

Season of cheer

Chinese exporters rush to ship Christmas-themed products

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Apology sought for Asian scientists who were targeted in US

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Friends across the sea

Tianjin and Kobe's partnership a symbol of Sino-Japanese ties

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# CHINA DAILY

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## In the spirit of the Games



Syrians with special needs and war injuries participate on Monday in their own version of the Paralympic Games in Idlib, northwestern Syria. The event was organized by the Violet Organization, a nongovernmental entity that provides humanitarian aid in northern Syria, together with the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. ANAS ALKHARBOULTI / DPA PICTURE-ALLIANCE VIA AP

## Rising industrial profits drive economic growth

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's industrial profits rose in July at their fastest pace in five months, propelled by stable industrial production and robust new growth drivers, official data showed on Tuesday, amid signs of steady economic recovery coupled with a gradual improvement in domestic demand.

Analysts said that China's economic recovery will likely gain a firmer footing with a range of economic stimulus measures taking effect gradually in the remainder of the year.

As policymakers have pledged to consider new incremental policies in the second half, analysts said potential moves will include further property easing measures, the accelerated issuance of local government special bonds, and reductions in the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates.

Their comments came as data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Tuesday that industrial enterprises with annual revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million) saw their total profits in July rise 4.1 percent from a year earlier, com-

pared with a 3.6 percent year-on-year increase in the previous month.

For the January-July period, China's industrial profits increased 3.6 percent year-on-year, following a 3.5 percent growth in the first six months.

"Steady industrial production growth, coupled with the continued development of new growth drivers, has promoted the continued recovery of corporate revenue," said NBS statistician Yu Weining.

"Meanwhile, the broader economy continues to face pressure from still-weak consumer demand, as well as a complicated and grim external environment," Yu said.

"More efforts should be made to actively expand domestic demand, better implement reform measures listed in the resolution adopted by the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July and foster new quality productive forces."

Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said the latest statistics come amid robust macroeconomic policy support and a gradual recovery in market demand, pointing to an improved relationship between supply and demand in the industrial sector.

"Notably, the rapid growth in profits among high-tech equipment manufacturers showcased China's continued industrial upgrading and transformation process," he said.

According to the NBS, profits at high-tech manufacturing and equipment manufacturing enterprises surged 12.8 percent and 6.1 percent respectively in the first seven months, 9.2 percentage points and 2.5 percentage points higher respectively than overall industrial profits.

"Meanwhile, we also see that insufficient effective domestic demand has constrained the continued improvement of corporate performance, while price fluctuations in the international energy commodity market and mounting uncertainty in the external environment have increased the operating pressure on enterprises," Zhou said.

Despite these headwinds, Zhou said he remains confident that China's industrial profits will likely continue to improve in the following months, given the continuous recovery in consumption and investment, as well as robust stimulus policies for enterprises.

The industrial profits reading echoed July's solid industrial production growth, although other

indicators have pointed to still-weak domestic demand and challenges in the property sector.

NBS data showed that China's value-added industrial output grew 5.1 percent in July from a year earlier, while China's retail sales, a key indicator of consumer spending, grew 2.7 percent year-on-year in July. Property investment fell 10.2 percent in the first seven months, compared with a 10.1 percent decline in the first six months.

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said the indicators point to a mixed picture with regard to China's economic recovery, suggesting that the broader economy still faces downward pressures.

"To meet the preset annual growth target this year, China needs to achieve around 5 percent year-on-year growth in the second half, with about 1.4 percent quarter-on-quarter growth," he said.

Xiong called on policymakers to take more steps to stabilize growth in the remainder of the year, including moves to resolve debt risks related to local authorities, further property easing policies in key cities, the accelerated issuance of local government special bonds, and further reductions in the RRR and interest rates.

## DRIVING REFORM

# Deepening of reforms opens doors for Gen Z

Global youth develop their careers, establish businesses thanks to widened opening-up

By MENG WENJIE  
mengwenjie@i21st.cn

In 2014, when Priyasha Sharma first arrived in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, from India to study at Shenzhen University, she had no inkling that she would still be living in the city 10 years later and calling it home.

Shenzhen, a pioneer model of China's reform and opening-up, was designated as the nation's first special economic zone in 1980. It transformed from a small fishing village into a leading global technology center within just a few decades.

"Shenzhen is often referred to as China's Silicon Valley, and it's home to Chinese tech majors like Huawei and Tencent," Sharma said.

After completing her master's degree from Shenzhen University in 2022, the now 28-year-old Sharma chose to pursue a career in a technology-focused supply chain firm.

Though Sharma spoke Chinese fluently, she had to cope with some cultural differences as the company's first foreign employee, but the open and supportive atmosphere empowered her to express her views and provided her with equal opportunities for career advancement. Today, she holds a top managerial position in the company, helping foster its growth and bring about more international influence.

"Shenzhen's residents embrace newcomers, blending different perspectives into a cohesive local identity," she said.

The Shenzhen government offers services, policies and incentives to assist foreign residents, expatriate startups and established businesses, Sharma added.

For instance, there are expatriate centers in every district of Shenzhen, offering services such as language learning, legal consultation, employment and internship platforms, as well as business networking events for international residents. More importantly, these services and events are provided free of cost, with ongoing surveys conducted to enhance support for expats.

A popular saying in Shenzhen, "Once you come here, you are a Shenzheners", deeply resonates with

Sharma. She finds that the city's openness to new ideas and its focus on entrepreneurial spirit cultivate a profound sense of belonging and inclusion.

"For many, including myself, living and working in Shenzhen often feels like being part of a large, diverse community where the local identity is shaped by a blend of cultures, backgrounds and experiences," she said.

As China's opening-up has widened, like Shenzhen, many cities have been drawing in international talents to live, work, invest and establish businesses. Among them is Yiwu, a renowned small commodities trading hub in East China's Zhejiang province.

According to data from the Yiwu Administration for Market Regulation, 162 new foreign-funded enterprises have been established in the city this year, marking a 34 percent increase compared to the previous year.

Kirill Kravtsov, a 23-year-old Russian student at Peking University, visited Yiwu recently. He discovered that many young entrepreneurs from around the world have started their businesses in the city. Some of them have lived there for over 10 years, witnessing and being part of the city's economic progress and infrastructure enhancement.

"Yiwu is undoubtedly a business-friendly city, as it has been launching a lot of initiatives to attract international talents and make it easier for them to live and work there," Kravtsov said.

Kravtsov met a young entrepreneur from Kyrgyzstan who moved to Yiwu and started her own accessories business, which she successfully expanded globally to numerous countries.

She told Kravtsov that Yiwu provides favorable policies for foreign startups, including a points system. Foreign entrepreneurs who meet specific requirements, such as clearing the HSK 6, the Chinese-language proficiency test's highest level, and possessing a master's degree, among other qualifications, can accumulate a high score, which makes it easier for them to obtain a long-term work visa.

See *Connection*, page 3

## Financing model in Africa bears fruit over 10 years

WORLD WATCH  
By Etsehiwot Kebret

ber this year, the AGTF is a symbolic multilateral approach that is a welcome departure from China's usual practice of bilateral agreements on the African continent.

So, what exactly has the AGTF achieved over the last decade? According to the most recent figures available online, there are currently 41 ongoing projects and six approved projects with Nigeria, Tanzania, and Egypt being the biggest recipients of funding and transportation, water supply, agriculture and rural development sectors benefiting the most.

According to Charles Boamah, AfDB's former vice-president and CFO, the AGTF enables an additional \$200 million in large-sized projects annually across the continent, on the same terms and conditions as loans administered by the AfDB itself.

See *Financing*, page 3

## DALIAN ON COURSE TO RIDE 'COOL' WAVE OF SAILING BOOM

Aquatic sports, seaside attractions drawing droves of tourists

By ZHANG XIAOMIN  
In Dalian, Liaoning  
zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn



Following a brief rain shower, the sky cleared and revealed a picturesque scene off the coast of Dalian, Liaoning province, with the billowing clouds and blue waters accentuated by the white sails of boats.

As the tour sailboat moved past a lighthouse on the morning of Aug 19 and departed the harbor, the tall buildings along the shoreline unfolded before the tourists' eyes like a painting.

One of those enjoying the sightseeing tour was 10-year-old Liu

Linxuan from Beijing, who told his mother he was reluctant to say goodbye to the beautiful seaside spot in Zhongshan district's Dalian Old Wharf Scenic Area. "The sun was scorching," the boy said. "But once the sailboat started moving — the cool breeze blowing in my face, the splashing waves trailing behind the boat, and the seagulls flying around us made me really enjoy the voyage."

See *Sailing*, page 2

## Against a common enemy



Participants get ready for a group photo on Tuesday before the opening ceremony of the Great Wall-2024 International Forum on Counter-terrorism in Beijing. The four-day event attracted over 170 delegates from more than 50 foreign armed forces. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

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## PAGE TWO

From page 1

Located on the southernmost tip of the Liaodong Peninsula, Dalian faces the Bohai Sea and the Yellow Sea. Including its islands, it boasts a coastline of 2,211 kilometers, the longest of any Chinese city.

This summer, amid the prolonged heat waves in many regions, the northeastern port city's relatively cooler climate has attracted domestic tourists seeking relief, and turning it into a haven for beach lovers. Sailboat camps and boat trips have been popular activities with visitors.

**Join the crew**

After adjusting to the sway of the boat's movement, Liu Linxuan took out chunks of a ham sausage he had bought earlier and tossed them into the air for the seagulls to catch in their beaks. He delighted in the birds' swift gobbling of the morsels.

"This was my first time feeding seagulls on a boat. I never expected it to be this much fun!" He exclaimed.

Watching the tourists interact with the seagulls, with some lifting their phones to capture memories, 62-year-old captain Yang Zongjiang reminded everyone to prioritize their safety.

Like the tourists, Yang also found joy in being on the sailboat, and often pilots over 10 trips a day.

A native of Changhai county in Dalian, Yang, began working on boats at the age of 16, eventually becoming a captain at 25. For over 30 years, he has navigated passenger boats along a 14-nautical-mile route between the ports of Dachangshan Island in Changhai and Pikou subdistrict in Dalian's Pulandian district.

"Since June last year, I have been steering sailboats here, which, relatively speaking, has been much easier," Yang said.

The double-hulled sailboat Yang operates, which is also powered by a diesel engine, measures 9.9 meters long and 5.5 meters wide and can accommodate about 40 passengers each trip. The scenic area has nine similar tourist boats.

Sun Xizhe, the chairman of the Dalian Old Wharf Scenic Area, said this summer, 3,500 to 5,000 people a day had gone on sightseeing boat rides.

The sightseeing tour in the scenic area has been selected as a pilot waterway tourism passenger route. The journey takes nearly 30 minutes, and allows passengers to admire the historical buildings of the century-old harbor and the coastal scenery in the downtown of Dalian.

**Competitive nature**

With a sea area of 30,100 square kilometers, its long coastline, and 538 islands, Dalian is prospering from its aquatic environment.

Surrounded by the ocean in three directions, navigating the waves in a boat has become a trendy pastime that is also injecting vitality into the city.

This summer, 15-year-old Zhang Shaohui, had the opportunity to fully enjoy the happiness sailing brings him. Since he first sailed at Xinghai Bay Yacht Harbor at the age of 8, sailing has become his favorite sport.

"I love sailing because it is not confined to a single location," said Zhang. "Additionally, sailing is a very independent sport that requires athletes to have the ability to think and make judgments independently."

Over the years, Zhang has spent his summer and winter vacations, as well as weekends, practicing his sailing techniques on the water.

His dedication paid off when he was selected for the national youth sailing team. He placed 17th in the final series at the International Topper World Championships 2024 held in Murcia, Spain in July.

Gao Lin, the head coach at Zhang's Dalian Mingdao Sailing Club, said the teenager's selection for the national youth sailing team was based on his outstanding performance in several 2023 CYA Youth Sailing League races.



## Sailing: Skills perfected for maritime pursuits



**Top:** Boats from various countries compete in the first Navy Cup International Sailing Regatta in Dalian, Liaoning province, on July 24.

**Above left:** A team from the Dalian Naval Academy races during the Navy Cup International Sailing Regatta on July 21.

**Above right:** A coach from the Dalian Mingdao Sailing Club and his students pose for a photo at the Xinghai Bay Yacht Harbor in Dalian, on June 30. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

formance in several 2023 CYA Youth Sailing League races.

Sailing relies on the wind and is a pastime that combines competition, entertainment, viewing, and exploration, Gao said. "The winds and waves can change unpredictably, presenting various challenges that demand flexibility and quick responses," he added.

Gao, 54, was one of the first sailing enthusiasts in Dalian. When the Dalian Mingdao Sailing Club was established in 2008, there were only five sailing clubs in the country, he said.

The club, which has 47 sailboats of various sizes docked at Xinghai Bay Yacht Harbor, is the only one in Northeast China authorized by the Chinese Yachting Association and the American Sailing Association to issue dual certifications for domestic and international sailing.

It can award 10 levels of ASA sailing certifications and eight levels of CYA sailing certifications. Since 2021, the club, which has more than 20 Optimist class small boats, has conducted training for junior coaches.

The club's summer camps this year consisted of 10 sessions, each with six participants aged seven and above. Half of the participants come from outside Dalian, including the inland provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi, as well as cities with well-developed sailing activities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen.

"With 16 years of experience in

Students and coaches from the Dalian Mingdao Sailing Club set sail for training near Xinghai Bay in Dalian.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

promoting and popularizing sailing, the club has a certain influence nationwide. For out-of-town students, Dalian's summer temperatures are relatively comfortable compared with cities in the south, which is also an advantage," Gao said.

He said many parents hope that through summer sailing camps, their children can put down their smartphones, reconnect with nature, improve their outdoor sports skills, and understand maritime culture.

The five-day summer camp costs around 5,000 yuan (\$700). However, the family of one student from Shanghai who underwent 10 days of one-on-one training, which also included accommodation in a nearby high-end hotel and a nanny, spent 120,000 yuan.

"Sailing is still not popular. Many people mistakenly believe that it is expensive, but in reality, it can be affordable; (whether) fancy or simple, it depends on your budget. Our annual membership fee is just over 10,000 yuan," Gao said.

He said many companies choose sailing as a team-building activity and most of the Fortune 500 companies with branches in Dalian have had some form of interaction with the club.

**Sailing events**

With its natural maritime advantages, Dalian has hosted numerous sailing events, including national champi-

onships, the national games and various other championships in recent years.

In July last year, two racing categories in the 2023 National Sailing Championships and a round of the 2023 National University Sailing Championships were held in Dalian.

Organized by the CYA and the Dalian Sports Bureau, the events saw 103 athletes from 11 cities across the country participating.

In July this year, the first Navy Cup International Sailing Regatta, hosted by the Chinese navy, was held in Dalian.

During the four-day event, 16 sailing teams from naval academies representing China and eight other nations, including Brazil, Chile, Italy and Russia competed against each other.

The regatta's objective was to establish a platform for naval exchanges that encompass training, competition, interaction and exhibitions. In addition to the competition, various activities were arranged to facilitate exchanges between the naval academies.

"By organizing a series of high-profile and influential events, Dalian can fully demonstrate its unique mountain-sea advantageous resources and urban cultural charm," said Ni Haoran, deputy director of the competitive sports department of the Dalian Sports Bureau.

"By promoting Dalian through competitions, we aim to create new sports consumption scenarios, boost enthusiasm for fitness, attract domestic and foreign tourists, and promote the deep integration of sports with business, culture, and tourism," he said.

According to Ni, over 30 aquatic sports events are scheduled for this year. The bureau plans to further develop sailing, windsurfing, kayaking, rowing, and fishing projects that are compatible with the city's natural environment.

"We will continue to host more high-level sailing events to attract more sailing enthusiasts and tourists from home and abroad," Ni added.

The 2024 Dalian Cup Sailing Invitational is scheduled to take place in Dalian from September 13 to 17, the CYA said.

Wang Jiaxin, deputy secretary-general of the CYA, said the event is expected to attract sailing enthusiasts from various regions, and will allow residents to better experience the city's sailing sports.

Dalian is considered an early adopter of sailing sports in China and has hosted several influential sailing events in the past, Wang said. Many sailing enthusiasts are eager to return to Dalian to participate in national-level events.

"Dalian's sea area boasts excellent wind conditions, unique 'city-sea' event settings and landscapes, making it an ideal location for sailing and maritime sports," said Wang.

"We also hope to further cooperate with local governments and sports departments to jointly promote the development of sailing sports for youth, and sports leisure," he added.

**Young recruits**

Dalian has had a longtime involvement with the development of youth sailing, Wang added. A prestigious local high school attached to the Dalian University of Technology made spots available for sailing recruits this year, a measure Wang described as groundbreaking.

The move is expected to enhance the appeal of sailing to young people, he said.

Students with special skills in sports such as volleyball and swimming have easier access to certain high schools. It is the first time that students with sailing expertise have been recruited in Dalian.

Zhao Jun, Party secretary of the school, said that Dalian, as a coastal city, should encourage primary and secondary school students to participate in sports that reflect the city's characteristics. "Non-powered sailing is an excellent educational project that demonstrates the competitors' athletic abilities, as well as their application of comprehensive knowledge and teamwork," he said.

Chen Baocai, president of the Dalian Yachting Association, said the association will also strengthen its sailing training for young people.

"Sailing is not just a competitive sport; it is also a way of life and the pursuit of a spirit. We hope to continue attracting more people to understand and participate in this dynamic and passionate sport," he said.

Since its establishment in 2016, the association has been dedicated to promoting and popularizing sailing sports.

Dalian boasts 30 higher education institutions and a young and vibrant group of university students full of potential, Chen said.

In collaboration with Dalian University of Technology, Dalian Maritime University, Dalian Ocean University, and Dalian Naval Academy, the association jointly initiated the China Urban University Sailing Alliance, to encourage and guide college students to participate in aquatic sports.

"Dalian is a paradise for marine sports. Its seaside offers so many places that are suitable for sailing, each promising a different maritime journey," said Chen.



## TOP NEWS

## Talks seek to build on consensus

New round of China-US strategic communication aims at improving ties

By ZHANG YUNBI

zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Shortly after United States National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan arrived in Beijing on Tuesday afternoon, he embarked on a new round of China-US strategic communication with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

In his opening remarks at the talks, Wang expressed his expectations for the two days of in-depth communication.

He expressed hope that China-US relations would move in the direction of overcoming disturbances, removing obstacles and "truly realize stable, healthy and sustainable development".

**Inside** Wang noted that the relationship is "vital to both countries and affects the world" and that "the past few years have been full of ups and downs".

Sullivan thanked China for its thoughtful arrangements for his first China visit as national security advisor. He said that US President Joe Biden is committed to managing the US-China relationship responsibly, avoiding competition from veering into conflict, and cooperating in areas of common interest.

Washington looks forward to having a fruitful dialogue with Beijing on a wide range of topics through this strategic communication and implementing the consensus reached by the two heads of state, said Sullivan.

Wang, who is also member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission, previously held three rounds of strategic communications with Sullivan in Vienna, Malta and Bangkok.

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

When disembarking his plane at



Wang Yi (right), director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, shakes hands with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan before a round of China-US strategic communication in Beijing on Tuesday. DING LIN / XINHUA

Beijing Capital International Airport on Tuesday afternoon, Sullivan was welcomed by Yang Tao, director of the Foreign Ministry's Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs and a veteran diplomat in handling US affairs. US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns also greeted Sullivan there.

Sullivan's three-day trip till Thursday also marks the first visit to China by a US national security advisor since Susan Rice's trip in 2016.

Speaking to Sullivan, Wang mentioned that under the strategic guidance of President Xi and President Biden, the two sides realized the Bali summit and the San Francisco summit in November.

