

Boosting confidence

Monetary easing with fiscal stimulus to rev up economy

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Dedicated doctor ensures healthcare in her community

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New transportation option offers better views on way

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2024

## Trouble at home



Police attempt to break up demonstrators protesting with banners and flags against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government on Saturday in Tel Aviv, Israel. The protesters demanded an immediate hostage swap deal to free those being held in Gaza. MOSTAFA ALKHAROUF/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Shift in policy to strengthen nation's growth

Slower CPI increase, deeper PPI drop prompt need to roll out new measures

By OUYANG SHIJIA, LIU ZHIHUA and ZHOU LANXU

China's economic growth is expected to strengthen on a sequential basis amid the latest stimulus package and with more incremental policies in the pipeline, translating into over 5 percent year-on-year growth in the fourth quarter, analysts and economists said on Sunday.

They said a long-awaited policy shift is unfolding for China's economy and markets, as policymakers have pledged to strengthen countercyclical adjustment and step up fiscal policy support. This will include the largest debt resolution support in recent years, with a particular focus on addressing pressing challenges such as the prolonged housing downturn, debt issues and sluggish domestic demand.

Their comments came as data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Sunday that China's consumer prices rose at a slower pace in September, while the decline in factory gate prices continued, pointing to pressures on the world's second-largest economy and intensifying the need to roll out more incremental policies.

The country's consumer price index, the main gauge of inflation, rose 0.4 percent year-on-year in September, compared with a 0.6 percent increase in August. The producer price index, which gauges factory gate prices, dropped 2.8 percent last month, widening from a 1.8 percent fall in August, the NBS said.

"The slower CPI growth in September was mainly due to still-weak domestic demand, seasonal factors and the high comparison base in the previous year, while the deeper PPI drop was influenced by falling commodity prices, especially in the energy sector," said Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank.

Shen Bing, director-general and a senior research fellow at the market and price research institute of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said the growth in CPI is expected to register a mild recovery while maintaining overall stability in the fourth quarter of the year.

"This is because consumer demand has shown signs of pickup, with the sales of passenger vehicles and home appliances having improved, a trend that would be consolidated upon the implementation of incremental policies to expand domestic demand, Shen said.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Finance announced plans to soon introduce a comprehensive package of new targeted policy measures, with a key focus on improving the financial situations of local governments, facilitating the stabilization of a bottomed out property market, and enhancing the risk resilience and credit allocation capabilities of major banks, among other things.

The ministry said there is still ample room for the central government to borrow and increase its deficit. It plans to enhance the large-scale debt limit at once, replace the hidden debt of local governments, and increase support for local governments to resolve debt risks.

Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at rating agency Fitch Bohua, said this policy is the largest supportive debt measure introduced in recent years and will greatly alleviate the pressure on local governments.

"It is expected that the hidden debt of local governments may be replaced in large part by increasing the issuance of treasury bonds in the future," he said.

According to Chang, the current economic growth is under pressure and fiscal revenue is lower than expected, making some local governments more stretched financially.

"Once implemented, this policy will substantially reduce local fiscal pressure, unleashing fiscal funds for economic development and ensuring people's livelihoods. At the same time, the balance sheets of local government financing vehicles will also be strengthened," he said.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said his team estimates that the size of the announced fiscal stimulus package will be at least 4 trillion yuan (\$566 billion), surpassing market expectations.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said he believes that much of the incoming fiscal stimulus will likely be used to fill the fiscal gap faced by local governments.

"In addition to the 200 billion yuan for strategic projects announced by the National Development and Reform Commission, we expect the country to increase fiscal transfers to local governments and give them a large quota for borrowing," he said.

Wang Keju contributed to this story.

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## POST-2000 YOUNG PEOPLE REDEFINE WORK, LEISURE

Tech-savvy generation takes innovative, independent approach to jobs, life

By CHEN NAN  
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Young entrepreneur Weng Ziyuan, 23, begins her day not with the blaring sound of an alarm clock, but with the gentle vibration of her smartphone. Before she's left her bed, she has already scrolled through her social media platforms, catching up on overnight updates from her friends, influencers and new contacts.

### In-depth

Her morning routine at her home in the heart of Yanji, Jilin province, is a seamless blend of technology and convenience. Her soybean milk machine, set via an app the night before, brews her a fresh beverage. She adds dried jujube and black sesame seed to make the drink more healthy.

Meanwhile, Weng's already set up a work space in a corner of her balcony equipped with a comfortable ergonomic chair and a dual-monitor computer.

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

## Ishiba's 'Asian NATO' plans put on the back burner amid lack of support

By CAI HONG  
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Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba seems to have shelved his ideas of an Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization amid widespread criticism and lack of support.

Ishiba did not broach the topic during his first overseas trip after assuming office to Laos last week for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit.

His vision of a NATO-like security framework in Asia has been criticized in Japan as well as in other Asian countries, and has not found a receptive audience in Japan's closest ally, the United States.

Ishiba has long pushed the idea of an Asian version of NATO. In a signed article for the Washington-based think tank Hudson Institute in September, before he was elected Japan's prime minister, Ishiba broached the idea again. He reiterated the stance of his predecessor Fumio Kishida, saying "Ukraine today is Asia tomorrow".

An Asian NATO, he claimed, would "unite" various security frameworks in the region, such as

the US-Japan security alliance, the US-South Korea security alliance, the ANZUS security treaty among Australia, New Zealand and the US, and the Five Power Defense Arrangements among the Commonwealth nations of Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK.

Observing the unease Ishiba's idea generated in the region, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya denied any urgency to create an Asian version of NATO, describing Ishiba's proposal as something that could be considered in future.

"The most ideal form of security cooperation in the future is the one that would not exclude any country in the region or Asia as a whole," Iwaya said at a news press conference on Oct 2.

NATO was created during the Cold War by Western nations to counter the "common threat" of the Soviet Union.

"It is difficult to imagine a similar framework being established in Asia, which has a completely different geographical and historical background," Japanese newspaper The Asahi Shimbun said in an editorial.

Kazuya Shimba, general-secretary of Japan's Democratic Party for the People, described Ishiba's Asian NATO vision as "abrupt" and said it would hinder Japan in its efforts to deepen cooperation with its allies and like-minded countries.

Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar made it clear that India didn't share Ishiba's vision for an Asian NATO. "Unlike Japan, India has never been a treaty ally of another country," he said at an event at Washington's Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also rejected Ishiba's calls for an Asian regional security body similar to NATO to protect against threats, saying the idea was not raised at the ASEAN summit.

As the world's largest transnational military alliance, NATO has been active in the Asia-Pacific region and has developed partnerships with nations including Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

See Proposal, page 3

## Third plenary session offers a glimpse of path ahead

Ever since my first visit to China in 2017, I have felt that this was a country that was continuously changing. Each time I went, I saw visible changes not only in the airports but also in daily life. The world too changed over the same time, with the fragmentation of the globalized system making China's path even more imperative.

A sign of China's continued commitment to wide-reaching changes was the recent reforms proposed by the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which provided insight into the latest step of this path as well as promised opportunities for cooperation between China and the world.

One of the most notable indications of the course that China will take in the future can be seen in the confirmation of how China

will continue on the path of reform and opening-up. Such a path has enabled China to achieve rapid development as well as provided opportunities for promoting mutual benefit and cooperation that has underpinned globalization. As a result, this confirmation can be seen as China's renewed commitment to globalization that has faced the challenges posed by economic nationalism and populism.

