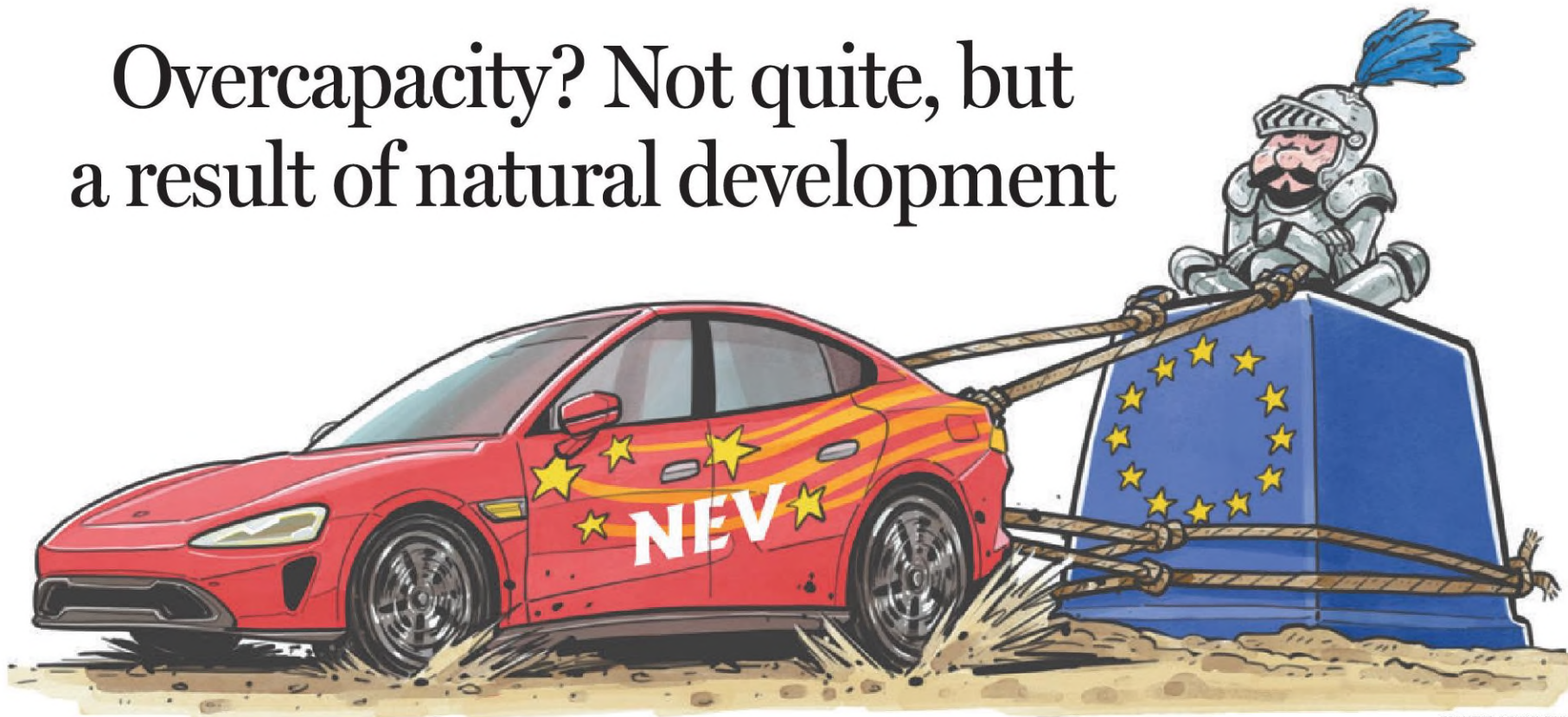
XINHUA



Officials from Shenyang Customs check containers of a China-Europe cargo train in Shenyang, Liaoning province, in early June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Overcapacity? Not quite, but a result of natural development



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

EAGLE EYE

By Zhao Zhongxiu

Two recent events have indicated escalating trade tensions in the clean-tech sector.

On May 14, the United States said it would significantly increase, from Aug 1, tariffs on a range of Chinese exports, mainly clean-tech products such as new energy vehicles (100 percent), solar panels (50 percent) and lithium batteries (25 percent).

On June 13, the European Commission announced the preliminary results of its ongoing investigation into so-called Chinese NEV subsidies, concluding that China's NEV value chain benefits from "unfair subsidization" that hurts EU rivals, and planning tentatively to impose extra tariffs ranging from 17.4 percent to 38.1 percent on NEV exports from China.

Indeed, the underlying rationale for the (countervailing) tariffs on China as advocated by the EU is highly similar to that of the "overcapacity" (or, more accurately, the "predatory overcapacity") allegation of the United States, both claiming that China's competitiveness in clean-tech products in general, and NEVs in particular, derives from the subsidies they receive, thus consti-

tuting predatory pricing, resulting in flooding of exports to the detriment of relevant industries in importing countries.

The argument, however, is highly misleading, if not unfounded.

Even US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen admits that "overcapacity" is "a complicated issue that involves China's entire macroeconomic and industrial strategy". Admittedly, there may be some sign of overcapacity in some clean-tech sectors, but this is far from "predatory overcapacity" backed by industrial subsidies, as the US asserts, and the competitiveness of Chinese clean-tech industries is not bolstered by industrial subsidies, but by the dynamics of China's factor endowments at this stage.

To industry insiders, those signs of overcapacity are more likely to be the product of a boom-bust cycle driven mainly by spontaneous market process, as relevant industries are entering a mature phase in their respective technology/product life cycles.

For example, in the case of NEVs, for the past 20 years, Chinese companies have been making early strides in this field in a systematic manner, making substantial R&D investments successively, and gradually building up their unique technological edges.

Moreover, China has a huge market; its sustained investment in STEM research and higher education has ensured a steady stream of the so-called "engineers' dividends"; rich application scenarios, full-

fledged competition (even to the extent of so-called "involution"), and frequent interactions between the supply and demand sides and among relevant participants have all enabled an ongoing optimization of the value chain ecosystem.

Through years of competition and cooperation (including cooperation with foreign companies), a highly cost-competitive, efficient and comprehensive NEV supply chain has gradually taken shape in China. In short, in the NEV industry, China is increasingly demonstrating a clear comparative advantage, consistent with the dynamics of its factor endowments at this stage.

In fact, over the last decade, thanks to the technological, manufacturing and engineering progress of Chinese companies, the global average costs of wind/solar power generation and lithium batteries have fallen significantly, making a significant contribution to the global transition to green and low-carbon energy.

Against the backdrop of the global energy transition and after years of development, the NEV, lithium battery and PV industries have so far entered the mature phase of the technology/product life cycle. In this phase, a dominant (technological) design emerges, and the market becomes commoditized. Accordingly, the competition increasingly revolves around price, and there is usually a shakeout, characterized by large-scale capital investment (in the dominant technology/design) to grow volume and bring down

costs, leading to fierce price wars and the exit/consolidation of competitors.

Overall, an industry in this phase often exhibits signs of overcapacity, which is the natural result of industrial development driven mainly by spontaneous market forces.

The consequence of protectionist measures that unfairly target China will only result in the shift of production from a low-cost (more efficient) country to a higher-cost (less efficient) one.

As Singaporean scholar Lance Gore sharply pointed out, Yellen's argument "is practically saying that the US cannot compete with China's 'new trio' but the US workers' livelihoods must be protected, so production capacity must be allocated, and the benefits shared".

Meanwhile, these recent events have shown that the Sino-American trade disputes have further spread to clean-tech sectors closely related to climate change. However, China-US cooperation on climate change has long been viewed as a special bond that helps to stabilize the relationship between the two countries during difficult times.

Moreover, another major global geopolitical player, the EU, has also become involved in trade tensions with China, which adds to the geopolitical complexity that China faces.

If trade disputes over clean-tech products continue to escalate, the foundation of trust for China-US climate change cooperation (and also for that between China and Europe) will be undermined, impeding any

further substantive climate cooperation between them and making it much more difficult to achieve global climate change goals.

On a more practical level, disruptions in the supply chain of clean-tech products will slow down the deployment of renewable energy projects worldwide, affecting efforts to combat global climate change.

In the process of readjusting/restructuring the global new energy industries, it is necessary for all major global players to effectively communicate and cooperate with each other to jointly address global challenges and put the world economy back on track.

As Stephen Roach put it bluntly, "to take a protectionist stand against a country like China — that has a comparative advantage in producing the non-carbon, alternative energy products that a world in the grips of climate change desperately needs — is a blunder, potentially of historic proportions". The author concurs.

The writer is president of the University of International Business and Economics. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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Good use of FDI key to cultivating new forces

MAIN STREET

By Zhang Jianping

Global foreign direct investment has been affected by tightening financial conditions, high real interest rates and market uncertainties. Additionally, turbulence in the banking sector in Europe and the United States this year is expected to lead to a further decline in global FDI from the \$1.3 trillion recorded in 2022.

The slowdown in global capital flows also reflects a sensitivity to various factors in the global market.

First, global economic growth is decelerating. The IMF and the World Bank expect global economic growth this year to be similar to or slower than that of 2023.

Second, the trend of deglobalization continues. From decoupling to so-called de-risking and the "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework", these trends will have a potential impact on capital flows.

Third, geopolitical conflicts are intensifying while the interest rate hike cycle continues, with the soaring US dollar coexisting with high interest rates. This reduces the efficiency of global supply chains and logistics, thereby increasing the impact on global capital flows and foreign investments.

Fourth, the US debt crisis is escalating. This year, the high US national debt — which now tops \$35 trillion — is increasingly burdensome. And debt financing in the US now exceeds defense spending.

Currently, the US is the largest recipient of FDI globally and the country with the largest FDI scale among developed nations. China is the second-largest FDI recipient worldwide and the largest among developing countries.

The greenback is still in an interest rate hike cycle, which benefits the return of dollars to the US, which will inevitably affect China and other developing countries in terms of foreign capital utilization.

The US recorded a net FDI inflow of \$87.3

billion this year. However, developed countries are experiencing overall net FDI outflows.

Germany and France, in particular, have been significantly affected by inflation and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Germany's net capital outflow decreased from \$132 billion in 2022 to \$86.6 billion, while France's net capital outflow increased from \$11.6 billion in 2022 to \$23.8 billion.

Developing countries are facing increasing pressure from the current dollar interest rate hike cycle, exacerbating inflation issues in many of these countries, with a downward trend in FDI inflows in emerging markets in Asia and Latin America.