"The experience therein is worth drawing on, lessons need to be learned, and the key is to pivot to the major direction of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win

cooperation," Wang said, adding that implementing the consensus of the San Francisco summit "is the shared duty of China and the US, as well as the main task of this strategic communication."

Teng Jianqun, professor and director of the Diplomacy Studies Center at Hunan Normal University in Changsha, said, "Since the two leaders' summit last year, the two sides have seen a recovery in cooperation in areas such as politics, the economy, diplomacy and security."

Teng noted that Sullivan is a key policy assistant to the Biden administration, and his ongoing trip undertakes a series of important missions. "Sullivan's China trip aims to keep afloat the good momentum of China-US interactions," he said.

Wu Xinbo, dean of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, noted that China-US relations

are still plagued by constant frictions because the US suppresses China in the areas of trade and commerce, as well as science and technology, and it keeps targeting Chinese companies.

"Sullivan's visit to China also provides an opportunity for both sides to discuss pressing concerns and manage differences," he said.

In a recent video speech for the Second Fudan-Harvard China-US Youth Leaders Dialogue, Jing Quan, minister of the Chinese embassy in the US, noted the progress in bilateral cooperation in fields such as counter-narcotics, people-to-people exchanges, the economy and trade.

"Over the past 45 years, the China-US relationship has kept forging ahead despite twists and turns, growing into the most important bilateral relationship in the world today," he said.

## Macron denies Paris arrest of Telegram CEO a political move

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

French President Emmanuel Macron has said the arrest of Pavel Durov, the Russian-born CEO of messaging platform Telegram, was part of an ongoing judicial investigation and not a political move, after the French action triggered heated debate about free speech and protests from Russia.

The first French official confirmation came on Monday, two days after the 39-year-old Durov was detained at the Paris-Le Bourget Airport where he landed in his private jet on Saturday night.

French authorities extended Durov's detention on Sunday for allegedly not curbing offenses such as fraud, sexual exploitation, crimes against minors, drug trafficking, organized crime and promotion of terrorism on the Telegram platform, French news media reported.

The billionaire, who holds multiple citizenships, including French, Russian and from the United Arab Emirates, could be detained for up to a maximum 96 hours for questioning and then the judge would have to decide whether to press charges or set him free.

Telegram said in a statement on Sunday that its CEO "has nothing to hide and travels frequently in Europe".

It said Telegram "abides by EU laws, including the Digital Services Act, or DSA, — its moderation is within industry standards and constantly improving". The DSA is an European Union regulation adopted in 2022 to address illegal content, transparent advertising and disinformation.

"It is absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform," the statement said.

Russia came to Durov's defense by accusing France of free speech double standards and said Durov should be accorded his rights. The Russian embassy in Paris said it had demanded access to Durov but

"the French side is refusing to cooperate".

Telegram is popular among Russian speakers.

On her personal Telegram account, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said 26 NGOs "condemned the Russian court's decision to block Telegram" in 2018.

"Do you think this time they'll appeal to Paris and demand Durov's release?" she asked.

Macron, who faces domestic political chaos following his party's defeat in the July parliamentary election, said France is "deeply committed to freedom of expression and communication", but such freedoms are "upheld within a legal framework, both on social media and in real life".

"It is up to the judiciary, in full independence, to enforce the law," he said on social media platform X.

Macron has been a user of Telegram since the early days of his 2017 presidential campaign. The encrypted messaging app is popular among his supporters as well.

The European Commission has distanced itself from the case with a spokesperson telling the media on Monday that Durov's arrest on suspicion of allowing criminal activity on his platform has nothing to do with Telegram's obligations under the DSA.

Telegram has more than 900 million active monthly users globally, but its claim in February of 41 million monthly average users in EU means it has not passed the 45 million threshold for a Very Large Online Platform tag under DSA and is not subject to the strictest transparency rules.

Ron Paul, former US Congressman from Texas and former presidential candidate, said on X on Monday that the arrest is "a huge blow to free speech across the globe".

Elon Musk, who owns X, criticized the arrest, saying on X that "it's 2030 in Europe and you're being executed for liking a meme".

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Connection: Programs encourage youths to visit China

From page 1

"Chinese cities are striving to be more open to the world, and I believe Yiwu is an exemplary case," Kravtsov said.

Melina Gisela Weber, a 31-year-old from Germany, shares a similar perspective. She traveled to the Hainan Free Trade Port in South China's Hainan province in July and observed that the island is creating platforms for collaboration with countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative in fields including culture and education.

A prime example of this is the Hainan Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences, the pioneering higher education institution in the

Chinese mainland established independently by an international university.

According to Weber, the university offers mechanical engineering and German language courses for students, who are taught in English and follow the German education system.

"I consider this a great example of cross-border education," Weber said.

Weber's connection with China began in 2015 during her one-semester study at the Ocean University of China, located in Qingdao, East China's Shandong province. The experience touched her deeply and aroused her curiosity, and she has been traveling between

Germany and China since.

In 2019, Weber started sharing videos on Chinese social media platforms, showcasing her life in both countries. She has now amassed over 2 million followers on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok.

In May, Weber launched her own business in Beijing as a content creator, focusing on making videos that promote cultural exchanges.

"The Belt and Road Initiative has increased trade flows between Germany and China, as well as people-to-people exchanges," she said.

Kravtsov, with a bachelor's degree in Asian and African studies, perceives the significant impact

of the BRI on enhancing trade relationships among the involved nations.

"These trade relations have changed the way the world is structured," he said, explaining that he has observed a notable shift from traditional trade partnerships among Western nations to a more diversified landscape in recent times.

Kravtsov also noticed that China has been organizing various intercultural events and programs in recent years. "These activities encourage global youth to visit China in person and see with their own eyes how China has developed and the benefits it can bring to the world," he said.

## Financing: AGTF benefits all sectors, showcases growing bilateral ties

From page 1

This includes no conditions attached to the loans and operating within AfDB's policies and procedures, allowing open contracts to suitable international bidders to take on large-scale projects, and creating a space for transparency and opportunity for all stakeholders.

So is the AGTF a success story for China-Africa relations? Should the AGTF be replenished this year and by how much? And what type of projects has the AGTF financed over the last 10 years and what kind of impact has it had on different countries? Let's dive into two key examples.

The first instance is in Nigeria. The AfDB has played a vital role in revitalizing agriculture in Africa through one of the bank's High Five Priority Areas — Feed Africa — which focuses on 18 priority commodities across the five core agro-ecological zones in the continent. The bank works with African governments and the private sector in 11 African countries to create special agro-industrial processing zones that transform

rural areas into dynamic economic zones to catapult economic transformation in the continent through value addition, market access, and increased private sector investment.

Nigeria is one of those countries that is currently in Phase I of implementing SAPZs that will be implemented between 2022 and 2028.

This program, spanning seven states across Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory is estimated to cost \$538.05 million in its first phase, with a loan from AfDB of \$160 million and an AGTF loan of \$50 million. The program will support the development of agro-industrial hubs, enhance agricultural value chains, increase job creation, and support agro-industrial policy and development. In just the first phase, a minimum of 400,000 jobs and up to 1.6 million indirect jobs can be created. The project, which is currently being implemented by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development, can put the country a step further in its structural transformation and economic growth agenda.

The second example is Rwanda.

**The Africa Growing Together Fund is a testament to not only the growing partnership between China and the AfDB, but also the value of China as a creditor.**

According to a recent analysis by UNICEF, 28 percent of Rwandan households lack access to basic sanitation (2022 consensus), and 44 percent of households lack access to basic water supplies (2019-20 Demographic and Health Survey). The Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation Program is currently being implemented in the capital Kigali and seven satellite cities to support infrastructure investment and institutional capacity development in the urban water and sanitation sector to promote adequate, reliable, and sustainable water supply and sanitation services. In Phase I, this program will

receive a loan of \$199.5 million from the bank and another \$50 million from AGTF with a contribution from the Rwandan government of \$24.7 million.

The program is scheduled for five years from 2024 to 2029, with the first phase of the project focused on infrastructure refurbishment. Through the program, 1.1 million people will get improved water supply services and almost 475,000 people will get improved sanitation services, with the main beneficiaries being business owners and small-scale agricultural industries.

The AGTF projects in Nigeria and Rwanda are only the tip of the iceberg. Across the 52 AGTF projects, African governments, private sector actors, and communities both small and large have benefited tremendously from the financing. As such, the AGTF is an important model for African countries and institutions for three key reasons.

First, the AGTF is an innovative financing model. The success of the AGTF as the first-of-a-kind cofinancing model between an African multilateral institution and a creditor

has demonstrated the transformative impact that partnerships such as that between AfDB and PBOC can have on African growth and development. The AGTF model can be replicated with other AfDB members or with other African multilateral institutions more broadly.

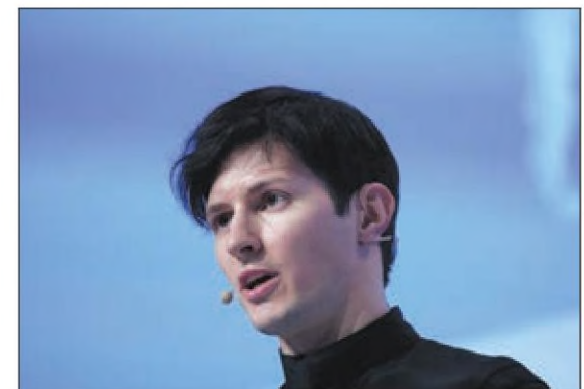
Second, the AGTF is a testament to not only the growing partnership between China and the AfDB, but also the value of China as a creditor. The AGTF, through its flexible bidding process and procedures, as well as the lack of conditionalities attached to its lending has made it easier for the bank to target countries and projects where financing is needed the most. At Development Reimagined, an African-led international development consultancy, we argue for financing to be channeled through African institutions, such as AfDB, which have a stellar reputation for delivering great results across the continent. Overall, the AGTF by channeling financing through the AfDB, has become a localized mechanism and has had a greater impact on the continent.

Third, the AGTF provides financ-

ing not only to governments but also to the private sector. Far too often, the private sector gets overlooked when designing large-scale projects. However, with the right incentives and opportunities, commercial investors can transform a country's economic landscape. Recent data from AfDB shows that till 2024, approximately \$400 million has been utilized for the private sector.

With the AGTF expected to be replenished this year, we would hope to see the \$2 billion replenishment as a minimum. Given the AGTF's success, expanding the replenishment beyond \$2 billion will allow for more vital projects, such as those in Rwanda and Nigeria, to be financed on the continent. It would also be great to see the AGTF financing cross-border regional projects and linking the work of AGTF with larger initiatives including the African Continental Free Trade Area and working more closely with other African multilateral institutions including Afreximbank and the African Finance Corporation.

The author is Development Finance Advisor at Development Reimagined. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



In this file photo, Pavel Durov, chief executive officer of Telegram, speaks during a keynote session at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, on Feb. 23, 2016. CHRIS RATCLIFFE / VIA GETTY IMAGES

# Xizang prospering from heritage protection

People's livelihood in autonomous region boosted by high-quality, sustainable development efforts



A view of Potala Palace from Lhasa's Nanshan Park, where a massive greening project is taking place. JIANG FAN / XINHUA

By YUAN SHENGGAO

In Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, the area's pristine natural environment and brilliant culture are precious assets that the locals are truly proud of.

In recent years, Xizang has made further efforts in protecting the local environment and culture, aiming to make these assets more conducive to balanced, high-quality and sustainable socioeconomic development.

The "peach blossom village" of Kala in Nyingchi, the Yani wetland at the confluence of Yarlung Zangbo and Nyangchu rivers, the South and North Mountains in Lhasa and Lhokha, and the millennia-old street of Barkor in Lhasa are all prime examples of how the protection and development of ecological and cultural assets can bring visible benefits to local residents and enrich their sense of happiness, gain and security.

## Peach blossom village

In the city of Nyingchi, nestling in the Nyangchu River valley, Kala village is now a famed destination among tourists for its reputation as the "Jiangnan of the snowy region".

Jiangnan is a reference to the prosperous regions south of the Yangtze River.

More than 1,200 wild peach trees make up 18 hectares of peach blossom groves in Kala. When spring arrives, the trees bloom one after another, covering the mountainside in a shade of rosy pink. The picturesque spring scenery of this snowy region has earned Kala the title of Xizang's "peach blossom village".

The village is also the host of Nyingchi's peach blossom tourism and culture festival. But about two decades ago, none of the locals realized the peach trees and flowers could be a resource for developing tourism and generating revenue.

"The peach trees have been here for hundreds of years and I was told the oldest one is more than 600 years old," said Dawa Gyaltzen, a local resident. "In my childhood, though, people never associated them with revenue."

But tourists from the rest of the country visited Kala by chance and were immediately enchanted by the beautiful blossoms, the scenery of the village and its vicinity, said Penpa, head of the village. He added that their word of mouth brought in an increasing number of visitors in the years to come.

"Kala first hosted the peach blossom festival back in 2002," Penpa recalled. "At that time, pigs and cattle still roamed freely around the village, residents would set up stalls in a chaotic fashion, and the village looked quite rundown. For 10 years, the festival didn't create any practical benefit."

In 2014, Kala moved to build its brand as a "peach blossom village" and began renovations to improve the appearance of the village, according to Penpa.

It promoted afforestation and greening, renovated courtyards, paved roads, and put plumbing and wiring underground.

When the transformation was complete, tourists began to flock to the village. Revenue from tourism grew year upon year, allowing residents to move toward prosperity by relying on the tourism industry.

In recent years, Kala began to further expand its tourism industry by developing its "tourism-plus" growth model, Penpa said.

It has built farms for sightseeing and fruit-picking, upgraded local farm stays, developed cultivation bases for other species of flowers, created programs for experiencing local customs, and introduced innovative products related to local culture while also developing specialty food made with peach blossoms.

In seeing the expanding tourism industry and growing revenue, residents have come to realize a good ecological environment is crucial for local growth, according to Nyima Dorje, another village official. "Their enthusiasm for promoting environmental conservation and protecting the ecosystem has become stronger than ever," he said.

Since 2021, Kala has received more than 285,000 tourist visits, garnering a total tourism revenue of more than 9.33 million yuan (\$1.31 million). "The revenue means an additional income of nearly 200,000 yuan to each household on average," Nyima Dorje said.



From left: Yani National Wetland Park is one of the largest wetland reserves in Nyingchi city. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY Tourists wearing traditional Tibetan clothes take pictures at Lhasa's Barkor Street. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

The official said the blooming period of peach trees is about one month. "So we have created more channels for increasing villagers' incomes, like founding an entity for transportation, and organizing residents to offer labor service for the Sichuan-Xizang Railway that is under construction," Nyima Dorje said.

Local statistics show that the total income of Kala village reached 13.02 million yuan in 2023, which translates to 36,700 yuan in terms of per capita disposable income.

**Yani wetland**  
Not far from Kala village is the confluence of the Nyangchu and Yarlung Zangbo rivers. The area is home to one of the largest wetland reserves in Nyingchi — Yani National Wetland Park.

Covering a total area of 6,973 hectares, the wetland park boasts rich biodiversity, with more than 200 species of wild animals, according to Jiang Wentao, an official at the Dragyib district bureau of forest and grassland in Nyingchi, an institution responsible for the management of the park.

He said things were different a decade ago. "The area was sparsely vegetated. It became dusty on windy days," he recalled.

The official said changes began to happen in 2009 when Yani National Wetland Park started trial operation, and the critical turning point came in 2016 when a wetland restoration program was launched by the administration center of the park.

"Since 2016, a total of 154 million yuan has been invested in ecological recovery, infrastructure construction and research," Jiang said. "We have established a national-level wetland ecosystem monitoring station here and hired 45 locals as wetland patrollers."

Sangye Phuntsok is one of the patrollers. He inspects the wetlands by riding a motorcycle and walking every day. "I patrol around the park three to four times a day, from 9 am to 8 pm," Sangye Phuntsok said.

He said he is happy to have the job, which offers him a stable stream of revenue.

"I'm also glad to see the environment improve at the wetland park, which is becoming a habitat for more animals," he added.

“We are trying to build Yani National Wetland Park into a shared green space that integrates wetland conservation, ecological improvement, leisurely sightseeing, science popularization and environmental education, and to unleash the green development potential.”

**Tsering Drolma**, head of the administration center of Yani National Wetland Park



Barkor is the oldest street in Lhasa. DAWA LHAMO / CHINA DAILY

Tsering Drolma, head of the administration center of Yani National Wetland Park, said the park is bringing both environmental and economic benefits to the locals.

The improved environment has attracted flocks of birds to the park, which has become an ideal site to observe rare bird species. As a result, tourists also arrived in their hordes. "The park receives hundreds of thousands of tourists every year, bringing in millions of yuan in tourism revenue," the official said.

She added that by profiting from tourism by selling farm produce or running rural inns, the local residents have become staunch advocates for wetland protection.

"We are trying to build Yani National Wetland Park into a shared green space that integrates wetland conservation, ecological improvement, leisurely sightseeing, science popularization and environmental education, and to unleash the green development potential," Tsering Drolma said.

## Afforestation project

Several hundreds of kilometers away from Nyingchi and on the upper reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, a massive afforestation project is underway in Lhasa and its neighboring Lhokha city, bringing unexpected joy to local residents.

More people in Lhasa, the capital city of Xizang, are enjoying tours of Nanshan Park. They like to stand on the hilltops and have a view of the Potala Palace and the city, under the blue sky dotted with white clouds.

Chodron, a Lhasa resident, said a trip to the park can give people a clear picture of how the environment has improved in Lhasa and its neighboring areas in recent years.

"Over two years, the once barren mountains are now cloaked in lush greenery and the overall appearance of Lhasa has improved a lot," Chodron said. "While there are more trees in the mountains and gullies, there is more oxygen and the air is more humid," she said.

What makes this change possible is Xizang's efforts to afforest its land in recent years, especially the project in the South and North Mountains in Lhasa and Lhokha,

which was launched on a massive scale in 2021.

The South and North Mountains project — which is known as Nanbeishan Greening Project among locals — is Xizang's first large-scale tree-planting project implemented in the high-altitude mountainous areas.

Planting trees in Xizang, especially in high-altitude areas of more than 3,900 meters, is a challenging task, according to local officials.

Lhasa began its tentative efforts in greening mountains in 2012, with Nanshan Park, which stands at the southern side of the Lhasa River, as a pilot project.

Building on the success of the Nanshan Park tree planting, local officials are aiming for a higher goal — transforming this region into a place with a more livable environment by adding nearly 140,000 hectares of trees on the South and North Mountains in 10 years.

Wang Shangde, deputy chief of the Lhasa forestry and grassland bureau, said he is very optimistic about this greening project on high-altitude mountains because available statistics show a surprisingly high survival rate of trees planted in the past years.

"Statistics show that trees had been planted on an area of 26,000 hectares in Lhasa during 2022 and 2023, with a survival rate of above 85 percent," Wang said.

He explained that this is the result of local researchers' efforts in afforestation research.

"Afforestation research is a comprehensive project," Wang said. "It involves great efforts in breeding and selecting the right tree varieties, and analyzing the geological conditions, atmospheric temperature, soil humidity and amount of sunlight on plant growth."

Over the past decade, researchers have bred and selected dozens of tree varieties suitable for the region, used remote sensing technologies to analyze natural conditions and installed intelligent, water-conserving devices for irrigation, according to Wang.

Similar survival rates have also been reported in Lhokha city. Tsering Norbu, a local afforestation engineer, said the rate on the greening sites near the Gonggar Airport has reached 92 percent.

## New lease on life

While the Nanbeishan Greening Project is giving refreshed vitality to Lhasa, the city's oldest street of Barkor has also been given a new lease on life because of its flourishing tourism and booming commerce.

