

Comeback queen

Chinese tennis ace fends off major opponents to advance in US Open
SPORTS, PAGE 6



US students get to experience China's culture, commerce
GLOBAL LENS, PAGE 7

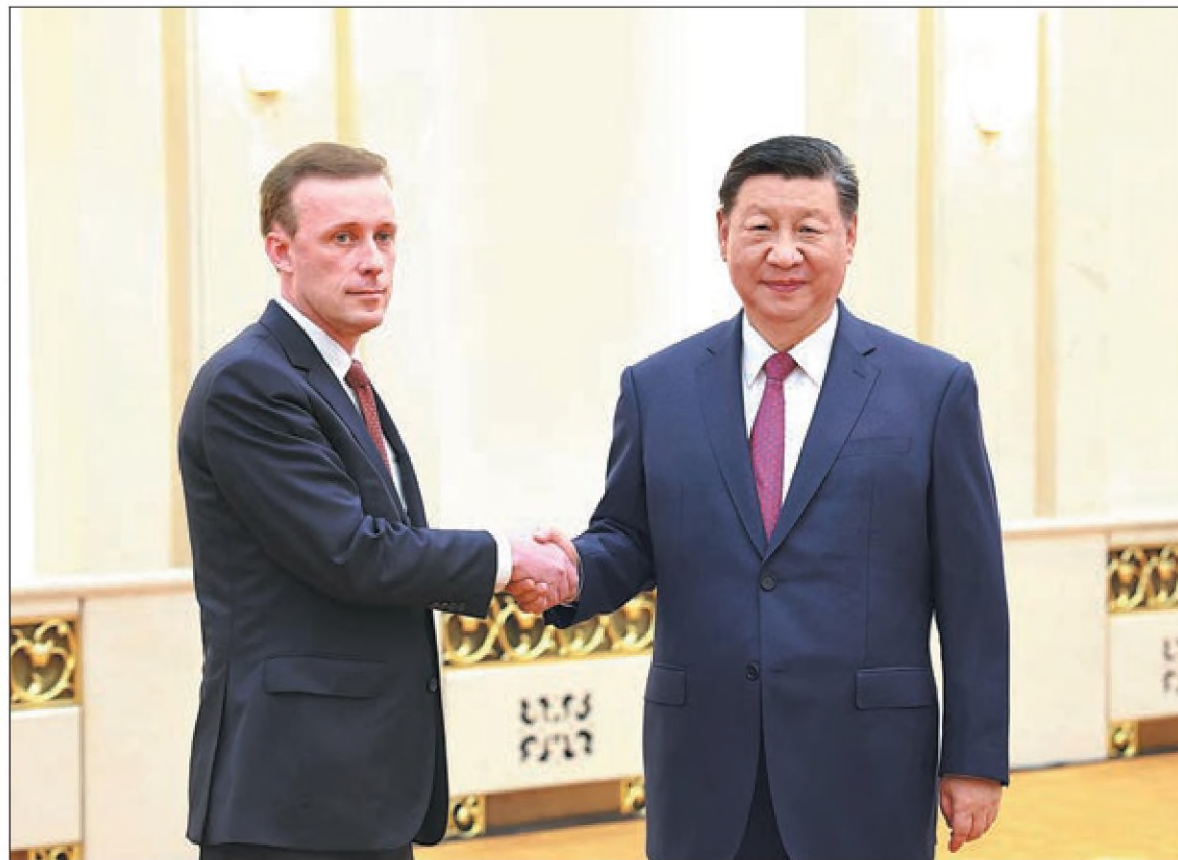


Top trends

Expo displays cutting-edge tech applications of big data, LLMs
BUSINESS, PAGE 14

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President Xi Jinping shakes hands with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan during their meeting on Thursday at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Xi urges Washington to view Beijing properly

China's US policy maintains high degree of consistency, president says

By ZHANG YUNBI
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When President Xi Jinping met with visiting United States National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Thursday afternoon, he highlighted the need for the US to perceive China properly as well as Beijing's foreign policy consistency.

"When China and the US, two major countries, engage with each other, the No 1 issue is to develop a correct strategic perception, and they need to first and foremost find an answer to the overarching question:

Are China and the US rivals or partners?" Xi told the senior US official at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Thursday was the final day of Sullivan's three-day visit to China, the first in his current post. Together with Foreign Minister Wang Yi, he co-chaired the two-day China-US strategic communication, which concluded on Wednesday.

Xi said that as two major countries, China and the US should be responsible to history, the people and the world, and "should be a source of stability for world peace and a driving force for common development".

Xi expressed the hope that the US will work in the same direction with China, "view China and its development in a positive and rational light" and "see each other's development as an opportunity rather than a challenge".

He called on Washington to work with Beijing to find a right way for China and the US — two countries with different civilizations, systems and paths — to "coexist in peace and achieve common development on this planet".

The two nations should promote the stability of bilateral ties and, on

this basis, strive to improve them and move them forward, he added.

Sullivan conveyed US President Joe Biden's greetings to Xi and thanked Xi for taking the time to meet with him.

He reiterated that Washington does not seek a new Cold War and does not seek to change China's system, and that the revitalization of US alliances is not against China, the US does not support "Taiwan independence", and it does not seek conflict with China.

The US has not changed its one-China policy and has no intention of using the Taiwan question as a tool to contain China, he added.

Analysts noted that Beijing and Washington had candid and adequate discussions and even debate at the recently concluded China-US strategic communication, and its outcomes include further dialogue and collaboration involving areas such as the two militaries, climate change and artificial intelligence.

See *Relation*, page 3

Nation propels global shift to green energy

By ZHENG XIN
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China's green energy development has become an engine for the global energy transition, which has substantially eased global inflation pressures while addressing climate change, according to a white paper issued on Thursday.

China is responsible for over 40 percent of the annual additions to global renewable energy capacity since 2013. The newly installed capacity in China last year accounted for more than half of the world's total, according to the white paper titled "China's Energy Transition", which was issued by the State Council Information Office.

From 2014 to 2023, the share of nonfossil fuels in global energy consumption rose from 13.6 percent to 18.5 percent, with China accounting for 45.2 percent of the increase. Today, China is collaborating with more than 100 countries and regions on green energy projects, the white paper noted.

Zhang Jianhua, head of China's National Energy Administration, said during the release of the white paper in Beijing that "as a strong advocate of global energy transition, China will continue working with other members of the international community to plan energy cooperation together, address global climate change and create a clean world for all".

The International Energy Agency has recognized China as a front-runner in the global renewable energy sector and a major driving force behind the world's rapid expansion of renewable energy capacity.

Analysts said that China has been stepping up efforts to promote the reform of its energy production and consumption methods while upgrading its energy supply capacity.

"Buoyed by supportive policies, competitive advancements in the domestic supply chain and a reliable grid system, China is on track to accelerate energy transition with continuous renewable energy projects in place," said Deng Simeng, a senior analyst for renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

According to the consultancy, over half of the additions to renewable capacity this year will come from China. By the end of July, China had installed 1,206 gigawatts of wind and

solar power capacity, exceeding the 1,200 GW national target set for 2030, meaning that China has accomplished the target six years ahead of schedule.

A report from the International Renewable Energy Agency said that global wind power projects have seen the average power generation cost per kilowatt-hour decrease more than 60 percent over the past decade, while solar power projects have seen a cost decrease of more than 80 percent. The reductions are largely attributable to China's green energy shift, the report said.

Wang Lining, director of the oil market department of the Economics and Technology Research Institute of China National Petroleum Corp, said that China's further opening-up has created new opportunities for deeper international cooperation on clean energy.

Multinationals, including General Electric, BP and Siemens, are steadily expanding their investment in China's energy sector, with many foreign projects well underway across the country, he said.

According to the white paper, China has become the world's largest investor in energy transition, with the country's investment in the transition reaching \$676 billion in 2023.

Wan Jinsong, deputy head of the National Energy Administration, said that China's exports of photovoltaic and wind power products helped other countries reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 810 million metric tons in 2023.

"The country's electricity generated from clean energy has catered to more than half of the increase in total electricity consumption over the past decade, marking a growing share of green energy in its energy mix," he said.

According to the white paper, the country's installed capacity of clean energy reached 1,700 GW last year, or 58.2 percent of the country's total installed power generation capacity. Clean energy accounted for 26.4 percent of the country's total energy use in 2023, up from 15.5 percent in 2013, while the share of coal in its energy consumption dropped 12.1 percentage points during the past decade.

Zhang, the NEA head, said the government will continuously step up efforts to deepen energy reforms by establishing and improving mechanisms for green and low-carbon development.

Partnership of equals and its impact on Nigeria's implementation of AfCFTA

Developing and monetizing the African trading sector is possible through the African Continental Free Trade Area. When fully implemented and ratified, this trade pact will encompass over 1 billion people across 55 countries, and have a combined GDP of about \$3.4 trillion. The AfCFTA is also expected to boost competitiveness of member states, lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty and 68 million out of moderate poverty by 2035, increase intra-African exports by over 80 percent, and boost Africa's income by \$450 billion. Through the AfCFTA, the African economy is expected to

WORLD WATCH
By Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi

grow by \$29 trillion by 2050. It is significant for the continent because a number of African nations developed insufficient and narrow merchant fleets during the 1960s and 1970s. The AfCFTA could change this, making intra-African trade significantly different from what it was.

As a member of the Economic Community of West African States,

Nigeria has established various domestic economic programs such as Economic Recovery and Growth Plan. The AfCFTA has been cited as particularly beneficial for Nigeria, a historically marginalized nation with colonial trade patterns. As Nigeria lacks industrialization, combining the ERGP and AfCFTA would gradually change its colonial trade pattern, and significantly increase its imports and exports. Additionally, it will help diversify investment flows, accelerate growth and reverse the anti-industrialization trend.

See *Ties*, page 3



Joining the fleet

A C919, China's first self-developed large passenger aircraft, is welcomed with a water salute to its arrival at Beijing Capital International Airport on Thursday. The plane was delivered to Air China on Wednesday in Shanghai. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY
See story, page 14

GOOEY FLUID TURNED INTO \$1.68B LIQUID GOLD FOR JINAN

Shandong capital's world-leading hyaluronic acid industry spreads its reach in cosmetics, health, food products

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

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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It's in your eyes, joints and skin, and even present in your tissue. Hyaluronic acid is a naturally occurring fluid that

has multiple functions in the human body and contributes to

joint and skin health, healing and tissue hydration.

An adult human, on average, only has around 15 to 20 grams of this disaccharide polymer, known for its ability to bind water many times its weight. However, the con-

centration of HA decreases as a person ages and can lead to health problems such as knee pain, wrinkles and eye diseases.

Since 1934, when researchers Karl Meyer and John Palmer of Columbia University in the United States extracted the acid from cows' eyeballs, scientists around the world have been exploring

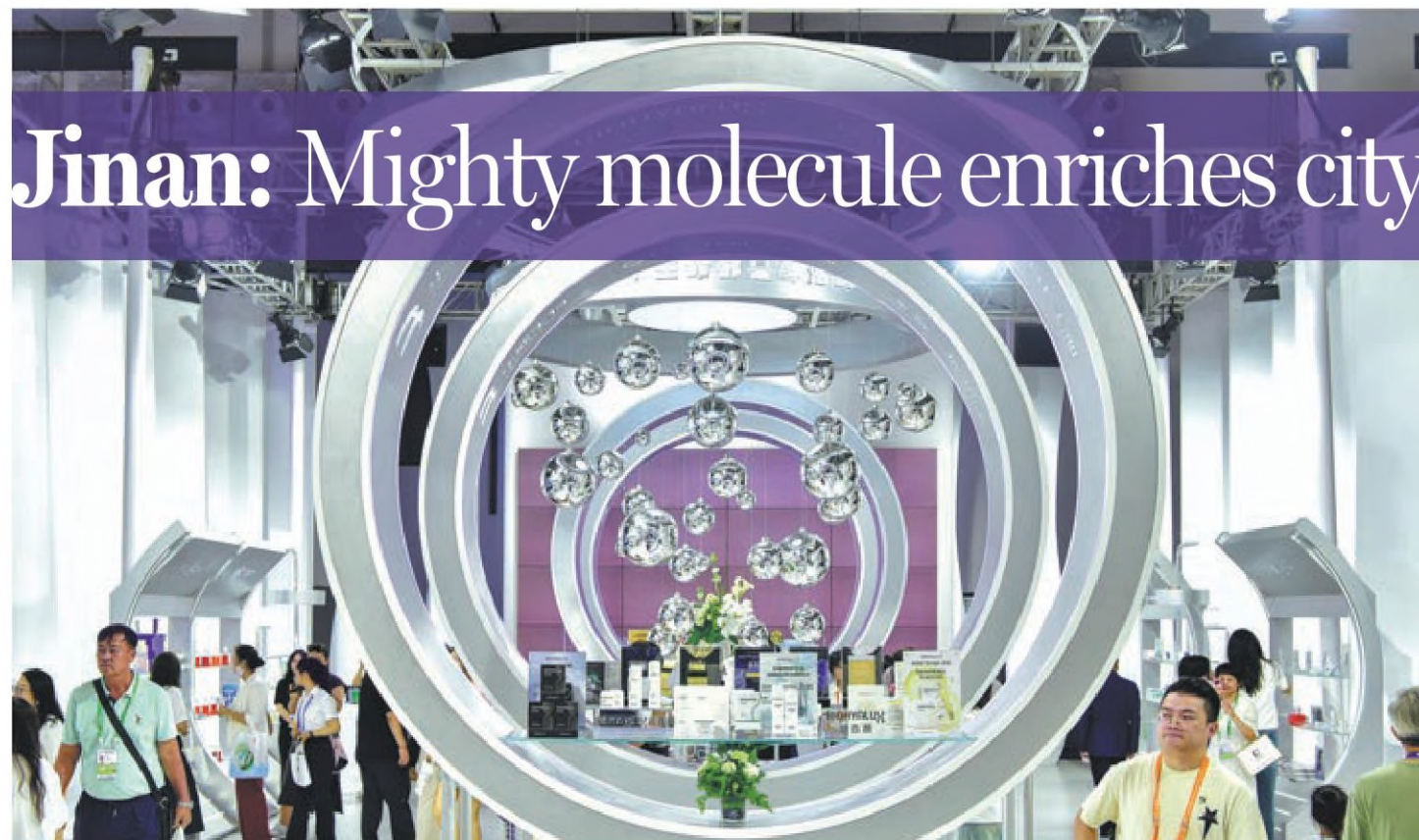
ways to create products containing HA to benefit people's health.

Applications of the substance have also expanded beyond medical use, to beauty products and daily use items such as hand sanitizers and some foods.

See *Jinan*, page 2

INSIDE
Paving way for RMB in Africa
Global Views, page 13
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PAGE TWO



People visit the Bloomage Biotechnology Co booth at the fourth China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou, Hainan province, in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

The wide use of the gooey fluid has created huge global demand for HA raw materials, with China emerging as the world's largest producer of such products.

China accounted for 82 percent of HA global raw materials sales in 2021, according to the 2021 Global and China Hyaluronic Acid Industry Market Research Report by US research firm Frost & Sullivan.

Jinan, capital city of Shandong province, produces 70 percent of China's HA raw materials, making it the largest production base of hyaluronic acid in the country, said Xu Lei, deputy director of the city's bureau of industry and information technology.

"The total revenue generated from the HA industry in Jinan, including its raw materials and HA end products, surpassed 12 billion yuan (\$1.68 billion) last year," Xu said at a news conference during an industry conference in Jinan, this June.

"HA cosmetics and health supplements produced in Jinan have gained widespread popularity," she said.

Once considered a luxury item, hyaluronic acid has become an affordable product used in everyday items due to new production capabilities and methods. At an exhibition hall of one production company based in Jinan, bottled water, pet food, cosmetics and healthcare products featuring HA are on display, indicating its widening uses.

Scientific advances

Scientists started manufacturing hyaluronic acid products in the 1970s after they realized it could be extracted from rooster combs — the fleshy, red, crown on the bird's head. However, this method not only faced challenges in collecting enough rooster combs, but was hampered by low extraction rates and high impurity levels.

Also, few people could afford products that used HA as it was more expensive than gold. It requires 200 kilograms of combs, from approximately 20,000 roosters, to extract 1 kg of hyaluronic acid.

Although starting late, the research and development of the industry in China progressed rapidly.

In the early 1980s, scientists in Jinan successfully extracted the substance from human umbilical cords and rooster combs, marking the first step in China's research on hyaluronic acid. In 1985, scientists in Jinan produced the country's first HA injection for ophthalmic surgery.

In the 1990s, Jinan scientists pioneered a microbial fermentation process to produce hyaluronic acid, which significantly advanced the industry in the city. The breakthrough also brought down the price of hyaluronic acid substantially, making it more available to the general public.



Left: An engineer checks the status of cosmetic ingredients at a plant of Freda Biotechnology Co in Jinan, Shandong province. Right: A technician observes the development of experimental strains in a lab at the R&D center of Bloomage in Jinan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"In the early 1990s, HA was mainly for medical use, particularly in orthopedics and ophthalmology, and it was very expensive," said Liu Aihua, senior president of Bloomage Biotechnology Co based in Jinan.

"At that time, the cost of using HA viscoelastic agents for a cataract surgery was around 2,700 to 3,000 yuan. But now, the cost is around 100 yuan."

With the introduction of HA, cataract surgery, which used to take several hours, could be performed in about 10 minutes.

"The viscoelastic agents made from HA help millions of ophthalmic patients regain their sight each year," said Liu.

As part of its public welfare undertakings, the company has been donating HA viscoelastic agents and intraocular lenses for cataract patients for 10 years.

"In cataract surgery the role of hyaluronic acid in facilitating procedures and protecting the corneal endothelium is well established," said Wang Lihua, 70, an eye expert at Jinan Huashi Eye Hospital.

"Domestic HA viscoelastic agents are high quality. In addition, domestic ones are more affordable," he said.

Sales of eye treatment products using HA reached 2.32 billion yuan in China in 2021, according to industry data. Between 2017 and 2021, the compound annual growth rate of the market was 11.8 percent.

Go on, rub it in

There is also fast-growing demand for the fluid in the cosmetics industry.

A bottle of moisturizing spray priced at 80 yuan has topped online sales of moisturizing products for five consecutive years. Over 700 million yuan in product sales were recorded last year, with the figure projected to reach 900 million yuan this year, said Gao Chunming, chairman of Jinan

China's techniques for producing HA are leading the world, which has ensured the quality of HA end products and a reasonable price for consumers."

Liu Aihua, senior vice president of Bloomage Biotechnology Co

based Shandong Freda Biotechnology Co.

Gao and Liu both believe that growing recognition of domestic brands is expanding the market for Chinese HA products.

Last year, Freda's cosmetics revenue hit 2.42 billion yuan, representing year-on-year growth of 22.71 percent, according to the company's annual report.

A dermal filler injection product made by Bloomage saw a year-on-year sales increase of 250 percent, according to its 2023 annual report.

"China's techniques for producing HA are leading the world, which has ensured the quality of HA end products and a reasonable price for consumers," said Liu.

Wang Qian, a Jinan resident and cosmetics seller, likes using local HA moisturizing products on her skin. "It's not a secret in our circle that many top skin care products are using HA produced in Jinan as ingredients," she said.

In the city's supermarkets, local cosmetics are favored by buyers for their affordability and good quality. "Jinan made HA skin care

products are one of my favorite gifts to give to my friends," said Wang.

Weighing the options

The molecular weight of HA defines its application in end products, depending on their type and intended function. For example, HA with a molecular weight of less than 10 kDa is desirable for liquids that can be absorbed thoroughly by the skin. One kDa is equivalent to 1,000 daltons, a unit used to express molecular mass.

HA's biochemistry is highly complex, as it interacts with various cell receptors depending on its molecular weight.

Bloomage has been able to produce different HA molecular weights since 2011, the first company in the world to do so, by using an enzyme degradation method. The company can produce the largest HA molecular weight, over 4 million Da, and the smallest, 800 Da, in the world, Liu said.

With its enzyme degradation method, Bloomage now offers over 200 specifications of HA raw materials to meet various production demands. This innovative approach has won the company clients around the world.

The technology has obtained invention patents in China, the United States, the European Union, Japan, and South Korea, and expanded Bloomage's global markets.

