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CHINA DAILY

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Yang Jiayu of China celebrates as she crosses the finish line to win the gold medal in the women's 20-kilometer race walk on Thursday at the Paris Olympics. As of Thursday, China had accumulated 11 gold medals, more than any other country. AMANDA FEROBELLI / REUTERS

Swimmer breaks record, drowns doping noise

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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Freestyle swimming prodigy Pan Zhanle reaffirmed the integrity and solid progress of Chinese swimmers by breaking his own world record to win the men's 100-meter freestyle on Wednesday night at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Pan, 19, who cleared several rounds of doping tests, finished in 46.40 seconds to win China's first swimming gold at the ongoing Games in the French capital, topping his 46.80 seconds record made in February at the world championships in Doha, Qatar.

Entering Wednesday's final session under huge pressure to end China's gold medal drought in the Paris Olympics pool, Pan sent the capacity crowd at the La Defense Arena into a frenzy as he shaved 0.4 second off his own record.

It was the first world record broken in any swimming competition by the end of Wednesday, and significantly boosted Team China's morale following a series of near-misses from the top spot on the podium in earlier events.

Pan's masterful performance, which came after he completed rigorous doping test programs prior to and during the Games with zero positive results, delivered a fitting reply to some Western media organizations, such as The New York Times, and other organizations led by the United States Anti-Doping Agency that claimed Chinese swimmers achieved consistent improvements through "unfair" means.

"I just swam perfectly today and made a strong impression for Chinese swimming. I hope this gold lifts the spirits of the whole team and helps more teammates make a golden start," Pan said at a news conference held after the event.

"For Chinese swimming and for my country, I think it's huge to prove that Chinese athletes can also prevail in another event (other than traditionally strong disciplines) in swimming," he added.

Australia's Kyle Chalmers finished 1.08 seconds behind Pan to win silver, while former world record holder David Popovici of Romania finished another 0.01 second behind to settle for bronze.

In response to media allegations before the Paris Games, targeting a food contamination incident involving 23 Chinese swimmers in 2021, the World Anti-Doping Agency, World Aquatics, which is the international body governing six aquatic sports, and the International Testing Agency published relevant review reports and analyses to support the Chinese anti-doping authorities' assessment of the case as a no-fault incident.

As a talented young swimmer, who is particularly strong in his final split push, Pan made his presence felt at the world championships in Doha by setting his previous record in a stunning leadoff leg in China's gold-winning men's 4x100m relay.

Asked how he managed to achieve such an impressive progress, the teenager attributed his improvement in time during the Olympics to hard work, commitment to clean sport, discipline and the support of modern training methods.

"I took 21 doping tests from May to July, prior to the Games, and had no positive results at all. It was no big deal as long as the testing was conducted fairly and according to rules. I

cooperated with all the testing procedures and stayed confident that I am competing fair and clean," Pan said.

"As far as my daily routine is concerned, I did a lot of aerobics and endurance training to strengthen my push and kick in the final split. We have also adopted a scientific underwater monitoring and analyzing system to review our techniques and strokes, so that we can train better and more effectively," he added.

Pan's great form has been hailed by his rivals including Chalmers, the 100m freestyle winner at the 2016 Rio Games, who said the blend of raw power and strategic brilliance in Pan's swimming is simply impressive.

"For him to produce a 46.40 and break the world record in the Olympic final is incredible," said Chalmers, an eight-time Olympic medalist. "I trust that he's done everything he possibly can to be there. And he deserves that gold medal. And I did everything I possibly could to challenge for that gold medal."

Inside

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Anger over assassination



Demonstrators voice support for the Palestinian people near the Parliament building in Rabat, Morocco, on Wednesday, as they denounced the assassination of Hamas Politburo Chief Ismail Haniyeh. HUO JING / XINHUA See more, page 4

YANGTZE RIVER DELTA RACES AHEAD AS INTEGRATION MODEL

Region leads way in modernizing, developing transportation, upgrading services to benefit people

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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To complete his Chinese bucket list, Dominican student Danzel Djimon Dangleben wants to travel from Shanghai to see major attractions in three nearby provinces.

The 26-year-old, who is studying Chinese at Tongji University in Shanghai, hopes to see firsthand "the sea of clouds" on the peaks of Huangshan Mountain in Anhui, discover the beauty of Qiandao Lake in Zhejiang, and take a close look at a two-stringed bowed *erhu* in Wuxi, Jiangsu. He was excited to learn he can reach all three destinations by taking the "super loop" high-speed rail service.

"There is no high-speed railway in my home country, so it is an



extremely novel and special experience for me to travel by the high-speed trains, taking me from one city to another within a few hours or even dozens of minutes," he said.

Dangleben can speak Chinese quite fluently after studying for nine months, and plans to visit a variety of scenic spots near Shanghai during the summer vacation. The high-speed railway loop is the first of its kind in the region and links key cities as well as scenic spots.

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XI'S VISION | PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT

PLA strives for peace and development

Chinese military is willing to engage in pragmatic and friendly cooperation

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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As the People's Liberation Army celebrates its 97th anniversary, its naval hospital ship *Peace Ark* is on the 10th Mission Harmony, providing free medical services to people in 13 countries across Asia and Africa. At the same time, nearly 2,000 Chinese military personnel are participating in United Nations peacekeeping missions worldwide.

Nearly a century after its founding, the PLA has grown stronger than ever. As Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said in his report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC in 2022, the PLA "has the confidence and capability to make greater contributions to world peace and development".

Embarking on missions for peace has always been a distinct feature of the Chinese military.

At the celebration of the PLA's 90th anniversary in 2017, Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, said the nation's military will continue to engage in international military exchanges and cooperation, jointly addressing global security challenges, and actively fulfilling responsibilities and obligations commensurate with China's international status, thereby contributing to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

At a reception in Beijing on Wednesday to celebrate the anniversary, which fell on Thursday, Defense Minister Dong Jun said the Chinese military is willing to engage in pragmatic and friendly cooperation with the armed forces of other nations, fostering a security framework characterized by fairness, justice, and joint construction and sharing, and creating a world of lasting peace and universal security.

According to the Defense Ministry, since China first sent five military observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organization in 1990, the Chinese military has dispatched over 50,000 personnel to participate in UN peacekeeping

operations in more than 20 countries and regions.

Currently, China is the second-largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget and the top contributor of peacekeepers among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, with nearly 2,000 Chinese troops serving in six peacekeeping missions.

Zhao Xiaozhuo, a retired PLA senior colonel, said that engaging in UN peacekeeping missions is an important way for the Chinese military to maintain world peace.

"Chinese peacekeepers are integrated into the UN peacekeeping system and operate under UN command," said Zhao, who served in the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2001 to 2002.

Zhao also noted that China is one of the few countries able to effectively carry out peacekeeping missions, thanks to its strong and comprehensive capabilities.

"Chinese peacekeeping forces undertake a significant amount of frontline work, mainly in security, engineering, transportation and medical units. Therefore, they also contribute to local development by improving infrastructure and medical conditions," he said.

"Our military has become stronger, and we also hope to do our part to make the world a better place," he said.

At the UN peacekeeping summit in 2015, Xi announced six measures that China would take to support these operations. All the measures have been fully implemented, including establishing a peacekeeping standby force of 8,000 troops and offering 20 training programs to over 1,500 peacekeepers from more than 60 countries.

Zhao Lei, deputy director of the International Strategy Research Institute at the Party School of the Central Committee of CPC, said that peacekeeping is a concrete manifestation of China shouldering its international responsibilities, emphasizing that peacekeeping is China's contribution to the international public good in the security domain.

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WORLD WATCH

By Mehmood Ul-Hassan Khan

Japan trying hard to justify militarism in defense report

The recently published Defense of Japan white paper is the 50th issue of its kind. Instead of reviewing past lessons, the country's Ministry of Defense this year resorts to hyping imagined fears, speculations and fake security narratives. The paper is turned into a desperate search for ways to justify Japan's military euphoria and military alliance with the United States.

In the preface of the white paper, Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara cites emerging geopolitical and geostrategic trends to predict a new era of crisis, thus justifying his country's strategy to push through dramatic changes in its defense policy.

The white paper states that "for

more than 30 years, China has sustained high-level growth of its defense budget without transparency". Yet China's defense budget has been made public to the world every year, and the rise has been generally shy of its GDP rate. On the other hand, Japan has hiked its military spending sharply for several consecutive years despite a stagnating GDP.

According to a report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the 2023 budget for the Japan Self-Defense Forces was 26 percent higher than that for 2022.

The white paper further claims that "China has intensified its military activities around Taiwan". Taiwan is a part of China, and ever since the establishment of diplomatic ties between Beijing and Tokyo, Japan has recognized the one-China principle.

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PAGE TWO

Delta: Pioneering integrated development

From page 1

With 21 stations in major cities across the Yangtze River Delta region, the railway loop stretches for more than 1,200 kilometers and is regarded as a major achievement in the area's integration.

By linking Shanghai and the provincial capitals of Nanjing in Jiangsu, Hefei in Anhui province and Hangzhou in Zhejiang, the super loop is expected to facilitate exchanges across the region and promote economic integration in the Yangtze River Delta.

In its first-month of operation, the super loop recorded about 110,000 passenger trips, with its average occupancy rate reaching 90 percent, news portal ThePaper.cn reported, citing the China Railway Shanghai Group.

Accelerated pace

The integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region is a national strategy now in its sixth year. The ambitious plan aims to build the region into a world-class cluster of cities, said officials and scholars.

By the end of 2023, the region had put 7,100 kilometers of high-speed railway network into operation, an increase of 71 percent compared with 4,150 km in 2018, according to Zhang Zhongwei, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission.

Gu Jun, deputy secretary-general of the Shanghai municipal government, said during a news conference on July 25 that the significance of the region's integrated development had become greater after the issue was raised at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which concluded on July 18.

"The latest three-year action plan indicates the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region is entering a new phase of deeper development," Gu said.

"Comprising nine major aspects and 165 key tasks, the plan for the years between 2024 and 2026 has charted a clear road map and outlined tasks to be accomplished in the coming three years," said Gu, who is also director of the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission.

The regional leadership will strive to realize the targets at an accelerated pace, Gu added.

Zhang said implementation of the three-year action plan will combine the solo efforts of each province or city "into a symphony of the region as a whole".

According to Zhang, the previous two three-year action plans had achieved 90 percent of their key tasks, gathered useful experience, and laid a solid foundation for the implementation of the new action plan.

"Integration and high-quality are the key words in implementing the action plan, and provincial entities will combine their three-year targets with annual tasks, come up with specific measures, and encourage local innovation," said Ling Ming, deputy director of the Jiangsu Provincial Development and Reform Commission.

Chen Haitao, deputy director of the Zhejiang Provincial Development and Reform Commission, said 10 projects for 2024, covering areas such as medical services, elderly care, culture, tourism, government services and food safety, were announced at a high-level forum on the Yangtze River Delta's integrated development held in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, in June.

The projects include adding 660 km of rail and more than 70,000 new public charging piles in the region. More than 200 virtual government service points will also be launched in 41 major cities across the region.



Top: The first super loop rail service, train G8388, passes over the Dashengguan Yangtze River Bridge in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on June 15.

CHEN DANCHI / XINHUA
Above: Passengers pose for a photo before boarding the train G8388 at Shanghai Railway Station in east China's Shanghai, on June 15.

SU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY
Left: An attendant sorts luggage on train G8389 on July 15. XINHUA

Path to progress

The third Three-Year Action Plan for the Integrated Development of the Yangtze River Delta Region (2024-2026) involves 165 key tasks:

- 1 Strengthen cross-regional coordination of scientific and technological innovation. (20 key tasks)
- 2 Coordinate building world-class industrial clusters associated with key industries including new energy vehicles, and a low-altitude economy. (20 key tasks)
- 3 Accelerate the formation of a sophisticated system and mechanism for the region's integrated development. (25 key tasks)
- 4 Speed up the enhancement of regional market integration. (23 key tasks)
- 5 Actively promote the high-level coordinated opening-up of the region. (22 key tasks)
- 6 Effectively strengthen ecological environmental protection and management. (17 key tasks)

- 7 Actively explore and build the modern civilization of the Chinese nation. (10 key tasks)
- 8 Vigorously expand the breadth and depth of urban cooperation. (15 key tasks)
- 9 Spare no effort to improve the region's capability in developing safety. (13 key tasks)

— WANG YING

Over 300 elderly care venues for seniors will be developed across the region. An all-in-one card will be made available, enabling the cardholder to visit 3,000 cultural and tourism venues including libraries, museums and scenic spots, as well as fitness complexes.

Measures will also be taken to continue ensuring the safety and quality of food products such as rice, flour, oil, meat, eggs and milk.

The list also covers medical insurance and construction in the countryside. In addition, it grants eligible foreigners a visa-free period of 144 hours, or six days, as long as they are transiting through cities across the Yangtze River Delta region, added Chen.

Chen Jining, Party secretary of Shanghai, said: "Focused on the thoughts and expectations of the people, efforts will be made to make cross-provincial government services more convenient, strengthen collaboration on education, medical care, and elderly care across the region, deepen ecological environmental protection through regional

collaboration, and promote the integrated development of culture, sports, business and tourism in the region."

"We will work together with Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui to accelerate construction in the Yangtze River Delta of rail, amplify and elevate the effects of the metropolitan cluster, and deepen public service convenience, so as to continuously enhance people's livelihood and happiness."

Shared future

As a key economic engine of the country, the Yangtze River Delta region contributes about a quarter of the country's total economic output, and accounts for more than one-third of the nation's imports and exports, according to public information.

"Sharing a relatively similar culture, cities within the Yangtze River Delta region have long maintained very close communications and exchanges, and their similarity is also extended to entrepreneurship," said Zuo Xuejin, a researcher from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

"Their strong connection and interaction make integration of the region much easier than in other regions," Zuo said.

According to Zuo, since its integrated development was elevated to a national strategy in 2018, the region has achieved significant progress, improving people's quality of life and benefiting business.

The Yangtze River Delta region has one of the nation's most developed high-speed railway networks. As of May 2024, a total of 26 high-speed railway routes were operating across the region, covering all prefecture-level cities with the exception of Zhoushan, an island city in Zhejiang. In total, the region operates more than 14,500 km of rail lines, including over 7,200 km of high-speed rail.

The region plans to extend its rail network to about 17,000 km by 2025, with some 8,000 km of high-speed rail.

The rapid rail network has accelerated economic development and personnel exchanges, Xu Ruihua, a professor with the College of Transportation Engineering at Tongji University was quoted as saying by China Business News.

"Once the regional railway network is formed and gets integrated into the national railway network, the exchanges between the Yangtze River Delta region and areas across the nation will be further enhanced," said Xu.

The rail networks have also reduced the costs of trade and communications across the region, aiding the free and efficient flow of people, goods, capital and information, said Niu Fengrui, a researcher specializing in regional economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In addition to the rail network, a world-class airport cluster with global importance is taking shape in the East China city cluster. Accounting for merely one-thirtieth of the country's airspace, the area operates one-fifth of China's passenger volume and handles one-third of the nation's air cargo throughput at its 24 airports, according to China News Service.

From January to May, the region transported 115 million air travelers as well as 2.41 million metric tons of cargo, with 862,000 aircraft landings and takeoffs, according to data from the Civil Aviation Administration of China's East China Regional Administration.

Supported by reliable air transportation and improved infrastructure, the Yangtze River Delta region has seen its aviation capacity and services constantly enhanced.

However, the integration of the region is more than just transportation, experts said. The medical

expenses settlement service, which connects 24,500 medical institutions in 41 major cities across the region, has assisted more than 33 million medical visits by patients and saved nearly 5.6 billion yuan (\$773 million) in advance payments, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Modernization model

Xin Changxing, Party secretary of Jiangsu province, said thanks to the smooth flow of people and goods, collaborative manufacturing has become common in the region.

"The cooperation of enterprises along the industrial chain helps control costs and enhances efficiency," said Xin.

Liu Qingfeng, chairman of iFlytek, a leading AI company, said, "In the past four years, we have seen how enterprises along industrial chains have collaborated and promoted technological products in the region at a greater speed."

The Yangtze River Delta Entrepreneurs Union, founded four years ago, has facilitated the growth of technological innovations and helped match these innovations with market demand, Liu said. It has become a great contributor to the region's industrial upgrade, innovation and development, he added.

With a commitment to promoting industrial chain cooperation across the region, the union has promoted the establishment, consolidation and strengthening of 19 industrial chain alliances. It has boosted scientific and technological innovation and industrial innovation in the region, and built a Yangtze River Delta industrial chain community with global competitiveness and influence, said a report on the region's development of such alliances.

"The essence of the Yangtze River Delta region's integration is collaboration in systems. This is the most difficult and important part in the integrated development of the region. In fact, all the achievements we have made are the results of system collaboration," said Zhang Zhaoan, a counselor at the Shanghai Municipal People's Government.

According to Zhang, who is also former vice-president of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, with the resolution of the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization, the outlook for the Yangtze River Delta region's integrated development looks promising.

"The success of the region's city cluster development will become important support for China's economic growth, in the meantime, the experience of innovations in reform and opening-up will also serve as a role model for other Chinese city clusters to follow," Zhang said.

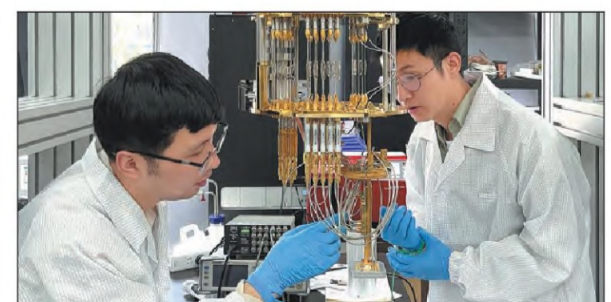
Scholars said regardless of the great achievements made in the region's integrated development, there are still many challenges ahead.

"We have reached many collaborative agreements, but few are obligatory. Binding agreements with a focus on integrated development will better facilitate the region's integration," said Zuo from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

Liu Zhibiao, head of the Yangtze Industrial Economic Institute with Nanjing University, said the experience of world-class city clusters demonstrated the importance of technological innovation.

