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Going back to the roots

Exhibition offers glimpse into origins of Chinese civilization

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# CHINA DAILY

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XI'S VISION | REFORM AND OPENING-UP

## Policy focus to be on innovation through opening-up

By MA SI and FAN FEIFEI

Promoting innovation through opening-up will be a key policy focus area during an upcoming vital reform meeting, with greater international tech cooperation widely seen as crucial for China to nurture new growth drivers and share fresh opportunities with the rest of the world, experts and corporate executives said.

New measures could include expanding global cooperation in

scientific research and encouraging enterprises to play a major role in tackling technological bottlenecks, they added.

The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee is scheduled to be held in Beijing from July 15 to 18 to map out new economic reforms.

These comments came after President Xi Jinping called for efforts to foster a globally competitive, open environment for scientific and tech-

nological innovation, saying that it is important to insist on promoting innovation through opening-up.

Xi made the remarks when presiding over the fifth meeting of the central commission for deepening overall reform of the 20th CPC Central Committee in June. He is head of the commission.

Wang Zhigang, a member of the Standing Committee of the 14th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Commit-

tee, said, "It is of utmost importance to leverage openness to stimulate vitality and expand international cooperation in science and technology despite external headwinds."

Wang, who is also a former minister of science and technology, said that integrating with the global innovation network using a proactive approach would help to attract top global talent.

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## Xi's Central Asia visit further enhances trust

Trip filled with heartfelt receptions, fruitful diplomatic engagements, overarching visions

By XU WEI and REN QI in Dushanbe

Amid rounds of applause and standing ovations, President Xi Jinping conferred China's Friendship Medal on Tajik President Emomali Rahmon on Friday in a grand ceremony in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

The atmosphere was electric at the Palace of the Nation, the official residence of the Tajik president, as the two leaders shared a firm and long handshake after Rahmon received the medal, which is China's highest state honor for foreign nationals.

Rahmon, visibly overwhelmed by emotions, held his right hand over his heart several times in a gesture of appreciation, as he told the audience, "My old friend, the president of the People's Republic of China, is one of the few great leaders of our time with a global vision."

The remark drew another round of standing ovation from the audience, in a show of immense respect for the Chinese president.

Rahmon then turned to Xi and said, "Dear friend and brother, I believe that the outcome of your state visit will open a new, illustrious chapter in the history of relations between our two countries."

It was a quintessential moment of Xi's trip to Central Asia over the past week — one that was filled with heartfelt receptions, fruitful diplomatic engagements and overarching visions for the future development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

"A complete success" was the phrase used by Foreign Minister Wang Yi during a media interview to wrap up Xi's attendance at the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO in Kazakh capital Astana, and his state visits to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Xi's visit to Central Asia has further enhanced China's strategic

mutual trust with relevant countries, consolidated and expanded the nation's "circle of friends", while it has enriched and expanded the theory and practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind, Wang said.

Xi's speech at the SCO summit highlighted the importance of unity and cooperation within the grouping in the face of global challenges. The summit adopted the Astana Declaration, the SCO initiative on building a just and peaceful world through collective effort. It also issued a statement on principles of mutual trust and partnership among nations, and 26 outcome documents covering diverse fields such as economics, finance, security, culture and institutional development.

Xi's visit to Astana — his fifth to Kazakhstan — featured grand receptions and heartfelt goodwill gestures, mirroring the strong personal bond between the Chinese president and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Through their long and cordial exchanges, the two heads of state reaffirmed their strong political will to advance the building of a China-Kazakhstan community with a shared future, while drawing up plans to start another "golden 30 years" of bilateral relations, Foreign Minister Wang said.

The two leaders also pledged to double the volume of bilateral trade and expand partnerships in key sectors including energy, connectivity, key minerals and the digital economy.

Xi's three-day visit to Tajikistan went into full swing on Friday as the leaders held talks, jointly met with the media and witnessed the exchanges of over 20 cooperation agreements.

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## Race against time

Above: Emergency responders carry sandbags on Sunday to help repair a dike breach along Dongting Lake in Yueyang, Hunan province. Hunan has been receiving very heavy rainfall since June 16, with record downpour in some regions.

Right: A truck dumps rocks and sand on Sunday into the water to plug a breach in the dike at Dongting Lake. The dike breach, which occurred on Friday, was initially about 10 meters wide but expanded to around 220 meters later.

PHOTOS BY GUO LILIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY See story, page 3



## SCO Astana summit brings up new opportunities for Sino-Uzbek cooperation

On July 3-4, the Kazakh capital of Astana successfully hosted the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Today, the SCO unites about half of the world's population, representing a powerful platform for multilateral and fruitful cooperation in all areas.

China and Uzbekistan, which are among the founding members of the SCO, see this organization as playing a key role in safeguarding national interests and regional stability. Dur-

### WORLD WATCH

By Elyor Makhmudov

ing the Astana summit, the leaders of the two countries held bilateral talks, where they once again emphasized the importance of the chosen course of comprehensive strategic partnership and outlined plans to implement the existing agreements. Strengthening of the comprehen-

sive strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and China has contributed to the intensification of cultural exchanges, unlocking of tourism potential and strengthening of the dynamics of trade and economic relations. Certainly, this process is gaining even greater momentum under the conditions of "New Uzbekistan".

The term "New Uzbekistan" has been actively used since 2017, symbolizing a new stage in Uzbekistan's development, socioeconomic and sociopolitical reforms and open-

ness to the outside world. It is important to note here that President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has repeatedly emphasized the importance of studying and applying China's experience in transforming Uzbekistan.

Today, the experience of the Chinese miracle is actively studied and implemented at the level of think tanks, ministries and agencies of Uzbekistan, and is also the focus of attention of domestic scholars. Uzbekistan's scholars have pub-

lished more than 100 textbooks, training manuals, monographs and phrasebooks on China studies.

All these factors make it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese model of development, to conduct comparative analysis and to make proposals and recommendations for Uzbekistan. The Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of Uzbekistan alone has prepared 18 targeted socioeconomic projects on poverty reduction in the regions of Uzbekistan

based on the study of the People's Republic of China's experience and with the participation of Chinese experts.

Due to the political will of the leaders of Uzbekistan and China, today cooperation is observed across formats such as the intergovernmental committee, the interparliamentary group, the strategic dialogue at the level of foreign ministers, and interregional dialogue.

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**INSIDE**  
Shift accelerated toward currency multipolarity  
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## HEAT WAVES ACROSS ASIA STOKE HEALTH CONCERNS, FOOD SECURITY FEARS

Record temperatures affect people's daily lives, have impact on agriculture, highlight climate change challenges

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong, ARUNAVA DAS in Kolkata, India, and KASWAR KLASRA in Islamabad

### In-depth

Santosh Sikdar, 52, who does welding jobs for a small construction company in Kolkata, eastern India, finds the scorching weather "simply unbearable", but says he cannot afford to skip work, even for one day.

"This is a killing summer ... a blast-furnace situation ... hot, humid and sultry. Sometimes, I fear that I may collapse at any moment," he said.

Authorities and experts in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal

state, advised people to stay at home, but Sikdar, who works for a daily wage, said that staying at home is not financially feasible.

"Even a day of missed work will mean that my family and I have empty stomachs," he said, dismissing the "luxury" of staying indoors. "It is a matter of survival for us," he said.

See Climate, page 2

## Past as a prelude



Visitors look at a photo of the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games on Saturday in Paris. Olympic-themed exhibitions are being held in the French capital to usher in the 2024 Olympic Games. XU CHANG / XINHUA

# PAGE TWO



A boy cools himself under a pipe spewing water on the outskirts of Srinagar, India, during scorching temperatures on July 2. HINDUSTAN TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES



Residents fill large containers with water from Delhi Jal Board tankers on June 22 in New Delhi, India. The Indian capital had endured 40 consecutive days of temperatures above 40 C. HINDUSTAN TIMES / SIPA USA / NEWSCOM



A laborer pulls a cart loaded with empty water bottles on a hot summer day at a market in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, on June 12. FAROOQ NAEEM / AFP

From page 1

Large parts of South and Southeast Asia are in the grip of unrelenting heat waves. New Delhi this summer recorded one of India's highest-ever temperatures of 49.9 C, while some areas in Pakistan hit 53 C.

Across the region, farmers have struggled to plant their crops, industries are facing labor shortages, and schools have shut for days amid the unrelenting heat.

Mehr Ghazanfar Abbas, a farmer in Layyah district in Pakistan's Punjab province, is one of those suffering. He recently collapsed under the blazing sun as he reached the middle of his field. Other farmers rushed to help, carrying him to a nearby medical unit where a doctor diagnosed him with sunstroke.

### Vulnerable populations

The impact of the extreme heat in South Asia has been profound, escalating health risks such as heatstroke and dehydration, and affecting vulnerable populations like the elderly and impoverished, said Anjal Prakash, an associate professor and research director at the Bharti Institute of Public Policy, a think tank under the Indian School of Business.

"Agriculture suffers from crop failures and water scarcity, exacerbating food insecurity," said Prakash, who contributes to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Additionally, extreme heat intensifies air pollution and exacerbates energy demands, leading to power shortages and economic strain."

India has had record heat in recent months, with temperatures hovering above 45 degrees for long stretches and even soaring beyond 50 degrees in some regions, according to the Indian Meteorological Department. Since May 14, the capital New Delhi had recorded at least 40 consecutive days of temperatures at or above 40 C till June 22, a department official said.

"I have spent almost four decades in Delhi, but I have never experienced such an excruciatingly painful heat wave," said Prasan Dutta, a retired electrical engineer.

The summer is "not only sapping and draining, it is financially ruining us," said Shyamapada Pal, a 40-year-old farm laborer from Bankura district in West Bengal. "It has been the severest, harshest and cruelest in recent memory."

There were more than 40,000 suspected heatstroke cases and at least 110 confirmed deaths between March 1 and June 18, when northwest and eastern India recorded twice the usual number of heat-wave days, an Indian Health Ministry official said.

More than 450 million people in India work in the informal sector, employed on farms, construction sites or at foundries. They have little job protection or rights, leaving them extremely vulnerable during times of severe weather.

The extreme heat has also depleted groundwater, and water reservoir levels are down to nearly 35 percent of capacity in some parts of the country. In many cities, including New Delhi, local authorities have announced water conservation measures, including a ban on car washing.

"Heat waves and their impacts on water resources will increase manifold in the near future," Sanjay Vashist, director of Climate Action Network South Asia, told environment magazine Down To Earth.

"Shrinking water resources can lead to conflict situations within a country, endangering national security."

### Further risks

In neighboring Pakistan, mercury levels went as high as 53 C in the southern Sindh province.

The highest temperature ever recorded in Pakistan was 54 C in Turbat, Balochistan province, in 2017, the second highest temperature recorded in Asia and the fourth highest in the world, Sardar Sarfaraz, chief meteorologist at the Pakistan Meteorological Department, told China Daily.

In the wake of high temperatures and a heat wave in Punjab province, all public and private schools closed for seven days from May 25. However, schools were allowed to conduct scheduled exams with necessary precautions to ensure the safety of students, the provincial school education department said, according to Xinhua News Agency.

With a population of around 250 million, agriculture is the mainstay of Pakistan's economy, employing about 40 percent of the nation's labor force.

Agriculturalist Salman Shah Khagga recently told China Global Television Network (CGTN) that the heat wave in Pakistan is "causing significant stress to crops, especially vegetables. We are seeing a substantial reduction in yields for tomatoes, potatoes, cotton, and other staple crops, which will have a direct effect on the economy."

According to experts, crop losses may go beyond 30 percent this summer, causing food shortage as well as huge potential economic losses.

The Pakistani government has launched a public awareness campaign to counter the adverse impacts of the severe ongoing heat wave, according to Romina Khurshid Alam, coordinator to the Pakistani prime minister on climate change and environmental coordination.

Pakistan's climate is warming much faster than the global average, with a potential rise of 1.3 to 4.9 C by the 2090s over the 1986 to 2005 baseline, according to a World Bank expert panel on climate change, The Associated Press reported.

The country, which is one of the most vulnerable in the world to climate change, also faces the risk of heavier monsoon rains, in

“Adaptation strategies are crucial for helping communities cope with extreme heat. These include developing heat action plans, improving early warning systems, and creating public awareness campaigns about heat exposure dangers and preventive measures.”

Bagh Ali, Pakistani climate change expert

part because of its immense northern glaciers, which are now melting as temperatures rise.

This year's monsoon season will start in July, causing flash floods, according to Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority.

### Food crisis warning

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has warned his country will face heat waves and drought over the next four months, potentially leading to a food crisis.

Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) has estimated that the heat wave and dry season will run from July to October, bringing a high possibility of drought, Xinhua reported. "This must be anticipated," Widodo said on a visit to Bapeang village, Central Kalimantan province, on June 26.

Widodo expressed concern that the dry season caused by the heat wave could reduce agricultural productivity, noting that this issue is not unique to Indonesia but affects many countries globally. The situation could worsen as other countries experiencing long droughts, and heat waves might also see their rice production decline. These countries might then prioritize their domestic consumption over exports, Widodo added.

Data from Indonesia's Ministry of Agriculture indicated that a food crisis can cause 7 to 16 percent of the population to experience hunger. With the country's population projected to reach 281.6 million in 2024, it is estimated that around 19.7 to 45 million people could be at risk of hunger.

"Currently, Indonesia is vulnerable to a hunger crisis. We have to boost our food pro-

duction, especially rice, in the next three months," Indonesian Minister of Agriculture Amran Sulaiman said on June 25.

The Indonesian government is preparing to distribute 20,000 water pumps throughout the country to ensure water availability in rain-fed lands that dry up due to the heat wave. Widodo said the program could be increased to 70,000 and the number of yearly crop plantings increased.

The BMKG said last month Indonesia had faced unusually high temperatures in the April-June period this year, despite unexpected heavy rains in some areas. However, the extreme heat hitting the archipelago is not the same as heat waves hitting its neighbors due to Indonesia being located on the equator and enclosed by oceans, the agency said.

Areas starting to experience drought in June included southern Sumatra, Java, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Bali, southern Sulawesi and southern Papua. Southern Sumatra, Java Island and southern Sulawesi are the country's major rice producing centers.

### Bigger issue

Soma Sen Roy, a scientist at the IMD, said the heat wave stemmed from a combination of factors, including El Nino.

Sunita Narain, director-general of the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, said at a recent Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific roundtable that "temperatures in Delhi have remained abnormally high over the last two months."

"Scientists are now very clear that the abnormally long duration of high temperatures in Delhi and the intensity of the heat wave are linked to climate change," said Narain.

There are multiple factors leading to the extreme heat in South Asian and Southeast Asian regions but climate change remains in the background, said William Yu, founder and CEO of the World Green Organization, an NGO based in Hong Kong.

Two years ago, the UK Met office warned that the probability of record-breaking heat hitting India and Pakistan had increased 100 fold due to climate change.

Yu said that due to economic constraints people living in tropical areas often do not have sufficient cooling facilities or ventilation indoors. As for outdoor workers, they need to keep themselves hydrated and take regular breaks to avoid heatstroke, he said.

"Inaction on climate change is intolerable now, given the various calamities across the world this year, including flooding in the Middle East, Brazil and Afghanistan, and drought and extreme heat in many other places," he said.

Green finance is very important to addressing the issue of adaptation and to building climate resilience for the common good of humanity, Yu added.

Jayanta Basu, an Indian environmentalist and convener of the Kolkata Climate Action Plan, said the time has come to prepare long-term and short-term plans to address high heat for vulnerable regions of India, taking into consideration various factors.

"The most important thing is that heat mainly affects the poor and marginalized as they often have to work under heat stress conditions. They should take priority in planning linked to heat-related resilience," he said.

A multifaceted approach was needed in South Asia and elsewhere to tackle the immediate and long-term impacts of heat waves and climate change, experts said.

"Adaptation strategies are crucial for helping communities cope with extreme heat. These include developing heat action plans, improving early warning systems, and creating public awareness campaigns about heat exposure dangers and preventive measures," Bagh Ali, a climate change expert from Pakistan.

Prakash, from India's Bharti Institute of Public Policy, said, "International cooperation and policy interventions are vital for effective adaptation and mitigation efforts, ensuring the region's resilience against escalating heat extremes."

Arunava Das and Kaswar Klasra are freelance journalists for China Daily.

Leonardus Jegho in Jakarta and Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Top left: People walk under a water-mist system on a hot day in the Ginza district of Tokyo on July 2. PHILIP FONG / AFP Top right: Boys cool themselves under a water tap on a street in Jalandhar, India, on June 13, amid the ongoing heat wave. SHAMMI MEHRA / AFP Above: A water tanker drives away from a parched section of the Padach Dam on the outskirts of Chandigarh, India, on June 23, after filling up with water for birds and animals. AFP

## TOP NEWS

## Run for your life



Participants in red and white sprint and dodge down a narrow alley on Sunday during the San Fermin bull run in Pamplona, Spain. The nine-day San Fermin festival, which runs through July 14, honors the city's first bishop and patron saint. The bull run takes place over an 875-meter course in front of fighting bulls every morning during the festival. ANDER GILLENIA / AFP

## Hunan dike breach set to be plugged soon

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha  
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The dike breach along Dongting Lake in a township in Hunan province is expected to be sealed off by noon on Tuesday, according to local authorities.

As of 3 pm on Sunday, a gap of 87.3 meters had been plugged, with first responders continuing to make efforts to repair the 220-meter breach in the dike in Tuanzhou township of Huarong county in the city of Yueyang, local authorities said at a news conference.

After the breach occurred at around 5:48 pm on Friday, President Xi Jinping urged all-out rescue and relief efforts to safeguard people's lives and property. He instructed that people in threatened areas be evacuated in a timely manner and properly resettled.

A similar breach had taken place in the township in July 1996.

Efforts to plug the dike breach started on Saturday afternoon,

**7,680**  
residents

have been evacuated and resettled from the Tuanzhou township of Huarong county in Hunan's Yueyang city

after the water level in the lake went down.

Zhang Yingchun, executive deputy governor of Hunan province, said that emergency responders were racing against time to seal off the breach.

With trucks and barges bringing rocks and raw materials, they can proceed to rebuild 60 to 80 meters of the dike each day. A total of 100,000 cubic meters of rock is needed to plug the whole gap, she said.

More than 4,200 emergency responders and over 3,000 pieces of equipment are assisting in the relief and rescue efforts, she added.

The central government has

allocated 258 million yuan (\$35.5 million) and the provincial government 250 million yuan for emergency flood response in Hunan, Zhang said.

The embankment, viewed as "the second line of defense", is located about 2 kilometers from the breached dike and is 14.3 kilometers long, according to Xinhua News Agency.

An area of 47.64 square kilometers, which is about 92 percent of the township's total area, is underwater, with the average depth of water being 5 meters, according to local newspaper Hunan Daily.

The Ministry of Water Resources has sent an expert team to offer technical support to local teams.

Li Heng, leader of the expert team, said the most important work is to reinforce the embankment, which separates the flooded township from other areas. All 7,680 residents of the township have been evacuated and resettled, and there were no immediate reports of casualties or injuries, she said.

alties or injuries, she said.

Zhu Dongtie, head of Hunan's Department of Water Resources, said they need to drain about 200 million cubic meters of water and plan to use pumping equipment as soon as the breach is repaired.

A total of 3,224 residents have been resettled at four schools in Huarong county.

Xiao Juxiang, 68, said she and her husband left their home after hearing an evacuation announcement on the village radio.

"The atmosphere was very intense and I was very nervous," she said, emphasizing that she felt reassured after seeing People's Armed Police Force personnel join the rescue efforts.

The troops transferred all villagers to safe locations and gave them water and food, Xiao said, adding, "You could see how tired they were. It is no mean task to evacuate so many people."

Xinhua contributed to the story.

## Xi congratulates Pezeshkian on election win

Iran's president-elect vows to help country overcome bottlenecks, challenges, crises

By JAN YUMUL  
and MIKE GU in Hong Kong

President Xi Jinping has congratulated Masoud Pezeshkian on being elected as president of Iran.

In a message sent on Saturday, Xi said that China and Iran enjoy a long history of friendly exchanges and bilateral relations have seen sound and steady development since diplomatic ties were established between the two countries more than 50 years ago.

In the face of a complex regional and international situation, China and Iran have always supported each other and stuck together through thick and thin, continuously consolidating strategic mutual trust, steadily promoting exchanges and cooperation in various fields, and maintaining sound communication and coordination on regional and international affairs. This has not only benefited the two peoples, but also contributed positively toward promoting regional and world peace and stability, Xi said.

Xi said that he attaches great importance to the development of China-Iran relations and is willing to work with Pezeshkian to guide the deepening of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

On Saturday, reformist candidate Pezeshkian won the 14th presidential election in Iran, succeeding late president Ebrahim Raisi to become the ninth president of the country.

Iran's election headquarters spokesman Mohsen Eslami said Pezeshkian, who is also the former health minister, secured more than 53 percent of votes, while Saeed Jalili, Iran's former chief nuclear negotiator, gained more than 44 percent of the total votes.

Iranians expect the new government to mitigate the domestic economic crisis, deal with escalating tensions with Israel, and promote prosperity and stability by improving ties with other countries.