HA raw materials generated 1.13 billion yuan in revenue for the company last year, a year-on-year increase of 15.22 percent, according to its annual report. Of the total, 517 million yuan is from overseas markets, representing year-on-year growth of 21.47 percent.

"I have always been proud of the fact that both the top global cosmetics producers and Chinese cosmetics producers are using our HA products," Liu said.

The company's products are sold in over

70 countries and regions including European nations, the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

Expansion of products

The global HA market is poised for major growth, driven by both the cosmetics industry and increasing incidences of osteoarthritis and ophthalmic diseases in aging populations around the world, experts said at the Jinan conference in June.

HA manufacturers are also ramping up their research and development efforts to expand the liquid's applications in more fields. Bloomage spent 446 million yuan on R&D last year, a year-on-year increase of 14.98 percent. Freda spent 166 million yuan, a 10.11 percent yearly increase.

Bloomage has helped expand the use of HA products from traditional areas such as ophthalmology, orthopedics, medical aesthetics, and skin care to new areas including tissue engineering, gastrointestinal health, oral care, pet care and textiles.

Targeted technologies are necessary to unlock the potential use of HA in different fields, Liu said. For example, to use hyaluronic acid in hair care products, the technology must prevent water from rinsing away. For its use in lipsticks, advances are needed to change the molecular structure to make it able to be dissolved with oil.

Gao, of Freda, envisions vast opportunities for HA beyond cosmetics and medical use, particularly in the food and high-end agricultural sectors.

The National Health Commission has approved HA as a new food ingredient, allowing its incorporation into common food products in 2021.

"Unlike medicines that can have immediate effects, HA food products require a process," said Gao, adding that Freda has developed a drinkable HA product that is set to hit the market soon.

"The moisturizing and lubricating effects of HA can protect the gastric mucosa (a protective layer of mucous membrane in the stomach)," he said.

Gao said HA is beneficial in enhancing soil quality, improving plant nutrition, and elevating fruit quality. He said he had tasted an orange grown by the Agricultural Sciences Institute in soil enriched with hyaluronic acid, and it was "very juicy and sweet".

Jinan is also aiming to build its HA industrial base within three years to create a world-class hub for a complete industrial chain that integrates R&D, pilot experiments, production and sales.

The initiative will incorporate government policy support, collaborative innovation and financial support, and is expected to attract a cluster of HA-related companies.

Thirty-two companies involved in the HA business already have facilities in Jinan, the city government said.



Left: An aseptic workshop producing facial masks at Freda's factory. XINHUA



Middle: People learn about hyaluronic acid cosmetics at the China Beauty Expo in Shanghai in May. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: HA bottled water produced by Bloomage on sale at a shopping mall in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Magnificent display in the sky

A PLA Air Force Y-20 aircraft and six J-10 performance aircraft from the August 1st Aerobatics Team fly in formation over the Giza pyramids in Egypt on Wednesday. Invited to participate in the first Egypt Aviation Exhibition, the performance by the Chinese aircraft was a reflection of the friendship between China and Egypt.

SUI XIANKAI / XINHUA



Hong Kong welcomes Olympic stars

By ZHANG YI, XING WEN and STEPHY ZHANG in Hong Kong

A star-studded delegation of mainland athletes who achieved outstanding results at the Paris Olympic Games arrived in Hong Kong on Thursday for a series of activities to demonstrate the medalists' Olympic spirit and to interact with local residents for three days.

Led by Gao Zhidan, president of the Chinese Olympic Committee, a group of 65 Chinese Olympians, including 59 gold medalists from the Paris 2024 Olympics, arrived in

Hong Kong on Thursday. It has been a tradition since 2004 for mainland Olympic medalists to visit the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions after finishing the Summer Olympic Games.

China celebrated its most successful overseas performance ever during the Paris Olympics, securing the second spot in the overall medal standings with a haul of 40 gold medals.

The visiting delegation included diving superstar Quan Hongchan and record-breaking swimmer Pan Zhanle. During a welcoming meeting,

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said that the event provides Hong Kong residents with the opportunity to witness the excellence of national athletes up close, fully demonstrating the care that the country places on Hong Kong.

"I hope that the delegation's visit to Hong Kong will make everyone feel like one family," he said.

At a news conference on Thursday afternoon, table tennis star Ma Long reminisced about the warm welcome he received from the government and residents of Hong Kong during his previous visits to the city.

"I feel lucky to share my stories during this event. This time, I hope to engage in more interactions with young people, which will be a special memory from my career," he said.

Swimming star Zhang Yufei, who won one silver and five bronze medals in Paris, said that she had visited Hong Kong several times before for competitions and felt quite familiar with the city. Speaking Cantonese, she shared with the media that she had enjoyed tasting Hong Kong-style shrimp dumplings and barbecue pork buns during previous visits.

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Ties: Chinese aid for Nigeria promising

From page 1

The Belt and Road Initiative, nine programs implemented under the first three-year plan of the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, prepared at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus, align with the infrastructure and development agenda goals of the AfCFTA, jointly contribute to the global community of shared future, thereby enhancing cooperation for implementation of the AfCFTA trade agreement.

Moreover, all recognize trade as a major factor for inclusive growth and poverty reduction as well as an opportunity for Nigeria to diversify its export and import markets. China, in its cooperation with Nigeria, has taken into account the West's colonial and imperial legacy in Nigeria, as well as its own experience of being subjugated by it, when forming a partnership of equals that could impact Nigeria's successful implementation of the AfCFTA.

As a result, the Chinese government has used anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism as a common denominator in strengthening Sino-Nigerian relations. Due to this, China has repeatedly emphasized the need for rapid, sustainable and pro-poor growth and development through trade channels, especially in manufacturing products.

I believe, based on the above, that the Nigerian government with its current comprehensive policy framework in collaboration with China can successfully implement

its AfCFTA goals and facilitate cross-border trade while pursuing its development agenda and closing its development gap. Taking into account China and Nigeria aiming to develop a comprehensive partnership at the same time as developing the Africa-China trade community and regional trade integration through AfCFTA, Nigeria believes that joining forces with China to develop development policy goals for sustainable and pro-poor economic growth and development through trade channels is imperative. By improving regional trade integration, the AfCFTA will accelerate Nigeria's development agenda, enabling it to reach its full potential and close its development gaps.

As a global leader in industrialization that wants to see Africa's development policy objective work in Africa, China has nurtured its relationship with African countries such as Nigeria for the past decades. Investing in African development projects like infrastructure development has opened up a new source of funds for Africa, allowing China to become the partner of choice for many African countries, including Nigeria. It is not surprising that China has gained considerable favor on the continent in general. Due to the AfCFTA, China intends to support Nigeria's successful implementation of its AfCFTA goals by strengthening the value chains of goods produced in Nigerian and other African markets. Furthermore, China intends to help Nigeria address its domestic

supply-side constraints and boost its value-added production by providing research and knowledge management facilities. This will ultimately lead Nigeria to diversify its exports to China and other countries and to benefit from the Chinese consumer market. Also, Nigerians will be able to specialize in their crafts, align their production capacity with global standards, and enhance the infrastructure network of the country so that fresh produce can be transported to consumers within the country and across the continent more quickly, since the AfCFTA aims to promote economic integration and intra-Africa trade.

The AfCFTA is clearly focused on trade within Africa, but it may also indirectly affect trade relations between China and African countries such as Nigeria. Improved infrastructure and harmonized regulations on the continent could make African countries such as Nigeria more attractive for Chinese investment and trade partnerships, which could affect future trade dynamics between Africa and China. Consequently, there could be an increase in trade activity that could benefit both China and Nigeria directly, indirectly, and mutually, since China is one of Nigeria's most important trading partners and investors, involved in infrastructure, manufacturing and creative industries. Since Chinese leaders have consistently engaged with the region on several economic fronts in recent years; as such, numerous African leaders have concluded that

no country can match China's economic engagement in Africa. Among the reasons for this is how Chinese direct investment has injected substantial growth into Africa's economy. Chinese government policies have helped alleviate employment problems, solve poverty problems in African countries, and make the relevant planning in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for world poverty alleviation a reality for Africans.

It is promising that China will assist Nigeria in implementing the AfCFTA, but security and economic experts will tell you Nigeria's success depends on an environment free of insecurity, especially maritime piracy. By partnering with Nigeria and promoting bilateral and multilateral Sino-Nigerian relations, China recognizes the importance of a safe environment free of insecurity issues. Thus, the Chinese government believes that addressing Nigeria's insecurity issues through preventive approaches that include fixing poverty, infrastructure and economic development issues is more significant for local people. And the Nigerian government should learn from Chinese experiences and explore its development path based on its own situation.

Looking ahead, Nigeria and China will advance their cooperation to build a Nigeria-China community with a shared future, which will help unleash their development potential in the new era.

The author is executive director of the Center for Nigerian Studies at the Institute of African Studies in Zhejiang Normal University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ambassador decries futile trade wars

Milestone in China's reform and opening-up to influence the world in a significant way

By YIFAN XU in Washington and YANG RAN in Beijing

China's ambassador to the United States said "China's journey of reform and opening-up will never stop", and that means "opportunity, opportunity and opportunity" for the US and the world.

Ambassador Xie Feng added that "cooperation is the only right choice" for China and the US.

Referring to the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the envoy said the meet unveiled systematic plans for further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization.

"A new milestone in China's reform and opening-up, the meeting is also a gateway for the world to understand China," Xie said in the keynote speech via video at the sixth US-China Business Forum held by Forbes China on Tuesday in New York.

"It will both shape China's future trajectory and influence the world in a significant way," he said.

Xie added that with greater depth of reform will come new opportunities for growth; with higher-standard opening-up will come new market opportunities; and with higher-quality development will come new opportunities for cooperation.

He said that in the first half of this year, China's GDP grew 5 percent compared with last year, outperforming many other major economies and reflecting its resilience.

"Opening-up is a defining feature of Chinese modernization," Xie said, and China is aiming "to make the pie bigger and the list of cooperation longer, so as to deliver win-win outcomes for all", which means "we will open up more doors" and "we will break down more barriers".

The ambassador added that high-quality development is the "primary task" in building China into a modern socialist country.

Referring to the newly launched Chinese video game *Black Myth: Wukong* as an example, Xie said it "has recently become a global hit".

"So you can see the huge consumption potential in the economy and also the magic of integrating traditional culture with modern technology," the ambassador observed.

More than 120 people attended the forum.

In his speech, Xie also said that "scapegoating solves no problems, and trade wars, industrial wars or tech wars produce no winners" when there are new circumstances and challenges.

Four days before Xie's speech, the US added 42 more Chinese companies to the BIS Entity List, bringing the total to over 700.

"While the move was intended to hinder China's semiconductor sector — more than 40 percent of the targeted companies belong to this industry — the strategy seems counterproductive. Instead of stifling China's growth, these controls are accelerating the development of China's semiconductor supply chain. Washington's strategy, therefore, seems to be cutting off its nose to spite its face," said Wang Xiaofeng, director of international cooperation at the Center for China and Globalization, a Chinese think tank.

"Instead of trying to slow down China, the US should focus on strengthening its own innovative capabilities by promoting open trade and technological collaboration, rather than relying on protectionism and sanctions," said Wang.

"Imposing tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles won't enhance the competitiveness of the US EV industry. Instead, it risks depriving the American public of access to affordable and advanced EV options. This approach not only undermines global efforts to combat climate change but also hampers the broader transition to a green economy. By embracing open markets and fostering innovation at home, the US can lead in sustainable technologies, ensuring long-term economic and environmental benefits for both itself and the world," Wang added.

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Motorist's nightmare



A car lies inside an eight-foot-deep sinkhole that opened up suddenly in the middle of a busy road in western Seoul, South Korea, on Thursday morning. Two elderly occupants of the car were injured in the incident. YONHAP

Relation: US expresses hopes for maintaining strategic dialogue

From page 1

As part of bilateral cooperation on energy transition and cutting greenhouse gas emissions, US senior adviser for international climate policy John Podesta is set to meet with China's special envoy for climate change Liu Zhenmin during the first week of September.

Pragmatic cooperation

"The US has made some pragmatic gestures, but it still seems obsessed with major-country competition and it keeps containing and suppressing China," said Diao Daming, a professor of US studies at Renmin University of China's School of International Studies.

Beijing's rolling out of pragmatic cooperation with the US while urging Washington to shape a proper perception is part of China's efforts to deal with the US persistent two-faced approach in its China policy, he said.

On Thursday, Sullivan told Xi that Biden looks forward to having communication again with Xi soon.

Xi asked Sullivan to convey his greetings to Biden, and expressed his willingness to stay in touch with Biden to guide and steer the development of China-US relations.

"Head-of-state diplomacy has been giving an irreplaceable impetus to the relationship and playing a navigating role in stopping the relationship from worsening," said Diao, the professor.

Speaking to Sullivan, Xi said that China's foreign policy is open and transparent and its strategic intentions are aboveboard, both of which "have been highly consistent and stable", and China's US policy "has maintained a high degree of consistency".

While great changes have taken place in the two countries and in China-US relations, China's commitment to the goal of a stable, healthy and sustainable China-US relationship remains unchanged,

and the principle of handling the relationship based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation remains unchanged, he said.

What also remains unchanged is China's position of firmly safeguarding the country's sovereignty, security and development interests, as well as its efforts to carry forward the traditional friendship between the Chinese and American peoples, according to Xi.

Sullivan said that since the San Francisco summit last year, the two sides have earnestly implemented the consensus of the two heads of state and made positive progress.

He said his strategic dialogue with Foreign Minister Wang during this visit was in-depth, candid, substantive and constructive.

The US hopes to continue to maintain strategic communication with China to find a way for the US and China to coexist peacefully and for the US-China relationship to develop

in a sustainable way, he added.

Responsible management

At a news conference in Beijing on Thursday, Sullivan said the meetings he had during his trip to China were "constructive, candid, substantive", and that he believes it is critical to keep lines of communication open between the US and China.

Competition between the two countries does not have to lead to conflict or confrontation, Sullivan said, adding that "the key is responsible management through diplomacy".

Also on Thursday, Zhang Youxia, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, met with Sullivan in Beijing.

Commenting on the situation in the Taiwan Strait, Zhang emphasized that "the Taiwan question is at the core of China's core interests", it constitutes the very foundation of China-US relations, and it is the first and foremost inviolable red line in China-US ties.

China has always been committed to maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, but "Taiwan independence" is totally incompatible with peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, he said.

It is the mission and duty of the People's Liberation Army to resolutely oppose "Taiwan independence" and promote reunification, and the willful provocations of the "Taiwan independence" forces

must be countered, Zhang said.

China demands that the US stop military collusion with Taiwan, stop arming Taiwan, and stop spreading false narratives about Taiwan, he said. Washington should return to a rational and pragmatic policy toward China, effectively respect China's core interests, work with China to promote communication and exchanges between the two militaries, and jointly shoulder the responsibilities of major countries, he added.

Wang Qingyun contributed to this story.

Notice of Employment Termination for Zhou Lin

Zhou Lin (ID No 3702031965****18), Due to your consecutive unauthorized absence from work for more than 15 working days without following leave procedures, this unit has decided to terminate its employment relationship with you, with effect from August 23, 2024, in accordance with the "Regulations on Personnel Management of Public Institutions". If you disagree with this decision, you may apply for a review at the Support Center of Beihai Bureau, Ministry of Natural Resources or appeal to the Beihai Bureau of the Ministry of Natural Resources within 30 days from the date of this announcement.

Support Center of Beihai Bureau, Ministry of Natural Resources August 23, 2024

CHINA

Former legislator pleads guilty to graft

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
in Guangzhou
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Chen Jixing, former vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, pleaded guilty to accepting bribes during his trial at the Guilin Intermediate People's Court in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region on Thursday.

He is the third former vice-chairman of the committee to be brought to trial on such charges this year.

According to the public prosecutor, Chen was found to have illegally accepted money and property valued at more than 278 million yuan (\$39.15 million) directly or indirectly from 2002 to 2015.

The defendant took advantage of his positions as director of the Guangdong Department of Finance, Party secretary of Jiangmen city and vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress to help companies and individuals procure real estate projects and land transfers and resolve economic disputes, the prosecutor said, adding that Chen accepted bribes in return.

His graft continued even after he retired, with him raking in more than 1.15 million yuan in money and property by capitalizing on the power of his former positions between 2019 and 2022, the prosecutor said.

Chen also improperly assisted people with loan approvals, project promotions, subsidy applications and other matters by taking advantage of the positions, the prosecutor said.

The procuratorial organ requested that he be held responsible for the crimes of accepting bribes and using his influence to accept bribes.

Chen pleaded guilty and repented in his final statement in court.

More than 40 people, including Chen's relatives, deputies to the Guilin People's Congress, members of the local committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, journalists and people from all walks of life, attended the trial.

In late July, former vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress Li Chunsheng was sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined 4 million yuan for accepting bribes by the Chenzhou Intermediate People's Court in Chenzhou, Hunan province.

And earlier this month, another former vice-chairman of the committee, Chen Rugui, received life in prison for taking bribes valued at more than 108 million yuan (\$15 million) by the Nanning Intermediate People's Court in Guangxi.

Not quite ready



A teacher begins placing learning materials on students' desks at Niemaoshan Junior Middle School in Neijiang, Sichuan province, on Thursday. Due to persistent high temperatures in the region, some cities in Sichuan have postponed the start of the fall semester at kindergartens and primary and secondary schools to ensure the safety of students and faculty. Many schools were originally slated to open on Sept. 1, but will now open on Sept. 9. LAN ZITAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Tolerance does have a limit, China warns

Beijing urges Manila to withdraw its ship anchored at Xianbin Reef

By JIANG CHENGLONG
and LI LEI

China is committed to properly managing differences through dialogue and consultations, but its "tolerance does have a limit," a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman said on Thursday regarding the Philippines' recent provocations in China's Xianbin Reef in the South China Sea.

The spokesman, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, made the remarks at a news conference in Beijing, criticizing the Southeast Asian country's efforts to seek long-term existence in the uninhabited reef by illegally anchoring a vessel there.

In April, Philippine coast guard ship No 9701 entered the lagoon of Xianbin Reef and has been anchored there since.

Chinese authorities closely monitored and managed an illegal resupply mission by a Philippine H-145 helicopter on Wednesday near the Xianbin Reef, China Coast Guard spokesman Gan Yu said late on Thursday.

Gan said the helicopter had attempted to deliver supplies to a Philippine coast guard vessel unlawfully stationed in the area. He warned that this risky maneuver by the Philippines could result in unforeseen maritime and aerial incidents.

He noted that the Philippines had recently tried and failed to resupply the No 9701 ship using watercraft such as coast guard ships, government vessels and fishing boats.

The spokesman said that the No 9701 ship is operational and capable of leaving independently. But the Philippines has chosen to endanger the crew's health and safety, using "humanitarianism" as a pretext for reckless rights violations.

A spokesperson for the Armed Forces of the Philippines said that the maneuvers by the Chinese undermined the safety of the Philippine crew members and violated international law, according to media reports.

Wu, the defense ministry spokesman, rebutted the claims, saying that China has indisputable sovereignty over Nansha Islands, including Xianbin Reef, and its adjacent waters.

The Philippine ship's intrusion has seriously violated China's sovereignty, breached international law and the stipulations of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and undermined regional peace and stability, Wu said.

"The Chinese side firmly opposes those activities and has lodged solemn representations multiple times", said Wu, stressing that the Philippines' attempt to seek a permanent presence at Xianbin Reef is akin to opening a "Pandora's box" and has drawn strong opposition from regional countries.

Since Aug 19, Philippine coast guard ships have repeatedly intruded into the adjacent waters of Xianbin Reef, and deliberately took dangerous maneuvers to ram China Coast Guard vessels, the

ministry spokesman said.

"The Chinese side took necessary measures in accordance with the law," he said, adding that the responses "were professional and appropriate."

"The Chinese side is committed to properly managing differences through dialogue and consultations, but our tolerance does have a limit," Wu said.

The official urged the Philippines to withdraw its ship and personnel as soon as possible, and restore the unoccupied status of Xianbin Reef with no infrastructure, warning that China will continue to take resolute and strong measures to safeguard the nation's territory and maritime rights and interests.

