

Changing for the better

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Seeing is believing

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# CHINA DAILY

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WORLD WATCH  
By Gert Grobler

## African scholars thank Xi for his efforts to boost ties

In early August, based on my role as a senior research fellow at the reputable Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University in Jinhua, China's Zhejiang province, and a former South African diplomat, I had the honor, together with 63 scholars from 50 African countries, of sending a joint letter to President Xi Jinping to express our profound appreciation for his unwavering commitment to China-Africa relations.

The idea of approaching President Xi arose from the growing contact and cooperation between the reputable Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, and its many Chinese partners and its broad interaction with a growing number of universities and like-minded organizations across the African continent and elsewhere.

An important role player and contributor regarding our letter to President Xi was the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, which was initiated by the institute a number of years ago.

The 13th meeting of CATT in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in March, was an exemplary mechanism for bringing people together. It continued to build on its proud track record in contributing significantly to the consolidation and promotion of enhanced Africa-China friendship, strengthening of diplomatic, economic, people-to-people exchanges and cultural ties, as well as better mutual understanding and policy development.

This was effectively demonstrated by the joint release of an important document titled Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus, also referred to as the Consensus Among African and Chinese Think Tanks on Deepening Global Development Cooperation. This commendable document represents a significant and admirable strategic initiative by Chinese and African scholars to deepen exchanges and mutual learning.

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A sculptor creates a statue of An Huixia (center), a model teacher, at an event held to mark the 40th Teachers' Day on Tuesday at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. Over 30 primary school students and teachers attended the activity. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

## China's foreign trade shows strong resilience

By ZHONG NAN in Shanghai  
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China's foreign trade has continued to demonstrate strong resilience, and the nation's enhanced export channels with emerging economies, coupled with ongoing support from its opening-up policies, will drive its economic growth throughout the year despite external challenges, government officials and exporters said.

They said that China's enriched trade and economic ties with Africa, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Middle East, alongside expanding sectors such as technology-intensive green products and cross-border e-commerce, are helping Chinese exporters gain a competitive edge in global markets.

According to the General Administration of Customs, China's foreign trade reached 28.58 trillion yuan (\$4.02 trillion) in the first eight months of this year, a 6 percent year-on-year increase.

This robust growth was driven by a 6.9 percent year-on-year rise in exports, while imports increased by 4.7 percent.

China's foreign trade with emerging economies has grown at a faster pace than its trade with the United States and European markets, while general trade has shown greater resilience compared with processing trade, said Li Ke'ao, executive deputy director of Tsinghua University's Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking.

General trade refers to a type of international trade in which goods are imported or exported directly by domestic companies without the use of intermediaries like trading companies or agents.

During the January-August period, China's trade with countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative reached 13.48 trillion yuan, up 7 percent year-on-year, customs statistics showed.

"These facts underscore China's strong trade performance and its increasing international competitiveness," Li said.

Ji Jianjun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research in Beijing, noted that China recently removed all foreign investment restrictions in the manufacturing sector with the release of the 2024 version of the negative list for foreign investment access.

See *Growth*, page 3

## Modernization of education urged

President greets teachers and emphasizes building strong foundation for rejuvenation

By CAO DESHENG  
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President Xi Jinping has urged efforts to make solid progress toward the strategic goal of building China into a leading nation in education, as the country celebrated the 40th Teachers' Day on Tuesday.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at a national meeting on education held in Beijing on Monday and Tuesday.

On behalf of the CPC Central Committee, Xi sent greetings to teachers and others working in the education sector across the country.

He emphasized that building China into a leading nation in education has been a long-cherished dream of the Chinese nation in modern times, and it serves as the leading task, solid foundation and strategic support for building China into a strong country and realizing national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China has been working to fully implement the strategy of invigorating the country through science and education and speeding up the drive to modernize education. It aims to achieve the goal of building a leading nation in education by 2035.

Xi said that the socialist country strong in education with Chinese characteristics that China aims to become should possess strong ideological and political leadership, strong talent competitiveness, strong scientific and technological support, a strong capacity for ensuring people's livelihoods, strong power in social coordination, and strong global influence.

He said that building a nation strong in education is a complex and systematic endeavor that requires focusing on education's fundamental task of fostering virtues.

Xi underlined the importance of coordinating the implementation of the strategies for invigorating the country through science and education, building a strong nation through talent development, and driving innovation-

driven development.

It is essential to advance education development, scientific and technological innovation and talent cultivation in an integrated manner, with a focus on enhancing innovation capabilities based on the nation's strategic demands in the development of science and technology, he said.

Xi called for improving mechanisms for readjusting disciplines and talent cultivation modes in higher education institutions, strengthening basic disciplines as well as emerging and interdisciplinary disciplines, and cultivating top-notch talent.

He underscored the need to enhance collaboration between universities and the corporate sector in scientific research, and accelerate the transformation of more research achievements into industrial applications.

It is important to establish a vocational education system that integrates vocational and general education, and vigorously cultivate skilled workers, craftsmen and high-level skilled talent, he added.

While emphasizing people-centered education, Xi called for enhancing the inclusiveness, accessibility and convenience of public services in the education sector to

ensure that the benefits of education reform and development reach all the people more fairly and broadly.

He stressed the need to optimize the allocation of educational resources in different regions, promote the high-quality and balanced development of compulsory education, and gradually narrow the urban-rural gap in education.

To cultivate and foster a high-caliber team of teachers for the new era, it is essential to elevate the political and social status of teachers, enhance their benefits and safeguard their professional dignity and legitimate rights and interests in order to ensure that teaching is one of the most respected careers, Xi said.

He also called for efforts to deepen opening-up in the education sector, continuously enhance the global influence and competitiveness of China's education, expand international academic exchanges and education cooperation, and actively participate in global governance in education.

Before the meeting, Xi and other leaders met with representatives attending an award ceremony honoring model teachers and outstanding groups and institutions in the education sector.

## FILM SALVAGES WARTIME STORY OF TRAGIC SINKING, HEROIC RESCUES

Documentary sheds light on Chinese fishermen who saved British prisoners of Japan

By XING YI in London  
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The cargo vessel *Lisbon Maru* was converted into a troop carrier by the Japanese army during World War II. In October 1942, while carrying about 1,800 British prisoners of war from Hong Kong to Japan, it was torpedoed by a United States submarine off the coast of East China's Zhejiang province.

The POWs were locked in the holds and left to drown. Some of them managed to escape, but



were fired upon by Japanese soldiers. Chinese fishermen heard the incident from the shore and rushed to save 384 British soldiers. The ship sank with the loss of 828 POWs who were either shot or drowned.

Down went the ship, the prisoners and their stories for decades. In 2015, during his visit to the Unit-

ed Kingdom, President Xi Jinping made a speech at a state banquet in which he referred to the Chinese fishermen's rescue of the British POWs as an example of friendly ties that will never fade and an invaluable asset in relations between China and the UK.

In recent years, there have been efforts to raise awareness about the rescue, including the documentary film *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, which hit the big screen on Friday.

See *Lisbon Maru*, page 2

## Candidates face off



Former US president Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, listens as Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, speaks during a debate at the National Constitution Center on Tuesday in Philadelphia. ALEX BRANDON / AP

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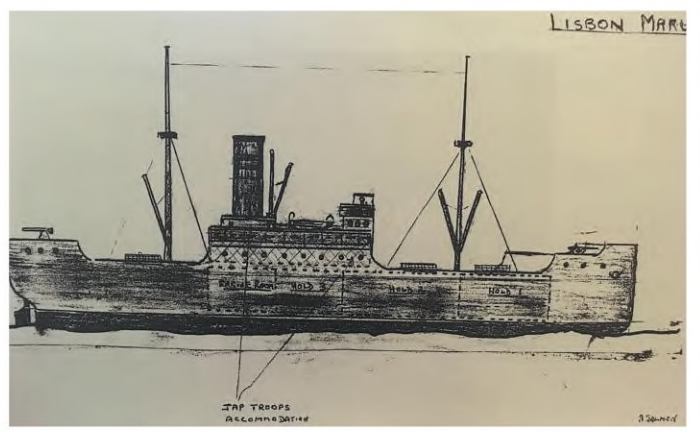
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**Above:** A sketch of the *Lisbon Maru* by one of the survivors.  
**Right:** Briton Dennis Morley recounts his survival story to Fang Li at his home in Gloucestershire, England, in 2018.  
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A poster of the documentary *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*



**Above:** One of the last photos of the foundering *Lisbon Maru*.  
**Left:** Relatives of *Lisbon Maru* survivors throw flower petals at the coordinates of the shipwreck off the coast of Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, in memory of their fathers in 2019.



"The real long-term impact of war is on the families of those who were killed and those who survive."  
Tony Banham, British historian



From page 1

Filmmaker Fang Li spent eight years making the film. With rare footage and historical archives, the documentary tells the heroic and tragic story of both the lost and the saved.

### Finding the wreck

Fang first heard about the tragedy in 2013 when he was on a boat heading from Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, toward Dongji Island while working on another film.

The island is the home of the fishermen who saved the British soldiers. The captain of the boat Fang was on, pointed to the open sea and said the *Lisbon Maru* was lying underwater with hundreds of people trapped in the hold, but no one knew its exact location.

"From the moment I learned about this, out of curiosity, I was determined to find this shipwreck," said Fang, who trained as a geophysicist in the 1980s and helped locate a plane's black box in 2002 after it crashed into the Bohai Sea.

In 2016 and 2017, Fang carried out two surveys of the area and finally captured sonar images of a wreck 140-meters long and 40-meters wide, lying 30 meters below water. "We found it! I was quite proud about that," Fang said.

The coordinates of the shipwreck — 30°13'44.42" N, 122°45'31.14" E — are printed on the film's poster and also on the back of the T-shirts of Fang's documentary team.

"After finding the ship, I wanted to find the survivors to understand their stories and what they went through 82 years ago. This is how the story was uncovered. Now, it's time to share it with more people," he said.

The story begins with the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in the winter of 1941.

At the time, Hong Kong was under British colonial rule with 15,000 troops stationed there. Hours after Japan's strike on the Pearl Harbor US Navy base in Hawaii, on Dec 7, 1941, Hong Kong was also under attack.

The battle ended in 18 days with 8,500 Allied soldiers taken as prisoners. The next year, the Japanese army began transporting prisoners, including the Hong Kong POWs, in requisitioned civilian ships back to Japan as forced labor to repair roads, extend airports, and do other work to assist its military operations.

### Hell ship

Because these transport ships were unmarked they became targets and some were hit by "friendly fire" from US submarines. Due to the cramped, inhumane living conditions onboard, they were referred to as "hell ships".

Tony Banham, a British historian based in Hong Kong, has written



Relatives of *Lisbon Maru* survivors attend a remembrance ceremony on Dongji Island, Zhejiang province, in 2019. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Lisbon Maru: Epic quest to uncover story of fatal sinking

about the wartime defense of the city. While doing research in the 1990s, he came across records of the deaths of more than 700 British Commonwealth soldiers marked as "lost in the *Lisbon Maru*".

After further research, Banham located and interviewed a dozen survivors of the tragedy. With the material he gathered, in 2006 he published *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru: Britain's Forgotten Wartime Tragedy*.

He wrote that the number of those who perished on "this dirty little ship" was more than half the amount lost on the *Titanic* thirty years earlier, "but while the latter had spawned eternal interest and the world's biggest box-office success, the former had been completely forgotten".

When Fang made up his mind to make a documentary about the *Lisbon Maru* he recruited Banham as a historical adviser.

But time was running out. When Banham began writing his book in 2003, there were only nine surviving POWs from the ship. By 2018, when Fang began filming, the number had dwindled to two.

Fang also enlisted Brian Finch, a retired major, as the film's military advisor. Finch had served with one of the survivors and became interested in the incident. He translated *A Faithful Record of the Lisbon Maru Incident*, which was compiled by the

*Lisbon Maru* Association of Hong Kong, from Chinese to English.

### Last survivors

In April 2018, the documentary team embarked on its first trip to the UK, visiting 20 cities, and various museums and archives. They also interviewed the last survivor in the UK, Dennis Morley, who died in 2021 at the age of 101.

Morley was a 22-year-old in the Royal Scots regiment when he was put on the *Lisbon Maru*. After the war, he settled in Gloucestershire, England, and kept the horrific wartime story to himself.

But when he faced Fang's camera, he recounted the horror that unfolded after the ship was torpedoed. The Japanese soldiers battered down the three holds the POWs were in, he confirmed.

"We were sealed in, we couldn't get out anyway," said Morley. "The water is pouring in. The bastards are going to drown us."  
In one hold, the ladder broke, trapping many of the Royal Artillery members. As the ship sank, survivors said they heard *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*, an uplifting British marching song, being sung.

Some of the prisoners managed to escape and jumped into the water only to face a hail of machine-gun fire from other Japanese ships that had come to rescue their compatriots.

"The Japanese were shooting at them, and you swam among dead bodies," said Morley. "Eventually, the Chinese fishermen came out and started picking up people, and then the Japs stopped shooting."

Morley was picked up by one of the Japanese ships, but was grateful to the fishermen whose heroic actions prevented a complete massacre. "Those Chinese fishermen didn't know that they saved a lot more people than they thought they saved," he said.

Fang's team also interviewed Lin A'gen, the last surviving fisherman, at the age of 95, on Dongji Island.

"Four men on a boat, (and) altogether some 20 to 30 boats went out," said Lin, who has since passed away. "When people get in trouble at sea, we always go to help them, that's very natural for us."

The story of the *Lisbon Maru* has also been preserved by the local museum and studied by Chinese scholars. A document from the Zhejiang Provincial Archive declassified in 2005 detailed the rescue efforts.

After the fishermen saved 300 POWs, Japanese soldiers went to the village the next day and recaptured all but three who were hidden by the villagers in a cave.

Three Britons — J. C. Fallace, W. C. Johnstone, and A. J. W. Evans — escaped to Chongqing, China's wartime capital. Through broadcasts, they disclosed the *Lisbon Maru* inci-

dent as well as the Japanese mistreatment of POWs, the first time this information was made public.

A record of that great rescue is kept in an exhibition hall in the Dongji History and Culture Museum. More than 400,000 visitors have visited the museum since it opened in 2009.

### Full account

To find people connected to survivors of the sinking, Fang accepted interviews with the BBC, and bought full-page advertisements in *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *The Guardian* newspapers.

His team received 300 emails, mostly from the children and relatives of the survivors, saying that they had heard the stories about the tragedy and were eager to share them. From 2018 to 2019, the team flew to the UK four times and interviewed 100 families, filming hundreds of hours of footage.

In 2018, another survivor, 98-year-old William Beningfield was located in British Columbia, Canada. His memories were crystal clear, and the film documents his account of how the sinking unfolded.

Fang also interviewed the relatives of the US submarine engineer who fired the torpedo, and who lived with a sense of guilt after learning that POWs were onboard. Striving for a full and fair account,

Fang's team overcame difficulties to locate the archive of the incident in Japan. They interviewed the daughter of Shigeru Kyoda, the *Lisbon Maru*'s captain. Kyoda was imprisoned for seven years for his role in the incident following a post-war trial.

The team also interviewed Fumitaka Kurosawa, president of the Military History Society of Japan, who analyzed the intentions of the Japanese military commander Lieutenant Hideo Wada who gave the order to abandon the POWs.

In 2019, Fang organized for some of the relatives of the *Lisbon Maru* survivors to visit Dongji Island to meet the children of the fishermen. During the visit the families held a long-overdue memorial service at sea near the shipwreck.

In 2021, a memorial dedicated to the 828 POWs who perished and over 200 more who died in captivity, was unveiled at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, England.

### Long-awaited premiere

In August last year, a special screening of the nearly finished documentary took place in the British Film Institute's Southbank theater, in London, following delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The screening was for 400 relatives and friends of the *Lisbon Maru* POWs.

"When we filmed Morley, we promised that we would give him this documentary as his 100th birthday gift, but unfortunately we could not make it," Fang said.

After the two-hour screening, applause erupted and many in the audience shed tears. Banham, the historian, said he could hear people sobbing from the moment the film started.

"The true story of war is grief," Banham said. "It's the impact on families. Many documentaries about war talk about the glamour of war, the aircraft, the tanks, the colorful explosions. But, the real long-term impact of war is on the families of those who were killed and those who survived."

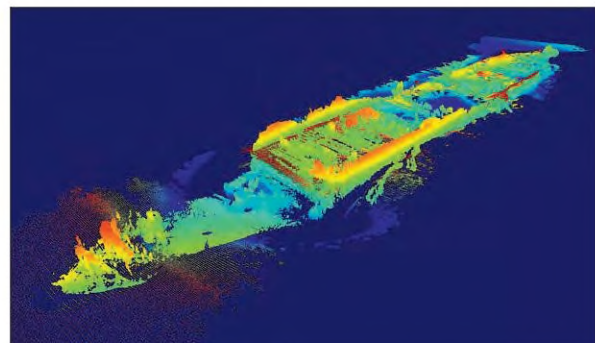
In June, the long-awaited documentary finally made its global debut at the 26th Shanghai International Film Festival. Of 450 films, *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* was chosen to open the festival.

Morley's daughter Denise Wynne tearfully said after watching the film that "history should not be forgotten or distorted".

Some family members of the fishermen were also present at the premiere, including Chen Xuilian, whose father steered a sampan to rescue several British POWs.

"I'm so excited to see my father's image on the screen today. I'm so proud of his heroic acts," said Chen.

Zhang Kun and Wang Xin in Shanghai contributed to the story.



**Left:** Lin A'gen (sitting), the last surviving fisherman, shakes hands with the relatives of the *Lisbon Maru* survivors, who came to visit Dongji Island in 2019. **Middle:** Fang Li (left) interviews Fumitaka Kurosawa, president of the Military History Society of Japan, in 2019. **Right:** A sonar image of the *Lisbon Maru* ship lying about 30 meters underwater off the coast of Dongji Island.

## TOP NEWS

## Art as an ambassador



A visitor admires on Monday the displays at an exhibition on Dunhuang art and culture in Auckland, New Zealand. The event aims to enhance people-to-people exchanges through the unique charm of Dunhuang murals, statues and cave arts. LU HUIQIAN / XINHUA

## Relations: Vision, policies and mechanisms applauded

From page 1

Enhanced financial and intellectual support toward African studies conducted by collaborative think tank research projects, media initiatives and people-to-people exchanges can contribute significantly toward carrying forward the spirit of Africa-China friendship and cooperation and open new vistas for the Africa-China relationship.

We as African scholars, therefore, decided to write to President Xi to thank him and congratulate him on all his excellent work on collaborative people-to-people exchanges, think tank research projects, media initiatives and joint events. We also raised the issue of asking for possible expanded support from both China and Africa to endorse and actively participate in the growing think tank, university and media initiatives and to possibly establish additional funding mechanisms, for instance, grants, scholarships and subsidies, for joint activities.

We were particularly delighted and encouraged by the quick and constructive response we received from President Xi on August 27 and I was very privileged to have been, together with fellow African scholars, involved in preparing a response to President Xi's constructive letter.

We, among other things, highlighted the following key elements in our response to President Xi's valued letter:

We expressed our profound appreciation for President Xi's thoughtful communication and unwavering commitment to China-Africa relations, adding that we have observed with great interest China's recent exceptional progress and modernization as well as its commitment to deepening reform and expanding the horizons of Chinese modernization. This together with President Xi's vision of a world strengthened by China's dedication to peace, development, and openness, and anticipated positive impact on the Global South, are truly inspiring to us.

We lauded China's diplomacy with its expanding role and agenda, under the banner of peace, development, win-win cooperation, and increasingly advocating reform of the global governance system and in the process promoting the building of a community with a shared future toward a better world.