Under Pezeshkian, who had campaigned to ease foreign sanctions against Teheran, Iran is expected to increase exchanges with China and other countries, analysts said.

Speaking with supporters at the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini in Teheran on Saturday after his victory, Pezeshkian said that helping the coun-

try navigate "bottlenecks, challenges and crises" would be a "big test", the official news agency IRNA reported.

"We will extend the hand of friendship to everyone," Pezeshkian said on television on Saturday, Iran's Mehr News agency reported.

The country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on his X account: "The Iranian people have now chosen their president. I extend my congratulations to the nation, the newly elected president."

The president-elect is likely to take office next month, the Presiding Board of Iranian Parliament said.

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia wished Pezeshkian success and said he looked forward to continuing to develop relations.

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain underscored the kingdom's commitment to strengthening relations with Iran and building a bright future for the people of the region.

Heads of state and government of Algeria, Armenia, Cuba, India, Iraq, Japan, Pakistan, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates were among those who congratulated Pezeshkian on his election.

Mehran Kamrava, a professor of government at Georgetown University in Qatar, called Pezeshkian's victory a milestone. The president-elect is a reformist and has promised to improve things in the country, Kamrava said.

"Much more importantly, he has promised to start negotiations over the revival of the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)," Kamrava told China Daily. "One of the (things) he has talked about (is) the importance of gearing Iranian foreign policy toward the removal of sanctions."

Rasha Al Joundy, a senior researcher at the Dubai Public Policy Research Centre, said Iran's policy of de-escalation with Gulf Cooperation Council countries will continue.

It is strategic as a policy, especially on relations with China, Al Joundy said. "The continued peaceful relationship means economic progress will continue and foreign investors will still find the region safe for new projects."

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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## Visit: Beijing committed to sharing benefits with others

From page 1

The two leaders also jointly inaugurated the new government and parliament building of Tajikistan, constructed with aid from China.

Wang said the interactions between Xi and Rahmon have always been filled with sincere thoughts, with the Tajik side expressing gratitude to China and profound admiration for Xi.

Xi held a host of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Astana, underscoring

Beijing's commitment to Chinese modernization and sharing with various countries opportunities emerging from its development.

Andrey Seleznev, director of Confucius Institute at Moscow State Linguistic University, said that Xi's trip to Central Asia has helped strengthen China's relations with countries in the region at the economic and people-to-people levels. It appears that China is ready to open its market wider to Central Asian countries, he said.

The messages from Beijing at the

SCO summit in Astana resonated with leaders and observers.

Rahmon, who is among the SCO's founding leaders, said the grouping established "under a great initiative proposed by the Chinese people" is advancing gloriously and is committed to global development. "It teaches us how to coexist, cooperate and prosper together," he said.

Dicky Budiman, a public health researcher at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, said that Xi has underscored the significant shifts in the global land-

scape and the necessity for unity and cooperation among member states to address these changes.

"President Xi's speech articulates a comprehensive framework for addressing contemporary global challenges through solidarity, mutual trust and cooperative security. As the world navigates these transformative times, such collaborative efforts will be critical in building a resilient and equitable future for all," Budiman said.

Xu Weiwei in Hong Kong  
contributed to this story.



Iran's president-elect Masoud Pezeshkian speaks at a meeting on Saturday at the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini in Teheran, Iran.

VAHID SALEMI / AP

## Ties: Regional cooperation strengthens links with Uzbekistan

From page 1

The last format is relatively new, where regional leaders, based on the socioeconomic priorities of their regions, cooperate, meet and exchange experiences with Chinese partners. For instance, leaders of all regions of Uzbekistan have repeatedly visited China, and delegations from China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and provinces of Anhui, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Shaanxi and Shanghai have visited Uzbekistan over the past six months. This format is already showing results with friendship between the regions of our countries strengthening, and

many of them establishing the status of twin cities.

The result of close cooperation and strategic partnership in recent years can be seen in a number of key indicators. For instance, in 2015, the trade turnover between the two countries stood at \$4.1 billion. By 2023, it had increased 3.5-fold to \$13.7 billion, and China became Uzbekistan's leading trade partner by the end of that year. In 2015, the total volume of Chinese investment and loans in the Uzbekistan economy exceeded \$6.5 billion. This figure is over \$12 billion now. Again in 2015, the number of enterprises in Uzbekistan operating with

**Today, many major Chinese brands are present in Uzbekistan. ... The first Sino-Uzbek technological park was launched in Jizzakh region this year, which is expected to create more than 5,000 jobs ... and for which Chinese investors will allocate \$1.2 billion.**

Chinese capital stood at 650. Today there are more than 2,500 such companies.

Today, many major Chinese brands are present in Uzbekistan. An important event in the current year was the launch of the first Central Asian production facility for BYD electric cars in Jizzakh region. The first Sino-Uzbek technological park was launched in Jizzakh region this year, which is expected to create more than 5,000 jobs and implement 30 projects, and for which Chinese investors will allocate \$1.2 billion.

The opening of the first regional branch of a Chinese bank, the Export-Import Bank of China, is also expected soon. This will open

up additional opportunities for partnership with Chinese financial structures and create new opportunities for trade and economic growth. In particular, the construction of Uzbekistan's first Olympic city in Tashkent, which will host the 2025 Asian Youth Games, is being finalized with the assistance of the Export-Import Bank of China.

Uzbek President Mirziyoyev, during his visit to China in January 2024, noted that relations between Uzbekistan and China "are experiencing the best period in their history, demonstrating consistently high dynamics".

The Belt and Road Initiative has played an important role in

achieving these results. Since the initiative was proposed in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, Uzbekistan has been an active participant, implementing with Chinese partners large joint investment projects in high technology, green energy, chemistry, mechanical engineering, metallurgy, electrical engineering, infrastructure modernization, transportation and logistics.

The meeting of the leaders of the two countries in Astana once again showed the deep respect the leaders have for each other, and the mutual trust and desire for further strategic partnership and cooperation in all spheres.

The author is rector of Diplomat University in Tashkent. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## International beer festival opens

This year's event in Harbin features world's largest indoor ice hall

By TIAN XUEFEI and ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin

The 22nd Harbin International Beer Festival kicked off on Saturday, transforming a vast park into a haven for beer lovers and offering a summer surprise: the world's largest indoor ice and snow hall.

This year's festival boasts the largest venue ever. Organizers say it's also the most diverse in terms of beer selection, aiming to provide a comprehensive cultural and tourism experience.

With an area of more than 300,000 square meters, the annual festival, which usually lasts for about three weeks, is held at the same park that hosts the Harbin Ice and Snow World in winter.

The festival boasts over 1,000 beers from more than 10 countries, including China, Russia, Germany and the United States. The first barrel of beer in China was produced at the Harbin Brewery in 1900. Themed zones at the beer festival offer everything from beer halls, gardens and camping to comic exhibitions.

Harbin hopes to replicate its success in winter, when a record number of visitors flock to the city to admire its ice and snow scenery at the Harbin Ice and Snow World, which features numerous ice and snow sculptures and has long been a must-see for tourists from all over the country.

As night falls, the Dream Stage at the center of the beer festival venue, covering over 40,000 sq m and accommodating 30,000 people, comes alive with interactive activities and performances.

Each week, electronic music festivals or concerts will be held, featuring star performers, top DJs and internet celebrities. The four beer halls will host a variety of performances every day, creating a high-end cultural and tourism experience that brings together unique beers, fashionable bars and cultural tourism.



**Above:** Visitors enjoy beers during the 22nd Harbin International Beer Festival at the same park that hosts the Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Saturday.

**Left:** Tourists pose for a photo through a heart-shaped formation created by two ice swans at the indoor ice and snow hall at the park in Harbin on Saturday.

Each of the 21 beer gardens has its unique features, offering not only drinking but also barbecue gatherings, leisurely afternoon teas, socializing with friends and corporate team-building.

The camping area features 24 RVs, five double-peak tents, 40 camping tents, 30 trendy tents and multiple space capsules for visitors. The self-driving RV base covers an area with camping parking spaces, and provides dining and entertainment including a drive-in cinema

and a public activity plaza, as well as a public bath center.

But the biggest draw might be the new 23,800 sq m indoor ice and snow hall, recognized by Guinness World Records as the largest of its kind.

The immersive hall features cutting-edge ice and snow carving techniques, creating an ice wonderland with temperatures ranging from -8 C to -12 C. Divided into nine themed areas and offering 13 experiential projects, visitors can explore the wonders of ice and snow year-round.

For tourist Bu Jing, the chance to experience a 40 C temperature difference within the park was irresistible.

"I came for the festival, but then I saw the ice and snow hall and knew I had to visit," said the 42-year-old tourist from Taizhou, Jiangsu province. "I was sad to miss Harbin's famous winter displays, but this is like an incredible summer miracle."

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## Police smash online soccer gambling gangs

By CAO YIN [caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn)

While Chinese fans have been enjoying international soccer tournaments in recent weeks, police across the country have solved a number of online gambling cases that used events such as the ongoing Euro 2024 championship as a cover.

In Beijing, police dismantled three online gambling gangs on June 26, capturing 21 people suspected of being involved in operating casinos and confiscating many tools, including electronic devices and bank cards, believed to have been used in illegal activities, the Beijing Public Security Bureau said in a statement issued on Wednesday.

Police in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, said on Tuesday that they had caught two people on June 27 believed to have been members of a gang involved in betting worth more than 400,000 yuan (\$55,000).

They said one suspect, surnamed Liu, registered as an agent on an overseas soccer betting website, and then hired the other suspect, surnamed Song, to invite people to join a WeChat group and collect money from gamblers betting on Euro 2024.

One of the suspects has been given administrative penalties, while the other has been placed under criminal coercive measures in line with the law, but the public security department in Chengdu's Qingbaijiang district has not specified which suspect received which punishment. Further investigation of the case is underway.

According to China's Criminal Law, criminal coercive measures include detention, bail or residential surveillance.

In Dujiangyan, another city in Sichuan, police smashed another group consisting of five people who allegedly used overseas websites to organize soccer gambling during Euro 2024, which kicked off in Germany on June 14 and will conclude on Sunday.

In addition to disclosing such cases to remind soccer fans not to

bet on games, police in many areas have also posted tips on social media platforms to help people be on guard against fraud involving such events.

Some scammers, for instance, were found to have created false versions of the official Euro 2024 online platform to sell fake commemorative gifts, such as coins, bank notes and mascots, or to have posted advertisements on WeChat Moments to attract fans to buy. Once the fraudsters received the money, they would block the buyers, according to Shanghai police.

Meanwhile, some fraudsters also forged and widely distributed text messages claiming to be sent by the official Euro 2024 website that told people they had won a prize and could click on a link to receive it, police in Leshan, Sichuan, said.

"If people click on the link, the scammers will ask them to pay a sum of money as taxes or service charges to a designated account, or directly implant a virus to steal personal data from the users' mobile phones," the police added.

A man in the Yinzhou district of Ningbo, Zhejiang province, called police on June 16 after being cheated during Euro 2024.

He said he had seen an advertisement on WeChat Moments offering discounts on bets during the soccer tournament. He then contacted the person and downloaded the required app, placing a bet of 10,000 yuan.

But when he won the bet and tried to withdraw the money, he found he could not, nor could he reach the person anymore.

"What the man experienced is a scam that uses high odds to get football fans to bet," Ningbo police said. "Even if people win, they cannot withdraw because when they click on the advertisement and place the bet, the fraudsters have already run away with the money."

Beijing police advised people to watch games rationally, avoid participating in soccer gambling and pay close attention to the protection of their personal information.

## Second Luban Workshop being built in Kazakhstan

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin [yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn)

China's second Luban Workshop in Kazakhstan, which is under construction, will focus on nurturing artificial intelligence talent to fuel the growth of the industry in the Central Asian country.

It is being built by Tianjin Vocational Institute and L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University of Kazakhstan.

"The workshop is under construction, and we plan to collaborate with the local university in the field of information technology applica-

tions to provide sufficient talent support for the development of the artificial intelligence industry in Kazakhstan," said Wu Zongbao, president of Tianjin Vocational Institute.

"Kazakhstan is a leading digital and financial technology center in Central Asia, and information technology is a crucial cornerstone of the digitalization process."

Initiated by Tianjin, the Luban Workshop is a globally renowned brand in vocational education, with an increasing number of workshops being set up in countries involved in the Belt and Road initiative.

"The Luban Workshop has offered strong support for these countries, meeting the rising demand of their thirst for quality technological personnel," said Luan Jianzhang, director general of the Foreign Affairs Office in Tianjin.

The first Luban Workshop in Kazakhstan, jointly established by Tianjin Vocational Institute and East Kazakhstan Technical University, was put into use in December.

The initial phase offers training to over 400 students in transportation equipment and technology,

with four practical training areas: vehicle maintenance, vehicle fuel systems, new energy vehicles and intelligent connected vehicles.

Tianjin Vocational Institute has tailored five course standards for the workshop: pure electric vehicle operation theory, electric vehicle equipment, automotive engines, advanced driver assistance systems, and unmanned vehicle assembly technology.

"We will continue to construct the second Luban Workshop in Astana, Kazakhstan, at a high level, and strive to run the first Luban Workshop in East Kazakhstan province

as well, creating more opportunities for the career development of local youth," Wu said.

Meanwhile, a delegation of 12 students and teachers from the Luban Workshop at Tajik Technical University, the first in Central Asia, arrived in Tianjin on Friday for a nearly one-month training program at Tianjin Urban Construction Management & Vocation Technology College.

The Tajikistan Luban Workshop is a collaborative effort between the Tianjin college and TTU.

Bozorzoda Bakhtiyor, a junior student at TTU, said he will make the

most of his valuable learning experience in Tianjin to master advanced surveying and mapping techniques, ultimately aiming to contribute to his country's development upon his return.

Spanning 1,138 square meters, the Tajikistan Luban Workshop offers majors in urban heating application and engineering measurement technologies.

It includes two practice centers — one green and one smart — for student projects, and is equipped with 377 sets of teaching equipment and an online classroom.

In just over a year, it has provided theoretical learning and practical training to more than 1,500 undergraduate and graduate TTU students.

## Reform: Digital technologies expected to create more room for growth

From page 1

Wang added that it would also foster a competitive, open innovation ecosystem.

"More efforts are needed to build international and regional science and technology innovation centers, which could become pioneers in scientific progress and drive the development of new quality productive forces," he said.

Xue Lan, dean of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University, said that no country can become a great innovative nation in isolation.

"Even amid stringent tech restrictions by the United States, China should not isolate itself, but rather integrate more actively into the global innovation system to avoid severe disruptions in the global industrial chain," Xue said.

"As China holds a very important position in the global industrial chain, we must continue to innovate and open up to strengthen this position," he added.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Berger, said that China has emerged as a strong player in the global landscape of research and development. For instance, the

country has the world's largest number of patent applications, and its research and development spending exceeded 3.3 trillion yuan (\$454 billion) in 2023, second only to the US.

"But innovation needs international exchanges and serendipity, not only money," Depoux said. "To become a true innovation-driven country, China needs to become an enabler of R&D driven by universities, public institutions and companies, not only in China, but also globally."

According to Depoux, that will be the key to growing China's total factor productivity, an indicator that measures the efficiency of production. To that end, multiple levers can be activated, such as launching venture capital funds for global startups, globally scaling China's startups, and encouraging Chinese companies to establish global R&D centers.

"China can continue to take an inclusive approach to science and technology with emerging countries and the Global South. By fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and promoting sustainable technological advancements, China can contribute to the

“Innovation needs international exchanges and serendipity, not only money. To become a true innovation-driven country, China needs to become an enabler of R&D driven by universities, public institutions and companies, not only in China, but also globally.”

Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Berger

overall development and global integration of emerging nations," Depoux added.

Dou Xiankang, head of the National Natural Science Foundation of China, also emphasized the

need to actively participate in global scientific governance.

According to Dou, international scientific and technological cooperation is an inevitable trend, and fundamental research serves as an important channel for promoting such cooperation.

Denis Simon, president of the Alliance of Global Talent Organizations, said that greater global cooperation in industrial innovation is needed to address the challenges that the world is facing.

China has a mix of expertise and experience, and it can bring speed to the market, as seen in electric vehicles and renewable energy, Simon said, adding that deeper international cooperation, rather than protectionism, is vital for the world to cope with climate change.

Luo Zhongwei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics, said that Chinese enterprises should also expand cooperation with their foreign counterparts in fields such as artificial intelligence, life sciences, green energy and advanced manufacturing, in order to enhance their competitiveness on the global stage.

Luo said China's emphasis on

fostering a globally competitive, open environment for scientific and technological innovation will create enormous opportunities for multinational corporations to invest in the country and inject strong momentum into global economic recovery.

Frank Meng, chairman of Qualcomm China, said, "Chinese enterprises have actively integrated themselves into the overall landscape of global technological innovation, which has created even broader opportunities for collaboration with companies like Qualcomm."

According to Meng, the US chip company has "consistently considered China as a pivotal business partner and valued customer, viewing it as more than just a market or a link in the supply chain."

Meng said that in the coming years, digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G, the internet of things and intelligent connected vehicles will create more room for growth.

"Qualcomm and Chinese industries will have even bigger opportunities for cooperation, and we will keep creating value together," he added.

Tao Lin, vice-president of US

electric car maker Tesla, said the US company's rapid growth in China over the past decade cannot be separated from the country's open policy support and favorable business environment.

With unmatched advantages and vast prospects, China is a "must-have" market for Tesla, Tao said, adding that the localization rate for components in Tesla's gigafactory in Shanghai has exceeded 95 percent, showcasing local suppliers' technological progress.

Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that China's efforts to build a globally oriented innovation system indicate that the country attaches great importance to improving technological innovation capacity and international competitiveness.

Highlighting the move is expected to provide new impetus for China's high-quality economic growth and bolster industrial upgrade, Pan said, adding that Chinese enterprises should play an active role in formulating global rules and standards for core technologies, and strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights.

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## CHINA

## Desert dash



Athletes compete in a desert canoe pulling competition during the 6th National Desert Fitness Games at the Shapotou scenic area in Zhongwei, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, on Saturday. The games, which opened on Saturday and end on Monday, feature 16 events, including a desert obstacle race, and have attracted 1,190 athletes and sports enthusiasts from 13 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions including Jiangsu, Beijing, Inner Mongolia and Ningxia. FENG KAIHUA / XINHUA

## AI to play bigger role in astronomy, experts say

By WANG XIN in Shanghai  
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Artificial intelligence is already providing solid support in astronomical data collection, analysis and processing, as well as in satellite engineering and system management, and is expected to further assist astronomers worldwide in their search for exoplanets and space exploration, experts said in Shanghai on Thursday.

Zhang Yonghe, deputy head of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Innovation Academy for Microsatellites in Shanghai, was among those who spoke during the 2024 World Artificial Intelligence Conference, which ran from Thursday to Saturday.

"Astronomy is about discovering the unknown, and AI can help in various aspects when it comes to astronomy," said Zhang, who is also director of the Key Laboratory of Spacecraft Digitalization Technologies, and lead designer of the Einstein Probe and chief commander of the Space Variable Objects Monitor, both of which are telescope satellites.

He said AI can help make a big difference in data analysis and processing.

Though many people may be familiar with megabytes, gigabytes and terabytes, astronomy generally measures data in petabytes. One petabyte is equal to about 1,000 TB.

"Each astronomical satellite can generate massive amounts of data, and the quantity can be too much for the human brain to process," Zhang said.

"Also, astronomical data is complicated. Some data can be extremely subtle, but it often indicates unknown phenomena and new discoveries, especially in the search for exoplanets," he said, adding that AI can help astronomers identify accidental discoveries.

In addition to data processing, Zhang said AI could also play a big role in spacecraft development and the management of observational satellites.

For example, AI can accelerate the satellite design process by swiftly creating plans for an optimal structure.

"An astronomical spacecraft usually requires much more advanced technologies than existing ones when it is initially proposed," Zhang said. "That is to say, we have to think about the future and carry out error analysis to find out the

right way of doing things. And this is where AI is key — it can help us face technical challenges at much lower costs."

In recent years, China has seen rapid development in space science. The nation's first astronomical satellite, China's Dark Matter Particle Explorer — nicknamed Wukong, or "Monkey King"—was launched in December 2015 and is still functioning well.

In August 2016, China launched the world's first satellite dedicated to testing the fundamentals of quantum communication in space. Six years later, the Advanced Space-based Solar Observatory, a comprehensive solar observation satellite dubbed Kuafu 1 in Chinese, was sent into space and has detected more than 100 solar white-light flares, according to CAS' Purple Mountain Observatory.

On Jan 9, the Einstein Probe was sent into orbit from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province to observe astronomical phenomena. Last month, the Space Variable Objects Monitor, jointly developed by China and France for two decades, was launched to capture and observe gamma-ray bursts.

"With continuously increasing investment in the astronomy and space sector, China has been making efforts to increase the number of astronomical satellites in recent years," Zhang said. "As more satellites are produced, the human brain is less capable of efficiently managing aspects such as their operations and data transmissions."

With the rapid development of AI systems, astronomy is advancing faster than ever before.