The spokesman also responded to recent comments by United States officials claiming that a Mutual Defense Treaty between the Philippines and the US applies to armed attacks on Philippine armed forces, public vessels or aircraft anywhere in the South China Sea.

Wu said that no country is able to surpass the US in stirring up trouble or disrupting peace and stability in the South China Sea.

"It is the US' support and endorsement that have emboldened the Philippine side in making reckless provocations time and again," Wu noted.

He said that intimidating China with the Mutual Defense Treaty will never work.

"On the contrary, it will only result in stronger indignation and greater morale among the Chinese people," he stressed.

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Stronger ties could aid Africa's green transition

By HOU LIQIANG
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Experts are advocating for a stronger partnership between China and Africa to promote sustainable development on the continent, emphasizing China's potential to help Africa transition to a low-carbon economy through its expertise in green technologies.

The remarks were made at the China-Africa Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change, which was themed "Sino-African Cooperation on Green and Low-Carbon Development: EVs and New Initiative". The event was organized by the BRI International Green Development Coalition on Tuesday in Beijing.

Arkebe Oqubay, former senior minister and special adviser to the prime minister of Ethiopia, highlighted the synergy between China's experience in green transformation and Africa's economic development potential. He noted that Africa currently plays a marginal role in global green transition, with very limited investment in this area.

According to a 2022 report from the International Renewable Energy Agency, only 2 percent of global investment in renewable energy over the past two decades has been made in Africa.

"This means that international inequality is widening. We are seeing a new green divide emerging," Oqubay said.

Despite this, Oqubay expressed optimism about Africa's potential for economic prosperity, driven by a growing population, increased urbanization and a burgeoning labor force over the next 25 years.

"Africa is going to have an additional 1 billion people living in cities. Africa is going to have 800 million people joining the workforce," he said.

Oqubay emphasized the importance of sustainable mobility, renewable energy infrastructure and green financing for Africa's economic transformation, point-

ing to China as a key partner in these efforts. He noted that China, which has become a leading global player in green technology within the past 25 years, has the capacity to support other nations in their transitions.

Yang Xi, chief technology officer at China Automotive Carbon (Beijing) Digital Technology Center Co, underscored the potential for China-Africa cooperation to boost Africa's new energy vehicle market. He noted that several African countries are already promoting electric cars, motorcycles, tricycles and buses, and some have eliminated or reduced import tariffs on NEVs and introduced tax incentives to encourage growth in NEV production and sales.

Yang also highlighted Africa's abundant new energy resources, which provide a strong foundation for the NEV industry. He cited a prediction that the market size of electric vehicles in Africa will reach \$21.4 billion by 2027, with an average compound annual growth rate of 10.2 percent from 2022 to 2027.

China has the potential to assist African nations in advancing NEV development through support in policy formulation, technological collaboration, fundraising and talent development, Yang said.

Jiang Zhaoli, a senior official with China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment, reiterated China's commitment to helping African countries tackle climate change. He noted that China has signed 18 memorandums of understanding on climate cooperation with 16 African nations and, in 2021, joined 53 African countries and the African Union Commission in endorsing a joint declaration to establish a new era of strategic cooperation to combat climate change.

China will continue to provide material assistance, technical aid and collaborative research to help African countries strengthen their climate adaptation and mitigation capabilities, Jiang said.

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US businesses increase imports before election on tariff concerns

By BELINDA ROBINSON

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American manufacturers, businesses and retailers are stockpiling some imported products and parts, especially those shipped from China, due to uncertainty over tariffs heading into the US presidential election in November.

Between June and July, the peak season for retailers to build inventory for the holiday season, the volume of ocean shipments to the United States from China increased by more than 4 percent over 2023, according to a report by Project44, a company that provides a digital supply chain platform for businesses.

The analysis suggests that retailers are somewhat nervous over tariff policy.

US President Joe Biden announced in May an increase in tariffs on more than \$18 billion worth of goods from China. The

duties were scheduled to start on Aug 1 but have been delayed until September.

Manufacturers have asked for the higher tariffs to be reduced, delayed or abandoned, Reuters reported.

Biden raised tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles to 100 percent, and on semiconductors and solar cells to 50 percent. A 25 percent tariff was put on lithium-ion batteries and cranes. Steel, aluminum and solar cells imports also will cost more.

Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential candidate, hasn't said if she will keep the existing tariffs in place if she wins in November.

Charles Lutvak, a spokesperson for the Harris-Tim Walz campaign, told The New York Times that she will "employ targeted and strategic tariffs to support American workers, strengthen our economy, and hold our adversaries accountable". Republican presidential

candidate Donald Trump has floated the idea of tariffs of 60 percent or higher on imports from China. In 2018, the Trump administration enacted tariffs between 10 percent and 50 percent on \$283 billion of goods from China.

China responded with tariffs of its own. A trade agreement was reached in 2019, but Biden has kept the tariffs in place and extended them.

Trump has said that tariffs will bring back American jobs. In a speech in North Carolina on Aug 14, he told the crowd: "We are going to have 10 to 20 percent tariffs on foreign countries that have been ripping us off for years."

"Tariffs may create jobs in directly protected sectors, but they cause job loss in sectors that use imported intermediate and capital goods," Mary Lovely, a professor emerita of economics at Syracuse University, told China Daily.

Businesses are also aware of potential strikes at East Coast

and Gulf Coast ports this fall that could affect imported goods before November, the National Retail Federation (NRF) found.

Most recent imports into the US arrived at ports on the West Coast rather than the East Coast as the contract between the International Longshoremen's Association and the United States Maritime Alliance covering East Coast and Gulf Coast ports is due to expire on Sept 30. A breakdown in negotiations could cause strikes, the NRF said.

The Port of Long Beach in California has seen a 5 percent increase in imports over 2023 and has handled 22 percent of the peak season volume so far in 2024, Project44 found.

The California ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland and Seattle-Tacoma in Washington state received more than 44 percent of all imports in June and July. The ports of New York, Baltimore and Savannah, Georgia,

saw a drop.

Ben Hackett, founder of Hackett Associates, a consultancy for the maritime industry, said in a statement: "Importers are continuing to grow their inventories and are shifting cargo to the West Coast as a precaution against potential labor disruptions."

Freight rates are rising, too. The ports of New York and New Jersey have ordered eight cranes from China's ZPMC costing \$18 million each. A 25 percent tariff — as proposed by Biden — could push up the price by \$4.5 million.

Both the Biden administration and former Trump administration have stated that tariffs create more production jobs in the US and lessen American reliance on Chinese imports. However, some production has shifted to Mexico, Vietnam and India.

Lovely, who is also a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, added: "In some sectors, tariffs create no

new jobs in the US, as trade is diverted to third countries rather than inducing new domestic production."

Other challenges include ongoing tensions in the Red Sea region, which have caused delays and rerouting from the important global shipping route.

And a drought in Central America made water levels fall in the Panama Canal, affecting shipments on that route.

Jonathan Gold, the NRF vice-president for supply chain and customs policy, told China Daily: "Retailers are consistently working to mitigate any risk to the supply chain to ensure cargo arrives in a timely manner."

In August, monthly inbound cargo volume at the nation's major container ports was expected to see a record surge, according to the NRF's port tracker. Most of the goods will likely come from China.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Journey of discovery across Shanxi

Teenagers from nine countries travel to province and learn about their ancestors

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi is one of the cultural roots of Chinese people, wherever they are. That's what a group of teenage reporters learned when they finished a journey in the province.

A total of 29 teenagers from nine countries wrapped up a special study tour called the 2024 Shanxi Summer Camp for Young Reporters on Aug 9. The members reported what they saw in Shanxi in the form of livestreaming throughout their tour.

During the 12 days, the tour covered 10-plus reputed places of historical interest, including Jinci Temple in Taiyuan, Yungang Grottoes in Datong, and the ancient city of Pingyao in Jinzhong.

Experienced teachers from Shanxi were assigned to the summer camp, informing members of the history of the sites they visited, engaging them in cultural heritage protection activities and teaching them skills related to new-media reporting.

As all the camp members are from overseas Chinese communities, they showed a keen interest in tapping into the history and culture relating to their ancestral roots.

Cindy Liu from Canada said she had prepared herself for the trip by learning the history of Shanxi.

"I learned that Shanxi, with a history of more than 5,000 years, is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization," Liu said. "And I was also informed that the long history has left a wealth of cultural assets here that have earned Shanxi the fame as one of China's top regions in terms of preserved cultural heritage items."

Liu brought with her a question that struck a chord among the camp members.

"Some overseas Chinese communities are usually known as Chintowns to many," Liu said. "But we overseas Chinese like to call them *tangrenjie* — the towns of Tang people. So my question was what is the origin of this term?"

"I guess in Shanxi I could find the answer to the question why our folks like to call ourselves Tang people," Liu said.

She visited Jinci Temple in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi province. A teacher showed the camp members a stone stele in the temple, with inscriptions written by Li Shimin, one of the founding emperors of the powerful Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The teacher said that why overseas Chinese like to call their communities "towns of Tang people" has some associations with this dynasty that was founded by Li and his father.

"Tang was a powerful and prosperous dynasty in Chinese history, featuring a developed economy, flourishing culture and booming international exchanges," said the teacher.

"China has two powerful dynasties that people have taken pride in for thousands of years — the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and Tang," the teacher further explained.

The teacher said Shanxi was the source of Tang Dynasty because Li Shimin and his father Li Yuan were natives of Taiyuan and used to be military governors of the city. They used Shanxi as a base to unify the country and founded the Tang Dynasty.

But the teacher noted that the Tang Dynasty was not the first to use Tang as the name of their sovereignties.

"Jinci Temple is something closely related to the earliest Tang state," said the teacher. "It is known to many that Jinci is an ancestral temple dedicated to Jin (1033-376 BC) — a vassal state in the Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-256 BC) — and its



Clockwise from top: Members of the summer camp pose for a photo at Jinci Temple. HAO SHENGYU / FOR CHINA DAILY Camp members attend a class on video post production. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Students learn to make wood carvings at a studio in Jiexiu. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"This was the first time I tried my hands on relics repairs. It was a mission impossible for me this time, but it gave me a clear idea on the importance, difficulty and imperativeness of cultural heritage protection."

Piao Zhiyan, a student from South Korea

"The video productions of the camp members show the unique traits of vigor, curiosity, innovation and originality. They have presented vivid stories of Shanxi with their own points of view."

Guo Yanbin, an official from the United Front Work Department of the Shanxi Committee of the Communist Party of China

founding monarch Shuyu.

"But I must tell you all that the Jin state was also called Tang and the full name of the founding monarch is 'Tang Shuyu,'" the teacher said. He added that the Jin state was where the recorded history of Shanxi began.

Legend has it that Ji Song became the second monarch of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) when he was young. He once played with his younger brother, Shuyu, sending him a lump of soil as a gift.

The playful game was recorded by his ministers, who required the monarch to give his brother a certain territory as a fiefdom, appointing him the king of it because the soil represented the land of a state.

Ji honored his promise and Shuyu became the first king of the state that was called Tang — in the central part of today's Shanxi — at that time.

Shuyu made a great contribution to the development of the fiefdom, by leading locals to improve agriculture through building irrigation projects.

When Xiefu, the son of Shuyu, succeeded his father to become the second king, he changed the fiefdom's name to Jin. Xiefu built Jinci to memorialize his father.

The ancestral temple was renovated and expanded during the following millennia, becoming the largest ancient building complex in Taiyuan.

The quest of the spiritual roots of overseas Chinese was recorded on the cameras of the young reporters.

Kim Woo-jin from South Korea used his camera to record every detail of Jinci. He told his friends and audience about his discoveries of the ancestral temple complex in China.

"The temple has some oldest things in China," Kim said. "It is, for instance, the oldest ancestral temple and the oldest royal garden in China."

He targeted his camera to a huge cypress tree in the temple, saying that "this might be the oldest tree still alive in China."

He said there are two trees of the same age. "I was told that the two trees — one died in the early 1900s, only leaving its trunk — were planted by Shuyu himself and have a history of more than 2,900 years."

The teacher affirmed that the age of the trees is not a legend. "Carbon-14 dating proved that they are 2,600 to 2,990 years old," he said.

While tapping into the history of Shanxi, the camp members were offered an immersive experience of how the historical assets are protected and cultural heritage is inherited.

At a studio for heritage protection and inheritance in Jiexiu, Jinzhong city, the young camp members learned how to make stone rubbings.

Stone rubbings, also known as ink-imprints, are one of the major inventions from ancient China. Using paper and ink, the engraved surfaces can be copied as images to depict history.

Under the instruction of the studio's teachers, the members used pieces of moistened paper to cover the surfaces of stone steles with inscriptions or carved images. They then used stiff brushes to press the paper tightly, bringing the images to light.

When the paper was almost dry, they used inked pads to tap or squeeze the surface, leaving the inked inscriptions or images on the paper. To their delight, when the paper was peeled off, they saw impressions of the engraved texts or pictures emerge clearly on the paper.

A teacher said this traditional technique is an important skill for preserving and passing down Chinese cultural heritage.

"The stone rubbing works contain loads of information about history, culture, art and life in ancient China," the teacher said. "They are not only the copied images of cultural relics but also the carrier of history and precious memories from China's past."

At Yungang Grottoes Academy, an institution engaged in the operation of the famed Yungang Grottoes in Datong, the camp members were taught by professionals on how to repair and preserve historical relics.

At the academy, the members learned that preserving a historical and cultural heritage site that was created more than 1,500 years ago would be a challenge in any country. But Yungang Grottoes fulfilled the task thanks to the efforts of researchers and professionals in recent decades.

Yungang Grottoes was built during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534). The grottoes were carved out of sandstone cliffs at Wuzhou Mountain in the northwestern suburbs of Datong.

A total of 54 main caves were carved out during the period from 460-524. Today, 45 main caves remain intact, which house more than 59,000 statues, ranging from a few centimeters to 17 meters in height.

Yungang Grottoes was added to the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List in 2001.

While proud of its increasing recognition in the world, local researchers understand that, after Yungang Grottoes having been battered by wind and rain for over 1,500 years, protecting this cultural heritage site has become a pressing challenge.

Initial preservation work on the grottoes started in the 1930s and systematic protection has been made

since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Efforts in protection have been enhanced since the establishment of Yungang Grottoes Academy in February 2021.

An expert at the academy, who was teaching the camp members about relics repair and protection, said that the main target is to maintain the authenticity of the relics and the grottoes as a whole. For this purpose, he added that a scientific and systematic approach, which combines both traditional skills and modern techniques, should be employed.

"We are teaching you some fundamentals on repair," the expert said. "But I want to tell you that repairing relics requires long-term concentration, as work on some sections of relics can take several years to finish."

The camp members made their attempts on some replica wall paintings. During that process, Piao Zhiyan from South Korea was careful about everything, although he didn't expect an immediate success.

"This was the first time I tried my hands on relics repair," Piao said. "It was a mission impossible for me this time, but it gave me a clear idea on the importance, difficulty and imperativeness of heritage protection."

Alicia Jiang and Jin Jiayi from Spain also showed a keen interest in relics repair. "Compared with seeing the exhibits and hearing the stories of relics, engaging yourselves in relics repair will help you better understand the value of cultural heritage," Jiang said.

In many locales in Shanxi, the camp members had the opportunity to make cultural heritage items, like wood carvings and pottery.

Learning to improve their livestreaming and video-making skills was another important task for the camp members. There were dedicated teachers to help them in video-making procedures, like interviews, shooting and post production.

Liew Li Han from Malaysia said the improvements he made are always in the details. When hosting a short video featuring a Shanxi merchant residence in Jinzhong, he was confused by the pronunciation of Shanxi and Shaanxi.

"This is the Qiao Family Courtyard in Jinzhong, Shaanxi ... oh sorry, Shanxi province," he said to the camera. A teacher told him that the pronunciation differs with the accent and he immediately found the right way.

Guo Yanbin, an official from the United Front Work Department of the Shanxi Committee of the Communist Party of China, had been with the young camp members during their journey. He said he felt the growth of the youngsters during the 12 days in terms of livestreaming and video making.

"The video productions of the camp members show the unique traits of vigor, curiosity, innovation and originality," Guo said. "They have presented vivid stories of Shanxi with their own points of view."

The summer camp was sponsored by the Chinese Language and Culture Education Foundation of China, an organization promoting Chinese language and cultural education overseas.

Under the arrangement of the organization, four Chinese-language schools from Germany, the Netherlands, Pakistan and Myanmar signed agreements with two schools in Taiyuan on Aug 8, aiming for enhanced curriculum and teaching methodology cooperation.

SCS Delft, a Chinese-language school in Delft, the Netherlands, is among the schools to have signed up.

Liu Yan, an SCS Delft teacher, said he expects the cooperation program to help with the sharing of resources between China's and overseas schools through more frequent online and offline exchanges.

Hao Hong contributed to this story.



From left: Local students perform the traditional musical instrument of *zheng* at the closing ceremony of the summer camp. LI YAO / FOR CHINA DAILY Two camp members host a livestream at an ancient castle in Jiexiu city. LI YAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

ADVERTORIAL

SPORTS

TENNIS

Comeback Queen Wen battles on

Olympic golden girl joined in US Open third round by compatriots Wang Yafan and Shang Juncheng

By SUN XIAOCHEN
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

First an Olympic gold medal, and then a major title right away? Some think it may be too soon for Chinese ace Zheng Qinwen, but why not?

The world No 7, known as "Queen Wen" to her growing legion of fans, is well on course to replicate her biggest achievement to date — winning China's first Olympic singles title in Paris just weeks ago — at the major level in New York, after fending off two tough opponents to book her place in the round of 32 at the US Open.

The way that she rallied after conceding the first set, and the fight that Zheng dug deep to deliver during her 6-7(3), 6-1, 6-2 second-round win against Russia's Erika Andreeva on Wednesday, was reminiscent of her opening victory over Amanda Anisimova.

It all bodes well for Zheng to emulate in New York the tough, yet consistent, deep run that carried her to Olympic glory in Paris.

The 21-year-old from Hubei province, however, remains pragmatic on the prospect of fulfilling another career dream almost immediately after such a historic achievement.

"When I saw my father (after returning from Paris) in China, he already gave me the next plan, which is (winning) the Slams. That was our dream since I was 10 years old," Zheng said during her on-court interview after beating Andreeva in 2 hours and 28 minutes on the Grandstand court.

"I don't need him to push me more anyway. I've already fought so hard for my target. We will see what happens in the Slams, because in tennis, you never know."

Already a recognizable young star in New York, thanks to her quarterfinal appearance last year, Zheng's Paris feat has only added to her popularity in the Big Apple, particularly among the large Chinese-American community around Flushing Meadows.

Her impressive comeback effort amid an electrifying vibe on Wednesday earned a standing ovation from the crowd in the grandstands, with supporters waving red flags and chanting: "Queen Wen! Queen Wen!"

Zheng, who's won 14 of her past 15 matches, including six in a row at the Olympics on red clay, said she's grown more comfortable playing in front of the loud, energetic New York crowd.

"I felt nervous on court the first time playing in New York (in 2022), even with a big Chinese-American crowd supporting me," said Zheng.

"I caught every single Chinese word they said in that moment. This affected me instead of giving me support.



Zheng Qinwen of China hits a return to Erika Andreeva of Russia during a US Open second-round match on Wednesday in New York. After a slow start, Zheng, Olympic champion and No 7 seed, rallied past Andreeva in three sets, 6-7 (3) 6-1 6-2. AP



Wang Yafan of China, pictured hitting a return to Maria Sakkari of Greece during her first-round match on Monday, beat Diane Parry of France, 6-0, 6-4, to advance to the third round on Wednesday. AP



Shang Juncheng of China celebrates beating Roberto Carballes Baena of Spain, 6-2, 6-3, 7-6 (2), in a US Open second-round match on Wednesday. USA TODAY SPORTS VIA REUTERS

"But, right now, I can just block out all the noise. I am more calm, I can keep the same focus on the court. I feel really comfortable. I love them all yelling my name; I loved it when they clapped a good shot.

"I feel at home," said Zheng, who will next face German power hitter and 2022 Wimbledon quarterfinalist Jule Niemeier, in the round of 32 on Friday.

