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# CHINA DAILY

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XI'S VISION | REFORM AND OPENING-UP

## Structural reforms key priority area

Measures seen as crucial to fostering new quality productive forces, development

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

Structural reforms to boost technological innovation and drive industrial upgrading will be among the key priorities of China's policymakers to foster new quality productive forces and promote high-quality development over the next few years, said economists and entrepreneurs.

They said the country will likely further deepen structural reforms and expand high-standard opening-up to revive confidence in its long-term economic trajectory, which will help tackle economic woes, foster new competitive edges and deal with pressures and headwinds from a more complicated external environment.

Their comments came as the market is eagerly awaiting clues about major economic strategies for the next few years from the ongoing third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which is being held in Beijing from Monday to Thursday.

President Xi Jinping shed light on the likely economic priorities as he chaired a symposium in May in Jinan, Shandong province, that was attended by representatives from businesses and academia.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, stressed the need to further deepen reform across the board, with efforts centering on

advancing Chinese modernization. He said that China should take resolute steps to remove the ideological and institutional barriers hindering the advancement of Chinese modernization, and double down on its efforts to resolve deep-seated institutional challenges and structural issues.

Jeremy Zook, lead analyst for China at Fitch Ratings, said the country will primarily focus on reemphasizing many of the policy themes that have already been laid out by the central authorities for the medium term.

"These are a sustained focus on developing new high-value-added industries through investment and domestic technological innovation and enhancing domestic supply chain resilience," Zook said.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said China will likely sustain the economic framework that has taken shape in recent years, prioritizing choke points in supply chain self-sufficiency and tech innovation.

Senior China researchers and analysts said they believe the metric of China's success will be total factor productivity with a highlighted focus on new quality productive forces and new technologies.

Joe Ngai, chairman of management consultancy McKinsey China, said that he believes innovation will remain the biggest driver boosting China's economic growth in the long term.

"Innovation and technology will have to drive the future. And for us, these are the new quality productive forces," he said.

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## Collective effort

Local residents clear the rubble of a house that was partially damaged by a landslide after heavy rainfall in Surkh Rod district of Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, eastern Afghanistan, on Monday. At least 40 people were killed and nearly 350 others were injured in the calamity, Taliban officials said on Tuesday. SHAFIULLAH KAKAR / AP See story, page 8

## Shenzhen to offer self-driving minibus rides

By FAN FEIFEI and WANG XU

The commercial application of self-driving technology is gaining momentum in China, with Shenzhen, a metropolis in Guangdong province, preparing to launch a fleet of 20 autonomous minibuses this year in Qianhai, a significant step that experts said will bolster the use of such vehicles for public transportation.

They said that China has taken the lead in the development and commercialization of self-driving technology, while calling for increased efforts to strengthen the construction of 5G-enabled intelligent transportation infrastructure and ensure the safety and stability of autonomous vehicles under complex scenarios.

Their comments came after Shenzhen Bus Group announced that four routes for self-driving minibuses will open to the public by the end of this month.

The routes, which will cover subway stations, shopping areas, residential compounds, central business districts, industrial parks, and cultural and tourism attractions, mark the first of their kind in Shenzhen operated by a public transportation company.

Online reservations can be made to experience self-driving minibuses free of charge during the trial phase, while the ticket fare will be 1 yuan (\$0.14) per person once formal operations begin.

The nine-seater minibuses are equipped with high-definition cameras and advanced lidar sensors, which allow them to identify with precision surrounding vehicles, pedestrians, traffic lights and changes in road conditions, according to the company.

In accordance with Shenzhen's regulations on the management of intelligent connected vehicles,

The ticket fare on the nine-seater minibuses, which are equipped with high-definition cameras and advanced lidar sensors, will be 1 yuan.

a safety supervisor will be present onboard each minibus and will take control of the vehicle in case of an emergency.

Shenzhen Bus Group is not the only company in China introducing self-driving technology to public transportation.

Jinan Public Transport Group in Shandong province is planning to roll out four autonomous minibuses, which will be tested on public roads in designated areas. After completing 240 hours, or 1,000 kilometers, of autonomous driving tests, these vehicles will be able to apply for self-driving demonstration application permits.

Lyu Jinghong, an intelligent mobility analyst at research agency BloombergNEF, said the operational routes of self-driving minibuses are fixed and simpler than those of robotaxis, and their design speed is also lower, which will decrease the probability of accidents and promote their large-scale commercial use in public transportation.

Continuous testing of autonomous vehicles on public roads, relaxing regulations and reducing manufacturing costs will help speed up the deployment of self-driving technology, which is crucial to achieving commercialization targets, Lyu added.

Chinese authorities have released a slew of supportive policies to facilitate commercial



A self-driving minibus makes a test run in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in July. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

trials of self-driving vehicles and build an intelligent transportation system.

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, together with four other government departments, selected 20 cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Shenzhen, as participants in a pilot program for the application of "vehicle-road-cloud integration".

The program aims to link intelligent vehicles with roadside perception and cloud-based control, paving the way for enhanced safety and efficiency in self-driving technology.

Beijing recently announced its plan to support the use of autonomous vehicles for urban public transportation including by electric bus operators and ride-hailing and car rental services.

Shanghai will start using autonomous vehicles for ride-hailing services on designated roads in its Pudong New Area as early as next week, offering free rides to local residents throughout the trial period. The city granted demonstration

application permits to four companies this month.

Zhang Xiang, an auto sector researcher at North China University of Technology, said the commercial operation of self-driving vehicles will promote the evolution of innovative technologies and help enterprises explore viable business models, thereby allowing autonomous technology to create more value.

More efforts are needed to accelerate the building of an intelligent transportation system, including the 5G-enabled vehicle-to-everything technology, which allows a vehicle to share real-time information with other vehicles, pedestrians and roadway infrastructure such as traffic lights to improve efficiency, Zhang added.

Global consulting agency McKinsey & Co has predicted that China will become the world's largest market for self-driving vehicles, with revenue from such vehicles and mobility services exceeding \$500 billion by 2030.

Contact the writers at fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

## China is ushering in a new era of innovation

Every day we read about some innovation or the other taking place in China.

Over the past couple of months, there have been reports of Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD unveiling a new car model that runs on plug-in hybrid technology and can travel continuously for over 2,000 kilometers without charging; diversified tech player Huawei announcing its Harmony operating system, and companies like UBTECH and SenseTime, as well as Huawei, introducing new versions of humanoid AI robots that boast way more capabilities than before.

Innovations are taking place at the State level too. The Chang'e 6 mission that landed on the far side of the moon made history. The China Sky Eye, a 500-meter-diameter radio telescope, has discovered more than 900 new pulsars, and the artificial sun Huanliu-3 (HL-3) tokamak discovered an advanced magnetic field structure for the first time in the world. Development of the magnetic levitation train technology that can travel up to 620 kilometers per hour is now in the pilot test phase. The central bank's digital currency, e-CNY, is expanding its pilot testing, paving the way for fintech to be more broadly applied across China and in cross-border transactions.

In 2023, China authorized 921,000 invention patents, a year-on-year increase of 15.3 percent. The 2023 Global Innovation Index

### WORLD WATCH

By Edward Tse

Report released by the World Intellectual Property Organization shows that China has 24 of the world's top 100 technology clusters. The Economist now calls China a "scientific superpower".

Once, people would say because China doesn't follow the Western-style political system, it can't be innovative. However, when my book *China's Disruptors* came out in 2015, many readers were surprised to learn that the Chinese had begun to demonstrate that they could be, and have been, innovative. For me, that book was probably already five years too late because well before that, I had begun to see signs of, or at least intentions of, innovations by the Chinese. I saw something about the Chinese and their potential ability and inclination to innovate. I was trying to understand when and why innovation would manifest in China, as well as what and how.

In the book, many of the cases were about companies engaged in wireless internet. They would leverage that as a platform to generate new business models that addressed pain points in the society at that time. Many successful companies evolved as a result.

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## ENGINEERING MARVEL TO BRIDGE WEALTH GAP IN PEARL RIVER DELTA

Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link further connects Greater Bay Area cities, boosts region's growth, global competitiveness

By LUO WANGSHU luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

The Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link is expected to even out economic disparity in the Pearl River Delta, boost the region's global competitiveness and make commuters' lives much easier, experts said.

The long-awaited 24-kilometer link, built with an estimated cost of 44.69 billion yuan (\$6.38 bil-



lion), opened to traffic on June 30 after seven years of construction, establishing a vital transportation connection across the Pearl River region.

The infrastructure marvel, which features two bridges, two artificial islands and an undersea

tunnel, triumphed over numerous technical challenges during its construction and set multiple engineering records.

The eight-lane expressway, which is designed for a traffic speed of 100 km per hour, starts at Shenzhen airport interchange and crosses the Pearl River estuary to connect with Ma'an Island in Zhongshan.

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**INSIDE**  
Azerbaijan seeks to attract investment in renewable tech  
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# PAGE TWO



Vehicles travel in the undersea tunnel of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link in Guangdong province. CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

From page 1

It joins the city clusters of Shenzhen, Dongguan and Huizhou in the eastern part of the Pearl River Delta to the cities of Zhuhai, Foshan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen and Zhaoqing in the western part, strengthening connectivity of people, businesses, manufacturing and infrastructure in the Greater Bay Area.

### Balancing growth

The link shortens the travel times between the cities, and has significantly altered the regional landscape, said Wei Jianzhang, vice-president of the Belt and Road Initiative's International Cooperation and Development Research Institute in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"It accelerates the region's development by facilitating economic coordination, efficient transportation, cultural exchanges, and social integration. This infrastructure serves as a bridge transforming the Greater Bay Area's global competitiveness," he said.

The project also greatly benefits several cities on the western bank of the Pearl River and will help promote co-construction of industrial and innovation systems, Wei said.

"In terms of residents, both sides can enjoy high-quality living standards. Shenzhen residents can purchase more comfortable housing in Zhongshan at lower prices, while Zhongshan residents can easily access cultural activities in Shenzhen, such as top class performances," he said.

Liu Daizong, the East Asia director at the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy based in Beijing, sees the link as a catalyst to promote regional integration and growth, and eventually, coordinated development of the GBA.

"Enhancing transportation connectivity is the first step toward promoting regional integration," he said.

Liu divides the GBA into three areas: Zhongshan, Zhuhai, and Macao on the western bank of the Pearl River; Hong Kong and Shenzhen on the eastern bank; and Guangzhou on the northern bank.

The link provides excellent development opportunities for the economically less-developed cities on the western bank, allowing them to engage in direct business with Shenzhen and other cities, he said.

"This infrastructure opens up possibilities for strategic interactions among the three regions, which represents a form of benign competition. Overall, it will promote the coordinated development of the Greater Bay Area," he said.

Wei said the development of the region relies on various elements such as labor, capital, technology, information, data, and land. Cities on the western bank can benefit from these key elements being combined in new ways to boost efficiency and output.

This will improve wages, profitability, and returns, and ultimately drive economic growth and improve the region's global competitiveness, Wei said.

"The link not only accelerates the flow of these elements and opportunities, but also fosters economic coordination, efficient transportation, cultural exchanges, and social integration in the region," he said.

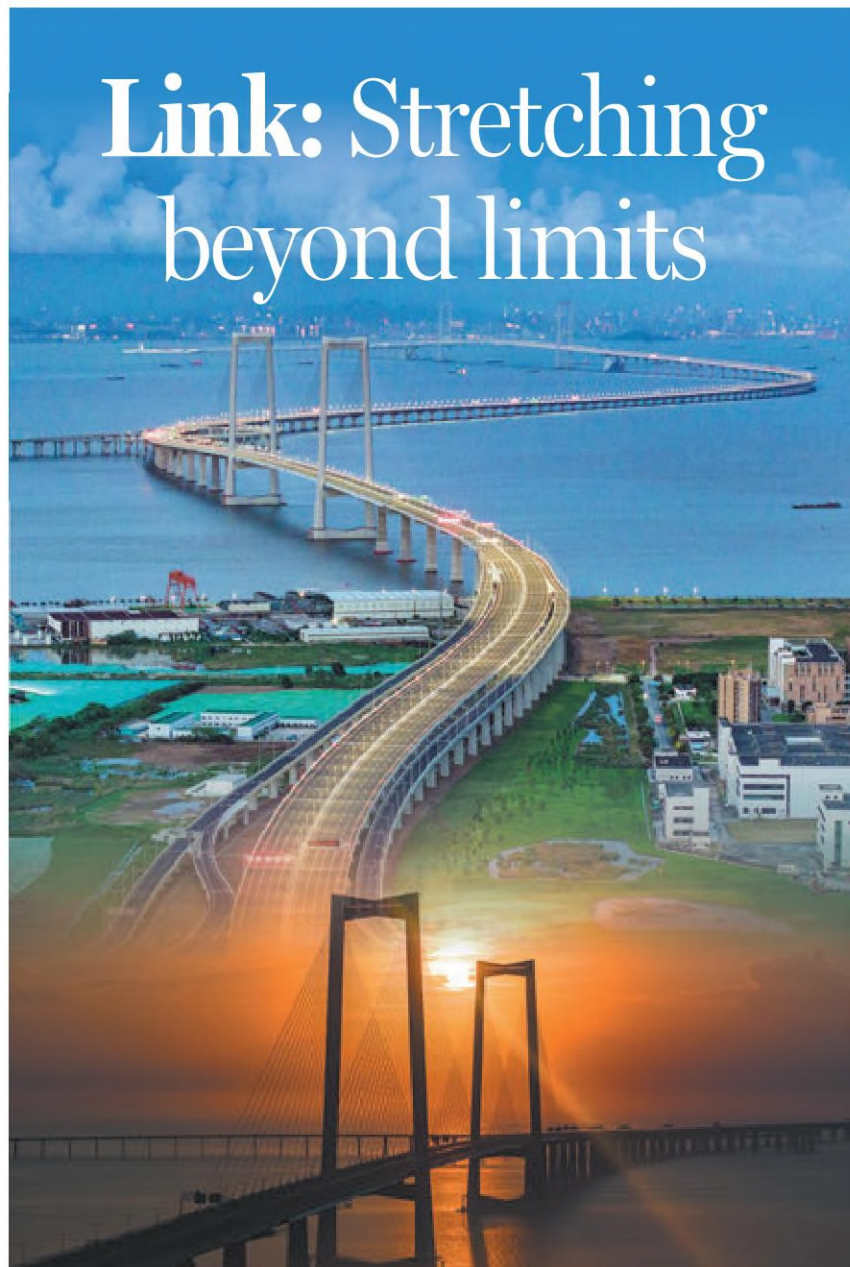
### Benefiting people

The link, which reduces average travel time between Shenzhen and Zhongshan from approximately 2 hours to just 30 minutes, commenced trial operations at 3 pm on June 30.

On its opening day, motorists flocked to try the link, resulting in traffic jams. Within the first 24 hours of operation, 125,000 vehicle trips were recorded.

The new infrastructure project quickly became a trending topic on social media platforms, with photos of drivers breaking traffic rules to capture sunset views from the bridge, which went viral.

Residents on both sides have eagerly embraced the link, anticipating the improved connectivity



The Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link in Guangdong province.

PHOTOS BY MAO SIQIAN / XINHUA AND SHI LEI / NANFANG DAILY

# Link: Stretching beyond limits

and economic opportunities it will bring. Shenzhen resident Huang Mu said her friends and relatives have been talking for a long time about the new transportation passage and its potential benefits.

The 40-year-old has a cousin who lives in Zhongshan. Before the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link opened, motorists had to make a detour via the Humen Bridge to travel between Zhongshan and Shenzhen.

"Me and my cousin mean to see each other more often, but the traffic is pretty challenging, especially during the holidays," she said, referring to the notorious traffic congestion on the Humen Bridge, which opened in 1997.

"We local people always say it is better to have three spare hours to cross the (Humen) bridge during the holidays."

Huang plans to drive with her son to Zhongshan via the new link to visit her cousin during the summer vacation.

Many people working in Shenzhen, including one of her colleagues, have bought an apartment in Zhongshan because of the lower property prices, Huang said.

"As soon as the new link opened, my colleague began considering commuting between Zhongshan and Shenzhen every day, instead of staying in a rented apartment in Shenzhen during weekdays," she said.

Zhongshan resident Ye Qifan, 27, said his friends were also excited about the link opening. He said that the bus commute between the cities is convenient and affordable.

"It's great news for us. I think I will travel to Shenzhen and Hong Kong more often," he said.

### Multiple access

In addition to the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, three other transportation passages cross the Pearl River Estuary, linking the region's eastern and western sides. The Humen Bridge and Nansha Bridge both connect Guangzhou and Dongguan, and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge connects the three cities.

Situated 30 km south of the Humen Bridge and 31 km north of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link is strategically positioned to significantly alleviate traffic congestion and facilitate the movement of people and goods across the Pearl River.

The densely populated Greater Bay Area, with over 86 million people, needs a more developed transportation network, and local government is making plans to build more transportation links to better connect the region, said Li Hui, an assistant professor at the School of Media and Communication at Shenzhen University.

The transportation cluster will play a significant role in propelling the development of the region, fostering mutual growth among cities, and creating a win-win situation for everyone involved, he said.

"With the opening of the new link, it is poised to not only benefit Zhongshan, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, but also establish a more robust transportation network that connects major metropolitan areas with medium-



Vehicles line up at the Cuihengdong toll station in Zhongshan to enter the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link on June 30. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

sized and smaller cities in the region, fostering shared development," he said.

Cities on the Pearl River's western bank can accommodate Shenzhen's industrial shift, leading to mutual growth, Li said.

### Engineering challenges

The Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link has been recognized by the global engineering community as the second "disappearing bridge" built by China, following the opening of the 55-km Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge in October 2018.

The new link is one of the most challenging cross-sea cluster projects to have been built, and has set multiple construction records in areas such as suspension bridge engineering, tunnel construction and underwater highway interchanges.

The link has garnered global recognition for its innovation and quality, and stands as a testament to China's engineering excellence and commitment to pushing boundaries, according to experts.

In May, the International Tunneling and Underground Space Association awarded the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link the title of "One of the 50 Iconic Projects in the Global Tunnel and Underground Engineering Sector".

In June, the project was honored with the George Richardson Award at the International Bridge Conference, receiving high praise from international peers for its engineering innovation and quality. The IBC is recognized as the preeminent arena of the global bridge construction industry.

The undersea tunnel represents a significant engineering feat, and was one of the most formidable challenges of the project. As the world's longest and widest underwater steel shell-concrete immersed tube tunnel, it features a tube section spanning 5,035 meters.

Ning Jinjin, a senior engineer from the First Harbour Engineering Company of China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), said innovation was key to solving problems encountered in such a monumental project.

Ning was responsible for the intricate task of submerging the tube underwater, and emphasized the importance of identifying and resolving issues in a systematic manner.

"For engineers, the challenges encountered in projects are fundamentally straightforward — it's about progressing through the process of identifying and resolving issues, a simple cyclical approach," he said.

To overcome logistical hurdles, engineers built a vessel equipped with an automated navigation system to transport the tube from the manufacturing base, situated roughly 50 km from the construction site.

To expedite the tube's movement through the primary navigation channel of the Pearl River, engineers sought ways to control the vessel's speed.

"Solving practical problems lies at the heart of our work," said Ning, who drew on his involvement in the construction of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's undersea tunnel for the latest project.

Suo Xuhong, another senior engineer from the engineering company, said he is proud of the team's utilization of the Beidou Navigation System for precise placement of the undersea tube, which highlighted the accuracy and reliability of the China-developed system.

In addition to the remarkable undersea tunnel, a series of groundbreaking achievements were realized in bridge construction.

The Shenzhen Bridge has set several world records, including boasting the longest span for an offshore steel box girder suspension bridge at 1,666 meters, and achieving the highest navigational clearance of 76.5 meters.

Qiu Quanlin in Guangzhou and Liu Kun in Wuhan contributed to this story.



Vehicles are seen entering and exiting the immersed tunnel on the west artificial island of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link. ZHONG ZHIHUI / NANFANG DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## China's shipbuilding sector to retain global top spot this year

By ZHONG NAN  
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China's shipbuilding industry will retain the global top spot this year by capitalizing on robust industrial chain capabilities and prioritizing advancements in intelligent and green technical solutions, analysts and shipbuilders said on Tuesday.

Despite the United States launching a Section 301 investigation into China's shipbuilding business earlier this year, they said the growth momentum of Chinese shipyards will remain competitive and support China's exports in the second half.

This is because their strength stems from a combination of factors that cannot be constrained merely by tariffs or other trade remedy measures.

Chinese shipyards saw new orders surge 43.9 percent year-on-year to 54.22 million deadweight tons in the first half of the year, accounting for 74.7 percent of the global total, according to data released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the country's shipbuilding output has reached 25.02 million deadweight tons, up 18.4 percent on a yearly basis, making up 55 percent of the world's total.

Among the world's 18 major ship types, such as bulk ships and oil tankers, China ranked first globally in new orders for 14 of them during the January-June period, statistics from the Beijing-based China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry showed.