We believe that over the past decade, the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind has been translated from ideas into actions, and has provided effective safeguard for

preserving world peace, injected vigorous impetus into promoting global development, and built strong synergy for addressing global challenges. Africa has made the vision of building a community with a shared future its own and that it, in fact, represents a key pillar in the rapidly expanding relations between Africa and China.

Given the growing globalized, uncertain and fragmented world we are living in with all its challenges, we praised President Xi for all his wise words to the effect that "In the face of common challenges, no person or country can remain insulated. The only way out is to work together in harmony with one accord", which were said at the Communist Party of China and World Political Parties Summit in July 2021. As African scholars we strongly associate ourselves with this constructive approach.

President Xi's encouragement to build upon the China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus has been most favorably received. As a result, we as African scholars have committed ourselves to intensify our research on the development paths of the Global South, with a focus on China-Africa and South-South cooperation and expressed the hope that through these aca-

demie pursuits, we can contribute meaningfully to the high-quality China-Africa community.

We also expressed our strong view that Africa believes that the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in October 2000 initiated a new vital and game-changing phase of Africa and China cooperation to a more comprehensive and strategic level. FOCAC has, in fact, since become a vital and central platform for future friendship and cooperation between Africa and China as reflected by the positive outcomes of the FOCAC in Beijing this year.

We thanked President Xi for his esteemed support which motivates us to further step up our ongoing work and rigorous research and our wish to continue to strive for excellence in our contributions toward the further enhancement of China-Africa relations. We also reaffirmed our dedication to the crucial task of building bridges of comprehension between our nations and peoples.

*The author is a senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University and a former senior diplomat in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation.*

## Foreign experts praise China's free trade stand

Delegates attending CEO roundtable speak of immense opportunities awaiting global firms

By LIU ZHIHUA, ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHIJIA in Shanghai

China's steadfast advocacy of free trade and investment, including concrete moves to pursue high-standard opening-up, will continue to benefit not only the nation but also the rest of the world amid geopolitical tensions, according to foreign business leaders and experts.

They also said that Shanghai, a leader in China's drive for opening-up and an international metropolis deeply connected to the global economy, is expected to strengthen its efforts to develop a higher level of open economy, thereby boosting the confidence of foreign investors and injecting new vitality into the broader Chinese economy.

They made the remarks on Tuesday in Shanghai during the "Grow with China" CEO roundtable, jointly held by the Foreign Affairs Office of Shanghai Municipal People's Government and China Daily.

Ronen Mense, Asia-Pacific president and managing director of AppsFlyer, a United States-based mobile marketing analytics company, said: "If there's one way to describe what I saw coming into China, I saw the future. If there's any time to be even more optimistic about the future in China, that time is now."

With China's emphasis on reform and opening-up, there are substantial opportunities ahead for tech companies, he said, adding that by staying agile, fostering innovation and embracing opportunities for collaboration, foreign companies can continue to leverage China's market potential and contribute to their growth and success in the region.

He also highlighted that Shanghai's position as an international economic and financial center presents a wealth of opportunities for companies like AppsFlyer to establish strategic partnerships, expand market reach and tap into a dynamic ecosystem.

Carlo D'Andrea, vice-president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China and chairman of its Shanghai board, said he is definitely optimistic about the agenda that the Chinese leadership has put

in place for European businesses.

"It's a great market. I truly believe that our members of European businesses can do much more here in the market," said D'Andrea, who is also founder and managing partner of D'Andrea & Partners Legal Counsel and president of DP Group.

China has been taking more solid steps of late to expand high-level institutional opening-up and boost the confidence of foreign investors.

The resolution adopted in July at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China vowed to enhance opening-up capacity while expanding international cooperation, and to develop new institutions for a higher-standard open economy, leveraging the strengths of China's enormous market.

Among the most recent moves, China's latest version of its negative list for foreign investment, released on Sunday, has removed all restrictions in the manufacturing industry.

Liliana Lucioni, president of Coach China, said Coach's parent company, Tapestry Group, is planning to open 100 stores across China by 2025, adding that Shanghai's ambition to become an international economic, sci-tech innovation and trade hub aligns well with its expansion plans. "While geopolitical tensions and global supply chain adjustments may present challenges, China remains a core market for our global business," she said.

"The size of the Chinese market, the continued rise of the middle-income group, and growing spending power of Gen Z and the 'she economy' make it an attractive investment destination," Lucioni added.

Rani Jarkas, chairman of Cedrus Group, said he believes that China is becoming a leader in many sectors including life sciences, presenting a great opportunity for the whole world.

He spoke highly of Shanghai's one-stop integrated services for international visitors.

Zhong Nan, Cheng Yu and Zhuang Qianqian contributed to this story.

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## Growth: Increasing global competitiveness stressed

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The move is expected to further lift the country's competitiveness by attracting multinational corporations to build plants within the country and export their products globally, Ji said.

Similar views were expressed by

Lyu Daliang, director of the General Administration of Customs' department of statistics and analysis. "In the first eight months of this year, the number of foreign-invested enterprises engaged in import and export activities has increased in China," Lyu said.

Their monthly import and export

value has grown year-on-year for five consecutive months, reinforcing China's position as a prime destination for foreign investment and exports, he said.

Meng Yue, deputy director of the department of foreign trade at the Ministry of Commerce, noted that by exporting high-tech and tech-

tensive green products, China has accelerated the development of high value-added industrial chains, further stimulating new momentum in foreign trade and providing competitive industrial goods to the global market.

For instance, China saw its exports of mechanical and electrical

products, such as electric vehicles, smartphones and integrated circuits, grow 8.8 percent year-on-year to 9.72 trillion yuan between January and August, accounting for 59.1 percent of the country's total export value.

A clear case in point is exemplified by China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Yangzhou) Dingheng Co, a subsidiary of State-owned China Merchants Group in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. The company

delivered a 25,000-ton stainless steel chemical tanker to its Belgian client earlier this month.

Ding Hui, deputy director of the company's sales department, said: "We have signed orders for eight vessels with the same shipowner. This is the fifth one we have delivered."

The shipyard's exports reached \$300 million in the first seven months, a year-on-year increase of 15 percent, and its order book is already scheduled through 2028.

## Unmanned return of Starliner points to quality issues

By SHAO XINYING  
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When United States astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams blasted into space aboard Boeing's Starliner capsule in early June, they expected their trip to last only a week.

However, three months down the line, Starliner undocked from the International Space Station and landed in New Mexico on Saturday minus the two astronauts, who remain stranded in space, because NASA deemed the Starliner's problems with its thrusters too fraught with risk for a crewed return.

Despite Starliner's safe return, NASA's commercial crew program manager Steve Stich said the decision not to have the astronauts on board during the craft's journey back to earth was the right one.

"The Starliner's successful return seems like pure luck, as the issues it encountered could not be replicated on earth for a solution," said Lin Luzhou, assistant professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University's Academy of Regional and Global Governance.

"It points to problems in quality management, an area where Boeing used to excel," he added.

Despite the successful docking in early June and its uneventful return, Starliner has faced persistent issues, including a failed unmanned test trip to the ISS in 2019. A do-over mission in 2022 went ahead but some thruster malfunctions remained.

"Boeing is shifting away from being the crown jewel of US manufacturing. In recent years, it has prioritized profit over quality," Ding Yifan, a senior fellow at Taihe Institute, a think tank in Beijing, said.

"Cost-cutting measures, like outsourcing key components, have further compromised standards," he said.

The crashes of two Boeing 737 Max jets in 2018 and 2019, in Indonesia and Ethiopia, killed 346. The company faced another blow when a door plug blew off during an Alaska Airlines flight in January.

"It shows a broader decline in US manufacturing capabilities," he added.

Following its launch, Starliner reported helium leaks and thruster problems, extending the space mis-

sion multiple times, before NASA announced in August that the astronauts will only come back in February on a SpaceX Dragon capsule.

"NASA's decision to ultimately rely on the Dragon spacecraft must have come after extensive technical evaluations. However, the issues won't be resolved in just a couple of months," Lin of the Academy of Regional and Global Governance said.

"Space missions, particularly those involving the International Space Station, require meticulous planning and multilateral coordination," he added.

"It is an image issue. SpaceX's space program has indirectly benefited from NASA's budget cuts over the years, which led to the outsourcing of projects and the lay-offs of NASA engineers — many of whom ended up working for Elon Musk," Ding of Taihe Institute said.

Boeing has a long history of working with NASA. Apollo 11, which was propelled by a Boeing-built rocket, landed on the moon in 1969. "Previously, ample funding supported US technological advancements. How-

ever, the focus has now turned to more profitable ventures and space exploration receives less support," Ding said.

"Additionally, military-industrial complexes have shifted federal budget priorities, further reducing NASA's funding and diminishing its role."

Boeing incurred about \$1.6 billion in cost overruns while developing the Starliner, facing repeated delays and price increases due to supply chain issues, Agence France-Press reported.

"The current model for commercial space exploration undoubtedly starts with significant investment in research, which is no longer sustainable under incumbent financing mode," Lin said.

According to Ding, US public finances have become increasingly strained, with growing debt leaving less room for discretionary spending. The gross federal debt of the US has surpassed \$35.3 trillion, US Treasury Department data showed.

NASA's budget peaked during the Apollo program in the 1960s, at more than 4.4 percent of the US fed-



Astronauts inside the vestibule between the forward port of the International Space Station's Harmony module and Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. NASA released this picture on July 2. HANDOUT / NASA / AFP

eral budget, according to the Space Report website. It fell below 1 percent after 1993 and has hovered around 0.5 percent in recent years.

"When the government budget is primarily allocated to debt repayment and military expenses, public funding for space exploration — an area that isn't immediately profitable — diminishes," Ding said.

However, despite the constraints, Lin said we are witnessing a second

major wave of human space exploration since the Apollo program, with commercial space ventures booming globally.

"Both established players, as well as newcomers, are undergoing significant transformations, which will bring both opportunities and challenges," he said, adding that the key question is whether they can secure a competitive edge in the evolving space industry.

## CHINA

## Successful landing



Crew members prepare to disembark from Air China's new C919 airplane at the Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport on Tuesday, after the plane completed its first successful flight with the airline. The domestically made plane, which flew in from Beijing Capital International Airport, will be used on routes between Beijing and Shanghai, as well as Beijing and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Experts remind recent rise in new births temporary

More sound measures needed to reverse ongoing population decline in country

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha  
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Several regions in China have reported a rise in new births during the first half of the year, driven by pent-up demand to have children following the COVID-19 pandemic and the auspicious Year of the Dragon. However, experts caution that the increase is likely a short-term "episode" and that reversing the long-term decline in births will require more robust policy support.

In Guangdong province, the number of births rose by 1.4 percent year-on-year during the first six months, according to Liu Fenghua, deputy head of Guangdong Women and Children Hospital.

Liu told the Yangcheng Evening News that the increase was fueled by China's 2021 policy allowing couples to have up to three children, as well as the cultural significance of the Year of the Dragon, which symbolizes success, wealth and good fortune.

"The increase may indicate a temporary easing of the downward

“The number of women of childbearing age will continue to decline, while the country's overall birthrate is unlikely to rise.”

Yuan Xin, professor at Nankai University's School of Economics and vice-president of China Population Association

trend in new births," Liu said.

In Qingdao, Shandong province, the number of births rose by 5.93 percent year-on-year, reaching 22,669 in the first half of this year. Du Weiping, a senior official with the city's health commission, told a local television program that the number of newborns in Qingdao is expected to see a slight increase or remain stable throughout the year.

He attributed the growth to an uptick in the number of women of childbearing age, pro-birth government policies and the preference for children born in the Year of the Dragon. However, Du predicted that the number of newborns would remain low over the next few years.

In Baoji, Shaanxi province, the number of newborns in five surveyed hospitals and medical institutions increased by 10.7 percent year-on-year during the first half of the year, according to the city's bureau of statistics. Officials said the baby boom was driven by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had previously discouraged some couples from having children due to health concerns. The Year of the Dragon and supportive government policies also played a role in the surge.

Despite these localized increases, the National Bureau of Statistics reported a long-term decline in births. The number of newborns peaked at 17.86 million in 2016 but has fallen each year since, reaching just 9.02 million last year. The country's overall population has also declined for a second consecutive year, dropping by more than 2 million from 2022.

In response, local governments have introduced various incentives, including tax breaks and childcare subsidies, to encourage more births. However, experts warn that these measures are insufficient to reverse the country's demographic trends.

Yuan Xin, professor at Nankai University's School of Economics and vice-president of the China Population Association, emphasized that the current uptick in births is temporary and cannot halt the long-term decline. He pointed out that after China lifted most COVID-19 restrictions in late 2022, many couples who had postponed having children during the pandemic decided to have babies the next year, leading to the increase observed in early 2024.

"However, the number of women of childbearing age will continue to decline, while the country's overall birthrate is unlikely to rise. The downward trend in newborns will persist," Yuan said, adding that it will take time for pro-birth policies to have a significant impact. He suggested that more substantial government measures will be needed to address the ongoing population decline.

## IAEA ready to partner with China, top official says

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
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Hailing the "significant progress" China has made in nuclear development, a senior communication official of the International Atomic Energy Agency said that she looks forward to deepening collaboration with the country, as this year marks the 40th anniversary of China's accession to the international organization.

Sophie Boutaud de la Combe, director of the Office of Public Information and Communication of the IAEA, made the remarks during an international media tour in late August. The tour, themed Atoms for Better Home, was launched by the China Atomic Energy Authority's news office during her visit.

Boutaud de la Combe said the IAEA highly values its partnership with the CAEA and looks forward to deepening its collaboration and exploring the future directions together.

"Through its extraordinary economic growth and advance in knowledge, technology and expertise, China has become a key supporter of the agency financially, politically and through our collaborations," she said.

China's decades of experience in innovative collaboration is a solid foundation to build on for the agency and for its other member states, the director said while lauding Chinese experts who are sharing their knowledge with other countries through IAEA capacity-building programs.

The cooperation between the IAEA and China has been multifaceted, covering areas such as nuclear energy, nuclear safety and security, nuclear technology applications and nonproliferation, she said, adding that many important projects promoted by the CAEA and IAEA have achieved remarkable results.

"These achievements are not only crucial for China's development, but also have far-reaching impact on the peaceful use of nuclear energy globally," Boutaud de la Combe said. "Therefore, I look forward to learning more about China's progress in those areas and exploring how to leverage and promote those successful experiences through the partnership with the CAEA news center."

During her visit to China, the IAEA official toured the Chinese mainland's first nuclear power site in Qinshan in East China, the Daya Bay Nuclear Power Plant in South China and two IAEA collaboration

centers — one at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the other at Sun Yat-sen University — to learn about the applications and innovations in China's nuclear sector.

In June, Liu Jing, deputy director of the CAEA, delivered a speech at an IAEA board of governors meeting in Vienna, Austria, according to the official website of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Vienna.

Liu said that China places great importance on the critical role of nuclear energy in global sustainable development, noting that the country viewed nuclear energy as a key option for building a new type of energy system and achieving carbon peak and carbon neutrality goals.

So far, the Chinese mainland has 57 nuclear power units in operation and 36 nuclear power units approved or under construction, he said.

On Aug 19, the State Council, China's Cabinet, approved five nuclear power projects, including 11 nuclear power units.

Boutaud de la Combe said China's nuclear development is avoiding "tons of carbon emissions and air pollution" and is creating a conducive environmentally and biodiver-

sity-friendly source of energy for the people of China and the nation's industrial development.

In addition, she praised China's efforts to help other countries achieve their energy goals by building their own nuclear industries and power plants quickly and safely.

"This is showing the world that it's possible to build nuclear power plants quickly and with integrated cost," she said.

Speaking in Vienna, Liu stressed that China attaches great importance to nuclear safety and security, enhancing the operational safety and construction quality of nuclear power plants, improving the security of nuclear facilities and materials and bolstering national nuclear counterterrorism capabilities.

Over the past 40 years, China has actively supported various initiatives of the IAEA through concrete actions, providing support and assistance to developing countries in need, he said.

Liu emphasized that in the face of severe development and security challenges worldwide, China is willing to work together with the IAEA and all parties to promote the innovative development of nuclear energy technologies, ensuring that the benefits of nuclear energy development reach more countries.

## Findings can aid fight against plastic pollution

QINGDAO — A collaborative team of scientists from China, the United Kingdom and Denmark has constructed a comprehensive global marine microbiome database, demonstrating the potential of marine microorganisms for marine science research and biotechnological and biomedical applications.

The research team, led by BGI-Research in Qingdao, Shandong province, also discovered new enzymes that can break down plastics and peptides that can aid efforts to fight antibiotic resistance.

The team spent five years reanalyzing nearly 240 terabytes of publicly available marine metagenomic data and built a database containing 43,191 metagenome-assembled genomes and 2.46 billion gene sequences. More than 20,000 of these genomes were identified as potential novel species.

The study was recently published in the journal Nature.

This database contains information on marine ecosystems ranging from the Antarctic to the Arctic, from coastal areas to the open ocean, and from the ocean's surface to the 10,000-meter deep hadal zone.

"This study significantly enhances our understanding of the diversity of marine microorganisms, including marine archaea and bacteria," said Fan Guangyi, director of BGI-Research.

Fan added that the study has analyzed the biogeographical distribution patterns of global marine microbial communities, providing new insights into how these microorganisms are distributed across different environments.

The research team also uncovered three new polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic-degrading enzymes, one of which can degrade PET plastic film with-

in three days, with the degradation rate reaching 83 percent.

"One gram of this enzyme can degrade 55 plastic water bottles of 500 milliliters each," said Li Shengying, co-corresponding author of the study.

"This advancement will play a positive role in addressing plastic pollution, particularly in achieving green, low-carbon, and sustainable use of PET plastics in China," Li said. "It will also help reduce the reliance of the plastic manufacturing industry on petroleum and lower its carbon emissions."

Earlier research has revealed the tremendous potential of marine microbial diversity in exploring novel gene editing systems, antimicrobial peptides and other microbial functions.

In this study, the research team explored the database's genetic resources from multiple dimensions, identifying 36 new gene editing systems.

Researchers investigated the application potential of one of these systems, which has proved highly effective for genome editing in all testing scenarios. This highlights its potential as a new tool for basic research and translational medicine development.

In addition, 117 potential new antimicrobial peptides were identified, among which 10 showed notable antimicrobial activity and broad-spectrum efficacy after biosynthesis and testing. This offers a promising new approach to tackling antibiotic resistance.

"Antimicrobial peptides are likely to be employed for the development of entirely new antibiotics or other drugs in the future," Li said.

Building on these results, BGI-Research has partnered with Hong Kong Polytechnic University to establish a joint research center for further development and commercialization.

XINHUA

## Governance framework promotes AI security

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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The introduction of a governance framework on artificial intelligence security marks a significant step in promoting collaborative efforts to address AI security across society, according to the National Technical Committee 260 on Cybersecurity of Standardization Administration of China.

The framework provides essential technical guidance to create a secure, reliable, fair and transparent ecosystem for AI research and application, the National Technical Committee 260 on Cybersecurity of Standardization Administration of China said.

As part of the Global Artificial Intelligence Governance Initiative, launched last October to address universal concerns over AI development, the committee conducted research and developed the AI Security Governance Framework.

The first version of the framework was unveiled on Monday in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, during a themed forum to mark China Cybersecurity Week, a nationwide event aimed at raising public awareness on cybersecurity.

The framework emphasizes fostering innovation in AI development while prioritizing the

prevention and mitigation of AI security risks. It outlines key principles for AI security governance, including inclusiveness, risk orientation, integration of technology and management, collaborative responses and open cooperation.

Utilizing a risk management approach, the framework identifies and analyzes the sources of AI-related risks such as data, system and application security in areas such as networks, real-world operations and ethics. It proposes corresponding technical responses and preventive measures to ensure secure AI development and application.

The framework is expected to support the healthy development and standardized application of AI technology. It will also promote international cooperation in AI security governance, contributing to the establishment of a globally recognized AI governance system aimed at ensuring such technology benefits humanity.