A further example of this continuity as well as the opportunities presented by these recent reforms can be seen in the continued development of the Belt and Road Initiative as well as China's long-established partnerships with the developing world.

I saw this expansion of the BRI firsthand while studying at Xi'an Jiaotong University, where students from what had once

### WORLD WATCH

By Tom Harper

been the old Silk Road regions came to study, adding to Xi'an's cosmopolitan nature as one of the hubs of the Silk Road as well as making China an increasingly important destination for overseas study.

Most recently, this was demonstrated by the growth of the Digital Silk Road, which has played a notable role in developing the digital infrastructure of nations in Africa and Asia. This was underpinned by the emphasis on technological development presented at the third plenary session as well as demonstrating continuity of China's relations with the developing world, which has been the cornerstone of the country's foreign policy since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

See Path, page 3

## Felled by storm



People stop to look at a house that was destroyed during Hurricane Milton in Bradenton Beach, Florida, on Friday. Moody's Analytics on Saturday estimated economic costs from the storm will range from \$50 billion to \$85 billion. CARLINE JEAN / SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL / TNS

## PAGE TWO

## Young: Stronger sense of self and autonomy

From page 1

With a quick swipe, she checks her calendar, updates her to-do list on a project management app, and makes her first phone call of the day.

Weng recently obtained a license to open a fruit shop. It's called Cookie's Fruit Shop, and is located not far from her home. Renovations started recently, and the young woman is not only sharing her ideas with the construction workers, but also helping them paint the walls.

"I like the feeling of being involved in the renovation, though it's physically exhausting. I have a clear vision about how the small fruit shop will look, and I want to make it a reality with my own hands," she said, adding she hopes to open the shop by the end of the year.

Weng is an interior design graduate from a university in Shanghai, and believes it is not difficult to take her ideas from paper to reality.

She has taught herself how to run a business through courses offered by online education platforms. Weng's access to a vast array of online resources allows her to pursue diverse interests and acquire new skills at her own pace. She also makes videos and runs her own social media platforms, hoping to expand the shop's fan base and reach out to potential customers.

## Generations apart

Weng's life is a seismic shift from the way her civil servant parents lived when they were in their early twenties. Now aged in their early fifties, they grew up and worked during an era when technology was far less omnipresent.

Their mornings began with analog alarm clocks and reading newspapers, while their workdays unfolded in office buildings where face-to-face interactions were common.

For Weng's father, the office was a structured environment where professional boundaries were clearly delineated and employees were expected to work from "nine to five".

"I don't like the traditional working environment," said Weng. "I had an internship in Shanghai and I found that being in the office is frustrating, such as the phone ringing constantly, people getting too close when talking to you, and people not cleaning the microwave when they spill food."

She also didn't like her boss bullying the employees and taking credit for their work, and the extra unpaid working hours. "I don't know whether I would find a regular job and work in an office again. But now I want to focus on developing my own business," said Weng.

Many of her classmates have also become independent entrepreneurs, reflecting a broader trend toward work-life integration rather than the work-life balance that characterized her parents' professional lives. She values the autonomy of remote work and the ability to design her own workspace — a far cry from the rigid office structures her parents' generation experienced.

"They don't understand my career choice," Weng said of her parents. "They expected me to find a stable job, just like them, but that's not what I wanted."

"Despite their doubts about my career choice, I want to try everything new and interesting. I don't know where this small fruit shop is heading, but I am doing my best to make it unique."

## Born innovators

The post-2000 generation, characterized by growing up with the internet, has attracted the attention of marketers and academics for the way they are redefining work and leisure in the digital age.

A total of 76.4 percent of people born after 2000 want to rely on the internet to generate income, breaking the strong traditional bond between work and location, according to the 2022 Employment Relationship Trends Report released in August by the Peking University's National

School of Development and Zhilian Recruitment, one of the major recruitment platforms in China.

"These young people live in second- and third-tier cities, earn salaries comparable to those in first-tier cities, and combine travel, residency, work and leisure, enjoying a lifestyle that blends work with leisure," the report said. "They place a high premium on working in environments that align with their interests. Despite challenging job markets, many are unwilling to sacrifice personal passions for employment. They often weigh job offers carefully, considering both the job's alignment with their interests and its potential for personal fulfillment."

Lin Bin, 24, teaches Chinese at a primary school in Haikou, Hainan province. He graduated from Changsha University in 2022 with a major in Chinese language and literature, and had planned to become a tour guide as he also had a major in tourism.

"But the pandemic forced me to change my plan. To make a living, I returned to Haikou, my hometown, and applied for a job at a primary school," he said.

Despite his youth and lack of experience, last year he was assigned to become the head teacher of a class of fourth grade students. He has to communicate frequently with the students' parents, who are much older than him.

"Parents' reactions to young teachers with less experience can vary widely. Some are supportive, appreciating the fresh ideas, enthusiasm, and innovative teaching methods that younger teachers often bring. Other parents might have concerns about the lack of experi-

ence, preferring teachers with a proven track record and established classroom management skills," said Lin.

He has resorted to social media platforms to get inspiration from other young teachers. Lin launched his own channel about his work life on popular platforms including Xiaohongshu and Douyin. To his surprise, in addition to making friends with other young teachers he has attracted a large fan base.

"I learned to make videos when I was at university. It was for my girlfriend, who is very beautiful, and I wanted to make videos and post them online to show off," said Lin.

"With the videos I made to record my job, I have gained nearly 240,000 followers and one of my videos has been viewed more than 50,000 times," said Lin.

His youthful innovation is a far cry from his own school days. He concedes that he wasn't a good student and his favorite class was physical education.

His teachers back then were much older than he is today and very experienced, he said. "They looked serious and rarely smiled, which made me very nervous. But I don't want to be a teacher like them. I want to make friends with my students and win their trust," said Lin.

Over the past two years he has found great joy in teaching fourth and fifth grade students.

He usually starts his class by introducing a popular new phrase to the students, such as *nei juan* (involvement), and *qing xu jiazhi* (emotional value). Combined with examples his students can easily comprehend, Lin often gets warm feedback from the students, which he finds rewarding. "I am grateful that the

school supports young teachers and gives us opportunities to try our new teaching methods," he said.

## Different drum

When it comes to relationships and family dynamics, young people today are also veering from tradition.

Lin, like many of his peers, values personal development and career aspirations over milestones such as early marriage and homeownership. Young people are now marrying and starting a family later in life, prioritizing their careers, personal growth, and financial stability, before settling down.

"My parents were born after 1970 and they adhered to a more conventional timeline," Lin said.

"Many of their peers were married by their late twenties and began raising families shortly after. This traditional trajectory reflected societal expectations and norms that have since evolved. My parents never push me to get married and I have no plan to get married until I'm 30 years old," said Lin. He lives with his girlfriend who is pursuing a master's degree.

A report about young people's perspectives on marriage and relationships released by the social networking app Soul and the Shanghai University's School of Sociology and Political Science in July, reflected the changing attitudes.

"Those born after 1985, 1990, and 1995 have been deeply influenced by traditional values during their upbringing," it said. "For them, marriage is not only a personal milestone but also an important symbol of assuming family and social responsibilities."

However, those born in the 2000s, and who grew up in the information age, have a stronger sense of self and autonomy.

"They hold a positive attitude toward marriage, hoping it will center around personal development and self-worth," the report said.

This generation's distinctive attitudes and choices are creating waves in how trends evolve and how businesses innovate, it said. With their self-assured yet laid-back demeanor, young people are setting new standards in both their professional and personal lives.