For China, the scale of foreign capital utilization is declining due to the COVID-19 pandemic and structural adjustments. China's FDI utilization rate in 2023 decreased by about 8 percent. However, the number of foreign enterprises in China increased by nearly 40 percent, and the structure of foreign capital utilization has been optimized.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that China's net FDI inflow in 2023 was 1.1 trillion yuan (\$137 billion). From a structural optimization perspective, the actual utilization of foreign capital in manufacturing accounted for about 30 percent, with a relatively low year-on-year decline of 1.8 percent.

High-tech manufacturing saw a 6.5 percent year-on-year increase in actual foreign capital utilization. The service industry's actual foreign capital utilization reached nearly 780 billion yuan, accounting for 70 to 80 percent of the total, with a significant year-on-year decline of 13.4 percent.

With the overall rise in costs of capital, technology, labor, R&D and financing in China, those who invest and develop long-term in China are those foreign enterprises engaged in high-value-added, high-tech modern service industries, high-tech industries and advanced manufacturing.

These areas have become important fields and directions for foreign investment in China, which align with China's goal of fostering new quality productive forces, and can promote high-quality development.

China has introduced more than 20

detailed measures for foreign investment utilization this year, and local governments are accelerating the implementation of such measures. We have reasons to believe in the stabilization of China's foreign capital utilization this year and better prospects for future foreign investment in the country.

Foreign investment in China can be categorized into two types based on investment purposes — cost-driven and market-oriented. Cost-driven foreign investment often views China as a core of global supply and value chains.

According to a World Trade Organization report, China is undoubtedly one of the key countries in global supply and value chains, alongside the US and Germany, which are at the center of the East Asian, North American and European economic regions, respectively.

In this context, China is unique globally for its comprehensive industrial system, covering 99.9 percent of the United Nations' classified industries across 41 major categories, 207 mid-level categories and 666 minor categories. China's industrial output accounted for 32 percent of the global total, making it the most efficient in organizing and coordinating global supply and value chains.

This efficiency attracts a substantial amount of foreign capital, especially from developed countries to China, for operations in the Asia-Pacific region and globally.

From the perspective of market-oriented foreign investment, China is now the world's second-largest single consumer market, second only to the US. With a population of 1.4 billion, China is at the stage of middle-income development, where consumer spending contributes 82 percent to economic growth (2023 data), which demonstrates the significant role of domestic demand in driving economic growth.

China's retail sector is approaching that of the US, and in services consumption, sectors such as cultural tourism, education and training, comprehensive healthcare and information services are rapidly expanding. Currently, 70 percent of the products and services provided by foreign-invested enterprises in China are aimed at the Chinese consumer market.

Therefore, China has comparative advan-

tages in attracting and utilizing foreign investment.

First, capital highly values infrastructure conditions, in terms of both hardware and software. Over the past 45 years, China has followed a principle of "To get rich, build roads first", which leads to significant infrastructure development.

High-speed railways, highways, airports, ports, efficient logistics and coordinated transportation across sea, land and air, along with container transport, port conditions and communication support all make China's infrastructure conditions unique and help it lead globally.

Second, China is vigorously promoting institutional openness and has signed 22 bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements with 29 countries and regions. Among these, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership covers 30 percent of the world's population, 30 percent of the global economy, over 30 percent of capital flows and over 30 percent of trade.

The RCEP, as the largest integrated market globally, enhances trade creation, investment and employment growth within the region. In 2022, China's actual use of foreign investment from RCEP partners reached \$23.5 billion, a 24.8 percent year-on-year increase, significantly higher than the 9 percent growth in foreign investment in China.

The RCEP contributed 29.9 percent to China's actual foreign investment utilization, up 17.7 percentage points from 2021. We expect the RCEP to increasingly support China's foreign investment in the future.

In addition, China has established 22 pilot free trade zones, including Hainan Free Trade Port. Such a platform represents China's high-standard opening-up to the world. We now encourage the synergy between the small free trade zone network formed by pilot free trade zones and the large free trade network established by free trade agreements, thus enhancing efficiency for both domestic and foreign investments.

In 2022, China's 21 free trade zones, covering less than 4 percent of the nation's land area, contributed over 18 percent of the country's foreign investment and 17.9 percent of import and export trade. In the first half of 2023, these figures rose to 18.4 percent and 18.6 percent, respectively.

Last, China currently boasts a multitiered

human resources system. Although the demographic dividend of a large labor force is diminishing, China now benefits from the "engineer dividend".

The average education period of young Chinese workers is 11 years, which surpassed those of other developing countries like India, Mexico and Vietnam. This means that China's human resources system can systematically support and meet the needs of foreign investment.

Also, there is no clear trend of countries like Vietnam, India or Mexico replacing China as the global manufacturing hub. Therefore, China's role as the world's manufacturing center is likely to be maintained for an extended period. From this perspective, foreign investment will continue to play an active role in China's journey toward high-tech and service-oriented development.

To introduce more high-quality foreign investment, China should firmly support globalization and regional economic integration, as well as the Belt and Road Initiative to increase its influence and attractiveness to foreign investors.

This requires further liberalizing ideas and continuously improving the business environment to create an international, market-oriented and law-based business environment. It is especially important to improve service sector efficiency and quality for foreign enterprises.

Also, given the increasingly specialized global division of labor, attracting both upstream- and downstream-related enterprises will significantly enhance the efficiency of industrial chains.

At the same time, China should leverage the advantages of free trade agreements, free trade zones and free trade ports and enhance foreign investment in central and western regions. Chinese business associations should also play a more active role in attracting foreign investment.

The writer is a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation. This article is a translation of excerpts of his op-ed piece published on the official WeChat account of the China Macroeconomy Forum, a think tank. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

US should uphold commitments it has made to Beijing on Taiwan question

Something seems to have got lost in translation. Or is the US blatantly eating its words? Despite stressing on multiple occasions the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and pledging that the United States does not support "Taiwan independence", the United States said on Saturday that it held consultations with Taipei on Friday with the aim of expanding the Chinese island's "meaningful participation" in the United Nations system and other international forums.

That belies US President Joe Biden's words and the commitments the US has made to Beijing concerning the Taiwan question, as statehood is the prerequisite for participation in UN agencies and other international organizations. Taiwan has previously been granted observer status of the World Health Assembly subject to Beijing's approval and the island's authorities upholding the 1992 Consensus on one China.

The majority of countries, the US included, recognize that there is only one China, Taiwan is part of China, and that the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing China. This principle is enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolution 2758.

In his talks with the Chinese leader, whether by telephone or in person, Biden has discussed the fact that the US and China have differences when it comes to Taiwan, but that they have managed those for over 40 years. That those differences are now at the heart of the fraught relations between the two countries is because the Biden administration seems intent on negating the US' commitments, as set out in the Three Joint Communiqués between the two countries. In a statement released by the US State Department, the US administration continued to affirm that it still adheres to the US' one-China policy, but it was simply playing with words. Washington has developed a penchant for playing the Taiwan card in a bid to contain China's rise and development and maintain the US' global hegemony.

To throw its support behind the island's separatists and bolster them up to confront the Chinese mainland, the US has been ramping up its arms sales to the Chinese island. Just last week, Washington approved sales of hundreds of armed drones, missile equipment and related support material to the island. Such moves severely undermine China's sovereignty and security interests, and seriously harm China-US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

But, no matter what the US does it will not change Beijing's stance on the Taiwan question. No one should underestimate its resolve and capability to safeguard the nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It has already taken a series of countermeasures to deter pro-independence forces in Taiwan and send a signal to the "black hand" behind them. The People's Liberation Army has demonstrated its capability to effectively seal off the island of Taiwan. It has also intensified patrols in waters near Taiwan and staged military drills and exercises more frequently, making big strides in steadily improving its combat readiness.

And marking an important step to curb the ill trend of "Taiwan independence", Beijing on Friday revealed a set of judicial guidelines that impose severe criminal punishments on diehard pro-independence separatists. This new legal weapon sends a stern warning to any on the island aspiring to separate the island from the motherland that there will be a heavy price to pay for organizing, plotting or carrying out schemes of "de jure independence", or seeking independence by relying on foreign support or force.

Washington should realize that it is its growing addiction to playing the Taiwan card and the wobbly-wobbly line it is walking on its word that is recklessly emboldening the secessionists on the island and putting peace across the Taiwan Strait in jeopardy.

Talks only way to prevent trade war

Although Vice-Chancellor of Germany and Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action Robert Habeck does not represent the European Commission, his three-day visit to China, which concluded on Sunday, has helped to ease tensions between China and the European Union over the issue to a certain degree.

In his packed itinerary that consisted of stops in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, Habeck not only met with business leaders of both China and Germany, he also had face-to-face meetings with Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao and Minister of the National Development and Reform Commission Zheng Shanjie in Beijing on Saturday.

Habeck's respective meetings with the Chinese commerce chief and head of the country's economic policymaking body have served to reinforce the two sides' consensus on the need to avoid a damaging trade war and produced some concrete bilateral cooperation agreements and projects on trade facilitation, the green economy and energy.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Germany. Both have been beneficiaries of economic globalization, and the two countries' economic interests are deeply intertwined. Both Beijing and Berlin know clearly that cooperation poses no risk, but that decoupling does.

Habeck's hosts reaffirmed that China is willing to work with Germany to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation between the two sides' enterprises, create an open and fair competition environment, and inject more positive energy into the healthy and stable development of China-Germany and China-EU economic and trade relations.

The productive exchanges during Habeck's visit clearly convey the common pro-free trade stance of the EU's largest economy and the world's second-largest economy, as well as their joint concerns over the dire implications of the European Commission's planned punitive tariffs on Chinese EVs. If implemented, the tariffs will unavoidably plunge the EU and China into a damaging trade war that will actually harm the EU's green transition and consumers' interests, as Habeck said. Beijing's announcement that it is launching an anti-dumping probe into imports of EU pork products indicates that China will resolutely defend its legitimate rights and interests.

The EU launched its anti-subsidy investigation on Chinese EVs in October, without any application from member states or the industry. And the details that have been disclosed regarding the investigation clearly indicate that the probe and the resulting planned punitive tariffs violate World Trade Organization rules. By adopting such protectionist measures, the EU aims to suppress the development of Chinese companies, which is doomed to failure, and will not help boost the global competitiveness of the EU's EV companies either.

