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Animation film on family love wins fans at home, abroad
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CHINA DAILY

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Xi, Lula laud 50 years of bilateral ties

Increasing global influence seen amid steady growth of China-Brazil cooperation

By ZHOU JIN
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President Xi Jinping and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva exchanged congratulations on Thursday on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, pledging to jointly build a China-Brazil community with a shared future and contribute to world peace and development.

China is willing to use the 50th anniversary as a new starting point to continue enhancing the alignment of development strategies with Brazil, and deepen bilateral exchanges and cooperation in various fields, Xi said in his congratulatory message.

As China and Brazil are both major developing countries and important emerging markets, they are like-minded friends and partners moving forward together, Xi noted.

He said that the steady growth of the bilateral ties and their increasing global influence have promoted the development and revitalization of the two nations, which has also contributed to world peace, stability and prosperity.

Recalling Lula's successful trip to China last year, Xi said the two sides had reached a significant consensus on piloting and opening a new future for China-Brazil relations in the new era.

Lula said in his message that Brazil-China ties are increasingly important for building a multipolar order and achieving more just and effective global governance.

Such a relationship provides support for the stability of both countries as well as the world, he said.

Lula also said that for the next 50 years of the bilateral relations, the two countries will chart a new course together and create a bright shared future.

In a signed article published in China Daily on Thursday, Lula noted new areas of cooperation, such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors and renewable energy sources.

He said that "throughout these 50 years, we have built a strategic partnership that strengthened our peo-

ples' commercial, cultural, scientific and technological ties".

As Brazil is scheduled to host the G20 Summit in November and will assume the rotating BRICS presidency in 2025, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira told People's Daily that the country hopes to use the opportunities to usher in a new round of high-level exchanges with China.

Brazil is the first developing country to establish a strategic partnership with China and the first Latin American country to elevate its bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Since 2009, China has been Brazil's largest trading partner and one of its major sources of foreign investment, while Brazil is China's largest trading partner in Latin America.

China's cumulative investment in Brazil has exceeded \$70 billion, accounting for nearly 50 percent of the country's investment in South America.

Zhou Zhiwei, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Latin American Studies, said that China and Brazil have no geopolitical conflicts, enjoy high economic complementarity, and share similar positions on major international and regional issues.

This is the most precious strategic asset and the most important common interest between the two countries, as well as the political foundation for deepening mutual trust and cooperation between the two sides, he said.

He noted that the highly integrated interests between the two countries have driven a significant transformation in their relationship, from a model of South-South cooperation to a major power relationship.

"Particularly through the BRICS platform, China and Brazil can cooperate more extensively with other developing countries, enhancing the voice of developing nations in international affairs and promoting the establishment of a new global political and economic order and a multipolar international structure," Zhou said.



People visit the site of a former "comfort women" station at Liji Lane on Wednesday to mark the International Memorial Day for Comfort Women in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. The exhibition reveals the extent of atrocities committed on the victims of sexual slavery by Japanese military personnel between 1932 and 1945. YANG BO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

418 Chinese 'comfort women' survived torment, WWII

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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A total of 418 Chinese victims survived Japan's "comfort women" system during World War II, according to a survey conducted over three decades by the Research Center for Chinese Comfort Women at Shanghai Normal University.

According to the survey's results unveiled on Tuesday, among these 418 "comfort women", 359 were from the Chinese mainland and 59 were from China's Taiwan region. South China's Hainan province accounted for 168 such women, the highest number, followed by North China's Shanxi province with 120.

As of now, seven "comfort women" are still alive on the mainland, with six living in Hunan province and one in Shanxi, according to the research center.

"Comfort women" was the Japanese imperial government's euphemism for those women and girls

who were forced into sexual slavery at Japanese military brothels between 1932 and 1945, until the end of WWII. They were repeatedly raped and subjected to other forms of abuse and torture by Japanese soldiers. It is estimated that at least 400,000 women and girls were kidnapped, coerced or duped into sexual servitude by Japanese invaders around the world, with the number of Chinese victims exceeding 200,000.

Su Zhiliang, a professor and director of the research center, said he and his wife, Chen Lifei, started the survey in 1993 and they were joined by many researchers across China over the years. Su said it was not easy to confirm who among the thousands of these women survived the torment and the war, as it required concrete proof of every incident, such as recorded narration in first person and material evidence, as well as witness accounts. Gathering such evidence meant

forcing survivors or their kin to recall the traumatic past, and many of these people needed years to finally reveal their stories, he added.

"We found many of the survivors as early as 2000, but they were living in poor conditions, mostly in rural areas. Therefore, alongside the survey, we had to develop a system to care for these women and help improve their lives," Su said.

He emphasized that the survey was primarily meant to reveal historical truths that Japan has been trying to bury. "When the war ended, Japan destroyed vast archives (of evidence). We knew nothing about this part of history until the first victim broke her silence in 1991," he said.

On Aug 14, 1991, Kim Hak-sun, from the Republic of Korea, was the first "comfort woman" to testify against Japan's wartime crimes. To commemorate her courage, the international community designat-

ed Aug 14 as the International Memorial Day for Comfort Women in 2013.

Su noted that the horrifying stories of "comfort women" have been drawing more and more public attention in and outside China.

The Chinese documentary *Twenty Two*, named after the number of "comfort women" alive at the time of its filming in 2014, was one positive move toward raising public awareness about this group. Part of the documentary's box-office revenue was donated to aid the survivors.

Although the number of these women still alive is fast dwindling, dozens of statues and monuments have been set up across the world, including in China, the United States, Canada, Germany and Italy, to honor their courage, Su said. "We hope more people can focus on this group in the future, think about the history and cherish the peace."

Highway to waterway



The La Plata river floods a road on Wednesday after Hurricane Ernesto passed through Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. The hurricane, headed toward Bermuda on Thursday, resulted in torrential rain and strong winds that knocked out power supply. ALEJANDRO GRANADILLO / AP

Trust deficit on climate change one of the issues to be tackled

Climate change is one of the key existential threats confronting humanity. Over the past three decades, the globalized world has been fighting an exponential emergency with incremental progress.

Yet, there are still some influential politicians and opinion leaders on the world stage willfully denying the impact of climate change, thereby condemning humanity to a very dangerous future.

Year after year, conference after conference, the international community has been repeating the same old appeal to developed economies to honor their commitments to helping the Global South address the pressing concerns of climate change. Yet, the outcome is simply disappointing.

The delivery of an annual climate finance commitment of \$100 billion remains unfulfilled. Breaching of the promise made

WORLD WATCH By Ong Tee Keat

by the Global North at the COP27 in Egypt has further widened the trust deficit between the Global North and South.

Beyond the fanfare and rhetoric for global optics, the outcomes of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC have been nothing more than reaffirming the 2015 Paris Agreement goal of limiting the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 C above preindustrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 C.

Lack of political will and prevalence of silo mentality have thrown the global aspiration of good climate governance into disarray.

Worse still, climate action has increasingly been weaponized in the escalating big powers' geopolitical rivalry.

Amid the evolving global order, though the G7, representing the rich Global North has reached out to the Global South since the Japanese presidency last year (2023), substantive initiatives of multilateral cooperation in addressing the North-South economic divide are yet to be seen.

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SPICY SNACK CLEANS UP IMAGE TO CONQUER CULINARY WORLD

Born out of agricultural necessity, *latiao*'s popularity is spreading globally

Editor's note: In a series of reports titled "Claims to Fame", China Daily looks at how some regions have earned wealth and recognition through specific products to realize the goal of rural vitalization.

By ZOU SHUO in Pingjiang, Hunan
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Anyone who approaches Malawangzi's snack factory in Pingjiang county, Hunan province, is greeted by the mouth-watering aroma combination of chili pepper, peppercorn, cumin and cinnamon.

Malawangzi is known for producing *latiao*, spicy wheat strips that are popular with young people and children. The snack evokes fond childhood memories for many Chinese people.

However, it is also a treat that many parents forbid their children from eating, as it is regarded as unhealthy, greasy and salty.

In-depth

This unflattering image of the gluten strips is what manufacturers have been striving to change.

There are more than 600 *latiao* producers in China, and 90 percent of the founders of those companies are from Pingjiang.

See *Latiao*, page 2



Online See more by scanning the code.

www.chinadailyglobal.com Newsstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1 UK £1 EU €1 Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb, Philippines 120 php, Myanmar 2000 kyat, Japan 210 yen, Dubai 10 dirham, Pakistan 300 rupee

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PAGE TWO



Left: Participants compete in a *latiao* eating competition in Changsha, Hunan province, on Nov 13, 2021. Right: A college student learns how to make *latiao* dumplings on June 11, 2021, for Dragon Boat Festival. PHOTOS BY YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Latiao: Spicing up local economy



Employees work on the production line of *latiao* snacks at the Malawangzi factory in Pingjiang county, Hunan. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Latiao is a 60 billion yuan (\$8.37 billion) industry, a third of which is generated in Pingjiang, home to 116 *latiao* enterprises. The sector employs about 102,000 people — or almost 10 percent — of the county's 1.1 million population.

The fiery snack has caught on around the world and is now sold in 160 countries, including Japan, South Korea and the United States.

In early July, news that operations at the Malawangzi factory had been suspended due to a flood became one of the highest trending topics on social media platforms.

The flood in Pingjiang affected 340,000 people, with many parts of the county inundated by floodwater from the local river.

No soybeans, no worries

Twenty-six years ago, it was another flood in Pingjiang that led three people to invent the snack.

After the flood devastated the county's soybean farms, soybeans were replaced by more affordable wheat flour to create a new snack inspired by the county's tradition of producing dried bean curds, a culinary dish which dates back to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The snack was an instant sensation, and many small local food factories in Pingjiang started to make *latiao*.

Qiu Pingjiang is one of the creators of the snack, and he now works for Malawangzi as a consultant.

"We decided to make *latiao* because we had to make a living," Qiu said of its invention. "The flood had significantly increased the price of soybeans, so there was no profit in continuing to make the bean curds," he said, adding that's why he and two other villagers started to make *latiao*.

After the snack increased in popularity, more processing plants opened in other places in China, Qiu said.

"I feel pleased that such a simple snack that is about 8 centimeters long, can be loved by so many people and has brought joy and delight to generations of children."

Qiu is also aware of the snack's negative reputation, which is why he believes the industry must stick to the food safety and quality standards it has implemented.

In 2009, Zhang Yudong founded Malawangzi in a bid to improve the *latiao* industry's image.

In the early 2000s, there were many small food factories in the county making the popular snack, and the quality of some was not

good or was inconsistent, giving the industry a bad name with many people, he said.

In 2013, the company scrapped substandard production lines worth 300 million yuan as it wanted to upgrade the ingredients, packaging, and flavor of its products.

Three years later, Malawangzi started to build the first Good Manufacturing Practice factory, which has quality standards that are the same for making medical products.

"*Latiao* used to be treated as a low-end substandard snack and parents did not want their children to eat it, so one of the biggest challenges was to change the negative image of the industry," Zhang said.

Li Manliang, deputy general manager of Malawangzi, said the company has gone to great efforts to make its products healthier by eliminating chemical additives and preservatives. It has also cut the sugar, oil and salt content in its *latiao* products to conform with healthier eating habits, he added.

Zhang said he wants *latiao* to go beyond being a snack and become the Eastern equivalent of chocolate, and used by young people to express love and emotion.

As part of its marketing strategy, the company has sponsored more than 1,000 weddings, as well as music festivals and even esports competitions to boost interaction with the younger generation, Li said.

The sales revenue of Malawangzi

exceeded 1 billion yuan last year, ranking first in both online and offline *latiao* sales, he said.

The company's sales revenue has seen remarkable growth in recent years, climbing from 200 million yuan in 2020, to 400 million yuan in 2021 and 700 million yuan in 2022, Li said.

Moreover, more than 80 percent of its online sales are from people in the 18 to 28 years age bracket, proving the brand is still a favorite of young people, Li said.

Lifeline industry

The *latiao* industry provides important job opportunities for the county, which was a national-level impoverished county until 2020, according to Li.

As a mountainous county, in the past, many people in Pingjiang had to leave to find jobs in bigger cities. However, the labor-intensive *latiao* industry has offered locals jobs near their homes, and the opportunity to take care of their children and elderly parents, Li said.

The average salary for Malawangzi workers is about 6,200 yuan per month, a relatively high salary in the county, he said, adding that the industry's development had contributed to local poverty alleviation efforts.

The development has also spurred up and downstream industries, such as machinery manufacturing, packaging and rapeseed farming.

Chen Gaoqiu and his wife have both been employed at Malawangzi

factories for 14 years. They used to work in outside cities to support the family, but the salaries were not high.

The couple can each make 5,000 to 7,000 yuan a month working for Malawangzi.

"We have bought a car, and an apartment and we work near home and look after the family," Chen said. "As a small county, the *latiao* industry has offered job opportunities for many local people, so we are grateful for the industry."

Li said he is optimistic about the development of the industry. In the past, when its image was poor, people were reluctant to say they worked in the *latiao* industry, and the government vowed to rein in its development.

"However, as the industry becomes healthier and upgrades, we are more confident about promoting ourselves," he said.

Contrary to public perception, *latiao* is not deep fried. It is cooked by a process known as extrusion puffing, which Li believes makes it a healthy food.

As the company invites more people and government officials to visit its factory, the perception of *latiao* has changed, he said, adding the local government has also offered more policy support for the industry.

Peng Jinsong, head of another Pingjiang *latiao* manufacturer, Liren Food, said he started to make spicy food in Wuhan, Hubei province in 1994, before he returned to

his hometown in 2005 to look after his elderly parents.

He opened a small food factory that year, and hired a dozen local people. In 2012, he started his *latiao* enterprise.

His company's sales volume has increased by 30 percent for three consecutive years, reaching 40 million yuan last year.

The company now has 252 employees and it is targeting 80 million yuan sales volume this year, Peng said.

Most of the employees are local villagers and they can make 4,000 to 6,000 yuan per month, he added.

"The *latiao* industry is developing in a more standardized, automated, and healthier way, and also transforming its previously negative image, he said.

"As a Pingjiang person, I want to promote the local *latiao* snack on a bigger stage," he said. "It is not just a culinary delight, but also a comfort food for many people."

"For me and many other Pingjiang people, the industry is a lifeline so that we can find jobs near our home and take care of our family."

Vocational training

To help train more skilled workers in the *latiao* industry, the Pingjiang Vocational School has cooperated with Malawangzi since 2020.

The three-year program teaches students how to make *latiao*, and educates them about food quality and safety as well as marketing strategies. It is the first *latiao* "major" offered in the country, the school said.

More than 230 students have taken the course in the past four years.

Xiang Weiwei, principal of the vocational school, said it is the school's duty to train skilled workers to participate in the development of local economy.

Offering specialized training will also help ensure the rapid development of the *latiao* industry, he said.

In 2023, the first 50 graduates were employed by Malawangzi and other companies in the county, he said.

Graduate Zhang Qi secured a job as a technician with Malawangzi.

He believes his career prospects in the industry are good, and happily admits to being a fan of the snack since childhood.

"I used to secretly eat the snack when I was little because my parents did not allow it," he said. "Now I have learned how to make it, and my appreciation of the snack has deepened."

Zhang said many of his friends envy him because he can now eat as many of the spicy strips as he likes. He is pleased the snack is getting healthier and better quality, which he said gives him a sense of achievement.

Struggling son learns of family's true value

By ZOU SHUO
in Pingjiang, Hunan

Zhang Zilong had trouble finding a good job after he graduated from college, but his parents did not tell him that the family is rich.

The 24-year-old went to secondary school in Changsha, Hunan province, and lived in a small apartment in Pingjiang county during school vacations. His father often said the family had heavy debt due to running a *latiao* company. It was only last year, that they moved into a mansion in Pingjiang.

"Many people in Pingjiang own a *latiao* factory, so I didn't think I was special," he said.

He was raised as a regular child and lived in a village home until he was 8 years old and attended a local primary school. After graduating from a university in Ningbo in 2022, he was unable to find a good job after a long search.

His father then invited him to work for the family company, Malawangzi.

Zhang did not get the job he applied for after he was rejected by the human resources department, but he later landed a position in the branding department after "someone" did him a favor.

"I had doubts about joining the company as it might be awkward to work as the boss' son, he said. "After a while, I saw most people in the department were young, and they did not treat me any differently," he said.

Zhang Yudong, his father, said he did not deliberately lie to his son about the family's financial situation.

In 2013, as *latiao* became a stronger, cleaner industry, the company ditched 300 million yuan (\$41.9 million) worth of outdated production lines. It made big investments in building new factories and equipment as well as research and development, which resulted in the company being in debt for a long time.

Zhang Yudong does not believe that he should necessarily hand the company over to his children. "People who are the most capable and have made the most contributions to the company should take over, so I am still looking," he said.

On his son's prospects of running the business one day, he said: "He still has room to grow. If after 10 to 20 years he has won approval from the team, I might consider letting him run the company."

Zhang Zilong is now in charge of the company's e-commerce platform on Douyin. The company's Douyin account has more than 400,000 followers and his personal account has more than 52,000.

"People do not have high opinions of children of affluent families, but I don't deny the fact that my family is rich," Zhang said.

Since a video of his story was posted on Douyin late last year, he has become famous online, with many netizens saying they want their parents to tell them they are rich one day. Some critics have questioned the authenticity of the story.

His father does not approve of his son being the new face of the "rich second generation", which he believes goes against the values of the company.

Zhang likes to call himself the child of entrepreneurs, and adds he holds himself to high standards as he has been under great public scrutiny.

The public attention and fame have forced him to work harder to advance his career. He spends most of his time surfing the internet to gauge feedback on the company's products. Zhang also tries to enlighten people on the origins and culture of *latiao* through short videos and livestreams.

"As someone who has grown with the *latiao* industry, I believe it has great prospects and I want to make it a national brand through our efforts," he said.



Zhang Zilong



Workers use *latiao* to make a giant *tangyuan* on Feb 24, 2021, to celebrate the Lantern Festival, in Pingjiang county. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

TOP NEWS

Faces of hunger



Palestinian refugees, mostly children, hold out their plates to receive their share of vegetable patties prepared by volunteers in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday, amid the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. OMAR AL-QATTA / AFP

Restoring consumer sentiment a key for growth, experts say

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

Restoring consumer sentiment and revitalizing confidence among consumers will be among the key priorities for China's economic growth for the rest of this year, as policymakers shift their focus more toward seeking a consumer-led recovery, according to experts.

As the broader economy continues to face mounting external uncertainties and still-weak domestic demand, they said the country needs to step up stimulus measures to promote a recovery in consumer spending. Potential measures include offering direct support to households and improving the supply-side offerings of products and services.

Their comments came as China reported major economic data on Thursday that pointed to faster growth on the consumer side while both industrial production and investment grew at a slower pace in July.

Figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's retail sales, a key measurement of consumer spending, grew 2.7 percent year-on-year in July, up from the 2 percent growth in June.

The country's value-added industrial output grew 5.3 percent in July from a year earlier, while fixed-asset



Customers select fruit at a supermarket in Dongying, Shandong province, earlier this month. LIU ZHIHUA / XINHUA

investment rose 3.6 percent in the January-July period compared with the same period last year.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said the latest indicators suggest an uneven recovery, with the supply side being stronger than the demand side, pointing to the still-weak endogenous driving force and lackluster demand.

"Although the economy still faces several headwinds, China's economic recovery will likely gain a firmer footing in August with a new round of stimulus measures aimed at stabilizing growth taking effect gradually," Wang said.