"Their impact is a clear indication that the post-2000 generation is not just participating in the world, but actively reshaping it, heralding a new era of style and success," the report said.

Zhang Tongdao, a professor of documentary studies at Beijing Normal University, said: "Due to the country's economic development and improved family conditions, the post-2000 generation has more choices and opportunities to realize their dreams than in the past. These young people have a good self-assessment ability. By observing society and trends, they actively adapt and improve themselves. They are more likely to achieve significant success, surpassing previous generations."

Zhang spent 12 years working on a five-episode documentary titled *Born in 2000*. He recorded the changing lives of people born after 2000, from their early days in kindergarten to their lives as young adults.

In the internet age, the post-2000 generation has an innate ability to apply new technologies, the professor said.

"They have a broad perspective and global experience, allowing them to interact with the world on an equal footing. Their strong independence means they don't need others to make decisions for them, and conflicts may arise if parents insist on making choices for them."

Zhang believes that as more young people from the post-2000 generation join the workforce, a trend is emerging where the changes initiated by the younger generation impact the wider social group. The work styles, approaches, and skills of this generation may refine, adjust, or even overturn traditional models, the professor said.

"Once their creative potential is unleashed, it is believed that they will bring a fresh new face to the country," he said.



ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

They have a broad perspective and global experience, allowing them to interact with the world on an equal footing. Their strong independence means they don't need others to make decisions for them, and conflicts may arise if parents insist on making choices for them."

Zhang Tongdao, professor of documentary studies at Beijing Normal University

## TOP NEWS

## China, Vietnam committed to solidarity

Li: Beijing ready to boost cooperation with Hanoi in multiple areas

By ZHOU JIN  
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China and Vietnam signed a series of deals on Sunday in the areas of connectivity, agricultural products, customs, finance, human resources, media and education, in a bid to further cement the pragmatic cooperation between the two neighboring countries.

The signing of the agreements was witnessed by visiting Premier Li Qiang and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

Li arrived in Hanoi late Saturday afternoon to kick off a three-day visit to the Southeast Asian country.

The visit came after Li concluded a visit to Laos, where he attended a series of leaders' meetings on East Asian cooperation and made an official visit.

Noting that both China and Vietnam are developing countries at a crucial stage of modernization, Li told the Vietnamese prime minister that Beijing firmly supports Hanoi in pursuing a steady socialist path that suits its national conditions.

He expressed willingness to work with Vietnam to jointly implement the cooperation plan for the synergy of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and Vietnam's "Two Corridors and One Economic Circle" plan.

China is ready to deepen cooperation with Vietnam in connectivity, trade and investment, tourism, healthcare, disaster prevention and reduction, and expand cooperation in local currency settlement, the digital economy and green development, Li said.

Statistics show that China is Vietnam's largest trading partner and remains the largest export market for Vietnamese agricultural products.

From January to July, bilateral trade volume reached \$145.07 billion,



Premier Li Qiang (front, left) and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh attend the signing ceremony for a series of agreements between the two countries on Sunday in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

an increase of 20.9 percent compared with the same period last year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The Vietnamese prime minister emphasized that developing relations with China is the top priority and strategic choice of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government.

He called on the two countries to explore new models of collaboration, such as cross-border economic cooperation zones, and to intensify exchanges in education, tourism and youth.

During the talks, the two leaders also reiterated their commitment to

sticking to friendly consultation in properly handling differences, and to safeguarding maritime peace and stability and expanding maritime cooperation.

On Saturday, upon his arrival, Li also met with To Lam, general secretary of the CPV Central Committee and Vietnamese president.

Li expressed hope that the two sides will simultaneously promote the "hard connectivity" of railway, expressway and port infrastructure and the "soft connectivity" of smart

customs to provide solid support for improving the facilitation of trade

and investment and safeguarding the stability and smooth flow of industrial and supply chains.

The Vietnamese president said his country is willing to take the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries next year as an opportunity to maintain regular high-level exchanges, and to strengthen exchanges between parties, legislatures and civil societies.

China and Vietnam have engaged in close high-level exchanges in recent years. After assuming office, the Vietnamese president made China his

first destination in August for an overseas visit, reflecting the great importance he attaches to developing China-Vietnam relations.

President Xi Jinping also met on Friday in Beijing with Luong Cuong, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPV Central Committee.

After wrapping up the visit to Vietnam, Li will fly to Islamabad, Pakistan, on Monday, to attend the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and to make an official visit to Pakistan.

## Path: Pride in Chinese identity now more evident

From page 1

At the same time, the path suggested by the third plenary session has also provided an indication of how China sees itself as well as the wider world. This was illustrated by the CPC's continued commitment to China's traditional culture as well as its socialist values, which has been reflected in the growing interest of Chinese youth in China's traditional culture, symbolized by the popularity of the *Hanfu* (traditional Chinese attire) and the emergence of the *Guochao* (a fashion trend featuring modern designs mixed with traditional cultural elements). The former has become a growing industry which saw sales of around \$1.9 billion in 2023 alone. In this sense, the third plenary session can be seen as a wider expression of China's cultural and ideological identity as well as the growing pride that China's youth have in this identity.

This pride in Chinese identity and China's path have been evident to me on a personal level through my many trips to China. When I first visited in 2017, the few who wore traditional costumes were tour guides at one of the numerous historical sites around Xi'an. However, when I returned to work in China in 2019, the *Hanfu* had become commonplace. It was then I saw firsthand the pride that younger Chinese have in their identity.

In addition, the proposed reforms for China's development announced at the third plenary session also suggest the next stage of China's development. In recent years, China has sought to move beyond its commonly perceived image as a producer of low-cost manufacturing commonly associated with the "Made in China" brand to becoming a leader in advanced manufacturing and technologies that had traditionally been the preserve of the developed world. This was illustrated by the progress of Chinese tech and new energy vehicle giants such as Huawei and BYD, both of which have become pioneers in telecommunications and hybrid vehicles, challenging more established firms in their respective fields.

The third plenary session has shown a desire to change the meaning of "Made in China" to denote advanced high-quality manufacturing, a far cry from its humble beginnings. This in turn is also in line with the key message of the *Guochao* movement, which has sought to turn this label into a source of pride.

The third plenary session also illustrated the key to China's developmental success. It stated that China's modernization has been underpinned by education, science, technology and talent, which will likely be further developed by China's push toward creating a more skilled workforce, as underlined by the country's recent success at the 47th WorldSkills Competition in Lyon, France.

To summarise, the reforms announced at the third plenary session are an indication of the path that China has taken since 1979 and is likely to take in future. This will present opportunities for the wider world. Thus, by following and understanding China's path, it will be possible to navigate the wider changes in today's world.

The author is a lecturer and researcher specializing in China's international relations at the University of East London. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Proposal: Wave of criticism unexpected for Ishiba

From page 1

The bloc planned to open a liaison office in Tokyo in July 2023, when the Japanese government clarified that the country had no intention of joining the alliance.

Opposed by China and France, the NATO gave up the idea of a Tokyo office during last year's summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Lyu Yaodong, a research fellow with the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said it is unlikely that Ishiba's Asian NATO vision will ever be realized.

"However, Ishiba will continue to attach great importance to Japan's defense policy, beef up the country's self-defense capability and upgrade army equipment in the name of coping with more severe security challenges," Lyu said.

Xiang Haoyu, distinguished research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies' Department of Asia-Pacific Studies, said the Asian NATO vision smacks of Cold War-like confrontation and zero-sum mentality.