As both China and Germany urge, Brussels should try and resolve its differences with Beijing through dialogue and consultation in good faith. In that sense, it is good to hear that after a video conference between the Chinese commerce chief and Executive Vice-President of European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis on Saturday, the two sides have agreed to launch consultations on the EU's anti-subsidy investigations into Chinese EVs.

If the EU is sincere in sitting down at the negotiating table, China is also willing to engage in dialogue to try and resolve the reasonable concerns of the EU. It is to be hoped that the EU will strive to avoid the expansion and escalation of trade frictions in a rational and professional manner by meeting China halfway in that direction.

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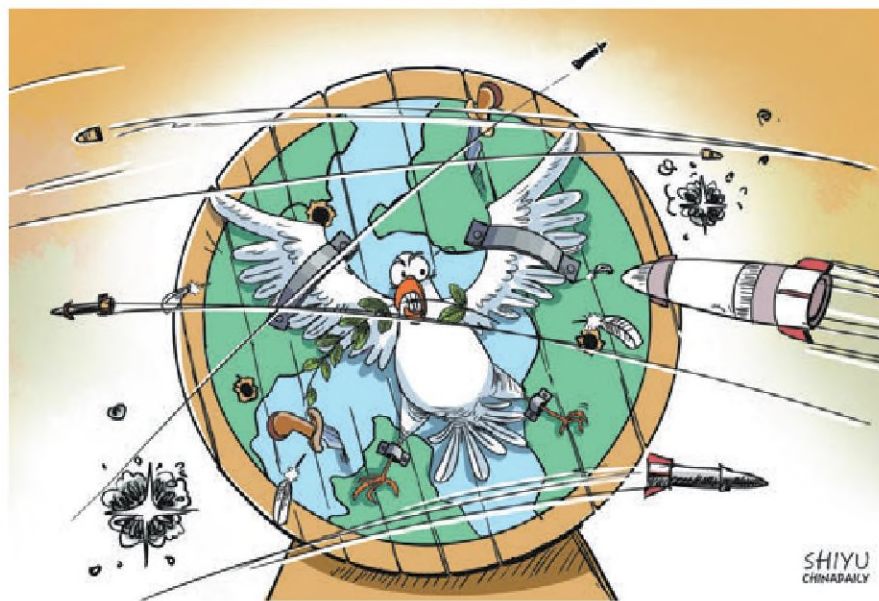
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Shi Yu



Opinion Line

Bar to STEM students stems from targeted policy flip of Washington

Reportedly, four Chinese students who travelled to the United States to study and participate in academic conferences suffered from the US side's unwarranted harassment, interrogation and repatriation. All of them have scientific and technical backgrounds.

The officers with US Customs and Border Protection repeatedly questioned them about their personal and family information, whether they are members of the Communist Party of China, and whether they have cooperated with the Chinese government.

This is just the latest politicized law enforcement move the US side has taken targeting Chinese students and researchers with backgrounds in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Such discriminatory actions started a few years ago

when the US defined China as its No 1 rival.

The US actions far exceed the scope of normal law enforcement. The purpose is not to maintain the so-called national border security, but to hinder China's technological development.

In so doing, the US is poisoning the public opinion environment for bilateral relations, hindering personnel exchanges and talent exchanges between China and the US, and ultimately damaging the US' international image and its own innovation vitality.

For decades, Washington regarded well-educated Chinese youths as a key group that it wanted to influence in the hope that not only would the US benefit from China's brain drain but, more importantly, it could cultivate a pro-US stance among the elites of Chinese society.

Now, the US has done a 180-degree turn in its China policy and its politicized law-enforcement actions target this same group of people. Washington has given up its previous strategy of trying to make friends with Chinese youths, if not its hope that China can be transformed to a member of the US club by the US' "opening-up" to it.

That being said, those pointing out that the US that it is shooting itself in the foot through shutting the door upon Chinese STEM talents should be reminded that the US has already made its choice, considering that to be the lesser of two evils. Chinese STEM talents pursuing further education and research opportunities overseas need to divert their attention to other developed countries that have not yet followed the US' lead.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Appeal of multilateralism and free trade prevails

Chile's application to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement demonstrates the appeal of the RCEP as the world's largest free trade framework. It also shows that multilateralism is still widely recognized by countries.

Against the headwinds of unilateralism and protectionism, multilateral trade mechanisms such as the RCEP have played a prominent role in promoting global economic recovery and maintaining economic globalization.

Since the RCEP came into effect in 2022, it has significantly promoted open cooperation in the region and stimulated the

vitality of regional economic development. Data indicate that in 2023, intra-regional trade in the RCEP region reached \$5.6 trillion, attracting a total of \$234.1 billion in greenfield investment.

Over the past two years, industry and supply chain cooperation among the RCEP members has shown strong resilience. Not only have the 13 members of the RCEP benefited significantly from that, but the trade pact has also produced positive spillover and demonstration effects, effectively mitigating the adverse effects of the "fragmentation" of the world economy.

Reportedly, in addition to Chile, Sri Lan-

ka and Bangladesh, among other countries, have also expressed their interest in joining the RCEP.

If Chile successfully joins the trade deal, it means that the scope of RCEP cooperation will expand to Latin America, further enriching each member's trade options.

Chile is one of the countries that has signed the most free trade agreements in the world. It has already signed free trade agreements with many of the RCEP members such as China, Australia, and the Republic of Korea. It therefore has a good foundation for joining the RCEP.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Rutte's NATO honeymoon looks set to be sweet but short

Outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is expected to replace Jens Stoltenberg as secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in October. Last November, after Rutte announced his intention to run in the NATO chief election, he quickly received the support of the United States.

The appointment of the NATO secretary-general must be unanimously agreed by all 32 member states. Some Eastern and Central European countries, which are dissatisfied with the long-term monopoly of Western Europeans in the post, were interested in Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas being appointed. But as Kallas seems more interested in competing to be the next European Union foreign policy chief, these countries are now supporting Rutte.

Most observers believe that the US has cleared the way for Rutte to be successfully elected in advance. It was the pressure from Washington that caused the Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries to change their positions. It is precisely because Washington recently expressed its hope to reach an agreement on the new NATO chief before the Washington Summit in

July that prompted all parties to speed up their bargaining on the issue.

Rutte has been reelected prime minister of the Netherlands several times since 2010, and each time he has been leader of a coalition government. He is good at working with politicians of different styles and positions. Because of this, he has been able to stand firm in the Dutch political arena, which has been full of contradictions in recent years, and has become the longest-serving prime minister in Dutch history.

Rutte is also one of the most active politicians in Western Europe who supports aid for Ukraine. Some analysts believe that in the context of Donald Trump's possible reelection as US president and the general concern that he will weaken the US' support for Ukraine, it is more conducive to the running-in between all parties to let Rutte, who has a good relationship with Trump, serve as the next NATO chief.

If Trump is reelected, Rutte will inevitably be busy mediating between the positions of most NATO members and the US.

Ukraine will inevitably continue to ask NATO for more air defense systems and fighter jets that can be used to combat Russia's winter offensive. But there remains disagreement within NATO on the issue, which will be a huge test for the new secretary-general.

Furthermore, Trump has always complained that NATO's European members

are unwilling to protect themselves and have long failed to meet the goal of "defense spending accounting for 2 percent of GDP" stipulated in the NATO Charter. The Netherlands, where Rutte has long served as prime minister, barely met the target until 2024. So far, nine countries have failed to meet the requirement. If Rutte cannot solve this thorny problem, it will be more difficult for him to coordinate the positions of relevant parties if Trump is reelected.

Central and Eastern European countries are increasingly dissatisfied with their status as "second-class citizens" in NATO. Although these countries supported Rutte, under the pressure of the US, they will inevitably demand more positions such as deputy secretary-general and assistant secretary-general of NATO to counterbalance Rutte's influence, affecting the organization's internal cohesion.

The rise of the far-right politicians in the European Parliament and some European countries will make NATO's European member states' aid and support for Ukraine more difficult, as many far-right parties oppose it.

Thus observers believe that Rutte's honeymoon period as the new NATO head is destined to be short. For Rutte himself, the only thing he doesn't have to worry about is that he will have nothing to do on that post.

— BEIJING NEWS

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | New Quality Productive Forces

Editor's note: By developing new quality productive forces, China can seize the opportunities created by the technological revolution and industrial transformation. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Li Yiping

Paradigm shift driving future growth

In a crucial speech on the importance of developing new quality productive forces to drive high-quality economic growth, President Xi Jinping said that traditional industries should not be abandoned but rather upgraded. He emphasized the importance of not neglecting traditional industries, and warned against bolstering new quality productive forces in a way that would create economic bubbles.

Traditional industries are not synonymous with backwardness. Their longevity signifies the significant role they have played in the rapid development of China. For instance, agriculture is a traditional industry, but it is by no means outdated. A poor harvest can lead to disastrous consequences, including famine.



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Hence, there is a need to use advanced technology to revolutionize traditional agriculture and transform it into a vibrant growth sector. The remarkable contributions of Yuan Longping, who developed the first hybrid rice strains and helped save millions of lives, to agriculture are an apt example of how advanced technology can be used to revolutionize agriculture.

Manufacturing, another traditional industry, too, does not equate with backwardness. The rise of the United Kingdom and the post-World War II economic boom in the United States were fueled by manufacturing. Similarly, China's rapid ascent to the world's second-largest economy was based mainly on its manufacturing sector, which also used high-tech and innovations to develop modern defense equipment. The evolution of China's military gear, from the crude "Type 38 rifles" to advanced modern armaments, reflects the nation's scientific and innovation capabilities.

Europe's manufacturing sector and China's Yiwu in Zhejiang province, renowned for its light industry, have been meeting global demand through continual innovation and

upgrading. And the development of automobiles from petrol-powered cars to electric vehicles shows traditional industries can adapt to the changing times and continue to serve the nation.

The key takeaway is that traditional industries are not inherently backward. Their classification as "traditional" is relative to the present; it is not an assessment of advancement versus obsolescence. We must avoid committing the mistake of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The right approach is to introduce new quality productive forces to the traditional

industries, helping them become the "traditions" for the new era.

China's vast land area and uneven economic development mean that traditional industries remain crucial. Each region has its own advantages and levels of development. Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to pursue advanced industrial development could be counterproductive, as economic efficiency lies in tailoring strategies to local conditions, not in forcing premature modernization upon them.