"Based on first-rate industrial innovative capacity, cities across the region will form complementary industries in accordance with the market-oriented economy," he said.

"Strong technological innovation abilities will help establish world-class multinational corporations and brands with global competitiveness and attract the world's best talents. This is my vision of the future Yangtze River Delta region," he said.



Left: An employee works on a motorcycle parts production line in October in Huainan, Anhui province. In recent years, the province has been trying to seize opportunities presented by the Yangtze River Delta integration strategy. LI XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY **Middle:** Visitors watch a robot welding a car body during the 23rd China International Industry Fair in Shanghai in September. FANG ZHE / XINHUA **Right:** Researchers conduct testing and debugging of quantum chips at Quantum Science and Technology Yangtze River Delta Industrial Innovation Center in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. XINHUA

TOP NEWS

Chinese tennis players reach the finals, making history with wins

After victories in shooting, racewalking, country tops medal tally with 11 golds

By LI YINGXUE
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China's Zheng Qinwen stunned top-ranked Iga Swiatek of Poland with a 6-2, 7-5 victory on Thursday in the women's singles tennis semifinals in Paris. Her achievement surpassed Li Na's fourth-place finish and made her the first ever Chinese player to reach the women's singles final in the Olympics.

No 6 seed Zheng will face either Croatia's Donna Vekic or Anna Karolina Schmiedlova of Slovakia in the gold medal match.

"I feel more than just happy — happy isn't enough to describe how I feel," said Zheng, who played back-to-back three-hour matches to make the semifinals. "If you ask me to play three hours more for my country, I could do it again."

Zheng, 21, was defeated by Swiatek, four-time French Open champion, at Roland Garros, in all of their six previous meetings.

"It was an amazing match. To beat Iga is not easy, as it's an important event for her," Zheng said.

On Thursday, Wang Xinyu and Zhang Zhizhen also made history by defeating Demi Schuurs and Wesley Koolhof of the Netherlands 2-6, 6-4, 10-4 in the mixed doubles tennis semifinals. The Chinese duo's opponents in the final will be decided by the result of a match between a Czech mixed doubles team and the Individual Neutral Athletes.

Before the Chinese tennis players' historic victories, Chinese shooter Liu Yukun and race walker Yang Jiayu, who hold world records in their respective disciplines, clinched the 10th and 11th gold medals for China at the Paris Games.

Liu, 27, scored 463.6 points in his Olympic debut to secure gold in the men's 50-meter rifle 3 positions final at the Chateauroux Shooting Centre, around 270 kilometers south of Paris. His victory marked the fourth gold medal for the Chinese shooting team at the Games.

"I'm very lucky, because the Olympics happened at a time when I'm in a good stage (of my career)," Liu said, adding: "Today, I did not perform as well as I did in the World Cup. I feel like my overall control is good and my mentality is good. I was not as nervous as I was during the initial competitions."

The shooter admitted that he was "influenced" by the audience, the cheering and the surroundings in general, but said he tried to get a grip on all distracting thoughts and stay focused during the competition.

"I just believed in myself and had a lot of confidence," he added.

Liu is making his Olympic debut much later than many would



Top: China's Zheng Qinwen returns the ball during the Olympics women's singles tennis semifinals on Thursday at the Roland Garros Stadium in Paris, France. Zheng defeated top-seeded Iga Swiatek of Poland 6-2, 7-5, to secure a final berth, a first for China. GAO JING / XINHUA

Above: Chinese players Zhang Zhizhen (left) and Wang Xinyu (right) in action during the mixed doubles tennis semifinal of the Paris 2024 Olympics on Thursday. The Chinese pair reached the final after defeating Demi Schuurs and Wesley Koolhof of the Netherlands 2-6, 6-4, 10-4. CARL DE SOUZA / AFP

expect. Zhang Changhong, who won gold at the same event during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, was just 21. Though new to the Olympic stage, Liu secured his spot for the Paris Games as early as October 2022, during the World Championships in Cairo, Egypt.

In May, Liu set a world record with 468.9 points during the World Cup in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Yang, 28, delivered another win for China just an hour after Liu.

On the first day of the athletics events at the Paris Games, she blazed

to the finish line in 1:25:54 to secure gold in the women's 20-km race walk at the Trocadero.

This victory marks a significant turnaround for Yang, who finished 12th at the Tokyo Games. "Tokyo was very tricky for me, so I worked harder to make a comeback and get the best results in Paris," she said.

Yang's Paris win has extended China's dominance in the event.

The tradition of excellence began with Wang Liping's gold medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. The 2012 Games in London saw an

unprecedented sweep by Chinese athletes Qieyang Shijie, Liu Hong and Lyu Xiuzhi, who claimed gold, silver and bronze, respectively.

Liu Hong further solidified her career with a gold medal at the Rio Games in 2016 and bronze in Tokyo. At the Paris Games, the now 37-year-old, who once held the world record with a time of 1:24:38, finished 21st.

Inside

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Peace: Mission will send PLA hospital ship to 13 nations

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"Unlike the military forces of the United States, NATO and others, which have indeed caused conflicts and wars in many regions, the PLA soldiers, wearing the UN's blue helmets, carry out peacekeeping missions in conflict areas," Zhao said.

He also stressed that the Chinese military's peacekeeping participation is a crucial way for China to support

the UN-centered international system and true multilateralism, and is one of the important ways in which China practices the concepts of a community with a shared future for mankind and the Global Security Initiative.

Additionally, the Chinese military practices them in other ways, including sending naval escort task forces to the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters and the *Peace Ark* hospital ship to underdeveloped countries.

The hospital ship is currently on a seven-day friendly visit to Madagascar. During this mission, the ship will visit 13 countries, such as Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, Djibouti and Sri Lanka.

Peace Ark provided medical services to over 8,000 Tanzanian citizens, and more than 80 operations were carried out on board.

A Tanzanian baby was born on the ship with the cooperation of Chinese

and Tanzanian military doctors. The father named the baby Zakhir, which means "steadfastness". He hopes that when his child grows up, he will also become a steadfast defender of peace, according to a report by CCTV News.

According to the Defense Ministry, since it was commissioned in 2008, the ship has conducted humanitarian medical missions overseas multiple times, visiting 46 countries and regions and serving over 290,000 people.

Global tech outage raises information security alert

By SHAO XINYING
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A glitch in a software update developed by a cybersecurity company in the United States caused widespread disruptions last month, affecting computers globally, grounding flights and interrupting banking services. Incidents like this underscore the vulnerability of key digital infrastructure in a connected world, experts said.

They added that China remained largely immune to such disruptions, highlighting the need for developing technology independence to ensure information security.

On July 19, as CrowdStrike released a faulty software update, millions of Microsoft Windows users were hit by the "blue screen of death".

The impact was felt across the world, leading to media services being suspended and medical systems collapsing at healthcare facilities. Almost 30,000 flights were delayed on that day and nearly 7,000 were canceled worldwide, according to Euronews.

Microsoft put the number of affected Windows devices at about 8.5 million.

Australian web security consultant Troy Hunt called the malfunction the "largest IT outage in history".

The episode highlighted the fragility of the current technology landscape where key digital infrastructure such as operating systems fall prey to tech glitches, Liu Jiqiang, dean of the School of Software Engineering at Beijing Jiaotong University, told China Daily.

"Considering the significant consequences of such failure, relevant companies should provide compensation to the security victims and make commitments to providing proper future updates and contingency plans in case of emergency," said Liu, who specializes in computer and information security.

Almost a week after the disaster, CrowdStrike CEO George Kurtz said 97 percent of the company's Windows sensors were back online, but experts warned that full recovery might take longer.

Despite the widespread disruptions, key pillar industries across the Chinese mainland, such as government services and airports, remained untouched as the occurrence had a relatively limited impact on China, Kong Xiangyan, head of the Endpoint Security Department of 360 Digital Security Group, told China Daily.

The repercussions of this tech fault in China were felt mainly among multinational companies

and industries with significant overseas operations, Kong said.

Self-reliance in the field of technology helped China avoid being hit by the glitch as domestically developed endpoint security protection software is widely used in China, especially in industries crucial to the economy and the livelihood of the people, Kong said.

Such an incident, to some extent, can be called a "good" thing as it serves as an alert about security risks in a digitized world dependent on just a handful of providers, said Liu of the School of Software Engineering.

The outage "is the result of a software monopoly that has become a single point of failure for too much of the global economy", George Rakis, executive director of the advocacy group NextGen Competition, said in a statement.

Microsoft's Windows is the most widely used computer operating system in the world, accounting for about 70 percent share of the desktop, according to Statista.

It serves as a wake-up call for more resilient supply chains in the information infrastructure sector, Liu said.

Liu highlighted the risks of management lapse and the errors in system development, saying such a mishap could have been avoided had the system been better designed and tested.

He cited the example of a method used by railway transportation, in which three different systems are put in place to monitor and detect signals. The final decision or action is only taken when at least two out of the three systems agree. This ensures increased safety and reliability by reducing errors or failures from a single system, Liu said.

"The outage is likely to intensify regulations for critical services and risk management," Madeleine Stevens, an IT expert at Liverpool John Moores University, was quoted by Xinhua as saying.

Liu said the keyword "security" was mentioned a dozen times in the resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, underlining the nation's determination to achieve self-sufficiency in key technological infrastructure.

"We will establish risk monitoring, early warning, and response systems to safeguard science and technology security, and ensure self-sufficiency in scientific and technological infrastructure," the resolution said.

Technology and information security constitute a broader concept of national security, whose importance can never be overstated, Liu said.

Balancing act



Foreign students practice acrobatics at the Wuqiao Acrobatic Art School on Wednesday in Cangzhou, north China's Hebei province. Forty students from six countries are in China for two months of training in acrobatics under the guidance of professionals. YUAN LIWEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Policy: Japan caters to US' strategy of building 'Asian NATO'

From page 1

Besides, China's military activities are in response to the collaboration between separatists in Taiwan and external forces.

Interestingly, since Japan mentioned Taiwan for the first time in its white paper in 2021, it has increased its emphasis on this topic. This stance ignores the fact that Japan is breaking its own pledge of observing the one-China principle and has failed to respect China's full sov-

eighty over Taiwan. Japan is simply coordinating with US strategy and encouraging the reckless activities of the separatist forces in Taiwan.

Hyping and smearing China expose Japan's real intention to portray the Taiwan question as an explosive one, to pave the way for the introduction of NATO into the Asia-Pacific, and, for its own aggressive policy, to relive its military expansion dreams.

Moreover, Tokyo's historical enmity with Russia and the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea vividly reflects the US' invisible pressure and NATO's strategic incursions in the region.

"The alliance with the United States is the cornerstone of our national security policy," claims the white paper. It seems that the whims and wishes of the US and the West have forced Japanese policymakers to deliver a direct and unprecedented warning against China, Russia and DPRK, which may further deteriorate regional peace,

stability, harmony and security.

Critical analysis of emerging socio-economic, geopolitical and geostrategic activities in the Asia-Pacific, South China Sea and East Asia reveal that Japan is ready to act and thus it is continuously cooperating with NATO in multiple fields and joining US efforts to contain China, to suit its desire for so-called military normalization and bury its history of aggression before and during World War II.

Thus the white paper reflects Japan's own fears. It demonstrates

Japan's NATO-centric paradigm shift, justifying the latter's entrance into the Asia-Pacific in the future. It is obvious that Japan is silently working on the trans-regional geopolitical and geostrategic agenda of the US and the West against China.

Realistically, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine is a result of continuous fueling by the US and NATO knocking at the doorstep of Russia.

Japan hyping threats from China, DPRK and Russia only caters to the US' strategy of building an "Asian NATO", which should alarm all peace-loving people.

It is apparent to even many Japa-

nese that the Asia-Pacific does not need military blocs, confrontation or clubs of countries pushing for a new Cold War. Thus, countries in the region should correct their ways.

For the good of the region and of itself, Japan should return to the right path of Asia-Pacific cooperation by playing a positive and productive role in maintaining and promoting peace, stability and development.

The author is president of Pak-China Corridor of Knowledge and executive director of the Center for South Asia & International Studies. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Focus on Harris' race, gender seen as bias in US politics

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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US Vice-President Kamala Harris is used to political attacks on her race and gender.

The 59-year-old, who is both South Asian and black, faced a slew of questions and comments from the right wing in 2019 when she first ran for president.

But in the days after she became the Democratic Party's presumptive presidential nominee — following President Joe Biden's announcement on July 21 that he wouldn't seek reelection — attacks on her racial identity and gender have increased.

Harris was born in Oakland, California; her parents immigrated from India and Jamaica and later became naturalized US citizens. She became the US' first woman vice-president in 2020 and would become the first woman president if she is elected in November.

Political analysts suggest that the focus on Harris' race and gender have exposed how divisive US politics can be for women who seek the highest office, eight years after Hillary Clinton's failed presidential bid.

Harris' Republican opponent, former president Donald Trump, drew gasps from an audience at the annual convention of the National Association of Black Journalists in Chicago on Wednesday by questioning her racial identity.

"She was always of Indian heritage, and she was only promoting Indian heritage. I didn't know she was black until a number of years ago, when she happened to turn black, and now she wants to be black. So, I don't know, is she Indian or is she black?" he told Rachel Scott, an ABC News correspondent.

"I respect either one, but she obviously doesn't, because she was Indian all the way, and then all of a sudden she made a turn and she went — she became a black person," Trump said. "I think somebody should look into that, too."

Harris quickly responded that Trump was putting on "the same old show, the divisiveness and the disrespect. Let me just say the American people deserve better."

She has also faced criticism from several Republicans who branded her a "DEI hire". The phrase refers to diversity, equity and inclusion policies of recent years that stem from executive orders in the 1960s by presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson during the civil rights era.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires government employers to "hire without regard to race, religion and national origin". By the 1980s, workplaces and universities began implementing related policies.

US Representative Tim Burchett, a Tennessee Republican, said of Harris in an interview with CNN last month: "Biden said first off, he's going to hire a black female for vice-president. He just skipped over, what about white females, what about any other group, when you go down that route you take mediocrity and that's what they have right now. One hundred percent she is a DEI hire."

Harris was a former prosecutor with more than two decades of experience. She became district attorney of San Francisco in 2004. In 2010, she was elected attorney general of California. In 2017, she was sworn into the US Senate and became vice-president in 2020.

She went to the historically black college Howard University and belonged to a black sorority. As a senator, she was a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

In 2020, Trump questioned whether she met citizenship requirements, as he had previously done questioning where Barack Obama, the country's first black president, was born. Trump said that he had "heard" that Harris wasn't born in the US because her parents were born abroad, and so she "doesn't meet the requirements to be vice-president", a claim that was debunked.

Since Harris announced her bid for the White House, Trump allies have ramped up their criticism.

Lance Wallnau, a leading prophet in the New Apostolic Reformation, said she represents "the spirit of Jezebel in a way that'll be even much more ominous than Hillary [Clinton] because she'll bring a racial component and she's younger".

US Representative Harriet Hageman of Wyoming said in a video clip that Harris was "intellectually, just really kind of the bottom of the barrel".

"We know from more than two decades of our research that women face higher standards from voters when they seek executive office," Amanda Hunter, director of research and communications at the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, a nonpartisan organization aimed at advancing women's representation in politics, told China Daily in a 2020 interview when Harris became vice-president.

American women have made great strides in US politics in the past 50 years. Today, there are 11 with Cabinet and Cabinet-level positions and 150 in Congress (106 Democrats, 43 Republicans).

Twenty-five serve in the Senate (15 Democrats, nine Republicans, and one independent). And there are 125 in the US House (91 Democrats, 34 Republicans), according to the Center for American Women in Politics.

Yet many still face questions that their male counterparts do not. Trump's running mate J.D. Vance called Harris and others a "bunch of childless cat ladies" in 2021.

Harris has two stepchildren, Cole and Ella Emhoff, and is married to Doug Emhoff, who is Jewish.

While many Republicans have criticized Harris, House Speaker Mike Johnson, and the chair of the House GOP campaign arm, Richard Hudson of North Carolina, urged their party to focus only on her policies.

Only 5 percent of Americans polled by Gallup in January said they wouldn't vote for a female presidential candidate and 5 percent said they wouldn't support a black candidate.

"We have [already] had the first woman candidate for president," Kathleen Dolan, distinguished professor and chair of the University of Wisconsin's political science department, told China Daily when Harris was chosen as vice-president in 2020. "Voters have become more accustomed to seeing women candidates."

In 2016, Clinton said in her concession speech to Trump: "We have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday, someone will — and hopefully sooner than we might think right now."

"As we see more women challenging stereotypes, it will help break down the 'imagination barrier' so many voters hold about women in executive office," Hunter said.



Legacy of courage

Warsaw Uprising survivor Wanda Traczyk-Stawska (center) speaks with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (right) during a ceremony at the Monument of Mothers, preceding the main event marking the 80th anniversary of the uprising, at the Warsaw Insurgents' Cemetery in Warsaw, Poland, on Wednesday. The uprising, initiated on Aug 1, 1944, by commanders of the Polish Home Army loyal to the exiled Polish government in Britain, was a courageous resistance movement against German occupation forces toward the end of World War II.

OMAR MARQUES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Iran holds funeral for Hamas chief Haniyeh

China slams killing as UNSC countries call for stepped-up diplomatic efforts

By MINLU ZHANG
at the United Nations
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Iran held funeral processions on Thursday for Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh after he was killed in a strike in Teheran blamed on Israel, while United Nations Security Council countries called for stepped-up diplomatic efforts to avert a wider Middle East conflict.

Thousands of mourners paid respects to Haniyeh as the Israeli military confirmed that an airstrike in Gaza last month killed the Hamas military chief, Mohammed Deif.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led prayers for Haniyeh ahead of his burial in Qatar, with President Masoud Pezeshkian standing next to him. State television later showed the coffins placed in a truck and moved on the street toward the Azadi Square in Teheran and people showering flowers at them.

The assassination of Haniyeh, who went to Teheran to attend Pezeshkian's inauguration on Wednesday, sparked threats of revenge against Israel and fueled concerns that the Gaza conflict is turning into a wider Middle East war.