The growth highlights the resilience and adaptability of Chinese manufacturers in the face of external challenges. It also reflects the insufficient global high-tech shipbuilding capacity resulting from structural changes on the demand side, said Li Yanqing, CANSI's secretary-general.

The global shipping market has witnessed a significant increase in demand for fleet renewal. The rise in shipping costs due to various economic and political factors worldwide has also led to a notable increase in new shipbuilding orders, said Peng Bo, a researcher specializing in foreign trade at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

Han Jianfeng, president of the China unit of Wärtsilä Corp, a Finnish ship engine manufacturer, said the current demand for orders is mainly concentrated in large vessels with advanced technical requirements, but there is a severe shortage

**54.22 million deadweight tons**

worth of new orders were received by Chinese shipyards in the first half of the year, accounting for 74.7 percent

of global production capacity for high-end vessels like mega dual-fuel-powered container ships and liquefied natural gas carriers.

China is among the few countries that possess the advanced technology and large-scale shipbuilding capabilities required for both. The country's well-developed industrial chains provide its shipbuilding companies with a competitive edge in cost control and production efficiency.

China's ship exports amounted to \$20.67 billion between January and June, soaring 85.2 percent year-on-year, according to CANSI data.

On a monthly basis, the average monthly export value was \$3.4 billion, with a year-on-year growth rate consistently above 30 percent. This growth rate ranked first among the key electromechanical product exports from China during that period.

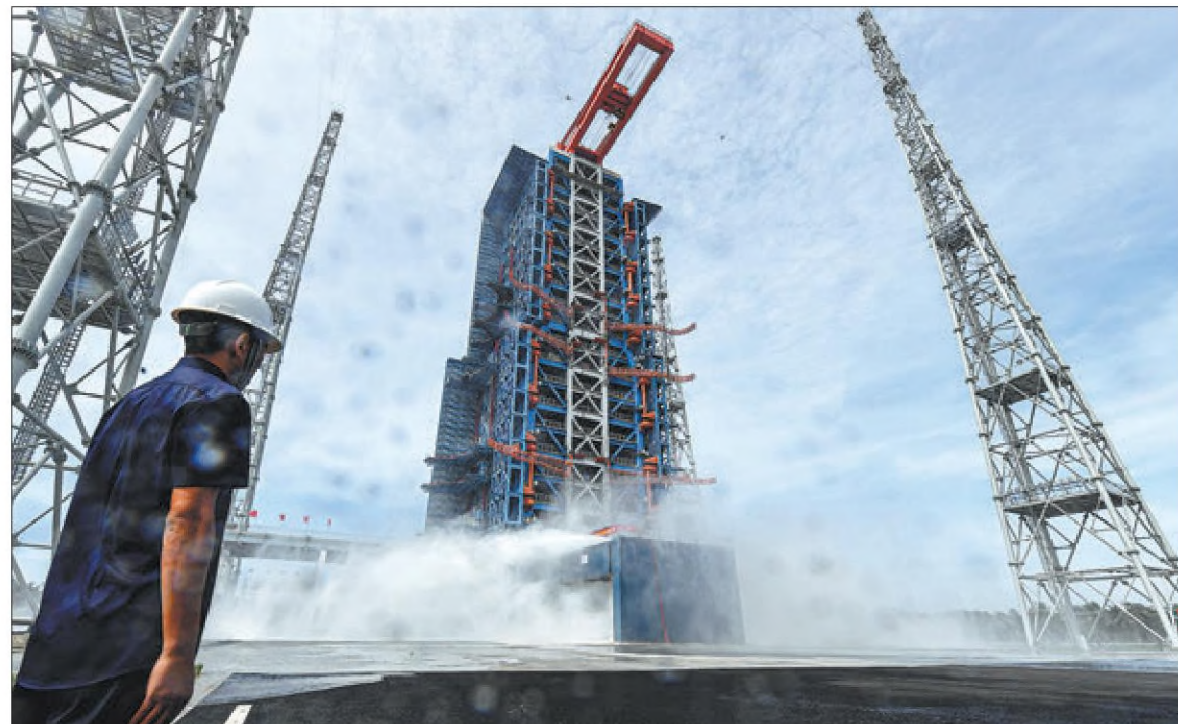
Chinese shipyards, including Liaoning province-based Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co and Shanghai-based Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co, have already upgraded their production capacity to accommodate high-tech vessel types, aligning with evolving market demands.

For instance, Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co has stepped up research and development for ultra-large as well as medium and small cruise ships, after delivering China's first domestically built large cruise ship to its owner last year.

Zhou Jingli, vice-president of Taizhou Sanfu Ship Engineering Co, a Taizhou, Jiangsu province-based shipyard, said the company currently has 45 orders in its backlog, with production planned through 2027.

"We have increased our investment in technological innovation to develop high-value-added ships equipped with advanced methanol and LNG dual-fuel power systems, while maintaining our advantage in building multipurpose heavy lift vessels," said Zhou.

Dual-fuel-powered container vessels can significantly reduce carbon, nitrogen oxide and sulfur emissions compared to traditional fuel-powered container ships, he added.



A staff member oversees a system test at China's first commercial space launch site, located on the island province of Hainan, on June 30.

PUXIAOXU / XINHUA

## Commercial space launch site gears up

China's first such endeavor scheduled for debut in autumn; two towers are completed

By ZHAO LEI  
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China's first launch complex dedicated to servicing commercial space operations is scheduled to carry out its debut mission in the coming autumn, according to its top manager.

Yang Tianliang, chairman of the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center in Wenchang, Hainan province, told China Daily in an exclusive interview on Tuesday that if everything goes according to plan, the center's debut launch will take place around September or October.

"This is because we need time to carry out all-system rehearsals to prepare our staff for the first launch and spot possible problems. So far, most of the rehearsal tasks have been

accomplished. We will make some small changes to related procedures based on the results of the rehearsals," he said.

Construction of the second of the first two launch towers was completed in early June. Construction of the first tower was finished in late December.

In the coming weeks, workers at the complex will conduct rehearsals with a real carrier rocket, which will be used for the debut flight, after it is transported to the center, according to Yang.

He did not reveal the type of the rocket to be used in the coming mission, but sources from the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp and one of the country's two major rocket

makers, have said that the rocket will be a Long March 12, and the mission will also mark the model's first flight.

According to designers, the Long March 12 is the latest model in the Long March family and the first Chinese rocket with a diameter of 3.8 meters — wider than the 3.35-meter diameter of most Chinese rockets. It has two stages, with a combined height of more than 60 meters.

Propelled by six engines fueled by liquid oxygen and kerosene, the rocket will be capable of transporting spacecraft with a combined weight of at least 10 metric tons to a low-Earth orbit, or six tons of satellites to a typical sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 700 kilometers.

Yang said that whether other launch missions will be carried out before the end of this year will depend on restoration work after the first launch. "In 2025, we plan to conduct the first launch of any privately built rocket at our center. We

will also strive to make our facilities ready for more missions that will come next year," he said.

Yang's center is a joint venture of the Hainan provincial government and three State-owned space conglomerates — China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp and China Satellite Network Group.

Construction, which began in July 2022, was undertaken by China Aerospace Construction Group.

The No 1 launch tower is specifically tasked with servicing Long March 8 carrier rockets. The No 2 tower is capable of servicing more than 10 types of liquid-propellant carrier rockets, including those in the Long March family and models developed by private companies.

When put into operation, the complex will become the fifth ground-based launch complex in China and the first dedicated to facilitating commercial space missions.

The other launch complex in Hainan, the Wenchang Space Launch Center, is administered by the central government and primarily tasked with serving State programs. There are three more such centers in China, located in Jiuquan in Gansu province, Taiyuan in Shanxi province and Xichang in Sichuan province.

## Tech: Focus is now on achieving full self reliance

From page 1

As the wireless internet began to run out of steam, the Chinese shifted gears to "hard tech" innovations. Despite the fact that the United States imposed sanctions on China in many areas on the tech front, China has seen the rapid development of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics and automation, as well as blockchain technology.

Along the way, China has changed the focus of its innovation from the internet-based platform economy, which is driven by the wireless internet, to a digital economy as defined by hard tech and digital technology.

China has now become the world's leading producer of electric vehicles and battery tech. China has also become a leader in the manufacturing of solar panels and wind turbines, as well

as in shipbuilding. It has also taken a leadership position in robotics and automation.

Because of the US sanctions on semiconductor chips, the Chinese have been focusing on this sector with the aim of achieving self-reliance and breakthrough in high-end chips. The central government has provided lots of support for this sector. China recently launched its largest-ever semiconductor fund, investing 344 billion yuan (\$48 billion) to boost its domestic industry.

Unlike the wireless internet era in which most of the innovations were about business models, the innovations in the current era often include real technology breakthroughs and their applications. While fundraising for internet-based business model innovations could often be achieved by storytelling, that for the current stage of tech-driven innovations needs much

more solid evidence of whether the innovations could actually work.

It's a different world. The new requirements have not deterred people or organizations from trying to make it. Unicorns in the generative AI space in China are popping up. Start-ups such as Moonshot AI, MiniMax, and Baichuan AI have grown into unicorns, becoming role models for others to come. After several years of downturns, venture capital companies have become active again in China, looking for good deals in the new areas of innovation.

Private sector entrepreneurs are emerging again in large numbers, many of whom are pretty young, and they are trying to capture a piece of the action. Some entrepreneurs are teaming up with State-owned companies and/or local governments in pursuit of new ideas.

So while the internet space

seems to have run its course and the EV sector has become overly crowded and hypercompetitive, new lanes such as AI, robotics and automation, intelligent manufacturing and low-altitude aviation are close to, or right at, their upward inflection points. More innovation and entrepreneurship will come from these sectors. And I think that's the essence of what the Chinese are calling "new quality productive forces", or simply technological innovation. That's the key to China's high-quality growth. I expect this will continue to manifest itself not only within China but also beyond its borders into other countries, especially those in the Global South.

The author is founder and CEO of Gao Feng Advisory Company, a strategy and management consulting firm with roots in China. The views do not reflect those of China Daily.



A large vessel is seen under construction at a shipbuilding yard in the Jiangdu district of Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. As the shipbuilding industry has grown, various types of ships, including new energy vessels, are now being manufactured in the area. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Reforms: Building of a more unified national market urged

From page 1

In an article published in early June in Qishi Journal, the flagship magazine of the CPC Central Committee, Xi said the relations of production must be adapted to the requirements for developing productive forces, adding that new quality productive forces are providing powerful impetus and support for high-quality development.

He said that China needs to further reform the economic structure and scientific and technological systems to remove the bottlenecks

impeding the development of new quality productive forces. And it also should expand high-standard opening-up and work to create a favorable international environment, he said.

Sun Xuegong, director-general of the department of policy study and consultation at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said, "We need to reform the scientific and technological system, education systems and talent systems to develop new quality productive forces and drive innovation."

Sun said he expects to see the accelerated building of a modern industrial system and a more enabling environment to foster leading companies featuring high technology, high efficiency and high quality, in a bid to boost advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth modes and productivity development paths.

Tian Xuan, associate dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, highlighted the need to address the pressing issues of hidden restrictions on market entry,

regional protectionism and market segmentation, saying that more steps are needed to speed up the building of a more unified national market, promote the free flow of production factors such as talent, capital and data and provide a more level playing field for domestic and foreign companies alike.

"Such a series of institutional arrangements will help drive scientific and technological innovation, and leverage China's strength as a large economy with an ultra-large domestic market and a complete

industrial system."

Zhu Guangyao, former vice-minister of finance, said that China needs to deepen reform and opening-up to promote innovation and facilitate the development of its private sector, to further unleash growth potential in new energy and artificial intelligence industries, leveraging its existing advantages. "The country should provide more support to the private sector and deepen reform that encourages sci-tech research and industrial applications," Zhu said.

Anu Rathinde, president of

Johnson Controls Asia-Pacific, hailed China's ongoing efforts to deepen reform and expand opening-up, saying that "as China's economy grows, the foreign enterprises grow and benefit equally."

He said that as long as the government is committed to supporting enterprises in innovation and upgrading through reforms and creating an environment where foreign and local companies can compete on a fair and equal footing, it will generate increasing growth opportunities for stakeholders both domestically and internationally, thereby boosting China's long-term development.

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## CHINA

## Welcome letter



Retired professors, alumni and teachers of Shaanxi Normal University write admission letters with Chinese calligraphy brushes to the university's freshmen in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Monday. They will write 5,200 letters this year. Handwriting admission letters has been a tradition for 18 years at the university. This year, the oldest participant was 91 years old. RUAN BANHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Behind China's growing appeal to intl travelers

CHANGSHA/SHANGHAI — Jin Yeong-deg, a 72-year-old man from the Republic of Korea, opened his Korean payment app Kakao Pay and showed the QR code to the cashier. Within seconds, the scan was complete, and he successfully purchased his items.

That would be a very ordinary transaction in the Korean cities of Seoul or Busan, but it actually took place in Zhangjiajie, a tourist city in China's Hunan province.

"Traveling in Zhangjiajie is very convenient," Jin said. "I didn't expect to be able to use mobile payments here just like a local."

It was Jin's second visit to the breathtaking landscape of Zhangjiajie — home to the real prototype of the floating mountains in *Avatar* — and he saw significant changes since his first trip in 2004.

According to the Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024 of the World Economic Forum, China ranks eighth among the top 10 countries for travel and tourism.

## Travel made easy

According to a recent survey conducted by Beijing Foreign Studies University, among 714 foreign tourists from 103 countries, 86 percent of those who have visited China said the payment experience has become more convenient. The vast majority used mobile payment methods.

By the end of last year, China's mobile payment penetration rate had reached 86 percent, the highest in the world. Foreigners can now easily bind their overseas bank cards with Alipay or WeChat Pay, China's two major payment apps.

In the first half of this year, foreign card transactions using mobile payment platforms surged 6.65 times from the previous year to nearly 37.4 million, according to

data from Chinese online payment clearing house NetsUnion Clearing Corporation.

The apps also enable convenient transportation for foreign tourists.

Spanish couple Miguel and Irena Rodriguez Jimenez used Alipay to take the subway in Shanghai and book ride-hailing services.

"Some warmhearted locals helped us download the app and register," Irena said. "It was a bit complicated at first, but now we can use it adeptly."

## Gate opening wider

China is welcoming more tourists with new visa policies.

On Monday, China expanded its 144-hour visa-free transit policy to 37 entry ports. Foreign nationals from 54 countries, including the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, are eligible for the policy for short-term travel and business visits.

The country is also piloting visa-free travel for ordinary passport holders from more than a dozen countries, including France, Spain, Australia and Poland, allowing them to enter China visa-free for up to 15 days for business, tourism, visiting relatives and friends, and transit.

Data from the National Immigration Administration showed that the number of foreigners visiting China in the first half of this year exceeded 14.6 million, two and a half times more than the same period last year. Of these, more than 8.5 million, or 52 percent, entered visa-free, a 190 percent increase year-on-year.

Eva Gajewska is the manager of a travel agency in Warsaw, Poland. Since the visa-free policy started, she has received lots of phone calls asking about tours to China.

"In the past, a visitor usually

spent about \$100 for the visa to China, and had to wait for seven days," she said, hailing the new policy as a "long-awaited" move. The company is now designing new routes to offer its clients more choices for their China trips.

Edward Iglesias, a 61-year-old Australian tourist, embarked on a 17-day tour of China, starting from Kashgar in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Having applied for his visa before the policy change, he felt the new policy would definitely make things easier for travelers.

With simplified entry procedures, Iglesias plans to recommend China as a tourist destination to his friends, praising its "nice people and beautiful scenery". He expressed a desire to return when the weather is cooler, "maybe in autumn or spring".

## Seeing is believing

Many visitors have changed their perspective on China after their visits to the country.

Colombian tourist German Raigosa was visiting China with his family for the first time. "It's surprising to see the public transportation, and how clean the cities are compared to other cities like New York," the 71-year-old said.

"I didn't know that Chinese people are so nice," added his 29-year-old daughter, Susana. "I was surprised at how little I knew about these cities."

Arnr Herrmann from New Zealand returned to Shanghai 28 years after his first visit. "Back then, I only remember seeing the Oriental Pearl Radio and TV Tower as the landmark," said the leader of a 60-student group. This time, he marveled at China's development and the juxtaposition of both historical and modern

buildings in the metropolis.

"We are impressed by the cleanliness of all the places," said Samuel Juara from Mexico via WeChat, which he downloaded for his trip to China. "The respect from all the people and their willingness to help, the number of electric cars and beautiful buildings, the electronic advances and communicating measures ... are very impressive."

New measures are being implemented across China to better serve international travelers in tourist cities. For instance, the Bank of China's Zhangjiajie branch has upgraded the airport's self-service currency exchange machines. These machines now accept over 20 currencies, including Australian dollars, up from six previously.

Chinese customs authorities have made declarations easier for foreign passengers by using mobile phone apps. "Foreign tourists can now complete their arrival process and pass through customs in just 30 minutes," said Liu Jinbo, director of Zhangjiajie Customs. He added that the average clearance time for inbound passengers is expected to drop to under 10 minutes by the end of September.

"You will know how beautiful China is only after you visit the country," said Shin Young-yun, a team leader with Korean travel agency Modetour.

"China is a very safe and lovely country, which I have recommended to my compatriots. I know many of them who have visited once would like to go there again. Hopefully, in the future, more Koreans, more foreigners, can visit and see the real China."

XINHUA

## Local initiatives unveiled amid electricity surge

Tailored measures rolled out to cope with summer power consumption

By LI MENGHAN

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With soaring summer temperatures and potential electricity shortages looming, some parts of China have introduced local initiatives to conserve power and ensure a stable supply.

The measures, alongside national strategies, aim to mitigate the impact of increased electricity demand due to possible extreme weather events and industrial development.

In Taizhou, Zhejiang province, the city development and reform commission and State Grid Corporation have advised new energy vehicle owners to start charging their vehicles after 11 pm. The owners of electric bicycles are also being encouraged to charge during off-peak hours at night to reduce strain on the power grid.

Suzhou, Jiangsu province, has told government authorities to turn off air conditioners for one hour during peak power hours from 9 to 11 am. Additionally, public facilities like air conditioning, lighting and boilers in nonessential areas are to be switched off.

In Jiangxi province, the promotion of energy-saving appliances is a key strategy. Public spaces such as supermarkets, hotels and office buildings are recommended to reduce or suspend the use of high-power equipment and unnecessary lighting during peak power periods from 7 pm to 11 pm. The management of air conditioners has been emphasized, with cooling temperatures set no lower than 26 C, and air conditioners turned off half an hour before the end of business hours. Curtains at exits are also recommended to minimize the escape of cold air.

## Former energy boss given life sentence for bribery

By YANG ZEKUN

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Li Dong, 64, a former deputy general manager of CHN Energy Investment Group, was sentenced to life imprisonment for accepting bribes totaling 108 million yuan (\$14.8 million) by the Yichun Intermediate People's Court in Jiangxi province on Tuesday.

The court also ordered the confiscation of all his personal property and the deprivation of his political rights for life.

From 1999 to last year, Li utilized his positions, including deputy manager of China Shenhua Energy Company, a listed coal-based energy company under CHN Energy Investment Group, and deputy general manager of the CHN Energy Investment Group, to assist certain individuals and companies in mat-

terials such as product sales, coal procurement, business operations and position adjustments. In exchange, he received money and property totaling 108 million yuan, either directly or through intermediaries.

The court said Li's actions constituted the crime of accepting bribes involving a substantial sum. Acknowledging that he confessed to all his crimes and actively returned all illicit gains, the court imposed a lenient punishment in accordance with the law.

Li assumed the role of deputy general manager of the group in November 2017 and retired in March 2020. He came under investigation in February last year and was expelled from the Communist Party of China in August. He was prosecuted in December, and the court first heard the case in April, when he pleaded guilty.

Conventional measures to strengthen inspections of power generation facilities, monitor electricity usage in key areas, increase coal production and implement cross-regional power transmission are also in place to ensure a reliable power supply throughout the summer, Luo said.

Du Zhongming, head of the National Energy Administration's electricity bureau, said the national electricity load is expected to increase by over 100 million kilowatts year-on-year. While the overall power supply remains secure, extreme and catastrophic weather events could intensify stress on the grid.

Conventional measures to strengthen inspections of power generation facilities, monitor electricity usage in key areas, increase coal production and implement cross-regional power transmission are also in place to ensure a reliable power supply throughout the summer, Luo said.

## Northwest China's Ningxia region: From vine to global wine stage

By MINGMEILI in New York

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Wine glasses clinked as enthusiasts in New York savored the rich flavors of various red and white wines from the eastern foothills of Ningxia's Helan Mountain.

More than 100 people attended the promotion of the Ningxia Hui autonomous region's specialty industries at the Chinese Consulate General on Monday evening, where they enjoyed wine and a goji berry-tasting.

It was the Ningxia delegation's second visit to the United States this year, as the region in Northwest China is trying to widen its market in the US and internationally.

The Fourth China International Wine Culture and Tourism Expo will be hosted by the regional

government from Aug 9 to 11 in Yinchuan, Ningxia's capital, and welcomes winemakers and visitors from around the world to join and taste the wine, the delegation announced.