In a bid to further boost domestic demand, China recently announced that it would allocate about 150

billion yuan (\$20.96 billion) in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds to support trade-in deals for consumer goods, such as appliances and autos, which is seen by some analysts as a sign that the central government has become more willing to directly subsidize consumers.

Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at Fitch Bohua, said: "It is expected to ultimately promote an increment of more than 600 billion yuan in consumption, effectively driving the growth of total retail sales in the second half of the year."

Chang also expects that the People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, will cut interest rates and the reserve requirement ratio at least once each in the second

half of the year. "It is not ruled out yet that interest rates on existing housing loans will be lowered again, reducing the overall financing costs of society and stimulating consumption."

A recent meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee pledged to step up macroeconomic support in the second half of the year, with a greater focus on expanding domestic demand by stimulating consumption.

Zhang Yansheng, former secretary-general of the Academic Committee of the National Development and Reform Commission, said cash handouts would be an immediate and effective way to boost spending.

"It is advisable for the government to announce cash handouts for people," he said, adding that such a measure could "strongly boost confidence among consumers and revitalize people's expectations."

"That will significantly bolster household consumption and support economic growth."

Looking toward the rest of the year, Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said China's domestic demand will likely pick up in the second half of the year, with the accelerated use of special treasury bonds and local government special bond funds, as well as policies that aim to stabilize the property market gradually taking effect and the shopping sprees that are expected during the holidays.

Wu Peizhi contributed to this story.

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German firms keen to invest more in China

Opening-up steps, high-end manufacturing and green industries promise opportunities

By ZHONG NAN
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German companies are determined to ramp up investment in China, motivated by the country's heightened focus on expanding market openness and fast-growing industries, said business executives and market watchers.

They said that in the context of a rapidly changing global economy, China's ongoing opening-up measures, flourishing high-end manufacturing and green industries are set to accelerate the emergence of new economic growth drivers and foster innovation. These advancements will present decent opportunities for German businesses.

German direct investment in China reached 7.3 billion euros (\$8.04 billion) in the first half of the year, compared with 6.5 billion euros for the whole of 2023, according to data from the Bundesbank, Germany's central bank, shared with the Financial Times newspaper early this week.

Maximilian Butek, executive director and board member of the German Chamber of Commerce in China - East China, said that in the long run, China is viewed as an important innovation market, leading to more research and development investment by German companies.

Regarding supply chain disruptions and geopolitical tensions, Butek said that German firms are addressing these challenges by diversifying their suppliers and developing local partnerships in China.

"Overall, German companies see the benefits of investing in China's growing market and are taking steps to minimize potential risks and overcome challenges," he added.

According to the results of the chamber's latest survey, more than half of German companies plan to increase their investments in China, particular-

ly big corporates, automakers and manufacturers of electronic products.

Sharing similar views, Xu Daqian, president of Bosch (China) Investment Ltd, a country branch of German industrial conglomerate Bosch Group, said the Chinese market is evolving rapidly, and the vehicle industry holds great potential.

Highlighting that China is Bosch's largest single overseas market with an average annual investment of 5 billion yuan (\$700 million), Xu said the company's spending in this category will continue to rise.

"It is possible that going forward, the innovative technologies invented in the Chinese market could be applied in other foreign markets," he added.

Following that trend, Volkswagen AG announced in May that it had started building the third phase of the group's mega R&D center in Hefei, Anhui province. The project is scheduled to be operational in 2027.

BMW AG also announced in April an additional investment of 20 billion yuan in its production base in Shenyang, Liaoning province, to localize the manufacture of a new generation of BMW models by 2026.

Wang Xiaohong, a researcher specializing in cross-border investment at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing, said China's strengths will substantially enrich Sino-German economic and trade relations in the years ahead.

With China introducing several policies this year to promote high-standard opening-up and explore new growth areas, including support for large-scale equipment renewals and trade-in programs for consumer goods, the Munich-headquartered BSH Home Appliances Group said it will continue to expand its investment in both sales network expansion and innovation within the country.

Crucial inspection



Inspectors from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon look at mine clearance and explosive ordnance disposal equipment on Tuesday at the headquarters in Lebanon. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Economy: Inclusivity seen as ultimate solution to North-South divide

From page 1

Unsustainability of our global development will linger on as long as inequitable distribution of global resources prevails. Disproportionate consumption of earthy resources and skewed wealth distribution to the disadvantage of Global South, if left unabated, would only serve to exacerbate the economic divide between the Global North and South.

The developed economies have long been the major resource consumers as well as the major polluters in the world, despite technological advancement. This is the elephant in the room. While wielding the power of rules-based global governance, the Western dictats of "sustainable development" have been used to target industrial development in emerging economies indiscriminately. To this end, coercive economic restrictions are the common tools deployed to the detriment of the vulnerable Global South.

This was best exemplified by the ratification of the European Union Deforestation Regulation by the

European Parliament in April 2023. It is a landmark deforestation law that will ban the import of goods if they are found to be linked to the destruction of forests in their countries of origin.

This is tantamount to hanging a Sword of Damocles over the heads of many developing Global South countries which have yet to acquire the necessary sustainability-savvy in their economic development. After all, these nations are merely following the footprints of the developed economies which had prospered earlier. This is a glaring practice of double standards in favor of the Global North.

A case in point is the biased decision of the European Union to ban the use of palm oil-based biodiesel purportedly due to deforestation and emissions risks under the EU's second Renewable Energy Directive.

The EU policy is deemed arbitrary, unjustifiable and discriminatory against the two main palm oil producing countries in the Global South, namely Indonesia and Malaysia. It was found to be protectionist, since it singled out palm

oil while overlooking the environmental impact of biofuels produced within Europe, such as that from rapeseed.

To fight the injustice, Indonesia filed a lawsuit with the World Trade Organization, calling out the EU for unfair trade practices in 2019, followed by a separate challenge filed by Malaysia in 2021. As of today, palm oil from the Global South is yet to see the light at the end of the tunnel in the European market and large parts of the Global North.

In all fairness, no single nation should ever be deprived of its right to industrial development in its pursuit of economic well-being of its people. Any attempt to scapegoat the developing world for environmental degradation and the consequential impact of climate change is nothing but a Trojan to justify plans of stifling nascent economic development in the developing world.

After all, industrialization is not the monopoly of industrialized nations. The developing Global South, too, is in dire need of job creation and revenue generation to alleviate its poverty and enhance

social development. This can only be delivered by industrialization.

To address the escalating Global North-South divide, perhaps the Lima Declaration, adopted by United Nations Industrial Development Organization member states in December 2013 provides a window of opportunity.

It set the foundation for a new vision of inclusive and sustainable industrial development, in addition to highlighting the role of industrialization as a driver for development. Inclusive and sustainable industrial development is no doubt the primary source of revenue generation. It allows for rapid and sustained enhancement in living standards for all people, and provides technological solutions to environmentally sound industrialization.

It is simple knowledge that without technology and innovation, industrialization with enhanced resource and energy efficiency remains a dream. Without industrialization, physical development will virtually grind to a halt.

The conundrums confronting the

developing Global South today seem to be putting the emerging economies in a no-win position, where on the one hand, lack of technology transfer throttles the nascent sustainable development in these countries, and on the other hand, their wings of industrialization are further clipped by stringent rules imposed by rich nations in the name of environmental protection. As such, the Global South nations would perpetually be left stranded at the lower rung of the global value chain characterized by low-tech and labor-intensive industries, or worse still, trapped in the doldrums of poverty. This, in itself, is a travesty of the inclusiveness desired in the ideals of inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

In this context, the word "inclusive" signifies that industrial development must include all countries and all segments of societies. Equal opportunities and equitable distribution of the benefits of industrialization are to be offered to all stakeholders. While the other key word "sustainable" addresses the need to decouple the industries-in-

duced prosperity from excessive natural resource use and negative environmental impacts.

In this context, humanity is not deficient in globally available knowledge and expertise to mitigate the common existential threats, but trust deficit is looming large, thus casting a long shadow on multilateral cooperation. Pan-secularization of technology know-how has further stunted positive exchanges between nations of contending geopolitical interests that could otherwise facilitate concerted efforts in mitigating the common exigencies.

Sheer arrogance of the collective West's preponderance in global governance continues to reign and obscure the cognizance of "no man is an island". They have yet to come to senses that the only ultimate solution to the prevailing North-South divide lies in walking the talk of "inclusivity", failing which would only hasten the pace of pushing the world to the point of no return where no single nation could ever be spared from the dire fate.

The author is president of the Malaysia-based Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

IN DEPTH

China's trade with Mexico, FDI on the rise

Chinese companies now the fastest-growing source of foreign investment, a trend that has accelerated in recent years

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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When you buy drinks from McDonald's, Wendy's or Dunkin', the straws and cups you use are likely from a Chinese company and produced in Mexico or the United States and are a product of a complex trilateral trade relationship.

After former US president Donald Trump imposed tariffs on Chinese imports and restricted Chinese investment starting in March 2018, the company making the cups, Fuling Plastic, began to face tariffs on many of its products.

As a result, Fuling moved a factory to Indonesia. Around 2019, it also moved some production to Monterrey, Mexico. And then, Fuling opened a factory in Pennsylvania.

Fuling Plastic is not the only Chinese company moving factories to North America amid rising US-China geopolitical tensions.

Monterrey is capital of Nuevo León, a state in Northern Mexico. Chinese corporations last year were responsible for more than 30 percent of the foreign investment in the state, second only to the US at 47 percent, The New York Times reported.

"A lot of our customers that are close to the border of Mexico can take advantage of competitive pricing and shorter lead times. Not only do we avoid the tariffs coming out of China, but customers within a reasonable distance of Monterrey can enjoy the same type of products manufactured in Mexico at a fairly competitive price," Tom Melchiorre, president of Direct Link USA, a joint venture of Fuling Plastic, told China Daily.

The company currently has about 120 employees in Mexico operating out of an 80,000-square-foot facility, but soon it will expand to over 200,000 square feet and about 400 employees. Only the management is from China, while all other employees are Mexican.

The Ministry of Economy of Nuevo León reported that the state received \$13 billion in investments from October 2021 to April 2023, creating 88,000 new jobs.

The Mexican Ministry of Economy recorded 378 foreign direct investment announcements in 2023, totaling \$110.7 billion. The United States led with \$42.1 billion, followed by China with \$11.2 billion.

In 2022, China's direct investment in Mexico rose 48 percent year-on-year. Chinese companies now represent the fastest-growing source of foreign investment in Mexico.

The trend of Chinese investment in Mexico started around 2019 and will likely continue as the US imposes more tariffs on Chinese products and industries.

The increasing tariffs from the US have been imposed on items from China like solar panels, electric vehicles and EV batteries, which have led to shipping costs rising about six times, Melchiorre said.

"When you're producing commodity products, and shipping costs rise that much, your product is now 15 to 20 percent higher. So, I think it becomes more and more attractive to manufacture in Mexico as we continue to face these challenges," Melchiorre said.

A complex trilateral trade relationship

Mexico's exports to the United States last year surpassed China's for the first time in two decades, a development linked to the political tension between China and the US. However, the trade relationship between China and the US is resilient, even under strained conditions.

Researchers analyzed the evolution of the trilateral trade relationship between Mexico, the US and China from 1993 to 2020, and found that, in general, for every 1 percent increase in Mexico's exports to the US, Mexico's imports from China increased by 1.06 percent.

Xuedong Liu, professor of economics and engineering at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, noted that since 1993, about half of the US trade surplus with Mexico has been offset by a growing deficit with China, making Mexico a key assembly hub for North America, and China an influential player in the region's trade.

Mexico chose Chinese products not for political reasons, but for their high cost-effectiveness and the lack of substitutes from other countries, Liu told China Daily.

"The primary reason is that Mexico's local supply chain is not robust enough to meet all its needs. To increase exports to the US, Mexico must also increase its imports. These imports don't necessarily have to come from China; they could come from other countries," he said.

"However, Mexico ultimately chooses Chinese products due to their competitive pricing. This choice isn't driven by any specific policy or political measure but by market economics.

"Chinese products offer better value for money compared to those from other countries. If this weren't the case, local manufacturers in Mexico would opt for imports from



Above: A light rail train manufactured by CRRC Zhuzhou Locomotive Co Ltd, at a station in Monterrey, Mexico, on Oct 1, 2021. FRANCISCO CANEDO / XINHUA

Left: Chinese Ambassador to Mexico Zhang Run meets with Governor of Nuevo León Samuel García in May 2024. Chinese corporations were responsible for more than 30 percent of the foreign investment in the state of Nuevo León last year. PROVIDED BY CHINESE EMBASSY IN MEXICO

Lower left: A child paints a stuffed panda toy during a cultural salon in Mexico City on May 19. FRANCISCO CANEDO / XINHUA



The structural reasons that are bringing capital to Mexico are here to stay."

Juan Carlos Baker Pineda,
Mexico's former vice-minister for external trade

Still, Mexico faces challenges with its supply chain, lacking intermediate and capital goods, which limits its export capacity. So, to increase exports, Mexico needs to increase imports, Liu said.

Mexico is now importing more products from China that used to come from North America. In 2019, 17.7 percent of Mexico's imports in electronics such as mobile phones, auto parts and motor vehicles came from China, sectors where the US was traditionally the main supplier, according to Americas Quarterly.

Some believe that in the contest between the two major powers, the US and China, Mexico has not yet found a strategy to address the increasingly complex trilateral trade relationship. Caught between US-China trade dynamics, Mexico's relationship with China has become more politically complicated.

In January 2023, the US, Mexico and Canada established a committee to substitute imports from Asia with products manufactured in North America.

Before 2021, trade between China and Mexico was primarily driven by mutual benefit and market principles, Liu said. Since 2023, bilateral trade between China and Mexico "has not only been influenced by economic and market factors but also political ones", Liu said. He emphasized that it is a new characteristic of the trade relationship. Mexico welcomes Chinese investment. In 2019, ahead of his visit to China, former Mexican foreign minister Marcelo Ebrard said the country wants to deepen economic ties with China by increasing its exports and attracting more Chinese investment.

Ebrard told reporters via a video link from the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan, in 2019 that he would be prioritizing the expansion of business ties during his visit in China.

"What we're interested in is increasing Mexico's presence in China, Mexico's capacity to export to China, and China's investments

in Mexico," he said, Reuters reported.

"The structural reasons that are bringing capital to Mexico are here to stay," said Juan Carlos Baker Pineda, Mexico's former vice-minister for external trade. "I have no indication that the trade war between China and the US is going to diminish any time soon."

"While the Chinese origin of the capital coming into Mexico may be uncomfortable for the policies of some countries, according to international trade legislation, those products are, to all intents and purposes, Mexican," the BBC reported.

An example of such products is Mexico's auto-manufacturing industry. In 2023, Tesla announced plans to establish a factory in Mexico, which attracted a large number of suppliers to the country.

Many of those suppliers already were producing components or raw materials for Tesla in China. The Chinese auto-parts makers are rapidly setting up plants on the outskirts of Monterrey, where Tesla plans its manufacturing plant.

While "Made in Mexico" is gaining ground in the North American market, Chinese companies still hold an advantage due to their stronger technical and supply chain foundations, experts said.

"Mexico now aims to strengthen local supply chains and increase production value, but this has been a long-standing issue. While China has invested heavily in technology and research over the past 50 years, Mexico has not, making it difficult to achieve these goals quickly," Liu said.

"Most of the companies going to Mexico are bringing skills that we don't currently have in Mexico," José Luis Enciso, business intelligence director for Keno Consulting in Beijing, told China Daily. "This will benefit us by introducing new skills and creating new suppliers. It will also benefit the Chinese investors because they will gain access to a new market and become more efficient."

Challenges and hopes

Meanwhile, it is not easy for Chinese companies, capital and technology entering the Mexican market.

Going to Mexico "has helped reduce lead times, which is an advantage for our customers, not having such a long lead time coming from China. You're cutting your lead time from 100 days to 30 days to two weeks. So, there are a lot of advantages to producing in Mexico," Melchiorre said.

There also are some disadvantages. Resin, the raw material for Melchiorre's company's products, is more expensive in Mexico, he said. Compared with China, the cost of labor also is higher in Mexico. And shipping is very expensive, especially when the company produces and ships throughout North America.

"The further north we go, the more expensive and less competitive we are out of Mexico," Melchiorre said.

Cultural differences are another issue for Chinese companies operating in Mexico. There are not many Latin Americans who speak Chinese, and not many Chinese who have Spanish skills and industry experience.

That can lead to misunderstanding and make it difficult for companies to understand the local context, said Enciso, whose company provides consulting services for Chinese businesses entering Mexico.

While Mexican companies are accustomed to working with European and American firms, integrating Chinese companies can be challenging. That is due to the need for local expertise in engineering, legal and accounting services, which also must align with the practices of Chinese companies, Enciso added.

Enciso, who also served as minister counselor for trade affairs at Mexico's embassy in China, remains positive about the future development of economic and trade relations between the two countries.

"While we don't have a free trade agreement in place, Mexico and China have developed a very good economic and policy dialogue over the past 10 years," he said.

Recent efforts to strengthen ties between China and Mexico involve multiple sectors.

China Southern Airlines announced a direct route from Shenzhen to Mexico City in May, and Hainan Airlines resumed direct flights between Beijing and Tijuana and Mexico City in July.

"The connectivity is really going to help to enhance the relationship between the people-to-people exchange," Enciso said.

Several major ocean carriers have opened new China-to-Mexico trade routes in recent months. On the governmental level, Mexican Tourism Secretary Miguel Torruco visited China in July, which led to support from both governments to continue strengthening bilateral relationships.

"Certainly, the global policy environment will continue to evolve, unfortunately, with more protectionist measures and security concerns. However, I believe it's only a matter of time until common ground is found to recognize the positive aspects of increasing trade and investment," Enciso said.

WORLD

Evacuation of thousands more begins from Kursk

By REN QI in Moscow
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Russia began evacuating thousands more people from its border regions on Thursday after Ukraine said it was advancing deeper into the country in a lightning incursion aimed at forcing Moscow to slow its advance along the rest of the front.

The biggest foreign attack on sovereign Russian territory since World War II unfurled on Aug 6 when thousands of Ukrainian troops smashed through Russia's western border.

Supported by swarms of drones, heavy artillery and tanks, Ukrainian units have since carved out a sliver of Russia and battles were continuing along a front about 18 kilometers inside Russian territory on Thursday.

Authorities in the Kursk region have decided to evacuate its Glushkov district, acting Governor Alexey Smirnov said late on Wednesday.

The district directly borders Ukraine and has a population of about 20,000 people. Smirnov said on Telegram that police and other state bodies would coordinate the evacuation process.

Russian officials said at least 200,000 people have been evacuated from the border regions following the attack.

The Ministry for Emergency Situations said more than 8,000 residents of Kursk, including more than 2,500 children, currently stay in temporary accommodation centers.

The work to temporarily resettle people and provide them with everything they need continues, the ministry said.

Most residents of Kursk districts bordering Ukraine have been evacuated to safety, the ministry added.



Russian residents from border areas receive supplies in the Kursk region on Wednesday. XINHUA

Russia's Defense Ministry said on Thursday its forces had recaptured a village in Kursk after it was seized by Ukraine in its cross-border incursion.

In the first such claim since the start of the Ukrainian offensive more than a week ago, the ministry said the army had "completed destruction of the enemy and restored control of the settlement of Krupets".

Russian forces were continuing to "repel the attempted incursion of the Ukrainian armed forces", it said.

Moscow said that using aircraft, artillery and drones, its forces had "foiled the latest enemy attacks", including attempts to break through deeper into Russian territory using mobile groups.

As for the neighboring region of Belgorod, Defense Minister Andrei Belousov said on Thursday that Russia will send additional forces to defend the border region.