"Ishiba may not have expected the strong opposition to his idea. He has not talked about it since he was inaugurated on Oct 1," Xiang said. "It looks like Ishiba is shelving the vision."

The Liberal Democratic Party left out some of Ishiba's key policy ideas, such as the Asian NATO and a NATO liaison office in Tokyo, from its manifesto for the general election on Oct 27.

However, the idea may not be completely off the table. Before departing for Laos on Wednesday, Ishiba told reporters that the idea was still being discussed in the LDP.

While Ishiba looks like stepping back for the moment, US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel continues to fan the flames. In an article in the *The Wall Street Journal* published on Wednesday, Emanuel called for forming a NATO-like economic coalition in the region.

For the trade defense coalition to be effective, he suggested it would need the "economic equivalent" of NATO's Article 5 — an attack on one is an attack on all — at its "core".

## Nation hailed as transformative force

By WANG MINGJIE in London  
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China's achievements over the past 75 years have been nothing short of spectacular, said Danilo Turk, former president of Slovenia, highlighting China's role as a transformative force on the global stage, both economically and diplomatically.

In a recent interview with *China Daily*, Turk also praised the nation's contributions to addressing global challenges such as climate change and advancing international peace-keeping efforts.

"The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked the end of a century of humiliation and the beginning of an astonishing transformation," he said. "In the decades since, China has evolved into one of the world's leading powers, becoming a key player in global economic and technological progress."

China's development has reshaped global statistics and established the country as a major force in international affairs, according to Turk, who is president of Club de Madrid, a non-profit organization that has more than 100 former heads of state and prime ministers as members.

He views the transformation as a "unique historical success", one that has allowed China to play a constructive role in key global issues, including international peace and security, as well as in the fight against climate change.

Having observed China's evolving role in the United Nations since the early 1970s, Turk hailed the country's responsible and prudent approach to international affairs. He noted how China has transitioned from being a "careful and responsible player" within the Group of 77 to a global leader.

"China's economic growth first transformed it into the factory of the world and then into a technological and financial powerhouse," he said, adding that this growth has had a profound impact on the global economy, allowing China to play a key role in multilateral cooperation and diplomacy.

Turk recalled China's critical role during the 2008 global financial crisis, when it provided decisive support to stabilize the world economy. He described the China-proposed



Danilo Turk

Belt and Road Initiative as a "new development opportunity for large parts of the world", emphasizing its contributions to infrastructure development and economic cooperation in multiple regions.

Reflecting on the strong diplomatic and economic ties between Slovenia and China, Turk highlighted how both countries have enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship.

Slovenia, as a member of the European Union, has participated in the EU's well-established economic relations with China, he said, noting the significant potential for this relationship to deepen further in the years ahead.

"We would like to expand our trade cooperation, and Slovenia will make every effort to contribute to this," he said.

Turk emphasized that Slovenia and China have no major political disputes and maintain an exemplary level of cooperation within the UN framework.

With Slovenia currently serving as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council, he said that both countries have worked closely on sensitive issues related to international peace and security, learning from each other's perspectives and promoting common international causes.

Strengthening this relationship further, China recently took a significant diplomatic step, announcing visa-free entry for Slovenian citizens.

Turk expressed optimism about the future of Slovenia-China relations, particularly in areas where the two countries can collaborate on tackling global challenges. "Together, we (can) help promote progressive international causes," he said.

As the world faces increasingly complex challenges, including climate change, health crises and economic instability, Turk said he believes that China will continue to play a pivotal role in addressing these issues.

He praised China's efforts in developing affordable technological solutions to mitigate global warm-

ing and called on the world to be bolder in utilizing these innovations. "The world should be more courageous in utilizing Chinese technologies in this domain," he said.

Turk also emphasized the need for stronger multilateral cooperation, particularly within the World Health Organization, to address global health crises more effectively.

In the economic realm, he described China as a "bulwark of stability", especially as the world grapples with ongoing geopolitical conflicts such as the growing tensions in the Middle East and Ukraine and the potential for economic disruption. Should these conflicts lead to broader economic disruptions, Turk said he believes that the world will look to China as a key source of stabilization.

The former Slovenian president was in Beijing on Friday to attend the China International Friendship Conference, which marked the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. He commended the organization for its significant role in promoting people-to-people exchanges and fostering mutual understanding between China and the rest of the world.

Over the decades, the association has played a crucial role in facilitating international cooperation and dialogue, helping to create deeper connections between individuals and nations.

"I have met many people who have learned about China through the CPAFFC's activities. Its role remains as important as ever, and there is a need to expand and diversify its partnerships with a wider variety of partners," he said.

Looking ahead, Turk encouraged the association to explore new areas of cooperation, particularly related to addressing global challenges such as climate change and promoting peace and security. He said he believes that these issues present an opportunity for the association to further expand its influence and strengthen global partnerships.

"My message to the CPAFFC is simple: Continue your good work, observe the changes in the world, and offer new themes for cooperation with an ever-growing number of partners," he added.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

## CHINA

## Lai's speech reveals deceptive nature

Taiwan leader's separatist stance seen as very provocative toward mainland

By ZHANG YI  
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Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te's recent speech demonstrated the dangerous nature of his brinkmanship policies and secessionist intention, which would lead to a tense situation in the Taiwan Strait, experts from both sides of the Strait said.

Their remarks came after Lai claimed on Oct 10 that the People's Republic of China cannot represent the island, and the two sides across the Strait are not subordinate to each other.

Zheng Jian, a professor of Taiwan studies at Xiamen University, said

that Lai refused to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus and the one-China principle, removing a crucial cornerstone of cross-Strait peace.

He continued to adhere to his separatist stance conveyed in his speech while taking office in May, which was very provocative toward the mainland, Zheng said.

The Democratic Progressive Party knew clearly that provocative policies would lead to a tense cross-Strait situation, which was what they wanted as they have worked to promote "anti-China" sentiment on the island, he said.

Zheng criticized the DPP for exaggerating military exercises from the Chinese mainland before Lai's

speech as a form of cognitive warfare operation.

"The DPP authorities knew in advance that Lai's speech was provocative, so they wanted to shift the responsibility for the increasingly tense situation in the Taiwan Strait onto the mainland. Hence, they claimed that regardless of what Lai said, the mainland would conduct military exercises," Zheng said.

"After Lai's speech, the DPP would suggest in various ways that it had shown goodwill, so why would the mainland take countermeasures?" he said, adding that this tactic was a way to deflect blame onto the mainland and manipulate perceptions.

"On the mainland side, there is no motivation to see tensions escalate in the Taiwan Strait. The mainland wants to see peace in the Strait

and people living in harmony, with both sides striving for reunification," he said.

It demonstrated the dangerous nature of his brinkmanship policies, Zheng said, adding that it proved the deceptive nature of the "peace, democracy and goodwill" facade he presents.

While Lai's rhetoric might be highly deceptive, it did not absolve him of being the instigator of unrest in the Taiwan Strait, he said.

He added that "Lai is currently taking Taiwan society and its youth down a path towards war. There used to be peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and the tense situation was caused by the secessionists."

Wu Yongping, deputy director of the Institute of Taiwan Studies at Tsinghua University, said that inter-

nationally, some politicians saw Lai's proposal to cooperate with the Chinese mainland as extending an "olive branch", believing he has no malicious intent, but in reality, Lai's rhetoric was highly misleading and deceptive.