With a slow start on Wednesday, seemingly affected by the scorching

heat, Zheng quickly regrouped after losing the first set to Andreeva, the surging world No 75, who peppered the Chinese star with a steady string of flat, angled ground strokes and drop shots. Zheng regained control by serving big and applying pressure with her trademark powerful forehand shots.

Zheng ended up firing 20 aces, taking her tournament total to 32 and leading the way among the women after the first two rounds.

"I didn't start the match the way I wanted, but I still fought until the end and didn't give up. My serve helped me a lot today. When you can get a short win (in your service game) in these kinds of conditions, you save a lot of energy," Zheng said.

Already a history maker, Zheng, who's won three WTA singles titles, is pursuing both her first Slam trophy and a place among rarefied company. A championship win in

New York will make her just the fourth woman to immediately follow a win at the Olympics with victory at the US Open, joining Steffi Graf (1988), Venus Williams (2000) and Serena Williams (2012).

Joining Zheng in the third round of the women's draw is her compatriot, No 80-ranked Wang Yafan, who dominated Frenchwoman Diane Parry 6-0, 6-4 with her high serving efficiency, which helped the 30-year-old win 76 percent of her

“

Right now, I can just block all the noise. I am more calm, I can keep the same focus on the court. I feel really comfortable. I love them all yelling my name; I loved it when they clapped a good shot.”

Zheng Qinwen, after winning her second-round match on Wednesday

first-serve points.

By advancing into the third round at a Slam twice this year, a level she'd never reached before the beginning of this season, Wang, who cracked the top-100 in April 2018, said she hopes to achieve even more breakthroughs at the major level.

"I am more confident now that I can play with more composure, as well as having a naturally better game, even when facing seeded opponents," said Wang, who reached a career-high ranking of 47 in 2019.

She'll be facing No 20-ranked Victoria Azarenka in the next round. The Belarusian beat France's Clara Burel 6-1, 6-4 on Wednesday.

China's sole survivor in the men's draw, teen star Shang Juncheng, proved he's got a mature game and a big heart, delivering a performance beyond his years to stun Spain's 55th-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena 6-2, 6-3, 7-6 (2) on Court 13 to reach the third round and match the best result for Chinese men at the US Open.

Previously, only China's top-ranked man Zhang Zhizhen and former US Open boys' champion Wu Yibing had reached the third round in New York.

The teen, however, remains grounded, even with a shot at becoming the first Chinese man to reach the round of 16.

"Whenever I win, or I do something bad, I try to forget about it, because if you're always staying in the past, I feel like you can't really enjoy the present," Shang told aptour.com.

"I take days off. Sometimes, I don't want to practice. I try not to think too much about things that happened before, I just focus on the present and what's going to happen in the future."

Shang will now face world No 8 Casper Ruud in the next round.

The Norwegian beat Frenchman Gael Monfils 6-4, 6-2, 2-6, 7-6 (3) on Wednesday.

Stars align for 'unprecedented' turnout at China Open

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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As Chinese players triumphantly march on at the season's final Grand Slam in New York, their home tournament in Beijing is gearing up for an upgraded feast of tennis in a bid to galvanize the sport's booming popularity.

The China Open, as the largest men's and women's combined tournament in Asia, promises to be bigger and better this year.

On Wednesday, organizers announced the star-studded rosters for the WTA1000 and ATP500 events and a series of experience-enhancing initiatives for the 2024 tournament, which will run from Sept 23-Oct 6 in the Chinese capital.

A total number of 16 Grand Slam winners, led by women's top star Iga Swiatek, men's No 1 Jannik Sinner and young Spanish phenom Carlos Alcaraz, and nine current and former world No 1s will descend on the National Tennis Center in northern Beijing to compete for important ranking points, as well as a share of the \$13.14 million prize pot.

The women's tournament, a mandatory event on the WTA Tour, will be expanded into a two-week,



Women's world No 1 Iga Swiatek of Poland (left) and men's No 1 Jannik Sinner of Italy will spearhead a star-studded field for the China Open tennis championships from Sept 23 to Oct 6 at the National Tennis Center in Beijing. AP

96-draw tournament, up from 64 last year, joining Indian Wells, Miami, Madrid and Rome as a fifth top-flight tournament of that size.

On the men's side, the ATP500 tournament is expected to continue serving up above-its-ranks quality as the world's top-5 players — with the exception of 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic — have

all confirmed their participation.

On top of the stellar international cast, the highly anticipated return of China's homegrown heroes, following their recent Olympic success in Paris, is expected to draw phenomenal levels of attention and significantly enhance the tournament's appeal, said organizers.

"Among all the star attractions

this year, for sure, the strong presence of Chinese athletes will shine the brightest at the 2024 China Open," said tournament director Zhang Junhui on Wednesday.

"We are expecting an unprecedented turnout at this year's tournament, and we are ready to indulge every participant, from players, to fans and media, with better experi-

ences than ever."

The China Open made its debut in the fall of 2004 and benefited from a surprising women's doubles gold medal, won by Li Ting and Sun Tian-tian at that year's Athens Games. The tournament is now riding a new, and much stronger, Olympic wave two decades later, inspired by world No 7 Zheng Qinwen's historic

singles win at Paris 2024.

"It's good fortune, not only for our tournament's promotion, but also for the fans, to enjoy the sport after celebrating a gold and a silver (in mixed doubles by Zhang Zhizhen and Wang Xinyu) at the Olympics, 20 years after the doubles gold in Athens," said Zhang.

"We've already begun to expect bigger achievements in Chinese tennis in the next 20 years."

Zheng, who lost in the first round to Elena Rybakina in Beijing last year, said she cannot wait to back up her elite credentials this year.

"I am very much looking forward to stepping on the Diamond Court (center court) again. Hope to see you all at the China Open," said the 21-year-old Olympic champion.

Spearheaded by Zheng, and men's world No 41 Zhang Zhizhen, five Chinese players have confirmed their participation in the women's and men's main draws directly via ranking, with more wild-card entries to be announced.

Tournament organizers will keep going the extra mile to optimize services and operations to make it an unforgettable experience, not only for the players, but also fans and sponsors, during the two-week event, said Zhang Junhui.

GLOBAL LENS



Liu Haoran (left) from Communication University of Zhejiang and Kiara Verence Flores from Franklin University Switzerland holds stuffed toys at Yiwu International Trade City, China's largest small commodity export market, in East China's Zhejiang province, on July 22. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



US student Grace Ho Lee from Lincoln Park High School checks out Ningbo-Zhoushan Port in Zhejiang province on July 21.

Learning advantage

US students get firsthand experience of vibrant Chinese commerce and culture

By **HOU CHENCHEN**
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When a group of students from the United States visited Ningbo-Zhoushan Port, the sight of countless rows of containers and distant ships stretching beyond the horizon sparked a flood of thoughts.

For them, China, previously an abstract concept across the ocean, began to take on a clearer image.

"I never could have imagined all the things that I use were being made so far from where I live and the process of them getting to me ... It really shows the important role China plays in the world ... providing for other countries," said Annaliz Yazici, 18, from Santa Monica College in California.

"I was able to connect the dots between the port and the Yiwu market, where goods are wholesaled and then exported through the port to destinations around the world," said Kiara Verence Flores, 18, who lives in Los Angeles and studies in Franklin University Switzerland.

Yazici and Flores, along with 18 other US students, visited the port in the Yangtze River Delta region of eastern China on July 21.

During their trip stretching two weeks, the students also traveled to Qingshan village in Zhejiang province to learn about rural revitalization and explored Yiwu International Trade City, the largest small commodity export market in China, to gain insights into China's import and export trade and digital trends.

Their livestreaming activities at the trade city drew the attention of many US youngsters. They were fascinated by the dynamic, real-time interaction between small commodity sellers and buyers, showcasing the vibrant and innovative aspects of e-commerce.

The students said the experience offered them a firsthand look at how digital platforms are transforming global trade, making it an intriguing and memorable part of their visit.

"This type of business is not as prevalent in America. Without this program, I would never have had the chance to experience e-commerce livestreaming and see this kind of work firsthand," said Krista Ming Lee, 20, from Loyola University Chicago.

Grace Ho Lee, 17, is interested in business and marketing. The Lin-

coln Park High School student said she is considering studying and working in China after her visit to Zhejiang.

"China offers so many opportunities in media, marketing and various business fields," she said.

The tour is part of Youth With You: 2024 China-US Student Cross-cultural Exchange, a project jointly organized by the Global CSR Foundation and ICN Television Network, which recruited US youths to visit China and had a total of 40 participants from the US and China.

"It aims to enhance communication between Chinese and American students, fostering a better understanding and appreciation among American youths of China's rich traditional culture, ecological advancements, and technological innovations," said Zhao Jing, president of the Global CSR Foundation.

Thomas Patrick Gehl, a former adviser to the US Executive Office of the President's Council on Environmental Quality and vice-president of the Global CSR Foundation, said,

"We grew up in very different ways, but I wanted to connect with Chinese students who are similar to me in age."

Sofia Lin Cesarone, from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

"One of the most important things we can do is to bring people together for mutual understanding."

"They can understand that people on the other side of the world are not just similar to them but that there are many aspects of

the other culture and society to admire. Imparting this understanding to young minds helps shape their entire worldview," he said.

Beatrice De Salles, member and global ambassador of the United Nations Association of Orange County and member of the World Affairs Councils of America, praised the deep friendships formed between the youth of both countries.

She noted the positive changes she observed in the US students in just a few days and encouraged them to share their experiences in China with those who have never visited the country.

"We grew up in very different ways, but I wanted to connect with Chinese students who are similar to me in age. I also wanted to meet more American friends who share these interests," said Sofia Lin Cesarone, 20, from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

"I think visiting different Chinese cities is a great way to understand the various facets of China," she said.

Wang Zichen contributed to this story.



Krista Ming Lee (center) of Loyola University Chicago visits Dongqian Lake in Zhejiang with two other US students on July 21.



Alma Ruby Romay from California's Orange Coast College drives a CHERVON Group's e-vehicle in East China's Jiangsu province on July 26.



College students Sofia Lin Cesarone (center) and Yu Jiabei (right) experience Chinese paper-cutting in Quzhou of Zhejiang on July 23.



Aria Lan Cesarone (left), from Barrington High School in the US, takes part in a tea-making event in Zhejiang on July 18.



Students visit Pairdeer's factory to learn about green battery production in Ningbo of Zhejiang on July 21.



Alma Ruby Romay (left) and Santa Monica College student Annaliz Yazici view small commodities in Yiwu of Zhejiang on July 21.



Roads paved with silk

A salon explores the legacies of the ancient trade routes that connected China with the West to discern what they mean for our world today and tomorrow, **Erik Nilsson** reports in Xi'an.

Italian archaeologist Marcella Festa surprised fellow participants of a recent salon about the Silk Road when asked to name the one artifact that she believes best epitomizes the trade route.

Her answer? Camels. "It reminds us that the Silk Road is not made of objects. It's made of living beings," says the associate professor at the School of Cultural Heritage of Northwest University in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

Indeed, these creatures have, perhaps as much as silk itself, become synonymous with the intercontinental transport network that flourished for millennia. They literally served as the vehicles for trade and exchange that shaped the routes and, ultimately, the world beyond.

"The Silk Road would not be possible without humans meeting each other, without animals carrying things. So, it's a good reminder for us to not just look at the objects, which are very beautiful and very significant in terms of history and artistic value, but also people — how people lived, why did they meet, how they met — because these are the aspects that actually built the Silk Road."

Festa joined two other academics from Northwest University: School of Foreign Languages associate professor Briton Robin Gilbank and Xi Huidong, deputy dean of the Institute of Silk Road Studies, as well as two moderators from China Daily.

The discussion unfolded amid the 10th anniversary of the inscription of "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor" on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

This particular section is part of what Xi calls the "yellow route" that passed through the deserts and oases of central and western Asia and northern Africa to connect China with Europe.

That is, as opposed to the "green route" or the steppe route through Mongolia, Central Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe; the "blue" Maritime Silk Road through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean; and the "gray route" or the alpine-canyon route through China's Tibet, or Nepal or Myanmar.

"Silk was not only a commodity but also a medium of exchange between different regions and different ethnic groups," Xi says.

Gilbank points out that the material was — and still is, to an extent — a luxury item.

"A lot of these things which come via the Silk Road initially had high cultural or monetary value attached to them," Gilbank says.

"But actually, as time went on, as the volume increased, it became more readily available. So, I think it's about participation. People want to have a piece of the action or a piece of the pie, so to speak, or a piece of the silk."

Porcelain was another status symbol that headed westward from China.

"The secrets of porcelain-making were not known until, I think, the 1700s in England. We have our glazed wares, which were originally used for tea, but then we really coveted the secrets of china-making," Gilbank says.

"It's kind of bound up the name of the country and the commodity. We think of China and we think of



Clockwise from top: Italian archaeologist Marcella Festa (middle) from Northwest University, with her colleagues, Briton Robin Gilbank (second from right) and Xi Huidong (second from left), with two moderators from China Daily in a salon in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. A lab researcher at the university works on technology to protect the relics along the Silk Road. Silk Road-themed pottery artifacts on show at the Shaanxi History Museum. **Below:** A Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) gilt bronze silkworm and a Tang Dynasty (618-907) tri-colored pottery camel with musicians, on show. **PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY** **Bottom:** The Gaochang (Qocho) city ruins in Turpan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, classified as part of "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor", a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are a key witness to exchanges among various cultures along the Silk Road. **WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY**

china, as well as just tea."

Nourishing exchanges

Beyond beverages, panelists agreed that it's not just such tableware but also the foods that grace them that nourish the Silk Road's legacy.

"So, I would say the Silk Road is still like those mediums of connections, not just in terms of space but also in terms of time, because we still use them today," Festa says.

She points to such spices as cinnamon from Sri Lanka and peppercorns from India, and fruits like apricots from China, as foodstuffs that were initially exported along the Silk Road and are now enjoyed by people around the world.

"We have also the transportation of cereals ... wheat from, let's say, the West to the East, as well as millet from the East to the West," she says. This generated some of the most celebrated delicacies in Xi'an, then called Chang'an, which served as the capital of 13 dynasties and a starting point of the Silk Road.

"The gift of the Silk Road became the most favorite Shaanxi dish. So, it's a very vivid example," Xi says.

"The most famous Shaanxi dish is *yangrou paomo* or *niurou paomo*,

which means beef or lamb stew with bread."

He points out that cattle, sheep and goats, as well as wheat, were introduced to China from western Asia about 4,500 years ago.

These livestock also provided meat for kebabs, which came from Persia, he says.

"Also, northern China, especially this region, is very famous for the noodles usually made from wheat flour," Gilbank says.

Xi says: "The 'yellow route' enabled the invention of *naan* bread as we have it now."

A moderator pointed out that *naan* was specifically developed for the Silk Road because it doesn't spoil easily, especially in arid climates. So, there were caravans of camels with heaps of *naan* the size of manhole covers jiggling atop their humps, as they plodded atop desert dunes.

Speaking of grains, Festa points out: "There is also this discussion of a myth between China and Italy on the origin of pasta, whether the pasta really originated from the noodles that Marco Polo brought to Italy," Festa says.

This legend is seemingly disproven.



But the very fact that it's widely believed testifies to the "spirit of the Silk Road", she says.

"It says that we really are like one big community. Our basic needs are the same. And taste could be shared knowledge. The spirit of the Silk Road in the past as well as the present is ... appreciation for cultural diversity and knowledge sharing."

This year marks the 700th anniversary of the explorer's death.

"Marco Polo has become my best friend since I moved to China," Festa says, laughing.

"I think that Marco Polo actually represents very well the idea of both the importance of writing but also the importance of people-to-people exchanges.

"Italian kids, even today, learn about China from Marco Polo's book. What I personally do appreciate about the book is not just the content itself but the perspective. Marco Polo went to travel through the Silk Road and reached China with an open mind, with this willingness to learn and to take in and share information."

That said, he couldn't have produced his famous travelogue without technologies disseminat-

ed along the Silk Road.

Tech transfers

Xi explains that Chinese invented paper 2,000 years ago. Papermaking technology was introduced to Central Asia in the 8th century and arrived in Europe around the 12th century.

"Europeans could make paper through the introduction of papermaking technology by Arabs. So, it changed the historical process of Europe because papermaking technology made knowledge dissemination possible at reduced costs and broke the monopoly of knowledge by nobles and clerks," he says.

"So everybody can learn knowledge through paper. Before that, parchment was the main document (medium) in Europe. But it was very expensive."

Gilbank points out that movable type was not just a complementary, but also a comparably revolutionary, innovation.

"The conjunction of those two things was what really moved us into the early modern world," he says.

Xi points out that not only the printed word but also language itself traveled along the route.

"We also have a very famous proverb in Shaanxi dialect. We say *kelimacha*, which means, 'make it snappy,'" Xi says. "Actually, it's a Persian word that we borrowed from the Silk Road, and it was introduced to the Shaanxi dialect 1,000 years ago."

He explains that China received technologies, such as bronze and gold forging, which came from western Asia 4 millennia ago, glassware that came from the Mediterranean world 2,000 years ago and terracotta sculpting from ancient Greece.

Similar techniques were also seen to shape Xi'an's Terracotta Warriors during China's Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). Today, armies of tourists from around the globe march to Xi'an to see these world wonders.

And other echoes of the metropolis' Silk Road legacy remain, panelists agree.

Gilbank hails a tourism industry that celebrates the "golden age" of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

"Every day, if you go ... on the city streets or on the metro, you will almost always see young women dressed in that (period's) style," Gilbank says.

Festa says Xi'an continues to blend the old and new.

"You have the opportunity to eat very traditional food," she says. "But at the same time, you also feel the new, the rush of modern life."

Xi says he's happy to have moved from Central China to the northwestern metropolis.

"It witnesses the multi-civilizational exchanges of the human world," he says. "But it also witnesses the Silk Road spirit, which is peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit. So, I love Xi'an."

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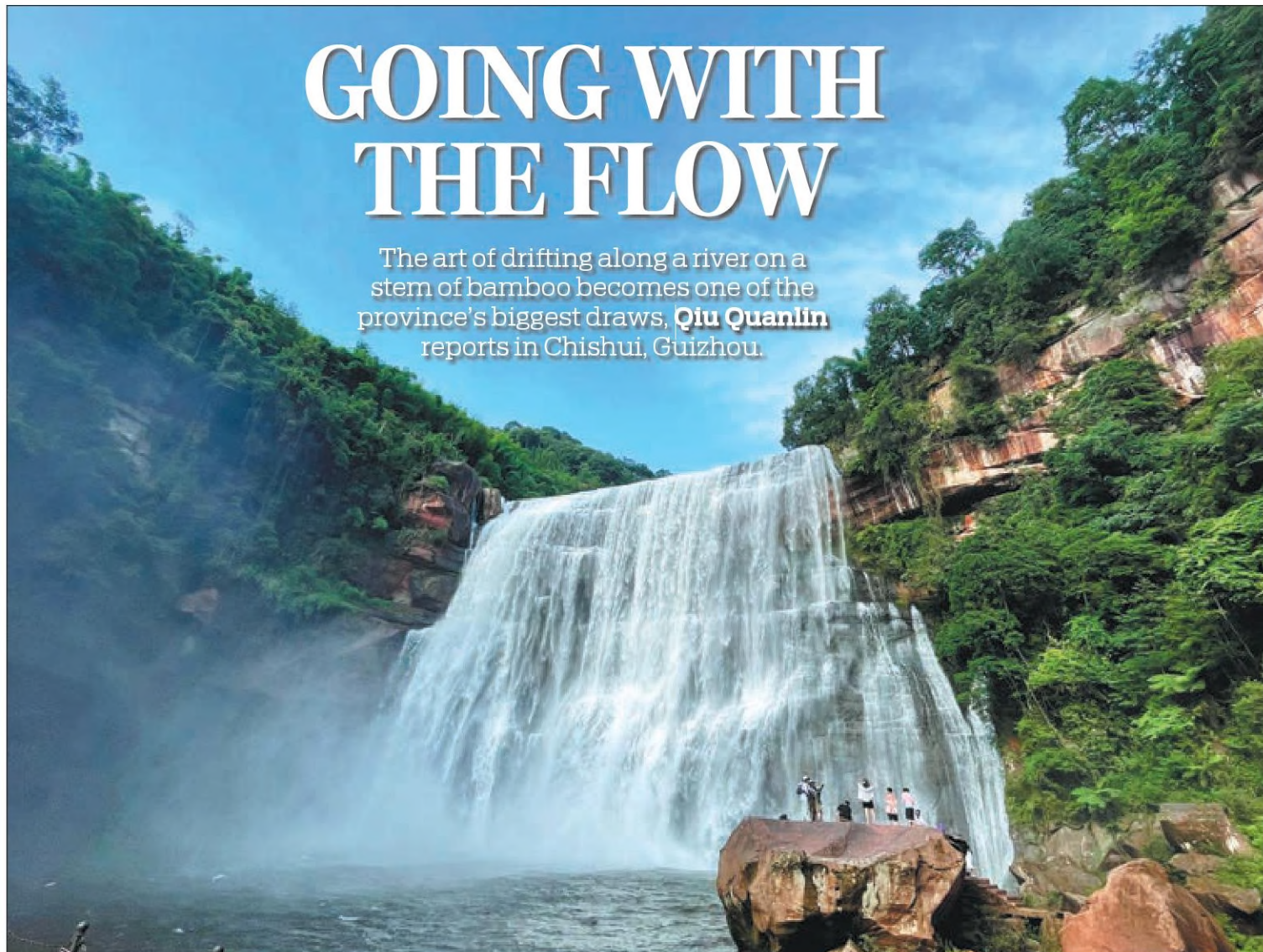
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LIFE

GOING WITH THE FLOW

The art of drifting along a river on a stem of bamboo becomes one of the province's biggest draws, **Qiu Quanlin** reports in Chishui, Guizhou.