"Astronomy involves global collaboration and coordination," Zhang said. "When one spacecraft observes a phenomenon with high value, it will promptly transmit the information to other observation devices across the world, including other spacecraft in space and telescopes on Earth. Given that most of the devices are unattended in space, artificial intelligence can play a major part in the data-sharing process."

"Any spacecraft or device has a limited view on its own, but others located in different places can be complementary. Hence, the more astronomical spacecraft there are, and the more intelligent they are, the more opportunities for new discoveries will arise."

## Scholarship to commemorate ALS student

Deng Xiansong died in April due to the incurable neurodegenerative disorder

By TAN YINGZI  
and DENG RUI in Chongqing

A university in Chongqing recently set up a scholarship in the name of a student who died of a motor neuron disease to encourage young people to learn from his fighting spirit.

Deng Xiansong, 22, who began studying economics at Southwest University of Political Science and Law in 2021, died in April due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a rare, incurable neurodegenerative disorder often referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease.

"Deng remained strong and faced the possibility of sudden death with a smile, never giving up on his pursuit of academic excellence," the president of the university, Lin Wei, said at its graduation ceremony late last month. "While suffering immense pain, he continued to study diligently and achieved outstanding grades."

With the consent of Deng's parents, the university foundation has established the Xiansong Perseverance Award in his name.

"The university will never give up on, nor forget, any student who loves life and strives for excellence," Lin said. "This award embodies our spirit of resilience and unity."

The details of the award are still being worked out, the university said.

Deng was born in Chongqing's Yuzhong district in 2002. He was diagnosed with ALS at age 3, lost the ability to walk at 10 and spent the rest of his days relying on the use of a special wheelchair.

The disease also deformed his spine and fingers, so he could only write with his right index finger.

But he never gave up his studies. With the help of his school and family, Deng took the national college entrance examination — known as the *gaokao* — in 2021 and scored 592 out of a possible 750 points.

A cheerful and confident young man, he loved singing and watching sports such as basketball, tennis, billiards and curling.

During his time at the university, Deng received a lot of support from faculty and students. His classmates carried him to the classrooms every day, and many alumni donated money to his family.

After his death, his parents returned the remaining 3,300 yuan (\$454) of alumni donations to the university.

"Actually, we didn't set very high academic expectations for him because of his health condition, but he consistently set high standards for his own academic performance and stuck to his goals," his father, Deng Jun, said. "He had a wish to give back to society, to his teachers and to his classmates."

"We hope to realize his unfinished dream by setting up this award and encourage every SWUPL student." ALS is a rare disease with a grim prognosis, with patients typically surviving only three to five years after diagnosis. There are estimated to be roughly 200,000 ALS patients in China, according to Xinhua News Agency.

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## High-profile archaeology grad plans to work in Dunhuang

By ZHAO YIMENG  
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Peking University archaeology graduate Zhong Fangrong, who surprised many netizens four years ago when she chose the major after acing the national college entrance exam, plans to work in Dunhuang, in Northwest China's Gansu province.

Zhong, from a rural part of Hunan province, has said she plans to continue pursuing her dream and dedicate herself to research on historical and cultural relics as an archaeologist, a field stereotypically viewed as having dim career prospects.

In a speech at the university's graduation ceremony this month, Zhong recalled her growth during her undergraduate studies and related fieldwork.

"We gained professional knowledge through six courses in archaeology and followed our professors to archaeological sites for field investigations," Zhong said.

The excitement of new discoveries during the daily excavation work and of cataloging late into the night at a heritage site in Linzi, Shandong province, was unforgettable, she added.

"Each excavation and discovery during the field investigation gave us a deeper understanding of archaeology, history and the world," she said.

Zhong has applied for a position as a rock cave archaeologist at the Dunhuang Academy and is working through the admission process.

In 2020, the daughter of migrant workers said she aimed to study archaeology at Peking University because she had been touched by the story of Chinese archaeologist Fan Jinshi, who devoted herself to protecting Dunhuang's cultural heritage.

The story of Fan, also a distinguished alumna of Peking University, inspired Zhong to dream of

conducting research in Dunhuang, a city renowned for its crucial role on the ancient Silk Road and home to the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Netizens had expressed doubts about her decision to study archaeology, claiming that given her family background, the niche major was not expected to result in a lucrative career.

Zhong responded at the time that she did not place too much value on a job's salary.

"I don't think I need a lot of money," she told ThePaper.cn news website. "My parents have jobs and don't need me to support them financially."

After she opted to study archaeology, nine museums and archaeological institutions across the country sent gift packages with a combined weight of nearly 50 kilograms to support her decision, including archaeological reports, books about relics and related tools.

Many netizens described her as "a girl spoiled by the archaeological circle".

Zhong was selected as a representative of graduates of the university's School of Archaeology and Museology to deliver a speech at the graduation ceremony this month.

"After absorbing knowledge and developing ourselves, we have obtained a deeper understanding of the major we initially chose, either blindly or firmly," she said at the ceremony.

This year, a new tuition-free enrollment plan for "general archaeology" undergraduates was announced in provinces including Shandong, Shanxi and Shaanxi.

Shandong plans to enroll 60 students in the first batch. The students will sign targeted training agreements and will not need to pay tuition or accommodation fees. After graduation, they will work for at least five years in related public institutions in the province.

## Visa-free policy draws visitors to country's capital

By DU JUAN  
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China's optimized visa-free policy, together with several other measures aimed at enhancing international exchanges, has substantially increased the number of foreign travelers arriving in Beijing.

In the first half of the year, the number of foreign visitors entering the Chinese capital reached 1.02 million, a year-on-year increase of 257 percent, according to data from the Beijing General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection.

By last month, China had reached agreements or made arrangements to simplify visa procedures with over 40 countries and achieved comprehensive mutual visa exemption with more than 20.

Travelers with ordinary passports from New Zealand, Australia and Poland are among the latest beneficiaries of China's optimized visa-free policy.

In an arrangement that took effect on Monday and will continue till the end of next year, people from the three countries can enjoy visa-free stays of up to 15 days in China for business, tourism, family visits or transit purposes.

Previously, China had extended visa exemptions to 12 countries in two rounds — first to ordinary passport holders in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia in December, and then to those in Switzerland,

Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg in March.

A Dutch traveler in Beijing, who only gave his name as Teun, said the new policy had made visiting China very convenient for foreigners.

"The visa-free policy is just great! It makes one's trip nice in many ways," he said, adding that one of the many things he loves about Beijing is its public transportation system. "It is so easy to get anywhere you want."

Lyu Naipeng, deputy director of the border inspection office of the Beijing General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, said China is making concerted efforts to attract more foreigners for the purposes of business, education and tourism.

"We have helped 14 airlines implement the usage of electronic boarding passes, allowing travelers to go paperless," Lyu said. "We expect the total number of inbound and outbound travelers passing through Beijing's ports to increase."

Over 159,000 foreign nationals from the 12 visa-exempt countries have entered the city under China's visa-free policy this year, according to the Beijing exit and entry authority.

The border inspection office is helping local travel agencies organize international group tours more efficiently. In the first half of the year, over 30,000 foreign visitors came to Beijing as part of such tours, a 30-fold increase compared



Foreign visitors pose for a photo at Tian'anmen Square in Beijing on June 1. With ongoing adjustments of visa policies, the number of inbound passengers has increased sharply. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

with the same period last year.

Also during that period, 33,700 eligible foreign inbound travelers capitalized on China's 144-hour visa-free transit policy, a sevenfold increase year-on-year, according to the Beijing exit and entry authority.

A British tourist identifying herself as Daisy, who is traveling with Teun, said she took advantage of the 144-hour policy for their trip to Beijing.

She said she hopes China's visa-free policy will be extended to visitors from the United Kingdom.

"It would allow me to visit more cities in China," she added, as the 144-

hour policy restricts travelers to specific areas in the country.

Kelvin Ramirez, a professor in his 40s from Florida in the United States, who visited the Forbidden City on Wednesday during his first trip to China, described his experiences in Beijing as "amazing".

"I used Alipay ... China's mobile and online payment service during my trip, and it is so convenient," he said.



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## CHINA

**Editor's note:** Young Chinese people are being increasingly drawn to the nation's traditional culture, including those from Taiwan, despite efforts by the authorities on the island to sever cross-strait ties through de-Sinicization policies. Three people from Taiwan share their stories.

# Passion for opera bridges Taiwan Strait

Classical Chinese musical art form links people with a shared history

By ZHANG YI and ZHANG WENFANG

Cheng Ting-yi always carries with him his notes on Kunqu Opera, whether in Taiwan or later when he pursued studies in Beijing. His notes, carefully taken down in pencil, represent over six years of studying the ancient Chinese musical art form.

Through Kunqu Opera, Cheng, 28, has explored the larger landscape of Chinese culture, traveling from Taiwan to the Chinese mainland to seek out the roots of the craft. He's shared the beauty of Chinese culture by performing abroad, fostering a sense of pride in his Chinese identity.

Despite his sporty outward appearance, many who first encounter Cheng, a doctoral student at Beijing Normal University, are intrigued by his profound fascination with Chinese classical literature and traditional opera.

Kunqu Opera emerged in the mid-Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), created by a group of literati during their gatherings. Both the audience and the performers from the beginning were cultured people.

Cheng's exploration of the art form began during his time at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan, where he joined an opera club and had the opportunity to study with renowned Kunqu actor Wen Yuhang, a figure of repute on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Reflecting on his early experiences, Cheng said taking the stage for just five minutes for the famous piece *The Peony Pavilion* required a month of intensive study.

"It's all very difficult to master in terms of the lyrics and the singing techniques. Kunqu is more elaborate than other kinds of operas," he said.

"It's this very difficulty that makes it precious, as it retains the most original aspects of life from ancient China," he said, adding that if one wishes to connect with ancient figures such as Tang Bohu, the Ming Dynasty scholar and calligrapher, or Tang Xianzu, the Ming Dynasty playwright, Kunqu Opera is the way.

During his undergraduate years, Cheng founded a Kunqu Opera association at Fu Jen Catholic University, with membership peaking at 20 individuals.

He said many of the Kunqu teachers in Taiwan come from Shanghai, and they would often expose students to mainland cuisine, fostering a deeper connection to the diverse facets of Chinese culture.

Cheng's interest in traditional Chinese culture has also prompted him to delve into the realms of ancient poetry and verse. He has participated in cultural exchange trips to the mainland to introduce Taiwan students to the landscapes and themes depicted in classical Chinese poetry.

In 2015, during his second year of undergraduate studies, he visited Beijing, where the ancient charm left a lasting impression.

The experience made him decide to undertake a six-month exchange program at Beijing Normal University the following year.

After graduating in Taiwan, Cheng studied for his master's at Beijing Normal University, where he joined the university's Kunqu Opera society, meeting with fellow young enthusiasts from the mainland.

"I was once invited to the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre to watch a play in Beijing. When the show was over, I went backstage with the host to meet the actors. It turned out some of the actors were former students," he said.

"I was almost moved to tears at that time. I truly felt the power of apprenticeship. In this way, culture and art have been passed down from generation to generation."

In 2019, Cheng was chosen to represent Beijing Normal University and perform Kunqu Opera in the United States for a Chinese cultural event at Oklahoma State University.

He fondly recalled meeting Professor Paul Bell, who was the chairman of the Confucius Institute at the university, and even shared with him a glass of Kinmen Kaoliang liquor, a specialty from Taiwan.

His performance on the campus lawn garnered praise from the audience, and afterward Cheng donated his performance attire to the university's library.

"Young and old, the foreigners liked the performance very much," he said, adding that the experience strengthened his belief that traditional Chinese culture serves his identity.

As the secretary-general of the Chinese Youth Development Association's Taiwan student branch, Cheng has many opportunities to connect with young people from Taiwan studying on the mainland. He found there is a growing convergence and resonance between young people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait in popular culture.

"There is a craze for 'China chic' among younger people such as those in Taiwan who prefer products or entertainment with Chinese cultural elements, including reading Chinese classics and wearing traditional attire," he said.

"The motivating force behind the trend must be that China is rising on the world stage. We have confidence in our nation. That's why we want to explore the nation's past to learn about the splendid history and glorious culture," he added.

Wang Jing, Peng Chengcheng and Liu Shenshi contributed to this story.

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Cheng Ting-yi (left) practices Kunqu Opera with peers from the Chinese mainland. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



Hanfu lovers gather during an annual festival for the traditional Chinese attire in Hsimenting, a popular commercial area in Taipei, Taiwan, in November last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Traditional ethnic dress pulls on thread of the past

By ZHANG YI and ZHANG WENFANG

The dream of Zhong Min-hao, a dedicated hanfu enthusiast from Taipei, is to travel around the Chinese mainland wearing traditional Chinese attire. A lover of Chinese culture and history, he said the clothes make him feel closer to history.

His journey with the traditional dress of the Han ethnic group began seven years ago after he saw videos of people wearing hanfu online. He's owned as many as 100 hanfu outfits, but has whittled them down to 30.

"Hanfu carries cultural significance, better enabling me to learn about Chinese history and cultural heritage," said Zhong, 33, adding he likes to study the meaning behind each design and the custom of wearing them.

His passion for hanfu led him to take part in the annual Taiwan Hanfu Festival in Hsimenting, a popular shopping district in Taipei, where enthusiasts from all over Taiwan converge to celebrate this cultural heritage.

"When dressing in hanfu, I go out with my chin up and chest out trying to look good and confident. In this way, many people like to come

over and talk to me, so often I become an ambassador for our hanfu festival," he said.

During the event, he posed with people to take pictures and introduced them to various hanfu clothing.

The event has grown significantly, from just over 100 participants in its first year to over 1,000 by the fourth, reflecting the growing interest in hanfu in Taiwan.

"The Han culture in Taiwan is deeply rooted. We speak Chinese, use Chinese characters, celebrate Chinese festivals, but we haven't done enough to preserve and inherit our traditional clothing," Zhong said.

"So I hope that by wearing it and going out, we can make more people aware that we actually are Han people and have our own traditional attire that is rich in culture," he said.

Despite the current de-Sinicization policy in Taiwan, Zhong said: "If one really wants to explore the culture and history of one's own ethnic group, they will search, explore and learn by themselves.

"I had a strong interest in China's history, culture and ancient buildings, but I could only read about them from textbooks or see them in pictures," he said. He made up his



Wearing hanfu, Zhong Min-hao tries scented candles in Xiamen, Fujian province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

mind when he was at school that he must visit and really experience it when he grew up.

In 2019, he visited the mainland for the first time, experiencing the old towns and streets of Shanghai. "I was like 'wow', I experienced something I can't in Taiwan, the whole ancient street vibe," he recalled.

Zhong told himself he must come again and started planning. "I visit one city on the mainland every year, and I walk around and explore the

city and see the historical places described in textbooks."

He said his life now resonates with the Chinese saying: "It is better to travel 10,000 miles than to read 10,000 books."



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## Literary masterpiece resonates with language teacher

By ZHANG YI and ZHANG WENFANG

In a university classroom on the Chinese mainland, teacher Chang Yu-ming brings the characters of the Chinese ancient classic *Dream of the Red Chamber* to life through intricate paper-cutting and crafting handmade floral bookmarks inspired by the literary masterpiece.

Originally from Taipei, Chang, who was born in the 1980s, previously taught at Banqiao Senior High School in Taiwan where she was responsible for curriculum development and conducting research on Chinese language teaching across the Taiwan Strait.

Her journey to the mainland was sparked by a visiting scholar in 2017 when she was focusing on her doctoral dissertation on the impact of television adaptations of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which proved to be a pivotal turning point in her life.

Through her studies and in-depth interviews with professionals related to the TV series of the novel, she gained a deeper understanding of the mission and reverence held on the mainland for the literary and cultural significance of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Written by Cao Xueqin in the 18th century, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is considered one of the greatest Chinese novels of all time.

In 2017, before Chang traveled to the mainland, Taiwan was embroiled in debates over its high school curriculum. As a Chinese lan-



Chang Yu-ming (right) talks with her students about making bookmarks related to the Chinese literature classic *Dream of the Red Chamber*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

guage teacher, she advocated for maintaining the importance of classic texts in the curriculum amid a growing trend by authorities to reduce their emphasis.

"When I was receiving education at university, students of my generation carried the expectations of our teachers, hoping to carry forward and promote traditional Chinese literature. However, when I became a Chinese language teacher, what I faced in Taiwan was de-Sinicization," she said.

"I felt a sense of pessimism toward the de-Sinicization policies under the Democratic Progressive

Party in Taiwan. However, my experience in Beijing exposed me to a different world — one that embraced and revitalized Chinese culture and traditions," said Chang, who now teaches literature at Xiamen Institute of Technology.

Chang said this contrast led her to choose a path where she could contribute positively to the field she loved, rather than feeling stifled in an environment that seemed to suppress her passion.

In Taiwan, it could take weeks to explain to students the significance of reading *Dream of the Red Chamber*, whereas on the mainland, stu-

dents engaged in full-text readings, she said.

Upon completing her doctoral studies in 2019, Chang quit her teaching position in Taiwan and joined Guangxi Normal University as a college teacher.

Her love for *Dream of the Red Chamber* remains a constant theme in her teaching and research. Through immersive experiences, she guides her students in exploring the themes of food, love and relationships depicted in the classic novel, fostering a lively and emotionally rich learning environment that has proved popular.

"Many young people on the mainland show a strong interest in traditional culture, with students even exploring the themes of traditional Chinese medicine and health practices depicted in *Dream of the Red Chamber*," she said.

By intertwining these themes with the narratives of family relationships and love, Chang said her students are deeply moved and engaged, sometimes even shedding tears at the emotional depth of the stories.

In her teaching, Chang has collaborated with other teachers to bring the characters of *Dream of the Red Chamber* to life through vivid paper-cutting art.

Through hands-on activities such as creating handmade floral bookmarks inspired by *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Chang encourages her students to internalize the essence of the literary masterpiece in their unique ways.

## WORLD

## Report faults tariffs on EVs from China

US, EU tariff hikes on Chinese electric vehicles predicted to lessen autos' adoption worldwide

By MAYZHOU in Houston  
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The increased US tariffs on China's electric vehicles (EVs) will have a negative impact on EV adoption worldwide, according to Bloomberg.

The United States in May raised the tariff on EVs imported from China from 25 percent to 100 percent, effective Aug 1.

The European Union is imposing new tariffs ranging from 17.4 percent to 37.6 percent on China's EVs, in addition to the current 10 percent.

China is "the only large auto market that has reached the point of consumer-led takeoff for EV sales", according to Bloomberg's recent Electric Vehicle Outlook.

China's "formidable lead" in batteries and the EV supply chain and its "incredibly cheap" batteries are "a major factor driving prices lower", Bloomberg reported. But it said Europe, the US, India and others are pushing back against China's dominance, and tariffs and further protectionist measures could "slow down global EV adoption in the near term".

Anticipated high prices also are leading almost half of American owners of EVs to consider switching back to gasoline-fueled vehicles, according to the newly released 2024 McKinsey Mobility Consumer Pulse survey.

The survey showed that 46 percent of current EV owners in the US said that they are likely or very likely to switch back to a traditional gas car, primarily due to the high price of EVs and anxiety over long-distance driving because of an insufficient number of public charging stations.

In China, where EVs accounted for 40 percent of new passenger-car sales as of May, the percentage of car owners saying they will likely return to a gas car was 28 percent.

Overall, 29 percent of all surveyed global EV drivers said they are likely to switch back to a gas car with their next purchase.

The McKinsey survey questioned almost 37,000 drivers in 15 countries, including 4,100 in the United States. The respondents included drivers of both EVs and gas-powered cars. The survey covered more than 80 percent of the global EV markets.

A recent analysis by Bank of America also found that the high prices of EVs in the US are slowing their sales. Its analysis showed that the EV penetration rate has dipped slightly, and EVs are expected to make up only 8 percent of vehicle sales in 2024 in the US, down by 1.5 percent from last year.

Most American consumers will buy an EV if the price is competitive with an internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle, the analysis showed. It said, however, that manufacturers "are unlikely to achieve ICE-comparable costs on EVs until 2028".

In the US, only 3 percent of EVs are priced below \$37,000, according to Bank of America research, while more than half of gas-powered or hybrid vehicles are priced below that figure.

The US needs to reduce EV costs and expand its battery-charging infrastructure to improve the transition to EVs, said the analysis.

That could be helped by partnering

with "private Chinese companies such as CATL, the leading battery manufacturer in the world, or BYD... a leading EV producer in China and the leading one in the world", said William Kirby, a professor of China studies and business administration at Harvard University.

In a recent interview with Harvard Magazine, Kirby said that such a partnership would benefit the US because China is the leader in clean technology — from solar panels to batteries to EVs. He said a number of Chinese companies would like to manufacture EVs in the American market, but politics get in the way.

He pointed to the collaboration between Ford and CATL, saying "political pressures on Ford, both from politicians and unions, made this very difficult to do".

Ford announced last summer that it would invest \$3.5 billion in the battery venture but had to suspend the project after Congress initiated two federal investigations into its license deal with CATL.

According to Bridge Michigan, Ford resumed the construction this year, but the investment was reduced by \$1 billion, and the number of new jobs will be reduced by 800.

