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CHINA DAILY

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China breaks US' swimming grip

Pan Zhanle leads 4x100m medley team to gold, ending run by US, which took silver

By HENG WEILI in New York
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China ended the United States' 64-year unbeaten run in the men's 4x100 meters swimming medley at the Paris Olympics on Sunday.

Amid deafening cheers at La Defense Arena, a converted rugby stadium, the 100-meter freestyle world-record holder Pan Zhanle led his teammates Xu Jiayu, Qin Haiyang and Sun Jiajun to victory as they recorded a time of 3 minutes, 27.46 seconds.

On Wednesday, Pan's time of 45.92 in the freestyle was one of the fastest 100m freestyle splits in history.

"This is magic for me," Pan, who celebrated his 20th birthday on Sunday, said of the medley victory. "We make a good team and we managed to get a great result."

The United States took the silver, 0.55 seconds behind China, while France, powered by Leon Marchand, won the bronze, finishing nearly a second behind.

"Today China was just a little bit better. I think all of us going in, we're putting a lot of pressure on ourselves to be great out there. ... So hats off to China, they did a great race tonight," Ryan Murphy of the US team told reporters.

The Americans did not compete at the 1980 Moscow Games due to a boycott, but they had never been beaten in the men's medley final dating to the inaugural event at the 1960 Rome Games.

"That was a monster split for Pan ... so that's a pretty cool birthday present," said Hunter Armstrong of the US.

Qin, who swam the breaststroke leg in the medley, was also crucial in the victory with a time of 57.98



Gold medalists Team China (top), silver medalists Team USA (left) and bronze medalists Team France attend the victory ceremony for the men's 4x100m medley relay in swimming at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games on Sunday. DU YU / XINHUA

to beat France's four-gold medal winner Marchand.

Chinese swimmers had been unfairly portrayed in Western media reports about some food-contamination cases, raising doubts over their capabilities. Pan's success came as a timely, powerful response.

Acknowledging that he had been under tremendous pressure, Pan said that he had slept little before the final because of a doping test that ran into the early

hours of the morning.

According to World Aquatics, swimming's global governing body, Chinese swimmers were tested on average 21 times from Jan 1 to the start of the Games. In comparison, Australian and American swimmers were tested only four and six times on average, respectively.

Under such circumstances, Chinese swimmers showed their resilience with a collection of two gold, three silver and seven bronze medals.

Although the US topped the swimming total with eight gold medals, the results were under par for the country since the 1992 Olympics.

The Americans had trailed Australia until the last day of swimming Sunday, when they secured two more gold medals in the men's 1500m freestyle and women's 4x100m medley relay, improving on world records in both events.

Bobby Finke of the US set a world record in the 1,500-meter

freestyle, finishing in 14 minutes, 30.67 seconds to break the record of 14:31.02 set by Sun Yang of China at the 2012 London Games.

Legendary US swimmer Katie Ledecky last week won both the women's 800m and 1500m freestyle, raising her Olympic gold medal total to nine. She has won the 800m freestyle four times in a row, a feat achieved only by the US' Michael Phelps from 2004 to 2016.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Xi greets Vietnam's To Lam on election as party chief

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, has congratulated To Lam on his election as general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee.

In a message sent on Saturday, Xi said he was glad to learn that Lam has been elected as general secretary of the CPV Central Committee, and would like to extend warm congratulations to

Lam on behalf of the CPC Central Committee.

In recent years, the CPV has implemented the spirit of the resolution of the party's

13th National Congress, vigorously promoted party building, and pushed for new achievements in socialist construction and the cause of Doi Moi, the country's economic reform policy, Xi said.

He expressed the belief that under the strong leadership of the CPV Central Committee, the whole of the CPV and the people of Vietnam will successfully fulfill the goals and tasks set forth by the party's 13th National Congress, steadily advance preparations for the party's 14th National Congress, and continue to march toward the goals set for the centenary of the CPV and the centenary of the country.

Noting that China and Vietnam are friendly socialist neighbors linked by mountains and rivers, Xi said that during his state visit to Vietnam in December, the two sides jointly announced the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance, opening up a new journey and a new chapter in the relations between the two parties as well as the two countries.

Xi said he stands ready to work with Lam to guide substantial development in building a China-Vietnam community with a shared future, jointly carry forward their traditional friendship, consolidate political mutual trust, deepen strategic communication, and promote practical cooperation, in order to bring more benefits to the two peoples and make positive contributions to the cause of peace and the progress of mankind.

Xi added that he wishes Lam new achievements in his noble post.

XINHUA

Double happiness



Above: Fan Zhendong celebrates after winning the men's table tennis singles gold on Sunday at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Fan beat Sweden's Truls Moregard 4-1 to win his first Olympic gold medal. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY See more, page 6

Below: Liu Yang in action on Sunday during the artistic gymnastics men's rings final at the Paris Olympics. Liu won the gold medal to defend his title. His teammate Zou Jingyuan won the silver, while Greece's Eleftherios Petrounias took the bronze. MIKE BLAKE / REUTERS

Beijing is increasingly establishing itself as a diplomatic hub of growing influence

The fourth week of July was hectic for Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. He spent several days discussing how to end the two deadliest conflicts in the world today. First, Wang hosted the gathering in Beijing of 14 Palestinian factions, including bitter rivals Fatah and Hamas, for peace talks. Then, he had a long meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba.

Both visits show that Ramallah and Kyiv are no longer relying on their Western partners. The Palestinian and Ukrainian authorities are pinning their hopes on Beijing for conflict resolution. Both events reveal the conflicting parties' belief that any peace agreement in Ukraine and the

WORLD WATCH By Djoomart Otorbaev

Gaza Strip is unlikely to succeed without China's involvement.

The Ukrainian minister's four-day visit to China surprised many, as no such high-ranking representative from Ukraine has visited China since the start of the special military operation in February 2022. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, while choosing his words carefully, has repeatedly accused Beijing of insufficient political and diplomatic efforts to end the hostilities. Before Kuleba's trip, Ukraine's political leadership

hinted that it was prepared for negotiations with Russia and desired peace. However, for the first time, this was stated plainly.

Notably, the Ukrainian minister first expressed the need to initiate peace talks with Russia for a cease-fire in Beijing rather than in Washington or Brussels, Kyiv's allies. The "no limits" strategic partnership between Beijing and Moscow gives Beijing a crucial role in ending the conflict. China has become the primary broker for determining the strategy to resolve the major clash in the heart of Europe. Any parties interested in ending the fights must now turn to Beijing.

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SUPPORT BOOSTED FOR DEPRESSED ADOLESCENTS

Young people's mental health issues receiving wider recognition, treatment

By ZHANG SHANGQING
For China Daily

Zhang Haimei has been struggling with her son's severe depression for nearly three years. He was absent from school for a year and was striving to return to normalcy when he faced the high school entrance exam in June.

She wore an auspicious red

qipao to bring her son good luck in the test.

However, on the afternoon of the second day of the exam, he returned home and uttered the words she dreaded. "I won't do the

exam," he told his mother. It was not until after nine in the evening that his mood calmed down, and he agreed to do the exam the next day.

At the beginning of her son's illness, Zhang thought he had just encountered "a small setback" in the second year of middle school, but it turned into a major obstacle for him.

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Math was her son's academic weakness, and the number of times he flunked the subject began to increase. When Zhang tried to talk to him about his grades, he would sometimes "suddenly explode," shout, throw things, and even lash out at his parents.

He gradually became addicted to video games and ignored his parents' attempts to break the negative spiral. In the second half of his second year in middle school, he opened a window in front of his parents and threatened to take his own life.

Zhang decided that he needed counseling for his depression.

Emotional crisis

Deng Xiaomei is a national Grade II psychological consultant and an expert who works with the Guangzhou Youth Cultural Palace's 12355-volunteer helpline for teenagers.

When the emotional pressure on a child exceeds certain levels, he or she exhibits telltale signs, Deng told ThePaper.cn news outlet. These signs include being irritable, over-dependent, continuously sad, anxious, or inattentive, avoiding social activities, increased internet usage, and significant changes in sleeping and eating habits.

"The general emotional crisis reaction will last six to eight weeks. When children exhibit more than one or two of these conditions, it is recommended to seek help from a school psychologist or professional organizations," she said.

Looking back, Zhang said that as a parent she had downplayed many of the signs of mental illness in her son.

She tried to impose too many of her own ways and ideas on the child, which was counterproductive to addressing his psychological problems. On one occasion she told him to attend a concert to relieve his depression, although he was reluctant to go.

After arriving at the concert hall, her son said again that he did not feel good about going, but Zhang insisted he attend. After half an hour, he became very agitated and eventually acted aggressively.

During that period he resisted most social interaction and lost interest in almost everything, Zhang said.

Li Yanjuan, a clinical psychologist at Peking University, explained that depression is a mood disorder that causes loss of interest and a persistent feeling of sadness.

"Chinese people may be relatively restrained and reserved, and they are somewhat discouraged from expressing emotions, especially negative emotions," said Li. "They tend to be influenced by their social environment, and they may not be willing or able to find appropriate ways to express these feelings."

"Some of my teenage patients think that their classmates won't like them if they admitted that they were depressed or that people would feel bad and wouldn't want to play with them, so they tend to hide their depression," said Li.

Zhang's son was reluctant to say he was depressed. Instead, he said he felt sick, but resisted his mother's advice to take medicine or see a doctor.

She now encourages him not to suppress his emotions all the time, hoping that he can "cry and laugh whenever he wants" and "not bury everything in his heart."

Lowering defenses

Like Zhang's son, Pang Haolin, a 22-year-old college student, had to take temporary breaks from studying during secondary and high school due to mental health problems. He used to experience severe anxiety and discomfort when he was under too much pressure at school or from his parents.

He has gotten better, but both he and his parents were "pretty defensive" about his mental state for a long time.

Pang was unable to express himself as openly as he does now, especially with his father, and resisted the idea to be open. He said his concerns and emotions were met with "endless criticism" from his dad.

"If your child is already tired of learning and overly anxious in school, parents must support and understand the child's ideas instead of blindly giving them mandatory requirements," Pang said.

"I think the most important thing for children is that they have time to figure out things for themselves, think about what they want to do in the future, and find a purpose and direction in life."

Li, the psychologist, said cognitive rigidity, like the idea that life has no



Left: A teacher gives a psychology lesson to students at a primary school in Beijing in April, using games to enhance the students' self-awareness and empathy toward others. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY Right: Students participate in sandplay therapy in a psychological counseling room at a middle school in Huzhou, Zhejiang province, in October. YI FAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Age old problem

The number of depression cases increases as children progress through school, according to research on the annual evolution of adolescent mental health status from 2009 to 2020 contained in the 2020 Blue Book of Mental Health in China. The blue book is co-sponsored by the Institute of Psychology, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Social Sciences Academic Press.

The detection rate of depression in elementary school is about 10 percent, with major depression between 1.9 percent to 3.3 percent, whereas the detection rate of depression in high school is close to 40 percent, with major depression at 10.9 to 12.5 percent, according to the blue book.

The average level of depression among teenagers from the third year of middle school to higher grades is significantly higher than those in the lower grades. As ages and academic stages rise, depression among adolescents becomes more serious and pressing.

The average age for students in China to be excused from school for the first time due to mental difficulties is less than 14 years, according to the latest publication of the National Mental Health Assessment Development Center of the CAS's Institute of Psychology and other bodies.

Of those, more than 30 percent are exposed to other physical and psychological difficulties, such as sleep deprivation and obsessive-compulsive disorder. When teenagers are diagnosed with mental illnesses, half of them take one to four years to recover.

Li Nian believes that society still lacks qualified and responsible mental health counselors, especially at each educational level. This shortfall prevents families from getting help from school counselors and puts the financial burden on them to pay for treatment.

She also thinks that the social stigma attached to psychological difficulties makes it harder for depressed teenagers to recover. More general education regarding symptoms of psychological illnesses, as well as better medical definitions of psychological illnesses, can foster empathy and reduce stigma, she added.

Pang's mother, Guo Peiyi, believes that the school's teachers and her change of attitude toward her son played a crucial role in supporting and helping him when he was at his lowest point.

"At that time, several teachers and I told Pang that it didn't matter how he did in the exam; as long as he could finish it, it was already a success," said Guo.

Riding it out

As parents who have accompanied their children through depression, Guo and Zhang have both seen families and society now pay more attention to this trend and generally have a better attitude toward mental health issues.

They believe that with the rise of depression in adolescents and the increasing pressure from academic competition, schools and parents are more open-minded and understanding of the importance and seriousness of these problems than they were in the past.

Wang Pan, deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, said at a ceremony in May to promote awareness about students' mental health, that the commission has always attached great importance to students' mental health.

He stressed the need to understand the importance of working on students' mental health issues, improving services for those affected, and cultivating students' positive thinking.

Li, the psychologist, advised young people undergoing mental hardships to not blame anyone, including themselves, their parents, or society, for their problems.

A 20-minute walk to the park can be a positive sign of engagement and acceptance of real life, she said. Sometimes feeling down is inevitable, and almost everyone is anxious and stressed nowadays, so what we need to learn is how to deal with it, Li said.

"When the wave comes, we don't have to push it down. We can actually surf with skills that a lot of psychologists are now working on by testing different interventions, and that's what my field is doing," said the psychologist.

"Of course, mental health education in our country started late, and clinical psychologists still have a relatively small voice, but we are trying as much as we can."

Mind: Navigating a bright path to heal from depression



Children wear brainwave devices to monitor their emotional states at a child and adolescent mental health service center in Jiaxing, Zhejiang, in May last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese people may be relatively restrained and reserved, and they are somewhat discouraged from expressing emotions, especially negative emotions. They tend to be influenced by their social environment, and they may not be willing or able to find appropriate ways to express these feelings."

Li Yanjuan, clinical psychologist at Peking University

value and meaning if we fail a certain test or task, is an important factor in depression.

Similar to Zhang's son, and Pang when he was younger, having no hope for the future and not maintaining a positive attitude toward the world is a typical sign of depression, she said. It is important to give teenagers such as some time and space to find the future they really want, she added.

Academic pressure

Li Nian, a junior majoring in Social Work at the University of Science and

Technology in Beijing, was one of those teenagers who experienced severe depression, confusion, and stress during her high school years.

As a high achiever, Li used to be in the top five of her class and excelled at schoolwork. But this did not offer her enough joy or any sense of achievement. Instead, she became increasingly weary of school, and was stressed out by countless exams. She would motivate herself to work harder for her future, but the perceived setbacks seemed harsher and increasingly unbearable.

With high academic expectations

imposed by herself, the school, and her family, Li felt "pressure rushing toward her like tidal waves."

For a period during her high school years, Li cried every day. She described feeling like her chest was being constricted by a gust of air that she couldn't breathe out. At her worst, she sat stiffly in her bed for nearly an hour.

Li initially sought help from her parents but received no sympathy and was admonished. "You are not depressed," Li recalled was her parents' initial reaction. "You are not like the depressed girl we saw

on a TV drama," they told her.

It was only when she texted her father from school telling him she had suicidal thoughts that her parents took her to the hospital. Li was diagnosed with moderate depression and began receiving professional treatment including counseling, and later medication.

Her depression, though still recurrent, has been significantly ameliorated compared with the most difficult times back in high school. However, her situation and history of adolescent depression are shared by many young people.



Left: A parent visits the child and adolescent mental health service center in Lin'an District, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in May. The center has been helping parents and caregivers develop the knowledge and skills to support children in distress. XU YU / XINHUA Right: Students play games in groups to learn about mental health at a primary school in Beijing. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY



TOP NEWS

Crumbling into dust



Security and emergency personnel search for survivors in the rubble of a collapsed five-story residential building on Saturday in Cairo, Egypt. At least one person was killed and seven others wounded in the incident. The collapse was reportedly caused by an illegal expansion carried out by a ground-floor resident who demolished a wall inside the apartment. SAYED HASSAN / GETTY IMAGES

UK likely to take more pragmatic approach toward ties

By SHAO XINYING
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With a new government and Cabinet in place in Britain, a reset of relations between China and the United Kingdom is likely, experts said, while calling upon Downing Street to take a pragmatic and realistic approach toward mending ties with Beijing.

The UK elected Keir Starmer as prime minister in early July, ending 14 years of Conservative rule.

The Labour government outlined its China policy in its election manifesto before the country went to polls on July 4. "After 14 years of damaging Conservative inconsistency over China, Labour will bring a long-term and strategic approach to managing our relations," the manifesto said.

"We will cooperate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must," it added.

Starmer has promised a "full audit" of the UK's relationship with China within 100 days of assuming office. It could take as much as a year to carry out the audit, an article in Politico said.

The Labour government will largely follow the China policy of the last administration, but is "likely to see minor adjustments in fields

such as economy and trade", Jian Junbo, deputy director of the Center for China-Europe Relations at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, told China Daily. "The Labour government might adopt a more pragmatic approach toward China. Cooperation in climate change and investment could see potential growth."

China is the UK's largest trading partner in Asia and the UK is China's third-largest trading partner in Europe, official data show.

Former UK prime minister David Cameron sought to create a "golden era" of engagement with China in 2015, but relations swung to overt hostility under Liz Truss and to confused ambiguity under Rishi Sunak, the newly appointed UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy wrote in an article, titled The Case for Progressive Realism, that was published in Foreign Affairs in April.

The UK must "adopt a more consistent strategy" that would recognize that Beijing "poses a systemic challenge for British interests" and recognize China's importance to the British economy and the need to work with China on matters of global concern, Lammy wrote.

Zheng Zeguang, China's ambassador to the UK, said it is a critical

time now for China-UK relations, with both new opportunities and new challenges.

Fifty-two years of diplomatic relations between China and the UK have proved that cooperation serves both sides and the world, Zheng said at an event organized for the British business community on July 30.

Wang Zikui, an assistant researcher of UK politics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations, told China Daily, "A pragmatic and realistic approach is expected from the Starmer government."

"China and the UK can see the possibility of cooperation on issues that do not involve security or sensitive topics. Clean energy, artificial intelligence and education could be areas of shared interest," Wang said. "Cultural and people-to-people exchanges should be further enhanced to bolster ties."

Noting the "special relationship" between the UK and the United States, Wang said the UK will enhance its role as a "knot" in strengthening the bond between the US and the European Union.

The UK will keep close ties with the US and the EU while exploring relations with China, Wang said.

"The upcoming US election

could further complicate Britain's China policy as the UK is a core part of the US alliance system," Wang said. "Whoever ascends to the White House will align Britain in consistency with its geostrategic goals."