A waterfall in Chishui Danxia National Geopark. Chishui, a county-level city in northern Guizhou province, is well-known for its plentiful bamboo and world natural heritage sites. QIU QUANLIN / CHINA DAILY

Standing on a thick bamboo stem floating on the Datong River, a tributary of the Chishui River in Guizhou province, Xiong Bin played the *lusheng*, a Miao ethnic reed-pipe flute.

Such scenes have become common in Datong township, which lies in a mountainous area in northern Guizhou, as 20-year-old Xiong and other young villagers perform for tourists at the weekend or during holidays.

Originating in northern Guizhou, the tradition of single bamboo drifting requires the practitioner to stand or sit on a stem of bamboo, which is usually 7.5 to 8 meters long, while performing balancing movements using a thinner strip of bamboo up to 4.5 meters long.

In addition to the balancing movements, Xiong usually plays the pipes.

"Playing the *lusheng* and performing other balancing movements on the bamboo stem is part of our efforts to improve the experience for tourists, as we are promoting single bamboo drifting," says the Miao man.

The unusual practice, listed as national intangible cultural heritage in 2021, was introduced as a competitive event at the 9th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities in 2011.

Xiong says that in the Chishui River area, where bamboo covers the mountains, people used to cross rivers on bamboo stems.

"Traditionally, transportation in our township relied heavily on river channels, as roads were not very convenient," he says.

The practice arose from the transportation of bamboo by river to nearby Sichuan province and Chongqing. People lashed stems together with small strips of bamboo, creating rafts that they then floated downriver. Xiong says the trouble with this was that the rafts could easily break apart.

"So people would use poles to pull the bamboo back, jumping back and forth frequently. With practice, they became skilled at drifting along rivers on bamboo," says Xiong.

The bamboo has to be a green *moso* bamboo, which is more buoyant and lasts longer. Xiong says that green *moso* is thicker and grows straighter, so it creates less resistance, allowing it to travel faster, and was unbundled in the river for transportation.

"When I first saw people doing single bamboo drifting, I found it very interesting," he says, adding that he began to learn how to do it himself in 2018.

The practice relies on balance because each stem of bamboo has a different degree of curvature and so



Clockwise from top: Xiong Bin (center), a member of the Miao ethnic group, performs single bamboo drifting with two young residents of Chishui on the Datong River, a tributary of the Chishui River. ZHANG XIAO / CHINA DAILY A view of the Chishui Bamboo National Forest Park. Foguangyan, or the Buddha Light Rock, a Danxia colorful rock formation in the Chishui Danxia National Geopark. PHOTOS BY QIU QUANLIN / CHINA DAILY



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finding the point of balance is vital. Single bamboo drifting has gained popularity among youngsters in recent years, thanks to increased efforts by local authorities to promote it.

"We hold training classes every year, so that young people who are interested come and learn," he says.

Xiong is a member of a single bamboo drifting team led by Peng Gang, who has nearly four decades of experience.

Growing up along the Chishui River, the 54-year-old developed an interest as a child.

"Single bamboo drifting was a common sight when I was young, as villagers used to cross the river on bamboo," says Peng, who began imitating his elders by jumping on floating bamboo stems for fun.

Peng joined the single bamboo drifting team that was founded in Datong in 2009, practicing in the river for four to five hours every day from May to September.

"All the movements that are simple to perform on the shore, such as a forward stroke, a backward stroke, turning around, supporting the pole and manipulating it, place a high demand on physical strength, endurance and balance when done on the water," he says.

Over time, Peng became highly skilled and was later designated as an inheritor of the tradition. "Developing an interest is very

important. Then you need to practice again and again to become skilled," he says.

He was forced to step back in 2021, due to age and physical injuries, leaving the water for the land, and he threw himself into training successors.

"Although I can't do it anymore, I will lead this team well and pass on the legacy of single bamboo drifting to young people," he says.

Over the years, Peng has taught his team a complete set of performances consisting of 20 balancing movements.

As a local intangible cultural heritage performance project, single bamboo drifting is performed for tourists during holidays and at large-scale events, and has been performed around the country on many occasions.

Peng maintains a playful attitude to the practice, saying that this plays an important role in

training young people.

"Only those who love it and are willing to experiment can persist and improve their skill," he says.

He doesn't worry about skill levels, but ways to pass on the tradition. "I'm really used to playing on bamboo in rivers for fun, and this should be encouraged among young people who are training to do it."

There are no fixed schedules and training takes place whenever weather conditions allow, and his team includes a dozen local young people, two of whom are women.

Luo Qing, a 26-year-old member of the team, started learning when he was in primary school.

"It was really exciting and fun to watch people drifting, so I slowly learned how to do it," he says.

Learning wasn't easy as he wasn't a good swimmer. "I couldn't even stand on the bamboo, let alone balance. I fell into the water a lot at first," he adds.

Support from his family encouraged Luo to persist. "My parents were quite supportive, and they encouraged me to learn in my spare time."

Peng taught him for free. "Peng was very responsible, he taught us how to stand on the bamboo, how to make it move, and how to balance our attitude toward the sport," he says.

"It takes a lot of time to learn if you really want to be good at standing on a bamboo stem, so you need to be very patient."

After practicing for more than a decade, Luo now performs for tourists in Datong, which has become a popular destination for its many examples of intangible cultural heritage and tourist offerings.

Datong was traditionally an important river port for trading between the provinces of Guizhou and Sichuan.

Thanks to its plentiful supply of bamboo, it is also famous for bamboo weaving, which is a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage in Guizhou.

"We do not earn much from performing for tourists, we do it because we love it, and we want to demonstrate our intangible cultural heritage to the outside world," Luo says.

After years of involvement, he has decided to encourage his daughter to learn single bamboo drifting when she grows older.

"Like my parents when I was young, I would like my daughter to learn. After all, single bamboo drifting is the legacy of our ancestors," he says.

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Chinese movies weave magic on screen

Upstream, the latest in a series of thought-provoking Chinese movies to hit the theaters, will leave you breathless. It is paced almost like a thriller, and takes the viewer on an emotional rollercoaster right from the word go, rapidly unspooling to reveal the interesting backstories of the characters, each of whom aspires to fulfill their dreams. As the credits roll, you find yourself rooting for each one, especially the protagonist and his family.

At the box office this summer, an entire crop of Chinese movies has managed to enthrall with their technical finesse, plot, direction and acting chops, quietly working their magic on viewers, and knocking for a place at the global high table on merit alone. Of course, video streaming platforms such as Netflix do list popular Chinese movies for the global audience, but I fear they may be missing out on a clutch of exciting new offerings.

Take *Decoded*, for instance. I was quite looking forward to its release and it did not disappoint. Here is a thriller about a genius cryptographer that is also an intimate family portrait set from the 1940s to '60s, before and after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The spy thriller — which has dream sequences that

are perhaps some of the most imaginative and well-executed in recent memory — is yet another example of how Chinese directors are elevating storytelling to a sublime art.

A spate of other blockbusters —

with one Cannes winner thrown into the mix — has left film connoisseurs spoiled for choice. *Black Dog*, which won the top honor in the Un Certain Regard category at Cannes this year, certainly deserves mention for its sensitive portrayal of a mining town on the brink of transition and the uneasy bond forged between its protagonist and a stray black canine.

Life Hotel, another gem, is certain to leave one teary-eyed for its deeply moving sketch of a struggling palliative care facility eyed by land sharks, while *A Place Called Silence* will shatter your cozy assumptions of childhood and the perils children face daily.

The Successor is a hilarious comedy — with a message — on how even the most carefully laid-out plans can go wrong, while *The Last Prenez*, which is both irreverent and funny, is also ultimately a poignant tale of a miser and social misfit who discovers that he has only a few days to live.

Moments We Shared, a heart-warming story of the bond between a doting grandmother and her aimless grandson, can make even the most cynical among us hope for the best, while *Dwelling by the West Lake* unravels the exquisite tapestry of a mother-son relationship teetering on the brink, only to be salvaged by grit and audacity.

Time Still Turns the Pages deals with the suicide of an elder brother, seen through the eyes of the younger years later, and is certain to make your heart ache for days after. Of course, *Crisis Negotiators* and *Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In* are other equally taut thrillers which one must not miss.

Suffice to say, as the Chinese movie ecosystem puts its stamp on world cinema, big events such as the annual Beijing International Film Festival may even surpass the popularity of Cannes, Venice or Berlin in the future.

It is no easy task to hold the interest of viewers, and I am quite sure China's innovative directors will think of even more compelling narratives in the days ahead to satiate them.

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Biju Dwarakanath
Second Thoughts

LIFE



From left: French artist Claude Viallat's works on display at the Contemporary Gallery Kunming in Yunnan province. The exhibition highlights Viallat's signature use of sponge-shaped patterns on various fabrics such as clothing, sun umbrellas and tents. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Kunming welcomes back French artist

Claude Viallat's solo show sees his return to city where his style made an impact on art scene, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.

More than two decades ago, in 1999 to be precise, French abstract artist Claude Viallat held his solo show at Kunming Museum in Kunming, Yunnan province, at a time when most Chinese artists rarely had opportunities to travel overseas and experience contemporary Western art. During this show, Viallat drew a Chinese dragon with a pencil on a poster.

Twenty-five years later, Viallat's work returns to Kunming at the Contemporary Gallery Kunming, directed by Nie Rongqing, who was also the designer of Viallat's 1999 show and the show's posters. Nie is also the owner of the dragon drawing which he collected at that time.

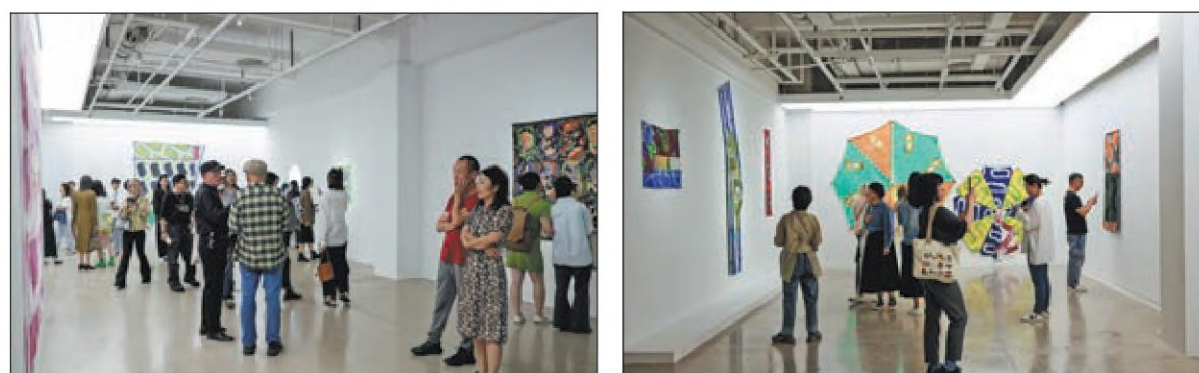
"I never imagined that my gallery will hold Viallat's show. Everything seems predestined," says Nie.

Viallat's solo show at the Contemporary Gallery Kunming displays more than 80 pieces of the famed French artist's works spanning 40 years of his career. It's one of the key cultural activities of the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Compared with Beijing and Shanghai, Kunming in Yunnan is a city distant from China's thriving contemporary art scene. Viallat's show in 1999 in Kunming made an impact on China's art circle and attracted many curious artists and art lovers.

An established abstract artist in France, Viallat spearheaded an avant-garde art movement called Supports/Surfaces in France in the 1960s. It features painting on fabrics used in daily life without a frame, such as sun umbrellas, clothes and quilts. His works are often installed in public spaces like squares, beaches, riverbeds, forests and meadows. "At that time, we knew nothing about Viallat's art and his works seemed very different from traditional paintings on canvas. It was the first time for us to see contemporary art works created by a Western artist," recalls Nie.

Cheng Xindong, a gallerist and a curator, who brought Viallat to Kun-



Top: The show *Retour de Claude Viallat* presents more than 80 pieces of the French artist's works spanning 40 years. Above: Visitors appreciate Viallat's solo show at the Contemporary Gallery Kunming. This is the second solo by the French artist in the city. The first was in 1999 and generated a far-reaching impact on the city's artists.

ming in 1999, says that Chinese artists were eager to learn about Western art. He expected the show he curated to offer an opportunity to artists from China to communicate with Viallat.

The artist visited China three times in 1999. In addition to Kunming, he traveled to Chengdu in Sichuan province and Shenyang in Liaoning province as his show toured these cities.

"It did make an impact on Yunnan and maybe on some Chinese artists. It was rare to hold such kind of contemporary shows of influential artists from overseas in China," says Cheng.

When Li Mengmeng visited 88-year-old Viallat in Nîmes, a city in southern France, earlier this year, showing the artist the poster with a dragon drawn by him in 1999, Viallat was surprised and immediately remembered his trip to Kunming.

Viallat shared his interesting experience of eating fried insects and watching bullfights in Kunming with Li, who worked for HdM gallery that helped bring the artist's works to Kunming this year.

Viallat was pleased that, after 25 years, his show would return to Kunming on a larger scale. He planned to

visit the city in person for the opening ceremony. However, due to health reasons, he was unable to do so.

The exhibition at the Contemporary Gallery Kunming gives a comprehensive presentation of the artist's life and oeuvre, and explores the threads of his practice to introduce Viallat's art, and his contributions to art history, to a wider audience. It comprises five sections, including The Work Made Visible, Persistence, The Texture of Reality, and Opening the Gaze.

One of the core tenets of Viallat's works is to make the labor behind

the artworks visible. He says it's important that a visitor should be able to realize the hard work from the presentation of the piece. In each of his art piece, viewers can easily understand how the work was made; how the fabrics were stitched together or split open, and how they were painted, printed, or dyed.

Viallat incorporates a sponge-shaped pattern into all his works, which has become a signature mark of his art. He was inspired by a practice among craftsmen in the Mediterranean who use a sponge dipped in paint to quickly apply a pattern of

blue paint to walls.

Two years ago, Nie, the director of the gallery in Kunming, happened to collect one of Viallat's works. At that time, he never imagined the artist's solo show would be held at his gallery.

The exhibition has set up a space to display dozens of Viallat's fabrics just the way the artist would have liked. Viewing from a distance, visitors get a sense of a familiar outdoor scene.

"He is a very down-to-earth artist; his works are not lofty or distant but derived from everyday life. He even insists on preserving the loose threads on the fabric in his pieces and emphasizes that his works must be hung, like drying bed sheets outdoors," says Nie.

To let visitors better understand artists and art in France, the show establishes a space to illustrate important periods in France's art history and gives a special introduction to the art movement in the 1990s in France.

At the conclusion, the exhibition presents some videos showing artists who attended Viallat's 1999 show in Kunming narrating the French artist's influence on them. Chinese artist Liu Jianhua said in a video that such an important French artist holding a show in a distant Chinese city in 1999 did have a profound impact both on the city and Chinese contemporary art.

Viallat's show will run till the end of September. This is not the first exhibition at Contemporary Gallery Kunming to introduce the works of foreign artists to audiences in Southwestern China. Established in 2019, the gallery, dedicated to contemporary art, has previously hosted exhibitions featuring artists from Europe and America.

Considering Yunnan's geographical characteristics and rich biodiversity, Nie says future gallery exhibitions will focus more on themes of environmental protection and biodiversity but at the same time also continue to contribute to cultural exchanges between Chinese and foreign artists.

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Chandelier lights up the stage for Phantom's darkest secrets

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai
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With the rise of the giant chandelier to the roof of the auditorium at Shanghai Grand Theatre, one of the most celebrated musicals, *Phantom of the Opera*, kicked off its six-week performance schedule in the city, on Tuesday. Its run will go on until Oct 13.

It has been 20 years since the epic musical's first show in Shanghai, with 100 performances given at the theater in 2004.

Marni Raab, who played the heroine Christian Daae in the 2004 tour to Shanghai, has returned to the show, playing Madame Giry, a role who knows all the secrets behind the Paris Opera, in the current world tour production.

"The city is so much bigger and even more cosmopolitan, even more beautiful if that's possible," she told the media on Sunday.

"And what's really remarkable is that the show is the same. It's the same beautiful production, with all

its glorious sets and lush music.

"It's just a testament to how wonderful *Phantom of the Opera* is. And we are really grateful for all the people who are coming back, and those coming for the first time to see the show."

Widely considered one of the most spectacular live theater productions in history, the musical composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber with lyrics by Charles Hart and Richard Stilgoe, has played to more than 160 million audiences in 46 countries and 193 cities, with productions in 21 languages. In 2023, the show celebrated its 35th anniversary on Broadway, and closed the Broadway version later the same year.

One of the Chinese audience members, Wu Nan, recalls the impact he had watching the show at the Shanghai theater for the first time 20 years ago.

"I was fresh from university and worked in the office building opposite the Shanghai Grand Theatre. I was not well-off and could only afford to buy the cheapest ticket at that time.



Right: Jonathan Roxmouth, as the Phantom, shares his experience performing in the China tour of *Phantom of the Opera*. Left: A scene from the famed musical. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA

I remember sitting on the third floor with my eyes glued to a giant prop covered in dark cloth hanging near the ceiling of the theater.

"Then the theater turned dark, and the music started, I was so overwhelmed to see the beautiful chandelier lit up and falling all the way down to the stage. Later on, I saw the show several more times, includ-

ing at Her Majesty's Theatre in London, but nothing compared to the strong emotional impact I experienced the first time."

Since then, the musical made another two tours of China, in 2013 and 2015 respectively. Last year, the Chinese version of the musical was produced and successfully toured nine cities across the country.



Playing the Phantom in the current world tour is Jonathan Roxmouth, the youngest English-speaking Phantom. Having performed the show more than 700 times, he tries to push aside the pressure, and not to keep a count any more, though "I do dream of celebrating my 1,000th show as the Phantom," he says.

Staying in Shanghai for the com-

ing six weeks, the actors are looking forward to experiencing the culture and lifestyle of the city. Grace Roberts, who now plays the role of Christine Daae, the young singer, says that she wants to see the city from the top of the Shanghai Tower, and also have afternoon tea with a view of the Bund.

Raab, on the other hand, recalls spending Spring Festival in Shanghai 20 years ago, when she saw the Yuyuan Garden decorated with beautiful lanterns. "This year, we will probably be celebrating the new year in Guangzhou," she says.

The 2024 China tour took the musical to Shenzhen in Guangdong province from July 2 to Aug 4, and Xi'an in Shaanxi province from Aug 13 to 18.