Efficiency in economics means achieving the best results with the least

input. When machine production is the cheapest option, use machines; when labor is more cost-effective, employ labor. The aim should be to use the appropriate technology, not necessarily advanced technology, to boost production. These principles suit China's rich and diverse industrial landscape. So different regions should leverage their unique strengths for optimal results, and avoid blindly imitating others.

Nationally, there is a need to advance new quality productive forces and use these forces to empower traditional industries. In regions where traditional industries dominate, innovation is key.

By applying the achievements of new quality productive forces to traditional industries, we can modernize and help them to achieve success in the future.

Productive forces are dynamic in nature, evolving with scientific and technological progress, and help humankind to better understand nature. They first emerged in the most developed economic regions, and then spread to all receptive regions and industries, merging with traditional sectors. Each wave of qualitative change in productive forces leaves behind elements that become the "traditions" for the next era.

For example, the First Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) replaced human and animal power with mechanical power, introducing looms and iron tools. The period from 1840s to about 1950s saw the advent of the telegraph and telephone — once cutting-edge technologies, now considered traditional technologies, and yet they have been continually upgraded, not discarded. The Third Industrial Revolution (1950s to 1990s) gave rise to new productive forces characterized by information technology, which in turn transformed existing industries.

Today, our priority should be to leverage our national strength to pioneer key technologies of new quality productive forces, creating new industries and revitalizing traditional ones. The correct approach is to adapt strategies to local conditions, pursuing balanced development without neglecting any sector.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

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

Cao Jia

Universities should foster more quality talents

The Chinese leadership has stressed that to address the structural employment problem of imbalance between human resources supply and demand, efforts should be made to speed up the development of human resources, optimize structure and ensure reasonable distribution of goods and services. It should be noted that promoting high-quality development and creating enough jobs comprise the new orientation and mission of the employment work in the new era.

China's human resources development has reached a major turning point and faces structural contradictions. From a high population growth rate, China is experiencing negative population growth and rapid population aging, with population mobility shaping the population structure in both urban and rural areas.

The population decline leading to demographic changes will create problems for employment generation and population development. Yet China will continue to be the second-most populous country in the world despite the declining fertility rate. China still had 864.81 million people aged between 16 and 59 years in 2023, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. On the other hand, the Chinese Academy of Labor and Social Security estimates that by 2035 China's working-age population will decline to 788 million, meaning China's working-age population will still be double of the size of the United States' total population.

Besides, the deepening structural contradictions in the labor market have made it difficult to find skilled and highly skilled workers due to the shrinking working-age population. In contrast, some graduates cannot find suitable jobs because

their majors make them unsuitable for certain professions which are necessary to propel China's structural transformation, while employment rates are declining in sectors such as financing, computing, vehicle manufacturing and some traditional industries.

Some new fields such as artificial intelligence, robot maintenance, new machinery manufacturing and digital upgrading require more workers. But educational institutions have not been able to come up with new curriculums which can meet the needs for industrial transformation and labor market shifts. An increasing number of graduates today prefer a stable job in a government department or State-owned enterprise despite the severe competition. Worse, it has become more difficult for arts graduates, as well as graduates from general universities, as opposed to prestigious universities, to find suitable jobs. Also, female graduates are less likely to find jobs than their male counterparts.

While college graduates face an increasingly difficult job market, many industries including manufacturing, clothing, catering, electronic processing and architecture can hardly find ordinary workers all year round. Employers in the eastern, central and western regions, too, face labor shortage. Chinese Academy of Labor and Social Security data show that 48.07 percent enterprises face labor shortage in the manufacturing sector, and 20.01 percent and 18.82 percent cannot find enough salespersons and services personnel.

Besides, skilled workers accounted for only 26 percent of the total workforce by the end of 2022, compared with 70-80 percent in advanced economies such as Germany and Japan. And estimates show that by the end of 2025, China will have a shortage of nearly 30 million workers in manufacturing.

Hence, efforts should be made to realize full employment. First, China should gradually integrate the primary, tertiary and service industries, establish a modern industrial system that matches the human resources, and increases employment in the services and agricultural sectors. And the college curriculum, especially for majors, should be changed to reflect the needs of industries, and regular training programs organized to train undergraduates and graduates in a way that they can meet the requirements of different industries.

Second, the government should consider revising the school system and boost education reform, as well as improve access to public services for migrant workers and help them find stable jobs in cities. It should also issue favorable policies to help overseas returned migrant workers start a business and older rural workers to find jobs closer to home, and the elderly people should support to resume work.

And third, there is a need to establish a high-level human resources market that is fairer, more unified, more effective and better regulated, and optimize the public service system to help create more jobs and ensure workers get access to the system. And the labor market barriers should be dismantled, and employment discrimination eliminated.

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

Chris Pereira

China offers high-tech road to success

No country changes as rapidly as China. Every decade marks a new era in business, governance, innovation, and socioeconomic development. This constant evolution is not merely a characteristic but the essence of China's dynamism, presenting a unique and compelling proposition for multinational companies to grow with the Chinese economy.

Each era creates immense opportunities for multinational companies to succeed in China. As China evolves, business strategies must adapt to stay ahead of the trends. Success here demands agility, foresight, and a deep understanding of the ever-shifting market dynamics.

In the 1980s, forward-thinking companies invested in early manufacturing, laying the foundation for China to become the "factory of the world". Those pioneers saw beyond the immediate challenges, envisioning the huge potential in China's vast, untapped resources and workforce. The 1990s saw a dramatic surge in foreign direct investment, expanding into diverse sectors such as infrastructure, communications and agriculture. That period was marked by a symbiotic relationship where China provided the growth environment, and multinational companies brought in expertise and capital.

Over the last 20 years, China's supply chain has evolved into a diversified powerhouse, offering everything from shoes and shirts to smartphones and satellites, and the massive domestic consumer base has created a vast market for international products. The sophistication and scale of China's manufacturing capabilities have reshaped global commerce.



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The impact of China's transformation on global trade has been profound. And China's focus on new quality productive forces is bound to make the present era into a new phase of quality production and technological advancement.

While China's consumer market remains enormous, international brands now face fierce competition from sophisticated local brands which align closely with Chinese consumers' tastes and demands. To succeed in such a market, international brands need to offer products that suit Chinese consumers' tastes. Understanding the nuanced preferences of Chinese consumers is crucial, and those who do so by integrating local insights with global best practices will thrive in the vast Chinese market.

The investment and manufacturing landscape too is evolving in this new era of higher competition, rapidly advancing technology and globally-focused Chinese companies. Previously, knowledge, investment and technologies flowed into China, now they are flowing outward. This shift marks a significant change in China's role on the global stage, from a receiver of foreign expertise to an innovation and export powerhouse.

Chinese companies are occupying the global stage like never before. Nearly every global industry now has competitive Chinese companies, and some sectors such as clean energy technology,

electric vehicles and smart home appliances are dominated by Chinese brands. The global presence of Chinese companies offers new avenues for international collaboration and competition.

These companies have developed technologies at home and expanded worldwide, creating new investment opportunities. The narrative is no longer about foreign companies coming to China to sell and manufacture goods; it is about partnering with Chinese companies to innovate and grow on a global scale.

China's new era is characterized by high-tech innovation, industrial development and robust industry and supply chains. Despite complexities isolating China's high-tech innovation for long, intense domestic and global competition has driven its progress. Global investors not engaged in this development are missing out on significant opportunities, especially because China's emphasis on research and development has led to breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology and renewable energy.

One of the biggest opportunities lies in being part of China's future industrial development. Foreign companies have the chance to collaborate with China in developing technologies for the future. Given China's complete industry and supply chains, world-class infrastructure and skilled workforce, foreign companies and researchers will find an ideal environment for developing new technologies. This collaboration is not just about leveraging resources but also about being part of an ecosystem that fosters rapid prototyping, testing and scaling.

Another key opportunity for foreign companies is China's focus on further

improving its industry and supply chains. With decades of infrastructure development and competent regional high-tech hubs, China is set to promote rapid innovation, and improve production and distribution. The efficiency and speed with which products can be developed and supplied to the market in China are unmatched.

In today's China, companies can find everything they need to develop and make high-tech products in one city. From the software development hub of Shenzhen to energy storage and EVs in Hefei, Anhui province, companies can complete projects without sourcing from around the world. This concentration of resources not only reduces costs but also enhances the speed of innovation cycles.

This system also benefits low-end goods production. China's vast network of original design manufacturers (ODMs) and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) allows companies to utilize existing facilities and personnel to expeditiously manufacture products. Many of the world's biggest companies, both domestic and foreign, have taken advantage of China's mature ODM/OEM networks for producing everything from apparel to tools and appliances, and quickly meet market demands.

While nothing beats being on the ground to seize these opportunities, a willingness to adapt to the Chinese market is the first step toward success. Indeed, the future of global business will be shaped by those who can navigate and leverage the intricate and ever-evolving landscape of China.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ARAVIND YELERY

Driving Global South to the center

The agenda for global development will be better incentivized and activated by working on larger issues where consensus is natural and addresses the root cause of global divides

The solution to escalating global tensions, political disarray and economic fluctuations lie in the emerging of alternative voices and scenarios in global affairs. The resurgent efforts of the Global South are a testament to their



potential, and these marginalized voices are now being heard in the form of disagreements over intimidation and military aggression by the affluent and influential states. The essence of global relations lies in upholding universal values and not imposing the interests of a few on all. The rise of the Global South signifies the rise of these nations, but the final stretch to make South-South cooperation effective and transform it into a powerful collective force necessitates a shared agenda, rooted in the values of cooperation, mutual respect and development.

Since World War II, the powerful countries have forced the former colonies and subjects to relinquish their right to question and disagree. The core challenge for the South-South cooperation is to cope with exceptionalism. The search for a modern world and the underlying obsession with modernity in the past centuries created drifts and delusions about the priorities of the Global South. A self-driven and self-centered agenda in the second half of the 20th century's postwar construction of the world unveiled a long-standing reality as imperialism and notions of subjugation surfaced in newer forms. To put it into context, in the age of artificial intelligence and automation, a large part of the population in the Global South lives in the shadow of deprivation, where extreme poverty pre-

vails, and access to education, healthcare and better living standards is daunting.