Jian, of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, said, "Global geopolitical shifts, as well as the US-UK and EU-UK relations, will influence the trajectory of China-UK relations."

Starmer assumed office as the country grappled with a series of economic and societal challenges.

The UK's GDP fell for two quarters in a row in the second half of 2023. Overcrowded prisons are close to running out of space and the National Health Service has been beset by strikes.

UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves said at the end of July that public finances face a projected overspend of 22 billion pounds (\$28 billion) inherited from the previous administration and warned of "difficult decisions" ahead.

The Labour government has laid out five priority missions that include kick-starting economic growth, developing green development and modernizing the NHS.

IMF applauds China for its resilient growth

Nation's economy primarily driven by strong public investment, consumption, report says

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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The International Monetary Fund welcomes China's "resilient economic growth and the post-pandemic recovery in private consumption", according to a new report.

Each year, an IMF team visits China and other countries to collect economic and financial data and discuss with officials of each country their economic developments and policies. On Friday, the IMF released the final report for China's 2024 Article IV Consultation.

China's economy has remained resilient, even though the property sector is experiencing ongoing difficulties, the report said. It noted that the nation's GDP grew 5.2 percent in 2023 and, during the first half of 2024, grew 5 percent year-on-year.

Driven by China's strong economic data from the first quarter, the IMF increased its forecast for the nation's annual economic growth to 5 percent this year, an upward revision of 0.4 percentage point compared with the projections released in the IMF's "World Economic Outlook" report in April.

This expectation aligns with China's goal, announced earlier this year, of reaching around 5 percent annual economic growth in 2024.

The IMF said that such growth has been "primarily driven by strong public investment and the post-COVID recovery in private consumption, with net exports also providing a boost more recently".

However, the global lender said inflation has been low in recent quarters amid continued economic slack.

"Looking ahead, growth is projected to be broadly in line with the government's target in 2024, and inflation is expected to pick up gradually as the output gap closes and the impact of lower commodity prices wanes," the report said.

While there is uncertainty in China's economic outlook, "decisive policy action to facilitate adjustment in the property sector or market-oriented structural reforms could boost confidence and lead to better-than-expected economic outcomes", it said.

The IMF's directors emphasized downside risks from the ongoing adjustment in the property market and the drag from local government debt.

In that context, they concurred that macroeconomic policies should support domestic demand in the short term, according to the report.

Directors also highlighted that a balanced policy approach and pro-market structural reforms "would be necessary to foster

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Decisive policy action to facilitate adjustment in the property sector or market-oriented structural reforms could boost confidence and lead to better-than-expected economic outcomes."

International Monetary Fund, in the final report for China's 2024 Article IV Consultation

high-quality, green growth in the medium term", it said.

The recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China outlined a vision to establish "a high-standard socialist market economy" by 2035, according to the communique issued after the meeting.

This vision focuses on enhancing the role of market mechanisms to create "a fairer and more dynamic market environment".

As part of the reform priorities set during the third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee, the plan includes lifting market restrictions while ensuring effective regulation to maintain market order and address market failures. These efforts aim to balance market freedom with necessary oversight to promote economic growth and stability.

"We will implement various measures for preventing and defusing risks in real estate, local government debt, small and medium-sized financial institutions, and other key areas," the communique said.

The IMF also said it welcomed China's ongoing efforts to facilitate the property sector adjustment and boost homebuyers' confidence, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive policy package for an efficient and cost-effective transition, according to the report.

Furthermore, the organization recommended that China adopt a neutral fiscal stance in 2024 to boost consumer confidence and domestic demand, with a shift toward household support and a more progressive tax regime. They suggested reducing the fiscal deficit starting in 2025 and emphasized the need for fiscal consolidation and reforms to stabilize public debt.

The IMF also noted China's "constructive role" in addressing global challenges, such as supporting debt restructuring in low-income countries and tackling climate change.

Mediation: Efforts made in resolving global conflicts

From page 1

On July 23, in the presence of Wang, the leaders of the 14 Palestinian factions signed a Beijing declaration, aimed at maintaining Palestinian control over the Gaza Strip once the ongoing conflict ends. Musa Abu Marzouk, a senior Hamas official, said that "historic moments" were taking place. Mahmoud al-Aloul, Fatah's deputy leader, thanked China for standing with the Palestinian people.

The two main Palestinian political factions have been bitter rivals since 2007 when Hamas seized control of Gaza. Despite several failed attempts at reconciliation between the two factions in the past, it has now become clear that the only viable option for the Palestinian parties is to unite. This is especially important as Israel and its allies, led by the United States, work out principles for governing the enclave in the future. The ongoing conflict in Gaza has been the primary catalyst for the Palestinian factions to put aside their differences.

In addition to long-term and sustainable political support for Arab nations, Beijing has significant regional economic interests. The region's powers have shown gratitude and high trust in Beijing, con-

After successfully negotiating the Saudi Arabia-Iran deal last year, Beijing's efforts to mediate global conflicts, such as those in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, have a good chance of succeeding.

tributing to its growing reputation and authority. This will likely result in greater participation in existing and future economic projects in the rapidly developing region.

The humiliating retreat of US troops from Afghanistan and the US' unilateral support for Israel in the conflict in the Gaza Strip have critically undermined the credibility of the US in many developing countries of the Global South, especially in the Middle East. The rapidly declining credibility of Washington's regional and international policies has allowed Beijing to demonstrate the strengths of its policies, increasing its credibility and influence in the Arab world. Interestingly, the agreement

between the Palestinian factions was reached during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the US. In light of this, the question arises: Can China play a more prominent role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Israel is an American ally, while Iran, an adversary of the US and Israel, is a strategic partner of China.

Given the significant influence of the Israeli lobby in Washington, it is evident that its political and military establishment will continue to depend on the US, hoping to rely on its military and economic power as the primary mediator in the peace process. However, this may no longer be possible. With its involvement in fostering Palestinian unity, China is emerging as the de facto legitimate representative of Palestinian interests in the global arena across all platforms of negotiations. Beijing will continue to serve as the hub for ongoing discussions between Chinese diplomats and Palestinians. Furthermore, active diplomacy will persist in the capitals of influential Arab nations to solidify and elaborate on the signed agreement.

One possible way to achieve a lasting peace settlement in the Middle East is by organizing a multilateral international peace conference

under the guidance of the United Nations. In this scenario, Beijing would challenge the long-held dominant role of the US as the primary peace mediator. Instead, Beijing would take on an equal role with Washington as a co-sponsor of future negotiation processes. As a result, the significance of the Beijing declaration cannot be overstated.

After successfully negotiating the Saudi Arabia-Iran deal last year, Beijing's efforts to mediate global conflicts, such as those in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, have a good chance of succeeding. These initiatives demonstrate China's growing influence as a significant mediator in international affairs. Beijing's recent diplomatic successes are consistent with its broader strategy of leveraging its growing influence, particularly in regions with substantial economic potential. Why are global landmark agreements negotiated in China rather than in Washington or the UN? Beijing is gradually becoming the diplomatic capital of the world.

The author is former prime minister of the Kyrgyz Republic and a distinguished professor at the Belt and Road School at Beijing Normal University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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CHINA

Transplant games celebrate perseverance

Nation aims to increase wider acceptance of organ donation among the public

By WANG XIAOYU in Wuhan
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On a clear day in June, lung transplant recipient Xuanxuan stepped up to the start line of his sprint race and prepared to dash, something that would have been unimaginable just a few years earlier.

For the 20-year-old, his transplant surgery has given him a new lease on life. "I love the feeling of the cooling breeze on my skin, and I enjoy letting my mind wander off when I sprint," he said.

Xuanxuan, who is using a pseudonym to protect his privacy, was unable to run or even walk long distances due to pulmonary fibrosis — a condition where damaged and scarred lung tissue causes severe breathing difficulties.

However, thanks to a double lung transplant surgery in late 2019, he's been able to return to school and took this year's national college entrance examination in early June. And in his spare time he likes to hit the track.

Xuanxuan was one of some 400 organ recipients who took part in the eighth China Organ Transplant Games held in Wuhan, Hubei province, on June 11 and 12.

During the two-day event, participants ranging in age from 9 to 78 from 21 provincial-level regions across the country competed in various events, including track and field, table tennis, badminton and tug-of-war.

The transplants they'd received included kidney, liver, lung and bone marrow, according to the China Organ Transplantation Development Foundation, which hosted the event with the Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology and Tongji Hospital.

"The transplant games are aimed at demonstrating advances in transplantation technologies, encouraging recipients to reengage in social activities and spread awareness about organ donation," said Chen Zhonghua, a professor at Tongji Hospital's Institute of Organ Transplantation and one of the founders of China's first transplant games held in 2004.

Chen said that after successfully receiving a new organ, most transplant patients can resume normal, active lives as perfectly healthy people, except that they need to take immunosuppressant medication for the rest of their lives. "They are also encouraged to exercise regularly and moderately to keep fit."

Xuanxuan ran the first leg in the 4x100m relay, representing a team comprising transplant recipients from the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University in Zhengzhou, Henan province.

Though a competition, the event is more about awareness and solidarity rather than raw pace and professionalism.

"I only came here to relax myself, enjoy running and learn more about the field of organ donation. It's given me a second chance at life, so the result doesn't matter to me," he said.

Xuanxuan's condition of constant coughing and breathing difficulties first emerged at age 3 due to an allergic reaction. By the time he reached high school, these symptoms had become his constant companion.

"Before the surgery, it would take me at least 10 minutes to walk from my classroom to the nearest restroom at my high school," he said. "So it's already a miracle that I am standing here."

Coming from the small, inland city of Zhumadian in Henan province,



Top: Contestants pull hard during a tug-of-war event at the eighth China Organ Transplant Games in Wuhan, Hubei province, in June. Above: Contestants dash in a three-legged race during the games. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CHINA ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Xuanxuan said that he'd never met another transplant recipient there.

"Some people in my hometown may not even be aware of such a medical procedure," he said. "It's amazing to see so many people here who have traveled a similar path to me."

As Xuanxuan finished his leg of the relay, gasping for air due to exertion, Zhao Gaofeng, head of the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University's lung transplantation surgery department, reminded him to slow his pace gradually rather than stopping immediately.

Zhao was the doctor who first introduced the possibility of an organ transplant to Xuanxuan in October 2019 when the boy and his family were running out of treatment options after consulting doctors in Henan and Beijing. Zhao was also one of the lead surgeons who carried out the transplant operation for Xuanxuan.

As the leader of the competing team from his hospital, Zhao said it was touching and uplifting to see recovered patients take part in the activities.

"On the one hand, I think the event can boost their confidence in carrying on with their lives despite

their struggles and in most cases, life-threatening battles against diseases," he said. "On the other hand, the event can play a role in expanding awareness about organ transplantation and the medical procedure's profound significance."

While recruiting his team for this year's games, Zhao said one of the potential competitors that came to mind was Lei Yadong, one of the first heart-lung transplant recipients at the hospital.

Lei, from Anyang in Henan, was admitted to the hospital in late October 2020 due to severe pulmonary arterial hypertension caused by Eisenmenger Syndrome, a congenital heart defect that disrupts blood flow in the heart and lungs.

"When I first saw him, each breath tortured him and his life seemed desperate," said Zhao.

On top of the limited availability of suitable organs, Zhao said the heart-lung transplantation surgery itself is an extremely complex and demanding procedure.

"Its level of difficulty could be seen as the pinnacle of a pyramid compared to other transplantation procedures. The probability of success is less than 50 percent," he said.

Fortunately, Lei was paired with a match in less than three months and his operation was successful. He was discharged from the hospital around a month after his surgery.

"We are all surprised by how well he has recovered from such a high-risk surgery," said Zhao. "When I called him a couple of months ago, asking if he was willing to join the event, he agreed instantly."

Lei, 36, teamed up with transplant recipients from different regions to compete in the tug-of-war.

"I look thin, but I am actually very strong," said Lei as he proudly rolled up a sleeve to show his bicep. "I was placed in the second last position, in front of the anchor of a pretty brawny guy. It was great fun."

Lei now works full-time on a construction site as a welder.

"I took a gamble when getting on the operating table three-and-a-half years ago, and it paid off because of my conviction, the kindness of the donor and the efforts of all the medical staff at the hospital," he said.

Lei said that participating in the games shows how organ recipients can lead a full and meaningful life.

"At work, I'm often hung high in the air to weld and fix metal on

bridges and high-rises," he said. "Most people might find the job intimidating, but as a transplant recipient, I am able to nail it, and this fact makes me very proud and motivates me to carry on and work harder each day."

Both Xuanxuan and Lei are among the fortunate to have been matched with a donor in a relatively short period of time. However, for many, the wait is too long.

Each year, only about 20,000 out of the 300,000 patients in China with late-stage organ failure waiting for a transplant receive an organ.

According to Chen Zhishui, head of Tongji Hospital's Institute of Organ Transplantation, only about one in 6.7 patients waiting for a liver transplant can wait long enough to receive a donation.

Organ donation, as in many countries, can be a sensitive subject in China, with some believing for spiritual reasons that a body must remain whole. However, attitudes are changing.

Since 2015, organ donations and transplant surgeries have been on the rise. Last year, China recorded 10,778 organ donations, including 6,454 posthumous donations, a 14.7 percent increase from the previous year. The country also carried out nearly 24,000 organ transplant surgeries, up by 18.1 percent from the previous year.

"China's organ transplantation skills are among the most advanced in the world, but a shortage of organs remains a serious challenge," Chen said.

"In recent years, we have dedicated concerted efforts to promote organ donation registrations, enhancing the use of marginal donated organs and accelerating research into xenotransplantation and artificial organs," he said.

According to a guideline released by the National Health Commission and 13 other government departments in May, the country aims to achieve an annual growth rate of at least 10 percent in terms of the number of voluntary registrations in the next five years.

The nation will also strive to raise the organ donation rate to eight per million people within five years. The rate stood at 4.6 last year. For developed nations such as the United States and countries in Europe, the donation rate ranges from 30 to 40 per million people.

REPORTER'S LOG

Recipients not in search of special treatment

When I first met Dabao, a kidney transplant recipient, near the end of the opening ceremony of the eighth China Organ Transplant Games held in Wuhan, Hubei province in mid-June, he was sitting alone, away from the crowds busy taking pictures to mark the moment.

I was initially attracted by the two badminton rackets sticking out of his backpack. A badminton fan myself, I thought we could strike up a conversation easily.

He was startled when I introduced myself, and was concerned about his privacy and whether I wanted to take his picture. He asked that I use a pseudonym.

Reassured by my response, he agreed to talk and said he was looking forward to meeting people at the event who'd shared similar experiences with him. "We all live in different regions and only chat online, but this event brings us together in person."

He revealed why he shunned the group photos, though. "I have hidden the fact that I underwent a kidney transplant surgery from most of my colleagues and acquaintances back in my hometown, so I do not want to be seen in any pictures," he said.

The primary reason for this decision, he said, was because he did not want to be seen as being different or vulnerable. "Being an organ recipient, I don't usually feel discriminated against in my daily life, but I fear being considered susceptible to injuries or being thought of as less capable than my peers," said Dabao.

At that moment, I realized that when I approached him and other competitors at the event, I was still seeing them as patients. My meager medical knowledge and my instinct led to the belief that despite a new organ and a successful surgery, organ recipients had to live in the shadow of their past diseases.

I wondered what the physical situation was like for most organ recipients, so I turned to an expert for an answer.

Chen Zhishui, head of Tongji Hospital's organ transplant research institute, said all organ recipients are encouraged to lead a full life, and many of them are capable of outperforming their old selves.

"The whole purpose of the transplantation surgery is to enable them to immerse themselves into society again and contribute to social development," he said.

Transplant recipients have taken different approaches to deal with scars from the past. Some are unwilling to divulge their experiences to anyone other than family members. Some don't flinch when showing areas of deep scarring on abdomens or chests to others. Some have dedicated efforts to promoting organ donation and have become ambassadors for the cause.

Chen said participants at the games were among those adapting well to their new lives.

"There is still a large number of organ recipients who are fully recovered but are still reluctant to go outside due to psychological barriers," he said.

The next day following my chat with Dabao, I grabbed an opportunity to play badminton with him when the court was free.

I pulled out all the stops and didn't give him an inch; I knew it was the right way to show my respect for him and to celebrate life.

WANG XIAOYU



Left: Contestants cheer during the games. PROVIDED BY CHINA ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Right: A contestant participates in an event pushing a shopping cart containing a balloon during the games. WU ZHIZUN / XINHUA

WORLD

Intel's revenue drops amid trade curbs

Chipmaker cites revoked licenses for exports to China, AI challenges as it announces layoffs

By HENG WEILI in New York
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US chipmaker Intel, citing "geopolitical and trade tensions," saw its second-quarter business drop in China and overall while announcing a major workforce reduction to reduce operating expenses.

"Our Q2 2024 revenue was unfavorably impacted by the revocation of certain licenses for exports of consumer-related items to a customer in China," the company said in its 10-Q filing Thursday with the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Among the business risks the company cited in the forward-looking statements section of the report were "macroeconomic conditions and geopolitical tensions and conflicts, including geopolitical and trade tensions between the US and China."



Our Q2 2024 revenue was unfavorably impacted by the revocation of certain licenses for exports of consumer-related items to a customer in China."

Intel 10-Q filing for second quarter

The Silicon Valley company, in Thursday's earnings release, said that it will lay off more than 15 percent of its workforce, which amounts to about 17,500 employees, by year-end and suspend its dividend. Intel's quarterly revenue was \$12.8 billion, down 1 percent year-over-year.

Intel also has been picked to receive billions of dollars in federal government subsidies under the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act — which is aimed at competing with China.

The company has struggled to compete in artificial intelligence, while other US chipmakers Nvidia and AMD have done well. Intel's lagging position in the market for AI chips has contributed to its shares falling more than 40 percent this year, Reuters reported.

"Share loss and structural shift from traditional CPU-centric compute to AI-accelerated continues to weigh on Intel," wrote Oppenheimer analyst Rick Schafer, reported Barron's.

Intel, based in Santa Clara, California, is in the middle of a turnaround plan aimed at developing advanced AI processors and expanding its for-hire manufacturing as it looks to compete with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC), the largest contract chipmaker in the world.

"Our revenues have not grown as expected — and we've yet to fully benefit from powerful trends, like AI. Our costs are too high, our margins are too low," CEO Pat Gelsinger said in a memo to staff Thursday.