"I've heard that people who are separated by an ocean can be brought together by a glass of wine," David Adelman, managing director and general counsel of asset manager Krane Funds Advisors and a trustee of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, told China Daily.

"I've been to vineyards in Argentina, South Africa, of course, California. So, I've been lucky enough in my life to taste some nice wine," he said, noting that he is still learning more about wine from China. "I think China will do a magnificent job promoting its wine across the world, including the US," he added.



"I tried the wine, and I liked it. So, as an Italian, I think it's a compliment ... It's something I would drink on a day-by-day basis."

Francesco Rizzo Marullo, chairman of the United Nations World Cultural Arts Organization

The wine region lies at Helan Mountain and stretches along the Yellow River, forming a corridor seen as a golden zone for the high-quality

growth of wine grapes, with more than 2,800 hours of sunshine a year and less than 8 inches of rainfall.

It is the largest area for growing wine grapes in China, covering 40,133 hectares (99,170 acres), with 128 wineries producing 140 million bottles of wine. The output value is \$5.5 billion, and the wine is exported to 40 countries according to data from the delegation.

The region grows grapes for wines such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, marselan, riesling and others.

Ningxia's wines have won more than 1,000 honors internationally, including the Decanter, Concours Mondial de Bruxelles and the Berliner Wein Trophy.

The region's venture into wine-making began in the 1980s and has since grown significantly, attracting winemakers and companies from

China and the West.

"Not only does the wine offer an excellent taste, but it also provides the region with massive job opportunities, lifting residents out of poverty," said Bai Yuzhen, the director-general of the Ningxia foreign affairs office.

"Wine is a great connector, and it's a cultural product in many countries of the world," said Pablo Piñero Aramburu, consul general of Argentina in New York. "I think it has a great future."

"It has improved enormously. It has a lot of potential, and today we have a very good wine," he said, recalling that when he started his career in China years ago, the wine industry in Ningxia had just started.

"It needed development; wine needs a lot of time to evolve and become a better product," he said.

"And now, today, I was impressed."

"I didn't know anything about it, so it was very educational to understand that. I knew that [in China], we're producing wine, but not to this extent. It's very informative," said Francesco Rizzo Marullo, chairman of the United Nations World Cultural Arts Organization.

"I tried the wine, and I liked it. So, as an Italian, I think it's a compliment," he said. "It's a good wine what we tasted tonight. It was really good. It's something I would drink on a day-by-day basis."

He said that when people are dining with others of different nationalities and cultures, wine is a good cultural ambassador that connects people easily.

"I've been to China twice. And so next time I can add Ningxia to my bucket list," he said.

## POLICY REVIEW

## Efforts to draw more foreign investment

Policies aim to boost confidence as complex global landscape hinders inflow of capital

By WANG KEJU  
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China is set to intensify its efforts to attract and harness foreign investment, with a specific focus on removing market access restrictions in the manufacturing industry and introducing pilot measures to expand the opening-up of the service sector.

China's increasing economic growth, large consumer base and technological advancements are strong incentives for foreign businesses seeking opportunities to expand their market share, experts and executives said at a recent meeting, while cautioning that the global landscape presents a complex set of circumstances that hinders the inflow of foreign capital into China.

As the world's second-largest economy gears up for the second half of the year, the State Council, China's Cabinet, reiterated in late June the pivotal role of foreign-invested enterprises in shaping the country's new development paradigm and announced a series of initiatives to stabilize foreign investment in the pipeline.

In the first five months of the year, foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland, in actual use, totaled 412.51 billion yuan (\$56.77 billion), which was 28.2 percent lower than that of the same period last year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

While the quantity of foreign-invested projects has risen, the decline in the actual utilization of foreign capital indicates a shift toward lighter asset projects and a greater presence of small and medium-sized projects, said Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

This decrease in the proportion of large-scale projects poses a significant challenge for China's economic landscape, Bai said, stressing that the decrease in foreign investment inflows into China is not an isolated phenomenon but is part of a larger global trend.

The flow of foreign direct investment globally saw a steep 18 percent decline last year when a few European conduit economies, which often act as intermediaries for FDI destined for other nations, were excluded, according to data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

In addition, global industrial restructuring, geopolitical rivalries and competition from developing countries have collectively contributed to the decline in China's foreign investment inflow, as shown by a report from the China Macroeconomy Forum in late May.

Foreign investors in China are increasingly focusing their investments on the manufacturing and service sectors. Notably, foreign-funded enterprises are gradually withdrawing from traditional manufacturing fields and shifting toward high-tech and high-profit areas, the report said.

In the first five months of this year, China's manufacturing sector attracted 117.1 billion yuan in actual foreign investment, up 2.8 percentage points year-on-year, with high-tech manufacturing accounting for 50.41 billion yuan, a 2.7 percentage point increase year-on-year, according to the ministry.

**Taming restrictions**

In the free trade pilot zones, which have been at the forefront of China's economic reforms and liberalization efforts, the negative list for foreign investment in the manufacturing sector has been eliminated, said Cui Fan, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics.

Efforts to revise the national version of the negative list and remove restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector across the entire country are underway, Cui added.

Following the complete removal of market access restrictions on foreign investment in



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

the manufacturing sector, the focus of China's efforts has now shifted toward opening up sectors such as telecommunications, healthcare and other service industries, experts said.

This move presents new opportunities for foreign investors looking to enter high-demand areas such as education, healthcare and elderly care, where the Chinese market shows tremendous growth potential, said Jin Ruiting, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission.

Allianz Global Investors, owned by German insurer Allianz, secured a 2 percent stake in Chinese national pension insurer Guomin Pension & Insurance Co in late June to expand its presence in China's burgeoning private pension sector, which is considered lucrative due to an aging demographic.

In May, Belgian insurer Ageas sealed a deal to invest around 1.07 billion yuan to acquire a stake in Taiping Pension, a subsidiary of China Taiping Insurance Holdings, in a move to tap the Chinese pension market's potential by capitalizing on the increasing demand for personal pension products in China.

**Equal treatment**

Besides providing attractive market prospects, efforts to treat foreign enterprises the same as domestic companies and ensure a level playing field for all participants are also crucial, Jin said.

Domestic and foreign companies engaging in various actions, including large-scale equipment upgrades and government procurement, will be treated equally, according to plans announced at the executive meeting.

According to estimates made by the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, the scale of the market generated by equipment upgrades is projected to exceed 5 trillion yuan annually.

With the potential to generate substantial returns on investment, the trillion-dollar market presents a significant opportunity for foreign-invested companies looking to expand their presence and tap into China's dynamic business landscape, Jin said.

Several State-owned enterprises in the Shanghai pilot free trade zone have recently procured a batch of Tesla Model Y vehicles for corporate use, marking Tesla's entry into China's government procurement arena.

**Shift in advantages**

By providing a stable and predictable policy framework, China aims to instill confidence in foreign investors, attract their long-term commitment and facilitate their greater participation in the Chinese market, said Cai Wei, chief strategy officer of KPMG China Advisory.

Amid a complex global economic landscape, China still stands out as a favorable

investment destination due to its robust economic fundamentals and growth potential, and investing in China can yield long-term and trend-setting returns for foreign investors, experts said.

In the past, China appealed to foreign investors by primarily relying on its comparative advantages in factor prices such as low labor and production costs, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

However, as the Chinese market expanded and matured, the country's comparative advantage gradually shifted toward its vast consumer base and growing market opportunities, Gao said.

Today, China's competitive advantage lies not only in its market size but also in its position within the global industrial chain. With a strong emphasis on technological advancement, innovation and industrial upgrading, China has become a key player in various industries, attracting foreign investors seeking to tap into its competitive edge, Gao added.

Foreign businesses operating in China continue to exhibit stable investment expectations and confidence in the country's market. Recent surveys conducted by various commerce chambers reveal that over three-quarters of United States, European and Japanese companies plan to sustain their operations in China, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

## Policy Digest

**Ministry to tap cities to promote use of Beidou**

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology is planning to select a batch of qualified cities to join a pilot project to promote the usage of Beidou, a global navigation satellite system independently constructed and operated by China.

In a notice issued on Friday, the ministry said cities selected to join the pilot project should make vigorous efforts so that the system can be used to further empower many sectors and industries.

The project is specifically aimed at promoting Beidou in three fields — goods consumed by the general public, industrial manufacturing, and emerging technologies and industries, the ministry said, adding that each city selected for the pilot project should carry out promotions in at least one of the three fields.

Smartphones, wearable devices and tablets are among key consumer goods that should see a wider application of Beidou, according to the ministry, which also called for faster implementation of the system in key products such as automobiles, ships, aircraft and robots.

**Enhanced food security sought in flood-hit areas**

The State Administration for Market Regulation has asked regulators across the country to enhance the protection of food security during the flood season.

Since the season began, southern China has experienced multiple heavy rains, causing disasters in provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian and Hunan, the administration said in a notice, adding that high temperatures and humidity have significantly increased the risk of food being contaminated.

Local market regulation authorities should urge food companies to fully examine their facilities, equipment, material procurement, food processing and storage, as well as the health of their staff workers to root out risks that threaten food safety, the administration said.

The administration required local market regulators to enhance their inspections of food companies in disaster-hit areas and take more samples of food allocated, donated or sold to people in these areas.

Market regulators in such areas should issue advisories promptly to raise awareness so that people will better avoid unclean water, or food coming from unidentified sources or that is not well cooked.

**Notice calls attention to patent open license system**

China will comprehensively promote the efficient operation of its patent open license system, according to a notice issued by the National Intellectual Property Administration.

Modes and channels for the transformation and application of patents will also be broadened, according to the notice.

The notice calls for collaborative efforts to operate the patent open license system by guiding patent holders to standardize their filings of open license declarations and reasonably estimate the license fees.

It also says the sharing of patent open license declaration information should be improved in order to promote the connection between supply and demand, and to give full play to the roles of all parties in the sector.

The patent open license is designed to promote the efficiency of patent transformation and application. It will help facilitate the transformation of sci-tech achievements into new quality productive forces, the notice said.

CHINA DAILY—XINHUA

## Provincial-level regions urged to do more to attract overseas money

By WANG KEJU

Major provincial-level regions that serve as magnets for foreign investment across China should remain open to innovative ideas and models that stay ahead of the curve and adapt to changing global dynamics and emerging economic trends to better attract foreign capital, officials and experts said.

Additionally, the regions should increase the number of services for foreign-invested business, promote the accelerated implementation of foreign investment projects and give full play to the role of open platforms such as pilot free-trade zones, ensuring their smooth entry and operation in the local market, they added.

During a symposium in early July, Vice-Premier He Lifeng called for the further relaxation of market access for foreign investment. He also said the nation should take advantage of its enormous market to

attract overseas capital.

In particular, provincial-level regions that are major recipients of foreign capital should take steps such as improving services for foreign-invested companies and making use of open platforms, He said.

Guangdong province recently unveiled a plan that introduced significant incentives to encourage foreign investment, with the highest rewards reaching up to 150 million yuan (\$20.63 million) for high-tech manufacturing enterprises. Similarly, foreign-invested businesses in high-tech service industries can receive incentives of up to 80 million yuan.

The provincial-level regions need to adopt a targeted approach to attract foreign investment, taking into account their unique industrial structures and development needs, said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

One such approach involves encourag-

ing foreign enterprises to participate in large-scale equipment upgrades and government procurement projects on equal footing with domestic enterprises, Zhou added.

In addition, such regions should leverage various open platforms such as free trade zones to attract foreign investment, according to experts.

In March, the State Council, China's Cabinet, rolled out a guideline to better attract and utilize foreign investment, proposing the implementation of pilot projects to ease market access for foreign investment in the field of technological innovation.

As part of this plan, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and other areas with free trade zones will be allowed to select eligible foreign-invested enterprises to participate in expanded opening-up pilot projects in areas such as gene diagnostics, treatment technology development and application.

Free trade zones and other open plat-

forms in China, with their strong economic foundations and institutional innovation advantages, are playing a pioneering role in exploring new investment ideas and models, said Xiao Benhua, an expert on free trade zones at the Shanghai Lixin University of Accounting and Finance.

A digital investment platform that harnesses the power of big data and artificial intelligence could be established on a trial basis in provinces with local resource advantages to meet the needs of foreign enterprises, Xiao said.

Also, by understanding the specific requirements and preferences of each company, the platform can offer tailored solutions and recommendations. This includes identifying suitable investment locations, connecting companies with local partners and suppliers and providing information on relevant policies, regulations and incentives, the expert added.

China should take proactive steps to fos-

ter the development of cross-border e-commerce, providing convenient customs clearance services and policy support to attract foreign investment in the rapidly growing sector, Xiao said.

China's cross-border e-commerce trade value grew 15.6 percent year-on-year to 2.38 trillion yuan in 2023 and is expected to increase to 2.95 trillion yuan this year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

In addition to the coastal provinces, the central and western regions are increasingly becoming attractive destinations for foreign investors.

According to a recent survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in February, 30 percent of the surveyed companies said that China's central and western regions hold tremendous opportunities. Furthermore, 17 percent said they have plans to allocate at least half of their investments to those regions within the next one to three years.

## CHINA

By CHEN LIANG

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In his first post on his public WeChat account, Zhou Xinxin declared: "I have a dream. I want to be the person who photographs the most plant species in the world one day."

Within the country's community of botanists and ardent plant enthusiasts, few would consider this dream to be unrealistic, as current public data indicates that the 43-year-old has already photographed more plant species than anyone else in China.

In July and September last year, Zhou updated all the plant photos he had taken on the Chinese Field Herbarium and the Plant Photo Bank of China, the two largest plant image websites in China. CFH is run by the Chenshan Botanical Garden in Shanghai, and PPBC by the Institute of Botany of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

On both websites, Zhou ranks first in the number of plant species photographed, with 16,421 on CFH and 16,430 on PPBC.

In fact, he told China Daily that on iNaturalist, an international online social network where members discuss biodiversity, the person with the highest number of photographed plant species has captured fewer plant species than him, so he might already rank first in the world.

"My aspiration is to genuinely rank first worldwide," he said. "So I made the choice to broaden my botanical explorations to include other countries. For example, I visited Malaysia earlier last year."

During this year's Spring Festival, he spent 23 days exploring Vietnam, and then in May, he made a 15-day trip to Turkey. At present, he is participating in a plant survey in the Xizang autonomous region. Next month, he will head to South Africa for 20 days.

"I now plan to visit all of the world's floristic regions and take photos of all families of the world's vascular plants in the next 20 years," Zhou said.

Currently, there are about 400,000 species of vascular plants in the world, grouped into approximately 13,000 genera and more than 400 families.

## Pure obsession

It's truly remarkable to consider that just 12 years ago, Zhou, who hails from Anhui province, was merely a novice in the world of botany.

After graduating from Anhui University in Hefei, the provincial capital, in 2002, he joined a medical equipment company in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, as a salesperson. He was soon transferred by the company to a branch in Beijing, where he lived and worked for a decade.

In 2012, he resigned and took a break from working for a while. Then one day, he stumbled upon a news article discussing the identification of wild plants in urban areas, which sparked his newfound interest in botanical exploration.

The article discussed an online chat group consisting of botanical enthusiasts in Beijing. Zhou quickly joined and became an active participant.

Some of the members he met were post-graduate students who were majoring in botany at Beijing Forestry University.

The university has a workstation at the Xiaolongmen Forest Farm on the outskirts of Beijing, where its students can conduct field studies. Zhou visited a friend at the farm and studied botany with the students there.

"At Xiaolongmen, I bought a copy of *Flora of Beijing* and learned how to use the taxonomic key in the books to identify plants," he said.

"It was a book I read again and again."

After spending several months taking photos of plants in Beijing and trying to identify them, he traveled to Zhejiang province to



Zhou Xinxin examines debris from a landslide he encountered while conducting a botanical survey in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in 2020.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Passion for plants takes photographer worldwide

Researcher chases dream to take pictures of more species than anyone else



Zhou (right) and his colleagues cross a river by riding in an excavator's bucket in Sichuan province in 2017.

continue his botanical studies, purchasing a copy of *Flora of Zhejiang* upon arriving.

By 2013, Zhou's initial interest in botany had evolved into a full-fledged obsession. Over the next two years, he worked a sales job while dedicating nearly all his free time to photographing plants.

In 2015, he quit that job and decided to spend a year immersing himself in his botanical pursuits.

He began participating in a multitude of plant surveys initiated by botanists nationwide, offering his services as either a paid field assistant or a volunteer. His responsibilities included photographing and identifying wild plants, and collecting specimens.

"Since 2015, I've spent more than 200 days a year exploring the wilderness by car, searching for plants and taking photos of them," Zhou said.

He became known among the country's botanists for his ability to find rare wild plants, which allowed him to obtain an increasing number of field job opportunities.

In 2018, a botanist with the South China Botanical Garden of the CAS in Guangzhou, Guangdong, invited him to join his team as a full-time research assistant.

Zhou worked with the botanist for two years and has been employed at the botanical garden ever since. He is currently an assistant in the botanical garden's herbarium, where he is responsible for collecting plant specimens and identifying them.

"I need to cooperate with different research teams at the botanical garden," he said.

He also continues to receive invitations to join plant surveys across the country, often as a field expert.

## Road to the top

Zhou's work in the wild has enabled him to realize his initial dream to photograph more plant species than anyone else in China.

In a post on his public WeChat account, he wrote about how he managed to photograph so many plant species. He credited three key points with his success.

First, he travels to as many places as possible. "Plants have distinct regional characteristics, so visiting different locations yields diverse plant species," he wrote.

Zhou has been to all of China's provincial-level regions and special administrative regions.

Last year, he drove more than 80,000 kilometers to find plants to photograph.

Second, he takes photos of every plant he encounters in each location, as some places may be challenging to revisit.

"I appreciate the uniqueness of every plant, regardless of its appearance, believing each has its special qualities," he said. "Different from most enthusiasts who prefer beautiful flowers to unimpressive trees or grasses, I will attempt to take photos of every new species I find at a site."

His method has often led to unexpected



Zhou takes photos of a plant during a one-month survey that started last week in Xizang.

discoveries, he said, but it has also led him to take too many photos at the locations. As a result, he frequently stays up until 2 or 3 am to organize all the pictures he takes.

Thirdly, he sets quantifiable goals for himself.

Over the years, he has collaborated with researchers in the discovery, naming and publishing of a dozen new plant species and was the lead author of two research papers.

"Along with increasing the number of my photographed species, my vision has broadened and my understanding of floral regions and plant classification has deepened," Zhou said. "I started thinking of trying to see every family of the country's flora in 2018, and then decided to see every genus in 2020. To meet these targets, I had to carefully plan my botanical trips, always with specific objectives in mind."

In 2021, he managed to view almost all families of the country's vascular plants. As of last year, there were still 470 genera of vascu-

lar plants in China that he had yet to photograph, but he remains determined to achieve his goal of seeing more than 95 percent of all the nation's genera by the end of 2027.

According to the latest Chinese plant data compiled by Professor Liu Bing from the CAS, excluding moss plants, there are a total of 359 families, 3,664 genera and 35,443 species of vascular plants.

## Perilous journeys

While spending countless hours behind the wheel and numerous days in the wilderness, Zhou has encountered a multitude of dangers over the years.

While driving along a long-abandoned road in a mountainous area in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, he narrowly escaped a landslide.

During a plant survey with a team of five botanists in a township in Nang county, Xizang autonomous region, their car got stuck in an alpine meadow more than 3,000 meters above sea level.

Zhou and one member of the team lost contact with the other three and had to walk for hours in the mountains.

"It was raining and freezing," he recalled. "The loss of temperature put us in danger."

Fortunately, the other team members managed to dislodge the car and find Zhou and his companion in the darkness.

He was not so lucky while conducting a survey in the jungle of Metog in southeastern Xizang in 2022. He was bitten by a tick and came down with a rickettsial infection, a disease that is difficult to diagnose and can be life-threatening if treatment is delayed.

Zhou had a high fever for a couple of days and experienced aches throughout his entire body. The doctor in the remote county failed to diagnose the disease and didn't give him the right treatment. "It was so painful that I even thought about suicide," Zhou said.

A doctor friend of his in Guangzhou was informed of his plight, correctly determined the cause and recommended an alternative treatment.

"He suggested that my doctor in Metog treat me with doxycycline (an antibiotic used to treat many kinds of bacterial infections)," he said. "It saved my life. But the medicine also killed many healthy bacteria in my body. I felt ill for a long time and had to spend half a year recuperating."

Since his recovery, Zhou has continued his botanical explorations around the world — and has continued to experience other maladies.

During his trip to Vietnam earlier this year, he was bitten by a species of fire ant, which caused his leg to swell rapidly. His local guide tried to squeeze out the venom by using a knife to cut the wound open.

Zhou managed to visit a hospital and had to take antibiotics for two weeks. After returning to Guangzhou, he visited a hospital there regularly to treat his wound for another month. Despite the difficulties, he said his woes are nothing compared with the joy and excitement he derives from his botanical excursions.

"Knowing plants and their names has given me a new way to look at the world," he said. "In Turkey, I found that the locals cultivate a type of olea because they like eating its nuts. In Malaysia, I found palm oil can be used for many things."