Surrounding the 1,300-year-old Jokhang Temple, Barkor Street has been one of the cultural and commercial hubs of Lhasa for many centuries. As its name suggests — Barkor in Tibetan language means "central rings" — Barkor is a labyrinth of 35 streets circling the famed Buddhist monastery in the city.

Inside Jokhang, there are many cultural relics telling the long history of the temple. One of them is a statue of the Sakyamuni Buddha, which was brought to Xizang — known as Tibet in the past — by the famed Tang Dynasty (618-907) Princess Wencheng. Wencheng arrived in Lhasa for a historic marriage with the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. In addition to the temple, another significant historical monument in the area is a stone stele marking the alliance between the Tang Dynasty and the Kingdom of Tibet, which was built in 828.

In the center of Lhasa, Barkor is home to 56 ancient residential courtyards featuring Tibetan-style buildings.

With a wealth of historical assets, Barkor has developed into a popular destination for tourists, thanks to the local authorities' efforts in protecting local cultural heritage.

Old as it is, Barkor features openness and inclusiveness nowadays, embracing tourists and commerce from all over the world.

It is not just a holy ritual route for pilgrims, it also has a reputation as a paradise for tourists, where delicate Tibetan foods and commodities are served at its 4,000-plus dining and shopping outlets.

On the street, visitors can have easy access to both local handmade commodities and goods from the rest of the country and the world. Gradually, Barkor has been widely accepted as the most vibrant area in Lhasa or even Xizang.



Peach trees bloom in Kala in spring, making the village a major attraction in Nyingchi. PENG HUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

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## BUSINESS

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# Central-local fiscal ties in the spotlight

Experts focus attention on tax reform, well-defined powers and resources

By LIU ZIZHENG and ZHOU LANXU

China is expected to make more efforts to optimize the fiscal relationship between the central and local governments, thereby strengthening fiscal sustainability while ensuring macroeconomic adjustment capability, to further unleash development potential of the Chinese economy, experts and a senior government official said.

In an article published in People's Daily on Tuesday, Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, said it is a key fiscal and tax reform task for China to establish a fiscal relationship between the central and local governments that features well-defined powers and responsibilities and the appropriate allocation of resources, with an optimum balance between regions.

Han said China needs to clearly delineate the fiscal powers and responsibilities between the central and local governments. The central government will hold more fiscal powers as appropriate and raise the proportion of central government expenditure accordingly.

Meanwhile, efforts will be made to optimize division of revenue between the central and local governments. Specifically, China will place more fiscal resources at the disposal of local governments, by expanding the sources of tax revenue at the local level and grant greater authority for tax management to local governments as appropriate.

Also, the country will step up the improvement of its transfer payment system by overhauling special transfer payments and increasing the scale of general transfer payments.

"These will help ensure that the fiscal resources of prefecture and county-level governments are commensurate with their powers," said Han.

Previously, China had outlined a slew of measures to deepen fiscal and tax system reforms in the resolution that was adopted during the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July. Han's article meant to delve into the spirit of those fiscal and tax reform measures.

In another development, the Ministry of Finance and five other government departments jointly issued trial measures for municipal infrastructure and asset management on Monday, which emphasized that illegal and irregular borrowing for municipal infrastructure and assets that have no or insufficient income must be prohibited, and that hidden debts must not be increased.

Zhu Guangyao, former vice-minister of finance, said in an earlier interview that China is moving in the right direction to solve problems underpinning financial strains in some regions, and it is of great significance for the country to carry out necessary measures to achieve such goals.

Zhu said the central government has to take on more responsibility, while reducing some responsibility on local governments by transferring more fiscal resources to them.

Meanwhile, Zhu noted that the scale of financial transfer payments in China exceeded 10 trillion yuan (\$1.4 trillion) last year, or about half of China's fiscal revenue.

Such a large amount of transfer payments necessitate reforms to increase direct financial strength for local governments while increasing central government responsibility accordingly, said Zhu.

Zhu also stressed the significant role that economic growth plays in improving financial conditions of local governments.

Yang Zhiyong, director of the Center for Public Finance and Taxation Research, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the third plenary session highlighted that there are many measures to place more fiscal resources at the disposal of local governments, like expanding the sources of tax revenue at the local level.

Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities, said the outlined reform measures will help alleviate the financial difficulties currently faced by most local governments.

Luo said he expects the reforms to increase tax sources for local governments and thereby strengthen their fiscal sustainability.

Contact the writers at liuzizheng@chinadaily.com.cn



A Boeing aircraft model on display during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Boeing forecast: China air travel market set to be largest by 2043

By ZHU WENQIAN zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

China's domestic air travel market will surpass that of the United States to become the world's largest by 2043. It will also more than double its current commercial airplane fleet size, fueled by ever-growing demand, US aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co said in a forecast.

As China's economy and air traffic continue to grow, its commercial fleet size will grow by 4.1 percent annually over the next two decades to 9,740 jets by 2043, and more than half of the new deliveries will be used to meet growing demand, according to Boeing's latest Commercial Market Outlook.

Through 2043, China's annual passenger traffic growth of 5.9 percent will exceed the global average of 4.7 percent. This would mean China is set to witness the world's largest traffic flow. The country's air passenger volumes will get a boost as airlines grow their flight networks by connecting major hubs with smaller cities, Boeing said in Beijing on Tuesday.

China's fundamentals for sustained development of its air travel market remain robust, supported

by a current population of 1.4 billion, and more than 200 million middle-income families by 2043, Boeing said.

"China's economy has recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and grown steadily, including growth in personal consumption and industrial production," said Darren Hulst, Boeing's vice-president of commercial marketing.

"The country's commercial aviation market for passengers and cargo continues to expand, with airlines building their in-country networks. As this forecast shows, China's airlines will see strong demand, requiring further growth of their modern fuel-efficient fleets," Hulst said.

He said that in the past 20 years, China's civil aviation market achieved higher-than-expected growth. This year, the commercial fleet size of China accounted for 15 percent of the total globally, behind the US (27 percent). Back in 2004, China's fleet size accounted for 5 percent of the global market.

China will require 6,720 single-aisle aircraft through 2043, accounting for more than three-quarters of the total deliveries. Also, the country will have the world's largest wide-body fleet to support the growth of

international routes, with demand for 1,575 new wide-body airplanes, Boeing said.

Through 2043, Chinese carriers will generate demand for \$780 billion worth of aviation services, including digital solutions, maintenance and modifications. The country will need to hire and train nearly 430,000 new aviation personnel, including new pilots, maintenance technicians and cabin crew members.

In addition, China will need 585 dedicated and converted freighters over the next two decades, nearly tripling the current size, with demand stimulated by its booming e-commerce sector, Boeing projected.

China's domestic air travel market is steadily picking up. In July, some 69 million trips were handled, up 10.8 percent year-on-year, a record high, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

On Wednesday evening, domestic aircraft manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp of China, or COMAC, will deliver one plane each of its single-aisle C919 model to State-owned carriers Air China and China Southern Airlines. The C919's first customer, China Eastern Airlines, currently operates seven C919 jets on multiple domestic routes.

### Briefly

#### Autonomous vehicle test licenses issued

To date, Chinese public security authorities have issued a total of 16,000 test licenses for autonomous vehicles, the Ministry of Public Security announced on Tuesday. At a news conference in Beijing, the ministry also revealed that 32,000 kilometers of thoroughfares nationwide

have been opened for autonomous vehicle testing.

#### Renminbi weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 110 pips to 7.1249 against the US dollar on Tuesday, said the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot for-

ign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the greenback is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Exporters getting in Christmas spirit

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

With soaring sea freight costs impacting global trade this year, Chinese exporters have been rushing to ship Christmas-themed products to overseas buyers, leading to an earlier-than-usual sendoff of holiday-related goods.

Exporters said that the growing shipping costs between China and Europe, as well as China and the United States, have forced Chinese manufacturers to adjust their timelines. Many companies have sped up their production schedules and secured container space to ensure timely shipments of Christmas gifts and other items overseas.

Due to ongoing tensions in the Red Sea region and other geopolitical uncertainties, the spot price for a 40-foot container setting sail from Qingdao in East China's Shandong province or Shanghai — to Rotterdam in the Netherlands — was around \$8,000 in the first half of July, soaring 100 percent compared to mid-May, said the Shanghai Shipping Exchange.

Ningbo, Zhejiang province, another major trade hub in East China, saw exports of holiday-related products grow 10 percent to 790 million yuan (\$111 million) in the first seven months. Meanwhile, East China's Jiangsu province exported a total of 930 million yuan worth of such goods, soaring 33.9 percent on a yearly basis, statistics from Ningbo Customs and Nanjing Customs showed.

Christmas products encompass a wide range of festive items that are popular during the holiday season. These include Christmas decorations like artificial trees, ornaments and lights, as well as figurines of Santa, reindeer and snowmen. They also cover gifts, Christmas cards, specialty food items and holiday-themed apparel such as sweaters and Santa hats.

Rather than waiting to ship its products in large bulk volume to various foreign markets during the August-September period, Nanjing Zhongmao Craftwork Gift Co, a Nanjing, Jiangsu-based company specializing in making ceramic dolls and Christmas gifts, had

already shipped 10 twenty-foot equivalent units to clients in the US, South Africa and Australia in July.

"The multifunctional Santa Claus and angel products we have developed, featuring electric, fiber optic and sound elements, are high in quality and competitively priced. We have built a stable customer base in the US," said Xie Hongyan, the company's head of logistics unit.

Ningbo Flyingking Import and Export Co, a Ningbo-based manufacturer of Christmas decor, reindeer and promotional items, shipped 7 million yuan worth of Christmas products to overseas markets in July. The export value of these items is expected to exceed 10 million yuan on a monthly basis in both August and September.

"In addition to seizing stable market share in traditional markets like the United Kingdom, Germany and the US, we have gained orders placed by new customers in Ireland this year," said Pan Danqun, the company's general manager, adding that Ningbo Flyingking's export value reached 46.05 million



Customs officials check Christmas-themed products at a factory showroom in Ningbo, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

yuan during the January-July period, jumping 40.23 percent year-on-year.

The surge in shipments of Christmas products involves not only steady overseas expansion of traditional products, but also ongoing efforts by innovative companies. Longjing Cultural and Creative (Jiangsu) Co, a Nantong, Jiangsu-

based sticker maker, has exported its products to 33 countries, including Canada, the US and New Zealand.

"We have been preparing stock for Christmas-themed stickers since April. In the past two months, the delivery schedule has been quite tight, with shipments going out every week," said Yu Lipeng, a sales manager at the company.

## SGS bond to lift yuan's global profile

By ZHOU LANXU zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

A renminbi-denominated bond that will fund sustainability-linked, green and social activities, has been listed in Frankfurt Stock Exchange, Germany, marking the latest step in boosting the global presence of the Chinese currency.

Bank of China, the issuer, said the SGS bond has received favorable responses from global investors. According to Xinhua News Agency, this is the first listing of a renminbi-denominated SGS bond.

Experts said the bond's successful issuance reflects renminbi-denominated assets' wide appeal among global investors and the potential for China to further internationalize its currency, also known as the yuan, by advancing international green finance cooperation and innovation.

The bond, listed in Frankfurt on Monday, was issued through BOC's Frankfurt branch on Aug 13.

With an issuance size of 2.5 billion yuan (\$351 million) and a two-year tenor, the bond has a framework that adheres to latest market standards, ensuring that the funds raised are directed toward qualified SGS projects that cover a variety of loans for environmental, social and governance (ESG) projects.

ESG loans are special loans that encourage businesses to be on the right side of the environment, society and corporate governance by tying the loan terms to these best practices.

"The bond has offered international investors a new avenue to support ESG development," BOC, one of the largest banks in China, said in a statement.

The bond issuance has further promoted BOC's offshore renminbi business in Frankfurt and enhanced its participation in ESG financial innovation, it added.

According to a resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July, efforts should be made to steadily and prudently advance the internationalization of the renminbi and develop offshore renminbi markets, while vowing to actively develop green finance.

Financial experts have pointed to green finance cooperation as the potential driver for renminbi internationalization, as China has one of the world's biggest green bond and credit markets.

China is collaborating with the European Union and Singapore to develop a new version of the Common Ground Taxonomy, which is a list of economic activities that are recognized both by China's and EU's green standards and which make it easier for borrowers from both jurisdictions to access green funding in each other's capital markets.

The new version, when unveiled, will upgrade the existing bilateral cooperation initiative into a multi-lateral project and further boost international green capital flows, said Ma Jun, president of the Institute of Finance and Sustainability.

Efforts will be made to facilitate foreign investment in Chinese green bonds, the country's central bank said in a guideline to support regional green development on Tuesday.

"We will guide financial institutions and enterprises in the Yangtze River Economic Belt to issue green bonds in accordance with domestic and international standards, and facilitate international capital investment in China's low-carbon transformation," the central bank said.

Huang Yiping, dean of Peking University's National School of Development, said China can outline a plan to provide commercial investments, low-cost funding and government aid to other developing economies to help them bridge a funding gap in achieving their green transition.

The plan will be a win-win as it will facilitate the global pursuit of carbon neutrality while helping bolster China's new energy exports and promote the internationalization of both Chinese financial institutions as well as the renminbi, Huang added.

Liu Zihua contributed to this story.

# BUSINESS

## Investments in energy sectors set to increase

Improving technology, equipment upgrades highlighted in NDRC plan

By LIU YUKUN  
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

China will extensively upgrade equipment and improve technologies in key energy sectors with a target to increase investments by 25 percent by 2027 compared to 2023 levels, according to a document issued recently by the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration.

The plan targets seven areas for transformation, including thermal power, electricity transmission and distribution, wind power and photovoltaics.

These upgrades will optimize the energy industry's structure, facilitate the technological evolution of traditional sectors and foster the growth of emerging energy industries, leading to a shift from "quantity" to "quality" development, said Wang Weiquan, deputy secretary-general of the renewable energy committee of the China Energy Research Society.

Meanwhile, the recycling of outdated equipment will also improve resource efficiency, reduce waste and support the circular economy.

For thermal power, the focus will be on continuing energy-saving renovations and heating facility modifications. The plan aims to speed up the digital and intelligent upgrade of thermal power plants, emphasizing smart sensing, diagnostics, control and operation.

In transmission and distribution, there will be a push to renovate old substations and power transmission lines, and replace outdated transformers and high-voltage switches to improve grid safety.

State Grid Corp of China has pledged an investment of over 600 billion yuan (\$84 billion) in grid upgrades this year, an increase of 71.1 billion yuan from last year. This funding is directed mainly toward ultrahigh voltage direct current projects, enhancing connections between county and main grids, and advancing digital and intelligent grid systems. China Southern Power Grid also said it would invest 195.3 billion yuan from 2024 to 2027, including 40.4 billion yuan this year.

Significant updates are also planned for wind power and photovoltaics. Wind farms older than 15 years or with turbines smaller

than 1.5 megawatts each are encouraged to undergo upgrades.

Qin Haiyan, secretary-general of the Chinese Wind Energy Association, said these changes could generate over 3 trillion yuan in output value from 2025 to 2030.

"Upgrading older equipment with advanced technology will enhance the efficiency of wind and solar power generators. Improvements in grid and transmission infrastructure will increase the grid's capacity to integrate power generated from new energy sources and support China's carbon goals," Qin said.

He said China has been developing wind power over the past 10 to 20 years. Many turbines were designed with a life span of 20 years, so those built around 2003 or 2005 have already reached the end of their service life and are due for replacement.

"Although some of these equipment have not yet reached a 20-year life span, their performance is equivalent to turbines from a decade ago, while technological advancements over the past 10 years have drastically improved generation efficiency and turbine technology."

Zhou Libo, deputy secretary-general of the electric transportation and energy storage branch of the China Electricity Council, said the sector's shift from scale to quality is timely, as there are over 10 million new energy vehicle charging facilities already in place.

Investment in the construction and upgrade of integrated energy stations, photovoltaic-storage-charging stations and supercharging stations is expected to grow, with additional substantial investments in updating outdated charging stations and adopting new technologies like automatic and vehicle-to-grid interactive charging, Zhou said.

"The construction and upgrade of integrated energy stations, photovoltaic-storage-charging stations and supercharging stations will drive investments. It is estimated that the upgrade of high-power charging equipment alone will attract investments exceeding 100 billion yuan, with additional investments for upgrading outdated charging stations and damaged piles. Investments in new technologies such as automatic charging and vehicle-to-grid interaction also are expected to be substantial," Zhou added.

## Power mo(o)ve



Employees of State Grid Ningxia Electric Power Co check power equipment at the Yanghe Cattle Raising Base in Longde county in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, which is part of the SOE's efforts to support the local cattle business. LIU HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## China makes rapid progress in drilling rig tech

By LIU MINGTAI  
and HAN JUNHONG in Changchun,  
and ZHENG CAIXIONG  
in Guangzhou

China's homegrown drilling rig technology is making important breakthroughs in excavating deep oil and gas resources, thanks to increased and innovative cooperation between research institutes and businesses.

For example, Crust 1, a land-based drilling rig jointly developed by Jilin University and Sichuan Honghua Petroleum Equipment Co Ltd, is

being used to excavate an 8,795-meter-deep oil and gas well in the Taklimakan Desert in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Supported by the rig, which has a drilling capacity of more than 10,000 meters deep, drilling work is expected to be completed in the following days, said Fan Yueshui, a staff member of Jilin University who is part of the project.

The equipment has played a key role in boosting efficiency, as "drilling work of 8,000 meters is normally a difficult job", Fan said.



A humanoid smart robot works at an auto production facility in Ningbo, Zhejiang province. ZHENG XUEXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## More capital in digital field key to transformation

By FAN FEIFEI  
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

**\$2.86 trillion**

economic value that generative AI can further create in China by 2038, according to global consultancy Accenture

More companies in China will increase investments in digital technologies and drive continuous transformation through advanced technologies led by artificial intelligence, as generative AI can unlock an additional \$2.86 trillion in economic value in China by 2038, according to a new report released by global consultancy Accenture.

The report found that nearly 60 percent of surveyed Chinese companies intend to invest more in digital transformation projects, up from 53 percent last year. Manufacturing, finance and supply chain were identified as the top three areas with the highest potential for AI-led reinvention.

The study said only 15 percent of polled Chinese firms have dedicated AI teams, and 32 percent said they are trying to redesign job roles to better adopt technologies such as generative AI — which is below the global average of 46 percent.

It noted that only 4 percent of Chinese companies are adopting an enterprise-wide approach focused on constantly evolving over the long term to drive sustainable growth. While this represents a significant increase from 2 percent last year, it

is still lower than the global average of 9 percent.

The study also found that nearly 40 percent of Chinese executives report unprecedented changes in their operating environments, which is far higher than the global average of 12 percent. Compared with their global peers, Chinese executives feel less prepared to navigate this challenging and changing business environment.

This is the seventh consecutive year that Accenture has traced the digital transformation journeys of Chinese companies. The study surveyed 450 companies in eight key sectors, namely high-tech manufacturing, automotive and engineering machinery, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, consumer goods, traditional retail, chemicals and building materials, natural resources and utilities.

Accenture also showed that generative AI can unlock an additional \$2.86 trillion in economic value in China by 2038, provided Chinese

companies take a holistic and people-centric approach to deploying the technology.

"As the pace of technological change accelerates, its impact on business and society continues to increase. Harnessing the power of technologies at higher level is key to the continuous transformation," said Samantha Zhu, chairwoman of Accenture Greater China.

Zhu said Chinese companies, with their focus redirected toward innovation and growth, are increasingly turning to digital investment in key businesses and functions, and only a few have flexible and robust technological and organizational strategies in place.