In July 2023, at the Aspen Security Forum, Gelsinger noted that China represents 25 percent to 30 percent of semiconductor exports.

"If I have 25 percent to 30 percent less market, I need to build less factories," Gelsinger said. "You can't walk away from 25 to 30 percent and the fastest-growing market in the world and expect that you (continue)

funding the (R&D) and the manufacturing cycle that we've released."

CFO David Zinsner said on an earnings call Thursday that the chipmaker expects weaker consumer and enterprise spending in the current quarter, especially in China.

Intel shares closed at \$21.48 on Friday in Nasdaq trading, down \$7.57, or 26 percent.

The White House, in an Aug 9, 2022, "fact sheet," said that the CHIPS and Science Act would provide \$52.7 billion for American semiconductor research, development, manufacturing and workforce development.

In addition to the CHIPS Act, the US also has restricted exports by American tech companies to China.

Export licenses that were revoked in May also hurt Intel's business in China in the second quarter, Zinsner said. Intel warned in May that its sales in China would suffer after Washington revoked some of the export licenses for a customer there.

The New York Federal Reserve, in an April research paper, wrote: "Amid the current US-China technological race, the US has imposed export controls to deny China access to strategic technologies. We document that these measures prompted a broad-based decoupling of US and Chinese supply chains."

"Once their Chinese customers are subject to export controls, US suppliers are more likely to terminate relations with Chinese customers, including those not targeted by export controls," the paper said. "However, we find no evidence of reshoring or friend-shoring."

"As a result of these disruptions, affected suppliers have negative abnormal stock returns, wiping out \$130 billion in market capitalization, and experience a drop in bank lending, profitability and employment."

In an opinion piece in the New York Post on Friday, conservative economics commentator Stephen Moore and free market analyst Phil Kerpen wrote: "Intel was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the CHIPS Act, receiving an \$8.5 billion grant announced in March, a \$25 billion sweetheart tax incentive and likely the lion's share of an \$11 billion federal loan program."

"This CHIPS Act was supposed to be the Biden-Harris crowning achievement. A giant job creator," Moore and Kerpen wrote. "Hundreds of billions of government handouts to bring the semiconductor industry back home."

On March 20, in an appearance in Chandler, Arizona, US President Joe Biden said: "I'm thrilled to announce the latest public-private partnership and one of the largest investments in semiconductors in the United States ever: the landmark — a new landmark agreement under the CHIPS and Science Act between my administration and Intel for up to \$8.5 billion. It's a smart investment."

"And that's being paired with over \$100 billion from Intel, including \$30 billion in Arizona and \$30 billion in Ohio," he said. "It's among the largest private-sector investments ever in the history of Ohio and in Arizona."

The Washington Post reported on Friday, however, that Intel has yet to receive the funds, and a Commerce Department spokesperson declined to say whether Intel's announcement Thursday would affect the grants.

Leonidas Mushimiya, another Rwandan farmer, said the Juncao technology has made a big influence on his community.

He started mushroom production after receiving training from Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University

Agencies contributed to this story.



Police officers detain a woman during a protest in Nottingham, England, on Saturday, following the knife attack on July 29 in Southport, in which three young children were killed. JACOB KING VIA AP

Renewed rioting sweeps British cities

LIVERPOOL/BELFAST — Violent disorder swept across several cities in the UK on Saturday, injuring police and damaging property in the country's most widespread rioting in the past 13 years, following the murder of three girls in northwestern England.

Riots involving hundreds of anti-immigration protesters have erupted in towns and cities after false information spread rapidly on social media that the suspect in the July 29 knife attack at a children's dance class in Southport was a radical Muslim migrant.

Police have said the suspect, Axel Rudakubana, who turns 18 on Wednesday, was born in Britain but protests by anti-immigration and anti-Muslim demonstrators have continued, descending into violence, arson and looting.

Violent disorder erupted in Liverpool, Bristol, Hull and Belfast — four cities located in different corners of the United Kingdom — with scuffles breaking out and bricks and bottles thrown as anti-immigration

protesters faced anti-racism groups. Many police officers suffered injuries as they tried to keep several hundred rival protesters from clashing.

In Liverpool, two officers were taken to hospital with suspected facial fractures, while another was pushed from his motorbike and assaulted in the disorder involving some 750 protesters and a similar number of rival protesters, according to Merseyside Police, the force overseeing the northwestern city.

Vandalized shops

At least two shops in Liverpool were vandalized and looted, police added.

In Belfast, some businesses reported damage to property while at least one was set on fire, according to police.

"I have no reason why they attacked us," said Rahmi Akjol, standing outside the shattered glass doors of his cafe in Belfast, which he said was attacked by dozens of people with bottles and chairs. "I've

lived here 35 years. My kids, my wife are from here. I don't know what to say. It's terrible."

Across Britain, police have arrested dozens of individuals for offenses ranging from violent disorder to burglary and criminal damage.

Extra police have been deployed across cities while mosques across the country have been advised to strengthen security following an attack on a mosque in Southport on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, facing his first big test since his election a month ago, has condemned the "far right" for the wave of violence and backed police to take strong action. He discussed the disorder with senior ministers on Saturday, his office said.

Further gatherings were scheduled for Sunday and police will continue to mount a significant security operation, deploying thousands more officers onto the streets, many in riot gear.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Rwandan farmers thrive with Juncao tech

KIGALI, Rwanda — At an exhibition stand during an agriculture show in Rwanda's capital Kigali, Emmanuel Ahimana said it is an exciting time to be involved with China's Juncao cultivation technology.

His company, which operates in Kigali's Gasabo district, uses the Chinese-invented Juncao technology to grow mushrooms with low-cost materials such as Juncao powder, cotton husks and lime powder.

After learning the technology, Ahimana established a mushroom cultivation workshop in 2016, employing dozens of people. The workshop produces up to 10,000 mushroom tubes monthly. His goal is to expand the business with modern machines and open several shop outlets around Kigali to sell mushrooms.

Juncao is a hybrid grass and an important multifunctional agricultural resource developed and used for mushroom farming in China. The innovation invented by Lin Zhanxi from China's Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University in the 1980s has benefited more than 100 countries, including Rwanda.

Ahimana is one of more than 4,000 Rwandan farmers making use of Juncao technology, employing more than 30,000 people in the agricultural value chain, according to the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board.

Leonidas Mushimiya, another Rwandan farmer, said the Juncao technology has made a big influence on his community.

He started mushroom production after receiving training from Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University



Emmanuel Ahimana checks mushroom tubes at his workshop in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2020. CYRIL NDEGEYA / XINHUA

and capacity-building workshops from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

This came at a time when a solution was needed to address local challenges such as poverty, child malnutrition and youth unemployment.

Mushimiya said he used the income from his Juncao mushroom production to build a school, which has improved education and economic opportunities in his community.

Since 2006, experts from Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University have been working with the Rwandan government on Juncao technology, teaching and promoting Juncao and other agricultural technologies in the country.

To date, more than 50 training courses on Juncao mushroom cultivation technology have been organized, benefiting more than

35,000 local mushroom farmers, official data showed.

By supporting mushroom cultivation, the innovation has promoted food security and the transition to a green economy through environmentally friendly technology and more sustainable agriculture, said Egide Karuranga, an economist in Rwanda.

Juncao has played an important role in building resilience to climate change, Karuranga said, adding it has also helped combat land degradation by producing fodder for livestock and minimizing soil erosion.

"Juncao technology has been a success, which demonstrates the need to invest in science and technology," Karuranga said, highlighting the technology's transformative power in changing the lives of various communities.

XINHUA

Maduro to focus on growth of Venezuela

By JIMENA ESTEBAN
in Buenos Aires, Argentina
For China Daily

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro is set to begin a third six-year term with a focus on maintaining the country's growth momentum of the past few years and overcoming the negative effect of sanctions imposed by the United States.

"People did not trust the opposition in the election and knew who was responsible for the sanctions," Maduro said on Thursday. "Venezuela has broken hyperinflation and managed to stabilize the dollar exchange rate for months."

The National Electoral Council on Saturday reaffirmed Maduro as the winner of the presidential elections held on July 28, with about 97 percent of the votes tallied.

Meanwhile, Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Friday the recent US position on Venezuela's elections was "reckless" and renewed his call for the international community to avoid interventionism.

In a news conference, Lopez Obrador said statements such as the one made by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday do not help resolve electoral disputes. Blinken has claimed opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia received the most votes in the election.

After a few difficult years, Venezuela shifted back to growth from 2021. In 2022, real GDP expanded by 8 percent and added another 4 percent in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund. Maduro has predicted growth would hit 8 percent this year.

Venezuela has the tools at its disposal to ramp up growth, including the largest oil reserves in the world, but US sanctions have curbed its ability to trade its oil in international markets, curbing production and causing underinvestment, experts said.

Since 2015, Venezuela has had 932 sanctions and seven US executive orders leveled against it and "this does not rule out the possibility of more so-called sanctions," said Vladimir Adrianza Salas, a professor and researcher at Venezuela's National Centre for Historical Studies.

Affected by blockade

Franco Vielma, a sociologist at think tank Mision Verdad in capital Caracas, said: "In Venezuela, the economy is fundamentally based on oil exports. Before 2016-17, 92 percent of the foreign currency income was from oil exports, and this inventory of foreign currency dramatically decreased due to the blockade since 2017."

The country returned to growth at the beginning of this decade. "It is estimated that in 2024, the Venezuelan economy will be the fastest-growing in Latin America," Vielma said.

Maduro has put forward a plan for the next five years, the Seven Transformations project, to diversify the economy beyond oil. It aims to "ensure that 95 percent of the food consumed is produced in Venezuela, making the country much less vulnerable to economic and commercial blockades," Vielma said.

Looking abroad, Maduro has called for greater integration into the international system and has expressed an aspiration to join the BRICS.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Sharp decline in US hiring raises recession fears

WASHINGTON — The US economy suffered an unexpected setback in July as hiring fell sharply and the unemployment rate rose for the fourth straight month, with raised interest rates taking a toll on businesses and households.

Employers added just 114,000 jobs last month — 35 percent fewer than expected — and unemployment, now at 4.3 percent, is the highest since October 2021, the Labor

Department reported on Friday.

"Things are deteriorating quickly," said Julia Pollak, chief economist at job posting platform ZipRecruiter.

The sharp downturn in US hiring shook global financial markets. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 610 points, or 1.5 percent. The S&P 500 tumbled 1.8 percent.

The unemployment rate's jump to 4.3 percent last month crossed a trip wire that historically has signaled

recession, though economists say the gauge probably is not reliable in the post-pandemic economy.

Hiring may have been disrupted by Hurricane Beryl, which slammed the Texas economy last month. And Pollak said employers have cut work hours and made temporary layoffs, suggesting they are optimistic a rate cut may turn things around.

"They are just slowing hiring and putting people on temporary layoff,

furlough," Pollak said. "They want to get back to business. They see lots of opportunities to expand. They just need rates to be (lower)."

At the Barrel Room, a San Francisco wine bar and restaurant, founder Sarah Trubnick is puzzled by what is happening with the economy. After an "insanely busy" first three months of the year, she had high hopes for the rest of the year. But business plummeted over the sum-

mer, and she does not know why.

She had to lay off four workers and now has 10 at the business she founded in 2011.

"We had been in business for many years," she said. "So we were very familiar with the patterns, and we knew when to bring on more people, when to expect difficult times. And we knew we had to have a financial cushion at times. We had it all down to a science. And post-COVID I can't figure out the pattern."

The Labor Department reported on Thursday that 1.88 million people were collecting unemployment bene-

fits in the week of July 20 — most since November 2021 and a sign that those without a job are likely struggling to find a new one.

Julian Cannon, 34, of New York lost his job as a reporter at an online publication back in December. He has applied for hundreds of jobs with no luck. One company interviewed him eight times for several positions, then ended up hiring a candidate who already worked there. "I'm still looking, and I'm at a breaking point," he said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

PARIS 2024



China's Fan Zhendong beats Sweden's Truls Moregard in the 2024 Olympics men's table tennis singles final in Paris on Sunday, completing a prestigious "Grand Slam". PHOTOS BY REUTERS AND WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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Complete, ruthless, aggressive and dominant — no single word quite describes China's Olympic and world champion paddler Fan Zhendong when he unleashes his fierce precision. He simply leaves his opponent, and the world, in awe.

The "baby-faced assassin", as he is known among his adoring fans for his cherubic features and deadly wrist, took the table tennis world by storm on Sunday, as he romped to a 49-minute 4-1 win over Sweden's Truls Moregard in the final of the men's singles to claim first Olympic gold medal of his career. It also means he has completed a prestigious "Grand Slam" by collecting titles at the World Championships, World Cup and, now, the Olympics.

It was eight years in the making, and countless challenges had to be overcome, not just from overseas opponents, but as many, if not more so from his world-class teammates, as he fought for supremacy in, arguably, the most intense "civil war" of any sport's national program. It has forged Fan's already steely will to the point of invincibility.

Fan's win on Sunday at the South Paris Arena — an almost "home court", packed by red-flag-waving Chinese fans — has redeemed the narrow defeat he suffered at the hands of his legendary teammate Ma Long in the singles final at Tokyo 2020, inspiring Fan to keep pushing to achieve a "double-slam" by 2028, as Ma did in 2021.

"It all came down to the hard work I put in every day. While there are athletes with innate talent, who can win easily anytime, anywhere, I hope to keep sharpening my craft and continue fighting for more glory, together with my team," Fan said at the post-final news conference.

Fan's final encounter with Moregard, who stunned China's world No 1 Wang Chuqin in the opening round, was the latest installment of a decades-long international rivalry between China and Sweden, underlined by the respective team coaches — China's three-time Olympian Wang Hao and Swedish legend Jorgen Persson, who have fought many classic matches against each other throughout their playing careers.

"Each and every team has its own prime era, and the Swedish program was definitely one of our biggest rivals," said 27-year-old Fan, who has bagged a total nine world championships gold medals in singles, doubles and team since his debut in 2014.

"Now with strong and young competitors like Moregard emerging, I believe the rivalry will continue, and we need to push ourselves to stay ahead."

After beating Moregard 4-1 with relative ease, Fan performed for the roaring crowd in Paris, tucking both



TABLE TENNIS

FANTASTIC!

Taylor Swift-loving paddling prodigy wins the 'End Game' to claim his first Olympic gold

hands beneath his armpits to emulate French soccer star Kylian Mbappé's signature goal celebration.

A die-hard fan of Spanish La Liga giant Real Madrid, Fan also impersonated former Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, performing the iconic "siu" celebration to celebrate his 4-0 semifinal win against local favorite Felix Lebrun — a fun gesture that has won over fans in Europe.

A super Swiftie

As aggressively competitive as he is at the table, Fan comes across as any average young man, following European soccer as his hobby, and enjoying the latest music trends, especially the catchy songs of pop megastar Taylor Swift.

After Fan outplayed Lebrun to advance to the men's singles final on Friday, social media users



Bronze medalist Felix Lebrun of France (right) takes a selfie on the podium with silver medalist Truls Moregard of Sweden (left) and gold medalist Fan Zhendong of China. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

began superimposing Fan's face on Taylor Swift posters and stickers to rally support for the table tennis standout.

Fan, a self-proclaimed Swiftie himself, has openly expressed his admiration for the iconic musician. "Music is universal. Great musi-

cians like Taylor bring us healing power and confidence," he said.

The intersection of China's ping-pong and global pop culture perhaps hit its high note when Fan edged Japan's Harimoto Tomokazu 4-3 in a gruelling, see-sawing quarterfinal battle on Aug 1 — a date

loaded with Swiftie superstition due to the star's hit song "August".

However, due to the demands and expectation of his fans, the sharing of his personal life on social media can sometimes end up not being much fun at all.

In March, Fan posted footage

from Swift's Singapore leg of her Eras tour on his Weibo account just days before a World Table Tennis event, where he was eventually upset by 18-year-old compatriot Lin Shidong in the round of 32.

Some overzealous fans soon tried to link his defeat to attending the concert and enjoying himself, believing it distracted him from his preparations for the tournament.

His post of the concert was soon flooded by negative comments, criticizing his lack of commitment.

As a major sports celebrity in China, Fan has called on his followers to "be rational and boycott idol culture", after an incident which saw an unidentified fan break into his Beijing hotel room and steal his underwear.

"I am an athlete, cultivated by my country. It's my duty to fight for the country and, for more than 10 years, I've never wavered from this duty," Fan said.

"In my free time, I am just an ordinary young man. I have normal hobbies and I have my social network. I will continue to be true to my heart under the premise of following the law and the rules."

Chen outshines Sun again to retain women's singles title



Gold medalist Chen Meng of China (center) is flanked by teammate and silver medalist Sun Yingsha (left) and bronze medalist Hina Hayata of Japan on the podium on Saturday. REUTERS

History repeated itself for China's defending table tennis champion Chen Meng, as she beat teammate Sun Yingsha 4-2 to win the women's singles gold medal at the Paris Olympics on Saturday, just as she did three years ago at the Tokyo Games.

This second triumph was even sweeter for fourth-ranked Chen, who called this win over world No 1 Sun a surprise, making her the third female table tennis player to win singles gold medals at two consecutive Olympics.

"This gold medal feels more valuable. In Tokyo, I was at the peak of my career, but, in the past few years, I've suffered a lot of losses and injuries," said Chen.

The 30-year-old added that she

felt at a significant disadvantage before the match, given her losing track record against Sun, and attributed the win to her mindset.

Sun comfortably won the opening game 11-4. After Chen claimed the next two games 11-7 and 11-4, Sun, who had not lost a game at the Olympics until then, said her confidence started to shake. She leveled the match at 2-2 by taking the fourth game 11-9.

Chen remained calm under pressure, especially when she fell three points behind at the start of the sixth game, which she took 11-9 before finishing off the contest 11-6.

For Chen, the quick turnover in China's dominant team left her wondering if she will be back to defend her title.

"I don't know if this is going to be my last Olympics, so I want to cherish the opportunity as best as I can," she added.

The 23-year-old Sun, who was consoled by Chen with a hug after the loss, said she will fight for gold again in Los Angeles.

At the press conference, Sun also praised Japan's Hina Hayata, who earlier won the bronze medal match by beating South Korea's Shin Yu-bin 4-2 after overcoming an injury. It was a hard-fought victory which left her in tears.

Her performance secured Japan's second medal in the event, following Mima Ito's bronze in Tokyo three years ago.

