

Road to recovery

Fish stocks in Yangtze River increase thanks to 10-year ban on fishing GOING GREEN, PAGE 5



Japanese citizens protest discharge from Fukushima WORLD, PAGE 7



Catering to the world

Chinese brands expand overseas to tickle global taste buds BUSINESS, PAGE 8

# CHINA DAILY

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DRIVING REFORM

## Aid programs boost prosperity of Global South

New forms of foreign assistance continue amid challenges for nations' self-sustained growth

By ZHOU JIN zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

Ogiji Sunday Uko's enriching journey in China came to an end in June, when he graduated from China Foreign Affairs University.

His experience not only broadened his understanding of international relations, but also provided him with insights into China's development model, which he believes offers valuable lessons for Nigeria and other developing nations.

The Nigerian government executive learned about a training program two years ago that would let him study at the university, and he jumped at the opportunity, as it had been his dream to study in China.

Uko, who studied in the master's program of international relations at China Foreign Affairs University, said his experience in China has enlightened him very much.

"The infrastructural development of China is amazing," he said, adding that witnessing it firsthand has shaped his view of how infrastructure could transform society in his home country.

"Studying in Beijing also helped me know more about the real image of China, more than what we are told by Western media," he said.

Uko is among 40,000 people who finished training as part of the China-proposed Global Development Initiative, which aims to provide 100,000 training opportunities to other developing countries to support their economic and social development.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi pledged in July to offer an additional 100,000 training opportunities for Global South countries in the next five years.

Following the philosophy that it is more helpful in the long term to teach people how to fish rather than

just giving them fish, China has attached great importance to cooperation in human resources development, exemplifying its evolving reform of foreign assistance.

A resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which was held in July, pledged to open China's doors wider to the world's least-developed countries.

The resolution called for further reforming institutions and mechanisms for foreign aid to realize full-chain management.

Analysts said that foreign assistance is a systematic endeavor that requires a holistic approach, integrating the formulation and planning of foreign aid policies, project implementation and evaluation, in a bid to meet the needs of recipient countries as well as achieve China's diplomatic goals.

The full-chain management approach helps streamline systems and mechanisms of foreign aid, reduces management and communication costs among relevant departments, and enhances the effectiveness of foreign assistance, they added.

### Challenges seen

Wang Yiwei, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of International Studies, said that foreign aid bolsters China's political influence, its ability to shape international rules and its global reputation.

The professor said that advancing foreign aid faces several challenges, as its necessity is sometimes questioned, which can affect decision-making and the implementation of relevant policies of various departments.

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## Fire and counterfire

Above: An unmanned aerial vehicle launched by the Lebanon-based Hezbollah is intercepted by Israeli forces over north Israel on Sunday. Hezbollah said that it had launched more than 320 rockets at Israel overnight, targeting a string of military positions.

JALAA MAREY / AFP

Right: Smoke billows from the site of an Israeli airstrike on Zibqin in southern Lebanon on Sunday. The Israeli military announced that it was conducting preemptive strikes in Lebanon after detecting preparations for "large-scale" attacks by the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah. KAWNAT HAJU / AFP



## High-level talks aim to stabilize Sino-US ties

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

At this week's high-level talks between senior diplomats from China and the United States, Beijing and Washington will "continue to discuss the issue of strategic perception and the boundary between national security and economic activities," the Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

### Inside

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will visit China from Tuesday to Thursday for a new round of China-US strategic communication with Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

It will be Sullivan's first visit to China in his current post and will also mark the first visit by a US national security adviser to China in eight years.

The trip will mark an important step for the two sides to carry out the consensus of the San Francisco summit last year, and both sides have displayed a strong desire to keep communication afloat despite various challenges, analysts said.

Wang will have an in-depth exchange of views with Sullivan

"on China-US ties, sensitive issues and major international and regional hot spot issues," a leading official from the Foreign Ministry's Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs said on Sunday.

The two sides will take stock of the progress made by the two countries in implementing the consensus reached at the San Francisco summit, and give full play to the more than 20 dialogue and communication mechanisms that have been established or resumed.

China will focus on expressing serious concerns, stating its position and making serious demands on matters "such as the Taiwan question, its right to seek development and China's strategic security", the official said at a media briefing.

Following the San Francisco summit, the two sides' diplomatic, financial, law enforcement and climate change working teams, as well as the two militaries, have maintained communication, such as the defense ministers' talks in Singapore in May and the fifth meeting of the China-US financial working group held this month.

At the same time, the US continues its containment and suppression of China, as Beijing has taken resolute countermeasures,

and China-US ties are still at a critical juncture of stabilizing, the official said.

The strategic communications between Wang and Sullivan are part of the consensus reached by President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden in Bali, Indonesia, in 2022.

Previously, Wang and Sullivan had three rounds of strategic communications in Vienna, Malta and Bangkok.

Those meetings "were substantive and constructive, and achieved positive results," and "both sides agreed to further make good use of this channel of strategic communication", the Foreign Ministry official said.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the China Institute of International Studies' Department of American Studies, said, "Sullivan's China visit showcases the great importance attached by the Biden administration to ties with China, and the two sides share a readiness to further roll out the San Francisco Vision."

"In the meantime, China is using the communication to further shape the bilateral ties in an active way, and it does not shy away from addressing existing issues and challenges, including the US perception of China," she added.

On the overall China-US relations, the ministry official said dur-

ing the briefing that Beijing has always believed that "the competition between major countries does not solve the problems faced by the US and the world".

The three principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation as put forward by President Xi "should be the direction of joint efforts by China and the US", the official said.

Regarding the situation in the Taiwan Strait, the official said the US should strictly observe the one-China principle and the provisions of the three landmark China-US joint communiques, and carry out its commitment to not supporting "Taiwan independence".

Speaking on Washington's continued unreasonable measures against China in terms of tariffs, export controls, investment reviews and unilateral sanctions, the official said that China urges the US to "stop politicizing and securitizing economic and trade issues" and "take more measures to facilitate people-to-people exchanges between the two countries".

China will also call for the US to fulfill its responsibility as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and "play a constructive role in the political settlement of current major and prominent international and regional issues", the official added.

## Resolution reflects China's strategic vision for future

The unveiling of a landmark reform resolution by the Communist Party of China Central Committee in July signals a significant move in China's trajectory toward modernization, progress and global integration. This comprehensive set of reforms, meticulously crafted and adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, reflects the country's unwavering commitment to reform and opening-up that contributes to human progress and global governance.

Led by General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping,

### WORLD WATCH

By Khalid Taimur Akram

the document drafting group has laid out strategic plans that are based on a people-centric approach that will benefit all sections of the country. The guiding principle places significant emphasis on pursuing national rejuvenation and Chinese modernization. A distinctive feature of Chinese policymaking is the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This approach is

unique due to its integration of profound philosophical aspects, particularly those referring to Confucianism.

The resolution, titled Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization, outlines a road map for China's reform and development up to 2029 and beyond.

Ambitious goals set by the resolution are set to culminate in the realization of socialist modernization by the mid-21st century, laying a solid foundation for building a great modern socialist country in a

more holistic, systematic and coherent manner.

The resolution is a guiding principle for further deepening reform comprehensively in 60 listed main aspects, giving prominence to key areas, and focusing on major reform measures that are significant to Chinese modernization, well-rounded development and common prosperity for all.

The resolution emphasizes several core objectives, including the importance of deepening supply-side structural reform.

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## HONG KONG RESIDENTS MIGRATING NORTH FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE

Greater Bay Area hospitals offer them affordable, high-quality medical treatment

By ZHOU MO and WANG XU in Shenzhen

Hong Kong resident Cheung Yiu-fu is frustrated with the city's healthcare system and has been traveling across the border to Shenzhen in Guangdong province for dental treatment since June last year.

The border crossing, closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, opened in early January 2023 after the travel restrictions imposed to control the virus were eased.

"I have come to Shenzhen several times for teeth implant surgery. The quality of service is quite



good, and the price is much cheaper than in Hong Kong," the 69-year-old said, adding that he has recommended the healthcare services across the border to six of his friends.

Cheung has also traveled to Guangzhou, the capital of the province, to see a doctor for treatment of heart disease after consultation at a Hong Kong hospital.

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INSIDE Opening-up continues apace on larger scale Global Views, page 13

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# PAGE TWO



**Left:** Patients wait for treatment at the Hong Kong-Macao Residents Healthcare Service Center in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Aug 30, 2022. It is the first collaboration center in the Chinese mainland between medical institutions from Guangdong and Hong Kong.  
CHEN CHUHONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE  
**Right:** Shuttle buses between Shenzhen and Hong Kong wait to depart from Huanggang Port in Shenzhen.  
LI ZHIHUA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



## Medical: 'Welfare portability' advances in GBA

From page 1

"The Hong Kong hospital told me that I would have to wait up to four years for the operation. In the Guangzhou hospital, the doctor arranged the operation for me at once," he said.

Seeing a doctor in a Hong Kong public hospital is difficult for many of the city's residents. The excessive burden on medical resources means lengthy waiting periods and unsatisfactory experiences for many of Hong Kong's 7.5 million inhabitants.

The migration northward for medical treatment, follows the trend of Hong Kong residents traveling to Shenzhen for dining, shopping and entertainment.

In total, more than 53 million trips were made by residents across the border last year, according to Hong Kong's Immigration Department.

To cater to the growing demand from Hong Kong, some medical institutions have launched shuttle buses at border checkpoints to transport patients to hospitals in Shenzhen. Others have opened online appointment channels to make the visits more convenient.

### City's stressed system

Hong Kong patients have been struggling to get adequate medical services in local public hospitals as insufficient resources have led to prolonged waits of up to several years.

In specialist outpatient clinics, a triage system is implemented to ensure that patients needing urgent treatment are given priority. New patients are classified into urgent, semi-urgent, and stable categories.

For patients classified as in a stable condition, the medium waiting time for surgery is 26 to 59 weeks, while those classified as urgent wait less than a week.

The lengthy waiting times for some patients have forced many of them to turn to private hospitals, but the high prices they charge are prohibitive for the majority.

Hong Kong's public healthcare system boasts some of the most generous subsidies in the world, with the local government bearing roughly 95 percent of inpatient and clinical expenses. General consultations at public hospitals are HK\$50 (\$6.40) and specialist consultation fees HK\$80 for non-first-time local patients, according to official health data. Inpatient service costs are HK\$100 to HK\$120 per day.

By comparison, medical costs in private hospitals are staggeringly expensive.

A Hong Kong woman, who asked to be identified as Miss Chan, said she went to a Shenzhen hospital for a gastroscopy, which cost her less than 1,000 yuan (\$140). The cost of the same examination in a Hong Kong private hospital could be 10 times higher, she said.

"Going north for medical treatment has become a new trend to fulfill medical needs in an affordable and high-quality way," said Wong Kwok, chairman of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions and a member of the city's Legislative Council.

"Just like the recent upsurge of Hong Kong people going to Shenzhen for meals, goods and services, cross-border medical cooperation is an obvious trend, and the idea of 'welfare portability' should be strengthened and accelerated."

### Confidence in services

The three major reasons Hong Kong patients visit Shenzhen are

the cheap prices, the high quality of services, and the good experience, said Yu Sze-yuen, director of the office for cross-border healthcare services at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital.

Yu said Hong Kong patients paid 138,000 visits to the hospital between February 2023 and February 2024.

The number of visits by Hong Kong patients to the hospital's outpatient department reached 40,493 in the first quarter of this year, accounting for 10.4 percent of the total.

Hong Kong patients also made 2,471 visits to the Shenzhen hospital's emergency department, while visits for physical examinations and inpatient services were 1,264 and 1,197, respectively, over the period.

According to Zheng Yuyan, director of the Stomatology Center at Shenzhen People's Hospital, Hong Kong residents accounted for 5 percent of the total number of patients in 2023, and the proportion is expected to rise this year because of the heating up north-bound trend.

The Stomatology Center is one of the most popular departments chosen by Hong Kong residents due to its cost advantage compared with

“Going north for medical treatment has become a new trend to fulfill medical needs in an affordable and high-quality way.”

Wong Kwok, chairman of The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions and a member of the city's Legislative Council



A general practitioner examines a patient at the health service center for Hong Kong and Macao residents in Guangzhou in August 2022.  
CHEN CHUHONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

dental clinics in Hong Kong offering similar medical services.

"At present, the Stomatology Center has nurses who can speak Cantonese and English at the guidance desk. Doctors also conduct online patient group chats for communication after treatment and plan to open an online consultation channel for Hong Kong residents in the future," said Zheng.

Chen Xiaoqiong, deputy general manager of CKJ, a dental organization in Shenzhen, believes the consumption patterns of Hong Kong residents have changed a lot since the border reopening. "Thanks to improvements in the transport network and the development of digital payments, it has become much easier and more convenient for Hong Kong residents to travel to Shenzhen."

Chen said HK residents have gained more knowledge about the mainland and "the convenience of healthcare there".

CKJ received over 40,000 visits by Hong Kong patients in the first quarter of this year.

"The average monthly number of visits by Hong Kong patients this year stands at 14,000, compared with 10,000 last year, so we can see that the number is on the rise," she said.

### Path smoothed

To make it easier for its residents to get more affordable healthcare across the border, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government has launched several initiatives in recent years.

In February, it announced the extension of the Elderly Health Care Voucher GBA (Greater Bay Area) Pilot Scheme, which lets eligible elderly people to use healthcare vouchers to pay for cross-border outpatient healthcare services. It now covers in total nine medical institutions, including CKJ, in the GBA.

Seven medical institutions in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan and Zhongshan were added to the program, which is expected to benefit up to 1.7 million Hong Kong people.

In March, Hong Kong's Health Bureau announced that the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the Hospital Authority in the GBA would be extended for another 12 months.

Under the scheme, which was launched in May 2023, eligible patients only need to pay a 100-yuan consultation fee at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital. The remainder of the fee, up to a 2,000-yuan limit, is subsidized by the government.

Over 4,000 Hong Kong patients had enrolled in the scheme by the end of February.

In 2021, the Hong Kong and Macao Medicine and Equipment Connect program was introduced. It allows medicine and medical devices that are already on the Hong Kong market to be used in designated medical institutions in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area after approval.

As of mid-January, 28 drugs and 28 medical equipment items had secured approval for use in 19 medical institutions.

Wong, from the Federation of Trade Unions, said cross-border medical cooperation is at a preliminary stage, and added that "overall progress has to be accelerated".

The elderly healthcare voucher scheme, for example, should be expanded to 3A hospitals or accredited private medical institutions in GBA cities, where more and more Hong Kong people have chosen to settle or retire, he said.

"The recent announcement of seven more GBA medical institutions to be included in the EHCV GBA Pilot Scheme merely widens the door to 'welfare portability'. There is still a lot of work to be done in the overall integration of medical systems between the two places," Wong said.

As early as 2022, Macao's medical insurance subsidies were extended to nine GBA cities for residents aged 65 or above, or below 10, primary and secondary school students, and people with disabilities.

"Now that Macao can do it, so can Hong Kong," Wong said.

### Integration key

HKSAR Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu stressed the importance of making good use of healthcare services in the GBA in his 2023 Policy Address delivered in October.

The city's Secretary for Health, Lo Chung-mau, said the HKSAR government is exploring arrangements with suitable GBA healthcare institutions for purchasing healthcare services.

"The initial idea is to start with healthcare services with immense demand and lower risks, such as investigation or imaging services, and devise a service model for the purchase and specific arrangements under the premise of compliance with the relevant laws and regulations of both places," Lo said in May.

He said the HKSAR government will continue to monitor the progress of various cross-border healthcare collaboration initiatives. It will also explore feasible measures

to support the medical needs of Hong Kong residents more effectively, he added.

"The government's policy objective is to enable Hong Kong people who travel between or reside in the two places and some of those who intend to settle in the GBA, to reside and integrate into local life, instead of solely relying on healthcare resources on the mainland to meet the needs of Hong Kong people," Lo said.

The HKSAR government is also discussing with city governments the provision of cross-border ambulance services to enable point-to-point hospital transfers of patients.

At present, patients who need to be transferred from a Shenzhen hospital to one in Hong Kong have to leave the ambulance and clear customs before getting in another vehicle on the other side of the border, which is difficult for those in critical condition.

Yu, from the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital, said the provision of cross-border ambulance services involves a large amount of paperwork that needs to be addressed by different government departments.

"Hong Kong and Guangdong have their own laws and regulations regarding customs clearance of people and vehicles, management of dangerous drugs and equipment, ... which requires a lot of time for coordination," he said.

The governments on both sides are actively working on the matter and "hopefully, this service will be implemented within this year," Yu said.

Chen, from CKJ, believes cross-border healthcare will become a long-term trend and demand will grow as regional integration in the GBA further deepens.

However, there are challenges that need to be addressed in the process, she said.

### Obstacles to overcome

Differences in laws and regulations between Hong Kong and the mainland present a major obstacle for medical integration.

"Licensing of physicians, insurance reimbursement policies, data privacy protection ... all these issues require a sound regulatory system and mechanism," Chen said.

Language and cultural differences could also have an impact on cross-border medical services, she said. "How to enhance consumer trust is another problem that needs to be considered," Chen added.

While acknowledging that cross-border medical cooperation could help alleviate Hong Kong's healthcare burden, Wong believes more effort is needed from Hong Kong.

He called for reforming medical licensing examinations and bridging courses, so that veteran doctors from the mainland and abroad have channels to connect and align with Hong Kong professionals.

"To alleviate the manpower shortage, it is suggested that Hong Kong establish an 'associate doctor' system through promotion of limited registration for both overseas medical talents, and those who have been already practicing as a 'community doctor' in the city," he said.

"With these pragmatic adjustments, the system could better utilize these professionals and effectively protect the rights of patients," he added.

Yi Yang in Shenzhen contributed to this story.

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## TOP NEWS

## Grim picture



An aerial view of a flooded area on Saturday in Fení, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Nearly 300,000 people were taking refuge in emergency shelters as of Saturday as floods inundated vast areas of the low-lying South Asian country, disaster officials said. The floods were triggered by heavy monsoon rains and have killed at least 42 people in Bangladesh and India since the start of the week.

SULTAN MAHMUD MUKUT/DRIK/GETTY IMAGES

## Programs: Major 'small yet smart' projects benefit people's livelihoods

From page 1

"It is crucial to recognize the strategic importance of foreign aid," Wang said, adding that departments involved in the mission must better coordinate under the guidance of the China International Development Cooperation Agency. The agency, established in 2018, clarified the responsibilities of the foreign aid system, the professor said, adding that this reform aligns with international development practices and represents an achievement in the institutionalization of China's diplomatic efforts.

He also said that China's foreign aid reform reflects its responsibility as a major power and its commitment to achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Zhou Taidong, vice-president of the Center for International Knowledge on Development, said that deepening the reform of foreign aid systems and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of such assistance are essential for meeting the growing expectations of Global South countries, resolving global development challenges, and fulfilling the goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind. Further efforts should be made to strengthen top-level design and tailor policies for different nations and regions, while multilateral, regional and bilateral channels should be integrated to foster a comprehensive aid approach, Zhou said.

Emphasis should be put on evaluation of aid, as this plays a crucial role in measuring and showcasing the outcomes of China's international development cooperation, he said, adding that China should also promote third-party cooperation and multilateral coordination in a more active manner.

## Synergy with BRI

International development aid has boosted connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative, with a large number of flagship infrastructure projects built over the past 11 years.

Aid cannot increase the burden on recipient countries. It should enhance accessibility while laying a foundation for their long-term development."

Wang Yiwei, professor at Renmin University of China's School of International Studies

Among them is the China-assisted Eastbay Expressway of Gwadar Port in Pakistan, an early harvest project finished in 2022 as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

As a project initiated and managed by Pakistan and built by a Chinese enterprise, the host country has had decision-making authority throughout the process.

This arrangement allowed the project to be built to meet the specific needs and conditions of Pakistan, said Liu Fangtao, who was the manager of the project for China Communications Construction Co.

Despite numerous challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, harsh climatic conditions and security risks due to terrorism, the expressway was completed in five years.

The expressway, which serves as the only external link for Gwadar Port, solved the transportation problem and also facilitated trade and connectivity, Liu said.

By establishing and promoting its standards, China, which is renowned for its infrastructure capabilities, can gain greater influence in international aid projects, he added.

"Looking forward, there is a pressing need for China to clearly introduce its foreign aid policies and system to recipient countries, such as issuing an English version of its policies and procedures," he said.

By promoting Chinese management practices and standards abroad, the communication gap can be narrowed, which will help reduce misunderstandings, Liu added.