It occurred just hours after a top Hezbollah commander, Fuad Shukur, was killed in an Israeli strike on Lebanon's capital Beirut in retaliation for a deadly weekend rocket attack in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Baby steps

A white rhinoceros calf stands beside its mother, Nola, at Lunaret Zoo in Montpellier, southern France, on Wednesday. Born in captivity on July 20, the calf marks a historic first for the zoo — an addition crucial for the conservation of the endangered species. SYLVAIN THOMAS / AFP



Russia vows to shoot down Ukraine's F-16 fighter jets

By REN QI in Moscow
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The Kremlin said on Thursday that Russian forces were prepared to shoot down Ukraine's first batch of F-16 jets and the weapons will not be a "panacea" for Kyiv's army, one day after officials from Lithuania and the United States confirmed that Ukraine had received the first order of the long-awaited jets.

The arrival is a milestone for Ukraine, which has yet to comment on it publicly. The fighter jets, built by Lockheed Martin, have been on Ukraine's wish list for a long time because of their destructive power and global availability. The fighter jet is equipped with a 20mm cannon and can carry bombs, rockets and missiles.

"F-16s in Ukraine. Another impossible thing turned out to be totally possible," Lithuanian Foreign Minister

Gabrielius Landsbergis said on X.

Analysts and officials say the F-16s will not alone prove a turning point in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which began in February 2022.

The lengthy process to procure the US-designed aircraft and train Ukrainian pilots to fly them has frustrated Kyiv, Reuters reported.

The number of delivered F-16s appears to be small for now. The Times of London cited a source familiar with the matter who put the figure at just six. That number is expected to grow, but it is far short of what military analysts say Ukraine needs.

Denmark has committed to donate 19 jets in total, while the Netherlands has promised to deliver 24 aircraft. Both countries have been driving forces behind a coalition to supply Ukraine with F-16s. Norway also said it would donate six F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

with the tensions between Lebanon and Israel, between Syria and Israel, and in the Red Sea sounding the alarm frequently."

Failure to achieve a cease-fire in Gaza was responsible for worsening tensions, he said. "Countries with major influence must put more pressure and work more vigorously ... to put out the flames of war in Gaza."

Amir Saeid Irvani, Iran's UN ambassador, said Teheran has consistently exercised maximum restraint but reserves its right to respond decisively. He called on the Security Council to condemn Israel and punish it with sanctions.

Iran's first vice-president Mohammad Reza Aref said his country has no intention of escalating the Middle East conflict, state media reported.

Robert Wood, the United States' deputy ambassador to the UN, called for members of the Security Council with influence over Iran "to increase pressure on it to stop escalating its proxy conflict against Israel and other actors".

Israel has declined to comment on the Teheran strike, but experts said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is likely to benefit domestically from the killing, Agence France-Presse reported.

"It's a tactical, not a strategic victory (for Netanyahu), he scored points but that could change very quickly," said Asher Cohen, a political science professor at Israel's Bar Ilan University.

Agencies and Mo Jingxi in Beijing contributed to this story.

Briefly

UNITED STATES
Plea deal with 9/11 mastermind reached

The man accused of masterminding the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and two of his accomplices, held at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have agreed to plead guilty, the Pentagon said on Wednesday without elaborating. The New York Times reported that Mohammed, along with Walid bin Attash and Mustafa al-Hawsawi, had agreed to plead guilty to conspiracy in exchange for a life sentence instead of a trial, which could lead to the death penalty. Such a proposal was detailed by prosecutors last year but divided the families of the nearly 3,000 people killed in the Sept 11, 2001, attacks, with some still wanting the defendants to face the ultimate penalty.

NIGERIA
Bomb attack in teahouse kills 19

A bomb exploded in a teahouse in northeastern Nigeria, killing 19 people and wounding 27 in the second major attack in a few weeks, security sources said on Thursday. The blast in Kawuri village in Borno state on Wednesday evening was one of the deadliest in recent years in northeastern Nigeria, where violence from a grinding jihadist conflict has been on the decline. The latest blast came just weeks after multiple suicide attackers killed 32 people in Borno state's Gwoza area when they targeted a wedding, a hospital and a funeral.

UNITED KINGDOM
Stabbing suspect named in court

A 17-year-old boy charged with three counts of murder and 10 counts of attempted murder for a knife attack at a dance class in England was named in court on Thursday as Axel Rudakubana, as he made his first court appearance. Liverpool Judge Andrew Menary said that despite not being an adult, the boy can be named because he will turn 18 next week. The court appearance came after the shocking crime left three girls dead and sparked two nights of violent unrest across England.

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PARIS 2024



Golden girl Deng hopes win will urge more kids to fall in love with BMX

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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Furious, aggressive, gentle and elegant all at once — that's the message China's BMX freestyle cyclist Deng Yawen delivered with her history-making golden run at the Paris Olympics.

For those back home who tuned in to watch a sport with no clue what to expect, teen rider Deng dazzled them, no doubt eliciting "oohs" and "aahs" from China's night owls as she lit up the Place de la Concorde under the scorching sun of Paris on Wednesday, performing some of the most spectacular BMX freestyle runs that the world has ever seen in the final of the women's freestyle park event.

With bar spins, high-flying flips, and then the killer trick of double tail-whips — twice — the Chinese favorite, a runner-up in qualifications, literally soared across a course set up with jumps, ramps and rails, exhibiting the best of what bicycle motocross — or BMX — has to offer.

Roared on by the enthusiastic crowd in the iconic Paris square, Deng landed on top of the podium after leading the eight-woman field with a near flawless 92.6-point second run, securing China's first medal of any color in the youthful urban sport that debuted at Tokyo 2020.

It was also China's third Olympic cycling gold across all disciplines overall, following back-to-back titles in the women's track cycling team sprint at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

The "kingdom of bicycles" has emerged as force on the highest sporting stage, yet Deng took more pride from setting a brave example for China's daring youth — boys and girls — to valiantly try new things.

"I was overjoyed, and only truly felt like an Olympic champion when I sang my national anthem with the Chinese flag raised, during the medal ceremony," said a proud Deng, an



Gold medalist Deng Yawen of China (center) poses with silver medalist Perris Benegas of the US and bronze medalist Natalya Diehm of Australia following the BMX freestyle women's park event on Wednesday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY AND REUTERS

HEAD OVER WHEELS



18-year-old native of Southwest China's Sichuan province.

"I am so proud to show the world that I am from China, and I am even happier that I managed to change some opinions about young people, especially girls, that they should not try this or that because of danger, fear or any other perceived obstacles.

"BMX cycling used to be a very niche sport in our country. My gold medal today proves that we can develop a strong program quickly.

"I hope more fans will become interested in BMX, and that more young people will try it to make it more popular," said Deng, who won the World Cup series' Bazhong leg in her home province.

BMX freestyle park involves athletes taking a 60-second run over a rugged park course, performing a variety of tricks.

The Olympic final features the top-eight qualifiers and ranks riders by their best run out of two attempts.

Deng set the tone with an impressive 92.5 in her first run, building an early lead in the field. But, she had to deliver under pressure in her second, after runner-up Perris Benegas scored 90.7 points in her second run to close the gap and Deng's teammate, Sun Jiaqi, fell on both of her runs.

Deng rose spectacularly to the occasion, though, holding her nerve to improve her score to 92.6 points on her second attempt, finishing higher than Benegas and bronze medalist Natalya Diehm of Australia.

Courageous decision

Overwhelmed with pride and joy, Deng, in a post-final interview, expressed appreciation for all the support from her coaches and association officials, before she took the opportunity to thank herself for making a bold decision seven years ago.

"Looking back, and regardless of what the future holds, it was definitely the best decision of my life," said Deng, a junior javelin thrower, who chose to join the new Chinese BMX freestyle program in 2017.

"As uncertain and risky as it looked back then, it has paved the way to where I am now, and I really appreciate myself for having the bravery to make the switch, and for all the hard work I've put in along the way," said Deng.

The dramatic shift from throwing a javelin far, to riding a bike high, and having to suffer falls off ramps and walls, was so tough that Deng almost cried every day trying to master some of the world's most difficult tricks.

"Countless falls and bruises here and there have almost been my daily routine. I still have that fear today, like when I pushed for big double tail-whips just now in my second run. That fear factor helps me stay as focused as I need to be, and keeps me sharp throughout the run," said Deng.

The rapid improvement of Chinese women's riders owes a lot to the Venezuelan legend Daniel Dhers, who has been coaching the Chinese national team over the past year.

Known as the "Godfather of BMX", Dhers, as an active athlete himself, has been riding together with his Chinese pupils and passing on his nearly two decades of experience in the sport to China's talented young riders.

With the national program mainly drafting hard-working athletes from other sports since its inception in 2018, Dhers said he had a good start to his tenure after accepting the coaching role, adding that it didn't take long for his lessons on technique, trick selection and the sport's culture to trickle through.

"He really helped us avoid making a lot of mistakes in training with his vast experience. He was instrumental in our technical breakthroughs," Deng said of Dhers' guidance.

'Flying fish' lands two more medals for HK

By ATLAS SHAO in Hong Kong
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Hong Kong's "flying fish" Siobhan Haughey won her second bronze of the Paris Games on Thursday, this time in the women's 100m freestyle, becoming the first athlete from the region to clinch four Olympic medals. It also takes the total number of medals won so far by Hong Kong, China, at this summer's Olympics to four.

Its first two were individual gold medals in fencing — won by Vivian Kong Man-wai in the women's epee, and Edgar Cheung Ka-long in the men's foil — followed by Haughey's bronzes in the 200m and 100m freestyle.

In the 100m freestyle final, Haughey finished the first 50 meters in 25.09 sec, putting her in second place, but dropped back to

third, taking the bronze in a time of 52.33 sec.

After the finals, Haughey spoke to the media, saying that although medals are important, what matters most to her is that she has put in a tremendous amount of effort and truly enjoyed this competition.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government officials, including Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu, sent congratulations to Haughey and her coach.

"Siobhan has maintained a high level of performance and remained fearless against the world's best athletes throughout the competition," Lee said, adding that all Hong Kong residents, including himself, are proud of Haughey.

Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kevin Yeung Yun-hung said that Haughey demonstrated extraordinary skill, and emphasized



Siobhan has maintained a high level of performance and remained fearless against the world's best athletes throughout the competition."

John Lee Ka-chiu, chief executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

that the city is both thrilled and proud of her.

During the women's 200m freestyle on Tuesday, Haughey finished third with a time of 1 minute 54.55 sec.

Kong, who won the team's first gold at the Paris Olympics on Saturday, returned to Hong Kong on Thursday morning and received a rapturous welcome at the airport. The 30-year-old fencer expressed her gratitude to the public, and thanked everyone for supporting the athletes.

"It is a blessing to be an athlete in Hong Kong, especially in fencing," Kong thanked her predecessors for their efforts, which she said have enabled the current generation of athletes to enjoy greater resources to pursue their dreams.

She also congratulated Cheung and Haughey on their achievements,

and emphasized that the efforts and passion of athletes cannot always be measured by their results.

Regarding the prize money of HK\$6 million (\$769,000), awarded under the Jockey Club Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme, Kong expressed her intention to set up a charity fund aimed at supporting more children to engage in fencing. She aspires to increase the exposure of sports, with the hope that more individuals will discover one they enjoy and excel at.

Kong's brilliant performance also garnered plaudits from the Chinese mainland. In Mandarin, she expressed gratitude for the support, and said that all athletes deserve to be appreciated.

At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, held three years ago, Hong Kong secured six medals, including one gold by Cheung and two silvers by Haughey.



Siobhan Haughey of Hong Kong, China, poses on the podium with her bronze medal for the Paris 2024 Olympics women's 100m freestyle swimming event on Wednesday. AFP

PARIS 2024

SWIMMING

A Pan-oply of speed

Chinese swimming prodigy smashes own world record to win coveted sprint gold in epic fashion

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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Sure, it's a little early to make such bold proclamations, but freestyle swimmer Pan Zhanle's Paris heroics have immediately thrust his name into conversations about China's sporting immortals.

By breaking the world record in a sprint event long dominated by Western athletes, the teen sensation has left fans marveling at the emergence of a new, waterborne Liu Xiang, after Pan snatched up the coveted gold medal in the 100m freestyle final in the Paris pool on Wednesday, bringing back fond memories of Liu's epic 110m hurdles win at the Athens Games 20 years ago.

The magnificence of Pan's incredible 46.40-second world record swim, which secured Team China's first swimming gold medal in Paris on the fifth day of the Games has, as many claimed, also matched track legend Su Bingtian's feat of making the 100m final at the Tokyo Games three years ago.

The young phenom, who turns 20 on Sunday, took pride in joining his senior track stars as stereotype breakers.

"For myself, I haven't come to terms with it yet," Pan said of the gold medal's significance after the final at the Paris La Defense Arena. "My life goes on, for sure, and I will continue training and swimming."

"But, for Chinese swimming, and for my country, I think it's huge to prove that Chinese athletes can also prevail in another event we were not so good at in the past."

Boasting a strong start and a stunning second-split push, Pan touched first in Wednesday night's final, with a commanding 1.08-second lead over runner-up Kyle Chalmers of Australia. Bronze winner, David Popovici of Romania, finished a mere one hundredth of a second behind Chalmers.

To put that into perspective, Pan did it in what is being called a "slow pool" — built shallower than normal, at 2.15 meters in depth, resulting in more turbulence and bigger waves that athletes and coaches have blamed for slower-than-expected times in Paris.

Pan's new mark for the 100m free was the first swimming world record set at this summer's Games, making him the first male swimmer so far to eclipse a world record in 2024.

Yet, none of this was even imaginable less than three years ago, when Pan made his international debut at the 2021 short-course world championships in Abu Dhabi.

Failing to make the finals in any of the events he contested, Pan had to watch among the spectators, later self-effacingly changing the name of his social media account into "onlooker in the stands".

Since then, though, he's not missed any individual final at any major meet he has entered, nor has he let any opponent take him lightly again.

"I think it's huge to prove that Chinese athletes can also prevail in another event we were not so good at in the past."

Pan Zhanle, Olympic 100m freestyle champion and world record holder

Pan Zhanle smashes his own world record on the way to winning the men's 100m freestyle on Wednesday, finishing in 46.40 sec and securing Team China's first swimming gold of the Paris Games. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY AND REUTERS

Overlooked talent

Relatively unknown to the world before Paris, Pan's meteoric rise started at his first long-course meet, the 2022 worlds in Budapest, where, at 17, he tied the Chinese national record set by 2015 world champion Ning Zetao with a sublime semifinal swim of 47.65.

Despite being overshadowed by then world-record holder Popovici, Pan still managed to give the Romanian prodigy a scare by following him shoulder-to-shoulder in the final's first split, before finishing fourth, just 0.21 sec behind the winner.

Following that Budapest launch, Pan fired his boosters, fueled by discipline and hard work supported by science and technology, such as underwater monitoring and analysis in training, which propelled him higher among the elite ranks of the sprint event, further raising expectations that even better results could be on the horizon.

A year later, by the time the world championships in Fukuoka, Japan, rolled around, Pan had started beating Popovici. In the 100m final, Pan maintained his scintillating pace, finishing fourth in a new Asian record time of 47.43, beating the Romanian star by 0.4 sec and placing just one hundredth of a second off the podium.

Powered by Pan, Team China won both men's free relays and the mixed 4x100m free relay. Combined with victory in the women's 4x200m free relay, it was the country's best-ever collective result at the long-course worlds.

A star had been born, but, as he continued his ascent, most eyes were focused on other stars in the swimming firmament.

Pan flew under the international radar until the all-important Olympic year arrived, landing in some style at February's worlds in Doha, where he broke the 100m world record for the first time in a surprising fashion.

Out of blue, in the men's 4x100m relay on Feb 12, Pan wowed the capacity crowd at the Aspire Dome by clocking 46.80 in a strong leadoff leg, shaving 0.06 sec off Popovici's previous record and leaving the on-site commentary team in awe. "We still have a race to complete here", the loudspeaker shouted in disbelief.

Wednesday night in Paris, Pan convinced even his strongest critics in the pool, and made sure that no one is looking elsewhere now.

Popovici, asked by some media how insanely, or perhaps suspiciously, fast Pan's swim looked, said it's all reasonable as long as Pan is working hard in the right direction. "I think we can go even faster. There are people now alive, and who are swimming, who can do it. It's just a matter of putting it together and doing it at the right moment," said Popovici, who will turn 20 next month.

"This is only motivation for us. I mean, we can't be mad, we can only congratulate him. This is what sports is."

Magnifique! Magical Marchand sweeps to Olympic double

Turns out, those comparisons to Michael Phelps weren't farfetched at all when it comes to Leon Marchand.

They certainly weren't a burden for the 22-year-old Frenchman.

Marchand completed one of the most audacious doubles in swimming history on Wednesday night, winning the 200-meter butterfly and the 200 breaststroke about two hours apart, in front of a home crowd cheering his every stroke.

Two grueling races. Two very different strokes. Two Olympic records. Two gold medals.

Phelps, who won several doubles of his own while claiming a record eight golds at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, was duly impressed.

"That's probably the greatest double I've ever seen in the history of the sport," Phelps said while appearing on NBC's Olympics coverage in the United States. "The cheer, the electricity... I can't wait to talk to him to hear what it felt like."

"I'm a really shy person," Marchand said. "I was kind of the center of attention during those two races. I was trying to get the energy from the whole crowd. They're amazing to me, pushing me in every final."

The five-time world champion, little known outside the world of swimming before the Olympics, has become a national hero in the space of a week with his trio of golds.

"I've fulfilled a lot of dreams since I've been here. Doing this double was something I felt I could do, but to really do it, that's something else," he said.

"Of course, I had a lot of doubts, because everyone told me it wasn't possible," he said of the unprecedented double.

While the 15,000 crowd at the Paris La Defense Arena belted out a rousing rendition of *La Marseillaise* during the medal ceremonies, a smiling Marchand looked calm as he soaked up the adulation.

"I'm just trying to keep going. I really

enjoyed every moment of those two finals. It was really amazing for me to swim those," he said, after dethroning two defending champions.