Looking ahead, Zhou said he plans to make three overseas trips annually, hoping to add three new families and 200 genera of plants to his world list each year.

With just two trips this year, he has already added five families and 184 genera of plants to his list.

"So after finishing my work in Xizang and a trip to South Africa, I might add 10 families and 400 genera to my list by the end of the year," he said.

By CHEN LIANG

Since 2012, Zhou Xinxin has photographed over 16,000 plant species, more than anyone in China. Since last year, he has been expanding his botanical explorations beyond the country in an attempt to photograph more plant species than anyone in the world.

Zhou said he has had some interesting experiences during his quests to find plant species.

"I have too many stories with various plants," he said.

The following are stories he has shared involving three rare plants:

1. *Cynomorium songaricum*, found in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region

In June 2017, Zhou drove to the Alshaa region for one of his botanical excursions. On the last day of his trip, he decided to search for the *Cynomorium songaricum*, a parasitic plant that thrives at the roots of the *Nitraria sibirica* thorn. Despite hours of searching in its potential habitat, Zhou was unable to locate the plant, which is used as an aphrodisiac in traditional Chinese medicine.

Determined not to give up, he resorted to alternative methods. Knocking on the door of a nearby Mongolian yurt, he explained his quest to a middle-aged man inside. To his surprise, the man shared Zhou's passion for photography and offered to assist him in finding the plant. The man explained that most of the plants growing outside of the reserve had already been harvested by local herdsmen.

Together, they navigated the desert in the man's off-road vehicle until they reached a fenced-off area that, according to the man,

## Tales of triumph in quests to find rare flora



From left: *Cynomorium songaricum*, *Frankenia tulinica* and *Centrolepis banksii*. PHOTOS BY ZHOU XINXIN FOR CHINA DAILY

was part of a local nature reserve. The man called his friend to find a hidden key they could use to unlock the fence and enter the area.

In the protected area, Zhou finally spotted one of the elusive plants and took photos of it.

2. *Frankenia tulinica*, found in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region

In June 2018, Zhou and several friends took photos of a species of *Frankenia* on the shore of Lake Sayram in Xinjiang. According to the book *Flora of China*, there is only one species of *Frankenia*, *Frankenia pulverulenta*, distributed in the country. So Zhou considered the plant they saw to be of that species.

In July 2020, he discovered the plant again at Lake Sayram and posted photos he took of it on his WeChat Moments. A researcher from Inner Mongolia saw the photos and told Zhou

that the flower he saw was probably not *Frankenia pulverulenta*, but *Frankenia tulinica*, a new plant species in China.

In September last year, Zhou traveled to Ejine Banner in Inner Mongolia and saw a real *Frankenia pulverulenta*. By comparing photos, he was able to determine that the plant he saw in Xinjiang was indeed *Frankenia tulinica*.

3. *Centrolepis banksii*, found in Hainan province

On Christmas Eve in 2020, Zhou offered a reward of 5,000 yuan (\$688) on Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo to anyone who could find a plant called *Centrolepis banksii*.

A species of plant in the *Restionaceae* family, it is a grass found mainly in northern Australia. According to specimen data, this



species is also found in Vietnam and Hainan province in China.

However, the last time a Chinese researcher had been able to locate a specimen in Hainan was in 1956.

Zhou always believed that a small plant like *Centrolepis banksii* wouldn't just disappear. Therefore, from 2018, he started traveling to Hainan every year before the flowering and fruiting period of the plant to search for it. Whenever he traveled to Hainan for work, finding the plant became a priority for him.

In 2020, he and a Hainan botanist searched for the plant in Qicha town for two days but were unable to find it.

So Zhou decided to post the 5,000 yuan reward, hoping to enlist the aid of others to find the tiny plant.

One day last year, a friend informed him

that someone had found the plant in Hainan. After inquiring extensively, he learned that a survey team from the Kunming Institute of Botany had unintentionally discovered it during a field investigation in Hainan in early April. They saw some of the plants on the brink of wilting.

Zhou estimated that it should sprout and flower around November to December.

In late October last year, he eagerly joined the KIB team on a trip to the collection site to search for seedlings of the plant. However, perhaps because they had arrived early, they were unable to find what they were looking for.

On Jan 1 this year, while dining with Professor Zhang Kai from Hainan University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Zhou mentioned the plant. Zhang offered to check its growth status in Hainan and immediately inform Zhou if he found anything.

On Jan 11, Zhang, accompanied by three students, conducted a plant survey in Wenchang. After spending an afternoon searching for the plant, as darkness approached, Zhang called Zhou to report that they had been searching for a long time without success and were considering giving up.

However, shortly after, Zhang made a video call to Zhou. They had found it!

Zhang explained that while intending to show a student a tiny flower on the grassland, they unexpectedly stumbled upon *Centrolepis banksii*, which was incredibly small.

Zhou spent the night sleepless with excitement. After work on Jan 12, which happened to be a Friday, he and two of his friends drove through the night to Haikou and finally found the blooming plant.

## WORLD

## Help on its way

Palestinians watch airdropped aid being carried by parachutes along a highway in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday, amid the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. At least 38,713 Palestinians have been killed and 89,166 injured in Israel's military offensive on Gaza since Oct 7, the Gaza health ministry said on Tuesday.

BASHAR TALEB / AFP



## UK looking to rekindle trade ties with bloc

By EARLE GALE in London  
earle@mail.chinadailyuk.com

The United Kingdom's new Labour Party government has said it wants to build a closer trading relationship with the European Union, after years of strained post-Brexit ties with the bloc.

The reset began in Reggio Calabria, Italy, on Tuesday, with closed-door meetings between the UK's new Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and his counterparts from G7 member nations. The sessions were set to include sit-downs with Valdis Dombrovskis, vice-president of the EU Commission, and Robert Habeck, Germany's vice-chancellor.

Reynolds was due to deliver a speech in Italy on Wednesday, during his first overseas visit since the Labour Party's election landslide win on July 4, in which he will tell G7 trade ministers collectively that a "confident, outward-looking, future-facing UK is ready to play our part on the international stage."

A draft of his speech issued in advance, states the UK now has "a strong government with an even stronger mandate from the British people, one that respects, wants to partner with and is open for business".

After a period of increased tension between the UK and the EU attributed to the nation's 2016 decision to leave the bloc, coupled with successive Conservative Party administrations that entrenched differences, Reynolds planned to say "Britain is back on the world stage and 'open for business'".

## Closer relationship

"We are seeking a closer, more mature, more levelheaded relationship with our friends in the European Union," the draft said.

The UK's new Prime Minister Keir Starmer has also signaled he wants closer trade ties with the EU by inviting the bloc's leaders to a one-day European Political Community summit at Blenheim Palace near Oxford on Thursday.

The Guardian newspaper said the prime minister is aiming to "walk a tightrope" by both massively strengthening ties with the EU and also making it clear that the UK will not be rejoining the bloc, something experts believe the British public is not yet ready for.

About 41 percent of the UK's exports of goods and services were sent to EU nations in 2023, while some 52 percent of its imports were from the EU, highlighting how important the two-way ties are.

The Labour Party's warmer tone around UK-EU ties could manifest itself during the first scheduled review of the Brexit deal that was agreed in December 2020, as the nation left the bloc.

The terms of the trade deal between them reached at that time call for the agreement to be reviewed every five years, with the first such review expected in 2026, which will offer them both a chance to formalize a closer relationship.

## China's UN envoy calls NATO a 'troublemaker'

Says some nations look to create own system outside international law

By MINLU ZHANG  
at the United Nations  
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

China's envoy to the United Nations said on Tuesday that some countries intend to "create another system outside the existing system of international law", and he called NATO a "troublemaker".

"We often hear the talk about a rules-based international order by some countries. But what kind of rules are they talking about? And who are the rulemakers? No one has given us a clear and precise answer," said Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN.

"I would like to emphasize that there is only one order in the world, that is the international order based on international law. There is only one set of rules, and they are the basic norms governing international relations based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. There is no room for ambiguity on matters of principle, and the positions must be clearly staked out," Fu said.

He delivered the statement at a UN Security Council meeting on multilateral cooperation for a more just, democratic and sustainable world order, convened by Russia, which is presiding over the 15-member body in July.

He called on NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to stop being a "troublemaker".

"NATO, a regional military bloc

History has amply proved that wherever NATO's hand extends, turmoil and chaos will ensue."

Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN

left over from the Cold War, has been seeking to expand its sphere of influence," he said, "stirring up confrontation between camps, and even shifting the blame to countries outside the region to frame them on the issue of Ukraine."

"History has amply proved that wherever NATO's hand extends, turmoil and chaos will ensue. China hereby advises NATO and certain countries to conduct some soul-searching and stop being the troublemakers who jeopardize common security at the expense of others," he said.

NATO is attempting to expand its reach to the Asia-Pacific region. Last year, NATO announced plans to open a liaison office in Japan.

During last week's NATO summit in Washington, the alliance claimed that China is a "decisive enabler" of the Ukraine crisis.

China strongly condemns the "irresponsible and provocative remarks," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian. He said such a statement is "steeped in Cold War mentality and ideological bias and consists of baseless accusations".

Fu also emphasized that common development and security are essential for a fair international order. He

stressed the need for reforms in the international financial system and AI governance to help developing countries.

"Some individual countries have overstretched the concept of national security by building a 'small yard, high fence' and indiscriminately imposed unilateral sanctions to disrupt the global production and supply chains, which will ultimately lead to a situation of no winners, whether bilaterally or multilaterally. We must resolutely resist such erroneous practices," he said.

Fu said China believes that to build a more just and equitable international order, the focus should be on six areas: upholding sovereign equality in a multipolar system; respecting each nation's development path without interference; building common security through dialogue; promoting inclusive economic globalization; upholding fairness and justice by strengthening the UN and developing countries' voices; and fostering openness, dialogue and shared human values.

The Security Council meeting was chaired by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who said the US "has long declared its own exceptionalism".

He said the United States requires "unquestionable obedience" from its allies, "even to the detriment of their national interests".

Lavrov said that Rule America, "the essence of the notorious rules-based order", is a "direct threat to multilateralism and international law", adding that the UN Charter and the Security Council's decisions are "perversely interpreted by the collective West".

## British govt starts work to regulate AI

By EARLE GALE in London

The United Kingdom's new Labour Party government is prioritizing the regulation of artificial intelligence, its leader, Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said.

Starmer, who is concerned about threats from AI that include the potential for it to put huge numbers of people out of work, is expected to introduce legislation in Parliament on Wednesday to control the technology, delivering on a pledge made during the recent general election.

The promise, which was included in the party's printed election manifesto, said a Labour Party government would "ensure the safe development and use of AI models by introducing binding regulation on the handful of companies developing the most powerful AI models".

Sky News reported that Starmer is also concerned about the potential of AI to worsen inequality if it is left unchecked.

His anticipated legislation will be among 35 proposed bills that will be unveiled during the King's

Speech, a traditional ceremony carried out at the start of each new parliamentary term in which the monarch unveils the legislative priorities of the government for the coming months.

Quoting unnamed party insiders, the Financial Times reported that the proposed AI legislation will focus on the production of large language models, which are general-purpose technologies that underlay AI products, including OpenAI's ChatGPT.

## Previous stance

The legislation will be in marked contrast to the stance of former UK prime minister Rishi Sunak and his Conservative Party government, which had favored minimal intervention in the hope that largely unregulated conditions would encourage AI innovators to choose the UK as a base for their operations.

However, the Labour Party's emphasis on legislation is similar to the approach of the European Union, which introduced clear rules in March, through the bloc's Artificial Intelligence Act.

Starmer laid out reasons why his party planned to regulate AI in a speech last year during London Tech Week, in which he said a Labour Party government would introduce "an overarching regulatory framework" that would be "stronger" than the voluntary approach taken by Sunak and his government.

"We are nowhere near where we need to be on the question of regulation," Starmer said.

While noting that AI has the power to help humanity by assisting with things such as medical diagnoses and the reform of public services, he said it could also add to problems, especially around misinformation.

"Our country is facing a choice about who benefits from the huge disruption that tech will bring," he said.

"Will it be those who already hold wealth and power, or will it be the starter firms trying to break in and disrupt the industry, the patients trying to book an appointment... the worker using technology to enhance and improve their role?"

## FRIENDS AFAR

Editor's Note: China Daily presents the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

## Breathing life into a childhood dream

By HE XIATING in London  
hexiating@chinadaily.com.cn

Hundreds of thousands of people around the world are amazed by Jackie Chan's kung fu movies. Some dream of living a life out of it. But few could realize it. Matt Jane did.

"People often say you should do a movie, that would be great, but I am living the real-life version of it, that's more meaningful than making a movie," the British kung fu master said.

Jane, who is also known by his Chinese name Bailong, which means white dragon, has been on a remarkable 25-year journey with Chinese kung fu.

At 11, he watched a kung fu show called *The Wheel of Life* in London. Inspired by the spectacle and Chinese kung fu movies, the young Jane nurtured a dream deep within his heart — to become a Shaolin master.

When he turned 16, he went to the Shaolin temple in Henan province to learn the ancient martial art.

The journey proved to be a transformative experience for the young Briton who encountered a world that was vastly different from the life he had known back in the UK.

"At 5 every morning, we would awaken and ascend a mountain, cool down on our hands and knees and practice headstands on concrete for hours on end," Jane recalled.

Although the rigorous lifestyle may seem arduous to most, Jane found immense joy in it.

"I was loving this lifestyle... I felt like I was living straight out of a kung fu movie," he said.

Alongside the demanding training came austere living conditions.

"We didn't have access to a lot of things, but we were a very happy group of people. And the idea of family was really powerful because we were able to encourage each other to train and push forward, which I also didn't feel I had much connection to in the UK growing up," reflected Jane.

Growing up in Camden in north London, Jane described himself as a lost young man with a bloated street ego and a narrow perspective on life. However, his time in China transformed him in ways he could never have imagined.

"During my four-and-a-half-year stay in China, not only did I learn some incredible kung fu, but I grew from a young teenager into a man. And I experienced many different things, the learning process and the principles and morals which I would then continue into my life, which I continue to do until today," said Jane.

## Shaolin warrior

After living in China for almost five years, Jane, then 21, became the first and only non-Chinese Shaolin warrior to join *The Wheel of Life* kung fu show, the very same show he watched as an 11-year-old.

And Jane met his future wife, Chang Chun, who was also a martial arts enthusiast. In 2009, they decided to return to London when Chang became pregnant. It was during this period that Jane started to establish his kung fu school, called Temple, in London.

The Temple had been an old and derelict glass factory and Jane, a 21-year-old Caucasian at the time, faced skepticism. Many questioned his ability to teach kung fu at such a young age and doubted his expertise. Some even questioned his legitimacy as a non-Chinese teaching Shaolin kung fu.

Jane remained focused on his passion for kung fu and replicated the rigorous training methods he experienced in China, conducting traditional training sessions that lasted eight to 10 hours a day.

The hard work paid off. Jane's students progressed rapidly through the intense training, showcasing skills that few in the UK had seen. Their talent caught the attention of the TV show *Britain's Got Talent*, and they were invited to perform and tour across the UK.

Nathaniel Lawrence, a 40-year-old who has been training under Jane for two years, commends his kung fu skills and the positive impact he has made on the community.

"Many people have to go far away to learn such skill, so being able to have somebody within driving distance like Matt Jane is incredible," Lawrence said.

## Access to culture

Jane said: "Kung fu is a resource that allows people like myself to achieve something unique. And I'm so happy to have the chance and opportunity to bring this resource to the people of London and the communities here, the local people who come from across the UK to experience this unique opportunity, to have access to a culture, which before Temple, wasn't available (here)."

In order to be better connected with the people in the UK, Jane interprets kung fu in a modern way.

"Not everyone wants to shave their head and become a Shaolin monk. But in reality, what we really need in kung fu is a culture called *chanwuyi*, and for me it's not just Buddhism, kung fu and traditional Chinese medicine, it's mind, exercise and nutrition," he said.

Charlotte Walker battled depression before joining the Temple. After training with Jane for three and a half years, Walker said kung fu has completely altered her perspective on life.

"Kung fu makes me feel as a person," Walker said. "And Jane gives you so much guidance toward life through kung fu."

Costakis Evangelou, 65, thinks the Temple is like a hub which inspires young people a more constructive lifestyle.

"It helps build your character, build your personality and gives you different options. It helps with the discipline in life and makes you a better person and contribute to the community," Evangelou said.

The now 36-year-old Jane has a tattoo of Chinese characters on his right arm saying "a thousand-mile journey begins with a single step".

"I think that quote is very important because there's no mention of the destination," he explained, believing that what his career in kung fu could bring is endless.

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# WORLD

## More nations interested in joining BRICS

Trend reflects desire of Global South to counter Western dominance: Analysts

By EDITH MUTETHYA  
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Following its expansion at the beginning of this year, BRICS is increasing its appeal to developing nations, which analysts said reflects the common desire of the Global South to build a more just and equitable world order against Western dominance.

Last month, Zimbabwe announced its interest in joining the BRICS grouping for an opportunity to access new markets and investment opportunities as well as grow its economy.

Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri, the country's defense minister, made the announcement at the "World Majority for a Multipolar World" international inter-party forum with BRICS and partner countries held in Russia.

She said Zimbabwe has a strong conviction in BRICS' potential to counterbalance the dominance of Western powers, by challenging their unilateral decision-making and promoting a more balanced global landscape, as quoted by Zimbabwe's The Herald newspaper.

Cavince Adhere, a Kenyan expert on international relations, said BRICS formation provides Zimbabwe with a family that respects its own unique internal conditions but at the same time allows it to play on the global stage.

In addition, by joining BRICS, Zimbabwe will be provided with alternative markets for its natural resources, as the country is unable to do business with Western countries due to sanctions, he said.

"Zimbabwe has to seek new territories and friendly countries to work with and I think BRICS provides that framework for the country to engage," he said.

Just like Zimbabwe, some other developing countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS recently. In January, the grouping welcomed five more countries, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia, expanding to a 10-member organization.

Paul Frimpong, founder and executive director of the Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory, said more than 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, indicating the attractiveness of the bloc.

"BRICS attracts a diverse group of potential members because of its primary-driven shared desire to create a more equitable global landscape that many countries believe is currently biased against them," he said.

Frimpong said the BRICS countries' push to represent a collective voice for the Global South in international forums like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, is one of the reasons countries are interested in joining the bloc.

He said BRICS offers a chance for member countries to have a greater influence on global issues and policies as well as push back on the

West's economic dominance.

The grouping's emphasis on a multipolar world, an international system that better advances emerging market country and developing country interests appeals to nations desiring a more balanced global order, he said.

This is in addition to establishing alternative financial institutions like the New Development Bank to provide financial support to member countries, offering an alternative to the IMF and the World Bank, which are traditionally dominated by Western nations.

These initiatives reflect an effort by BRICS members to reduce their vulnerability to Western economic policies, and create a multipolar world reflecting the interests of emerging economies, he said.

"Additionally, shared development challenges and goals among BRICS members offer a platform for collaboration on issues like poverty and sustainable growth, presenting significant trade, investment, and economic development opportunities for prospective members."

### Significant shift

Frimpong said BRICS expansion represents a significant shift toward a more inclusive and balanced global governance structure, with the inclusivity promoting multilateralism, encouraging cooperation and dialogue among a diverse set of nations.

Economically, the expansion stimulates growth and stability through enhanced trade and investment among member states, which collectively possess substantial economic potential.

He said BRICS initiatives in energy, trade networks, and infrastructure projects can significantly boost economic development and connectivity, contributing to global prosperity and sustainable development.

By addressing critical global issues such as climate change through a multilateral approach, BRICS can foster a more equitable and sustainable world, he said.

"By providing a platform for the Global South to voice its concerns and priorities, BRICS contributes to the creation of a new world order that is more reflective of the diverse economic and political realities of the modern world," Frimpong said.

"This shift toward a more balanced and inclusive global governance system has the potential to address long-standing inequalities and promote a more just and equitable international order."

Melha Rout Biel, executive director at the Institute for Strategic and Policy Studies, based in South Sudan, said BRICS expansion means a lot to the international system.

"The fact that many developing countries are joining in a big number is sending a signal that something might have been wrong with the current world system and that different ways of doing things must be found," he said.

## Raising voices



A police officer holds back protesters at the Bharatiya Janata Party head office during a protest by the Delhi Pradesh Mahila Congress against rising price hikes of vegetables, fruits and essential food items, in New Delhi, India, on Monday. SONU MEHTA / NEWS.COM

## Syrians cast ballots for new parliament

DAMASCUS — Syrians flocked on Monday to the polling stations to cast their votes in the parliamentary elections, hoping for changes that can help the country overcome current difficulties.

The Supreme Judicial Committee for Elections affirmed the initiation of voting across the government-controlled regions of Syria, with 8,151 polling centers opening at 7 am. The election sees 1,516 candidates competing for 250 seats in the People's Assembly.

Syria's parliamentary elections take place every four years, with the People's Assembly serving as the country's legislative organ.