The Russian army has prepared "concrete actions" to defend Belgorod from Ukrainian attacks, including "the allocation of additional

forces", Belousov was quoted by the ministry as saying.

In a video published on Thursday by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's top commander Oleksandr Syrskyi said Kyiv had set up a military commandant's office in the occupied part of the Kursk region, where he said his forces were still advancing and had taken up to 1.5 kilometers in the past 24 hours.

Kyiv's forces had advanced 35 km into Kursk since launching the incursion, Syrskyi added.

'Buffer zone'

Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said Ukraine would create a "buffer zone" in the region to prevent Russian cross-border strikes.

"The creation of a buffer zone in the Kursk region is a step to protect our border communities from daily hostile shelling," he said.

In his nightly address on Wednesday, Zelensky referred to the growing number of Russian prisoners of war taken in Kursk who could be exchanged for Ukrainian fighters.

"Our advance in Kursk is going

well today — we are reaching our strategic goal," he said. "The 'exchange fund' for our state has also been significantly replenished."

Ukraine's surprise attack on Kursk has been seen by military analysts as an attempt to force Russia to divert forces from the eastern front, where Russian forces have taken control of a village that is just 16 kilometers from the city of Pokrovsk, which sits abreast of major roads that supply Ukrainian forces in the area.

In a daily briefing, the Russian Defense Ministry said its army units "liberated the village of Ivanovka" in the Donetsk region.

Russian forces have been inching toward Pokrovsk for months, taking a string of tiny villages in recent months as they seek to reach the outskirts of the city.

A Ukrainian official told AFP over the weekend, on condition of anonymity, that the incursion had little effect on fighting in the east but that the "intensity of Russian attacks" had decreased slightly.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Trump hits out at Biden over economic record

Former president claims Harris' 'radical' policies have caused 'horrific' inflation

ASHEVILLE, United States — Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump tore into the Joe Biden administration's economic record on Wednesday, just days before Kamala Harris is set to unveil her plan for tackling living costs in her first major policy speech as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee.

In a rambling address that was light on specifics, Trump claimed his Democratic rival would spark another Great Depression if elected and pledged that he would instead send wages soaring and "make America affordable again."

"Under Kamala Harris and crooked Joe Biden, the American Dream is dead. You don't hear about the American Dream anymore — it's dead," Trump said in Asheville, a liberal enclave in the crucial swing state of North Carolina.

"Her radical liberal policies have caused horrific inflation, decimated the middle class and gutted the finances of millions and millions of American families."

Consumer inflation is one of the biggest issues of the campaign, but new government figures published on Wednesday showed it easing to 2.9 percent last month — its lowest since March 2021 — cheering those calling for a cut in interest rates.

Trump conceded that inflation was "starting to maybe get under control", but also claimed that Harris "has cracked as the American economy has burned", possibly meaning "cackled", a word he has used to describe her laugh.

Marginally more people trust Harris to handle the economy than Trump, according to a new University of Michigan poll, and she leads or ties the Republican in every battleground state except Nevada, according to the influential Cook Political Report.

But in another poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Trump has advantages on the economy and immigration.

People in the United States are more likely to trust Trump over Harris when it comes to handling the economy or immigration, but

the difference is slight — 45 percent say Trump is better positioned to handle the economy, while 38 percent say that about Harris. The difference is similar in handling immigration. Independents are about twice as likely to trust Trump over Harris on economic issues, and they give him the advantage on immigration as well.

Harris is due to roll out a much-anticipated plan on Friday in Raleigh, North Carolina, to lower costs of healthcare, housing and groceries for middle-class families and take on corporate price gouging.

Vance-Walz debate

On Wednesday, Democratic vice-presidential nominee Tim Walz said he has agreed to debate his Republican rival J.D. Vance on Oct 1, which is one of the dates for a debate proposed by CBS News.

The network said it has provided four dates for the debate: Sept 17, Sept 24, Oct 1 and Oct 8.

When asked about a possible debate, Vance told Fox News: "I strongly suspect we're going to be there on October the 1st." Vance also said he wanted to debate Walz more than once.

Harris and Trump are scheduled to debate on ABC News on Sept 10.

In another development, Trump has lost his latest bid for a new judge in his New York hush money criminal case as it heads toward a key ruling and potential sentencing next month.

In a decision on Wednesday, Judge Juan Merchan declined to step aside and said Trump's demand was a rehash "rife with inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims" about his ability to remain impartial.

It is the third time that Merchan has rejected such a request from lawyers for the former president. They contend the judge has a conflict of interest because his daughter works as a political consultant for prominent Democrats, including Harris when she sought the Democrats' 2020 presidential nomination.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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Peek into the past

German archaeologists collect soil samples from an excavation site in the Altmark region of Saxony-Anhalt on Wednesday. The preconstruction excavations for a highway have uncovered a 7,000-year-old Stone Age settlement. The white buckets embedded in the ground mark the locations where the beams of the ancient houses once stood.

KLAUS-DIETMAR GABBERT VIA AP



Expert blames icing for Brazil plane crash

By JIMENA ESTEBAN
in Buenos Aires, Argentina
For China Daily

An aviation expert has cited severe icing as a potential cause of the recent plane crash in Brazil, which is the world's deadliest aviation disaster since January last year, as bereaved families wait for answers on the tragedy.

The aircraft, operated by Brazilian airline Voepass, crashed in a residential neighborhood on Aug 9, killing all 62 people.

The ATR 72 twin-engine turboprop was en route from Cascavel in southern Brazil to Guarulhos International Airport in Sao Paulo. According to the Brazilian Air Force, the pilots did not report any emergency or adverse weather conditions. The plane was flying normally at 1:21 pm when radar contact was lost at 1:22 pm, and it crashed about eight minutes later.

While the cause of the crash has not yet been determined, aviation expert Daniel Calazans, head of the Professor Calazans Institute in Brazil, which trains pilots, suggested that severe icing might be a factor.

"There was a weather forecast for severe icing along the route and at cruising altitude," Calazans said.

"If deicing devices are not used, this could cause deformation in the wings and control surfaces (aileron, elevators, flaps), leading to the aircraft losing lift and possibly crashing."

"If the aircraft surfaces were to freeze and parts of the aircraft were to be deformed, the pilot could lose complete control and might no longer be able to keep the plane in flight."

Marcel Moura, chief operations officer of Voepass, said at a news briefing that the plane was sensitive to ice. While some ice had been anticipated, it was predicted to be within an acceptable range, he said.

Calazans said a thorough analysis of the contributing factors is needed to determine if the accident could have been avoided. "It is still too early to determine this," he said, adding that the black boxes are expected to be investigated in about a year.

Voepass officials are working with Brazil's Aeronautical Accidents Investigation and Prevention Center to investigate the crash.

Voepass CEO Eduardo Busch said the plane had two black boxes that store flight data. However, the boxes, which have not yet been recovered, might have sustained damage during the crash. Authorities are expected to issue a preliminary report on their investigation in 30 days.

Identifying bodies

Over the weekend, more than 40 families of the victims traveled to Sao Paulo to identify the bodies.

Apart from the aircraft's pilot and co-pilot, other crash victims included eight doctors, four college professors from Unioeste University in Cascavel, a 3-year-old child, a lawyer who specialized in cases against airlines, and a Venezuelan family and their dog.

This was the world's worst plane crash since January last year, when 72 people onboard a Yeti Airlines plane in Nepal died after the aircraft stalled and crashed while making its landing approach. The Yeti plane was an ATR 72, similar to the one used in the Voepass flight, but an investigation had attributed the Nepal tragedy to pilot error.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Relatives of victims of the Voepass plane crash mourn next to a coffin during a mass in Guarulhos, Brazil, on Tuesday. MIGUEL SCHINCARIOL / AFP

US firms face boycott calls over brand disinformation

WASHINGTON — From Google to Netflix, prominent US companies are battling internet boycott calls over their perceived political leanings in a polarizing election season that has exposed them to what researchers call "brand disinformation."

The online campaigns, which falsely claim both Netflix and Google are funding or favoring Democratic nominee Kamala Harris ahead of the November election, illustrate how brands are vulnerable to political falsehoods that can expose them to financial perils.

Those calling for a boycott include fake accounts on X, researchers said. The site, which has become a hotbed of disinformation, is owned by Elon Musk, who has endorsed Republican nominee Donald Trump.

The recent boycott calls targeting Netflix, which also spread on other platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, were triggered by false claims of a \$7 million donation from the streaming service to Harris' campaign, Agence France-Presse fact-checkers reported.

Reed Hastings, the service's co-founder and executive chairman, made a contribution to Vice-President Harris' campaign but the company said it was a "personal donation" and had "no connection to Netflix."

Still, calls to "cancel Netflix" flooded social media sites, with many users falsely claiming the company was indirectly funding the Harris campaign. Some shared screenshots of their canceled subscriptions.

Nearly one-fourth of the boycott calls on X were traced to fake profiles, which have consistently expressed support for Trump through the past year, said Cyabra, a

disinformation security company.

"Brand disinformation campaigns in today's polarized climate have far-reaching impacts beyond just corporate reputation," Dan Brahm, Cyabra's chief executive, told AFP.

"The Netflix case demonstrates how rapidly these campaigns spread, potentially reaching hundreds of millions" and shows how "disinformation can manipulate public opinion and consumer behavior," he said.

Similar boycott calls recently targeted Google after unfounded claims that the company censors election-related content and manipulates search engine results in favor of Harris.

Fake profiles

Cyabra identified hundreds of fake profiles on X that called for a boycott of the tech giant while promoting another search engine.

Google did not respond when AFP asked about the allegations, or about the effect of the boycott calls.

Earlier this month, a survey by the portal Sitejabber showed 30 percent of respondents had boycotted a brand over political reasons in the past 12 months, while 41 percent said they prefer that companies keep their "political positions private."

"Brands face a delicate balancing act this election year," Michael Lai, chief executive of Sitejabber, told AFP. "While staying apolitical may seem safe, it's important for businesses to understand that even neutrality can be interpreted as a position."

Other surveys suggest consumers consider it the brand's fault if its advertising appears next to polarizing, false or defamatory content.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Students inspired by Shanxi history, culture

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi is a perfect combination of the old and new, and its traditional elements can inspire modern creativity. That was what students from Malaysia felt during their 12-day study tour of the North China province.

Thirty-three students from PIA, a vocational school in Malaysia's Perak region, together with their teachers, visited Shanxi from July 1-12 to learn about its history and culture, the modern creative industry and the latest developments in the vocational education industry.

The trip is a part of a Sino-Malaysian youth exchange and training program.

During July 3-10, the students toured Shanxi's famed places of historical interest, including the ancient city of Pingyao, the Xuan-kong Temple — or the Hanging Temple — in Hunyuan county, Sakyamuni Pagoda — or Wooden Pagoda — in Yingxian county and the Great Wall fortress of Yanmen Pass in Daixian county, as well as two of China's oldest Buddhist temples — Foguang and Nanchan in Wutai county.

Keen interest

As most of the students are Malaysian-Chinese, they have a keen interest in Chinese history and culture, and other aspects relating to their ancestral roots.

Mok Hao Han is a student with an interest in ancient Chinese architecture. He said his knowledge about China's ancient architecture is from his grandmother.

"My grandma was a teacher of Chinese history," Mok said.

"When I was a kid, she told me that China boasts some of the greatest ancient buildings in the world. What she said aroused my curiosity in this country where she was from and now my dream has come true because of this trip to Shanxi."

When viewing the ancient buildings, Mok said the aesthetics of the structures can inspire him as a student of artistic design.

"I've paid special attention to the linear characteristics of the buildings' roofs, as well as their colors," he said. "I believe these are the things I can learn from for my designs."

Wong Xin Yi, a student of graphic design at PIA, shares the same interests with Mok. She said she is a follower of Lin Huiyin, a renowned Chinese researcher in ancient Chinese architecture and an artistic designer.

"I was informed that Lin and her husband Liang Sicheng, who was also a famed architecture researcher, discovered quite a few ancient buildings in Shanxi," Wong said. "This time, I'd like to follow in their footsteps to find out what and where they are."

She said she was lucky that Foguang Temple, one of the oldest Buddhist temples discovered and identified by Lin and Liang, was in her itinerary.

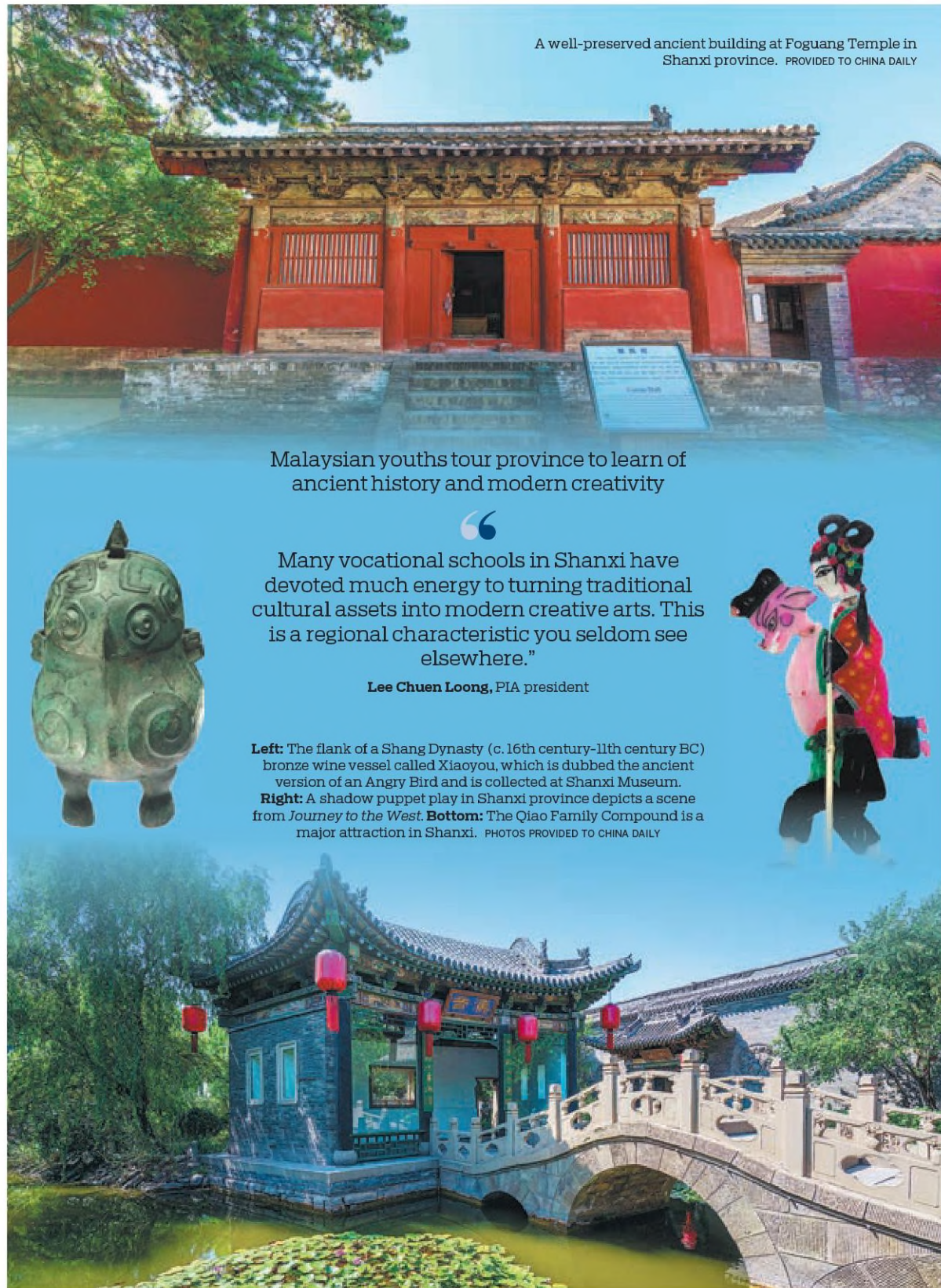
At the temple, the tour guide told her that this is the second-oldest preserved wooden-structure building in China, next only to the Nanchan Buddhist Temple, which is also located in the county of Wutai and which they would visit later.

According to inscriptions found in the temple, the Grand Eastern Hall, the main hall of Foguang, was built in 857 during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and has been preserved to this date. It has a history that rivals the Nanchan Temple, which has a main hall built in 782.

Historic discovery

She was also told the story about the discovery of the building, which was hidden in a remote village more than eight decades ago.

If not for a discovery by Liang and Lin in the 1930s, its historical



A well-preserved ancient building at Foguang Temple in Shanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Malaysian youths tour province to learn of ancient history and modern creativity

Many vocational schools in Shanxi have devoted much energy to turning traditional cultural assets into modern creative arts. This is a regional characteristic you seldom see elsewhere."

Lee Chuen Loong, PIA president

Left: The flank of a Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) bronze wine vessel called Xiaoyou, which is dubbed the ancient version of an Angry Bird and is collected at Shanxi Museum.

Right: A shadow puppet play in Shanxi province depicts a scene from Journey to the West. Bottom: The Qiao Family Compound is a major attraction in Shanxi. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



and cultural value may still be unknown.

Before the 1930s, many researchers, especially those in Japan, believed that there were no preserved wooden structures older than the Tang Dynasty in China.

When examining the photos of murals in Gansu province's Mogao Grottoes, the couple found there was a set of maps of temples in the Mount Wutai region and Foguang was one of them.

In early 1937, they launched a search for the temple and it was quickly found in June.

Their research proved that the Grand Eastern Hall is the largest among the few preserved Tang Dynasty structures in China.

Wong said she was also impressed with the scale and the cultural values of this temple.

"This is a treasure house of Buddhist arts with a large number of statues and great murals, and also a trove for the study of ancient architecture as it features Tang Dynasty architecture

style and structural details," Wong said.

At Foguang Temple, some students like Mok and Wong discovered a unique feature of the Tang Dynasty building. The huge roof has its eaves extending several meters out of the walls.

Classical woodwork

They learned what makes this extension possible is the unique ancient Chinese structuring component called *dougong*.

A *dougong* is a set of interlocking wooden bow-shaped brackets. Its

function is to provide increased support for the weight of the horizontal beams that span the vertical beams or pillars.

Later, at Taiyuan Tourism College, the students had the opportunity to learn how to make *dougong* brackets themselves and how these ancient structural components can be used in modern creations.

"*Dougong* is among the most innovative structural components in ancient China," Mok said. "It is a great invention in terms of technique and aesthetics."

Chin Wei Chong is a student of

multimedia-aided design at PIA. He said he is happy to see that designers can be inspired by ancient things when designing modern, creative products.

He noticed that schools in Shanxi are trying to transfer ancient things like *dougong* into a local version of Lego bricks.

Chin said the most amazing thing in Shanxi is that the traditional cultural assets, like buildings, paintings, calligraphy and folk arts, can inspire people in the cultural creative industry.

"I've heard that a lot of Shanxi designers have won international awards for the innovative use of traditional elements in their works," Chin said.

"When it comes to creativity, a designer should not start from scratch," he said. "He can draw inspiration from many other things. In Shanxi, for instance, the traditional culture is the source of inspiration for many designers."

Ong Zi Eng, another PIA student, said that building a linkage

between traditional culture and modern creativity is the wisdom that Shanxi contributes to the design industry.

"We are Malaysians with ancestral and cultural roots in China," Ong said. "We'd like to bring home these Chinese cultural elements, which would be conducive to our career development in the future."

Latest developments

During the trip, PIA students were also amazed with Shanxi's rapid development empowered by new technologies, especially in the design and creative industries.