Leon Marchand celebrates his win in the men's 200m breaststroke final at the Paris 2024 Olympics on Wednesday. AP

Thrilling the French fans and claiming the spotlight, even on a night when Katie Ledecky romped to another gold medal, Marchand notched up his second and third victories in the Paris pool and stamped himself — with the Olympics not even a week old — as one of the faces of the Games.

Trailing most of the way in the 200 fly, Marchand surged past the Hungarian world-record holder and defending Olympic champion Kristof Milak on the final lap to finish with an Olympic record of 1:51.71, touching first by just four-hundredths of a second.

Marchand's final lap was nearly 0.66 faster than anyone else in the field — and 1.26 clear of Milak.

"I've been watching so many races of his," Marchand said. "I know he has a lot of speed, way more than me, so I was just trying to get as close as possible, and then just push it until the end."

The bronze went to Canada's Ilya Kharun.

After rallying to beat Milak in the 200 fly with a finishing kick for the ages, Marchand made it look easy in the 200 breaststroke.

He led all the way, touching in 2 minutes, 5.85 seconds, as the fans — many holding up cardboard cutouts of his smiling face — nearly blew the roof off the arena.

Following on from his dominant victory in the 400 individual medley (IM) on Sunday, Marchand waved one finger and shook his head just a bit, as if he couldn't quite believe what he had done.

Then, he hustled off the deck to another rousing cheer to begin his warm down, before returning for the medal ceremony.

After another boisterous rendition of *La Marseillaise*, the other two medalists walked slowly around the pool, getting their pictures taken.

Not Marchand. He hustled back to the practice pool. There's still the 200m IM to win.

AGENCIES

GLOBAL LENS

A Brazilian's love for martial arts inspired by Bruce Lee



Gabriel de Moraes Neto (center) practices skill of Chinese *miaodao*, a two-handed long sabre, with his fellows at a park in Nanning, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on July 6. JIN HAORYUAN / XINHUA

FIST FOR FRIENDSHIP



Gabriel teaches as students learn martial arts in Nanning on July 6. CAO YIMING / XINHUA



Gabriel (first from right) practices skill of *miaodao* with his fellows at a park in Nanning on July 6. CAO YIMING / XINHUA



Gabriel (center) teaches as students learn martial arts in Nanning on July 6. CAO YIMING / XINHUA

Born in 1978, Gabriel de Moraes Neto hails from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is now a martial arts coach based in Nanning, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

Inspired by Bruce Lee's kung fu at a young age, Gabriel developed an interest in Chinese martial arts and began to receive systematic training in 1999.

As his understanding of martial arts and traditional Chinese culture deepened, he named himself "Mo Xiaolong", after Bruce Lee's Chinese name "Li Xiaolong".

In 2008, Gabriel came to the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine as an exchange student to study acupuncture while practicing martial arts. To him, both kung fu and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) display the charm of Chinese culture.

After completing his studies, Gabriel returned to Brazil, where he opened a school specializing in kung fu training and acupuncture courses.

In 2011, Gabriel revisited China and met his soulmate in Nanning, whom he married the following year back home in Brazil.



Gabriel (front) practices martial arts with his fellows beside Yongjiang River in Nanning on July 6. JIN HAORYUAN / XINHUA

In 2016, Gabriel and his wife returned to Nanning and decided to stay and work in China. Soon after their return, Gabriel was introduced to local martial arts master Cai Rongkun and became a coach at a local martial arts club.

In his spare time, Gabriel enjoys cycling, Chinese tea and calligraphy, while learning from local TCM practitioners on medical techniques. He shares insights into martial arts and TCM cultures on his social media accounts, attracting a significant international following.

"Chinese traditional culture is truly captivating. I'm committed to continuous learning," Gabriel said.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil.

As an expat, Gabriel aspires to serve as a cultural ambassador to foster understanding between people from the two countries while promoting China's traditions among Brazilians.

XINHUA



Gabriel (left) learns massage skills at Guangxi International Zhuang Medicine Hospital in Nanning on July 4. CAO YIMING / XINHUA



Gabriel makes tea in Nanning on July 9. JIN HAORYUAN / XINHUA



Gabriel (right) learns calligraphy from a teacher in Nanning on July 6. CAO YIMING / XINHUA

BUSINESS

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PATHWAY TO PROGRESS

IEA says China renewables benefit world

Chinese efforts to combat climate change aid global shift to green energy

By LIU YUKUN
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The rapid growth of renewable energy in China is outpacing the pursuit of national carbon goals, significantly aiding the global shift toward green energy, experts said.

They noted that China's advancements in technology, manufacturing and installations are crucial in providing affordable power and combating climate change globally.

Heymi Bahar, senior analyst at the International Energy Agency, said China is contributing a major portion of the National Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, which is all about countries' climate action goals to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts.

Bahar said the rapid growth of renewable energy in China can potentially allow the country to peak carbon emissions well ahead of its 2030 goal.

"China's lead in clean energy technologies is much more important than its share in the demand for renewables. Without

China's scale of manufacturing and installing renewables, it is very difficult to combat climate change," he said.

"Between 2022 and 2023, clean energy technology investment has increased by almost 50 percent and China was responsible for much of it. The country now dominates the global market of energy technologies. It produces 95 percent of the solar modules in the world. And around 75 percent of the global battery manufacturing is taking place in China."

Zhu Xian, executive vice-president of the International Finance Forum and former vice-president of the World Bank, said being innovation-driven is key to China's energy development. Innovations include the generation 3 nuclear reactors, the continuously upgraded conversion efficiency of photovoltaic cells, ultra-high-voltage transmission technology, new types of energy storage, hydrogen energy, electric vehicles and lithium batteries.

By the end of June, China's grid-connected wind power capacity stood at 470 million kW, and grid-connected solar power capacity was

Technicians install photovoltaic panels at a solar power farm in Dongshan county, Fujian province.
LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA

at 710 million kW, totaling 1.18 billion kW and surpassing coal-fired power (1.17 billion kW) for the first time in terms of installed capacity, said the National Energy Administration.

Looking ahead, experts said that market-oriented reforms are set to define major directions of the Chinese energy sector's development in the coming years, highlighting the major discussion points of the recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Efforts will be made to advance independent operations of the grids, though they are facing pressure from integrating new energy into the grid, necessitating increased investment, digitization and flexibility. More

measures are also in the pipeline to boost renewable energy consumption and improve energy pricing mechanisms, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Wang Bohua, honorary chairman of the China Photovoltaic Industry Association, said at a recent forum that China's new energy sector is witnessing increasing trade barriers.

"In the first six months, major global photovoltaic markets such as the United States, Europe, India and Brazil rolled out policies that increased barriers to PV product imports and launched measures to protect local productions, posing challenges to global cooperation," he said.

Edmond Alphandery, chair-

man of the Task Force on Carbon Pricing in Europe, called for further efforts to promote deeper cooperation between China, the US and the European Union, saying without major markets' close cooperation, the international community cannot battle climate change.

He said the global average temperature for the last 12 months has risen by 1.63 C above the pre-industrial average, and the temperature goal of 1.5 C set at the Paris Agreement a decade ago was hanging by a slender thread.

"The consensus reached at the 2023 COP28 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai called for tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030. To reach the goal, the pace needs to change drastically," said Bahar.

Financial push to lift promising tech firms

By SHI JING
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Shanghai's recently announced policies to optimize the financial services rendered to technologically advanced companies will promote new quality productive forces and drive high-quality economic development, said experts.

Their comments emerged after a review of the new guideline released by the Shanghai municipal government on Wednesday that called for nurturing more high-quality listed technology companies by giving more play to the capital market.

According to the guideline comprising 24 detailed measures, the STAR Market at the Shanghai Stock Exchange should adapt to the development trajectory of new quality productive forces, and support IPOs of certain technology companies that are yet to turn profitable but boast key technologies, huge growth potential and innovation capabilities.

Stock market analyst Wang Jiyue said the green light given to such companies does not apply to every candidate. Companies making bottleneck breakthroughs, showing significant efficiency improvement, achieving groundbreaking research and development results, and promising firm profitability outlook will likely find support if they seek to list despite a record of no profits, he said.

Launched in 2019, the STAR Market is home to 573 listed companies that raised 910.8 billion yuan (\$125.9 billion) from their floats. These companies, mainly specializing in "hard technologies" like integrated circuits, biomedicine and aviation, devoted a combined 156 billion yuan to R&D in 2023, up 14.3 percent year-on-year, according to the SSE.

Sun Lijun, co-head of global banking for UBS Securities, said the capital market's enhanced inclusiveness and valuations based on long-term considerations can encourage technology startups to pursue technological breakthroughs and expand their footprint in the global market.

The new guideline stated that the STAR Market should be moderately inclusive on the valuations of listed companies' mergers and acquisitions. Industry leaders are encouraged to pursue M&A deals or pick up controlling stakes in companies along the industry chain to consolidate their core operations. Financial institutions are encouraged to provide loans, insurance or bonds for M&A activities.

Given the current pace of global economic recovery and technological innovation, companies can quickly acquire new technologies, expand market share and grow resources via M&A activities, accelerating their own transformation and upgrade, said Tian Lihui, director of the Institute of Finance and Development at Nankai University.

Efforts should be made to complete the multilevel structure of the capital market so that financial services can be provided to technology companies throughout their entire life cycle, said the guideline. In this sense, Shanghai should build a platform of professional services to provide angel investment as well as investment and financing to companies in their seed or startup stage.

Meanwhile, the special board at the regional equity market targeting the technologically advanced small and medium-sized enterprises should be consolidated in Shanghai. Efforts should be made to deepen the pilot project for the transfer of private equity and venture capital shares and the pilot project for comprehensive stock option services, according to the guideline.

The multilevel stock market is of special importance for the expansion of SMEs to provide more financing channels, said Chen Li, chief economist of Chuancai Securities.

An ecosystem featuring long-term investment should be nurtured in Shanghai, according to the guideline. Therefore, long-term capital, represented by the national social security fund, insurance capital and banks' wealth management capital, is encouraged to invest in the key technology sectors in Shanghai.

CICC, CGS shares rise on likely merger talk

By ZHOU LANXU
and LIU ZIZHENG

Shares of China International Capital Corp (CICC) and China Galaxy Securities (CGS) rose for a second consecutive session on Thursday following reports that the two companies — which share one major shareholder — are set to merge.

Though both companies denied speculation surrounding any possible merger, any such development, if it comes to pass, would reflect the sector's accelerated trend toward competitiveness via mergers and acquisitions at a time when China is attaching greater importance to its capital markets, financial experts said.

Central Huijin Investment, an arm of China's sovereign wealth fund, is the common shareholder of both firms.

While shares of Shanghai-listed CGS rose 2.75 percent to close at 11.19 yuan (\$1.54) on Thursday, CICC's Shanghai-listed shares inched up 0.73 percent to end at 30.47 yuan per share.

On Wednesday, shares of CGS had jumped 8.47 percent, while CICC's Shanghai-listed shares had risen by 6.48 percent.

CICC told China Daily on Thursday that the reports of a potential merger are groundless and that one should refer to official releases.

CGS also denied the reports,



A view of the booth of China International Capital Corp during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shanghai Securities News reported on Wednesday.

Talk of a possible merger had done the rounds last November, too, but it was denied by both companies.

There have been a series of M&As in progress by Chinese investment banks this year.

These include the ones between Guolian Securities and Minsheng Securities; Zheshang Securities and Guodu Securities; and Western Securities and Guorong Securities.

Liu Wenqiang, a researcher of nonbanking financial industries at Great Wall Securities, said the Chinese government has attached "consistent importance" to the capital markets and will continue to support M&As of securities firms, or investment banks.

"We believe the pace of M&As in the sector will likely accelerate over the next few years, especially for cases where the businesses of the involved companies are complementary, as part of the country's efforts to step up supply-side reforms in the financial sector," Liu said.

The Central Financial Work Conference in November had called for efforts to "cultivate first-class investment banks".

The policy signal was reinforced by a set of measures released by the State Council, or China's Cabinet, in April, which required supporting leading investment banks to enhance core competitiveness via M&As and organizational innovations.

"The Chinese economy needs first-class investment banks more than ever," said Yang Haiping, a researcher at the Central University of Finance and Economics' Institute of Securities and Futures.

Yang said a merger between CICC and CGS, if it happens, would foster ample room for further growth.

"Their businesses are complementary — CICC has strong investment banking and private equity investment businesses, while CGS is better at the brokerage business."

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Nation stays confident of meeting GDP target

By OUYANG SHIJIA
and ZHOU LANXU

China has the capabilities and confidence to tackle economic problems and meet the country's annual growth target of around 5 percent this year, the country's top economic regulator said on Thursday.

Although the broader economy is facing pressure from mounting negative factors from the external environment, lack of effective domestic demand and lingering risks in key sectors, China still enjoys favorable conditions and positive factors supporting economic recovery in the second half, said Zhao Chenxin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission.

"We still have plenty of room to step up countercyclical policy adjustment," Zhao said at a news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

"With a series of stimulus policy measures taking effect gradually, the foundation for economic recovery will be further consolidated. We have the conditions, capabilities and confidence to overcome economic problems, deal with challenges from economic transitions and achieve the annual growth target."

The latest economic data showed a mixed picture of a stabilizing economy. Media group Caixin said on Thursday the Caixin China General Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index fell to 49.8 in July from 51.8 in June, while data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Wednesday that the official manufacturing PMI stood at 49.4 in July, down from 49.5 in June.

Both figures are below the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

Meanwhile, Caixin said sentiment in the Chinese manufacturing sector remained positive in July, with the level of confidence rising from June's low. Firms were optimistic that business development efforts and the launch of new products can help to drive sales in the year ahead.

"The most prominent issues are still insufficient effective domestic demand and weak market opti-

mism," said Wang Zhe, senior economist at Caixin Insight Group. "Policy efforts should focus on stabilizing growth, boosting employment, safeguarding people's livelihoods, intensifying policy stimulus measures, ensuring effective implementation of previous policies and unleashing market vitality."

Experts said the latest key meetings suggest that policymakers will likely mull new incremental policies in the second half, which will significantly help boost market confidence and drive a steady economic recovery for the rest of the year.

"With stepped-up macroeconomic policies, more reform measures underway and the ongoing efforts to drive innovation-driven development, China will further boost its internal driving force, gain more competitive edges and further unleash the potential of domestic demand," said Guo Chunli, director of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research's Economic Research Institute.

"We are capable of achieving the annual economic and social development goals this year," Guo told a macroeconomic situation symposium in Beijing on Thursday.

A State Council executive meeting held on Wednesday emphasized the need to optimize and strengthen macroeconomic policies, and called for efforts to better implement existing policies and mull new incremental policies.

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee held a meeting on Tuesday to analyze the country's economic performance. The meeting pledged to step up macroeconomic support in the second half, with a greater focus on expanding domestic demand, cultivating emerging sectors and further widening opening-up, in a bid to meet the nation's annual growth target for 2024.

Wu Peizhi contributed to this story.

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Briefly

Book-entry discount T-bonds scheduled

The Ministry of Finance said on Thursday that it will auction 30 billion yuan (\$4.21 billion) worth of book-entry discount treasury bonds the following day. With a term of 91 days, the bonds will be sold at a discounted price and mature at par value. The price will be determined through a competi-

tive tender on Friday.

Internet firms log steady revenue growth

China's internet sector saw steady growth in business revenue in the first half, said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. In the first six months, China's major internet companies and related services firms generated 867.6 billion

yuan (\$121.6 billion) in business revenue, an increase of 5.6 percent year-on-year. This growth rate was 0.6 percentage point higher than that registered in the first five months. Specifically, business revenue of firms mainly providing information services soared 9.5 percent — 5 percentage points faster than the January-May period.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



Consumers check out shoes at SKP Wuhan in Hubei province on July 26. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

SKP expands footprint to tap young Chinese consumers

New outlet in Wuhan records sales exceeding 100m yuan on launch day

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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High-end department store SKP, which officially opened an outlet in Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei province, on July 26, netted 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million) in sales on its official launch day and has drawn in more than 100,000 visitors since a trial run on July 13.

SKP-S, the youth culture-focused luxury retail brand of SKP, also opened in Wuhan, targeting local Generation Z consumers with a selection of designer brands.

SKP is the luxury unit of Beijing Hualian Group and has surpassed London's Harrods in terms of revenue. It has established a reputation for high revenue in luxury product sales across China's top cities.

SKP's Beijing store posted revenue of more than 24 billion yuan in 2022 and 26.5 billion yuan in 2023.

The store in Wuhan is SKP's fourth, following the ones in Beijing; Xi'an, Shaanxi province; and Chengdu, Sichuan province.

Despite a rise in livestreamed shopping and e-commerce, high-end department stores such as SKP have continued to gain traction.

SKP Xi'an, which opened in 2018,

8 billion yuan revenue of SKP Xi'an last year

reached a revenue of 9.5 billion yuan in 2022, though it declined to 8 billion yuan in 2023. Chengdu SKP reached a revenue of 5.5 billion yuan last year.

The expansion of high-end shopping centers has been steady in the country, with megastore Shenzhen Coastal City opening its second outlet in July and Shenzhen-based high-end shopping center Mixc, a unit of China Resources, launching its first store in Guiyang, Southwest China's Guizhou province, showcasing the vitality of the retail industry.

The scaling up of high-end shopping centers has been mostly driven by demand in the luxury market.

According to the Hurun Chinese Luxury Consumer Survey released by the Hurun Research Institute in March, the total size of the Chinese luxury market is forecast to rise by 3 percent to \$240 billion this year.

The luxury goods industry glo-

bally has, however, seen slower growth this year.

LVMH Group's first-quarter revenue fell 2 percent year-on-year to 20.7 billion euros (\$22.3 billion). Kering Group fell 11 percent and is expected to see a 40 percent to 45 percent decline in profits for the first half of 2024.

Hermes Group recorded growth, but the rate narrowed from 22.3 percent in the same period last year to 12.6 percent.

The decline in revenue of luxury brands has been mirrored in the commercial real estate sector.

In the first quarter of 2024, retail sales of Swire Properties' projects on the Chinese mainland almost all declined. Retail sales of Beijing Sanlitun Taikoo Li and Beijing Indigo saw drops of 5.4 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively, while Shanghai HKRI Taikoo Hui fell 19.4 percent in sales revenue.