The Global South's solidarity has begun to take a definitive shape, particularly in the face of ecological devastation. Agriculture, a cornerstone of low-income economies, sustains the livelihoods of millions, ensures food security, and contributes to national economies. Climate change poses significant threats to agriculture in the Global South, including altered rainfall patterns, increased frequency of extreme weather events and rising temperatures. These changes have reduced crop yields, led to food shortages and increased the vulnerability of farmers. The industrialized nations, which champion equality and ethics, have been emitting hazardous gases since the Industrial Revolution. The Global North has been responsible for 50 percent of the total greenhouse emissions since 1850, despite constituting only 12 percent of the global population. The Global South is bearing the brunt.

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the countries in the Annex I category (i.e. the most industrialized countries) account for 90 percent of excess emissions.

Energy cooperation and developing sustainable and alternative responses to the energy crisis have become crucial to the Global South and a key factor in building synergies. With the intense pressure to survive in the competitive West-led markets of labor and production and the excessive emissions produced by the Global North, the developing nations often face challenges when it comes to utilizing affordable energy sources for their development. The question is not



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

only about the choice here but also the fact that the developed countries have long controlled energy production and supplies, a significant factor in global geopolitics and economics. These dynamics affect international relations, economic development and energy security.

The Global South's road to moderate prosperity has been severely affected by the oil cartels and energy geopolitics. The conventions and high-table meetings around emissions and climate policies dictated by the global rich manifest the newer forms of controlling energy. We all remember when the countries controlling the funding levers pledged to stop funding fossil fuel projects and condition the funding on clean energy standards. In 2022, the Glasgow Statement signed at COP26 by 20 countries unilaterally

decided to end new direct public finance for overseas fossil fuel projects by the end of 2025.

This is another of the technological divides in which the Global South has been ensnared in. The UN Conference on Trade and Development's Innovation and Technology Report 2023 warns about the increase in the green tech divide between the Global North and the Global South. The report discusses the importance of 17 frontier technologies ranging from fuels to automation and communication. The adoption of frontier technology was low in low-income countries. The global push for reducing climate change is forcing poor countries to adopt these technologies. The point is that they have a limited overall budget to spend and might have to compromise

between providing basic facilities and adopting green technologies.

The investment and sale of green technologies have been largely dominated by developed countries. In terms of numbers, the net zero emissions 2050 programs and the annual clean energy investment worldwide would see a manifold rise of up to \$4 trillion, which also means that the market for the tech-rich countries is widening in favor of the developed countries. As the UNCTAD's Technology and Innovation Report 2023 lists, among 166 countries, the 30 higher-income countries are better prepared for frontier green technologies. This indicates the green tech gap between developed and developing nations from the Global South.

Global development also demands solidarity among the Global South countries over the structure of the world's development and financial order. The use of international institutions by developed countries to wield global power dynamics is evident in blocking the Global South's access to capital and resources. The Global South countries need to be alert to neocolonialist institutions and laws, where poor countries may be coerced to give up cheap energy choices and buy expensive technologies such as green hydrogen in the name of energy transition and cutting emissions.

Some newer technologies do not provide practical solutions for developing countries. For example, green hydrogen requires not only technological know-how but monumental investments in infrastructure and supplies. The trade of green technologies is also protected

by institutions led by developed economies. This double tariff standard disadvantages the Global South's efforts to fight climate change and use a composite approach to achieve global development.

The Global South's approach to building consensus on global development should be incremental. The elementary approaches like food security, improving primary healthcare, ecological balancing and curating ways to inculcate indigenous innovation build resistance to stand up against re-emerging forms of colonization. Access and inclusivity are the core principles of any engagement the Global South countries seek. The agenda for global development will be better incentivized and activated by working on larger issues where consensus is natural and addresses the root cause of global divides.

To achieve the equitable goals of green development and subsequently accomplish the South-South cooperation prerequisites, China and India can play a more active role. India and China's approach to reaching a consensus on green cooperation is more than preventive but civilizational. India and China represent the concerns of green living and rising growth disparities of the global south but also lead them to raise voices for green technology and green accountability from the richer countries. Both countries' contribution to the evolving green consensus will decide the course of global dialogue on a green future.

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ZHANG MONAN

Via intermediates

Despite Washington's push for decoupling, the US and China continue to maintain close trade relations through third parties

Globalization, trade frictions and geopolitical conflicts have led to a reshuffle of the global industry and value chains. Amid the changing international division of labor and trade structure, the United States' push for "decoupling" from China is affecting the future of the international division of labor.



For several decades before the global financial crisis, world trade had been growing almost uninterrupted, before the US-China trade frictions, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine crisis accelerated the restructuring of the global industry and supply chains.

In 2018, the Donald Trump administration imposed high tariffs on Chinese goods, and it subsequently expanded them from high-tech manufacturing such as machinery, electronics, pharmaceuticals and automobiles to raw materials such as chemicals and metals, and even end-user products such as clothing and food. The Joe Biden administration has largely maintained the high tariffs levied on about \$300 billion worth of Chinese goods.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 prompted many governments to prioritize the resilience of global supply chains. Countries such as the US and Japan are actively pursuing a "de-risking" strategy, diversifying their supply chains aiming to reduce their reliance on China. However, this has expanded the list of industries with high economic risks.

The restructuring of the global

industry and value chains and geopolitical factors have severely impacted US-China economic and trade relations in terms of scale and structure.

First, the US-China trade volume has significantly declined. In 2023, bilateral trade was \$664.45 billion, down 11.6 percent year-on-year. Specifically, China exports totaled \$500.29 billion, down 13.1 percent; imports from the US totaled \$164.16 billion, down 6.8 percent; China's trade surplus with the US was \$336.1 billion, down 16.8 percent year-on-year, and the US trade deficit with China fell to its lowest level in more than a decade.

Second, bilateral trade dependence has decreased. From 2018 to 2022, the share of the US imports from China was 21.2 percent, 18 percent, 18.6 percent, 17.8 percent, and 16.5 percent of its total imports. In 2023, the percentage further dropped to around 14 percent, which is 7 percentage points lower than the pre-trade war figure in 2018. China has dropped to be the second-largest source of US imports.

In 2023, the share of Chinese capital goods and intermediate goods in US imports was 16.1 percent and 9.2 percent, respectively, a drop of 15.2 percentage points and 4.6 percentage points from 2017. Specifically, capital goods and parts and accessories (except transport equipment), as well as industrial supplies experienced the largest falls.

Third, both China and the US are shifting trade elsewhere. In recent years, the US has drastically cut its exports of semiconductors, liquefied natural gas, and coal to China. The US' manufacturing "reshoring" and supply chain "nearshoring" and "friend-shoring" have led to the

sourcing of some products from places other than China.

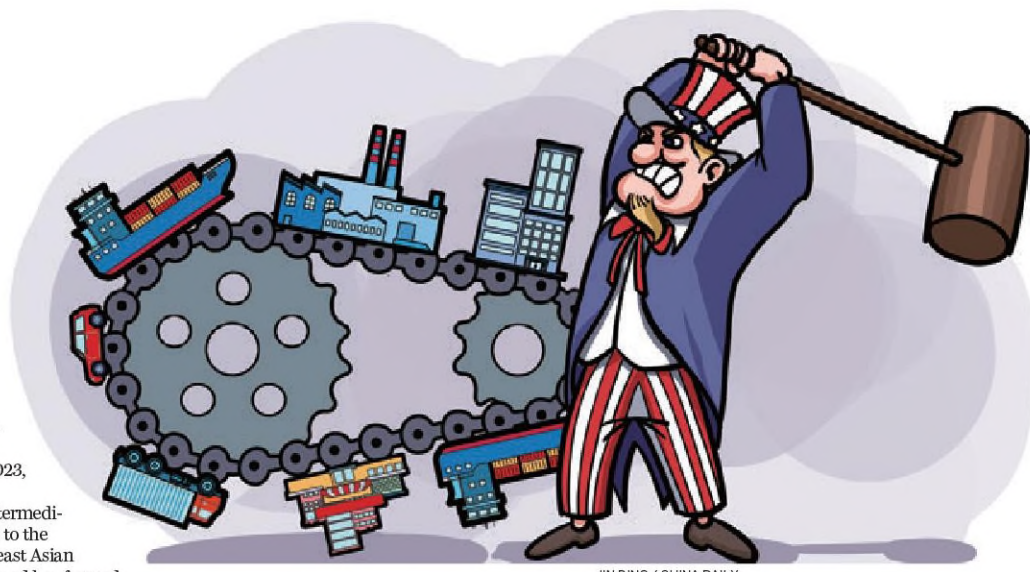
Similarly, China has shifted some foreign purchases away from the US. Since 2023, China has exported increasingly more intermediate and capital goods to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Mexico, and has formed closer industry ties with ASEAN and other emerging economies.

While tariffs have altered the bilateral trade volume between the US and China, they have not significantly changed their positions in the global trade landscape. Though influenced by the Biden administration's substantial industrial subsidies and supply chain reshoring efforts, and the US has entered a "super investment cycle" over the past two years, Chinese manufacturing remains competitive globally.

The US is pursuing "decoupling" from China under the guise of "de-risking", but the changes mentioned above do not represent the entirety of US-China trade relations. The US and China continue to maintain close trade relations through third parties.

Although external shocks have accelerated the restructuring of global value chains, the core factors driving this restructuring are technological advancements and market optimization behaviors.

With further analysis, it can be seen that China is actually gaining a greater share in the indirect trade of US capital goods and intermediate goods. This means that the direct bilateral trade between the US and China is occurring through



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

intermediate third parties and the industry and value chains between the two countries have been extended. The trade surplus of China with the US has shifted to countries such as Vietnam, India and Mexico, known as "friend-shoring" and "nearshoring" substitutes.

Here is the paradox: the US tariffs and decoupling efforts against China have boosted China's industry and value chain relations with emerging economies; with these third-party countries as intermediaries, indirect trade ties between the US and China have actually been strengthened.

From 2019 to 2022, China-Mexico trade grew at an average annual rate of 15.2 percent. China is now Mexico's second-largest global trading partner, second-largest source of imports and third-largest export destination.

In 2022, the trade volume between China and Mexico approached \$95 billion, up 9.8 percent year-on-year, with Chinese exports to Mexico growing by 15.1 percent. China maintains a trade surplus, while Mexico faces big trade deficit challenges.

China's top exports to the Mexican market include telephones,

LCD equipment, computer parts, electronic integrated circuits, auto parts, power transformers, and parts for telephone and television transmitters and receivers.

The share of added value created by China in Mexican exports to the US has risen from 5.9 percent in 2017 to 8.4 percent in 2021, an increase of 2.5 percentage points, while the share of added value from the US has fallen from 20.1 percent in 2017 to 18 percent in 2021.