The resolution adopted at the third plenary session in July called for coordinated efforts to promote "small yet smart" public welfare projects under the BRI, while also advancing major flagship projects.

Zhou, from the Center for International Knowledge on Development, said that as a major regional opening-up strategy, the BRI has reshaped China's international development cooperation and greatly increased its global contribution to development.

Though China has a key strength in large-scale signature aid projects, which address critical infrastructure gaps and the urgent needs of developing nations, "small yet smart" projects can deliver quick results that benefit people's livelihoods, he said.

Policy banks and market entities should better play their roles in flagship projects, while "small yet smart" projects should emphasize public resource investment, Zhou added.

"If well-coordinated during planning and implementation, these two types of projects can better complement each other and inject greater momentum into global development," he added.

Wang, from Renmin University, said that for large-scale flagship projects as well as small-scale livelihood projects, the key lies in sustainable development, which involves ensuring debt sustainability.

"Aid cannot increase the burden on recipient countries. It should enhance accessibility while laying a foundation for their long-term development," he said.

Whether through the BRI or new forms of foreign aid, the ultimate goal is to strengthen recipient nations' capacity for self-sustained growth, which will encourage them to pursue development paths that conform with their own national conditions, the professor added.

## US entry horror triggers complaints from students

Experiences of Chinese scholars and techies fuel calls to stem exchange disruptions

By HOU CHENCHEN  
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An increasing number of Chinese students and tech professionals are expressing their alarm on social media about being harassed in what they described as a "small dark room" at the secondary inspection areas of immigration and border authorities in the United States.

The trend has sparked heightened concerns among international students about traveling to the US, in turn fueling calls for the US to halt the revocation of legally obtained visas and stemming the disruption to people-to-people exchanges.

Chinese student Chen Guo (not his real name) began his journey to Boston, Massachusetts, in 2022 after he was accepted by Harvard Medical School. However, his academic dream quickly turned into a nightmare when, on arrival in the US city, he was subjected to an 18-hour secondary inspection by US Customs and Border Protection officers.

Sharing his harrowing experience on Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu earlier this year, Chen described how the officers scrutinized his emails and online browsing history and chat records.

The ordeal reached its climax when they discovered a screenshot of a news photo celebrating a successful Chinese satellite launch in his digital album. Despite his legally obtained visa, Chen's entry was denied and he was unceremoniously deported.

"They made me stand against a wall with a measuring scale for a photo; isn't that how criminals are photographed?" Chen said. "I never thought I would face such mental humiliation."

Two weeks after Chen was deported, he received a collect parcel from the US, which charged him \$50 in postal fees and contained his electronic devices seized by US Customs.

A Chinese employee surnamed Liu, from an international Internet company specializing in short video services, shared a similar ordeal through his WeChat public account.

Liu had thought he was on a routine business trip, departing from Guarulhos International Airport in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on March 14, 2023. He wrote in his WeChat social media account, "Life has become increasingly simple in middle age, and a single backpack is enough for a five-day business trip across continents."

However, his experience at the border in Houston, Texas, shattered his relaxed and cheerful mood after getting off the plane.

A CBP officer subjected him to the secondary inspection area at George Bush Intercontinental Airport. Liu's electronic devices were seized and he was interrogated for over 10 hours.

"They asked me if I and my company were engaged in data theft, spreading sensitive information and connected to Chinese governments," Liu said.

Liu's valid visa was eventually revoked despite his role in company logistics strategy, leading to his deportation from the US and a severe blow to his career. Liu later learned from a CBP officer that his sufferings arose because

his name was similar to that of a Chinese scientist.

The secondary inspection area is referred to as the "small dark room" on Chinese social media, although interviewees clarify it is not literally small or dark, but labeled so due to the harassment and oppressive atmosphere.

More than 30 Chinese students from computer-related fields have been subjected to unwarranted harassment, scrutiny and deportation by US authorities, according to latest accounts.

Most were graduate students whose research areas included artificial intelligence, information science, cybersecurity, electrical engineering, software engineering and electronic information engineering.

"When the students applied for their visas, the US side would have done the necessary security background checks. That is to say, they passed the security risk screening to get the visa," said Wu Xinbo, dean of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies and director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University.

"But now even if you get a visa, it is highly possible that you can be refused entry and deported when you enter the US, which is not reasonable."

Shi Yinhong, director of the Center on American Studies at Renmin University of China, said that these "absurd incidents" have been on the rise amid the escalating "China threat" rhetoric, with the US increasingly viewing China as its main competitor.

Shi said that the focus on "national security" signals a rise in protectionism and underscores US insecurity about advancements in science and technology.

Wu from Fudan University said the political motivation behind the phenomenon is clear — it aims to control and restrict cultural exchanges between the two countries for "national security", directly leading to a decline in people-to-people interactions.

Many online discussion forums have been organized through Chinese social media platforms to address the concerns, with students sharing their educational backgrounds and internship experiences and asking whether their academic credentials might affect their visa applications and entry.

"For students majoring in business and data at my university, will there be issues with visa approvals? I believe my major isn't sensitive, but I'm worried that pursuing this degree might be futile," asked one forum participant.

A CBP officer subjected him to the secondary inspection area at George Bush Intercontinental Airport. Liu's electronic devices were seized and he was interrogated for over 10 hours.

"They asked me if I and my company were engaged in data theft, spreading sensitive information and connected to Chinese governments," Liu said.

Liu's valid visa was eventually revoked despite his role in company logistics strategy, leading to his deportation from the US and a severe blow to his career. Liu later learned from a CBP officer that his sufferings arose because

"Depends on your luck," replied another forum user.

Chen, the student who was heading to Harvard Medical School, advised through his social media account that Chinese students from universities identified as "sensitive" by the US should consider refraining from pursuing studies or post-doctoral positions in the country.

A student surnamed Chou who graduated in 2022 from the University of California, San Diego, said the US has long claimed to be a "lighthouse of openness and inclusiveness", but its actions "run into the opposite direction".

"Compared to the risk of being inspected and deported during each trip to and from the US, it is a wiser choice to pursue higher education outside the US," Chou said.

"We have already witnessed a significant decrease in the number of Chinese students studying in the US over the past two years, and this downward trend is expected to persist," Fudan University's Wu said.

According to the Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, while China remains the largest source of international students in the US, the total number has dropped from 372,532 to 289,526 in the past four years. India surpassed China to become the largest source of international graduate students in 2023. The proportion of Chinese students in engineering fields is also decreasing annually.

A source from an overseas study consultancy firm in Shanghai said that US visa rejection rates for doctoral students in high-tech fields are notably high. Even when they are not rejected, the students face rigorous scrutiny, prompting many to seek study opportunities in other countries like Britain, Singapore and Australia or at European universities.

Experts said that under the pretext of safeguarding national security, US law enforcement authorities have oversteered the concept of national security and arbitrarily interrogated and repatriated Chinese students, which has caused a "chilling effect" and seriously affected the atmosphere of people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

"The US attitude toward cultural and educational exchanges might be influenced by the US election and political situation," said Wu from Fudan University, adding that the US should act responsibly and be more open and inclusive in people-to-people exchanges.

Duan Jichu contributed to this story.

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Passengers in a queue at Salt Lake City International Airport in Utah, the United States, on Jan 11, 2023. Rick Bowmer / AP

## Reforms: Nation's focus on innovation, digitalization will drive world progress

From page 1

The resolution emphasizes several core objectives, including the importance of deepening supply-side structural reform. This involves improving incentive and constraint mechanisms to promote high-quality development, creating new drivers and strengths for growth, and fostering the integration of the real economy with the digital economy.

China aims to transition from rapid growth driven by investment and exports to more sustainable growth driven by innovation and consumption, and to create a more balanced and resilient economy. The focus on integrating the real economy with the digital economy is particularly noteworthy.

As China continues to advance in areas such as artificial intelligence, big data and 5G, the digital economy is poised to become a significant driver of growth. This integration will enhance productivity, spur innovation and transformation, and create new business opportunities, positioning China as a global leader in digital transformation.

A significant emphasis is placed on enhancing the resilience and security of industrial and supply chains, which includes modernizing infrastructure, fostering new quality productive forces, and modernizing China's governance system and capacity. This includes improving regulations and institutions to attract and utilize foreign invest-

ment, particularly in high-tech manufacturing and services. China's dedication to inclusive economic globalization and global development reaffirms China's commitment to the Belt and Road Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation Action Plan and efforts to develop multilateral platforms for cooperation.

It is certain that successful implementation of reforms listed in the resolution will provide more opportunities for the rest of the world.

China's commitment to improving regulations and institutions for attracting foreign investment is likely to bolster investor confidence. China aims at attracting high-quality foreign investment that can contrib-

ute to its technological advancement and economic modernization, with full focus on providing a more stable and sustainable business environment for investments. This, in turn, will strengthen China's role in global trade and investment networks.

The resolution's emphasis on inclusive economic globalization and global development underscores China's intention to play a more active role in international affairs. The country will continue to build a multidimensional network to connect the nations along the Belt and Road and develop multilateral platforms for cooperation. China seeks to foster global connectivity and shared development, which align with China's vision of building a community with a shared future for

mankind and promoting peace, development and cooperation on a global level.

The opportunities presented by these reforms are immense. China has achieved sustainable and inclusive growth, enhanced its global competitiveness, and contributed to global economic stability and development. The resolution's focus on innovation, digitalization and high-quality development positions China to lead in emerging industries and technologies, shaping the future of the global economy.

The historic landmark reform resolution represents not only a bold and strategic vision for China's future but also holds importance for world progress and development. China

will continue to ascend, fulfilling its historical destiny while leading the global effort to build a community with a shared future for mankind. The CPC's ambition for enduring greatness for the Chinese nation is not achieved at the cost of others. Instead, this ambition is a significant force driving humanity's progress, as evidenced by China's remarkable contributions to the world. As China continues to deepen comprehensive reforms and advance Chinese modernization, it aims to build a high-standard socialist market economy and a great modern socialist country.

The author is Executive Director of Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

# Fresh graduates volunteer to support education in Xinjiang

Students consider assistance to be right way to serve people, country

By MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi and ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang

For most Chinese, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is a place to go for regular trips and enjoy the fantastic natural scenery.

But for Zhang Xiaowei, the country's inland region has become a place to fulfill his teaching duties and strive to impart knowledge to children.

Zhang, 22, graduated in geography this summer from Baoding University in Baoding, North China's Hebei province. Along with 12 other graduates, he joined a local school in Xinjiang as part of the university's project to provide educational support to the region, which started in 2000.

They departed on Aug 11 for Xinjiang, a region about 2,500 kilometers west of Baoding.

"I will go to Qiemo county. No matter what difficulties there may be, I can overcome them and strive to bring knowledge to the children there, broadening their horizons," Zhang said before leaving for the region.

The desert county of Qiemo in Bayingolin Mongolian autonomous prefecture is known as a "small city at the edge of the sky". The county is located in the hinterland of the Tak-



Pang Shengli talks with his students at the No. 1 High School in Qiemo county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

limakan Desert, the country's largest desert, spanning 38.4 percent of the county's administrative area.

"I was born and grew up in a rural area, so I know how much impact a good teacher can have on students," said Zhang, who hails from Weixian county in Hebei.

Zhang's determination to go to Xinjiang came from his alumni,

many of whom have taught in the region for over 20 years. "I greatly admire them and it has further strengthened my decision," Zhang said, adding that the university in Baoding invited many of the alumni to share their experiences with the students many times.

Pang Shengli, 45, was one of the first batch of 15 graduates who came

to Xinjiang for the supportive education project.

He started working as an ideological and political teacher at Qiemo county's No. 1 High School in 2000. Determined to dedicate his life for the cause of education, he has since settled there.

When he first arrived, Pang, being single, lived and ate at the school,

which helped him be with the students all day long. He devoted all of his time and energy to the students, building a good relationship with them.

"At that time, a student asked me whether I would leave. It's as if when teachers leave, the students would have no one to rely on," Pang said. It was then he made up his mind

to stay there. "My motivation came from the needs of the students," he said.

With a teaching career spanning 24 years in Xinjiang, Pang not only gained a happy family but also became a key teacher at the school and an expert in his field. He has also mentored numerous outstanding graduates.

During his first 10 years in Xinjiang, he used to encourage students to go outside of Qiemo. But in the next decade, he wished for the students to go out to broaden their horizons and then return.

"Qiemo has developed rapidly. I feel that after completing the studies from outside, the students have a responsibility to come back and build their hometown," Pang said.

According to Pang, most of his students have returned to their hometowns and one of them has even become his colleague.

Like Pang, 26 graduates from Baoding University have settled down in Qiemo county since 2000, mentoring more than 20,000 middle and high school students, according to the university.

Inspired by them, more than 300 graduates of the university have volunteered to support education in China's western regions including Xinjiang, Xizang autonomous region, Chongqing and Guizhou province.

"It is the right way for us youth to serve the people and contribute to the country," Zhang said.

Contact the writers at zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

## Laos railway exemplifies development of BRI

By DU JUAN dujuan@chinadaily.com.cn

Twenty-four students and faculty from Beijing Jiaotong University took a weeklong trip during the summer via the China-Laos Railway to Vientiane, Laos, to experience the development of countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

During their journey from late July to earlier this month, they talked with China-Laos Railway staff, passengers and representatives from the Confucius Institute of the National University of Laos, witnessing the remarkable achievements of the railway.

The group included Chinese and international students from academic disciplines at the undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels.

"Since the railway opened, both passenger and freight volumes have exceeded expectations," said Zhang Zhendong, the train station head of the Vientiane operation and management center.

Daily passenger count has surged from over 2,000 at the start to a peak of more than 14,000, and freight volume has jumped from over 4,000 metric tons per day to 20,000 tons, Zhang said.

At the center, the group met with Chinese assistant engineer Zhou Wei and high-speed train mechanical engineer Duan Xingchang, who

both graduated from Beijing Jiaotong University.

Zhou said, "Through this project, I have learned a lot of advanced technology and management experience, which has greatly helped my career development."

Duan said, "Being involved in the construction of the China-Laos Railway makes me feel proud because I have not only contributed to a major national project but also witnessed the international influence of Chinese railway technology."

They encouraged younger students to study hard, improve themselves and join the BRI after graduation to contribute to the development of the country and the prosperity of the world.

A tourist traveling to Luang Prabang said: "Before the opening of the railway, it took two days of driving to reach Laos for a trip. Now, it takes only a few hours to travel from Kunming to Laos."

Additionally, the railway has significantly impacted the availability of goods.

"Durian used to be a luxury fruit for us. Now, durian is everywhere in my city, and the prices of tropical fruits have become more affordable in Kunming," she said.

An automotive sales professional who conducts business in Laos, Myanmar and Thailand reflected on the past. "Previously, transporting



Students and faculty from Beijing Jiaotong University pose at Vientiane Railway Station in Laos, where they traveled to experience development along the BRI. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

goods by land was time-consuming and costly.

"However, the opening of the China-Laos Railway has completely changed the situation, not only boosting sales of Laotian products in China but also providing more employment opportunities for Laotians, allowing them to work in China and earn more income," he told the students.

"I eagerly look forward to the full completion of the China-Southeast Asia Railway, which will further enhance cultural and economic exchanges between China and countries along the route, promoting regional integration."

Luo Ming, the Chinese director of the Confucius Institute of the National University of Laos, shared his view of the project's impact with the students.

He said that the China-Laos Rail-

way project has a high demand for talent, making the Confucius Institute's enrollment extremely competitive.

"Before 2019, enrollment was mainly done offline, with long lines of applicants. After switching to online registration, all slots were filled within 25 to 35 seconds," he said.

The group members gained substantial insights through their participation, expressing admiration for the achievements of the BRI.

"This trip has deepened my understanding of the concept of 'unity of knowledge and action'. I have realized that only by addressing issues from a national perspective can we better serve our country and society," said Chen Junxi, a doctoral student at BJTU.

Li Boyu contributed to this story.

## Cross-border tourism boosts Heihe economy

HARBIN — For eight-year-old Timur and his family, crossing the border from Russia to Heihe, a city in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, to savor Chinese delicacies is a simple and frequent pleasure, thanks to streamlined cross-border travel policies.

Located on the China-Russia border, Heihe faces Blagoveshchensk city across the Heilong River. Since the resumption of visa-free group tours between China and Russia in September last year, Heihe has seen a surge in cross-border tourism, boosting the local economy.

For many people in Blagoveshchensk, a trip to Heihe's morning market has become a routine part of their daily life.

"I come to Heihe very often because the food here is cheap and fresh," said Nastya from Raichikhinsk in Russia, as she and her family shopped for snacks and local produce at the morning market to take back to their relatives.

Apart from the morning market, a renovated night market has also become a vibrant and bustling hub. With bilingual signboards in Chinese and Russian, many vendors are fluent in Russian, making it easy for international visitors to navigate. "I don't speak Chinese, but we communicate without any barriers here," said a Russian tourist surnamed Oleg.

A young couple from Blagoveshchensk noted that they often visit the night market for snacks and clothing and appreciate the convenience of the ferry service back home.

In addition to enjoying delicious food and vibrant nightlife, visitors from across the border also

explore other aspects of their "cross-border weekend" in Heihe, including medical services.

On the Russian social media platform VKontakte, dental hospitals and clinics in Heihe have become popular search terms, with many Russian users sharing their experiences online.

"We had about 200 outpatient visits and around 50 emergency visits from foreign patients this year," said a local hospital official, adding that exchanges between Russian and local doctors have increased.

Liu Xuesong, director of the Heihe Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital, said that a growing number of Russian patients seek traditional Chinese medicine treatments including acupuncture and massage therapy.

The hospital's international department has offered treatments to 422 such patients with various traditional Chinese therapies.

Data from the Heihe border inspection station shows that as of Aug 12, the Heihe Port had recorded over 440,000 entries and exits, a 160 percent year-on-year increase compared to the previous year. In late July, the average daily border crossings exceeded 4,000, up 90 percent from the yearly average.

"With improved transportation, favorable policies and diverse tourism options, we are expecting a continuous boom of cross-border tourism," said Hao Shuai, an assistant researcher at the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences.

XINHUA

## Bird enthusiasts 'occupy' rooftops of Xiaoqi village

NANCHANG — Yu Zhibiao's three-story house may appear ordinary and slightly weathered, but its rooftop has become a hidden gem, attracting bird enthusiasts from around the world eager to observe rare species.

Yu lives in Xiaoqi village in Wuyuan county in East China's Jiangxi province. Celebrated for its vibrant ecological environment, Wuyuan boasts a forest coverage rate of 83 percent and the vegetation coverage in grasslands exceeding 90 percent, creating an ideal habitat for wild birds.

Official data shows that the number of wild bird species in the county has risen from 286 in 2012 to 356 last year. This includes the critically endangered blue-crowned laughingthrush and the pied falconet, which is under sec-

ond-class national protection.

In 2005, a shutterbug from neighboring Zhejiang province spotted several pied falconets nesting in a camphor tree near Yu's home. The pied falconet, often called the "flying panda" for its panda-like face, is a favorite among bird photographers.

With Yu's permission, the photographer captured several close-up shots of these elusive birds from the rooftop. After sharing these photos online, Yu's rooftop quickly gained popularity within the birding community.

Yu hosts nearly 10,000 photographers and bird watchers worldwide each year. His roughly 100-square-meter rooftop is constantly abuzz with the sounds of bird calls, camera shutters and excited exclamations.

To improve the experience for the visitors, Yu reinforced the rooftop, added railings and built a rain shelter to ensure a safe and comfortable viewing area.

As more bird enthusiasts flock to his home, Yu, who once made a living by growing tea, transformed his house into a thriving bed and breakfast place. He has also gladly embraced his new role as a guide, sharing information about birds with visitors and helping them discover the best viewing spots.

Inspired by Yu's success, villagers are now eagerly engaging in the birding economy. Some converted their rooftops into viewing platforms, others opened homestays, and many became bird-watching guides.

Birdnet, China's premier web portal for wild bird photography, has

featured the village as the liaison station of Wuyuan, with Yu as the head.

A bird enthusiast from Zhejiang's Ningbo visited the village over eight times in a single year. "I once photographed more than 10 bird species in just half a day," he said. "Bird-watching and photography are also great ways to relax."

Whereas bird-watchers once stayed just one day, many now arrive early to survey the terrain and adjust their equipment, with some staying several days to capture the perfect shot, Yu said.

"It might seem that the location of our houses is the key to our benefits, but the real reason is the overall improvement in local ecological conditions, which has benefited everyone here," he said.