Kirby called the US tariff on China's EVs "a statement of a kind of technological isolation that to me makes no sense for us".

"We need to take a step back and think of why we are doing this. If we could partner with several of these competing companies, Ford and CATL, or General Motors and BYD, why would it be in the national interest of the United States to oppose this?" he said.

China's EVs have a much larger presence in the EU market than in the US. According to data from Rhodium Group, European Union imports of Chinese EVs surged from \$1.6 billion in 2020 to \$11.5 billion in 2023. Overall, Chinese and Chinese-owned EV brands accounted for 19 percent of Europe's EV market in 2023.

The McKinsey survey found that 27 percent of European consumers who already own an electric vehicle said they are likely or very likely to consider purchasing one from a Chinese brand in the future.

They have good reasons to consider Chinese EVs in the future. According to industrial analysts, Chinese EVs are competitively priced — \$5,000 to \$10,000 cheaper, with comparable features to other brands in the EU market.

Chinese EVs are known for their innovation and technology. Companies such as NIO, BYD and XPeng are recognized for their technological advancements, including battery technology, autonomous driving features and smart connectivity. Those innovations appeal to European consumers looking for the latest technology in their vehicles, the McKinsey report said.

As a result, the report showed that in the EU, roughly one-third of current EV owners, young consumers and premium-brand owners are more likely to consider a Chinese brand than other consumers.

Agencies contributed to this story.



American students participating in a cultural exchange and study program in Hebei province take a group picture on July 1 after learning how to do a dragon dance. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## US students thrilled by cultural trip to China

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco  
junchang@chinadailyusa.com

For some it's a trip of cultural discovery filled with awe-inspiring moments; for others it's a journey to seek heritage and identity, which can be intense and sometimes emotional.

Whatever the experiences bring them, US students traveling to China this summer to take part in theme camps have learned to appreciate differences. More importantly, the exposure to China's culture and people is conducive to forming a well-rounded and profound perception of the country.

"These 10 days will definitely broaden my vision," said Amy Gao, 12, a seventh grader who flew from the San Francisco Bay Area to attend an exchange and study program in Hebei province. With 174 other peers and team leaders from across the United States, Amy started her "exploration and adventure" in China on June 26.

A culturally rich ceremony was organized in Shijiazhuang, Hebei's capital, to welcome the young visitors. Hebei, one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization, was called the State of Yan and Zhao during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221 BC).

"Organizers are so welcoming that they spare no effort showcasing to us literally, everything," Amy said. The wonders they encountered ranged from an internationally recognized Wujiao acrobatics performance to

Hebei *bangzi*, a genre of local opera featuring singing, reciting, acting and martial arts performances with accompanying Chinese instruments such as the *banhu*, a two-stringed fiddle, and *dizi*, the bamboo flute.

Ren Zhuoping, vice-chairwoman of the Hebei Provincial Overseas Chinese Federation, told US students at the ceremony that they would get to immerse themselves in China's 5,000 years of history and culture, experience the rapid growth and changes of contemporary China, and gain a deeper, vivid understanding of the country's breadth.

"Through what you see, hear and feel in Hebei, each and every one of you can serve as a young ambassador for cultural exchanges between China and the US and a bridge connecting peoples," she said.

Samantha Tow, a second-year high school student from California, was making her first trip to China. "The acrobatic performance at the opening ceremony is simply breathtaking and astounding," she said, adding that she also tried on Chinese costumes with traditional makeup and hairdo. "The color of my outfit is peacock green and azure, very Chinese."

Campers also went sightseeing at an ancient Buddhist temple and a section of the Great Wall and learned paper-cutting, Chinese painting, calligraphy and tea presentation.

"Lots of different activities, very interesting," said Selina Fang, a middle schooler from California.

The eye-opening activities also

included observations on the street. "I don't see so many electric vehicles on American streets as opposed to China," she said.

Dong Xudong, who spent two months starting in April helping recruit US students for the Hebei camp, said such programs are important because they improve understanding and exchanges.

"To maintain healthy and normal China-US relations, we need to sow seeds of mutual understanding and friendship in the hearts of young generations in China and the US," he said.

## Interaction between youth

At a summit in San Francisco in November China said it would invite 50,000 US students to visit on exchange and study programs in the next five years to increase interaction between the two peoples, especially between youth.

Young people are quick learners, they have many common interests transcending national boundaries, and they naturally befriend each other, said Xiaopei He Gelb, founder of a dance troupe in Tri-Valley, California.

Last month Gelb took her students to the Dance Academy of Southern China, a local professional dance school in Dongguan, Guangdong province, for a camp at which her girls received eight days of intensive professional training.

"My students only went to dance class twice a week in two-hour sessions in the United States," Gelb said.

"So it came as no surprise that they called the first day traumatic and catastrophic after learning to bend, stretch, split, glide and jump in a professional way. Many were crying due to pain, swelling limbs, fatigue and frustrations."

However, Gelb's students persevered because "local dancers, bigger sisters and brothers at the academy have set good examples".

"They impress our children not only because they can deliver very difficult moves, but their grit, their pursuit to be a better self. Those (are) stellar traits that I want my students to cultivate and possess."

Kelly Ma, just 12, but who has been learning from Gelb for more than seven years, attended the camp.

"We've learned and changed so much because of the amazing teachers that helped us grow from the second they met us," Kelly said. "It may have been difficult and different from what we were used to, but no one gave up."

The "difficult and different" aspects of the programs, said Alan Gao, a parent team leader with the Hebei camp, are an integral part of cross-cultural exchanges and collaboration.

"The American children encounter language barriers, cultural shock, homesickness and unfamiliarity with team members, different kinds of challenges besides scorching weather there. But they learn and grow from overcoming obstacles."

## Rail partnership key to pan-Asian network vision

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
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China's partnership with Malaysia is crucial not only to building the latter's key rail projects but also for the growth of a pan-Asian rail network, analysts say.

Peter Chang, deputy director of the Institute of China Studies at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, said the idea of a railway linking the west and east coasts of Peninsular Malaysia has been developing for many years.

"China's technological expertise is now making this vision a reality," Chang said.

On June 19 China's Premier Li Qiang and Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim attended the groundbreaking ceremony of the East Coast Rail Link, held in the west coast state of Selangor as part of this year's celebrations of the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations.

The ECRL is a flagship project of China-Malaysia high-quality Belt and Road collaboration, Li said.

At the event, Anwar said Malaysia places high value on the relationship and collaboration between Malaysia



Workers lay down the first track for the East Coast Rail Link project in Gebeng, Pahang state, Malaysia, on Dec 11. VINCENT THIAN / AP

Rail Link, which owns the ECRL, and China Communications Construction Company, its main contractor.

The ECRL could serve as a "vital component" of a broader railway network connecting Malaysia to Singapore in the south and Thailand in the north, as well as to China and the rest of Asia, Chang said.

Ong Kian Ming, pro vice-chancellor for external engagement at Taylor's University in Selangor state and Malaysia's former deputy minister for international trade, said there is one

key challenge for the ECRL.

It is vital to ensure that it is financially sustainable "so that this infrastructure project won't be seen as a costly white elephant that does not bring about a significant increase in economic activity", he said.

The 665-kilometer rail network is expected to be operational by 2027. It will connect the east coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang with the Klang Valley on Peninsular Malaysia's west coast.

The aim of the railway is to promote

connectivity, boost economic development and promote trade and tourism in Malaysia's East Coast Economic Region, which accounts for more than half of the area of Peninsular Malaysia, but economic development in these states lags behind that of their counterparts on Malaysia's west coast, forcing residents to migrate for better job opportunities.

"The ECRL is crucial because it is designed to foster balanced development across Peninsular Malaysia," Chang said. "It aims to transfer the economic vibrancy of the Klang Valley on the west coast to the less developed states on the east coast."

Ong said the ECRL can foster economic growth in the East Coast Economic Region if industrial parks and manufacturing activity could be brought to some of the key stations along the route.

During last month's visit, Li said China is also willing to explore connecting the ECRL with the China-Laos Railway and the China-Thailand Railway to better promote the building of new international land and maritime trade routes and improve regional connectivity.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Kenyan president tries to quell anger using social media

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya  
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Kenya's President William Ruto made history as the first head of state in the country to come face to face with his citizens on social media, fielding unfiltered questions about his government's inadequacies and ills, following weeks of nationwide protests sparked by a controversial financial bill.

At a meeting hosted on social media X attended by more than 1 million Kenyans on Friday, Ruto took the opportunity to field tough questions from furious anti-tax

protesters, and apologized for police brutality witnessed during recent protests and the alleged abductions of organizers.

Ruto was forced to withdraw the controversial finance bill late last month because of the demonstrations that rocked Kenya. Last week, he also announced a budget cut to seal the budget hole left after the withdrawal of the finance bill.

The protests were organized online through social media platforms such as the X Spaces, a feature that allows users to host live audio conversations. The protesters called for rejection of the bill that

would impose additional taxes on a wide range of commodities, and denounced corrupt officials.

## Pledging to do more

In Ruto's X Spaces session he pledged to sack all officials implicated in corruption, saying: "I agree some of our officials display obnoxious opulence, and I have called them personally and advised them how to conduct themselves. I will do more."

Ruto defended many of his government's policies, saying a lot of them had been misunderstood and had been intended to boost Kenyan businesses.

He said he had learned much during the online engagement and hoped to have more such interactions. In particular, he said it had taught him that he needed to show more empathy for the plight of his fellow citizens.

Some X users voiced their opinions and asked questions, which he promptly answered.

"My administration has always believed in listening and engaging, and that is why I go around the country to engage people," Ruto said. "I rarely sit in the office. I go to different places to engage with Kenyans."

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## BUSINESS

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## Chinese brands tap soccer to shine in Europe

5 Chinese firms among UEFA's 13 partners contribute money, tech, content products and services to energize Euro 2024

By MASI  
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As Euro 2024 nears its grand finale in Germany on Sunday, it is not just soccer players who are involved in pitched battles of the sporting kind — advertisers, sponsors, marketing whizzes and brands, including several Chinese labels, are all vying to create maximum impact. The strong presence of Chinese companies among the major sponsors is expected to resonate with consumers in Europe.

According to UEFA's official website, there are 13 global partners for this year's tournament and, remarkably, five of them are Chinese companies: BYD, Vivo, Hisense, Alipay and AliExpress.

This marks a historical record, as Chinese firms now occupy over a third of the sponsorship slots. This represents significant growth from 2016 when Hisense was the sole Chinese sponsor. Vivo and Alipay have been involved since 2020, highlighting the increasing international competitiveness and influence of Chinese enterprises.

The participation of these five Chinese companies in this year's tournament signifies a new milestone in the history of Chinese sponsorship of major international sporting events, experts said.

Chinese companies are eager to expand their international presence and bank on such events to boost their brands among local consumers.

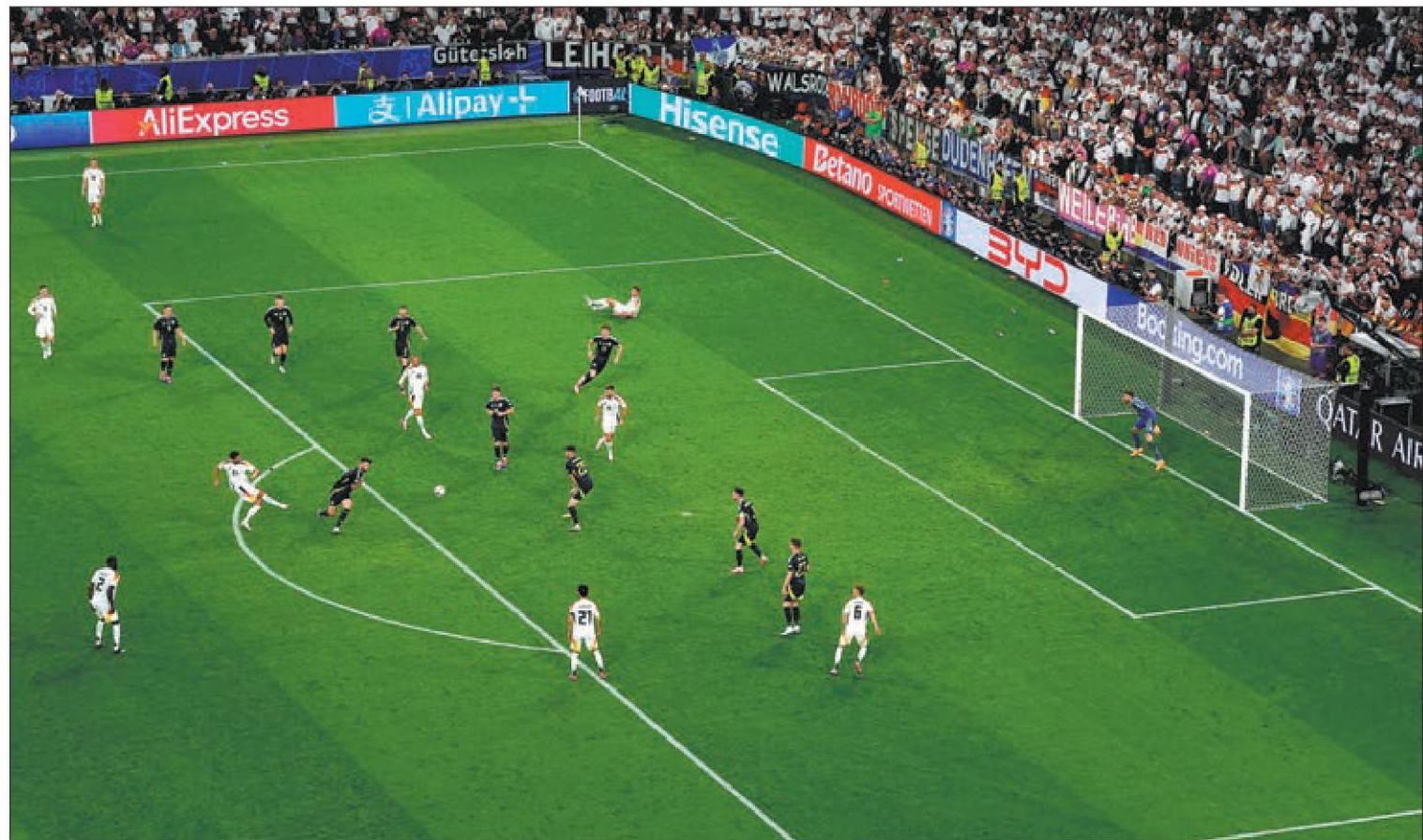
"For Chinese companies with global strategies, sports marketing is a vital accelerator for enhancing brand influence and international development," said Jiang Han, a senior researcher at the Beijing-based think tank Pangoal Institution.

Chinese companies' participation goes beyond monetary investments, as they also provide valuable products, services, content and technologies to support the tournament.

BYD, for instance, is offering green transportation solutions with its electric vehicles, serving as the official car for the tournament. Vivo, as the official smartphone partner, is supplying flagship smartphones to event staff. Alipay is facilitating convenient payment solutions for fans and staff as the official payment platform, while AliExpress is providing exclusive discounts and interactive games for fans, enhancing their experience with the chance to win match tickets.

Zhou Yongduan, general manager of overseas product development at Vivo, said, "Our partnership with UEFA allows us to enhance the user experience by enabling everyone to enjoy the beautiful game and capture their most cherished memories."

"The exciting game brings people all around the world together ... we want to fuel that passion by enabling users to become storytellers of this unforgettable journey," Zhou said. "We'll continue to develop the cutting-edge technologies that advance mobile photography and ensure that everyone can be a storyteller of their own experiences, with one single tap."



Chinese brands dominate perimeter advertisements during a Euro 2024 match in Munich, Germany. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A soccer player of Portugal takes a selfie with a Vivo smartphone after the match between Portugal and the Czech Republic on June 18 in Leipzig, Germany. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

This is the latest major football tournament where Vivo is a key partner. In the past, it played a key role at the FIFA World Cup 2018 in Russia, the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar and the Euro 2020 that took place across Europe. The Chinese smartphone brand also partnered with FIFA, the game's global governing body, to promote its devices at the 2017 Confederations Cup.

In Germany, the heart of the European auto industry, Chinese automaker BYD has replaced Volkswagen as the official auto partner of Euro 2024. This is the first time in the tournament's history that the organizer has partnered with a new energy vehicle brand and a Chinese automaker.

Michael Shu, managing director of BYD Europe, said, "BYD is thrilled to partner with UEFA and proud to be the first e-mobility partner for this prestigious sports event, which will enable us to showcase our latest advancements in electric vehicles to a far-reaching audience. Significantly, the partnership underlines BYD's brand commitment to reducing carbon emissions for a greener future, for which UEFA will provide an influential voice."

Guy-Laurent Epstein, marketing director of UEFA, said: "We are excited to welcome BYD, a pioneering brand with a 29-year pedigree in advanced battery technologies with a reputation for global innovation in new energy vehicles and the world's

biggest electric car company, as a partner for UEFA 2024.

"The partnership aligns perfectly with UEFA's vision of promoting a greener and more sustainable European championship by merging the excitement of football and UEFA's commitment to environmental responsibility."

During the tournament, BYD showcased its latest electric vehicle models and cutting-edge technologies at select venues, demonstrating the brand's commitment to greener and more intelligent vehicle solutions to customers and millions of football enthusiasts.

In addition, BYD has a vibrant presence at the official fan zones, inviting fans to enjoy live match broadcasts and captivating entertainment to further elevate the football celebration experience through sustainable and engaging activities.

The British online marketplace Auto Trader reported a 69 percent increase in views of BYD models to 26,000 over the opening weekend of the tournament.

The move aligns with BYD's broader efforts to expand its international presence. The company had successfully expanded its new energy vehicle footprint to six continents, over 70 countries and regions, and more than 400 cities as of January.

Since its entry into the European passenger vehicle market in 2022, BYD has made great strides in expanding its presence by establishing a network of 230 stores in

19 European countries, with five innovative NEV models launched. Looking ahead, BYD said it will introduce more new models in Europe, further enriching its product portfolio. BYD's sub-brand, Denza, is also poised to make its European launch, marking another milestone in BYD's global expansion, the company said.

Zhan Junhao, founder of Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, said that providing technical support for the European soccer championship allows Chinese companies to showcase their technological prowess and innovation capabilities. This integration with such a high-profile event not only enhances their brand image, but deepens their involvement in the European market, creating more business opportunities.

Euro 2024-involved Chinese companies have all strategically positioned themselves in the European market. For instance, Hisense has identified Europe as a key market. BYD is constructing an electric vehicle manufacturing plant in Hungary, targeting the European market. Alipay has also been establishing its presence across Europe for many years.

The significant investments by Chinese companies to sponsor Euro 2024 are driven by the tremendous exposure such events offer. UEFA has projected that this year's tournament will attract over 5 billion viewers globally, presenting an enormous opportunity for corporate sponsors to build their brands.

For instance, as the first e-com-

merce sponsor of Euro 2024, AliExpress saw an 80 percent increase in football product sales in May compared to the previous year, with Spain and France leading in sales. Additionally, the volume of packages sent from Cainiao's cross-border warehouses to Europe increased by over 300 percent.

Jiang from the Beijing-based think tank Pangoal Institution said that with China's rapid economic development and rising international status, Chinese companies are seeking more international opportunities. Sponsoring top global sports events not only helps them expand in overseas markets, but also brings valuable international experience and resources, enhancing their global operational capabilities.

But some experts sounded a note of caution, saying more efforts are needed to optimize Chinese companies' services and products in Europe, if they really want to leverage sports marketing to nurture a stable source of business opportunities.

Doreen Wang, Kantar Greater China CEO and global chair of Kantar BrandZ, said many Chinese brands have turned increasingly professional and actively expanded into foreign markets.

As the Chinese economy gradually matures, the local brands will naturally seek to "find new spaces abroad" so they can keep growing. Brands' moves conform to China's commitment to achieving a transformation from a "made in China" economy to a "created in China" economy, she said.

## Riding summer sports in key year for global influence

REPORTER'S  
LOG  
By Ma Si

With two of the world's premier quadrennial events, the summer of 2024 is an exhilarating time for sports enthusiasts like me as the UEFA Euro 2024 is in full swing and the Paris Olympics is on the horizon in late July.

Beyond the stadiums, Chinese companies have already kicked off their sports marketing campaigns, leveraging the massive exposure opportunities presented by this "big sports year" to burnish their brand image and tell cultural stories globally.

A recent study by The Trade Desk,

a leading global advertising technology company, highlights the significant impact of this sports-centric year on international branding. According to the research report, nearly half of global TV and online audiences will be focused on Paris this summer, with the internet becoming the primary channel for sports fans to access content.

For Chinese companies aiming to expand internationally, adopting a comprehensive advertising strategy centered around the internet is crucial to harnessing the opportunities presented by 2024's sports calendar.

As "creating more internationally influential Chinese brands" was highlighted in China's 2024 Government Work Report, the discussion around building global brand power has gained momentum.

Wu Yulin, the director of business development for China at The Trade

Desk, emphasized the unprecedented marketing opportunities available to Chinese companies during this summer.

Wu said that nearly three-quarters of online time is spent on the internet, indicating that Chinese companies must strategically invest in channels like internet-connected TV and online streaming sites to fully capitalize on the "big sports year" and drive long-term growth.