In contrast to the mixed picture for domestic luxury shopping, the global luxury market has benefited from a resurgence in luxury vacations by Chinese travelers.

According to the Bain & Co Luxury Goods Worldwide Market Study, released in June in collaboration with Italian luxury goods manufacturer's industry association Altgamma, Europe and Japan have demonstrated notable resilience,

buoyed by tourism inflows in the first quarter of 2024, with Japan thriving as it attracted a growing number of nationalities beyond the historical predominance of nearby Chinese travelers.

In Japan, tourist inflows surpassed pre-COVID levels, bolstered by a favorable yen arbitrage — which reached its lowest level against the US dollar in two decades.

This has resulted in a surge of tourists from around the globe, flocking to both established destinations and emerging luxury locations across the nation.

According to Global Blue, a business partner for shopping journeys, in terms of origin markets, the recovery of the Chinese mainland shoppers continues to accelerate.

Japan is currently the country benefiting the most from this acceleration. Globally, the momentum remains solid across nationalities, especially with shoppers from the Chinese mainland.

In May, in-store sales in continental Europe grew by 19 percent compared to the same period in 2023, influenced by positive dynamics across nationalities, with shoppers from the Chinese mainland leading the way with a 39 percent growth rate, according to Global Blue.

Hefei's Science Island boosts nation's efforts in opening-up, innovation

HEFEI — Surrounded by a huge reservoir and dense vegetation, an islet in Hefei, Anhui province, looks tranquil. Yet it is devoted to something very big, namely nuclear fusion research with the future of humanity in mind.

Science Island is an epitome of innovation and the opening-up of China's science and technology in pursuit of future clean energy, as well as solutions to climate change and health problems, through global cooperation.

"One thing I really like here is, as you can see in the control room, the large number of young people that are involved in the project. This is exactly what fusion needs," said Richard Pitts, leader of the Experiments and Plasma Operation Section of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER).

Being built in France by seven ITER members — China, the European Union, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States, ITER will be the world's largest experimental tokamak nuclear fusion reactor. A tokamak is basically a magnetic cage designed to confine, shape and control the super-hot plasmas that make fusion reactions possible.

Pitts said that ITER should be seen as a foundational project to bring nations together, and China is a perfect example of this.

China officially joined the ITER program in 2006. Nearly 10 percent of the procurement packages were undertaken by China. The Institute of Plasma Physics under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (ASIPP), located on the island, is the main unit of the Chinese mission.

"China is leading nuclear fusion. Our cooperation in basic research gave very good results in applied research," Grigory Trubnikov, director of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research and an academician at the Russian Academy of Sciences, said while visiting the island on July 1.

"We have a lot of plans together, and not only in basic research, but also in engineering, physics, novel energy, biomedicine and more to improve the quality of people's lives," he noted.

Science Island is home to the Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST), known as the "Chinese artificial sun". Its ultimate goal is to create nuclear fusion like the sun, using substances abundant in the sea to provide a steady stream of clean energy.

In 2023, a new construction and operation plan was developed for the ITER program, which requires experimentation to find and solve potential problems. With the same technology path and experimental conditions as ITER, EAST was chosen by the ITER organization as a partner in optimizing its new plans.

China has been sharing the EAST achievements globally.

In May 2023, the Chinese Academy of Sciences officially launched a pilot program on magnetic confinement fusion energy research for open innovation, aiming to build a globally competitive open innovation ecosystem.

With the support of major scientific facilities including EAST, ASIPP has actively facilitated the development of relevant disciplines and experimental devices in countries in Southeast Asia, West Asia, South America and North Africa.

On July 25, 2023, Thailand's first experimental tokamak device was officially launched. The Institute of Plasma Physics under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (ASIPP) and the Thailand Institute of Nuclear Technology.

Aiming to enhance Thailand's capability in fusion research, the two sides had decided to join hands to build the first tokamak device in an ASEAN country, while also helping Thailand cultivate a team of young talent in fusion research.

XINHUA

Way to future prospects



Piers of a railway bridge leading to the 8.35-kilometer Liren Tunnel are seen under construction in Gansu province on Thursday. Built by China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd, the bridge and the tunnel are part of the Sichuan-Qinghai Railway, which aims to cut travel time between the two inland provinces. XING JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Holding Up Half the Sky

Gender equality is the bedrock of a productive and progressive work environment, and when women are empowered to shine on the job, the world is a brighter place.

Equitable opportunity and compensation for women strengthens society and nurtures stability, so please join us in building a brighter future for all.



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BUSINESS FOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Vibrant day, radiant night: Rural tourism rocks

Nighttime biz, stable power, growing infra yield rich dividends

By LI JIAYING
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It is not just the summer that is heating up the evenings in Xinghua village of Yiyang county, Henan province. The thriving nighttime economy does that too, as the village comes alive with music, laughter and the bustling sounds of vendors.

"Xinghua village, formerly known as Shandi village, used to be an ordinary settlement at the foot of the local mountain. Today, it is vibrant by day and radiant by night, attracting a steady stream of visitors," said Zhou Jingwei, Party secretary of the village. "Our small mountainous village has gained new life."

With intensified efforts for rural vitalization, the village's cultural tourism, dining and homestay businesses have flourished to new heights — a night tourism economy with local characteristics has taken shape, featuring light shows, themed restaurants and unique camping experiences.

"Adorning every nook and cranny of the ancient village with lights that also reflect modern aesthetics, the village transforms into a dazzling spectacle when night falls," said a visitor surnamed Wang to the village. "The beautiful illumination breathes new life into the historic setting."

The rapid growth of the local nighttime economy has led to a significant increase in power consumption, and the escalating demand for electrical load has also placed higher requirements on the local power grid infrastructure, Zhou said, adding that electric power has become an essential factor to invigorate the village's nighttime economy.

After on-site assessments, it was estimated that Xinghua village's nighttime power load would reach 80 kilowatts and existing power lines, with their smaller diameter, were insufficient to meet the current demand.

"Many people from nearby counties and cities choose to visit Xinghua at night. The restaurants, shops and homestays within the scenic area consume significant amounts of electricity," said Zheng Shanlin, an employee at State Grid Yiyang County Power Supply Co.

"Therefore, we conduct regular nighttime inspections to promptly address any potential issues, ensuring everyone can safely enjoy the night scenery and unique charm of the ancient village," Zheng said.

To thoroughly resolve the power supply issues, the electricity supplier installed additional transformers, repositioned certain facilities, and upgraded over 1,200 meters of distribution lines to ensure a reliable and uninterrupted supply, it said.

Henan is not alone in backing rural tourism with full support and



reliable energy push. Driving along the highway in Linxia, Gansu province, one can enjoy the serene scenery with gentle breezes and endless green meadows. At this time of the year, the expansive landscapes of Linxia are adorned with blooming wildflowers under clear skies.

At the intersection of the Linxia and Hezheng sections of the Taishan tourism cluster lies the Yunshang Hezhou health resort. The cultural and wellness tourism base spans 30,000 square meters and offers a blend of local cultural experience, health-focused cuisine, leisure activities and eco-friendly farming.

"Currently, it's the peak tourist

season, and visitors are flocking to the tourism cluster from all around the country, boosting our business," said Yao Xinzhou, head of the resort, adding that with its lush green landscapes, clear waters and melodic birdsong, it aims to provide a retreat for urban visitors seeking a slow-paced natural tourism experience.

However, as the resort is located more than 2,300 meters above sea level, it can experience drastic temperature fluctuations between day and night, and thus relies heavily on electricity for accommodation and kitchen facilities, Yao said. "Monthly electricity usage can reach over 13,000 kilowatt-hours during peak times."

Linxia has therefore formulated a special inspection plan tailored to the electricity usage of the resort, including high-temperature load forecasting and safe operation strategies. It has also increased the frequency of inspections for power cables and equipment, and utilized advanced technical tools to monitor and record the condition of both indoor and outdoor electrical operations, said State Grid Linxia Power Supply Co.

According to a rural tourism development index report released by the culture and tourism bureau of Gansu, the province's rural tourism market experienced comprehensive growth last year, with 152.61

Above: An ancient village in Huangshan, Anhui province, attracts tourists from across the country in July.

Left: Visitors in traditional Chinese gowns stroll through an ancient tourist spot in Linxia, Gansu province, in May.

million trips throughout the year, up 71 percent year-on-year. Total revenue from rural tourism reached 48.19 billion yuan (\$6.67 billion), up 81.54 percent year-on-year.

The 2024 China Rural Tourism Development White Paper by industrial research company Fastdata said that the rural tourism sector emerged as a front-runner for the domestic tourism market, attracting about 800 million visits in the first quarter. The sector also generated an output value of over 900 billion yuan and created over 60 million jobs last year, it said.

However, the development of rural tourism cannot be separated from efforts to advance infrastructure and support services in rural areas, where travel facilities, tourist services as well as management and operation capabilities may lag behind those in urban areas, the report said.

Targeting the gap, a guideline jointly issued by the country's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and eight other departments last month focuses on the improvement of tourism public services and the capacity to provide tourism-related public

services in weak areas, during peak hours and for groups with special needs, to ensure the system is compatible with the high-quality development of the tourism sector.

"In certain regions, particularly economically underdeveloped areas, tourism-related public infrastructure still lags behind. The functionality of services remains incomplete, and the level of development does not match the rapid growth of our tourism market," said a spokesman from the ministry in an earlier news conference.

"In this regard, filling the gaps and weaknesses in public tourism services, improving supporting services, further enhancing service quality and creating a favorable tourism environment are a crucial task before us," he said.

The next three to five years will see China establish an efficient tourism public service system featuring a complete structure, sound standards, smooth operation and high quality, according to the guideline.

"China has fully entered the era of 'mass tourism', characterized by the distinct trend of individual travel preference. The issuance of the guideline aligns with the developmental characteristics of the country's current tourism industry," said Li Yungang, a professor at the Capital University of Economics and Business.

Li said the guideline is conducive to building a systematic and comprehensive public tourism service system at the national level, which will greatly enhance the travel experience for tourists.

Cold storage proves a tonic for Henan's crimson berries

By LI JIAYING

One afternoon last month, as workers at Linshuo Traditional Chinese Medicine Specialized Cooperative meticulously went through the process of peeling, pitting, sorting and sun-drying fresh *Cornus officinalis* berries (also known as Japanese cornelian cherries), the sight appeared unusual for mid-summer as the fruit is usually ripe for harvest in fall.

The fact is, the berries were not freshly picked but freshly retrieved from their refrigerated sanctuary, an effort intensified by growers in Miping town in Xixia county, Henan province, to better sustain the area's specialized pharmaceutical industry.

Cornus officinalis is widely used in traditional Chinese medicine, or TCM, as a tonic and has been recognized for its beneficial pharmacological effects on the reproductive system.

With a rich history of cultivation, Xixia is known as the "Hometown of *Cornus officinalis*" and a national

production base. Nestled at altitudes between 600 meters and 1,200 meters, Xixia's berries are famed for their vivid red color, large size, thick flesh and potent medicinal properties.

Late autumn and early winter usually herald the fruit's harvest season, when growers would de-seed and dry the freshly picked berries and ready them for the market. However, the peak harvest season often sees a glut and drives prices down, so staggered sales can significantly boost profits, said Qiao Siqing, the cold storage manager at the cooperative.

"Cold storage can help extend the shelf life of *Cornus officinalis* by over a year, effectively bypassing the price troughs of peak production," Qiao said, displaying a handful of refrigerated plump crimson berries that looked as if they had just been picked.

The *Cornus officinalis* stored in refrigerated warehouses is of much better quality than those kept outdoors over winter, fetching an addi-

tional 6,000 yuan (\$830) per metric ton, he said.

As a result, the cooperative has invested over 20 million yuan in the construction of a state-of-the-art integrated cold storage facility, which boasts a capacity of 6,000 cubic meters and can house 1,500 tons of herbal medicines.

"The strategic move has lengthened and solidified the industrial chain for *Cornus officinalis* cultivation, fostering a modern industry model that seamlessly integrates planting, processing, transportation, freezing and sales," Qiao said.

In this regard, the local power supplier has also undertaken a comprehensive upgrade to support cold storage with improved electrical infrastructure. It has revamped 10-kilovolt lines, regularly dispatched experts for on-site inspections and offered guidance on the scientific use of electrical equipment, eliminating potential hazards and ensuring safe, standardized electricity usage, said State Grid Xixia County Power Supply Co.

Currently, Xixia's embrace of *Cornus officinalis* cultivation spans more than 200,000 *mu* (13,333 hectares), with an annual production of over 4,000 tons, accounting for nearly 50 percent of the national output.

As a major production base for herbal medicines in the country, Xixia has also developed a full-chain industry system that strategically positions TCM as a cornerstone for specialized rural development.

Take Miping town, for example. Its medicinal plant cultivation area spanned 60,000 *mu* last year. It boasts an annual output value of over 1 billion yuan. It is now home to two large-scale TCM processing enterprises, one small-scale decoction processing factory and 37 professional cooperatives, solidifying its status as a veritable "herbal town".

In addition, local growers are also weaving themselves into the herbal medicine industry fabric, leveraging this sector to chart their paths to prosperity.

Seventy percent of Miping's farmers are engaged in herbal medicine



A visitor enjoys a swing surrounded by *Cornus officinalis* bushes in Xixia county, Henan province, in March.

WANG XIAOJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

production, with per capita income rising by over 5,000 yuan, according to data from the Xixia county government.

"I've planted over 800 *Cornus officinalis* trees, yielding about 1,000 kilograms of dried berries after processing. This year, I can sell them for over 60,000 yuan," said Zhou Jinwei, a grower from Da-

zhuang village of Miping town.

Xixia has developed over 300,000 *mu* of more than 20 types of herbs used in making TCM, including *Cornus officinalis*, forsythia, and yellow ginger. The county now yields an annual production of over 60,000 tons, with an output value of nearly 500 million yuan, according to local government data.

COMMENT

Editorials

Worries that situation in Middle East is on the brink of spiraling out of control not unfounded

China is among those countries that have expressed their concern at the latest turn of events in the Middle East.

In a routine news conference, responding to a question about the killing of Hamas' top political leader Ismail Haniyeh in a targeted missile strike on Wednesday in Teheran, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said, "We are greatly concerned about the incident, firmly oppose and condemn the assassination, and are deeply worried that this incident may lead to further instability in the region."

While falling short of admitting culpability for Haniyeh's execution, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country "will exact a very heavy price from any aggression against us on any front" after Iran accused Israel of carrying out the strike and vowed "a harsh and painful response".

Iran naming Israel as the perpetrator is not surprising given that Netanyahu has repeatedly stated Israel's objective is to completely eliminate Hamas, that Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders were on Israel's most wanted list after the group waged surprise attacks on southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza, and that Tel Aviv and its ally Washington have orchestrated previous extraterritorial hits on leaders of Hamas and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in recent years.

With Israel's onslaught against the Palestinians continuing in Gaza, Haniyeh's assassination will, no doubt, fuel more hatred between Hamas and Israel and trigger more anti-Israel sentiment among Hamas sympathizers, thus giving greater momentum to the vicious circle of violence that has convulsed the region.

With Haniyeh's killing triggering fears that it presages a dangerous escalation of the animosities in the Middle East, a region already deeply mired in the monthslong Israel-Hamas conflict, it is only natural that members of the international community are urging that there be no further reckless moves that could ignite a broader conflict in the region.

Saying that China is deeply worried the incident may lead to further instability in the region and beyond, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman called for a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire in Gaza as soon as possible to avoid any further escalation of conflict and confrontation.

The Israel-Hamas conflict has already spilled over to other parts of the region, involving more regional actors, including the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. If Iran steps in to avenge the death on its soil, it could also drag the United States directly into the conflict, which has already killed more than 39,445 Palestinians in Gaza and displaced approximately 2 million people.

Yet for the warmongering Israeli leader, dragging the US into a direct conflict with Iran may seem attractive as a way to help him out of the current quagmire of the prolonged war with Hamas and the rising opposition to it both at home and abroad.

With the backing of the US, Israel is already striking out in all directions, creating more obstacles to international efforts to broker peace.

A day before Haniyeh's assassination, Israel claimed a strike in the Lebanese capital of Beirut that killed Fouad Shokor, Hezbollah's top military commander. As such, if Washington continues to give tacit consent to Israel and allow it to attack whoever and wherever it wants, it is tantamount to handing it a match to light the fuse of an all-out regional war.

Further instability in the Middle East serves no country's interest, including Israel and the US. Key players in the region should exercise the utmost restraint to stop the vicious circle of tit-for-tat retaliations, so as to prevent the situation from spiraling out of control.

The chaos in the Middle East and the worsening humanitarian crisis should spur the international community to make even greater efforts to resolve the regional animosities through negotiations and dialogue and push for a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire in Gaza as soon as possible so as to avoid further escalation of the hostilities.

Weakness of US' 'iron chip curtain' exposed

According to a Reuters report, the Joe Biden administration plans to expand the so-called Foreign Direct Product Rule to more Chinese semiconductor fabrication factories.

The Rule that was first introduced in 1959 gives the US government the power to control the trading of US technologies, including in products made in a foreign country. The Biden administration has employed the provision to ban foreign companies from exporting semiconductor manufacturing equipment and advanced chips that contain US technologies or parts to Chinese companies.

Yet Japanese, Dutch and Republic of Korea companies, including Tokyo Electron and ASML, the two largest chipmaking equipment manufacturers, along with companies from 30 other countries and regions, are to be exempted from the expanded controls. That companies from Malaysia, Singapore, Israel and China's Taiwan island, are not exempt serves to expose the symbolic nature of the move as part of the Democratic Party's China-bashing stunts before the presidential election.

The other takeaway from the move is that more and more US allies are starting to distance themselves from the Biden administration's "chip war" against China in fear of being left high and dry should the former "America-first" US president prove successful in his bid to return to the White House. In other words, instead of showing the success of its "chip alliance" scheme to thwart China's high-tech progress, the prospective new rule indicates that the "united front" the Biden administration has painstakingly formed over the past more than three years is beginning to collapse.