"AI technology can enhance the detection of malicious and unknown cyber threats, reduce human dependence in security operations, and improve the quality and efficiency of network security," said Liu Hui, vice-president of Topsec Technologies Group, a leading provider of network security and cloud services in China.



People promote a smart public legal service platform at a cybersecurity expo held during China Cybersecurity Week in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Sunday. ZHOU WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## CHINA

# Couple devoted to guarding cultural relics

Elderly husband and wife team ensures protection of fire beacon towers that played vital role in safeguarding Silk Road

By CHEN LIANG in Hami, Xinjiang  
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Traveling along the highways that traverse Hami prefecture in the eastern part of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, one cannot miss the sight of tower-like mud mounds rising from the vast and desolate plains.

They are ancient fire beacon towers that date back to as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

In ancient times, they formed a crucial part of the military defense system and played a vital role in safeguarding the Silk Road, ensuring its smooth operation and serving as a testament to the governance and jurisdiction of Xinjiang by the central government.

In total, there are 106 of these ancient structures scattered throughout Hami, which has an area of more than 137,000 square kilometers — slightly smaller than Shandong province.

Located about 100 km west of Hami city and 250 meters north of the Lianyungang-Horgos Expressway stands the Liaodun Fire Beacon Tower, known as one of the largest and best-preserved among the collection.

Fifty meters from the fenced compound protecting the tower and several remains of ancient buildings is a patch of poplar trees, a wetland and a meadow.

A dozen sheep, several camels and horses graze on the meadow. In a house built at the mini-oasis lives the family of Memet Ali and his wife Bahail Idris.

For 23 years, the Uygur man has been living there to watch over the ancient structure, which has been under national first-class protection since 2013.

## Early connection to relics

Memet was born in Shazaoquan village of Liushuquan, Hami city, in 1955. In 1978, he was hired by the local forestry bureau as a patrolman.

He and 11 fellow patrolmen were tasked with overseeing forests scattered in an area of nearly 600,000 sq km in the prefecture.

While patrolling the area, Memet has become familiar with the ancient fire beacon towers.

"In the 23 years I worked as a ranger, I kept an eye not only on trees and wildlife, but also on about 10 towers scattered around our farm," he said.

When the Hami Bureau of Cultural Relics launched a comprehensive survey of the prefecture's immovable cultural heritage, he eagerly stepped forward to offer his services as a guide.

"In the vicinity of Liushuquan there are dozens of karez wells and those towers," Memet said. "I am familiar with all of them."

Karez wells are an ancient irrigation system dating back over 2,000 years, with underground channels that supply water from the melted ice and snow in the Tianshan Mountains to human settlements dotted on the vast land.

After the survey, he was appointed by the bureau as a voluntary cultural relics guardian.

Having retired from the forestry bureau in 2001, he now receives a pension of 2,300 yuan (\$322) per



Memet Ali and his wife Bahail Idris patrol the Liaodun Fire Beacon Tower in Hami city, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, last month. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

month from his former position.

After retiring, he relocated his family from Shazaoquan to Liaodun, about 25 km west of his village, where there are no signs of human habitation within a radius of over 10 km, to oversee the beacon tower situated at an ancient courier station site, which contains remnants of several rammed earth buildings. He was aware of a functioning karez well near the site, which sustained the surrounding meadow and his livestock.

Between 2001 and 2016, he and his wife dedicated themselves to be voluntary watchers over the ancient site.

Following the site's inclusion on the national protection list in 2013, the local government built iron fencing around it.

In 2016, his wife was hired by the local government as a full-time cultural relics guardian, earning a monthly wage of 400 yuan. Now, her wage is 2,000 yuan per month.

## Tedious and tough job

It has never been an easy job to safeguard the relic site.

Constructed with rammed earth and wooden beams, the fire beacon tower reaches a height of about 6 m, with a base measuring 7.2 m north to south and 6.4 m east to west.

Before 2001, when Kazak herders living in the region moved livestock between their winter and summer pastures in spring and autumn, they used buildings at the site as temporary pens.

After Memet started protecting the tower, he would intervene, persuading the herders to keep their livestock away from the site.

Once three herders from Liushu-

quan grazed their livestock near the site on their way of seasonal migration between the pastures. Memet asked them to leave, but they refused.

"They said, 'The Gobi Desert is vast with no pens, no water. Livestock have no way to survive without a break while grazing here,'" he recalled.

Unable to reason with the herders, Memet eventually found a house 15 km from the tower for the herders to temporarily reside in. He helped them to build enclosures for their livestock.

He also encountered tomb raiders during his patrols in the area. Sometimes he scared the raiders away by himself and sometimes he called the local police for help.

Before he moved to Liaodun, Memet had a failed marriage. His first wife, a Han Chinese from Anhui province, left him with their three children and moved to Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang.

Later, he married Bahail Idris, a Kazak woman, in Liaodun. On April 9, 2006, as Bahail showed signs of going into labor with their first child, a severe sandstorm struck the area, causing flying debris that shattered his car's windows.

Despite the challenging conditions, he drove for six hours to transport his wife to a hospital in a nearby town around 30 km away.

The sandstorm resulted in a temporary power outage in the township. As a result, the doctors had to deliver their son by the light of flashlights.

Last month, almost 20 years later, their son was admitted to Chongqing University. The couple's second child, a daughter, is 11.



Memet and his wife walk on a dirt road leading to the ancient structure that was put under national first-class protection in 2013.

On July 20, 2008, an unusual rainstorm triggered floods in the Gobi Desert, posing a threat to the relic site. Memet waded through waist-deep floodwaters, tirelessly digging trenches to redirect the water away from the site.

Thanks to his efforts, the tower managed to withstand the flooding and remained unharmed.

## Regular work

About once every two days, Memet drives with his wife on their regular patrol of the fire beacon towers in the area.

When tourists arrive to visit the site, Memet will open the gate for them.

He will take the time to not only

grant them access but also to explain essential guidelines for respectful behavior during their visit. Sometimes he takes on the role of a volunteer guide.

With the surge in tourism within the prefecture, an increasing number of travelers are flocking to Hami to uncover the wonders of the Gobi Desert, particularly the breathtaking mesa landforms nestled deep within the arid landscape.

Whether navigating on camelback, horseback or by car, these adventurers rely on knowledgeable locals like Memet to lead the way. Ultimately, Memet can leverage his expertise to benefit from this flourishing tourism industry.

He leads self-driving tour groups

through the expansive Gobi Desert, navigating the route from Hami to Dunhuang in Gansu province. Frequently, after receiving requests from local tour services, he mobilizes his team of two temporary assistants and transports his four camels and two horses to the Dahaidao scenic area by truck.

At the vast park known for its stunning mesa landforms, he guides tourists on camelback and horseback to enjoy sunsets and sunrises. The two-day experience yields substantial returns, with Memet and his team earning about 10,000 yuan.

"Now almost everything in my life is on the right track and I am truly enjoying my life here in Liaodun," he said.

## Wetland parks offer escape from heat in Harbin

HARBIN — While many Chinese cities are still battling the summer heat, citizens in Harbin, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, are flocking to the riverbank beaches in the Hulan Estuary Wetland Park to enjoy refreshing water activities and outdoor barbecues.

"We've seen a significant increase in tourists recently, entertaining about 5,000 visitors every weekend," said Zhang Huan, operations manager at the park.

Zhang said that reservations for the park's barbecue sites must now be made a day in advance, due to the excessive number of tourists.

On one Chinese social media platform, wetland parks such as "Sun Island Scenic Area" and "Hulan Estuary Wetland Park" have repeatedly appeared among the top search terms for tourist attractions, with many tourists posting photos and



Tourists admire blossoming lotuses at a wetland park in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

notes sharing their experiences.

Located in China's northernmost province, the city of Harbin was also a big hit on social media last winter due to its various ice-and-snow tour-

ist attractions, reinforcing its reputation of the "ice city".

This summer, the city has been vigorously developing summer attractions to further boost local

tourism, making its vast wetland area a hub for leisure travel.

In addition to water activities, sports events in the wetlands have also become trending topics. Recently, a China-Russia invitational canoeing competition commenced on the Hulan River at the Hulan Estuary Wetland Park, attracting more than 3,000 Chinese spectators and over 100 Russians.

Wang Hongxin, director of the culture and tourism bureau of Harbin, said the city is constructing an all-around river and wetland tourism area by tapping its unique natural and historical resources.

The area has incorporated summer cultural and tourism activities and night economy projects, attracting an increasing number of investments, said Wang. The boom in wetland tourism has been achieved thanks to Harbin's long-term efforts

in wetland protection.

Harbin was among the first batch of cities in China to be certified as "international wetland cities" by the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental environmental treaty that provides for national action and international cooperation on wetland conservation. As such, Harbin is dedicated to advancing wetland protection and restoration.

Its recent accomplishments include Alejin Island Wetland Park, which became a national level wetland park in December 2020, with a total area of 419 hectares and a wetland rate of 71.1 percent.

"We have established internal management systems focusing on wetland protection, animal preservation and water-quality monitoring, standardizing protection operations," said He Xiaohu, director of the operations department of Harbin Alejin Business Management Company, which is responsible for the park's management.

The company demolished illegal buildings, including various shacks and livestock pens, and dredged the hydrological connection between the park and the Songhua River to form a relatively complete water network to improve its environment, He said.

In addition, a 191 million yuan (\$26.8 million) investment has been made to build a water quality monitoring center, a 7.7-kilometer loop road and 1-square-km green belt, He added.

According to the local government, Harbin has restored more than 3,000 hectares of wetlands, built 150 km of wetland sightseeing avenues and demolished 154 illegal buildings and structures to protect and develop its wetland resources. Wetland tourism is said to attract nearly one million tourists, creating a total direct and indirect value of around 10 billion yuan for the city each year.

XINHUA

## WORLD

## CHINA LINK

**Editor's note:** As the People's Republic of China celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding this year, China Daily asked prominent international figures to reflect on their relationship with the country and to talk of the direction in which they see it going.

## Life-changing experience in China

Belgian scholar's insights reflect deep connection with nation's transformation

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
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At 18, Dorien Emmers, a Belgian, faced a pivotal decision: which new language to pursue after already studying Greek and Latin. Intrigued by Chinese culture but aware of the language's complexity, she embraced the challenge.

"I like a good challenge," recalled Emmers, now an assistant professor at the Chinese Studies Group and the Department of Economics at KU Leuven, Belgium's oldest university, founded in 1425. She described the decision as being made "just out of curiosity and interest" and "without knowing a lot about China."

The China study program at KU Leuven was so intensive that she quickly found herself lost and ended up forgoing a bachelor's degree in the subject.

After finishing her undergraduate studies, Emmers received a scholarship from the China Scholarship Council to study at the Southwestern University of Finance and Economics in Chengdu, Sichuan province, from 2012 to 2013.

"This was an amazing experience and actually had an impact on everything I did afterward," she told China Daily at her Brussels home.

As a European, Emmers finds learning Chinese more challenging

than studying ancient Greek, as the latter shares similarities in grammar and vocabulary, whereas Chinese belongs to a completely different language family. However, she had much fun learning Chinese idioms and colorful expressions that "we don't have in our languages."

"That was also the beautiful thing about it," said Emmers, who now speaks fluent Chinese and is known to many by her Chinese name Du Yan. She also quickly fell in love with Chengdu and returned last summer, still enamored with the city.

"I still love the vibe there; Chengdu ren (people) are just great people," she said.

Her language skills improved rapidly in Chengdu, an accomplishment that she said can only be achieved by "being there, studying the language all year round and practicing the language all day, in a fun way by interacting with people, or just by reading the signs next to the streets."

It is also the case when it comes to learning about a culture and society, she said. "You can only learn it by being there."

Emmers was fascinated by China's rapid urbanization and excited about learning new things, from singing karaoke to eating hot pot.

She was overwhelmed by the hospitality received from the Chinese, who frequently invited her to dinner,

so she was never alone during meals.

Initially, she could not eat spicy food. During her first three months in Chengdu, she ate with tissues in hand, "sweating, crying and sneezing."

"But I really like it now," she said. Shortly after returning to Chengdu, she wanted to know where to find spicy food but failed.

"Chengdu people are very lucky to have so many good dishes," she said. "I want to meet local people and make local friends."

Emmers, who holds a PhD in economics from KU Leuven, is a development economist with extensive experience in studying early childhood development in China.

It goes back to her time in Chengdu, where she and several international students taught English to the kindergarten children in Ya'an, about 116 kilometers from Chengdu, after the area was struck by a major earthquake in spring 2013.

"It was a very beautiful region, but I also realized the English level of 12-year-olds in the boarding school was worse than that of 4-year-olds in Chengdu," Emmers said.

Coming from the Belgian countryside herself, Emmers said she became interested in the subject because her mother and grandmother, unlike urban women, were not allowed to study in Belgium in the olden days.

After returning from China, she wrote a thesis on this topic while pursuing a master's degree in Chinese studies and economics at KU Leuven. Her research revealed that educa-

tional inequalities begin very early in life, even in the first year of life. For example, if a 2-year-old struggles with language development, they will likely face difficulties keeping up with their peers by the time they start primary school at age six.

"Starting to help children catch up at age six is much more difficult, much more expensive than helping them when they are 1 or 2 years old," she said, adding that was true around the world.

The lack of resources, from financial support to educational materials such as children's books, was a major problem in rural China, especially when grandparents, often the primary caregivers, mistakenly believed it makes no sense to talk to a child who could not yet speak.

"But actually, even for a child who can't talk, it's important for the language development ... These are some small changes that can make (a big difference) for early child development," she said. "That's what we have been working on."

## Substantial improvements

Having visited China about 20 times, Emmers has seen substantial improvements in early childhood development across Chinese cities as living standards have improved.

She was impressed by an early childhood development center she visited in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, where she saw all kinds of specialized classrooms for dancing, singing and other activities.



Dorien Emmers (right) conducts a field study on early childhood development in Ya'an, Sichuan province, in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"In urban China, amazing job ... But in rural China, none of these of course," she said.

Emmers is excited that going to China has become much easier now, with the Chinese government's visa-free policy for short-term visits by Belgian nationals.

She has traveled across the country, from Yunnan province to Guilin and Yangshuo in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, to Shaolin in Henan province, the birthplace of Chinese kung fu, and Dunhuang in Gansu province, renowned for its caves with ancient murals.

She said her perception of China has changed completely since her visit to China and she felt she did not know anything about China at the time.

"It has changed so much ... I think most people don't realize how little they know about China," she said.

"People need to learn about China to actually understand it a little bit ... It's incredible how quickly China develops and changes."

She describes China today as "completely different" from 10 years ago and "a different country" if going back 20 years.

"I'm a development economist, that's why studying China is so interesting. You can learn so much from the Chinese experience," Emmers said.

"That's also such useful information for other countries which try to develop and grow ... Yes. China has done impressive things over the last 50 years."

Emmers is worried about the declining enthusiasm among her students in studying in China because of the pandemic, and the global geopolitics that has triggered a lot of negative press in the West about China.

However, she said students who have studied in China generally have very positive experiences.

"For most students, it's really a transformative experience," she said. "So it's very beautiful to see almost all of them are very positive. There are exceptions. There are people missing home."



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

## 'Inspiring' Chinese show hailed after London run

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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A production fusing modern dance and ancient Chinese martial arts has been praised as a landmark that will inspire people for years to come as it ended a run of performances in London on Saturday.

*Wing Chun*, presented by the Shenzhen Opera and Dance Theater at the Sadler's Wells dance venue, tells the story of martial arts master Yip Man.

The SeeingDance website called it "a stunning evening ... everything about *Wing Chun* exceeds expectations", while Everything Theatre described it as "a breathtaking show that will leave you with a feeling of awe and a newfound respect for martial arts and dance."

In an end-of-run academic seminar, guests from the worlds of dance and theater production shared thoughts about the show and its effect.

Christopher Bannerman, a visiting professor at the London Contemporary Dance School and founding director of the ArtsCross project at Beijing Dance Academy, said blending dance with "the body culture of martial arts, handed down through thousands of years of Chinese history ... has unlocked something — by cleverly channeling that energy, a new movement language has emerged."

"I believe for the next 10 years, young choreographers in China will be inspired by this (show) and we will see a great flowering of Chinese creativity," he said.

Glynis Hall, founder of Glynis Henderson Productions, who has put on award-winning shows in both the West End and Broadway and who is deeply involved with Chinese productions, said she was

delighted to see a show with such global appeal.

"In the past, I've seen so many Chinese artists who wanted us to take their work abroad but it was hard, because what they did was difficult to export, but what we have seen here is a million miles away from that," she said. "This is obviously the beginning of a very different future for Chinese work internationally. I congratulate you on crossing that bridge."

Wang Yun, counselor at China's embassy in the United Kingdom, commended the creative team behind the show. He highlighted the praise from Josephine Chanter, an audience member and deputy director of London's Design Museum, who had commented that the performers "flew around the stage like birds" and said the performance had "opened a window to allow the audience to get into the spirit of *Wing Chun* and recognize Chinese culture."

*Wing Chun*, which premiered in China less than two years ago, made its overseas debut in Singapore a year ago. The show celebrated its 200th performance during the London run and will have a short run in Paris next month, with the producers then keen to take it elsewhere.

Hall said the fusion of dance and martial arts gave the show an obvious global audience appeal and added that she hoped it could be the start of something bigger.

"Artists working together from different art forms is the chemistry that fires something brilliant, when they make each other better, and I think collaborations between China and the outside world are a larger form of that," she said. "The more we can find artists who want to connect and make work together, the more rich the world will be."



*Wing Chun*, presented by the Shenzhen Opera and Dance Theater, premieres at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London on Aug 30. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Scaling history



Specialist abseilers conduct an annual inspection of the condition of the stonework of the West Towers at Westminster Abbey in central London on Tuesday. Westminster Abbey, the site of 40 English and British monarchs' coronations, most recently hosted King Charles III's coronation in May last year. PA

## Visa-free policy boosts tourism, exchange with Singapore

By YANG RAN  
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Since the mutual visa-free policy between China and Singapore was implemented on Feb 9, travel between the two countries has surged, significantly boosting tourism and fostering cultural exchanges and people-to-people connections.

In the first half of the year, China reclaimed its status as the largest source of foreign tourists for Singapore, while the number of Singaporean visitors to China has also risen notably.

Pedro Li, 29, from Kunming in Yunnan province, recently returned from a trip to Singapore and highly recommends it as a travel destination.

"Compared with other Southeast Asian countries I've visited, I particularly appreciate Singapore's safety and enjoyable environment," said Li, a travel blogger who has visited more than 20 countries.

"Singapore is a clean garden city, with lush greenery and a vibrant atmosphere. Every day you can see people jogging, cycling at night and socializing outdoors. The cultural diversity here is remarkable, with places like Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam each offering

unique cultural experiences on this small island.

"Singapore is probably one of the hottest overseas travel destinations for Chinese travelers this summer. Since the visa-free policy came into effect, many of my friends have visited the city-state, especially during events like Taylor Swift's concerts. When I visited it in early August, I found some of my friends are traveling in Singapore as well."

Statistics validate Li's observations. Data from Trip.com Group reveal that flight bookings by Chinese tourists to Singapore from January to June have doubled compared with the previous year, highlighting a robust recovery and rising travel demand.

Andrew Phua, chief representative and executive director of Greater China at Singapore Tourism Board, attributed the rebound to the 30-day mutual visa-free arrangement that allows Chinese travelers to plan trips to Singapore at short notice.

From January to July, Singapore welcomed 1.86 million visitors from the Chinese mainland, a year-on-year increase of 183.6 percent and reaching 84.5 percent of 2019 levels.

"July, which marks the start of summer vacation, also saw strong performance, with the number of

visitors to Singapore exceeding that of 2019," Phua said.