Yu Yi, technology lead at Accenture Greater China, said as companies strive to stay ahead and adapt to fast-changing markets, they are increasingly turning to AI to fuel their innovation efforts, adding the proportion of Chinese companies that boost investment and application of AI is rising dramatically.

Yu said it is noteworthy that Chinese enterprises have accelerated digital transformation in the process of their globalization push, while the application of generative AI tech in Chinese enterprises' efforts to expand their presence in overseas markets is also more obvious.

The report suggested enterprises should adopt a holistic approach that aligns AI initiatives with business objectives and build a robust digital core essential for leveraging AI effectively and driving business transformation, as well as place people at the center of their transformation strategies.

Moreover, enterprises should establish clear principles for responsible AI use — including fairness, transparency, accountability and data privacy — with robust controls to mitigate risks, such as potential biases, security vulnerabilities and compliance issues, it added.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, underscored the significance of developing digital technologies represented by AI and digital twins, which will inject fresh impetus into the country's economic growth and speed up digital and intelligent upgrades in enterprises.

Noting that some Chinese enterprises are facing mounting difficulties in the process of digital transformation, such as budgetary shortfalls and inadequate skill training, Xiang said these companies should devise long-term plans for digital transformation and continuously pour money into this field.

## Lin-gang Special Area sees standout trade growth

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
wang\_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

Over the past five years, Shanghai's Lin-gang Special Area has seen its offshore trade grow at an annual rate of 128.9 percent and its cross-border renminbi settlement volume surge 136.3 percent per year, thanks to its adamant adherence to opening-up and innovation, according to official sources.

While celebrating its fifth anniversary in August, Lin-gang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone announced it had achieved high-speed development with an average GDP growth of 19.8 percent per year, and its combined industrial output value of enterprises with annual revenue of 20 million yuan (\$2.81 million) or above rose 34.6 percent on average per year, said Chen Jinshan, director of the Lin-gang Special Area Administration, during a news conference on Tuesday.

Chen said Lin-gang's accomplishments include a number of institu-

tional innovations such as enhancing its complete industrial system and becoming an ideal place for young career development, which are attributable to Shanghai's efforts to boost high level opening-up.

The special area, situated in southeast Shanghai — with Pudong International Airport to its north and Yangshan Port to its south — has seen the number of high-tech enterprises expand from 254 to 1,493 in five years, and the total value of its four major industries, which are integrated circuits, artificial intelligence, biomedicine and civil aviation, surge at an annual rate of 34.1 percent. In addition, about 100,000 talented staff members have settled in the area, up 97 percent per year, Chen said.

Since its launch on Aug 20, 2019, the special area unveiled a series of benchmark innovations under strong support from the municipal government, which rapidly and effectively helped solve challenges and difficulties during the area's development, and greatly promoted

the area's economic growth, said Chen Yanfeng, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission.

Chen said this year's municipal-level supportive measures consist of 16 items in five categories — to better utilize global high-end and innovative resources, build a complete scientific and technological innovation system covering the complete industrial chain, form key industries with global competitiveness, further explore high-level opening-up and improve mechanisms including optimizing the business environment and strengthening the rule of law.

"Looking forward, Shanghai will continue to support Lin-gang Special Area's explorations both in mechanism and practice, so as to make the special area a strong growth driver of the city's economic development," Chen added.

"Closely connected to Shanghai's international financial center development, the Lin-gang Special Area has launched a series of pio-

neering initiatives and opening-up measures over the past five years, and its achievements include the launch of a 20 billion yuan tech innovation fund," said Tao Changsheng, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Financial Regulatory Bureau.

"To better support the special area's high-standard opening-up in the financial area, the municipal government recently issued a 50-item implementation plan to speed up the area's financial sector high-standard opening-up and high-quality development," Tao said.

"The Lin-gang Special Area will firmly seize the great opportunities presented by the nation's further opening-up," said Chen Jinshan, director of the Lin-gang Special Area Administration.

"The area's further opening-up and innovation will be focused on high-level institutional innovation, advanced manufacturing, digital economic industry and the constant improvement of urban functions," Chen said.

"The R&D team managed to overcome major technical challenges in deep drilling and made breakthroughs in technologies such as high-speed fully hydraulic top-drive drilling," he said.

Since May 2019, Crust 1 has completed oil and gas drilling projects of seven wells with depths exceeding 8,000 meters each in the Taklimakan Desert. All of these wells have begun operations.

Liu said the development and application of Crust 1 is a successful example of Jilin University's school-enterprise cooperation in industrial production, research and application.

Crust 1 is an important breakthrough in the independent capaci-

ty building of China's deep exploration program, providing high-tech means for the comprehensive implementation of subsequent national deep exploration projects and exploring the mysteries of the deep earth, Liu said.

"It will drive the scientific and technological progress of China's deep oil and gas resources and the geothermal resources exploration and development industry," he said.

Crust 1 has made China the third country to develop indigenous drilling capacity of more than 10,000 meters, he added.

Contact the writers at  
zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

## WORLD

## US agency apology for Asian scientists sought

Enforcement actions of China Initiative damaged researchers' trust, report says

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

The director of the US National Institutes of Health, or NIH, has acknowledged that the federal agency's actions to address the integrity of its funded research have created "a difficult climate" for Asian researchers "who may feel targeted and alienated".

"NIH greatly values our relationship with Asian researchers and recognizes their extraordinary contributions to advancing science," NIH Director Monica Bertagnolli said in a statement issued in mid-August.

"More broadly, NIH strives to promote a diverse and inclusive research community to deliver the best results for the American people."

Bertagnolli also mentioned a June investigation report by the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, which acknowledged that enforcement actions resulting from the China Initiative "have damaged trust between the US government and the academic research community".

The purported objective of the China Initiative, launched in 2018 by the US Justice Department under former US president Donald Trump and halted in 2022 by the administration of President Joe Biden, was to reduce economic espionage.

While the NIH's announcement was welcomed by Asian American researchers, some weren't satisfied and believed that the NIH — the primary agency of the US for biomedical and public health research

— should apologize for wrongly accusing many researchers who received its grants.

"NIH and the government should issue a formal apology to people who were wronged and suffered in both NIH inquiries and China Initiative espionage charges," an academic researcher who chose to use Frank as a pseudonym told China Daily.

"They acknowledged that some damage was done to Asian academic researchers. Why can't they take one step further and make apologies? Better yet, reinstate those innocents who lost their jobs in the process," Frank said.

He noted the case of Feng Tao, a former tenured professor at the University of Kansas and the first person charged under the China Initiative. Tao was fired by the university while fighting for his innocence in court. He was cleared on the last count in July.

Despite winning his court battle, Tao is still without a job and has incurred more than \$2 million in legal fees. "It would only be fair to give his job back," Frank said.

The sentiment was echoed by Yan Chen, an experimental economist at the University of Michigan.

"I am disappointed that Chinese American scientists whose labs were shut down for two or more years or forced into early retirement because of (NIH's) overzealous prosecution have not received any apology or compensation," Chen told Science magazine.

The June investigation report mentioned by Bertagnolli was produced by a subcommittee under the Homeland Security Academic

Partnership Council under the order of DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas last November to establish the best practice to counter "foreign malign influence" in higher education institutions.

As part of the findings, the report said the China Initiative brought several cases involving academic researchers, but few resulted in convictions.

One study found that cases related to the China Initiative had a 25 percent conviction rate compared with a 91 percent overall conviction rate at the Department of Justice.

## Chilling effect

The report said that although the China Initiative ended in 2022, "the increased scrutiny and perceived bias against Asian Americans has had a chilling effect on the research community".

It cited a national survey of more than 1,300 Chinese American faculty members, which found that 72 percent feel unsafe in the US, and 42 percent are fearful of conducting research.

The report also said that in May 2020, Trump issued Presidential Proclamation 10043, which continues under the Biden administration. It seeks to prevent visas from being issued to any graduate students or researchers from certain universities in China, which the US claimed have ties with the Chinese military.

Although the impact of the proclamation enforcement has been narrow, the government actions "raised additional anxiety for those traveling outside the US for academic conferences or to visit family around not knowing if they will be permitted to reenter", the report stated.

## Diplomat warns of 'hawkish forces' in Ukraine conflict

By ZHOU JIN  
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn



Li Hui

The international community is widely concerned over the further escalation and spillover of the conflict, and more countries believe the pressing task is to cool down the situation, he said.

Li also slammed "one particular country" for using the crisis to shift blame and fabricate a "China responsibility" theory. Using illegal and unilateral sanctions, that country is threatening other nations that have normal economic and trade ties with Russia, he said.

Li's fourth round of shuttle diplomacy followed a meeting between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Guangzhou, Guangdong province last month. It also happened at a time when the hope for a peaceful resolution of the protracted Ukraine crisis is dimming.

The envoy's previous three trips took him to several countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Poland, France and Turkey, as well as to the European Union headquarters in Brussels.

Speaking on why he chose Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia for his latest trip, the senior diplomat

underscored that these nations are representatives of the Global South and are important forces in promoting global peace and development.

The three countries share similar positions with China on the Ukraine crisis, he said, adding that they have maintained communication with both Moscow and Kyiv, upheld an objective and just position, and remained committed to the political settlement of the crisis through dialogue and negotiation.

China and Brazil jointly issued a six-point common understanding on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis in May, and Li expressed hope that more countries will extend their support to this common cause.

He encouraged more nations to create conditions and provide help for the two conflicting parties, in order to resume direct dialogue and negotiation. He called on various parties to focus on how to combine the peace efforts of all sides, and promote a fair and just solution.

Jian Junbo, deputy director of the Center for China-Europe Relations at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, said that China's mediation efforts followed the principle of impartiality, respected the common interests and adhered to the majority opinion within the international community.

## Bicycling amid ruins

A boy pushes a bicycle, loaded with aid boxes provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, past a collapsed building, with a concrete block bearing graffiti reading in Arabic "to passersby over our dreams, this is Gaza", along a street in central Gaza City on Tuesday amid the ongoing conflict in the Palestinian territory between Israel and Hamas. OMAR AL-QATTAA / AFP



## Rescue mission



Rescue teams work at the scene after an ice cave partially collapsed at the Breidamerkurjökull glacier in southeastern Iceland on Monday. The cave collapsed as a group of 23 tourists visited it along with a guide on Sunday. One tourist died and another was taken to hospital, police said. VIA AP

## US universities prepare for more protests over Gaza

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
in New York

belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

US universities and colleges across the country have revised their codes of conduct for students as the schools reopen in the wake of nationwide protests on campuses over the Israel-Hamas conflict.

At Columbia University in New York, where the protests began earlier this year with an encampment on the campus, changes, updates and revisions to rules are in the works, according to school officials, but the university hasn't yet released all the details.

Rule changes or new rules also are being implemented by the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California, the University of Denver, Indiana University, Harvard University, Barnard College (at Columbia University) and others.

University and college presidents and administrators have issued the stricter guidelines ahead of the one-year anniversary of Oct 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israel, in which more than 1,100 people were killed and over 200 taken hostage, according to Israel's Foreign Ministry.

Many educational institutions spent the summer talking to lawyers and staff and revising their policies. Some now require undergraduates to attend classes on free speech, antisemitism and hatred. Most of the schools haven't been explicit about the consequences students will face if they break the rules.

Kendall Easley, a spokesperson for Columbia University, told China Daily: "University leadership takes its responsibility for the safety and well-being of the entire university community seriously" and over the summer, the university had "learned lessons of the past academic year and were planning for the next one".

She added that they "seek to strengthen the skills and training in de-escalation techniques, expand the ability to manage a range of incidents while taking into account that Columbia doesn't have its own police force, as many other institutions have, and potentially reducing our reliance on the New York Police Department".

Katrina Armstrong, who was named Columbia's interim president after Minouche Shafik resigned on Aug 14, said in a letter that security changes will be released soon to provide guidance. A newly created Office

of Institutional Equity will handle any complaints of discrimination.

The school's new term starts Sept 3. Over the summer, Columbia students organized courthouse demonstrations to support those facing criminal charges from the protests.

Of the 40 students who were arrested or disciplined when the university called police to the campus on April 18, only two remain suspended, according to a US congressional panel, Reuters reported.

Of the 80 students arrested between April 29 and May 1, only five face interim suspension without access to the campus.

Mahmoud Khalil, a student negotiator for the main protest movement — Columbia University's Apartheid Divest — said that "students will continue their activism and actions until Columbia divests from Israeli apartheid".

Amid the rule changes, the American Association of University Professors said that colleges have "hastily enacted overly restrictive policies", arguing that they "impose severe limits on speech and assembly that discourage or shut down freedom of expression".

The updated guidelines for students come after three Ivy league presidents resigned over their disastrous congressional hearings on antisemitism on campus, where they were roundly criticized by Republican lawmakers. Two others also left their posts.

The University of Pennsylvania, whose president, Liz Magill, resigned last December, has installed temporary standards that require students to get approval two weeks before holding any event in a public space. It has banned encampments and demonstrations.

At the University of Denver, encampments of any kind are banned. Indiana University students must gain permission before they hang signs from buildings and flagpoles. Protesters aren't allowed to use semipermanent or permanent paint, markers or stickers on lampposts and signs.

When Indiana students erected an encampment on the campus' Dunn Meadow in the spring, fights broke out, and 57 people were arrested. Most weren't charged.

On the West Coast, Michael Drake, the president of the University of California (UC), asked chancellors at all

10 campuses to strictly enforce rules against protests and encampments.

Drake wrote in a letter to the school: "Clear communication and consistent application of policies and laws are key to achieving the delicate but essential balance between free speech rights and the need to protect the safety of our community and maintain critical university operations."

Universities have been under pressure to update rules after investigations by Congress and by the US Department of Education.

Some colleges face lawsuits from people who accuse them of mishandling claims of antisemitism or anti-Muslim bias. Some Jewish students and staff said they felt unsafe when encampments were erected, and buildings were occupied by pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

UC has been hit with an injunction by a judge that stops it from allowing pro-Palestinian protesters from blocking Jewish students from gaining access to campus buildings. The UCLA campus was the scene of fierce clashes between protesters and police in April.

At California State University, Chancellor Mildred Garcia and 23 campus leaders warned students in a letter that campuses "must maintain an environment where its work can be conducted without disruption".

Its website lists banned activities as "camping, overnight demonstrations, or overnight loitering, unauthorized structures, walls, barriers, barricades, furniture, or other objects".

Students must avoid "vandalism, property damage, trespass, occupation of a building or facility, refusal to disperse in violation of the law".

Barnard College — which was hit by protests earlier this year — quietly revised its student code of conduct last year. It gives the school more power in disciplinary proceedings.

New York University, where New York City police were stationed on campus amid protests, said students who violate the school's code of conduct during demonstrations will face punishment.

Harvard University, whose President Claudine Gay resigned, now bans amplified sound, camping and messages in chalk without prior permission.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## CHINA DAILY USA

## NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

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## WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg., Suite 1108

539 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-663-7249

Fax: 202-663-7247

## SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San Francisco,

CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

## SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

## CANADA / TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-461-5706

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CityDance 双城记

Editor's note: Amity between the people holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. China Daily will come out with a series of stories highlighting Chinese cities' special connections with sister cities, mutual understanding, trust and friendship between peoples of different countries and cultural backgrounds, and shining light on "city diplomacy".

# SOLIDARITY FROM SEA TO HEART

Half-century of friendship has transformed port pair from maritime gateways into symbols of Sino-Japanese ties



## Bridging bonds that go through thick and thin

By LIU JIANQIAO in Tianjin and JIANG XUEQING in Kobe, Japan

For more than half a century, Tianjin and Kobe have cultivated a profound friendship, strengthened by the dedication of individuals who serve as vital links between these two cities.

Their stories reflect the depth of cultural exchange, resilience, and mutual support that define the Tianjin-Kobe relationship.

Kenji Takahashi, former chief representative of Kobe in China who worked in Tianjin for more than three years, is an excellent example of these efforts.

Takahashi's connection to China began in his college years, when he studied Chinese history and developed a deep affection for the country.

As a representative of Kobe in Tianjin, Takahashi's major responsibility was to promote mutual understanding between the two cities and their people.

Chinese School underwent a transformative shift in its Chinese language education. Moving away from traditional textbooks authored by its own teachers, Zhang introduced innovative materials from the College of Chinese Language and Culture at Jinan University in South China's Guangdong province.

"The effect was profound," he said. "With the adoption of new textbooks and teaching methods, the school witnessed a qualitative improvement in Chinese education. Students became more engaged, actively interacting with teachers in class and showing a newfound enthusiasm for learning the language."

Zhang's leadership extended beyond education into the realm of cultural exchange through his active role in the overseas Chinese community in Kobe. Under his guidance, the International Music Association organized landmark events, such as a concert commemorating pivotal milestones in Sino-Japanese relations.

"Overseas Chinese have been rooted in Kobe for more than 150 years, and they have become one of the important parts of the bond between the two countries. Sino-Japanese friendship begins at the grassroots level, and the future of China and Japan relies on the younger generation," he said.

Cao Guangzhong, an associate professor at the Institute of Contemporary China Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said: "People-to-people exchanges can deepen understanding and respect for cultural differences, and on this basis, help discover or establish shared ideas and values. This process is key to building long-term, deep, and enduring relationships."



Zhang Shuzhou (left) and Kenji Takahashi. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**Sino-Japanese friendship begins at the grassroots level, and the future of China and Japan relies on the younger generation.**

Zhang Shuzhou, honorary principal of Kobe Chinese School

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By LIU JIANQIAO in Tianjin, WANG XU in Beijing and JIANG XUEQING in Kobe, Japan

As the Japanese saying goes: "Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend." While this embodies companionship, it only partially captures the dynamic and enduring partnership between Tianjin in northern China and Kobe in western Japan. Their relationship is a fascinating dance of sisterhood and mutual support, forged over decades of collaboration since the two became friendship cities.

China and Japan normalized their relations in September 1972, setting the stage for interactions at all levels. Just a year later, in 1973, Tianjin and Kobe embarked on a new journey of friendship. On June 24, 1973, they signed a friendship city agreement, the first of its kind between a Chinese city and a Japanese city. The pact marked the beginning of a relationship that transcends national and political boundaries, forging a special bilateral bond.

More than 50 years later, Kenji Takahashi makes his daily commute along the tranquil Haihe River in Tianjin. As Takahashi walks along the river, he can see the striking similarities between Tianjin and his hometown Kobe.

As the former representative of Kobe in Tianjin, Takahashi sees a story rooted in their shared history — both were bustling ports and gateways to their respective countries, each boasting a rich maritime heritage.

Yet, it was their shared vision for the future that truly cemented their connection. As China began its reform and opening-up, Kobe, with its advanced infrastructure and industrial prowess, emerged as a valuable partner, offering expertise and support.

"In the 1980s, Tianjin Port faced challenges of congestion and outdated infrastructure," Takahashi said. "Recognizing the need for improvement, Kobe city sent delegations to offer guidance and expertise. They proposed a comprehensive long-term renovation plan for the Port of Tianjin, aimed at enhancing its efficiency and fulfilling its commitment to carbon reduction and neutrality."

This collaboration served as the



bedrock for development of Tianjin Port and stands as a milestone in the enduring ties between Tianjin and Kobe, he added.

Today, Tianjin ranks eighth in the American Journal of Transportation's Top 100 Container Ports. Customs data showed that in the first half of the year, Tianjin Port has cumulatively completed a cargo throughput of 248 million metric tons, a 3.1 percent year-on-year rise, and a container throughput of 11.88 million TEUs (20-foot equivalent units), an increase of 4.6 percent year-on-year. The Port of Kobe, which ranked third in 1990, now stands at 67th.

It is no wonder that Takahashi, a frequent visitor to Tianjin's port, marvels at its state-of-the-art infrastructure; the seamless, automated operations; and the sheer scale of activity.