In fact, sports marketing is far from being niche, and Chinese companies have been active participants in top-tier sports events for years. However, recent years have seen a marked increase in their sponsorship levels, integration depth and alignment with business operations.

As noted in the cover story, five of the 13 global sponsors of UEFA at Euro 2024 are Chinese companies, a record. Paris 2024, this year's sum-

mer Olympics, as the world's largest multi-sport event, is also a focus area for Chinese companies.

The high penetration and exposure of the Olympics naturally draw numerous corporate sponsors. Chinese companies often sponsor the Chinese delegation or game-specific squads (taking part in, say, swimming, boxing, athletics, equestrian, so forth); yet, their presence among the top-tier Olympic sponsors is also notable. According to the official Paris 2024 Olympics website, two of the 15 global partners are Chinese companies: Alibaba and Mengniu.

As Chinese companies amplify their global presence, they share a common goal: to succeed globally. A prime example is Alibaba Group, a sponsor of both Euro 2024 and the Paris Olympics. Despite a slowdown in overall revenue growth in recent years, Alibaba's international busi-

ness has surged, becoming the fastest-growing segment within the group. In the first quarter, Alibaba's international digital commerce revenue grew by 45 percent year-on-year to 27.4 billion yuan (\$3.7 billion), exceeding market expectations for seven consecutive quarters.

Prior to this, Chinese e-commerce startup Temu aired two 30-second commercials during the Super Bowl in February 2023, featuring the catchy slogan "Shop like a Billionaire". This campaign led to a significant spike in Temu's download numbers in the North American market.

Similarly, companies like Vivo and Oppo have successfully leveraged sports sponsorships to penetrate local markets, such as sponsoring Indian cricket events and the French Open tennis tournament.

However, visibility alone doesn't translate into consumer support or sales revenue. Effective sports marketing requires sustained efforts. Just

as Nike signed a lucrative seven-year contract with NBA basketball player LeBron James as early as in 2003, witnessing his rise to stardom, brands seeking global success through sports sponsorship must commit to long-term and consistent operations. Such an approach will test a company's ability to endure market cycles and create lasting value.

From a marketing perspective, involvement with sport is often associated with "long-term" goals, challenging companies to maintain steady growth. Sponsorship of top-tier sports events demands a stable cash flow. Beyond this financial challenge, Chinese companies face hurdles like compliance, intellectual property rights and market access abroad.

If not handled well, such areas could jeopardize initial investments. Overcoming any obstacles thereof, therefore, is essential for Chinese brands to thrive globally, especially in a landmark sports year like 2024.

# BUSINESS



People watch a UEFA Euro 2024 game at a restaurant in Shanghai in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Immersive tech wows sports fans

Everyone can benefit from personalized, interactive soccer viewing thrill

By MA SI  
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IT engineer Ma Min, a super soccer fan who did not want to miss any matches of the ongoing UEFA Euro 2024, has got a big helping hand this summer.

A partnership between Migu, the digital content unit of China Mobile, and iPhone maker Apple Inc has ensured that Ma, wearing Apple's Vision Pro headset, can seamlessly watch up to five matches at once on the Migu Video app, eliminating the need to switch channels and making certain that no thrilling moment is missed.

This breakthrough has been made possible by Migu Video's advanced multiscreen broadcast technology and adaptive bitrate strategies. This has brought in high-definition quality on the main virtual screen while supporting four additional virtual screens with smooth, synchronized playback.

The platform's real-time, virtual data sand-table feature enhances the viewing experience by providing comprehensive, multiangle displays of player information and live match data through eye and hand gestures. Fans can also interact with high-fidelity replicas of the UEFA Euro 2024 trophy and other virtual elements, creating an immersive sports atmosphere.



A user watches a UEFA Euro 2024 game through Apple's Vision Pro headset on the Migu Video app. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"The ability to watch five matches simultaneously is incredible! I no longer have to switch channels constantly during overlapping games," Ma, who is based in Shanghai, said about his extended reality experience. "The 3D data sand table feels like it's floating right in front of me, making the match data crystal clear."

This is part of broader efforts by Migu Video, in collaboration with Apple Vision Pro, to revolutionize the way sports enthusiasts watch events like the UEFA Euro 2024. With its innovative XR platform, Migu Video said it wants to offer an unparalleled viewing experience, allowing users to immerse themselves in the excitement of multiple matches simultaneously.

XR technology is an umbrella category that covers various forms of computer-altered reality, including augmented reality and virtual reality.

Migu Video — as a digital content platform that integrates telecom-

munications and internet features — remains committed to driving technological innovation and digital transformation in China, said Zhu Jiawei, product director of Migu Video app on Apple Vision Pro.

Zhu said the company will continue to explore AI-driven spatial computing and next-generation immersive audiovisual applications, aiming to foster new business models and industry growth. By harnessing collective industry efforts, Migu Video aspires to extend the benefits of China's technological advancements to a global audience, sharing the dividends of the emerging digital economy.

Migu Video is also leveraging AI-powered features for a better sports-watching experience. Soccer fans have long desired the ability to track their favorite players in real-time during matches. With Migu Video's new AI star highlight feature, this is now possible.

By simply selecting a player on the screen, viewers can instantly

access their statistics, allowing for an engaging and interactive viewing experience. Whether seasoned fans or newcomers to the sport, everyone can benefit from this personalized way of enjoying the game.

Additionally, Migu Video has launched AI intelligent commentary during Euro 2024. Built on China Mobile's Jituan large language model and Migu's independently developed model, this feature analyzes real-time match data to automatically generate precise commentary.

A unique aspect of this service is the AI celebrity voice feature, which extracts and simulates the voices of famous personalities. Broadcasters on Migu Video can choose their preferred celebrity voice packs, cloning familiar voices like Monkey King, a mythical Chinese hero from the novel *Journey to the West*, thus creating a novel and entertaining viewing experience that blends beloved characters with live football action.

Beyond the UEFA Euro 2024, Migu Video also offers a wide array of sports content, including from the NBA, CBA and more, with plans to introduce more sporting events like the Olympic Games in future.

As China's premier sports content platform, Migu Video said it provides extensive live coverage of top-tier events and boasts a vast library of over 4,000 ultra-high-definition films, more than 100 premium 3D movies, and leading cultural and tourism content.

China's investment in AI is forecast to reach 273.9 billion yuan (\$38.1 billion) in 2027, accounting for 9 percent of the world's total, according to a recent report by market consultancy International Data Corp.

## Country's central provinces bolster trade ties with Africa

CHANGSHA, Hunan — In the predawn mist off Kenya's coast, fishermen cast their nets into the sea, chasing wild anchovies. Little do they know, this catch would soon embark on a journey to China and elsewhere, where it would be made into tasty snacks destined for supermarkets across over 30 countries.

Jinzai Food Group Co Ltd in Central China's Hunan province drives this international operation. Since 2022, after Kenya's aquatic products gained access to the Chinese market, the company has emerged as one of the largest importers of these products.

"The company's sales of dried small deep-sea fish have surpassed 1 billion yuan (\$137.5 million) and tens of thousands of tons of fish are imported each year," said Zhou Jinsong, the company's chairman.

Zhou added that the company has set up a fish-processing factory in Kenya, supports the local government in conducting fishing surveys, and helps train fishermen into skilled industrial workers.

Jinzai exemplifies the thriving economic and trade exchanges between Hunan and Africa. The province has stayed at the forefront of China-Africa economic and trade relations. Featuring advanced agricultural technology, equipment manufacturing and infrastructure construction, Hunan has sustained an annual growth rate of 23.1 percent in economic and trade cooperation with Africa over the past three years, according to official data.

In addition to Hunan, the five other central provinces of China have been encouraged to establish inland reform and opening-up centers. The region will accelerate the development of platforms such as the pilot zone for deepening economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa, as highlighted in a news briefing by the Ministry of Commerce in May.

Guided by the national strategy, the provinces, located faraway from borders and coastlines, are

actively driving institutional and practical innovations in economic and trade cooperation with Africa.

The China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo, regularly held in Changsha, Hunan's capital city, has become a crucial showcase for African agricultural products, enhancing their international visibility.

In the city's China-Africa Economic and Trade Headquarters Building, hosts from both sides sell African products via livestreaming to help them gain a foothold in Chinese and global markets. Spanning over 100,000 square meters, the building commenced operations in mid-June and is expected to achieve a trade volume with Africa totaling 30 billion yuan over the next three years.

Numerous construction companies from neighboring Hubei province have ventured into Africa, undertaking diverse engineering projects in sectors such as energy, transportation, municipal construction, housing, telecommunications and metallurgy.

North of Zambia's capital Lusaka, about 88 kilometers along a major highway, lie rows of modern standard factories and a grid of straight roads. This area is Jiangxi province's first overseas economic and trade zone, the Zambia-Jiangxi Economic Cooperation Zone, which was completed after five years of construction.


The area will be developed into a new eco-friendly urban area that combines industry, trade, logistics, comprehensive services, leisure, healthcare, education, and essential living facilities, said Xu Jianfeng, the zone's general manager.

"We see the booming trade as a win-win situation which keeps growing," said South African Ambassador to China Siyabonga Cyprian Cwele. "And the massive growth in bilateral trade has been translated into direct benefits to our people."


XINHUA



Visitors check out the third China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo in Changsha, Hunan province, in July 2023. CHEN ZHENHAI / XINHUA



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国际爱护动物基金会

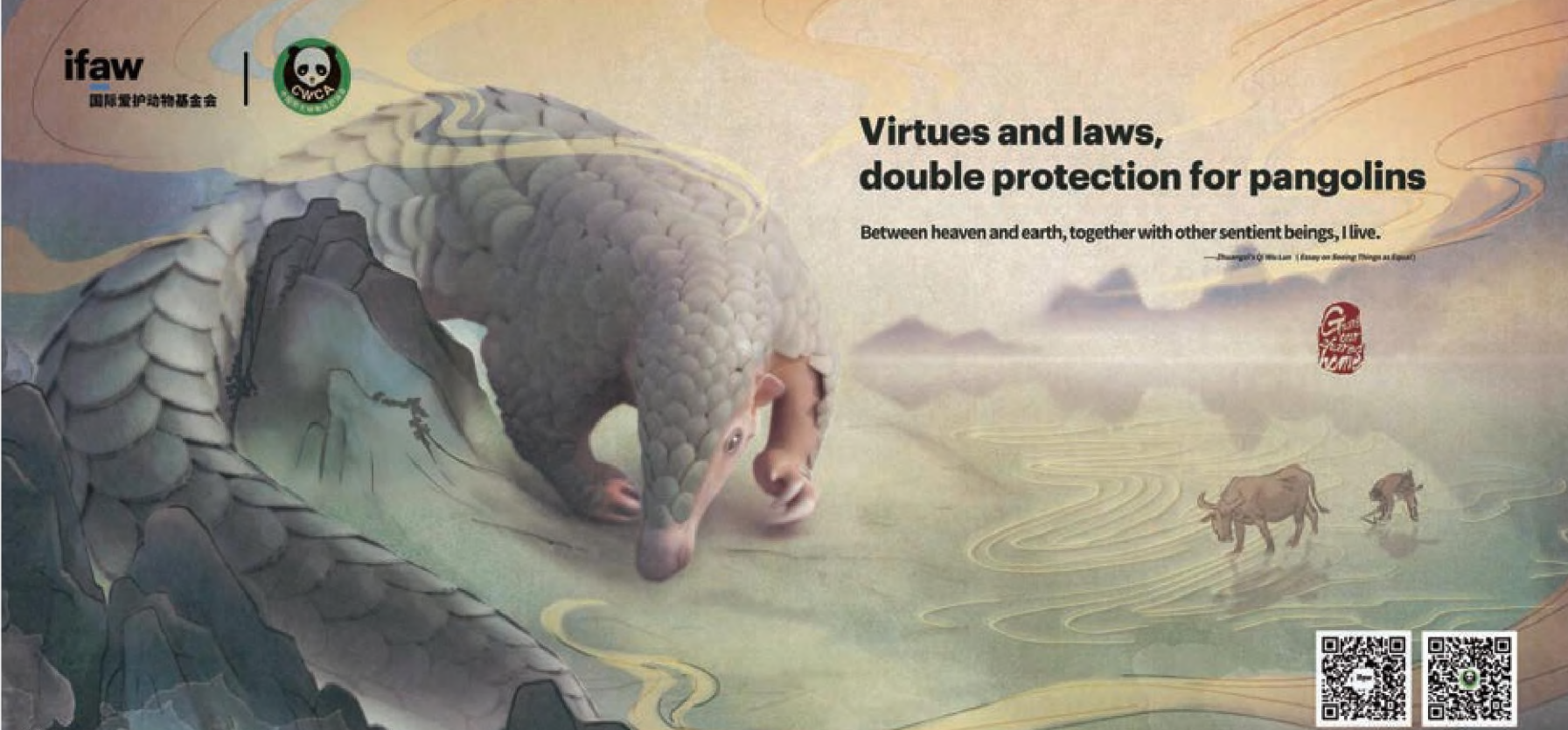




CWCFA

### Virtues and laws, double protection for pangolins

Between heaven and earth, together with other sentient beings, I live.

— Zhuangzi's Qi Wu Lun (Essay on Being Things as Equal)



AD

## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## China needs more momentum in its economic recovery

## EAGLE EYE

By Zhu Baoliang

China's economy is still in a post-pandemic recovery stage, with production indicators in January and February showing positive trends. The recovery phase indicates that severely impacted areas are gradually recovering, while areas less affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are recovering more slowly, leading to a significant divergence across economic sectors.

Analyzing this year's economic situation, it can be concluded that China's economy has entered a stable growth phase, albeit at a low momentum, characterized by low prices and deflationary pressure.

First, economic stability mainly relies on manufacturing investment and exports. From January to April, China's exports grew 11.4 percent year-on-year, and manufacturing investment maintained a rapid growth rate. Driven by exports and manufacturing investment, industrial production recovered relatively well, with a growth rate of 6 percent from January to May.

After a rapid recovery in the services sector last year, the growth rate slowed to less than 5 percent from March onwards. Comparing monthly data over the past four years affected by the pandemic, the services sector has roughly recovered to average recent levels.

Driven by exports, industrial production growth from January to May this year was faster than in the past four years. Maintaining a high export growth rate is crucial. If export growth slows, industrial production may decline, manufacturing investment may decelerate and the economy could see further downturns.

Second, from March to May, economic data remained stable but at a low level, mainly reflected in prices. Price increases were not significant, especially the producer price index, which had been negative for the past 20 consecutive months leading up to May. Although there was a slight month-on-month increase in May, it was influenced by international market-driven inflation.

From January to April, import prices rose continuously, especially in April. Although specific data for May is not yet available, the increase is expected to be greater, linked to rising copper and oil prices in the global market. Excluding these factors, domestic price levels are relatively low, especially the PPI. The consumer price index is also at a low level, both in terms of core inflation and month-on-month growth.

Thus, although China's economy remained stable from March to May, it has not rebounded to a high level, and price declines reflect an unresolved supply-demand gap. It is estimated that China's current potential growth rate over the period should be between 5.2 percent and 5.3 percent, with the supply-demand gap accumu-

lated after the pandemic still not being fully addressed.

## Key challenges

The current Chinese economy faces three main challenges. To start with, there is insufficient effective demand. Consumption demand is insufficient, with the growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods stuck at around 4 percent in recent years.

Services consumption, heavily affected by the pandemic, fluctuated greatly but recovered to a 5 percent growth rate post-pandemic recovery. This level is significantly lower than the nearly 8 percent growth rate before 2019 and the real consumption growth rate of 6 percent after adjusting for prices.

Meanwhile, the real estate market remains sluggish, making it difficult to reduce dependency on the property. Despite a series of stimulus policies this year, their effectiveness has been insufficient, and real estate investment growth may continue to decline in the second half and into next year.

Export growth in the second half might slightly increase compared to January-May, but import growth may also rise. Actual export growth may not reach the nearly 11 percent level of January-May, reducing its pull on the economy as trade frictions persist.

Second, there is a risk of deflation. China faces structural and institutional overcapacity in some sectors, leading to persistent deflationary pressure. The 10-year government bond yield has fallen to 2.25 to 2.3 percent, while the one-year medium-term lending facility, or MLF, rate remains at 2.5 percent. This inverted yield curve reflects market concerns about future economic and deflationary risks.

The PPI has been declining for 20 consecutive months, and the CPI is only 0.1 percent. During the initial four years of supply-side structural reforms from 2012-15, the CPI remained at around 2 percent, and the PPI experienced over 50 months of negative growth. This time, the CPI is not high, the PPI is still falling and some industries face overcapacity issues.

Price expectations of no increase or even declines will significantly impact industrial and enterprise production, discouraging inventory stocking and large-scale investment. While current policies, including large-scale equipment renewal and replacement, provide some support, maintaining high growth in manufacturing investment is challenging.

Third, trade frictions persist. The scale of trade frictions might not be large, but unresolved issues between countries could lead to conflicts, significantly impacting business. Marginal effects suggest that exports' contributions to economic growth may slow in the second half.

The complexity, severity and uncertainty of the global economy are rising, affecting China's economy through exchange rates, prices, capital flows, foreign trade and overseas asset security. The global economic environment in the second half is expected to be more challenging for China than in the first half.

The Chinese economy might hover at the



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

bottom in the second half or even be lower than in the first half. The second-quarter growth rate is expected to be around 5.1 percent, with the overall growth rate in the first half at about 5.2 percent. The third and fourth quarter growth rates might be below 5 percent, with the annual growth rate around 5 percent.

Specifically, the consumer market remains stable, manufacturing investment remains relatively high but may slow, and infrastructure construction investment is weaker than expected despite substantial government funding, including special bonds.

Short-term recovery to stability in the real estate market is unlikely, and it is expected to continue its downward trend. The marginal effect of exports may weaken, with less pull on economic growth. Despite strong resilience in the US and European economies this year, their growth is expected to slow in the next one to two years, impacting China's exports.

## Policy recommendations

China's economy remains in a recovery phase, now stabilizing but with potential slight deceleration and continued deflationary pressure. In this context, three economic principles are proposed.

First, economic development is more important than risk prevention. Actions should not be taken solely to prevent risk but to promote development. Last year's Central Economic Work Conference and this year's two sessions — the nation's legislative and political advisory meeting — emphasized consolidating and enhancing the momentum of economic recovery, while avoiding economic decline due to excessive risk prevention, which could lead to even greater economic risks.

Second, internal economic balance is more important than external balance. Fiscal and monetary policies should closely monitor price levels to ensure stability, focusing on money supply and exchange rate stability.

Third, there is a need to develop new economic drivers while stabilizing traditional ones. Efforts should be made to avoid blind pursuit of new drivers which could lead to overcapacity and over-competition.

We look forward to the upcoming third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee, a vital reform meeting scheduled for July, to provide guidance for long-term policies. For short-term policies, including fiscal policy, monetary policy and policies targeting the real estate market, the following recommendations are advisable.

To start with, proactive fiscal policies should be properly strengthened. This year's two sessions proposed a 0.1 percent growth in the fund budget, namely an expected increase of 0.1 percent in land transfer fees. However, land transfer fees from January to May declined by over 10 percent, implying a reduction in fund budget revenue. This funding gap needs urgent resolution so that local governments can ensure fund security in three areas — basic livelihoods, salaries and operational expenditures.

Second, prudent monetary policy needs to be flexible, targeted and effective. It should maintain reasonable liquidity, aligning social financing and money supply with economic growth and price targets. Lowering interest rates and reserve requirement ratios, and prioritizing development over risk prevention should be considered. Emerging bank risks can be addressed through fiscal special bond issuances.

Third, more efforts are needed to expand demand. Boosting consumption requires increased urban and rural incomes through smooth economic circulation and development. We anticipate reforms in July to progress in income distribution and social security. Strengthening the social security system can stimulate consumption by addressing issues like migrant workers' retirement stability and encouraging child-birth policies.

For investment, there is a need to relax restrictions in certain areas and encourage mergers and restructuring in sectors displaying overcapacity, including real estate. Local governments should reduce large-scale investment funds to avoid herd-like behavior. When encouraging the development of new quality productive forces, it is important to avoid excessive investment and inappro-

propriate use of structural monetary policy tools.

As for exports, it is crucial to address trade frictions properly. When exporting Chinese electric vehicles, EV batteries and photovoltaic products, a possible solution is implementing a quota system, drawing from the 1990s US-Japan trade dispute experience. This system would specify the quantity supplied to a specific market each year, on the condition that the other party must encourage our enterprises to invest in their country by utilizing comparative advantages. Quotas can be auctioned domestically, generating fiscal revenue and incentivizing higher value-added exports. Meanwhile, due to the quota restrictions, domestic enterprises can determine production volumes based on these quotas and domestic demand, thereby avoiding blind large-scale investments.

In the property sector, first and foremost, the task of ensuring the completion of presold properties must be effectively completed. Enterprises on the white list should be exempt from accountability for bad loans related to development loans and housing acquisition loans, which is an important reflection of policy coordination and consistency. Second, policies to assist real estate enterprises should be studied, including mergers and acquisitions of real estate companies and the revitalization of existing housing stocks, such as policy-oriented housing financial instruments. Finally, further research can be conducted into including mortgage interest in the deduction of personal income taxes to encourage real estate demand.