XINHUA



Two Russian customers purchase breakfast at a street stand in Heihe, Heilongjiang province. XINHUA

**Editor's note:** As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and HOU LIQIANG in Beijing

# Conservation efforts help revitalize Yangtze

With 10-year fishing ban underway, fish stocks starting to recover

Born in De'an, a county near Poyang Lake along the Yangtze River in Jiangxi province, Wei Qiwei, chief scientist at the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences, has vivid childhood memories of water and fish.

The 64-year-old used to play in a small river near his home from the age of 3. "For us kids, the river was a place of comfort and fun. We couldn't live without it," he smiled.

More important was that the river provided his favorite food — fish. His grandfather was a fisherman who fished with the help of trained cormorants. "The bird could easily catch fish as there were quite a lot of fish back then."

In stark contrast to his childhood, however, Wei described the remarkable fish scarcity he encountered when he first surveyed the Yangtze from 2017 to 2020 as chief scientist.

"Fishermen hardly had any catch. The money they made from selling fish was barely enough to cover the cost of the fuel," he said, noting that he was deeply concerned about the conservation situation at the time.

A total of 323 fish species were found in the river, with 135 historically distributed in the Yangtze undiscovered, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, which funded the survey.

A few years on, Wei is somewhat relieved because of a 10-year fishing moratorium that came into effect in the Yangtze River Basin on Jan 1, 2020, which is part of a national campaign to promote Yangtze conservation.

Aside from the fishing ban, a series of measures have been taken to conserve fish resources in the basin following a symposium presided over by President Xi Jinping in Chongqing on the issue in January 2016.

The president stressed that concerted efforts should be made to protect the Yangtze, and that the overdevelopment of the river should be banned.

Xi hosted three more symposiums concerning the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Basin thereafter, with the first held in Wuhan in April 2018. At that symposium, the president emphasized properly dealing with the relationship between environmental protection and economic development.

Wei lauded the decision to promote concerted efforts in Yangtze conservation as one "with farsightedness and vision", as fish conservation is not something that can be done by a single institution or government body, and needs participation from all walks of life.

## Illegal fishing curbed

Relevant authorities at different levels have come down hard and are maintaining intense pressure on illegal fishing since the moratorium came into effect, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Over the past 3 years, agricultural and rural authorities and public security organs at different levels have handled over 1,600 administrative cases and more than 500 criminal cases related to fishing, it said.

On average, it said different levels of administration for market regulation handled more than 300 relevant cases every month.

The ministry also noted significantly strengthened law enforcement capabilities have been used to ensure the full implementation of the moratorium.

The number of licensed fishery law enforcement officers in regions along the Yangtze has reached 10,400, four times more than before the moratorium, it said, adding all key waters in the mainstream of the Yangtze, its estuary and Poyang and Dongting lakes have been covered by surveillance cameras.

"In 2023, the number of reports from the public about illegal fishing decreased by 28 percent compared to the previous year. The trend of frequent incidents of illegal fishing has been effectively curbed," it said.

To enhance the conservation of fish, especially endangered species, many projects previously built along the country's longest watercourse have been relocated.

Built in 1958, for instance, the Wangjiahe oil depot in Yichang, Hubei province, used to be the largest reserve base for refined oil in western Hubei, handling 13 billion metric tons of refined oil every year.

The depot, the wharf of which is located in a section of the Yangtze that Chinese sturgeon must pass in their breeding migration, has been moved to a new location about 60 kilometers away.

Listed as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Chinese sturgeon are endemic to



A fish escapes the net as fishermen secure their catch at a fish farm in Anqing, Anhui province, in March last year. The farm has expanded and adopted higher ecological standards to help revitalize the Yangtze River, which is just a few kilometers away. LI LONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Researcher calls for release of more artificially bred species

A researcher has called for the scaling up of the release of artificially bred fish of some endangered species in the Yangtze River and better shoreline restoration to further improve the aquatic ecosystem in Asia's longest watercourse.

Liu Huanzhang, a professor with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Hydrobiology in Hubei provincial capital Wuhan, also hailed the 10-year fishing moratorium that came into effect in the Yangtze River Basin on Jan 1, 2020, as a bold initiative with no precedent globally, both in scale and duration.

The urgency of this measure is underscored by the alarming decline in the Yangtze's aquatic resources and a severe setback in its biodiversity. Past attempts at fishing bans that lasted annually for three months proved insufficient, with unsustainable fishing practices quickly reversing any progress made.

Liu stressed that the ban provides a crucial window for the Yangtze's ecosystem to recover. He also said, however, for some endangered species like Chinese sturgeon, which takes nine years for its male and 14 years for its female to reach sexual maturity, the release of artificially bred fish is necessary to help restore their population.

However, the previous scale of release has been insufficient, and the work was also adversely affected by overfishing, he said.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, starting this year, the ministry will allocate 50 million yuan (\$7 million) in funding annually to ramp up the release of artificially bred endangered species in the Yangtze.



Yangtze sturgeon are released into the Yangtze River in Yibin, Sichuan province, in June last year. Some 8,190 sturgeon, including 30 adult individuals, were returned to the wild on the day. ZHUANG GEER / FOR CHINA DAILY

With the money, the ministry will release 1 million adolescent fish of endangered species into the Yangtze this year, it said. By further increasing the input, it will strive to gradually increase the number to 5 million a year in 3 to 5 years.

Liu said, aside from increasing the numbers, it is also important to release older artificially bred fish. "These young fish released into the wild are easily preyed upon by predators," he noted.

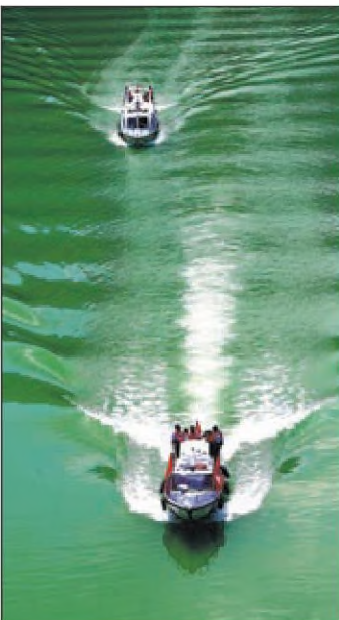
He emphasized shoreline restoration as another key measure China needs to further enhance to rejuvenate the Yangtze's aquatic ecosystem.

Many of Yangtze's flood plains, once critical spawning and nursery grounds, have been severely degraded by shoreline development for flood control and navigation, he said.

Learning from experiences in Europe, he said, China can adopt strategies like meandering riverbank designs, which can help create small bays that are prone to the growth of moss and aquatic plants, creating a favorable environment for small insects, which then provides a food source for small fish.

HOU LIQIANG

**Below:** Banned fishing rods and equipment are destroyed by law enforcement officers near the Apeng River, a secondary tributary of the Yangtze River, in Chongqing earlier this month. **Right:** Fishery officers patrol the Apeng River. PHOTOS BY YANG MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



**Below:** A fishing boat is hoisted out of the Ganjiang River to be scrapped and recycled in Taihe, Jiangxi province, in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



China and are under national first-class protection. The fish is one of the world's oldest living species, dating back to the days of the dinosaurs some 140 million years ago.

A wharf with the depot is still there along the Yangtze. But now it works as a facility to disseminate knowledge about Chinese sturgeon protection.

According to Sinopec Marketing Hubei, the Wangjiahe depot is just one of 11 depots the company has relocated to help with Yangtze conservation. It has also shut down 17 shipping docks and 12 floating fueling stations along the Yangtze, said Wang Baosheng, deputy Party chief of the company.

In a move also aimed at protecting the Chinese sturgeon, investors in the Wujiagang Yangtze Bridge in Yichang changed the design of the structure before its construction started in late 2016, despite that it would significantly increase costs.

Situated 15 km downstream of the Gezhouba Dam hydropower project, the bridge lies in the core area of the zone for Chinese sturgeon conservation and a breeding and habitat area for the species.

The bridge, as tall as a 50-story building, was originally designed with two piers erected in the middle of the Yangtze. With low cost, however, such a design needs a lot of construction work in and over the water, and that would inevitably result in water, light and noise pollution, disturbing Chinese sturgeon in the area, according to China Communications Construction Company Second Harbor Engineering Co, one of the investors.

In the new design, no piers were constructed in Yangtze waters. But that meant that the main cables of the bridge needed to be thickened and anchorage points also needed to be increased, bringing up the cost by about 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million).

## Remarkable recovery

Though it has been only over 3 years since the fishing moratorium was imposed, there have been positive signs that show the recovery of some fish species in the Yangtze.

The location where the Jinsha and Minjiang rivers converge into the Yangtze in Yibin city in Sichuan province is a popular destination for tourists. It has become even more popular because a large school of wild fish are usually visible there, with some weighing more than 20 kilograms.

"They don't shy away from crowds," said Quan Hong, a law-enforcement officer for fisheries management with the agriculture and rural affairs bureau of Xuzhou district, where the river convergence is located.

A recent assessment conducted by the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research shows that the aquatic biological integrity indexes in the Yangtze's mainstream, as well as Poyang and Dongting, the only two large lakes that remain naturally connected to the Yangtze, stood at the worst level of having "no fish at all" before the moratorium. Now, their indexes have all improved by two levels.

There are six levels under the index system with "excellent" being the best level, followed by "good", "average", "poor" and "very poor".

As a professor dedicated to researching fish with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Hydrobiology, Liu Huanzhang has endorsed the improvement of Yangtze's aquatic biological integrity, noting the *Ochetobius elongatus* — a type of carp — as an example.

The fish used to be a common species in the Yangtze, but it became rare after the year 2000 and "could hardly be seen", especially over the decade before the moratorium. But Liu now finds the species multiple times a year in his fish monitoring and resources surveys of the Yangtze.

*Ochetobius elongatus*, a demanding fish with carnivorous tendencies, relies heavily on the presence of other fish for its survival, he said. The dramatic decline in its population this century happened mainly due to overfishing, which has not only directly impacted its numbers but also disrupted its food chain.

"The recovery of the *Ochetobius elongatus* certainly indicates a recovery of the overall fish stock," Liu said.

Wei, the scientist, believes that, with the gradual implementation of comprehensive protection measures for the Yangtze, the aquatic ecological environment of the river will significantly improve in the future.

"I can't wait to see the Yangtze in 2030," he said, indicating his high expectations to see a significantly positive transformation in Asia's longest river.

Xinhua contributed to the story.

## WORLD

# Leaders' role in progress of China hailed

Experts laud path to modernization as nation marks Deng's birth anniversary

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong and WANG XIAODONG in Nairobi, Kenya

The reforms initiated by China's late leader Deng Xiaoping and currently being amplified by President Xi Jinping have set China on the road to modernization and peaceful development as well as making greater contributions to the world by building a community with a shared future for mankind, global experts say.

Xi hailed Deng's significant contributions and called for the advancement of socialism with Chinese characteristics as the country commemorated Deng's 120th birth anniversary on Thursday.

Karori Singh, former director and emeritus fellow of the South Asia Studies Centre at the University of Rajasthan in India, said China has made remarkable progress in the past 75 years.

Chinese leaders have continuously made their contributions in leading China to modernization, Singh said. "Chairman Mao Zedong consolidated unity while Deng set the road to economic growth and progress. President Xi further advances and synergizes Marxist ideology, Mao's thoughts and Deng's theory in socialism with Chinese characteristics and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

Xi has enunciated the Chinese worldview and global vision through the initiatives of Global Development, Global Security and Global Civilization, by advancing its flagship Belt and Road Initiative for realizing the Chinese ideal of world order inspired by Deng Xiaoping Theory, Singh said.

Tom Harper, a lecturer and researcher specializing in China's international relations at the University of East London, said Xi's remarks are "symbolic in several key aspects".

They confirm that "China is still following the path that Deng had set China on," and in this sense, the policies adopted thereafter have been the logical step in following this path, Harper said, adding it is worth noting how the Chinese leadership adapted to the context they find themselves in to achieve modernization in the economic and technological spheres.

Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former

prime minister of Pakistan, said the reform and opening-up policy initiated by Deng "has led to prosperity and progress for China, and greatly impacted China's relationship with its neighbors and trading partners".

In Pakistan, Deng is revered as a leader who helped "foster and expand the relations with Pakistan during the 1980s", he said. "This relationship has continued to grow over the last four decades with collaboration in trade, investment, infrastructure, etc."

Under the leadership of President Xi, the China-Pakistan relationship, termed as "Iron Brothers", has grown exponentially under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as part of the BRI, he said. "The people of Pakistan look forward to strengthening the special relationship between China and Pakistan."

Dennis Munene, executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute, said: "The African Renaissance dream is being realized as China remains Africa's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years."

## Greater contributions

The reforms initiated by Deng and currently being amplified under the leadership of President Xi, who is committed to making greater contributions to the world by building a community with a shared future for mankind, continue to empower Africa to seek its independent path to modernization, Munene said.

Booker Ngesa Omole, organizing secretary of the Communist Party of Kenya, said there is hardly any literature on China's economic advancement without referring to Deng.

"A towering figure in Chinese history, Deng formed part of Chinese politics from the day the People's Republic of China was proclaimed," Omole said.

He said poverty affects different segments of Africa's population in comparative terms and that Africa's economic policies should address this reality, adding China's policies are tailored to its own reality.

Wang Mingjie in London and Otiato Opali in Nairobi, Kenya, contributed to this story.

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## Clouds of sand



A wall of sandstorm wrecks havoc in Dongola, Northern State, Sudan, on Saturday. XINHUA

# Giant panda celebrates 1st birthday at Moscow Zoo

By REN QI in Moscow [renqi@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:renqi@chinadaily.com.cn)

The Russia-born giant panda Katyusha celebrated her first birthday on Saturday with special cakes, a cheerful party and best wishes from Moscow citizens.

Her keepers at the Moscow Zoo offered special desserts that took the shape of a large multitier cake made from her favorite bamboo and leaves. At the top of a cake, zoo staff members placed one bamboo shoot denoting the cub's age.

Katyusha was also offered some

desserts made from carrots, fruits and steamed cornbread.

An improvised bamboo TV was also made in Katyusha's enclosure with a painted panda "leading" a news program.

Katyusha was born at the Moscow Zoo in the late summer of last year, the first panda to be born in Russia. Her parents, Ru Yi and Ding Ding, giant pandas from China, met in the spring and immediately fell in love with each other, said Svetlana Akulova, director of Moscow Zoo.

Ru Yi and Ding Ding arrived in Moscow in 2019.

## Carnival colors



A costumed reveler marches during the 51st annual Caribbean American Carnival Association of Boston's parade in Boston, Massachusetts, on Saturday. JOSEPH PREZIOSO / AFP

# Chinese firm takes on global luxury market

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York [belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com](mailto:belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com)

The Chinese e-commerce platform Dewu has emerged to shake up the global luxury goods market by offering steep discounts of up to 40 percent on luxury fashion goods and sneakers.

Dewu, or its English name Poizon, was originally a platform for purchasing, reselling and discussing sneakers. But since 2018, it has sold branded clothing, handbags, watches, electronics and toys that are purchased worldwide.

The platform has more than 160 million active users who often have new, legitimate goods from abroad such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Gucci to sell on the site. It is especially appealing to price-conscious Generation Z Chinese shoppers.

Jeff Unze, former general manager of the San Francisco office of Dewu, was brought on to roll out the company in the United States. He has since left to work for the startup CrossTerra.

"They're the first Chinese company that is taking branded goods globally," Unze told China Daily. "Every other Chinese company has done fast fashion like Temu."

The vast majority of Dewu's customers are in China, he said. "It has been downloaded 350 million times in China, so it is a pretty large platform and has monthly active users over 160 million."

Founded in July 2015 by CEO Yang Bing, the company's headquarters is in Shanghai. By 2021, the site offered more than 100,000 new products every month and expanded into Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Japan, Europe and the Americas. Its move into the US is to gain new products and customers.

"(Dewu) can draw products from retailers, wholesalers, even people to people, just like eBay," Unze said. "They can get luxury or sneakers from everyone because they're doing such great work on the authentication side."

## Booming trade

The success of the site is partly being attributed to it repurposing China's \$81 billion daigou market, which was booming before the pandemic but was halted because of pandemic-era travel restrictions.

Daigou translates to "buying on behalf of" and refers to individual business entrepreneurs who used to travel from China to the US, Japan or Europe to buy cheaper goods because of fluctuating exchange rates, then ship them back to China for sale.

Dewu has captured nearly three-fourths of China's daigou sellers' trade, according to the publication Inside Retail.

As it focuses on selling more luxury goods, the value of sales of Louis Vuitton on Dewu grew 11 percent year-on-year to 2.6 billion yuan (\$365 million)

in the first half of this year, the publication Business of Fashion reported.

LVMH, the Paris-based owner of Louis Vuitton, is said to be watching the rise of the site closely as Dewu accounted for more than 14 percent of Louis Vuitton's total estimated sales in China of 2.3 billion euros (\$2.6 billion) for the same period.

Luxury goods from Hermes, Chanel, Dior and Prada have also seen higher sales year-on-year on Dewu.

While most of Dewu's merchandise is purchased from the official luxury stores, the platform is chipping away at the fashion houses' profit margins.

Its primary customer base is Gen Z and Alpha shoppers. Of the 264 million Gen Z population in China, 70 percent claim to have a Dewu account, said a report by consultancy firm Re-Hub, which helps luxury and premium brands in China generate online growth.

Chinese Gen Z consumers "have a higher-than-average per capita disposable income and along with Gen Alpha are projected to increase their spending on luxury three times faster than other cohorts", Re-Hub said.

Unze said the US expansion was to ensure it could get "a really steady supply of some of the new hot goods, things that just aren't last season and they want to source them globally to make sure they always have the full array of supply and they always have the best prices".

## Briefly

### CAMBODIA

#### The Composer wins Best Film at festival

The film *The Composer* (China/Kazakhstan) won the Golden Rumdul Award for Best Film at the second Cambodia-Asia Film Festival in Phnom Penh on Saturday. The film, directed by Xirzat Yahup, depicts the life of Chinese musician Xian Xinghai in Almaty, Kazakhstan. During a meeting with the film's producer, Shen Jian, Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia Wang Wenbin praised *The Composer* for its role in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative and enhancing people-to-people connections. As 2024 is designated as the Cambodia-China People-to-People Exchange Year, the film festival seeks to foster cultural exchanges between Cambodia and other Asian countries while supporting the growth of the Asian film industry.



### UNITED STATES

#### Starliner astronauts to return next year

Two NASA astronauts who flew to the International Space Station in June aboard Boeing's faulty Starliner capsule will have to stay six more months and return home on a SpaceX vehicle, NASA said on Saturday, in a fresh public relations blow to the crisis-hit aviation giant. The return of Barry "Butch" Wilmore and Sunita "Sunni" Williams had already been delayed for weeks by thruster malfunctions of the Boeing spacecraft, and NASA said they will return to Earth in February, while Starliner will return uncrewed.

### ITALY

#### Manslaughter probe into yacht sinking

An Italian prosecutor has opened a manslaughter investigation into the deaths of British tech magnate Mike Lynch and six other people who were killed when a yacht sank off Sicily last week. The head of the public prosecutor's office of Termini Imerese, Ambrogio Cartosio, said that while the yacht had been hit by a very sudden meteorological event, it was "plausible" that crimes of multiple manslaughter and causing a shipwreck through negligence had been committed.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES

# African countries urged to improve railway systems

By NDUMISO MLILO in Johannesburg [For China Daily](mailto:For China Daily)

African countries must urgently address transport and rail bottlenecks by adopting new technology and harmonizing legislation to propel trade and economic growth, South African officials and experts say, calling for further partnership with China.

Barbara Creecy, South Africa's minister of transport, said African nations face challenges to improve their outdated railway systems to grow economy and increase competitiveness.

"These challenges are further complicated by the need for greater regional integration, interoperability and the harmonization of standards to ensure efficient and competitive rail services," Creecy said at the Southern African Railways Association's annual international conference in Johannesburg last week.

Railways are crucial for transporting bulk goods such as minerals, agricultural products and energy

resources, she said, so rail networks within the Southern African Development Community region are vital for boosting the competitiveness of SADC products and services in the global market.

"As we look to modernize and expand our rail networks, the need for investment in appropriate skills across logistics, engineering, infrastructure development and digitization cannot be overstated. Investing in these skills today will not only help us address the challenges we face, but will also enable us to take advantage of new opportunities for economic growth and development," she said.