After the shows in Shanghai, the production will perform in Suzhou of Jiangsu province from Oct 22 to Nov 3, Chengdu in Sichuan province from Nov 12 to 24, Beijing from Dec 3 to 29, and Guangzhou of Guangdong from Jan 7 to 26.

LIFE



Ancient Greeks gave culture a sporting chance

Items on display in Nanjing Museum reveal importance attached to physical and mental condition, Zhao Xu reports.

Within the enviable collection of ancient Greek art held by the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, there's a type of red-on-black container known as krater, ancient Greek clay vases typically used for mixing wine and water, as the ancient Greeks would do.

Of the thousands, if not tens of thousands of kraters held by the museum, this one, dating to the early 4th century BC, has traveled the long distance between Greece and China to show up at an exhibition focusing on ancient Greek civilization, for a distinct reason.

"The piece, by capturing on one side a specific moment inside the gymnasium, tells a story about the building of the body, which, together with the exercising of the mind, constitutes the Grecian ideal of a man," says Guan Lin, curator of the exhibition *Ancient Greek Civilization — the Glory of the Aegean Sea* at the Nanjing Museum in Nanjing city, East China's Jiangsu province.

With the natural red color of the clay accentuated by the black background, the picture shows three nude youths preparing to treat their bodies after physical exercise.

The one in the middle is shown holding up an aryballos — a small round or oval-shaped oil container — from which oil drips into the hands of his companion who stands on his left. The athlete on the right holds a bronze strigil. Made up of a handle and a curved blade designed to conform to the contours of the body, a strigil was used after exercise to scrape off oil, dirt and sweat, the latter two tending to accumulate on the oil-covered young bodies.

Examples of both the aryballos and the strigil, also from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, are on view at the exhibition that runs until Oct 20.

The applying of oil was done for both aesthetic and practical reasons. While emphasizing well-worked muscles, the oil helps to warm muscles and provides a protective layer to the skin. During wrestling, a well-oiled body would be very slippery and therefore hard for the opponent to grasp, let alone to throw to the ground.

Considered by Plato as a sport for the education of youth in the "Ideal State" he envisioned, wrestling was among the competitions of the ancient Olympic Games, held every four years between the 8th century BC and AD 4th century in Olympia, a small town on the Peloponnese Peninsula in Greece.

The Games also included competitions for jumping, discus and javelin-throwing, horse and chariot racing, and most importantly, racing on foot, which was the only event for the first 13 Olympics.

"Participants were required to complete a length of 192.27 meters in the Games that lasted only for a day," says Guan.

"It was eventually extended to a five-day event starting from its 77th edition in 472 BC."

Foot racing was known in ancient Greece as stade or stadion race — stadion being the ancient Greek word for stadium. Another term for sporting venues — gymnasium — contained the inextricable link between physical training and education, according to Guan.

"Few people might know this, but Aristotle founded his philosophical school on the grounds of the Lyceum, a prominent gymnasium in Athens," she says.

The word athlete derives from the ancient

Greek word *athlos*, meaning contest or struggle. It seems that what the ancient Greek athletes were aiming for, with their struggle, was not mere victory, but a balance of the body and the mind, a deeply philosophical concept not entirely unfamiliar to ancient Chinese philosophers.

The immense popularity and cultural significance of the ancient Olympic Games can be testified by the fact that during the Games, Greek city-states observed a truce known simply as the Olympic Truce, which generally covered the period from one week before the Games to one week after. Safe passage and participation by athletes who took part in the Games was guaranteed, forging among the warring Greek city-states a shared sense of identity that ultimately proved essential to the nation-building of Greece.

One example of the implementation of the Olympic Truce, as documented by the 5th century BC Athenian historian Thucydides, involved its possible breaching by the Spartan forces during the prolonged and brutal conflict known today as the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC).

Having allegedly launched attacks during the truce period, the Spartans were not only fined by the Olympic authorities but also banned from participating in the Games in 420 BC. The Spartans refused to pay the penalty, claiming that their maneuver had been completed before the Olympic Truce was officially announced.

Whatever happened in reality, the Spartans' participation in the Olympic Games that year was prohibited, and the decision was significant given Sparta's reputation as one of the most powerful and militaristic city-states of Greece.

"The Olympics became symbolic of peace thanks to the truce, and the symbolism has continued to date ever since the Games' revival in 1896 by the International Olympic Committee led by Pierre de Coubertin," says Guan.

Whenever there was a war, there were deaths, sometimes countless

ones. In ancient Greece, annual funerary games were organized for those fallen on the battlefield, as in the case of the 192 Athenians who died in the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

Some scholars believe that although the ancient Olympic Games had been held in Olympia, the sanctuary dedicated to Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, it was these funerary games that are at the core of its origin. And that had added another human dimension to a game closely associated today with the celebration of humanity.

On display at the Nanjing Museum exhibition is an ancient Greek grave stele dating to a period between 400 BC and 375 BC. Depicted on the stele's preserved relief are a naked youth trying to balance a ball on his right thigh and his naked servant boy holding a strigil and aryballos.

According to Guan, it was a Grecian funerary tradition for the deceased to be represented as a young athlete. And it resonated deeply with the Grecian psyche.

In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors in the Trojan War, was given a choice between a long, uneventful life and a short, glorious one.

Achilles chose the latter.

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Games where mortals become immortal

By ZHAO XU

If there's one single incident in Homer's *Iliad* that best underscores the epic poem's themes of friendship, honor and vengeance, it's the death of Patroclus, Achilles' closest companion who was killed by Hector, the Trojan prince, during the Trojan War.

One of the most famous conflicts in ancient Greek mythology and literature, the Trojan War saw Greeks fighting the Trojans for 10 bloody years, with gods and goddesses taking their own sides. At one point, Achilles, the greatest Greek warrior, withdrew from battle due to a dispute with the leader of the Greek forces, Agamemnon.

Seeing the Greeks struggling and the Trojans advancing, Patroclus took to leading the Greek warriors wearing Achilles' armor, before he was challenged by Hector who delivered his fatal blows.

Overcome with sorrow and rage, Achilles returned to the battle to avenge the death of his dear friend. He killed Hector in a dramatic duel before dragging the latter's body with his chariot around the tomb of Patroclus. The scene, vividly and gorgeously depicted by Homer, can be found on the painted surface of a Greek vase dating to the late 6th century BC that is on display at an exhibition held at the Nanjing Museum.

"Achilles then went on to honor his friend the Greek way, by organizing elaborate games in his name that included chariot racing, boxing, wrestling and other athletic competitions," says Guan Lin, curator of the Nanjing exhibition *Ancient Greek Civilization — the Glory of the Aegean Sea*, which features more than 270 pieces from 14 museums and cultural organizations in Greece.

Touching almost all aspects of ancient Greek culture, which derived its compelling narrative from a combination of mythology and history, the show has among its main themes the crucial role physical training and sporting games played.

One prominent example concerns the origin of the Olympic Games. Greek mythology has it that the Games, taking place annually in the town of Olympia on the Peloponnese Peninsula in Greece, were first held by Heracles (also known as Hercules), the son Zeus had with a mortal woman.

From birth, Heracles was subjected to the relentless hatred of Hera, the powerful wife of Zeus, whose most devastating act of vengeance came when she drove Heracles mad, causing him to kill his wife and their children. As atonement and redemption, Heracles was subjected to a series of nearly impossible tasks known as the Twelve Labors, upon the completion of which he founded the games to honor his father and to commemorate his own endeavor, which could only be called herculean.

Having offered little protection to his much-tormented son before his tragic and violent death — Heracles set himself ablaze having endured enormous pain after being poisoned — Zeus, the philandering father and king of all Greek gods, did grant Heracles immortality, making him a deity on Mount Olympus.

"On one hand, the image of Heracles is an embodiment of male power and virility; on the other, his life, a constant struggle against all the toil and torture inflicted upon him, provides a supreme example of heroism, with its inbuilt sense of tragedy and nobility," says Guan.

"The two aspects combine to make Heracles the athletic ideal!"

There's another layer of meaning to the story. Heracles was also held by Greek mythology as the first hero to sail the seas. Being worshiped as the divine protector of seafarers, he symbolizes the ambition and efforts of the ancient Greeks to tame and ply the ocean.

Another Greek god, although much less valiant, associated with athleticism is Hermes, son of — not surprisingly — Zeus and



Above: An ancient Greek statue of Heracles. Below: A gold coin from ancient Greece that shows the laureate head of Apollo on one side and Philip II on the other.

another of his lovers. Able to move quickly and freely between the worlds of the mortal and the divine aided by his winged sandals, Hermes, thanks to his speed and agility, became a patron of travelers, messengers and athletes.

During the sporting games, winners were presented with wreaths woven of laurel or olive tree branches. While the former was sacred to Apollo, the latter was symbolic of Athena — both children Zeus had outside his marriage with Hera.

According to Greek mythology, Athena, competing with the sea god Poseidon for the honor to be the patron deity of Athens, planted an olive tree and successfully won the locals' hearts and minds. Vases filled with olive oil were awarded to the winners of the athletic and equestrian competitions, especially those held in honor of Athena.

At the Nanjing Museum exhibition, the head of Apollo wearing a laurel wreath appears on one side of a gold Greek coin dating to early 4th century BC. On the

other side, the legendary Macedonian King Philip II, with goad in one hand and reins in the other, is driving his two-horse chariot to victory during the Olympic Games of 356 BC.

The king also appeared as a chariot driver on a silver coin dating to around the same time that is on view at the exhibition. On this one, the head of Zeus appears on the reverse side.

Known as Staters, the coins, widely circulated throughout the Mediterranean both for large economic transactions and as a store of wealth, had contributed to the spread of Greek culture and influence, something that the Macedonian king was highly aware of.

According to Greek biographer Plutarch, Philip II, the unifier of the Greek city-states, and his horse were victorious in the single horse race at the Olympic Games the same year that his son Alexander was born. The boy is remembered as Alexander the Great, responsible for creating one of history's largest empires and for spreading Greek culture throughout his conquered territory.

The death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC set in motion a gradual decline of the Greek culture, which culminated with the Roman conquest of Greece in 31 BC. In 393, the ancient Olympic Games were banned by Roman Emperor Theodosius I as part of a broader effort to suppress pagan practices and promote Christianity.

However, Heracles, who had a difficult life but eventually gained immortality, had somehow evoked the Christian idea of reward in heaven for sufferings sustained on Earth, says the curator.

Despite his destructive strength, the hero-god was worshiped, first and foremost, as a champion, a guardian and a peace-lover, if one listens to a hymn of the 6th century BC:

"Heracles, noble of soul, mighty in power ... defender of all ... you reassure people by driving out wild beasts and by your desire for nurturing greatly honored peace ..."



Top: An ancient Greek vase shows the images of three nude youths preparing to treat their bodies after physical exercise. Right: A strigil was used to scrape off oil and dirt on the body of an athlete. Below: An ancient Greek grave stele depicts a naked young athlete and his servant boy. Bottom: An oil container known as aryballos.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The painted surface of an ancient Greek vase depicts a scene from Homer's *Iliad*, in which Achilles, after having killed the Trojan prince Hector, drags the latter's body with his chariot.

COMMENT

Editorials

Washington shooting itself in the foot targeting scientists of Chinese descent

In 2018, the Donald Trump administration launched its China Initiative in the name of rooting out so-called Chinese spies from US universities and research institutes. The program, reminiscent of McCarthyism in the mid-1950s, overwhelmingly targeted academic researchers of Chinese descent — who made up 90 percent of the defendants — for suspected links with the Chinese government, and created a climate of fear among Asian Americans in the United States.

The program was scrapped by the US Justice Department in 2022, partly due to increasing criticism from civil rights groups and academics who claimed the initiative had applied different standards based on race during the probes and was thus tantamount to racial profiling targeting Asian Americans. Moreover, most of the cases brought under the initiative fell apart before trial due to a lack of evidence. Matthew Olsen, assistant attorney-general for the National Security Division, had to admit “this initiative is not the right approach”.

But the damage had been done. The US National Institutes of Health, which led most of the investigations, said earlier this month that as of June 9, a total of 112 scientists targeted by the initiative — mostly of Asian descent — had lost their jobs through dismissals or forced retirements for alleged undisclosed links to Beijing.

Monica Bertagnoli, director of the government's main agency for biomedical and public health research, acknowledged the “difficult climate” its inquiries created, but stopped short of making an apology for those who have been wronged. She only said that the government actions had made many Asian American and Asian research colleagues “feel targeted and alienated”.

The failure of the US government to take effective measures to resolve the problem of systemic racial discrimination led to the legitimate rights and interests of scientists of Asian descent being trampled on, and the atmosphere created meant many of them lived in fear amid the increasing violence against those of Asian descent, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hate crime cases targeting the Asian community in the US increased by 76 percent in 2020.

A study conducted by researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Princeton University and Harvard University last year found that over one-third of the scientists of Chinese descent in the US felt unwelcome in the country, and 72 percent of them felt unsafe. The survey, titled “Caught in the cross fire: Fears of Chinese-American scientists”, pointed to a trend of higher incentives to leave the US and lower incentives to apply for government grants because of fear among the scientists of potential federal investigations since the launch of the China Initiative. It also warned of “significant loss of talent” in the US.

For more than six decades, the US has been the prime destination of the world's top scientists who have greatly contributed to the US' leadership in science.

The perception that the US can put on hold China's progress in science and technology, either through export controls and sanctions or unwarranted persecution of scientists of Chinese origin in the US, is wrong, and none of the restrictive measures the US has adopted targeting China is likely to achieve its intended purpose. This has been proved by the achievements China has made in recent years in such sectors as power batteries and electric vehicles despite the lasting US crackdown and technology war on Chinese high-tech firms.

In his meeting with visiting US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Thursday, President Xi Jinping said that he hoped the US will see China's development as an opportunity not a challenge and work to get along with China. In this fast-changing and turbulent world he said, countries need solidarity and coordination, not exclusion or regress.

To maintain its lead on the science and technology front, the US should strive to push itself ahead, rather than trying to keep China down.

Japan butting into disputes with malice

The Chinese embassy in the Philippines on Thursday said it has issued a diplomatic note of protest to the Japanese embassy in the Philippines over what it called “irresponsible remarks” by the Japanese ambassador over a recent collision between Chinese and Philippine coast guard vessels in the waters of Xianbin Reef.

Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Endo Kazuya said the China Coast Guard vessels' law enforcement actions, which were legitimate and professional, against Philippine vessels trying to trespass in the Chinese waters were “another unacceptable development”, and he denounced them as tension-increasing “harassment”.

This is not the first time the Japanese envoy to the country has thrown himself into the ongoing spat between Manila and Beijing. He has also spoken out to openly endorse Manila's provocations in forum speeches and interviews.

Noting how eager Kazuya is to jump into the fray, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy said in a statement that even if he were a judge or arbitrator of some sort, he would still need some time to learn the facts of the incidents. Instead, his hasty and “unprincipled criticism” is the symptom of “habitual bias” that is not conducive to upholding the rules-based international order.

Although the Philippines has bilateral defense treaties and military cooperation programs with Japan and the US, along with a trilateral security treaty, none of these pacts has the legal force to justify Japan's or the US' bid to intervene in China's maritime disputes with the Philippines, which should and can only be settled by the two disputing parties. In fact, the maritime disputes were not a challenge to Sino-Philippine relations, or even regional stability, until the US and Japan began to stick their oars in the issue.

The reason why they have instigated and encouraged the Philippines to stage its provocation of anchoring a vessel in the lagoon at Xianbin Reef is they intend for Manila to repeat the trick it has used at China's Ren'ai Reef, where it grounded an old warship in 1999. The intention is for Manila to transform these into permanent facilities so it can make its occupation of the Chinese reefs a fait accompli.

A recent agreement between Beijing and Manila setting the conditions for the Philippines to deliver life support to the military staff stationed on its ship grounded on Ren'ai Reef seems to have stirred Washington and Tokyo into action. Awakening them to the fact that the situation will soon quiet down if they do not continuously tighten the screw on Manila's back.

One day after Kazuya made his latest irresponsible remarks, Samuel Paparo, head of the US “Indo-Pacific” Command, said at an international military conference in Manila that the US military is open to consultations about escorting Philippine ships in the South China Sea, citing the Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Philippines.

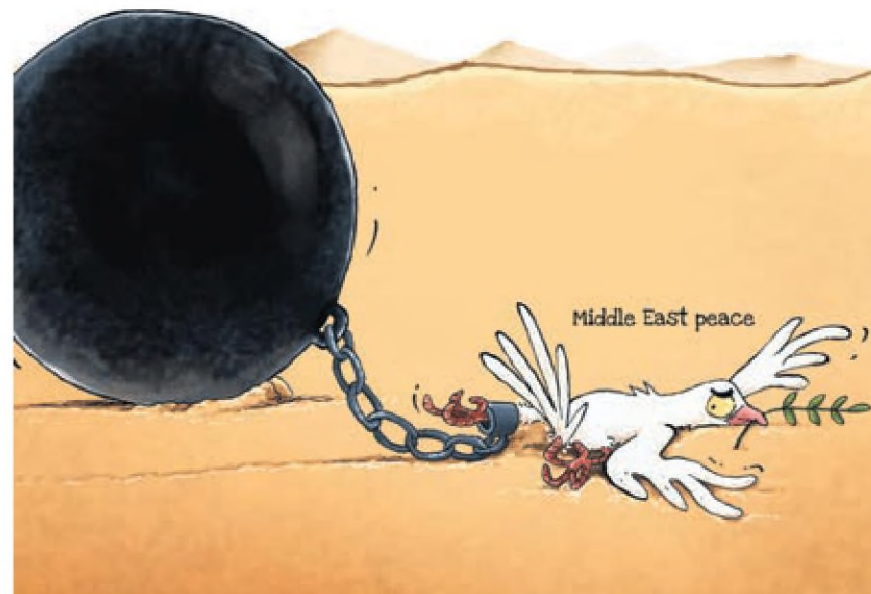
As a matter of fact, many collisions between Chinese and Philippine vessels in the South China Sea that Manila has plotted are closely watched over by US military ships and planes from nearby and recorded by US reporters on board the modern and larger Philippine ships newly provided by Japan.

That being said, it should be seen that the US and Japan are the real instigators behind the rising South China Sea tensions. They have never thought about helping to promote an early settlement of the disputes but instead are trying to stir them up and further escalate them so that they can drag all regional countries into a united front against China.

China has made no bones about its resolve to firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, or its willingness to properly handle maritime disputes with the Philippines through dialogue and consultation.

Instead of acting as a US proxy in the Asia-Pacific, Japan should reflect on history and its words and actions, and contribute more to regional peace and stability, while trying to establish itself as a truly independent and trustworthy country in the eyes of its Asian neighbors and the international community. The peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific are hard-earned and need to be cherished and protected by regional countries.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Paralympics show love, compassion at a time of challenge and conflict

The 17th Summer Paralympic Games opened at the Place de la Concorde in Paris on Wednesday evening.

About 4,400 athletes from a record 168 delegations are participating in the 11-day Games, to which China has sent 284 athletes, 95 of them first-time Paralympians, to compete in 302 events. All of them, through their unyielding struggle, will interpret the Paralympic values of “courage, determination, inspiration and equality”.

Unlike the Olympic Games, the Paralympics are not just a sporting event, but also an arena for profound dialogue about courage, perseverance and inclusiveness, as athletes challenge physical disabilities to become legends.

The Paralympic Games have been trying to increase global awareness about people with disabilities. They have changed the stereotype about people with disabilities and made

respect for and understanding of them a mainstream perception. From the first Paralympic Games to Paris, countless Paralympic athletes have jointly strived to create records. They have also used their fighting spirit to change the fate of countless physically challenged people, casting the glory and change of the humanistic spirit of sports.

All Paralympic athletes have proved that physical limitations cannot limit the flight of their mind and their pursuit of dreams.

The Paralympic Games provide a stage for athletes with disabilities to pursue personal dreams and glory, while giving them a platform to change how society sees them. The support of all sectors of society, including the selfless dedication of volunteers, the generosity of sponsors, and the wide reach of the media, have combined to create an inclusive and encouraging environ-

ment, not only promoting the development of sports for people with disabilities, but also promoting the whole world to become open and inclusive, free of discrimination, and with love and respect.