Among the electronic and optical products exported from Mexico to the US, the share of added value from China has increased by 5.0 percentage points, while that from the US has decreased by 4.2 percentage points. In terms of transportation equipment, the share of Chinese added value has increased by 2.7 percentage points, while that from the US has decreased by 1.8 percentage points.

Moreover, while the US has been promoting India as a substitute for China, Sino-Indian trade has maintained rapid growth. In particular, Indian imports from China have surged, with top imports including electromechanical products, chemicals, auto parts and intermediate products.

"Friend-shoring" and "nearshoring" may have had strong impacts on direct US-China trade relations, but when indirect trade is taken into consideration, decoupling is no easy task. It will incur additional costs and distort the market's allocation of resources.

According to a 2023 research report by the US National Bureau of Economic Research, from 2017 to 2022, for every 1 percentage point decline in China's share of US imports, the unit prices of imports from Vietnam rose by 2 percent, those of Mexico by 0.6 percent, and those of the Republic of Korea, Singapore and China's Taiwan region by 0.5 percentage points. This is a loss of efficiency in the international division of labor, as well as a disruption to the collaboration among the global industry, supply and value chains.

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Shipwrecks offer up their treasures

Teams utilize state-of-the-art technology to examine and study underwater archaeological findings to bring them to the public, **Chen Bowen** reports in Qionghai, Hainan.

A mechanical claw deftly picks up samples of underwater artifacts during an archaeological expedition in the South China Sea. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In the waters 150 kilometers southeast of Sanya, South China's Hainan province, lie two ancient shipwrecks enveloped in a shroud of mystery, resting beneath 1,500 meters of deep blue sea.

The shipwrecks, discovered in October 2022 and traced back to the middle of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), have been named by researchers as "Northwest Continental Slope No 1 and No 2 Shipwrecks in the South China Sea".

The two shipwreck sites are relatively well-preserved and contain a wealth of cultural artifacts with a clear historical context, said Song Jianzhong, a researcher at the National Centre for Archaeology of the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

"This discovery not only stands as a major achievement in deep-sea archaeology within China, but it also holds global significance as a world-class archaeological find," he added.

Archaeological investigations have confirmed that the core area of No 1 Shipwreck, housing the primary accumulation of the hull and a significant amount of neatly stacked cargo, spans 37 meters in length and 11 meters in width.

It is estimated that over 100,000 cultural relics, including porcelain, pottery, bronze, ironware, bamboo and wood are hidden on the spot, with much of No 1 Shipwreck still submerged under sand. Some of its exposed sections are buried by up to three meters of artifacts.

Some porcelain pieces have inscriptions and markings on them, such as "Fu" (happiness and blessing), "Taiping" (peace), and "Made by Wu Wen", providing clues about the origin, production and possible ownership of these items.

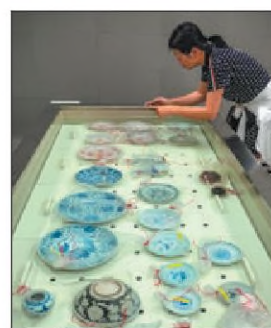
Located about 20 kilometers away from No 1 Shipwreck, No 2 Shipwreck has been delineated into a core area and a scattered area. The core area, stretching 21 meters in length from north to south and 8 meters in width from east to west, showcases orderly stacked logs. In contrast, the scattered area presents an assortment of artifacts including pottery, shells and dispersed logs.

The stable physicochemical properties of seawater and the excellent acid and alkali resistance of ceramics enable these artifacts to be preserved underwater for centuries, said Li Jian'an, a researcher from the Fujian Museum.

"These artifacts are pioneering archaeological findings, serving as witnesses to the trade interactions along the ancient Maritime Silk Road in China. They offer tangible evidence that sheds light on China's maritime history and the cultural exchanges between Chinese civilization and foreign cultures," Song said.

Crucial findings unveiled

In a series of archaeological investigations that commenced in May 2023 on the two ancient shipwrecks, researchers have retrieved a collection of 928 pieces of cultural relics, with some undergoing a desalination treatment in deionized water. The extensive efforts involve three stages of exploration and 63 dives, the National Cultural Heritage Administration announced during



Top: The manned submersible *Shenhai Yongshi* is deployed during the archaeological expedition. **Above left:** A state-of-the-art scientific research vessel on the archaeological expedition scene. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Above right:** Retrieved artifacts undergo desalination. ZHANG MAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

a press conference in China (Hainan) Museum of the South China Sea in Qionghai, Hainan on June 13.

In the exploration of No 1 Shipwreck, the focus has predominantly been on porcelain artifacts, including blue-and-white, celadon and *fahua* wares. *Fahua* refers to Chinese porcelain with bold, deep blue decorations and glazes in turquoise, purple, green, yellow and white. While major museums worldwide house *fahua* wares mostly passed down through generations, archaeological findings of such wares have been rare, making their discovery in the shipwreck a first. To date, several *fahua* wares, including jars and prunus vases, have been retrieved from the sunken vessel.

The discovery of *fahua* wares in No 1 Shipwreck validates their exportation from Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province — recognized as China's "porcelain capital" — as commodities during the mid-Ming Dynasty, according to Li. He further noted that this discovery not only illuminates the quest for associated production kiln sites but also provides concrete evidence to elucidate the origins of *fahua* wares in foreign regions.

The third phase of exploration, conducted in May and June, achieved a significant breakthrough by establishing a chronology through the finding of a red-and-green-colored bowl dated to 1506. The year, marking the commencement of Emperor Zhengde's reign in the mid-Ming Dynasty, solidifies

earlier assessments that No 1 Shipwreck originates from the Zhengde era (1506-21).

"This precise dating connects the shipwreck to a specific year, improving our comprehension of its historical significance," said Song.

He noted that No 1 Shipwreck carried a load of porcelain, presumably earmarked for export to Southeast Asia. In contrast, the second shipwreck was found to have been transporting mainly timber homeward from overseas. "This marks the world's initial discovery of ancient merchant vessels in the same area, believed to be privately owned merchant ships," Song said.

State-of-the-art tech

In 2023, the National Centre for Archaeology, the Institute of Deep-sea Science and Engineering of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the China (Hainan) Museum of the South China Sea joined forces to form a team, which pooled expertise from various fields to undertake research, excavation and preservation activities linked to underwater cultural heritage. Employing cutting-edge deep-sea technology, the team utilized the scientific research vessels *Tansuo 1* and *Tansuo 2*, alongside the manned submersible *Shenhai Yongshi* (Deep Sea Warrior), for an archaeological expedition at the two shipwreck sites.

The long baseline positioning system, for example, has revolutionized the accuracy of position-

ing, navigation and labeling of positions, making mapping underwater terrain more precise. With the system, "we have increased the update rate of underwater positioning from the previous 60 seconds to 3 seconds, providing divers with real-time navigation reference without delays," said Chen Chuanxu, deputy head of the scientific department of the Institute of Deep-sea Science and Engineering.

The *Shenhai Yongshi* is equipped with three-dimensional laser scanning and high-definition cameras to capture panoramic images and create detailed 3D scans of the shipwreck sites' distribution area.

Precise positioning and 3D reconstruction of all artifacts at the sunken shipwreck sites are required for underwater archaeological operations, according to Chen.

"In the depths of 1,500 meters, these present new challenges to our previous techniques for underwater positioning and measurement," he said. "To meet the demand, upgrades were made to the manned submersible platform and detection payloads to integrate information such as position, altitude, speed and synchronized clock into a laser-scanning device for high-precision 3D mapping."

The *Shenhai Yongshi* is also outfitted with an enhanced manipulator system. "The traditional rigid material manipulator claws have been replaced with claws made of flexible materials, ensuring the

stable extraction of underwater artifacts while preserving the precious details and patterns on the surface of the artifacts for further study and conservation," said diver Deng Yuqing from the Institute of Deep-sea Science and Engineering.

Extensive sampling of submarine sediment, seawater and marine organisms has also been carried out, providing data for environmental analysis and understanding of the ecosystem surrounding the shipwreck sites. Since its presumable submergence in 1506, the gradual alterations within No 1 Shipwreck have intertwined with marine life and the micro-environment on the seabed. This symbiotic relationship has fostered the development of a distinctive underwater ecosystem, giving rise to a fragile ecological chain encircling the sunken vessel.

Relics to be exhibited

The collaborative team is immersed in tasks such as cleaning, protecting, restoring, measuring, registering and organizing the retrieved artifacts. Upon meeting exhibition criteria, selected artifacts will be unveiled in the exhibition hall of the China (Hainan) Museum of the South China Sea before this year's National Day holiday, providing the public with an opportunity to admire these cultural relics, according to Xin Lixue, director of the museum.

He said that advanced technologies will be harnessed for the restoration and virtual display of the sunken ships' hulls, offering a vivid portrayal of the conditions at the sites. This approach will be guided by the ongoing progress in archaeological endeavors and research conducted at the shipwreck sites.

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Major underwater archaeological projects

1. Nanhai One shipwreck in Guangdong province, Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279)

Discovered in 1987 off the coast of Yangjiang, Guangdong province, it is the first major shipwreck ever found in the South China Sea (Nanhai) under China-initiated programs. Systematic research centering on this ship carrying cargo began in 2000. It was salvaged in 2007 in a pool-type container. From 2014 to 2019, archaeologists "unearthed" the shipwreck from its sand covering.

Over 180,000 cultural relics, proof of the prosperous Maritime Silk Road, have been recovered from the shipwreck, which is 22.9 meters long and 9.8 meters wide with a 2.7-meter-deep hull, making it among the biggest underwater archaeological discoveries in China. About 170,000 well-preserved porcelain objects below deck provide crucial references for studying Chinese exported ceramics in particular. Related follow-up lab research is expected to last well into the future.

2. Shengbeyu sea area shipwreck in Fujian province, Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)

In 2010, a typhoon led to the discovery of a Yuan Dynasty shipwreck in the Shengbeyu sea area near Gulei Peninsula, Zhangzhou, Fujian province. Since 2014, archaeological efforts have been conducted on the shipwreck to confirm its former status and retrieve cultural relics.

The remains of the vessel are about 16.95 meters long and 4.5 meters at the widest point. It has 10 sections with nine panels separating them. More than 17,000 cultural relics were retrieved from the water, most of which are celadon porcelain produced by kilns in Longquan, Zhejiang province. These include bowls, plates, dishes and cups dating back to the later part of the Yuan Dynasty.