In Shanxi, they attended several seminars and workshops at local vocational schools, focusing on such topics as the use of artificial intelligence in design and the utilization of digital technologies in inheriting and developing traditional arts.

"In Malaysia, AI is in its nascent stage and we don't have much experience in applying it in the design industry," said PIA student Haisvianee Krishnan. "In Shanxi, we were amazed with the scenarios where AI is applied."

"It is used in almost every industry: in modern design, in the protection of cultural heritage and in manufacturing and many others," she added.

Chin Choong Kooi was a PIA teacher taking part in this Shanxi trip. He said the deepest impression of this trip is that he saw the connection between traditional assets and modern technologies. "This is especially the case in the vocational education sector, which is a focus of our study," he said.

"We felt the difference in vocational education and career development between Malaysia and Shanxi," said Lim Chow Ding, another PIA teacher. "This difference will not hold us apart. Instead, we see the difference as an opportunity to broaden our vision."

This year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and Malaysia. Over the decades, the two countries have witnessed steady and prosperous cooperation in many fields, said Lee Chuen Loong, the president of PIA who headed the delegation to Shanxi.

Lee said education is an important sector for bilateral collaboration. Vocational training has gained strong momentum for growth since the launch of the Malaysia-China International Industry and Education Cooperation Center.

He added that under this new initiative, nearly 1,000 Malaysian students have come to China for vocational training.

"The Shanxi tour is also one of the latest moves under this program," Lee said.

The journey covered such Shanxi local schools as Taiyuan Tourism College, Shanxi Vocational University of Engineering Science and Technology, and Jinzhong Vocational & Technical College.

"My deepest impression of this trip is that many vocational schools in Shanxi have devoted much energy to turning traditional cultural assets into modern creative arts," Lee said. "This is a regional characteristic you seldom see elsewhere."

He added that the practice in Shanxi's vocational education sector is a typical case worth studying. "We are considering further cooperation in exchange of such an experience," he said.

The collaboration has entered the implementation stage after PIA signed a framework agreement for cooperation with Taiyuan Tourism College on July 5.

In addition to exchanges, the two schools will launch joint teaching programs in the future, according to Xie Yuhui, president of Taiyuan Tourism College.

Hao Hong contributed to this story.

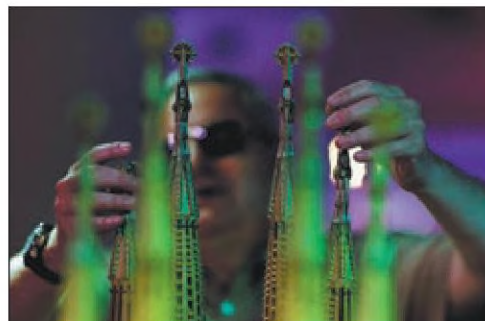


From left: Malaysian visitors learn about carpentry practice at Shanxi Vocational University of Engineering Science and Technology, a stop of the Malaysian students' tour of Shanxi.

LIU YUFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY A replica of an ancient structure *pailou* displayed at the school. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Tour members from Malaysia pose for a photo at a Shanxi museum, which focuses on brick-carving art. HAO HONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



GLOBAL LENS



From left: Visually impaired visitors walk past a model of the Leaning Tower of Pisa at the Typhlological Museum in Madrid on Aug 6. Visually impaired Jose Pedro Gonzalez touches a model of the Sagrada Familia of Barcelona at the museum on Aug 5. Gonzalez walks among building models at the museum on Aug 5.

With their fingertips, Marina Rojas and Jose Pedro Gonzalez went through a small-scale model of Barcelona's Sagrada Familia church in an exhibition which allows the visually impaired to discover some of the world's best-known monuments.

"There are just so many tiny details! And what a strange roof," enthused Gonzalez as he explored the wooden replica of Antoni Gaudi's spectacular basilica.

Rojas said that she "never imagined the Sagrada Familia like that."

"It's very surprising, because you get a general idea of what the monument is like, what the space inside is like," she added.

The Madrid Typhlological Museum — from the Greek "tuphos", meaning blind — houses 37 reproductions of global monuments that are listed as world heritage sites.

It was set up in 1992 by ONCE, Spain's national organization for the blind which has 71,000 members.

Made of wood, stone, metal or resin, the models are accessible to all visitors — whether blind, sighted or partially sighted — giving them a hands-on, sensory experience of the architecture.

"There's no other place in the world with a museum like this. ... they don't have this kind of collection" said guide Mireia Rodriguez, who is herself visually impaired.

ONCE runs a lottery and some scratchcard games which bring in 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) a year and pays the salaries of its 72,000 employees; six out of 10 of them have some sort of disability.

The funds are also used for other investments, such as the museum, which in 2023 welcomed 16,000 visitors.

Besides the models, the museum also features artworks by people who are visually impaired and a display of tools and equipment used from the early 19th century until the 1980s to help visually impaired people access culture, including books in Braille.

PERSONAL TOUCH

Museum in Madrid offers visually impaired visitors a feel of the wonders across the world



Visually impaired visitors touch with their hands a model depicting reliefs of the Parthenon at the Typhlological Museum in Madrid on Aug 6. PHOTOS BY OSCAR DEL POZO / AFP



Museum visitor Jose Pedro Gonzalez walks among exhibits at the Typhlological Museum in Madrid on Aug 5.



From left: Visually impaired visitors touch a model of the Monument to the Discoveries in Lisbon at the museum on Aug 6. A visually impaired visitor touches a model of New York's Statue of Liberty at the museum on Aug 6.

Up close

After wandering through a room housing models of Spain's top attractions, such as the Alhambra palace in Granada, Madrid's Royal Palace and the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, Rojas branded the exhibition "really marvelous".

Another room is filled with global landmarks such as the Taj Mahal, London Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, Rome's Colosseum, the Parthenon in Athens, the Eiffel Tower, the Kremlin and the Old City of Jerusalem to name but a few.

"No matter how much they explain to you, you can't really get a proper image of what it's like ... and that creates a lot of frustration, so the fact there are spaces like this is fantastic," said Rojas, whose eyes can only see a bit of light.

It was while feeling the dome of the Taj Mahal that Gonzalez's hands lingered longest, his fingers taking in the model's smooth curves made of the very same Makrana marble as the dazzling white mausoleum in northern India.

"I knew the Taj Mahal was made of marble, but the first thing that surprised me was touching it and how cold it felt, that the model itself was also made of marble," said the 60-year-old, who has been blind since birth.

Gonzalez, his hands gliding over the monument's rooftops and facades, said he was impressed by all the work that goes into carving the marble and the little details.

"I wish there were more chances to touch such works of art," said Rojas. "Touch gives you a lot of information, even if most comes through sight, so it's very important to touch."

No matter how much they explain to you, you can't really get a proper image of what it's like ... and that creates a lot of frustration, so the fact there are spaces like this is fantastic."

Marina Rojas, a visually impaired visitor at the Typhlological Museum



From left: Visually impaired visitors touch a model of France's Eiffel Tower at the museum on Aug 6. Gonzalez feels a model of India's Taj Mahal at the museum on Aug 5.

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BUSINESS

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China-Africa economic, trade relations deepen

China and African countries have developed closer economic and trade ties with ever-increasing trade volume, diversified commodities and services on both sides, latest data showed.

Trade between China and Africa rose 5.5 percent year-on-year to 1.19 trillion yuan (\$166.6 billion) between January and July, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

China has been Africa's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years, the Customs data showed.

China-Africa trade reached a record high of \$282.1 billion in 2023, up 1.5 percent year-on-year, showing strong resilience.

In 2023, China's new energy vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic product exports to Africa increased by 291 percent, 109 percent and 57 percent year-on-year, respectively.

Meanwhile, China's imports of African nuts, vegetables, flowers and fruits increased by 130 percent, 32 percent, 14 percent and 7 percent year-on-year, respectively.

China's trade with Africa in intermediate goods posted 6.4 percent year-on-year growth in the first seven months of the year, the GAC data showed.

Trade in intermediate goods between China and Africa accounts for 68 percent of the total value of bilateral trade, helping Africa in its industrialization and economic diversification efforts, said Liu Daliang, an official with the GAC.

During the January-July period, China's exports to Africa hit 697.93 billion yuan, while imports reached 490.89 billion yuan, Customs data revealed.

Sang Baichuan, dean of the Institute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics, said China-Africa trade has grown rapidly as a result of

mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation.

"It not only demonstrates the remarkable achievements of China's high-quality economic development, but also plays a significant role in promoting Africa's social development and improving local people's living standards," said Sang.

The China-Africa Trade Index, based on trade-indicator data between China and African countries, was released for the first time by the GAC in 2023, with the general index of data from 2000 serving as the benchmark.

Starting from 100 points in 2000, the index reached a record high of 990.55 points in 2022, indicating the rapid and positive development of China-Africa trade.

"China and African economies are highly complementary," Sang noted, adding that China possesses mature technologies, equipment and sufficient capital, while African countries have significant advantages in terms of manpower and natural resources.

Strengthened trade ties between China and Africa is beneficial in leveraging their respective advantages and vast markets, achieving mutual benefits and win-win development, according to Sang.

The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will be held in Beijing from Sept 4 to 6, and Liu expects the two sides to enhance their economic and trade cooperation.

The theme of the summit is "Joining Hands to Advance Modernization and Build a High-Level China-Africa Community with a Shared Future", according to an announcement made by China's Foreign Ministry on July 30.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



A residential property project is under construction in Hefei, Anhui province. CHEN SANHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Realty draws hope from data

Policy effects, narrowing sales declines, Shanghai market show bright sparks

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Despite continued adjustments, positive signs have emerged in China's housing market, thanks to the supportive measures from both central and local governments. And further efforts are needed to form a stable and healthy property market, said officials and experts on Thursday after digesting July data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

Declines in some key real estate indicators continued to narrow as a series of policies introduced in the past few months took effect, said Liu Aihua, an NBS spokeswoman, at a State Council Information Office news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

Sales by floor area of new commercial housing — flats, apart-

ments, condominiums and the like, as against public housing like municipal housing — fell 18.6 percent year-on-year to 541.49 million square meters in the January-July period, compared with a 19 percent slump in the January-June period, according to NBS data.

"Most of the real estate indicators remain in downtrend, showing the real estate market is still in the process of adjustments," said Liu.

The sector is required to implement the new measures well, aim to promote the stable and healthy development of the property market, digest the existing inventories, optimize the newly developed properties, actively support the acquisition of existing commercial housing for government-subsidized housing, ensure the delivery of residential properties and build the new real

estate development pattern at an accelerated pace, Liu said.

Shanghai came up with a good performance in the housing market as home prices of both new and existing properties registered positive growth month-on-month, according to NBS data.

New home prices edged up 0.2 percent in July from a month earlier, while the nation's four first-tier cities — Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province — saw their new home prices fall 0.5 percent from June on average.

In Shanghai, pre-owned home prices edged up 0.1 percent month-on-month, against an average decline of 0.5 percent in China's top-tier cities.

"Shanghai's stronger supportive policies and its comprehensive capability in sustaining demand have contributed to resilience in home prices," said Zhang Dawei, chief analyst at Centaline Property Agency.

Yan Yuejin, vice-president of the

Shanghai E-House China Research and Development Institute, said, "The strong fundamentals, along with the city's ease in homebuying policies, have released potential demand."

Fewer Chinese cities reported new home price rises in July compared to June, suggesting a need for various Chinese cities to explore new demand, said Yan.

"The July data also indicated that the home price index staged a mild improvement month-on-month, which indicated the effectiveness of our supportive policies in lowering homebuying costs and activating demand."

"With regard to the extended year-on-year decline, we expect more follow-up measures to better facilitate and explore demand in various segments of the housing market."

First-tier cities, Yan said, play an important role in driving the nation's housing market in the right direction.

Major oilfield achieves zero fossil fuel status

By ZHENG XIN in Beijing and
MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

Hadson Oilfield, located in the Taklimakan Desert in the Tarim Basin of Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, became the country's first million-ton oilfield with zero fossil fuel energy consumption, said its operator China National Petroleum Corp on Thursday.

Zero fossil energy consumption refers to the elimination of fossil fuel use by replacing it with clean energy sources such as wind and solar power — or solar thermal systems — thereby achieving zero carbon dioxide emissions.

The establishment of a zero fossil energy consumption oilfield is significant for promoting energy transition while driving economic development, it said.

CNPC said the oilfield, once a major energy consumer, consumed 20,400 metric tons of standard coal and emitted 68,300 tons of CO₂ in 2020 alone. To address the issue, the oilfield has shut down a 1-million-ton central station and a 100,000 cubic meter natural gas facility, reducing 90 electricity and gas-consuming devices, and stopping four gas-fired heaters and 59 electromagnetic heaters.

It has also installed three 1,100-kilowatt heat pump units, utilizing the waste heat from extracted water to replace the gas heaters, providing heating for the living areas and on-site facilities, which reduces natural gas consumption by 1.04 million cubic meters per year.

The oilfield has implemented extensive green energy replacement measures, including the installation of solar thermal storage heaters and the construction of a distributed photovoltaic power station with an annual generation capacity of 20.4 million kilowatt-hours.

This enabled full electrification of production operations, achiev-

ing zero gas and oil consumption on site, it said.

An analyst said the achievement of zero fossil energy consumption at the oilfield represents a significant milestone in the energy sector, reflecting both advances in technological innovation and strategic foresight.

This achievement demonstrates that even energy-intensive sectors like oil extraction can effectively integrate renewable energy solutions to minimize their carbon footprint, said Wang Lining, director of the oil market department of the Economics and Technology Research Institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

"The use of heat pumps, solar thermal systems and PV power indicates a comprehensive approach to energy management that can serve as a model for other oilfields both in China and globally," Wang said.

By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, the oilfield enhances energy security, a critical concern for China and other nations. The shift toward clean energy sources not only aligns with China's "dual carbon" goals, but also mitigates the risks associated with fossil fuel price volatility and supply disruptions, he added.

The company said the oilfield will continue intensifying efforts to replace traditional energy sources with PV and solar thermal power, while planning to build centralized PV power stations connected to the grid and achieving 100 percent green electricity substitution within the central station.

It aims to establish CNPC's first million-ton "zero-carbon central station" and "zero-carbon oilfield", setting a leading example for the accelerated green and low-carbon transformation of China's petroleum extraction industry.

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Xinjiang new energy tops in H1

By ZHENG XIN
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With an abundance of strong winds and long hours of sunlight, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in Northwest China has seen its newly installed capacity of new energy rise by 103 percent year-on-year during the first half of this year, ranking first in the country, said the local authorities concerned.

First-half investment in wind and photovoltaic or PV power generation projects in the region, meanwhile, grew by nearly 37 percent year-on-year, accounting for 15.7 percent of fixed-asset investment, which contributed to a 4.5 percentage point increase in fixed-asset investment growth, said the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Development and Reform Commission.

Among these, investment in PV power generation projects accounted for more than 70 percent of the total investment in new energy in the region, with a year-on-year growth of 36.5 percent, becoming the main component of the new energy industry layout, it said.

An analyst said increasing investment further facilitates power supply and the transmission of large wind and solar power bases in western regions.

"China has been stepping up efforts accelerating the construction of a new type of power sys-



A view of a wind farm near Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. SONG YU / FOR CHINA DAILY

tem, promoting high-quality development of new energy and driving large-scale equipment upgrades and renovations," said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

State Grid Corp, China's largest power utility firm, said earlier that the company's annual grid investment surpassed 600 billion yuan (\$84 billion) for the first time this year, with a record investment of 71.1 billion yuan in the region.

According to State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power Co, all the new energy generated within the region has been connected to the grid during the first half.

Xinjiang is rich in clean energy, including wind and solar power. By the end of 2023, clean electricity transmitted from Xinjiang to other places amounted to 210 billion kWh since the transmission program of electricity generated in the western region was launched in November 2010, it said.

This is equivalent to a reduction of about 171.52 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, said the company.

Xinjiang's new energy installed capacity exceeds 80 million kilowatts as of now, accounting for more than 50 percent of the total installed power capacity, said Zheng Ziwen, deputy chief of the new energy and renewable energy division of the commission.

The region will continuously take advantage of local resources to further elevate the development of new energy to a new level, said Zheng.

According to data from the National Energy Administration, in the first half, Xinjiang's newly installed capacity of new energy reached 14.08 million kilowatts, including 4.28 million kilowatts of wind power and 9.8 million kilowatts of PV power, up 103 percent year-on-year. Xinjiang's new energy installed capacity accounts for more than 10 percent of the national total, it said.

Briefly

PRC conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 577.7 billion yuan (\$80.91 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.7 percent on Thursday. The move aims to offset the impact of medium-term lending facility expiration, tax payment peak and government bond issuances, as well as keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said. A reverse repo is a process in which the PBOC purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future. The MLF tool was introduced in 2014 to help commercial and policy banks maintain liquidity by allowing them to borrow from the central bank using securities as collateral.

Renminbi strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 16 pips to 7.1399 against the US dollar on Thursday, said the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the greenback is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the inter-bank market each business day.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Jiangsu powers up EV charging with new facility

Micro-grid charging zone in Yangzhou boasts faster recharges, bigger space

By LIU YUKUN in Beijing and GUO JUN in Nanjing

Yangzhou, East China's Jiangsu province, unveiled its first micro-grid charging station, a facility that combines solar carports, energy storage, charging piles and direct current charging/discharging capabilities.

Micro-grids are small-scale power systems made up of distributed energy sources, loads as well as energy storage, distribution and control systems. With capabilities of power generation, distribution and consumption, a micro-grid can efficiently optimize energy use within its network.

The Yangzhou micro-grid charging station, which recently began trial operations, is capable of simultaneously charging up to 22 vehicles, marking a significant step forward in the city's green energy infrastructure.



China's charging infrastructure has developed rapidly in recent years, establishing the world's largest, most extensive and most diverse charging network."

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association

The station is equipped with two liquid-cooled ultrafast chargers and 20 direct current fast chargers. The ultrafast charger has a maximum power output of 480 kilowatts, making it eight to 10 times more efficient than standard fast chargers and capable of fully charging a vehicle in as little as 10 minutes. The site also includes a 200 kW energy storage system, expected to handle an annual energy transfer of 100,000 kilowatt-hours.

The site's energy storage system can prioritize using stored power during peak electricity usage times, thus reducing grid load levels, and storing electricity during off-peak times, which helps balance power demand. This approach not only stabilizes the integration of renewable energy into the grid, but also lowers the station's power costs, and ensures safe and stable site operations.

In recent years, the rapid growth of electric vehicles in China has significantly increased demand for charging infrastructure. The National Energy Administration said that by the end of June, the total number of charging piles in the country had reached 10.244 million units, a 54 percent year-on-year increase. Among these, 3.122 million were public chargers and

7.122 million were private chargers, meeting the charging needs of about 24 million new energy vehicles.

Zhang Xing, an NEA spokesperson, said at a recent news conference that China's charging network continues to expand, with efforts underway to increase the deployment of public charging piles in provinces including Jiangsu, Guangdong, Henan, Jiangxi, Sichuan and Guizhou.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said, "China's charging infrastructure has developed rapidly in recent years, establishing the world's largest, most extensive and most diverse charging network."

Minsheng Securities expects that by 2025, the domestic market for charging piles could exceed 300 billion yuan (\$42 billion).

Cui said that despite the rapid growth of China's charging infrastructure sector, challenges remain, such as inadequate layout, unbalanced structure, outdated technology of older charging piles, uneven service quality and inconsistent operations.

He said leading operators in China's charging pile sector are performing well. For example, GAC Energy's charging piles averaged 5,671 kWh of electricity in terms of output in June, while NIO's charging piles reached around 6,500 kWh.