Crynos Mutendera, a senior research specialist of the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency in South Africa, told China Daily that Africa's colonial history has led to varying standards and plans for rail and road infrastructure, as different European powers implemented distinct systems during their colonial rule.

China has taken part in building

major infrastructure projects across Africa, and projects done by Chinese companies are completed in time, Mutendera said.

Many Chinese companies offer a "one-stop shop" approach, managing all stages of a project, he said. China's involvement has prompted some former colonial powers to change their engagement strategies with Africa, he added.

## Self-introspection

"The good thing about the Chinese factor is bringing to the fore everybody to do self-introspection and say, 'I think there is something I'm not doing right.' So for them to compete, they have to change the tune. The way the Chinese have come in has brought in constructive competition to help us even in public-private partnerships and coming up with innovative financing solutions."

Leslie Mlungisi Mpfu, executive director of Trans Kalahari Corridor Secretariat, urged Africa to improve

its rail and road infrastructure and payment methods at border posts to facilitate trade.

The Trans Kalahari Corridor is an alternative trade route developed by South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The secretariat has streamlined trade between these countries by harmonizing legislation on trade, health, customs, transport and enforcement.

Mpfu said that in the past, trucks carrying goods could take 24 to 48 hours to clear borders. Simplifications have reduced this time to just 20 to 30 minutes by standardizing border transactions.

Additionally, Mpfu urged African countries to work with China to develop innovative financial solutions to developing crucial infrastructure projects. "We know dynamics are not the same but China has come up with their strategy which seems to be working," he said.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Russia-born giant panda Katyusha celebrates her first birthday at the Moscow Zoo on Saturday. REN QI / CHINA DAILY

countries for taking good care of the panda family.

Zhang took part in a stamp-release ceremony on Saturday at the zoo. The postage stamp, dedicated

to Katyusha and her parents, shows the healthy development of the panda family at the Moscow Zoo and reflects the friendship between China and Russia, he said.

Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin called Katyusha the national favorite panda. At birth she weighed only 150 grams. Now, she is a 38-kilogram cub. Katyusha deftly climbs the logs, slides down the slide, and tries to repeat everything after her mother Ding Ding, Sobyenin said on his social media account.

He noted that people come to the Moscow Zoo from all over the country to see the panda. About 15,000 people visit the Chinese Fauna Pavilion every day.

WORLD

Japanese citizens call for halt to discharge of nuclear water

Concerns aired over food safety as 1 year of release marked

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo

A year after Japan began releasing nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean, many Japanese citizens are still urgently calling for an immediate halt to the discharge, which has failed to reassure both neighboring countries and the Japanese public.



People gather in Tokyo on Saturday, calling for an end to the release of nuclear-contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the ocean.

None of the concerns regarding safety, stakeholder agreement, or justification have been addressed, and the citizens of the Pacific Island countries are even more outraged, Mutoh added. "I am very sorry that Japan is contaminating the world's oceans instead of trying to contain the nuclear pollution in its own country."

On Saturday, Japanese citizens gathered for a rally in Shinjuku, a bustling district of Tokyo, marking one year since the ocean discharge of nuclear-contaminated water on Aug 24, 2023.

Participants called for an end to the release of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean, expressing concern that the discharge is causing anxiety about the safety of food from Fukushima.

The Citizens' Conference to Condemn Further Pollution of the Ocean, a nonprofit organization in Iwaki, a coastal city in Fukushima Prefecture, called for global action on Saturday. The organization invited people worldwide to join in by standing up and holding homemade placards to express their opposition to the discharge.

Chiyo Oda, co-director of the organization, also known as KOREUMI, said the process of deciding to release the nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean was done in a way that ignored the opposition from the public.

"When I eat fresh and delicious fish and shellfish, or when children and young people play by the sea, I feel anxious that the effects of radiation may appear one day. I feel that we are losing our natural way of life, which is to eat delicious products and play freely in the sea around us," said Oda, a resident of Iwaki.

On Sunday, Japan completed its eighth release of around 7,800 metric tons of nuclear-contaminated water into the sea. This was the eighth release overall.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant, has already released over 60,000 tons of contaminated water. The discharge is expected to continue for several decades.

Three Japanese civic groups, namely the Fukushima Prefecture Peace Forum, the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, and the Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs, submitted a second round of signatures to government officials in Tokyo on Wednesday, requesting an immediate halt to the ocean discharge.

Earlier this year, they submitted a petition, accompanied by the first batch of 184,712 signatures collected nationwide. On Wednesday, the second batch of 22,744 signatures was handed over to officials of Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, bringing the total number of signatures to 207,456.

TEPCO has used the Advanced Liquid Processing System, or ALPS, to remove multiple radioactive substances from the contaminated water before discharging it into the sea.

However, this has not alleviated the safety concerns of the Japanese public and residents of other countries.

"Even though ALPS can reduce radioactive particles in the water, it cannot eliminate them entirely. Moreover, the water release is expected to continue for 30 to 40 years, resulting in a tremendous amount of water containing radioactive substances being discharged," said Hajime Matsukubo, secretary-general and researcher at the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center.

Masashi Tsunoda, co-representative of the Fukushima Prefecture Peace Forum, expressed skepticism over whether the discharged water truly meets safety standards.

No assessment

"The government speaks of implementing a long-term monitoring system, yet no comprehensive long-term assessment is being conducted. Therefore, I find it hard to simply accept the safety claims based solely on official statements," said Tsunoda.

Masayo Ikeda, secretary-general of the Women's Conference, a nonprofit organization, criticized the Japanese government and TEPCO for claiming the released water is safe without thorough verification.

"The presence of tritium and various radioactive substances means there is no guarantee that it won't have any environmental impact," Ikeda said. She stressed the importance of Japan continuously verifying the safety of the facilities and the water being released.

Toshihiro Inoue, a special committee member of the Japan Congress against A- and H-Bombs, criticized the government and TEPCO for using the term "ALPS-treated

water," which gives the impression that the water is not contaminated.

"This kind of image manipulation has made it increasingly difficult for us to call it 'contaminated water.' But the reality is that the water remains contaminated with radiation. Even if radioactive materials are reduced, they are still present," said Inoue.

He expressed serious concerns over the long-term environmental impact of releasing this water over an extended period, especially regarding its potential effects on marine products that enter the food supply.

On Thursday, TEPCO suspended experimental work to extract nuclear fuel debris from one of the reactors at the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi plant after discovering an error in the installation of a debris removal device.

The government has set a goal to decommission the plant by 2051. However, the recent setback in debris removal underscores the uncertainties surrounding the entire decommissioning process, raising concerns that the timeline may be extended even further. If the timeline is indeed prolonged, it would mean the release of contaminated water could continue, said Inoue.

"What's really needed now is an acknowledgment that the plans are delayed and that achieving the original goals might be impossible. However, instead of admitting this and communicating openly with local residents and those in surrounding areas, the authorities continue to insist that everything is fine. This approach is alarming because it puts undue pressure on the workers, which could lead to mistakes and further complications," he said.

Before the Fumio Kishida administration, Japan's nuclear policy was to "reduce nuclear power as much as possible," but under Kishida, it has changed to "make maximum use of it," said Motoo Tomizuka, a member of No Nukes Plaza Tokyo.

"With earthquakes becoming more frequent each year, continuing to operate aging nuclear power plants only heightens the risk of another severe accident. It's a reckless decision," said Tomizuka.

Masahide Kimura, a member of the Japanese anti-nuclear campaign

group, said that in TEPCO's monitoring results, the term "Not Detected" is used to indicate that radioactive material levels are below the detection limit. However, TEPCO treats these levels as if they are zero.

"Given the large volume of water being released, if you multiply this by the detection limit, it becomes evident that a significant amount of radioactivity is being discharged. They're releasing numerous radioactive substances, including plutonium and strontium, not just tritium," Kimura said during a protest in front of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority on Wednesday.

Approach slammed

Many others have expressed concern over the Japanese government's approach of proceeding with the ocean discharge without properly securing international understanding.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on Friday that China strongly opposes Japan's unilateral discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean.

"Let me stress that the more transparent and open Japan is on the issue, the easier it will be for Japan to alleviate international concerns," said Mao.

China once again calls on Japan to seriously address both international and domestic concerns, and fully cooperate in establishing an independent international monitoring arrangement that remains effective in the long haul and includes substantive participation from Japan's neighboring countries and other stakeholders, she said.

Kimura supports China's proposal. "Ideally, Japan should engage in international dialogue and address these issues with other countries before concerns are raised. The discharge is expected to continue for 30 to 40 years, possibly even longer. It is essential to reassess the situation and initiate discussions now, even though a year has already passed," he said.

Ikeda, representing the Women's Conference, shares a similar perspective. "I believe that an international monitoring system is absolutely necessary, and I think it should be established," she said.

Mayoral candidates in San Francisco court Chinese voters

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco

On the bustling streets of San Francisco's Chinatown, campaign posters adorned with Chinese characters vie for attention alongside colorful shop signs and fruit stands. As the November elections draw near, candidates are intensifying their efforts to win over Chinese American voters, a crucial demographic in the city's political landscape.

San Francisco has the highest percentage of Chinese Americans among major US cities, with 22 percent of its population identifying as such. When considering the broader Asian American community, the figure rises to 37 percent, according to the latest data from the US Census Bureau.

"The candidates, whether for mayor or supervisors, all hope to get Chinese American voters' support because we have become an important voting bloc that they could not afford to ignore," Louis Lam, chairman of the American Teo Chew Business Association and a board member of the Chinatown nonprofit Chinese Newcomers' Center, told China Daily.

The current mayoral race exemplifies the heightened focus on Chinese American voters. Incumbent Mayor London Breed, facing a challenging reelection bid, has seen her approval rate shift dramatically among this demographic, which played an important role in her previous election.

A poll conducted by the San Francisco Chronicle in February revealed that 80 percent of potential Asian voters disapprove of Breed's performance, and only 10 percent support her.

Recognizing the need to regain favor with Chinese American voters, the mayor has taken actions such as increasing the police budget, granting law enforcement more authority, addressing homeless encampments, and even embarking on a trip to China.

During her April visit to China, Breed signed an agreement to bring a pair of pandas to the San Francisco Zoo, a move that resonated strongly with Chinese American advocates. She also lobbied for the restoration of direct flights between China and San Francisco International Airport, which had been disrupted during the pandemic.

Those efforts appear to be paying dividends. A recent Chronicle poll indicated that Breed's approval rating among Asian voters doubled over the past six months. The resurgence in support from the Asian and Chinese American communities has bolstered her standing in the mayoral race.

However, Breed's challengers are not ceding ground in the battle for Chinese American votes.

Former San Francisco supervisor Mark Farrell, one of Breed's main rivals, recently secured a crucial endorsement from the San Francisco Chinese American Democratic Club — an organization that had previously backed Breed in her last mayoral campaign.

Farrell has been a frequent presence at community events in Chinatown, distributing Chinese-language flyers and engaging with potential voters. His campaign platform emphasizes cracking down on street homelessness and drug use, issues that resonate strongly with many Chinese American residents.

Another prominent challenger, Daniel Lurie, founder of an

anti-poverty nonprofit and heir to the Levi Strauss fortune, has taken a strategic approach to courting Chinese American voters.

Lurie has hired a Chinese American campaign manager and enlisted Chinese American activists to bolster his outreach efforts. His campaign has been marked by personal interactions with Chinese American residents, visiting them in their homes and attending community banquets. Like his rivals, Lurie has prioritized addressing public safety concerns and combating drug use in his campaign promises.

The race also features San Francisco Board of Supervisors President Aaron Peskin, who entered the contest later than his competitors but brings a strong base of support from Chinatown.

As the longtime supervisor representing the district, Peskin has cultivated deep ties within the Chinese American community. His implementation of Cantonese-speaking workers during his tenure as board president has particularly endeared him to Chinatown residents.

Supervisor Ahsha Safai, another mayoral hopeful, is leveraging his existing relationships with the Chinese community to garner support. Safai pointed to his track record of addressing issues important to Chinese American voters, such as securing funding for nonprofits supporting single-room occupancy units and sponsoring legislation to increase police foot patrols. Safai also has hired a Chinese American campaign manager to strengthen ties with the city's Chinese community.

The intense focus on Chinese American voters in this election cycle is no coincidence. Political consultant Jim Ross emphasized the critical nature of the demographic, saying to San Francisco news website Mission Local, "It will be very challenging for any candidate to win without getting the most votes from that coalition."

The political engagement of San Francisco's Chinese American community has reached new heights, driven by several factors, said Lam, who attributed the surge to the community's increasing education levels and a growing awareness of their voting power.

"All the people I know have realized the importance of casting ballots. Even those who do not read or speak English, their children, who are well educated, can help them," he said.

The successful recall elections in 2022, which replaced several progressive school board members in the city and the liberal district attorney Chesa Boudin, served as a watershed moment, demonstrating the community's ability to effect change through the ballot box, he said.

Economic concerns and public safety issues remain at the forefront for many Chinese American voters. As Lam pointed out, a significant portion of the community consists of small- and medium-sized business owners or working-class individuals who are acutely affected by the city's economic challenges and crime rate.

"It's tragic that many businesses in Fisherman's Wharf remain closed, and an office tower downtown was sold nearly 80 percent less than the price about a decade ago," said Lam, adding that it was why he switched his support from Breed five years ago to Farrell and Lurie for the upcoming election.

3 Chinese among 5 killed in South Korea accident

SEOUL — Three Chinese nationals were among the five people killed in a traffic accident in South Korea, the Chinese embassy in South Korea confirmed on Saturday.

A van carrying day laborers collided with a bus at an intersection in Ansan, about 30 kilometers south of the capital Seoul, at around 5:45 am local time, on Saturday, killing five people and injuring nine others, local media reported citing the fire authorities.

Following the collision, the van hit a passenger car waiting in the

opposite lane before coming to a stop. Five laborers in the van were sent to a nearby hospital but were pronounced dead.

Seven others in the van, including the driver, were injured, while two in the passenger car were wounded. One of the injured was in critical condition.

The police suspected the van violated a traffic signal at the intersection.

However, they are going to investigate the exact cause of the accident.

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Some posters of San Francisco mayoral contenders are displayed outside a store in the city's Chinatown. LIA ZHU / CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESS

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Left: Diners seen at an outlet of hotpot chain Xiapuxiapu in Beijing. Right: A view of the advertisements of Xibei Catering Group at a department store in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# China's cuisines tickle global taste buds

Catering brands expand overseas even as they seek growth in domestic market

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

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Earlier this year, Song Xuan, a communication executive of Xibei Catering Group, a renowned restaurant chain in China, was in Los Angeles on a business trip and craved an authentic Chinese meal after a tiring day.

At a restaurant, he ordered an eggplant dish with minced meat. To his surprise, it tasted extremely delicious, just like what his mother would prepare at their Beijing home.

When he looked around, however, he found only a few Chinese tourists dining at the restaurant.

Song said it is the kind of situation Xibei Catering would want to avoid as it expands overseas.

"We are not opening restaurants abroad solely for consumers with Chinese background," he said. "Our plan is not to simply copy what we do in China, but to cater to the larger population."

Xibei's overseas expansion strategy currently has focus on the US market. "We are starting in the most challenging and the largest catering market in the world where there is high per capita expenditure on dining out," Song said.

Jia Guolong, Xibei's CEO, said he had visited Europe and the Americas last year to evaluate market potential there.

"The United States is the world's largest economy, and its consumption power is much stronger than China's. Most people eat out and consume frequently. It presents a strong opportunity for quality Chinese food," Jia said in a letter to the firm's employees.

Xibei quickly established a food lab in the US to innovate Chinese cuisines so as to adapt cooking methods and tastes to the local markets.

The restaurant chain is now working with local partners in the US to refine its products like Shao Mai (steamed dumplings) and Mian Jin (wheat gluten). It is undergoing extensive testing as the firm seeks to find the right flavors.

It also plans to hire local management and marketing professionals



Diners wait for their turn outside an outlet of Haidilao, a Chinese hotpot restaurant giant, in Fuzhou, Fujian province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to better understand the US catering culture.

Xibei is not alone in this kind of endeavors. In recent years, Chinese catering brands have gradually expanded overseas to fuel their growth.

According to international consulting firm Frost & Sullivan, by 2026, the size of the overseas Chinese catering market is expected to reach \$409.8 billion, with a compound annual growth rate of 9.4 percent.

In its financial report for the first half of 2023, Haidilao, a Chinese hotpot restaurant giant, disclosed it has 115 outlets abroad. Seventy of them are located in Southeast Asia, 17 in East Asia, 18 in North America

and 10 in other regions. Small hotpot chain Xiapuxiapu opened its first store in Singapore in 2023.

On-premise beverage and ice-cream giant Mixue Bingcheng, the world's fifth-largest fast food restaurant chain, has over 36,000 stores worldwide, including more than 6,000 stores outside China.

As early as March last year, Luckin Coffee, a Chinese coffee chain in the mold of Starbucks, expanded its presence in Singapore, growing its store count to 12. Tea-based chain HeyTea entered Europe by opening its first store in London last August. Beverage operator Tianlala said it will open 300 stores in Indonesia and aims to expand its reach in other Southeast Asian countries.

Teahouse chain operator Chabaidao saw its overseas operations' revenue grow 40 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of this year.

The Chinese catering industry saw a recovery last year, according to the China Chain Catering Enterprises' Road to Capital Report 2024, released jointly by the China Chain Store & Franchise Association and PwC. The report surveyed 29 catering chains with a presence on the Chinese mainland.

But the momentum slowed in the first five months of this year, resulting in more fierce competition and pushing restaurant players to seek operational models that prioritize value-for-money, quality food and

better experiences, said the report.

"The domestic market still has significant opportunities, particularly in the lower-tier cities," said Song of Xibei.

"We are prioritizing the recast of protein-based categories such as beef to continue to attract consumers who value quality food on the menu."

The report said thanks to considerations like supply chains, Southeast Asian countries that are geographically more convenient, Japan and South Korea are top priorities for catering chains seeking to expand abroad.

Australia, the US, Canada and the United Kingdom where there are high numbers of Chinese people

among local populations, are also considered top destinations for catering brands.

In addition, thanks to the strong rebound of overseas travel, many catering brands have scaled up their reach to countries such as the United Arab Emirates, which are visited by an increasing number of Chinese travelers.

Such overseas expansions, however, have been testing the supply chains concerned. The catering industry is greatly influenced by the quality and supply of upstream ingredients. For customers, the consistency and quality of catering products are more important than taste and flavor, market insiders said.

In the Chinese food industry, Xibei Catering is one of the few dining brands that has achieved standardization. In China, Xibei's central kitchen ensures standardization across all its outlets, maintaining consistent portions and flavors, Song said.

This formula would be extended to its operations in the US. So, local procurement capacity is crucial. "If we cannot source ingredients from general suppliers or supermarkets, we won't even include them in our menu in the first place," Song said. "Any ingredients that require long-distance travel or are hard to secure will not find their consumers locally here in the US."

As Chinese restaurants continue to innovate and localize their offerings, they are poised to capture a boarder international market, meeting the diverse tastes of global consumers, market observers said.

Maymay Li, who has been living in Melbourne, Australia, for two decades, applauded the rise of Chinese restaurants and bubble tea houses such as Lanzhou Noodles, Mixue Bingcheng, Heytea and David Hotpot in the city.

"I used to miss Chinese food," said Li. "Now I feel I don't need to travel back to China just for Chinese food. Chinese cuisines and beverages are now available here in Australia that my friends in China enjoy. What's more, their businesses are booming."

## Success needs more than pleasing 'Chinese tummy'

### REPORTER'S LOG

By Wang Zhuoqiong

The global travel industry is seeing a rise in experience-craving travelers who demand the comfort of regular food while away from home. In the context of Chinese tourists, this phenomenon is often referred to as the "Chinese tummy" — something that is stubborn and uncompromising. Stated differently, many Chinese simply love Chinese cuisines too much.

This strong cultural attachment to Chinese food is driving a new

wave of international business opportunities for Chinese catering brands.

For decades, Western food chains such as McDonald's and Starbucks have expanded into the Chinese market, cultivating successfully a taste for Western cuisine among Chinese consumers in the cities.

However, when abroad, many Chinese still prefer their own culinary traditions. Often, without "proper" Chinese food, they can endure no more than a week at most. Then, they are overcome by craving for home food.

For example, when Chinese tourists pack their luggage, they would often include some Chinese instant noodles or even a travel-size electric boiler to cook noodles or simply have hot water.

A bag of instant spicy noodles in an outbound Chinese tourist group is likely to prove popular and sought after, potentially earning its owner extra respect during the trip.