The Yuan Dynasty witnessed a peak in maritime trade with an active and open maritime trade policy. The sunken ship and precious artifacts retrieved from it are important evidence of that historical period and display the prosperity of the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

3. Changjiangkou No 2 shipwreck in Shanghai, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)

Discovered in 2015, the Changjiangkou No 2 shipwreck originally sat 5.5 meters below the ocean bed at a shoal on the northeastern tip of Hengsha Island in Chongming district, Shanghai. It dates back to the reign of Emperor Tongzhi (1862-75) in the Qing Dynasty.

In 2022, the ship was retrieved, with its remains about 38.1 meters long and 9.9 meters at its widest point. A total of 31 cargo chambers were detected, with its main structure quite complete, including the prow, bollard, portside and starboard.

Piles of ceramics made in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province have been retrieved from the vessel. Also found on the wreck or scattered near it were purple clay objects, hookah pots made in Vietnam, cables and construction materials. It is one of the largest and best-kept ancient wooden boat wrecks, with the biggest number of cultural relics on board both in China and the world.

4. Shipwrecks of the Beiyang Fleet in Liaoning and Shandong provinces, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)

Since 2013, comprehensive archaeological research focusing on the sunken Chinese battleships of the Beiyang Fleet during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) has been conducted along the coasts of the two provinces.

The Battle of the Yalu River in 1894 and the Battle of Weihaiwei in 1895 were two major naval engagements between China and Japan during that war, which had a lasting influence on the history and geopolitics of East Asia. Losing the battles led to the annihilation of the Beiyang Fleet, an early-stage modernized Chinese navy.

The past decade's research has located all related Qing shipwrecks, among these the ironclad battleship *Dingyuan*, the famous flagship of the fleet. Numerous recovered relics, including construction components and artillery cannons of the ships and sailors' personal belongings, help clarify many historical rumors and fill in the gaps in studies of naval history.

WANG KAIHAO AND WANG RU

CULTURE



Beijing set to stage an array of domestic and international productions from July to December, **Chen Nan** reports.

Hamlet, the Chinese stage adaptation of William Shakespeare's classic tragedy produced by the National Centre for the Performing Arts and directed by Chen Xinyi, will open the 2024 NCPA International Theatre Festival. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Theater festival promises performances to remember

The 10th edition of the NCPA International Theatre Festival by the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing will take place from July 6 to Dec 6.

During the event, 17 theatrical productions from China, Russia, France and the United Kingdom will be staged along with 62 shows in Beijing.

"Theater has the power to entertain, provoke thought, inspire change and unite people across cultures and generations," says Wang Wei, director of the performance department of the NCPA, in a news conference in Beijing announcing the festival on June 18.

Since 2015, the festival has staged 96 theatrical productions from home and abroad, presenting over 400 performances, Wang says.

This year, the festival will open with two Chinese stage adaptations of William Shakespeare's classic works — *Hamlet* by director Chen Xinyi and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by director Guan Bo, both produced by the NCPA Drama Ensemble.

Hamlet premiered at the performing arts center in 2016, marking the 400th anniversary of the death of Shakespeare, which not only interpreted the classic tragedy but also gave it a fresh spin with a new character based on Chinese poet and translator Zhu Shenghao (1912-44). Zhu, a Shakespearean scholar, was the first to translate Shakespeare's complete works into modern Chinese. Since its premiere, the Chinese iteration of the play has been staged five times in multiple performances at the NCPA, receiving warm feedback from audiences.

From July 6 to 14, *Hamlet* will be shown at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre, a new venue of the NCPA that opened to the public in December 2023.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, according to the director Guan, will also be staged during the festival from July 6 to 14 with a new version, which is made exclusively for the outdoor stage at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre.

"It has been eight years since we premiered *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and for the first time, it will be staged outdoors in a park near the Beijing Performing Arts Centre.



Left and right: Scenes from *Prima Facie*, a one-woman play featuring Chinese actress Xin Zhilei. Middle: The play *Rickshaw Boy* based on the classic work of the same title by writer Lao She (1899-1966).



Guests, including director Fang Xu (third from left) and writer Liu Zhenyun (middle), pose at the NCPA on Tuesday.

The real forest atmosphere will make the production more immersive and romantic compared to indoor theaters," says Guan.

With this year marking the 125th birthday of Lao She (1899-1966), an iconic modern Chinese writer, the festival will feature *Rickshaw Boy*, a play based on his classic novel of the same title. It will be staged at the NCPA from July 17 to 19.

Rickshaw Boy is considered a masterpiece of 1930s Chinese literature, centering on Xiangzi, a poor young man from the countryside who comes to Beijing to become a rickshaw puller. Its dramatic treatment of everyday details, vivid portrayal of characters and vibrant capturing of Beijing life lends itself to adaptation in a variety of forms, including films, plays and operas.

"This is the seventh stage production that I made and adapted from Lao She's works. I was very nervous because *Rickshaw Boy* is one of his most adapted and performed works," says director Fang Xu.

According to Fang, most of the adaptations of *Rickshaw Boy* highlight the relationship between Xiangzi and Huniu, a tough and hot-tempered woman who marries Xiangzi and dies in child labor.

In Fang's adaptation, the director tries to portray the path of Xiangzi and his changes from an ambitious young man dreaming about owning a rickshaw one day to a poor man who had to sell his newly bought rickshaw to pay for his wife's funeral.

Fang has three male performers onstage simultaneously, all playing the role of Xiangzi at different stages of the character's life.

"They have a talk, which not only

unveils their inner world but also communicates with the audience," Fang adds.

"Theater has a remarkable capacity to evoke a wide range of emotions, from joy and laughter to sadness and empathy," says Fang. "Through compelling storytelling, vivid characters and evocative performances, theater allows audiences to experience emotions viscerally and immediately. This emotional engagement can be cathartic, providing a release and a deeper understanding of human experiences and struggles."

Chinese award-winning writer Liu Zhenyun agrees.

Liu's novels — *One Sentence Worth Ten Thousand*, *I Didn't Kill My Husband*, and *Laughter and Tears: A Novel* — have been adapted into Chinese plays. "The emotional impact that theater brings to people cannot be achieved with novels. The process of a writer creating a novel is also quite different from a director creating a theatrical production. A theater director can also imagine and, with different methods, create a space in the theater where performers and audiences breathe and dream together," says Liu. "Theater brings people together, fostering a sense of community and collective experiences."

First premiering in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Feb 23, *Laughter and Tears: A Novel*, directed by Ding Yiteng, will be staged at the NCPA from Nov 27 to 30. It follows a woman named Hua Erniang who loves jokes and seeks to learn new ones as a fairy who, for over 3,000 years, has searched for jokes in people's dreams. In her laughter, she also tastes the sadness

from people's everyday, messy lives.

"My novels have also been adapted into movies. Unlike movies, theatrical productions can be different with each performance. The performers can improvise and interact with the audience, who give instant feedback," says Liu. "I love the unique connection among people in the theater."

Prima Facie, a one-woman play featuring Chinese actress Xin Zhilei, will be staged at the NCPA from Oct 18 to 20. The play, originally written by Australian playwright Suzie Miller, revolves around a criminal defense barrister who experiences a shift in her perception of the legal system after becoming a victim of sexual assault. The Chinese play was staged at the NCPA in 2023 to great success.

"Besides the touching moments we had in the theater, the connection between the Chinese play and audiences has been expanded outside the theater. Many people shared their own stories with us and even actress Xin shared her own story, which she tried to forget about for years," says Zhou Ke, the director. "The significance of the play goes beyond the play itself. I wish more people would bravely stand up to support those who have experienced sexual harassment after watching it."

Musicals will also be featured in this year's NCPA International Theatre Festival with two productions — the Russian musical *Anna Karenina* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's classic production *Cats*, which will be staged at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre.

Other international productions will include *The Glass Menagerie* starring Isabelle Huppert and directed by renowned Belgian theatre director Ivo van Hove, which will be staged at the NCPA from Dec 4 to 6, closing the festival.

According to Wang Wei, one special section of the festival will be dedicated to traditional Chinese operas as this year marks the 130th anniversary of the birth of Peking Opera master Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) and the 90th anniversary of the birth of Mei Baojiu (1934-2016). Renowned artists such as Peking Opera actress Shi Yihong and Wang Peiyu will also perform at the NCPA.

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Bookstore owner brings passion for reading to rural areas

XIAN — Jiao Meining, 47, took a particular liking to a picture book titled *That Book Woman*, based on the true story of female librarians traversing mountains to deliver books to children in the rural United States, which went on to inspire her own life.

"Even in snowstorms, these librarians would deliver books on time to rural households in the mountains, allowing children in remote areas to read," she says.

Following in the footsteps of the librarians in the story, Jiao has provided picture book classes to at least 100,000 children in more than 400 schools over the past nine years, with many located in remote rural areas of Northwest China's Shaanxi province.

Born in a rural part of Lintong district of the provincial capital of Xi'an, Jiao developed a passion for reading at a young age. She soon realized that rural children had less access to quality reading resources than their peers in big cities.

When she became the owner of a bookstore offering some 14,000 picture books, she began thinking of ways to help. A lecture she attended in 2015 gave her the direction she needed.

"In late 2015, during a lecture at the Shaanxi Library, I saw Japanese picture book author Tatsuya Miyanishi and listened to his story of persistence in providing picture book classes to children and parents in Japan for more than 20 years," she says.

Motivated by his experience, Jiao sprang into action. About a month later, a local primary school invited her to try her hand at an on-campus class. Once it ended, she felt that her confidence was boosted by the children's enthusiastic applause.

In 2016, Jiao visited the Muzhai Central Primary School in Lintong to read stories to the pupils there. When she finished, the children were eager for more, but she had already read all the picture books she had brought.

"When I was about to leave, a child called out to me, 'Teacher Jiao, can you bring 10,000 books next time?' I felt sad, and I thought that no matter what, I must persist in this work."

Having worked as a docent at several scenic areas in Lintong, which is now a popular tourist destination, Jiao is able to read picture books aloud with passion.

"When I tell stories, I try to be an actor and do my best to perform using my facial expressions, voice and body movements."

"For a long time, under the illuminating presence of the sun and the moon, the stone seemed to come alive. And one day, with a thunderous crack, it split apart!" Jiao pronounces, mimicking the sound of the stone shattering and the piercing screams of a group of monkeys. She was telling the story of the birth of the Monkey King, a tale from the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, to a group of children at another primary school in Lintong.