However, in today's world, people in some countries and regions are still suffering from wars and conflicts. Be it the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Middle East crisis and the rising tensions in the Asia-Pacific under the instigation of external forces, they all tell people that the world is still not peaceful, something that runs counter to the global desire for peace.

At a time when regional conflicts and hotspot issues are still cropping up, the pursuit of peace, solidarity and progress shown by the Paralympic athletes should prompt all to think about a common thread that binds all mankind.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

More duty-free shops to boost tourism and economy

The central authorities have recently issued a regulation on duty-free shops to promote tourism. The regulation will apply to duty-free shops in eight cities, where some new duty-free shops are to be opened. The regulation comes into effect on Oct 1.

According to the regulation, duty-free shops will be allowed to sell commodities to people bearing documents proving they are leaving the Chinese mainland within 60 days. Beginning July 2023, China has been offering a 144-hour visa-free policy to visitors

from 54 countries via 37 ports. Because of such relaxations, the number of foreigners entering the mainland in the first half of 2024 reached 14.6 million, 152.7 percent higher than that in the first half of 2023, when 8.5 million tourists made a visa-free entry.

On TikTok, videos shared with the ChinaTravel hashtag were viewed a record 700 million times, while Feeyo, an app about flight schedules, shows the total number of international flights in the first half of 2024 had recovered to over 70 percent that

of 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The increasing number of overseas tourists arriving in China has laid a sound economic basis for enlarging the duty-free shop sector.

But foreign travelers are apparently not the only group that will benefit from the duty-free shops. Even domestic residents who are planning an overseas trip get to buy a wide range of things from these shops ahead of an overseas trip.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Practical Sino-German cooperation boon for both

After the European Commission announced that it would impose high tariffs on Chinese new energy vehicles, German automakers such as BMW, Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz expressed their opposition.

“We don't think that our industry needs protection,” BMW CEO Oliver Zipse was reported by the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle as saying in a meeting with analysts after the tariffs were proposed. Zipse said that operating on a global basis gives major automakers an industrial advantage, cautioning that “You can easily endanger that advantage by introducing import tariffs.”

The market share of Chinese manufacturers in Germany and Europe is less than 1 percent and more than half of the Chinese-made car sales in Europe are from non-Chinese companies, he pointed out.

The German auto companies believe they should make their own

assessments of the situation and make the decision on their own, rather than simply heeding the dictates of the politicians in Washington.

The fall of sales of Volkswagen and BMW in the Chinese market is caused by the fact that they cannot compete with the Chinese EV makers in the country, and an increasing number of Chinese consumers are choosing an EV for their next car.

In the view of some German auto industry experts, European car companies must enter the Chinese market to catch up in the field of EVs. But the high tariffs the European Commission is imposing on Chinese EVs will not be conducive to the improvement of the competitiveness of the European automotive industry.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Germany comprehensive strategic partnership. The industry and supply chains of China and Germany are deeply intertwined, and the markets of

the two countries are highly interdependent.

Mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Germany is not a “risk”, but the guarantee for a stable bilateral relationship and an opportunity for the future. There is still huge potential to be tapped from win-win cooperation in both traditional sectors such as machinery and automobiles, and new areas such as the green transition, digitization and artificial intelligence.

Both China and Germany uphold free trade and economic globalization. It is important that the two countries remain vigilant against the rise of protectionism, adopt an objective view on the issue of capacity, and devote more efforts to strengthening and broadening their cooperation.

China and Germany have long been partners of dialogue, development and cooperation, as well as partners for handling global challenges. There is no reason why that should change.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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GLOBAL VIEWS



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

WU GUODING

Paving the way for the RMB in Africa

African countries should loosen foreign exchange controls, creating a better environment for using the renminbi and China should expand currency swap agreements with more countries

Internationalizing the renminbi is an inevitable path for China to further economic development and financial opening-up. Boosting the use of the renminbi in African countries, which are important trading partners of China and participants in the Belt and Road Initiative, is key to the internationalization of the renminbi. It will help elevate China-Africa financial cooperation and economic and trade relations to a higher level.



The growing economic strength of China and Africa and their deepening cooperation in recent years have paved the way for increased use of renminbi on the continent.

China-Africa trade reached \$282 billion in 2023, of which Chinese exports to Africa stood at \$172.8 billion and its imports from Africa were \$109.3 billion. China has been the largest trading partner of Africa for 15 years. The growing trade has led to increased use of renminbi in cross-border transactions and created higher demand for renminbi as a reserve currency.

Among developing countries, China is the largest provider of investment capital to Africa. China's direct investment in Africa topped \$40 billion by the end of 2023. Industrial capacity cooperation is a major form of cooperation between China and Africa. China has established industrial capacity cooperation mechanisms with 15 African countries.

Africa is China's second-largest overseas market for contracted projects, with a total of \$700 billion worth of African projects contracted to Chinese enterprises. Chinese investment and infrastructure projects in Africa have boosted the use of renminbi in Africa, and promoted the role of renminbi as a global currency.

Africa is a key participant in the BRI. So far, 52 African countries have signed BRI cooperation documents with China. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summits held in Johannesburg in 2015 and in Beijing in 2018 have brought the bilateral relations to a higher level, and created sound political and economic conditions for the wider use of renminbi in Africa. Other cooperation mechanisms

such as the China-Africa Renminbi Internationalization Forum and the China-Africa Inter-Bank Association have also created conditions for the internationalization of the renminbi.

Africa's economic integration has made solid progress in recent years. The African Continental Free Trade Area came into force in January 2021, facilitating the development of a financial industry in Africa. The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System, a system which China could leverage to boost the use of renminbi on the continent, was formally launched in January 2022.

Thanks to these favorable conditions, the internationalization of the renminbi has made some progress in Africa. Between 2010 and 2020, the cross-border trade settlement using the renminbi between China and Africa soared from 520 million yuan (\$73 million) to 79 billion yuan. Many African institutions are connected to the Cross-border Interbank Payment System. By early 2024, six African institutions were direct participants in the CIPS, with another 52 indirectly involved.

China-Africa currency swap has also made breakthroughs. China has signed bilateral currency swap agreements with countries such as South Africa, Morocco, Egypt and Nigeria. South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya have adopted the renminbi as a reserve currency. In addition, the Bank of China's branch in Johannesburg issued in 2017 the first offshore renminbi-denominated bond in Africa.

However, the internationalization of the renminbi in Africa still faces many challenges. Due to long-standing internal contradictions and geopolitical competition among major powers, some African countries have been plagued by political instability. In addition, some African countries have yet to build a complete legal system, a credit system, and a sound business environment. As a result, foreign enterprises face more risks when operating there.

Because of the dominance of the US dollar and historical traditions, some African countries' financial systems rely heavily on the dollar and the euro, where the renminbi remains a minor player. Most African countries have strict foreign exchange controls, with

the exception of a few such as Kenya and Libya. These negative factors have limited the wider use of the renminbi in Africa.

Africa's economic fragility and structural deficiencies are also obstacles to the internationalization of the renminbi on the continent. In recent years, Africa has seen a growing trade deficit with China, which reached \$64 billion in 2023. The trade deficit has led to an insufficient flow of renminbi in Africa, hampering its wider use on the continent.

Some measures should be taken to boost the use of the renminbi in Africa.

It is imperative to encourage monetary authorities of African countries to loosen foreign exchange controls, and create a better environment for using the renminbi. It is equally important to introduce the benefits of using the renminbi and the policy of cross-border use of the renminbi to African market entities. Efforts should be made to train African market entities to enable them to use the renminbi. It is key to strengthening China-Africa industrial capacity and infrastructure cooperation. On the one hand, China could increase the supply of the renminbi to African markets. On the other hand, the cooperation can enhance the renminbi's role as an invoicing currency. African countries can earn the renminbi by providing commodities such as natural resources to China, and, in turn, they can use the renminbi to buy China's industrial products and infrastructure construction services.

China can also expand currency swap and renminbi settlement agreements with more African countries and encourage Chinese financial institutions to open branches in Africa or partner with local banks through investment or joint ventures. Additionally, more renminbi clearing banks should be established in Africa, either by Chinese banks or in cooperation with African national banks.

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



WANG JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



YAN GUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIXIAOYUN

Growth engine for a continent

China-Africa agricultural cooperation exemplifies the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind

China-Africa agricultural cooperation plays a vital role in their broader partnership, and viewing it as beneficial to only one side is a biased perspective. The differences in development between China and Africa, along with their respective strengths and challenges in agriculture, create a mutually beneficial relationship. Promoting China-Africa cooperation is crucial for Africa's

development, particularly in poverty reduction and agricultural advancement, as well as for China's agricultural growth.

First, the African continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, remains predominantly agricultural. In most countries, agriculture accounts for over 30 percent of GDP, with more than 70 percent of the population involved in farming and most people living in rural areas. Agriculture is crucial to these countries' economies and societies. However, low urbanization and limited demand for non-agricultural products pose challenges. Aside from cash crops such as coffee and cocoa for international markets, domestic demand for agricultural products is limited. For instance, our team has been promoting high-density maize planting in Morogoro, Tanzania, for a decade, but farmers often face the dilemma of unsold maize despite increased yields.

Second, sub-Saharan African countries have abundant land resources but low population density, resulting in less pressure on land. And many areas are in the tropics and have rich sources of food that do not need to grow on arable land, which also contributes to low agricultural productivity. In southern Tanzania, where we work, farmers in major maize-producing provinces achieve an average yield of only 50 to 100 kilograms per mu (one-fifteenth of a hectare). Even with simple techniques such as increasing planting density and weeding frequency — without using fertilizers — yields can increase

two to three times. Many African countries have substantial agricultural growth potential and could become key to global food security.

Third, in most African countries, rural areas generally do not face severe difficulties accessing food, provided there are no wars or natural disasters. However, the primary challenge lies in households lacking sufficient economic resources to meet their basic material needs. Farmers relying solely on family labor often cannot cultivate larger plots, leading to low productivity and limited commercialization. Additionally, insufficient domestic demand hampers the creation of a robust demand in urban and rural areas, resulting in slow income growth for farmers. Consequently, sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest poverty rates globally — 36.7 percent in 2020, according to the World Bank standards, compared to just 1 percent in East Asia and the Pacific. Promoting agricultural development in Africa from a global perspective is crucial for poverty alleviation in the region.

Fourth, China's experience in transitioning from an agriculture-based country to an industrialized one, particularly in leveraging agricultural development for large-scale poverty reduction and rapid socioeconomic transformation, is highly relevant to Africa's current development stage. African agriculture needs to shift from extensive cultivation to increased land productivity. China's labor-intensive farming techniques can offer valuable insights for Africa to overcome its capital and technology constraints.

Additionally, manual and semi-manual agricultural machinery once widely used in China is also applicable in Africa. Therefore, China-Africa agricultural cooperation should focus on the complementarity of experience and application.

Fifth, as China is a major player in global agricultural trade, China-Africa agricultural cooperation can significantly boost African agricultural development. In the first half of 2024, China imported a total of

84.18 million metric tons of grain, with increased imports of wheat and soybeans. In recent years, China has reached a series of trade agreements with African countries. For example, China and Tanzania reached an agreement on soybean trade in 2020, making Tanzania one of China's soybean suppliers. In this sense China-Africa trade cooperation could provide impetus.

Sixth, with China's economic and social development, the spillover of Chinese agricultural education, research and technology has become increasingly evident. More Chinese research institutions and universities are beginning to engage with Africa. As an emerging economy, China's development process and experience over the past decades are highly relevant to Africa in its modernization drive. Viewing China-Africa cooperation as a mechanism for sharing parallel experiences, particularly in agriculture, is highly valuable. China's experience in maize, rice, vegetables, fruits and animal husbandry, based on small holder farmer development models, is highly relevant for many African countries, highlighting the unique value of China-Africa agricultural cooperation.

China-Africa agricultural cooperation exemplifies the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, where both sides establish a mutually beneficial partnership at their respective development stages. The cooperation includes bilateral, trilateral and multilateral development partnerships, as well as a new type of South-South cooperation formed through trade and investment, making it a typical example of global development cooperation in the new era.

The author is lead chair professor of China Agricultural University and honorary dean of the College of International Development and Global Agriculture. 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.

BUSINESS

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Sino-US talks in Sept seen creating clarity on trade policy path

By ZHU WENQIAN and ZHONG NAN

Senior officials from China and the United States will hold the second round of the deputy minister-level meeting of the China-US commerce and trade working group in Tianjin on Sept 7 to exchange views about economic and trade policy concerns, China's Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday.

China International Trade Representative and Vice-Minister of Commerce Wang Shouwen, and US Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Marisa Lago will co-chair the meeting, the Ministry of Commerce said in a weekly news conference in Beijing.

"The two sides will have in-depth exchanges of views on a wide range of topics, including their respective economic and trade policy concerns, corporate demand and practical cooperation," said He Yadong, a spokesman for the ministry.

Experts and business executives noted that with the US presidential election approaching, holding such a meeting will provide clarity on the direction of trade policies and regulations to exporters and investors on both sides.

Given the interconnections of the global economy, any changes in China-US trade relations could have widespread repercussions, said Wang Xiaosong, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of Economics in Beijing.

The US remains China's third-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade value reaching 2.72 trillion yuan (\$383.1 billion) in the first seven months, up 4.1 percent year-on-year, accounting for 11 percent of China's total foreign trade value, said the General Administration of Customs.

Highlighting that stable Sino-US economic and trade ties will benefit businesses from both countries, Sandeep Seth, chief growth officer of Tapestry Inc — a New York-based luxury goods group — said that China's vast market, favorable policies to attract global capital, ongoing industrial upgrades and its growing reputation as a leading innovator make it one of the most crucial markets for many US companies.

Sharing similar views, Sally Loh, president for China unit at Otis Worldwide Corp, a US elevator manufacturer, said China's new reform initiatives aimed at fostering new quality productive forces will fuel high-quality development of the country. The continuing opening-up to foreign investment provides a favorable

"The two sides will have in-depth exchanges of views on a wide range of topics, including their respective economic and trade policy concerns, corporate demand and practical cooperation."

He Yadong, spokesman for the Ministry of Commerce

business environment.

In another development, the Ministry of Commerce held a meeting last week to gather opinions and suggestions from industry professionals and experts on raising import tariffs on large-displacement fuel vehicles. Representatives from industry organizations, think tanks, research institutions and enterprises attended the meeting.

China has always adhered to green and low-carbon development. Previously, experts proposed specific suggestions to increase tariffs on large-displacement fuel vehicles, as this is in line with World Trade Organization rules and will be helpful to the green transformation of the country's automotive industry, the Commerce Ministry said.

"Next, relevant departments will carefully study the opinions and suggestions of industry experts based on work procedures, support the green and low-carbon transformation of China's automotive industry and achieve high-quality development," said He from the Ministry of Commerce.

This move followed the European Commission's recent announcement of plans to impose import tariffs of up to 36.3 percent on electric vehicles produced in China. These potential measures, if implemented, would remain in effect for five years, although a final decision has yet to be made.

He added that the move is a typical protectionist strategy and goes against the cooperation between Chinese and EU automotive industries. It is also detrimental to the stability of the global automotive supply chain, the EU's green transformation and global efforts to address climate change.

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Chen Zhongyue, chairman of China Unicom, speaks at the China International Big Data Industry Expo 2024 in Guiyang, Guizhou province, on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China Unicom to up computing network

Telco keen on next-generation internet, breakthroughs in big data and LLMs

By EAN FEIFEI and YANG JUN in Guiyang

China Unicom will step up efforts to accelerate the construction of intelligent computing infrastructure, build the next-generation internet and achieve breakthroughs in the key technologies of big data and large language models or LLMs, as part of its broader push to bolster the high-quality development of the digital economy.

Chen Zhongyue, chairman of the company, said Guizhou province has emerged as a computing power center as it has realized the coordinated layout and development of computing power, network carrying power and electric power.

Chen made the remarks during the three-day China International Big Data Industry Expo 2024 that will conclude on Friday in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou.

The internet is now rapidly advancing toward the next-generation internet, namely the intelligent computing network, given that there is surging demand for computing power along with the rapid development of LLMs, he noted.

He emphasized that China Unicom is taking steps to build new types of infrastructure, facilitate the development of new-generation wireless communication technology, speed up the construction of intelligent computing network as well as promote the efficient and safe circulation and use of data by

leveraging key technologies, including privacy computing, blockchain, quantum computing and encryption technology.

The company is intensifying efforts to implement the artificial intelligence-plus strategy, upgrade its LLM called Yuanjing, and speed up the application of AI models in a wider range of fields, in a bid to better drive the development of big data and AI.

The top executive also said China Unicom has developed 35 industry-specific Yuanjing models, which have benefited urban governance, economic operations, information consumption and industrial manufacturing.

The company will step up investment in Guizhou, build and operate new infrastructure and provide more intelligent, convenient digital services, he said.

China is constructing new information infrastructure and promoting the research, development and application of cutting-edge technologies like 6G, next-generation internet and quantum communications.

Experts said computing power is a vital part of the new quality productive forces, and is widely regarded as a significant foundation for bolstering the development of the digital economy. It is also a new growth engine that can unleash the potential of data as a factor of production.

Gao Wen, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the rapid development and

application of AI-powered LLMs in various fields necessitates higher computing power. He called for efforts to accelerate building of data infrastructure like computing power networks and data centers.

Gao said China's computing power industry has grown at an annual average rate of more than 10 percent, with its scale expected to surpass that of the United States in the near future.

Data from the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, a Beijing-based think tank, showed that the country's total computing power reached 230 EFLOPS, ranking second globally after the US. EFLOPS is a unit of the speed of computer systems, equal to 1 quintillion floating-point operations a second.

Liu Yulin, director of the China Internet Network Information Center, said the speedy growth of the digital economy driven by AI has created strong demand for digital infrastructure like information network, data centers and computing power, which will advance the building of a national computing power network.

China has 196 national green data centers. The total number of standard racks in use at data centers nationwide has exceeded 8.1 million, Liu said.

China has launched a megaproject involving the construction of eight national computing hubs and 10 national data center clusters in 2022. Guizhou is among eight national computing hubs.

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Lego to invest more in China

By WANG ZHUOQIONG wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Toy giant Lego Group, which operates over 480 stores across more than 120 cities in China, has reaffirmed it will continue to invest in the Chinese market for long-term growth.

Lego announced its decision after posting robust first-half results, marked by 13 percent year-on-year growth in overall revenue to 31 billion Danish kroner (\$4.62 billion) that outpaced the overall toy industry's.

Consumer sales surged by 14 percent year-on-year, a contrast to the broader toy industry's 1 percent decline. First-half operating profit grew by 26 percent year-on-year to a record 8.1 billion Danish kroner, while net profit rose 16 percent to 6 billion Danish kroner.

During the company's earnings call on Wednesday, its CEO Niels B. Christiansen highlighted Lego's rapid growth in China over the past five years.

"Our brand position and market share are much stronger today than they were a few years ago," Christiansen said. "Although the market is affected by macroeconomic situations, we remain committed to building our brand, optimizing stores and investing in our portfolio in China. The long-term potential in China is fantastic, and we will continue to invest in this market."

About 40 percent of Lego stores in China are located in third- and fourth-tier cities. In May, the Danish firm launched its fourth beacon store in Fuzhou, Fujian province, following similar launches in Beijing in April and in Changsha, Hunan province, and Xi'an, Shaanxi province, last year.

This strategic expansion aims to bring the brand and play experience closer to Chinese consumers, Christiansen had said earlier this year.

Lego also increased investments in sustainability, retail and digitization to support short and long-term growth.

In the first half, Lego launched around 300 new sets, maintaining a diverse portfolio that caters to fans of all ages. Top-performing themes included both home-grown and licensed lines such as Icons, City and Technic.

Briefly

Ningbo-Zhoushan HSR makes progress

The Ningbo-Zhoushan High-speed Railway, which is under construction and whose completion will connect all cities in Zhejiang province with the HSR network, entered the phase of whole-line construction when work on another major HSR bridge started recently. State builder China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp said its team started drilling for a major pillar of the Qitai Railway Bridge in Ningbo, Zhejiang. CR24G said the HSR will link Zhoushan with the provincial HSR network, making the city the last one in the province to be connected.