Since the US Commerce Department says that it categorizes countries and regions "based on factors like diplomatic relationships and security concerns", it might be the good relations that Malaysia and Singapore have with China that are the reason the two Southeast Asian countries are not exempted from the expanded export ban.

Given the fraught cross-strait relations thanks to the US' interference, the only reason that the Taiwan island is not to be granted the pardon is that Washington knows its proxies in Taipei do not have the audacity to bark. As long as the move can further estrange the two sides across the Taiwan Strait economically, Taipei, in the view of its US ally, should feel grateful to the latter's assistance to its "pro-independence" agenda, even at the cost of relevant companies on the island.

And given the strong support Israel counts on the Biden administration now over the Middle East situation, its non-exemption status is not surprising, as there is always a price to pay for US help.

Meanwhile, US semiconductor manufacturing equipment companies, such as the California-based Nvidia and Lam Research, will certainly be among the victims of the move, which means that their major competitors in more than 30 developed economies, can compete in their absence for their previously sizable share of the Chinese market.

As a matter of fact, the chip-related deals between China and Japan, the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea have kept rising steadily over the past years as companies from the latter have found plenty of ways to steer clear of the US government's de facto coercion. Which might be a practical factor spurring the Biden administration to issue the new rule signaling that it will allow them to trade with China, making the move a face-saving attempt.

The marked rise in the share price of ASML, Tokyo Electron and some other exempted companies upon the release of the news speaks volumes of the market's optimistic sentiment about the demise of the "iron chip curtain" the US has tried so hard to draw around the world's largest chip market.

The rise and fall of that "iron chip curtain" clearly demonstrates that the Biden administration is not only trying to coerce its allies to contain China but also playing the "China card" to exploit its allies.

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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

PLA a key force contributing to world peace and stability

The Chinese People's Liberation Army celebrated the 97th anniversary of its founding on Thursday.

Chinese troops have fought their way through battles and wars and made huge sacrifices to achieve one brilliant victory after another. They have made immense contributions to realizing China's national independence and people's liberation, safeguarding State sovereignty, security and development interests, supporting the country's economic and social construction and protecting people's lives.

Keeping pace with the development of the country, China's military has become more modern, with ever-enhanced deterrence and defense capabilities.

The PLA has always upheld the defensive military strategy, pursuing

peace, development, cooperation and win-win results. From the very first day when it possessed nuclear weapons, China solemnly announced that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and unconditionally not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones.

China and its military have always stood for the peaceful settlement of international disputes, insisted on resolving conflicts and problems with relevant countries through dialogue, negotiation and consultation on an equal footing, and opposed the willful use or threat of force. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese military has never initiated a war or occupied an inch of

land belonging to other countries.

The Chinese military has also always been a staunch force in safeguarding world peace. It has taken an active part in international military cooperation and provided public goods for the international community and regional security.

China is the largest contributor of peacekeepers among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Its navy has sent task forces to the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the coast of Somalia on escort missions for ships passing there. The Chinese armed forces have undertaken many international responsibilities and obligations within their capacity and made more contributions to safeguarding world peace and promoting common development.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

AI patents show country's innovation potential

For anyone who uses modern appliances or electronic devices, be it a smartphone, a tablet or even a simple table lamp, the latest data from China National Intellectual Property Administration - saying the number of effective domestic artificial intelligence inventive patents had reached 378,000 by the end of 2023 - is undoubtedly good news, because it means the possibility of even smarter appliances and devices arriving soon.

The penetration of AI in modern daily life is deeper than many people may realize. While it's known to all that electric vehicles with cruise control systems have AI chips inside to recognize the road and control

the steering wheel, many might not know that even doors that recognize the user's face or voice have an AI-supportive chip inside to "remember" the biometric data in storage and compare it with that of the potential user, while many email service providers that send junk emails to spam folders have an AI program in their server to sniff them out. And these applications are what a majority of the emerging AI inventive patents are all about.

With a 1.4 billion-people market and one-third of its 1.4 million new engineers every year working in AI-related jobs, it's natural that China's AI inventive patents grow by 40

percent year-on-year, 1.4 times the speed of the global average.

The market will decide which of the new inventions will evolve into actual products that can make daily life more convenient for all. With the new inventive AI patents, it will become possible for EVs to drive more safely under AI control in the future, and for locks to talk with the person at the door to know whether he/she is the house owner, or for fridges to open and present the user's favorite drink at the latter's command. All this will happen thanks to the inventive patents being developed today.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Bigger reformer-baked cake can prevent 'involution'

The central authorities recently urged governments of various levels to take necessary measures to prompt industries to strengthen self-discipline and prevent vicious "involutionary" competition.

"Involutionary" competition refers to the fierce competition among companies for limited resources. This competition forces all parties to make more efforts, but may ultimately lead to increased overall pressure and reduced efficiency. Such competition does not result in growth in productivity or a more advanced economic model. Without significant breakthroughs, society spirals into a state of internal friction, with increased complexity but not expansion.

The authorities need to provide an institutional solution.

In the past few years, price wars and verbal wars in some industries have repeatedly become the focus of public opinion. For example, in the new energy vehicle industry, many car company executives have publicly called for an end to "involutionary" competition. In the

absence of innovation and increasingly serious product homogeneity, if enterprises only have the lowest price card to play, it is not conducive to the long-term development of the industry.

Fundamentally, the reason why the "involutionary" competition is intensifying in some industries is because the cake is limited.

If the market demand lacks growth and there are not many options left for enterprises, then it is highly likely that they will turn to vicious competition at a low level. From this perspective, only by promoting industrial upgrading, strengthening emerging industries and future industries, continuously expanding the pie, and cultivating a large number of gazelle and unicorn enterprises can the problem of "involutionary" competition be fundamentally solved.

It is innovation that makes the pie bigger. How to more reasonably balance the allocation of factor resource endowments in terms of market access, factor acquisition, government procurement, bidding, rewards

and subsidies, how to allow market players to let go more calmly, and how to avoid the industry from passively falling into the vicious cycle of the bad driving out the good are all important issues related to building an innovation ecosystem.

The authorities should ensure that all types of business entities can use production factors equally and participate in market competition fairly in accordance with the law, so that all enterprises stand on the same starting line and turn more energy to product innovation and management reform, rather than falling into vicious competition of "killing one thousand enemies and hurting eight hundred of oneself".

It is thus necessary to cultivate nutritious soil so that all market entities can thrive. The key to curbing "involutionary" competition, therefore, is to promote the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and promoting high-level scientific and technological self-reliance.

— THEPAPER.CN

COMMENT

Yi Shaohua

Unified market to promote modernization

The resolution of the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasized the need to build a unified national market and refine the systems underpinning the market economy.

Accelerating the construction of a unified national market is part of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform and necessary to "perfect" the socialist market economy, ensuring the circulation of the domestic economy, and minimizing global economic risks.

A unified domestic market is a hallmark of a major economy. As the world's second-largest economy and second-largest consumer market, China has abundant human capital, the most complete industrial system globally, and growing high-tech innovation capability. These factors underpin China's advantages in manufacturing and supply.

Also, a unified national market can leverage market regulations, optimize resource allocation through market mechanisms, guide investment and industry flows, facilitate industrial upgrading and help adjust the production structure. Yet China can achieve high-quality development and Chinese modernization only after fostering a dynamic, competitive, open and orderly market.

A "unified market" here means an integrated domestic market that allows the free flow of goods, services and factors of production across industries, regions and sectors, and follows standards and rules. While "open" means the capability to ensure the free flow of goods and production factors across borders to participate in the international division of labor, "competitive" means market entities having the ability to make rational profit by taking advantage of price and supply-demand mechanisms, and ensuring fair access to market information and opportunities. And "orderly" means maintaining market rules to promote fair competition and resource flow, and granting all market entities equal access to production factors.

Building a unified national market involves two key factors. The first is the improvement of the market system and comprehensive function to enable different types of markets (goods, factors, tangible, intangible, domestic, international, rural, urban, spot and futures) to coexist and complement each other in order to promote economic circulation. The second is the requirement of effective market mechanisms, including price, competition, supply-demand and risk-curbing mechanisms.

To improve the market system, it is necessary to cultivate vibrant suppliers and buyers. Suppliers need market entities that operate independently and are responsible for their profits and losses. For that, the authorities need to develop

the public sector while supporting the development of the non-public sector, and reduce business entry barriers and unnecessary approval procedures to encourage entrepreneurship. And to boost demand, the authorities should take measures to increase people's incomes, and to make good use of market mechanisms, they should optimize market economy institutions, better protect intellectual property rights, grant equal market access to all market entities, promote fair competition, and standardize economic activities.

For all this, the authorities need to establish a standard system to create an open and unified market environment, which requires eliminating local protectionism and monopolies, withdrawing local regulations that hinder fair competition, and further shortening the negative list.

Strengthening the standard system is necessary in businesses such as intelligent logistics, e-commerce, and agricultural product distribution, while it is important to strengthen supervision and evaluation of standards, and standardize the admin-

istrative management of certification.

It is also necessary to eliminate monopoly in industries to foster a fair competitive environment, separate the functions of the government and enterprises, curb improper market competition and intervention, and crack down on dumping and counterfeiting. But while eliminating local protectionism and regional barriers, the authorities should ensure the move accords with the local conditions, prevents homogeneous competition, and facilitates the free flow of goods and services.

Besides, the authorities should take measures to help transform the medium- and high-end industrial manufacturers with high potential, high added value and high technical requirements, and allow market mechanisms to eliminate long-term unprofitable enterprises from the market.

The authorities also need to further improve infrastructure connectivity among different regions and boost the urban-rural circulation system. Improving the infrastructure facilities in rural areas and the less-developed western region

will enhance inter-regional coordination and reduce urban-rural disparities, which in turn will improve the quality and efficiency of the distribution system.

Moreover, the authorities should strengthen the unified domestic market with new quality productive forces, which can give rise to new business forms, models and scenarios by helping upgrade technologies and industries, and promote information sharing with the aim of increasing regional market interaction and promote innovation.

In the new dual-circulation development paradigm, the unified domestic market will be large in scale, higher in quality, and be more integrated, open, competitive and orderly. Such a market will be more efficient, and promote high-quality development and Chinese modernization.

The author is a research fellow at the National Academy of Economic Strategy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Zhang Xinying

Effective early warnings secure the first line of defense

The year 2023 was the warmest since global records began in 1850. The rising temperatures are causing frequent extreme weather events and climate disasters worldwide. This underscores the necessity for collective action to combat climate change.

China experienced several extreme weather events during the first half of this year. Since the start of the rainy season, South China has been subjected to a series of intense precipitation events. The cumulative precipitation in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River has exceeded the levels observed during the same period in previous years. Heavy precipitation and extensive flooding have affected numerous provinces, including Anhui, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi and Guizhou. This has presented a significant challenge for the authorities in terms of flood prevention and management.

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent due to intensifying climate change. In its Sixth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that climate change has had a wide and far-reaching impact on the ecological system and society. Furthermore, the resulting risks are expected to become increasingly complex and more challenging to manage in the future.

It is therefore imperative that China prioritizes the enhancement of its early meteorological warning capabilities, given that it represents the first line of defense against extreme weather events. Evidence shows that the provision of just 24 hours' notice of an impending natural disaster can lead to a 30 percent reduction in damage, making early warnings a powerful tool in the fight against climate change.

China is the largest developing country in the world and is prone to frequent nat-

ural disasters. Official data show that the direct economic losses resulting from natural disasters in China during the previous year amounted to 345.45 billion yuan (approximately \$47.6 billion).

The potential for a cascading impact of compound extreme weather events is increasing due to rapid socioeconomic development across the world. This issue can be addressed by establishing a state-of-the-art early warning system. In this regard, it is crucial that China establishes an efficient and effective early warning system, further strengthens the coordination between meteorological and disaster-response departments, and pays closer attention to point-to-point weather forecasts.

China attaches great importance to disaster prevention and mitigation, as well as the advancement of its meteorological department through the provision of precise monitoring and accurate forecasting mechanisms.

In fact, the government has established a Chinese-style early warning system that encompasses numerous industries, communities, rural areas and individuals. Additionally, it has implemented a comprehensive array of policies, regulations, and standards at the national, provincial, municipal and county levels with the objective of enhancing inter-departmental coordination, thereby enabling the issuance of warnings concerning imminent extreme weather events. It has also completed the first nationwide survey on natural disaster risks, which will help improve its disaster prevention and mitigation efforts.

Moreover, China has established a mechanism to ensure the suspension of classes, work and transport services in high-risk areas and high-sensitive industries as soon as early warnings are issued

about extreme weather events. Additionally, about 400,000 educational initiatives have been implemented with the objective of fostering raising awareness about disaster prevention and mitigation strategies among schools, villages, enterprises, and communities. This initiative aims to encourage individuals to relocate to safer areas to mitigate the impact of severe weather events.

China is behind developed countries in issuing warnings, particularly in remote areas. However, it has intensified its efforts in this regard, particularly through its engagement with the United Nations Early Warnings for All initiative. Its approach to disaster management entails enhancing disaster knowledge and management, and monitoring and forecasting both normal and extreme weather events, issuing warnings, and responding to natural disasters in a timely manner.

Currently, the meteorological department is well prepared to collect global multi-hazard threat data, analyze more than 10 types of meteorological and hydrological events, and assess the potential damage that these events could cause in advance.

The cornerstones of an effective early warning system are monitoring and forecasting. Following the completion of the largest network of ground-based observatories on Earth, China has become a global leader in space weather monitoring. Furthermore, a meteorological disaster-risk prediction model has been developed, which provides information on the types of disasters that may occur, the areas and industries that may be most affected, and the duration of the potential impact.

In accordance with the national emergency warning information system, Chi-

na has established a multi-tiered early warning system at national, provincial, municipal and county levels. This system is linked with 16 different sectors and industries, thereby ensuring the prompt collection and dissemination of information regarding extreme weather events.

It is crucial that disaster preparedness and response strategies are in place to facilitate the transformation of information into action. In this regard, China's high-level "call-and-response" mechanism is capable of notifying the local emergency departments of the timing of extreme weather events, and the extent of potential damage.

Moreover, China organizes a series of international training programs and seminars, which are designed to enhance the capacity of developing countries, including those with less developed economies, to effectively respond to extreme weather events. Additionally, China offers invaluable expertise in global forecasting, monitoring and risk assessment of extreme weather events, thereby contributing Chinese wisdom.

Nevertheless, it is important that the government take actions to promote innovation in the science and technology sector, enhance research on extreme weather events and their impacts on vulnerable regions and industries, develop advanced early warning technologies, and establish national standards for addressing climate change.

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The All-American Flag Act a sign of weakness, not strength, of the US

The All-American Flag Act signed into law by US President Joe Biden on Tuesday is aimed at promoting patriotism, but it actually exposes the sorry state of US politicians whose confidence in their own country seems to be weakening.

The act, introduced by Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine and Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio, mandates that the federal government purchase only those flags that are 100 percent made in the United States, compared with the previous requirement of just 50 percent.

If this is an example of US exceptionalism, it is certainly not in a good sense.

Americans are indeed patriotic. During my years of higher studies and work in and travel across the US, I saw more Americans displaying the national flag outside their apartment windows and in their yards and shops than I have seen in any other country, including in European countries.

The law has a strong anti-China tone because the US imports millions of flags from China — in 2017, it imported about 10 million national flags, with 99.5 percent of them coming from China.

The fact that China has not introduced legislation banning the production of US national flags due to those hostile US politicians shows China is much more open-minded, and less ideological and confrontational than the US government and lawmakers.

By demonstrating their country's strength through such a law, the US leaders and lawmakers are exposing their lack of confidence in their own country; in fact, the law is a sign of their weakness.

Many of the Made-in-China labels in the Democratic National Convention gift shops were removed beforehand to avoid controversy.

Senator Collins said: "the American flag serves as a symbol of our identity, resolve, and values as one people. To honor its significance, the federal government should only use flags entirely manufactured in the United States".

According to her logic, the flag act should be expanded to cover the US' state and local governments, because they too need to demonstrate their American identity and values. If so, should US lawmakers introduce bills that require the White House and the federal government to purchase only made-in-US furniture and office supplies? How about the suits, socks, shoes and underwear worn by the US president, because wearing 100 percent made-in-US clothes and shoes will make him look like a true POTUS to US citizens like Collins and Brown?

Or, how about a bill requiring US presidential campaigns to only use mementos made entirely in the US?

It is no secret that many items, from caps to T-shirts, sold in the Republican and Democratic parties' gift shops during presidential campaigns are made in China. I have seen firsthand the 2016 US presidential campaigns of former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and former president Donald Trump. Many of the Made-in-China labels in the Democratic National Convention gift shops were removed beforehand to avoid controversy. The list of such deceitful activities is very long.

The argument made by the two senators that the flag act will help create jobs in the US is totally false, because it is against Econ101 principles of microeconomics on comparative advantage. The US-made flags are far more expensive than the imported ones. Forcing the US federal government to buy such expensive flags will only contribute to the ballooning of the US' national debt, which hit an astronomical \$35 trillion on Monday.

The flag act is an attempt to cash in on the growing anti-trade and pessimistic sentiment among US citizens, because according to a Pew survey released on Monday, about 59 percent of Americans say the US has lost more than it has gained in terms of the cost and benefit of increased trade with other countries. And Gallup's Economic Confidence Index, also released on Monday, continues to show the long-term trend of negative public sentiment with regard to the current state and the future of the US economy.

But resorting to jingoism, in the name of promoting patriotism, and trade protectionism as reflected in the flag act will not help revive the US' manufacturing sector. Instead, it will make things worse. And that's why other countries have no interest in introducing such an absurd law.

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

DJOOMART OTORBAEV

Sanctions will result in reduction of dollar's influence

In her testimony to the House Financial Services Committee on July 9, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen cautioned that the world is increasingly moving away from the US dollar. She specifically underlined the negative role of sanctions: "We have very



powerful sanctions that are available because of the important role of the dollar in international transactions. The more we have

used sanctions, the more countries look for ways to engage in financial transactions that don't involve the dollar." Confidence in the dollar has recently declined due to the illegal freezing and subsequent confiscation of Russian assets by the G7 countries, disrupting the stability of the current global financial system. More than \$288 billion of Russian assets remain in the G7 countries, the European Union and Australia, of which 200 billion euros (\$218 billion) is in the EU. The frozen assets produce around \$3 billion in annual interest income.