"By basing his rhetoric on the premise that Taiwan is an 'independent' country, Lai was engaging with the mainland as if Taiwan were an 'independent' nation. This statement was made from a 'pro-independence' standpoint rather than on the basis of the 1992 Consensus," he said.

"The mainland must respond with corresponding strength and intensity, making it clear to the international community, and also within Taiwan, that we cannot tolerate nor accept his stance," he added.

Hsiao Hsu-tsen, executive direct-

or of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation, said although Lai mentioned the Republic of China in his speech, in reality, his concept of the Republic of China is completely different from that of the opposition Kuomintang Party.

Lai is pushing for the concept that the Republic of China is Taiwan, and treating the mainland as another country, while the KMT insists on one China based on constitutional provisions, he said.

Hsiao said that Lai was using the "Republic of China" as a shell while replacing its content with "Taiwan independence", and this approach could lead to a dangerous situation of potential conflict between the two sides, possibly escalating toward war.

Pro-reunification political parties and groups in Taiwan, including Taiwan's Labor Party, have issued statements pointing out that Lai's deliberate use of the term "goodwill" is an attempt at "peaceful secession", which is likely to prompt the mainland to respond with a more serious attitude.

## Former Xizang political adviser sentenced to death with reprieve

By CAO YIN  
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Jiang Jie, a former senior political adviser in the Xizang autonomous region, was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve for accepting more than 225 million yuan (\$31.8 million) in bribes, a court in Tianjin announced on Saturday.

Following the two-year reprieve, if no new offenses are uncovered, his prison term will be reduced to life imprisonment.

He was also deprived of his political rights for life, and all of his personal assets were confiscated, according to the ruling made by the Tianjin No 1 Intermediate People's Court.

Jiang's illicit gains and relevant interests will also be recovered and turned over to the State treasury, the ruling said.

From 2000 to 2023, Jiang, former vice-chairman of the regional committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, was found to have taken advantage of his various positions in Shandong province and Xizang to seek profits for some individuals and departments in matters such as administrative approvals, project contracts, land transfers and work promotions. He accepted over 225 million yuan in bribes in return, the ruling showed.

The court said that Jiang's actions constituted the crime of bribery, and the significant amount he accepted caused great harm to the interests of the country and the people.

"Considering he confessed to the offense, voluntarily shared some of the bribery facts unknown to investigators, provided clues about a few other major cases and returned his illicit gains, we've leniently punished him, giving him a suspended death sentence," the court added.

Public information shows that Jiang, 59, joined the Communist Party of China and started his career as a journalist in Shandong, his home province, in 1985.

He served in various positions in Shandong, including as head of Huangdao district in Qingdao and mayor of Dongying.

He moved to Xizang in 2013 and became a vice-chairman of the regional committee of the CPPCC in 2022.

Jiang was placed under investigation in July last year on suspicion of severely violating Party disciplines and national laws.

In January, he was expelled from the Party and dismissed from public office. Five months later, he was indicted on the bribery charge brought by prosecutors in Tianjin.

The Tianjin court publicly heard Jiang's case in July.



## Swimming for success

Participants compete during the 2024 China Mermaid Open Competition held at Xiaomeisha Sea World in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Saturday. The three-day event attracted 46 athletes competing in four categories: the qualifying round, women's solo, men's solo and three-person group competitions. XUAN HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Communities getting more delivery driver-friendly

By TAN YINGZI and PENG CHAO

Delivery driver-friendly communities are emerging in Chinese cities to improve working conditions for such workers and mitigate potential conflicts arising from delivery problems.

Accessing buildings, locating specific units, and finding parking spots and rest areas have long been headaches for drivers. Such issues are now being tackled through joint efforts among grassroots governments, delivery platforms and property management companies.

In Chongqing, Shapingba district has established delivery driver-friendly neighborhoods. Various measures, including posting driver-friendly maps, allowing access to underground parking lots and introducing designated parking spots, have been implemented to provide convenience for delivery drivers, local authorities said.

Huang Song, deputy director of the social work department of the Shapingba District Committee of the Communist Party of China, said the district has designated over 400 parking spots and built 36 new charging facilities and 750 charging piles for delivery drivers.

"These services are very thoughtful and can save us nearly 10 minutes in delivery time," said Zhang Daru, a food delivery worker in the district.

In Chenjiaqiao subdistrict, a pilot area for the driver-friendly neighborhood program, a delivery workers' union and service stations have been established to serve the workers. In addition, local businesses are also being encouraged to offer the drivers drinking water, places to rest and charge their cellphones, and dining discounts.

Chenjiaqiao official Zhao Liangyan said that since the pilot program was launched in May, the subdistrict office has been recruiting delivery workers to serve as part-time community workers so they can receive work permits that allow them to enter and exit residential areas freely.

"If they encounter any safety hazards while delivering food such as missing maintenance hole covers or blocked fire exits, they can report them in a WeChat working group," she said.

Zhao said more than 30 delivery workers have become part-time community workers so far, and they have reported over 100 safety hazards.

In Chongqing's Jiangbei district, an access solution jointly developed by major online services platform Meituan and property management companies began pilot testing in some residential communities in early September.

To gain access to the communities, delivery workers simply need to scan a QR code with their cell-

phones at the entrance to verify their identities. The whole process takes just a few seconds, according to executives responsible for the project.

"It makes entering and exiting the residential areas more convenient, enabling us to deliver meals to customers more efficiently," said delivery driver Wang Yu, adding that it also helps reduce the number of misunderstandings.

Since August, Meituan has been working with major property service companies such as Vanke Property, Jinke Service and Gemdale Smart Service to promote the QR code system to communities across the country.

Statistics from the food-delivery giant show that as of October, the number of delivery drivers using the QR codes has exceeded 1 million.

In Beijing, over 20 delivery driver-friendly communities have been established in areas such as Tiantongyuan neighborhood and Sanlitun subdistrict.

Meituan delivery driver Su Weidong said he frequently visits the service stations created for such workers in Tiantongyuan. There, he can drink water, charge his phone, use a microwave to heat up food and even take naps at lunchtime.

"If riders get sick, they can find medicine here. There is also a bookshelf, and I occasionally read the books inside when I take a break," he

said, adding that the stations also have suggestion boxes that regularly collect feedback from the drivers.

Zhang Haiyang, who works in Sanlitun, agreed that the service stations have made things more convenient for his fellow workers, and that they sometimes gather at them to socialize.

He said getting in and out of communities and shopping malls has become smoother, as security guards or employees are ready to guide them in the right direction.

"Maps and signs have also been put up in the communities, making it easier for us to find our destinations," Zhang said.

A growing number of cities in the country are building driver-friendly communities. However, due to a lack of unified standards regarding driver-friendly communities, some property management companies are concerned about potential safety risks.

Shen Jianfeng, a professor at the China University of Labor Relations, suggests that all relevant parties hold consultations to set such standards, thereby promoting the establishment of driver-friendly communities.

Guo Yanqi and Liu Boqian contributed to this story.

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## Showing his skills



A contestant competes in the Second Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Vocational Skills Competition in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Saturday. YUETIKE NUJIATI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Team, platform help ensure food safety

By CHEN YE in Hangzhou  
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Recently, Fuyang district in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, established a food safety supervision drivers team composed of 100 food delivery drivers, effectively enhancing the efficiency of online food safety supervision and promoting social co-governance in food safety.

In mid-July, the Fuyang district online delivery workers association, in collaboration with the district's food and drug safety office and the food safety supervision association, initiated the formation of the team, aiming to leverage the role of deliv-

ery drivers as "whistleblowers" in food safety matters.