Judge Jihad Murad, the chairman of the Supreme Judicial Committee, characterized the voting process as a "critical democratic undertaking", detailing the procedures for vote counting and result announcement upon its conclusion.

Most of the voters hope the would-be lawmakers could work hard to find solutions to the current situation. Years of civil war, political instability, and international sanctions have pulverized the Syrian economy, plunging millions of Syrians into poverty.

"I hope they will improve something in the country and find solutions for the situation we are going through," Nariman Shanli, a voter in Damascus, told Xinhua.

"Every candidate who nominates themselves from any faction must be up to the responsibility," said Nasreen



Syrians elect new members of the parliament in Damascus on Monday. LOUAI BESHARA / AFP

Ahmed, another voter in the Syrian capital.

"They must feel the same sorrow as we do," she added.

The country's economy remains in dire straits with high inflation and little foreign investment amid Western sanctions and a stalled UN-led process meant to find a political solution to the conflict.

At a Damascus polling center, government employee Bassem Badran said he hoped the new chamber would help improve the economic situation.

"We are always hopeful that in each phase good will come to this country, that there will be tangible steps to have real improvements for the economic and living conditions of Syrian citizens."

The ruling Baath Party, led by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, currently holds the majority of seats in parliament. Ahead of the elections, the party undertook significant reshuffling among its candidates.

After casting his ballot in Damascus, the president spoke to reporters about the vote and how the parliament could be the place for a national dialogue in the country.

He also spoke about attempts for reconciliation with Turkey, which has backed opposition fighters since the start of Syria's conflict 13 years ago. He noted that such attempts have failed to achieve goals over the past five years.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## Afghanistan death toll from floods rises to 40

KABUL — The death toll from rainstorms and flooding in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province has risen to 40 and the number of injured has reached 347, the country's Ministry of Public Health reported on Tuesday.

Health workers were dispatched to the affected areas to treat the injured, said Sharafat Zaman Amarkhil, spokesman for the ministry, adding that the casualties in the tragedy are expected to rise.

The tragedy took place on Monday afternoon and caused heavy fatalities and financial damages in the provincial capital Jalalabad, Surkh Rod district and neighboring areas in the province bordering Pakistan.

Similarly, five people were killed as flash floods swept away most parts of eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province on Monday morning.

Images on Monday shared by the Ministry of Information and Culture showed medical personnel wearing white and blue uniforms giving treatment to the wounded.

Other pictures on social media showed battered buildings and power masts.

Nangarhar authorities said on X that 400 houses were damaged, while electricity was out of service in Jalalabad.

They added that several citizens had donated blood at the hospital to support recovery efforts.

A camp at the Torkham border crossing with Pakistan, built for Afghans returning to the country, was particularly devastated as tents were swept away.

"We share the grief of the families of the victims," Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman of the Taliban government, said.

"The relevant institutions of the Islamic Emirate have been directed to go to the affected areas as soon as possible," Mujahid wrote on X, adding that the government would provide shelter, food and medicine to displaced families.

The tragedy comes after flash floods killed hundreds of people in Afghanistan in May and swamped agricultural lands in the country, where 80 percent of the population depend on farming to survive.

Among the poorest countries in the world, Afghanistan is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change.

This year, it saw an unusually wet spring after an extremely dry winter.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## Spruce up



Vets perform dental cleaning on a sedated male African lion during his annual medical checkup at a new space open to the public at Guadalajara Zoo in Jalisco State, Mexico, on Monday. LUIS RUIZ / AFP

## Copenhagen welcomes visitors with a conscience

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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While some cities in Europe such as Barcelona are showing an increasing hostility to overtourism, the Danish capital Copenhagen is going the opposite direction and giving visitors incentives to come to the city — provided they behave in the right way.

Sustainability and eco-friendliness play prominent roles in a new initiative launched by the country's tourist board, called CopenPay, which will run on a trial basis for a month.

Perks will be given to visitors who reuse coffee cups, use bicycles or public transport, or even help

with gardening or trash collection.

In some cases, participants can offer proof of their actions by showing train tickets or photos of themselves being involved, but in many instances the reward system will be done on a trust basis, as a 2020 survey published by the Pew Research Center think tank showed that Denmark is the most highly trusting country in the world.

"No matter if you ride a bike, use public transportation, or collect trash, you can spend your good energy to collect the listed rewards, and we trust you when you ask to pay with it," says the CopenPay website. "After all, the only one you would be cheating is yourself if you miss out

on doing good for our planet."

Copenhagen's most popular attractions include the Tivoli Gardens amusement park, an extensive canal network and the statue of the Little Mermaid, from the story by acclaimed Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen.

### Management measures

In Barcelona recently, tourists were sprayed with water pistols by locals protesting excessive visitor numbers and the impact they are having on the local environment. Visitors to Venice in Italy have to pay a daily charge, while other destinations, including Spain's Balearic islands and Dubrovnik in

Croatia, have also introduced tourist management measures.

Mikkel Aaro-Hansen, from the official tourist board Wonderful Copenhagen, told The Guardian newspaper he hoped other cities might follow the Danish lead.

"We need to ensure that tourism, rather than being a burden for the environment, is transformed into a power for positive change," he said.

"Our core goals are to make travels more sustainable. We'll only manage this though if we are able to overcome the big divide between the desire of visitors to behave in a sustainable way and their actual behavior."

## Study finds melting ice caps slow Earth's spin

WASHINGTON — As far as the climate crisis goes, time is of the essence.

Now, a study released on Monday showed that the melting of polar ice caps is causing our planet to spin more slowly, increasing the length of days at an "unprecedented" rate.

The paper, published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, showed that water flowing from Greenland and Antarctica is resulting in more mass around the equator, co-author Surendra Adhikari of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory told Agence France-Press.

"It's like when a figure skater does a pirouette, first holding her arms close to her body and then stretching them out," co-author Benedikt Soja of ETH Zurich said.

"The initially fast rotation becomes slower because the masses move away from the axis of rotation, increasing physical inertia."

Earth is commonly thought of as a sphere, but it is more accurate to call it an "oblate spheroid" that bulges somewhat around the equator.

Moreover, its shape is constantly changing, from the impacts of daily tides that affect the oceans and crusts to long-term effects from the

drift of tectonic plates and abrupt violent shifts caused by earthquakes and volcanoes.

The paper relied on observational techniques like Very Long Baseline Interferometry, where scientists can measure the difference in time it takes for radio signals from space to reach different points on Earth, and use that to infer variations in the planet's orientation and length of day.

It also used the Global Positioning System, which measures the Earth's rotation very precisely, to about 100th of a millisecond, and even looked at ancient eclipse

records going back millennia.

If the Earth turns more slowly, then the length of the day increases by a few milliseconds from the standard measure of 86,400 seconds.

A significant cause of the slowdown is the gravitational pull of the moon, which pulls on the oceans in a process called "tidal friction" that has caused a gradual deceleration of 2.4 milliseconds per century over millions of years.

But the new study comes to a surprising conclusion that, if humans continue to emit greenhouse gases at a high rate, the effect of a warming climate will be greater than that of the moon's pull by the end of the 21st century, Adhikari said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## BUSINESS

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# Post-plenum boost to tech SMEs seen

Low-altitude aviation, biomedicine, digital field, power equipment in focus

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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As the new quality productive forces will serve as a major economic driver for China during its ongoing efforts to deepen economic transformation, more policies supporting technology companies, especially the small and medium-sized ones, can be expected after the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, said experts.

They made the prediction after smaller-cap technology companies showed strong growth as of Tuesday. While the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index rose a tad on Tuesday, ChiNext in Shenzhen, where technology-focused companies are traded, climbed 1.39 percent.

ChiNext-listed machinery equipment maker Nanjing Railway New Technology and electronic equipment company Sunwoda Electronic saw their respective share prices surge to the daily limit of 20 percent on both Monday and Tuesday. Solar energy equipment provider Suzhou Maxwell Technologies and lithium battery company EVE Energy, two well-known ChiNext companies, saw their prices rise 5.44 percent and 3 percent, respectively, on Tuesday.

The Beijing Stock Exchange, home to shares of many technologically advanced small and medium-sized companies, also saw robust trading on Tuesday. Only four out of the 249 BSE-listed companies reported a loss on Tuesday, lifting the BSE 50 Index by 2.68 percent.

Xiu Qiang, joint chief strategist of CITIC Securities, explained that the A-share technology sector has seen a business turnaround since mid-2023. Electronic companies' profitability has been especially noticeable over the past two quarters.

The bullish performance of these technology companies will be further consolidated by clearer plans for the development of new quality productive forces after the ongoing third plenum, he said. More supportive policies may be introduced for the low-altitude economy, the digital economy and biomedicine after the meeting, he said.

Ying Ying, chief computer industry analyst at China Securities, anticipates more support to technology-advanced SMEs, given that a number of stimulative measures to further facilitate technological innovation have been

introduced over the past few months.

The third phase of the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund was launched on May 24, with a registered capital of 344 billion yuan (\$47 billion), outnumbering the size of the previous two phases. A 500 billion yuan reloan to serve technology innovation and transformation was set up in mid-June, among which 100 billion yuan will be used to support tech startups and SMEs.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, released a set of measures on June 15 to facilitate the high-quality development of venture capital firms. Four days later, the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog, issued eight new measures to deepen the reform at the STAR Market of the Shanghai bourse.

"The capital market will attach greater importance to A-share technology companies amid central regulators' emphasis and accelerated planning for technological innovation," said Ying.

The capital market has already taken action in this direction. The exchange-traded fund tracking the largest 100 ChiNext companies in terms of market capitalization, launched by China Asset Management in 2017, received net capital inflows of over 12.9 million yuan over the past 10 days, according to market tracker Wind Info.

A quick review of the market performance during the previous third plenum meetings since 2000 showed that rebound of growth-oriented enterprises had a probability of about 75 percent, said Li Meicen, chief strategist at Caitong Securities.

Small-cap tech companies with higher price elasticity, including those specializing in TMT (technology, media and telecommunications), power equipment and new energy, usually show stronger growth in the two months after the third plenum. Based on the top regulators' previously launched fundamental research plans, companies focusing on quantum information, synthetic biology and the low-altitude economy may gain more support after the third session, he said.

The average valuation of A-share tech companies is much lower than their peers in overseas markets, said experts from Everbright Securities on Tuesday. In anticipation of more policies to boost technology innovation, these companies' valuations will likely be adjusted significantly in the medium term, they said.

## Station reconstructed



Builders from China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd recently completed reconstruction of Jiangdu railway station on the Nanjing-Qidong Railway, the first line in central Jiangsu province and a key part of the intercity railway network in the Yangtze River Delta region. The reconstruction project is expected to help in the future operation of the Jiangdu Railway Special Line (Logistics Base), built at a cost of 628 million yuan (\$88.2 million). WU ZHIBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Technicians check a power transmission tower in Chuzhou, Anhui province.  
SONG WEIXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## New energy helps in green transition

By ZHENG XIN  
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Installations of new energy in China, including solar and wind, were predominant in the power sector last year, further accelerating the country's green and low-carbon transition, the China Electricity Council said.

Major power companies completed investments exceeding 1.55 trillion yuan (\$213 billion yuan), an increase of 24.7 percent year-on-year. Investments in national power generation projects reached 1.02 trillion yuan, up 37.7 percent year-on-year, while that in national power grid projects totaled 527.7 billion yuan, up 5.4 percent year-on-year, according to the electricity authority.

The increased investment in new energy has accelerated the green and low-carbon transition across the nation, said Hao Yingjie, a spokesman for the council.

Investment in the solar power sector reached 431.6 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 50.7 percent, followed by wind power, which totaled 275.3 billion yuan, up 36.9 percent year-on-year. Investment in non-fossil energy power generation grew by 39.2 percent year-on-year, accounting for 89.2 percent of total power investment, he said.

Power grid companies have further strengthened the construction of rural grids and distribution networks, with investments in 110 kV and below power grids totaling 290.2 billion yuan, accounting for 55 percent of the total investment in power grid projects, Hao added.

According to the annual development report of China's electric power industry released by the council in Beijing recently, renewable energy projects by Chinese power companies are also on the rise abroad.

By the end of 2023, the total amount of direct overseas investment by major Chinese power companies reached \$4.42 billion, a year-on-year increase of 30.8 percent. Of this, 61.8 percent of projects were in the new energy sector, and this investment trend is expected to grow in 2024, it said.

Chinese companies enjoy advantages in terms of cost competitiveness, advanced technology, experience and expertise as well as a comprehensive supply chain on the global stage, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

China has made significant advancements in renewable energy technologies, particularly in solar and wind power. These technological innovations enable Chi-

nese companies to deliver high-quality and efficient renewable energy solutions, he said.

With extensive experience in large-scale renewable energy projects domestically, Chinese power companies have also developed considerable expertise in project development, management and operation. This experience translates well for international projects.

In addition, China has a well-developed supply chain for renewable energy components, such as solar panels, wind turbines and batteries. This integrated supply chain allows Chinese companies to source materials quickly and cost-effectively.

China's major electric power companies signed 205 new overseas engineering contracts last year, amounting to \$26.46 billion. These projects involved 55 countries and regions, with the highest proportions in Asia and Africa, accounting for 59 percent and 23.9 percent, respectively.

The total value of overseas engineering contracts signed by China's major electric power companies by the end of last year was \$402.43 billion, with overseas investments by China's major electric power companies mainly in solar power generation, wind power, hydropower, power transmission and transformation.

## Multimodal LLMs pursuing AGI now

By WANG XIN in Shanghai  
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Multimodal large language models have made substantial advances over the past year, and the practical application of such models is heading in the direction of pursuing artificial general intelligence, with diverse vertical industrial large models and AI agents emerging, said experts at the 2024 World Artificial Intelligence Conference, which wrapped up on July 6 in Shanghai.

Multimodal LLMs integrate and process diverse types of data — such as text, images, audio and video — to enhance understanding and generate comprehensive responses.

In May, the launch of GPT-4o, the latest LLM developed by OpenAI, caused a global sensation. The new flagship generative AI model features capabilities across text, voice and visuals, making interaction between humans and machines much more natural and seamless, the company said.

Triggered by GPT-4o, Chinese AI companies also showcased their LLM updates during the conference, including Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, SenseTime and Ant Group, as well as emerging companies such as Minimax, Baichuan Intelligence and Zhipu AI.

Chinese AI pioneer SenseTime launched its latest multimodal

LLM on July 5. The new model features integration of diverse types of data and real-time streaming multimodal interaction with users, closely competing with GPT-4o in interaction effects and multiple core metrics, the company said.

Chinese financial tech firm Ant Group shared its latest LLM product on the same day.

"The Ant Bailong Foundation Model has been equipped with native multimodal capabilities. It can directly understand and train various types of data including audio, video, images and text," said Xu Peng, vice-president of the group, who regards such native multimodal capabilities as the "right path to achieving artificial general intelligence" as they will enable LLMs to interact like humans.

Compared with the previous edition, this year's WAIC showcased remarkable advances in LLMs. The number of LLMs in China exceeds 330, according to official statistics.

The practical industrial application of large models, such as applying vertical large models, AI agents or MaaS (model as a service), was another hot topic at this year's WAIC.

"The creation of large models is only the starting point. Landing the LLM into industrial scenarios to generate value is the goal," said Wu Yunsheng, vice-president of Tencent Cloud and head of

Tencent YouTu Lab.

Tencent Hunyuan, the company's general model, was one of the highlighted exhibits at this year's conference.

Jiang Jie, Tencent's vice-president, said: "In the future, general models will exist as infrastructure — like water, electricity and networks — for on-demand access. More models of different sizes and modalities will appear, and businesses can coordinate with large and small models to meet customized needs while improving performance."

Hu Shiwei, co-founder and president of Chinese AI company 4Paradigm, said the positioning of such large models as the new "infrastructure" in the future is a certainty.

"Our industrial large models have seen remarkable results in application. For example, in the financial services sector, AI has improved the accuracy of identifying fraudulent transactions. In the retail sector, personalized services have led to a significant increase in sales," Hu said.

In addition to developing vertical large models, many companies and developers are also using MaaS — a type of cloud-based service that offers users access to machine-learning models to develop AI applications.

Zhipu AI, a Beijing-based startup dubbed one of the four new "AI tigers" of China, has accumulated over 400,000 corporate users.

## HK council's water safety report kicks up legal row

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing and LI BINGCUN in Hong Kong

Nongfu Spring Co Ltd, China's largest bottled water supplier in terms of market share, issued a lawyer's letter to the Consumer Council of Hong Kong on Tuesday, demanding the latter clarify its report on taste, mineral and safety tests on 30 samples of widely consumed bottled water products, including Chinese and foreign brands, and issue an apology to the company and consumers.

The council released a report of the test results on Monday and found that the bromate levels of the bottled water products, including those of Nongfu Spring and Ganten, another Chinese bottled water producer, hit the maximum limit set by the European Union. Ganten said the company's legal department is pursuing the matter.

Bromate, a byproduct formed in the disinfection process, has potential health risks to human bodies when consumed in excess quantities, and may cause nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea.

Hangzhou, Zhejiang province-based Nongfu Spring said in its lawyer's letter that the council's report is based on incorrect understanding and nonprofessional analysis, and a subjective evaluation was made, causing significant damage to the company's reputation.

It claimed that there were three major mistakes in the test report, including the errors in the application of standards, judgment of standards and the subjective misinterpretation. The release of the report caused panic among consumers in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, and huge losses to Nongfu Spring, the lawyer's letter said.

The Hong Kong Consumer Council said it has received the lawyer's letter and is looking into the issue. It also said it has made it clear earlier it did not find any harmful substances exceeding the World Health Organization's standards in all of the 30 samples and they can be safely consumed. The focus of the report is on the cost-effectiveness of each sample and the impact of bottles on the environment, rather than safety issues with the products.

Nongfu Spring argued that as a product manufactured and sold in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, the laws and regulations of the respective regions should be taken as applicable standards.

The company also claimed that even if EU safety standards were applied, the safety standard for drinking water, instead of natural mineral water, should be applied.

Bromate levels of Nongfu Spring's bottled water reached 3 micrograms per liter, and it is far below the EU standard of 10 micrograms per liter of drinking water. The product quality meets the safety requirements for drinking water in China, the United States, Japan and of the WHO, which is below 10 micrograms per liter, the lawyer's letter said.

"Some food safety standards in Hong Kong have certain differences from those in the Chinese mainland. If we talk about international practice, 3 micrograms of bromate per liter didn't exceed the standard," said Zhu Danpeng, an independent food and beverage industry analyst.

"When domestic food companies go global and internationalize their businesses, they must thoroughly study the local food safety standards," Zhu said.

In 2023, Nongfu Spring achieved sales revenue of 42.67 billion yuan (\$5.87 billion), up 28.4 percent year-on-year, which generated a net profit of 12.08 billion yuan, up 42.2 percent year-on-year, according to its annual financial report.

In recent months, Nongfu Spring has cut prices of some of its drinking water products to about 1 yuan per 550-ml bottle. Other industry players such as Hangzhou Wahaha Group and CR Beverage also slashed prices of their bottled drinking water products.

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### Briefly

#### FAW Jiefang truck output hits 9m units

FAW Jiefang, a truck-making unit of China's leading automaker FAW Group, saw its 9 millionth vehicle roll off the production line on Tuesday, bringing the group's total vehicle output to 60 million. FAW Jiefang

produced 143,300 trucks in the first half, up 4.11 percent year-on-year, and sales rose 15.4 percent to 151,800 units over the same period.

#### PRC conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 676

billion yuan (\$94.77 billion) of seven-half reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Tuesday. The move aims to offset the impact of the tax season and keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESSFOCUS

## CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Co-branded promotions spark growth

F&B firms partner with IP holders of popular shows to tap potential business

By ZHENG YIRAN  
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Chinese food and beverage makers are teaming up with intellectual property (IP) owners of popular shows to launch co-branded campaigns aimed at tapping potential new business opportunities in the highly competitive catering sector.

For instance, coconut beverages provider FreeNow has teamed up with the IP holders of *Qing Yu Nian* — a drama adapted from the eponymous popular online novel that has attracted tens of millions of viewers in its second season this summer — to launch a range of products, including stickers of its characters, themed cushions, fans and glasses.

According to Jiaying, Zhejiang province-based FreeNow, in order to receive these products, consumers can either join in the discussions of “drinking FreeNow while watching *Qing Yu Nian 2*” on social media platforms, or purchase FreeNow’s coconut water. In June, sales of the company’s not-from-concentrate (NFC) coconut water achieved decent growth.

Likewise, domestic coffee brand Luckin Coffee joined hands with acclaimed TV series *The Tale of Rose* starring Chinese actress Liu Yifei to launch its yellow rose latte on June 24.

The themed coffee set, containing two cups of yellow rose latte and a keychain featuring its main character, is being sold for 31.9 yuan (\$4.4). The same evening, Liu posted a picture of her drinking the beverage on popular microblogging platform Weibo, and soon Luckin Coffee’s new offering went viral online.

On June 26, at a Luckin Coffee chain store in Chaoyang district in Beijing, a shop assistant told China Daily that the themed set had gone out of stock, and customers who had been drawn in by the yellow rose keychain had returned disappointed.