My friend Flora, who relocated to Singapore last year from China, tells me a bubble tea from a Chinese tea beverage chain would often prove to be the high point of her day. This is something she misses the most living outside China.

"Check out what I've got," she texted me, followed by an image of her holding a milk tea from Chagee, a Yunnan province-based tea beverage chain that operates more than 4,500 stores, including 100 overseas.

Recently, at a Singapore shopping center near her office, she found that a majority of popular teahouses, coffee chains, snack bars and res-

taurants are all brands she had been familiar with while living in Beijing.

An increasing number of Chinese catering operators, teahouses and coffee chains are currently expanding their presence in not only Southeast Asia but also Europe, the Americas and Australia.

For instance, Haidilao, China's largest hotpot chain, has found success by catering to the tastes of overseas Chinese and curious locals alike. Ding Tai Fung has recently established a presence in New York City. Chinese tea chain Heytea has made its European debut by opening a store in London's Chinatown.

During the 2024 Summer Olympics, Chinese tea brands like Chagee and Heytea set up pop-up stores across Paris, pulling in over a thousand visitors daily.

All this clearly suggests that the potential for growth in this sector is immense. According to the China Tourism Research Institute, wanderlust will ensure there will be 130 million outbound Chinese tourists this year.

However, some argue, it wouldn't be enough for Chinese catering players to please the Chinese tummy alone, ignoring other nationals in markets overseas.

Chinese catering brands' go-global strategy should be more than just an exercise in replicating their domestic success. Success in the global market requires more than just serving familiar dishes, market insiders said.

Sustainable global growth would require a collective effort to blend authenticity with localization. It is what internationally acclaimed catering chains, including Starbucks, KFC, McDonald's, have done in the past decades, adapting

themselves locally, in terms of what's on the menu, the supply chain and talent.

It also demands a deep understanding of local cultures, regulations, consumer preferences and marketing methods. Chinese catering brands are looking for the magic recipe that can produce long-term success abroad.

Haidilao has introduced a hotpot soup tailored to the Thai palate and serves baguettes in the United Kingdom. This ability to adapt to the local tastes while maintaining the core elements of their Chinese identity, is what sets these brands apart in a crowded international market, and hopefully will help them grow stronger in the future.

By striking the right balance between authenticity and localization, these Chinese catering brands are poised to turn the Chinese tummy into a global business opportunity.

# BUSINESS



Children check out Hsu Fu Chi's candy products during a visit to the company in Dongguan, Guangdong province, in March.  
CHEN HUIXIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Candy play Hsu Fu Chi seeking sweet success story overseas

Global snack market expected to see CAGR of 5.1 percent over next decade

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Hsu Fu Chi, a leading manufacturer of confectionery products in China, recently launched its candy buckets at Costco, the largest chain membership warehouse store in the United States.

This move not only marks Hsu Fu Chi's entry into the North American market, but also underscores its firm steps on the path to globalization. The company's online products have also made their way to North American shopping websites such as Weee! — the top online Asian supermarket in the US — and Yami Buy, another shopping website targeting Asian Americans, as well as supermarkets under Walmart, Sobeys and Loblaw's Group in Canada.

Hsu Fu Chi's going-global efforts started in Southeast Asia. By 2023, its products had begun to cover local chain supermarkets like Lotus's and Aeon in Malaysia. Its candy products have become very popular in Vietnam, achieving significant growth in Southeast Asia.

In 2018, Three Squirrels, a top nut snack producer in Anhui province, began its overseas market layout. Currently, over 100 stock keeping units have entered markets such as the United States, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. Brand flagship stores have also been established on mainstream cross-border e-commerce

platforms like Lazada, Amazon and JD.

"For overseas food and beverage companies, the populous Chinese market is the world's largest fast-moving consumer goods market. But for Chinese food and beverage brands, the massive overseas market is also full of opportunities," said Mei Hongdao, director of the overseas development division of Want Want Group, a leading snack producer in China.

According to industry data, global snack sales are likely to have reached \$507.2 billion in 2023, and it is expected that the market will reach \$835.8 billion by the end of 2033. The global snack market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.1 percent over the next decade.

Many domestic F&B companies choose to launch their global journeys from Southeast Asia. The Southeast Asian market, mainly concentrated in countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, has a total population of about 600 million.

Maria Yang, director of food, beverage, and health category at Lazada China, which operates one of the largest online shopping websites in Southeast Asia, said this market is characterized by a young average age of consumers — just 29 years old — indicating hope and vitality.

Additionally, the overall market

size is relatively large, with data showing that by 2023, the combined online and offline retail scale in Southeast Asia could have reached \$4 trillion. These countries also have relatively healthy economies and a substantial overseas Chinese population.

At present, Southeast Asian e-commerce has vast growth potential and the market situation is favorable. However, challenges remain, including logistics infrastructure, transportation costs and price sensitivity in the region, Lazada said.

At the FBIF 2024 Food and Beverage Innovation Forum, Yang said they have witnessed the growth of many Chinese brands in the region.

However, exporting Chinese F&B brands overseas is quite challenging, she said.

First, food and beverages differ from other categories such as 3C products, clothing, shoes and hats, which have highly advantageous domestic supply chains.

"For F&B, there are always competitive local brands or products in every country. Additionally, consumers need to trust the safety and quality of these products since these products are to be eaten," she said.

In recent years, many people have established international business operations and increased discussions about fast-moving consumer goods going global. However, significant challenges remain, including understanding local consumers, localizing product development and production, brand design, talent structure, credit

compliance and supply chains.

Li Feng, founding partner of Frees Fund, said he has observed two main changes in the consumer market over the past five years — the restructuring of China's supply chain and the increasing consideration of globalization among Chinese F&B enterprises.

"Although international expansion today is full of dynamics, globalization is an inevitable result after a decade," Li said.

Zhang Xiqiang, vice-president of Nestle Group and chairman and CEO of Nestle Greater China, said that companies entering overseas markets need to focus on localizing their organization and talent, creating shared value, and supporting the growth of upstream and downstream industry partners.

"Only by localizing can enterprises achieve globalization, and only by gaining local consumer acceptance can they root themselves in the local market and embrace the global market," said Zhang.

Hu Yajun, vice-president of Dongpeng Beverage Group, said that in recent years, international business norms have seen dynamic changes, making planning difficult. Hence, actively working toward global market presence is essential.

The wave of "Made in China" products is now being followed by the second wave — brands from China, according to Jiabin Business Consultancy founder Wu Ting. This represents an opportunity for both production capacity and branding to go global, she added.

## China's data industry galloping toward wider digital future

BEIJING — With its far-reaching impact across various sectors, the data industry is rapidly evolving into a game-changer in China, contributing to the country's economic growth and digital transformation.

Last year, the total amount of data generated nationwide reached 32 zettabytes, equivalent to the digital resources of over 10 million national libraries, according to the National Data Administration.

“We are witnessing the emergence of new production factors, new data space, and new infrastructure, as well as the rise and evolution of new industry forms.”

Zhang Xianghong, a professor at Beijing Jiaotong University

Emerging from the application of data technology to develop products and services, the data industry is an industrial form that spans a broad range of digital activities, including data collection, storage, processing, management, application, circulation and transaction.

As the once abstract concept of "big data" has been widely integrated into business practices, it has unlocked significant opportunities for companies to enhance efficiency and expand their market reach.

The market size of China's database industry exceeded 52 billion yuan (\$7.28 billion) in 2023, and it is expected to reach 93.03 billion yuan by 2028.

is formulating targeted policies for businesses looking to make technological breakthroughs, explore data circulation, and improve infrastructure, which would support a more dynamic and innovative data ecosystem.

According to an action plan jointly released by the NDA with several other government organs at the end of last year, by the end of 2026 the breadth and depth of data element applications in China will significantly expand, with the annual growth rate exceeding 20 percent and data transaction scale doubling.

This growth is complemented by the data transaction sector, which has experienced stable and rapid expansion in recent years. In 2022, the overall market size of data transactions reached 87.68 billion yuan, accounting for 13.4 percent of the global data market, and is projected to surpass 500 billion yuan by 2030, the industry data showed.

Contributing to this vibrant growth, the number of data-driven businesses in China has surged from 110,000 to over 1 million in the past decade. These enterprises play no small part in maximizing the value of data elements and driving further expansion and innovation across the data industry.

"In this new development stage where data have become a novel factor of production, we are witnessing the emergence of new production factors, new data space, and new infrastructure, as well as the rise and evolution of new industry forms," said Zhang Xianghong, a professor at Beijing Jiaotong University.

In response to the evolving landscape of the burgeoning sector, Chinese policymakers have turned their attention to supporting, advancing and guiding the development of the data industry.

Although the industry is closely intertwined with information technologies and the internet sector, it has unique development characteristics that require targeted policies, said NDA official Zhang Wang at a recent news conference.

Zhang said the administration

By aligning the burgeoning data industry with its broader digital drive, China has also accelerated advancements in cloud computing, artificial intelligence and e-commerce, among other digital domains.

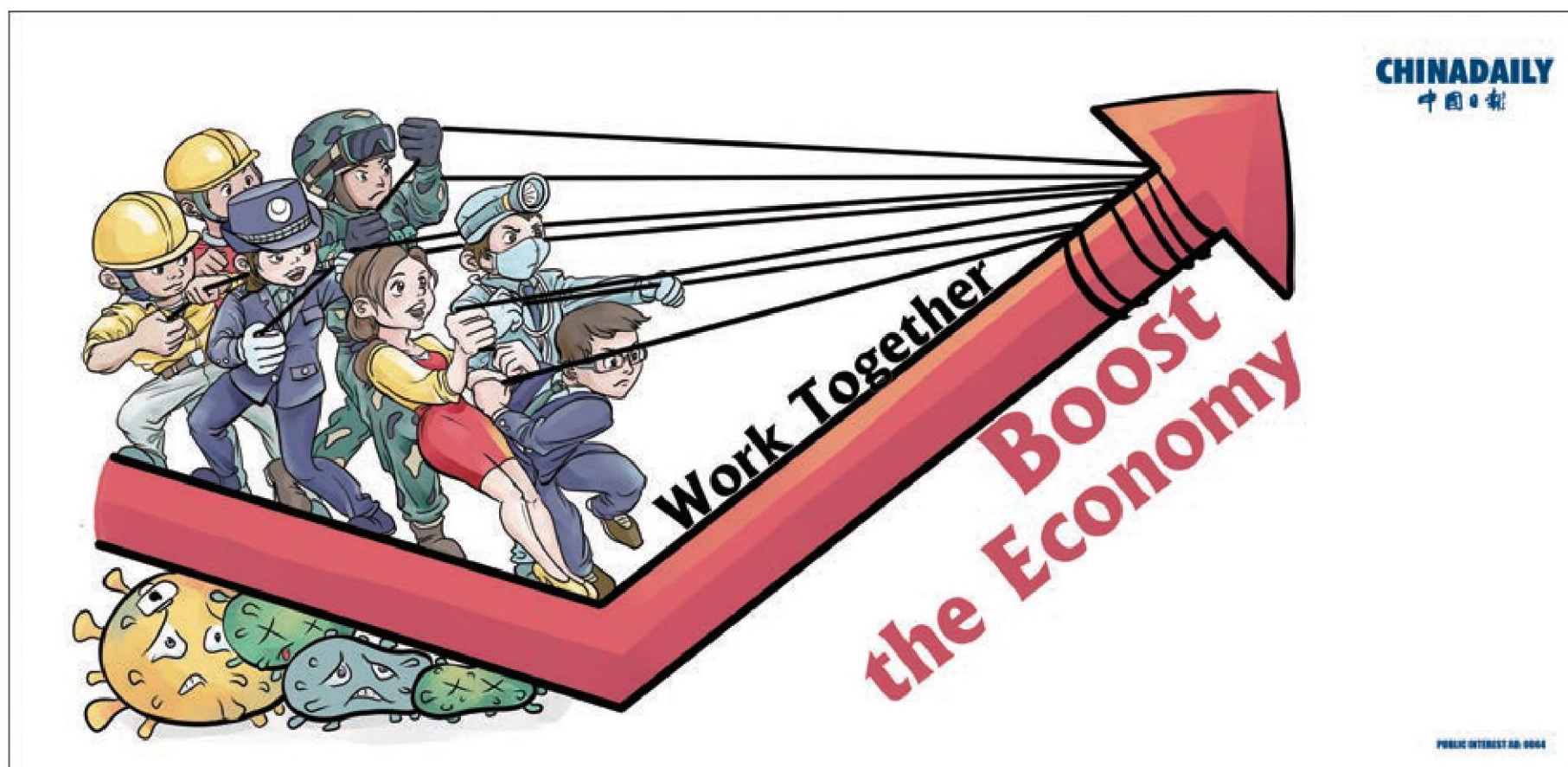
The number of valid AI invention patents in China had reached 378,000 by the end of last year, with its year-on-year growth rate surpassing 40 percent, 1.4 times the global average, according to a report by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology.

Essential to these achievements is China's expansive digital infrastructure. The number of 5G base stations in China had risen to nearly 3.92 million by the end of June, representing a net increase of 540,000 over the end of last year.

A recent official report forecasts that as the construction of digital infrastructure accelerates nationwide, the data industry is set to maintain its rapid growth, further permeating other sectors and driving the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries.

Looking ahead, Zhang said the country would fully leverage policy tools to develop the data industry, including implementing tailored measures to bolster investment, nurture talent, and promote industrial clustering in the sector.

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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Population decline won't hold China back

EAGLE EYE

By Rick Dunham

In recent years, a narrative of demographic doom has descended over China. Global economists and political commentators, wielding statistics as weapons to support their own hidden academic or ideological agendas, have pointed out the country's population decline of about 1.5 percent since its peak in 2021 and the ascendancy of India to the top spot in terms of global population rankings.

The National Bureau of Statistics said the country's population now stands at 1.409 billion, with 15.4 percent aged 65 and older. China's shrinking total population and rising graying demographic pose numerous policy challenges that need to be addressed on an urgent basis, as policymakers grapple with issues ranging from falling fertility rates to decisions by many young couples to forgo the skyrocketing expense of raising children, as well as soaring costs of healthcare for an aging population.

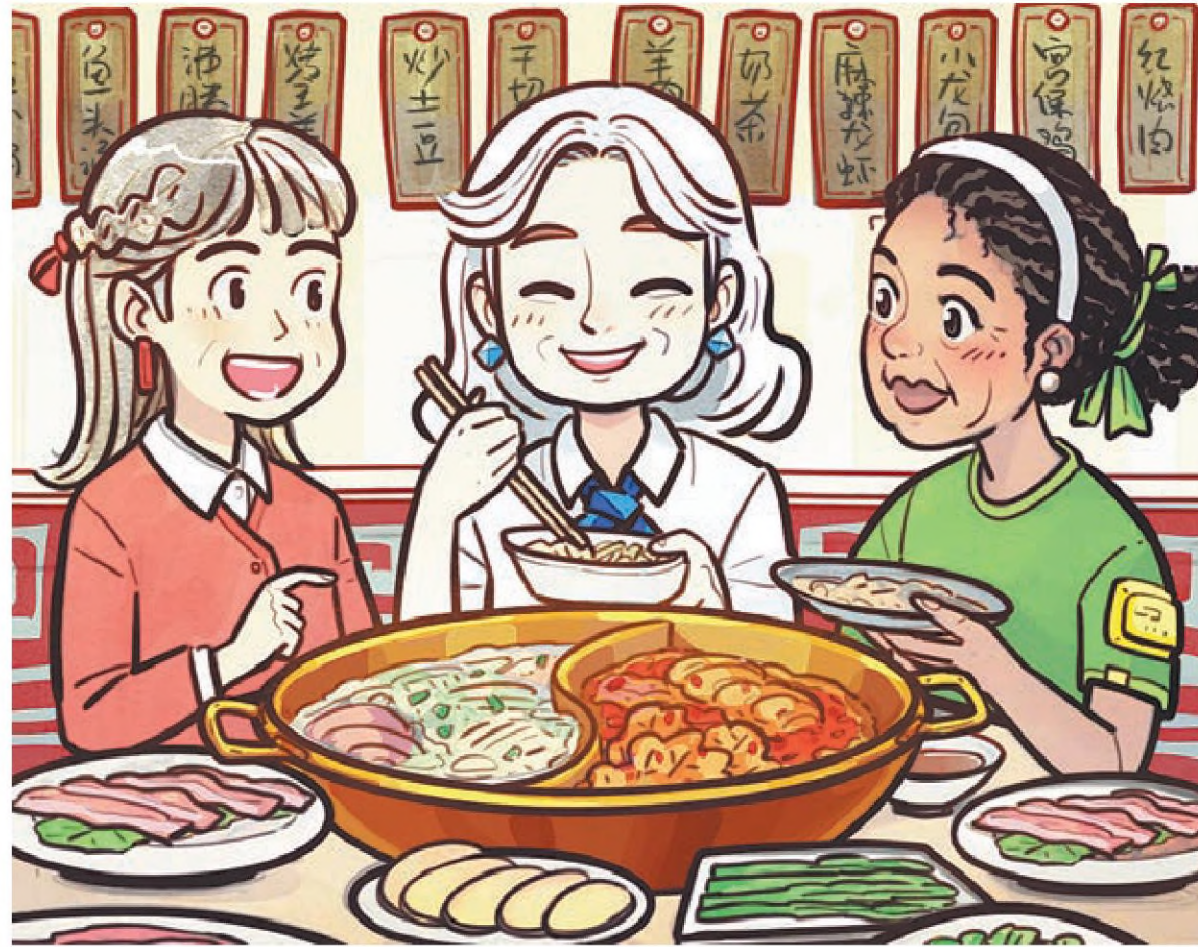
While these are serious economic and policy challenges, China is not alone in facing them. Seventeen European nations have seen their population shrink since 2020, even with an influx of immigration from Syria and Africa. Major economic powers such as Japan, Italy, South Korea and the United States are experiencing declining birth rates. Sweden experimented with financial incentives to counteract falling birth rates, to modest effect.

According to the United Nations, the pace of population growth is slowing worldwide, making population aging an irreversible global trend. Among high-income economies and those that strictly limit immigration, this trend is particularly evident.

**Two positive factors**

Despite a host of serious challenges, China has two major factors in its favor. First, productivity increases historically have provided an economic offset to population decline. The moderately prosperous society sought by China's leaders will need to become a bit more prosperous over time so the newer, higher-quality workers can afford to spend more of their larger paychecks on consumer goods to keep the Chinese economy humming.

None of this "economic prosperity dividend" is guaranteed. The global economy will have its cycles, and the Chinese economy is not immune to our interconnected global financial



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

forecasts that China could close the GDP gap with the US because of increased productivity, higher prices for its products, postponed retirement, and improved health and longevity of its citizens.

Second, to some degree, the size of China's working-age population is not as important as the quality of the workers. So China can, once again, offset much of the economic effect of a declining population by creating higher-quality, higher-wage jobs in value-added industries. The moderately prosperous society sought by China's leaders will need to become a bit more prosperous over time so the newer, higher-quality workers can afford to spend more of their larger paychecks on consumer goods to keep the Chinese economy humming.

None of this "economic prosperity dividend" is guaranteed. The global economy will have its cycles, and the Chinese economy is not immune to our interconnected global financial

network. But the overall outlook for China's demographic future should not be dismissed as demographic doom and gloom. This closer examination of China's demographic landscape reveals a more nuanced and, potentially, positive outlook if innovators are allowed to have their say and way.

The challenges are daunting. China's birth rate has declined for decades, hastened by the one-child policy (1979-2015). It stood at 6.39 births per 1,000 people in 2023, down from 11.59 births per 1,000 people in just two years. The fertility rate of 1.15 in 2021, down from 2.01 in 1991, is about half the 2.1 level needed to maintain the country's population. It is far below the fertility rate projection of 1.8 for both 2020 and 2030 made by the State Council, China's Cabinet, in 2016, which accompanied estimates of continuing national population growth.

The birth rate has also been affected by the rapid population shift to

China's cities, where raising children is more expensive, and by decisions of more young couples to go childless — a decision that again is often an economic one, related to the high costs of housing, education, transportation, healthcare and childcare. Attempts to encourage women to give birth to more children have thus far not yielded significant results.

Talk of a "demographic dividend" depends on both the size of the working-age population and the education level of the population. Despite the declining fertility rate and an aging population, China still has the world's largest labor market. With nearly 900 million individuals of working age, China surpasses the combined working-age populations of all developed countries.