**Green technologies**  
Luan Jianzhang, director-general of the Foreign Affairs Office of Tianjin, said Tianjin has been dedicated to innovation and green technologies, as the Port of Tianjin is evolving into the world's leading zero-carbon terminal and fulfilling its commitment to carbon reduction and neutrality.

"Over the past five decades, the

cities of Tianjin and Kobe have engaged in fruitful collaboration across a spectrum of sectors, including port and logistics, healthcare, environmental protection, culture, sports, and animal conservation," Luan said.

"The success of this collaboration has paved the way for Tianjin to form more friendship city partnerships, fostering cultural dialogue and mutual understanding across different cities."

At the core of the Tianjin-Kobe friendship is a deep appreciation for people-to-people exchanges. While official agreements provide a framework for cooperation, the personal connections forged between individuals also strengthen the bonds between cities and countries.

Mutsumi Kashiwase, a 22-year-old student majoring in Chinese language at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, joined the international student class at Tianjin Foreign Studies University last year, where she delved into the intricacies of Chinese grammar, lengthy texts, and the art of calligraphy.

Tianjin's urban skyline at night. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**"The success of this collaboration has paved the way for Tianjin to form more friendship city partnerships, fostering cultural dialogue and mutual understanding across different cities."**

Luan Jianzhang, director-general of Tianjin's Foreign Affairs Office

Center: The Ikuta Shrine in Kobe, ICHIBAN JAPAN  
Left and right: Spring blossoms at Kobe Nunobiki Herb Gardens.  
Kobe Nunobiki Herb Gardens

During her time in Tianjin, Kashiwase frequently interacted with Chinese graduate students. And every two weeks, students from the School of Japanese Studies would engage in discussions in Japanese with students like her, fostering strong relationships among them.

"Students in Tianjin were genuinely enthusiastic, discussing topics like Japanese language learning and anime with me," Kashiwase said. Their kindness and hospitality have left a lasting impression on her perception of China and its people.

In 1983, on the 10th anniversary of the friendship city relationship, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies and Tianjin Foreign Studies University signed an agreement on establishing an exchange program.

From 2007 to 2023, the Kobe university sent 12 undergraduate students to Tianjin and received 16 graduate students from the Tianjin university, said a public relations officer at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies.

The spirit of friendship also extends to younger generations. In

the past two months, hundreds of students from Kobe and other Japanese cities visited Tianjin, taking part in the "Friendship Tour" organized by Tianjin's Foreign Affairs Office.

"I was captivated by Tianjin's architecture and was eager to learn more about it while interacting with teenagers in the city," one of the students said. "Though one week was short, it promised to be an unforgettable experience."

**Touching daily lives**  
The Tianjin-Kobe relationship goes beyond diplomatic exchanges, touching the daily lives of people, especially the youth, and fostering a deeper cultural understanding. This has laid the groundwork for a future built on mutual respect and shared interests.

Yukako Ooka, now with the Beijing office of the Japan Foundation, recalled: "As part of joint Sino-Japanese conservation research efforts, the giant panda Dan Dan arrived at Kobe Zoo on July 16, 2000, sparking fascination among the local community for this adorable creature. Later, the arrival of a pair of golden snub-nosed monkeys from Tianjin Zoo further delighted Kobe residents."

Ooka has actively promoted

exchanges between the two cities for the past 25 years. Last year, she helped organize the *Kobe City and China* photo exhibition, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Tianjin-Kobe friendship.

"Traditional friendship city relationships were often seen as 'dots and lines' connecting citizens or specific fields. However, with the rise of social media, these connections have evolved into more comprehensive relationships, enabling collaboration across multiple sectors," she said.

"I believe we should continue creating opportunities for collaboration between the 'Kobe Spirit' and the 'Tianjin Spirit', enhancing the appeal of both cities and countries in a mutually beneficial way."

With these remarkable outcomes, Tianjin and Kobe have established a new model of collaboration between local governments in China and Japan, experts said.

"Tianjin and Kobe, as the representative of Sino-Japanese friendship cities, have set a good example of collaboration," Xin Gang, former president of Tianjin Foreign Studies University, said. "This not only reflects friendly exchanges among people in the two cities, but also points out an important path for promoting mutual understanding between China and Japan."

Given the current challenges in China-Japan relations, it is essential that both countries cultivate a peaceful and friendly strategic relationship that transcends sociopolitical differences and ideological divides, he said.

Luan said the enduring bond between Tianjin and Kobe fully demonstrates the power of international collaboration and mutual respect.

As both cities continue to innovate and grow, their partnership sets an example for other cities worldwide, demonstrating that cooperation and understanding can pave the way for a brighter, more sustainable future.

Yang Cheng in Tianjin contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at liujianqiao@chinadaily.com.cn



## A city of timeless splendor, leisurely charm

"Three, two, one, go!" a group of grandpas shouted in unison as they stood atop the iconic Shizilin Bridge that stretches proudly over the tranquil Haihe River traversing the heart of Tianjin.

With a synchronized leap, they dove headfirst into the inviting waters, their bodies breaking the surface with a satisfying splash. Spectators onshore applauded excitedly, turning the whole scene into a lively stage for joyful aquatic acrobatics.

In the late August heat of last year, Tianjin's "diving grandpas" found themselves thrust into the spotlight as video clips of their daring dives went viral on social media. Even a Chinese Olympic gold medalist in diving joined them. Some netizens have dubbed the Shizilin Bridge an "8+ level tourist attraction, with the spirited grandpas drawing tens of thousands of visitors to the city."

I was floored at the beginning. After my four years in Tianjin for college, I had grown accustomed to the city's vibe of openness and relaxation, as well as its laid-back lifestyle. From the moment I arrived, Tianjin embraced me with open arms, its bustling streets alive with the energy of a city full of possibilities.

Venturing through Tianjin's labyrinthine alleys and boulevards, I encountered a wealth of hidden treasures — European-style mansions and ancient Chinese temples nestled among modern skyscrapers, lively teahouses brimming with laughter, and expansive parks where locals gathered to savor life's simple joys.

The city's rich history as a pivotal trading port and cultural crossroads instills a deep sense of pride



in its residents, evident in their daily lives and interactions.

"For us locals, no other city compares to Tianjin," said Liu Jiahang, a proud resident. "Its vibrant arts and culture scene offer us countless opportunities for creative expression and cultural enrichment."

From historical theaters and opera houses resonating with the melodious strains of *xiangsheng*, or cross talk, to contemporary art galleries and music venues pulsating with life, residents are fervently dedicated to preserving their city's rich cultural legacy while embracing new forms of artistic expression.

"On weekends and holidays, Tianjin offers countless ways to appreciate life's simple joys," Liu said with a smile. "Whether it's gathering with loved ones for a leisurely meal, strolling along the riverbank at sunset, or enjoying tea in one of the city's lush parks, we cherish every moment and find beauty in every corner of our beloved city."

This special atmosphere — a harmonious blend of rich history, cul-

Liu Jianqiao  
Reporter's log

tural diversity, and modern vitality — brings a sense of ease and contentment to daily life in Tianjin.

In recent years, the city has captured widespread attention on the internet with its endearing and captivating cultural phenomena.

Among the most notable are the viral videos of "diving grandpas" and the fashionable "antique hairdos". These awe-inspiring videos not only highlight the remarkable physical prowess of these senior citizens, but also serve as a testament to their indomitable spirit and zest for life.

Together, these viral sensations offer a glimpse into the vibrant culture in Tianjin, where age is no barrier to creativity, vitality, and joie de vivre.

As I ventured forth into new horizons, I carried with me the lessons and love I found in Tianjin. Although my time here may have come to an end, a piece of Tianjin will forever remain in my heart — a gentle reminder of the power of community, the beauty of diversity, and the endless possibilities that await those who dare to explore.

In Tianjin, the journey never truly ends. It is merely a pause in the symphony of life, a chance to catch our breath before embarking on the next adventure. As I took my leave, I did so with a smile, knowing that no matter where I go, Tianjin will always be with me — a beacon of hope, a sanctuary of the soul, and a home away from home.

**Kobe Garden: An oasis at center of Tianjin**

Nestled within the bustling metropolis of Tianjin, the Kobe Garden epitomizes the strong friendship city relationship between Tianjin and Kobe, Japan. This beautifully landscaped garden, located in the Tianjin Water Park, is designed in the traditional Japanese style, offering a peaceful retreat from the urban environment. It features classic elements of Japanese garden design, including meticulously pruned trees, serene ponds, and winding paths. The harmonious layout is intended to evoke a sense of tranquility and natural beauty, making it a perfect spot for quiet contemplation and leisurely strolls. Visitors can also enjoy the sight of koi swimming gracefully in the ponds, adding to the garden's tranquil ambience. The Kobe Garden not only serves as a symbol of friendship between Tianjin and Kobe, but also provides a cultural exchange platform, showcasing Japanese horticultural artistry and fostering greater understanding between the two cities. Whether you are a resident or a visitor, the garden offers a delightful escape into nature and a chance to experience a piece of Japanese culture in the heart of Tianjin.

**Nankin-machi: A portal to Chinese heritage**

Located in the center of Kobe, Japan, Nankin-machi, commonly known as Chinatown, is a vibrant district that serves as a center for Chinese culture and cuisine. Established in the 19th century by Chinese merchants, Nankin-machi has evolved into one of Japan's most famous Chinatowns alongside those in Yokohama and Nagasaki. The area is a feast for the senses, with its colorful lanterns, ornate gates, and bustling streets lined with a variety of shops and food stalls. Visitors can indulge in authentic Chinese dishes such as dim sum, Peking duck, and steamed buns, as well as Japanese interpretations of Chinese classics. Nankin-machi is especially lively during festivals such as Chinese New Year, when the streets come alive with dragon dances, traditional music, and vibrant decorations. Beyond its culinary delights, the neighborhood offers a rich cultural experience, with stores selling traditional Chinese crafts, herbal medicines, and souvenirs. Nankin-machi embodies the cultural fusion that characterizes Kobe, making it a must-visit destination for anyone exploring the city.



## CHINA

## Flying saucer makes debut

A saucer-shaped drone designed for sightseeing hovers in the sky during its public launch in Taizhou, Zhejiang province, on Monday. The flying saucer has a diameter of 5 meters, a one-person cabin in the middle, a maximum flight height of 200 meters, and can take off and land in narrow spaces, promising to offer tourists a unique sightseeing perspective.

WEI ZHIYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



# Governments closing their unused social media accounts

Effort aimed at curbing formalism and bureaucracy, easing grassroots' burdens

By YANG ZEKUN  
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Government departments across multiple regions in China have been shutting down official social media accounts this year as part of a broader effort to curb formalism and bureaucracy and ease burdens on grassroots governments.

On Aug 14, the public security bureau of Rongcheng, Shandong province, announced the deactivation of its official Weibo account due to operational needs. The account, which began posting in June 2014, had amassed only about 500 followers and 860 posts over a decade.

Since the start of the year, numerous government agencies in cities including Kunming in Yunnan province, Changsha in Hunan province and Shenzhen in Guangdong province have closed their social media accounts, redirecting the public to the accounts of higher-level departments, government websites and official apps.

In 2013, the General Office of the State Council encouraged local governments to use social media platforms to release information promptly. As a result, government social media accounts proliferated, becoming key channels for government transparency, public services, and public engagement.

However, issues such as redundant functions, unhelpful content, infrequent updates and poor management have arisen, occasionally leading to public relations crises.

For example, pornographic content appeared on the official Weibo account of the Zhongzhai township government in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, in December 2016. Zhongzhai officials claimed the account

“Unrealistic measures often significantly hinder the efficiency of grassroots work and increase the burden on grassroots officials.”

Yang Weidong, law professor at China University of Political Science and Law

was hacked, and the account's administrators were ordered to rectify the situation immediately. The township's disciplinary committee imposed punishment on the administrators and made personnel adjustments.

And in October 2017, the Huangtian township government's account in Hezhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, sent private messages promoting counterfeit goods. The account, which had been underused, was ultimately deactivated.

In December 2018, the General Office of the State Council issued guidelines to promote the healthy development of government social media, highlighting issues such as unclear functional positioning, lax information management, irregular maintenance and insufficient supervision. Problems such as abandoned accounts and lack of interaction were frequently observed, negatively impacting the governments' image and credibility.

A report from the China Internet Network Information Center indi-

cated that there were over 146,600 government Weibo accounts certified by the Sina platform as of last December.

Also in December, the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission issued a directive to prevent “formalism on fingertips”, which was aimed at regulating government mobile internet applications, official social media accounts and work groups. The directive called for the prompt deactivation of government apps with low usage or practicality.

The directive is expected to enhance the efficiency of digital government management services and address the formalism issue within one to two years. By 2028, the government aims to refine supervision measures and establish long-term mechanisms to prevent the resurgence of such formalism and genuinely alleviate grassroots burdens.

In response, a major reshuffling of government social media accounts has begun nationwide.

In April, the WeChat accounts of the housing and urban-rural development bureau and the water affairs bureau in Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu province, were deactivated. Similarly, the WeChat accounts of the Wuhua district veterans affairs bureau in Kunming and the Yuhua district market supervision bureau in Changsha announced that they would stop updating their accounts and initiate deactivation.

Earlier this month, the General Offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, the nation's Cabinet, issued new regulations aimed at reducing unnecessary formalities and alleviating burdens at the grassroots level.

A senior official from the CPC Central Committee's General Office said that formalism and bureaucratic problems have long existed, and that sustained efforts are needed to

alleviate the burden on grassroots levels. The new regulations mark a significant step in strengthening systems for full and rigorous Party self-governance.

Yang Weidong, a law professor at China University of Political Science and Law, said that since the Party's 18th National Congress in 2012, the CPC Central Committee has consistently emphasized the need to combat the “four forms of decadence” — formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism and extravagance, with a focus on the first two. He said the issues are closely related to reducing the burdens borne by grassroots-level governments, as emphasized at recent Party congresses and sessions.

For some time, many grassroots departments have been asked to fill out and submit a large number of forms within specified time frames, often with repetitive information or similar data. Also, some grassroots governments require officials to participate in activities such as volunteer work and to document every step with photos as evidence, he said.

Some places have also followed the trend of creating numerous work chat groups and launching government apps that require local civil servants to participate in study sessions, answer questions and have their study scores ranked, he said.

“Unrealistic measures often significantly hinder the efficiency of grassroots work and increase the burden on grassroots officials, preventing them from focusing on local socioeconomic development issues,” Yang said.

He called for innovation and efficient coordination at all levels of government to better serve the people, and stressed that government leaders should strive to relieve burdens on grassroots departments.

“The key to their work depends on whether they can truly serve the people,” he said.

## People from both sides of Strait celebrate hero

By ZHANG YI  
zhangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

At an event in Beijing on Tuesday commemorating Zheng Cheng-gong, a national hero who expelled Dutch colonists from Taiwan in 1662 and recovered the island, participants from both sides of the Taiwan Strait said the history strongly confirms that Taiwan is a part of China and provides significant meaning for advancing the complete reunification of the country.

Over 200 participants from both sides paid tribute to Zheng on the 400th anniversary of his birth. Zheng was highly respected in Taiwan, as he promoted education, agriculture and maritime trade on the island, significantly accelerating Taiwan's progress. His efforts facilitated the flourishing of Chinese culture in Taiwan, particularly fostering closer ties between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland.

Su Hui, a vice-chairwoman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, said it was a glorious historical lesson for all Chinese to resist external aggression and build their homeland.

She said that Zheng's patriotic actions were a shared historical memory to unite both sides in defending the country's reunification and opposing “Taiwan independence” separatist activities and external interference.

Wu Jung-yuan, chairman of Taiwan's Labor Party, said Zheng's

recovery of Taiwan demonstrated the historical fact that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one country, and his cultural legacy in Taiwan highlights the fact that both sides belong to the Chinese nation.

“Zheng's legacy provides significant meaning for advancing the complete reunification of the country, opposing separatism, and upholding the legitimacy and legality of territorial sovereignty integrity,” he said.

Huang Chi-jung, who frequently worships at temples dedicated to Zheng in Taiwan, said: “In the eyes of Taiwan people, he is seen as a god protecting Taiwan's territory because he drove out the Dutch in a short period, demonstrating his courage and strategy. This historical episode teaches us the importance of unity and not succumbing to division, ensuring that countries around the world cannot invade us through this maritime territory.”

Lin Wun-hau, a member of Taiwan's New Party, said, “Zheng is regarded as a national hero on both sides of the Strait, especially symbolizing patriotic sentiment.”

Through a shared review of history, it is crucial for both sides to strive for consensus, he said.

The opening ceremony also included a book launch, the screening of a documentary on Zheng and the unveiling of commemorative postal items marking the anniversary.

Li Ren contributed to this story.

## A tossed treat



A vendor puts on a performance as he prepares a bowl of yogurt by tossing and catching it at the Kashgar Old Town Scenic Spot in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Monday.

YUETIKE NIJATI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## HK to play greater role in modernization push

By STEPHY ZHANG in Hong Kong  
stephyzhang@chinadailyhk.com

Hong Kong's political and business leaders have underscored the city's significant role in China's drive for modernization, emphasizing the importance of leveraging its unique advantages under the “one country, two systems” framework, such as its international standing and common law system.

After three seminars on Sunday and Monday, leaders called for closer alignment of Hong Kong's policies with the Chinese mainland's latest development goals and urged accelerated reforms in key sectors where the city has distinct strengths, particularly in innovation and finance.

The seminars, attended by about 1,600 representatives from various sectors, featured two central government officials who outlined the key takeaways from the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki highlighted Hong Kong's growing importance in China's efforts to deepen reforms and promote modernization, noting the city's role in both attracting foreign investment and expanding Chinese businesses globally.

Hong Kong Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po emphasized the

seminars' importance in helping local sectors understand and implement the plenary session's directives, aligning Hong Kong more closely with national development strategies.

Hong Kong Secretary for Justice Paul Lam Ting-kwok described the city's common law system as a unique institutional advantage under “one country, two systems”. He stressed the need to leverage it to actively participate in the development of China's external legal framework, suggesting that while fundamental systems like common law should remain unchanged, mechanisms should be enhanced to maximize their benefits.

Lawmaker Starry Lee Wai-king, a Hong Kong member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, said the seminars provided clear guidance for Hong Kong's future development. She noted that China's reform efforts focus not only on economic growth but also on improving governance and adapting to global and digital trends.

Lawmaker Tan Yueheng, a Hong Kong member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, highlighted the need for Hong Kong to address its aging population by adapting elderly care, social welfare and economic policies to create an elderly-friendly society and boost the silver economy.

## Robot learns the ropes on Harbin metro network

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin  
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

A small robot patrolling and dispensing advice at a metro station in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, has recently attracted growing attention.

The intelligent inspection robot is undergoing tests for inspection operations and related work at selected metro stations, vehicle depots and residential properties on the metro line network, according to Harbin Metro Group.

The key technologies used in the robot, including intelligent inspection, intelligent recognition and intelligent control, have obtained national patents and intellectual property rights.

“The robots can identify the passenger flow entering the station and remind them to enter the station in an orderly manner, line up voluntarily and undergo security checks through voice prompts to maintain order in the station,” said Wang Sicong, manager of Harbin Metro City Development Group Intelligent Co.

“They can also provide high-temperature warnings, environmental temperature and humidity sensing, and PM2.5 and PM10 air quality detection during inspections.”

The robot was jointly developed by Harbin Metro City Development and Beijing Conco Intelligent Technology Co.

“Additionally, they can monitor whether the firefighting equipment in the station is complete and detect any anomalies such as leaks in a timely manner,” Wang said. “The robots are managed through both computer and mobile devices and can be remotely controlled and respond quickly.”