To broaden her listeners' horizons, Jiao reviews various materials and prepares early for each class. When she tells animal stories, for example, she also talks about how entomologists conduct their research.

"In class, I don't define the children's understanding of the stories as right or wrong. I encourage them to dare to think and speak, even if their thoughts and words might seem absurd," she says. "Maybe something I say or a plot I tell will trigger their curiosity and ignite their thinking."

Her storytelling classes have been well-received among students. Some children in the schools she visits have even memorized her license plate number so they can rush to surround her with excitement as soon as she arrives at the school gates.

The effects of these classes have gone beyond the classroom. Han Lei, principal of the Rengzong Central Primary School, says that many children have become bolder and more confident as a result, and are developing improved lifestyle habits.

Under Jiao's influence, more than 10 parents have joined in her work.

"I hope I can be like the female librarians in *That Book Woman*, planting the seeds of enthusiasm for reading in rural and mountainous regions, and illuminating the hearts of more children," she says.

XINHUA



WANG LIQUN / XINHUA

Ancient Chinese gown on display for first time

CHANGSHA — A garment made with incredibly thin material that was worn by a Chinese noblewoman 2,200 years ago is on exhibit for the first time in Changsha, the capital of Central China's Hunan province.

The simple unlined gauze gown with its curved hem and weighing just 48 grams is on display as part of an exhibition titled *She Walks in Beauty: Women of the Han Dynasty and the Roman Empire*, which opened on June 15 at the Hunan Museum.

The exhibition showcases more than 200 objects from 19 museums across Italy and China. Among them are the gown and a T-shaped painting on silk from the tomb of Lady Xin Zhui, both of which are national treasures in China.

The gown, described as "thin as a cicada wing" and "light as smoke", has never before been on public display.

It is longer and wider — yet 1 gram lighter — than a plain, unlined gauze gown with a straight hem that is on display as part of the Hunan Museum's Mawangdui Tombs exhibition. The garments showcase the

pinnacle of textile techniques during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24).

Both gowns were unearthed from Lady Xin Zhui's tomb at the Mawangdui relics site. Xin Zhui, who died around the age of 50, was the wife of Li Cang, the chancellor of the Changsha Kingdom.

Among the Italian artifacts on display is a fresco depicting Perseus and Andromeda, which is being exhibited outside the Capitoline Museums for the first time since it became part of the museums' collections.

Capitoline Superintendent of Cultural Heritage Claudio Parisi Presicce says that the objects from Rome are being exhibited for the first time in China.

"In particular, there are some female statues that have never been lent before," he says.

The exhibition focuses on the family, social and emotional lives of women 2,000 years ago in both the East and the West and will continue until Oct 7.

XINHUA

CULTURE

Xu Ting and Zhang Sha perform Huangmei Opera *Emperor's Female Son-in-law* during the 2024 Spring Festival Gala held by the TV station of Wulian in Shandong province in February. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Taking center stage

Traditional folk opera poised for encore with increasing support,
An Baijie reports in Rizhao, Shandong.

Chinese writer Mo Yan, who won the 2012 Nobel Prize in literature, grew up watching a traditional folk art known as *Maoqiang* Opera in his hometown in East China's Shandong province and featured it in one of his novels.

"It was so popular in the 1950s and 1960s that when a troupe came to my village, all the people would stop everything and rush to secure a seat. If a famous performer was due, the show would sell out many days in advance," Mo said at a session of national political advisors in 2015.

Maoqiang Opera developed from local folk songs and gained popularity in the 1860s. It originated in the Jiaozhou area of the Jiaodong Peninsula in East China. During its development, the opera absorbed arias and other local art forms, such as the flower drum dance and the *yangko* (a popular folk dance).

In 2006, the opera was included on the national intangible cultural heritage list. Mo's novel, *Sandwichwood Death*, is written in the *Maoqiang* Opera style and its English translation was published in 2013.

In the past century, the opera has faced challenges, such as shrinking audiences, a dearth of performers from the younger generation, and a shortage of public funds.

But things are looking up under nationwide measures to revive the traditional arts — *Maoqiang* Opera itself is gaining new momentum in line with sustainable development in Shandong's Wulian county, with support from the public and private sectors.

Staging a revival

Wang Jinxia, 37, executive deputy director of Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe, started to learn *Maoqiang* Opera from her cousin at the age of 19 after graduating from high school. Initially, Wang's parents did not support her decision to learn the folk art.

"Just like most parents who want their children to have a bright future, my dad and mum didn't think performing opera was a promising job," she said.

But Wang did not give up. Beginning in the winter of 2006, she practiced at least an hour a day and subsequently became a full-time performer at the government-funded Wulian County *Maoqiang* Opera Troupe in 2013. Seven years later, she was invited to join the privately-run Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe.

Wang said she was glad to see that more young people were becoming fond of the folk art, with many of them choosing to learn the opera. Nearly half of the 42 members of the New Era troupe are under the age of 35 and its youngest actress, Xu Ting, was born in 2002.

"It's lucky for me to become an actress of *Maoqiang* Opera. This traditional art has made me feel fulfilled, especially when I noticed the eager eyes of my audiences in front of the stage," Wang said.

Sun Hongju, a national first-class opera performer and director of the Wulian



Wang Jinxia, executive deputy director of the Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe

"It's lucky for me to become an actress of *Maoqiang* Opera. This traditional art has made me feel fulfilled, especially when I noticed the eager eyes of my audiences in front of the stage."



From left: Members of the Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe perform the opera *Selecting Son-in-law* in Wangshutuan village of Wulian county on Oct 17; Sun Hongju (center) performs *Maoqiang* Opera *Zhao Meirong Observing Lanterns* at Tuoshigou village of Wulian county on March 27.



Li Futang of the Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe prepares for a performance in Donghonghe village of Wulian county on May 14.



Wang Mu'er of the Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe prepares for a performance in Donghonghe village of Wulian county on May 14.



Xu Ting of the Wulian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe prepares for a performance in Donghonghe village of Wulian county on May 14.

ian New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe, said she has been deeply moved many times by the enthusiasm of her audiences.

"Once, on the day we were about to perform on stage, a drizzle started. We originally planned to postpone the performance, but when I turned around and saw the audience sitting under umbrellas, waiting eagerly, we decided then and there: we will perform, rain or hail!" Sun said.

The New Era troupe presented a total of 469 performances last year for residents in the vast rural areas to enjoy, she said.

"Folk culture should not be absent in the national rural vitalization drive," she said.

The troupe's performance during the May Day holiday this year, at the county's Furong Square, drew throngs of local residents estimated to number in the tens of thousands, she said.

"It was so popular that you could not even find a place to stand if you arrived late," said Wulian resident Zheng Bin, 34.

Staying relevant

Sun, who retired from a *Maoqiang* Opera troupe in Gaomi, the hometown of Nobel laureate Mo Yan, was employed by the newly established New Era troupe in 2018 and has been its director since.

With an experience of over 40 years in *Maoqiang* Opera, Sun said it is a great responsibility for her to inherit and reform the century-old opera so that it can better reflect people's lives.

Through the efforts of Sun and her colleagues, China's first *Maoqiang* Opera-themed film, *The Laughter of Huashi Village*, was completed and shown in 2020. The film tells the story of how villagers were lifted out of poverty. It was invited to participate in the 4th and 5th China Quyi Film Promotion and Commendation Ceremony held in 2022.

Sun also worked on an anti-corruption *Maoqiang* Opera drama, titled *Cold-faced Secretary*, which highlights clean governance by showcasing a Party secretary of a township. It won the third

prize in the drama category of the 13th Mount Taishan Literature and Art Award in Shandong province in December.

"When *Cold-faced Secretary* was shown in Rizhao city, I could see some audiences bursting into tears because it really touched their hearts," Sun said, adding that the drama is now touring the city to help spread the anti-corruption message.

In 2022, Sun was invited to take part in the Lantern Festival Gala of State broadcaster China Central Television, performing the *Maoqiang* Opera, *Zhao Meirong Observing Lanterns*, and marking a new high for the art.

Help at home

Financial support from a local entrepreneur also significantly helped the rapid development of *Maoqiang* Opera in recent years, Sun said.

"Without Dong Yanping, there would be no New Era *Maoqiang* Art Troupe," she said.

Dong, 63, president of Wulian county's

stone industry association and chairman of Wulian Shanqian Stone company, set up the New Era troupe in 2018. He said the troupe's annual expenses amount to about 2 million yuan (\$277,200).

Dong said he particularly enjoyed traditional Chinese opera when he was a student majoring in music. When he came across the music of *Maoqiang* Opera master Zeng Jinfeng's *Luoshanji*, it began to linger in his mind. It continues to do so after more than four decades.

"Now, when I think about it, that melody immediately jumps out," Dong said.

Dong made up his mind very early on to establish his own *Maoqiang* Opera troupe to perform for the villagers of Wulian once he had the means to do so.

The troupe is an important part of Dong's life — in 2019, the billionaire went through liver surgery in a Shanghai hospital and could not speak for nearly half a year due to a tube that was inserted into his throat.

After he recovered, the first thing he asked through a phone call was: "How many people are still in the troupe?"

"My troupe director replied, 'All of us 42 people are staying! None of us will leave. I could not help crying on hearing that,'" Dong said. He was deeply moved by the dedication of the troupe members and wanted to do all he could to support their work.

"Whenever I see thousands of people cheering the members excitedly, even with tears in their eyes, whenever the performance ends and the actors take multiple curtain calls, the audience still keeps applauding. Whenever someone from the audience delivers water, flowers, fruit or even helps with the cleaning up after the shows, I always feel that performing for the people is worth it," Dong said.

Dong said he is considering setting up a fund to finance the troupe in a sustainable way. "With stable interest generated from the fund, the troupe can be sustained in the long run," he said.

Government support for folk arts has also promoted the development of *Maoqiang* Opera, Dong said. Under a government project that encourages folk arts at the grassroots, the troupe can get subsidies of about 1,500 yuan for each performance.

In recent years, local county authorities such as those in Wulian and Gaomi have included in their budgets the cost of collecting and preserving traditional folk art items scattered among small theaters or held by elderly performers, and providing training courses to cultivate new *Maoqiang* Opera performers.

"I believe that with good policy support, *Maoqiang* Opera, a treasure of our culture, will continue to thrive," Dong said.

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