"Before we established this team, some drivers and delivery stations had already contacted us about safety and hygiene issues in food delivery outlets," said Yu Yun, head of Fuyang's market regulatory administration's common prosperity team. As reports of issues increased, the administration recognized the need for a more systematic mechanism to gather information and address the problems, leading to the development of the district's pilot Delivery Driver Code platform.

Launched in 2023, the code serves as an electronic work ID for food

delivery drivers. It combines the functions of an identification card, a regulatory certificate and a protection certificate, encompassing management platforms, direct welfare distribution, policy outreach and grassroots governance, with ongoing enhancements.

"The reporting process is very convenient; you simply need to take a photo, upload it, describe the issue briefly and indicate the store's location," said Qiu Lianke, a member of the food safety supervision drivers team in Fuyang.

Having delivered food in Fuyang for six years, Qiu is well aware of food safety issues.

"In the past, we often noticed

problems but were unsure where to report them, or thought it was better not to get involved," he said. "Since becoming food safety supervision drivers, we feel a stronger sense of responsibility to live up to this role. Consumers appreciate knowing what we are doing," he said.

Yu said: "The Food Safety Supervision Drivers program is particularly beneficial because drivers have a professional advantage. They frequently visit food service locations, making them well aware of which stores maintain cleanliness and whether the food prepared meets safety standards."

The responsibilities of the members of the team include: collecting evidence of illegal activity, such as the use of expired or spoiled ingredients and non-food-grade sub-

stances; false advertising; inspecting fraudulent claims about food efficacy; reporting price fraud and the trade of wild animals; and providing feedback on management issues such as improper store licenses and poor hygiene conditions.

Once the supervision team members upload information regarding food safety issues, relevant authorities and the market regulation department in Fuyang will collaborate to investigate.

"We will complete investigations and announce confirmations of the reports within seven days, and rectify any problems within 30 days," said Fan Wenxiang, head of the food safety coordination department at the Fuyang district market regulatory administration.

In addition to Hangzhou, other

regions are also exploring new models for food safety supervision. Cities such as Shenyang in Liaoning and Laixi in Shandong have begun hiring food delivery drivers as food safety supervisors, allowing them to report issues by taking photographs. Drivers who join the food safety oversight team can earn points, which can be exchanged for goods or used to participate in recognition programs, thereby gaining more respect and acknowledgment in their roles.

"In our daily interactions with food delivery drivers, we find that the relationship between drivers and food outlets is not equal. We hope that by empowering them as food safety supervision drivers, we can help them gain more respect and recognition in fulfilling their duties," Yu said.

## CHINA

## Dedicated doctor ensures community healthcare

Zhang Puqing gave up county job to serve hometown

By ZHU XINGXIN in Jixian, Shanxi and ZHAO RUIXUE

In the town of Hukou in Shanxi province, situated along the middle reaches of the Yellow River, Zhang Puqing, a 45-year-old doctor, has devoted 25 years to delivering healthcare services to local residents.

Working at the Hukou Town Health Center in Linfen city, approximately four kilometers from the Hukou Waterfall scenic area, Zhang not only tends to the health needs of residents but also prioritizes medical services for tourists.

"I grew up in a nearby village where we drank water from the Yellow River. I feel proud to contribute to the health of the people," Zhang said. "Every patient seeking treatment carries the weight of expectation in their eyes, reinforcing my awareness of the duty to safeguard their health."

Whether during quiet late-night emergencies or busy daily clinics, she approaches each case with utmost focus and professionalism, never allowing complacency.

The villages in Hukou town are scattered, requiring Zhang and her colleagues to traverse mountains and rugged terrain, even in adverse weather conditions, to conduct home visits for chronic disease patients.

In Nanyuan village, Yuan Wulong was deeply troubled by diabetes and his wife suffered from high blood pressure, which plunged their lives into hardship. When they felt helpless, Zhang entered their lives.

"Her smile, gentle inquiries about our conditions and her soothing voice gave us hope," Yuan said.



Zhang Puqing measures the blood pressure for a patient at a village in Jixian county, Linfen, Shanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Now Yuan and his wife live a lifestyle as Zhang instructs, and their symptoms of diabetes and high blood pressure have been greatly alleviated.

As a grassroots doctor, Zhang's phone remains on 24 hours every day, with 80 percent of the town's residents having her number. "Each successful treatment fills me with a profound sense of accomplishment, especially when I witness the joy and gratitude on patients' faces and their families," she said.

In the eyes of her colleagues, Zhang is known for her strength and

determination. Over the years, they have faced challenges together, from late-night mudslides at the hospital to emergency rescues in the farming fields.

In recent years, the Shanxi Provincial Health Commission has focused on enhancing the capabilities of rural healthcare workers, carrying out competency-based training and various initiatives to strengthen the workforce.

By improving training programs, the commission aims to enhance the service capabilities of rural healthcare workers in areas such as

high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory illnesses and emergencies.

Zhang Bo, director of the provincial commission, said the comprehensive training provided to over 300,000 healthcare professionals has strengthened services at the grassroots level.

Through her dedication and hard work, Zhang Puqing obtained a bachelor's degree through self-study. In 2013, she was admitted into Jixian People's Hospital. However, driven by her deep concern for the people of Hukou town, she chose

to forego the superior conditions of the county hospital and returned to the town health center.

"I have grown and evolved with the Yellow River, the Hukou town health center and my family. My affection for my hometown has deepened over time, and I am willing to work at the grassroots," she said.

As the sole medical institution in the Hukou waterfall scenic area, the town health center plays a crucial role in providing medical support for tourists.

During holidays, Zhang voluntar-

ily takes on shifts, participating in over 1,000 medical emergencies.

Recognized for her outstanding performance, Zhang was promoted to the position of director of the health center in 2017.

In early October 2021, heavy rainfall led to a landslide at 1 am that caused mudflows to inundate the pharmacy, storage rooms, examination rooms and vaccination rooms at the main building of the health center.

Upon receiving a call, Zhang rushed to the scene, ensuring the comfort of her frightened colleagues and promptly reporting the situation to the county medical organizations. She disregarded personal safety, wading into the rooms to retrieve medical equipment.

In recent years, the city's health commission has been improving service capabilities in 137 township health centers across the city. With joint efforts, the grassroots healthcare service system has achieved significant progress, said Dong Fengni, director of the Linfen City Health Commission.

Looking ahead, Zhang aims to introduce advanced medical equipment, enhance medical technology and ensure that residents can access quality healthcare services at the town.

By seeking collaboration and exchanges with higher-level hospitals, she strives to establish convenient referral and telemedicine mechanisms to provide comprehensive care. "The Yellow River is beautiful, and I love my hometown. I will not forget my original aspiration as a healthcare provider, dedicating my efforts to the health of the grassroots people," Zhang said.

Hao Dongliang contributed to this story.

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## CCICED Special



## Green future discussed

Xie Zhenhua (second from right), China's former special envoy for climate change, talks with guests after the conclusion of the annual general meeting of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development in Beijing on Saturday. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

## Clean oceans key to mitigating carbon

By YAN DONGJIE

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As one of the planet's largest carbon sinks, the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems are effective ways of mitigating carbon emissions and accelerating carbon neutrality, experts and officials agreed during the annual general meeting of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development.