Before the pandemic, China was Singapore's largest source of foreign tourists for three consecutive years. Although Chinese tourists ranked second behind Indonesia in numbers last year, they generated the highest tourism revenue for Singapore.

"We are heartened that Singapore remains one of the top destinations for Chinese travelers," Phua said. "In addition to Singapore's reputation as a family-friendly, bilingual and safe destination, our diverse range of tourism offerings, including a wide array of attractions and a robust events calendar, makes Singapore an attractive destination choice for Chinese visitors."

The Singapore Tourism Board is dedicated to keeping Singapore an attractive and accessible destination for visitors from China, a key source market, Phua said. "We are working closely with travel trade partners to promote Singapore's refreshed destination offerings and collaborating with key Chinese payment gateways and banks to offer visitors greater convenience and benefits when spending in Singapore."

Edison Chen, vice-president of Trip.com Group, said: "Singapore remains one of the most popular des-

tinations for global travelers. We aim to strengthen our partnerships and attract more travelers for a unique experience in this beautiful country."

Phua said Chinese visitors are seeking more immersive and in-depth experiences, as well as customized small-group travel itineraries. "Sustainability is also a key theme that Chinese travelers are increasingly paying attention to when traveling," he added, highlighting that Singapore's tourism sector is aligning with these preferences.

Not only are Chinese tourists flocking to Singapore, but the number of Singaporean visitors to China is also on the rise. Since the implementation of the mutual visa-free policy, flight bookings by Singaporean tourists to China have surged.

Data from Trip.com Group showed a 246.2 percent year-on-year increase in bookings from Feb 9 to Aug 14, highlighting the policy's positive effect on travel convenience and tourism between the two countries.

Popular destinations for Singaporean tourists in China include Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Chengdu, Shenzhen, Chongqing, Beijing and Kunming, reflecting a broad interest in exploring China's diverse cities and cultural landscapes.

# WORLD

## Chinese EV sales in Latin America zoom

Advanced technology and competitive pricing helps in rising market share

By JIMENA ESTEBAN  
in Buenos Aires  
For China Daily

Made-in-China electric vehicles are winning over car buyers across Latin America and reshaping views about Chinese products.

The advanced technology and competitive pricing of Chinese vehicles — EVs as well as traditional cars — are rapidly translating into rising market share for China's automakers in the Latin American market.

In 2019, Chinese carmakers sold about \$2.2 billion worth of vehicles across Latin America, according to the International Trade Center. By last year, the value of Chinese vehicles sold in the region almost quadrupled to \$8.56 billion, accounting for roughly 20 percent of the region's car market.

The quality of the cars and their price caught the attention of buyers like Florencio Perez Romero, a pilot in Mexico. Romero recently bought a Chinese-made MG RX5 because of the features it includes, like a large touchscreen console, myriad sensors and LED lighting, as well as an appealing panoramic sunroof.

"These are cool features. Compared to similar SUVs in the market like Toyota, Volkswagen, Ford and Chevrolet, it seemed like a good deal," said Romero.

The price tag was another big factor for Romero, who noted that when all is said and done, Chinese vehicles end up being cheaper than similar offerings from other brands.

### Making strides

Chinese EV makers have been making strides in global markets. BYD, for example, has topped Tesla, which also makes many of its cars in China, as the top EV seller globally.

But they are facing significant headwinds in North American and European markets, which have increased their scrutiny and tariffs, Oxford Economics noted in a report.

The US increased the import tariffs on China-made vehicles from 27.5 percent to 100 percent in May, and Canada followed suit in late

August. In June, the EU Commission announced plans to impose tariffs on imported Chinese cars, and adjusted them in August. For example, tariffs on Tesla EVs manufactured in China were cut from 20.8 percent to 9 percent while tariffs on BYD vehicles were reduced marginally from 17.4 percent to 17 percent.

In Latin America, meanwhile, sales are flourishing, from Mexico all the way down to Argentina's Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city. In many markets across the region, including Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia and more, where buyers are very price-conscious, the savings attached to buying a Chinese car make a big difference.

In Chile, in particular, Chinese automakers have been particularly successful both in selling cars to private buyers and providing vehicles to support infrastructure development, like public transit. Chileans are increasingly willing to buy Chinese traditional cars and EVs.

"Brands like MG, Maxus, Great Wall and Chery have dominated the streets with the highest sales numbers among Chinese brands, suggesting considerable popularity (among) Chilean customers when buying a new vehicle," said Renzo Burotto, a historian at the University of Chile.

According to the National Automotive Association of Chile, 111,108 China-made cars were imported to the country in 2023, reaching a market share of 39.4 percent.

Burotto attributed the growth of Chinese EVs in Chile partly to a free trade agreement and strong commercial ties between the two nations.

Chinese EVs are also increasingly visible in public transportation. Burotto pointed out that Santiago, the Chilean capital, uses more than 2,000 electric buses imported from China. Santiago, which has the second-largest fleet of such buses in the world outside of China, has replaced more than 1,000 diesel combustion buses.

And there is little reason to think that buyers across Latin America will not continue scooping up Chinese cars and EVs. Any concerns about the quality, technology or safety of made-in-China products are fading quickly.

"China no longer just makes irons and blenders," said Burotto. "It is now not only manufacturing but also leading in innovation, with a view to sustainable development, and putting China's unparalleled production capacity at the service of Global South countries that so desperately need to emerge from their chronic infrastructure deficit."

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Workers assemble a chassis at the BYD solar panel and electric bus chassis production facility in Campinas, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, in November. JONNE RORIZ VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Germany tightens controls at all borders

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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Germany's government has announced a new six-month tightening of border checks will come in from the start of next week, in the aftermath of an attack in the town of Solingen in August that left three people dead, for which the Islamic State terror group claimed responsibility.

The suspect detained is a Syrian national who had failed in his asylum application and was awaiting deportation from Germany.

Shortly after the incident, the far-right Alternative for Deutschland party, or AfD, enjoyed its biggest success yet in local elections.

Germany shares more than 3,700 kilometers of land borders with Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland, all of which are members of

the Schengen Zone, within which free movement is usually permitted, with no restrictions.

An increase in first-time asylum requests last year meant that Germany had already imposed some level of checks at the frontiers with Austria, Czech Republic, Poland and Switzerland, but these are now being extended nationwide.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser insisted the government was "taking a hard line" against irregular migration to reduce cross-border crime. "We are doing everything in our power to protect the people of our country against these threats," she added.

### Public concern

In recent years, Germany has welcomed huge numbers of people fleeing conflict, but the AfD campaigned heavily on the issue in the recent election and had success, so politicians are aware it is becoming

an increasingly significant public concern.

Members of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition government have already held talks with center-right opposition groups about a new approach to the issue of migration in the aftermath of the Solingen attacks, and Friedrich Merz, leader of the mainstream conservative Christian Democratic Union party, said migration in general needed to be tightened up.

"If the coalition wants to talk to us about the solution, then item one on the agenda must be limiting migration," he said.

Marcus Engler, a researcher from the German Center for Integration and Migration Research, told the Reuters news agency that "the intention of the government seems to be to show symbolically to Germans and potential migrants that the latter are no longer wanted here".

## Fukushima plant debris removal begins

TOKYO — A difficult operation to remove a small amount of radioactive debris from Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear plant began on Tuesday, after technical issues suspended an earlier attempt.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, said in a statement that its "pilot extraction operation" had started. It will take about two weeks, according to the company.

The tiny sample will be studied for clues about conditions inside the reactors — a crucial step toward decommissioning the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

About 880 metric tons of extremely hazardous material

remain 13 years after a tsunami caused by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake triggered one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

Removing the debris from the reactors is regarded as the most daunting challenge in the decades-long decommissioning project.

TEPCO originally planned to start its first trial removal on Aug 22, aiming to collect just three grams for analysis — if the extraction process is successful.

However, the company had to stop the work at a preliminary stage after detecting a problem involving the installation of the necessary equipment.

Three of the Fukushima plant's six reactors were operating when the tsunami hit on March 11, 2011, sending them into meltdown.

The debris within has radiation levels so high that TEPCO had to develop specialized robots able to function inside.

The government and TEPCO are sticking to a 30 to 40-year cleanup target set soon after the meltdown, despite criticism it is unrealistic. No specific plans for the full removal of the melted fuel debris or its storage have been decided.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Rescue mission



Rescuers onboard a Spanish Maritime Safety and Rescue Society vessel help people from a boat carrying 81 migrants, including 3 women and 3 children, at La Restinga port on El Hierro, Canary Islands, Spain, on Monday. More than 22,000 migrants have landed in the Canary Islands so far this year, compared to just under 10,000 during the same time last year. ANTONIO SEMPERE / AFP

## US slammed for targeting biotech firms

By ZHOU JIN  
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Beijing condemned on Tuesday the so-called Biosecure Act passed by the United States House of Representatives, urging Washington to stop unwarranted oppression against Chinese enterprises.

The bill, passed by 306 to 81 votes on Monday, would prohibit the US government from contracting with, or providing grants to, companies that do business with a "biotechnology company of concern".

It names five Chinese companies — BGI, MGI and its subsidiary Complete Genomics, WuXi AppTec, and WuXi Biologics.

China firmly opposes such discriminatory measures against its companies, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a

daily news conference.

Mao urged the US to abandon ideological bias, earnestly respect market principles and trade rules, stop pushing forward the legislation and provide a fair, just and nondiscriminatory business environment for companies from all countries.

China will continue to firmly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of its companies, she said, adding that the country also supports its companies in safeguarding their rights and interests in accordance with the law.

The legislation needs to pass the US Senate before it can be sent to US President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The targeted companies have all said the measure is based on false and misleading allegations and would limit competition. They

denied posing any threat to US national security and stressed that they do not have access to the personal data of US citizens in their operations.

The act is the latest move by US lawmakers who have already succeeded this year in requiring Chinese-based parent company ByteDance to divest from TikTok or face a US ban.

The Biosecure Act is part of a string of China-related bills that the US lawmakers are pushing ahead this week.

In what has been dubbed "China Week", the US House of Representatives is aiming to introduce dozens of bills touching on trade, technology, farm ownership and electric vehicles, in moves to counter China's political, economic and technological influence.



# BUSINESS

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## AI slides into latest smartphones



**Above:** Smartphone users sample Huawei's Mate XT tri-fold device on display (foreground) at a flagship store in Shanghai on Tuesday. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Right:** A visitor takes a photo of an iPhone 16 in Cupertino, California, on Monday. MANUEL ORBEGOZO / REUTERS

Apple Inc launched the iPhone 16 Pro and iPhone 16 Pro Max on Monday, featuring the A18 Pro chip built for Apple Intelligence, larger display sizes, innovative pro camera features and a huge leap in battery life.

On Tuesday, Huawei Technologies Co Ltd launched the first tri-fold phone, the Huawei Mate XT, which also has AI features and a starting price of \$2,800.

"I have always had a dream to put our tablet in my pocket, and we did it," said Richard Yu, Huawei's consumer group chairman, at the Mate XT rollout.



## CGN to build Namibia's largest desalination plant

By ZHENG XIN  
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Construction of Namibia's largest desalination plant, led by China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN), will play a key role in addressing the country's water scarcity, experts have said.

CGN, China's largest nuclear power operator in terms of installed capacity, will work on the Namibian undertaking in cooperation with a local water corporation, the company said during the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing last week.

An analyst said the project is a milestone in China's strategic partnerships in Africa, contributing to water security in Namibia while positioning Chinese companies as

key players in critical infrastructure development worldwide.

CGN's entry into the water desalination sector in Namibia signals a strategic expansion beyond nuclear energy, a move that aligns nuclear operators with broader strategic goals of energy and water security, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

China has long been developing nuclear power and has accumulated extensive experience and engineering capabilities in nuclear technology, research and construction operations.

The desalination plant will provide a sustainable water source, enhancing local water security and supporting industries like mining and agriculture in Namibia.

The venture also strengthens China-Namibia ties and reflects China's commitment to supporting infrastructure development in emerging markets, Luo said.

"The project demonstrates China's efforts to leverage its expertise in large-scale infrastructure to meet critical needs like water management in developing regions, aligning with China's broader global infrastructure ambitions under the Belt and Road Initiative," Luo added.

Once completed by the end of 2026, the facility will have an annual production capacity of 20 million metric tons of water, said the Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based CGN.

The project, which is part of BRI cooperation results, will alleviate water shortages especially in central Namibia and the country's western coastal areas. It will also

support development of local industries, the company said.

China-Africa economic and trade cooperation continues to gather momentum driven by a slew of concrete plans announced at the summit in Beijing last week.

During the summit, China said that in the next three years, it will work with Africa to implement 10 partnership actions for modernization that will deepen China-Africa cooperation and spearhead the Global South modernization.

The 10 partnership actions cover areas of mutual learning among civilizations, trade prosperity, industry chain cooperation, connectivity, development cooperation, health, agriculture and livelihoods, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, green development and common security.

## Opening up of services seen broadening

From 2012 to 2023, average annual growth of sector's trade reached 6.2%

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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China will further open up its services sector, promote convenient cross-border flow of various innovation elements, and optimize the environment for the growth of trade in services, a senior official said.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, released a policy document earlier this month regarding promotion of the development of trade in services through high-standard opening-up. The guideline addressed key points in supporting the development of trade in services and will encourage an innovative environment for the growth of the sector.

"Currently, China's services trade is embracing an important period of innovation and growth. The document will guide China's services trade growth in the future," Tang Wenhong, assistant minister of commerce, said during a news conference on Tuesday.

"The services sector has been an important driving force for economic globalization. Compared with trade in goods, trade in services is still a relatively new field in China with significant growth potential," Tang said.

From 2013 to 2023, the average annual growth rate of global services exports reached 4.9 percent, which doubled the average growth rate for the global export of goods. Exports of services accounted for one-fourth of total exports, said the World Trade Organization.

Since joining the WTO in 2001, China has been fully fulfilling its commitments, accelerating the opening up of its services sector to the outside world, and successfully boosting trade in services.

China's services trade steadily expanded in scale, optimized its structure and enhanced overall global competitiveness. Last year, China's total value of trade in services reached \$933.1 billion, surging 233-fold over levels seen in 1982, when the country was at the early stage of reform and opening-up, Tang's ministry said.

From 2012 to 2023, in US dollar terms, the average annual growth rate of China's services trade

reached 6.2 percent, higher than the global average growth rate and the growth rate of China's trade in goods, the ministry said.

"In particular, over the same period, knowledge-intensive services exports have increased to make up 57.5 percent of the total, and China's competitiveness and value of services exports have continued to improve," Tang said.

In addition, the document said China would establish and improve a negative list management system for cross-border trade in services. A comprehensive negative list for cross-border trade in services will be implemented, accompanied by the establishment of a corresponding management system.

The Ministry of Commerce said it will fully implement the negative list for cross-border services trade, establish and improve the management system for the negative list, and strengthen the links between various administrative approvals, licenses, filings and negative list adjustments.

Meanwhile, Beijing will host the 2024 China International Fair for Trade in Services from Thursday to Monday to continuously boost the growth of trade in services.

The fair, a crucial platform for China to expand opening-up and cooperation, has attracted the participation of over 420 Fortune 500 companies and industry leaders.

French industrial and technology company Schneider Electric will attend the CIFTIS for the fifth time and it hopes to contribute to the transformation and growth of enterprises with its electrification and automation technology and services.

"We plan to sign a service cooperation agreement with Chinese company Jingye Group and share our insights about the sector at the CIFTIS," said Xu Shaofeng, senior vice-president of Schneider Electric and head of medium voltage and services for the China market.

CPA Australia will show up for the first time this year. As an international membership organization, it looks to cooperate with Chinese industry players to foster more accounting professionals.

## Safety checks ahead



Employees of State Grid Quzhou Electric Power Co help a motorist charge his electric vehicle at a service area along the G60 Shanghai-Kunming Expressway. The power operator of Quzhou, Zhejiang province is ramping up inspections to ensure safe electricity use during the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holidays. MAO XIAOWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Ikea China investing \$38m to expand offerings

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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Ikea, the Swedish home furnishing and furniture retailer, said it plans to invest 273 million yuan (\$38.3 million) in China in the fiscal year to August 2025, and exploits post-COVID-19 consumption trends like more rational buying and a growing preference for cost-effective products.

To this end, Ikea will expand its product and service offerings, its senior executives said. Over 500 lower-priced products, mainly mattresses, bed frames, bedroom textiles and bedroom storage, will be launched. Up to 2,800 products related to sleep, including 400 new products, are in the pipeline for launch during the period, Ikea said.

Pontus Erntell, CEO, president and chief sustainability officer of Ikea China, said: "I think the role of homes has changed over time. We see home has become much more multifunctional and plays different roles. It's a safe place for people, and



Consumers browse products at an Ikea store in Beijing in August. SONG YU / FOR CHINA DAILY

now it's also a place to relax, interact, exercise and work. This leads to this feeling that people value their homes much more."

On the one hand, consumers seek value for money through rational consumption. "Consuming smart for

good deals" is in. On the other, people are also shifting from pursuing rational consumption to seeking multidimensional values, like social value, personal value and sustainability, Erntell said.

Based on Ikea's understanding of

Chinese consumers' special requirements and preferences, more than 10 products are tailored specially for the China market, the company said.

According to a report by Life Week, a lifestyle magazine, which cited a white paper on Chinese people's sleep trend earlier in March, about 28 percent of people in the country sleep less than six hours per night; 64 percent have poor sleep quality, with many others struggling with sleep problems.

Consumer demand for better living is on the rise in China. Also, with supportive policies set to boost home furnishing consumption, combined sales of the omni-channel retail home furnishing market are projected to rise substantially from 4.6 trillion yuan in 2023 to 5.3 trillion yuan in 2027, according to a report by iResearch.

Such momentum will be further driven by the newly released demand for existing homes and increasing requirements for smart home appliances, the report said.

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# BUSINESS

## Cloud tech providers join global march

By CHAI HUA in Shenzhen  
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Amid the growing momentum of Chinese companies going global, domestic cloud service providers are also progressively making further forays into international markets.

Tencent Cloud's international business has seen double-digit growth over the past three years, delivering impressive performances in Southeast Asia, Japan, the Middle East and Europe, said Li Qiang, vice-president of Tencent.

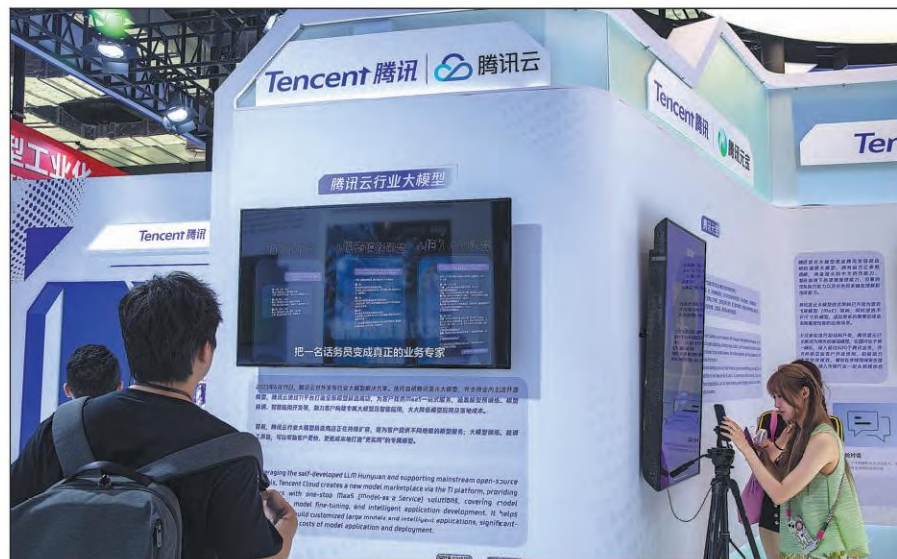
Li said Tencent Cloud's infrastructure spans 21 regions across five continents, operating over 3,200 global acceleration nodes and offering solutions across various sectors such as the internet, gaming, finance, tourism, autos and retail.