Having injured her left wrist this week, Hayata could not even use a

hair dryer and thought it was a mission impossible to play. After treatment, she adjusted her style to focus on using her forehead instead of backhand to avoid further pain.

"After this injury, I couldn't use my left hand at all. Being able to play and win a bronze medal despite that situation makes me feel incredibly grateful to everyone," said Hayata.

China's gold and silver sweep extended its dominance in women's singles, winning all 10 of the golds ever awarded in the event. Two Grand Slam — Olympics, World Championship and World Cup — champions, Zhang Yining and Ding Ning, were present in the stands to watch the matches on Saturday.

REUTERS



PARIS 2024

TENNIS

QUEEN WEN HOLDS COURT

China's Zheng anointed in Paris, as historic win delivers a heroine for a new generation of players to emulate

China's Zheng Qinwen celebrates scoring a crucial point against Croatia's Donna Vekic during their women's singles tennis gold-medal match at Roland Garros in Paris on Saturday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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The red flag flew high, the national anthem rang loud and a champion lay sprawled on red clay, rejoicing in her unprecedented accomplishment — it all had a sense of déjà vu for Chinese fans, transporting them back to 13 years ago at Court Philippe-Chatrier.

Yet, this time around, on Saturday afternoon, Zheng celebrated an even more special, emotional and “improbable” title than tennis legend Li Na’s 2011 French Open win — the first Olympic singles gold medal ever won by a Chinese — or any Asian — player.

This monumental victory will undoubtedly pour even more fuel on the fire powering Zheng’s meteoric career rise — it has already, surely, propelled her into the pantheon of Chinese sporting greats — but, more significantly, it will have served up another huge boost to the sport’s momentum in China.

It was on the Olympic stage 20 years ago that another unprecedented tennis victory, the doubles gold medal won by Li Ting and Sun Tiantian in Athens, lit the spark, bringing the Western-dominated racket sport into China’s mainstream.

Li Na then gave it a major push by winning Asia’s first Grand Slam singles title at Roland Garros in 2011, followed by a second trophy at the 2014 Australian Open.

Growing up admiring her predecessors, and dreaming big herself, Zheng has now etched her name in the sport’s history alongside her heroes, and has most likely planted those same seeds of determination in the hearts and dreams, of the next generation.

“I am really excited and proud to join all the history-makers and to become a source of inspiration for the next generation,” Zheng, a 21-year-old native of Hubei province, said in English after beating Croatia’s Donna Vekic in straight sets in the gold medal match at Roland Garros on Saturday.

“I still have a long road ahead of me, because winning a Grand Slam is also one of my targets. Every era has a hero. Li Na led her generation. Now, I’ll do what I can to reach my full potential.”

With her most-coveted Paris souvenir hanging around her neck, Zheng, who started playing tennis at 6 years old, influenced by her father, ranks the Olympic gold at the top of her career accolades, which include three singles titles on the professional WTA Tour, a runner-up finish at the 2024 Australian Open and a singles win at last year’s Asian Games.

Even with no ranking points on offer, nor prize money awarded, the Olympic gold will always hold a special place in her heart, and will inspire her to attain further success on the pro circuit, Zheng said.

“My father always treats the Olympic Games more importantly than any of the Slams, myself as well. You can see it in my eyes; the hunger I had this week was different than in all the other tournaments I play,” said Zheng, who, at No 7 in the world, is currently China’s highest-ranked female player.

“Winning this Olympic gold medal makes me feel more relaxed, because finally I can tell my father ‘I am an Olympic champion now’. It feels like a big stone has been lifted from my heart. Now I can enjoy tennis more, be more relaxed and have more fun on court.”

Tougher than expected

Entering the Olympic tournament as the No 6 seed, Zheng has completed a physically demanding week of six matches, five of which were competed back-to-back.

She had to come back from behind in two consecutive three-hour matches to beat 15th-ranked Emma



What they say

She was better than me today, so, all credit to her. She was playing really well, and she deserved to win.
Croatia's Donna Vekic, women's singles silver medalist

On the court, Zheng Qinwen faces formidable opponents with

confidence and energy. Off the court, she engages effortlessly with both Eastern and Western media, exuding a unique charm. Whether wielding a racket or speaking to the press, Zheng remains a formidable force.
Zhang Bendou, tennis reporter

A huge deal for China, but also for our sport. China is such a huge country, a huge market ... and they've been waiting for a big champion, a big name, since Li Na.
Novak Djokovic, 24-time Grand Slam champion

Congratulations to Zheng

Qinwen! Staying up late to watch the match was totally worth it! Winning medals in two tennis events at the Paris Olympics, both with legendary significance, definitely deserves a question in the exams.
Xiao Xurong, professor at Minzu University of China



Left: Zheng falls to the ground in celebration after winning the 2024 Olympics women's singles tennis gold medal in Paris on Saturday. Right: A delighted Zheng smiles on the podium. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Navarro of the United States in the round of 16 and former world No 1 Angelique Kerber of Germany in the quarterfinals, before challenging reigning world No 1, Poland's Iga Swiatek, a four-time major winner at Roland Garros, in the semifinals.

Exhausted and under pressure, Zheng drew extra strength from her national pride to upset the competition favorite Swiatek in straight sets, claiming her first win in their seventh encounter and snapping the Polish star's 25-match winning streak on the “terre battue” of Paris.

“I had a lot of tough fights. In a lot of matches, I almost lost. But, there’s a spirit holding me up. I don’t know why, because in a usual match (on the tour), maybe I’d let it get away. At the Olympics, I just held it and kept fighting,” said Zheng, who was eliminated in the third round of this year’s French Open at the same venue in June.

“I’d been through five matches already, and my body hurt everywhere, but I still felt I had a lot of strength in me. If I needed to stay three more hours to fight through (Vekic), I felt I could do it for my country. I think the biggest achievement was my mental strength.”

Professional push

The rapid progress of Zheng and her peers, including another young female talent Wang Xinyu, who teamed up with the country’s top male player, Zhang Zhizhen, to claim a silver medal in the mixed doubles on Friday, stems from a tennis revolution launched by the success of Li Na.

Talent development, at the core of that revolution, has evolved profoundly in China. Today’s players are exposed to the pro circuit earlier, managing their own careers with the support of international coaches, fitness trainers, physios and agents, unlike in the traditional State-run system, where a national-team program manages everything.

The result of this new, professional approach has been quite encouraging, especially on the women’s side.

Spearheaded by Zheng, China currently has six players ranked in the top 100 on the women’s tour. Only the United States, Russia and the Czech Republic have more players than China in the top 100, with 13, 12 and eight, respectively.

Organizers and promoters have also played their part in bringing more high-level tournaments to China to keep pace with the on-court breakthroughs.

From hosting only three professional tournaments before 2010, China now has seven WTA tournaments and five men’s Association of Tennis Professionals events scheduled this year, and has become one of the busiest destinations on the professional tennis calendar.

The China Open, already the biggest men’s and women’s combined tournament in Asia, promises to be bigger and better this year, too, thanks to the growing domestic appetite for elite tennis.

In April, the tournament organizers announced the women’s competition will be upgraded to a two-week format with 96 draws, up from 64 last year, placing Beijing alongside Indian Wells, Miami, Madrid and Rome as the fifth top-flight WTA1000 tournament.

On the men’s side, the ATP500 tournament is expected to continue serving up high-quality players. Grand Slam champions Carlos Alcaraz of Spain, Daniil Medvedev of Russia and Italy’s Jannik Sinner have all confirmed that they will return to Beijing this fall, after having featured in last year’s star-studded men’s draw.

The total prize money for the tournament, which runs from Sept 23 to Oct 6 at Beijing’s National Tennis Center, will be increased to a record \$13.14 million.

BUSINESS

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Boost to market confidence, growth momentum

Deepening of reforms to drive high-quality development, enthuse global stakeholders

By OUYANG SHIJIA

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China's recent decision to deepen economic structural reforms will significantly boost market confidence, revive growth momentum, and facilitate the country's sustainable and high-quality development in the next few years, said officials, experts and entrepreneurs.

They estimated that China's economic activity will likely continue to pick up in the remainder of the year, driven by reforms to tackle structural issues, improvement in domestic demand, resilient manufacturing activity and stimulus policy measures.

They, however, warned the economy is still facing challenges from ongoing disinflationary pressures, still-weak consumer confidence, and potential risks in local government debt and the real estate sector. Therefore, more efforts are needed to consolidate the foundation of the ongoing economic recovery, they said.

Their comments came after the recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted a resolution on further deepening reform in a comprehensive fashion to advance Chinese modernization.

Li Daokui, director of Tsinghua University's Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking, said as the country is set to roll out a slew of reform measures in the remainder of the year, it is on track for a steady recovery this year.

"Economic reforms in real estate, local government debt and initiatives to promote consumption and enhance social welfare are the three aspects that concern me the most," said Li. "These economic reform measures are soon set to become new drivers of economic development."

According to the resolution, China will establish a system for monitoring and regulating all local government debt as well as long-term mechanisms for preventing and defusing hidden debt risks. And it will refine long-term mechanisms for expanding consumption, reduce relevant restrictions and boost public spending as necessary.

On the property front, the resolution said China will move faster to establish a housing system that supports both housing rentals and purchases and foster a new development model for the real estate sector.

Notably, the resolution said municipal governments will be given greater decision-making powers to regulate the real estate market, and based on local conditions, some cities will be permitted to abolish or reduce restrictions on housing purchases and to scrap relevant standards for ordinary and non-ordinary housing. And the country will also carry out reforms to change the way real estate development is financed.

Looking ahead, Li said the real estate sector will remain a "pillar industry" over the next 15 to 20 years, as around 350 million people, including those now living in rural areas and migrant workers living in cities, will likely buy residential properties in cities in the future.

"There may be excess construction in the short term in certain cities and regions, resulting in a surplus of housing," he said. "However, after this period, likely within one to two years, the overall real estate market is expected to rebound and return to an expansionary phase."

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed China's property investment fell 10.1 percent in the first six months of 2024 from a year earlier, flat with the figure in the first five months, as the policymakers' efforts to support the ailing sector took time to revive demand.

Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, said more efforts should be made to speed up the building of a new development model for the sector, better meet residents' demand for basic housing and their need for improved housing, and establish corresponding

systems for financing, fiscal and tax policies, land and sales. At a news conference in July in Beijing, he said that the ongoing urbanization process will offer considerable space for high-quality development in the real estate sector.

Highlighting the country's ongoing deepening reform practices, Han said China aims to drive the transition from its traditional



Top: An employee tests LED lights at a tech company in Ruichang, Jiangxi province. WEI DONGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY **Middle:** A property construction site in Yantai, Shandong province. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY **Above:** Kids race with a robot dog during an expo in Mianyang, Sichuan province. CHEN DONGDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Highlighting the country's ongoing deepening reform practices, Han said China aims to drive the transition from its traditional

growth drivers to new growth drivers, providing robust support for high-quality development. Han said key focus should be placed on promoting the healthy development of the property sector and accelerating the development of emerging sectors and future industries. He emphasized the need to foster new quality productive forces in line with local conditions, saying more efforts should be made to spur emerging industries, develop future industries, upgrade traditional sectors and promote the advanced, smart and green development of the manufacturing sector.

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Looking ahead, Han highlighted the necessity to expand domestic demand, notably consumer demand, saying the country needs to fully unleash the potential of domestic demand to prop up the world's second-largest economy.

In its latest efforts to spur domestic demand, China announced in late July that it would allocate around 300 billion yuan in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds to support the program of driving large-scale equipment upgrades and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

According to the document jointly released by the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance, about half of the bond funds will be used for supporting trade-in deals for consumer goods, while nearly half of the funds will be used for driving large-scale equipment upgrades.

Earlier this year, China announced plans to issue 1 trillion yuan worth of ultra-long-term treasury bonds for major national strategies and build up security capacity in key areas in 2024.

Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said China's domestic demand and consumption will likely continue to pick up in the second half of the year, with the implementation of the latest meas-

ures to promote the trade-in program, issuance of treasury bonds and policies on stabilizing the real estate sector taking effect gradually.

Global entrepreneurs hailed China's ongoing efforts to deepen reforms and opening-up, saying China's pursuit for high-quality development will create fresh opportunities for global stakeholders. US-based smart building solutions provider Johnson Controls is optimistic about China's economic prospects. The company said it has seen a number of growth opportunities arising from the country's pursuit of new quality productive forces.

"China has done a lot to create a better business environment for domestic players and their foreign counterparts, including shortening the negative list for foreign investments," said Anu Rathinde, president of Johnson Controls Asia-Pacific. "We wouldn't have been as successful as we are today if that business environment didn't allow us to grow, which is a testimony to the support that we get from the government and the business environment."

According to him, China is one of the most important markets for Johnson Controls and the company will continue to enlarge its footprint in the market.

"We will continue to expand our manufacturing and R&D capabilities. That's our commitment to China — to do business in China and grow as the Chinese market grows," he said.

Zhang Ying, managing director of Dassault Systemes Greater China, said the company has significantly benefited from China's optimized business environment during the past few years.

Looking ahead, he said the company will continue to increase investment in the China market, scale up production and boost innovation and R&D.

the deep integration of the real economy and the digital economy. "Data are the core production factor in the digital economy era," he said. "It is necessary to accelerate the cultivation of emerging production factor markets such as data, establish and improve basic systems for data property rights, transactions, income distribution and security governance, and better release the potential of data factors to drive high-quality development."

To foster the new quality productive forces, more efforts should be made to create a fairer and more dynamic market environment, innovate ways of allocating production factors, promote the efficient flow and optimized combination of production factors, and improve the basic market economic systems like property rights protection, market access, fair competition and social credit, he said.

Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges and former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, highlighted the importance of improving systems that facilitate

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Lead in digital sector — how cool is that for China!

REPORTER'S LOG

By Ouyang Shijia

What fascinates me most about China's deepening reform practices is the emphasis on driving a shift to new quality productive forces. This will be among the top priorities for China's policymakers to promote high-quality development over the next few years.

As the economy is transitioning from a phase of rapid growth to a new phase of high-quality develop-

ment, the country is shifting its focus to emerging industries, creating new business models and fostering new growth drivers in a bid to promote the development of productive forces featuring high technology, high performance and high quality.

China will improve the institutions and mechanisms to foster new quality productive forces in line with local conditions, according to the resolution on further deepening reform in a comprehensive fashion to advance Chinese modernization, which was adopted at the recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The country will work to facilitate

revolutionary breakthroughs in technology; innovative allocation of production factors, in-depth industrial transformation and upgrading, and the optimal combination of laborers, means of labor and subjects of labor as well as their renewal and upgrading, the resolution said.

After years of development, China has gained a competitive edge in fostering new quality productive forces featuring new economic models, new businesses and new industries, bolstered by the blossoming cutting-edge technologies, such as the internet of things and innovation in the digital economy, said He Xuming, chairman of the World Internet of Things Convention executive committee.

He told a recent meeting in Beijing that the booming IoT and digital economy will inject strong impetus into the economy, saying more efforts should be made to speed up the digital transformation and boost the innovative applications of digital technologies.

The scale of China's digital economy topped 50 trillion yuan (\$6.9 trillion) in 2022, second in the world and accounting for over 40 percent of the country's GDP, according to a report released from the Cyberspace Administration of China.

He noted that while the United States, with a digital economy worth over \$14 trillion, ranks first in the world, China will likely overtake the size of the US digital economy by

2026 given its accelerated push for boosting the digital economy growth.

Last year, the country issued a guideline on the construction of a digital China, which will serve as an important engine for boosting its modernization drive in the digital era and provide solid support for the development of a new competitive edge.

By 2035, China will be at the forefront of digital development globally, and its digital progress in certain aspects of economy, politics, culture, society and ecology will be more coordinated and sustained, according to the plan.

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BUSINESS



Workers operate on an assembly line of new energy vehicles in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, in July. HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

China's tech advances boon for enterprises worldwide

New quality productive forces seen invigorating economy, spurring capital

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

China's emphasis on driving a shift to new quality productive forces will inject strong tailwinds into the economy and create rising growth opportunities for investors worldwide, said Simon Lacey, head of Digital Trade and Geopolitics at the World Economic Forum.

"I think China is well positioned to benefit and also accelerate its development in the area of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, internet of things and industrial robots," Lacey said during an exclusive interview with China Daily.

Recognizing the importance of these technologies going back to the early 2000s, China has initiated necessary reforms and bolstered the capacity of domestic firms and universities, positioning itself as a formidable player in the high-tech sector, he said.

"Chinese firms have proven that they can really innovate at the mar-

Global companies that want to stay at the cutting edge of technological innovation need to be in China for producing, selling and innovating."

Simon Lacey, head of Digital Trade and Geopolitics at the World Economic Forum

gins incrementally to produce breakthrough technologies," he added.

Official data reflect the marked shift with exports of high-tech and green "new three" products experiencing substantial growth. Exports of the "new three" — electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells — registered a year-on-year increase of around 30 percent in

2023, said the General Administration of Customs.

"China recognized the importance of these technologies decades ago and invested accordingly, and now it has clearly got a competitive advantage in the 'new three' sectors," Lacey said.

He believes that China is on track to achieve its goals of fostering new quality productive forces, especially in terms of cultivating cutting-edge technologies, adding that more efforts are needed to further expand high-standard opening-up and strengthen global cooperation.

"China just needs to keep on the path that it's on and it'll succeed. I think the most important thing is really that technical knowledge needs to be able to flow across borders, and you need to have this sort of open innovation model."

Looking ahead, he said China and the US — the world's two largest economies — should continue to cooperate and work together and rebuild trust in a number of areas, including green development.

"There are many areas where the US and China's interests align, and they're not in direct competition with one another. I think competi-

tion can be very healthy as long as it doesn't lead to confrontation which can escalate," he said. "If we can get to a stage of healthy competition, there can be a lot of benefits for the rest of humanity as both countries are trying to compete with each other on a whole range of really important technologies."

Lacey highlighted China's importance to global firms with its ultra-large domestic market as well as its role as a center for innovation and research.

"Global companies that want to stay at the cutting edge of technological innovation need to be in China for producing, selling and innovating. Otherwise, they just can't maintain their global competitiveness. China has made remarkable progress in upskilling its workforce and creating the world's largest and arguably most inclusive and equitable middle-income economy. Where it needs to do better is spreading the benefits of its growth beyond its cities to the countryside, and achieving sort of more balanced and more inclusive growth."