Moreover, China's labor costs remain significantly lower than those in most developed economies, while still offering advantages in experience and efficiencies compared to lower-cost emerging mar-

kets. As businesses in the US and Europe contemplate moving some of their manufacturing away from China, they are rediscovering in their research that workers in China's manufacturing sector generally have remained more experienced, better educated and better resourced than their counterparts in competing countries, often leaving the outsourcing companies a choice between cost efficiency and domestic politics.

China also boasts the world's best-educated talent pool in diverse business categories. The country has established the world's largest higher education system. In recent decades, university enrollment in China has surged to a total of 240 million, with the gross higher education enrollment rate reaching nearly 81 percent last year, said the Ministry of Education.

In terms of innovation and entrepreneurial education, Chinese colleges and universities have developed over 30,000 specialized

courses and employed 174,000 teachers with professional backgrounds. This reflects a shift from a demographic dividend to a talent dividend. The breadth of China's labor pool means the country's human resources are adaptable to business needs, enabling companies to find experienced workers and technical specialists across a wide range of fields.

**Turning silver into gold**

Economists have long been concerned that falling fertility rates could reduce the labor force, exacerbate inflation, disrupt the consumer culture that mature economies rely on, and overwhelm government programs designed to support aging populations.

Trying to turn potential negatives into positives during this demographic transition, policymakers have created plans to turn silver into gold, at least metaphorically.

At the beginning of 2024, China introduced a plan for a "silver economy" — a market with significant growth potential estimated to be worth trillions of dollars — aimed at tapping into the spending power of the rising ranks of seniors. This plan caters to a rapidly aging population with services including meal deliveries, nursing homes and evolving entertainment options.

While the aging population poses significant challenges to the country's healthcare system, economy and society, long-term planning and comprehensive policy measures can address these issues.

Almost every country in the world will see population shrink during the rest of this century, according to UN projections. So it is the quality of each nation's planning, and the clear-eyed recognition of the problems and potential solutions, that will determine who will succeed and who will struggle.

By prioritizing elder wellness through healthcare reform, sustainable retirement and pension planning, the expansion of social services and continuing productivity growth, China can progress during its demographic transition. An aging population is not necessarily an economic disaster. With prudent solutions continually implemented over time, China remains positioned to overcome these challenges in the coming decades of a growing gray demographic.

*The writer is co-director of the Global Business Journalism Program at Tsinghua University and former president of the National Press Club in Washington. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## Employment of youth improving, with new trend in many sectors

MAIN STREET

By Jake Haselkorn and Xu Bo

Some Western media outlets have recently highlighted China's unemployment numbers, particularly among the youth, often depicting the situation as a "crisis". Such portrayals exaggerate and distort the country's unemployment situation.

With the introduction of a series of government policies, China's unemployment scenario is improving.

According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the average urban surveyed unemployment rate in the first quarter was 5.5 percent, a slight decrease from the previous quarter. In April, with the arrival of the peak production and business season, employment increased, and the unemployment rate fell to 5 percent, a decrease of 0.2 percentage points quarter-on-quarter.

Such data indicate a positive trend in China's employment market.

China's burgeoning new industries continue to generate employment opportunities, while traditional labor-intensive sectors still require a large-scale workforce.

In late 2022, the Chinese government identified the 100 most "labor-scarce" occupations, with substantial demand in production, manufacturing, services sectors,

and technical fields. Many of these roles offer diverse options and do not require extensive qualifications, presenting ample choices for young job seekers.

Looking ahead, China's anticipated digital technology growth over the next several decades can potentially bring profound shifts in economic development paradigms and industrial structures, likely reshaping employment dynamics significantly. These evolving trends are crucial for predicting China's future employment landscape.

While traditional employment metrics remain important, it is equally essential to recognize the emergence of positive trends and nuanced realities in China, which may diverge from Western media narratives.

**Moving to small cities**

The proportion of Chinese youth willing to work in small cities is increasing. Historically, China's macroeconomic policies have focused on unlocking the job potential in impoverished rural areas. Through sustained poverty alleviation efforts, China has successfully generated large numbers of new job opportunities in rural regions.

In May 2023, 10 central departments initiated a plan to recruit 1 million job trainees. By November 2023, over 1.2 million trainee positions had been filled. Additionally, in 2023, this program recruited 42,000 college graduates nationwide to work in small cities and remote areas.

Chinese youth who participate in

this program often secure formal jobs after two years of work. Alternatively, they can choose to continue their studies or pursue other career paths.

**Enthusiastic young people**

The reality of Chinese youth differs significantly from the "lying flat" stereotype portrayed by some media outlets. In fact, most young people have shown a strong enthusiasm for employment. Learning new skills and exploring diverse opportunities are increasingly becoming common aspirations among Chinese youth in their job searches.

To gain an edge in the job market, many Chinese students are making more efforts to actively hone the skills necessary for employment and actively engaging in training programs to obtain industry-related certifications.

Many young Chinese proactively venture beyond campus boundaries to gain comprehensive insights into emerging industries. This hands-on experience not only helps them understand industry trends, but also meets practical job requirements.

**Flexible employment**

China's workforce includes a significant number of flexible jobs. Judging from the data released by the NBS, employment statistics have not yet included flexible employment.

Many Chinese college students, recognized for their proactive thinking and innovation, have become a dynamic force in the sharing and

platform economy. Their approach to flexible employment often differs from traditional models, focusing on self-employment and entrepreneurship facilitated by new technologies like the internet and big data.

With the rapid growth of China's digital economy, the emergence of new forms of flexible employment driven by modern information networks and communication technologies has become increasingly significant in stabilizing the employment landscape.

According to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China, by the end of 2021, the number of flexible workers in China had reached approximately 200 million.

Looking ahead, the Alibaba Research Institute forecasts that the number of new flexible workers in China could potentially reach 400 million by 2036, which will provide large numbers of job opportunities for the youth.

**New industries, jobs**

The emergence of new industries in China has significantly boosted job creation and enhanced the overall employment structure. These burgeoning sectors, such as artificial intelligence, digital economy, intelligent manufacturing, and information technology, are pivotal in generating new industries and job opportunities, thereby continually expanding the employment landscape. Specifically, automobiles, electronic products, semiconductors and new energy have become pivotal in driving recent growth.

These new career avenues predominantly align with the skill sets of college students, underscoring their technical proficiency and adaptability. Additionally, the rise of innovative business models, such as the sharing economy, online education and telecommuting, has further broadened employment prospects for college students. Professions in sectors like digital marketing, e-commerce, tech support and remote project management have emerged as sought-after roles in the market.

**Services sector spillover**

The services sector's proportion within China's economy has continued to grow, contributing significantly to economic expansion, job generation, consumption enhancement, social welfare and more. Moreover, the employment priority policy has been effective, and the vigorous development of new industries, formats, and models has created new occupational demands.

The number of employees in China's manufacturing sector remained stable in the second quarter, while employment in the services sector increased significantly, according to the NBS. The year-on-year growth rate of employment in the services sector was substantial, indicating that its capacity to absorb employment continues to rise.

Within China's services sector employment landscape, segments like wholesale and retail, transportation and warehousing, education, and accommodation and catering play pivotal roles, collectively com-

prising over half of the workforce. As previously mentioned, there is a noticeable shift among Chinese youth who are increasingly abandoning traditional career paths in favor of actively engaging in the services sector with a more positive outlook.

As incomes increase, there is a growing demand for improved quality of life services, such as community services, elderly care, patient support, community family doctors and healthcare services. These sectors are becoming increasingly vital as people seek higher standards of living. In the future, employment opportunities are expected to expand significantly within these industries to meet these rising demands.

**Brightening prospects**

According to the NBS, the unemployment rate for young people aged 16-24 dropped to 13.2 percent in June from 14.2 percent in May, marking a decrease for three consecutive months. That for people aged 25-29 has declined to 6.4 percent, suggesting that this group is starting to gain valuable work experience and build their careers, heralding improving job prospects.

To conclude, China's youth employment situation is far from the "desperate" condition that is often portrayed by some international media outlets.

*Jake Haselkorn is a visiting professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, and former Asia bureau chief of CBS News. Xu Bo is a research fellow at the school. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Washington should lend an ear to call that it uphold world peace and stability

Given the level of mutual distrust between the two governments, and the fact that US President Joe Biden will be leaving the White House at the start of next year, the visit by his national security advisor to China would not normally carry much weight.

Yet such is the volatile state of China-US relations at present that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's invitation to Jake Sullivan to visit for "another round of strategic communication" has caught much attention.

Whether Democratic Party candidate Kamala Harris or former Republican president Donald Trump wins the US presidential election in November, stable, predictable bilateral ties would prove more preferable than otherwise. Which is why, since the present state of the relationship is to a great extent the outcome of a growing "trust deficit", the Sullivan visit is being viewed as an important opportunity for the two sides to compare notes and perhaps ensure that Washington has a clear understanding of Beijing's position.

Considering both Beijing and Washington have clearly articulated their respective positions on key matters of concern, any breakthrough is unlikely. But it may make a difference later, if the two understand each other's strategic purpose in potential crisis scenarios.

From the Russia-Ukraine conflict to that in the Middle East, to the Taiwan question and the South China Sea tensions, misjudgment is considered a real and present danger. Sullivan's visit would certainly be worthwhile if the US were subsequently to stop smearing, framing, pressuring and blackmailing China. That may be too much to hope for. But given how far apart they are on so many things, what matters at this stage is not how much agreement they can find on specific issues, but rather how much willingness they retain for communicating and crisis management.

Beijing's vision of cooperative bilateral ties is patently at odds with Washington's more confrontational zero-sum viewpoint. But that keeping talking to each other still seems to make a lot of sense for both sides despite all the differences that keep them apart, it is still an encouragement for those looking for something positive to hold on to.

The Biden administration has largely taken over the Trump government's mantle when it comes to China policy, even though Trump as the Republican presidential candidate has blamed Biden for being weak on China and vowed to get tougher should he be elected. That the two US parties are on the same page to some extent when it comes to China was underscored by Democratic candidate Harris on Thursday, when, upon accepting her party's nomination, she pledged to make sure that "America, not China, wins the competition for the 21st century".

Sullivan is expected to raise such US concerns as alleged Chinese support for Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine, as well as its approaches to the Taiwan and the South China Sea issues. But for Beijing, the invitation has been extended so it can express its serious concerns about the US not honoring its commitments. It will take the opportunity to urge the US to not support those seeking "Taiwan independence", not politicize economic and trade issues, and not undermine the Chinese people's right to development and China's strategic security.

Beijing wants to focus more on its conviction that Chinese and US visions for the future don't have to be mutually exclusive. Chinese President Xi Jinping told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in April the two countries "should be partners rather than rivals", and should help each other succeed rather than hurt each other. Beijing wants the US to uphold the consensus reached by the two heads of state in their San Francisco meeting last November, and to orientate its China policy in accordance with the three principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation proposed by China's top leader.

Those principles are the distillation of the practical lessons that China has extracted from history that peace and stability are the prerequisites for development. It thus adheres to a peaceful development path, advocates for win-win cooperation, and firmly supports the international system and international order with the United Nations at its core. Sullivan's visit will therefore be taken as an opportunity by Beijing for it to urge the US to do the same.

## India plays opportunistic game in US

Prime Minister Narendra Modi told his hosts in Kyiv on Friday, one month after his visit to Moscow, he was committed to playing a personal role in trying to mediate in the over-2-year-old conflict between Ukraine and Russia, urging both sides "to sit together and look for ways to come out of this crisis".

However, before and during his meeting with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on the same day, Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh showed the Modi government is ready to take advantage of the United States for its own narrow ends at the cost of rising tensions in its neighborhood.

Speaking to a gathering of Indian-Americans in Washington on Thursday during his four-day visit to the United States, Singh spoke of India's commitment to strengthening its strategic partnership with the US, while warning New Delhi's neighbors about the emergence of a more assertive nation. "Previously, some of our neighbors thought they could trouble India at will, but India is no longer weak. We are now counted among the world's strongest nations." Although Singh and his hosts singled out no country, there is no doubt which country was high on their minds during their exchanges.

Austin said after the inking of some new agreements on strengthening bilateral military cooperation in supply chains, weapon innovations and regional operational coordination, "We share a vision of a free and open 'Indo-Pacific', and our defense cooperation continues to grow stronger and stronger". That defense cooperation also includes the US' geopolitical tool, the Quad which groups Australia, Japan and India with the US.

The Indian defense chief, who knows much better than anyone else how far the Indian military is from the modern level, will also be well aware the latest security agreements, like their predecessors, can only be described as broad but shallow.

But despite the US' apparent intent to take advantage of India's border disputes with China to support its China-containment strategy, and its desire to explore the feasibility of treating India as an alternative to China in both manufacturing and market, Washington is uneasy about New Delhi's close ties with Moscow and India-Russia trade that has swelled remarkably along with the ramping up of US-led sanctions on Russia.

The practical cooperation between India and Russia is of more strategic significance to the former than its practical cooperation with the US. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Russia provided 65 percent of India's weapons purchases, totaling over \$60 billion, in the past two decades. And Russian oil now accounts for over two-fifths of India's oil imports.

That means even if the US views India as an outsourcing alternative to China for US companies and a playable piece in its geopolitical game with China, the mutual trust between New Delhi and Moscow is clearly deeper than that between New Delhi and Washington. Washington will therefore be cautious about choosing which industries and technologies can work together with those of India, and which weapons can be sold to India.

US policymakers' scruples in working with India in both the economic and military fields do not come from the latter being a power but its opportune tightrope walking between Russia and the US. Washington will never allow itself to be treated as one side of the bread some can choose to butter or not at will. Claiming "India is no longer weak" and "India and the US are the two forces which can bring peace, prosperity and stability in the world" in Washington, the Indian defense minister was just telling the world the opposite.

Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## Tokyo not fooling anyone trying to pin blame on rational seafood ban

Friday marked the one-year "anniversary" of Japan discharging its nuclear-contaminated wastewater from the damaged Daiichi nuclear plant into the ocean despite both domestic and international opposition. With one year having passed already, opposing and concerning voices over the issue may seem to be lower but that's not really the case.

A browse of the major Japanese media outlets shows they have either turned a blind eye to the anniversary or else claim there have been "no abnormalities found" in the sea where the nuclear-contaminated wastewater is being discharged. Hardly any have reported on the fishermen and fishing industry that have seen their businesses affected by widespread concerns about health. Yet according to US-based Lee Enterprises news website, "Protesters gathered at the Fukushima Citizens Hall on Friday to voice their opposition to the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the sea".

Instead, the Japanese media hyped up their prime minister urging China to lift the ban on Japanese seafood imports in an attempt to misguide fishermen in Fukushima and elsewhere into blaming their suffering in aquatic product sales on China's ban on imports, a ploy that is doomed to fail as it can't fool anyone with a modicum of common sense.

Trapped in such a mindset of blaming others for its own fault, the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company will, doubtlessly, carry on polluting the ocean at the cost of the health and interests of its own domestic residents and those in neighboring countries such as China and the Republic of Korea. With over 60,000 tons of nuclear-contaminated water discharged into the ocean already, of which over 31,000 tons were discharged in Fiscal Year 2023, Japan plans to discharge 54,600 tons in Fiscal Year 2024, which contain approximately 14 billion becquerels of tritium.

Instead of gaining the confidence of Japan's neighbors, the move of the Japanese government and TEPCO will only make things worse. On Saturday, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government said they had received a request from the Japanese government to lift the ban on seafood imports but considering the huge amount of nuclear-contaminated water wastewater Japan plans to discharge into the ocean and that as many as seven accidents have occurred in the past year alone they must take strict measures to protect people's health.

On Friday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a news conference that the more transparent the Japanese side is on the issue, the more it will help to alleviate the concern of the international community. That's sincere advice that the Japanese government should heed, instead of playing tricks.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## Another high-water mark for Chinese scientists

Although quite a number of self-media mentioned the incident with headlines suggesting "Chinese scientists have discovered large quantities of water on the moon", the fact is, as shown by the original academic study, that domestic researchers have proposed a way of providing the large quantities of water that would be needed to support permanent lunar bases.

After three years of deep study and repeated analysis, Chinese researchers have found that a mineral in lunar soil holds huge amounts of hydrogen. When heated to more than 1,000 degrees Celsius, the lunar soil will release the water in the form of vapor.

That might not be as sensational as

the self-media headlines suggested, but it does point to a possible way of supplying permanent lunar bases on the moon with the water they would need. It is impractical to carry enough water from Earth to the moon considering the tens of thousands of dollars needed to carry every kilo of materials there via rockets.

The proposal by the Chinese scientists points to the possibility of a feasible way to ensure the amounts of water needed to support future lunar bases can be provided, as according to their calculation every ton of lunar soil could produce about 50 kiloliters of water, enough to support 50 persons for 24 hours, while the melted lunar soil could be used as bricks for building lunar bases.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## New energy targets realized ahead of deadline

According to data from the Chinese National Energy Administration, by the end of July 2024, the total installed capacity of power generation nationwide reached 3.1 billion kilowatts. Of this, solar power had an installed capacity of about 740 million kilowatts while that of wind power was around 470 million kilowatts, realizing early the commitment made six and a half years earlier for wind and solar power combined installed capacity to reach 1.2 billion kilowatts by 2020.

Following the announcement of China's peak and net-zero carbon commitments, photovoltaic power has experienced explosive growth in the country. And the growing demand has been reflected globally, leading the upstream industry of the PV to enjoy a glorious boom cycle from 2020 to 2022, turning relatively stable since

2023, and increasing from 280 million kilowatts at the end of 2020 to 470 million kilowatts in July 2024.

The rapid growth of photovoltaic and wind power installations have transformed China's electricity structure. As of the end of 2020, the combined installed capacity of wind and solar power was approximately 24 percent. It has now risen to about 39 percent.

However, due to the nature of new energy sources, their utilization rate is not high, and during peak periods of electricity demand new energy often cannot generate enough electricity. Moreover, the domestic new energy facilities are mainly located in the northwest, northeast, and southwest regions, far from the load centers in eastern areas. The increased fluctuation and uncertainty brought about by expanding the proportion of new energy installations has led to mismatches in supply and demand both temporally and spatially, making it impossible to ensure electricity supply

across all regions at every moment.

Authorities are attempting to guide the industry through various means to address these challenges. In May, the NEA issued a notice on a batch of new energy supporting grid projects aimed at enhancing system regulation capabilities, improving the grid-connection performance of new energy sources, strengthening grid resource allocation capabilities, and leveraging the role of the power market mechanism. In July, departments including the NEA and National Development and Reform Commission jointly released an action plan for building a new type of power system from 2024 to 2027, planning nine special actions over the next three years including building a stable power system guarantee and the construction of an intelligent dispatch system. With such policy support, China's new energy industry is expected to have a more brilliant future ahead.

—CAIJING MAGAZINE

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of the National People's Congress

**Editor's note:** This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the NPC. Over the past 70 years, the people's congress system has greatly improved and played a significant role in advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Wang Wei

## People's congress system a pillar of democracy

The people's congress system is the fundamental political system in China. At the apex of this system is the National People's Congress, which serves as the supreme organ of State power. According to the Constitution, all administrative, supervisory, adjudicatory and procuratorial organs of the State are established by the people's congresses and are accountable to them, and subject to their oversight.



The author is a professor of Marxist studies at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

This system integrates the leadership of the Party, the role of the Chinese people as masters of the country and rule of law into a unified governance framework. Hence, the year 2024, which marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the NPC, should be celebrated as a landmark year of China's whole-process people's democracy.

The deputies to the NPC and local people's congresses at different levels are elected through a democratic process, making them accountable to the people and subjecting them to people's supervision, because in China the idea of the people as the masters of the country is more than just a slogan. Also, the people's congress system ensures the will of the people is translated into policies and laws, and legislative, supervisory and administrative powers are exercised only through a democratic political structure.

Over the past 70 years, China's electoral system has become increasingly inclusive, with direct elections extended to the county level, and a universal system of differential elections (in which there are more candidates than posts) implemented. The country's electoral system has also been adjusted to ensure equal representation for urban and rural areas.

This evolution of the election procedure is an apt example of the development of democracy in China.

As early as in the 1940s, creative methods, such as the "bean voting" system, were devised by the Communist Party of China in rural areas where most villagers were illiterate to ensure their participation in the electoral process. Election officials used porcelain bowls placed against each candidate's name for villagers to drop a bean into, effectively enabling one person, one vote.

The voting method has changed from the earlier practice of "beans as ballots" to the current system of voting with ballots. But the democratic rights of the

people have not changed. More than 99 percent of the Chinese people aged above 18 in China have the right to vote and contest elections, with direct elections accounting for 94 percent of all elections in the country.