According to box office tracker Maoyan, the show, broadcast on CCTV-8, received the highest rating at 2.04 percent, while average ratings of other shows on the channel are about 1.8 percent.

Data from *The Tale of Rose* showed that by June 26, when the show reached its finale, its accumulative effective views exceeded 1.27 billion, and the average effective views per episode was over 33.55 million.

Huang Yimei, played by Liu, became the most popular character in the show, generating heated discussions on the internet.

By June 24, the total discussion volume of the show on Weibo was 30.7 million, gaining 479 Weibo hot searches, and a total of 3,714 Weibo hot search topics, data from Sina Entertainment Paparazzi showed.

Food and beverage makers are also joining hands with IPs popular among the post-90s generation amid a scenario in which brands often enlist Gen-Z pop sensations for their marketing strategies.

On May 15, milk tea brand Naixue, the first new tea beverage brand listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange, launched its *Sailor Moon*-themed fresh fruit tea. Co-branded with the popular Japanese cartoon, Naixue is targeting the rising consumption power of the post-90s set, many of whom had grown up watching *Sailor Moon*.

According to Naixue, on the first day of launch, it sold more than 500,000 cups of co-branded fresh fruit tea. Sales revenue at Naixue’s outlets nationwide has risen rapidly, with some outlets achieving 600 percent growth.

“As a super fan of *Sailor Moon* and also a fruit tea lover, when I got news that Naixue was teaming up with *Sailor Moon*, there was just one thought in my mind — ‘All in!’ The whole set, containing six themed cups, six fluffy bags — each featuring one character — one thermal cup and one ceramic cup, costs around 300 yuan. It is totally worth it,” said a consumer surnamed Zhang.

A spokesperson for Naixue said, “Among numerous co-branding marketing strategies, we are stepping up efforts to bring out more innovative marketing strategies even while maintaining the quality of product and service.”

“In co-branding with *Sailor Moon*, by launching a themed cup whose surface color alters in response to temperature changes, we try to bring ‘personality’ and ‘mood’ to our products, to create products with vitality. Only in this way can products ‘cross their life cycle’ and impress consumers, allowing us to stand out in the industry.”

Hot pot chain Haidilao has also chosen to co-brand with a



Top: Employees prepare milk tea orders at a Naixue store in Shanghai in April. ZHOU YOU / FOR CHINA DAILY  
Above: A collection of Naixue and the *Sailor Moon*'s co-branded products. On May 15, the milk tea brand launched *Sailor Moon*-themed fresh fruit tea. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“... co-branding campaigns have proved to be a good marketing strategy, as they fully utilize brand differentiation, helping brands expand the market.”

Zhu Dangep, independent food and beverages analyst

Japanese cartoon IP.

In April, it teamed up with *Chibi Maruko-chan*, a classic Japanese manga series. Haidilao has in its over 1,000 outlets nationwide launched a themed mushroom quartet — *boletus edulis*, *streptococcus pyogenes*, *streptococcus* and velvet antler mushroom. The company has also arranged themed shuttle buses in Shanghai, offering free rides for consumers to its outlets.

According to Kamen, a media portal on the beverages sector in China, 231 co-branding marketing campaigns took place among the 22 mainstream beverage brands in the country in 2023.

Specifically, cartoon-related co-branding campaigns took up the largest share with 61, while TV series co-branding and computer game co-branding tied in at second spot, with 17 each.

“For catering enterprises, co-branding has become the norm. The IPs that brands select, together with the emotional value, or the chemistry stimulated by co-branding, become critical factors for consumers’ purchase decisions, effectively promoting sales growth,” Kamen said in its report.

“Driven by traffic and sales, co-branding has become a golden channel for many brands to awaken dormant users and expand potential ones. However, there are also many brands that have not disclosed the sales of their co-branded products. Whether the input-output ratio is proportional is a bit like ‘Only the wearer of the shoes knows whether they fit or not,’ according to its report.

Despite the heightened co-branding campaigns, more efforts are needed to return to the essence of the products, in order to achieve high-quality development, experts cautioned.

“Currently, the industry has

entered a highly homogenized stage, and co-branding campaigns have proved to be a good marketing strategy, as they fully utilize brand differentiation, helping brands expand the market,” said Zhu Dangep, an independent food and beverages analyst based in Guangzhou.

“Judging from the numerous co-branding marketing strategies launched in China, brands now tend to target younger age groups (Generation Z). This is an inevitable trend. Recognizing, embracing, pleasing, and satisfying the new-generation consumers is undoubtedly a necessary task,” Zhu said.

However, regardless of the marketing strategies, the essence of catering consumption is to return to its nature — the products and services themselves, he said.

“Enterprises should pay attention to product quality control, consumption scenario innovation, user stickiness enhancement, and service system optimization, so as to achieve long-term, high-quality development,” Zhu added.

Zhang Yue, president of Beijing-based market consultancy Ao You International, said catering enterprises should carefully study consumer demand and preferences, and work out differentiated marketing strategies targeting each consumer group, in order to grasp new growth points and achieve breakthroughs in a highly competitive market.

“In addition, they should emphasize social media marketing, as social media platforms are now becoming an increasingly important marketing channel. Brands may take advantage of these platforms in precise marketing and personalized marketing strategy recommendation, in order to improve marketing effectiveness and conversion rates,” he added.

## Diners not souring anytime soon on trendy soup hot pot

By ZHENG YIRAN

With consumption upgrades, consumers’ increasingly diversified tastes and pursuit of healthier diets, eating sour soup hot pot has become the new “it” dish among Chinese hot pot lovers.

It’s noon on Saturday inside the New World Department Store in Dongcheng district, Beijing, with people lining up outside a hot pot restaurant, waiting to try out the new arrival for summer dining — sour soup hot pot.

“My friend and I are here to try out the Leishan fish sauce sour soup hot pot, which is a traditional dish of Southwest China’s Guizhou province. Entering summer, with the hot weather, sometimes I feel like eating something sour to stimulate my appetite. We plan to order the fish sauce sour hot pot, thin-cut beef, black fish fillets, butterfly shrimp, sweet bamboo shoots as well as pomelo ice drinks,” said Wang Yang, a hot pot fan waiting in line.

This summer, hot pot chain Hai-

dilao introduced Leishan “fish sauce sour” soup hot pot — a traditional dish from Leishan county of Qian-dongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture, Guizhou.

“The birthplace of sour soup is the autonomous prefecture, where the locals have a long history of enjoying sour food. Year by year, sour soup has transformed into various flavors, including rice sour soup, red sour soup, bean sour soup and fish sauce sour soup. Fish sauce sour soup is one of the chief culinary representatives of local intangible heritage skills. Therefore, we decided to introduce fish sauce sour soup hot pot to our menu,” said a Haidilao spokesperson.

Enjoying sour soup has become a new trend among Chinese consumers. As of July 9, there were more than 450 million views on videos related to sour soup hot pot on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok. On lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu, there were nearly 150,000 related notes.

The 2024 Chinese hot pot report, issued by industry research institute

Huoguoancian, showed that among consumers’ favorite hot pot options, sour soup ranked second, just behind beef tallow soup. According to business data provider Qichacha, by the end of 2023, the number of sour soup hot pot-related enterprises surged by 48.3 percent in just six months.

Apart from fish sauce sour soup hot pot, other sour soup hot pots — such as vinegar soup hot pot hailing from Puqian town in Wenchang, Hainan province — are also popular among hot pot aficionados.

Wang Peng, associate research fellow at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said: “With consumers’ tastes becoming increasingly diversified, traditional hot pot bases such as spicy soup and light soup no longer meet shifting demands. Sour soup, as a base with a unique taste, is better at gustatory stimulation. In addition, sour food conforms to modern people’s pursuit of a healthy diet, as it is rich in vitamin C and beneficial bacteria, which help with digestion and immunity enhancement.”

Haidilao’s innovative attempt is also in line with the country’s rural revitalization efforts. Leishan county boasts rich mountain forestry resources, but inadequate arable land and limited industrial space.

With the help of Haidilao, local enterprises’ manufacturing process has been modernized, and household incomes have been rising significantly. Currently, there are several companies in the area producing fish sauce sour. Taking Guizhou Leishan Fish Sauce Sour Technology Development Co Ltd as an example, the company manufactures 1,000 metric tons of such fish sauce sour per year, creating an output value of 30 million yuan (\$4.1 million).

In addition, the introduction of fish sauce sour soup hot pot to Haidilao’s outlets nationwide attracts tens of thousands of tourists to visit Leishan, boosting the local tourism sector, said Guo Changbiao, head of the Leishan agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

On Jan 1, the State Council issued notice on comprehensively promoting rural revitalization nationwide.



Performers from the Miao ethnic group dance at the launch ceremony of Haidilao’s Leishan fish sauce sour hot pot in Leishan county, Guizhou province, in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The notice noted that enterprises should play a leading role in supporting various industries in rural regions, as well as raising household incomes.

Speaking of future consumption trends, Yuan Shuai, executive vice-president of the rural revitalization committee under the China City Development Academy, said that over the short term, the frenzy of

eating sour soup is expected to maintain a strong momentum. However, for long-term development, catering enterprises are urged to constantly churn out innovative and differentiated sour dishes to meet consumers’ evolving palates.

Online-to-offline marketing strategies and a more nuanced combination of culture and food are also necessary, Yuan said.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Leadership of Party guarantee for success of deep-water reforms that are now needed

People's Daily has documented 72 key conferences of the central reform body that President Xi Jinping has presided over since 2012. In this time, more than 600 guideline documents on deepening reforms have been issued, prompting the release and execution of over 3,000 action plans.

At the ongoing third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Party's central decision-making body will not only review the implementation and effects of these plans, policies and measures but also chart the course for future reforms of the country. This will be set out in a milestone document the plenum is expected to issue upon its conclusion on Thursday.

It has been the relaying of the baton of reform from one generation of reformers to the next since the country began to implement its reform and opening-up policy in 1978 that has enabled the country to always keep its development on the right track.

In this process, the country has unflinchingly adhered to its own socialist path under the leadership and guidance of the Party. This has not only ensured material benefits for people's well-being, but also since 2012 produced solid progress in developing whole-process people's democracy and law-based governance across all fields of endeavor, and enhanced the country's ecological conservation.

These achievements have been possible because of the Party's own insistence on self-revolution to ensure its own cleanness and efficiency, which has enabled it to retain the confidence of the public that the country will be able to overcome any challenges it may face. So unlike some countries that experience unsettling social divisions when it comes to reforms touching the cheese of some, China has a strong social consensus on the necessity of carrying out deeper reforms.

Reform is not plain sailing. There are certainly pains and setbacks to be suffered. But the prospect of these has never hindered or deterred the Chinese people from forging ahead on the path of modernization.

With the proof of past experience, the people are confident that the Party's leadership can ensure any pains are borne for future gains. The past more than 40 years have shown that development has its laws and stages, which means before the pie is baked, it is too early to argue over how to cut it fairly.

Even those who keep a critical watchful eye on China cannot deny the Party has done a good job in eradicating extreme poverty and building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, making the most of the country's endogenous advantages and the benefits of being open and inclusive to the rest of the world. Nor that the Party has addressed many of the acute problems and challenges that emerged as a result of its rapid development, which has enabled it to maintain long-term stable governance.

By ensuring that Party members are more conscious of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership, the guarantee for the success of what are now deep-water reforms has been effectively strengthened. Problems will inevitably arise in the reform, opening-up and socialist modernization endeavors but the right answers suited to the realities of China and the needs of the day are there to be found.

At their gathering in Beijing this week, the Party's central decision-makers will once again roll up their sleeves and get down to the nitty-gritty of reform work, so the country can continue to forge ahead.

## Japan sharpening sword to be unsheathed

The cover of Japan's latest defense white paper, which was released on Friday, depicts the forging of a samurai sword. This is apt as the document is full of malicious ambitions.

The Japanese side claims that this is intended to show that Japan's defense and deterrence capabilities are being strengthened. But instead it exposes the blade Japan intends to wield with its militarist revival.

China is portrayed as the justification for this. The white paper devotes 30 pages to its claim that China is Japan's biggest strategic challenge, and that China's military activities around Japan are becoming more frequent.

Like the editions in the recent past, the Japanese defense white paper for 2024 is another step backward. A regressive outgrowth of the country's swelling ambitions as it clings to the coattails of the United States "Indo-Pacific" travesty.

It is a further sign of Tokyo's growing impulse to break through Japan's "pacifist Constitution", which gained momentum under the Shinzo Abe Cabinet.

Japan's 2024 defense white paper should worry everyone who wants peace in East Asia. No matter how Tokyo tries to whitewash the country's militarist past and argue the case for its present attempt to rearm itself, a militarily strong Japan unrepentant about past wrongs poses a grave threat to the neighborhood.

The 50th edition of the annual report warrants special attention as it signals that Tokyo is ready to completely cast off the constitutional constraints on rearming Japan.

Every recent Japanese prime minister since Abe has been pushing the envelope to rebuild Japanese military strength. The white paper pushes it further by creating a sense of "crisis" to drag the reluctant Japanese public along with it.

The latest document, presented by the Japanese Ministry of Defense to the National Diet and approved the same day, uses the same pattern Japanese politicians have employed for decades, building its case on imagined, exaggerated threats. But the picture it paints is darker and direr this year.

Its portrayal of an "increasingly aggressive" China, "provocative, nuclear-armed" Democratic People's Republic of Korea and "revanchist" Russia have been familiar tropes of fear in Japan's defense white papers, but this year they are hyped up to imminently menacing proportions.

In the crisis scenario crafted by Tokyo, a "defiant, provocative" Pyongyang is pressing ahead with its missiles and nuclear programs; and if Russia's conflict with Ukraine continues, it will inflict endless woes on the entire world.

"The international community has entered the most trying time of the postwar era," Defense Minister Minoru Kihara claims in his preface to the document. "The existing order has been seriously challenged, and we recognize that we are entering a new era of crisis." And, such an era calls for "fundamental reinforcement" of Japanese defense capabilities.

With 30 pages devoted to China, the white paper makes it clear that China is viewed as Japan's foremost "strategic challenge", in the same way the US Defense Department anchors its "Indo-Pacific" security narrative. The two employ almost identical rhetoric: China is escalating tensions in the East and South China seas, in the Taiwan Strait, even intensifying efforts to strengthen coordination with Russia. But most worrying is the seed being planted in the perceptions of the Japanese public that the circumstances are so volatile that the possibility of a "serious situation" occurring in East Asia akin to Russia's conflict with Ukraine, "cannot be ruled out".

That being said, Tokyo says that there is no other choice for the country but to arm itself to the teeth. So, it has to double its defense spending to 2 percent of GDP and develop and deploy long-range missiles to boost its strike capabilities.

Thus the Japanese authorities' claim that this year's white paper is intended to show how the country is forging a not-to-be-used sword has to be taken with more than a grain of salt.

The blade being forged is not intended to be kept sheathed, as the weapons and technologies and approaches presented in the white paper are all offensive, not defensive.

Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## Consumer confidence important to ensuring positive economic growth

China's gross domestic product grew 5.0 percent year-on-year in the first half of this year, National Bureau of Statistics data show, while GDP grew 5.3 percent in the first quarter and 4.7 percent in the second quarter, showing signs of decelerating growth.

The momentum of global economic growth has remained weak since the beginning of this year, which, along with geopolitical conflicts, international trade frictions and other issues, has contributed to insufficient effective domestic demand in China. In this context, it is not easy for China, with its huge economic size, to achieve a growth rate of around 5 percent, faster than that of the United States, the eurozone, Japan and other major economies, although it still remains an important engine and stabilizing force of world economic growth.

The country should attach greater importance to the lower-than-expected 4.7 percent GDP growth in the second quarter and the reason for it. The extreme weather events such as

drought and flooding in some places have affected household consumption and fixed asset investment, resulting in a slowing economy, but the fundamental factor is still the lack of effective demand and market confidence. Therefore, the country needs to increase policy intensity in the second half of the year to avoid further economic slowdown from affecting market expectations.

Among exports, investment and consumption, the traditional "troika" of China's economy, only exports exceeded expectations in the first half of the year. In terms of investment, manufacturing investment and infrastructure investment have seen stable growth, but weak real estate investment has weighed on economic growth. In terms of consumption, the total retail sales of consumer goods increased by 3.7 percent in the first half of the year, but this was weaker than market expectations.

The utilization rate of China's industrial capacity above designated size in the second quarter was 74.9 percent,

which is relatively low, indicating that some low-quality capacity needs to be phased out. The country should strengthen market enforcement and supervision to ensure the survival of the fittest, while taking measures to promote the recovery of prices and confidence.

In the second half of the year, the country should focus on expanding consumption and enhancing confidence. With the real estate market showing signs of improvement, positive monetary policy signals should be transmitted to further stabilize market expectations and enhance market confidence. The gradual implementation of special government bonds and ultra-long special government bonds should be promoted, efforts to cultivate and expand new quality productive forces be stepped up, and effective quality improvement and reasonable quantitative growth of the economy fostered to ensure the economy is on a stable and sound footing in the long run.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Scientist vindicated, damage to science permanent

Feng "Franklin" Tao can finally breathe easy after a panel of federal judges overturned the former University of Kansas' Chinese-American professor's conviction for "defrauding the US government by hiding his research ties to China". The judicial procedures against Tao ended on July 11.

That's another example of the bankruptcy of the so-called China Action Plan, launched by the US Department of Justice in 2018, under which about 20 Chinese-American scholars have faced criminal charges; the plan came to an end in February 2022. Tao was the first Chinese-American scholar to face charges under the plan, as well as the last to see his case dropped. After

an FBI probe in 2019, Tao was charged with 10 crimes, for which had he been found guilty he would have been sentenced to around 150 years in prison. He cleared himself of six charges via the jury while three were overturned by the judge and now the last one has finally been declared void.

But the damage it has done to the US science community is permanent. Tao is fortunate enough to have published a book and 16 academic essays even after the University of Kansas suspended him and the US National Science Foundation stopped funding his research. That such a witch hunt could take place two decades into the 21st century reflects the nervousness of US society

and its ability to invent enemies. Hundreds of leading US scientists, among them some Nobel Prize winners, had jointly signed letters in 2021 against what they called an "anti-China, anti-science witch hunt".

There is no way to blame any single political force for the witch hunt that lasted for two US administrations with opposing political views. It shows how distrust and suspicion of people of Chinese origin transcend the US political system. While this is the end of the China Action Plan, we hope the US does not come up with another plan to harm people of Chinese origin and even science.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## US Senate caught on horns of self-made dilemma

The US Senate Armed Services Committee has released its version of the National Defense Authorization Act, which, unlike the version passed by the House of Representatives last month, does not include a requirement to restrict DJI drones from entering the US market.

The SASC version of the bill passed behind closed doors last month by a vote of 22 to 3. It will go to the full Senate for consideration. If it passes the Senate, it will have to be reconciled with the House version.

Previously, the House version of the bill required DJI to be included in the so-called "control list" of the Federal Communications Commission, preventing the Chinese company's new equipment or software from obtaining FCC certification, which may also

lead to the revocation of its existing FCC authorization.

The US lawmakers' hesitance over banning DJI drones stems from the fact that the technological level of US-made drones cannot be compared with that of Chinese drones, and it is not easy to find suitable substitutes. In recent years, the US administration has repeatedly suppressed many Chinese companies, including DJI, on the grounds of protecting "data security" and "national security". However, judging from the current situation, the US lawmakers seem to have accepted the fact that before the US can find suitable replacements for DJI drones they will have to put aside their unfounded "security" concerns.

Not only are the Chinese drones widely used in US agriculture — four out of every five drones flying over US farms are made by Chinese companies led by DJI — but they are also

employed by the US military, law enforcement agencies and emergency personnel. Chinese drones have a 90 percent share of US law enforcement market and 92 percent share of its emergency rescue market. Chinese drones therefore make great contributions to protecting the US' food and national security, and protect the lives and properties of the US people.

That's why the US lawmakers face fierce opposition from the Chinese drone customers in the US for their proposal to ban DJI in the country, which, if adopted, would ironically constitute an imminent threat to the US' security.

But if they continue to allow the use of DJI drones, the US lawmakers will make it clear that their bid to ban DJI drones had nothing to do with "security" concerns, but was a protectionist move to protect US drone companies.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Li Yiping

## Socialist market system drives growth

The ongoing third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is expected to inject vitality into new, high-quality productive forces and the development of a socialist market economy.

Since the third plenary session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978, the focus in China has been on seeking truth through practice, centering on economic construction, and reform and opening-up. The subsequent sessions introduced significant theoretical innovations such as the immutable nature of the relationship between commodity and money, the primary stage of socialism, and the concept of a socialist market economy.

After the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in 2013, the Chinese political economy has ventured into new realms, advocating for the market's decisive role in resource allocation while emphasizing the enhanced role of the government. The primary contradiction in society has evolved to be that between people's growing material and cultural needs and unbalanced and inadequate development, marking a new phase in the primary stage of socialism. The mission of this phase is to achieve high-quality development and build a high-level socialist market economy and fostering new quality productive forces.