On the supply side, current support policies for new economic drivers are correct. Encouraging mergers and restructuring in industries with overcapacity is advisable. Meanwhile, more specific policies surrounding the construction of a unified large national market could be planned at the upcoming third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee this month to address supply-side issues.

The writer is former chief economist of the State Information Center.

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

## Effective market key to data element ecosystem

## MAIN STREET

By Li Sanxi

China's data element ecosystem is developing rapidly on strong policy support, but faces challenges including insufficient technical infrastructure and inactive market transactions.

Several problems still wait to be solved, such as high compliance costs on the supply side, slow digital transformation on the demand side, mismatched supply and demand and an incomplete data pricing mechanism.

To address these challenges, it is essential to understand the value of data as a production factor, find efficient circulation models, protect data investment incentives, and develop technological and innovation systems.

Since 2014, dozens of data trading institutions have been established across the country. China's data element circulation market has significantly increased since then, and the overall scale is continuously expanding, with an estimated market size of 159.2 billion yuan (\$21 billion) by 2024.

The data element market can be analyzed from three perspectives — support, value and policy. Support means infrastructure and technical support for data elements. In

terms of value, it involves data suppliers, data trading institutions, and analysis and application groups. Policy means establishment of unified data standards, promotion of public data openness, incentivizing market participants to share data, and scientific definition of data property rights.

In terms of support, technologies such as blockchain, privacy computing and multi-party computation can be applied to the circulation and trading of data elements.

However, in reality, there is a significant gap between the infrastructure and technical environment, and between national strategic goals and the needs of data element circulation practices.

In terms of value, there are high compliance costs on the supply side, due to the stringent and comprehensive compliance assessments required on the data supply side.

For instance, there are high costs for obtaining personal authorization, and difficulty in obtaining authorization from groups, lack of clear standards for the anonymization of personal data and insufficient motivation for individuals to share their data as they do not receive benefits from sharing their personal data.

There is also a research data fragmentation and a lack of incentive for public data development. Currently, the government and public institutions have not clearly defined the fees and standards for authorizing public data to operating units.

From the demand side, some enterprises have a slow digital transformation process and lack deep understanding and exploration of data value, and fail to fully utilize data for business decision-making and innovation.

Others lack the corresponding data analysis technology and capability, meaning the data cannot be transformed into actual business value. More than 80 percent of enterprises have developed or utilized only a small portion of their data.

In terms of matching data supply and demand, there exists an incomplete data element pricing mechanism. There is also significant information asymmetry between buyers and sellers regarding price negotiations, data compliance and security risks in data transactions.

At the policy level, related systems and regulations are still not perfect. There are four major imperfections in data ownership and rights allocation, data security compliance cost, data circulation and definition of data monopolies.

The causes of such data-related issues are due to market and policy reasons, for example, a redundant construction of data exchanges.

There is also a binary policy conflict between development and security, leading to unclear and unstable policies that cause enterprises to lack vitality due to policy uncertainty. Additionally, there is a lack of incentive mechanisms for public data sharing.

Monopoly is also prevalent, alongside coor-

dination failures among various enterprises in the industry chain and between different departments within a single conglomerate.

To address the aforementioned problems, it is necessary to first understand the value of data as a production factor. The value of data as a production factor lies in its ability to improve quality, reduce costs, increase efficiency and promote innovation, with the core being the development and utilization of data.

The design of foundational data systems should facilitate the full development and utilization of data, rather than maximize the volume and value of data transactions. Additionally, data should be cautiously treated as an asset for balance sheets, collateral and financing.

Second, it is important to find efficient circulation models for data elements to balance data transactions and interactions. This involves nurturing professional talent in the data element market and actively providing supporting services like quality assessment to promote data traceability and trustworthy transactions.

Third, more efforts should be made to effectively protect data investment incentives. It is necessary to scrutinize the standards used to judge whether data sharing is insufficient, to have a reasonable level of sharing to enhance social well-being.

Moreover, it is crucial to circulate and use data. In the face of competition from data giants like Alibaba, JD and Tencent, companies like Pinduoduo and ByteDance have successfully risen. The success of ChatGPT is also the result of the combined technology and economic factors.

My suggestions are as follows. First, it is essential to recognize that an effective market is the foundation for the development of the data element ecosystem, and the government's role is to supplement and guide in case of market failure, and policy formulation needs to follow market rules and principles.

Second, it is important to focus on the development of data trading platforms to further improve the data element market ecosystem. Data trading platforms should position themselves as comprehensive service providers, leverage their intermediary value to build trust mechanisms, connect various links in the data industry chain, and form a closed loop of data production and transactions.

Third, greater efforts should be made to explore a more refined system for data element pricing and revenue distribution.

Finally, data sources are divided into public data and enterprise data, and uses are divided into commercial and public welfare purposes. Different pricing methods should be applied based on these different sources and uses. Simultaneously, data trading platforms should continuously explore rules and methods for data transaction pricing to enhance the market's role in price discovery.

The writer is a professor at the School of Economics and director of the digital economy research center at Renmin University of China. This article is a translation of his speech 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

## Manila's infringement activities heading to wrecking confrontation

Last week, the China Coast Guard said it monitored and controlled Philippine Coast Guard vessels that attempted to transfer personnel and supplies to a coast guard ship illegally stationed at China's Xianbin Reef. The Philippine vessel has been there for more than 70 days.

This scenario looks familiar. In 1999, the Philippines deliberately grounded a World War II-era warship at China's Ren'ai Reef in the South China Sea, and its squatting on the Chinese maritime territory has continued till today.

Ever since the Philippines grounded its old warship at Ren'ai Reef, it has not only stationed and rotated forces there but also kept sending supplies to them. Since last year, it has even sent building materials to fortify the decaying ship, trying to make its illegal occupation a fait accompli.

Now, Manila is trying the same claim-jump trick at Xianbin Reef.

Manila should be aware that Beijing will not let what happened at Ren'ai Reef be repeated at Xianbin Reef with impunity. Chinese law enforcement forces will take pertinent countermeasures.

This is just the latest in a series of Philippine provocations which have raised tensions in the waters and stoked ire between the two countries.

This year alone, vessels on both sides have clashed more than once at Ren'ai Reef making it a flashpoint in the South China Sea.

So far, China has exercised restraint in the face of Manila's infringement activities, responding to them with legitimate, justified and appropriate law enforcement measures.

This underscores both its commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the waters and its continued hope that Manila will come to its senses and return to the right track of properly handling the territorial disputes through dialogue and consultation. That the ninth meeting between the two sides under the Bicameral Consultation Mechanism on July 2 went ahead was therefore positive in this respect.

However, after the consultation, Philippine officials, although expressing Manila's willingness to ease the tensions, also outrageously demanded 60 million Philippine pesos (about \$1 million) from China as "compensation" for property damages incurred during the recent incident, despite this being the result of its own brazen unlawful actions. The Philippine armed forces chief has even demanded the return of seven guns seized by Chinese law enforcement personnel.

Given the Philippines' recent antics, such ridiculous requests only serve to further discredit Manila, which bears all the responsibility for stoking tensions over Ren'ai and Xianbin reefs. It has allowed itself to be led astray by the worm-tongue enticements of the United States.

Manila should follow Beijing's lead and show more restraint, lest it go too far and have to face the consequences of constantly stirring up trouble in the South China Sea. Manila only has to look at Ukraine to see the upshot of being too willing to be the US' proxy.

Manila should reflect on the course of action it is pursuing. The Philippines will only run aground on the rocks of its ambitions if it navigates by the wrecker lights of Washington.

## NATO should reject Biden course

Although former Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte will not replace Jens Stoltenberg as NATO secretary-general until October, the NATO summit in Washington from Tuesday to Thursday will serve to show the organization the route along which Washington expects it to follow under its new leadership.

That US President Joe Biden, in an exclusive interview with ABC aired on Friday, bragged about his being able to hold NATO together and keep the Pacific Basin in a position to checkmate China, as a proof of his diplomatic achievements, indicates the route Washington is charting for NATO with Rutte at the helm.

"I'm the guy that put NATO together, the future. No one thought I could expand it. I'm the guy that shut Putin down. No one thought could happen. I'm the guy that put together a South Pacific initiative with AUKUS. I'm the guy that got 50 nations out — not only in Europe, outside of Europe as well to help Ukraine... Who's gonna be able to be in a position where I'm able to keep the Pacific Basin in a position where we're at least checkmating China now?" said Biden.

That Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand are also invited to take part in the NATO gathering in Washington, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed in a conversation at the Brookings Institution last week, confirms the United States is now welding together the US' NATO and "Indo-Pacific" security alliances.

Since its founding in 1949, NATO had not mentioned China at all in its Strategic Concept, its main political document, until two years ago during the Madrid Summit, thanks to the Biden administration's hyping up of the China threat. And almost all of its member states, including the US, the Netherlands and Norway, respectively Rutte's and Stoltenberg's home countries, have stable relations with China featuring sizable economic and trade cooperation.

Yet over the past more than three years, the Biden administration has coaxed and cajoled the US' European allies and Asia-Pacific partners to jump on its anti-China bandwagon without allowing them to care about the costs involved in turning their long-term partner into a rival.

The rise of the far right in European political circles and the forthcoming US presidential election in November will be what most of NATO's European leaders have on their minds as the flag of "shared values" is raised above the Washington meeting.

With the possibility of Donald Trump reentering the White House, the Biden administration's zero-sum game may be transformed again into an America-first art of the deal. So it is likely the attendees will adopt a nod-in-agreement, wait-and-see approach to any bid by Biden trying to squeeze any more vitality juice out of the organization to perk up his election campaigning.

Meanwhile Beijing will be hoping that under the leadership of Rutte, NATO will do more to show the sincerity of the claims made by Stoltenberg, when he met with Wang Yi in September 2022, that NATO does not see China as a rival, values maintaining and strengthening contacts with it, and will stick to its established geographical scope.

With NATO's self-vaunted role of champion of the West and seemingly insatiable desire for eastwards expansion having been the cause of much bloodshed and suffering under Stoltenberg's willingness to be a yes-man to the US, it is to be hoped that Rutte will be able to instill more practical common sense into the organization so that it rejects the course Biden has charted for it.

Cao Yi



## Opinion Line

## SCO's growing appeal exemplifies new type of spirited multilateral ties

In summarizing President Xi Jinping's trip to Central Asia last week, including attendance at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in the Kazakh capital of Astana, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the visit has amplified the Shanghai Spirit, deepened traditional friendships and opened a new vision for building a community with a shared future.

The SCO was not formed to, nor does it now, threaten the "US-led democratic order" as some Western media outlets' reports on the Astana gathering suggested. While the organization's growing size has expanded its geographical scope, and its remit has become more ambitious than countering terrorism, extremism and separatism, it remains a development partnership mechanism.

Although covering international news naturally becomes much easier through seeing the world as black or white, that tends to oversimplify the otherwise complicated and fast-changing situations of global affairs. That some allies of the United States, includ-

ing India, Turkey, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, participated in the SCO summit as an SCO member and dialogue partners respectively, belies the threat-to-the-West rhetoric.

Unlike the NATO summit to be held in Washington, which, as the same group of Western media report, will uphold "Western values", the SCO summit upholds the Shanghai Spirit of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diversity of civilizations and pursuit of common development.

It is absurd that these same Western media outlets mocked the UN chief's presence at the SCO summit as a move "to position the UN as an inclusive organization that's talking to all the big clubs" as if he should have naturally boycotted the Astana gathering to give legitimacy to the exclusiveness of the US club.

It is notable that some bilateral and multilateral meetings between leaders were held on the sidelines of the SCO summit producing many positive results that might advance the

solutions to some regional and global hotspot issues. Those claiming that the SCO summit is merely a "talk shop" rather than "a platform where collective decisions are made, implemented and have an impact" should be reminded that were it not for the SCO's deepening of pragmatic cooperation, Central Asia would not have enjoyed peace and stability over the past 23 years. They should bear in mind that over the past 23 years, the democracy experiment of the US in Afghanistan has been an abject failure. It is also the practical security cooperation of the SCO members that has prevented Central Asia from becoming another Middle East.

Since it was founded in 2001, the SCO has become a vital demonstration of a new type of international relations. Instead of clinging to a zero-sum mentality of damaging division, the SCO upholds the Shanghai Spirit as the means for common security, stability and development.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

## Heck of a mess for Labour Party to try and clean up

The Labour Party's victory in the UK's general election is largely due to the efforts of its leader Keir Starmer to adopt a more center-left position. Starmer has continuously sent friendly signals to the business community, and tried to dispel the middle and upper classes' concerns about possible substantial tax increases. He has also taken a pragmatic stance on geopolitical conflicts and showed his "patriotic" side on immigration issues, so as not to alienate conservative voters.

The Labour Party's victory reversed the overall downturn of the European left to a certain extent. For European politics, the return of the center-left Labour Party to power shows that the moderate centrists still maintain strong political momentum.

The Labour Party showed a valuable self-

restraint over its landslide victory in the general election and appeared to be cautious of the challenges it faces. It understands that this victory is largely due to the disorder of the Conservative Party rather than the UK public being convinced it is capable of clearing up the mess created and left by the Conservatives. The Labour Party must show it is capable of effectively improving the situation of the working class, who will otherwise be susceptible to the glib fixes promised by the right-wing nationalists as has been the case elsewhere in Europe.

But like the Conservative Party, the Labour Party is facing the problem of internal factional division. Although the party is temporarily united in the face of the challenge of the general election, after it comes to power, the left

wing within the Labour Party will undoubtedly put pressure on the mainstream centrists, leading to frictions and infighting within the party.

It should also be noted that the far right has also made a breakthrough in the general election. The Reform UK Party grabbed about 14 percent of the votes. This shows that immigration continues to be an issue. It can be said that the UK's political arena is becoming increasingly more complex than before, reflecting voters' dissatisfaction with the status quo and their desire for change. The overall crisis of the deterioration of the British political ecology has not been eliminated. The Labour Party needs to quickly rebuild voters' confidence in mainstream politics.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## What They Say

## In Japan's best interest to serve as bridge of amiability

**Editor's note:** Former Japanese prime minister Yukio Hatoyama delivered an address on Sino-Japanese relations at the 12th World Peace Forum held in Beijing on Saturday. Sunday is the 87th anniversary of the July 7 Incident, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, that marked the beginning of Japan's full-scale invasion in North China in 1937. The following are excerpts of his speech:

The current Sino-US relationship is not a new Cold War. Today's China is not Japan after the bubble economy burst, nor is it the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. The competition between the United States and China will be long-term.

Japan should play the role of a bridge between China and the US to help ease and manage the confrontation between the two countries. That serves its own interest best.

However, Japan has not only failed to play that role, but the Japanese government has become the most effective aide to Washington in military and diplomacy. In December 2022, the Japa-

nese Cabinet passed three security strategy documents, proposing a new policy to give Japan "counterattack capability", significantly increase military spending, emphasize the Japan-US alliance, and position China as "the biggest strategic challenge to date". In their pursuit of excessive defense power, Japanese politicians are inciting hostile policies toward China.

Also, following the lead of Washington, Tokyo has sent wrong messages to the "pro-independence" authorities of Taiwan. Both Japan and the US need to show with words and deeds that they do not support "Taiwan independence" if they really want to stabilize ties with Beijing. I have always been convinced that if a military conflict occurs between the US-Japan alliance and China, no matter what the outcome, all parties will suffer a catastrophic disaster, so Japan's national strategic goal must be to prevent the out-

break of war, rather than rushing toward it.

If China and Japan want to prevent trouble before it happens, they need to reassure each other on issues of mutual concern. Full communication and prevention of involution are indispensable.

The concept of community is particularly important for peace and development in Asia. Differences in values should not lead to hatred. We should recognize the differences in our values and systems, respect each other, understand each other, and help each other. The times require us not to give up our ideals, but to be down-to-earth and do our best.

It is encouraging to see the ninth China-Japan-ROK leaders' meeting was held in Seoul in May, as the last meeting was held more than four years ago. It is always crucial to strengthen dialogue and communication between Japan and China and improve the feelings of the Japanese people toward China.

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | NATO Summit

**Editor's note:** The NATO's expansion into the Asia-Pacific will heighten geopolitical risks and threaten the region's prosperity and stability. This attempted expansion into Asia reflects NATO's Cold War mentality and raises serious concerns about the alliance's role in undermining regional peace. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Zhao Junjie

## NATO serves US' hegemony at EU's expense

The NATO Summit, to be held in Washington from Tuesday to Thursday, is expected to provide more military aid, financial support and personnel training to Ukraine with the not-so-covert intention of prolonging the Russia-Ukraine conflict, in order to weaken Russia. The summit is also likely to accuse both Moscow and Beijing of challenging the West-led world order and posing a threat to the security of the US-led West.

However, it is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that actually poses a threat to global peace and security. A relic of the Cold War, NATO, after its radical transformation and aggressive eastward expansion, has become a tool for the

United States to maintain its global hegemony.

The Joe Biden administration attaches great importance to the NATO Summit, because it aims to use it to target Russia and China. After its Brussels summit in 2021, NATO has not only set its long-term goals, including those of building ideological blocs and

triggering bloc confrontations to gain geostrategic advantages, but also taken a series of military actions that have sparked a global arms race.

First, the drastic increase in NATO's defense budget has been draining the resources of the organization's European member states, with the spending for 2024 increasing by 18 percent year-on-year. Also, 23 of the 32 NATO member states have vowed to spend more than 2 percent of their GDP on defense this year, with Germany spending \$97.7 billion, more than the United Kingdom, to become NATO's second-largest spender on defense.

Second, NATO has expanded eastward, reaching tantalizingly close to Russia's borders, while the under-construction NATO base in Romania, spread over 28 square kilometers, is set to become the largest military base in Europe, capable of accommodating tens of thousands of troops and stockpiling tons of weapons and equipment. NATO has also decided to build a new command center in Wiesbaden, Ger-

many, to coordinate the strategic assistance for Ukraine, and Finland and Sweden, new NATO members, have signed defense cooperation agreements allowing US forces to use their military bases, thus posing a threat to Russia.

Third, NATO plans to take some nuclear missiles out of the silos and put them on standby in some European Union countries to reassure its European members that it remains committed to safeguarding their security. NATO may claim its move is justified from the Western security perspective and necessary for preventing Russia's "military provocations", but in effect, it is harmful to other countries' national security.

Indeed, NATO's expansion and militarization have disrupted global peace and undermined security. In fact, NATO has instilled the fear of Russia and China into some European and Asia-Pacific countries, making them increasingly dependent on NATO for their "national security".

At its summit in Vilnius last year, NATO accused China of posing a "sys-

temic challenge" to Euro-Atlantic security and "secretly expanding its nuclear arsenal". And earlier this month, the NATO secretary-general accused China of fueling the biggest armed conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. Such blatant distortions of facts have been damaging China-Europe relations.

The reality is that NATO's expansion and militarization pose a serious threat to the global arms control regime, and disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation efforts. The US pulled Ukraine into the Western camp by helping NATO expand eastward, thus creating an imbalance in the European security landscape and triggering the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Subsequently, the US used the Ukraine crisis to prompt NATO's European members to "generously" increase their military spending and purchase large amounts of US military equipment to aid Ukraine.

The US has manipulated NATO into conducting large-scale military exercises. For instance, NATO's Exercise Steadfast Defender 2024 involved more than 50 naval assets, 80 aircraft, 1,100 combat vehi-

cles and over 90,000 troops. The displays of NATO's combat power have provoked Russia into taking countermeasures, exacerbating tensions in the European Union and Eurasia. What has raised tensions further is Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and deployment of tactical nuclear missiles on the Russian-European border.

In order to fuel NATO's eastward expansion, leading to conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Washington forced NATO's European members to join hands with the US to weaken Russia. The security panic thus created prompted even French President Emmanuel Macron to stop advocating for Europe's strategic autonomy and independent foreign and defense policies.

All these moves have benefited only the military-industrial complex, which has been making huge profits by selling arms and equipment to not only Ukraine but also EU countries.

Equally important, the surge in NATO's military spending has, to some extent, reduced the international community's spending on climate actions. At a time when countries should be devoting more funds and efforts to combat climate change, European Union countries are splurging on weapons and military equipment all because of the US.

The arms race triggered by the Ukraine crisis has constrained the advancement of the EU's Green Deal. The EU member states, especially NATO's European members have spent hundreds of billions of euros on purchasing US weapons to counter the perceived threat from

Russia. If the Russia-Ukraine conflict drags on, the biggest beneficiary will be the US and the biggest losers the EU member states.

NATO's arms buildup will weaken international cooperation to address common global challenges. Washington is obsessed with the Ukraine crisis, because it believes the longer Moscow is engaged in the conflict the weaker it will become and the easier it will be for the US to use NATO to maintain its global hegemony, even at the cost of global peace and development.

That's why Washington is likely to use the NATO Summit to tighten its stranglehold on Europe and target Russia and China.

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

Wang Yiwei

## Ukraine conflict has exposed deep-rooted issues

There are no signs of the Russia-Ukraine conflict ending any time soon, because it has become a protracted war of attrition.