However, Cui said some older charging piles averaged only about 100 kWh per month, highlighting the need to further develop a high-quality charging infrastructure to support the rapid growth of NEVs, particularly by upgrading old low-power-output alternating current (AC) piles and increasing high-power-output direct current fast charging stations.

On the policy front, there has been some guidance to support the sector's high-quality development. In August, an action plan issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and two other departments called for expanding the EV charging infrastructure network and enhancing EVs' link with the power grid. The plan calls for fully utilizing EVs' energy storage function and innovating interactions between vehicles, piles, stations and grid networks.

Zhou Libo, deputy secretary-general of the electric transportation and energy storage branch of the China Electricity Council, said that the performance of power charging and swapping equipment needs to be improved, and further research is required in areas such as the power carrying capacity of distribution networks and the integration of solar power generation, power storage and charging processes.

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Sail with the wind



Wind Peak, an offshore wind turbine installation vessel, docks at a shipyard in Qidong, Jiangsu province, on Thursday. The vessel is able to transport and install seven complete 15 megawatt turbine sets per load. XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Visitors taste roasted nuts during an expo in Tianjin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Roasted nut hub in Tianjin sees cracking exports

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Wangkou, a town in North China's Tianjin with a rich history as a major producer of roasted nuts, is poised to extend its global footprint even further.

Wangkou's annual export value of roasted nuts reached 1.3 billion yuan (\$181.1 million) in 2023, and this is expected to grow further this year, the town's deputy head Liu Wentao said.

Wangkou is upgrading its industrial infrastructure in a bid to expand its overseas market presence, with digital-led initiatives also helping the roasted nuts industry generate 6 billion yuan in revenue last year.

Wangkou sells its produce to 12 countries and regions including Asia, the Americas, Europe and Africa.

The town, located in the city's Jinghai district, boasts a rich heritage tracing back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and produces roasted nuts across 30 categories, including almonds, pistachios and sunflower seeds.

With a thriving roasted food industry encompassing 8,000 employees and over 300 enterprises presently, Wangkou has emerged as a pivotal player in the sector.

Ma Lanbo, president of the Tianjin Nuts Industry Association, attributed Wangkou's growing exports to the convenient packaging

of its products and the use of high-quality raw materials, which have found favor among international buyers.

Benefiting from its location within the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei city cluster, Wangkou's ambitious global expansion plan received a significant boost with the establishment of its largest export warehouse spanning 4,500 square meters in Jinghai in May.

The facility is a result of cooperation between e-commerce giant Ali-Express and logistics giant Cainiao. The roasted nut production hub is also eyeing to further improve product quality.

Zhang Haidong, vice-director of the Jinghai commerce bureau, said its ongoing industrial upgrade and

the adoption of intelligent equipment will play a crucial role.

Companies in Wangkou are taking steps in line with efforts nationwide to promote equipment upgrades, and enhance their operational efficiency.

Upgrading equipment and innovation will help reduce packaging costs and further improve product quality, said Yue Youchao, vice-general manager of Yuecheng Food, the town's largest roasted nut producer, referring to consumers' evolving taste in roasted nut products.

"Through more standardized practices, improved logistics and upgraded equipment, Wangkou will see a more promising trajectory in its roasted nut businesses," Yue said.

Shenzhen, Dubai enhance financial cooperation

By CHAI HUA in Shenzhen, Guangdong grace@chinadailyhk.com

The Shenzhen Stock Exchange (SZSE) and Dubai Financial Market (DFM) have signed a memorandum of understanding outlining plans to explore closer cooperation in indexes, exchange traded funds, and fixed-income products, and the feasibility of new mechanisms and channels for cross-market financing.

The MoU, signed on Wednesday, marks a milestone in collaboration between the financial markets of China and the United Arab Emirates.

The SZSE and the DFM also pledged to organize regular senior executive meetings, collaborate on marketing promotion and sharing of know-how, and conduct joint research.

"This MoU with the SZSE is a pivotal step in strengthening our cross-border ties, driving global investment opportunities, and enhancing market accessibility. By leveraging our combined strengths,

we are not only reinforcing the ties between our financial ecosystems, but also paving the way for new avenues of growth and innovation that will benefit investors and stakeholders in both regions," said Hamed Ali, CEO of DFM & Nasdaq Dubai.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of China-UAE diplomatic relations. The non-oil trade volume between the UAE and China has increased 800-fold since 1984.

"The agreement will deepen practical cooperation between China and the UAE, and strengthen the capital market's capacity to serve the real economies of both countries," a representative from the SZSE said.

The SZSE said the MoU entails more bilateral road shows and promotional activities, cross-border investment, financing products and channels.

The document was signed at the China-UAE (Dubai) Capital Markets Collaboration Seminar in Dubai, attended by about 100 representatives from Chinese and UAE financial

regulators, and major institutional investors.

At the meeting, executives from eight leading A-share companies in sectors such as digital economy, advanced manufacturing, and green and low-carbon growth, engaged in one-on-one discussions with international investors.

Going forward, the SZSE said it will double down on efforts to deepen connectivity with overseas capital markets, expand high-quality services to overseas investors and steadily promote the institutional opening-up of the capital market.

The exchange has been seeking new alignments with financial institutions in the UAE.

In December last year, it signed an MoU with the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange in the capital of the UAE on closer cross-border capital market cooperation.

Zhang Yiming, managing director and global executive head of equities at China International Capital Corp (CICC), said UAE funds are continuously increasing their investment in China's A-share market.

To meet their surging demand for investment opportunities, CICC plans to augment its banking and financing businesses in the UAE, especially after it received approval recently to open a branch in the country.

Zhang said the collaboration between the SZSE and the DFM paved the way for exciting possibilities and expanding market frontiers. As to specific products, he suggested they could start by establishing an ETF connectivity mechanism, based on the successful experiences of other cross-border ETF channels.

In 2021, eligible ETFs were included in the Stock Connect program between Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Ltd and the SZSE and the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

"Broad-based index ETFs and thematic investment ETFs can be considered priorities. The two exchanges can also strengthen bilateral cooperation in green finance by expanding the dual listing of green bonds and other fixed-income products in both markets," Zhang said.

County boosts ecotourism potential with afforestation

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

In 2013, Wang Minggang, a native of Pengshui Miao and Tujia autonomous county in Chongqing municipality, decided to return to the Ayi River Community in his hometown after years of migrant work elsewhere.

Wang had two reasons to head back — to help beautify the local rocky environment and to be close enough to take care of his children and elderly parents.

He rented 300 mu (20 hectares) of undeveloped land in the Yantouba area of Ayi River Community Group 6 to develop an ecological agricultural business.

Nestled within the Wuling Mountains, Ayi River Community in Shaogqing subdistrict is characterized by high mountains and steep slopes, with a smattering of workable farmland.

"The area is very rocky and diffi-

cult to cultivate. During the rainy season, rocks often tumbled down hillsides, posing safety risks for residents," he said.

As one of the 100 key counties for comprehensive rocky soil/desertification control in China's karst areas, Pengshui started to restore and construct forest and grass vegetation since 2011 in its karst areas, covering 3,437 square kilometers.

After years of development, Wang's ecological orchard now boasts 12 types of fruit products certified as green foods, with annual fruit sales nearing 2 million yuan (\$281,600). During the peak tourist season between May and October, the orchard hosts more than 300 visitors daily, and also offers jobs for nearby villagers.

At Hujiawan Miao village in the Ayi River Community, Yang Caijun said ecotourism has completely changed the village.

Back in the 1980s, nearly half of the villagers were engaged in min-

ing, and Yang himself was among them.

"The mining activities often filled the area with dust, affecting Ayi River's ecological environment. But by 2017, all the mining enterprises around Hujiawan were shut down, and the ecological environment has turned for the better," he said.

Tuo Zhenping, Party secretary of Ayi River Community, said that since 2022 villagers in Hujiawan began to pay more attention to developing the ecotourism sector.

"During the peak season, many residents earn over 10,000 yuan a month just by selling tourism-related products," Tuo said.

Zhang Yao, a 38-year-old employee at Ayi River Scenic Area's Visitor Reception Center, said she has witnessed the entire process of Ayi River's development into a national 5A-level tourist attraction.

Though visitors can often find "a new view with every step" along the river, initial expert evaluation said

"the ecological resources are rich, but there is a lack of planning and management".

Tian Chuan, a manager at Ayi River Co, said the scenic spot has intensified efforts in vegetation care and the protection of rare flora and fauna in recent years, solidifying its foundation for developing ecotourism.

Currently, Pengshui has completed 7,740 hectares of artificial afforestation and 829 hectares of protected afforestation, helping enrich local residents and beautify the ecology.

In recent years, Pengshui has strived to become a model for distinctive, green ecotourism development. In the first half, the county's tourist visitor numbers and comprehensive tourism revenue increased by 20.8 percent and 24 percent, respectively.

Contact the writers at zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

BUSINESSFOCUS

Editor's Note: These interviews with CEOs of major foreign firms gauge their outlook for the Chinese economy, their operations in China and their business plans for 2024 and beyond, in the wake of the momentous resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in mid-July.

Execs sanguine on H2 business climate in China



Allen Li
President of Cytiva in China



Leon Wang
Executive vice-president of AstraZeneca



Nancy Wang
Country manager at LinkedIn China



Shirley Zhao
President of Astellas China

Q1 The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in mid-July has rolled out the reform and opening-up roadmap for the Chinese economy in the coming years. What are your major takeaways from the plenum? What are the biggest opportunities you spot in China's new measures to deepen reform and further open up its economy? How do you plan to capitalize on these opportunities in your specific industry?

LI: China's economy is transitioning from high-speed development to high-quality development, and the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee said China will improve the mechanisms supporting the development of innovative drugs. With pricing and payment reforms widely anticipated, we believe that, driven by favorable policies, China will continue to unleash the market potential of innovative drugs. Currently, Cytiva provides comprehensive end-to-end solutions for producing antibodies, mRNA drugs, viral vectors, cell therapies, small nucleic acid drugs and other novel therapies. Through localizing innovation, commercial operations, and supply chain and manufacturing, we hope to further accelerate our response to the development needs of local biopharmaceutical companies, helping more Chinese innovative drugs enter global markets.

L.WANG: AstraZeneca sees significant market and policy opportunities in China's new opening-up measures. With the increased opening-up of the medical field, AstraZeneca will be able to participate more deeply in the Chinese market. In addition, the government's active support for foreign-funded biopharmaceutical projects has provided AstraZeneca with more policy preferences and convenient conditions.

AstraZeneca will seize these opportunities to promote the research and development and launch of innovative drugs, and deepen cooperation with local companies and scientific research institutions to jointly promote the development of China's biopharmaceutical industry. Moving forward, as a localized multinational company, we are thrilled to embrace innovation in China and foster East and West combined innovations to benefit patients in China and worldwide.

N.WANG: China's new, more sophisticated open economic system promises an enhanced business environment for both domestic and foreign firms. This should enable foreign enterprises to better navigate and adapt to the Chinese market, facilitating the localization of their products and services.

As China continues to pursue high-level opening-up and refine its business environment, LinkedIn is committed to increasing its investment in the country over the next decade. We aim to collaborate with Chinese enterprises in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization, and supporting their pursuit of higher-quality growth in the global marketplace through building a cooperative partner ecosystem that strives for win-win outcomes.

ZHAO: We are very much impressed by China's ambition, determination and action manifested by China's new measures to deepen reform and further expand high-level opening-up, which reassures MNCs' investment for long-term development in China, including Astellas.

Our vision is to turn innovative science into value for patients. When we saw China's emphasis on improving people's quality of life, pursuit of innovation, and priority on policy and governance support for strategic industries like biomedicine, I would like to say we share the same priorities and purpose with China. Astellas will continue to invest in and evolve with China, to help improve quality of life for Chinese patients with our global leading innovations. Meanwhile, we will strengthen ties with stakeholders to accelerate what we do, to promote high-quality development of the healthcare industry in China for Chinese people's well-being.

Q2 In your view, how will the reform and opening-up measures rolled out at the plenum help strengthen the Chinese economy and bolster its prospects of achieving modernization? Do you think China's new reform and opening-up blueprint will make fresh contributions to the global economy? If yes, how?

LI: The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee vowed to steadily expand institutional opening-up in the future, aiming to foster a first-rate business environment that is market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized as well as protect the rights and interests of foreign investors in accordance with the law. This undoubtedly brings confidence to foreign enterprises like Cytiva. We will firmly establish our presence in China, promote the high-quality development of the Chinese biopharmaceutical industry, and further inject momentum into the development of the global economy.

L.WANG: The reform and opening-up measures will shape the future pathway of both the Chinese and the world economy in a positive way. We're pleased to see that openness and collaboration have been given priority in the government's agenda, which will promote international collaboration and cooperation in many aspects.

In addition, there have been frequent mentions of technology and innovation, especially with regard to technological breakthroughs, industrial transformation, and the development of high quality productive forces. Technology and innovation play pivotal roles in the pharmaceutical industry and will lead to the creation of new molecules, medicines, models, and more, further enhancing China's competitiveness in global markets, including the pharmaceutical industry, and ultimately benefiting the unmet needs of patients in China and beyond.

N.WANG: The reform and opening-up measures will attract an increasing number of foreign companies and capital into the Chinese market. While promoting the global flow of technology and resources, these measures will also help China achieve its unique path to modernization. China's comprehensive advantages for attracting foreign investment remain prominent, including its super-large market scale, well-established supply chain, advanced infrastructure and abundant human resources. These factors continue to offer immense development opportunities, making China a market that demands great attention from foreign companies like LinkedIn. LinkedIn believes that by enhancing economic resilience, promoting technological innovation and pursuing sustainable development, China is not only driving its own progress, but also injecting strong momentum into global economic growth.

ZHAO: China's approach to promoting reform and opening-up is holistic and comprehensive. It will help establish a solid infrastructure to strengthen the Chinese economy — the world's second largest — and to achieve Chinese modernization.

Taking the healthcare industry as an example, we have seen ongoing modernization happening in China's drug regulatory framework and innovation ecosystem, harmonizing with international standards. Since coming to China 30 years ago, Astellas has witnessed huge changes in the country because of the reform and opening-up.

With China's unwavering pursuit of innovation as stated at the plenum, we expect a more favorable environment for pharmaceutical innovation to thrive, bringing more vigor and vitality to the dynamic and huge healthcare market in China. The strategic industry has the potential to play an increasingly significant role as a key contributor to the growth of the overall Chinese economy, and to the global economy when China's door opens wider.

Q3 How do you view China's new reform initiatives aimed at fostering new quality productive forces, such as those to encourage industrial upgrade and technological innovation? Do you see these as opportunities or challenges for foreign enterprises, and why?

LI: Biopharma itself is representative of new quality productive forces, and the upgrade of the industry toward better standardization and digitalization aligns with the government's goal of promoting high-quality growth of the domestic economy.

The new reform initiatives will inject huge momentum into the biopharmaceutical industry. At the same time, technological innovation is key to building new quality productive forces, presenting significant opportunities for Cytiva.

L.WANG: I take these as opportunities for the pharmaceutical industry. First, innovative research and development are the core driving forces of the biopharmaceutical industry. Therefore, AstraZeneca continues to accelerate the research and development of innovative drugs and promote innovative results to benefit the world. Remarkably, over the past 12 months, AstraZeneca has entered into global licensing cooperation agreements with nine innovative Chinese pharmaceutical companies worth more than \$6.5 billion.

Second, innovative full disease management solutions will benefit more patients in China and around the world. AstraZeneca actively promotes innovations in integrated diagnosis and treatment models, which have been implemented in thousands of hospitals in China and some of these solutions even "go global".

N.WANG: China's vigorous pursuit of "new quality productive forces" aims to foster an innovation-driven economic growth model centered on technological advancement. We view this not only as a signal of China's readiness to face the challenges of globalization and technological revolution with greater openness, inclusivity and innovation, but also as a reflection of its forward-thinking approach to the impending transformation of the labor market, presenting opportunities for foreign enterprises, including LinkedIn.

LinkedIn has observed that the Chinese government has taken a series of measures to promote the healthy development of the labor market. For instance, driving industrial upgrading and structural adjustments to create more employment opportunities is a key means to realize new quality productive forces.

ZHAO: Science and technology innovation is a driving engine for new quality productive forces. I believe, with the new reform initiatives, China will nurture an even more pro-innovation environment, further unleashing its innovation potential.

The last decade has seen a constantly improving policy environment, dedication to innovation, and investment in healthcare talent in China, which has led to innovation and industrial upgrade. We are also a beneficiary and a participant from the evolving environment. One example is that Astellas China achieved a couple of "firsts" in the history of the company over the course of one year.

I believe the momentum of upgrades and innovation will continue with China's strategy to drive new quality productive forces. We see opportunities here. We will be more than happy to play our part with our strengths to contribute to the development of new quality productive forces in China while delivering on our commitment to Chinese patients.

Q4 While China is expanding opening-up, some are concerned that geopolitical tensions, rising protectionism and global supply chain adjustments may weaken China's attractiveness to foreign companies. What's your take? How important will China be for your global business in the coming decade? What more opening-up measures can China take to offset the impact of the complex external environment?

LI: China is the world's second-largest pharmaceutical market and our second-largest market as well. With decades dedicated to the Chinese market, Cytiva takes accelerating localization in China as one of our key global strategies. Through localization of innovation, commercial operations, and supply chain and manufacturing, we aim to empower Chinese enterprises as their best partner to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and innovate comprehensively.

The conference emphasized the need to foster a fairer and more dynamic business environment and improve the property right protection system, and we firmly believe in this. We look forward to the continuous improvement of the business environment, which will further boost international confidence in the Chinese economy, ushering in the next wave of high-quality development in the Chinese economy.

L.WANG: The Chinese market is of high potential and rapidly growing in the past many years with its robust manufacturing capabilities, comprehensive supply chain, and stable policy environment. We have firm and long-term confidence in the market as well as in its manufacturing and innovation capability. China is now AstraZeneca's second-largest market, and it is a key engine for our future success. As a localized multinational company, AstraZeneca has been truly rooted in China for over 30 years and our presence in China covers R&D, manufacturing and production, and commercialization. We have firm confidence in the Chinese market, its economic development, manufacturing and innovation capability.

N.WANG: China's deepening reforms and expanding opening-up promise to create broader opportunities worldwide. These reform measures are pivotal not only in addressing global challenges, but also in ensuring China's continued high-quality development — a dual impact that could reshape economic dynamics both domestically and internationally. China has always been one of the most promising markets for LinkedIn. We have utilized unique business model and industry-leading big data and AI technologies to help witness countless homegrown and innovative Chinese companies venture overseas, becoming a significant presence in the global market.

ZHAO: We have seen a series of new measures and initiatives aimed at creating an institutional environment that is transparent, stable and predictable against the backdrop of global headwinds, which is appealing to foreign companies. In addition, the vast market with high unmet medical needs in underserved and serious diseases, and the country's commitment to innovation are also boosters of confidence for MNCs like Astellas.

China is one of Astellas' five global markets, ranking among the top three out of the fifteen prioritized markets for Astellas globally. We're committed to delivering innovation that makes a difference to the people of China and the healthcare systems that support them.

Q5 The plenary session has stressed that reform tasks laid out at the meeting shall be completed by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2029. How do you expect the new reform and opening-up measures to transform the Chinese economy in the coming five years? What strategies will your company adopt to align with the expected transformation? Looking ahead, in the second half of 2024, what are your expectations for the Chinese economy? How do you think your company will fare in this evolving landscape?