Contact the writers at ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

Heritage, trade helping a historic city prosper

NANCHANG — Nearly 100 years ago, an uprising in Nanchang, capital of East China's Jiangxi province, marked the birth of the first army under the command of the Communist Party of China, earning Nanchang the title "hero city".

Secure in its old-time glory, Nanchang is undergoing a new era of rejuvenation, emerging as a hub of innovation and overland trade. The city's commitment to opening-up has breathed new life into its population of over 6.5 million, positioning it as a key player in China's modernization while earnestly preserving its rich historical and cultural heritage.

Innovative breakthrough

Innovation is at the heart of Nanchang's development strategy. The LED industry here exemplifies this innovation-driven economic growth, as the local government fully understands that innovation is crucial for unlocking the city's medium- and long-term growth potential.

The high-powered silicon substrate-based LED chips, used for display screens, saw China become the third country after Japan and the United States to secure intellectual property rights for blue LEDs, said Wang Qiong, vice-director of the strategic development department of Lattice Power, which produces the LED chips.

Lattice Power's LED products boast luminous efficiency on par with the cutting-edge LEDs developed by Japanese and US firms, while having a pricing advantage due to their use of cheaper materials, Wang said.

This technology won first prize in China's State Technological Invention Award in 2015.

The Nanchang-based company has developed an industrial cluster to produce LED screens for illumination solutions in areas such as aircraft, automobiles and smartphones, and realized an output value growth of about 40 percent year-on-year in the first half.

Wang said that Lattice Power invests around 10 percent of its annual revenue in research and development, pursuing a high-quality development path with research and talent as its core focus.

Opening up to world

At the forefront of Nanchang's economic opening-up is a major land port for international trade. This ambitious project, covering an area of 33.82 square kilometers, has become a crucial link in the Belt and Road Initiative.

The port's success is evident in its rapid expansion of international trade routes. As of 2024, it has launched 23 international freight train routes, connecting Nanchang with over 50 countries and regions.

On July 20, a significant milestone was achieved as the inaugural "Nanchang-Tashkent" freight train set off from the port. The train carried 938 metric tons of goods worth

26.05 million yuan (\$3.6 million) to Central Asia.

This new route will not only explore new markets for domestic products, but also significantly reduce transportation costs for foreign trade businesses, said Chen Wei, a business manager at the port.

More remarkable developments have been made in Nanchang's logistics sector. On July 11, the province's first sea-rail intermodal train loaded with imported durian from Thailand arrived at the land port. This breakthrough in the cold chain has opened new possibilities for the import of fresh produce and export of local specialties, further integrating Nanchang into global trade networks, Chen said.

The city's commitment to modern logistics is also demonstrated by the JD Asia No. 1 project in the port area. This comprehensive logistics park, spanning 400 mu (26.7 hectares), with an investment of 2 billion yuan, serves as e-commerce giant JD.com's core logistics node.

The facility uses advanced technologies, including an AGV intelligent warehouse system, that has increased work efficiency by 70 percent while reducing labor costs by over 60 percent.

Cultural tourism

Ahead of China's Army Day, which falls on Aug 1, a group of eighth-grade students from Nanchang Yuxin School visited the Nanchang Uprising Memorial Hall to learn about the history of the People's Liberation Army.

"After reading the stories of the martyrs, I was deeply moved by their spirit and contribution. They gave me the courage to face the challenges of life head-on," said Xing Renmei, one of the students who hails from Nanchang.

Last month, the memorial hall attracted nearly 10,000 visitors daily, predominantly young people and tourists from other provinces and regions.

As more Chinese tourist attractions seek long-term development by leveraging their cultural and historical resources, Nanchang's future trajectory is thoughtfully aligned with its rich history spanning over 2,200 years.

In the first half of this year, over 32,000 tourists earned free tickets to Tengwang Pavilion in Nanchang by successfully reciting the famous poem *Preface to Tengwang Pavilion* by Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Wang Bo. This initiative is part of a new campaign launched by Jiangxi, which allows students worldwide to gain free or discounted access to local tourist attractions by reciting designated poems or classics.

Over 190 million trips were made to Nanchang in 2023, up 16.9 percent year-on-year, which increased tourism revenue by 41.3 percent to 197.78 billion yuan, according to official data.

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BUSINESSINSIGHT

Total factor productivity growth a telling metric

EAGLE EYE

By Liu Qiao

Over the past quarter century or so, the world has grappled with the challenge of inadequate total factor productivity growth.

When using the TFP growth rate as a metric, it becomes apparent that despite having the world's leading research and development capabilities, most robust investment in basic research, and a relatively comprehensive industrial system, the United States has had a TFP growth rate of only about 0.5 percent over the past two decades.

This helps explain why the US has registered a long-term economic growth rate of merely 1.5 percent to 2 percent.

Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, which have already undergone industrialization, are also experiencing insufficient growth in TFP.

The fundamental rationale behind this phenomenon is that during the industrialization era, the economies of scale associated with mass production led to significant cost savings and technological applications, which in turn created substantial room for growth.

Following the completion of industrialization, the services sector typically expands in size. However, it is largely labor-intensive, making it more difficult for the sector to enhance TFP.

China mostly completed its industrialization process in 2010, a milestone year in which it surpassed the US and Japan to become the leading global manufacturer in terms of value added and total production.

Our calculations show that China's average annual growth rate in TFP declined from a previous 4 percent to 1.8 percent between 2010 and 2019. Some other scholars, using varying methodologies and measurements, have placed the figure at around 1.3 percent.

Typically, TFP accounts for approximately 40 to 50 percent of economic growth. If the growth rate of TFP were to fall to just 1.8 percent, it would suggest that the long-term economic growth rate would be at 4 percent or lower.

From this perspective, some scholars, including those living abroad, have put forward the "peak China" theory based on the argument that China has completed its industrialization.

However, China differs from the US in many ways. China's manufacturing currently

accounts for 27 percent of GDP and about 30 percent of global manufacturing output, whereas the manufacturing sector in the US makes up only 11 percent of its GDP. China still has an advantage in terms of its TFP growth rate.

Every industry can be transformed and revitalized during energy transition and digitalization. Second, the advancement of the digital economy and carbon neutrality is backed by massive investment.

If China is to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, the estimated investment scale can be more than 300 trillion yuan (\$41.55 trillion). This means an average annual investment of nearly 10 trillion yuan over the years leading up to 2060. The decline in real estate investment can be fully offset by investment in emerging industries.

China's edge in infrastructure development is largely attributable to its "government plus market" approach. Critical sectors like high-speed railways and expressways often lead to low capital returns. Our estimates suggest that the rate of return on capital is only around 2 percent, which makes it unattractive for private capital.

Yet, social benefits from infrastructure investments are substantial. It's undeniable that the advent of high-speed railways has spurred an extensive industrial chain, providing enormous growth opportunities for many enterprises and industries in both upstream and downstream segments.

Over the course of more than 40 years of reform and opening-up, China has made significant investments in infrastructure, which has had a strong stimulative effect on the nation's economy.

The key lies in the way private capital and State-owned capital — or the market and the government — find their respective areas of strength, ultimately forming a powerful investment intensity and investment rate that have propelled China through the process of industrialization.

Will China's TFP growth rate recover to above 2 percent, driving us to maintain a 5 percent GDP growth over the next decade or two? I am quite optimistic.

Faced with the global challenge of insufficient productivity, the Chinese government has devised a comprehensive strategy centered on developing new quality productive forces.

This strategy involves revolutionary transformation in technology, the synergy of technological and industrial innovation, innovative allocation of production factors, and the transformation and upgrade of traditional industries — all aimed at boosting TFP and carving out a path distinct from that of European and North American economies. We think that, in theoretical terms, this represents a systematic



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

approach to addressing global shortfalls in growth.

First, China's manufacturing sector needs to transition toward equipment manufacturing, which will generate numerous investment opportunities and enhance TFP.

Second, digitalization, energy transition and a "reindustrialization" process will generate numerous investment opportunities and a potential boost in TFP.

Thus, at the infrastructure level, with the process of digitalization, new energy and reindustrialization, there is a need for "new infrastructure", including 5G, 6G and future-oriented computing power. Investments in these fields will be enormous, bringing the possibility of rising TFP.

Also, high-standard opening-up and deeper institutional reforms will create immense room for improvement in resource allocation efficiency, leading to an increase in the growth rate of TFP.

Due to the aforementioned factors, China is still able to maintain a TFP growth rate of around 2 percent, compared with other

countries that have completed industrialization.

This presents a different economic outlook from theories like "peak China".

The significance of China's successful transformation from investment and production factor-driven economic growth models to a more balanced TFP-driven model is substantial.

What do new quality productive forces mean for businesses?

The path to new quality productive forces involves expanding into industries and fields that can enhance TFP and form new quality productive forces. There are two paths to achieving this objective.

The first route involves leveraging revolutionary technological changes to foster strategic emerging industries and future endeavors. This includes sectors associated with energy transition and digital transformation, as well as future-oriented industries like quantum computing and AI-driven big data. These will create new momentum, aiding in the acceleration of TFP growth.

The second path involves opportunities brought about by China's transformation and upgrade of traditional industries. Currently, the productivity in China's agricultural and services sectors, for example, is relatively low, offering significant potential for increasing TFP. This in itself is a source of new quality productive forces, as it represents innovation in the mode of development.

When we move toward development of new quality productive forces, the direction is clear, which is to follow the philosophy of "building before breaking".

"Building" refers to the promotion of new areas, new growth tracks and new industries that can help increase the growth rate of TFP. By creating new consumption and demand, it boosts people's confidence in the future.

The writer is a professor of finance and dean of Peking University's Guanghua School of Management.

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

Plenum expands new fields, brings more opportunities for businesses

MAIN STREET

By Zhou Mi

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to comprehensively deepen reform in order to further advance Chinese modernization, and proposed goals to be achieved in phases by 2029.

This has created favorable conditions for the long-term, stable and innovative participation of global investors.

As a key guidance for China's economic and social development, related concepts and goals — proposed during the session — will be implemented through more detailed policy measures to support high-quality development of enterprises in China.

Following the plenum, the market space for all types of enterprises will be further expanded.

The focus of State-owned capital will shift to critical industries and key areas related to national security, and they will serve as a guarantee for public services.

Reforms in State-owned enterprises will deepen, with segments like energy, railways, telecommunications, water conservancy, and utilities, which have been monopolies, becoming more market-oriented and independently operated. This will release more market space for non-State-owned enterprises.

Such a development will not only stabilize the market environment and help in the formation of strategic innovation leadership but also drive enthusiasm among market entities to boost economic vitality. This adjustment in business fields, through SOE

reforms and equity transactions, will ensure both private and foreign enterprises can participate in a market-oriented manner, which will help enhance their development momentum.

Notably, the nonpublic economy, or private economy, will receive stronger innovation aid. Supporting capable private enterprises in leading major national technological research projects will help ensure stable R&D funding and potentially provide broader application space for related technological achievements.

The further opening-up of major national scientific research infrastructure to private enterprises will help in expanding the commercial application of science and technology, significantly enhancing the foundational R&D capabilities of private enterprises.

In the digital economy era, computing power, represented by supercomputing centers, has become a crucial factor in processing massive amounts of data, exploring business opportunities, accelerating product upgrading, and seeking competitive advantages. With more access to computing power, private enterprises can save on repetitive investments in equipment while significantly improving data processing capabilities.

Similarly, with the support of numerous commercial applications, the utilization rate of major scientific research infrastructure will markedly increase, which will help private companies effectively leverage their R&D strengths and achieve precise guidance in the development of new materials, new processes and processing equipment.

In addition, establishing a unified national market will increase market fairness. In the face of a complex and changing internal and external environment, stable, fair, and advanced market rules will help

enterprises of all ownerships.

Unified foundational market system rules, a sound national standard system, and deepened reforms of local standard management systems will provide clearer references for business activities. A fair and unified market supervision will institutionally ensure that enterprises of different ownership structures receive equal treatment, eliminating and abolishing practices that hinder a unified national market.

Local investment laws and regulations will also be further standardized, and illegal preferential policies may be prohibited in future. High-standard connectivity of market infrastructure and improvement of factor markets will help enterprises utilize domestic and international resources more effectively.

At the same time, new quality productive forces, as the development focus for the foreseeable future, not only need active participation from enterprises but also provide more support to enhance their development momentum.

Comprehensive support for systematic innovation measures will further stimulate innovation dynamics and vitality, reducing the trial-and-error risks for innovators. The emergence of new industries, new models and new momentum will make the Chinese market a global laboratory for innovation and application, creating better conditions for innovators to achieve stable returns.

Historically, multinational companies have numerous examples of leveraging their product and service innovation advantages to gain stable profit sources in China, be it from consumer products, automobiles, financial management software and enterprise resource management systems.

Multinationals with technological advantages have always achieved excess

returns in China. With the gradual upgrading of the Chinese market, the technology gap between what multinational companies promote in China and overseas markets is narrowing. For high-tech products, including electronic products, the demand in the Chinese market even leads the global technology and supply frontier.

Strategic industries such as new-generation information technology, artificial intelligence, aerospace, new energy, new materials, high-end equipment, biomedicine and quantum technology will be the development focus in the coming period.

The complete industry chain advantage possessed by China's manufacturing sector will provide strong support for the reasonable advancement of these industries. The integration of the real economy with the digital economy is deepening, digital infrastructure is increasingly improving, and innovation vitality is strengthening significantly. China's super-large market can create a stable and vast space for development of multinationals.

Openness is another distinctive feature of Chinese modernization, and the steady expansion of institutional openness will create a transparent, stable and predictable institutional environment for global investors. Actively aligning with international high-standard economic and trade rules not only provides a more familiar and comfortable development environment for foreign enterprises in China but also offers institutional guidance to further open markets for goods, services, capital and labor.

Foreign investment in China is not only legally protected by law but also assured through the comprehensive removal of restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector. Such a move ensures that foreign enter-

prises can access resources, apply for qualifications and licenses, participate in standard-setting and engage in government procurement.

China's openness spans different industries and regions and fully considers the willingness and capabilities of all parties. While pursuing its own stable development, China focuses on mutual benefits and win-win cooperation with neighboring countries and regions.

The advancement of cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative significantly increases the points of interconnection between various markets and China, enhancing the resilience of economic and trade links.

Through collaborative efforts, BRI countries and regions not only promote the upgrade and development of traditional industries but also create conditions for cooperation platforms in green development, digital economy, artificial intelligence, energy, taxation, finance and disaster reduction.

The multidimensional connectivity network of the BRI will provide significant support for improving the efficiency of cooperation between Chinese enterprises and local ones in countries and regions participating in the BRI. It may also attract more enterprises globally, thereby increasing the inclusiveness and diversity of international cooperation.

China's opening-up will not close but only open wider. All parties are welcome to hop on to the express train of China's development. Investing in China is investing in the future; investing in China is investing in hope.

The writer is a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

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

COMMENT

Editorials

Blinken's visit serves to show regional allies' unease that they may be left in the lurch

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken concluded his 10-day back-to-back visits to six countries neighboring China — Laos, Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Mongolia — on Saturday. The visits were aimed at reaffirming the importance of the anti-China alliance the Joe Biden administration has sought to forge in the Asia-Pacific.

The trip is not only the 18th that Blinken has made to the region as secretary of state, but also the first overseas visit by the United States' top diplomat since the withdrawal of Biden from the approaching presidential election. Announced on July 22, the trip was reportedly scheduled hours after Biden quit his reelection bid.

The absence of Blinken's customary valediction that we are becoming stronger together on bidding farewell to the region after his longest visit over the past more than three years serves to indicate the trip was not plain sailing.

The scenarios that unfolded stop after stop over the 10 days should have awakened the US guest to the fact that the optimism the Biden administration displayed on announcing the trip with a lengthy and high-profile we-are-coming news release was largely huff-and-puff.

Instead of projecting "an aura of calm normalcy" to his hosts, it is the latter that have used Blinken's visit to convey to him a sense of unease at the anomaly of the domestic situation in the US.

"We are very happy to see (you) once again," Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said on Tuesday in Manila. "I am a bit surprised considering how interesting your political situation has become back in the States, but I'm glad that you've found the time to come and visit with us."

In Singapore, Blinken was asked by a senior diplomat about the "noise coming out of the presidential campaign." "Really? I hadn't heard any of it," he replied, to laughter from the audience, before taking a stab at a serious answer, as ABC News reported. "We have these periodic things called elections and I think it's normal that before every election — given the importance of this moment in history that our country has around the world — that of course people ask questions," Blinken said.

But his comment that "there are a number of constants that don't fundamentally change irrespective of who wins a particular election" only served to strengthen his audiences' conviction of the opposite.

By stressing that "If you listen to our fellow citizens, they actually want the United States to be engaged in the world ... They strongly prefer that the United States not engage the world alone", a veiled jab at former US president Donald Trump's "America First" mantra, Blinken only confirmed the validity of his listeners' concerns.

In Japan, the unease was palpable. "We are at a historic turning point," Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told him and the visiting US defense chief in Tokyo. "As for the US situation, we are watching with keen interest," she said. "But in any case, in order to completely and thoroughly defend the international order, Japan and the US ... should continue to enhance our deterrence power."

During the visits, Blinken invariably demurred when asked who would win in November and how it would affect US foreign policy: "One of the benefits of my job is that I don't do politics," he said in Singapore, defaulting to his stock answer.

But in saying that he will stick to the Biden administration's foreign policy during the next six months to try and "advance not only our own interests but the interests of so many of our friends and partners", he offered what sounded like a farewell speech.

That being said, although the Biden administration's commitment to the US' regional allies and partners remains "unwavering", it seems the latter are adopting a cautious drawback from the US' confrontational stance in the Asia-Pacific and a wait-and-see attitude.

Middle East turmoil calls for concerted efforts

The Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu does want the return of hostages taken by Hamas in its Oct 7 attacks. That is why it has sent delegations to internationally mediated negotiations. He has to engage Hamas for a cease-fire and the return of those hostages.

Hamas too has shown its desire for a cease-fire, and has also appeared more receptive to ideas of a broader peace. Just weeks back, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh sent representatives to Beijing to join 13 other political Palestinian factions for discussions on national reconciliation.

But as Netanyahu told the US Congress during his latest trip to Washington, his eyes are on a "total victory", which to him means the elimination of Hamas. The assassination of Haniyeh in the Iranian capital as part of that endeavor has ruined the recent progress made in international peace-brokering, and dashed hopes for a cease-fire agreement. Haniyeh played a crucial role as a key interlocutor with Egyptian and Qatari mediators during the negotiations between Israel and Hamas. His death has also provoked fears that the conflict in Gaza may evolve into an all-out Middle East war.