"Going global" has become one of the paramount strategies for Tencent Group and Tencent Cloud, he added.

Li said the tech giant will also expedite the international expansion of its artificial intelligence technology.

He made the comments in an interview with China Daily before the 2024 Tencent Global Digital Ecosystem Summit, which kicked off on Sept 5 in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

The accelerated pace of cloud service internationalization is closely intertwined with the overall growth of Chinese enterprises going global. In 2023, the amount of Chinese capital going global increased by 11 percent year-on-year, with a 23 percent growth in the number of enterprises,



Visitors check out Tencent Cloud's booth during the 2024 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai in July. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

according to consulting firm Bain & Company.

The mode of internationalization is also evolving, shifting from launching products to platform internationalization, together with the holistic system of Chinese experience and practice.

According to statistics released by the Ministry of Commerce in 2022, among enterprises going global in the past five years, the retail and manufacturing sectors accounted for the largest proportion, while the information and software services sectors exhibited the fastest growth.

However, Li found that Chinese enterprises are encountering new challenges in their globalization efforts due to rising barriers in international trade. One issue is how to effectively implement the high-level digital standards of their factories in China in emerging economies.

"An increasing number of businesses are contemplating local recruitment and supply chain establishment, leading to a rising

demand for top-tier software services in management processes," he added.

One example is Tencent's cooperation with automaker GAC Group. Tencent established the latter's digital infrastructure system tailored for Southeast Asia, and its mass production of internet of vehicles in the Thai market this year.

As of end-June, Tencent had been supplying overseas cloud services to over 30 auto manufacturers and mobility tech companies.

Apart from joining hands with Chinese companies, Li is also confident of attracting clients overseas, a segment which has already seen rapid growth.

Sun Wei, senior consultant at market research company Counterpoint, said the global expansion for such companies is more Asia-focused, due to geopolitical tensions and tighter data control policies elsewhere.

Sun said one of the main strategies of their expansion at the cur-

rent stage is price reduction. Taking Alibaba Cloud as an example, she said it has implemented two significant rounds of price cuts in both domestic and overseas markets since March.

She said they are also "enhancing their technological offerings, increasingly focusing on offering value-added services, such as AI-driven cloud solutions, specialized enterprise services in vertical markets as well as strong engineering capabilities for rapid scaling, to differentiate themselves from their Western competitors."

AI infrastructure and technology have become the new engine in the international expansion of Chinese software service providers. Alibaba Cloud and Huawei Cloud unveiled their AI "going global" initiatives in May of this year and November of last year, respectively. Alibaba Cloud is also investing in establishing new data centers in five countries worldwide, emphasizing the development of AI infrastructure.

## Work begins on \$1.76b power station

### East China's largest pumped storage facility highlights new energy push

By ZHENG XIN  
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Full-scale construction has begun on East China's largest pumped storage power station, with power generation scheduled to start before 2030, said its operator GCL Energy Technology Co Ltd.

The project in Zhejiang province entails a total investment of about 12.5 billion yuan (\$1.76 billion), and is the largest clean energy project invested by GCL Energy Technology.

It is expected to further advance the development of the clean energy industry in East China, driving local economic development while ensuring the stable operation of the new power system in the country, it said.

Located near the load center of the East China power grid, the power station will be equipped with six reversible hydro-generators, each with a capacity of 400,000 kilowatts, bringing the total installed capacity to 2.4 million kW, making it the largest such station in the region.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said the project will substantially promote the large-scale development and utilization of new energy in East China.

The project is poised to enhance the region's energy mix and solidify its leadership in renewable energy adoption, playing a key role in peak-load regulation, energy storage and grid stability for the East China power grid, he said.

This power station will further contribute to the construction of Zhejiang's new energy supply and consumption system, injecting strong momentum into local economic and social development, he said.

It is expected to generate an average of 2.52 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, save about 480,000 metric tons of standard coal each year, and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 960,000 tons.

As an efficient and flexible peak-shaving power source, pumped storage can use excess electricity during off-peak hours to pump water from a lower reservoir to an upper one and release the water to generate power during peak demand.

China's power storage capacity, fueled by rapid advances in the renewable energy industry, innovative technologies and ambitious government policies, has been developing at a rapid pace in recent years.

By the first half of this year, the installed capacity of clean energy in Zhejiang reached 71.18 million kW, surpassing thermal power for the first time and accounting for 52 percent of the total capacity, a significant change in the province's energy structure.

The pumped storage power station in Zhejiang is not only a major project requiring intensive technology and capital, but also a critical measure in transforming the energy structure and promoting green, low-carbon development, said Zhu Gongshan, chairman of GCL Group.

## Yancheng to tap MNCs for edge in clean energy

By ZHENG CAIXIONG  
and GUO JUN in Nanjing

Yancheng city in Jiangsu province, which has resource advantage of enriched green energy, will further promote and deepen exchanges and cooperation with multinational corporations to strengthen its clean energy industry.

Zhang Mingkang, mayor of Yancheng, said the city is now creating conditions to attract more MNCs to settle down in the city to accelerate the development of its green industry.

Zhang made the remarks at a cooperation and exchanges conference for Yancheng zero carbon industrial parks held in the coastal city late last month.

"Multinational corporations are an important force in building an open world and promoting economic globalization," he said.

"And Yancheng will approach the outside world with a more open attitude, integrate into the world, create a first-class business environment and provide maximum convenience for all investors, entrepreneurs, researchers and developers to expand in the city."

According to Zhang, Yancheng is rich in "wind and luminous" energy resources, with a total exploitable capacity of more than 30 million

kilowatts, making it the first "10 million kilowatt new energy power generation city" in the Yangtze River Delta region.

The installed capacity of new energy power generation in the city has reached 15.33 million kW, of which the installed capacity of offshore wind power represents about one-tenth of the global and one-fifth of the country's total.

Meanwhile, new energy generation accounts for about 65 percent of the total electricity consumption of Yancheng, making it a truly global capital of green energy, Zhang said.

The mayor said the city is actively exploring the development potential of the green energy industry and accelerating the construction of offshore wind and luminous energy comprehensive utilization bases, promoting the integrated development of "wind, luminous, hydrogen and energy storage" industries, to achieve the goal of an industrial production of 200 billion yuan (\$28.1 billion) and installed capacity of more than 20 million kW of the new energy industry by 2025.

Yancheng, one of three coastal cities in East China's Jiangsu province, is an important center in the Shanghai metropolitan circle. With a land area of 17,700 square kilometers and a sea water area of 18,900 square

kilometers, Yancheng has vast land for development and construction of green energy projects.

In Dongtai, a county-level city under the administration of Yancheng, the new energy power generation had come to 2.62 billion kilowatt-hours in the first half of the year, accounting for 71.4 percent of the total electricity consumption in Dongtai, fully covering industrial electricity consumption in the city.

Hu Guirong, director of the development division of State Grid Yancheng Power Supply Co, said green energy has significant advantages compared to traditional energy, as green energy sources, including wind and light, produce little pollutants, which helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to achieving the dual carbon goals.

Meanwhile, the development cycle of green energy is shorter than that of traditional energies, which can ensure the reliability of power supply.

Therefore, developing green energy has great significance, especially in Jiangsu, a major electricity consumption province, said Hu.

"The rapid growth of green energy can fill some of the load gap. And new quality productive forces are green productivity, and the large-

scale development of green energy has driven technological progress and green transformation in related industry chains, including the power grid," he said.

Hu said Yancheng, the first clean energy high proportion consumption demonstration city in Jiangsu, is one of the first batch of carbon peak pilot cities in China, and it has been identified as the only green and low-carbon development demonstration zone in Jiangsu.

Zhang Shimin, deputy general manager of Luxcase Precision Technology (Yancheng) Co Ltd, said clean and green energy can not only reduce a company's production costs, but also gain the favor of many international customers.

As an intelligent manufacturing enterprise, the company counts electricity among its main costs, said Zhang Shimin. "Yancheng has abundant green energy resources, and we have installed photovoltaic power generation equipment in the factory area, achieving 100 percent green energy usage in the production process this year, implementing the concept of green development throughout the entire production process."

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## Making a move



Technicians of the Transport Co of the No 2 Drilling Engineering Co, a unit of CNPC Greatwall Drilling Co, relocate drilling equipment at a gas field in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. State firms are ramping up exploration efforts to guarantee power supply nationwide. YU TENGJIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Caterers urged to go digital to cut costs, hike efficiency, drive development

By WANG XIN in Shanghai  
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Digitalization is key to improving efficiency and reducing costs for China's catering industry, as well as driving its high-quality development, amid a period of rising revenue but declining profits, said business leaders and experts at a conference held recently in Shanghai.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China's catering sector recorded a total revenue of 3.06 trillion yuan (\$429.8 billion) from January to July, up 7.1 percent year-on-year. However, the latest half-yearly earnings reports released by several leading catering companies, including hotpot chain Xiapuxiapu and Japanese-style noodle chain Ajisen (China) Holdings, show a fall in profits.

Despite the challenges, business leaders and experts present at the Meituan Catering Industry Confer-



An outlet of hotpot chain Xiapuxiapu in Shanghai in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ence on Sept 3 were still positive about the future prospects of China's catering industry, fixing their eyes on digitalization.

"Catering is an industry that has long-term resilience, but it requires changes to keep thriving. We are

witnessing transformation that we have never seen in the past three decades, making us go deeper into the industry for long-term development," said Wang Puzhong, CEO of the core local commerce business at Meituan, a leading food delivery

company and popular on-demand service platform in China.

Wang pointed out that people's demand for catering services is constant.

Meituan's data show that the demand for catering among people living in Chinese towns will continue to expand. By the end of 2030, each person in a town is expected to eat out five to six times per week.

On the digitalization of China's catering sector, food delivery platforms now form a critical part of people's daily life.

An increasing number of consumers are seeking out restaurants, ordering, eating and providing reviews on online platforms.

According to the company, 275 million consumers use Meituan for catering every week, making it a crucial battlefield for catering brands to expand both online and offline.

While it can be expensive to open an offline restaurant chain with

dine-in services, cost-effective "satellite restaurants" have mushroomed on online platforms.

Basically, a satellite restaurant refers to a small shop affiliated to chain brands that specializes in food delivery services.

With much lower operational costs, these restaurants still boast the advantage of guaranteed food products and services, which have made them popular on online platforms.

To date, a total of 150 catering brands have launched over 1,000 satellite restaurants on platforms, according to Meituan.

In addition to making full use of online platforms, digitalization is also in the spotlight for operations and management in catering companies, especially among big brands like coffee chain Luckin Coffee.

Established in 2017, Luckin Coffee has seen rapid expansion and has over 20,000 stores across China, recording a profit exceeding 3 bil-

lion yuan last year.

"Our business model is actually quite simple. We take digital technologies as the foundation, and integrate our people, brand, product development, supply chain management and business operations on it. Some people would describe us as a digitalized company or a technology company, but I would say Luckin Coffee is simply a catering company with digitalization as the base since our establishment," said Guo Jinyi, chairman and CEO of Luckin Coffee, during the conference.

Guo added that consumers do not care about the digitalization or technologies behind a cup of coffee, but they care about a smooth process in ordering and delivery, a good service experience and product quality, as well as cost-effectiveness.

"Digital technologies have helped us to promote service and consumer experience, reduce costs and improve efficiency," said Guo.

## BUSINESSFOCUS

# China's big role in global green transition

White paper highlights nation's tech advancements, industry and supply chains, and favorable market environment

By ZHENG XIN  
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Over the past decade, China has made remarkable contributions to global green transformation, thanks to its continuous technological advancements, complete industrial supply chains and favorable market environment, according to a recently released white paper.

China's green energy development has become a driving force for the global energy transition, significantly alleviating global inflation pressures while addressing climate change, the white paper issued by the State Council Information Office showed.

China, the world leader in renewable energy generation capacity, has been responsible for over 40 percent of the annual additions to global renewable energy capacity since 2013, with the newly installed capacity accounting for more than half of the world's total in 2023, the paper, titled "China's Energy Transition", pointed out.

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, credited the swift growth of the nation's renewable energy sector to ongoing technological innovations, well-established industrial supply chains and a supportive market environment.

China has established a relatively complete supply chain for wind and solar power industries at home, while actively integrating into the global clean energy supply chain, continuously sharing high-quality clean energy products with the world, said Zhang.

Chinese wind and solar technology as well as products are exported to many countries and regions worldwide, helping these countries, particularly developing ones, gain access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy, he said.

Zhang said China continues to advance in technology, with rapid upgrades of products. Innovations in photovoltaic technologies, such as high-efficiency crystalline silicon cells and perovskite cells, have repeatedly set new world records in conversion efficiency, with mass-produced advanced crystalline silicon photovoltaic cells now achieving conversion efficiencies exceeding 25 percent.

In wind power, technologies such as long blades and high towers are at the forefront globally, and the maximum capacity of offshore wind turbines has reached 18 megawatts, he said.

"As a strong advocate for global energy transition, China will continue working with other members of the international community to plan



Wind turbine blades at a port in Yantai, Shandong province, in August. U ZHENG / XINHUA

75 years on

energy cooperation together, address global climate change and create a clean world for all," he added.

Zhang said China will phase out fossil fuels and reform its electricity system, while promoting green electricity trading and replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy.

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

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 China has been stepping up efforts to reform its energy production and consumption methods while upgrading its energy supply capacity.

"China is at a pivotal moment in both the national and global energy transition, with rapid development seen in renewable energy in the country," said Deng Simeng, a senior analyst for renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

"Buoyed by supportive policies, competitive advancements in the



Technicians carry out inspections at a solar power farm in Hanggin Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in June. MEI TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

domestic supply chain and a reliable grid system, China is on track to accelerate energy transition with continuous renewable energy projects in place," she said.

"All types of renewables including solar, wind, battery storage and green hydrogen will be crucial to this transition, transforming China from a coal-dependent giant into a leader in clean 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 it has accomplished the target six years ahead of schedule.

While many experts believe China's carbon emissions could peak before its 2030 target, Song Wen, deputy director-general of the administration's agency planning department, said the dual carbon target will not be changed and the major targets the country has committed to will not be moved.

A report from the International

Renewable Energy Agency said that global wind power projects have seen average power generation cost per kilowatt-hour decrease by more than 60 percent over the past decade, while solar power projects have seen a cost reduction of more than 80 percent. The cuts 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 China's further opening-up has created new opportunities for deeper international cooperation on clean energy, as restrictions on foreign investment have been removed in all energy industries except nuclear power plants.

Multinational companies, including General Electric, BP and Siemens, are steadily expanding their investments in China's energy sector, with many foreign projects well underway across the country, including EDF's offshore wind power project, Tesla's electric vehicle project in Shanghai, and LG Energy Solution's battery project in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, he said.

Wan Jinsong, deputy head of the NEA, said 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.

In 2023, electricity generated from clean energy accounted for 39.7 percent of the country's total power generation, up by around 15 percentage points from 2013.

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.

According to Wan, China will also continue to expand and improve the country's electric vehicle charging network in response to the booming domestic new energy vehicle industry and public travel demands.

"China highly prioritizes the development of EV charging infrastructure, viewing it as a crucial step in advancing the green and low-carbon energy transition and supporting high-quality growth in the transportation sector," he said.

By the end of July, there were 10.6 million charging facilities across the country, effectively meeting the charging demands of over 25 million NEVs. In the central urban areas of major cities, the coverage of public charging services is now comparable to that of gas stations.

"Currently, 95 percent of highway service areas are equipped with charging facilities, and China will continue to drive rapid advancements in charging technology, and speed up the development of high-quality charging infrastructure to further support the green and low-carbon growth of the transportation industry," Wan said.

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.

China's new energy industry has already become a major global supplier of green energy and will continue to innovate and make breakthroughs.

Wind, solar, hydro, nuclear and intelligent technologies, will become key components of the country's new quality-driven productivity, providing significant momentum for the nation's high-quality economic development, Zhang said.

The white paper also noted that as China synchronized its energy transition with environmental protection, its energy consumption per unit of GDP fell by more than 26 percent from 2013 to 2023.

## Country expanding nuclear energy's share in power generation

By ZHENG XIN

China has achieved significant strides in nuclear power development in recent years, rapidly expanding the industry and establishing a comprehensive nuclear power supply chain, positioning itself as a global leader in the sector.

Over the past decade, China has experienced rapid growth in nuclear power, developing substantial expertise and engineering capabilities in nuclear technology research and development, engineering design, equipment manufacturing, and construction operations, said Zhang Jianhua, head of China's National Energy Administration.

"After 40 years of exploration and practice, China has established a comprehensive industrial system, making it one of the few countries in the world with a complete nuclear power industry system," said Zhang. "Nuclear power has become a critical and primary energy source for the eastern coastal regions, with over 20 percent of the total electricity generated in five provinces — Liaoning, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guang-

dong and Hainan — coming from nuclear power, playing a significant role in ensuring power supply."

According to Zhang, China's operational nuclear power units have consistently maintained a high level of output in recent years, fully serving their role as a reliable baseload power source.

Although nuclear power now accounts for less than 2 percent of the total installed capacity nationwide, it generates nearly 5 percent of the country's electricity, he said.

In August, the State Council, the country's Cabinet, greenlighted five new nuclear power projects encompassing a record 11 units, as the country revs up nuclear power construction as part of its transition to green and low-carbon energy.

The expansion marks the highest number of approved nuclear units in a single year since 2015, a development rate that experts predict will significantly boost related manufacturing sectors.

Among the newly approved projects, Jiangsu Xuwei nuclear power heating plant, which encompasses three units and is operated by China



Aerial view of a nuclear power station under construction in Ningde, Fujian province, in July. XINHUA

National Nuclear Power Co Ltd, is the world's first to combine high-temperature gas-cooled reactors with pressurized water reactors.

Nuclear power generation reached 433.4 billion kilowatt-hours last year, making China the second-largest generator globally and

accounting for 4.86 percent of the country's total power generation, resulting in an equivalent reduction of about 340 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually, according to the China Nuclear Energy Association.

According to BloombergNEF, the

world's second-largest economy is expected to leapfrog France and the US as the top source of atomic power by 2030, as "the scale and speed of Beijing's crusade are hard to overstate."

Zhang said China is ranked first worldwide in the total number of nuclear power units under operation and construction as of now, making the country the world leader in nuclear power.

China now has 102 nuclear power units either under operation or construction, with a total installed capacity of 113.13 million kW. This includes 56 nuclear power units under operation with a total installed capacity of 58.08 million kW and 46 of them under construction with a total installed capacity of 55.05 million kW, he said.

Zhang Tingke, vice-president of the association, predicts that by 2035, nuclear power's share in China's energy mix will reach around 10 percent.

An analyst said the Chinese nuclear power industry has rapidly evolved from initially importing and imitating foreign technologies

to now engaging in independent research, development, and innovative breakthroughs.

"China's nuclear power technology has advanced significantly and is now among the leading nuclear technologies globally," said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University. "This rapid development will also provide a substantial boost to related manufacturing sectors, driving growth in related industries such as nuclear equipment production. It will also strengthen China's energy security while positioning the country as a global leader in nuclear technology and green energy innovation."

Zhang, head of the NEA, said the government will continue to uphold the highest standards of operational management to ensure a stable and orderly pace of construction, while actively advancing the comprehensive use of nuclear energy in heating steam supply, and seawater desalination, to gradually increase the role of nuclear power in our energy and electricity mix.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Fruits of relations underscore importance and benefits of constructive engagement

Although Singapore is a small city state geographically, it is a respected larger-than-life player on the world stage, thanks to not only its rags-to-riches development, but more importantly its hallmark strategic autonomy in handling foreign affairs that has helped it maintain stable relations with all parties.