LI: The continuous emphasis on innovation and opening-up will bring more opportunities for Chinese innovative drugs to speed up their journey to the market and benefit patients not only in China, but around the globe. In line with our parent company Danaher's innovation strategy in China, we will continue our efforts to expand collaborations with all stakeholders in the biopharma industry, from discovery to commercial manufacturing and delivery of new drugs. Cytiva is happy to support more Chinese drugs in reaching the global market.

Meanwhile, I look forward to the digital transformation of our industry. We have launched many tools and solutions and an online service center, which enable smart manufacturing and services for our customers here in China. Going forward, we will continue to focus on customer needs, striving to develop more flexible and convenient solutions to advance and accelerate therapeutics.

L.WANG: China has demonstrated its potential to lead globally across various technological platforms.

Therefore, we have continuously increased our investment in China over the past two years, including \$700 million to build a manufacturing and supply site in Qingdao, Shandong province, an additional investment of \$475 million to build a small molecule factory in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, as well as announcing Shanghai as our fifth global strategic site, illustrating our long-term commitment in China.

N.WANG: We recognize and appreciate the Chinese government's positive attitude and firm resolve toward opening-up. These measures, we believe, will spur technological innovation and industrial upgrading, continually invigorating China's market dynamism and driving sustained, stable economic growth. This, in turn, is likely to offer broader development opportunities for foreign enterprises. China represents one of LinkedIn's fastest-growing markets globally, reinforcing our commitment to increased investment in the country. We aim to leverage our unique strengths in connecting top-tier global talent with professional opportunities, coupled with our first-hand data insights.

ZHAO: Given China's resilient economic performance in the first half of the year, alongside the new measures introduced to boost the economy, we are optimistic about the Chinese economy in the second half. With the implementation of the new reform and opening-up measures, we expect more breakthrough innovations coming from emerging or strategic industries such as healthcare in the next five years, which will inject new growth impetus into the country's economy.

We will continue to accelerate and evolve together with China with a patient-centric mindset, making our innovations more accessible for Chinese patients.

COMMENT

Editorials

Japan has much that it can learn from lessons of history

The only lesson some Japanese politicians seem to have learned from history is that they don't need to learn anything from it.

On Thursday, the 79th anniversary of the end of World War II, three Japanese Cabinet ministers visited the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where convicted war criminals of the country are among the honored dead. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida sent an offering.

Those politicians putting on their show at the shrine displayed exactly the same victim mentality that their colleagues conveyed at the commemorative ceremonies last week marking the 79th anniversary of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Japanese government has promoted that mentality in the country, particularly over recent years, to try and relieve the nation of its historical burden and also justify its attempts to "normalize" the country via its militarization. But that self-cheating game has its weak point as the politicians cannot explain why a "victim" of the war is subject to a series of restrictive measures preventing it from having a full-fledged military.

So almost every year when Japanese politicians pay their ritual visits or present their ritual offerings to the shrine on the so-called Japan surrender day, or victory day in the countries that resisted its invasion but the end of war day in Japan — they just perform a Japanese version of *The Truman Show* for the rest of the world.

Notably the Yasukuni performance this year comes a day after Kishida surprised many by announcing he would not run in his ruling party's leadership race next month, ending his three-year term as prime minister. Although he explained that move by saying he was taking responsibility for a recent party slush funds scandal, the shock that his announcement has caused at home and abroad speaks volumes of how far-fetched the excuse he found to justify the move appears to most people.

Although Kishida is seen as a dovish moderate within the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, as he has refrained from visiting Yasukuni in person since becoming prime minister in 2021, he not only sent offerings instead on the war anniversary every year, but more importantly the Japanese government under his leadership has adhered to a one-sided pro-United States diplomacy taking advantage of Washington's China-containment strategy to accelerate Japan's de facto re-militarization even before completing the necessary constitutional amendment.

Some observe that it is the rising uncertainties in the US election that have prompted Kishida to make the decision to avoid a knotty situation in which his government that has followed in earnest the Joe Biden administration's anti-China policy will be left high and dry if the US' China policy changes along with the change of the White House occupant.

That might be a factor but it is the lasting deflation of the Japanese economy that has only been aggravated during Kishida's regime that has become the last straw breaking the back of the camel. Kishida's specious "new capitalism" economic policy stresses wealth distribution, mainly to quell public anger, and consumption and investment, rather than production and innovation.

And the economic woes should also be seen as the collateral damage of his lopsided diplomacy. Not only has Japan's trade with and investment in China been substantially affected with the Kishida government enthusiastically toeing the US' line, but also the rocketing defense spending, which is also to cater to the US' needs, has forced the Kishida government to issue more national bonds, which will naturally lead to further deterioration of the fiscal environment and aggravate the deflation.

Things are unlikely to improve after Kishida leaves office. Shigeru Ishiba, former LDP secretary-general and member of the House of Representatives of Japan, who is reportedly likely to succeed Kishida next month upon the latter's stepping down, visited Taiwan island and met with its leader Lai Ching-te and others in defiance of the one-China principle being a political foundation of Sino-Japanese relations and the Taiwan question a redline concerning China's core interests.

Yasukuni means "peaceful country" in Japanese. But for that to be apt, Japan needs to reflect on the lessons of history.

AUKUS distorts deterrence into aggression

In a move that will pose a serious threat to peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia has signed a cooperation deal with the United States and the United Kingdom on the transfer of US and UK nuclear material and know-how to the country, a key step toward equipping the Australian Navy with nuclear-powered submarines.

The latest deal — signed in Washington last week and tabled in the Australian parliament on Monday — is part of the so-called AUKUS partnership. The tripartite security mechanism, whose aim is to counter China in the region, will allow Australia to purchase up to five Virginia-class submarines at a cost of A\$368 billion (\$244 billion) over 30 years. The nuclear-powered vessels will be built in Australia and the UK with US technology and support.

China has always strongly opposed the deal, given that it undermines the international nuclear nonproliferation regime and poses a threat to regional peace and stability as it has the potential to exacerbate the arms race in the region and trigger military confrontation.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian on Wednesday pointed in particular to the grave nuclear proliferation risks that are likely to be brought about by the program, as it involves the transfer of nuclear-powered submarine reactors and a large amount of weapons-grade highly enriched uranium from nuclear-weapon states to a non-nuclear-weapon state.

"Until the international community reaches consensus on safeguards and other issues, the US, the UK and Australia should not proceed with their nuclear-powered submarine cooperation," he said.

Even domestically, there has been increasing criticism targeting the AUKUS accord, which many in Australia believe ties the country's defense and foreign policy interests unwisely to Washington's geopolitical chariot.

"This government has sold out to the United States," former Australian prime minister Paul Keating said in a recent interview, as he described the AUKUS deal as being about "the military control of Australia" by the US. Keating has previously decried AUKUS as "the worst deal in all history".

That judgment could find proof in the details of the deal which reveal that Australia would compensate the US and the UK for any loss or injury caused by the transfer of sensitive technology and radioactive materials. Not to mention those associated with the disposal of high-level nuclear waste that will be generated by the submarines. Australia is responsible for the storage and disposal of any spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste from the nuclear submarine program.

In addition, the US and/or the UK can pull out of the deal with just a year's notice if either nation decides the deal weakens their own nuclear submarine programs. "This is a A\$368 billion gamble with taxpayers' money from the (Anthony) Albanese government," Greens senator David Shoebridge said following the tabling of the document on Monday.

Policymakers in Canberra should bear in mind that China is not and will not be a threat to Australia. It desires a peaceful neighborhood and is dedicated to peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit in the region and beyond. As the world's largest engine of economic growth, China's trade and investment with Australia are essential to the latter's future development.

In the nuclear sphere, China follows a policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons and a nuclear strategy that focuses on self-defense. In order to better safeguard its national security and fulfill its international non-proliferation obligations, China will start implementing export controls on antimony and some related materials from Sept 15. Australia has nothing to gain but everything to lose by participating in the US-led strategy to counter China. It should reconsider the wisdom of its deep dive into the US' geostrategic game.

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Cao Yi



Opinion Line

German vote of confidence turns 'de-risking' narrative into a joke

Some in Western countries who expect to see decoupling happening between the West and China get very excited when they see Western companies leaving, while being unhappy when the opposite happens.

But enterprises are known to choose their investment destinations carefully, they opt for places where they can make money easily, and this is not affected by political factors.

According to a recent survey on business confidence released by the German Chamber of Commerce in China, 91 percent of German companies surveyed said they will continue to stay in the Chinese market, and more than half of the entities surveyed plan to increase investment in the next two years. The results of the survey have, however, unnerved some European media outlets, with some describing the relationship between German companies and the Chinese market as a manifestation of the "Stockholm syndrome".

Why are they so sensitive about Ger-

man companies investing in China, and is it abnormal for German companies that have made money in China to be optimistic about the prospects of the Chinese market? It is very likely that those who have been hyping up the "foreign capital withdrawal from China" theory and want to see "de-risking" happen are afraid of being proved wrong.

Enterprises always make investment decisions based on the cost to return ratio, and enterprises that use real money to make investment choices are in the best position to tell what the Chinese market actually looks like.

That more than 500 German companies have settled in Taicang, a city in Jiangsu province neighboring Shanghai; Volkswagen has invested 2.5 billion euros (\$2.75 billion) to expand its production and innovation center in Hefei, Anhui province; and BMW has invested 2.5 billion euros to expand its Shenyang plant in Northeast China's Liaoning province, shows their vote of confidence

in China's overall business environment.

The increased investment confidence in China by German companies tellingly shows they are optimistic about not only the Chinese market today, but also its prospects tomorrow. A 2024 global foreign direct investment confidence index released by Kearney shows that China has jumped to third place from the seventh last year, ranking first in the ranking of emerging markets.

China's ongoing efforts for high-quality development and the full opening-up of its manufacturing and service sectors are creating new opportunities for foreign investment in China. Time will again prove that the choice of foreign companies, including German ones, for expanded investment in the Chinese market is wise and will be lucrative.

The choice of German companies is also a reminder to some in Europe that their "de-risking" narrative can only turn out to be a laughingstock.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Data theft a clear and present danger

A day after a threat actor called "Fenice" claimed to have hacked 1.4 billion user accounts on Tencent, the Chinese internet giant told Southern Metropolis Daily on Wednesday that the claim was untrue and the information was rigged up and exaggerated with historical materials, misleading the public.

According to a news release issued by Schubert Jonckheer & Kolbe LLP, the company investigating the issue, a cybercriminal group called USDoD hacked the US national public database based in Florida in April, after which the database containing information on 2.9 billion people was available on the dark web for \$3.5 million.

The US case is a reminder to all platforms worldwide that store users' data to guard the data from theft in a more secure way. US media outlets have, expectedly, been crying themselves hoarse with headlines such as "Hackers may have stolen the social security numbers of every American".

It won't be surprising if more people face similar fallout now considering the huge amount of information stolen from the US database. Similar risks stare at registered users of social networking sites such as Meta (formerly Facebook), X (formerly Twitter), YouTube and others where they have shared personal information in the process of creating the accounts.

That in turn calls for joint efforts from all sides to safeguard netizens.

While the police around the world need to cooperate more closely to strike at the criminal gangs involved in personal data theft, it's also necessary for the internet giants to strengthen cooperation with their governments, take stricter prevention measures and build firmer and higher firewalls, to minimize, if not eradicate, the possibility of criminals stealing personal information. That's an issue that concerns the safety of a majority of the 8 billion residents on Earth, the urgency of which is beyond dispute.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Visit will carry forward neighbors' close friendship

To Lam, general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and president of Vietnam, will pay a state visit to China from Aug 18 to 20, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Thursday.

Making China the destination for his first overseas visit since he was elected chief of the CPV Central Committee on Aug 3, following his predecessor Nguyen Phu Trong's death last month, conveys the great strategic significance Vietnam and the CPV attach to further deepening Sino-Vietnamese relations.

That Lam will meet with President Xi Jinping, as well as other Chinese leaders, including the premier and heads of China's top legislature and political advisory body, as well as senior officials from various relevant sectors, according to the itinerary of his visit disclosed by the Foreign Ministry, reflects the two sides' common wish to not only extend the traditional friendship between

the two countries, but also carry on their joint efforts to transform the series of achievements of Xi's visit to Vietnam late last year into actions and results.

Lam's visit is expected to mark a good beginning for the two sides to further synergize their endeavors to accelerate the construction of a community with a shared future.

While some external parties are trying to turn the Asia-Pacific into an arena for their geopolitical games by taking advantage of the maritime disputes in the region, the two neighbors are wise to their tricks. The two sides have been actively exploring and carrying out more maritime cooperation projects, striving to promote joint development of the blue economy, and turn the challenges brought about by maritime issues into opportunities for the two sides to deepen their cooperation.

China does not form exclusive small cliques, engage in group politics, or seek camp confrontation. It is willing to strengthen multilateral cooperation

with Vietnam under various multilateral frameworks, uphold true multilateralism, and enhance the voice and influence of developing countries in international affairs.

Also, as emerging market economies, China and Vietnam have broad space to strengthen their win-win economic, trade, technology and industry cooperation to seek to translate the complementarity of their economies and development stages into concrete benefits for the two peoples.

The two sides should take more concrete actions to jointly implement the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, safeguard the global free trade system, and sustain the stability of their industry and supply chains. To that end, China will continue to encourage capable Chinese companies to invest and start businesses in Vietnam. It is hoped that Vietnam on its part will provide a good business environment for these Chinese companies.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Masatsugu Asakawa

Tackling inequality through green transition

The Asia and Pacific region stands at a critical juncture, positioned both as a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions and a potential leader in transformative climate action. The Asian Development Bank, alongside its member countries, is steering the region toward a sustainable future through support for a just transition. Our (the ADB's) vision is to reorient economic and social frameworks to foster low-carbon, climate-resilient growth that enhances prosperity and inclusion.

The need for a just transition, one that puts people at the center of the shift to net zero, cannot be overstated. Asia and the Pacific account for more than half of the world's annual greenhouse gas emissions, driven by its dependence on fossil fuels. At the same time, more than 200 million people in the region are impoverished, with many lacking access to basic electricity and relying on traditional biomass for cooking and heating. Women are particularly affected, and often face disproportionate impacts.

As Asia and the Pacific's climate bank, the ADB prioritizes an inclusive approach to ensure that the costs and benefits of the transition to net zero are fairly distributed. Achieving net zero requires us to restructure our economies and change the way we live and work. It is paramount that in this process, the burden of change is not imposed on the most vulnerable section of society and that the benefits of a low-carbon economy are both maximized and shared equitably. Ensuring that all segments of society, including women, share in these benefits is critical to the success of our just transition efforts.

To create opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth, the ADB works with partners to implement robust policy frameworks, enhance institutional capacities and engage stakeholders through participatory processes. These just transition efforts align with global commitments such as the Paris Agreement, and at the country level we support ADB's developing member countries in crafting policies and programs that respond to their unique climate challenges and development needs.

At COP27 (27th UN Climate Change Conference), the ADB launched a "Just Transition Support Platform" to facilitate a just transition within our developing member countries. The platform focuses on supporting countries to incorporate just transition into their institutional and policy frameworks and identify innovative financing approaches that attract public and private capital for a just transition. The platform also supports the mainstreaming of just transition in the ADB's operations.

Moreover, at COP28, the ADB launched an inclusive process to design a "Just Transition Finance Facility" that will provide targeted finance to address the



This journey faces challenges but is also filled with opportunities for transformative change that can forge a healthier, more equitable and prosperous world.

socioeconomic challenges of the transition to net zero. It will help countries realize the economic and social benefits of the transition and ensure these benefits are inclusive and widespread, ultimately supporting a robust and equitable shift to low-carbon and climate-resilient economies.

Just transition is also a core part of the ADB's "Energy Transition Mechanism". Developed in partnership with ADB member countries, the ETM is a scalable

initiative that has the potential to be one of the largest carbon-reduction programs in the world. Under it, public and private investments — from governments, multilateral banks, private sector investors, philanthropists and other long-term investors — finance country-specific ETM funds. These funds are designed to retire or repurpose coal power assets on an earlier schedule compared with a business-as-usual timeline.

Just transition principles are a cornerstone of the ETM's implementation, helping us to ensure that potential negative socioeconomic impacts are minimized through policies and programs. For example, retraining and re-skilling programs provide new opportunities in emerging industries for women and vulnerable workers.

The importance of managing the social impacts associated with the transition to net zero can be seen through the ADB's work on the Cirebon 1 coal-fired power station in Indonesia. This plant serves as an ETM pilot, for which the ADB completed a preliminary just transition assessment earlier this year — the first of its kind for the ADB and for the region. The assessment utilized a comprehensive methodology to identify impacts along the coal value chain and within the community and surrounding areas. It also

established a process to further assess and develop a plan to deal with the impacts at the right project stages.

Just transition offers a compelling vision for green and inclusive development across Asia and the Pacific. Its promise lies not only in avoiding the worst impacts of climate change, but also in creating a more equitable social order that values people's well-being and gender equality, provides decent work, and ensures sustainable economic growth.

We must encourage optimism and all sectors of society should make a concerted effort to embrace the principles of justice and inclusivity that will be needed to build a low-carbon, climate-resilient future. This journey faces challenges but is also filled with opportunities for transformative change that can forge a healthier, more equitable and prosperous world. The path we chart now will determine the climate legacy we leave for future generations.

The author is president of the Asian Development Bank. This article was first published in the OECD Development Co-operation Report 2024 under the heading: "Finance for net-zero transition must maximise and share benefits equally." The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Yang Yiyong

Plenum resolution a blueprint for deepening reform

The third plenary session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978 was epoch-making in that it launched reform and opening-up, and initiated the process of socialist modernization. Similarly, the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in 2013 was also epoch-making, as it initiated a new era of comprehensively deepening reform and expanding high-level opening-up.

The third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, held in July, is also very important as it vowed to further deepen reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization, and defined the new reform goals and principles.

In advancing reform and opening-up, the CPC has always adhered to a people-centric development idea. And in the historical process of reform and opening-up, the Party has given full play to the role of the leadership, united and led the people, helped emancipate their minds, sought truth from facts, kept pace with the times, pursued truth and pragmatism, and vigorously promoted the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Reform and opening-up not only changed the face of China, but also profoundly influenced the world.

Reform is a powerful driving force for development and the key to achieving Chinese modernization. By comprehensively deepening reform, China can over-

come the drawbacks of the system, strengthen the relationship between the economic base and superstructure, and national governance and social development, and advance Chinese modernization.

On the other hand, the Party's efforts should be focused on achieving Chinese modernization through deepening of reform and expanding of high-level opening-up. This means that China has to constantly deepen reform to solve practical problems, promote socioeconomic development, meet the needs of the people for a better life, and advance Chinese modernization.

Thanks to reform and opening-up, China has made remarkable achievements, injecting new vitality into the Chinese economy and society. For example, the reform of the Party and State institutions, and the administrative scrutiny and approval system has promoted the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics and helped advance Chinese modernization.

Besides, the overall goal of further deepening reform is to continue developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, and modernizing the national governance system and governance capacity, in order to build a high-level socialist market economy by 2035, laying a solid foundation for building a "modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious" by the middle of this century.

The third plenum's resolution also said the country will follow the six major principles of comprehensively deepening reform, namely adhering to the comprehensive leadership of the Party, putting the people at the center, upholding integrity and innovation, focusing on institutional construction, promoting the rule of law, and adopting a systematic approach to address issues.

As the plenum stressed, there is a need to adhere to the Party's comprehensive leadership because it is the fundamental guarantee for further deepening reform to advance Chinese modernization. Also, the people need to be put at the center so they can live a better life. This is to say that, the purpose of deepening reform is to better serve the people, and ensure the fruits of reform are shared by the people.