The robots also feature functions like two-way voice communication, allowing passengers to seek help with a single click and promptly receive assistance from station staff members.

“In a large factory with lots of equipment, manual recording and data processing often lead to errors,” Wang said. “The robots can reduce human interference and



A robot patrols a metro station in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

increase inspection accuracy and consistency through automated data collection and processing.”

With their all-weather, no-blind-spot inspection capabilities, the robots can perform round-the-clock, he said, adding that they can automatically recharge and actively avoid obstacles and people.

“To meet the requirements of various scenarios in Harbin's subway, we will make adjustments

according to the test results ... and will further develop the practical application of intelligent robots in the field of rail transit and property services,” he said, adding that the research and development of the whole line of products is expected to be completed in one to three years.

Various intelligent robots such as vehicle intelligent inspection robots, tunnel inspection robots, 360-degree intelligent detection systems and cleaning robots are already in use in many Chinese subways.

On Nanjing's Metro Line 1, a new intelligent vehicle inspection robot and a 360-degree intelligent detection system have begun working together.

Shanghai Metro has introduced an intelligent inspection robot named Guardian, which is equipped with a variety of sensors such as a line scanning laser, high-definition camera and infrared thermal imager, to achieve autonomous inspection in tasks ranging from path planning to fault identification.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## US should manage ties responsibly to prevent competition veering into conflict

Although US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's visit to China, starting on Tuesday, marks his first China trip in that post and the first visit of a national security advisor of the United States over the past eight years, his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is their sixth in the past year and a half.

That their meeting came soon after his arrival in the Chinese capital conveys the sense of urgency with which the two sides want to get down to business, with both sides hoping the talks will be productive in terms of their respective agendas.

The Chinese side released a list of redlines and to-dos for the US side on Sunday, while Sullivan's busy itinerary ahead of his China trip showed the US was keen to try and put some leverage in place for the to-do list it has issued for Beijing.

Since the topics of discussion include the two countries' respective approaches to the Taiwan question, South China Sea disputes and the economic and trade issues that have become prominent friction-makers, how productive the visit can be is open to speculation. Particularly since China's efforts to try and help resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Middle East crisis and the Korean Peninsula issue only hinder Washington's geopolitical game-playing.

Sullivan is probably in a better position than anybody else in the Joe Biden administration to know how the US has transformed relevant security cooperation, dialogue and exchanges, based on mutual respect and equality, into confrontation, bickering and disconnection. It is the US' misjudgment of China that has made itself a victim of its own paranoia that it might lose its hegemony.

So although Beijing and Washington have more than 20 dialogue and communication channels open in various fields thanks to their consensus that they must responsibly manage their differences and effectively control risks to prevent conflicts, the effect of these has been limited. The root cause of the problems between the two sides is that the US does not have the right perception of China and thus it is unwilling to meet China halfway to develop stable, healthy and thriving relations featuring win-win cooperation, mutual respect and equality as Beijing has proposed.

If the US side had the correct perception of China, it would realize that China does not desire hegemony nor is it seeking to export its ideology. China pursues peaceful development and win-win cooperation, and it firmly upholds the international system and international order with the United Nations at its core. The US should appreciate China's systemic complementarity to it in not only economy and trade, but also culture and governance.

The US has its core interests and redlines that it requires countries to respect. In turn, it should respect those of other countries. It should accept that as the global superpower it has a corresponding responsibility to the world rather than the entitlement to make itself a law unto the international community.

The US national security advisor should therefore make good use of his first visit to China to gain more firsthand experience of the country to see how it is different in reality to that portrayed in Washington as the "primary strategic challenge" to the US. If Sullivan makes his visit with a closed mind and an inflexible message, no matter how many times he communicates with the Chinese side in whatever place, he is just turning an opportunity for promoting productive ties into a show for show's sake. Sullivan said in Beijing that there was an effort to ensure US-China competition did not veer into conflict "and that we find ways to work together where our interests align". The US should act on those words.

## Philippines disruption of regional peace

Tensions in the South China Sea have flared up in the past few days, mainly due to the Philippines' provocative activities that infringe on China's sovereignty in waters around Xianbin Reef.

Despite China's firm opposition and repeated warnings, the Philippines' Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Philippine Coast Guard sent ships to intrude into the waters around Xianbin Reef on Sunday and Monday, prompting the China Coast Guard to carry out appropriate "control measures" in accordance with domestic and international law.

Though dubbed as humanitarian missions, the real purpose of Manila's reckless decision to send supplies to one of its coast guard vessels, which has been anchored in the lagoon of Xianbin Reef since April, is to cement the vessel's long-term presence there.

That inevitably has triggered countermeasures from China, as the Philippines' activities infringe on China's sovereignty. They also violate the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, which specifies that all parties should refrain from inhabiting previously uninhabited islands or reefs. This cannot but raise the vigilance of China over whatever step Manila is going to take next.

History urges caution given that the Philippines grounded an old naval vessel on China's Ren'ai Reef in 1999 to reinforce its illegal territorial claim there. It has since refused to move the vessel despite China's repeated calls for its removal from the Chinese waters.

Now Manila is employing the same model of encroachment at Xianbin Reef.

Speaking at a military forum in Manila on Tuesday, attended by military officials and senior diplomats from the United States and allied countries, the Philippine defense chief laid bare the pot-valiant stimulant that has brewed Manila's pugnacious claim-jumping. Alleging that China is the "biggest disruptor of peace" in the region, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr called for the Philippines' mutual defense treaty with the US "to be interpreted dynamically" and for "stronger collective multilateral action against China".

The head of the US "Indo-Pacific" Command later expounded on this by saying that discussions were underway and US escorts for Philippine vessels on resupply missions in the South China Sea were "an entirely reasonable option".

That the forum was organized by the US "Indo-Pacific" Command only serves to show who is pulling Manila's strings.

But whatever tricks and coercion the Philippines and the US resort to, any attempts to challenge China's sovereignty in the South China Sea are doomed to failure.

The latest incidents and Manila's staging of the farce of "a thief crying 'stop thief'" happened after China and the Philippines agreed to "restore trust" and "rebuild confidence" at a high-level meeting last month. The announcement that the two sides had reached an agreement on the need to manage their maritime disputes seemed to be backed up by a provisional arrangement on Manila's resupply missions to the grounded naval ship at Ren'ai Reef.

That China's response to the Philippines' reneging on that agreement has so far been extremely restrained indicates it treasures its traditional friendship with the Philippines, and is doing everything possible to prevent peace and stability in the South China Sea being jeopardized.

Yet it seems that some in the Philippines, encouraged by the US, have taken China's show of goodwill as a sign of weakness, and are intent on trying to test the firmness of its bottom line on sovereignty. That the Philippines took the representatives of several media outlets on board its coast guard vessels for Monday's provocative intrusion into Chinese waters reflects its intent to turn up the heat in the South China Sea at the instigation of Washington.

The two unruly allies that are the true disruptors of peace and stability in the South China Sea should bear in mind that China has both sufficient means and resolve to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Manila should reconsider the wisdom of putting its trust in Washington lest it is emboldened to go too far on a dangerous path.

Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## New guidelines quality-booster for capital intermediary services

The China Securities Regulatory Commission and two other state departments jointly drafted the guidelines regulating the services provided by intermediary institutions for initial public offering, stipulating securities companies and accounting firms are not allowed to use the IPO results of a company to be listed as a condition for charging fees.

As important components of the capital market, the business quality of securities and accounting companies is related to the quality of listed companies. In order to ensure the independence of the IPO process, it is essential that intermediary institutions strictly perform their duties of professional check and verification, so as to improve the quality of listed companies, maintain market order and protect the legitimate rights and interests of investors.

However, in recent years, some intermediaries have linked the fee they charge to the results of a company's stock offering. Driven by interests, certain intermediaries turned a blind eye to the problems existing in stock issu-

ing companies, and even took the initiative to help the latter cover up obvious malpractices and whitewash performance to meet listing conditions, making them accomplices of financial fraud and fraudulent issuance, seriously damaging investors' rights and interests and denting the credibility of the market.

The independence of intermediary institutions is the basis for ensuring their objectivity and impartiality. That explains why the draft guidelines promulgated by the three departments focus on regulating the charges of intermediary services, strengthening supervision, and prompting intermediary fees to be decoupled from the public offering and listing results of stocks, which will enhance the independence and objectivity of intermediary services.

The guidelines also stipulate that securities companies engaged in sponsor business and accounting firms performing audits can charge service fees in stages.

This will help intermediaries establish more stable income expectations and ensure their corresponding efforts

are rewarded, which will encourage intermediaries to attach more importance to their service quality, and dare to press the "pause button" on companies that do not meet listing requirements.

At the end of July, the CSRC said it will promote the further implementation of the stock issuance registration system to cultivate high-quality listed companies. In this context, as the gatekeeper of the capital market, intermediaries face higher requirements and greater responsibilities.

The introduction of the guidelines is evidence of China's regulatory authorities' firm determination to promote intermediary institutions to improve service quality. Intermediary institutions should further improve their internal governance structure, explore new charging models and reasonable charging standards, establish an effective risk control system as soon as possible, and improve their self-restraint capabilities and self-regulation, to contribute more to the healthy development of the country's capital market.

—ECONOMIC DAILY

## Enriching natural gas bounty by digging deeper

The second phase of drilling for natural gas by Deep Sea No 1, the world's first 100,000 metric ton deep-sea, semisubmersible oil production and storage platform has ended.

For over a decade, China has accelerated its exploration of oil and natural gas in the deep sea. From 2012 to 2022, the number of China National Offshore Oil Corporation's deep-water drilling platforms increased from three to 10, of which three are ultra-deep-sea drilling platforms, capable of

drilling as deep as 3,000 meters.

This second phase of the drilling in waters off South China's Hainan province has unearthed 12 wells with a total depth of 60,000 meters. Such deep drilling is closer to the Earth's crust to exploit the resources there. Yet deeper drilling leads to greater difficulties; the pressure increases as one drills deeper. According to earlier reports, in the second phase of drilling, the platform encountered pressure as high as 69 million Pascals, or 1,000 times that in a

pressure cooker.

Its success means a huge technological breakthrough, coming just three years after the first phase of platform in June 2021. With the second phase of production of natural gas starting soon, the gas field will see its usable reserve rise from 100 billion cubic meters to 150 billion cubic meters and its annual production of natural gas rise from 3 billion to 4.5 billion cubic meters, which will increase the share of natural gas in China's energy mix.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Washington still has the voodoo on Ottawa

Canada has announced that it will slap 100 percent tariffs on imports of Chinese-made electric vehicles claiming government subsidies give Chinese manufacturers an unfair advantage.

The decision was announced on Monday after a Sunday meeting between Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and visiting US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, who encouraged Ottawa to take a "coordinated approach" with Washington.

Canada will also impose a 25 percent tariff on Chinese steel and aluminum, and launch a 30-day consultation about

possible tariffs on Chinese batteries, battery parts, semiconductors, critical minerals, metals and solar panels, which, if approved, means Canada is simply copying the US' protectionist policies targeting Chinese imports.

The tariffs not only show the willingness of the Trudeau government to do Washington's bidding, but

also the "let's see what we can get agenda" of Sullivan who is now on a three-day visit to Beijing.

The Canadian tariff rate on Chinese EVs will match that of the United States, and is tantamount to closing the door on Chinese EVs, which have a cost-performance advantage in the market. That originates from Chinese companies' long-term inputs in the R&D of the power batteries and other core technologies related to EVs, as well as the fierce competition among them based on China's superlarge manufacturing base and consumer market.

By blindly following Washington's lead, the Trudeau government is doing nothing but preventing Canadian consumers from buying quality EVs sold at reasonable prices and hindering the country's green transition. It will be the Canadian people that pay for their government's Washington-correctness.

That some Canadians have raised concerns about their country's agricultural and husbandry products, such as barley and pork, being targeted by China in retaliation for their government's politi-

cally motivated trade moves indicates not only the possible Chinese response but also the collateral damage that will be incurred by Ottawa's blind pro-US stance at the cost of Canada's national interests.

The Canadian leader once lambasted the previous US administration's protectionist tariffs targeting Canada's exports to the US. Yet he is doing exactly the same thing now. And it is US-made EV makers that will be the beneficiaries of the Canadian tariffs.

During her visit to Beijing last month, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly told her Chinese counterpart that Canada is willing to actively and pragmatically improve and develop relations with China, and is ready to strengthen cooperation in fields such as the economy and trade, climate change and environmental protection to achieve mutually beneficial development.

The punitive tariffs Canada has imposed and is considering levying on Chinese imports contradict that claim.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at:

**China Daily**  
15 Huxin Donglie Chaoyang District,  
Beijing 100029  
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366  
editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631  
ads@chinadaily.com.cn  
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203  
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn  
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

**China Daily UK**  
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 8270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

**China Daily Asia Pacific**  
**China Daily Hong Kong**  
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan  
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong  
+852 2518 5111  
editor@chinadailyhk.com  
editor@chinadailyasia.com

**China Daily USA**  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036  
+1 212 537 8888  
editor@chinadailyusa.com

**China Daily Africa**  
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya  
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)  
editor@chinadailyafrica.com  
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com  
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

## COMMENT

Kong Qingjiang

## US, not China, to blame for fentanyl crisis

Fentanyl is a highly synthetic opioid primarily prescribed by doctors as an analgesic or pain-reliever. But since the abuse of fentanyl can lead to drug addiction and even death, most countries have included it in their controlled substances' list. The easy availability of fentanyl in the United States, however, has led to a serious social crisis. In fact, the US is the world's largest producer and consumer of fentanyl-based drugs, and Americans, who account for 5 percent of the world's population, consume 80 percent of the opioids, including fentanyl, in the world.

Countries around the world have taken targeted measures to strictly control the sale and use of fentanyl and other opioids. Despite that, the abuse of fentanyl in the US has increased and caused more deaths. Recent US administrations have either regarded fentanyl abuse as a "threat" to the US or made opioid control one of their top priorities. But the anti-drug policies introduced by the administrations have been aimed at treating the symptoms rather than removing the root cause of the problem. For example, as a country facing the most serious fentanyl problem in the world, the US has not implemented strict drug control laws or put all fentanyl-like substances under control.

In May 2023, the US Congress introduced a bill to combat the threat of fentanyl, which was

intended to subject all fentanyl-related substances to control. Yet the bill failed to become an act due to political polarization. The Republicans and Democrats have used the drug problem, which has been destroying lives, as a "bargaining chip" in political games. Worse, some US pharmaceutical companies have exacerbated the opioid crisis in several states by downplaying the risks of using opioids as a painkiller, in order to increase their sales and make more profits.

On the other hand, China imposes strict control on the use of fentanyl and fentanyl-like substances, and supports other countries, including the US, in their fight against drugs.

China ratified the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in September 1989. Since then, it has fulfilled all its obligations under the UN Drug Convention, strengthened legislation and strictly controlled the use and sale of chemicals. Under

the convention's framework, China has cooperated with international organizations and other countries, including the US, in combating drug trafficking and abuse, to address the fentanyl crisis.

China and the US reached an agreement in December 2018 to strengthen cooperation in law enforcement and drug control, including the sale and use of fentanyl-related substances. In less than five months after that, that is, on May 1, 2019, China officially added all fentanyl-related substances to its list of controlled chemicals, which far exceeds the scope of 27 fentanyl-related substances under control under the UN Drug Convention.

The Chinese government has also drafted three legal documents, including one for prosecuting, trying in a court of law and sentencing those involved in fentanyl-related substance crimes. Also, it has established five sub-regional centers of the State Drug Laboratory across the country, strengthened the fentanyl-related substance testing and monitoring system, maintained data on enterprises manufacturing fentanyl-related substances, the number of people involved and the equipment used in the process, and monitored the overall production and sale of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances.

In addition, the govern-

ment has established a mechanism to scrutinize the import and export licenses of enterprises legally dealing in listed chemicals, ensure the products are dispatched and received by the entities mentioned in the export-import documents, and thoroughly check the parcels bound for the US. In accordance with the UN Drug Convention, it has cracked down on drug traffickers and abusers by investigating and intercepting drug supplies, so as to prevent controlled chemicals from flowing into narcotics processing channels.

And yet the US has imposed sanctions on Chinese companies and citizens on suspicion of manufacturing and selling fentanyl and fentanyl-related chemicals, while smearing China by claiming that it is a major producer of "precursor chemicals of fentanyl". Some US politicians have even alleged that "precursor chemicals from China flood North America and stifle international efforts" to combat the drug menace, and that "it is the Chinese chemicals for fentanyl that flow into Mexico and then into the US".

Instead of making China a scapegoat to divert domestic public opinion from the administration's failure to effectively address the fentanyl problem, the US should put its house in order, strengthen law enforcement and take targeted measures to contain the drug menace.

*The author is the dean of the School of International Law at the China University of Political Science and Law. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



Lau Siu-kai

## 'One country, two systems' vital to HK's development

In a speech he delivered on Aug 22 to mark the 120th birth anniversary of Deng Xiaoping, President Xi Jinping praised the late leader's contributions to the country, including the "one country, two systems" policy which facilitated the reunification of Hong Kong and Macao with the motherland.

However, over the past few years, some anti-China political forces have been trying to distort the meaning of "one country, two systems", and using it to accuse China of failing to faithfully implement the policy in Hong Kong.

First, "one country, two systems" is primarily a policy prioritizing the interests of the country. Its strategic goal of reunifying Hong Kong with the motherland was achieved in 1997. The goal now is to allow the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to continue to play a key role in the country's socialist modernization.

Deng emphasized that the country's "mainstay must be socialism" while allowing certain regions of the country, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, to follow the existing political system in order to maintain their prosperity and stability, because that would be in the nation's interest.

Second, under the policy, the central government has allowed Hong Kong to follow the existing system and way of life for 50 years. The commitment to "no change for fifty years" is crucial to enhancing the confidence of Hong Kong residents and the international community in the SAR's future. "No change for fifty years" also allows the United Kingdom and other Western countries, especially the United States, to believe their interests in the SAR are protected.

But "no change for fifty years" does

And sixth, Hong Kong's electoral system must serve the strategic goal of the "one country, two systems" policy.

not mean nothing can be changed between 1997 and 2047. It only means that fundamental or drastic changes would not take place. Despite that, opposition forces inside and outside Hong Kong have demanded from time to time fundamental changes in Hong Kong's political system. But by so demanding, they ignore the fact that such changes would do great injustice to China and the SAR.

Third, "a high degree of autonomy" as inscribed in the Hong Kong Basic Law is not the same as the "highest degree of autonomy", let alone "complete autonomy". Under "one country, two systems", the central government has the power to address Hong Kong's issues when necessary, safeguard national security and interests, and ensure the successful implementation of the policy. But the anti-China forces want to turn Hong Kong into an "independent political entity", with a few desperately seeking "Hong Kong independence". They refuse to acknowledge the power enjoyed by the central government under the "one country, two systems" policy, and often question the central government's legitimate powers. This is something Deng had warned against.

Fourth, according to the policy, Hong Kong residents should shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding national security and, if they fail to do

so, the central government has the authority to intervene. Maintaining the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system is the top priority of China, and that can be done by safeguarding national security. Deng said: "For example, after 1997, when some people in Hong Kong scold the Communist Party and China, we still allow them to do so. However, if they take action to transform Hong Kong into a base against the mainland under the guise of 'democracy', what should we do? Then, we must intervene."

The anti-China forces deny that Hong Kong residents are responsible for safeguarding national security, so they demonize Article 23 of the Basic Law as an "evil law". Deng did foresee external forces interfering in the SAR's affairs after the handover of Hong Kong to China. But he might not have imagined that the anti-China forces would seek "Hong Kong independence". Such acts will not be tolerated by the central authorities because they endanger national security.