The people's congress governance system is not a replication of the Western democracy model but a product of China's historical and cultural development. Western political systems often emphasize the separation of powers among the legislature, executive and the judiciary. But China has adopted a different approach, where decision-making, and execution and oversight of powers are separated but not in conflict. This model is more suited to China's political and social reality.

Western-style democracy is often equated with the electoral process, particularly competitive elections. In contrast, Chinese-style democracy includes both electoral democracy and consultative democracy. The former involves the direct election of representatives while the latter emphasizes broad consultation and consensus-building before making major decisions. These two forms of democratic processes are complementary, not contradictory, and together they form the basis of China's democratic governance system.

Consultative democracy is another key feature of China's political system. It is based on the idea that major decisions should be made only after extensive discussions and consultations among all stakeholders. This consultative process is a characteristic feature of all levels of governments, from the grassroots to the national level. For instance, local governments often use tools like the "mayor's mailbox" and "citizen hotlines" to solicit public opinion, a practice that has been praised by foreign scholars as innovative examples of democratic oversight.

This approach ensures the voices of even the people at the grassroots are heard and their opinions taken into consideration by the decision-makers. From the legislative processes to policy formulation, the Chinese system of consultative democracy ensures that the governance system is responsive to the needs and desires of the people.

The people's congress system is a result of China's historical experiences



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

and the choice of the Chinese people. It represents a new form of representative governance that differs from the Western model of democracy, but is effective in its own right.

The executive, the supervisory body, the judiciary and the prosecutorial organs — referred to as "one government, one commission, and two courts" (the State Council, the National Supervisory Commission, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate) — have all been established by and are accountable to the NPC, which also exercises oversight over them.

Although these bodies have distinct

responsibilities, there is no distinct separation of powers among them. In contrast, in Western political systems, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary are independent of each other. The Chinese system, on the other hand, operates differently in that it integrates these branches of governance that are responsible to the NPC, ensuring both unity and coordinated division of labor. This approach is rather unique and more effective, reflecting China's historical and political practices and development.

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

Colin Mackerras

## Chinese culture helps advance modernization

China's traditional culture has contributed greatly to the country's modernization. Yet it is not the only factor that has advanced Chinese modernization. The process of modernization has factors such as industrialization and greater equality brought about by socialism, which have been provided by the leadership of the Communist Party of China.

The factors of China's traditional culture that contribute to Chinese modernization include its emphasis on education, the tendency and ability to progress as a community rather than as individuals, and the focus on social harmony. To a large extent, these are derived from Confucianism, the secular ideology most associated with Chinese tradition.

The focus on education was reflected in the examination system, which for centuries had been producing Chinese bureaucrats. The system, however, had many drawbacks. For one, it was closed to women and involved a type of education that required too much rote learning and too little understanding. But it did mean the rulers of China were educated men whose ideology was secular. This was in contrast to countries where those with primary power and influence were hereditary aristocrats or clerics. Thus the focus on education is an enormous contribution to modernization.



The author is a Sinologist and an emeritus professor at Griffith University in Australia.

It is often said that the Chinese people put emphasis on "community", not individuals. Chinese history is replete with disagreements and conflicts. But compared with other civilizations, China has more examples of people working together, not against one another. A major illustrative example comes from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). After the Han Dynasty collapsed in disorder, China came together again and has mostly stayed unified. In contrast, when Ancient Rome fell in 476, signaling the end of the Western Roman Empire, Europe did not come together again, despite several major attempts at reunification, till the establishment of the European Union.

The Confucian philosophy's emphasis on social harmony also helps focus on living and working together with comparatively little conflict. There are plenty of exceptions, though. I have seen people pushing and shoving in crowds, where good manners might suggest standing back for others. But I have also seen people looking well together in crowded conditions that could lead toward strife in other contexts.

In the 13th century, Marco Polo noted that the Chinese were "friendly toward each other, and persons who inhabit the same street ... appear like one family". Was he a bit uncritical? Maybe, but I believe that in general the Chinese people make the best of crowded conditions and live in harmony.

Yet we know that China is a latecomer to modernization. Its pre-1949 attempts to achieve modernization were mostly dismal failures. Socialism brought equality, which in turn contributed to the country's efforts to advance Chinese modernization. For example, the 1950s saw China implementing a hitherto unknown concept of gender equality, including providing education for girls along with boys. Over the decades women have contributed more and more to the formal economy. In fact, giving play to women's capabilities, skills and high education levels is one of the main reasons why the process of Chinese modernization has been so successful.

In fact, modernization was the central theme of the third plenary session of the 11th CPC Central Committee held in December 1978. The plenum paved the way for "four modernizations", those of industry, agriculture, science and technology and national defense. China's progress since then has been phenomenal.

Some Americans claim credit for China's modernization. They say the visit of then US president Richard Nixon to China in 1972 foreshadowed essential assistance to China, and exaggerate the United States' contribution to China's modernization. The real reasons helping the country advance Chinese modernization are its advanced traditional culture, the hard work of the Chinese people and the effective leadership of the Party. No doubt, the West helped in certain fields, but it is certainly not the main reason for China's success. What we see now is the US' efforts to check China's development.

As someone who has been visiting and teaching in China since 1964, I have witnessed the enormous strides the country has taken toward achieving modernization. More than six decades ago, infrastructure in China was terrible. But now China has developed the largest and best high-speed train network in the world. Trains are punctual and comfortable, run smoothly, and are extremely fast.

Poor and backward in the 1960s, China now dominates world trade, and its economy has grown rapidly since the modernization policy was introduced. Measured in PPP (purchasing power parity) terms, China is now the world's largest economy. In terms of standard of living, it has improved to an almost unbelievable extent. The World Bank estimates China's GDP per capita was only \$164 in 1962. By the end of 2023, it had increased to \$12,174.

As for the science and technology sector, Cambridge scholar Joseph Needham has praised China's brilliant scientific tradition in his monumental work, *Science and Civilization in China*. The scientific revolution took place in Europe, paving the way to modernization. In the 21st century, the tide has turned, and China is catching up. It has overtaken the US in many crucial areas of technology.

China's modern and contemporary culture has helped advance Chinese modernization. But China's traditional culture has also helped advance modernization in multiple ways, an important one being the emphasis on education.

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

Mushahid Hussain

## China's political system truly serves the people

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of China's National People's Congress. The people's congress system is a key part of China's whole-process people's democracy, which differs in a number of respects with Western style democracy, especially in terms of its goals and decision-making.

Whole-process people's democracy, as the term suggests, is focused on the people in that its main goal is to better serve the people, which finds manifestation in the role of the Communist Party of China. First, the core aim and main mission of the Party is to serve the people — hence, the people-centric development of whole-process people's democracy. For China's leadership, the interests of the people, all the people, not just a section of society, are paramount.

Second, the social structure on which the Chinese sociopolitical system is based is egalitarian, not based on preferences for any class, creed, socioeconomic group, ethnicity or vested interests.

And third, a key aspect of China's political system is that it is based on merit, where the best and the brightest talents are selected through a rigorous process of training and screening, and they gain experience by working from the grassroots upward, rising through the ranks by dint of their performance and professionalism. For example, the CPC or government officials have to



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prove their honesty, dedication to the cause of the people and leadership mettle to be promoted to the higher level, meaning they have to work with and for the people to climb up the Party's ranks.

In contrast, the Western system works very differently despite the US claiming to be the greatest defender and promoter of democracy. In the US, decisions are often made by a cabal, a clique or a small group of influential, mostly rich people. Money is central to US-style democracy — for example, two-thirds of US senators happen to be millionaires.

For example, when US President Joe Biden "lost" a debate against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on June 27, it was the rich donors of the Democratic Party who reportedly decided Biden should not contest the presidential election, and made sure Vice-President Kamala Harris replaced him as the Democratic presidential candidate. Once the donors decided to no longer fund the Biden campaign, his re-election bid was over. Meanwhile, Trump's campaign spending more than doubled last month as he significantly

increased expenditures on advertisements targeting his new opponent Harris.

Another important difference between the US system and Chinese system is that the former is now largely run by influential and powerful lobbies that operate out of Washington. There are more than 100,000 lobbyists working directly or indirectly in Washington, and with a total budget of over \$9 billion, they influence US policymaking.

For example, one of the most powerful foreign policy lobbyists is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, while one of the most influential domestic policy lobbyists is the gun lobby run by the National Rifle Association, which is vehemently opposed to gun control laws despite the fact that every day on average 12 children are either killed or injured in gun violence in US schools and streets.

Another difference in the way democracy functions in China and the US is the manner of decision-making. In China, decisions are made through debates and consultations, and are based on a broad consensus. For instance, the third plenary session of the 11th CPC Central Committee discussed and debated thoroughly in December 1978 before deciding to do "course correction" and launch the epochal reform and opening-up policy.

The decision was reached after a thorough democratic debate and detailed discussions in a transparent

manner. In contrast, in the US, as US columnist Thomas Friedman wrote in his article of May 8, 2003, in *The New York Times*, "25 men who were working (in the private sector) in the vicinity of the White House, had they been exiled to an island, there would have been no Iraq War". In other words, in the US, the decision to invade Iraq was made by a small secretive, unelected cabal of 25 influential men, which makes the invasion of Iraq unjust, illegal and immoral. Worse, the invasion of Iraq was not sanctioned by the United Nations, and was against international law.

The core difference between US-style democracy and China's whole-process people's democracy is that the latter does not represent any vested interests nor is it a power game like in the US, where the military-industrial complex decides whom to wage war against irrespective of the costs and consequences to the US or the world. Thus, US-style democracy can be a threat to global peace, as it is dominated and dictated by the US military-industrial complex, while Chinese-style democracy ensures the country pursues a foreign policy based on peace, inclusivity and shared prosperity through connectivity and cooperation, without seeking conflict or confrontation which has, sadly, become a norm for the US system.

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

# GLOBAL VIEWS

DONALD RAMOTAR

## World of difference

The United States has launched a propaganda war against China as its cooperative approach with developing countries blunts its own exploitative dependency relations

The United States and other imperialist states are trying to portray China in a bad light. They hope to hide the main reasons for their hostility to China and why they have spurned almost all of the overtures made to them by China for normalizing socioeconomic and political relations.

The fact is that they are alarmed that China's relations are creating new hope for all countries whose main objectives are oriented toward the development of their own economies and peoples. The US and its allies are very concerned that the new approach to international relations will blunt their own exploitative relations with the world in general and the developing countries in particular. This is why their whole propaganda is directed toward painting China in a negative light.

Since the middle of the last century when the collapse of colonialism began, the former colonial powers have taken a very hostile attitude to any country that sought to exercise its right to self-determination. It was in this period that the US began its notorious activities of destabilizing those countries.

Recall that, in 1953 the direct interference of the United States and the United Kingdom led to the downfall of Mossadegh government of Iran. Also in 1953, the US supported the UK in invading British Guiana (now Guyana) and removed the first ever democratically elected government led by Cheddi Jagan. That administration was in office for only 133 days before it was removed.

That was only the beginning. In the years that followed the US destabilized several countries that sought to uphold their independence. Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, South Africa (it supported the Apartheid regime), Angola, Mozambique, Congo, Grenada, to name just a few, all suffered direct and indirect military actions by the imperialist forces.

The main reason for such continuous aggression is that those countries, mainly developing countries, have to remain underdeveloped so that their natural

resources and cheap labor can be exploited by giant imperialist corporations.

It is estimated that between 1990 and 2015 the net flow of resources from the Global South to the imperialist states of the US, Canada and the European Union amounted to some \$242 trillion.

This was achieved through repatriation of profits by multinational corporations, debt repayments to banks in the collective West and the International Monetary Fund

**It is a win-win approach. These relations are designed to be mutually beneficial to the developing world and China.**

and the World Bank, unequal trade (the large imperialist states control the World Trade Organization) and by several other mechanisms.

This explains the hostility of the US and its partners to China, as China has adopted a totally different approach to its relations with the developing world. It is a win-win approach. These relations are designed to be mutually beneficial to the developing world and China.

To achieve this, the Chinese authorities

are driven by a desire to enhance the productive capacity of poor countries including helping the developing world to enhance its infrastructure such as ports, railways, roads, bridges, hospitals and schools, with technical assistance in agriculture and other areas. It is also engaged in helping in the industrialization of many states.

Here the philosophy of the Chinese approach can be seen in stark contrast to the imperialist nations.

On the one hand the imperialist countries' main objective in the developing countries is to keep them dependent and poor. In this way their resources can be easily exploited. The whole intention is to keep those countries as a source of raw materials and cheap labor.

In other words, the imperialist states keep the countries in the Global South poor and powerless and easy to exploit in order to enrich themselves.

On the other hand, China wants to allow the developing countries to move to a higher stage of value-added production where they can become prosperous. This idea is based on the conviction that when the countries of the Global South become more productive and increase their wealth, trade relations will become more robust and all countries would become much better off. It would contribute to wealth creating and allow them to consolidate their independence.

It is this policy that has caused the West to become so hostile to China as the poorer states have become economically less dependent on imperialism. It allows them to resist the Western dictate by improving their bargaining power.

Despite all the negative propaganda of the West in the mainstream corporate media, the ordinary people of the world are beginning to see this fundamental difference and are continuing to increase and improve relations with China as equal and respected participants in international relations.

*The author is former president of Guyana. 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.*



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

MA YINGYING AND SU QINGYI

## Opening-up continues apace

China's FTZs will fully align with international trade rules, paying taxes will become easier, market access for foreign investment will be relaxed and service sector will further open up

Opening-up is China's basic national policy and a distinctive feature of Chinese-style modernization. The 2018 Central Economic Work Conference first proposed the transition of opening-up from the flow of commodities and production factors to the change of rules and other systems. Since then, China has aligned its opening-up



Ma Yingying



Su Qingyi

framework with high-standard international trade agreements, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement.

At the just-concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the commitment to steadily expanding institutional opening-up was reaffirmed with new concepts.

First, the plenum called for harmonizing rules, regulations, management and standards relating to property rights protection, industrial subsidies, labor protection and other areas, to create a transparent, stable and predictable institutional environment. This demonstrates China's strong determination to align with high-standard international trade rules.

Second, it emphasized on seizing the initiative to unilaterally open up to the least developed countries. In addition to opening China's commodity, service and capital markets, it also proposed an orderly opening of the labor market to the outside world. This shows that China does not demand reciprocal opening, which highlights its confidence in the opening-up policy.

Third, it stressed the importance of safeguarding the multilateral trading system centered around the World Trade Organization, actively participating in the reform of

global economic governance, and providing more global public goods. It also committed to expanding the globally-oriented network of high-standard free trade areas, establishing compliance mechanisms that are coordinated with prevailing international rules, and optimizing the environment for opening-up and cooperation. This indicates China's willingness to promote inclusive economic globalization by providing public goods.

From pilots and tests to expansions and upgrades, China's institutional opening-up has achieved successes in recent years.

First, pilot free trade zones have flourished. Between September 2013 and November last year, a total of 22 FTZs were established, which carried out over 3,400 pilot reforms, more than 1,700 institutional innovations and 278 innovations nationwide.

Second, the business environment has significantly improved. From 2015 to 2020, China's global ranking in business environment rose from 90th to 32nd, with continuous improvements in the ease of starting a business, obtaining construction permits, getting electricity, registering property and obtaining credit.

Third, restrictions on foreign direct investment have been reduced. From 2015 to 2020, China's FDI restrictiveness index dropped from 0.395 to 0.214. Restrictions on market access, equity, and personnel have been considerably relaxed, and the negative list for foreign investment access has been further shortened.

Fourth, the service sector has been opened in an orderly manner. From 2018 to 2023, China's service trade restrictiveness index for 18 sectors, including courier and financial services, has dropped, thanks to reduced foreign investment access restrictions and other discriminatory barriers, as well as increased regulatory transparency.

In the next five years, China's institutional opening-up is expected to expand steadily.

First, the institutional opening-up in FTZs will be promoted on a larger scale, in a broader range of areas and at deeper levels. FTZs have already introduced the one-

stop service system, free trade accounts and negative lists. The number of items on the negative list for investment access have been reduced from 190 to 27, with zero items in manufacturing and much relaxed access in the service sector.

FTZs will fully align with international high-standard trade rules, with harmonized rules in opening-up the service sector, facilitating the flow of commodities, labor protection, government procurement, e-commerce, industrial subsidies, environmental standards, intellectual property protection and post-border management.

In December 2023, the State Council issued the overall plan for comprehensively connecting with international high-standard economic and trade rules and promoting the high-level institutional opening-up of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone, which set out 80 measures across seven areas, including expanding opening in the service trade.

Second, the business environment will become more market-oriented, law-based, and aligned with international rules. Efforts will be made to steadily align with international high-standard trade rules in areas such as intellectual property and competitive neutrality, establishing a regulatory and market system in line with international standards to reduce institutional transaction costs for the allocation of production factors.

Paying taxes will be made easier by optimizing processes and reducing time and cost. Trading across borders will be facilitated by further cutting the cost and time to import and export. It will be less difficult for enterprises, especially private and foreign-funded ones, to get bank loans and credit. The enterprise bankruptcy system will be fully utilized to stimulate market vitality and stabilize market expectations.

Third, market access for foreign investment will be further relaxed. The latest edition of China's negative list for foreign investment access includes 31 items and is expected to be further shortened, with all restrictions on the manufacturing sector removed.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Equal support will be provided for both domestic and foreign enterprises, ensuring that foreign enterprises receive national treatment in accessing production factors, qualification licensing, standard setting, government procurement and bidding.

Under the premise of ensuring national security, cross-border data flow restrictions and localization requirements will be minimized.

Fourth, the service sector will be further opened-up. The negative list for the cross-border service trade will be fully implemented to orderly expand the opening-up of finance, telecommunications, internet, education, culture and healthcare sectors.

In the financial sector, financial infrastructure will be gradually opened up, cross-border capital management will be optimized, and restrictions on cross-border data flows will be relaxed. In the telecommunications sector, market access restric-

tions, competitive barriers, and other discriminatory barriers will be reduced. Pricing for telecommunications service will be optimized and quality will be improved. In the education, culture and healthcare sectors, entry barriers will be further lowered, the qualification licensing system will be improved, and policies on the residence and stay of foreign personnel will be optimized.

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# CULTURAL HERITAGE



It had been raining heavily for more than 10 days in Hekui, a village in Linyi city's Yishui county in Shandong province. The continuous downpour that July in 2020 caused levels at the Bashan Reservoir, about 300 meters to the east of the village, to exceed the safety limit, forcing it to release water.

The cascade eroded the riverbanks, carrying mud and sediment downstream into the Yihe River. However difficult it might have been to imagine at the time, this event changed the fate of the village and the surrounding areas for the best, as the force of the water washed away the soil to reveal significant archaeological remains.

"Someone found animal fossils likely been washed out by the water," says Li Gang, a researcher at the Shandong Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, as he recounted the call he received from the dean. "He said, 'You should go and take a look. There might be artifacts from the Paleolithic period.'"

Upon arriving at the village, Li was greeted by a trove of fossils covered in riverbank mud, with one particularly memorable find being a segment of an elephant molar.

However, it was the presence of quartz items in the strata that caught his attention. After examining a few of the pieces, Li, who has dedicated 15 years of his life to Paleolithic archaeology, felt a surge of joy — this vast alluvial plain and sloping hill before him was a rare and well-preserved Paleolithic site.

As he stood there, he tried to picture the scene 100,000 years ago, in what would have been lush grasslands. This was a time when humans wielded stone tools. In the distance, he could almost hear the trumpeting of extinct prehistoric straight-tusked elephants, and the neighing of wild horses.

## Sites

Remnants of early human life became more evident as the work progressed. The Bashan archaeological site, which stands on the bank of Yihe River, has been enclosed to prevent it from flooding. After years of hard work, the team led by Li is still excavating Bashan, as well as several other surrounding sites, including the one at Shuiquanyu in Cuijiayu town of the county.

At the Bashan site, the team has dug to a depth of nearly 8 meters, yielding stone tools and animal fossils in 14 layers, each indicating a different culture.

Li says that the oldest layers dating back 100,000 years contain stone tools and fossils of large mammals, including prehistoric straight-tusked elephants and woolly rhinoceroses.

At Shuiquanyu site, discovered in 2022, the stone tools found suggested it could be an Upper Paleolithic era site. Radiocarbon dating confirmed that the tools are approximately 24,000 years old.