"Without global action, plastic production is set to almost double by 2040, with severe impacts on the environment and human health," Kristin Halvorsen, CCICED vice-chairperson, said on Friday during a forum at the meeting, pointing to its implications for marine ecosystems.

Dou Shuhua, vice-chairman of

the Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Committee of the 13th National People's Congress, detailed China's efforts in marine protection, citing significant improvements in marine ecological environments.

He said that China has enacted and updated a series of laws and regulations related to marine protection, with over 100 guidelines and scientific and technological standards having been issued to support laws and regulations.

By the end of last year, China had completed the rectification of over 16,000 marine sewage outlets, and designated approximately 150,000 square kilometers of marine ecological protection redlines, covering mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs. The country has established 352 marine nature reserves, protect-

ing an area of about 93,300 sq km, according to the White Paper on China's Marine Ecological Environment Protection released by the State Council Information Office in July.

"We need to manage the ocean according to the rules and laws," Dou said, highlighting the importance of stringent regulations and public awareness.

Dechen Tsering, regional director for Asia Pacific at the United Nations Environment Programme, agreed, emphasizing the need for comprehensive policies to tackle marine pollution and climate change.

"Ending plastic pollution will address the entire life cycle of plastics. We need to rethink product design for circularity and enhance resource efficiency," she said.

## More support needed for developing nations

Collaboration indispensable for world to address environmental challenges

By HOU LIQIANG

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Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang has urged for an increase in support to developing nations as the world endeavors to synergize efforts in tackling global environmental challenges.

Ding, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks at the annual general meeting of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development, which he chairs, on Saturday.

Themed "Open, Inclusive and Innovative Cooperation to Build a Clean and Beautiful World", the three-day meeting that started on Thursday was participated in by some 400 attendees from home and abroad, including council members, experts and partners.

Founded in 1992 as a high-level, nonprofit international advisory body consisting of leading figures and senior experts from both China and abroad, the CCICED provides annual policy recommendations to the Chinese government on the

environment and development.

Under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, China persists in prioritizing the construction of an ecological civilization as a fundamental strategy for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation, Ding said.

Ecological civilization is a concept promoted by President Xi for balanced and sustainable development that features harmonious coexistence between mankind and nature.

Ding said that while vigorously waging the battle against pollution, China also strives to accelerate the transition to a green development model, actively and prudently advances its climate target of peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and realizing carbon neutrality before 2060, and strengthens ecological protection and restoration.

Thanks to these efforts, it has made remarkable advancements in building a beautiful China, and contributed significantly to promoting sustainable development and constructing a clean and beautiful world, the vice-premier said.

Emphasizing that Chinese modernization embodies the harmonious coexistence of humanity and

nature, Ding pledged unwavering commitment from China to collaborate with nations worldwide in advancing eco-friendly modernization, fostering a clean and beautiful world, safeguarding Earth as the sole homeland of humanity, and realizing global sustainable development.

He called on the world to stick to the vision of global governance that features shared growth through discussion and collaboration, and to safeguard and practice true multilateralism, as countries make joint efforts to build a global ecological civilization.

Upholding the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the global community must take tangible steps to enhance assistance for developing nations in finance, technology and capacity building, thereby fostering collaborative efforts to address shared environmental challenges effectively, he said.

Ding also called for injecting new impetus into global green development through scientific and technological innovation, and stressed sincere cooperation to help ensure the success of this year's United Nations climate change conference in Azerbaijan in November, and the UN biodiversity conference in Colombia this month.

## BRI to play role in sustainable development push

By CUI JIA

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China will step up efforts to boost green development while promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, and support low-carbon transformation in developing countries, China's ecology and environment minister said.

The country's concept and technologies of green development have

been widely implemented during BRI infrastructure projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and the China-Laos Railway, Huang Runqiu, minister of ecology and environment, said on Friday.

China has signed 53 agreements on climate change cooperation with 42 developing countries while providing over 3,000 train-

ing sessions on ecological and environmental management for personnel in more than 120 countries. It has also provided feasibility assistance to enhance the climate change resilience of developing countries by helping to set up low-carbon demonstration zones, Huang said.

He made the remarks during a forum on building a green Silk Road and enhancing South-South

cooperation during the annual meeting of China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development held in Beijing.

In the future, China will offer more support for low-carbon transformation in developing countries, said Huang, who is also the executive vice-chairperson of the CCICED, adding the country will also share important concepts and

the effective practices of coordinated efforts in carbon reduction and pollution control.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, said at the forum that a green BRI is more important to the world and China than ever before.

"We are in the period where we need dramatically to accelerate the transformation of the world energy system. And China is the world's great supplier of the technologies, hardware and software for that transformation because China pro-

duces the world's low-cost and high-quality hardware and software whether it's for zero-carbon power generation, long-distance power transmission, electric vehicles and supply chains," Sachs said.

China has great capacity in those sectors, and the world needs such capacity for accelerated green transformation, Sachs said, adding that the BRI is a great mechanism financially, organizationally, diplomatically, conceptually and in terms of specific project implementation to achieve such transformation.



From left: A rendering of Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre in Shenzhen Bay. The rehearsal hall of the Bay Opera of Shenzhen. The audience seating area of Pingshan Theatre.

By YUAN SHENGGAO

After more than 40 years of rapid economic growth, Shenzhen, a special economic zone in China, provides not only various high-tech and industrial products to the global industry and supply chains but now high-quality cultural and artistic products.

These cultural and artistic offerings have unique Shenzhen genes and reflect the energy and entrepreneurial spirit of China's youngest and most vigorous megacity.

#### Going global

After four consecutive performances over the previous three days, Shenzhen dance drama *Wing Chun* concluded its serial performance in France on the afternoon of Oct 6 at the Palais des Congrès in Paris.

The dance drama also ran for 12 performances at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London from late August to early September.

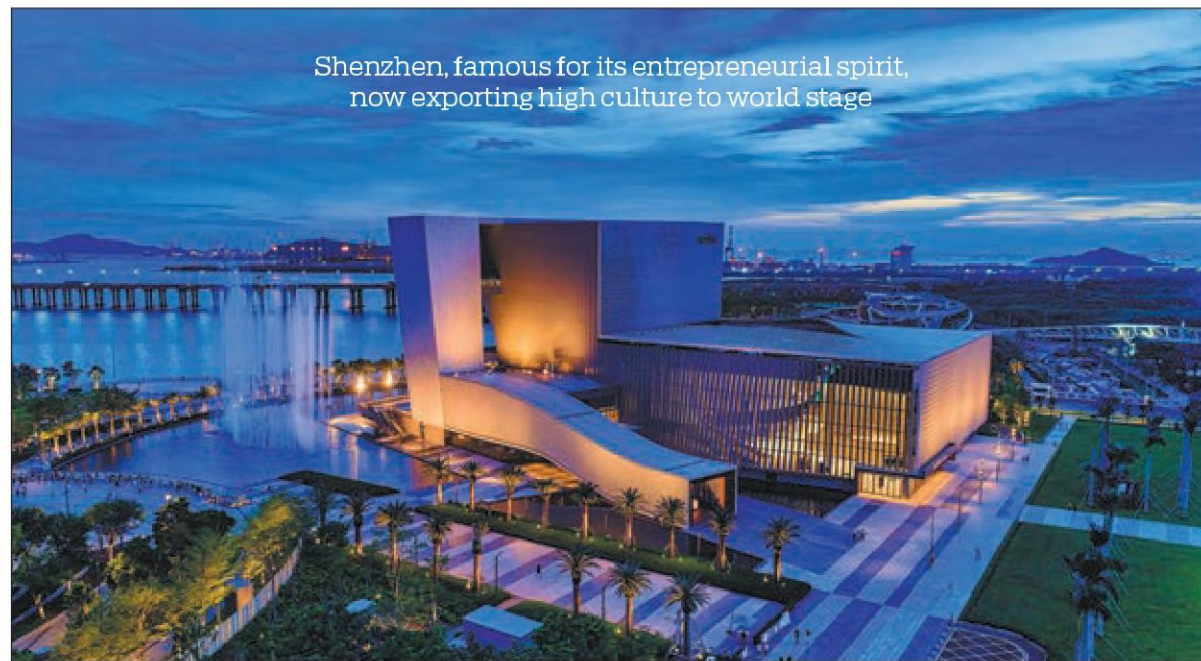
*Wing Chun* perfectly integrates outstanding traditional Chinese culture, including martial arts and dance, with modern artistic means to shape the story of an ordinary hero chasing his dream. Foreign audiences praised the drama's artistic creativity and profound cultural significance.