Productive forces comprise all the factors contributing to the productive activity of human beings. Machines and tools are productive forces, as are factories, means of transportation and communications, technology and science. Productive forces also include the concentration of production in large factories and the social division of labor which allows for more intensive use of machines. These tools and machines not only reflect the level of productive forces but also define economic epochs.

The difference between various economic epochs is not what is produced, but how it is produced. Labor is the most active component of productivity and the lever that enhances it. And the advancement of productive forces dictates the state of economic development.

Productive forces and production relations are interdependent, with the latter influencing the former. The fit between production relations and productive forces, and the superstructure with the economic base can either promote or hinder economic and social development.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

**As China transitions from a traditional planned economy to a socialist market economy, the superstructure must adapt to better suit the economic base.**

Therefore, it is crucial to continuously adjust production relations and the superstructure driven by the development of productive forces.

Reform essentially involves adjusting production relations and the superstructure that no longer fit with the evolving productive forces. As industrial spaces saturate and the efficiency of marginal investments wanes, innovation becomes essential to spawn new economic growth points. The unseen social landscapes always hold potential for dazzling economic

growth, powered by robust new quality productive forces.

Deeper reform is necessary to adjust all the elements of production relations and the superstructure that do not support these new forces. Ownership issues are often the first that need to be addressed. The ingrained bias against the private sector sometimes surfaces subtly, affecting economic development. So balancing State-owned and private enterprises is key to ensuring robust economic growth.

Distribution has always been a central issue in political economics, while polarization is detrimental to any country. The lesson from the United States is that entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs and Elon Musk should be rewarded in proportion to their contributions, while excessive earnings, such as those seen on Wall Street, should be curbed. China's distribution system must support innovators and ensure social stability. Such a balance cannot be achieved by

the market alone; as markets become more perfect, polarization intensifies, necessitating government intervention.

That's why China's approach to economic modernization is not merely about growth; it is about reshaping the economic framework to foster innovation, ensure fairness and maintain social stability through thoughtful reform and governmental adjustments.

As China transitions from a traditional planned economy to a socialist market economy, the superstructure must adapt to better suit the economic base. This means ensuring government actions help meet the demands of an efficient socialist market economy.

Indeed, the government's role is irreplaceable, yet its actions must be correct and not solely focused on short-term macroeconomic controls, which often result in inconsistent outcomes. Instead, its focus should be on setting long-term rules and systems that are compatible with socialist market economy, allowing the economy to operate in a healthy way without the need for sensational interventions. These rules, though less dramatic, should help maintain a stable economic environment.

A key priority is the construction of a unified national market, making clear government support for vital sectors, such as the real economy. The government's role in supporting basic scientific research is crucial and cannot be replaced. Additionally, the government should propel industries that clear bottlenecks and advance forward-looking sectors.

The immediate need is to curtail local governments' penchant for vanity projects, which waste enormous resources and distort performance evaluations. There must be a decisive move toward streamlining the administration, enhancing local governments' ability to turn central directives into practical productivity, and translate the spirit of these directives into actionable measures.

More importantly, it is necessary to deepen reform to adjust production relations and the superstructure to suit the evolving productive forces. With these adjustments, new quality productive forces will advance rapidly, driving China's development forward with unprecedented momentum.

*The author is a professor at the School of Economics, Renmin University of China. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Yang Liang

## Low-altitude economy has potential to propel development

Three key flows stand out in the evolving narrative of economic development — the movement of people, the flow of goods, and the exchange of information — concluded by Lin Zuoming, chairman of Chinese Society of Aeronautics and Astronautics. These flows are the lifeblood of all economic activities.

While facilitating the movement of people and the flow of goods, transportation has progressed from the linear transport symbolized by the Grand Canal to the planar networks characterized by modern highways. Currently, the world is about to transition to a three-dimensional transport system, with a focus on the aerial domain. This shift is critical for advancing a new economic model — the low-altitude economy — which can revolutionize China's economy.

The low-altitude economy, driven by cutting-edge technology, efficient operations and high-quality development, has immense potential, as it can be a powerful driver of China's high-quality growth and industrialization. However, the development of the low-altitude economy hinges on effective and efficient airspace management. Without low-altitude flights, the low-altitude economy will only be a theoretical construct.

Traditional aviation, regulated by the stringent rules of the civil aviation and military departments, ensures the safety and reliability of high-altitude flights. But the low-altitude economy will introduce new operational scales and methods, rendering the old regulatory system inadequate and infructuous.

There is a growing agreement within the industry that innovation is necessary to sustain this sector's growth. Consequently, China and other countries with advanced aviation networks have recognized that low-altitude flight management should not be led by central or federal governments. Instead, the standards and regulations should be set by local governments, which should also shoulder more responsibilities in order to facilitate the low-altitude economy's development.

**Only with these tools can drones be provided with route aviation, laying the foundation for intelligent low-altitude traffic management.**

The low-altitude economy features a "heterogeneous, high-density, high-frequency and high-complexity" activity profile, marking a novel phenomenon in China's aviation history. Local governments, lacking specialized teams and transitioning from isolated to integrated flights, must navigate this new landscape now. The establishment of standards and rules by relevant national authorities, coupled with the delegation of authority to local governments at all levels, is an inevitable choice for the transformation of the management system in the future development of the low-altitude economy.

Despite the ongoing efforts to open low-altitude airspace and pilot low-altitude applications, significant challenges remain due to inadequate digitalization of communication, navigation, surveillance and airspace systems. The low-altitude economy's development relies heavily on airspace digitalization, with the classification and management of airspace grades being foundational. These extensive flight activities must operate within a digital environment, making the construction of a digital low-altitude network a prerequisite for future development.

The rapid growth of the drone industry in recent years, with applications in aerial photography, agriculture, emergency response and security, has made daily life much more convenient. Much of the low-altitude economy's flight activities will revolve around drone usage, for which digital low-altitude networks that primarily target drone management are required.

China leads the world in the development of drones, having introduced interim regulations for unmanned aircraft flight management in 2023, which came into effect in 2024. Although the Civil Aviation Administration and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology have issued supporting policies, there is still a lack of detailed regulations for civilian drone traffic management and comprehensive top-level design documents, which can be attributed to regulatory frameworks lagging behind technological advancements and the cautious approach needed due to the booming interest in the low-altitude economy.

To establish a digital low-altitude economy network, it is essential to develop a scientific management perspective, clearly define the low-altitude economy's scope, and understand the objectives of operational modes of management. And that can be done only by collecting low-altitude data, assessing risks, charting low-altitude routes and identifying points of interest. There is also a need to devise security and risk maps, as well as communication data interaction maps to construct a comprehensive low-altitude aviation chart.

Only with these tools can drones be provided with route aviation, laying the foundation for intelligent low-altitude traffic management. Real-time operational assessments during drone flights represent the highest technical challenge, necessitating rigorous scientific measurement, planning and evaluation.

The low-altitude economy has huge growth potential, theoretically forming a new, expansive economic domain. The government has already signaled its commitment to develop the sector, for which the digital low-altitude economy network must be advanced, guiding the orderly progression of the low-altitude economy.

In this era of rapid technological advancements, embracing the skies as the next frontier of economic development is not just an option; it is a necessity. And with the right regulatory framework and technological advancements, a new dimension of economic prosperity can be unlocked.

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Michele Geraci

## West should see China's rise as opportunity

The development of the Global South, BRICS and the Belt and Road countries represents the transition from the old, unipolar world to a multipolar world. This transition is unstoppable and greatly contributes to the global economy.

Unfortunately, China's rapid development is often viewed with suspicion by the West, which continues to indulge in zero-sum games in international relations and international trade.

But there is another way in which countries can engage with one another — that is, the win-win approach, whereby the growth and development of one country also brings benefits to other countries. I do recognize that relations between countries can take the shape of competitors or partners. Competition for competition's sake is part of zero-sum-games and, unfortunately, the West has come to see country-to-country relations more as competition. On the other hand, countries that pursue mutual benefit, see country-to-country ties more as partnerships.

China's economic growth has improved the life of the Chinese people, creating a huge market with increasing demand for goods and services, with the growing middle-income group in China opening up a lucrative market for high-quality Western products.

The United States-led West, therefore, needs to accept trade is not a zero-sum game. The growth of China's economy stimulates global demand, benefiting its trading partners by providing new avenues for exports. In fact, European Union companies have been capitalizing (and can continue to capitalize) on China's demand for luxury goods, automotive products and high-end manufacturing. By fostering



**The potential benefits of economic collaboration, technological innovation, investments, cultural exchanges and trust-building are substantial.**

trade relations and reducing trade barriers, the EU and China can achieve mutual economic prosperity.

The zero-sum game mentality, where one party's gain is another party's loss, is outdated and counterproductive. Instead, countries need to adopt a win-win approach to international relations. By cooperating with China, the EU and the rest of the West can find synergies that benefit all sides. This collaborative mindset fosters an environment where innovations, resources and growth are shared, leading to greater overall prosperity.

China's significant investments in technology and innovation have transformed it into a global leader in fields such as 5G, renewable energy and artificial intelligence. Collaboration with China in these areas can spur the West's technological advancements, and joint ventures and research partnerships can lead to shared knowledge, improved technologies and more innovations.

Europe can benefit from China's advancements in renewable energy

technology to meet its ambitious climate goals, as collaborative efforts in research and development can accelerate the adoption of green technologies, contributing to global sustainability. This is the essence of a win-win approach, where both parties advance their technological capabilities and address global challenges together.

China's development has also led to the expansion of its financial market, creating new opportunities for Western investors. The liberalization of China's financial sector allows for increased foreign participation, offering attractive investment opportunities. As such, EU financial institutions can benefit by diversifying their portfolios in one of the world's most dynamic economies.

Besides, the Belt and Road Initiative, despite some Western countries' attempts to smear it, has created significant opportunities for infrastructure investment and development. EU companies participating in Belt and Road projects can gain access to new markets and contribute to global economic growth. The initiative exemplifies the value created for all the parties involved in collaborative projects, reinforcing the win-win philosophy.

Cultural exchanges are another area where China's development offers substantial opportunities. Increased people-to-people exchanges, tourism and collaboration in the educational field can foster mutual understanding and goodwill, while cultural diplomacy can play a crucial role in reducing tensions and strengthening ties between China and the West.

Moreover, educational exchanges can help bridge the cultural gaps and create a generation of leaders who

understand both Western and Chinese perspectives. This mutual understanding is essential for collaboratively addressing global challenges.

One of the biggest problems with the West's perception of China's development is the prevalence of misconceptions and fear about the country's intentions. To dispel such misconceptions and fears, and foster cooperation, the two sides need to engage in open dialogue and build trust.

Therefore, the West should see China's rise as an opportunity for more collaboration, not confrontation. While constructive engagement, rather than efforts to contain, can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, a thorough understanding of China's development goals and aligning them with Western interests can help build a more stable and prosperous world order.

The potential benefits of economic collaboration, technological innovation, investments, cultural exchanges and trust-building are substantial. By embracing the opportunities to do so, the West can enhance its economic and technological prowess while contributing to global stability and prosperity. Instead of succumbing to unnecessary fear and suspicion, the EU and the rest of the West should engage with China in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

The future of global development lies in partnerships, not isolation. And adopting a win-win approach rather than falling prey to a zero-sum mentality is essential for fostering a more interconnected and prosperous world.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

SHAHMAR HAJIYEV AND EDOARDO MONACO

## Sustainable progress ahead

Azerbaijan, which will host COP29 in November, is seeking to attract investment in renewable energy and green technology to diversify its economy away from oil and gas

The Joint Declaration of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership adopted on July 3 within the framework of the Astana Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is expected to open new opportunities for bilateral relations in a wide range of sectors, including renewable energy and green technology.



Shahmar Hajiyev



Edoardo Monaco

Azerbaijan is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 35 percent by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. Renewables offer the most promising low-carbon solution to meet the country's targets and its installed new energy generation capacity is set to reach 30 percent of the national total by the end of the decade.

Accelerating the use of renewable energy has become a key component of Azerbaijan's energy and foreign policy in recent years. In the context of its enhanced international cooperation to foster the country's green energy transition, Azerbaijan has strengthened ties with global energy companies such as ACWA Power, BP, TEPCO and Masdar.

Chinese energy companies have been increasingly active in Azerbaijan in recent years. For instance, a memorandum of understanding was signed in 2023 between Azerbaijan's Energy Ministry and China Gezhouba Group Overseas Investment on the implementation of

renewable energy projects with capacity of 2 gigawatts. Moreover, China is leading the electric vehicle market in Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani government will purchase 200 electric buses (to be locally assembled) from BYD each year between 2025 and 2028, but some buses will begin their service during the upcoming COP29.

This November, the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change will be held in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, in the South Caucasus region. This comes as an important acknowledgement of the status that the country has acquired within the international community, of its relevance in the global energy market and more broadly of its role in the modern quest for decarbonization.

Just like it initially happened with Dubai's COP28, entrusting a major oil and gas producer like Azerbaijan with the responsibility of organizing such a significant climate change gathering has been accompanied, in some circles, by concerns and criticisms.

It is also worth noting that the COP can significantly contribute to



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

the diversification of the local economy: Azerbaijan, in fact, like many other oil exporting nations is in dire need of economic diversification and is therefore interested in attracting investment in technologies and sustainable industries which may be fundamental for the country's long-term stability and prosperity. To this end, tourism is one of the priority sectors in Azerbaijan's non-oil economy, and hosting international events such as COP29 can contribute significantly to infrastructure development, showcase the country's attractive-

ness as a tourism destination and foster socio-economic mobility and inclusion.

The event may also serve as a catalyst for capacity building and knowledge sharing necessary to tackle the dramatic environmental challenges that Azerbaijan, like many other developing countries in the world, are faced with.

In fact, directly engaging oil and gas producing countries in the Global South is crucial to make them integral agents of climate change mitigation. Summits there can dramatically accelerate the

transition toward renewable energy and sustainable practices, showcasing the synergy — rather than outdated "trade-offs" — between economic growth and environmental sustainability. Moreover, the hindering contradiction that, according to many critics, is supposedly "inherent" to climate dialogue taking place in such countries, appears at least equally ironic as the fact that critical voices often come from the privileged Global North that for decades

has imported and burned fossil fuels to excess.

Many oil and gas exporting nations in the Global South, such as Azerbaijan, are developing and historically overdependent (at times dangerously so) on the sale of their finite natural resources to energy-hungry economies. They too are (at times severely) affected by the consequences of climate change, just like any other country on this planet.

Most importantly, besides "fossil fuels lobbies" (actually, rather ubiquitous worldwide), these nations first and foremost comprise vast, dynamic, vibrant populations who

also aspire to sustainable and inclusive progress and overall well-being. It is not only in their interest to take part in much-needed global climate action (where China features ever more prominently), but their legitimate right to be included, have their voice heard and meaningfully contribute — as per recent calls by President Ilham Aliyev himself — to a transition that for them is even more pivotal and profound.

The relations between Azerbaijan and China are getting closer, providing sound support to Central Asia-South Caucasus-China multidimensional engagement and further promoting partnerships within both the Middle Corridor — linking China with European markets — and the Belt and Road initiative, so as to serve the sustainable development interests of all parties involved. Actually, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the National Energy Administration of the People's Republic of China was already signed in 2023 to enhance cooperation in the fields of electricity, oil and gas, renewable energy. This agreement underscores the commitment of both nations to foster mutually beneficial collaboration and the vast potential for significant advancements in these critical sectors.

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CHEN YAN

## Spare tariff brakes, step on the gas

Chinese and European EV companies should join hands to expand the market, drive down costs through technological innovation, and accelerate the green transition

After a nine-month anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese electric vehicle companies, the European Commission has announced provisional duties on imports of battery electric vehicles from China starting July 5. Over the next four



months, the Commission will consult the European Union members, who will vote in early November to decide whether to impose definitive tariffs for a five-year period.

In essence, the EU tariff hike on Chinese EVs is an act of trade protectionism, following a surge in the global market share of Chinese EVs, something seen as a threat to traditional automakers in Europe and the United States.

According to data from the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association, in 2023, the EU exported 11,499 EVs to China, with a value of 852 million euros (\$925 million); while China exported 438,000 EVs to the EU, with a value of 9.7 billion euros.

The share of Chinese-made EVs in the EU's EV market was 21.7 percent in 2023, with Chinese brands accounting for 7.6 percent. In 2020, these figures stood at 2.9 percent and 2 percent, respectively.

The European Commission's anti-subsidy investigation was not launched in response to a complaint by its domestic industry, but

on its own initiative based on a threat of injury. Some EU member states, including Germany, Sweden and Hungary, as well as large European automakers, such as BMW, Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz, are explicitly opposed to the policy, citing its potential negative impact on the global trade order, green transition and the interests of car companies operating in China.

By imposing hefty tariffs, the EU and the US are seeking to contain China's growth and exclude China from the global industry and supply chains. However, Chinese EV companies will not be stopped.

Chinese EVs are highly competitive globally in terms of technology and production capacity. Data from China's General Administration of Customs show that in 2023 China exported 1.77 million EVs, with a value of \$41.8 billion, up 67.1 percent and 73.4 percent year-on-year, respectively. The momentum was sustained from January to May 2024, with the export volume and value growing 40.6 percent and 24.3 percent year-on-year. The target markets for Chinese new energy vehicles are increasingly diversifying, covering more than 180 countries around the world, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

Furthermore, Chinese-brand automakers are gearing up to set up factories overseas. For instance, to enter the North American market, Chinese NEV and auto parts companies are planning to build factories in Mexico. Central and Eastern

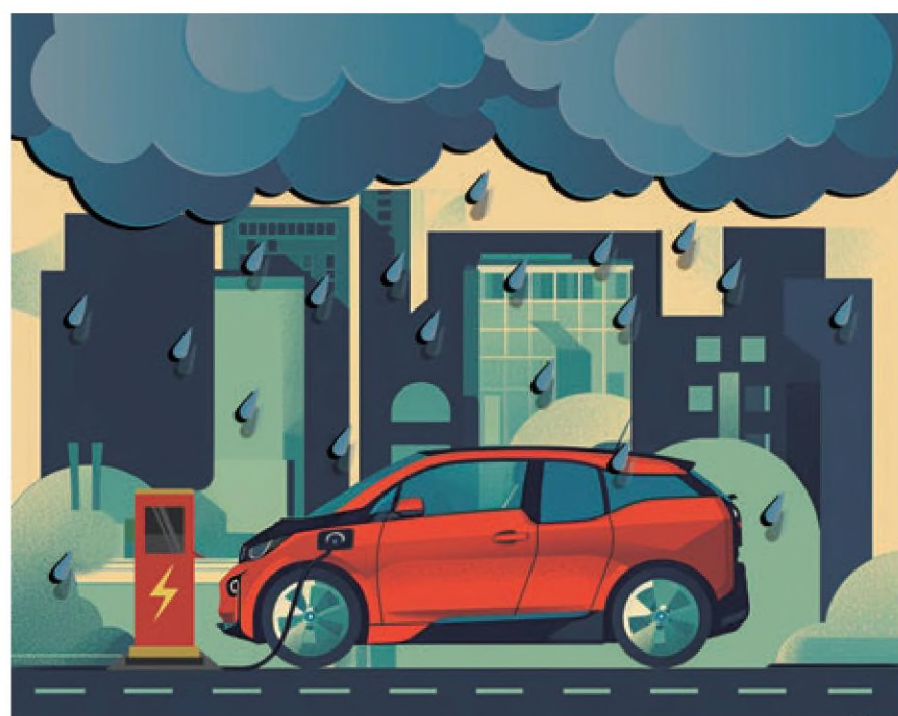
Europe is another favorable option thanks to the CEE's industry foundation and access to the entire European market. BYD is to launch its new energy passenger vehicle production base in Hungary, making it the first Chinese car manufacturer to do so in the EU. Chinese battery makers have started even earlier. Many of the major firms, such as CATL, have built plants in Europe.

Chinese NEV companies are now embracing a new stage of the "going global" strategy. By moving production overseas, they are no longer exporting products, but exporting production capacity and industry chains.

So far, the US and the EU policies to cut Chinese-made EVs going into their regions are unlikely to shake China's EV industry. Instead, they might boomerang on European car makers investing in China, and are not going to help European domestic auto firms to increase their competitiveness in the EV sector.

Recently, Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao and vice-president of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis agreed to launch consultations over the anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese EVs. As the EC consults with its member states and relevant manufacturers over the next four months, China and the EU will have opportunities to further enhance communication, build mutual trust, and increase consensus to avoid broader trade frictions.

China and the EU are the world's largest EV manufacturers and con-



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

sumers. Escalating trade friction between the two sides will not only jeopardize the industries in both markets, but also significantly disrupt the global automotive market and supply chain stability, harming the interests of all countries.

The automotive industry has long been a key trade and investment cooperation area for China and the EU. Thanks to complementary advantages in market and manufacturing, cooperation between the two sides is key to the rapid growth of their respective industries, which is a successful practice in achieving mutual benefits and win-win outcomes through globalization.