While the Israeli government has neither claimed responsibility for the killing, nor denied it, there is little doubt Haniyeh's assassination has become a rallying call against Israel and the ongoing peace process, as all its enemies in the region consider it to be the perpetrator of his killing. Hamas' armed wing said the incident would "take the battle to new dimensions and have major repercussions". Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei said Israel had provided grounds for "harsh punishments for itself", and it was Teheran's duty to avenge the Hamas leader's death as it occurred on Iranian soil. The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, who lost a senior commander in an Israeli attack on Beirut one day ago, has also vowed revenge.

It takes unremitting endeavors and strenuous behind-the-scenes diplomacy to bring hostile parties to the negotiating table. But one single missile has sufficed to blow up everything achieved so far. The incident frustrated not only all international peacemaking efforts, but more importantly derailed United States-orchestrated efforts to manage and control the situation. Leading Joe Biden administration officials have all reiterated their country's commitment to Israel's security in their latest exchanges with Netanyahu. In private, they have reportedly conveyed serious concerns about the situation getting out of control.

As Washington seeks to choreograph a pivot to Asia by the US-led Western alliance, it does not want to be tied down by another full-blown war in the Middle East. Not to mention domestic animosity against Israeli violence in Gaza is a growing negative asset for the ruling Democratic Party ahead of the presidential election in November.

President Biden said he was "very direct" in his meeting with Netanyahu regarding the significance of a cease-fire and consequences of escalation. Except deploying additional military resources in the region, however, there may not be a lot his administration can do to rein in Israel. The Israeli leader is ever more openly at odds with the White House's preference for diplomacy in the region.

With the assassination of Haniyeh, the Netanyahu government is no doubt confident it can fulfill its pledge to eliminate Hamas. It is therefore likely to seek to consolidate its gains by stepping up its military operations and show even less inclination to negotiate in good faith. Calming the situation in the Middle East is therefore becoming an increasingly formidable task and dispiriting challenge.

Yet it is critical that the international community do all it can to try to prevent any escalation of the conflict and confrontation. China has proposed a three-step approach to solve the Palestinian issue, starting with a comprehensive, sustainable cease-fire in Gaza, followed by the creation of an interim national reconciliation government focused on the post-war reconstruction of Gaza, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in line with United Nations resolutions. It is ready to work with all willing parties to achieve these goals.

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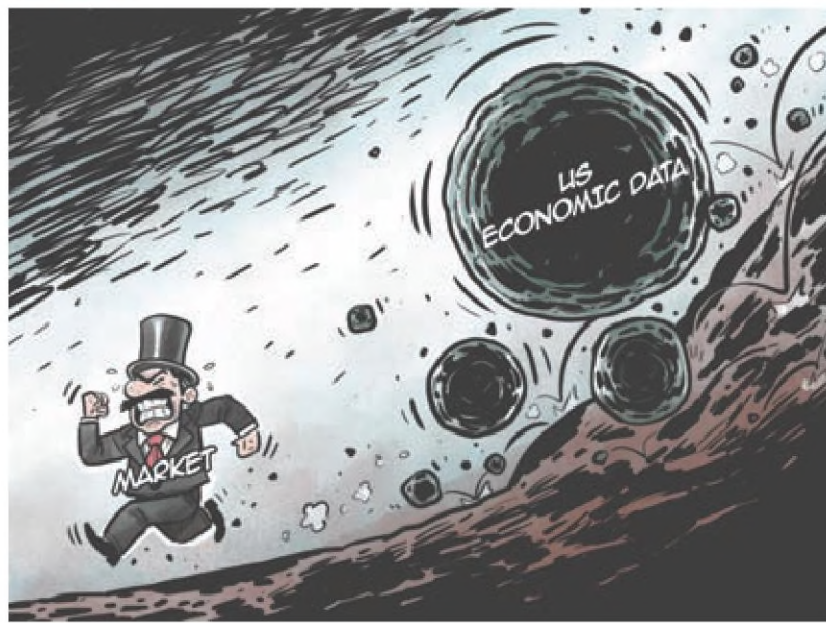
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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Stronger 'institutional cage' to prevent power distorting market

China's new regulations on fair competition reviews came into force on Thursday, filling the legislative gap in the field.

Although China founded its fair competition review mechanism in 2016, some local protectionism and market segmentation behaviors have not been completely addressed, which has hindered the free flow of production factors and reduced the efficiency of resource allocation and economic operations.

Administrative agencies and organizations legally authorized to manage public affairs must conduct fair competition reviews when formulating laws, rules and policies related to business activities, according to the new regulations that allocate duties to both central and local government departments.

The regulations outline specific standards for fair competition reviews. For instance, there are measures to restrict

market entry or exit, while the free flow of goods and business operations are not to be constrained by any policy measures. The regulations also stress that stakeholders and public opinion should be taken into account during reviews to safeguard their interests.

The move is conducive to accelerating the elimination of regulations and practices that impede the formation of a unified market. It will help ensure that all types of enterprises can participate in fair competition and better protect the legitimate rights and interests of all business entities.

Strengthening fair competition review is a powerful tool for cultivating and developing new quality productive forces, which should be jointly cultivated by both the "visible hand" of the government and the "invisible hand" of the market.

The regulations provide a strong institutional guarantee for fair compe-

dition and the innovative development of business entities, which is conducive to giving full play to the innovation incentivizing and survival of the fittest functions of the market competition mechanism, guiding the effective allocation of innovative resources through market demand, and allowing various advanced and high-quality production factors to flow smoothly.

The regulations, if strictly implemented, can help tighten the "institutional cage" for the abuse of administrative power and curtail improper interference in fair market competition.

The implementation of the regulations represents the country's latest efforts to prioritize the establishment of a unified national market characterized by high efficiency, standardization, openness, and fair competition in a bid to form a new development paradigm.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

New urbanization should focus on people's needs

China will advance its people-centered new urbanization through concrete measures, according to a five-year action plan unveiled on Wednesday by the State Council, China's Cabinet.

The country plans to support more rural migrant workers in settling down in urban areas and aims to lift the urbanization rate of permanent residents to nearly 70 percent within five years, the action plan said.

China's urbanization rate of permanent residents stood at 66.16 percent by the end of 2023, a marked rise from 53.1 percent by the end of 2012, and a total of 165 million countryside residents have moved to cities and towns through the country's household registration system in the past decade.

The country will implement targeted measures in two key types of areas.

In regions with low urbanization rates and large populations, the focus will be on enhancing the level of urbanization, while in areas with relatively high urbanization rates and continuous population agglomeration, the goal will be to cultivate modern metropolitan areas, the action plan said.

All relevant measures outlined by the action plan involve the core interests of the new urban residents after they move to the city from the countryside and touch various issues of public concern in a systematic way.

"People-centered" means that the urbanization construction must be based on the fundamental purpose of meeting the people's growing needs for a better life; and "new" refers to not only new public infrastructure, but also urban industrial upgrading, green

development and, more importantly, the protection of people's rights and interests so that people have comparatively fair access to the necessary means and opportunities to pursue a better life.

China's fast development over the past more than 40 years is a process to free people from the constraints of land by removing the rigid and outdated institutional shackles on them. The people-centered new urbanization is expected to carry on those efforts in light of the practical needs of the people and the actual situations of the country today.

The flow of population, the universalization of basic public services and the filling of the urban-rural gap are all indispensable to cultivating new quality productive forces.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Consumption boost requires society's buy-in

China will work to further develop consumer services to support high-quality economic development and meet people's demand for personalized, diversified and quality services, according to a guideline made public on Saturday. The guideline, issued by the State Council, China's Cabinet, sets out 20 key tasks, including tapping the potential of consumption in sectors such as hospitality, domestic services, elderly care, childcare, entertainment, tourism, sports, education and training.

It also pledges to foster the consumption of digital, green and health services, create new consumption scenarios, relax market access, strengthen regulation and provide more policy support for the consumption of services.

Sectors such as telecommunications, education, elderly care and medical care will be opened up further and opening-up measures

in areas such as technology services and tourism implemented, with the resumption of flights to be accelerated, diversified payment services provided, and the granting of visa-free entry extended to more countries as appropriate.

Such concrete actions to expand domestic demand with a focus on boosting service consumption, which is a major driver of the expansion and upgrading of consumption, should also include measures to create jobs, increase people's income and improve the market's confidence in the prospects of the economy.

China's retail sales of services have increased 7.5 percent from a year ago, 4.3 percentage points higher than that of goods, according to official data, showing a pickup tendency.

It is good to see that the central authorities issued a pro-employment policy for migrant workers on Friday

that stresses improving their skills training and protecting their legal rights and interests.

Also the central departments, in June, jointly issued a notice on the importance of doing a good job in promoting college graduates and other youth employment and entrepreneurship.

The document proposes 11 policy measures to that end, which notably include providing a "one-time job expansion subsidy" of no more than 1,500 yuan (\$209.5) per person to enterprises that recruit unemployed college graduates and registered unemployed youth aged 16-24 who have signed labor contracts and paid unemployment, work-related injury and employee pension insurance premiums for more than three months in full. The subsidy is to be paid from the unemployment insurance fund, and the policy will be valid until the end of next year.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Deepening Reform Comprehensively

Editor's note: *Comprehensively deepening reform not only advances Chinese modernization but also serves as a driving force of stable growth and high-quality development. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.*

Ong Tee Keat

Plenum draws clear road map to modernization

The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee that concluded recently vowed to further deepen reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization. The resolution suggests a tapestry of solutions to today's challenges, some of which have been created by foreign powers amid rising geopolitical tensions.

Prior to the third plenary session, China critics in the West had been speculating on Beijing's upcoming economic policy to overcome the gloomy global outlook and boost the country's slowing economic growth. An abysmal scenario of the Chinese economy was relentlessly portrayed by the Western media with a plethora of conundrums raised under the West's lenses. The Western pundits were quick to respond with dismay when their pre-framed "concerns" were not heeded by the plenum.

Indeed, the trajectory of China's reform and opening-up has never been influenced by external forces, which at times pretend to represent market forces. A case in point is the timing and latitude of China's opening-up. When the West's rumour mills kicked into high gear with their dystopian portrayal of China, little did they anticipate that Beijing's 144-hour visa-free entry granted to citizens of a dozen or so countries would tear their lies into tatters.

Many vloggers from the West were excited to share their video clips of China's bustling streets and tourist spots, and their personal experiences in China on social media, starkly contrasting the doomsayers' accounts.

The plenum promises to intensify reform to modernize the national governance system and governance capacity, in a bid to facilitate further opening-up of the Chinese economy. This, in turn, will spur on reform. In short, reform and opening-up are codependencies that reinforce one another.

Domestically, the resolution adopted at the plenum details a raft of key initiatives focused on elevating governance to a new level in response to the people's rising need for a better life and the changing global dynamics. Taking cognizance of the "increasing uncertainties and unpredictable factors" impacting national development, China's efforts to strengthen its economic resilience and promote innovation are understandably set to take the centre stage in the next phase of development.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



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The reform tasks laid out in the plenum's resolution have been given a challenging time frame — to be completed by 2029 to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Overall, the resolution constitutes a road map for China to build a strong socialist market economy underpinned by high-quality development.

In recent years, China's quantum leap in the realm of cutting-edge technologies has taken the world by storm. New growth drivers have turbocharged China up the global value chain, thus resulting in the West's anguish, hostility and restrictions on the exports of chips and chip-making equipment to China.

In the face of the West's increasingly aggressive attempts to contain China, Beijing's steadfast commitment to further open up its economy is a manifestation of its growing confidence in its economy and development policy. Beijing keeps its huge market wide open to exporters across the world.

In this context, China International Import Expo is a shining example. While

the West is obsessed with "near-shoring" and "friend-shoring" in its bid to realign the global supply chains to exclude China, the world's second-largest economy remains committed to embracing the world and sharing with it the economic potential and development dividends accrued from its opening-up.

For China, pursuing innovation-driven high-quality growth and developing new quality productive forces are now the imperatives necessary to realize Chinese modernization. Time and again, China has demystified the myth that Westernization is the only template for achieving modernization. Alongside this, not only has China proven to the world that its mode of socialism is compatible with market economy, but more importantly, modernization can be achieved by adhering to a socialist market economy.

In further unleashing the vast potential of the socialist market economy, the resolution underscores the Chinese authorities' commitment to handling the State-owned and privately-owned enterprises even-handedly under the framework of "rule of law", and vows to better leverage the role of the market, along with efforts to foster a fairer and more dynamic market environment, all of which converge to make resource allocation as efficient and productive as possible.

From the perspective of global development, China's deepening reform and further opening-up signify the vast potential to provide the world with concomitant vigor and opportunities for economic recovery, alongside a viable template for multilateral cooperation amid rising de-globalization in the West. The success of China's socialist market economy has shown

an inspirational model to the world, notably among the emerging economies from the Global South which are in dire need of a development model to boost their economies. In this context, the Chinese template fits the bill perfectly.

To its 1.4 billion people, China's potential economic triumph looks set to help the country achieve the second centennial goal of building a modern socialist nation that promises to be prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by the middle of this century so long as peace continues to prevail. In this context, China's resolute commitment to maintain peace is apparent and understandable.

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

Stephen Brawer

Third plenary session to have big impact on global development

World history is being shaped by processes and events larger, more profound and more complex than most people can imagine. One such recent event was the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The resolution adopted at the plenum makes it clear China will continue to implement the Belt and Road Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation Action Plan and redouble efforts to develop multilateral platforms for cooperation in green development, the digital economy, artificial intelligence, energy, taxation, finance, disaster mitigation, and other areas.

The third plenum also elaborated on how the CPC Central Committee has assessed China's success and achievements in the new era, and emphasized the need to further deepen reform to advance Chinese modernization.

Since the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, China has made unprecedented, remarkable economic achievements. This, along with the Belt and Road Initiative, has helped the country chart a new direction for global economic development.

Incidentally, the initiative was proposed in 2013, the same year that the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee was held.

The resolution of the third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee states: "The present and the near future constitute a critical period for our endeavor to build a great country and move towards national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization... We must purposefully give more prominence to reform and further deepen reform comprehensively with a view to advancing Chinese modernization in order to deal with the complex developments both at home and abroad, adapt to the new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, and live up to the new expectations of our people."

The emphasis on the need to pursue national rejuvenation and Chinese modernization, and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics is a unique aspect of Chinese policymaking, with the latter having more profound philosophical aspects, referring to Confucius. Chinese civilization has a long history of making efforts to maintain social and political stability, and pursuing development based on the principle of common good.

Despite the many transformations of Chinese society over millenniums, the country has maintained its salient socioeconomic features, which have allowed it to remain a proud and cultured society.

The proposal of the top Chinese leader to build a moderately well-off society by 2020, as part of his "four comprehensives" for good governance, was realized on schedule, facilitating the country's pursuit of national rejuvenation and Chinese modernization. On the other hand, the goal of building a high-standard socialist market economy by 2035 is a relatively long-term pursuit. All of this will lay a solid foundation for building China into a great modern socialist country by 2049, when the country will celebrate the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Besides, the resolution of the third plenum makes it clear that, contrary to claims of some Western media and politicians, China has no intention of closing the door on the global economy. Instead, it will continue to open up its economy to the outside world.

However, the international landscape is becoming more complex, with the United States, the European Union and some other Western economies resorting to trade protectionism and non-cooperation with China. They prefer to cynically ignore what China has achieved over the past more than four decades and perceive China as a threat.

Their short-sightedness and general ignorance are shaped by the Hobbesian view of being the dominant force under what can be called the law of the jungle. They wish to dominate the global economy and global governance system by brute force because they lack the insight and long-term development policy necessary to achieve sustained development, eliminate poverty and continue to create new jobs. It's time the West changed its attitude and policy toward China for the sake of global common good.

As the resolution of the third plenum says, China will continue to help build a community with a shared future for mankind. As such, building a community with a shared future for mankind, along with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, should become the criterion for international relations.

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

Sergey Lukonin

China to realize national rejuvenation despite hurdles

The recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China charted the future course of China's development, which will also influence the development of the global economy.

The resolution adopted at the third plenary session describes not only China's achievements but also the internal and external challenges facing China. That the resolution does so suggests the Party is not "dizzy with success". Instead, the Party understands the seriousness of the problems, accords priority to solving them, and realizes that it is necessary to continue the hard work to achieve Chinese modernization and improve the living standards of the Chinese people.

It is necessary to mention here that China's development is based on Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. However, in the new era, some of the previous theoretical provisions may not be as relevant as in the past. As such, their preservation in official documents demonstrates the conti-



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nuity of political thought in China which, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of the ideological basis for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Importantly, the resolution of the third plenum has emphasized that the starting point and the ultimate goal of all reforms is to ensure social equality and justice, and improve people's livelihoods. This universal thesis included in China's development policy has evoked positive response from the international community and boosted the status of China as a responsible global power.

Moreover, some experts have been discussing, for some time now, whether the private sector is losing its importance in China. The resolution has laid all such speculation to rest by emphasizing that the socialist market economy is an

important element of Chinese modernization and, accordingly, private enterprises are a key element of the Chinese economy.

Naturally, in a large economy like China's, various imbalances can, from time to time, affect the private sector — this is how a market economy develops. But it is necessary to improve the basic institutions of the market economy, as mentioned in the resolution, to mitigate the negative impacts of such imbalances.

The resolution attaches great importance to high-quality development and new quality productive forces, because the factors behind China's rapid economic development — such as cheap labor, rising exports and investment in infrastructure — may not be as important in the new era. This is because labor is no longer cheap in China, as average wages have drastically increased and the disposable income of Chinese households has been continuously increasing. As for investment in infrastructure, it no longer has a significant multiplier effect on the economy, as built infrastructure facilities require high maintenance costs and repayment of loans. And given the hostile attitude of China's major trading partners, the United States and the European Union, the space for growth of

exports is limited.

Therefore, China needs to look for new growth drivers, such as high-quality, innovation-driven development and the advancement of new quality productive forces, because they can enable China to produce more goods and equipment with high added value using new production methods, and make the Chinese economy more efficient.

As the resolution noted, to achieve high-quality development, China needs to improve the education and science and technology sectors, promote innovation, cultivate talents, and strengthen international cooperation.

This makes it clear that China, despite seeking self-sufficiency in vital sectors, is not shutting itself off from the rest of the world. Instead, it remains committed to open and fair trade.