In June, the G7 nations used those assets to give Ukraine a \$50 billion loan. This decision directly contravenes international law, which states that assets belong to their owner and not the country where they are located. The consequences of such illegal actions, including the erosion of trust among Western sovereign debt holders in their issuers, are causing serious concern among the buyers, although not yet panic.

As a result, countries in the Global South are attempting to divest from US government bonds. In April 2024, China's holdings of US treasuries fell from \$849 billion a year before to \$775 billion, the lowest level since 2009. During the same period, the other BRICS coun-

tries decreased their holdings of US treasury bonds as well: India sold \$1.4 billion, Brazil shed \$1.2 billion, and Saudi Arabia \$300 million. Earlier in the year Saudi Arabia indicated that it may sell some of its European debt assets if the G7 decided to confiscate Russia's frozen assets. The kingdom's finance ministry has communicated its disagreement with this idea to some G7 colleagues, with one person reportedly describing it as a veiled threat.

In her testimony, Yellen specifically noted the role of the enlarged BRICS in the coordinated shift away from the dollar.

The members of the expanded BRICS grouping have expressed long-standing concerns about the dollar's dominance in the global economy and its use as a political weapon. The BRICS countries, initially comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, later joined by Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have come together to increase their say and influence on the global stage.

The decline of the dollar has led to a search for settlement options in local currencies. For instance, China and Russia have been collaborating to create alternative payment systems, such as the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, or CIPS, which could be an alternative to the SWIFT system. At the beginning of the year, China and the United Arab Emirates carried out the first cross-border payments between the two nations using the digital dirham. This transaction utilized a newly developed digital platform and signifies the beginning of a new phase in converting central bank digital currencies.

Iran has announced that all transactions between Iran and Russia are now conducted without using dollars. Since last year, India and Russia have doubled their payments in national currencies

(rupee-ruble). Saudi Arabia is also seeking to diversify its economic partnerships, by exploring alternative currency agreements with the enlarged BRICS nations. If other significant oil exporters start accepting payments in alternative currencies, demand for US petrodollars will decrease, reducing their value and influence.

But a real breakthrough in mutual financial settlements would be creating a unified system for all the member countries of the bigger BRICS grouping. Apparently such a solution is not far off. Valentina Matviyenko, the speaker of Russia's Federation Council, announced at the BRICS parliamentary meeting on July 12 that work on an independent payment system "invulnerable to political pressure, abuse, and the interference of external sanctions" is ongoing.

Judging by the most recent information, the upcoming BRICS summit in Russia in October will prominently feature the establishment of an independent settlement payment system based on central bank digital currencies.

The BRICS countries are thus positioning themselves as representatives of an alternative economic order. Their efforts to create a more diversified and resilient financial network reflect a strategic desire to reduce dependence on the dominance and politicization of the US dollar and mitigate the impact of the US wielding current and future sanctions.

The status of the US dollar, once considered inviolable, is now becoming increasingly uncertain. As the global economic balance shifts, the strategies and alliances formed today will determine tomorrow's new economic and financial order. The US and its partners need to approach this new dynamic cautiously, stop using sanctions and carefully analyze the consequences of their unilateral



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actions for the sustainability of their future economic and geopolitical position.

Yellen's powerful warning highlights a critical moment in reshaping the architecture of the global financial system. It is evident to everyone that the misuse of sanctions by the US and other Western

countries will accelerate the shift toward a fairer and more multipolar world. As more countries seek alternatives to the US dollar, the world may soon witness a new financial landscape that will forever change international relations, global trade, investment and the global power dynamics.

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 author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WU GUODING

Strengthening Asia's financial safety net

As the geopolitical situation worsens, the Asia-Pacific region should improve currency swap deals, further develop bond markets and push for IMF quota adjustment, while China and the RMB do their bit

Against the backdrop of high interest rates maintained by the US Federal Reserve and escalating geopolitical tensions, there has been a collective devaluation of Asian currencies in the first half of 2024. Asia's major currencies, including the Japanese yen, the



Republic of Korea's won, the Indian rupee, the Indonesian rupiah and the Vietnamese dong, have all suffered sharp depreciation. In early July 2024, the exchange rate of the Japanese yen against the US dollar was close to 162 yen per dollar, hitting its lowest level since 1986. The issue of financial security in Asia has once again aroused the attention of Asian countries.

In the past 20 years, the degree of economic and trade integration within Asia has been deepening. According to statistics, about 60 percent of merchandise trade and foreign direct investment of Asian economies takes place within Asia. But financial integration in Asia is lagging behind. The US dollar remains the primary currency for pricing, settlement, financing and reserve in Asia. For example, Asia's exports and imports to the US account for 9 percent and 5 percent of Asia's total exports and imports, respectively, but 89 percent of Asia's exports and 77 percent of its imports are denominated in US dollars. This makes the region very sensitive to changes in the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy and the US dollar's exchange rate.

The high level of national debt in certain Asian countries has also increased financial risks in the region. Asian countries have seen an increase in debt in the wake of

the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the US Federal Reserve's high interest rates, Asian countries will have to raise rates as well, further raising the risk of debt defaults and consequently a financial crisis.

The geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific region also affects Asia's financial security. In recent years, the US has formed cliques in Asia, aiming to influence intra-regional economic and trade cooperation and the stability of industry and supply chains through the launch of such schemes as the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity and the "Chip 4 alliance". This will inevitably have a great impact on intra-regional economic integration and further affect financial stability in Asia.

In the face of the above-mentioned risks, it is imperative for Asian countries to strengthen financial cooperation within the region, strengthen the building of the Asian financial safety net, and enhance Asian countries' capabilities to cope with financial risks.

To start with, Asian countries should improve the Chiang Mai Initiative with the goal of maintaining regional financial stability.

The CMI was the first regional currency swap arrangement launched by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China, Japan and the ROK — collectively known as ASEAN+3 — in 2000 and upgraded to the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization in 2010.

At present, CMIM still has some flaws in capital scale, loan conditions, operating efficiency and so on, which limits the role of the mechanism. The CMIM needs to expand the foreign exchange reserve pool and enrich the types and maturity of loan instruments. The quota payment method of



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member states needs to be changed from the committed contributions to both committed contributions and paid-in capital. In order to fill the gap between the supply and demand of regional liquidity funds, enhance the level of regional financial integration and improve the multi-layer global financial safety net, it is necessary to upgrade CMIM to a regional monetary fund.

Second, Asian countries should further develop Asian bond markets to promote local savings for

local investment and reduce reliance on non-regional financial markets and bank financing.

The Asian Bond Markets Initiative was adopted in 2003 by ASEAN+3. Over the past more than two decades, the bond markets of major Asian economies have grown steadily. By the end of 2022, the stock of bond markets in representative Asian economies (including China, Japan, South Korea and six ASEAN countries) had reached \$33.4 trillion. But the breadth and

depth of Asian bond market development needs to be further improved.

From the perspective of the composition of bond varieties, the proportion of corporate bonds is relatively small. At the end of 2022, the proportion of corporate bonds in representative Asian economies was only 27.4 percent. With the development of corporate bonds lagging behind, the bond market can hardly play a role in avoiding exchange rate and term risks.

In terms of the scale of the bond markets, the scale of bond markets in Asia's representative economies accounted for 102 percent of GDP at the end of 2022, but there is still a big gap compared with European countries and the US. By the end of 2022, the share was 204 percent and 135 percent in the US and the EU, respectively.

In order to promote the development of the Asian bond market, Asian countries should expand the scale of the bond market, optimize the structure of the bond market, particularly by expanding the proportion of corporate bonds, strengthen risk prevention and control, and improve the building of relevant systems, including enriching risk-hedging strategies and establishing a rating system in line with Asia's market conditions.

Furthermore, Asian countries should push for the IMF quota adjustment as soon as possible to better reflect the status of Asian countries in the global economy. They need to strengthen cooperation and connectivity in financial infrastructure, including further opening up the payment environment among countries and facilitating cross-border local currency transactions. They should also continue to make good use of bilateral currency swaps and improve their domestic financial safety nets.

The steady development of the Chinese economy will provide impetus and guarantee for the economic growth and financial stability in Asia.

First, China should promote the development of local currency markets in Asia through more use of RMB in the region.

With the advancement of the internationalization of the renminbi, the renminbi is being used more often in Asia, especially in ASEAN member states. The Renminbi Cross-border Interbank Payment System has covered all ASEAN member states, and most ASEAN countries have included the renminbi in their foreign exchange reserves.

Second, the renminbi bond market is an important driving force for the development of Asian financial markets.

The renminbi bond market accounts for roughly 80 percent of the Asian bond market. New issuance in China's bond market is also the largest source of new issuance in the Asian bond market, accounting for a third of new issuance.

Third, China has an important role to play in the building of financial cooperation mechanisms in Asia.

China is one of the largest contributors to the CMIM, accounting for 32 percent of its total foreign exchange reserves. China has also signed bilateral currency swap agreements with a number of Asian countries.

The author is an associate researcher with the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

A tasty approach to eating well

Documentary celebrates food's various shapes and sizes, giving viewers a wider choice, **Li Yingxue** reports.



From top: Food is a cornerstone of the markets, as shown in the documentary series, including tofu pudding and beef stalls at the market in Jiaodai town, Xi'an, Shaanxi province; and lamb soup and fried fish stalls at the market in Feixian county, Linyi in Shandong province.

In supermarkets, shoppers may find that fruit and vegetables are almost uniform in size and neatly arranged on the shelves according to the requirements of the supermarkets.

However, at a vibrant outdoor bazaar in Feixian county, Linyi, Shandong province, the aspect of vegetables that attracts many shoppers is their unique shapes, such as thin, "snake-like" melons, "multi-legged" radishes, eggplants that appear to wave hello and potatoes that look like ducks.

One of the vendors, Cui Jingyu elaborates on selling his oddly shaped, peculiar-looking melons. "These are first-harvest melons. Due to their nonstandard shapes, supermarkets don't accept them, but they taste really good. Let me open one up so you can try it," Cui yells to buyers.

His melons quickly sell out, with many customers asking for more.

With great care, Cui meticulously wipes the dust off each melon displayed on the ground. "My life revolves around these melons. They are my treasures," he says with a smile.

Cui's story is featured in the newly released documentary series *Market's Legends* currently airing on Tencent Video, Fujian Straits satellite TV and Southeast TV. This six-episode series provides an immersive exploration of six periodic markets in China, highlighting authentic local cuisine, fresh vegetables and the vibrant tapestry of everyday life.

Periodic bazaars, many first formed in rural areas, unlike regular markets, are expansive and only operate on specific days each month, for example, the first or 15th day of the Chinese lunar calendar months. On the monthly open market day, the atmosphere is electric.

The dynamic environment captured the attention of general director Wang Shengzhi and executive director Yang Yan, prompting them to embark on this fascinating filming journey.

While exploring and filming these outdoor markets, Wang experienced a profound sense of nostalgia. Time seems to stand still, with goods and food remaining almost unchanged from decades ago, reflecting a timeless simplicity in the hearts of the vendors.

"The markets are still thriving, untouched by trendy internet-famous snacks and other novelties," Wang says.

"Each bazaar offers products unique to the local area. And when vendors gather, they are like old friends chatting a lot, with few using their phones to kill time."

Wang says that the documentary series' market selection is based on one criterion: authenticity. These bazaars have evolved and are not as organized as commodity exchange centers or standardized vegetable markets. There are no uniform processes for stocking or selling; the items, mostly grown by farmers, escape the confines of industrialized production and do not undergo meticulous selection for display shelves at indoor supermarkets.

"We're filming nonstandardized bazaars and nonstandardized lives to remind everyone that people need to live among others and be in relationships, even if it's just the transactional relationships found in



Top: Wang Shengzhi (center) directs the documentary shooting at a bazaar in Feixian county, Linyi, Shandong province. **Above:** Wang (right) takes footage in Lancang county in Pu'er, Yunnan province.

markets," Wang says. "I believe people should go out, meet others and experience love."

Market's Legends explores six vibrant bazaars across China: Feixian county, Linyi in Shandong province; Jiaodai town in Xi'an, Shaanxi province; Xinglong town in Wanning, Hainan province; Zaohua town in Shenyang, Liaoning province; Lancang county in Pu'er, Yunnan province; and Niufu town in Zigong, Sichuan province.

The documentary tries to highlight each market's unique blend of local characteristics, such as Shaanxi's carb-heavy delights, Hainan's fruit paradise and Sichuan's ancient town charm.

The production team also tries to find touching life stories that simultaneously happen among the vendors. Most of the stories recorded in the documentaries are said to be "impromptu scenarios."

The documentary also tells the story of online influencers, such as Geng Rongpei, who reports on the market's most eye-catching events and personalities, leveraging his online presence to highlight the lively market scene on his social media accounts. Despite his flair for generating buzz, Geng shows a compassionate side, like featuring a mute cook and buying apricots from a vendor who's 80 years old. "Even though my own life may seem chaotic, I can't bear to see others suffer," he explains in the documentary.

others — all cost just 48 yuan (\$6.62) at the bazaar.

Many visitors prefer to enjoy their breakfast at these lively stalls, according to Yang. "Seeing a line makes people curious and eager to line up also and try the food," Yang says. "The communal atmosphere enhances the taste and chatting with vendors adds a personal touch that goes beyond the food itself."

Wang Shengzhi believes that the finest foods are those that remain true to their origins. Unaffected by trendy food fads and geographical constraints, local cuisines maintain their unique characteristics, including their imperfections. "I'm drawn to food with 'flaws' — those authentic county and town specialties. Such foods are what I am keen to feature in future projects."

He has produced the documentary series *Breakfast in China*, known for its distinctive personal style. With a lighthearted and lively tone, the series explores breakfast foods nationwide, but on a deeper level, it reveals the everyday joys and sorrows of ordinary people.

In contrast to *Breakfast in China*, where each episode runs for about six or seven minutes, *Market's Legends* features 30-minute episodes focusing on five different stories that take place within the same market, with fresh impromptu plots.

"The market is a mosaic of stalls, each with its own unfolding story. ... These stories coexist on the same plane. It may lack a traditional narrative arc or continuous character relationships. Everything happens in fleeting moments," Wang Shengzhi explains.

Viewers of the documentary series may have the impression that it prominently features smiles. Wang Shengzhi recalls the time while filming in Yunnan, when he cracked a simple joke. Despite it being simple, a male avocado vendor laughed heartily, demonstrating the genuine, unrestrained joy found at the market.

"I hadn't seen people laugh so freely in a long time. At the market, the most valuable thing I encountered was the authentic range of smiles," says the director.

Contact the writer at liyixue@chinadaily.com.cn



From top: Various snacks, pickled meat as well as all kinds of fruit, sold at the market in Lancang county in Pu'er, Yunnan province, also featured in the documentary series, *Market's Legends*, directed by Wang Shengzhi. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

What's on



Reptile epic

Dinosaurs roamed the Earth more than 175 million years ago, before being wiped out. Archaeological discoveries and scientific research have helped people gain a general picture of the glorious days when these reptiles dominated the world.

Now, 500 fossils and skeletons have been brought together for *Dinosaurs Unearthed*, an exhibition that seeks to bring to life the era of the dinosaurs at Meet You Museum in Beijing's 798 Art Zone. With the aid of digital reenactment, the show focuses on the species that once thrived in this part of the world.

China was once home to more than 300 different kinds of dinosaurs, and fossils have been discovered all over the country, among them *Lufengosaurus*, which was found in Yunnan province. The exhibition runs until Oct 7.

10 am-5:30 pm, Mondays to Thursdays, 10 am-6 pm Fridays, 10 am-7 pm Saturdays and Sundays; E02, Tuoci Yijie, 798 Art Zone, Chaoyang district, Beijing.



True to the heart

Liang Hao's ongoing exhibition at UCCA Center for Contemporary Art,

Pacing the Void, shows her exploration of some 40 years to establish a nonfigurative approach to sculpture, and to integrate personal experiences of living at home and abroad with her renewed understanding of tradition. The exhibition runs until Sept 8.

The works on show are displayed in two parts in accordance with the materials they were made of — wood and plaster. She cuts wood into pieces and reassembles them; and plaster has been a working companion, a common medium for a sculptor. Liang has formed them in new ways to discuss the relations between one and their surroundings.

10 am-7 pm, closed on Mondays. 798 Art Zone, 4 Jiuxiangqiao Lu, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-5780-0200.

Absolute light

How the Light Gets In, a quote from Canadian poet and musician Leonard Cohen's song *Anthem* has been taken to describe the art of late Polish painter and draughtsman Stefan Gierowski who, in a career spanning six decades, was committed to showing the importance and brilliance of light by using a vivid palette of colors.

The exhibition ongoing at the Art Museum of Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing runs until Sept 1 and surveys Gierowski's intense interest in light, in different senses — especially, his interest in space exploration and scientific research.

Gierowski's paintings also reveal the influence of the philosophy of Laozi, which inspired him to explore concepts of the void and

emptiness in his work. 9:30 am-5:30 pm, closed on Mondays. 8 Huaqiadi Nanjie, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6477-1575.

CHINA DAILY



LIFESHANGHAI



Pop singer Jeff Chang Shin-che donates 12 elegant qipao made in the 1930s and 1940s in Shanghai to the Shanghai Museum. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pop star makes fashionable gesture

The 'prince of love ballads' donates vintage qipao to museum to showcase their eternal appeal, **Zhang Kun** reports.

Jeff Chang Shin-che, known as "the prince of love ballads" in the Chinese pop music scene, donated 12 vintage qipao that he collected to the Shanghai Museum on July 24.

"I remember as a child seeing my maternal grandmother and great-grandmother. They would always dress up and put on their qipao before going out," the singer says at the donation ceremony at the Shanghai Museum. "The memory inspired my interest in traditional Chinese clothing and that's how I started my collection."

Born in 1967 in Taiwan, Chang began his music career in 1989. Over the past decades, he released a series of chart-topping albums and maintained his popularity across the Taiwan Strait and Southeast Asia.