Archaeologists have identified over 80 Paleolithic sites in the Yihe River Basin, which form a group centered on Bashan. They are known collectively as the Bashan site complex, or the Bashan site group.

Li says the stratigraphic sequence and the types of artifacts unearthed in the group are consistent, and illustrate the history and material culture of the peoples that lived on the upper reaches of Yihe River between 100,000 and 10,000 years ago.

To date, more than 40,000 artifacts have been found around the Bashan site group, among them stone items like smashed cores, disc-shaped cores, and flakes. The array of tools includes spheroids, scrapers, choppers, points, stone drills and hammerstones.

Most of the stone artifacts are made out of quartz, sourced from the abundant veins in the nearby Bashan Hill.

The team also found the mandibles, and a femur fragment, of straight-tusked elephants (*Palaeoaloxodon antiquus*), along-



A shovel-shaped tool made from a straight-tusked elephant's incisor from the Bashan site in Shandong province.

## Drawing the Paleolithic picture

Excavations reveal settlements close to rivers and evidence of hunting, reports **Zhao Ruixue** in Linyi, Shandong province.



**Top:** At the Bashan site in Yishui county, Linyi city, Shandong, archaeologists have dug to a depth of about 8 meters, yielding stone tools and fossils in 14 layers, each indicating a different culture. **Above left:** Quartz tools found at Shuiquanyu site in Cuijiayu town of Yishui. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Above right:** Li Gang, a researcher from the Shandong Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, at the site. **ZHAO RUIXUE / CHINA DAILY**

side a wealth of fossils, including those of aurochs, red deer, woolly rhinoceroses, elk, sheep, wild boars, as well as small-sized cervids (hoofed animals from the deer family) and small mammals.

"The fossils of straight-tusked elephants and a plethora of stone tools were located in multiple layers, which is rare not only in northern China, but in the entire country," Li says, adding that this has provided important archaeological evidence for the study of early human settlements and livelihoods during the Pleistocene, which lasted from about 2.6 million to 12,000 years ago.

"These ancient inhabitants strategically positioned their settlements close to rivers and sources for stone tools, demonstrating their skill at choosing places to live," Li says.

Fan Chengtai, an official at the archaeology office of the Shandong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism confirmed the significance of the discoveries at Bashan. "Excavation findings indicate

that human development in the region around Yishui continued uninterrupted, illustrating a flourishing scenario in which indigenous inhabitants coexisted with wildlife," Fan says.

## Discoveries

Li recalls a particular day during the excavation of the Bashan site. "As the team members were clearing the lower cultural layers, they shouted out to me. When I went over, we discovered a section of an incisor of a straight-tusked elephant, along with a portion of an elephant molar," he says, adding that at about half a meter long, the incisor was weighty, and the thicker end had a diameter of 15 centimeters and a smooth, polished appearance.

"Microscope observations revealed scratches on the cross-section, suggesting it was likely a tool used by humans."

Test results indicated that the shovel-shaped tool was 99,000 years old and was made from the incisor of an adult straight-

tusked elephant that could have weighed up to 15 metric tons.

The team also found eight straight-tusked elephant mandibles, two of which belonged to adult elephants, and the other six to juveniles.

Li says the shovel-shaped tool, stone tools and animal fossils suggest human activity such as tool making and animal processing. "If it wasn't humans hunting and butchering animals, it would be hard to explain why six of the eight straight-tusked elephants' mandibles belonged to juveniles, which were weaker and easier to capture, while hardly any other parts were found," he says.

The team also discovered charcoal fragments and the residue of multiuse fires at the Bashan site, as well as grains of carbon at the Shuiquanyu site.

These findings led the team to conclude that humans did not become extinct in East Asia during the last glacial period 20,000 years ago. "Between 20,000 to 30,000 years ago, during the last harsh glacial period, ancient humans in the

region used fire-making techniques to stay warm, and adapt to deteriorating environmental conditions," Li says.

The Bashan Paleolithic site group is characterized by its thicker strata and extended temporal framework of ancient human activities. It has yielded a wealth of stone artifacts and animal fossils, shedding light on ancient human behavior linked to fire making and animal butchering.

"All these findings indicate the continuous behavioral evolution of ancient humans in the region," Li adds.

## Meaning

Prior to discovering Bashan, archaeologists from the Shandong Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology had already discovered a great number of sites from the late Paleolithic and the Paleolithic-to-Neolithic transitional periods in the Yihe River Basin.

"However, the vast majority of stone artifacts were surface finds, posing challenges to dating due to the absence of original strata," Li says. "The discovery of the Bashan site significantly improved the situation."

The excavation of the Bashan site group is focused on multidisciplinary cooperation. The team works on collecting chronological and environmental samples, reinforcing animal bones, conducting indoor CT scanning, and making protection plans for fragile remains. There are also team members analyzing paleogeomorphology (ancient topographic features) and ancient DNA samples. This allows inter-site variability and connections between the Bashan group sites to be discussed based on different kinds of data.

For its key academic value and cultural significance, the Bashan site group was listed as one of China's top 10 new archaeological discoveries last year, and its discovery marked a turning point in improving Paleolithic archaeology in Shandong.

Exploration of the province's Paleolithic sites began in 1965 when animal fossils were unearthed at the Qianrendong cave in Yiyuan county, Zibo city. A joint effort between the Shandong Provincial Museum and the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences then discovered stone artifacts made of vein quartz.

The following year, a fossilized human tooth was found in Xintai city. This discovery marked the beginning of a series of findings on the Jiaodong Peninsula in eastern Shandong, where stone tools and vertebrate fossils were found.

Throughout the 1980s, a nationwide survey of artifacts propelled archaeological work in southern Shandong and on the eastern coast of the province. Notable discoveries during this period included the unearthing of the Yiyuan Man skull and seven teeth in 1981, which demonstrated traits akin to Peking Man and Anhui province's Yuanmou Man, a stage in the development of *Homo erectus*.

In 1982, 700-odd pieces of microlith (small fragments of stone, often flints) were discovered at the Fenghuangling site in Linyi, the first find of microlithic remains discovered in Shandong.

Entering the new millennium, efforts in Shandong have focused on three river basins where over 50 Paleolithic sites have been discovered.

Compared to other provinces in northern China, Shandong boasts a significant number of late Paleolithic sites.

"Despite the numerous discoveries of Paleolithic sites, the lack of primary strata has hindered comprehensive research in Shandong," Li says. "The Bashan site group discovery has filled in critical gaps in Paleolithic archaeology in the province, paving the way for continued in-depth Paleolithic archaeological work in the region."

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An aerial view of the Bashan site, where items from the Paleolithic era have been excavated. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**

## LIFE

## Folk feast bewitches Beijing audience

Concerts are the latest in China National Traditional Orchestra's ongoing mission to preserve and celebrate country's musical traditions, **Chen Nan** reports.



It was a heartwarming scene as 5-year-old Lan Mijia from the small village of Xiage in Zhaoxing town, Liping county of Guizhou province, took the stage at Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts on Tuesday.

With innocence shining in her bright eyes and tentative steps, Mijia began to sing, her beautiful voice filling the auditorium with the sound of the traditional Dong ethnic folk song *Xiao Shan Yang* (Little Goat), a melody rich in the essence of her heritage. Mijia's giggles punctuated the performance, adding a touch of joy and spontaneity that captivated the audience.

"The song is about a mother goat feeding her kid, which kneels down to drink her milk. It delivers a message about respecting and feeling grateful to our mothers," Mijia said in an interview before her performance in which 6-year-old Wu Zixi, who is from the same village, also took part.

The two girls were part of a concert by the China National Traditional Orchestra Choir and its children's choir. Titled *Travel With Folk Songs*, the concert exemplified the orchestra's dedication to preserving China's diverse musical heritage.

It was part of the NCPA August Chorus Festival, which ran through Sunday and included 18 concerts by 10 choirs from China,



**Top:** Singers of the China National Traditional Orchestra Choir in traditional ethnic costumes perform at Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts on Tuesday. **Above left:** Young performers from the Dong ethnic group (middle front) cooperate with the children's choir of the China National Traditional Orchestra. **Above right:** Adaptations from Chinese folk music are performed. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

the United Kingdom and Georgia. "Mijia is a star in our village because of her musical talent. She was able to sing as soon as she could walk," says Zhang Qian, who works at Zhaoxing's cultural center and was responsible for bringing Mijia and Zixi to Beijing.

"It's the first time the two girls have left the county. Their parents can't speak Mandarin fluently, so I am traveling with them," Zhang adds. "We are members of the Dong ethnic group, which has a long tradition of singing and dancing. We

have a saying that 'rice nourishes the body and songs nourish the soul'. We are also working hard to collect all our folk songs and teach our children to sing, passing on culture and knowledge through music."

According to Zhao Cong, a veteran *pipa* player and president of the China National Traditional Orchestra, the musicians and singers spent a week in Guizhou province in July to seek inspiration from local folk music. *Xiao Shan Yang* was discovered by 14-year-old

songwriter Liu Xiaobai, who is a student at the middle school affiliated to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

"I listened to Mijia perform the song in her home and I was soon captivated by the melody, although I didn't know what the lyrics said," says Xiaobai, who plays piano and majors in composition and conducting. "I combined the music that I wrote during the trip to Guizhou with the song, which portrays the people of Guizhou and its beautiful natural scenery."

Zhao says: "It was one of the highlights of the concert. Mijia's innocence and beautiful voice brought the traditional folk song to life, enchanting the audience with her genuine delivery. Her performance illustrated the profound connection between folk music and cultural identity."

The concert featured adaptations of folk music from different parts of China, including Yunnan province and Northeast China. Traditional instruments like the *suona* (a double-reed woodwind instru-

ment), *erhu* (a two-stringed bowed instrument), *pipa* (Chinese lute), *sheng* (a wind instrument) and the *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle) were featured in the concert.

"It was more than just a showcase of talent; it was a testament to our ongoing efforts to celebrate and sustain the rich tapestry of Chinese folk traditions," says Zhao. "By using the power of music to evoke the landscapes and cultural essence of different regions, the choir invites the audience to experience China's vibrant and dynamic heritage."

The China National Traditional Orchestra co-organized the International Folk Song Festival between July 20 and 24 in different parts of Qiongdongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture of Guizhou province, including Liping county, Kaili city and Leishan county. Choirs from around the world took part in the event.

"Folk songs often carry deep cultural and historical significance, reflecting the traditions, values and stories of a place. Their melodies, rhythms and lyrics can evoke the atmosphere, landscapes and daily life of a region, allowing listeners to connect emotionally and mentally with a place's essence," Zhao adds.

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## CULTURAL JOURNEY

## Chongqing launches first digital map of farming heritage

By TAN YINGZI in Chongqing  
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Log onto a WeChat mini-program called the Digital Bayu Farming Culture Map and you can find information about over 1,000 local agricultural heritage spots in Chongqing and their associated tourist services.

The digital map, launched in mid-August, is the first of its kind in the country as China makes efforts to revitalize its farming culture.

Ba and Yu are the historical names of Chongqing, a mountainous municipality in southwestern China with 32 million people.

Developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Chongqing Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and the Fengdu County Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, the mini-program aims to make full use of local farming culture, promote agricultural development and create more jobs for farmers.

Farming culture is centered on agricultural production, including farming, agricultural tools, agronomy and agricultural customs.

"The source of traditional Chinese culture lies in the countryside. Farming culture is an important component of that," Tang Ke, director of the rural social affairs promotion department at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said at the launch ceremony for the map in Fengdu on Aug 15.

"The prosperity and development of rural culture cannot be achieved without the exploration and use of traditional farming culture."

China was one of the first regions in the world to begin agricultural production. The profound impact of its development shaped lifestyles, values and social structure, becoming an important component of Chinese civilization.

China is a large agricultural producer, consumer and trader, feeding 20 percent of the world's population with less than 9 percent of the world's arable land, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

In March, the ministry and the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles jointly issued a work plan, Col-



A drama showcasing the local wedding culture is staged at the launch ceremony of the Digital Bayu Farming Culture Map in Fengdu county, Chongqing, on Aug 15. PHOTOS BY CHEN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

orful Earth — National Rural Cultural Vitalization in Action, to promote farming culture in different ways.

"The work plan has received positive responses from different regions," Tang says. "So far, 39 key national activities have been successively carried out, and 28 provinces, regions and municipalities, such as Chongqing, have formulated local

implementation plans around distinctive rural cultural activities."

The digital map is an important part of the work plan as Chongqing and Tianjin municipalities, as well as the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, all participated in the pilot program, he adds.

"We hope to develop a rural cultural map to accurately identify the loca-



A dance show featuring farming scenes is staged in Fengdu county, Chongqing, on Aug 15.

tion of cultural heritage, specialty foods, rural guesthouses, folk festivals, sports events, and more. By gathering this information, we aim to create a rural cultural guide service for the public that is accessible, tangible and practical," the director says.

In recent years, Chongqing, which lies on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, has invested in the protec-

tion, passing on, development and use of agricultural heritage. So far, the city has located nearly 1,000 instances, such as the Sichuan peppercorn cultivation system in Jiangjin district, the Chinese goldthread production system in Shizhu Tujia autonomous county and the red tangerine cultivation system of Wanzhou district.

"Fengdu is a traditional agricultural county. Agriculture is the root and soul of our rural culture, as well as an invaluable asset," says Zhang Guozhong, the county's Party chief.

"Focusing on our main products of beef cattle, chicken and pickled vegetables, we are planning to develop a new agriculture model by promoting sightseeing, farming experiences and field study tours."

He says over 2,000 years ago the ancestors of the Ba people settled in Fengdu, which means "the land is abundant in water and grass" on the banks of the Yangtze River.

It boasts traditional music, drama and dance related to farming culture, such as the stonemason chants Longkong Chuida and the Longkong Cattle Dance.

## CULTURE



# In Marco Polo's ancient footsteps

Documentary maker brings 62-year-old ambition to life by finishing explorer's fabled route, **Xing Yi** reports in London.

Stanley Johnson and his son Max Johnson wear costumes during a role-playing game at a film production base in China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

It's a story about pursuing one's dream, a story of collaboration between China and the United Kingdom, and a story of cultural exchanges and mutual learning — all contained within the new documentary film *In the Footstep of Marco Polo*, which had its world premiere in London earlier in July.

Marco Polo was an Italian merchant and explorer who traveled through Asia along the ancient Silk Road in the 13th century, ending his journey in Dadu, the capital of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), which is present-day Beijing.

His observations and details about his route were recorded in the book *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which was later translated into many European languages and that inspired generations of Western travelers to go East.

Stanley Johnson was one such follower of Marco Polo.

An author, environmentalist, and former member of the European Parliament, he is also the father of the former United Kingdom prime minister Boris Johnson.

Last year, Stanley and his youngest son, Max Johnson, participated in a China-UK documentary project that showcased the country's astonishing landscapes while featuring engaging interviews with locals and capturing the hilarious banter between the 84-year-old father and his 39-year-old son.

Following part of the ancient route, their journey covered more than 5,000 kilometers, starting from a land port 5,100 meters above sea level on the China-Pakistan border at the Khunjerab Pass and crossing the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, through the Taklamakan Desert, through Gansu province to the Mogao Caves, traversing the highlands of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and concluding in Beijing.

## Start of the dream

As an undergraduate at the University of Oxford in 1961, Stanley Johnson, along with two friends, Tim Severin and Michael de Larrabeti, embarked on an ambitious adventure through Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan as they inched closer to the Chinese border.

The trio was traveling on motorcycles and found they could not cross the Pamir Plateau between Central and South Asia on two wheels.

Forced to give up, they vowed to return and complete the journey together one day, but the dream did not come true for de Larrabeti and Severin, who passed away in 2008 and 2020 respectively.

In 2023, accompanied this time by his son, Stanley picked up the



**Clockwise from top left:** Stanley Johnson (right) and Max Johnson pose for a photo at the premiere of their documentary in London in July. The duo tour the Great Wall near Beijing. The father and son filmmakers talk with a maker of traditional musical instruments in China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

unfinished journey he began six decades earlier and continued.

"This is the realization of quite a long-held ambition. I've been to China a lot of times, but I'd never done the whole route that I wanted to do," Stanley said at the premiere of the documentary film about his journey. "Sixty-two years ago, I first set out to try to follow Marco Polo's way to Beijing and didn't succeed. Sixty-two years later, we got there, we made it!"

Reflecting on the seven-week journey, Stanley's son Max said: "It was Confucius who said 'a good son is an obedient son. I am neither one nor the other, but I do try. And it was just great fun.'"

He added that the journey meant he got to spend cherished time with his father.

Max has also been to China before, and the first city he visited back when he was 20 happened to be Kashgar, in Xinjiang, which he got to visit again during the filming of the documentary last year.

"This time, I went back and to see the development was just incredible.

And then obviously, I've been to Beijing. I live in Hong Kong. But to me, to see how much China developed, how quickly China developed, is very fascinating," said Max, who had previously studied in Beijing and who can speak fluent Mandarin.

"When you watch this film, just remember it was something in the spirit of let's do something. Let's make a film, go to China, and see what it's like for yourself," he told the audience at the premiere.

## Nature, culture and people

In the documentary, Stanley and Max take the audience to see some of the most breathtaking landscapes in Northwest China. Driving a 4x4 SUV, the two slowly descended 1,000 meters by going around more than 600 turns on a mountain highway called *pan long* road, or twisting dragon road, near Kashgar.

They also board an overnight sleeper train from Hotan to Ruoqiang, the latest leg of the world's first railway loop line circling a desert that opened in 2022, which crosses China's largest desert, Taklamakan,

with ease. "This is the modern version of the Silk Road," Stanley exclaimed in the film.

Standing on a hot-air balloon, they catch the morning rays shining over the Zhangye National Geopark, creating the sight of a "rainbow mountain" out of the unique petrographic landform in China.

In addition to seeing magnificent scenery, the Johnsons meet various people along the way.

They watch a performance of Xinjiang Uygur Muqam, which includes songs, dances, and folk and classical music and that UNESCO put on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008.

During their journey, they also learned with a master chef how to make *Lanzhou lamian*, or the hand-pulled noodle that originated in Lanzhou, Gansu province, which was arguably China's most widespread noodle dish across the vast country and abroad.

And they got to grapple with Mongolian bokh wrestlers, try archery, and listen to khoomei, an ancient

throat singing performed by ethnic Mongolians.

They also had the chance to talk to historians at sites in Xanadu, the northern capital of the Mongol Empire, and in the Forbidden City, which was built during the Yuan Dynasty, tracing Marco Polo to the places he must have been, and the things he could have seen.

"We've met people, and we've been entertained by people, and we've had experiences which I will never forget," Stanley said at the end of the documentary.

## UK-China collaboration

The journey and the film would not have been possible without a team from both China and the United Kingdom and support from the Chinese embassy and local authorities, which the Johnsons thanked and praised at the premiere.

"Marco Polo became the great bridge-builder between the East and the West, and he is still very much appreciated in China. To me, I hope this film will also help in a symbolic bridge-building," said Stanley, add-



I believe this film is a celebration of cultural diversity and most importantly, it shows we all share a basic humanity as individuals."

**Dale Templar**, director of documentary *In the Footstep of Marco Polo*

ing that he was so impressed to see that there was a statue of Marco Polo in the center of the city of Zhangye.

Dale Templar, the documentary's director, said: "We worked for seven weeks straight, the journey was filmed as a continuous journey. And I cannot underestimate just how hard the 30 or 40-strong team of English and Chinese crew worked."

The film was a joint production by One Tribe TV, a UK television and radio production company, and CCTV Documentary International Media Co, was distributed by Blue Ant International, and was supported by the education group English Path.

"I'm gonna give a quick shout-out to everyone in the UK and China," said Templar.

"They are producers, directors, researchers, translators, production management teams, cameras and locations, sound, post-production, including editing, coloring, dubbing, graphic design, script writing, and so many more.

"I believe this film is a celebration of cultural diversity and most importantly, it shows we all share a basic humanity as individuals. We are, after all, just human, sharing the same hopes, fears and dreams."

Sherard Cowper-Coles, chair of the China-Britain Business Council, said after watching the premiere: "Stanley's film was just wonderful. (It is) a powerful evocation of Chinese civilization, ancient and modern, delivered with taste, humanity, humor, and brilliant cinematography."

Zheng Zeguang, China's ambassador to the UK, told the audience at the premiere: "This is a story about pursuing dreams... It's a story about China-UK collaboration... This is also a story about cultural exchanges and mutual learning.

"I hope all of you, and people in the UK, will be following the footsteps of Marco Polo and also the footsteps of Stanley Johnson. Travel to China, see the culture, and meet the people."

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