As regards relations between China and Singapore, their relationship is characterized by strong economic ties, strategic cooperation and mutual respect. The strength of their ties is of great significance for the Asia-Pacific region.

It was therefore no surprise that Singaporean Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan stressed the time-honored close connections between China and Singapore during his visit to China on Sunday and Monday.

Singapore was one of the first countries to participate in and deeply integrate into China's economic rise more than 40 years ago. In the years since, the two countries have deepened their cooperation through important initiatives such as the Suzhou Industrial Park, Tianjin Eco-City and Chongqing Connectivity Initiative.

And while China provides opportunities for Singaporean businesses to tap into its vast market and manufacturing capabilities, Singapore serves as a key hub for Chinese investments in Southeast Asia.

Working closely together and learning from each other has undoubtedly provided important impetus for their respective modernization drives and enabled the two countries to forge a high-quality and forward-looking partnership. This has prompted the two countries to collaborate to enhance the connectivity and trade between China and Southeast Asia.

In this light, Singapore firmly supports free trade, and China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations expanding two-way investment. It is willing to work with China to maintain the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core, ensure the smooth flow of production factors and the stability of supply chains, as Balakrishnan said.

In his meeting with Balakrishnan, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized that the two sides give full play to the role of dialogue mechanisms at all levels and in all fields, tap the potential of the New Land-Sea Trade Corridor, and create new high ground for their cooperation in the digital economy, green development and marine energy. Their cooperation in such emerging fields will create new development opportunities.

Meanwhile, the two sides should make good use of the mutual visa exemption policy, expand personnel exchanges, increase talent training, think tank media, youth, and local cooperation, and enhance the friendly relations between the two peoples.

Next year will mark the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Singapore and China. In their meeting in Beijing on Monday, Wang and Balakrishnan agreed that the two countries should take that occasion as an opportunity to expand their all-round cooperation.

The two countries share strategic interests in maintaining regional stability and security. In the face of the increasingly volatile world situation, especially as the United States and some of its allies are trying to take advantage of the territorial disputes in the region to sabotage Asia-Pacific solidarity, China and Singapore should plan well for important high-level exchanges in the next stage that can serve to provide strategic guidance for the China-Singapore cooperation to reach a higher level.

China supports the centrality of ASEAN in handling regional affairs, and is committed to building a China-ASEAN community with a shared future, upgrading the level of China-ASEAN free trade arrangements, and strengthening cultural exchanges, so as to gather greater synergy and inject sustained momentum into regional integration and economic globalization.

With the United States up to its tricks in Asia, it is important that Singapore and China, with their shared belief in Asian values, multilateralism and free trade, maintain their stabilizing relationship, which serves as a cornerstone for regional cooperation, economic development and stability in the Asia Pacific.

In the face of increasing geopolitical uncertainties, their partnership exemplifies the potential for mutually beneficial relationships in the region, and underscores the importance of constructive engagement for the broader Asia-Pacific community.

## Barometric visit indicates pressure on ties easing

Australian Treasurer Jim Chalmers' upcoming China visit is a further sign that the two countries are continuing their efforts to inject vitality into bilateral ties through frequent high-level interaction. Such exchanges are instrumental in anchoring the overall bilateral ties to a stable and healthy terrain after years of tensions and estrangement.

Speaking to Australian Broadcasting Corp on Sunday, Chalmers said his visit, dubbed a "strategic economic dialogue", is scheduled for the final week of September and will include talks on the remaining trade restrictions on imports of Australian lobster as well as Australia's foreign investment rules covering sectors such as critical minerals.

This will be the first visit by an Australian treasurer in seven years, indicating the positive trend that has developed in bilateral high-level communication since the Anthony Albanese government took office. As a barometer to gauge the temperature of bilateral ties, it marks the easing of the pressure that had been building up under the previous Australian government. As long as the two sides engage with each other with mutual respect and mutual understanding, they can work together to facilitate trade and economic cooperation, which is significant and has yielded various benefits for both countries.

The symbiotic economic relationship that had been fostered was unnecessarily put under stress by the previous Australian government under the influence of Washington.

Since taking office in 2022, Prime Minister Albanese's government has made a significant departure from his predecessor's hostile policy toward China, and pushed instead for easing tensions and building a rapport with China. In response, China has lifted a slew of trade restrictions on Australian products, which have effectively put bilateral trade and economic cooperation back onto the right path.

In the first six months of this year, a strong bounce-back in Australian coal exports resulted in them accounting for a large proportion of China's total imports of coal, with exports of coking coal from Australia to China jumping from 2.16 million tons in the first half of 2023 to 6.56 million tons in the same period this year, according to BigMint's ship-tracking data.

After the two countries resolved their trade dispute over wine in May, major Australian wine producers are now looking to reclaim their leading position in the Chinese market, with statistics from the Australian side indicating that in just one month after the duties were removed on bottled wine, Australia exported more than \$86 million worth of quality wine to China.

During his visit to Australia in June, Premier Li Qiang announced that China would grant visa exemptions to Australian citizens, a move that immediately saw a surge of interest in China-bound tourism in Australia, a healthy development that can contribute to deepening people-to-people understanding.

Since 2009, China has remained Australia's largest trading partner, export market and import source for 15 consecutive years. In 2023, bilateral trade in goods increased 4.1 percent year-on-year, while Australian investment in China increased 11.7 percent compared to the previous year.

The trade relationship has also facilitated the exchange of technology and best practices between the two countries, while collaborative initiatives in research and development, renewable energy, and other high-tech sectors have enabled both nations to benefit from each other's expertise.

It is essential that both countries work together to manage any challenges that may arise and continue to maintain their mutually beneficial economic partnership that supports sustainable growth and cooperation in the long term.

As long as Canberra respects Beijing's core interests, treats it as an equal partner, not a threat, and steers clear of Washington's disruptive designs, the prospects of their meaningful, pragmatic cooperation will be even brighter in the future.

This would also contribute to regional stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific, as their economic cooperation and interdependence play a crucial role in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

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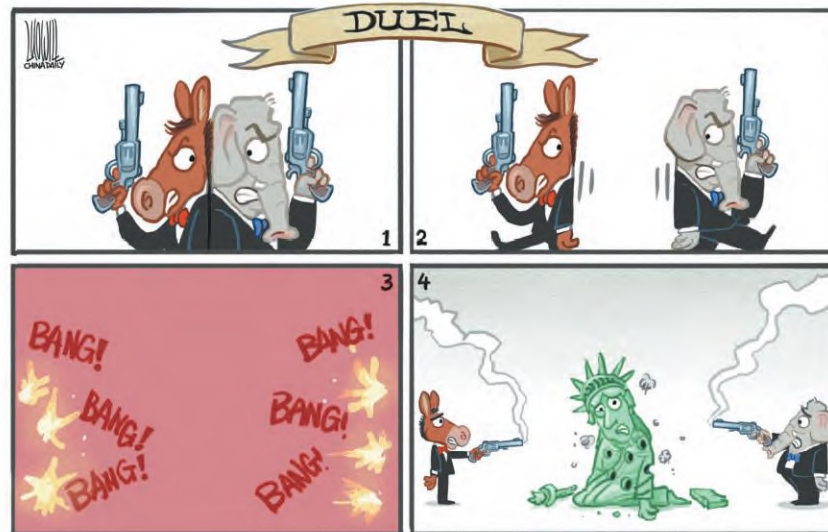
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## Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## Structural employment challenge prompts retirement age delay

The Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, is holding its 11th session in Beijing from Tuesday to Friday, and deliberation on a delayed statutory retirement age is on the agenda.

Since the central authorities confirmed for the first time in an important resolution issued in July that delayed retirement will be advanced on a "voluntary and flexible" basis, the narrative is no more about if, but when and how the statutory retirement age will be raised.

China has a serious aging population problem, a trend that is unlikely to be mitigated anytime soon. As the trend continues, the country may face labor shortages and pension pressures in the future. That is why the central authorities plan to raise the retirement age.

Compared with developed coun-

tries, China's statutory retirement age is relatively low. In China, male employees and cadres retire at 60, female employees at 50 and female cadres at 55, while in most developed countries both men and women retire at 65. Some countries are still calling for the retirement age to be raised.

For example, the United States has adopted a plan to gradually raise the retirement age from the current 65 years. In Japan, the retirement age is generally between 65 and 70, and companies can set the retirement age at above 70 too.

China's current retirement age has obviously not kept pace with its changing demography as well as social and economic development, especially at a time when the country's average life expectancy has gone up by more than 30 years from what it was 70 years ago and the kind of work people do is no

longer just manual. In this context, the adoption of a gradual delay in retirement age appears necessary and also feasible, given that it is conducive to increasing the supply of labor forces to alleviate the country's structural employment problem.

However, while promoting delayed retirement, the relevant authorities should also face up to the grim reality that many young people in China nowadays cannot find jobs, and in some sectors such as the internet, employees aged 35 or above are losing their jobs. Apart from increasing the supply of labor, raising the statutory retirement age will also increase the pressure on employees. To address this, the authorities should adopt a prudent and considerate approach, and, if necessary, introduce some supportive social security measures.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

## Clean sight of goal for Chinese soccer sector

The law enforcement and sports departments held a news conference in Dalian, Liaoning province, on Tuesday releasing the results of their crackdown on match fixing, betting and biased refereeing in the soccer sector, following which 83 players, referees, coaches and club managers were detained and 34 among them were given prison sentences.

This is not the first crackdown against corruption in the domestic soccer sector. Since the early 1990s several corruption cases have

emerged in the domestic soccer sector, with soccer players, officials, coaches and judges all being involved. The crackdown was much needed considering that corruption is largely responsible for where Chinese soccer stands today.

Among the problems in the domestic soccer sector, one must be the lack of real professionalism despite the reform that started in 1993. Clubs were formed, but power and responsibility were not clearly earmarked between clubs and multiple soccer associations,

with the latter still having too big a say in organizing matches. In some sense, it is the huge power soccer officials wield that prompts them to abuse it and end up in jail. Besides, China does not have a mature youth training system in soccer.

Until and unless all Chinese students, and not just professional sport school students, play soccer, or, until Chinese soccer players can play for world-class clubs, Chinese soccer will not rise.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Gulf trip will bolster collaboration, cooperation

At the invitation of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman and the UAE's Vice-President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Premier Li Qiang will visit Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from Tuesday to Friday. In Saudi Arabia, he will chair the Fourth Meeting of the High-Level Chinese-Saudi Joint Committee.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and China are all major emerging market economies upholding their strategic autonomy and supporting multilateralism in global governance and free trade.

Premier Li's visit is conducive to deepening China's win-win cooperation with the Gulf countries, and strengthening their strategic coordination, under various bilateral and multilateral frameworks, for proper resolutions of the Gaza conflict and the Ukraine crisis at an early date.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia on July 21, 1990, bilateral relations have developed rapidly. In January 2016, the two countries established a comprehensive strategic partnership.

They have achieved fruitful results in practical cooperation in various fields. Since 2001, Saudi Arabia has been China's largest trading partner in the Middle East. China has become Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner since 2013. Saudi Arabia has long been China's leading supplier of crude oil. In 2023, China imported 85.959 million tons of crude oil from Saudi Arabia.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the UAE on Nov 1, 1984, bilateral relations have made great progress. In July 2018, the two countries established a comprehensive strategic partnership. The UAE has been China's largest export market

and second-largest trading partner in the Middle East for many years. The UAE is China's fifth-largest source of crude oil imports.

China's cooperation with the two countries is not limited to energy but more importantly expanding fast to other sectors that are of strategic importance to the three countries' joint pursuit of sustainable development, including the digital economy, the green economy, innovation, climate change, telecommunications, aerospace, finance and investment.

China's cooperation with the two Middle East countries taps into their economic complementarity and sets a good example of South-South collaboration based on shared beliefs in international fairness and justice. It expands the common interests among the three countries and contributes to regional and world peace and common prosperity.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

Liu Jisen

## China, Africa embark on new collaboration path

In his keynote speech at the 2024 summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing on Sept 5, President Xi Jinping outlined a new blueprint for China-Africa cooperation for the next three years and for jointly advancing modernization.

President Xi's keynote speech had some distinctive features. A "new" positioning of China-Africa relations is one of them. He proposed that China-Africa relations be leveraged to build an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era. The expression reflects the importance China's leadership attaches to China-Africa relations, which have been a distinctive feature since the last century.

Also, the modernization that China and Africa jointly advance will be just and equitable, open and mutually beneficial, people-centric and inclusive, peaceful and secure, and eco-friendly. The new interpretation of China and Africa jointly advancing modernization is closely related to China's Global Development Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, which reflects the continuity of China's Africa policy.

The second distinctive feature is the stress on the term "practical". President Xi also proposed 10 partnership actions for jointly advancing modernization with Africa. The partnership actions include civilizational exchanges, promotion of trade prosperity and cooperation on strengthening industry chains. The 10 actions are not intentions but include specific, actionable requirements and targets. For example, on "development cooperation partnership action", the proposal is to implement 1,000 "small and beautiful" livelihood projects, and on the goal of "agricultural partnership action", the goal is to encourage two-way investment, enable African countries to retain added value and create at least 1 million jobs in Africa.

The third feature is "sincere". China's support for Africa's modernization is genuine and sincere, and it will not be swayed by Western media provocations. The 10 major partnership actions for jointly advancing modernization are based on China's own capabilities and African countries' development stages. For instance, on "trade prosperity partnership action", China will give the 33 least-developed countries in Africa zero-tariff treatment for 100 percent tariff lines. This

China has excellent tilapia farming technology that can help Cote d'Ivoire to narrow the production gap, thus increasing employment, improving production, and boosting tax revenues and foreign exchange income.

reflects China's role as a responsible major power and its determination to help African countries to achieve modernization.

In late August, before the FOCAC Summit, I led a Chinese delegation to Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Mauritania in West Africa to explore cooperation opportunities in four major industries: marine fisheries, mining, agri-

culture and forestry. While Cote d'Ivoire is rich in cashew nuts and cocoa and Sierra Leone has healthy iron ore reserves, Senegal is a leading producer of peanuts in Africa and Mauritania has abundant marine fisheries.

The total China-Africa trade volume in 2023 was \$282.1 billion. To increase the figure to \$500 billion, China needs to import more African products. To this end, President Xi proposed the trade prosperity partnership action, with China willing to expand market access for African products, by giving zero-tariff treatment to all products from 33 African countries. This will not only make China a larger market for Africa but also increase the volume of China-Africa trade.

Africa is a resource-rich continent but lacks manufacturing capacity, which makes the African and Chinese economies complementary. Through industry chain cooperation partnership action, Africa can integrate its industry and value chains into the global industry and value chains

and, with the help of China, can promote industrialization, and export more resources while retaining added value.

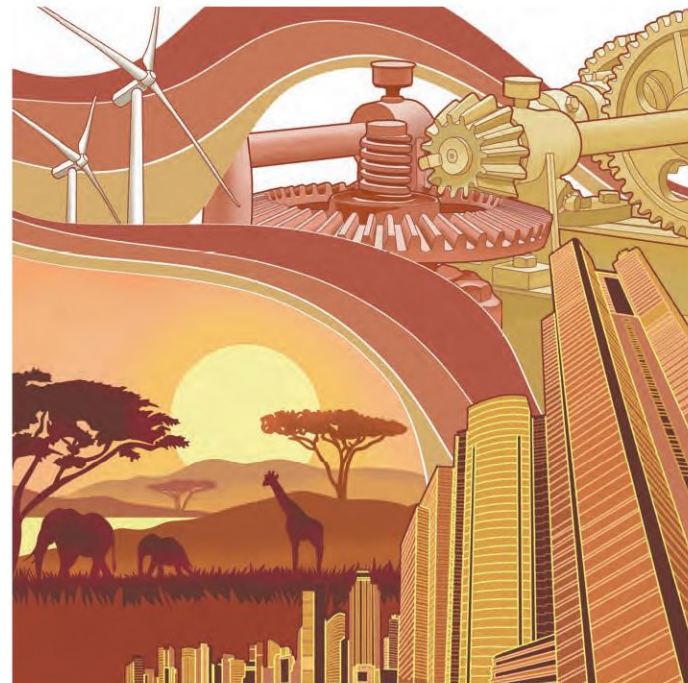
For instance, Cote d'Ivoire consumes 650,000 tons of fish annually but can farm only 100,000 tons, leaving a 550,000-ton gap. China has excellent tilapia farming technology that can help Cote d'Ivoire to narrow the production gap, thus increasing employment, improving production, and boosting tax revenues and foreign exchange income.

Why Africa, despite its rich resources, has been developing at such a slow rate? I believe it is due to the lack of skilled workers and advanced technology. This issue can be addressed through cultural exchange partnership action. China is willing to work with Africa to advance the Future of Africa-Vocational Education Cooperation Plan, co-establish engineering institutes, and build 10 Luban Workshops, creating opportunities for Chinese investment in Africa.

The Institute for African Studies of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and the consulate general of Cote d'Ivoire in Guangzhou have signed a strategic cooperation agreement, under which Cote d'Ivoire can inform the Chinese side of its human resource needs for the development of its industries, and the Institute for African Studies will provide the necessary vocational education resources for Cote d'Ivoire nationals in Guangzhou.

During our visit to the four West African countries, the officials there sought Chinese companies' technical support for their environmental protection industries. Shenzhen Zhongke Green Construction Environmental Protection Engineering Co specializes in water pollution treatment and handling of construction waste. We can arrange for the consulate general officials of Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal in Guangzhou to visit the company and establish a green development partnership with it to facilitate the African countries' green transformation.

In other words, President Xi's call for jointly advancing modernization with Africa has made it possible for China and Africa to jointly realize a brighter, greener modernization.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

The author is the dean of the Institute for African Studies of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Wang Yiwei

## Shared Sino-US history can help shape future

After Japan launched the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 during World War II, the United States retaliated with a massive air raid, known as the "Doolittle Raid", on Japan in April 1942. The daring operation ended with several dozen crew members from 16 US bombers parachuting into Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Anhui and Fujian provinces in China, where they were heroically rescued by Chinese civilians and soldiers.

This profound act of solidarity not only saved lives but also forged a lasting friendship between the peoples of the US and China, a legacy that has endured for decades. In retaliation to the "Doolittle Raid" and the assistance provided by the Chinese people for the US soldiers, the Japanese military launched a brutal attack on Zhejiang and Jiangxi a month later, killing about 250,000 Chinese civilians, and bombing the airport in Quzhou, Zhejiang province, after most rescued US pilots were escorted away from the city.

The documentaries and exhibitions about the rescue operation poignantly highlight the heroism of the Chinese people who risked their lives to save the US airmen. The story evokes memories of the Hollywood production, *Saving Private Ryan*, and suggests that a Sino-US collaborative movie perhaps titled "Saving Doolittle Airmen" would be a fitting tribute to those unsung heroes who deserve to be included in both nations' school syllabuses as an example of the global fight against fascism.

In the digital age, the world has transcended the clear-cut boundaries of primary, secondary and tertiary industries that defined the industrial era.

The historical chapter raises many pertinent questions, prominent among them being: Are China and the US locked in a permanent strategic competition, or are they bound by a shared destiny? The question reflects the fundamental differences in the two sides' understanding of the nature and future direction of Sino-US relations. The notion that the relationship is a zero-sum game, often referred to as "strategic competition", is outdated and pits the leading global power against a rising power. This perspective is as obsolete as it is unhelpful.

In the digital age, the world has transcended the clear-cut boundaries of primary, secondary and tertiary industries that defined the industrial era. Since we are helping build a community of cross-border integration and innovation, it is imperative that we foster a shared historical view of the US and China to chart a mutually beneficial future.

Historically, Ge Kunhua (a Chinese poet who spearheaded Chinese language teaching in Boston in the 1870s) and John Dewey (who helped promote China's modern education as a visiting scholar at Peking University and other higher education institutions) have built joint memories and shaped joint narratives for the two countries.