By appointing a new defense minister with an economics background recently, Russia appears to have adopted a long-term sustainable approach to the conflict. The US-led West's goal seems to be to exhaust Russia, overthrow Russian President Vladimir Putin, and even disintegrate the Russian Federation. Conversely, Russia seeks to wear down NATO and the European Union, thereby fracturing the connections between the European Union and the United States. The conflict, a prelude to a new world order, may not fundamentally change the global landscape but serves as an early warning about the shifting stances of major countries.

Some Western observers' belief that a single phone call from China could end the Russia-Ukraine conflict is both an oversimplification of the issue and an insult to Russia, because it makes Russia seem like a country dependent on others without any mind of its own.

Despite Russia's economic limitations, its actions, diplomatic, military and economic, are not dictated by GDP alone. The West's

long-standing disdain for Russia, exemplified by NATO's eastward expansion, is fueling the conflict, so accusing China of not intervening in the issue to seek its resolution is a diversionary tactic, designed to shift responsibility onto China and drive a wedge between Russia and China.

The US would not benefit from a swift resolution to Russia-Ukraine conflict. That's why it is keen on prolonging the

conflict, because it believes that will weaken Russia. Washington's strategy is multifaceted — severing Europe's energy links with Russia, fueling discord within NATO, and straining Sino-Russian relations — and its overarching goal is to achieve multiple objectives. The US' moves have worsened the situation and its maneuverings have turned some Ukrainian politicians into pawns on its geopolitical chessboard.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has highlighted the nuclear threat to Europe. Unlike past crises such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the tensions today have reached unprecedented levels. NATO, despite its claims of defending freedom, operates under a charter that contradicts its actions. The organization's true purpose is to maintain the US' dominance in Europe, "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down", in first NATO Secretary General Hastings Ismay's words.

The factors driving the Russia-Ukraine conflict are complex and deep-rooted. The Westphalian system, based on nation states, is flawed when it comes to managing multi-ethnic regions such as Ukraine. The persecution of Russian-speaking populations in eastern Ukraine led to claims of genocide, prompting Russia to launch the "special military operation". Western media often overlooks these factors, focusing instead on vilifying Russia.

The European integration project, boosted by the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, has not achieved full success. The EU's internal cohesion has come at the expense of external conflicts. The exclusion of countries such as Turkey and its strained relations with Russia exemplify the EU's failure to create a truly inclusive community. The EU's strategy has led to a heightened state of confrontation between Russia and NATO, undermining regional security.

Moreover, the EU's lack of strategic autonomy means it cannot address its own security issues independently. Historical instances such as the Kosovo conflict and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, have exposed Europe's reliance on the US for military support. Without the support of NATO and US, Ukraine would struggle to defend itself against Russia.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a vivid illustration of the challenges posed by a world in flux. The Westphalian system's inadequacies, the pitfalls of European integration, and the lack of European strategic autonomy are key to understanding the ongoing Ukraine crisis. As we navigate the new global order, it is imperative that we recognize and address these underlying issues to foster a more stable and inclusive international community of shared future.

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



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MAXUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Martin Sieff

## Alliance has become Frankenstein's monster

The NATO Summit to be held in Washington from July 9 to 11 will without doubt be yet another exercise in US and Western bluster and triumphalism, as well as empty posturing in what in reality has been for at least 23 years a multipolar world.

Even more than the previous gatherings of the venerable and dangerously resurgent transatlantic military alliance, the summit in Washington will be an exercise in nostalgia, unsuccessful time travel and wish fulfillment. Being held in Washington following the 75th anniversary of the 1949 Washington Treaty that led to the establishment of NATO, the summit is aimed at celebrating that event.

However, far from being a cautious defense alliance, as the original gathering of 12 states was presented back then, NATO in the 21st century has transformed into an unwieldy blustering, aggressive would-be giant now comprising 32 member states.

No longer does NATO simply seek to preserve the security and independence of a handful of countries across North America and Western Europe from an ideologically hostile Soviet bloc. Instead, it now projects aggressive military power directly and through its proxy regimes across Asia and Eastern Europe.

The alliance continues to arm Ukraine to the teeth and urge the highly undemocratic, irresponsible and repressive regime in Kyiv to continue conflict with Russia, in what Moscow now views as an existential struggle for survival.

Today, NATO supports the aggressive, irresponsible and entirely unjustifiable AUKUS trilateral security partnership of Australia, which has far too small a population base to indulge in such geopolitical adventurism; the United Kingdom, whose days of "Asian Empire" were dead and buried before NATO was even born; and the United States.

In reality, NATO was always a frightening thermonuclear gamble. In the 1961 Berlin Crisis and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, NATO put cities and countries in Western Europe directly into the crosshair of nuclear annihilation in the alarmingly dangerous stand-off between then US president John F. Kennedy and Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev that put the survival of the human race at risk.

Today, the situation is even worse. Far from even aspiring to be a limited European regional pillar of global stability and peace, NATO has transformed into a running-amok giant, careening out of control. It has supported devastating wars which have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, wrecking previously stable, peaceful countries such as Syria, Libya, Serbia and now Ukraine while indulging in insane and entirely unjustified fantasies of global power projection.

Far from increasing global and regional security as it endlessly, repetitively and obsessively claims, NATO, through its expansion in the 21st century, has greatly undermined those vital goals. In particular, under the reckless and blinkered leadership of current Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg from Norway, NATO has become arguably the main factor driving the US-led West's confrontation with Russia and risking the indescribable horror of a thermonu-



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clear world war.

This is no mere rhetoric. The danger is imminent and real.

In January, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists confirmed the setting of its Doomsday Clock at only 90 seconds to midnight: Midnight signifying the outbreak of a thermonuclear war.

Indeed, respected experts such as Edward Lozansky, president of the American University in Moscow and a friend and colleague of the late Andrei Sakharov, and US historian Peter Kuznick of the American University in Washington have publicly warned that the clock should in reality be reset to only 30 or even 10 seconds before midnight.

That's how great a risk is NATO's continued commitment to Ukraine in a conflict designed not for the good or national security of the Ukrainian people but just to bleed Russia dry of the lifeblood of its own soldiers.

It is likely that this awful conflict will lead to a direct clash of US and NATO troops with the Russian military, which could go nuclear.

NATO in reality is far weaker than the SCO in all direct military comparisons. Apart from the already weakened, debt-burdened and militarily wildly overstretched US, the only significant land military power NATO has is medium-sized Turkey. The SCO, in contrast, can boast of four major thermonuclear mili-

tary powers all of which have formidable land armies — China, Russia, India and Iran. Turkey itself, as I have noted, now appears happier associating with the SCO than with NATO.

NATO is even in a strategic and diplomatic shambles: The world has seen how its performance in dealing with internal member divisions and external intervention has undermined its cohesion and effectiveness and caused doubts on its legitimacy and morality in the international community.

A new generation of obsessive, micro-managing US diplomats led by former secretaries of state Hillary Clinton and the late Madeleine Albright and led most recently by just departed assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs Victoria Nuland continues to be fuscally obsessed with imposing their fantasies of human rights, democracy, free markets and even traffic regulations on the innumerable postage-stamp-sized fragments of the Balkans, while despising and insulting and seeking to destabilize the great global powers Russia and China. Such criminal stupidity and irresponsibility defy belief.

After 75 years, this is what NATO has sunk to. It has become a Frankenstein's monster — out of control and pulling the oblivious Western world into an unnecessary and easily avoidable global war that can only lead to the destruction of Western civilization.

NATO became toxic a long time ago. It needs to be wound up and the infection and madness it has spread cauterized right away. The future of humanity depends upon this.

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



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## GLOBAL VIEWS



HAN LUYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

WARWICK POWELL

## Currency converters

Weaponization of global payments systems and the dollar by the US in recent years has spurred an accelerated shift toward currency multipolarity

Currency multipolarity is gaining pace. The use of national currencies to settle cross-border payments — instead of relying on the US dollar — is an accelerating trend. China is leading the way in this. Recently, for the first time, the Chinese renminbi was used to settle more of China's trade than the US dollar. Over 52 percent of China's trade was settled with the renminbi; a little over 40 percent was settled with the US dollar. Thirty years ago, the renminbi was barely used, and over 80 percent of China's trade was settled in the US dollar.

A diminishing proportion of central bank reserves around the world is held in the US dollar — from around 80 percent 20 years ago to less than 60 percent today. This shift is marked not by the replacement of the US dollar by one particular currency, but by a process of diversification.

The real economy and institutional foundations for currency multipolarity have been unfolding for decades. One critical impetus has been the evolving contours of global trade flows and the development of China's economy. As China has evolved to become the largest trading partner of over 140 nations, the need to settle trade between countries with the US dollar has diminished. It is the developments in the real economy and the trade sector that have laid the foundations for the move to national currency-denominated trade settlements.

Institutionally, currency multipolarity is enabled by the progressive rollout of bank-to-bank bilateral local currency swap agreements. These agreements ensure the availability of liquidity to enable the settlement of accounts, and provide a cushion against temporary liquidity problems. The People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, has signed bilateral local currency swap agreements with the central banks and monetary authorities of more than 40 countries and regions, with the total size of about 4 trillion yuan (\$553.49 billion).

Additionally, alternative bank-to-bank messaging systems have emerged that bypass the US-dominated SWIFT interbank messaging platform. Both China and Russia have rolled out alter-

natives — the CIPS and SPSF respectively, which can support settlements outside of the SWIFT regime. As US scholars Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman recently showed in their book *Underground Empire: How America Weaponized the World Economy* (2023), the US government effectively abused the fact that SWIFT operated a database in Virginia to enforce sanctions on banks and countries it did not approve of.

The weaponization of global payments systems and the US dollar generally in recent years has only contributed to the acceleration of the shift toward currency multipolarity. Sanctions and the freezing or even the confiscation of US dollar-denominated assets have resulted in increased risks for those holding such assets. As US monetary policy pushed up interest rates, exposure to the rising US dollar-denominated debt repayment costs for developing countries has further compounded concerns.

How quickly can the move to national currency-based trade settlements take place? The short answer is quicker than one may initially expect. A case in point is Russia over the past two years. Now, almost all Russian trade is settled with a range of national currencies, without the euro or the US dollar. Over 95 percent of Russia's trade with China is settled in the renminbi or ruble.

Other institutions enabling currency multipolarity include commodity markets that enable trade in commodities in various national currencies. The Shanghai Petroleum and Natural Gas Exchange enables pricing and settlement in the renminbi. There is no compulsion anymore for global petroleum products to be priced and settled in the US dollar. Russian crude oil and gas trade isn't settled in the US dollar, effectively bringing to an end five decades of petrodollar domination.

China now runs two rare earth exchanges — the Baotou Rare Earth Products Exchange in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, which opened in 2014, and the Ganzhou Rare Metal Exchange in Jiangxi province, which was launched in 2019.

The digitization of currencies and supply chains can now be expected to round out the overall institutional and technical architecture for currency multipolarity. China is a global leader

in digital currencies. All major BRICS countries are also making rapid progress in the development, testing and implementation of their respective national digital currencies. By 2025-26, all the founding BRICS countries are expected to have digital currencies actively in use.

BRICS is now working on a cross-border payments system to enable streamlined and low-cost trade settlements among members using national currencies. The development of this system is likely to draw on the lessons learned from the blockchain-enabled cross-border interbank settlements platform, mBridge. The project was led by a consortium involving the People's Bank of China, the central banks of Thailand and the United Arab Emirates, the Monetary Authority of Hong Kong and the Bank of International Settlements. Saudi Arabia's central bank, previously one of its 29 observers, recently joined these ranks.

The BRICS New Development Bank is pressing ahead with plans to increase the amount of development finance it provides in national currencies. The target is to issue some 30 percent of its total financing in national currencies by 2025.

As for supply chain digitization, this is unfolding, as a combination of hardware and software, including a growing regime of applicable standards, take root. Supply chain digitization closes the loop, as it links the domain of digitized money with the activities and resources in the real economy. Just as the real economy gives impetus to currency multipolarity, so digitization of supply chains creates a seamless link between the circulation of money and the circulation of goods. Transactions time and costs can be expected to be dramatically reduced, leading to an ongoing process of transactions efficiency.

Currency multipolarity is part and parcel of an unfolding multipolar world. The technical foundations and institutions needed to accelerate this process are well and truly in place.

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REBECCA RAY AND WANG YAN

## Virtuous cycle

Debt relief must include all creditors and environmental concerns

Amid protracted debt restructuring negotiations, Zambia has found itself facing a historic drought, triggering a currency devaluation that has further complicated debt negotiations, showcasing the connection between financial stability and environmental sustainability.

Zambia is not alone in facing a financing crunch and the lack of an ability to mobilize investment for climate conservation — and the needs globally are massive. A G20 Independent Experts Group estimates that emerging market and developing countries other than China will need \$1 trillion in international investments annually to achieve the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement targets.

How can new capital for environmental investments be mobilized amid an emerging debt crisis? And how can China — itself a middle-income country — play a constructive role in supporting both financial stability and environmental sustainability?

Despite appearances, environmental and financial sustainability are goals that can be pursued jointly, and indeed, must be if the world is to regain financial stability and avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

There is a way forward, one that China has been forging. And the time has come for all creditor classes — including multilateral development banks and bondholders — to play their part as well.

Many low-income countries are in need of significant debt restructuring if they are to meet the SDGs and the Paris Agreement targets. The Sovereign Debt and Environment Profiles Database — a new interactive data project managed by the Boston University Global Development Policy Center — shows that among the countries most in need of debt relief, the largest creditor is the World Bank, which has not been active in debt restructuring since the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative of the 1990s. Bondholders are the second-largest creditor category and as the Zambia case shows, they benefit twice, through higher initial interest rates (which already take into account the probability of default), while offering little practical debt relief once the country has defaulted.

Thus, meaningful debt restructuring must include private and multilateral creditors, alongside bilateral creditors. Each creditor should have fair comparability of treatment, tak-

ing into account the different levels of concessionality in the initial finance. For example, China's finance is typically somewhat concessional, with an average grant component of 14 percent. Multilateral development bank finance is even more concessional, with an average grant component of 28 percent. However private creditors such as bondholders typically benefit from significantly higher interest rates, reflected in a negative grant component of -9 percent. Joint discussions on debt relief should reflect this difference, recognizing that private creditors have already benefited through higher interest rates.

Moreover, indebted countries will need more than a one-time debt restructuring to achieve shared climate and development goals. Indeed, developing countries need enough fiscal space to make the environmental investments necessary to cushion the impacts of extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent and destructive due to climate change, making future debt crises more likely.

For example, Zambia ranks among the top 30 percent of countries for climate vulnerability. This vulnerability is on display, as the worst drought in 40 years has necessitated increased food imports, leading to a record currency devaluation, making it even harder to access the dollars to repay existing loans. Zambia's path to debt sustainability must include investments in climate-resilient infrastructure and agriculture. These investments create assets, which then counter-balance government debt in public balance sheets.

One way to mobilize new capital for much-needed environmental investment is through debt swaps for sustainable development. The China International Development Cooperation Agency signed its first such swap with Egypt at the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing in October 2023, in conjunction with a memorandum of understanding concerning the Global Development Initiative.

However, debt swaps for development may not be the solution in every case. They are well-suited to countries facing a high cost of capital for necessary environmental investments, but countries facing current debt crises need faster and deeper options. For example, in 2021, Zhou Chengjun, director of the Financial Research Institute of the People's Bank of China, proposed a "Shanghai Model" for resolving debt, including a different type of debt swap: replacing nonperforming loans with guaranteed, renminbi-denominated bonds that once sold, can relieve creditor balance sheets. The Shanghai Model is compatible with the recommendation of a "New Common Framework" to extend and expand upon the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative. China played a major role in the initiative, contributing a greater share of debt

service suspensions than any other creditor.

Other options include China working with other sources of "patient capital", such as multilateral and institutional investors, to develop innovative financing for sustainable infrastructure. Asset management companies can oversee this type of process, allowing China's development finance institutions to focus on their core missions in the domestic and international economies.

Overall, China has been on a steep learning curve as a creditor, but it has shown a willingness to become more involved than ever in playing a constructive role in debt renegotiations.

In 2022, Zambia's debt to China amounted to 20 percent of its GDP — one of the highest levels of debt to China in the world. China has played a significant role in Zambia's debt relief, including co-chairing the creditor committee with France and by offering restructuring that was dramatic enough to lower the net present value of Zambia's debt — an ambitious and important step. China's leadership gave the Zambian government breathing room, helping to ensure that priorities like health and education can continue to receive attention while debt is repaid more gradually. Additionally, China has continued to build public infrastructure in other developing countries, so that liabilities can be counter-balanced with new public assets.

While Zambia's situation has taken a step toward resolution, the challenge is far from over, as dozens of countries still face the twin challenges of unsustainable debt levels and economic vulnerability to environmental disasters. However, ambitious steps, such as lowering the NPV of debt, a "Shanghai Model" of exchanging nonperforming debt for guaranteed bonds and equity/asset-based restructuring, offer opportunities for countries to regain financial stability while investing in environmental sustainability.

Now is the time for all creditors — including bondholders and multilateral development banks — to play their part. Together, creditors and developing nations can escape the vicious cycle of fragile economies and ecosystems and build instead a virtuous cycle based on resilience and sustainability.

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Rebecca Ray



Wang Yan



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

# CULTURAL HERITAGE

## Going back to the roots

Foundations of Chinese civilization come into greater focus as exhibition examines key themes, report **Li Yingxue** and **Wu Yong** in Shenyang.

A mong 86-year-old Guo Dashun's most vivid memories, which span decades of archaeological exploration, the one that shines brightest, despite first being glimpsed more than 40 years ago, happened at the Niuhehang Site in Chaoyang, Liaoning province.

"That was a moment etched in time, as the clay head of a goddess that we had just unearthed lay before us, gazing skyward with a smile that seemed to invite conversation," says Guo, an honorary director of Liaoning Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, and a leading scholar of Hongshan Culture studies.

"Her eyes, adorned with jade, gleamed with a mesmerizing intensity, and drew everyone closer. It was our first glimpse of the face of our ancestors from 5 millennia ago."

The sculpture is a life-size terracotta representation of a woman with distinctive facial traits: high cheekbones, shallow eye sockets, a low nose bridge, thin lips and eyes inset with sparkling, jade circular pieces. It was discovered at the Niuhehang Site, which has been identified as a late-stage primitive settlement of the Hongshan Culture. The culture, pivotal in Neolithic Chinese history, once flourished across modern-day Liaoning, Hebei province, and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

Presently, a replica of this captivating face is on display at the Shenyang Museum in the provincial capital, Shenyang. Alongside it are 265 artifacts, which take visitors on a journey into the beauty and enduring legacy of early Chinese civilization.

The exhibition, *The Light of Civilization: Hongshan, Liangzhu, and Chinese Civilization*, opened last month, elevates the Hongshan and Liangzhu cultures to equal importance, examining them within the grand narrative of the origins of Chinese civilization, according to Wang Chuang, the exhibition curator, and member of the Shenyang cultural heritage center.

About 1,500 kilometers from the core area of Hongshan Culture, the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City in Zhejiang province was a hub for a jade-worshipping and rice-cultivating regional civilization lasting from 5,300 to 4,300 years ago. It was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019.

"The exhibition focuses on three key themes: the height of civilization, Chinese characteristics, and cultural heritage," Wang says. "We hope visitors will see the interconnectedness of Chinese civilization and the enduring influence of both the Hongshan and Liangzhu cultures."

The first two sections of the exhibition explore the two cultures individually. The third draws comparisons between them.

"By comparing the two cultures in terms of production methods, large-scale architecture, social governance and ideological concepts, we aim to illustrate the foundations of Chinese civilization," he says.

Wang says that with one culture in the south and the other in the north, the distinct natural conditions and geographical environments of Liangzhu and Hongshan



The exhibition, *The Light of Civilization: Hongshan, Liangzhu, and Chinese Civilization* proves a popular attraction for many visitors to the Shenyang Museum in Liaoning province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



**Above:** Jade artifacts on show at the exhibition. **Left:** A jade cong from the Liangzhu Culture period. **Right:** A stone sculpture of a deity's face, dating back about 7,500 years, unearthed in Fuxin, Liaoning.

shaped their production methods and social structures. In the north, millet was grown, while the south focused on rice. The north practiced dry farming, and the south specialized in water-based agriculture.

"Architecturally, the north produced large ceremonial buildings,

while the south boasted the ancient city of Liangzhu. Their religious ideologies also differed, with the north leaning toward theocracy, and the south combining military and royal authority in a theocratic-political system," Wang says.

The first two sections of the exhibi-

tion highlight the differences between the two cultures, both in their developmental stages and paths taken. The final section brings them together, allowing visitors to see their commonalities and particular traits.

Viewed from a broader perspective, both cultures share similarities.

"They were built on advanced agriculture, supported by sophisticated handicrafts, and produced large sacrificial structures and high-grade noble tombs," Wang says.

Both cultures had advanced agricultural practices, and paid close attention to seasonal changes and climate. They adapted to their environments, using local resources wisely and living in harmony with nature.