True, China does face challenges and difficulties in achieving high-quality development. But its meticulous planning, thorough implementation of plans, and measures to address the internal and external challenges will ensure it realizes its strategic goals.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

DAVID MORRIS

Steady as it goes

No big bang, but clear commitment to further reform and opening-up in pursuit of modernization goals

The global outlook for the next few years is full of risk and uncertainty, with some critical challenges including big power rivalry, technological transformation and climate change. China itself has a host of domestic challenges, too, as it adjusts to a slower phase of growth and must attend to imbalances and problems of transition. Given its size and deep economic integration with many other economies, how China responds to these challenges is important for the world. The outcomes from the recent third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and, even more importantly, how they are to be implemented, will therefore be eagerly studied to understand the policy agenda for China in the next five years, as it approaches the 80th anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

The third plenum of each Central Committee is notable for setting a course for future significant economic, social and other policy reform programs. International and domestic observers alike remember the signature importance of the third plenum of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978 which heralded the beginning of China's historic reform and opening-up. It is too early to tell the full significance of the recently concluded third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Committee, but some important messages were included in the resolution and communicate that can help us to predict the direction of China's decision-making over the next five years.

The communique's title "deepening reform and advancing Chinese modernization" indicates consistency rather than any major redirection like that in 1978. The big-picture goals also remain unchanged: a "high-standard" socialist market economy by 2035 and a "great modern" socialist country by 2049, the centenary of the PRC. None of this is surprising to the Chinese people, but it is important to explain to international audiences that stability is much valued in China and that the nature of China's political system is that reform and modernization are usually designed to be implemented in a predictable, step-by-step manner, under the leadership of the Party. There will be no "big bang" of radical changes.

Nevertheless, everyone is looking for

signs of pragmatic reform. China's economy has accumulated and faces many challenges from its successful high-growth phase in recent decades, which created "unequal, uncoordinated and unsustainable" development. Now, China must manage a slower growth phase that must be more balanced if it is to be sustainable.

China needs less speculative real estate development and more productive investment in the industries of the future. It needs to manage a demographic challenge of a declining workforce while ensuring there are enough new, well-paid jobs as new technologies eliminate some of the old low-paid jobs.

It is widely considered that China needs to move from an investment-led to a demand-led model if it is to escape the so-called middle-income trap, to spread the benefits of growth more widely. This means a new emphasis on productivity rather than simply production at all costs, quality over quantity. It also means incentivizing domestic consumption of the goods and services being produced, including with better social protection to raise people's confidence to spend.

A more active agenda of centrally-directed reform can be expected over the next five years to manage market risks in finance and other sectors, as well as to



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manage public sector risks such as local government debt, while expectations are high for hukou, or household registration, reform and other measures to address the urban-rural divide.

There is a commitment to give the market mechanism "better play" and to create "a fairer and more dynamic market environment". How such aspirations are implemented will be closely watched by foreign investors. There has been a slowing of foreign investment in China, influenced by many factors including slower Chinese growth, diversification to other emerging markets and also in response to an increasing role of the State in the market. Given

the privileged local role for some inefficient State-owned enterprises, international business and China's private sector innovators are keenly looking for signs of a level playing field, at least in those sectors in which the private sector is demonstrably more innovative. One of the clearest signals from the third plenum of China's new priorities is the central role of "new growth drivers" for higher productivity economic activity to replace lower-value production. We can expect China to double down on its push for innovation in new technologies and the further digitization of industry and services. These go hand-in-hand with China's push for a green and low-carbon transition. It is also in response to US attempts to prevent China's access to high-end semiconductors for its development of artificial intelligence.

Domestic-driven innovation in technologies will likely see transformative changes in how goods are produced and how services are delivered, with greater efficiency and lower environmental impact. China's investment in renewable energy, electric vehicles and new battery technologies are demonstrating how to make development sustainable. The transition to EVs is the most evident change in today's China, with new energy vehicles accounting for almost half of new car sales, and more new productive and greener innovations can be expected in the future, particularly if pri-

private sector innovation is enabled and not stifled by regulation. Given its scale and advantages, China will seek to lead the world in these industries of the future.

There was also an interesting commitment made at the third plenum to improving the mechanisms for high-quality cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, through which China has stimulated \$1 trillion worth of infrastructure connectivity but of varying quality and local governance.

Modernization is about more than economic development and environmental sustainability. The third plenum committed to "ignite the cultural creativity of the entire nation". China has unique cultural assets to nurture and develop, and can equally be enriched by more international cultural exchanges in both directions. Let's hope modernization can therefore include a healthy exchange of contemporary art, music and other culture, which can contribute to cross-civilizational dialogue, respect and understanding.

Modernization must also mean peaceful development, and observers will welcome the third plenum's pledge that China remains committed to a foreign policy of peace and aimed at building an international community with a shared future. The new Chinese initiatives, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, will all be judged by the world on the contribution they make to peace, development and understanding, at a time when we all need more of each.

Of central importance, the third plenum reiterated the commitment to further opening to the outside world and promoting reform through opening-up, which recognizes this has been a fundamentally important part of China's modern success story. The world outside China will welcome opening and reform that is consistent with global rules developed through the World Trade Organization, widely pursued international norms and that brings all-round benefits to China as well as its international partners.

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PETER T C CHANG

Opening-up key to economic success

The third plenum reaffirmed the CPC's commitment to promoting high-quality growth, for which China must stay engaged with the world, especially countries in the Global South

The recently concluded third plenum of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China reaffirmed Chinese modernization as the driving force for development. It is asserted that while China's basic economic system must be upheld, it is essential to build a system that promotes high-quality growth, supports comprehensive innovation, and fosters integrated urban and rural development.

One of the urgent concerns is to revive an economy that has yet to fully recover from the COVID-19 slowdown. A key strategy the third plenum set is to give the market a more decisive role in the economy and level the playing field for all types of firms — State-owned enterprises, private entrepreneurs and foreign investors. Other priorities include rebalancing the economy toward consumption by strengthening the social safety net and stimulating the services sector to enhance growth potential and create jobs.

Even as the emphasis was on deepening ongoing reforms, the third plenum reaffirmed the government's commitment to pursuing a high-quality market socialist system, which must ultimately be people-centered and benefit the collective good. Equally important, the third plenum upheld the Party's overall leadership in strengthening both central and provincial governance in managing the country's economic challenges. A key principle was to pursue progress while ensuring social stability and security.

Here lies a feature that sets China's modernization apart from others, namely, the pivotal role of the State. In the West, the State and society are often viewed as being in an adversarial relationship, with the government seen as impeding individual rights and restricting human potential. In contrast, in China, the State is perceived to have a more fiduciary relationship with

The third plenum reaffirmed the Party's commitment to various goals, including promoting high-quality growth and maintaining a high-quality socialist market system. For the global community, it is crucial that China retains its policy of opening-up, as it has been key to China's economic success.

society, where both work together to further public and private interests. It is this cooperative partnership that has driven China's economic success over the past decades. This strong Party leadership is what makes China's "modernization with Chinese characteristics" distinct from Western models.

Another defining feature of China's remarkable economic transformation is Deng Xiaoping's momentous decision in 1978 to launch reform and opening-up. There is no doubt that China has greatly benefited from engaging with the world and opening its doors to the global community. Globalization has proven to be a boon for China.

Unfortunately, the international environment today has become hostile, with rising economic nationalism leading countries to turn inward. Amid a tense trade war, the United States is imposing tariffs and sanctions on China, undermining the global trade order. Seeing China as a systemic threat to its global dominance, the US is determined to stifle its technological

advancement by imposing bans on the export of advanced chips and other critical technologies.

It is in the context of this hostile international environment that the third plenum reaffirmed China's resolve to continue pursuing self-reliance and reducing its dependency on foreign technologies. Despite external challenges, China has achieved a degree of self-sufficiency. For instance, Huawei, after initially losing some ground, has regained its status as a leading smartphone manufacturer. While US sanctions have caused delays, they have not derailed China's quest for technological advancement.

At the third plenum, the Party leadership emphasized turning its quest for self-sufficiency into new quality productive forces that will drive the next phase of Chinese modernization. This push for high-quality, technological growth includes a focus on three specific industries: electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products.

Indeed, over the past decade, China has emerged as a leading green technological powerhouse, dominating the production and innovation of solar panels, wind turbines and electric vehicles. In the EV sector, for example, China leads the market in both manufacturing and adoption. Aggressive investments in EV technology and infrastructure have positioned the country at the forefront of the global transition to sustainable energy solutions.

In the West, China's success in the EV sector is seen as a threat, leading to the imposition of high tariffs. However, in the Global South, China's breakthroughs in EV technology are aiding developing countries in their transition toward greener economies. For instance, in Malaysia, Geely has pledged to establish an EV manufacturing plant, which will not only support the green transition but also facilitate technological transfer and boost the local economy.

Here lies a crucial observation: while rising economic nationalism may have caused



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the West to retreat inward, globalization remains alive and thriving in the Global South. Developing countries such as Malaysia continue to embrace free and open trade, which has significantly contributed to their socioeconomic advancement.

The third plenum reaffirmed the Party's commitment to various goals, including promoting high-quality growth and maintaining a high-quality socialist market system. For the global community, it is crucial that China retains its policy of opening-up, as it has been key to China's economic suc-

cess. Despite the ongoing tense great power rivalry, China must stay engaged with the world, not only for its own economic growth but also for the betterment of the international community, especially countries in the Global South.

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LIFE

LIVING HERITAGE



Amid the grand halls of the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, a splendid tribute unfolds to commemorate the 130th birthday of Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), the master of Peking Opera whose life and artistry continue to resonate profoundly within Chinese culture and beyond.

From old photos to Peking Opera costumes, from paintings to vinyl records, this retrospective exhibition running from July 23 to Oct 23 celebrates Mei's illustrious career as well as delving deep into his early influences, his pioneering efforts in promoting Peking Opera globally and the enduring legacy he forged.

Peking Opera, or *jingju*, is a 200-year-old art form that combines singing, dancing, acrobatics and martial arts. In 1790, when four Huiju Opera troupes visited Beijing as part of the 80th birthday celebrations of Emperor Qianlong (1711-99) of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), they stayed in the capital. Huiju Opera is a traditional opera form from Anhui province, out of which Peking Opera was later born.

Largely influenced by Huiju Opera, Peking Opera began to formally take shape around 1840, rapidly growing as an art form appealing to royal families and the masses.

Peking Opera was inscribed in 2010 on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

At the opening ceremony on July 23, Peking Opera artists who inherited the performing style founded by Mei, including Hu Wenge, Guo Xiao, and Wei Hai-min from Taiwan, staged some of Mei's most well-known Peking Opera pieces.

According to one of the exhibition's curators Zheng Guangxu, director of the Library of Chinese National Academy of Arts, which is one of the co-organizers of the exhibition, they spent over a year working on the exhibition, selecting more than 200 exhibits related to Mei, including nearly 120 valuable items on display to the public for the first time.

Featuring six sections, the exhibition opens with the early life of Mei, who was born in Beijing and was introduced to the world of Peking Opera at a tender age thanks to his family — his father Mei Zhufen and grandfather Mei Qiaoling were both famous Peking Opera artists. His uncle Mei Yutian was a celebrated player of the *huqin*, a traditional Chinese stringed musical instrument mostly used to accompany Peking Opera performances.

The first piece in the exhibition is a painting about 3.18 meters long and 0.82 meters wide, a replica based on the art piece by Qing Dynasty artist Shen Rongpu titled *Tongguang Shisan Jue* (Thirteen Masters of the Tongzhi and Guangxu Reigns), featuring 13 Peking Opera masters of the dynasty, including Mei Qiaoling.

Mei Lanfang's father died when he was a very young child and his mother died when he was 14. Mei Lanfang began studying Peking Opera at the age of 8, making his stage debut at 11.

He specialized in performing *nandan* roles in which men play female characters — a practice forged in feudal times when women were forbidden to take to the stage.

In the exhibition, photos of a young Mei Lanfang and his teacher Wu Lingxian are displayed. With historical documents, viewers learn how Mei Lanfang honed his skills in Peking Opera techniques, mastering the intricacies of vocal modulation, gestures and dramatic expressions.

In 1913, Mei Lanfang made his Shanghai debut performance. In the exhibition, the contract he signed in 1923 with Xu Shaoqing, who invited him to Shanghai, is displayed. His performances in the metropolis acquired him a national reputation.

From 1912 to 1932, Mei Lanfang adapted several classic Peking Opera pieces, created new works and gradually formed his own unique art style, which was later known as *meipai*, or "the art style of Mei".

Nandan's heyday was in the first half of the 20th century when Mei Lanfang, Shang Xiaoyun (1900-76), Cheng Yanqiu (1904-58) and Xun Huiheng (1900-68) — dubbed the Four Great *Dan* (female roles) — established the four *dan* styles of Mei, Shang, Cheng and Xun.

In 1925, Mei Lanfang premiered his original work *Taizhen Waizhuan* (The Anecdotes of Taizhen), which was inspired by *Changhen Ge* (The Song of Everlasting Sorrow), a narrative poem in which Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Bai Juyi portrayed the love affair between the legendary royal concubine Yang Yuhuan of the Tang Dynasty and Emperor Xuanzong. Taizhen was Yang's Taoist name as she was once a Taoist nun.

Mei Lanfang told the romantic

Tribute to Peking Opera master's genius

Exhibition marks 130th birthday of Mei Lanfang, whose legacy continues to resonate, **Chen Nan** reports.



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Peking Opera artist Mei Lanfang (above) specialized in *nandan* roles — men playing female characters (far left). **Middle:** A costume worn by Mei, when he performed in the Peking Opera piece, *Taizhen Waizhuan* (The Anecdotes of Taizhen), in 1925. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and tragic love story of Yang and the emperor through Peking Opera. With original songs and choreography, the performance of the whole play lasted for four nights and was a great success.

A costume worn by Mei Lanfang when he played the role of Yang is displayed for the first time at the exhibition.

According to one of the curators Xiang Qian, the costume shows the creativity of Mei Lanfang. Compared to the Peking Opera costumes of the time that his father and grandfather wore, Mei Lanfang widened the sleeves and integrated the elements of *shuixiu* ("water sleeves") — long, white silk sleeves attached to the cuffs of female character costumes in traditional Chinese operas. Performers would dance while manipulating the sleeves to create multiple stunts, portraying the female characters' gracefulness while expressing emotions.

"*Taizhen Waizhuan* was rarely performed due to the large and extravagant stage setting and the large number of actors and actresses onstage. It has become one of Mei Lanfang's most celebrated works," Xiang notes.

In 1926, songs from the play were released on vinyl records. During the exhibition, when visitors stand in front of the beautiful costume, they can simultaneously hear the songs played on an old-style vinyl record.

Central to Mei Lanfang's legacy is his pivotal role in popularizing

Peking Opera on the global stage.

He toured Japan in 1919, 1924 and 1956. In 1930, he toured the United States for about two months, giving shows in New York, Washington and San Francisco, among others. In 1935, he performed in the former Soviet Union and, in the same year, toured Europe, captivating Western audiences with his mesmerizing performances.

Through meticulously crafted costumes and rare photographs from these tours, the exhibition highlights Mei Lanfang's achievement in transcending cultural barriers and showcasing the rich traditions of Peking Opera to an international audience.

Photos showing Mei Lanfang shaking hands with Charlie Chaplin and news clippings about his performances in the US are displayed in the exhibition.

One of the most eye-catching items is a 4.25-meter-wide, 3.57-meter-high stage curtain, a replica of the one he used during his tour in the US, shown to the public for the first time. The curtain features different patterns, including two peacocks, chrysanthemums, lilies and 30 magpies standing on tree branches.

"In China, magpies (*xique*) are seen as messengers of joy," says Xiang, elaborating on the auspicious details of the curtain patterns. "There is an old saying in China — *xishang meishao* (happiness up to the eyebrows), so on the top of the curtain, pairs of magpies (representing happiness and auspiciousness) are embroidered standing on top of the branches of a plum blossom tree (homophonous with 'eyebrows')."

Mei Lanfang died in Beijing at the age of 67. His ninth son, Mei Baojiu (1934-2016), also performed as a *nandan*, trained young Peking Opera artists and passed on his father's legacy.

Other highlights in the exhibition include Mei Lanfang's contribution to the country's art development after he served as the first president of the China National Peking Opera Company in 1950 and the first director of the China Institute of Traditional Chinese Operas in 1951, which later became the Chinese National Academy of Arts.

Wang Yong, current president of the China National Peking Opera Company, says: "As a visitor, I was touched to see this exhibition, which traces Mei Lanfang's artistic evolution from a prodigious young performer to the maestro who revolutionized Peking Opera, particularly through his mastery of *nandan* roles, female characters portrayed with unparalleled grace and sensitivity.

"Our company has been training young artists to keep Mei Lanfang's legacy alive; not only his artistic style but also his artist spirit," Wang adds.

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Left: Peking Opera artists Hu Wenge (in blue suit, second row), Wei Hai-min (holding a fan, second row) and Guo Xiao (beside her, second row) at the opening ceremony of the Beijing exhibition commemorating the 130th birthday of Mei Lanfang on July 23. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Right: A stage curtain, a replica of one Mei used during his 1930 US tour, is on show. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



Reservation-free policy creates visitor boom

GUANGZHOU — It is now possible for art enthusiast Lin Yali to visit museums and exhibitions at will, as new walk-in policies exempt her from having to reserve in advance.

The Guangzhou Museum of Art has allowed visitors to enter without a reservation, as long as they pass the security checks, since last month. The museum has also extended its hours of opening until the end of this month, to offer a cool, art-filled summer experience.

Lin, who comes from Hunan province, decided to travel to Guangdong province to visit the 14th National Exhibition of Fine Arts after hearing about the new policy.

"I was worried I wouldn't be able

to get a spot in advance because of the large summer crowds. Now everything has become easier and I can take my time enjoying these amazing paintings," Lin says.

Shenzhen in Guangdong similarly announced late last month the elimination of its reservation policies for 133 sites in the city, including 17 tourist attractions, 61 museums, 33 art galleries, 12 libraries and 10 cultural centers.

Museums and historical sites have recently become popular choices for tourism in China. Data from the National Cultural Heritage Administration showed that museums hosted over 40,000 exhibitions and more than 380,000

educational activities last year, attracting a record-breaking 1.29 billion visitors.

To better serve them, the administration recently recommended that museums extend opening hours and eliminate reservation policies.