Fifth, implementing the principle of "patriots governing Hong Kong" is a precondition for "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" and the SAR enjoying "a high degree of autonomy". As Deng said, "What is a patriot? The standard for a patriot is to respect one's nation, sincerely support the motherland's resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong, and not harm Hong Kong's prosperity and stability. As long as these conditions are met ... they are patriots ... We only require them to love the motherland and love Hong Kong."

Since "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" means "patriots governing Hong Kong", those Hong Kong residents who do not meet the criteria of

patriots are not qualified to govern the SAR. To realize "patriots governing Hong Kong", the central authorities need to strengthen and support the patriotic forces, including helping them in various elections without violating the Basic Law.

And sixth, Hong Kong's electoral system must serve the strategic goal of the "one country, two systems" policy. In other words, Hong Kong's democratic development must not have consequences detrimental to the country's sovereignty, national security and territorial integrity, and should not make way for non-patriots governing Hong Kong or undermine the principle of "executive-led government". That's why Deng said "Hong Kong's political system cannot be completely Westernized or copied from the West."

The views of the anti-China forces are quite the opposite. They regard universal suffrage as the highest or even the only goal of "one country, two systems". But they pursue universal suffrage only to seize the governing power in Hong Kong.

However, considering the changes in the situations in the SAR, the country as a whole, and the world, the central authorities, while implementing the "one country, two systems" policy, should adjust their approach to Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the strategic goals and core principles of the policy introduced by Deng should continue to be the cornerstone and practical guideline of the policy.

*The author is an emeritus professor of sociology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a consultant to the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macao Studies. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Zhao Huirong

## Washington's geopolitics worsen Ukraine crisis

Ukraine launched a military operation in western Russia's Kursk region on Aug 6, prompting Russia to declare a state of emergency there, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky saying on Monday that the Ukrainian army had taken control of 92 settlements in the region. Despite the worsening situation, the United States continues to add fuel to the fire by supplying arms and military equipment as well as financial aid to Ukraine. US President Joe Biden seemed to be patting himself on the back when he said on Aug 13 that Ukraine's military incursion into Russia has "created a real dilemma" for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Ukraine crisis has its roots in the Cold War. Even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the US didn't change its hegemonic mindset. It launched a "mission" to Westernize former Soviet republics, which, to a large extent, laid the groundwork for the geopolitical confrontation between the US and Russia, leading to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The US' primary goal is to weaken Russia by promoting anti-Russia movements in the former Soviet republics and coercing them to strengthen cooperation with the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. By trying to Westernize the former Soviet republics, the US wants to change the political systems and install pro-Western governments in the former Soviet republics. To achieve that, it has even triggered "color revolutions" in those countries.

On gaining formal independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had great development potential thanks to its abundant natural resources. Although Russia and Ukraine had disputes before and after the Soviet era, those disputes did not lead to any military confrontation. In fact, the two sides managed, even resolved, many of their disputes during former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma's administration.

**The US' policy is not, as it claims, to promote the development of Ukraine, because the US has always put its own interests first.**

However, the US continued to cultivate proxy leaders in Kyiv, and instigated the 2014 "Maidan Revolution" in Ukraine because it considers the country a strategic fulcrum to deal with Russia. Ultimately, when Ukraine chose to join the Western camp, its disputes with Russia intensified, leading to the Crimea incident and the Donbas conflict. Following the two incidents, the US and NATO began fanning anti-Russia sentiments in Ukraine, which eventually led to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US and its allies have increased their military aid to Ukraine, encouraging the Ukrainian army to attack new targets in Russia. At the same time, the US has been trying to control the pace of the conflict. It refuses to send troops to assist the Ukrainian army and, instead, has been egging Kyiv to continue the conflict and cross Russia's redline and claim later that it was "unaware" of Ukraine's actions.

The US' policy is not, as it claims, to promote the development of Ukraine, because the US has always put its own interests first. To fulfill its narrow political goals, it can trigger a conflict and even hold Europe hostage, without the latter knowing about it. Its evil design is evident in its attempt to create a rift between China and the EU and smear the China-Russia relationship.

Given the US' machinations, the chances of a political resolution to the Ukraine crisis appear slim. However, calls for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine to end the two-and-a-half-year conflict became stronger this year. In his interviews in June and July, Zelensky, too, expressed his willingness to open the door to direct talks with Moscow. As a matter of fact, he said in July that Russia should be represented at the proposed second peace summit in November — and Moscow didn't refuse to hold negotiations with Kyiv. The two sides' softening attitude toward negotiations had raised hopes that the crisis could be resolved.

But Ukraine's military operation in Kursk and the US' attitude toward the conflict brought the world back to reality, with Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova saying that Russia was not engaged in any "direct or indirect" talks with Ukraine.

Ukraine's Kursk offensive will further extend the front line. And the conflict could escalate after the supply of a new batch of weapons, including F-16 fighter jets, by the US and its Western allies to Ukraine. In the process, both Russia and Ukraine will suffer further losses.

Furthermore, Ukraine's combat capability largely depends on Western aid. Some US experts say Washington's speed of arms delivery to Ukraine is in accordance with its production speed. The US' military aid to Ukraine will last at least one year at the current speed. And the fact that NATO has agreed to provide €40 billion (\$43 billion) worth of military aid for Ukraine next year means that, even if the next US administration reduces or cuts off aid to Ukraine, the country will still be able to prolong the conflict for some time with its own arms and military equipment and non-US Western aid, especially because the EU is likely to maintain or even increase its assistance to Ukraine.

The US has been instigating "controllable chaos" in other regions to serve its own geopolitical interests. For example, the US sees Israel as key to controlling the Middle East; that's why it continually provides military assistance for Tel Aviv. It is because of US support that Israel has continued its brutal assault on the Gaza Strip for the past more than 10 months, creating a humanitarian crisis. The US' hegemonic policy not only poses a threat to regional and global security but also violates the international order and undermines the global governance system.

*The author is a researcher at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS

JOSEPH ATTA-MENSAH AND HANY BESADA

## Driving force

China is helping Africa harness the transformative development potential of the digital economy

African leaders have positioned regional cooperation and integration as a cornerstone for the continent's development. Their goal is to transform the 55 disparate economies into a cohesive, resilient economy. This vision is supported by



Joseph Atta-Mensah



Hany Besada

cutting-edge trans-boundary infrastructure, a dynamic and mobile workforce, flexible financial capital, state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, and initiatives for peace and security. A pivotal element of this vision is the ethos of national ownership and self-reliance in development policies. This approach enables member states to craft strategies tailored to their unique needs, thus progressively decreasing dependency on aid.

Within the scope of Africa's regional integration strategy for growth, the deployment of science, technology and innovation is essential. The productivity leap of numerous nations, African included, can be attributed to refined managerial practices, organizational evolution, advancements in science and technology, and innovation in goods and services production. Investments in information and communication technology have enhanced the caliber of capital and labor. This is reflected in the elevated skill set of the average African workers.

R&D-driven technological shifts, along with the ensuing spread of innovation, are integral to growth. Fundamentally, productivity gains are a result of the refined integration of capital and labor in production processes. Consequently, the

significance of science, technology and innovation in bolstering growth is undeniable. ICT acts as a catalyst for sweeping changes across the economy, spurring innovation across diverse sectors. This technology diffusion, coupled with ICT investments and organizational reform, holds great promise for robust economic expansion.

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, digital transformation has been fast-tracked across sectors. Organizations are increasingly leveraging digital tools to enable remote operations, enhance customer experiences and streamline processes. The pandemic also propelled e-commerce as consumers gravitated toward online platforms for convenience and safety. There has been a surge in the adoption of digital payment methods, including mobile wallets, contactless payments and cryptocurrencies. This trend is motivated by the allure of convenience, expediency and security. The fintech revolution is redefining conventional banking and financial services, with breakthroughs in digital banking, lending, insurance and wealth management in response to shifting consumer expectations and behaviors. Artificial intelligence and automation are reshaping industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, finance and retail, facilitating process automation, data-driven insights and bespoke customer interactions. The digital economy thrives on technological innovation, changing consumer patterns and business model evolution.

Africa is determined not to fall behind in the global race to digitize services and enterprises. According to a World Bank report, digital technologies are revolutionizing economies, fostering job creation, and enhancing quality of life. This report cites a surge of 1.5 billion new internet users from 2018 to 2022, notably in middle-income countries — a trend amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, transforming sectors such as communications, business,

health, education, and finance. A McKinsey report projects that by 2030, AI could contribute an additional 1.2 percentage points annually to global GDP growth, representing about \$13 trillion.

In Africa, digital technologies such as blockchain, data analytics, AI, 3D printing, the internet of things, automation, robotics and cloud computing are crucial to deepening and expediting the continent's industrialization. For instance, Kenya's FarmDrive leverages mobile phones, alternative data and machine learning to provide smallholder farmers with credit by calculating alternative credit scores. FarmDrive is enhancing farmers' livelihoods, combating poverty, and bridging inequalities. In South Africa, Aerobotics employs AI to aid farmers by analyzing aerial imagery and detecting issues imperceptible to the human eye, thereby enhancing agricultural productivity. The adoption of IoT is also evident across Africa, improving business environments and quality of life, as exemplified in countries such as Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and Namibia.

The digital economy has the potential to substantially boost regional integration in Africa by encouraging collaboration, spurring economic growth, and surmounting traditional trade and communication barriers. High-speed internet, mobile networks and satellite communications can enhance interconnectivity among African nations. Improved connectivity facilitates communication, collaboration and the transnational exchange of goods, services and information. The application of digital technologies can expedite the implementation of initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, with e-commerce platforms and digital marketplaces providing businesses in various African countries with access to expanded markets beyond their national confines.



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

In the context of South-South cooperation, these digital platforms can be instrumental in sharing knowledge, best practices and resources among developing countries, thereby fostering collective growth and innovation. South-South cooperation, with its focus on collaboration among countries in the Global South, aligns with the vision of a digitally integrated Africa. It emphasizes mutual benefit and capacity building, which can be significantly enhanced through digital platforms that allow for the exchange of ideas and commerce among nations. Notably, China's involvement in promoting digital infrastructure development in Africa has been central to these efforts, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative and its contributions to South-South cooperation. As the upcoming Forum on China-Africa Cooperation approaches, there is an opportunity to deepen digital partnerships between Africa and China, enhancing the continent's digital transformation and fostering sustainable development through joint initiatives.

Moreover, digital payment systems such as mobile money and fintech solutions can promote financial inclusion and enable

cross-border transactions. By offering secure and convenient payment options, digital financial services empower individuals and businesses to engage more fully in regional trade and commerce. Investing in digital infrastructure such as broadband networks, data centers and digital hubs is crucial for the nurturing of digital entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems across Africa. Such an environment can attract investment, generate employment and drive economic progress. To capitalize on these opportunities for enhancing regional integration, the African Union, governments, businesses and civil society must collaborate to invest in digital infrastructure, foster digital skills development and craft policies that encourage digital entrepreneurship and innovation.

Without a doubt, the digital economy is emerging as a transformative force capable of catalyzing regional integration and economic growth in Africa. It harbors the potential to bridge divides, forge alliances across borders and create a unified market that is resilient, competitive and innovative. As African nations embrace these technologies, they can catalyze South-South cooperation, tapping

into a wealth of shared knowledge, resources and technological advancements. This collaborative approach, underpinned by digital innovation, is not merely a pathway to inclusive growth — it is a strategic imperative for Africa to assert its place in the global economy. It is through committed investment in digital infrastructure, concerted efforts in policy-making, and an unwavering dedication to capacity building that Africa will not only participate in, but also shape, the future digital landscape. The time is ripe for African leaders, policymakers, entrepreneurs and communities to seize the digital momentum, ensuring that the continent's integration and development are not just envisioned but vigorously pursued and realized.

Joseph Atta-Mensah is a senior fellow with the Centre for Economic Transformation, Ghana. Hany Besada is a visiting senior fellow with the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ZHOU MI

## No external disruptions please

China-Australia cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region should advance by responding to market needs rather than adapting to US interests

China and Australia are key economic and trade partners. According to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), Australia imported goods worth \$71.82 billion from China in 2023, which accounted for 24.9 percent of its total imports.



This is 1 percentage point more than the combined imports from the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea, which rank second, third and fourth among countries Australia imports from.

On the export side, Australia exported \$120.22 billion worth of goods to China in 2023, which accounted for 32.6 percent of its total exports. This is 1.2 percentage points more than its combined exports to Japan, the ROK, India, the US, New Zealand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore, which rank from second to ninth in Australia's export markets.

In its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, Australia first proposed the concept of "Indo-Pacific" partnerships to further bolster its role in global trade and strengthen economic and trade cooperation with economies in the "Indo-Pacific" region, aiming to place itself at the center of this region. However, the US adopted this concept and turned it into a tool to pressure China. The Joe Biden administration actively promoted the "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity" with four key pillars: trade (including digital trade), supply chains, clean energy (including infrastructure) and taxation (anti-corruption).

This framework seeks to establish a set of rules excluding China, one of the major regional economies.

Taking supply chains as an example, the agreement signed at the end of last year by 14 IPEF members, including Australia, came into effect on Feb 24, which established

three bodies for supply chain coordination: the IPEF Supply Chain Council, the IPEF Supply Chain Crisis Response Network and the IPEF Labor Rights Advisory Board.

The agreement explicitly requires members to jointly monitor the supply chains of critical items, improve coordination and response during crises, enhance supply chain logistics, elevate workers' status, promote labor development and identify opportunities for technical assistance and capacity building. This essentially reflects the concerns of the US. In fact, the current instability of global supply chains is largely due to the US' proactive restrictions on international trade and unwarranted intervention in market activities. The US has not only transferred this anxiety to Australia, but also tried to institutionalize and perpetuate its influence through the IPEF.

Australia benefits from its rich resources and long-term economic growth driven by exports of natural resources. According to the World Bank, international trade accounted for 48.1 percent of Australia's GDP in 2023. Also, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development data show that Australia's most important export commodities are mineral fuels and ores, making up 35 percent and 28.1 percent of the export value, respectively, in 2023. On this



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

China-Australia cooperation should advance in the Asia-Pacific region by responding to market needs, respecting market principles, and upholding the principle of openness and cooperation.

note, its exports of these commodities to China were 5.9 percent and 76.6 percent. Developing and maintaining strong economic ties with China are vital for Australia. Excluding China's market is both unwise and impractical, whether in terms of trade networks or international investment links. It is even less advisable to directly adapt US interests into Australia's trade rules with China. Both China and Australia should uphold and adhere to the existing multilateral rules represented by the World Trade Organization, the bilateral economic and trade framework defined by the China-Australia FTA, and the regional rules of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

China and Australia are both members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation mechanism. A free and open Asia-Pacific means the development aspirations of all economies in the region should be fully respected. The Australian business community has high expectations for cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, and hopes to continue expanding exports to China and the entry of Chinese new energy products (including electric vehicles) into the Australian market.

Chinese enterprises also have developed stably in Australia over the years. According to the Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment, by the end

of 2022, Chinese enterprises' investment stock in Australia had reached \$35.79 billion. Nearly 900 Chinese enterprises had set up locally, hiring more than 25,000 Australian employees. Among these, investments in the mining industry amounted to \$16.15 billion, accounting for 45.1 percent of the total; investments in the leasing and business services industry totaled \$7.04 billion, accounting for 19.7 percent.

With improved bilateral relations and reduced trade frictions, exports of Australia's iconic products, such as red wine, to China have accelerated, providing Chinese consumers with more quality options. China's vast market can create significant value for foreign goods and service providers with the willingness and capability to enter. For enterprises to have stable confidence in development and cooperation, not only commercial viability, but also long-term stability in the economic and trade cooperation environment are necessary.

China-Australia cooperation should advance in the Asia-Pacific region by responding to market needs, respecting market principles, and upholding the principle of openness and cooperation. By minimizing external disruptions and focusing on people-to-people exchange, the two countries can collaborate to enhance supply chain resilience, carry out institutionalized cooperation in areas such as climate change and foster a more accommodating and predictable business environment, providing reliable new business models and solutions to regional and global challenges.

The author is deputy director and research fellow at the Institute of American and Oceanian Study at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce. 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.

## Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

## Z WEEKLY

## Gen Z transforming alcohol culture

From cocktail bars to lecture halls, young patrons are reshaping alcohol into an accessory for creativity, conversation, and personal expression.

By LI XINRAN  
lixinran@121st.cn

"When I first started bartending nearly two decades ago, bar patrons were primarily in their 30s or 40s, and alcohol was often tied to work-related events like business gatherings," said Zhang Yuan, a 37-year-old bartender and partner at Tablo, a cocktail bar in Beijing.

Zhang has observed that today, with more and more Gen Z customers visiting bars, they are transforming the drinking scene and the role of alcohol: rather than imbibing to get themselves or others drunk, they now use bars as spaces for various activities like studying, painting, or playing games while enjoying a cocktail.

For them, alcohol is just a pleasant accompaniment.

"They are creating and nurturing their own alcohol culture," Zhang said.

Li Xiaoyi, the 35-year-old owner of Pugged, a three-story cafe and brewpub in Beijing, has also noticed that many customers now seek out bars as relaxing retreats for their personal hobbies. For instance, Li recalls one customer who drew 20 cartoon figure heads on napkins and left them on the table.

"He was there simply to enjoy the time spent creating something," Li said.

According to him, bars are also becoming venues for social events like movie nights, yoga sessions, and even academic lectures — activities once thought to be entirely unrelated to alcohol.

Zhang Jianing, 28, is an organizer of these events in Beijing. He explained that the seemingly casual lectures and discussions held in bars cover a wide range of serious topics, from social sciences and humanities to AI technology.

So far, he has hosted around 10 sessions, each attracting 70 to 100 participants.

The idea of merging bars and lectures came to him during his graduate school years when he regularly attended book clubs, and fellow attendees would often continue their discussions in bars afterward. As a fan of craft beer and cocktails,



Understanding the reasons behind their drink preferences is a great way to connect with people."

Zhao Zifeng, 25, a liquor enthusiast



More and more, people are recognizing alcohol as a way to unwind and enjoy life."

Li Xiaoyi, 35, a bar owner

Zhang Jianing decided to simplify things by hosting lectures directly in pubs.

"This is a new hobby that combines two of my favorite things: alcohol and academic discussions," he said. "My goal is to create a space for offline communication that is enhanced by these delightful beverages."

In Zhang Jianing's view, the ambience of bars and alcoholic beverages naturally carries a light-hearted vibe.

"Entering this space changes attendees' mindsets, creating an egalitarian and welcoming environment for the exchange of ideas. Speakers are not there to lecture, and participants are not there with a quota for how much they should learn," he explained.

One participant of such seminars is Qi Yuchen, 26, who attended an event focused on cats depicted in ancient Chinese paintings. According to him, the discussion remained lively even after the lecture ended, with conversations continuing about how cats have entered human lives and coexist with us.

While Qi offered opinions on pet welfare legislation, other participants shared insights from economic and ecological perspectives.

Although Qi is not a regular drinker himself, he noticed how alcohol influenced intellectual exchanges.

"Under the tipsiness, everyone seemed more willing to talk," he said. "Even if you ask a silly or layman question, others won't laugh at you; instead, they'll acknowledge you and view it as a fresh perspective."

## Redefining bar culture

These events also changed Qi's views on liquor and bars.

He explained that he had previously been influenced by the drinking culture of his parents' generation and held negative stereotypes about bars.

"I was surprised to discover that the bars we visited were well-decorated and even had a touch of romance. Most importantly, the relaxing atmosphere encouraged open and inclusive conversations," he said.

Li also observed a gradual decline in societal biases against alcohol consumption and those who partake in it.

"More and more, people are recognizing alcohol as a way to unwind and enjoy life," said Li.