Following his advancing singing career, he developed a strong interest in antiques and became a dedicated collector of vintage Chinese garments, furniture and early 1900s commercial poster calendars.

As a curator, he organized a series of exhibitions and compiled books about his collection. From May 2019 to October 2020, Chang and his team created the exhibition *Min Chao, or Folk Art and Fashion*, featuring rare manuscripts of calendar posters from the early 20th century, which were presented at the Aurora Museum in Shanghai.

"From that exhibition, we noticed Chang's research and collection of modern Chinese clothing and fashion culture, especially his unique perspective on qipao," says Yu Ying, a researcher in the handicrafts department of the Shanghai Museum.

"Qipao takes up quite an important section of my collection," Chang says, adding that his collection totals "several thousand".

He bought some at auctions and some at antique shops in different cities. "I've collected them through many different channels," he says. "This introduced me to other collec-

tors and I made friends in completely different circles."

Chang has long been in contact with the researchers of the Shanghai Museum, sometimes soliciting their professional opinions. A fanatic lover of traditional Chinese handicrafts, he is a loyal fan of the Shanghai Museum and would make private visits to the institution, where he especially enjoys the art gallery of Chinese ethnic groups.

A few years ago, he learned that Shanghai Museum needed qipao and other women's clothing pieces. Chang suggested the museum choose some items from his collection and offered to make a donation.

After many rounds of selection, the museum picked 10 pieces from Chang's collection and two garments for women that date to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

All 10 pieces of qipao were made of luxurious materials such as velvet, silk and jacquard. They were hand-stitched and decorated with elaborate embroidery, bindings and knotted buttons. Three were haute couture pieces featuring renowned brands of the time in Shanghai — Sun Sun Department Store, Sincere Department Store and Dragon.

These costumes feature the "distinctive aesthetic characters and fine craftsmanship representing the artistic styles and technical achievements in the Yangtze River Delta region from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, and thus have high value for research and exhibition," reads the appraisal by a senior academic on Chinese costume history, who was invited by the museum.

The two Qing Dynasty garments could "effectively fill in the gap in the museum collection and become highly valued assets for the studies and exhibitions about Yangtze River Delta culture and the costume evolution in Shanghai," Yu says.

Qipao, also known as Cheongsam, is a signature clothing style of women in China. It evolved from the Manchu female's long gown of



the Qing Dynasty. The early 20th century saw the modernization of the qipao style, which became slender and tight-fitting.

In Shanghai, the first modern metropolis and fashion center of

China, qipao was favored by women regardless of age or social status. Young, beautiful women wrapped in body-tight qipao were popular subjects on commercial poster calendars during this period. These

prints were immensely popular and hung in almost every household in Shanghai and other cities.

"About one-fourth of the treasured objects at the Shanghai Museum have been donated by people

from various social backgrounds," says Chu Xiaobo, director of the museum. "We are very grateful for the love and support from Mr Chang and other donors. The garments he donated are quite representative of the Yangtze River Delta culture and Shanghai style. We plan to hold a clothing-themed exhibition next year and hopefully these donated objects by Chang will be featured."

Also at the Shanghai Museum East, the museum's new wing on the east bank of the Huangpu River, "we have a gallery featuring the industrial achievements and handicraft innovations in the Yangtze River Delta," the director says. "We plan to showcase some costumes and accessories where Chang's donation can join the permanent exhibits."

"Mr Chang said that he intends to make more donations and we are thankful for his generosity. I hope more people care about the development of public museums, especially the museums in China."

Among the important categories of Chang's collection are vintage furniture from Shanghai as well as manuscripts of the poster calendars. "We are aware that these poster calendars represent an important part of commercial art in the 20th century, but few of the original manuscripts have survived," Chang says. "I held an exhibition of these before. I think they capture an important page of China's industrial history."

Collecting artwork has helped him find a peaceful space for himself away from busy daily work.

"Through dialogue about these objects, I have learned many interesting facts and achieved a kind of balance in my life," he says, adding the rich cultural background of the collection has given more depth to his music and made him a better artist.

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

“Through dialogue about these objects, I have learned many interesting facts and achieved a kind of balance in my life.”

Jeff Chang Shin-che, pop singer and collector

Top: Chang (right) at the donation ceremony in Shanghai on July 24. Left: Several of the items of his donation.

Exhibition honors iconic French designer who set the scene

By **Zhang Kun**

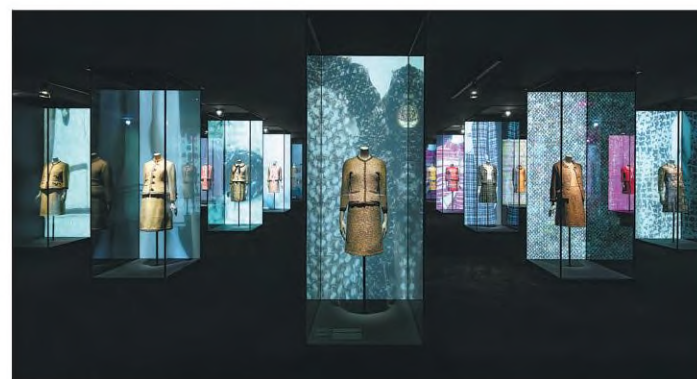
The ongoing exhibition *Gabrielle Chanel: Fashion Manifesto* at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai is the first retrospective devoted to the work of the fashion icon held in China.

Held from July 12 to Nov 24, the exhibition is co-organized by the PSA and the Palais Galliera, the Fashion Museum of Paris, Paris Musées in France, exploring "the long career of this trailblazing designer that changed the course of fashion twice in a lifetime," says curator Miren Arzalluz at a forum at the PSA held before the opening.

Gabrielle Bonheur "Coco" Chanel (1883-1971) was a French fashion designer, businessperson and founder of the Chanel luxury brand.

In the early 20th century, a time when decorative styles dominated the world of Western women's fashion, "Gabrielle Chanel created garments characterized by minimalism and precision ... She revolutionized the world of haute couture, liberating the bodies of her contemporaries with what amounted to a fashion manifesto," according to Arzalluz.

More than 200 objects were selected from the collections of Pal-



Left: A view of the ongoing exhibition at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Right: Gabrielle Chanel on the staircase of the Haute Couture salons, 31, Rue Cambon, Paris, in 1953. ROBERT DOISNEAU / FOR CHINA DAILY



IF YOU GO

Gabrielle Chanel: Fashion Manifesto

11 am-7 pm, last entry by 6 pm, Tue-Sun, through Nov 24, 2F, Power Station of Art, 678 Miaojiang Road, Huangpu district, Shanghai.

ais Galliera and Patrimoine de Chanel, as well as from international museums.

The exhibition was originally held at the Palais Galliera in Paris from Oct 1, 2020 to July 18, 2021.

It was the first retrospective ever dedicated to the French designer in Paris, Arzalluz says. It was also the inaugural exhibition of a renovated and extended Palais Galliera, which included a new gallery.

The exhibition was then adapted

and presented in Melbourne, Tokyo and London.

Shanghai is the final leg of the exhibition and, according to Gong Yan, director of the PSA, "We are paying tribute to this legendary designer from more than a century ago here in Shanghai, China's fashion capital, because she put forward brilliant ideas about women and beauty that are still relevant today and her creative passion and life stories have continued to inspire mod-

ern women to bravely pursue their dreams ... The exhibition tells us that women must leave behind their stories and legends and, more importantly, creation and works."

As visitors enter the museum, they will climb a broad stairway leading to the exhibition on the second floor, a replicate of the stairway in the Chanel House at 31 Rue Cambon in Paris projected on a giant screen.

"At the end of this stairway, we see

the connection between a soul and its residence turning into strong will and action. It is a combination of an individual with her time and the grace and her resolution against impediments and restrictions of the era," Gong says.

The exhibition consists of two chapters dedicated to her work from the 1910s to the 1930s and the second part of her career from 1954 to 1971.

Her early beginnings are presented with a few iconic pieces, including the famous sailor's jersey introduced in 1913.

From the sporty models and little black dresses of the 1910s to the sophisticated dresses initiated in the 1920s, this section centers on notions such as simplicity, youth, movement and allure.

The showcase of beauty products, jewelry and accessories reflects the consistency of her vision, with one room devoted entirely to the iconic perfume Chanel N°5 launched in 1921.

The second part of the exhibition presents a selection of models dating from the 1950s to her last collection created in 1971, focusing on iconic pieces such as the braided tweed suit, two-tone pumps and the 2.55 quilted bag.

LIFE

A player of many ages

Following the release of her new album, former child prodigy-turned *pipa* virtuoso set to tour China in October this year, **Chen Nan** reports.



In a whirlwind of excitement and youthful exuberance, *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) maestro Wu Man took center stage with the dynamic Beijing Youth Orchestra for two concerts in the capital last Friday and Saturday.

With her signature grace and passion, Wu led the orchestra through a vibrant exploration of traditional Chinese music with Zhao Jiping's *Pipa Concerto No. 2*.

As the air filled with the sound of delicate plucking and rising and falling tones, which wove seamlessly with the orchestral tapestry, the young musicians, brimming with enthusiasm, responded with palpable eagerness, their instruments resonating with vigor alongside Wu's evocative playing.

Each moment was a celebration of creativity and collaboration. The concerts offered a preview of the orchestra's upcoming performance under conductor Lyu Jia at New York's Carnegie Hall, to be staged on Sunday.

"I've performed with lots of professional symphony orchestras from around the world. I was very surprised by performing with this orchestra of teenagers," Wu said in an interview with China Daily after a rehearsal at the National Centre for the Performing Arts on July 24. "I am particularly happy with this collaboration, where the ancient timbres of the *pipa* meet the orchestra's vibrant rhythms.

"For the young musicians, it was not just about rehearsals and concerts but also about a thrilling adventure into the heart of musical exploration," she continues, adding that the musicians reminded her of her own days as a student learning to play the *pipa* at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music. A child prodigy who began learning at 9, Wu was accepted into the conservatory at 13 and became the first recipient of a master's degree in *pipa* in the country.

Talking about the *Pipa Concerto No. 2*, a warm, rhapsodic piece Zhao wrote expressly for her, Wu says the 22-minute movement integrates elements of *pingtan*, a type of folk art from Suzhou in Jiangsu province, which combines storytelling and ballads in the Suzhou dialect. Performers are usually accompanied by traditional stringed instruments, such as the *sanxian* (a three-



Clockwise from top: Pipa virtuoso Wu Man, a leading ambassador of Chinese music, at a studio in Shanghai recording her new album *Seeking the Tao of Strings* in December; Wu and the 11 old *pipa* instruments with a history dating back to the early Qing Dynasty in the Shanghai studio; performing with the Beijing Youth Orchestra under the baton of conductor Lyu Jia at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing last Friday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

stringed lute) and the *pipa*, as well as woodwind instruments.

The concerto premiered at the Sydney Opera House where it was performed by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra with Wu as soloist. Since then, she has performed it many times around the world.

"The concerto has become one of the most performed pieces in my repertoire. Whenever I play it, it conjures up images of my hometown, its rivers, pavilions, tea-houses and even its dialect," says Wu, who was born and raised in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

The *pipa*, which has its roots in Central Asia, has been in existence for over 2,000 years. Known for its distinctive pear-shaped body, it typically has four strings and is played either with the fingers or a plectrum. It is known for its versatility and expressive range and is capable of producing both melodious and percussive sounds, playing a significant role in Chinese musical heritage.

The celebrated player, who currently lives in California, is considered the ambassador for the *pipa* and has brought the instrument international acclaim.

Her performances and recordings have

helped introduce the *pipa* to global audiences by blending classical Chinese music with contemporary styles. Her latest album *Seeking the Tao of Strings* was released in June by Longyuan Music.

Aside from her experiments with contemporary rock and jazz musicians, Wu is a traditionalist and plays 11 *pipa* instruments from the late 19th century to early 20th century.

Some of their previous owners were masters Wu has admired since she was a student. One belonged to Jin Zuli (1906-2000), who Wu met during a summer break when she was pursuing her master's degree, traveling to Shanghai to learn to play the classic piece *Flute and Drum Music at Sunset* with the master.

"It gives me great joy to play these old silk string *pipa* previously played by masters. It's truly an honor to be able to record this album," she says.

Wu spent a whole day in her hotel in Shanghai in the winter of 2023 testing the 11 instruments to decide which one should be used to play which piece.

"I wanted to preserve the distinctive sound of the old *pipa*," says Wu. "I dedicated my entire day to acquainting myself



with each of them, 'dating' them one by one by playing them and familiarizing myself with their characteristics."

"The resonance in my fingers as they glide across the strings is nothing short of profound. I can feel the essence of my predecessors coming through each instrument," she adds.

Unlike contemporary *pipa*, which have strings made of steel, old *pipa* had strings made of silk. They also varied in the size and thickness of their bodies, which poses a challenge to controlling nuances such as strength and tonal quality.

"No contemporary *pipa* can replicate the sounds produced by these old ones," Wu says.

With 13 tracks, the new album not only has well-known *pipa* pieces such as *White Snow in Sunny Spring* and *Ambush From Ten Sides* but also pieces that have rarely been recorded before, including *Slow Shang Tune* and *Three Leaps Over the Stream*.

At the end of the recording, which lasted three days, Wu took off her shoes and played an improvisation, *Seeking the Tao of Strings*, after which she later named the album.

"She is a great musician and understands her instrument as well as she knows herself," says recording engineer Li Xiaopei, who worked with Wu for the first time on the new album.

Li says that instead of "beautifying" the sound, they tried to ensure the sound of the old *pipa* remained as natural and authentic as possible.

Wu was first exposed to Western classical music in 1979 when she saw Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra performing in Beijing. In 1980, she participated in an open master class with violinist Isaac Stern and in 1985, she made her debut in the US before moving there in 1990.

As a principal and founding musician of Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad project, Wu has performed throughout the US, Europe and Asia. She is featured in the 2015 Emmy-Award-winning documentary *The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble*, as well as on the film's 2017 Grammy Award-winning companion recording *Sing Me Home*, which won Best World Music Album.

"I love working with musicians from around the world. Their instruments, style and way of thinking and performing music all inspire me," Wu says.

In October, the Aga Khan Master Musicians will make their debut tour of China. Wu, who is one of its founding members, will be accompanied by five musicians from Central Asia. Founded in 2013, the troupe draws inspiration from traditional sources but creates an exuberantly contemporary sound through its mosaic of styles and sensibilities.

The tour will include mentoring opportunities for young musicians in the form of workshops, master classes and artist residencies that explore how traditional musical styles and repertoires can be expressed in a contemporary musical language that integrates performance, composition and improvisation.

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The Chinese coach who teaches table tennis to the world

PARIS — With a pair of spectacles perched on his nose, 66-year-old Han Hua told tales of his illustrious table tennis coaching career, brandishing photos that captured his triumphs in China, Tunisia and France.

Born in 1958, Han's passion for table tennis started at a young age. A mix of raw talent and relentless dedication propelled him to junior tournament victories and eventually, to a coveted spot in the national team.

China has dispatched coaches in sports like table tennis, badminton, gymnastics and diving to bolster the competitive prowess of nations far and wide since the 1950s. As one of them, Han embarked on a 12-year coaching odyssey in Tunisia in 1984. He swiftly acclimatized to the way of life, relishing the flavors of Chinese and Tunisian cuisine with equal gusto.

"I immersed myself in Tunisian culture, embracing their cuisine and even mastering French," says Han, recounting his two-year

stint at a language school and the rapid progress he made through daily interactions with his team.

Under his tutelage, Tunisia's table tennis team dazzled the African continent, culminating in a historic milestone when four Tunisian players clinched spots in the 1988 Olympics, a quarter of the continent's quota at the time.

After the 1996 Atlanta Olympics in the United States, Han returned to China to coach the national team, tutoring a generation of prodigies who would go on to clinch international titles and Olympic glory, including Wang Hao, Kong Linghui, Guo Yue and Chen Meng.

Known for his language proficiency and deep understanding of the sport, Han has earned accolades from peers and athletes alike.

"He is very talented. If I coached abroad, I wouldn't get past the language barrier," says Li Sun, head coach of the national table tennis team. "He also has a deep understanding of table tennis and is great-

ly loved by colleagues and athletes."

In the 1990s, France was basking in a golden era of table tennis spearheaded by the indomitable Jean-Philippe Gatien, whose rise as Olympic runner-up and world champion heralded a period of French dominance in the sport.

The French team, comprised of Gatien, Patrick Chila, Christophe Legout and Damien Eloi, achieved remarkable feats in the World Cup and World Championships.

However, as they retired in the early years of this century, a lull descended on the once-mighty squad, prompting the French Table Tennis Federation to seek a savior in 2013 to restore the nation to its former glory.

Han, with his plentiful experience, coaching acumen and fluency in French, stood out as the ideal candidate.

"From Monday to Saturday, my training regimen in France mirrored the intensity of my days in China," Han says. "I always stood tall during

training sessions. No matter how tired I was, I never sat down throughout the six-hour daily session. I came to improve their prowess, so I needed to spare no effort to help them improve as soon as possible."

After three years of relentless dedication, Han finally achieved his goal as the French men's team delivered its most outstanding performance in four decades — Emmanuel Lebesson clinched the men's singles title while Simon Gauzy secured the silver medal at the 2016 European Championships.

After successfully leading the team to the 2016 Rio Olympics, he transitioned into an assistant coaching role, paving the way for aspiring young French coaches.

However, fate took an unexpected turn before the 2018 World Championships when he suffered a cerebral infarction.

He returned home to China after the Tokyo Olympics and embarked on renovating his long-abandoned house. "I was at a crossroads. Despite



Chinese table tennis coach Han Hua helped the French team in its endeavors at the 2016 European Championships and the 2016 Rio Olympics. XINHUA

numerous coaching offers from many countries, I realized the importance of prioritizing my health," Han says, reflecting on his journey.

As this year marks the 60th anniversary of China-France diplomatic relations, Han emphasizes the significance of the enduring bond between the two nations in table tennis.

"The old generation of Chinese players competed and coached in France, bringing out many top players. I hope China and France continue to collaborate in the future and experience cultural exchange together," he says.

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