The plenum emphasized the importance of maintaining integrity, promoting innovation, and intensifying institutional construction. So efforts should be made to channel the enthusiasm and creativity of all parties to deepen reform and ensure reform yields practical results.

The resolution also said that achieving high-quality development is the primary goal of building a modern socialist country. Also, the resolution highlighted the need for building a high-level socialist market economy, improving the institutional mechanisms for promoting high-quality development and urban-r-

ural integrated development, promoting high-level opening-up, strengthening the institutional system for improving people's livelihoods, better protecting the environment and preserving the ecology, and reforming the education sector and the scientific and technological system.

The implementation of these measures will help overcome old constraints, and promote the comprehensive and coordinated development of China's economy and society.

Besides, the importance of the plenum held last month lies not only in highlighting the necessity of comprehensively deepening reform and opening-up in the new era, but also in demonstrating China's determination to overcome difficulties on way to achieving high-quality development.

China seems set to make new achievements on the economic, social and legal fronts, further improve people's living standards and livelihoods, and achieve the goal of common prosperity. In other words, the plenum has drawn a new blueprint for comprehensively deepening reform at a new historical starting point.

The author is a senior research fellow at the China Institute of Macroeconomics, and former director of the Market and Price Research Institute of the National Development and Reform Commission. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Chen Weihua

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Washington's bias a major cause of rising tensions in the Middle East

The United States and some of its major European allies have urged Iran to refrain from taking retaliatory action against Israel for the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, political leader of Hamas, in Teheran on July 31, about four months after an Israeli attack on Iran's consulate in Damascus, Syria, on April 1.

But it's time these Western leaders accepted that their double standard and hypocrisy are the major cause of the escalating hostilities and tensions in the Middle East.

Most Western leaders have been reiterating over the past 10 months that they are committed to helping Israel to safeguard its security and that Israel has the right to not only defend itself but also take retaliatory action against Hamas for the Oct 7 attacks despite the brutal Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip claiming the lives of some 40,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children.

Yet none of the Western leaders has ever said that Iran has the right to self-defense in the face of Israeli attacks and none has ever mentioned that they are committed to guaranteeing the security of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

While most of the UN Security Council members condemned Haniyeh's assassination, the representatives of the US and the United Kingdom exposed their bias against Iran by blaming Teheran for the killing.

But she should know that the US' biased policy in the Middle East, its hypocrisy and double standard are a major stumbling block to peace and stability in the region.

No wonder Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian rebuffed British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's warning of "a serious risk of miscalculation" on Tuesday, asserting that "a punitive response to an aggressor is a right of nations and a solution for stopping crimes and aggression".

It's hard to recall any restraint exercised by the US when it was attacked on Sept 11, 2001. Instead, it launched a full-scale war against Afghanistan and Iraq, leaving Afghanistan only after a 20-year-long occupation despite the fact that no Afghan national was involved in the 9/11 attacks.

Rather than putting pressure on the Israeli government to restrain itself, especially in the wake of Haniyeh's assassination, the US has been sending the wrong signals, encouraging Israel to launch more reckless and devastating actions.

The wrong signals include the latest Pentagon instruction to the USS *Abraham Lincoln* aircraft carrier strike group to sail and position itself close to the coastline of Iran. The US has also ordered the USS *Georgia* guided missile submarine into the region while the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier strike group has been stationed in the Gulf of Oman. The US has also deployed many F-22 and F-35 fighter jets in the region.

To make matters worse, on Tuesday, the US State Department announced the approval of \$20 billion worth of arms sales to Israel, including scores of fighter jets, advanced air-to-air missiles, tank ammunition, high explosive mortars and tactical vehicles.

The timing of the announcement is especially shocking, because multiple reports show that US-made weapons are being used by Israel in the attacks on schools in Gaza in clear violation of the Geneva Conventions and the Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflict.

The US message is clear: It will have Israel's back no matter how many such assassinations are carried out, how brutally Palestinian civilians are massacred, and how openly Israel violates the Geneva Conventions.

It's little wonder that Hamas has refused to participate in the cease-fire talks proposed for this week by the US, Egypt and Qatar. It insisted that talks be held based on a May 31 cease-fire plan announced by US President Joe Biden, the framework laid out by mediators Qatar and Egypt on May 6, and UN Security Council Resolution 2735. Incidentally, Biden had lied and misled the world when he said the May 31 plan was Israel's "comprehensive new proposal", because Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has never acknowledged giving such a proposal.

On Tuesday, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the Security Council that Washington aims "to turn the temperature down" in the Middle East. But she should know that the US' biased policy in the Middle East, its hypocrisy and double standard are a major stumbling block to peace and stability in the region.

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.

STEPHEN BRAWER

Creative contributions

Unlike the initiatives put forward by China, complexity of thought is absent in the zero-sum thinking of Western policy circles

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China recently outlined the path for national rejuvenation and modernization that will lead toward the historic national goal of building China into a great modern socialist country by 2049, the year when the country will celebrate the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

This visionary and unprecedented development of China over the past more than 40 years since the launch of reform and opening-up has not been missed by the developing nations of the Global South. As a result, many countries have chosen to join the Belt and Road Initiative launched by China in 2013. China's all-inclusive BRI proposal for global development and the elimination of poverty is based on the understanding that without modern infrastructure and innovation, development will be constrained. However, there is one crucial problem to recognize. That is: Infrastructure investment is not profitable in the short term. It is a long-term economic investment that lays the foundation for future rapid and successful economic growth. Western economic orientation is now dominated by short-term speculative investments, it leaves no room for long-term investments which are characterized by a moral orientation for the "common good". For example, the continent of Africa will require trillions of dollars or yuan over 25 to 50-year periods to achieve the necessary level of infrastructure modernization in transport, power and electricity production, and modern water management. China, with the best of intentions, and ongoing BRI projects, in Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, etc, cannot manage this alone. Yet the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union refuse to join hands with China to bring about such a long-term historic development for Africa and all mankind. Instead, they use accusations of so-called debt traps, de-risking and overcapacity to attack and criticize China's role. In point of fact, the great majority of African debt is

To achieve China's goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind, including win-win economics, will require a fundamental shift in Western economic thinking.

owned by Western companies in raw material exploitation, and short-term profit margins, not BRI-related projects.

To achieve China's goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind, including win-win economics, will require a fundamental shift in Western economic thinking. The reason for the great failure of Western powers to promote real infrastructure investment is the stubborn insistence on neoliberal short-term economic policies. The Western demonization of China comes as a result of the West's fear and frustration that it is losing the ability to persuade emerging economies to follow its lead. The use of threats and coercion is no longer working. On the other hand, China is forging ahead with both internal rejuvenation and modernization as well as a clear orientation to focus on investing and improving cooperation and friendship with the Global South and the emerging economies in Asia, Africa and South America. It is time for Western policymaking circles to recognize the shortcomings of their present economic thinking. A shift in their orientation to cooperate with the BRI, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is long past due.

This necessary change requires a much more profound subjective understanding of the role of culture and civilization in the long-term processes of human history. China's Global Civilization Initiative points in that direction. China has recently urged further efforts to preserve the country's cultural and natural treasures and renew their glamour in the new era. The inclusion of these heritage items has positive significance for the building of Chinese modernization that features material and cultural-ethical advance-

ment and harmony between humanity and nature, it also adds new luster to world civilizations.

The need to innovate and rejuvenate will not come from information technologies, digital innovation and artificial intelligence alone, it also requires talent and creativity. The emergence of the BRI is the result of the very unique history of Chinese civilization. The nature of human beings is fundamentally good, according to Confucius and Mencius. From this comes the importance of the family and the social factor that orientates society toward the common good.

Western civilization is presently dominated by a Hobbesian law of the jungle mentality. The strong dominate the weak, but even more importantly the nature of human beings is not necessarily good. It is sinful and driven all too often by selfish and egotistical desires. Applied to the larger global context it creates suspicion and mistrust. Your neighbor and fellow man are your adversary and not your friend. Therefore, other nations are ultimately seen as threats. Security and survival can only be assured by being more powerful than them. It is better to control and suppress them than to respect their sovereignty. This is the mentality of a failing civilization. Unfortunately, it runs very deep in the thinking of Western policymakers today.

Yet, there is more sound and very different thinking from certain important Western philosophical and cultural thinkers that can and should be brought back to life. The most important of these is Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a Western philosophical thinker with great respect for and understanding of the importance of Chinese civilization. One clear and important step to bring about the basis for a cultural understanding and peaceful harmony among countries is bringing to the table these great thinkers for inspiring new knowledge and creativity.

The author is distinguished research fellow of Guangdong Institute for International Strategies and chairman of the Belt and Road Institute in Sweden. 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.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

BI HONGYE

Eye on Central Asia

Despite more challenges following the new regional changes, China and Eurasian countries will still have broad prospects in economic cooperation

The geopolitical competition among major powers in the Eurasian region is intensifying. After the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the West tried to comprehensively weaken or curb Russia's already existing and China's expanding influence in Eurasia. On the one hand, the United States and Europe fully support Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's reform measures while constantly tamsh-

ing the Belt and Road Initiative as a tool creating debt traps for Central Asian countries.

On the other hand, the US and Europe continue to infiltrate the Caucasus region, providing military equipment and security commitments to relevant countries while intervening in the negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, posing long-term perils to the region's stability. Countries in this region are thus forced to maintain a balance between Europe, the US, Russia, Türkiye and China, which makes regional cooperation increasingly complicated.

The abundant energy and mineral resources in the Eurasian region, as well as the development of alternative trade routes such as the Middle Corridor, is what makes the region attractive to Western powers. In 2023, multiple "European Union-Central Asia" summits were held between Central Asian countries and the European Union. On French President Emmanuel Macron's historic visit to Kazakhstan, the two sides signed commercial agreements in the fields of nuclear energy, minerals and aerospace. The US elevated the C5+1 dialogue mechanism with Central Asian countries (namely Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) to the level of heads of state and proposes to support and expand the US-Central Asia partnership after hastily withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. The US and Europe are also actively taking more measures to leverage their "soft power", including providing educational scholarships and supporting civil society groups for the future leaders in Central Asia.

The impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Western economic sanctions on Eurasian economic cooperation have prompted countries in the region to seek diversified devel-

opment of geoeconomic relations, among which trade with China has seen rapid growth in the short term. In 2023, the trade volume between China and Central Asian countries increased by 27 percent year-on-year, reaching \$89 billion. China has expanded its trade with almost all Central Asian countries, except Turkmenistan (with which trade has decreased by 5 percent), surpassing Russia to become the largest trading partner of Central Asian nations.

Not only is the bilateral trade volume growing rapidly, but the forms of economic cooperation are also changing. China has shifted its focus from primarily exploiting natural resources in Central Asia to investing more proactively in long-term projects. The first China-Central Asia Summit announced the official establishment of a ministerial level meeting mechanism for diplomacy, economy, trade, customs and other areas, upgraded bilateral investment agreements, launched the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project, supported the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route plan, established the China-Central Asia energy development partnership, and announced an investment and assistance plan worth \$3.8 billion to Central Asia. At present, there are more than 3,000 Chinese enterprises in Kazakhstan, and the two countries are jointly advancing 40 plus projects.

In view of the Eurasian countries' strong demand for infrastructure development and economic growth, the BRI has gradually garnered confidence in this region. Georgia was one of the first countries to support the initiative and sign a free trade agreement with China. In July 2023, China and Georgia upgraded their relations to a strategic partnership, and the two governments signed the cooperation plan of jointly building the Belt and Road. Azerbaijan attaches great importance to the plan — building transportation and energy corridors connecting Europe and Asia, as well as the stable growth demand from China. In July, Azerbaijan and China issued a joint statement on establishing a strategic partnership, in which China expressed its willingness to actively participate in the construction and use of the Middle Corridor and jointly promote the uninterrupted operation of the Southern Corridor of China-Europe freight trains.

Meanwhile, China is also negotiating large-scale green energy projects with Uzbekistan. It has built two solar

power plants in Uzbekistan, each with an installed capacity of 500 megawatts. Chinese auto brand BYD, the world's largest electric vehicle manufacturer, will also establish a factory in Uzbekistan with an annual production capacity of 300,000 cars. In 2023, China opened 854 new enterprises in Uzbekistan, which was twice as many as in 2022. In the South Caucasus, following the Armenia-Azerbaijan war and the continuous impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan regard China as an important direction in which to diversify their foreign policies. The economic and trade ties between China and the three countries in the South Caucasus have also developed rapidly. In 2023, China's trade volume with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan all saw significant year-on-year growth, rising 48 percent, 44 percent and 21 percent respectively.

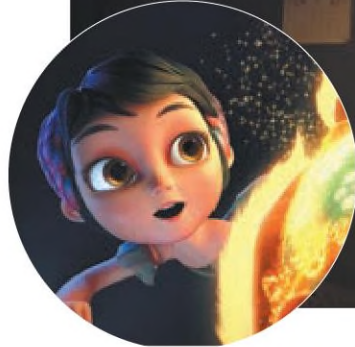
Following the new regional changes, China and Eurasian countries will face more challenges in their economic cooperation, but the cooperation between the Eurasian economy and the BRI still have broad prospects. The Agreement on Economic and Trade Cooperation Between China and the Eurasian Economic Union is a prime example. Officially signed in 2018, it has expanded into a webinar of subset agreements overarching inter-departmental cooperation, customs management, competition, technology supervision, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, intellectual property protection, e-commerce, national procurement, domestic market protection measures, and other issues. New forms of cooperation have also been proposed based on industries, including joint investment projects in transportation, energy, and agriculture. Under the future regional changes, economic cooperation between China and Eurasia will present new trends and positive prospects.

The author is a professor and director of the Center for Central Asian Studies at Shanghai International Studies University, a distinguished researcher at the Center for Russia Studies at East China Normal University, and a dual researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Global Governance and Area Studies. 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.



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE



Short animation film *Renai Dance* tells a story of a young girl passionate about ballet and her grandfather specializing in lion dancing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

FANTASY ANIMATION TELLS HEARTWARMING TALE

Film focusing on family love and traditional culture wins acclaim both at home and overseas, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

A grandfather skilled at lion dancing, a granddaughter with a passion for ballet — drawing on the universal dilemma of the generation gap — animation artist Yang Zhike and her team have brought a short fantasy animation film to life that weaves a spell of family love and cultural heritage.

Renai Dance unfolds with heartwarming moments between the grandfather and his granddaughter Bella, with the grandfather performing spectacular lion dance movements so that Bella eats her vegetables.

As she grows up and leaves home to pursue ballet, she returns only to find that her grandfather has passed away. Overwhelmed by grief, she nearly falls down a stairway, but a miracle occurs. Her grandfather's spirit comes to her rescue, and the two embark on a reunion.

With Yang as creative director, Wu Wenjie as technical director and Chang Han-chen as creative producer, the 3D animation won the 2024 Golden A' Design Award in Movie, Video and Animation Design. On July 18, Yang attended the international design award's gala ceremony in Como, Italy.

"The title is derived from 'Renaissance,'" Yang says. "It represents two layers of meaning, not only that the little girl carries on her grandfather's spirit, but also the rejuvenation of traditional culture, injecting it with new vitality, and passing it down for future generations."

Born in 1995 in Changsha, Hunan province, Yang earned a bachelor's degree in visual design from Jiangnan University, but she has always been fascinated by animation. She sees it as a useful medium for visualizing futuristic or imaginative concepts that transcend the boundaries of reality and give people a glimpse into the future.

After graduating, she spent two years

working in postproduction at an animation company, but the experience did not fulfill her creative aspirations.

"There are stories I'd like to tell, emotions I'd like to share with others, and cultural elements I'd like to highlight. Postproduction alone would not allow me to achieve these goals, so I thought that I should find opportunities to lead projects myself," Yang says.

"I wanted to create work that embodies shared emotions and resonates with the audience, while also incorporating elements unique to Chinese culture, that might leave an impression or spark an interest in viewers who aren't familiar with it."

In 2018, she enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts in Computer Arts program at the School of Visual Arts in New York, specializing in 3D animation. There, she met the other two members of her core creative team, and in 2019, the trio embarked on the project.

The setting for the story is inspired by childhood experiences common to many young Chinese, like visiting grandparents in the countryside during summer or winter vacations. Yang says that during her own visits, she was often able to see folk customs or traditional cultural elements that have become rare sights in cities.

"I feel that they are still vibrant. Since videos can be watched repeatedly, I think it's a great way to record fading cultural traditions, or represent them in a new light," she says.

The team chose to blend lion dance and ballet. Both are a means of physical expression, despite their different cultural contexts. While the two performing genres represent different aesthetics, Yang finds commonalities. For example, both involve collaboration with other dancers.

In lion dancing, a lion is typically played by two performers, who manipulate the head and tail respectively, while



Top: The short film's creative director Yang Zhike receives the 2024 Golden A' Design Award in Movie, Video and Animation Design at a gala ceremony in Como, Italy, in July. **Above:** Yang is an animation artist with a passion for traditional culture.

the pas de deux in ballet also requires two dancers to work closely together.

"These movements in both genres, such as when one dancer lifts up the other, rely heavily on trust and coordination between the partners," she says.

In the short film, when the dead grandfather reappears with his old lion head prop, he picks up his granddaughter and the two of them leap in sync with each other, but using different leg postures.

Due to time restraints, the animation only explores the echo between the two genres briefly in this one scene. Yang says that if the production could have been extended, the scene would be a perfect way to demonstrate the harmony between different dances and different cultures.

The three-minute animation took the team a year and a half to make. Since it was uploaded in 2021 onto video-streaming site Bilibili, it has received overwhelming acclaim from the viewers.

"I really welled up at the end. The grandfather reappears to save his grand-

daughter, but that leap at the end also represents the inheritance of culture," according to one of the top comments.

Many comments also commended the team's efforts to present authentic Chinese culture. Yang says that she has had an innate fascination for traditional culture from a young age, and this passion drove her to deepen her understanding.

"With young people maturing and bringing their own strengths to the table, it is natural that so many individuals from diverse backgrounds who are interested in traditional culture consider using their skills to promote China's cultural treasures," she says.

Over the past few years, the short film has been screened in countries, including the United Kingdom and France, and has been nominated for many international awards.

Yang says that it is essential to identify common themes and shared values, such as love, family and friendship, to create an animated film that is able to resonate internationally. Revolving around shared values, unique cultural elements can be incorporated to enhance its visual and emotional appeal.

"The sheer brilliance and depth in *Renai Dance* is a testament to the power of animation in bridging generational and cultural divides," Giulia Esposito, an Italian journalist based in Milan, writes on the A' Design Award's official site.

"This film not only celebrates the legacy of past generations but also inspires the pursuit of dreams with courage and support. The commitment of the team, under the guidance and creative vision of Yang and Wu, to bring this emotionally charged and culturally rich narrative to life, despite the constraints of time and budget, is indeed worthy of recognition and admiration."

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

What's on

Spirit of creativity

The Spirit of Zhong (as in *zhongguo* for China), an exhibition now on in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, gathers workmanship and design by dozens of artists, designers and inheritors of traditional handicrafts. It investigates the latest developments of homegrown design and crafts, and anticipates trends in integrating modern design with traditional arts.

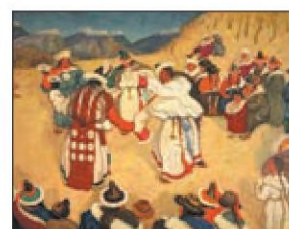


tion incorporates more forces from academic circles to give greater depth of thought to the discussion. It focuses on the influence of emerging concepts of design and modern technology, on the revival of tradition, the continuing embodiment of the unity of human and nature in design, and the harmony between past and present, and form and artistry. The exhibition is being held at Sea World Cultural and Arts Center until Aug 23.