Zhao Zifeng, a 25-year-old liquor enthusiast, for example, enjoys solitary drinking while eating meals, which contrasts with the traditional alcohol culture that often emphasizes social drinking.

"For summer, I prefer chilled white wine or beer, reserving red wine for the winter. The right beverage enhances the overall dining experience," he said, adding that sometimes after dinner, he might go for another round, drinking according to his mood and savoring the liquor.

He also enjoys discussing liquor because asking about someone's drink choice, even if it's non-alcoholic, reveals a lot about them. "Understanding the reasons behind their drink preferences is a great way to connect with people," Zhao said.

Just as Gen Z views their drink choices as a form of self-expression, young bartenders are also embracing cocktail crafting to showcase their individuality.

"When I look at a liquor, I see the culture and history intertwined with it," Zhang Yuan said. "A skilled bartender should not only demonstrate their techniques in a drink but also convey their emotions and interpretation of the ingredients."

However, she acknowledged that each customer may have a unique reaction to the same cocktail recipe. "Bartenders have the freedom to express themselves through their cocktails; customers are also free to share their feedback. All opinions are valued," Zhang Yuan said.

For Zhang Jianing, this shift toward a more personalized and relaxed alcohol culture is a positive development.

"Alcohol makes us more confident and expressive, allowing us to feel like the protagonists of our own stories rather than being objectified," he said. "As long as we drink moderately, a little alcohol can enrich our lives."



A seminar on women's empowerment was held at a bar in Beijing on Aug 18. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Z WEEKLY

## Hidden gems shine bright

In Beijing's vibrant theater scene, amateur actors from diverse backgrounds shine in plays, showcasing their passion and dedication on stage.

By GUI QIAN  
guiqian@121st.cn

On the evening of Aug 4, an immersive small theater in a Beijing hutong hosted a play that explored themes of war, hunger, and the complexities of human nature. The play, titled *Pure Land Temple*, focuses on the fates of various characters during the An Lushan Rebellion in the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Produced by an amateur theater group called 321, the play was performed by non-professional actors, including students, a journalist, a fashion designer, a veteran, and others from various professions.

Zhang Wanying, a 25-year-old from Jinzhou, Northeast China's Liaoning province, majored in broadcasting and television directing at university, but she has always dreamed of acting and is currently preparing for her third attempt to join the graduate program at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing.

In *Pure Land Temple*, she plays one of the lead roles — a strong yet tender woman who is both a general's wife and a grieving mother who has lost her baby.

"Being on stage feels liberating and stress-relieving, like you can pour out all your emotions," she said about her experience that night.

The fact that the show is a commercial play has made Zhang even more excited. "I accepted the invitation without hesitation," she said, fully aware of how rare such chances are for an amateur actor. "You have to seize opportunities when they come."

Zhang describes her love for theater as "a steady stream of water".

She discovered her passion for imitating skits from the Spring Festival Galas during elementary school. Although she didn't study a related major in college, she never gave up and practiced acting on her own, even though opportunities to perform were scarce.

"Since my junior year in college, I have practiced lines for hours almost every day, including tongue twisters, dialogues, and monologues," Zhang recalled.

*Pure Land Temple* is her first real theater work, which she sees as her "substantial first step" toward becoming an actor.

#### Theater dreams

One of the goals of Theater Group 321 is to help talented amateurs grow into professional actors.

The group was officially founded last year by three young women. One of them is 26-year-old Lu Yimin from Shaoxing, East China's Zhejiang province, who is also the playwright and director of *Pure Land Temple*.

Lu primarily supports herself by writing scripts for TV dramas and scripted murder games, or *juben-sha* in Chinese. However, the theater holds a unique significance for her — it is a place where she can "truly express her thoughts and ideas", even though the financial returns are minimal, and sometimes she has to invest her own money.

"Starting this theater group has given me a sanctuary in a busy society. Although it's small, it allows me to



Members of Just Neighbors (top and bottom center) and Theater Group 321 (bottom left and bottom right) perform plays in the theater. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

retain the copyright of my works and develop them into endless possibilities. Then, with friends who genuinely love theater, we bring these works to life. This sense of happiness and accomplishment is what I care about most," Lu said.

When professional actors face the financial pressure of earning a living, amateur actors can be a better choice for a startup theater group: one that offers little to no pay.

Despite the common bias that amateur actors are inferior to professionals, Lu disagrees. She believes that many non-professional actors can bring valuable life experiences and their own rich cultural knowledge to the table.

"Some amateurs have great potential; they just haven't chosen the path of being a professional actor," she said. "If things go well with 321, they could even become long-term resident actors while still maintaining their primary careers."

Her goal is for the group to eventually stand on its own, building a community of followers and an audience willing to pay for their performances.

"My teacher, who also runs a theater group, once told us that anyone running a theater group has to endure the initial dark times — usually about three years. If the group can survive this phase, it can establish itself," Lu said.

“People from all walks of life come to our group to perform, seeking to immerse themselves in someone else's stories and momentarily escape their own troubles.”

Zhang Peng, founder of Just Neighbors theater group

#### Universal stage

One theater group that has successfully navigated these early challenges and is now in its 17th year is Just Neighbors.

Having boasted thousands of members, the theater is currently the longest-running and largest amateur theater group in Beijing.

Zhang Peng, a professional playwright from Beijing, never expected that Just Neighbors would last

“Starting this theater group has given me a sanctuary in a busy society. Although it's small, it allows me to retain the copyright of my works and develop them into endless possibilities.”

Lu Yimin, one of the founders of Theater Group 321

this long when she founded it in 2007 because running an amateur theater group presents numerous challenges.

According to her, the amateur actors have their own jobs, making it particularly difficult to coordinate rehearsal times. Finding a venue is also a major issue. In a city like Beijing, where space is at a premium, securing a stable and affordable rehearsal place requires

both effort and a bit of luck.

"I'm an optimistic person, and I tackle each problem head-on," Zhang Peng said. "I don't see the theater group as just an activity; it has become a part of me, like an organ or a hand."

For the past 17 years, except for natural disasters or unavoidable obstacles, Zhang Peng has been at the rehearsal space every single Saturday, always waiting for the other group members to arrive.

For her, theater is a way to get closer to one's true self. She believes that, as children, we all played house and took on different roles naturally. Acting is a part of our nature. However, as we grow older, societal expectations constrain us, and we start wearing more masks.

"In our theater group, we strip away these layers of disguise and uncover our instincts. For amateur actors especially, I emphasize acting from intuition rather than relying solely on technique," she said.

Theater is also a comprehensive form of aesthetic education. From Zhang Peng's observations, members who have participated in plays tend to develop a deeper appreciation for literature, music, and even their daily attire. Her vision for the future extends beyond Just Neighbors; she hopes that theater education will become as common as children's programming classes.

"What life owes you, theater gives back to you. People from all walks of life come to our group to perform, seeking to immerse themselves in someone else's stories and momentarily escape their own troubles. Theater is a form of salvation, a baptism for our ordinary lives," she said.

#### Passionate pursuits

Li Yuan, 23, from Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi province, strongly resonates with Zhang Peng's perspective.

Now working as a copywriter at an immigration company, she joined Just Neighbors last summer right after graduating from university.

"Work can make people numb. Every time I see people crammed into the subway during rush hour, looking exhausted, I wonder, why are we working so hard for money? We need something in our lives that keeps us going. For me, that something is theater," she said.

In the nearly one year since she joined Just Neighbors, Li has performed in eight plays, taking on more than a dozen different roles — ranging from a virtuous wife to a rough-and-tumble female thug, a fantastical monster, and even a cross-dressing male judge — allowing her to experience a variety of different lives.

Li often becomes deeply immersed in her roles. She recalls a moment after one performance when she was walking home: "I felt as though I was strolling through the streets of old Shanghai in the early 1900s. Everything around me seemed to fade into black and white, and I was the only one in color."

Another theater enthusiast is Ge Sixiang, 23, from Beijing, who works as a research assistant at a medical institute.

When he first joined Just Neighbors last year, he had doubts about his acting abilities. However, within a few months, he had played the lead male role multiple times and had become known as the "pillar" of the theater group.

Beyond the highlights on stage, what Ge values most is the cohesion of the theater group — the way everyone "pulls together and focuses on pushing things forward".

"On stage, if I or my partner makes a mistake, we help each other instead of assigning blame. It's like we're all in the same small boat; if the boat starts taking on water, everyone bails it out together," he said.

In an amateur theater group, members often take on many tasks beyond acting, such as designing the stage, producing and playing sound effects, creating props, writing promotional materials, and managing audience WeChat groups.

From the moment he joined the group, Ge took on these roles and even taught himself to use multiple video and audio editing software programs.

"I spend most of my time outside of work in the theater. Unlike the stress and frustration of a regular job, working for the theater group — despite the intense and demanding tasks — fills me with a sense of purpose and love," he said.

# ZWEEKLY

## Brushing history back to life

Illustrator Qin Zhizhen captures the beauty of Shanxi's ancient architecture through hand-drawn art, inspiring a new generation's appreciation for cultural heritage.

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and ZHANG LI

In recent years, with the rise of traditional Chinese culture, the ancient buildings and temples scattered across rural areas have attracted more young people to explore and visit.

Hailing from Taiyuan, North China's Shanxi province, illustrator Qin Zhizhen has captured the hearts of social media users with his hand-drawn depictions of ancient Shanxi architecture, breathing new life into these millennia-old structures.

In a coffee shop, armed with a paintbrush and a box of colors, the 29-year-old begins his daily routine of painting.

"After painting ancient buildings for so long, I feel like every time I sit across from them and carefully sketch, it's as if I'm having a conversation with them, getting to know them all over again. Each meticulous creation is a moment where these ancient buildings and I draw closer, understanding each other," Qin said.

Qin grew up near Jinci Temple in Taiyuan. First constructed during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), Jinci Temple is a historic cultural site showcasing fine examples of ancient Chinese architecture, sculpture, frescoes, and inscriptions.

When he was little, Qin would often accompany his grandfather on visits to the temple and other classical buildings in Shanxi, listening to his grandfather recount legendary tales. These experiences planted the seed of his passion for ancient architecture.

"What truly made me realize the significance of these buildings was when I studied courses on ancient Chinese architecture in university. I came to understand that the pavilions and towers of Jinci Temple are truly unique in the history of Chinese architecture," Qin said.

As Qin delved deeper into his creations, he recognized Shanxi as a land rich in history and culture, where stories and anecdotes from the past abound. Landmarks like Foguang Temple, the Yungang Grottoes, and Yongle Palace have all become prominent features in his story books.

After graduating in 2018 with a degree in traditional Chinese painting, Qin returned to Taiyuan.

Aside from teaching at an art training institution on weekends, he often painted various subjects, including flowers, animals, and famous foreign buildings, in his spare time.

Though his work received some praise, it remained relatively unnoticed, serving primarily as a form of self-entertainment.

In 2022, feeling restless, Qin



Qin Zhizhen

decided to paint Jinci Temple, a subject he was familiar with.

He initially sketched it with a pencil on paper before adding watercolors. "After finishing the colors, I found it quite appealing. When I posted this work online, it received many likes, comments, and shares, which greatly encouraged me," Qin said, marking the beginning of his journey into painting ancient buildings.

Although his expertise lies in traditional Chinese painting, Qin opted for a more accessible style — outlining with a pencil and coloring with watercolor — to depict ancient buildings.

In his compositions, Qin focused on ancient buildings as the main subject, complemented by representative architectural details or artifacts, along with explanatory text, creating visually rich and appealing images.

One of the challenges in his creative process was mastering the structures and proportions of the buildings, as well as harmonizing colors to authentically capture the

weathered hues of the past, achieving an aged look.

To enhance the authenticity of his portrayals, Qin also consulted books on ancient architecture for reference.

These delicate and vibrant miniature paintings are easily shareable and widely accepted, striking a balance between sophistication and accessibility.

By presenting Shanxi's finest ancient architectural art in a relatively approachable manner, Qin ensures that his work resonates with a broad audience.

As his social media following grew, Qin began contemplating whether he could paint all of Shanxi's ancient buildings. To date, he has completed over 80 of them.

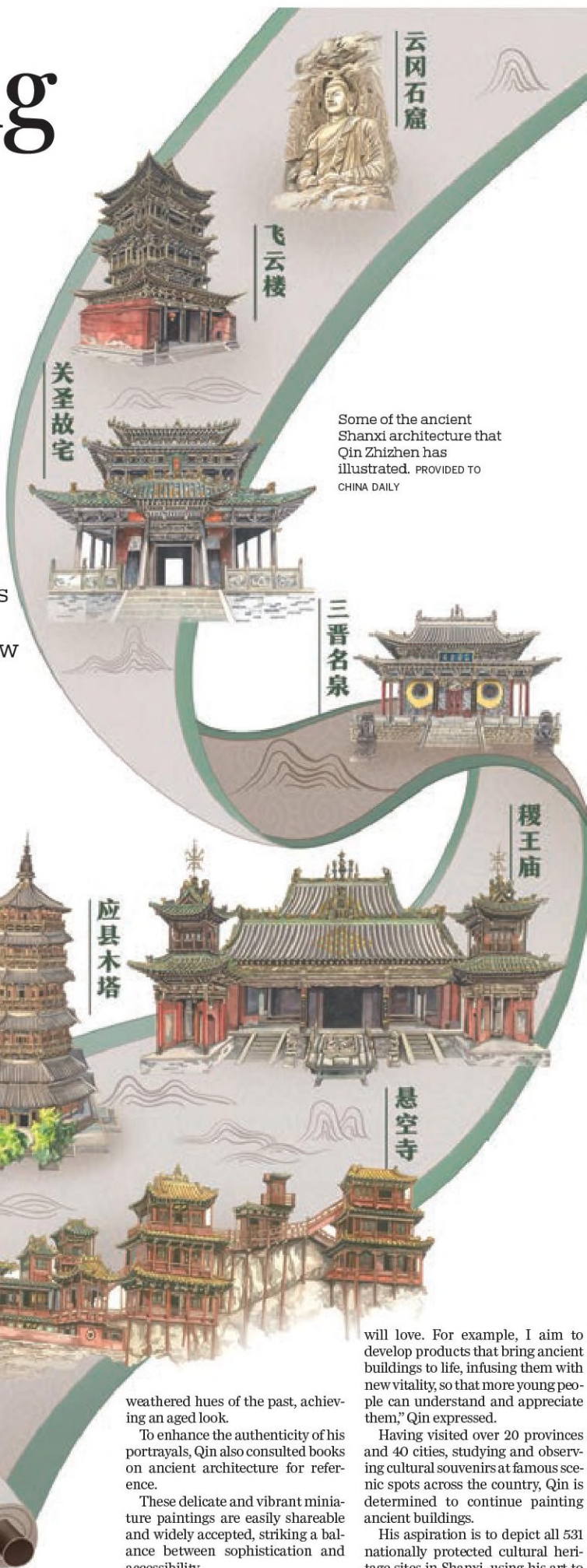
"While many people appreciate my art, these small works don't pose significant technical challenges; after all, they are not artistic creations but more like records. For me, the most important thing is to persist in this endeavor," Qin said.

As time passed, the number of fans of his work continued to grow. Some suggested turning his paintings into postcards, puzzles, or fridge magnets as cultural and creative products.

"I thought the idea was excellent and decided to give it a try. I was surprised by the overwhelming popularity of the products, which filled me with a sense of accomplishment," Qin said.

Today, Qin shares his work on social media platforms like Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili, and has also produced videos introducing ancient buildings.

"My goal now is to create things that young people, especially those interested in cultural innovation,



Some of the ancient Shanxi architecture that Qin Zhizhen has illustrated. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

### Global Insights

## A Hungarian student's journey to master TCM

By WU YONG and XING ZHIYUAN in Shenyang

From Aug 8 to 10, a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) night market took place at Liaoning University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (LUTCM) in Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province.

A foreign face stood out at the market. He was deeply engrossed in making hawthorn balls, a traditional Chinese remedy for boosting appetite and digestion.

"Even though I've studied TCM for years, this is my first time actually making a medicinal formula with my own hands," said Liu Bao Oscar, a 26-year-old Hungarian student at LUTCM.

Liu's journey from Hungary to LUTCM was not just academic but also personal.

As a child, Liu often struggled with digestive issues — a weak stomach and frequent diarrhea — and Western medicine offered little relief. "It cast a shadow over my childhood," he said.

So, Liu's father, a graduate of LUTCM, turned to his own training. He applied traditional Chinese medicinal patches to Liu's belly button, where the Shenque acupuncture point is located. In a matter of months, Liu's condition improved significantly.

"At the time, it seemed almost magical," Liu recalled. "How could something so different from Western medicine be so effective? I had to understand it."

In 2019, driven by both a love for the ancient practice and admiration for his father, Liu left Hungary for China. "I knew I had to come to the source to truly learn," he said.

During his studies, Liu's understanding of TCM broadened and deepened. He learned that the patches his father used contained herbs believed to have warming effects, perfectly suited to his cold-induced digestive issues, and that the proximity of the Shenque acupuncture point to the digestive organs allows the medicine to be absorbed more effectively.

"It all made sense once I understood the theory," he said. "It's not magic — it's science."

This realization marked a turning point for Liu. He began applying what he had learned to his own condition.

Diagnosed with spleen deficiency, Liu tried to create a personalized remedy by experimenting with different combinations and adjusting the formula based on his understanding of TCM principles.

After several months of treatment, the results were clear. "My appetite improved, I had more energy — my whole condition improved," he said.

The success of his self-treatment solidified Liu's commitment to TCM.

Among the many ancient texts he studied, *Huangdi Neijing* (Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor) — one of the Chinese medical classics — resonated most deeply with him, especially the principle of "nourishing yang energy in spring and summer, and yin energy in autumn and winter".

"This concept of aligning oneself with the seasons — it's so simple yet so profound," he said.

To preserve his yang energy, Liu made a significant lifestyle change. "I haven't eaten ice cream in three years," he said. "It's a small sacrifice to maintain my health."

The night market offered Liu a rare opportunity to see TCM in action outside the classroom. He eagerly engaged in various activities. At the acupuncture and massage booths, he watched seasoned practitioners at work, absorbing their techniques and insights.

"Seeing the theory put into practice — it's invaluable," he said. "It's one thing to study it; it's another to see it help real people."

Over three days, the market saw more than 55,000 people receiving treatments like acupuncture, cupping, and massage. An additional 100,000 participated in cultural activities, from tea tastings to making herbal remedies.

"Compared to Western medicine, TCM's most distinctive feature is its focus on holistic lifestyle adjustments to maintain health and balance," said LUTCM Party Secretary Lyu Xiaodong. "This night market isn't just about showcasing TCM — it's about making it accessible and helping people integrate it into their lives."

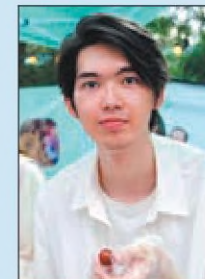
For Liu, the event reinforced his desire to bring this knowledge back to Hungary. "I want more people to understand, to accept, and to benefit from TCM," Liu said. "It's a responsibility, but it's also a privilege."

Reflecting on his journey, Liu sees himself as part of a larger narrative.

"Many years ago, my father came to LUTCM to study TCM. Now, I'm here, continuing that legacy," he said. "The more I learn, the more I realize how much there is still to discover."

Contact the writers at [wuyong@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:wuyong@chinadaily.com.cn)

Right: Hungarian student Liu Bao Oscar holds a hawthorn ball he has just made at the Traditional Chinese Medicine night market at Liaoning University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Shenyang, Liaoning, on Aug 8. Below: LUTCM Party Secretary Lyu Xiaodong (right) checks a citizen's pulse at the night market on Aug 10. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.