Both also produced anthropomorphic artifacts, such as jade figures and deity-beast faces, emphasizing ancestor worship — a key value in Chinese civilization. This respect for ancestry reflects a deep-rooted spirit. Their jade artifacts were ceremonial, not weaponry, highlighting the importance of harmony, he adds.

"The two cultures both demonstrated organized social governance and a unified spiritual belief system," Wang says. "They also shared an aesthetic preference for squares and circles, which has had a lasting influence on Chinese architecture, currency and design."

"From Hongshan to Liangzhu, we see the sequential brilliance of Chinese culture across different regions, marking a developmental process of rising and flourishing cultures, even though they did not follow a direct lineage," Gan Chao, chief director of the documentary series, *China Before China*, said after attending the exhibition.

Wang explains that the exhibition focuses on a significant number of precious artifacts that date from the

Chahai Culture to the later periods of the Hongshan, Liangzhu and Songze cultures. Chahai Culture is a Neolithic period culture that originated at the West Liaohe River Basin in northern China 8,000 to 7,500 years ago.

"Notably, exquisite jade artifacts from Hongshan Culture sites like Niuhehang, Dongshangang, and Banlashan are prominently featured in this exhibition, providing visitors a visual feast," Wang says.

One of the highlights is a jade pendant of both a dragon and a phoenix. The top part features a horizontal dragon head, while below it, a phoenix with its beak curved toward the dragon completes the composition.

"This piece is significant as it marks the first archaeological discovery of a combined dragon-phoenix motif on a jade artifact unearthed from Niuhehang Site, making it the earliest and only known 'dragon-phoenix jade pendant' in the country," Wang says.

As early Chinese civilization evolved, intricate spiritual beliefs developed, with animals often venerated as totems. Among these, the reverence for dragons and phoenixes stands out as one of the earliest and most central, he adds.

"Dragons and phoenixes, symbols of beauty, fortune and prosperity in ancient Chinese mythology are also the shared spiritual icons and cultural symbols of China. The Liaohe River Basin, where this pendant originated, is recognized as one of the birthplaces of dragon and phoenix imagery and beliefs," Wang says.

The exhibition, which had been in planning since March, brings together artifacts from a range of sources, primarily from cultural and archaeological institutions in Liaoning and Zhejiang provinces. Following extensive coordination, 266 artifacts have been chosen for display.

"We've gathered objects from the storage room at our archaeology institute, including several that haven't been displayed before, like the stone bearings from the Chahai Culture," Wang says. "They mark a milestone in productivity, and provide tangible evidence of early mechanical technology."

Huang Li, deputy director of the Liangzhu Museum, emphasizes the importance of the exhibition. "It presents the latest research on Liangzhu and Hongshan cultures from a variety of perspectives, demonstrating the diversity of Chinese civilization and highlighting significant achievements," she adds.

In addition to the exquisite artifacts on display, the exhibition incorporates cutting-edge digital exhibits. For instance, it uses holographic projections to illustrate the concept of the symbiosis between heaven, earth and humanity for both cultures.

Spanning 1,200 square meters, Wang says the exhibition hall requires about half a day for a thorough exploration. There are also volunteer guides to provide detailed explanations to visitors.

"Understanding prehistoric artifacts isn't as straightforward as with later historical periods. That's why we emphasize the importance of comprehensive interpretation," he says.

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## Sanxingdui's mysteries enthrall Beijing museumgoers

By **WANG KAIHAO**  
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Scorching weather and its location far from downtown Beijing are not proving to be obstacles to people's enthusiasm for admiring the brilliance of ancient cultures.

Over the last two weekends, visi-



tors have had to stand in long lines for hours on end to enter the Capital Museum East Branch to see artifacts from remarkable Bronze Age civilizations that flourished over 3,000 years in present-day Sichuan province.

The widely anticipated exhibition, *Unveiling Sanxingdui and Jinsha of Ancient Shu Civilization*, which opened on June 27 and which will run through to Oct 10, has placed 265 artifacts on display and shows the efforts over the last century to decode a distant past.

The Sanxingdui site in Guanghan was discovered in the 1920s, but what really amazed the world was the milestone 1986 discovery of two pits, presumably used for sacrificial ceremonies. Exotic-looking bronze masks, statues and gold artifacts ushered people into a world full of romance and imagination. The Jinsha site, discovered in 2001 in the provincial capital of Chengdu, is famed for its exquisite bronze, jade, stone relics and numerous ivory tusks.

Thanks to the two sites, ancient Shu civilization was able to emerge from mythology and literature to yield its treasures and character.

"Through tireless exploration and the generational efforts of archaeolo-

gists, the image of ancient Shu civilization, represented by the Sanxingdui and Jinsha cultures, is becoming increasingly clear," says Gao Hongqing, curator of the exhibition.

Nevertheless, the open-ended explanations on the artifacts on display demonstrate that the ongoing exploration of ancient Shu civilization still has a way to go.

As the bronze masks, human figures with protruding eyes, bronze wheel, and gold scepter on display show, the groundbreaking 1986 discovery at Sanxingdui leaves many issues unanswered. A new round of excavations between 2020 and 2022, which revealed six more "sacrificial pits," raised even more questions.

Tang Fei, deputy director of the Sichuan Provincial Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute, says that about 60 of the exhibits in the ongoing display come from this new round of excavation, which led to the unearthing of more than 17,000 artifacts, including 4,800 that were mostly intact.

The bronze statue, depicting a man kneeling, twisting his body and clasping his hands together, was widely covered by the media after it was found in Sanxingdui in 2021,



**Above:** A visitor, wearing a souvenir mask, takes a photo beside the original Sanxingdui gold mask at the exhibition in Beijing. **Left:** A bronze statue dug from the Sanxingdui site in 2021 depicts a kneeling man twisting his body. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

but visitors to the exhibition in Beijing may still wonder what exotic ceremony he is involved in.

Another bronze statue, with the body of a dragon, head of a tiger, and a bird resting on the base, also arouses curiosity about its use.

"Visitors can develop their own explanations," Gao says. "They may even inspire our own studies, as well."

Yu Jian, deputy director of the Sanxingdui Museum, says the ongoing exhibition displays the new

mindset toward artifact restoration, as even damaged items can convey a great deal of information.

Despite their initially strange appearance, the Shu artifacts also demonstrate close links and frequent interaction with other regions in the rest of modern-day China, particularly in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, Gao says.

For example, a jade cong, a square tube with a circular bore, is typical

of both Sanxingdui and Jinsha, but can be traced back to the Liangzhu Culture, which existed 5,300 to 4,300 years ago in modern-day Zhejiang province, nearly 2,000 kilometers away. Some bronze vessels from the sites also feature elements typical of the central Shang Dynasty (16th century-11th century BC).

"They provide significant evidence for a profound understanding of the diverse and integrated origins and development of Chinese civilization," Gao says.

"Regarding Sanxingdui and Jinsha, what moves us so deeply is not only the beauty, awe and mystery of the objects, but also the people themselves and their rich expression of self through materials like bronze, gold and jade," he says. "This expression embodies the commonality of the era and the individuality of regional culture blending tradition with innovation."

The Beijing event is the third major exhibition of recently excavated artifacts from Sanxingdui outside its home, after exhibitions in Hong Kong and Shanghai. It also lifts the curtain on a series of exhibitions tracing early-stage Chinese civilizations at the Capital Museum.

## LIFE

## Popping the Electric Boogaloo

Street dance festival captures the past, present and possible future of the famous style

At the Street Funk Battle in Shanghai, the moment MC Liao Bo announced, "DJ Alone, drop the beat," Li Yue sprang into action. This two-day competition, held during the Dragon Boat Festival holiday on June 9 and 10, was a qualifier for dancers aiming to join the prestigious Electric Boogaloo Family and EB Kids.

When a DJ drops the beat at a street dance competition, the dancer's body responds instantly, captivating the audience with a freestyle performance.

The Electric Boogaloo, founded by Boogaloo Sam in 1977, are iconic in the popping dance style, having appeared on *Soul Train* and choreographed for Michael Jackson.

Their legacy continues globally through teaching and performances. Its principal members starred in the iconic dance film *Breakin'*.

They then began traveling overseas to teach in Japan, France, South Korea and China, leading to the rise of many world-renowned street dancers who then developed into the EB family, a group dedicated to carrying on the style and tradition.

Li, a 28-year-old dancer and dance teacher born and raised in Fuzhou, Fujian province, successfully joined the EB family as a result of an epic battle with the well-known Korean dancer Dokyun during the finals of SFB's open age group competition.

Dressed in black, the two young men displayed their command of EB style elements including the twist-o-flex, the master flex, the Old Man, the Puppet and the Scarecrow, as well as their own understanding of body language, music and space. Since a typical popping routine involves quick jumps and the popping of muscles, they demonstrate an extremely precise control of their muscles while dancing freestyle and react quickly to the melody and beat.

Popping dancer and SFB co-founder Hu Hongjun and his team are the organizers behind SFB, while Popin Pete, one of the founding members of the Electric Boogaloo, is a co-founder of the event, which includes a training camp, competitions and lectures.

"SFB emphasizes the passing on of traditions and creation. All dance cultures have historical and cultural roots, and the more cultural elements are absorbed, the greater potential value is gained for further development," Hu says.

Hu's enthusiasm touched his fellow teachers, dancers, students and friends. In addition to Hu, Japan's Tetsu-G, France's Nelson and South Korea's Popping J were slated to join their teacher Popin Pete and another dancer Shi Kuang, whose studio is based in Taipei, to judge the competition. Tetsu-G eventually wasn't able to make the trip, and US dancer Jr. Boogaloo took his place. US dancer Mr Wiggles designed the graffiti that decorated the trophy.

Some 200 dancers competed in the open age group, while more than 80 children participated in the youth group. The event attracted dancers and learners from China and abroad. In addition to competitors from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, some 20 participants from France, Japan and South Korea registered for the competition.

It is traditional in street dance competitions for seeded dancers to skip the preliminary rounds and start from the elimination round. However, all the battle guests at SFB, including 10 adult and 10 youth dancers, participated in the preliminary rounds along with the other contestants.

Sixteen-year-old youth battle guest Zou Ruixi, a high school student from Changsha, Hunan province, and his friend went to check out the stage.

The venue was a sports club in the basement level of a shopping mall in Shanghai's Jing'an district.



**Top:** Youth group contestants Xu Jianzhi (left) and Wu Zhijing (right) in the quarterfinals. **Middle:** A semifinal match of the open age group takes place between two Korean dancers, Dokyun and Eun.G. **Above left:** The audience cheers for the contestants. **Above right:** The final of the open age group is between Chinese dancer Li Yue (left) and Korean dancer Dokyun. Li won, becoming the newest member of the EB Family. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Zou said that by having to participate in the preliminary rounds, there were actually no privileges for battle guests and the format certainly added to the pressure. However, he thought that it made the competition fairer and more just. "Everyone starts from the same line, so nobody has a natural advantage over others just because of good results in previous competitions," he says. "Confidence is a must. A dancer with no confidence will lose at the starting line."

Zou's own confidence is based on his six-plus years of street dancing, which helped him qualify as an EB Kids member. After a two-day competition, seven teenage dancers were qualified to be EB Kids members.

A report on China's street dance sector commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and carried out by the School of Cultural Industries Management at the

Communication University of China and the China Hip-Hop Union Committee published in January 2023, shows that CHUC has connected nearly 3 million street dancers and almost 10,000 training institutions. Every year, street dance enthusiasts take more than 10 million lessons, and participate in over 200,000 street dance exams.

Zou and his new EB Kids fellows are among the learners and Li is one of the dancers at the exams. Li says that being qualified as an EB family member is a huge encouragement and he will work harder on teaching street dance. He feels that the openness of China's cultural environment will be an advantage for dancers and learners to progress.

Chen Mingtao, a street dance teacher with 22 years of teaching experience and a member of the dancers association of Jiangxi

province, believes that the event — especially the lecture by Popin Pete on the developing process of popping and EB style — will help street dance learners to "better understand dancing and the style, not just know what to do but why".

He also says that a deeper love and inspiration from life will help learners have a better understanding of dance.

During his lecture, Popin Pete recalled the day when he first heard about popping and Boogaloo. While popping reveals the character of the dance, meaning that the dancers' muscles jump and pop, Boogaloo, originally an African-American dance style, was developed by Boogaloo Sam as a way of doing body movements.

Popin Pete also showed how the founding members created movements such as the Old Man and the Scarecrow. The Old Man was devised by Boogaloo Sam after

SFB (Street Funk Battle) emphasizes the passing on of traditions and creation. All dance cultures have historical and cultural roots, and the more cultural elements are absorbed, the greater potential value is gained for further development."

**Hu Hongjun**, popping dancer and co-founder of the event

watching an old man walk, and the Scarecrow was inspired by the scarecrows in cartoons. "As you can see, much of the inspiration comes from real life," he says.

The lecture was conducted on the morning of the SFB finals, and that afternoon, Li Yue fired the audience up by quickly reacting to the beat and dancing the Scarecrow in a freestyle battle that showed his own understanding and use of the classic movements.

The event also attracted street dance enthusiasts from abroad. Masako Mochizuki and Yuka Mochizuki, a mother and a daughter from Japan who are both learners, traveled to Shanghai to attend the SFB after volunteering in Jinan, Shandong province to accompany young Japanese street dancers to the competition. Yuka Mochizuki says that she watched the 2023 Chinese street dance film *One and Only 26 times*.

After the event, Hu took a short trip to Zhengzhou, Henan province, to attend the opening ceremony of a new dance studio founded by his friend, popping dancer Shi Jiankai, but could not stop thinking about the further development of street dance.

In a post on his social media accounts, he pondered the characteristics of a new style of street dance, if one should be created.

"It will have roots, technical inheritance and cultural sedimentation; it will have independent technical concepts, features and systems," he wrote.

The new style will also be challenging and fresh, requiring open-minded thinking and appealing to audiences regardless of cultural boundaries or social classes.

"The creators need to have a clear mind and body, truly listening to, observing and feeling (the world of dance)," he wrote.

Xing Yu contributed to this story.

CHINA DAILY

## Tibetan team hoping for its 1st American football victory

LHASA — Every Monday evening, just before 7 pm, Kelsang Lhundrup begins to close up his coffee shop in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, even though the summer sun still has a couple of hours before it sets.

The 25-year-old isn't just a cafe owner; he's also a passionate member of Xizang's only amateur American football team, and for the past two years, Monday nights have been dedicated to practice.

The sport was both familiar and alien to the young man. During college, Kelsang Lhundrup discovered it through the movie *The Blind Side*. Michael Oher's story struck a chord with him, igniting a desire to play American football, even though he didn't have the chance at the time. "American football always seemed so cool and thrilling, but no one around me played, and there were hardly any games when I was in school," he recalls.

Upon graduating and returning to his hometown, he learned through a friend that there was an American football team in Lhasa. After watching a few practices, he couldn't resist joining. Despite their makeshift training grounds and challenging conditions, the team's passion for the sport was unshaken.



Kelsang Lhundrup, the 25-year-old owner of a coffee shop in Lhasa, is also a member of Xizang's only amateur American football team. XINHUA

In June 2023, Kelsang Lhundrup and his teammates traveled to Chengdu, Sichuan province, to compete in the China National Football League, one of the country's top amateur leagues for American football. It was their debut game and they faced a crushing defeat, losing 60-0. "It was our first game, and we realized the gap between us and the other teams. But our goal was to enjoy the game and learn from the experienced teams," he says.

Back in Lhasa, the team intensified training, driven by the loss. Three months later, they returned to Chengdu for another game, this time against the runner-up from the previous year.

Kelsang Lhundrup and his team held off fierce first-half attacks with solid defense. Although they lost again and Kelsang Lhundrup was seriously injured, the team knew they had made significant progress.

"American football was never just a sport. It was a way to prove ourselves to the world," Kelsang Lhundrup says.

As he recovered, his coffee shop became a place of solace. He has named it Huddle, inspired by the term in American football.

"I hope my coffeehouse will bring young people in Lhasa who have dreams and passions together to enjoy coffee and life," he explains.

The young Tibetan man finds peace in his coffeehouse and releases stress on the American football field. "It has changed me. I used to be quite introverted, but the sport has made me braver and more outgoing," Kelsang Lhundrup says.

Now, the only American football team in Xizang has grown, expanding from its seven initial members to 56.

Kelsang Lhundrup and his team are determined to aim for their first victory. "Our goal is to win the first game for Xizang's American football team and to spread American football culture to the young generation here," he says confidently.

XINHUA

# CULTURE

## Mandarin unites young speakers at competition

Shared love of nation's language and culture brings students together, **Zheng Wanyin** reports in London.

**S**tanding on the stage of the 23rd Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students in the United Kingdom, Daisy May Lord, one of the contestants, could not hold back her tears as her teacher said, "I am always proud of you", in front of hundreds of audience members.

While other participants patted her arms, trying to comfort the crying girl, waves of emotion swept over Lord. On stage, they are rivals, but off stage, they compliment each other's performances and outfits, giving the impression of close friends even though many of them are meeting for the first time in the competition.

Francesca Pala, a third-year Chinese studies student at the University of Leeds and this year's competition runner-up, said that a shared passion for China, Mandarin, and Chinese culture bonds everyone together.

"It was really obvious that we all love China, Chinese culture, and Mandarin. So, it was really nice to be in that environment where other people could feel the same way you feel," she said.

With the theme "One World, One Family", the 23rd edition of the event united around 120 candidates from different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, who are studying at 15 UK universities, for the preliminary selection process that began on April 1.

On June 6, eight finalists convened in London to compete.

Zhang Qian, senior manager of the marketing department at the Center for Language Education and Cooperation UK, the organization that has hosted the contest since 2010, has witnessed significant growth in the number of participants. Fourteen years ago, only five or six universities sent fewer than 70 students, she recalled.

The scale of the event amazed some early adopters of Mandarin. "This (competition) didn't exist when I was learning Chinese," said Frances Wood, a British sinologist and former head of Chinese collections at the British Library.

Even in the 1960s when she enrolled at Cambridge University to study Chinese, Wood recalled that the number of British universities offering Chinese language-related programs was so few that they could be counted on one hand.

Over the years, Zhang noted that alongside students studying Chinese subjects at universities, a group of enthusiasts has also emerged among contestants who, despite not majoring in Chinese, are learning the language out of personal interest.

To encourage their enthusiasm and ensure fair play, the contest has been divided into professional and non-professional categories since 2018, with a certain number of final spots reserved specifically for contestants in the non-professional category.

Yet, no matter how the competition innovates its format, it is always for serving Mandarin learners, Zhang highlighted. "And once at the venue, you can be consistently moved by the students, their families and friends recording videos to cheer them on, and their Chinese teachers assisting with the final coaching. This is the fervent

atmosphere you can truly feel firsthand."

### Pure passion

The journey into Mandarin learning for Chidima Daisy Anyakora, a freshman at the University of Manchester and this year's champion, literally began with a simple crush on a boy.

"It was in 2019. I walked into the gym and saw a Chinese boy on the treadmill. I fell for him the moment I saw him," she said. Even though the boy turned out to be just a fleeting crush, the willows planted by Anyakora unintentionally grew into a source of shade. It was this experience that sparked her love for Mandarin and Chinese culture.

On Chinese social media, Anyakora has grown into an influencer with more than 27,000 followers.

She writes as if Mandarin is her mother language. Many netizens have even suspected she might be a native Chinese pretending to be a foreigner, prompting her to post a video speaking directly to the camera to clarify herself.

Similarly, Pala did not know much about China at first.

"I've never learned Chinese in my whole life before. I have no links to China," she said. When she enrolled at Leeds, learning a new language that was different as well as difficult was her only motivation.

"But it proved to be the best choice of my life. I fell in love with China, Mandarin and Chinese culture from the first moment," she added.

While admitting that learning Chinese brings a lot of benefits in an ever more globalized and competitive society, Pala pointed out that she did not view the language as strictly functional.

"What drives me is the pure appreciation of the culture."

### Common path forward

To truly understand a country and its culture, one needs to master the language, both young women emphasized.

"Language can break stereotypes and open your mind," said Anyakora, referring to media narratives that are pushed about China.

Pala echoed the sentiment. "It is easy to have opinions about something, but it might just differ from your perspectives because that is all you have been seen throughout your lives."

Engaging with a language and culture in the Far East enriches one's appreciation for the diversity of the world, Pala added.

In complex times when mutual understanding is the only way forward, bilingual and multilingual speakers play crucial roles.

"I think the contest is helping to train the next generation of people who will be able to work together, and we need more of that," said Cameron Patterson, the European champion in the 2015 Chinese Bridge competition.

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Jiang Duo contributed to this story.

"It was really obvious that we all love China, Chinese culture, and Mandarin. So, it was really nice to be in that environment where other people could feel the same way you feel."

Francesca Pala, a third-year Chinese studies student at the University of Leeds



Above: Finalists of the 23rd Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students in the UK and the 4th Chinese Competition of Charitable Projects & Business Innovations for UK University Students pose for a group photo in London on June 6 with Zhang Jin, minister counselor for education at China's Embassy in the UK (fifth from the right). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY  
Left and right: Contestants wear Chinese traditional costumes to perform talent shows and showcase their various skills.