10 am-6 pm, daily. L3 Garden View Gallery, Sea World Cultural and Arts Center, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. 0755-2667-1187.

Modern collection

Teachers and graduates of the Central Academy of Fine Arts had a deep involvement in the creation of iconic artworks of 20th-century



China. Many of these works or the drafts and preparatory drawings have been added to the collection of CAFA.

The CAFA art museum is now showing a selection from this assembly of works, including oil works, Chinese ink paintings, prints and sculptures, to offer a glimpse of the evolution of Chinese art in the last century, and the relation between fine arts and social life. The long-term exhibition features

preeminent figures, such as Li Shutong, a versatile artist and musician who later converted to Buddhism; Xu Beihong, one of the early Chinese students studying in Europe and who later became CAFA's headmaster; and Qi Baishi, one of the most world-renowned ink artists whose vivid depiction of lives in nature still captures the hearts of people today. 9:30 am-5:30 pm, closed on Mondays. 8 Huajiadi Nanjie, Wangjing, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6477-1575.

Master of versatility

Wu Changshuo (1844-1927), a man of luminosity in modern Chinese art, is known to demonstrate versatility in painting, calligraphy, poetry and the art of seal engraving. His intense studies of the evolution of Chinese characters, particularly those on



oracle bones, bronzes and primitive stone drums, have rendered his paintings a unique style and temperament which refreshed the look of Chinese painting in modern times. Over 180 pieces of art of Wu, as well as those by his contemporaries and disciples, are on show at Zhejiang Art Museum, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, until Sept 8.

It not only shows Wu's profound influence in the cultural circles, but also compares his works with that of other artists of his time to give a vivid, comprehensive picture of the art and social aesthetics at the time, helping people better understand Wu's contributions that have transcended time and space. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 138 Nanshan Lu, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. 0571-8707-8700.

LIFESHANGHAI

Art festival's vision delights overseas audiences

Productions sing and dance around the globe as China welcomes more foreign shows, **Zhang Kun** reports.

As the China Shanghai International Arts Festival reaps the rewards of promoting the performing arts to global audiences, eight theater productions from China will be presented in Edinburgh, Scotland, this month.

"For more than 20 years, we are dedicated to introducing high-quality shows from abroad to China and promoting outstanding local productions to the world," Li Ming, president of the center for the CSIAF said at a news conference held last Thursday, announcing the list of 13 productions it has successfully introduced to the overseas market this year.

"Last year we saw the return of overseas productions to the Shanghai festival following the pandemic impacts. This year, we are glad to see the overseas art markets are opening up for our shows," he says.

Now through to Tuesday, eight productions from China are being presented at the Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

These are: *Riding Alone*, a puppet show about a young performer's journey of self-discovery by the Shenzhen Puppet Art Theatre from Guangdong province; *Look at Them!*, a dance and physical theater show by Wen Xiaochao; *Forging the Swords*, a play adapted from a short story of the same title by Lu Xun, produced by the Central Academy of Drama; *Hi, Sid!*, an original musical by the Ju You Yi Si Theatre Troupe; *The Love Bridge*, a Huju opera program by the Shanghai Huju Opera Theatre; *Ancient Ship*, an original musical production of the CSIAF Youth Art Troupe; *Beautiful Earth*, a gala concert by the Little Companion Art Troupe, a company established in 1955 at the China Welfare Institute Children's Palace; and the concert by pipa virtuoso Wu Man.

The original musical *Ancient Ship* tells about the excavation of a shipwreck from more than 150 years ago at the Yangtze River Estuary, revealing the rich cultural heritage and historical development of Shanghai. All the songs but one will be performed in English. The performing group CSIAF Youth Art Troupe was founded last year, consisting of primary and junior middle school students from Shanghai.

These eight productions comprise the China Focus program. This is the fourth time the program has landed in Edinburgh since 2017, according to Yang Jialu, deputy president of the CSIAF center. They have been selected by a professional jury consisting of Chinese theater



Clockwise from top: Choreographer Zheng Jie brings the dance show *Three Rules of Admonition* to an audience in Romania. A scene from *Riding Alone*, a puppet theater show by the Shenzhen Puppet Art Theatre. Action from *Forging the Sword*, a theater production by the Central Academy of Theater of China. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

professionals and organizers of the Edinburgh Festival.

In September, the 13th production, the acrobatic drama *Swan* by the Guangzhou Acrobatic Arts Troupe from Guangdong province that the CSIAF promoted to the international market this year, will tour Moscow and St Petersburg in Russia.

An important part of the festival every year, the CSIAF hosts an inter-

national trade fair for performing arts attended by more than 100 art festivals, promoters and other industry insiders. "It is an important platform for recommending Chinese productions to the world," according to Yang. "Every year we invite leading players in the industry to gather in Shanghai and introduce the latest original productions in China."

A series of outstanding produc-

tions, such as the dance theater show *The Rite of Spring* choreographed by famous dancer Yang Liping, received an invitation to international tours thanks to the CSIAF. It promoted *The Rite of Spring* during its creation when highlighted episodes were performed at the trade fair in 2017. The production combined folklore, mysteries and other ethnic cultures of

southwestern China with Stravinsky's music, gaining the attention of foreign institutions and touring the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Russia.

"We found that industry leaders and representatives showed more interest in new original creations by young artists," Yang Jialu says. "Those with rich experience in the industry have been familiar with

classical Chinese theater and tend to pay more attention to new expressions of contemporary artists."

The Rising Artists' Work, another program by the CSIAF, is a platform that helps young artists to accomplish their creations. Since 2012 the program has provided funding, consultancy and professional appraisals for young artists to realize their works in theater, dance, music and more.

Zheng Jie, the choreographer of the dance theater show *Three Rules of Admonition*, was a successful example, with the production being shown at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival in Romania this year.

In 2017, Zheng participated in the work program and created the dance theater production *Beyond the Stillness*, which was later presented at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Beijing.

"We believe he is talented and promising and we are impressed with his strong creative capabilities and rich expressions, so we commissioned a new project by him," Yang Jialu says.

The CSIAF then recommended the commissioned piece *Three Rules of Admonition* at the 2023 performing arts trade fair, which led to the show being invited to the Sibiu International Theatre Festival in June.

Three Rules of Admonition is based on a legendary tale from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) about a monk transformed into a tiger and torn between hunger and human emotions.

Zheng's adaptation captures the turbulent flow of the mood in storytelling.

"All my works were born out of my understanding for 'powerful emotional entanglement' and the 'intricate relationship between people' ... While I have created my works, they have created me by opening a new door in my life," Zheng said earlier this year, as one of the recommended artists in the 10th anniversary celebration of the program.

He founded the Zheng Jie Dance Theater Company in 2022. "I used to tell my friends that I was like a big boy raised by the CSIAF," he says.

"The festival has witnessed my growth and recorded different phases of my development. It is a colorful platform where birds of the same feather gather. Good artists constantly spark new flames and pump fresh blood to the contemporary art scene of China."

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Master's works bring modernity to traditional painting

By ZHANG KUN

As one of Shanghai's most representative Chinese ink painting artists, Wu Hufan (1894-1968) is famous for his landscape paintings which showcase his superb use of light and vivid colors. An ongoing exhibition at the China Art Museum Shanghai displays some of his most celebrated creations.

Opened on Aug 6, *A Unique Peak of Shanghai: the Exhibition of Wu Hufan* brings more than 80 paintings and calligraphy works from collections of the China Art Museum Shanghai, the Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy, Suzhou Museum in Jiangsu province, the Shanghai History Museum and Duoyunxuan, as well as private collectors. The exhibition runs until Oct 27.

The China Art Museum Shanghai has hosted a series of group exhibitions in the past few years, elaborating on the characteristics and development of a distinctive "Shanghai Style", or *haipai*, of modern Chinese art, according to Wang Yichuan, executive director of the museum.

"We wanted to explore this direction and focus on specific artists. We chose Wu as the first featured figure because he made a great impact on



Left: *The Steep Peaks Above the Clouds*, a representative ink painting by Wu Hufan in 1936. **Middle:** Visitors admire the exhibition *A Unique Peak of Shanghai: the Exhibition of Wu Hufan*. **Right:** Another of Wu's masterpiece, *Life Sketch in the Xijiao Park*, created in 1958. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China's art scene in the latter half of the 20th century."

This year marks the 130th anniversary of Wu Hufan's birth.

The Shanghai museum chose to present his solo exhibition to "illustrate how traditional Chinese ink art

impacted the early 1900s and modern artists such as Wu inherited and innovated the great traditions of ink art in the Jiangnan region (south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River), turning a new page for modern Chinese art and proving the strong

vitality of traditional Chinese ink painting," said Chen Xiang, the academic director for the exhibition and the vice-chairman of the Shanghai Artists' Association, at the opening ceremony on Aug 5.

Wu was born in an esteemed

house in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, as the grandson of renowned scholar Wu Dazheng (1835-1902). Since childhood, he inherited the rich heritage of literati art. In 1924, he moved to Shanghai where he was exposed to modern urban culture.

Wu Hufan introduced Chinese ink painting to bright colors and imagery favored by ordinary folks, bringing art close to people's daily lives, opposite to the interest of the refined intellectuals who treated art as a way to express their spiritual pursuits, Chen says.

In 1936, Wu Hufan's landscape painting *Yun Biao Qi Feng*, or *The Steep Peaks Above the Clouds*, made a splash when it was exhibited in Shanghai. It is a Chinese ink painting but its perspective, light and dark shadow contrasts and rich layers of colors remind people of Western paintings. The piece gave Chinese ink painting a new look and immediately made Wu Hufan famous in China's art scene.

While many Chinese artists in the country at that time found new methods and inspiration in the cultural clash between the East and the West, tradition and modernity, Wu Hufan "chose a path less-taken", according to Chen.

He held tight to his roots and introduced new influences to enrich his expression, pushing the modernization of Chinese ink art. "I believe it is relevant today, as Chinese ink art is still developing and looking for new directions," Chen adds.

LIFE



Left: *Hamlet's Clouds*, a play written and directed by Italian theater director and author Eugenio Barba, will be staged at the 11th Wuzhen Theatre Festival. STEFANO DI BUDDO / FOR CHINA DAILY **Center:** Barba is also bringing the production, *An Ordinary Day in the Life of the Dancer Gregor Samsa*. SABRINA CIRILLO / FOR CHINA DAILY **Right:** Hu Defu (right), better known as Ara Kimbo, a pioneer of Taiwan folk music, will make a cameo appearance in Stan Lai's *River/Cloud*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Arms open to the new generation

The 11th edition of Wuzhen's festival promises to break ground, offer fresh possibilities to young theater practitioners, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

For around 10 days each year, the water town of Wuzhen in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, which is known for its historical feel and tranquil, tree-shaded rivers, brims with vibrancy as it welcomes the Wuzhen Theatre Festival.

The organizers' goal is to create a dynamic, immersive extravaganza for visitors. Each year, the event hosts a variety of cutting-edge, contemporary and classic domestic and international theater productions. Visitors can attend forums and panel discussions, where creators share their interpretations and insights, while those who have simply come to Wuzhen for a holiday can still experience open-air performances and enjoy stilt-walking processions that take place in the town's nooks and crannies. With the markets, exhibitions and live music, the festival embraces visitors with a varied experience of culture and entertainment.

"I remember sharing my thoughts about what the festival would bring to Wuzhen, when we were planning for the inaugural edition a decade ago. I said that in about 10 years' time, Wuzhen would have an entirely different image, with or without the festival," says cofounder and chairman, Chen Xianghong.

"Since the festival was launched, it has changed Wuzhen's ambience somewhat, making it a more lively place. Today, many young people first learn about Wuzhen through the festival, and the festival has become a yearly getaway for people of different ages and backgrounds."

This year, the festival celebrates its 11th edition, which is scheduled to run from Oct 17 to 27 under the theme of "Solidity" and the slogan, "Spirit like a torch; faith like a great rock".

In the course of 11 days, 24 productions from 11 countries will be staged at 11 theater venues, with a total of 86 performances. Eleven productions are from China and 13 are from countries including the United Kingdom, France and Japan.

A wide range of genres will be featured, including classic dramas, magnum opus productions by veteran theater directors, avant-garde dramas, physical theater and dance dramas.

The festival will see the return of



many familiar faces, including Italian theater director and author Eugenio Barba, who came in 2013 for the festival's first edition.

Along with his company, the Denmark-based Odin Teatret, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary, Barba will be mounting two productions, *Hamlet's Clouds* and *An Ordinary Day in the Life of the Dancer Gregor Samsa*.

Director Stan Lai, one of the festival's cofounders, will stage his 40th production, *River/Cloud*. Making its Chinese mainland premiere this year, after which it will go on tour, it is a spinoff of Lai's classic *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land*, and is about the poignant love story of the protagonists Yun Zhifan and Jiang Binliu.

Audiences will be able to watch screen actor Chang Chen as Jiang, while Hsiao Ai will reprise the role of Yun, which she played in 1991. Hu Defu, a pioneer of Taiwan folk music, better known as Ara Kimbo, will make a cameo appearance.

This year also introduces a public welfare performance, *The Revised Future*, by director Ma Yan and the Pleasure



Top: Members of the festival's chairman's committee speak at a news conference on Aug 6 in Wuzhen. **Above:** A poster for this year's festival features a painting by Jia Aili. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Troupe, an inclusive theater troupe, of which a majority of performers have disabilities.

"It won the best play award at this year's Nanjing Festival of New Theatre. It is such an extraordinary production, with people of diverse abilities telling their own stories onstage," Lai says.

The recurring section for young theater practitioners, the Emerging Theatre Artists' Competition, is making some changes this year, due to the growing number of submissions.

Each year, three of the festival's cofounders, Huang Lei, Lai and Meng Jinghui each come up with a topic which are then combined to create a theme. This year's is "pillow, sunshine, big dinosaur".

Participants exercise their imaginations to come up with a 30-minute stage production based on the theme, 18 of which are chosen to compete during the festival.

The call for entries is open until coming Tuesday. Huang estimates that the committee will receive around 700 submissions, and the panel will announce

the selected 18 on Sept 22.

To ensure that excellence is recognized and to inject more diverse perspectives into the selection process, this year's jury has seven new judges, including Beijing People's Art Theatre actress Xu Fan, actor and director Chen Minghao, and young theater practitioners who established themselves during previous rounds of the competition, such as Ding Yiteng.

The Outdoor Carnival section, which is open for applications until Sept 13, will include a variety of outdoor performances, ranging from traditional opera and dance, to modern art and multimedia shows. The festival committee estimates that 1,600 to 1,800 shows will take place, ensuring that visitors enjoy live performances as they explore Wuzhen's streets and alleys.

"Lai, Meng, Chen and I have worked hard together for more than a decade to reach the 11th edition. I feel it is almost like the first edition. It's a new beginning," Huang says.

"We are working to involve more young people in the festival. Also, we are designing and planning more new elements and sections that offer more young people space for creative expression."

One new section this year, the Dream Granary, will be installed at the Wuzhen Granary, a renovated former grain storage facility that opened to the public in 2017. The space is a popular venue for exhibitions by artists from the China Academy of Art.

Headed by Yang Ting, theater director and a former judge of the Emerging Theatre Artists' Competition, the new section is designed to provide young theater practitioners with a platform to create, perform, and collaborate with artists from other creative fields.

"These practitioners and artists from the China Academy of Art may have come from different places, and followed different paths, but eventually, they meet at the granary," Huang says.

Although their journeys have varied, for now they have ended up at the same place, coming together at the granary, a place that once sustained material needs, to create a spiritual home, Huang says.

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A contemporary Kunqu take on famous linguist

By CHEN NAN
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The Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre's latest contemporary production, *Li Pei*, which is about the famous applied linguist, will premiere at the Tianqiao Performing Arts Center in Beijing on Sept 20.

According to Yang Fengyi, president of the theater, the production is a compelling tribute to Li's remarkable life and legacy, and reflects her resilience, groundbreaking achievements as an educator, and her story with her husband, Guo Yonghua (1909-68), one of the founding fathers of China's atomic and hydrogen bomb, and satellite programs.

Born in Jiangsu province in 1917, Li was admitted to Peking University to study economics in 1936. She continued her studies at Cornell University in the United States in 1947, where she married Guo in 1948. The couple returned to China with their only daughter in 1956. Li passed away in 2017.

Li began teaching English at the University of Science and Technology of China in 1961, and transferred to its graduate school in

“For Li Pei, I had to put aside all my experiences with other female roles and start afresh.”

Wei Chunrong, actress, Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre

1978. Later renamed the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, she remained at the graduate school until she retired in 1987.

Besides being an educator and linguist, Li is also credited with being one of the most important initiators and promoters of the development of Zhongguancun, which later became the high-tech innovation hub that has been dubbed "the Silicon Valley of China". She also set up the Zhongguancun Forum, and invited eminent scholars from many fields to give lectures, arranging more than 600 between 1998 and 2011.

"Besides Li's professional life, which established her as a formi-

dable figure in her own right, the production also depicts her family life, from her romance with her husband to her life after his death," says Yang.

Guo was the first dean of the chemical physics department at the University of Science and Technology of China. A pioneer of modern Chinese mechanics, he made great contributions to mechanics, applied mathematics and aerodynamics and died in a plane crash in 1968, at the age of 59.

"Li was not only a pioneer educator but also a wife and mother, who coped with the devastating loss of her husband, and later of her only daughter, who died in 1997," says Gong Yingtian, director and scriptwriter of the opera that follows Li's story over the course of 80 years.

More than 600 years old and one of the oldest traditional forms of opera still in vogue in China, Kunqu Opera is performed in the Suzhou dialect, and is known for its graceful movements and dance. It has captured hearts of fans with its seemingly endless variety of gestures used to express specific emotions and in 2008, it was inscribed on UNESCO's list of

the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

"There are over 90 performers in the production. We also combine elements such as choral singing, narration and symphonic music, with Kunqu Opera," adds Gong.

One of the theater's leading performers is Wei Chunrong, who will play the role of Li.

"This is the first time for me to play a role in a contemporary Kunqu Opera production, and it's challenging since it is based on a real story. I did a lot of research on Li's life," says Wei, who started to study the ancient art form when she was 10, and has been performing with the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre since she was 16.

As a winner of the Chinese Theatre Plum Blossom Award, the top national performing arts award, Wei is mostly known for her roles as classic Chinese beauties like Du Linliang in *The Peony Pavilion* and Cui Yingying in *The Romance of the West Chamber*.

"Most of the roles I have played are of beautiful, soft and sentimental women. Many have been portrayed by Kunqu Opera actresses in different generations. For Li Pei,



Kunqu Opera performers Wei Chunrong (left), who plays the role of Li Pei, and Yuan Guoliang, who plays the role of Guo Yonghua, perform an excerpt from the Kunqu Opera production *Li Pei* in Beijing on Aug 10. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

I had to put aside all my experiences with other female roles and start afresh," Wei says.

Yang Jia, one of Li's students, is also portrayed in the production. She studied under Li after being admitted to pursue her master's degree at the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences at the age of 22. Two years later, she became a teacher at the university, and at 29, lost her sight. With Li's encouragement and a great deal of

determination, Yang Jia became the first blind person from outside the US to obtain a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University.

"I can still recall the first time I met Li when I was interviewed for entry to the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences some 30 years ago. Her smile was so heartwarming," says Yang. "I was lucky to have been her student. She was a great woman who inspired me."