Carlsberg's Foshan brewery starts ops

Carlsberg Group, a multinational brewer headquartered in Denmark, said its Carlsberg Foshan Sanshui Brewery, with an annual capacity of 500,000 kiloliters, has officially started operations. With a total investment of nearly 3 billion yuan (\$420.9 million), the new brewery in the Sanshui district of Foshan, South China's Guangdong province, is the company's 27th in China, meant to supply markets in and around South China.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

COMAC's C919 aircraft set to enter period of rapid growth

By ZHU WENQIAN zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

China's first domestically developed single-aisle aircraft, the C919, has achieved a new operating milestone after it was delivered to Air China and China Southern Airlines on Wednesday. The model is expected to become fully operational in the domestic air travel market going forward, said an industry expert.

The two State-owned carriers received their first C919 jets simultaneously on Wednesday evening at the final assembly manufacturing site of Commercial Aircraft Corp of China, or COMAC, in Shanghai, and the jets are planned to be put into commercial operation on more routes and cover more areas.

So far, the C919 has received more than 1,000 orders from home and abroad, and nine aircraft have been delivered. Shanghai-based China Eastern Airlines, its first customer, currently operates seven C919 jets on multiple domestic routes.

"The new deliveries stand as an important milestone for large-scale and market-oriented operations of the C919. The model provides the

4.1

percent forecast annual growth rate of China's commercial aircraft fleet size over the next 20 years

aviation industry a third option besides Boeing and Airbus. To truly enter the global market, it requires mass production and a ramp-up of production capacity of the model," said Lin Zhijie, a civil aviation industry analyst.

"The C919 has a more profound impact on China's high-end manufacturing industries, as it is foreseen to drive breakthroughs in a group of cutting-edge manufacturing technologies," Lin said.

Comparable to the narrow-body Airbus A320 and the Boeing B737 series, the C919 has 158 to 192 seats and a flying range of 4,075 kilometers to 5,555 km. Air China's C919 jet is equipped with two classes and 158 seats, while China Southern's C919 plane has a layout of three classes and 164 seats, the carriers said.

Air China, China Southern and

China Eastern earlier each purchased 100 C919 aircraft, and the planes are expected to be delivered before 2031, according to the delivery plans.

"The inclusion of the C919 in China National Aviation Holding Corp Ltd and China Southern Airlines Group signifies that the aircraft has entered a period of rapid growth after a breakthrough from zero to one," said He Dongfeng, chairman of COMAC.

"With continuous expansion of the C919's commercial operations, it is expected to account for a larger market share with more airlines adopting the model. With strengthening brand impact, the model is set to bring more vitality to China's civil aviation market and even the global market," He said.

Since the C919 began commercial operations in May last year as part of the China Eastern fleet, it has undertaken more than 3,600 commercial flights and its accumulated flying time exceeds 10,000 hours, according to COMAC.

China's domestic air travel market is steadily picking up after the COVID-19 pandemic. In July, some



A view of the delivery ceremony for the C919 at the manufacturing center of Commercial Aircraft Corp of China Ltd in Shanghai on Wednesday. TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

69 million trips were handled, up 10.8 percent year-on-year, a record high, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Fueled by constantly growing travel demand, China's domestic air travel market will surpass that of the

United States to become the world's largest by 2043. The country's commercial fleet size will grow by 4.1 percent annually over the next two decades to 9,740 jets by 2043, US aircraft manufacturer Boeing said recently in its latest forecast.

BUSINESS



A construction crew works at a housing project in Shanghai in June. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanghai broadens home supply standards

Small, medium-sized apartments in metropolis accorded 10-20 sq m more

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Shanghai announced policies to optimize housing supply standards in order to better address new buying demand, said experts on Thursday. The Shanghai government revised the definition of small and medium-sized apartment categories on Tuesday, with the standard gross floor area of flats in both categories now being expanded by 20 square meters at most.

"The new criteria will give real estate developers more free play to optimize home designs in accordance with market needs, and it also echoes the new trend that homebuyers want more spacious and comfortable rooms," said Yan Yuejin, vice-president of the Shanghai E-House China Real Estate Research Institute.

Under the new standards, flats in high-rise residential apartment buildings above 10 floors can have up to 120 sq m in gross floor area in comparison to 100 sq m before," Yan said.

The adjustment is based on Shanghai residents' average living space, family structure, market demand,

and housing design and construction. It looks to adapt to the latest market supply and demand conditions, people's expectations for prime quality housing, as well as better fit people's diversified home living requirements, said the notice on optimizing the city's real estate market's stable and healthy development.

Experts said the new adjustments to the housing supply structure officially end the previous criteria under which the majority of newly developed housing units are sized between 90 and 100 sq m.

"Larger-sized residential apartments will be built in Shanghai, and people will have more choices when they look to change living conditions," said Chen Julan, a senior analyst at the China Index Academy in Shanghai.

"Property developers will be encouraged to invest in new housing project development, which is expected to improve new home supply efficiency," Chen said.

Guan Rongxue, a senior analyst at the Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center, said the changes in housing standards in Shanghai are in line with the city's market demand.

"Since the beginning of the year, Shanghai's new home sales have been led by diversified needs for improved living, and transactions of large-size apartments carrying hefty price tags perform well," Guan said, adding that the supply restructuring will allow more large-sized apartments to be available in Shanghai in the future.

Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center, said Shanghai's new housing standards are in line with the central authorities' latest stand and market trends.

"The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made it clear that relevant cities are allowed to eliminate different definitions for housing," Li said.

According to Li, as many as 43 percent of the pre-owned homes traded in the first seven months in eight key Chinese cities were sized above 90 sq m, while there is a rising proportion of bigger apartments in new home supply as well.

"It is worth noting that while more high quality and larger residential apartments will be available in the market, a balanced supply of various sized homes should be ensured for meeting diversified living requirements," Li said.

Eli Lilly sanguine about China market

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Huzur Devletsah

US pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Co said the China market has enormous growth potential for its therapeutic products, as the country has a significant population of overweight people who have yet to address the obesity problem.

Eli Lilly said people who are overweight or those who face obesity issues face social stigma every day and that the drugmaker aims to improve the quality of their lives. "The commonly held view that their weight is somehow their own fault, or their individual responsibility, is one of the biggest barriers preventing people who are overweight or with obesity from accessing the healthcare they need," said Huzur Devletsah, president and general manager of Lilly China.

"The science is clear, obesity is not someone's fault. It is a chronic and progressive disease that deserves the same attention, funding and care as other noncommunicable diseases, and it requires long-term management. We are concerned about the rise of misinformation about weight loss especially on social media platforms, which offer a quick fix instead of comprehensive healthcare that can support improved long-term health outcomes," Devletsah said.

She said in China, there is a lack of awareness that this is a treatable disease, adding that raising public awareness is important.

Patients should receive screening and diagnosis from doctors, and merely changing their personal lifestyles, such as dieting and

exercising, may not be enough.

Adults with an initial body mass index (BMI) of 28 kilograms per square meter or greater are regarded as having obesity

issues, and those between BMI of 24kg/m2 and 28kg/m2 are considered overweight.

This year, among Chinese adults aged above 18, 34.3 percent are overweight and 16.4 percent obese, and the trend is growing, according to the National Health Commission.

By 2030, the number of overweight and obese adults in China is expected to reach 790 million, and the number of overweight and obese people in preschool age is estimated to reach 18.19 million by then, the commission said.

Despite the data, obesity does not receive the same level of diagnosis, medical care and insurance coverage as other chronic diseases. However, China is showing greater awareness and attaching more importance to tackling obesity.

The China Obesity Congress was held for the first time earlier this month, and shed light on the growing concerns over obesity within the industry.

The National Health Commission unveiled a comprehensive three-year campaign in June about weight management to address the country's growing population of obese and overweight residents.

"In the past five years, only 54 percent of overweight and obese individuals in China discussed weight management with doctors, and many experienced delayed medical treatment," said Qu Shen, director of the obesity research institute of Tongji University School of Medicine.

Qu said they deserve access to comprehensive care, including lifestyle regimens such as diet and exercise, anti-obesity medications and bariatric surgeries.

While the management of lifestyle and behavior has long been the cornerstone of weight management, it is recognized that these approaches alone are insufficient for achieving optimal long-term outcomes. In July, the National Medical Products Administration approved tirzepatide injections for chronic weight management, a prescription medication for adults developed by Eli Lilly that is not intended for cosmetic use.

"Tirzepatide represents Lilly China's inaugural chronic weight management treatment. It tackles an underlying cause of excess weight. The new treatment will support the Healthy China 2030 initiative and the newly launched three-year public weight management campaign," Devletsah said.

Eli Lilly first launched tirzepatide in the United States in 2022, and in the second quarter of this year, the pharma company's global sales revenue grew by 36 percent year-on-year, partly driven by this medicine, according to its financial report. The company said it has ramped up the production capacity of the medicine, and will further strengthen the research and development of other metabolic drugs.

Power business

As summer is always a peak season of power use, employees from State Grid Quzhou Electric Power Co check with local businesses about power supply during a special inspection tour to Yudong village of Gouxu town in Quzhou city in Zhejiang province.

WU CHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



FDI in nation optimized, upgraded

BEIJING — For some time, some have fixated on the isolated statistic of a decline in foreign direct investment to undermine confidence in the Chinese economy. The reality is that FDI in China is being optimized and upgraded.

It's misleading not to consider these figures within a global context, as a decline in FDI is not unique

to any single country.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's Global Investment Trends Monitor, excluding higher values in a few European conduit economies, global FDI flows had dropped by 18 percent in 2023, affected by economic uncertainty and rising interest rates. India's FDI inflows fell by

47 percent, the Association of South-east Asian Nations saw a 16 percent decline and the United States experienced a 3 percent drop.

From January to July, China's actual use of FDI exceeded 500 billion yuan (\$70.2 billion). Affected by a high base a year prior, the scale of investment attraction decreased year-on-year, but remained at a relatively

high level in the context of the past decade. In particular, nearly 32,000 foreign-funded enterprises were newly established in China in the first seven months, a year-on-year increase of 11.4 percent, according to official data.

In an era of global economic instability and rising protectionism, a dip in FDI is to be expected, particularly from a high base. Yet, China remains focused on finding opportunities amid challenges. As the country fosters high-quality development, foreign investment is shifting from

short-term "hot money" to long-term commitments, with stronger institutional and innovation capacities.

China's commitment to high-standard opening-up provides ample opportunities for foreign investors to engage in its industrial transformation, consumer market growth and urban development, allowing them to gain significant benefits.

A recent Harvard Business Review article listed four key strengths of China's economy, namely its innovation ecosystem, investment in the Global

South, ultra-competitive markets and 1.4 billion consumers, and suggested that leaders of multinational corporations seize opportunities in China.

With a steadfast commitment to high-standard development and high-level opening-up, as well as a willingness to share its growth with global partners, China will remain a leading destination for foreign investors. As many foreign executives believe, the next China is still China.

XIN HUA

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BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

By LIU ZIZHENG

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China's catering sector has witnessed fierce competition over the past few years, especially in the niche hotpot segment, with local hotpot businesses adopting a string of strategies of late to better attract customers.

These include lowering product prices and tapping into so-called "sinking markets" — mostly third or fourth-tier cities.

In 2023, 75,000 new hotpot businesses were set up in the country, a report by market research firm New Catering Big Data showed.

At a Xiaohai Hotpot restaurant in Chaoyang district of Beijing, customers are lining up for an inexpensive, yet tasty meal.

Though it was set up in September 2023, Xiaohai — a sub-brand of renowned hotpot chain Haidilao — has quickly turned popular among students and new workers, due to its cost advantage. Xiaohai sells food that is nearly 50 percent cheaper than at Haidilao.

Customers can get a hotpot broth for 9.9 yuan (\$1.39) and a plate of beef for 23.9 yuan.

Zhang Ying, a college student from Chaoyang district, told China Daily that she and her friends are frequent diners at the low-priced chain.

"I'm a huge fan of Haidilao, but it's a bit pricey for a college student like me. Besides, Haidilao's student discounts are only available during certain times of the day," the 20-year-old said.

"That's why I was very excited when a Xiaohai outlet opened near my college. The food tastes similar to Haidilao, but is priced much lower. Now, I can have delicious hotpot whenever I want," Zhang added.

A spokesman for Xiaohai Hotpot said one of the key reasons why Haidilao created the sub-brand was to better tap into the consumption potential of Generation Z, or those born during the late 1990s to early 2000s.

Gen Z's consumption accounts for a relatively low proportion of China's total, but their willingness to consume is much higher than that of any other generation, he said.

"... By creating Xiaohai, we expect to provide young people with more consumption options and allow them to enjoy the happiness of dining out at low costs," he added.

In addition to developing low-priced sub-brands, most hotpot businesses have chosen to directly reduce prices of their dishes, provide free snacks and fruits, or launch affordable set menus on e-commerce platforms such as Meituan and Dazhongdianping.

Xiabu Xiabu, for instance, lowered its prices by more than 10 percent in May, with the average consumption per customer not exceeding 60 yuan. The large hotpot chain also created a variety of "worker's set menus" priced at about 50 yuan, which are only available on weekdays.

Nan Hotpot, a brand that used to focus on middle and high-end consumers, recently changed its business strategy and announced a plan to cut product prices by nearly half.

Chen Hanzhao, a white-collar worker from Changping district of Beijing, said Xiabu Xiabu's new set menu has become one of his favorite weekday lunch choices.

The set menu usually includes vegetables, meat, noodles and drinks, and the serving is just enough for one person.

"In the past, I didn't really like eating at such restaurants, because hotpot does not require superb cooking skills. I could make it myself at home and spend less," said Chen.

"... But after Xiabu Xiabu launched the affordable set menu, I often go there for lunch because it saves me a lot of time," he said.

However, there is still some room for improvement, he added.

"In order to increase the number of dishes in the set menu, the hotpot restaurants always add something that is not very popular with the public ... My colleagues and I never eat them, which is really a waste," Chen said.

"Besides, I am a little worried about the food quality, because the price of hotpot is dropping too fast. I really hope the store owners will not overlook this," he added.

Meanwhile, as the hotpot market in China's first-tier cities — such as Beijing and Shanghai — reaches a saturation point, some brands have chosen to set



People savor mushroom hotpot at a restaurant in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, in July.
XIONG PINGXIANG / XINHUA

Youth take a shine to no-frills

hotpot

Businesses develop sub-brands, cut prices, provide free add-ons, or launch affordable set menus to attract Gen Z customers



their sights on third or fourth-tier cities.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that third and lower-tier cities are currently home to more than 77.55 percent of China's urban population, which demonstrates a huge market potential.

Since such cities have cheaper land and abundant human resources, it is easier for hotpot brands to cut operating costs and survive over the long run.

For example, Xiaohai Hotpot is actively expanding into the so-called "sinking markets". The brand has already opened restaurants in several provinces such as Hebei and Zhejiang, its spokesman said.

Experts said the recent initiatives taken by hotpot brands could serve as the driving force for China's economic growth in the short run, even as further efforts are needed from all parties in the sector.

Lin Shen, an associate research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said hotpot brands could stimulate the country's consumption if they reduce product prices.

Lin said the affordable set menus launched by some restaurants are a good example. They perfectly match the needs of individual consumers in a fast-paced life, and have thereby successfully caught their eyes.

"Meanwhile, compared to other sections of the catering industry, hotpot brands have lower labor costs, as there is normally no need to hire professional chefs. That's why price cuts won't hurt the brands' profits too much," said Lin.

"Of course, it is also important to avoid excessive price cuts, which will not only result in a waste of investment and resources, but also have an adverse effect on food suppliers and employees."

Lin also said hotpot brands must keep a close eye on quality during the process of price cutting.

"In recent years, there have been reports that some hotpot restaurants are passing off duck meat as beef and mutton. The restaurants must strive to build a better brand reputation, and the market supervision departments need to further step up law enforcement," Lin said, while lauding the brands' expansion into third and fourth-tier cities.

"Such moves can significantly reduce vicious competition among hotpot restaurants in first-tier cities, especially in their central business districts," he said.

He also expects the expansion to better empower China's rural vitalization, as they could become important consumers of livestock and vegetable farming products in China's third and lower-tier cities.

Besides, the brands should follow the example of China's milk tea beverage sector and gradually shift their focus to global markets, he added.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said there are two major reasons why so many people in the country are planning to start a hotpot business.

"While on the one hand, hotpot does not require deep processing and is relatively simpler to make, on the other, the price of raw materials, especially meat, has remained at a low level in recent years," said Zhou.

Cutting prices can temporarily help hotpot brands survive amid fierce competition, but if they want to grow further, they must intensify their efforts in other areas, he said.

For example, many consumers enjoy hotpot not so much for the food itself, but to spend happy moments together with family and friends. Therefore, hotpot restaurants that provide a cozy and lively atmosphere will be more popular, Zhou said.

Chen Xinhua, president of China Hospitality Association, said in an earlier interview that the high-quality development of China's catering industry relies heavily on innovation. Local restaurants should strive to develop new business strategies and products, as well as actively utilize emerging technologies.

Chen said such moves could help restaurants effectively address the "pain points" encountered during transformation, and thereby better adapt to the rapidly changing market environment. The industry's overall profitability is also expected to be further improved as innovation continues to deepen.

Zheng Yiran contributed to this story.

Largest *huo guo* restaurant sets bar high for quality

By LIU ZIZHENG in Beijing, TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

If you walk along stunning mountain trails, taking in deep breaths of fresh air, but are not exactly on a vacation, then chances are that you are heading to the world's largest hotpot (*huo guo*) restaurant.

Located in Nan'an district in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality, Loquat Garden is welcoming a surging number of customers, not only Chinese but also foreign visitors, this summer.

Unlike traditional ones, the hotpot restaurant is mostly open-air and terraced on a large hill. Visitors can enjoy its delectable cuisine while sitting amid loquat trees that give out a delightful fragrance.

When the loquats ripen, visitors can pick and taste them for free, making it a natural fine dining experience.

Since its establishment in 2003,

Loquat Garden has improved customer services and expanded in size.

It was officially recognized as the "world's largest hotpot restaurant" by Guinness World Records in July 2022.

Covering an area of 80 mu (5.33 hectares), Loquat Garden is equipped with about 800 tables that can accommodate more than 6,000 diners simultaneously.

However, if you want to dine here during the peak tourist season, reservations will be needed three to five days in advance.

Gan Yuanhuang, one of the managers of Loquat Garden, said the restaurant is popular not only for its huge size, but also for its high-quality food.

Gan said the vegetables are provided by nearby farmers and the meat products are purchased directly from slaughterhouses so as to ensure freshness.

Benefiting from this sound business strategy, Loquat Garden has so

far opened three directly operated outlets in Chongqing and quite a few franchise stores across the country, especially in Northeast China, Gan added.

A netizen surnamed Yang told China Daily that she visited Loquat Garden along with her family during a recent trip to Chongqing.

"I was deeply impressed by its size. I think it could take more than 20 minutes to walk from the parking lot at the bottom of the hill to the highest table," she said.

Yang said the restaurant is decked with colorful lights, which make it more attractive at nighttime, and the famous scenic spots nearby provide tourists with multiple options for after-meal entertainment.

"As for shortcomings, I think it's the inconvenient transportation. You have to drive or take a taxi to get there. I really expect more improvements in this regard," she said.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of

International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said Loquat Garden has set a good example for hotpot restaurants amid intensifying competition.

"Loquat Garden sources most of its ingredients locally and has given full play to the natural scenery ... That's what makes the restaurant more competitive than most of its peers," said Zhou.

According to Zhou, hotpot restaurants, especially those in rural areas, should seize the opportunities brought on by the rapid growth of China's rural tourism and better integrate local culture into their services, in order to provide customers with a more diversified experience.

This is also expected to promote healthy competition in the sector and contribute to the country's rural vitalization efforts, Zhou added.

Lin Shen, an associate research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said



Consumers dine at a Loquat Garden hotpot restaurant in Southwest China's Chongqing in February. CUI JINGYIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Loquat Garden's business strategy conforms to China's requirements for promoting high-quality development of its catering and service industries.

Lin said good restaurants like Loquat Garden could unleash the consumption potential of China's catering sector, contribute to the

inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, and advance the integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries.

Besides, as rural restaurants continue to grow and create more jobs for local people, the problem of rural population drain will be moderately alleviated, Lin said.