If the Flying Tigers symbolize the wartime alliance against fascism, the city of Quzhou, Zhejiang province, represents the enduring friendship between the American and Chinese peoples. When US airman James H. Doolittle embarked on his perilous Tokyo raid, he did so with the resolve to give the ultimate sacrifice. Little did he know that Chinese civilians would come to his aid and write a cherished chapter of Sino-US shared history.

International relations rest on the closeness of peoples of different countries, and this closeness comes from mutual understanding. A poignant inscription at the UNESCO Headquarters reads, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." This statement elevates diplomacy beyond mere interactions among countries, highlighting its role in fostering global peace through the exchange of ideas.

Although relations between China and the US have deteriorated of late, the two sides do share hopes and dreams. What happened in Quzhou all those years ago was beyond public diplomacy; unwittingly, Chinese people and the US airmen were crafting a shared historical perspective and building fortresses of peace.

Let's hope the "Doolittle Raid" inspires some filmmaker to make a feature film someday, establish a theme park, and create a museum dedicated to this shared Sino-US history. These initiatives could serve as a test bed for forging China-US ties in the future.

The author is a professor on international studies at Renmin University of China. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

## Protecting human rights via South-South synergy

**Editor's note:** The first China-Latin America and Caribbean States Roundtable on Human Rights was organized by China Society for Human Rights Studies, Renmin University of China, and the Fluminense Federal University in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Tuesday. More than 120 human rights experts and officials from China and Latin America and the Caribbean shared their views on the contributions of China-Latin American and Caribbean states to human rights protection and promotion, and the challenges faced by global human rights governance. Following are excerpts from the speeches delivered by three participants:

## Political manipulation of international justice

Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 is based on the spirit of mutual respect, freedom, justice and equality for all human beings, certain countries have used the 30 articles of the declaration to serve their own narrow political and geopolitical interests, turning the declaration into a weapon to justify even very serious violations of the very principles that the declaration seeks to safeguard.

The United States, for instance, has used its hegemonic role in the world order from 1945 onward to hide its political and geopolitical ambitions under the garb of protecting human rights. From its colonial and imperialist policy in Vietnam to its economic siege of Cuba and overthrow and assassination of former president Salvador Allende of Chile, among many other examples, to its current pretentious behavior in the face of the genocide its close ally, Israel, has been carrying out in Gaza, the US' record of serious human rights violations is simply atrocious.

The best way to honor the principles that gave birth to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is to reveal and highlight to the world how human rights have been, and are being, violated by the US and its closest allies, which hide their power interests (which often results in the most horrendous criminal and genocidal acts) in the discourse on human rights protection.

Fernando Estenssoro, doctor of American studies at Universidad de Santiago de Chile

## Beijing has helped better protect human rights

Human rights protection has long been seen through the Western lens, often neglecting the diverse cultural, political and economic contexts of the countries in the Global South. Since the existing world order was established by the Western powers after the end of World War II, it

doesn't represent the countries that were marginalized at the time, including a fragile China in the 1940s.

China's rise since the late 1970s has been outstanding. The country has transformed from an agricultural society into a global economic and technological force. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and its associated bloc between 1989 and 1991 gave rise to a world order dominated by a single superpower. In the absence of a competitor that would have restricted their influence, Western leaders have proclaimed the universality of Western principles, claiming certain privileged tutelary powers to regulate the world order, initially formulated based on a "liberal international order" and later in the form of a "rules-based order".

But the impressive rise of China, particularly in the past two decades, has brought about another profound change: China has become a more confident actor on the global stage. Accordingly, much of the international relations literature today tries to answer the question of whether China is a status quo power or a revisionist state.

The answer to this question could point to enormous policy consequences: if China is a revisionist power trying to replace the existing world order with a different type of international order, the status quo countries will strive for containing China's initiatives worldwide. But if China is a status quo power, less harsh measures would be taken by those countries to deal with China.

Grasping the role of China in this field is central to our understanding of the challenges threatening the international system along with our search for answers to better protect and promote human rights worldwide.

China contributes to a core issue of global governance: international human rights. It has ratified a series of laws and regulations including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1980, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2001, and the

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 2011.

Beijing's main efforts on the global stage are aimed at improving (not replacing) the existing world order, and to abide by the rules of the international human rights regime.

Jorge Eduardo Malena, director of the Asian Affairs Committee, Argentine Council for International Relations

## South-South cooperation on human rights to be fortified

Violations of women's human rights during armed conflicts, wars and political upheaval have been addressed by different forums, networks and public policies at the regional level. Although violence against women during war has been a reality since ancient times, the advances made in human rights protection at the global level have not only shaped a new perspective on the violation of women's human rights but also provided tools to ensure such crimes do not go unpunished. Advances in jurisprudence at the global level have been decisive in analyzing the causes of women's human rights violations that have not been legally addressed, such as the case of the "comfort women" in Asia.

The "comfort women" refers to women who were exploited as sex slaves by the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II. Historians and advocacy groups estimate that the Japanese military enslaved more than 400,000 women. The violence suffered by those women has not been adjudicated.

Due to the activism of the advocacy groups — which include historians, lawyers and volunteers — the issue has gained global attention, generating calls for justice even in non-victim countries.

The issue has also deepened South-South cooperation on certain fronts. For instance, Argentina and China collaborated in 2019 to publish the first Spanish-language book on "comfort women", opening the door to broader discourse. In

March 2023, a photo exhibition in Argentina on Korean "comfort women" living in China attracted significant media attention, showing the intensifying calls in Latin America for addressing the issue.

But the unresolved issue of "comfort women" is not confined to Asia. It is a global human rights concern, especially with intensifying conflicts in many parts of the world. Latin America, with its own history of gender violence during military dictatorships, has much to offer to this dialogue.

As such, China and Latin America must seize this opportunity to collaborate more deeply to address the issue. First, increasing scientific cooperation on gender violence — through joint research projects and publications — could bridge the knowledge gap between regions. Second, stronger linkages among museums and memory spaces in China and Latin America can help raise awareness about the gender violence through exhibitions that engage and educate the public. And third, there is a need to shift the debate beyond regional tensions in East Asia and focus on building a global human rights agenda that prioritizes the dignity and autonomy of women.

The issue of "comfort women" is not just a relic of the past; it is a reminder of the work still needed to be done to protect women's rights in conflict zones. China and Latin America, two regions often marginalized in global human rights discussions, can become leaders in addressing this issue. By building stronger networks of cooperation, they can challenge the North-South paradigm of women's rights advocacy and contribute meaningfully to the global discourse on human rights. The time to act is now.

María del Pilar Álvarez, a professor and researcher at the Interdisciplinary Chinese Studies Program, School of Humanities, National University of San Martín, Argentina

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

WANG YAO AND SHI LIN

## Linchpin of progress

Empowering women through targeted investments can strengthen the climate resilience of African countries and promote their economic and social development

The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, held last week in Beijing, reaffirmed the deepening ties between China and Africa. This year's discussions highlighted a growing commitment to sustainable development. China's investment in Africa, if steered in a gender-responsive manner, could significantly address the gender equality challenges in Africa, empower African women and contribute to the continent's inclusive economic growth.

Since its inception in 2000, the FOCAC has evolved into a mechanism to address a broad spectrum of issues in China-Africa relations. While gender issues were initially overshadowed by broader development goals, the focus on women's empowerment has gradually gained prominence.

The first FOCAC in 2000 did not specifically address gender issues. It emphasized poverty reduction and development, which benefited women. In 2006, China committed to improving maternal and child health in Africa, highlighting the vital role of women in ensuring family and societal well-being. It was not until the 2018 FOCAC Beijing summit that gender equality became a more explicit priority.

The 2018 Beijing Action Plan was a pivotal moment, introducing commitments to improve women's access to finance, promote women's entrepreneurship and enhance

women's participation in agriculture and education. The 2021 summit prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment, emphasizing the need for greater inclusion and participation of women in economic and social development.

The growing emphasis on gender issues within the FOCAC framework reflects China's increasing awareness that addressing gender disparities is integral to achieving sustainable development in Africa, as well as a growing recognition of the critical role that women play in economic development, social progress and climate resilience.

African women are central to the continent's economic development, contributing significantly to agriculture, entrepreneurship and leadership in local communities.

Women account for more than half of Africa's agricultural workforce, and many are involved in small and medium-sized enterprises, which are critical to economic growth. Women's leadership and participation in various sectors can transform economies, improve food security, and create resilient communities.

However, African women continue to face systemic challenges, including limited access to financial services, education and healthcare. Cultural barriers and gender discrimination often prevent women from fully participating in decision-making processes. Addressing these challenges is critical to realizing the full potential of African women and ensuring that they play a leading role in the continent's sustainable development.

Thus, efforts to empower African women are crucial, not only to enhance their personal and economic well-being, but also to ensure that Africa can leverage its full demographic potential. Gender

equality is thus not just a social imperative but an economic one, which China's investment in Africa can help address.

Gender-responsive investment is a growing trend in global finance, focusing on ensuring that women benefit from economic development and that investments do not perpetuate existing inequalities. China's investment in Africa is beginning to reflect this trend, particularly in sectors such as infrastructure and agriculture. However, the integration of gender considerations into these investments has been limited. While some initiatives, such as those aimed at women in agriculture and healthcare, show progress, there is a need for more systematic and targeted gender-responsive investments.

Gender bonds, which focus on financing initiatives that promote women's empowerment and reduce gender inequalities, offer a promising avenue. While relatively new, gender bonds have seen notable issuances in several African countries. For instance, the NMB Bank Jasiri Bond in Tanzania, issued in 2022, was one of the first gender bonds issued in the region. This bond raised 75 billion Tanzanian shillings (\$32 million) to provide loans to women-owned micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, with the aim of advancing gender equality and enhancing women's economic participation. Another example is the Development Bank of Rwanda, which issued a 30 billion Rwandan franc (\$24 million) bond in 2023, aiming to increase loans to women-led businesses to 30 percent of its SME loans by 2028. Efforts like these are helping to mobilize more capital for gender-focused initiatives, with the potential to bridge gender gaps in financial inclusion while offering both financial



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

returns and social impacts.

China, while still in the early stages of incorporating gender bonds into its financial framework, has the potential to lead by example in promoting gender equality through its financial partnerships with Africa and leverage its existing investment infrastructure to create more inclusive financing tools.

The opportunities for gender-responsive investment in Africa are vast. Empowering women through targeted investments can spur job creation, enhance productivity, and lead to more resilient communities. Women are often the driving force behind SMEs and supporting them can unlock new avenues for economic growth, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, investing in women's education and vocational training has a multiplier effect, as educated women are more likely to invest in their families' well-being, contributing to poverty reduction and improved health outcomes.

However, challenges remain. Cultural norms and gender biases in many African societies continue to limit women's access to resources and opportunities. In many African countries, women struggle to

obtain land rights, access credit, and participate in decision-making processes. These challenges require not only financial investment but also policy reforms and social change initiatives that can reshape the environment in which women operate.

Moreover, there is a need for better data collection and analysis to assess the gender impact of investments. Without accurate data, measuring the success of gender-responsive projects and making necessary adjustments is difficult.

To address these challenges, women, particularly those in vulnerable communities, must be allowed to actively participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are prioritized.

For example, climate financing projects could be designed to ensure that women in rural areas have access to clean energy, water resources and sustainable agricultural technologies, all of which are crucial for resilience in the face of climate change.

Gender-responsive financing also means investing in women-led initiatives, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture

and education. By prioritizing women's leadership and entrepreneurship, China cannot only support gender equality, but also contribute to building more sustainable and equitable economic systems.

As China continues to deepen its engagement with Africa, it has a unique opportunity to lead the way in gender-responsive investment. By placing women at a higher position in its investment strategy, China can help unlock Africa's full economic potential and ensure that African women are not only beneficiaries of development but active drivers of change. China can work together with African governments, local organizations and global partners, to drive inclusive growth and social progress across the continent.

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ONWUZURUIKE ODINAKACHI LILYAN

## Instrumental transformers

Digital technology and education can be catalysts for realizing a China-Africa community with a shared future

African countries that are developing rapidly can borrow China's experiences from its recent decades of change. Through government-led initiatives, market reforms and technological developments, China has evolved from an agricultural culture to a global economic powerhouse. Education and technology have been vital for this transformation.

The Chinese government's support of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education has produced a quality workforce able to industrialize the nation. Thanks to China's investments in digital infrastructure, its digital economy has expanded quickly. Alibaba, Tencent and Huawei now dominate worldwide e-commerce and telecommunications, and China is one of the countries at the forefront of artificial intelligence. With its quickly expanding economy, Africa might emulate China's educational and digital technology successes. African countries can overcome technological, educational and infrastructure problems by applying China's modernizing knowledge. Digital technology and education are keys to the timing.

But Africa is struggling to give every one of its citizens appropriate education. While there has been an increase in enrollment, many African nations still have packed classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, and a dearth of qualified teachers. China's educational reform offers Africa referential experiences. Early in its modernizing drive, China made investments in STEM education in order to provide workers for its industrial ambi-

tions. Among the best in the world, Chinese universities produce graduates who propel economic and technical progress.

China offers promise to the improvement of education in Africa via the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Among the support offerings are scholarships for African students studying in China, Confucius Institutes throughout Africa to promote cultural and educational interaction, and alliances with African colleges to enhance courses and research. These initiatives advance knowledge and skills to propel Africa's industrialization and economic development. Furthermore, making African education more inclusive and easily available is digital technology. Digital libraries, mobile apps and online learning systems can provide underprivileged or remote students with high-quality instruction. Customized training, interactive materials, and real-time feedback made possible by digital tools help to improve teaching and learning.

For both China and Africa, cooperation in digital technologies and education presents various opportunities. One important issue is job creation. As African nations improve their digital infrastructure, knowledge of information technology, engineering and data science will be highly in demand. China's assistance in providing digital skills training and other technological training will enable African employees to be ready for their future employment. Entrepreneurship and innovation are another possibility. Thanks to the digital revolution, startups are easier to launch. China's IT sector



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

expansion could teach Africa how to establish its own innovation hubs. Working with Chinese IT companies and investors, African entrepreneurs may grow their businesses and compete internationally.

Digital technologies and educational initiatives are also helping China and Africa to achieve the sustainable goals of quality education

and decent work that are required to lower poverty and inequality. By working together, China and Africa can help the world advance toward a fairer and more sustainable future.

Although there are many advantages, China-Africa cooperation also faces challenges. One of the main concerns is over-reliance on Chinese companies, therefore hin-

dering their own technological growth.

To address this issue, African nations should pay attention to local capacity building and technology transfer in their cooperation with Chinese companies. By developing local talents and inventiveness, African countries may better foster their self-reliance capability on their development path. Another problem is the digital divide among African nations. While digital technologies are helping metropolitan cities, rural and far-off places are sometimes being left behind. This digital divide compromises education, healthcare and economic development. To share the advantages of digital technology, African countries should enhance their coordination with China in order to increase internet infrastructure in underprivileged areas and encourage digital literacy for all.

As China's centralized government and State-led development model is appropriate for every African state, African leaders will have to carefully consider the consequences of including elements of the Chinese development model and modify them for their own circumstances as required.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the cooperation between China and Africa on digital technologies and education has made great progress. Expansion of continental digital infrastructure is among the main ones. By building data centers, smart cities, and telecom networks, Chinese companies have helped pioneer Africa's digital revolution. China has sponsored scholarships, trade initiatives and research projects for thousands of Africans. While developing the skills and knowledge required to industrialize

Africa, these initiatives have enhanced understanding and cooperation between the two sides.

The cooperation between the two sides has also generated creative ideas to meet Africa's most recent challenges. Chinese companies supported African governments in developing remote learning, telemedicine and contact tracing tools during the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives demonstrate how digital technology can improve African public services and resilience.

Effective cooperation between the two sides depends on mutual respect, common benefits and long-term sustainability. China and Africa should continue to work together to emphasize environmental sustainability, and share the advantages of their partnership.

Future China-Africa cooperation has great potential to enhance digital infrastructure in underprivileged communities, digital literacy and skills, and creativity and entrepreneurship.

Chinese and African cooperation in digital technologies and education can let both areas flourish in a fast-changing environment. By building on their achievements, tackling their problems, and learning from their past, China and Africa may establish a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future. Millions of lives could be improved, and a fairer, more prosperous, and sustainable planet could be created by their collaboration.

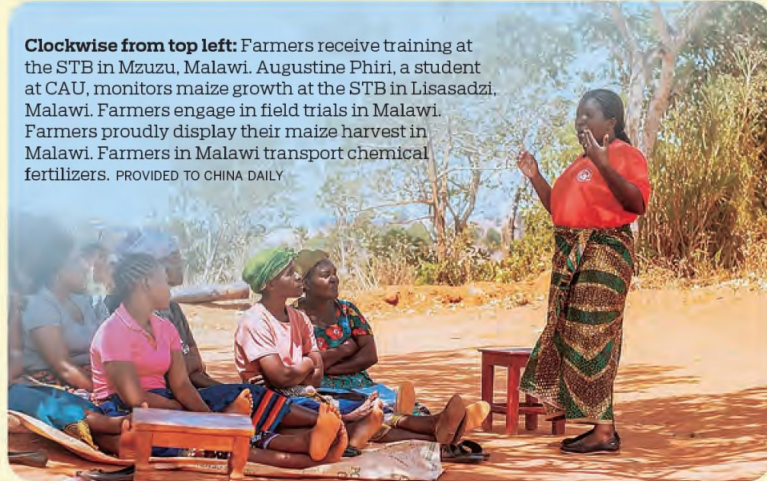
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# Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

# Z WEEKLY

**Clockwise from top left:** Farmers receive training at the STB in Mzuzu, Malawi. Augustine Phiri, a student at CAU, monitors maize growth at the STB in Lisasadzzi, Malawi. Farmers engage in field trials in Malawi. Farmers proudly display their maize harvest in Malawi. Farmers in Malawi transport chemical fertilizers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



# Harvesting knowledge

African students at the Sino-Africa Science and Technology Backyard program gain hands-on experience to improve farming practices for African smallholder farmers.

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang  
zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

Like a farmer, Aline woke up early, around 6 am, every day at her experimental station in Quzhou county, Handan, North China's Hebei province, beginning her busy day with various farming tasks.

Aline's full name is Roukiatou Aline Beniwende Pamtaba. A 26-year-old from Burkina Faso, a western African country, she began her graduate studies at the College of Resources and Environmental Sciences at China Agricultural University (CAU) in Beijing in September last year.

Majoring in resource utilization and plant protection, she is currently conducting research in experimental fields in rural areas of Quzhou, about 350 kilometers southwest of downtown Beijing, under the Science and Technology Backyard (STB) program.

The program, launched in 2009 by CAU, involves teachers and students participating in agricultural production in rural areas. It aims to address practical agricultural problems, develop high-level agricultural talent, and contribute to rural modernization.

In 2019, the university initiated the Sino-Africa STB project in Quzhou to train young technical talent for African nations, focusing on production issues faced by smallholder farmers, according to Jiao Xiaoqiang, an associate professor at CAU and head of the project.

So far, the project has trained more than 90 graduate students from 12 African countries, establishing a practical talent training mechanism tailored to the agricultural development needs of Africa, Jiao noted.

Aline arrived in Quzhou in February and has since been living and conducting experiments in the county.

"Usually, I head straight to the fields. Some days, I collect crop samples for analysis, such as measuring root length, plant height, leaf area, and chlorophyll content. On other days, I focus on data collection, calculating shoot and root weight, or analyzing plant growth metrics," she said.

Aline especially enjoyed interacting with local farmers, discussing the agricultural techniques they use, and observing their practices.

"These encounters are invaluable because I get to understand the real-world applications of my research and see firsthand the challenges they face," she said, adding that working alongside local

farmers has significantly broadened her perspective on sustainable agriculture.