In response, numerous museums, including the Capital Museum, the Sanxingdui Museum, the Shanghai Museum and the Guangzhou Museum of Art, have extended their hours and introduced visitor-friendly programs, including nighttime visits and immersive experiences, to enhance the accessibility and appeal of Chinese cultural heritage.

Li Cheng, a senior middle school

graduate has an infatuation for China's history and traditional culture and has made local museums his top destinations, as the new policy enables him to visit more historical sites.

This summer, he visited Chengdu in Sichuan province with his mother after the college entrance exam. Their first stop was the Chengdu Jinsha Site Museum. The Sanxingdui Museum and Chengdu Museum were also added to his itinerary.

Data shows a significant increase in tourists following the elimination of the reservation policies in multiple tourist cities.

According to the big-data research institute of online travel

service provider Qunar, the search volume for tickets to Beijing scenic spots has nearly tripled since the capital eliminated its reservation policies for all of its tourist attractions apart from the Palace Museum and the National Museum of China.

Several attractions and museums in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, have also experienced a peak in visitor flow after the elimination of reservation policies.

China currently has 59 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and by the end of last year, it was home to 6,833 museums, which attracted over 1.2 billion visitors last year.

The lifting of the reservation policies gives international visitors interested in Chinese culture new choices besides scenery and food tours, particularly in light of the 144-hour visa-free transit policy avail-

able to nationals of certain countries, which facilitates entry to China.

According to the online travel service provider Ctrip, domestic inbound travel orders in the first half of the year increased by more than 1.6 times year-on-year.

According to a survey conducted by the China Tourism Academy about inbound tourist satisfaction, over 60 percent of respondents cited the desire to experience culture as the main reason for their visit to China.

Dai Bin, director of the China Tourism Academy, says that the integration of culture and tourism has become a trend in China as living standards improve and people travel more frequently. Cultural and historical landmarks, such as museums and historical cities, have become must-visit destinations for many tourists.

XINHUA

CULTURAL HERITAGE



Late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) oracle bones exhibited at the newly built Yinxu Museum in Anyang of Henan province. KAN LI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Tech approach gives life to artifacts

The introduction of digital scanning and AI promises to revolutionize the study of ancient oracle bones, Yang Feiyue reports.



Visitors examine the oracle bones dating back to the late Shang Dynasty exhibited at the Yinxu Museum of Anyang, Henan. KAN LI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Clearly magnified oracle bone carvings are proving to be a big draw for the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the newly built Yinxu Museum in Anyang, Henan province.

Many have been amazed to see the intricate details of the strokes on the 16 oracle bones on display at the museum, which opened in February.

The 3,300-year-old Yinxu site, which is also known as the Yinxu Ruins, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006 and is the location of the remains of the ancient city of Yin, one of the capitals of the late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC). Yin is the first capital in Chinese history to have been documented and also substantiated by archaeological evidence.

In addition to its wealth of exquisite bronzes, the site has yielded a trove of oracle bones that were used to tell fortunes and record events. The bones are considered to be the oldest-known Chinese writing system, highlighting the endurance of Chinese civilization.

Unlike other famous ancient writing systems, such as Egyptian hieroglyphs, Babylonian cuneiform and Mayan glyphs, the character precursors on oracle bones eventually evolved into modern characters over the course of thousands of years.

In the museum's oracle bone gallery, visitors can manipulate high-precision 3D models of oracle bones on screen, which are vivid demonstrations that add depth to the overview of the Shang Dynasty provided by museum guides. Among them is Liu Mengke, who says that the Shang Dynasty was fond of divination, devoted to rituals and followed etiquette.

Some of the oracle bones from the Yinxu site turned out to be a kind of diary kept by a son of Shang Dynasty king Wu Ding.

"The bones are a vivid record of the son's daily activities and show that he resorted to divination whenever he was about to embark on something new," Liu says, adding that this included hosting sacrificial rituals, leading an army to war and organizing hunting expeditions.

A digital poster outside the gallery enables visitors to further appreciate the culture of oracle bones, allowing them access to the detailed interpretations of oracle bone scripts and a short quiz to put their knowledge to the test.

The range of questions cover different aspects of the oracle bone culture. After completing the quiz, visitors can view their results and use the information visualization function to review what they have learned, deepening their understanding of the ancient relics.

standing of the ancient relics.

Modern tools

The digitalization of ancient animal bones and turtle shells has been undertaken by technology giant Tencent, Anyang's cultural heritage bureau, Anyang Normal University's oracle bone script information processing lab and other parties since 2022. It is part of a joint initiative to promote human-machine collaboration to aid in the deciphering and vitalization of oracle bone scripts.

At the 2024 World AI Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance in Shanghai, the digital oracle bone co-creation center, set up by Anyang Normal University, Tencent, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and several other universities and research organizations, announced the open-sourcing of the world's largest multi-modal oracle bone script dataset.

This dataset includes rubbings, tracings and the positions of individual characters on more than 10,000 oracle bones, along with their corresponding contexts.

Researchers are able to use this dataset to develop algorithms for oracle bone script detection, recognition, character matching and deciphering, accelerating their digitalization and intelligent research.

In the past, datasets have been held back by limited information, simple annotations and lack of character sets.

For example, detection datasets were only able to isolate characters without identifying them, while character recognition datasets could recognize only a few hundred characters; and some annotations were incomplete due to a lack of specialized knowledge. These issues hindered the development of algorithms for oracle bone scripts.

The digitalization initiative seeks to address those problems.

"We have now achieved several significant milestones," says Wang Chaoyang, chief architect at the digital cultural lab of Tencent's sustainable social value division, which has been a major force behind the initiative.

Currently, some 160,000 oracle bones have been unearthed and around 4,500 characters identified, of which, about 3,000 have yet to be deciphered.

Wang says that the bones deteriorate rapidly and the number of



Top: A digital copy of an oracle bone rubbing with enhanced micro-traces. Above: A specific area of a rubbing is digitally enhanced for better clarity. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

experts and scholars specialized in reading oracle bone scripts is limited.

"There is an urgent need for digital preservation and intelligent tools to accelerate the decoding process," he adds.

Reading between the lines

Deciphering typically takes two dimensions into account: the precursor and its actual meaning in context.

A specific oracle bone character could vary in strokes or carving style while retaining the same meaning. Researchers have discovered that the matching between a certain precursor and its variations is crucial to decoding, much like image recognition, Wang explains.

To match precursors, the first step is to create a database for matching, starting by extracting them from the oracle bones.

"AI detection algorithms can accurately identify the different parts and shapes of oracle bone characters. These algorithms recognize and fill in the missing or damaged strokes, significantly speeding up the character collection process for the database," Wang says.

A micro-trace enhancement process is used to allow for the high-fidelity visualization of the start and finish of strokes, shapes and divination cracks on the bones.

"This significantly reduces storage and transmission costs, allowing terminals and devices to easily download compressed oracle bone models and quickly decode them for real-time display. The system enables six degrees of free interaction — forward or backward, up or down, left or right, pitch, yaw and roll — making it possible to zoom in and rotate the bones, giving users an immersive visual experience and promoting the research and exploration of oracle bone scripts," Wang says.

The second step focuses on making copies of single characters, with the challenge being the interference from "noise" like scratches on the bones, which can make it more difficult to recognize the white characters against their dark bone background.

"AI model generation algorithms have been used to identify and remove this 'noise' and to produce clear copies of dark characters on a

white background. This process clears the way for scholars to conduct further recognition and matching work," Wang says.

Then, the copies are stored, contributing to the formation of a database.

In particular, copies of a character that appears multiple times or in different rubbings have been made to facilitate their study.

"Just like reading comprehension, we can connect the different contexts for interpretation, potentially inspiring insight into the relationships between recognized and unrecognized characters," Wang says.

The database contains 1.43 million single-character rubbings along with electronic reproductions. Each character is also mapped to its specific location in the rubbings, he adds.

Aiding the experts

Experts are able to quickly find the images they seek by searching related characters and images.

"If they want to find a specific character, they just need to input the shape of the character. AI will automatically compare it with all the single-character reproductions in the database and provide the closest matching reproductions, along with the associated rubbings," Wang says.

So far, 150 expert-verified characters have been made available for the public to study and appreciate through a WeChat mini-program of the digital cultural lab.

Song Zhenhao, an expert in oracle bone scripts from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, says that they are a valuable part of Chinese civilization. Research in this area not only sheds light on ancient Chinese history but also provides crucial evidence for the origins of modern Chinese characters and the study of the language.

The use of AI technology holds the promise of accelerating the deciphering of oracle bone scripts, potentially resolving long-standing scholarly questions, he says, adding that he would like to see more research institutions and scholars join this endeavor to expand its research horizon.

Wu Yunsheng, vice-president of cloud computing service provider Tencent Cloud, says that AI is having a transformative impact on science, including oracle bone research.

"We are looking forward to collaborating with more technology teams to explore the use of AI technology in a variety of scenarios, and to providing further support for oracle bone scripts research," Wu says.

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These (AI detection) algorithms recognize and fill in the missing or damaged strokes, significantly speeding up the character collection process for the database."

Wang Chaoyang, cultural relics digitalization expert

We are looking forward to collaborating with more technology teams to explore the use of AI technology in a variety of scenarios, and to providing further support for oracle bone scripts research."

Wu Yunsheng, vice-president of Tencent Cloud



The significance of the oracle bones unearthed from the Yinxu site in Anyang, as well as the evolution of oracle bone scripts, are highlighted at an exhibition featuring major discoveries of ancient documents in the early 20th century, held at the National Museum of Classic Books in Beijing in early 2023. PHOTOS BY WEI YANG AND SONG YU / FOR CHINA DAILY

CULTURE

Historic kilns create memories

Craftsmen in Jingdezhen carry on traditions that stretch back 2,000 years, **Cai Hong** reports in Jingdezhen.

Jingdezhen's porcelain culture inheritor Sun Lixin at his workshop.



Sun Lixin's father Sun Tongxin, who trailblazes doing splash ink painting on ceramics.



Lyu Yating, owner of Fuyu Blue and White Linglong Ceramics Co. Ltd in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, at her workshop.

In the old days, children in Jingdezhen, east China's Jiangxi province had their own novel way to keep themselves warm during the chilly winters. They took a warm brick from a firing kiln and put it in their schoolbags.

They don't need warm bricks in cold seasons of the year now, but kiln bricks are still used for building houses in Jingdezhen, known as the Mecca of porcelain in China and even across the world. Brick kilns have to be demolished every two or three years in order to ensure they maintain a certain heat output, according to local ceramists.

The Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum, designed by the Beijing-based Studio Zhu-Pei, incorporates both newly fired and recycled bricks amassed from the dismantled furnaces. Located in the center of the city's historical area, the museum is adjacent to the imperial kiln ruins surrounded by many ancient kiln complexes.

Recycled kiln bricks still provoke warm memories among the local residents.

"The ancient kilns in Jingdezhen have never stopped firing for more than 1,000 years. And the whole craftsmanship for hand-making porcelain has been maintained, which makes the city what it is today," Wang Tongmao, secretary-general of the city government, said.

Along with the old lanes and houses, the ancient kilns are the links the city has with its past.

The early settlement of Jingdezhen was developed around kilns, which were built along the Yangtze River and its branches. Local people used the kilns as social and public gathering spaces. A unique culture, as a result, developed, that was and still is closely connected to the porcelain production.

In 2015, Jingdezhen put its imperial kilns used to fire porcelains for court in the dynasties of Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) forward in a bid for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Heritage Site status.

Between 2017 and 2023, the city added more kilns used from late Tang Dynasty (618-907) to the Qing Dynasty to its bidding package in the hope of presenting more details of its porcelain making history.

In July 2023, the city rolled out a brand-new strategy to apply to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It includes the old district of the city, some areas such as Gaolin, Yaoli and Jiaotan that used to provide kaolin clay and wood, as well as the Yangtze River system.

"The time-honored kilns are not the whole picture of the city," said Wang, who also doubles as the director of Jingdezhen's office for cultural heritage application and protection.

"The new strategy highlights the history of Jingdezhen's porcelain industry and city building," he added.

The city is having an exhaustive investigation of the underground relics and its layout, including kilns, buildings, streets, alleys, river systems and wharves.

The areas related to the porcelain making will make it to the city's conservation plan, while new archaeological findings in the future will also be put on the conservation list, according to the official.

"We want the conservation plan to be the most authentic and complete picture of Jingdezhen's ceramic making industry and city building," he said.

Old district

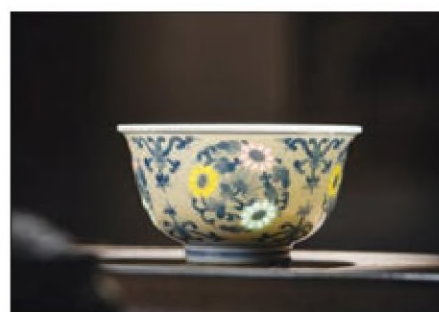
Jingdezhen was previously known as Changnan, which literally means "south of the Yangtze" in Chinese. In 1004 Emperor Zhenzong of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1279) was so enchanted by the translucent beauty of white porcelain from the town that he renamed it Jingde after the name of his reign.

It is on the eastern bank of the Yangtze River, which flows from the mountains to the north that separate northeastern Jiangxi from neighboring Anhui province. The city stands at the point where the river exits rocky gorges and loses its swiftness, broadening into a shallow, curving basin five kilometers long. Dozens of streams flowing into the basin powered undershot waterwheels and iron trip-hammers that crushed rock used for making pottery.

The city's layout was generated by nature and the porcelain industry. What makes Jingdezhen's old district special is the network of the long, narrow alleys extending in all directions along the Yangtze River. They are in between the kiln complexes.

The old district has been kept almost intact, with more than 100 alleys and some 100 buildings built in the dynasties of Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911), according to Wang.

Most of the alleys still have their original names. Some are named according to regions, such as Fuzhou alley and Hukou alley. Others are named after a particular business



Clockwise from top: Sun Tongxin's ceramic panel titled *The Yangtze River Rushes Eastward*; A blue and white linglong porcelain fan, made by artisan Lyu Yating, has Chinese landscape on one side and Tunisian symbols on the other; A new type of linglong cup with colored rice grain pattern Lyu Yating and her team make; *Dunhuang*, a piece of blue-and-white ink painting ceramist Sun Lixin does on a porcelain panel. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

such as firecracker, broom, pawnshop, soy sauce and straw sandals, while some are named after surnames like Zhan, Bi, Peng and Fang.

The alleys were the communities where craftspeople and their families worked and lived and there were the hostels for dealers from other parts of the country.

Local ceramists used the Yangtze River to bring down clay, firewood and other raw materials from mountains nearby, as well as to transport their products to the outside world.

Jingdezhen has witnessed ceramic making for more than 2,000 years, including more than 1,000 years for official kilns and more than 600 years for imperial kilns. It has developed the porcelain-making techniques that put it in a league of its own and by the mid-15th century, all of China's imperial porcelain came from Jingdezhen.

"The ceramic sector alone has served as Jingdezhen's most crucial economic pillar for nearly 2,000 years," Wang said. "It was the world's largest industrial city in the early 18th century."

Division of labor

What Jingdezhen contributed to the history of porcelain industry, in Wang's words, was organization.

stone miners and processors, men to make knives for trimming, transporters of unfired greenware, glaze producers, mould-makers, and men to make saggars, build kilns and pack finished wares, Wang said.

Dong Lin, who teaches arts at the Beijing Union University, works on ceramic panels and sculptures at her studio in Jingdezhen on every summer and winter break.

"I love Jingdezhen so much as it has everything I want to make ceramic artwork," Dong, who was a PhD graduate of ceramic art from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, said.

Restoration

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, all the family-run workshops in Jingdezhen were regrouped into 10 state-owned pottery plants and mechanized porcelain production started there.

These factories ran brilliantly for decades and their products were exported to countries around the world, earning heaps of foreign exchange for China.

In the 1990s, these plants lost their edge as their counterparts in Fujian and Guangdong provinces had better equipment and technology. The factories shut down and their workers were laid off and family ceramic businesses restarted in Jingdezhen.

To keep its unique porcelain culture, Jingdezhen has launched a large-scale conservation and renovation campaign to protect its ancient imperial kiln sites, as well as the old residential buildings and workshops.

Pengjia alley, for example, is one of the projects on the renovation list. The community has a large area of porcelain-making relevant ruins. The Tsinghua Tongheng Urban Planning and Design Institute restored the entire original structure with expertise and considerable love and attention to detail, and carefully supplemented with new buildings where necessary. Its approach makes the history of making porcelain not only visible to residents living and working there, but also enables it to be experienced by tourists.

"Historic ruins have been transformed into a lively place for living, shopping and culture, while ensuring that the past can still be felt everywhere," said Zhang Jie, professor of architecture at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Zhang's team and other architecture firms have also helped Jingdezhen redevelop an extensive area of old, large factory buildings as a new mixed-use quarter called Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Avenue. They preserve, restore and convert the old buildings while complementing them with new buildings.

Zhang was granted the Gold and Silver Awards at the 2023 International Design Awards for his innovative work in Taoxichuan and Pengjia alley projects. They are lauded as a remarkable fusion of traditional culture with urban regeneration, which underscores the significance of preserving industrial heritage and historical relics within the global design narrative. These areas have been revitalized into dynamic hubs for residential, commercial and cultural heritage showcases.

"Our approaches are aimed at preserving Jingdezhen's historical landscape, including the ancient residential buildings along the Yangtze River, old workshops, lanes, public facilities, ancient wharves," Zhang said.

The historic remnants of the imperial ceramic workshops on the site of the Pengjia alley, uncovered by archaeological excavations, have been injected with new life, whilst maintaining great respect for the culturally valuable remains. The combination of historic architecture and modern design has succeeded at a high formal and functional level. The result is an extraordinary place that plays with the contrast between old and new in a charming manner, and with its different cultural offers invites the visitor to go on a fascinating journey of discovery. It is an exemplary treatment of a protected monument.

"When the rest of Jingdezhen's old area is restored to its original look, the city will be in a class by itself," Wang said.

China's National Cultural Heritage Administration has sent four teams from the National Center for Archaeology, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University and the Palace Museum to help Jingdezhen find the underground relics. Archaeologists from Jiangxi province also joined the digging in the city, Wang said.

Jingdezhen's conservation of tradition, like the wood-fired kilns, has been a success. From 2009, 10 classic types of old kilns have been re-burned.

"We need to pass down our cultural heritage because that is the soul of the city," Wang said.

"To apply to be on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list, Jingdezhen intends to learn the advanced way of protecting and taking advantage of its cultural relics," Wang said.

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