When it comes to the EV sector, complementary advantages still exist between the two sides, promising vast potential for cooperation. The International Energy Agency's Global EV Outlook 2024 report forecasts that global EV sales could reach around 17 million units in

2024, accounting for 20 percent of all passenger cars sold worldwide.

According to another report titled Racing to 2030: Outlook on the Development of Global EV Industry, released early this year by McKinsey and the think tank China EV 100, global passenger vehicles sales are projected to exceed 80 million units by 2030, half of which will be powered by new energy.

Moreover, China and the EU are the most important players in global climate change cooperation, and the global low-carbon transition cannot proceed without cooperation between the two.

The rapid growth and continued cost cuts of EV manufacturing can be attributed to the cooperation between China and the EU. As the world's largest EV markets, in 2023, China accounted for 60 percent of global EV sales and Europe, 25 percent; more than one in three new cars in China was electric, over one in five in Europe. In comparison,

the US took up only 10 percent of global EV sales and only one in ten new cars was electric.

After years of technological advancement and market education, the prices of Chinese EVs are quite competitive when compared with the fossil-fueled ones, which is an important reason for the rapid increase in NEV penetration.

It is advised that Chinese and European companies should be encouraged to work together to expand the market, drive down costs through technological innovation, and accelerate the green transition.

The author is deputy head and researcher, department of research management and information services, China Center for International Economic Exchanges. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## LIFE

All about Gen Z

Z  
WEEKLY

## Pushing the ball forward

A new initiative to promote women's participation in soccer gains ground in overcoming gender bias and the stereotyping of women who play the sport.



Infinite, an amateur women's football team based in Beijing, organized an international women's football tournament in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on July 6. The event attracted 16 teams with players from over 12 countries.

XIA HUIQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

By MENG WENJIE  
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An unusual international women's soccer tournament, the Infinite Cup, kicked off in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on July 6.

Organized by Infinite, an amateur women's soccer team based in Beijing, the tournament attracted 16 teams with players from more than 12 countries. The participants are mostly passionate amateurs rather than professional players.

"This marks the first instance of a Chinese amateur soccer team organizing an international tournament abroad, whether for male or female players," said Xu Zhibin, coach of Infinite and organizer of the event.

#### Rising above obstacles

"Can women play soccer well?"

Nearly every female player in this tournament has faced this question on her journey to pursue soccer dreams.

Song Xuege, 28, works at an internet company in Beijing and plays for Infinite. Unlike boys, who often start playing soccer at a young age, Song's passion for the sport began during university, which she noticed is the case for many female soccer enthusiasts.

"I think it takes significant courage for women to start playing soccer as adults," she said. "It challenges gender stereotypes and becomes a journey of self-discovery."

Gao Huizi, aged 15 from Hubei province in Central China, has just completed her high school entrance exam. Although not a regular member of Infinite, she had the opportunity to join them as the youngest player for the tournament in Thailand, marking her first international soccer competition.

Unlike Song, Gao was fortunate enough to discover her passion for soccer in fourth grade at primary school. However, as academic pressures increased in middle school, her teachers advised Gao to give up soccer to focus more on her studies. What kept her going was not just her love for the sport but also the unwavering support of her mother.



On a broader scale, I aspire to use soccer to showcase the diversity of Chinese young women and promote greater support for women's participation in sports."

Xu Zhibin, coach of Infinite, an amateur women's soccer team based in Beijing

"Many people suggested that girls should stick to more 'feminine' hobbies like singing or dancing," said Liu Li, Gao's mother, recalling the pressure she faced when Gao picked soccer as her extracurricular activity. "But my girl shines on the soccer field, and I fully support her pursuit of what she loves."

Nang Seng Nwum, 28, from Myanmar, is a filmmaker. She started playing soccer at university in 2018. "At that time, only my friend and I had some knowledge of the game, as soccer for women wasn't popular in Myanmar," she recalled.

According to Seng, women in Myanmar also have to face pressure to engage in less active pursuits like sewing or crocheting, and societal stereotypes that question their abilities to play soccer well.

Now, she leads her own women's team, Hope FC, competing in the Infinite Cup.

Gender bias is just one of the initial challenges for girls passionate about soccer. Another significant barrier is limited access to training resources and quality match environments needed to foster their love for the sport.

During her university years in Beijing, Song observed that due to insufficient female players, coaches and training facilities were predominantly allocated to male teams. She had to join

a team at another university in search of more female soccer enthusiasts.

Xu pointed out some modest improvements in resources for women's soccer. For example, cities like Beijing and Shanghai each have around 15 grassroots women's soccer teams, offering consistent venues and training opportunities. However, these resources are unevenly distributed across different regions in China.

Chai Mijia, 22, is currently pursuing her graduate degree in Shenzhen, Guangdong province in South China. She used to be a member of Infinite during her undergraduate years in Beijing.

Chai discovered that in Shenzhen, many women's soccer teams often compete against men. In these games, both male and female players find it difficult to fully engage: men may hold back or be too arrogant to play at their best, concerned about accidentally harming female opponents, while women's teams have to establish rules for self-protection purposes, such as limiting physical contact.

"If we can't compete with our own gender at full intensity, how can we improve?" Chai questioned. "Under these conditions, it's almost impossible to enhance our skills."

Catherine Garnett, 35 from the UK, is a member of Big Mango FC, an international amateur women's soccer team in Thailand participating in the Infinite Cup. She shared a similar experience, recalling how she began playing soccer when there were no local girls' or women's teams in her hometown. Instead, she joined the boys' soccer team at school, where she often found herself as the only girl.

"My kit was three sizes too big, and I was often not considered on equal terms to my teammates," she said. "However, a lot has changed. Women's soccer is starting to get the recognition it deserves and is growing more internationally, but there is still a long way to go."

#### Game changers

In Beijing, Infinite has taken a significant step forward. Xu, with over 10 years of experience in soccer coaching, has witnessed the struggles of female

soccer enthusiasts. In late 2021, he founded Infinite, a team dedicated to grassroots women players.

The team currently consists of over 50 members, with an average age of 24 years old, offering training and matches tailored to their gender, along with reliable training facilities and a supportive environment.

Before joining Infinite, Song described soccer as filled with tension, conflicts, hostility, and occasional violence among players, teammates, coaches, and even referees. The strict elimination systems in many school teams also added significant pressure on her.

Infinite, however, offers a refreshing change. According to Song, Xu provides fair matches based on each game's performance, ensuring that every team plays an equal number of matches regardless of previous outcomes. This approach maximizes playing time for all participants, allowing them to enjoy the thrill of the game no matter the results.

"Infinite has changed my perspective on soccer and reignited my passion for the sport," Song said.

Currently, Infinite has organized more than 10 tournaments exclusively for women, not just in Beijing, but also in other cities like Shanghai and Weihai in Shandong province. The one held in Shenzhen featured teams from the Chinese mainland, as well as from Hong Kong and Macao.

Now, in Thailand, they have expanded beyond national boundaries to witness soccer's ability to bring together people from around the globe.

Xu explained that by organizing matches, he hopes to encourage Infinite's players to adopt an open mindset toward their teammates and opponents, allowing interactions among women players from different cultural backgrounds.

"On a broader scale, I aspire to use soccer to showcase the diversity of Chinese young women and promote greater support for women's participation in sports," he said.

Gao recalled a touching moment from the Infinite Cup when a teammate

was knocked down during a game. "At that moment, an opponent had possession, but she immediately kicked the ball out of play and signaled for attention to the injured player," Gao said.

Nahatai Kaewpadcha, aged 30 from Thailand and another member of Big Mango FC, also recalled the incident. She was impressed by how players from different countries paused the game, using gestures and translations from Thai to English and then Chinese, to ensure the injured player received proper care.

"The happiness we get from the game, and the post-game celebrations enjoyed with fellow competitors, that's what truly matters," Kaewpadcha said. "Our shared love for soccer transcends any borders or backgrounds. On the field, we all speak the universal language of the beautiful game — soccer."

Seng also found inspiration in the tournament. "I was so impressed seeing a female player score a stunning goal or make a crucial save," she said. "I hope this game can inspire countless girls to believe in their potential and strive for excellence in sports and beyond."

# LIFE



A summer dish that Dong Yi made with celtuce. DONG YI / FOR CHINA DAILY

By GUI QIAN  
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No other season evokes such polarized attitudes as summer. On Chinese social media, summer enthusiasts and detractors share posts, pictures, and videos to either celebrate or lament the season.

Icy watermelons, sparkling water, fireworks, green shades, evening breezes, and colorful dresses — these images encapsulate the summer memories or fantasies of those who love the season. For Zhang Suna from Harbin, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, these poetic depictions are a reality.

Summer is Zhang's favorite season. She even dedicated an episode of her podcast, "Yiran Ziqia" (meaning "remaining self-consistent"), to listing all the reasons she loves summer. Her co-host, Yumin (pseudonym) from Chengdu, Southwest China's Sichuan province, took the opposite stance, criticizing the inconveniences of summer in the same episode.

For Zhang, the greatest appeal of summer lies in its vitality. Lush plants, rich green hues, evening cicadas, and long daylight hours all signify life. She likens herself to a sun-loving plant.

"Whenever it gets cloudy, rainy, or snowy in winter, I get a bit emotional. But if the sun is out, no matter how hot it is, I feel happy. Summer gives me a sense of positivity and growth," she said. "Perhaps one's preference for a season is related to their personality."

The region where one lives also influences their perception of seasons. Zhang grew up in Harbin, where summers are relatively cool by Chinese standards.

"Harbin becomes very lively in summer, with events like concerts, beer festivals, and marathons. Locals enjoy strolling by the river or just sitting there and watching the birds," she said.

Now living and working in Shanghai, Zhang finds the summer in southern China more stifling but also more vibrant and brighter. "Shanghai's summer has a straightforward personality. Rain comes suddenly, and the sun shines intensely," she explained.

This intense and clear rhythm might be why summer stirs such strong feelings among different groups of people. "Autumn and spring are more ambiguous and can even feel like winter at times. But summer is distinct-

ly hot, presenting itself as a very clear season, so whether it is love or hate, people have strong emotions about it," Zhang added.

Dong Yi from Hangzhou, East China's Zhejiang province, believes that everything grows in accordance with the time of year, and the changing seasons are gifts from time itself.

"Spring brings sprouts, summer fosters growth, autumn yields harvests, and winter stores. Summer is a season of flourishing. I love summer," she said.

Summer also brings with it unique seasonal ingredients. Dong, who has a passion for traditional Chinese culture, enjoys using local ingredients to prepare dishes suitable for each season.

"For example, bayberries are great for quenching thirst, watermelons keep you hydrated, lotus roots help reduce dampness, and bitter melons are effective in clearing heat," she explained.

Before cooking, Dong usually consults the *Compendium of Materia Medica* (Bencao Gang-

mu), a 16th-century Chinese medical encyclopedia written by Li Shizhen (1518-93), to ensure the ingredients are appropriate for summer consumption.

She prefers light cooking methods like boiling, steaming, or preparing cold dishes, avoiding deep-frying or grilling.

As a graphic designer, Dong also pays great attention to the color and presentation of her food, aiming to create a "refreshing" feel. She often uses a rich green palette in her summer dishes. For example, she would pair green plums with perilla juice to craft a signature summer drink.

Delicious food is Dong's "summer cooling strategy", as she describes it.



## Hot and cold about summer

From joyous celebrations to deep-seated complaints, summer experiences reflect a spectrum of personal and regional influences.

Yumin's aversion to summer is so intense that she effortlessly outlines the "seven deadly sins" of the season on her podcast.

First on her list is the plum rain season. Every year from mid-June to early or mid-July, the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River in China experience continuous rainy weather. This period coincides with the ripening of plums in the region, hence the name "plum rain".

"When I was in school, the light drizzle or torrential downpours of summer were just a scenic backdrop that I could enjoy from my window. However, since I started working and commuting, the frequent summer rains have become a nightmare," she said.

Wet socks and shoes clinging to her skin make her uncomfortable, and sometimes she even

has to skip lunch because the relentless rain makes it difficult to go out.

The humidity and high temperatures of summer can also take a psychological toll. Yumin mentioned experiencing seasonal depression, which often occurs in late spring and early summer.

"I even feel that the seasonal changes affect my hormone levels, worsening my mood and overall well-being," she said.

What further affects Yumin's mood in summer are farewells. It's graduation season, which Yumin sees as a "season of good-byes".

Another reason for the disdain among summer detractors is the abundance of insects. Southern China is particularly plagued by various bugs, from flying cockroaches to rove beetles that cause dermatitis.

Living in the south, Yumin has encountered these pests firsthand. She even knew a classmate who ended up in the hospital after being bitten by bugs one summer.

Jin Baikai, a 25-year-old photographer from Chongqing in Southwest China, also shares a strong dislike for summer insects. She has captured many scenes of her hometown during summer, one of which she titled "My Malice Toward Summer".

"Mosquitoes, the sun, foot odor, humidity, and sticky people pressing against each other" are her most vivid impressions of the season.

Jin's hometown is known as one of the hottest cities in China during summer, often referred to as a "furnace". Its basin geography and location at the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers make summers there even more humid and stifling.

Jin vividly describes this climate as "being stewed in a pressure cooker".

"In summer, I can hardly go out during the day; I only venture outdoors after 5 pm," she said. "Summer feels very murky to me — my senses become dulled, unlike in winter when the sharpness of the wind keeps me alert."

While many photographers

depict summer as bright, cheerful, and candy-colored, Jin's summer photographs often feature a dark, mossy green as the predominant hue, with backlighting that blurs the outlines of objects and people's facial expressions, creating a sense of "oppression" or even "suffocation".

"I'm not deliberately trying to portray summer as bleak; it's just the way I see the world," she said. "I believe a photographer should present their own style and feelings, which naturally reflect their true self."

Jin attributed her outlook to her upbringing as a "left-behind" child, growing up feeling lonely and not sociable. Born in winter, she looks forward to her birthday celebrations, even though she has to organize them herself since she rarely receives surprises from others.

"I eagerly anticipate winter, which is why I always hope summer passes quickly," she said.



This summer photograph by Jin Baikai captures a dark, mossy green tone, evoking a sense of oppression.

JIN BAIKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIU CHANG / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

# Driving toward automotive excellence

He Langwei's passion for cars has led him from vocational school to university, where he prepares to pursue his childhood dream of building his own car.



Below: He Langwei (right) works at the automotive repair training center at Wuhan Business University in Wuhan, Hubei province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and LIXINRAN

He Langwei has harbored a dream of building his own car since childhood. "Cars were my obsession," he said. "According to my parents, I would gaze at passing cars when I was just a few months old, and disassembling and reassembling car toys was my childhood hobby."

Originally from Enshi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture in Central China's Hubei province, the 22-year-old has been steadfastly pursuing his dream since high school, when he made the surprising decision in his freshman year to transfer from a traditional high school to a vocational one.

Despite prevailing prejudices against vocational high schools, including skepticism from his parents who believed traditional high schools offered better prospects, He managed to convince them by explaining why this path would be most beneficial for him.

"It's true that most vocational students may not perform as well academically, but our abilities often shine in other, more practical applications," he said. "But having a clear goal and a future plan, while maintaining a resilient mindset, is crucial."

Thriving in the vocational school environment, He felt at home. "I vividly remember my first time in the training room, surrounded by countless car parts

and tools, where I could systematically learn how to disassemble, assemble, and repair. I felt one step closer to my dream."

He came to appreciate the significance of hands-on experience in the field of auto mechanics.

"When I encountered the term 'dynamometer' in the textbook, I struggled to grasp its essence. Even after doing more research, I still couldn't quite understand it," He said. "It wasn't until I used the device in the training center to measure the car engine's power that I truly comprehended its function."

Realizing that what he learned in vocational school was far from enough, He decided to take the technical college entrance exam three years later, scoring 604 out of 700 and ranking 40th in the province. This achievement secured his admission to the School of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering at Wuhan Business University in Wuhan, Hubei.

Upon entering college, He discovered the importance of integrating theory with practice.

"In theory classes, we delve into mechanical principles, which provide us with the foundation of machinery design. We then apply these theories in the automotive repair training center, where we study not only traditional fuel vehicles but also new energy vehicles," explained He.

"Due to my experience in vocational high school, my mentor praised my performance in practical classes, making me

more certain that I'm on the right path."

In his junior year of college, He decided to apply for graduate school because he realized that what he had learned from college was still not enough for him to build a car. "There's still so much to learn about automobiles," he said.

The preparation process for the graduate school entrance exam was extremely stressful, especially since He was aiming for a competitive program at the School of Mechanical and Transportation Engineering at Chongqing University.

"During the second semester of my junior year, I joined a group chat with students preparing for the same program and found that many had impressive accolades from competitions or came from prestigious universities. I was daunted and discouraged at first," He admitted.

However, he refused to succumb to self-doubt. "No student from my college had ever been admitted to Chongqing University. When others found out where I was applying, they would say, 'What makes you think you can be the first to succeed?'" He recalled. "I thought to myself, 'Well, since nobody has ever achieved it, it wouldn't be too embarrassing if I failed.'"

He dedicated months to studying, with minimal breaks for meals and sleep, investing 14 hours a day.

He attributed his sharp focus and perseverance to his love for the field. "I could spend hours in the training room honing my skills without feeling tired at all."



He also highlighted the crucial support he received from his family and friends. "It took time for my parents to come to terms with and ultimately endorse my decision to transfer to a vocational high school, but they've been very supportive ever since," he said. "My cousin and classmates also offered comfort and encouragement from a peer's perspective."

Starting his studies at Chongqing University this fall, He is poised to pursue his dream of building his own car.

"I'm consistently uncovering more facets of the automotive industry. It has evolved beyond the conventional image of repairing cars while covered in dirty engine oil; there are now many high-tech applications. I believe the automotive industry can be considered a 'high-precision' sector," he said. "To aspiring youths intrigued by this field, I urge them to explore and engage. Give it a try; this field may surprise you."

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## Global Insights



August Hagen (left) is working on a farm in Xuling village, Zhejiang province, on Nov 5, 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Reflecting on the pursuit of a simpler life

Last autumn and again this spring, I went to visit a small locale, Xuling village, in the hills of Zhejiang province. While I was staying there, I got to meet some members of a new community that had settled among the abandoned houses in the old village — where, they had started an "eco-village".

The members of the eco-village that I got to talk to had all come to this place for their own personal reasons, but they shared many core beliefs: they all found the lives in the cities to be too stressful, too harsh, and too suffocating. They had come to the eco-village to try a different way of living that they hoped would suit them more and fulfill them in other ways.

The eco-village offers a two-year program, where you pay an initial deposit; and if you complete the program, you get your payment returned.

During their stay in the village, the residents live communally, sharing living spaces and the duties of cooking, cleaning, and farming. All the farming is, of course, organic. The members are also expected to study ecology and spirituality and to practice meditation.

When I had the opportunity to visit one of their study rooms, I found the contents of their bookshelves to be quite fascinating. On the one side, they had ecological magazines and books on the topics of climate change, green technology, and sustainability, and on the other side, they had the classical Chinese texts of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Chuang Tzu in addition to various Buddhist writings, both classical and modern.

I found this combination to be very insightful into their way of thinking in the eco-village. Not only do they want to learn about and practice living sustainably by producing their own food, living closer to nature, and minimizing their CO2 footprint, but they also seek to study and practice meditation and spirituality.

However, the eco-village didn't work for everyone: many left before they finished the two-year program, perhaps because the drastic lifestyle change was too much for them, or that communal living left too little room for individuality and personal space, or perhaps they just did not enjoy the rural life.

But it certainly worked for some. One woman told me of the stress and pressure she had felt from home since she did not conform to a traditional female role. However, by coming here and learning about and practicing meditation, she learned to overcome this stress and found peace and quiet.

### Countryside dreams

The idea of escaping cities and retreating to villages is a big topic in China nowadays, and this is not only based on my own anecdotal experience but can be seen statistically as well. Eight eco-villages have been established in various provinces in China just this past decade, with the largest boasting 3,200 members.

The idea of fleeing the stressful life of the urban centers in favor of a down-to-earth, simpler life in the countryside is nothing new in China. *The Story of the Peach Blossom Spring* is a famous narrative poem written by the poet, bureaucrat-turned-recluse, Tao Yuanming, in 421 AD. It describes a veiled world of wonder, inhabited by people who live in a rural paradise and who know nothing of the outside world. The story encapsulates some ideals of what a good life is — something universally sought among humans.

Thus, this notion that paradise is not to be found in the cities but somewhere in the countryside is an ancient idea in China that is still very much alive in 2024, as it was in 421 AD.

Written by August Hagen, a 22-year-old Norwegian who is passionate about learning Chinese language and culture. He is currently studying for a master's degree in Chinese language and culture at Fudan University in Shanghai.



## Lotus celebration

International students from Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, along with local Chinese students, participated in a lotus flower arrangement event in Chongqing, Southwest China, on July 3. The group engaged in a series of activities celebrating the Summer Solstice, the 10th of China's traditional Twenty-Four Solar Terms, including tasting food made with lotus roots and leaves, catching fish in a lotus pond, and reciting poems about lotus.

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