Aline is currently working on several projects. One of them involves measuring the growth patterns of maize under different environmental conditions to better understand how climate variables affect crop yield.

In another experiment, she compares traditional fertilizer application methods with new techniques

and took part in the program in Quzhou.

"Students involved in the programs have enriched local farmers' channels for information acquisition via technical training and activities that promote crop cultivation management techniques," Jiao said.

So far, more than 200 households of local farmers in Malawi have benefited from the programs' training, contributing to the modernization of local agriculture.

At an STB project in Thuchira, a village in southern Malawi, two students, Lester and Brenda, guided 30 farmers in maize cultivation and conducted field demonstrations covering about 0.3 hectares of land.

In June, the average maize yield of 90 cooperative farming households in the northern, central, and southern regions of Malawi reached eight metric tons per hectare — triple the yield compared to previous years, according to a report by Hebei Daily.

According to Jiao, under the Sino-Africa STB project, CAU recruits master's students in agriculture from African countries to study in China.

The program adopts a "1+1-1" talent training model: in the first year, students study theoretical

courses at the Beijing-based university, then go to Quzhou for agricultural practice.

"After the first year of study in China, students will acquire advanced agricultural knowledge and production technology, learn how to interact with farmers, and gradually grow through close collaboration with them," Jiao said.

In the second year, they return to Africa to provide solutions for small-scale farmers based on their studies in China.

In the third year, they return to China to complete their research and thesis, based on their practical work in both China and Africa.

"This training model not only enhances students' overall capabilities but also promotes the application of agricultural technologies, contributing to agricultural development," Jiao said.

CAU and Malawi University of Science and Technology signed an agreement in Beijing during the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation on Sept 5, to jointly establish an Africa center for the STB program.

"We will cooperate to create a demonstration area in Africa for high agricultural yields and efficient resource utilization, bringing our experience in Quzhou to more African countries," Jiao said.

After completing her experiments, she will return to Beijing in November to start data collection for a meta-analysis.

Similarly, Matthews Kafunda, a 27-year-old from Malawi, is currently studying and conducting experiments in Tasigiao village, Quzhou.

"The advantage of the STB model lies in its combination of theory and practice to drive agricultural innovation," Kafunda said, adding that he plans to advocate for the STB model in agricultural practices in Malawi after graduation.

"The knowledge I've gained can help accelerate research and the development of problem-solving technologies for smallholder farmers in my country," he said.

Since 2022, three STB programs have been launched by students from Malawi who studied at CAU

## YOUTHFUL INSIGHTS

# Cracking down on toxic sports culture

The 2024 Paris Olympic Games saw some extreme behavior by Chinese fans that sparked widespread controversy. The most notable instance occurred during the women's table tennis singles final, where the audience overwhelmingly supported Chinese paddler Sun Yingsha while booing her teammate, Chen Meng.

Recently, the China Table Tennis Association issued a statement condemning the corrosive effects of "fan culture" and expressing full support for the authorities' crack-down on illegal behavior within sports fan circles.

By YANG CHUCHU  
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Although "fan culture" has been developing for a long time, it is only in recent years that it has begun to engulf China's sports industry.

This phenomenon is not unique to China. In 2019, during the Wimbledon final, Novak Djokovic faced uncomfortable moments as fans of Roger Federer applauded his mistakes and jeered at certain points, despite Djokovic's inspiring performance to claim his fifth Wimbledon title.

Originating from the entertainment industry and driven by idol economics, fandom has evolved

into an organized and specialized subculture centered around idols as symbols. This culture has gradually spread into the sports industry worldwide.

While a growing number of fans can bring more exposure to sports events, driving the prosperity of professional sports, it also has its downsides. Fan circles tend to be exclusive, making it difficult for different groups to appreciate athletes outside their own "idols". This can lead to extreme and irrational behaviors.

These behaviors pose serious threats to the well-being of players, diminish the engagement of future fans, and tarnish global sportsmanship.

Many young fans become obsessed with idolizing their favorite athletes while attacking others. In this process of "creating gods", athletes are often portrayed as omnipotent and invincible, expected to excel both on the field and in their personal lives.

On the field, extreme behaviors such as booing and shouting disrupt the normal flow of games. Off the field, athletes may face gossip, harassment, and even attacks, both online and offline.

Since the 1980s, soccer hooliganism in the UK has highlighted the dangers of such conduct, with opposing fans violently clashing during competitions.

Moreover, fans' exclusive sup-

port for certain players on the same team can lead to online arguments and personal attacks, undermining team solidarity.

This unhealthy "fan culture" can also have a direct or indirect impact on the development of young people's values, eroding the spirit of fair competition and endangering the future of global sports. It is easy for youth to imitate these frenzied actions rather than appreciating the true qualities of athletes and the essence of sportsmanship.

In contrast to "fan culture", the Olympic spirit emphasizes diversity and inclusion. Fans should be encouraged to respect the efforts of all athletes and take pride in

collective national achievements. The true spirit of sports lies in perseverance and resilience, celebrating success while acknowledging possible failure — values that are more important to the development of sports.

By maintaining a healthy distance between fans and athletes, audiences can enjoy thrilling sports events and contribute to a more positive and inclusive sporting culture.



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## Z WEEKLY

# From city stress to rural rest

"Youth retirement homes" provide a retreat for young people seeking a break from city life and stress, **Meng Wenjie** reports.



Zhang Rui, 29, once worked as a graphic designer in Beijing. After experiencing a layoff, she decided to temporarily step back from her career to find a peaceful space for relaxation and rejuvenation.

Now living in a small village, Zhang works part-time online. With affordable rent and a lower cost of living compared to Beijing, she has called this place home for over a month.

"Living here has really helped me unwind. I'm feeling less stressed, and I've learned that it's OK to slow down," Zhang said.

This tranquil location is a "youth retirement village" named Guanye, nestled in the Yesanpo Scenic Area of Baoding, a city in North China's Hebei province. Just a two-hour drive from Beijing, it offers a stark contrast to the city's hustle and towering skyscrapers.

Zhang discovered the spot through Xiaohongshu, a popular Chinese lifestyle-sharing platform, where the concept of "youth retirement home" has recently intrigued many young Chinese internet users. This term has garnered over 8.6 million views on the platform, sparking widespread interest and discussion.

Posts related to this trend reveal the existence of similar youth-focused residential communities in various cities across China, like Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Yunnan, Suzhou in Jiangsu, and Chengdu in Sichuan. Some of these communities have specific age limits, excluding individuals over 45.

Despite its name, a youth retirement home is not a facility for senior care. According to Cui Kai, 30, one of Guanye's six managers, it is a place where young people can escape the intense competition and mental pressures of modern life.

"They can take a break from their daily stress and worries, and simply relax in peace for a while," Cui said.

Before residents move in, the village conducts a survey to learn about their interests, daily habits, and health conditions. Based

“Living here has really helped me unwind. I'm feeling less stressed, and I've learned that it's OK to slow down.”

**Zhang Rui**, 29, a resident at Guanye Youth Retirement Village

on this information, the staff organizes activities like meditation, hiking, and book clubs.

The monthly cost for a mountain-view king-size room is 3,599 yuan (\$508) per person, which includes accommodation, meals, and activities. For a four-person dormitory, the monthly cost is 1,999 yuan per person.

#### A shelter for youth

The village was originally a guesthouse in the Yesanpo Scenic Area. Following upgrades, Cui and his partners combined traditional guesthouse services with the needs of young people seeking short-term relaxation, shaping the community into what it is today, which opened in May this year.

"It provides a third place for young people to come together," said Cui.

Cui's reference to the "third place" draws from the concept introduced by US sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1989 book, *The Great Good Place*.

The term describes a physical setting distinct from home and work, where individuals find comfort, spiritual fulfillment, and a sense of community. Such places can be cafes, bars, or libraries, where people from diverse backgrounds gather to socialize in an informal setting.

Currently, Guanye is home to over 10 long-term residents, primarily digital nomads who have

**Above:** (from left to right) Liu Jie (center) shares a laugh with friends after their volunteer work. Cui Kai (upper left) and five other managers of Guanye. Liang Siqi (front) poses with a new friend she made in her volunteer work. **Below:** Residents of Guanye gather to collect firewood in the mountains. **Bottom:** Residents participate in a morning meditation session in the yard. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“I want to support young people in finding a safe space away from the chaos of city life, where they can rediscover themselves and gather strength for their next chapter.”

**Cui Kai**, 30, a manager of Guanye Youth Retirement Village

broken away from fixed locations to work and live. On weekends, the village also attracts 30 to 50 visitors. Their average age is under 30, with about half born after 1995.

Residents with special interests or expertise in areas such as painting, calligraphy, music, medicine, or psychology often share their skills, exchanging them to help cover costs or accommodation.

The laid-back rural lifestyle and the easygoing social atmosphere have fostered a sense of belonging among young visitors.

Liang Siqi, a 30-year-old working in Beijing who volunteered at the village in June, observed that unlike typical youth hostels or guesthouses that primarily offer lodging, Guanye seamlessly integrates with the youth community and the surrounding area, promoting interaction among residents and locals.

She noted that the events at the village are arranged in advance and entirely voluntary.

"If you're interested, feel free to join in. If you prefer to enjoy your own space, you won't be bothered," she explained. "I see it as a sanctuary to recharge my energy."

The positive atmosphere also left an impact on Liu Jie, a 20-year-old university student, who exchanged two weeks of volunteer work for accommodation and meals at Guanye.

During her stay, a resident who happened to be a psychologist generously offered guidance and emotional support to the tenants.

"I had some anxiety before, and this resident's professional advice was incredibly helpful to me," she said.

Liu mentioned that this experience marked her first solo adventure, and these interactions inspired her to explore more of the world.

#### Chilled, yet engaged

Cui clarified that the term "youth retirement home" can be easily misunderstood.

He explained that while the relaxed lifestyle might seem to contradict traditional ideas of ambition and progress, the goal is not to encourage avoidance of the real world.

According to Cui, around 30 percent of the residents are digital nomads. Their jobs are not tied to a specific location, allowing them to enjoy the pleasant surroundings of the facility while working online and maintaining a steady income.

For those feeling stuck in their careers, the village regularly organizes career development workshops where professionals share valuable insights.

"These exchanges have helped me a lot," said Zhang, who initially felt disheartened after being laid off. However, experienced professionals reassured her that layoffs are often influenced by various factors. They encouraged her to enhance her market value and helped her refine her resume.

During her stay at the village, Zhang took up a hand-drawing illustration course and recently began sending out resumes again. After a brief pause, she returned with renewed confidence, ready for a fresh start.

"I want to support young people in finding a safe space away from the chaos of city life, where they can rediscover themselves and gather strength for their next chapter," Cui said.

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## Z WEEKLY



Gender Study

## AI meets feminism

Liu Siyi's innovative website combines her expertise in gender studies with AI technology to create a comprehensive and accessible resource for Gen Z exploring feminism and gender issues.



By GUI QIAN  
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Intimate relationships, menstrual stigma, and sexual harassment — these are gender-related issues that many women encounter during their lives. However, when they seek to gain a better understanding of feminism and gender studies, it's easy to feel lost due to the limited resources or guidance available.

These were the same challenges faced by Liu Siyi, a 24-year-old from Pu'er in Southwest China's Yunnan province, who is currently pursuing a master's degree in Media and Gender at the Communication University of China in Beijing.

Drawing on her personal experiences and academic knowledge, Liu decided to combine her interests in gender issues with cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) technology to create a feminist website.

Titled "Gen Z x Gender Exploration Guide", the website gathers over 200 high-quality resources, including podcasts, movies, books, music, video games, academic papers, communities, and organizations.

It even features a custom-built ChatGPT — Gender Study Helper — designed by Liu herself to provide easy-to-understand introductory guides on gender topics.

Liu describes the website as "a manual on gender and feminism", structured with young people's preferences and learning paths in mind.

According to her, many people encounter the concept of feminism through everyday gender-related topics or trending social issues, so she places this content at the beginning of the website.

Following this, she recommends various gender-friendly media works popular among Gen Z. Finally, she introduces serious scholars and academic research.

Liu explained that most feminist classics were written many years ago, which is why beginners, especially young people,



Top: The hero image for the "Gen Z x Gender Exploration Guide" website, generated using the AI tool Midjourney. Above: Liu Siyi, the creator of the website. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

find it hard to relate to or apply them without a contemporary connection.

"Feminism is crucial, but it needs people to keep it vibrant and relevant to the times," she said. "You need to find ways to connect what you care about with the present era."

#### Tech integration

Linking Gen Z culture with serious feminist knowledge became Liu's biggest challenge when designing her website.

Fortunately, she found technology to be the perfect bridge.

Liu not only introduced her custom-built AI assistant but also explained how to use various AI tools for feminist learning and exploration.

For example, one can engage in deep discussions on gender topics using the large language model Claude, conduct concept searches with BeigAI or Baidu's ERNIE Bot (Wenxin Yiyan), find research papers on Google Scholar, or transform topics into illustrations using the text-to-image AI tool Midjourney.

The media content recommended on the site also addresses gender issues within emerging technologies, such as human-robot relationships and the "male gaze" in AI-generated art.

"Technology is a topic that naturally resonates with every generation of young people. AI

is to Gen Z what the internet was to the '80s and '90s," Liu explained.

Liu's guiding principle for the website is "technology plus humanities". Despite being a liberal arts student, she has received support and feedback from friends with tech backgrounds.

One such friend, a woman working in STEM, introduced Liu to the "Tech Women" group on the review platform Douban, which connects women in the tech industry, particularly programmers.

This friend pointed out that many STEM fields are still male-dominated, making it difficult for women to thrive. Women like herself often focus on breaking through glass ceilings, leaving little time to address broader gender issues. That's why she was excited to see Liu's website, as it fills an important gap that many women in tech may not have the chance to explore.

#### Multimedia focus

Another standout feature of Liu's website is its diverse recommendations for gender-friendly media content.

"I think multimedia learning is a defining characteristic of Gen Z. For example, when I learn something, just reading books isn't enough; I need to watch documentaries and mov-

ies, and pick up knowledge in bits and pieces," Liu said. "Our generation's learning process is about finding logic within a collage of fragments."

The website features many online literature recommendations because, compared to traditional print works, it "faces fewer restrictions and can explore more avant-garde topics", Liu explained.

Podcasts have also gained popularity in China in recent years, emerging as "one of the few areas not yet dominated by men", said Liu. "Many female media professionals were among the first to start podcasts in China, and their gender awareness is very friendly to women."

Music also plays a significant role on the site, with Liu listing several songs that resonate with Gen Z, such as *Dice Life*, which expresses the loneliness of living in the digital age, and *She and She and She*, which describes the moments when women feel overwhelmed in everyday life.

For Liu, music is "the best medium for conveying the abstract thoughts of young people" — it doesn't require one to express themselves in a logically coherent or mature manner but instead focuses on their feelings.

Compared to communal media like television, music is more personal and private, offering "an outlet for emotions that might not align with mainstream values", Liu explained.

"In American TV shows, Gen Z is often portrayed wearing oversized headphones. The moment you put them on, all the world's anxious noise fades away, and you get to enjoy your own space," Liu said.

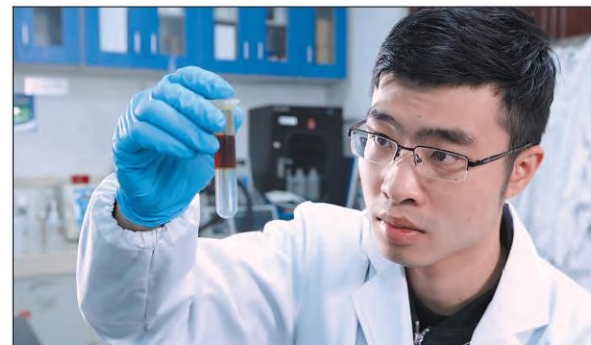
The website has earned Liu media attention and positive feedback. Still, she believes that achieving true gender equality is "a very slow process that requires the efforts of many generations", she added.

"But precisely because of this, I choose to stay optimistic and keep doing what I can."



With China announcing its dual carbon goals, I wanted to transform my research into a tangible product that could both benefit the country and make a difference."

Meng Jintao, a young entrepreneur



Meng Jintao conducting an experiment in his lab. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## From childhood curiosity to cutting-edge technology

By MENG WENJIE  
and LIU KUN in Wuhan

When Meng Jintao was a child, power outages in his rural hometown sparked his curiosity: Why can't we store electricity during regular times and use it when the power goes out?

Now 29, Meng has turned this childhood curiosity into reality with his advanced iron-based flow energy storage system.

Distinguished by its substantial storage capacity, high safety standards, and long-term durability, this technology represents a major advancement in energy storage.

To further develop his innovation, Meng founded JA Energy Storage Wuhan Technology Co., Ltd. in Central China's Hubei province.

In 2013, Meng began his studies at Hefei University of Technology in Anhui, East China, majoring in new energy materials and devices.

During his university years, he traveled to Qinghai and Gansu provinces in Northwest China for research, where he observed the initial successes of wind and solar power projects. However, he learned from power station staff that much of the energy generated by wind turbines was unstable and could not be effectively used.

It was during this period that Meng recognized the urgent need for advanced storage solutions to stabilize energy supply and release it steadily to the grid, thereby increasing efficiency.

This realization led him to develop the iron-based flow energy storage system.

"This system functions like a large power bank for cities," he explained.

According to Meng, while lithium batteries are well-established, there is a growing need for a more affordable and safer storage solution.

He chose iron for its cost-efficiency and the abundant availability of iron resources in China. Iron-based flow energy storage systems are also more economical and use water as a solvent, making them fire-resistant and safer.

#### Innovative milestones

In 2020, while pursuing his master's degree at Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) in Wuhan, Meng achieved a significant milestone by successfully testing the first iron-based flow battery in his lab.

"Seeing the battery model start its charging and discharging cycles was a moment of immense pride," he recalled.

After graduating from HUST, Meng went to the United States for further study.

In 2021, he chose to return to China to start his own company, JA Energy Storage, while continuing his doctoral studies at HUST.

"With China announcing its dual carbon goals, I wanted to transform my research into a tangible product that could both benefit the country and make a difference," he said.

Through continuous adjustments, rigorous research, and relentless experimentation, Meng and his team completed their first kilowatt-level energy storage system in 2021, suitable for everyday use.

Shortly afterward, in 2022, their first 100-kilowatt energy storage system was sold and received client approval.

Meng pointed out that their energy storage technology is a pioneering achievement both in China and globally, having been developed from scratch without any existing models. It has significantly improved upon traditional iron-based flow batteries by greatly enhancing the reaction rate, which allows for faster charging and discharging. Additionally, the storage efficiency has increased from 50 percent to 70 percent.

In 2023, the energy storage system was included in the China National Energy Administration's third batch of major technical equipment projects in the energy sector.

This year, JA Energy Storage's upgraded 1 MW/8 MWh iron-based flow battery energy storage system has been put into operation at Hubei Yangtze Electric in Wuhan's Optics Valley. The system is expected to reduce the park's electricity costs by over 20 percent annually.

Meng's success as an entrepreneur is rooted in his expertise in advanced technology, his commitment to research, and China's supportive environment for startups.

He highlighted that the industrial park where his company is based houses many innovative businesses. Young entrepreneurs like him benefit from collaborative platforms, along with favorable policies and financial assistance.

"The local government offers significant support to young entrepreneurs," Meng said, noting that his company has received top-level financial assistance of 10 million yuan (\$140,360) through a talent policy.

Looking ahead, Meng hopes to enhance the practical application of his research by fostering industry-academia collaborations.

Meng and his team are also working to integrate energy storage solutions with dual carbon policies, optimizing energy management and helping companies reduce costs and carbon emissions.

"I want to keep improving the technology to make energy storage safer and more cost-effective, both in China and worldwide," he said.

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