Lu Shaye, China's ambassador to France, gave a score of 110 points (presumably with the full score set at 100) for *Wing Chun*.

He believes that the dance drama opens a window for the French people to have a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese culture and modern art, and contributes to the mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

As some observers said, although the story of *Wing Chun* took place in the past, it reflects the spirit of Shenzhen. *Wing Chun* was produced in Shenzhen and its groundbreaking narrative features are in line with Shenzhen's innovative urban surroundings. The images presented in the performance not only reflect ancient Shenzhen but let the audience see the future of the city.

In another move that shows Shenzhen cultural industry's global pace, from March 11-22, the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra presented eight high-level symphonic concerts for audiences in eight British cities: Birmingham, London, Sheffield, Manchester, Edinburgh, Perth, Basingstoke and Croydon.



A scenic view of the Bay Opera of Shenzhen. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Trailblazing city gets in touch with artistic side

#### Picky audiences

A city that can export such international high-level literary and artistic products must, as a consequence, have a cultured and sophisticated audience and consumer group.

The classic opera *Phantom of the Opera* performed 40 consecutive performances in Shenzhen over five weeks this summer, attracting about 50,000 people in all, exceeding the record of 24 performances for a play in Shenzhen.

Shenzhen's box office revenue exceeded 45 million yuan (\$6.36 million), breaking the record of 22 million yuan for a play staged in Shenzhen.

After the gyms, fitness theme parks and greenways that populate this garden city, walking into theaters, cinemas, museums and libraries

is increasingly a part of everyday life for Shenzhen residents.

#### Fast chaser

Behind the consumption of culture and art in Shenzhen is the local government's attention to the city's cultural industry, with its huge investment and firm belief in development prospects.

In December 2018, Shenzhen began the planning and construction of "10 cultural facilities in the new era" including Shenzhen Opera House, Shenzhen Reform and Opening-up Exhibition Hall, Shenzhen Science and Technology Museum (new hall), Shenzhen Maritime Museum, Shenzhen Natural History Museum, Shenzhen Art Museum, Shenzhen Creative Design Institute and Shenzhen Conservatory of Music. In addition,

there are two new cultural facilities — the Shenzhen Book City Bay Area Store and the new Shenzhen Museum.

Although these cultural sites might come as standard to many big cities, Shenzhen was just a stretch of barren land belonging to rural Bao'an county to the north of Hong Kong just 40 years ago. The city is moving fast to catch up with its global peers in terms of cultural industry and infrastructures.

The local government sees the cultural industry not only as a basic public service but an important calling card, which can enhance the soft power of urban culture and become a new source of economic growth.

The cultural industry includes a whole chain of creative, financing, production, performance, publicity, sales and other artistic services, as

well as related education, cultural innovation, tourism and other industries.

#### Inclusiveness

Behind this is not only Shenzhen's strong economic development as a foundation, but the city's professional cultural and artistic talents, and scientific cultural industry management.

Unlike the cultural management departments in many other cities, there is a trend in Shenzhen where literary and artistic units only retain the management team and their business content can be outsourced to the market and industry.

In the view of Dai Jilan, deputy chief of the Shenzhen Cultural Center, this places high requirements on the professionalism of the cultural management department.

"Because literary and artistic works are like delicious food, (with) different chefs, the taste of the dishes produced will be different. There are thousands of artists and their works have their own strengths. How to choose the right artists with our requirements is a test of the level of decision-making," said Dai, who graduated from China's top Central Academy of Drama in 1999 with a degree in dramatic literature.

Dai believes that the scientific and inclusive connotations of Shenzhen city also contribute to the success of *Wing Chun* to an extent.

"The cultural departments in Shenzhen understand the characteristics of Shenzhen's urban culture, the laws of art and more importantly the artists, so they can make the right choice at every corner in the face of various complicated factors that is in line with the purpose of making Shenzhen original," she pointed out. "The cultural authorities do not restrict creators with such compulsory requirements of 'winning awards' or even the market, and thus give artists enough space to create."

#### Opera valley

A typical example of Shenzhen digging deep into local culture is the Changshou Dramaville. The project is located in Changshou village at the foot of Maluan Mountain in Pingshan district. This ancient village contains a community of Hakka huts with a history of about 300 years.

In June 2023, Longma Entertainment Company was introduced to the Pingshan district government to establish the project together with Zhang Guoli, a well-known Chinese performing artist, so as to integrate the history and culture of the ancient village with drama creation and performance.

After several years of hard work, this ancient village has built a small theater that can host 300 people and built cultural facilities such as a drama library, cultural exhibition hall, art studio, and a cultural and creative space, which can help drama creation, learning and exchanges, as well as supporting bed-and-breakfast businesses, restaurants, cafes and so on.

In the future, Pingshan will take advantage of the project to integrate drama creation, rehearsal, training, performance and consumption and make a characteristic industry chain.

By HAO NAN

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The dance drama *Wing Chun*, which was originally produced by Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre, recently sparked a wave of "China fever" during its three-day tour in Paris, France.

The event marked a new move by Shenzhen of South China's Guangdong province as the country's cultural gateway to the world. *Wing Chun* is a southern Chinese form of kung fu that originated during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

In the days leading up to the performance, the largest outdoor screen in France, located on the building of Citadium in downtown Paris, repeatedly displayed posters of *Wing Chun*, announcing it as "an extraordinary and unparalleled live dance drama" and inviting everyone to "immerse themselves in Asian aesthetics".

One month after 12 performances in London, the show lifted its curtain on the evening of Oct 4, local time at the Palais des Congrès, where *Wing Chun* was staged, had an audience that included figures from the French literary, political and business circles.

The audience erupted into applause several times, with spectators giving standing ovations and capturing the exhilarating moments on their smartphones.

Lucy Lee, CEO and producer of a French production company responsible for the Paris tour of the dance drama, said: "The best way to establish a cultural brand in Western countries is through commercial performances, which are also the



Dance drama *Wing Chun* is staged at the Palais des Congrès. LIU GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

true test of an artistic work. Only a successful commercial performance signifies market acceptance and effective international communication."

"From the feedback of local audiences and mainstream media outlets, it is evident that French audiences are very interested in *Wing Chun*," she noted.

During the three-day performance, some audience members traveled from London to Paris to see how *Wing Chun* was presented on different stages. Some were intrigued by the Chinese and Lingnan cultures expressed in the dance drama.

Jean Nouvel, winner of the pres-

tigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, shared his praise after watching the performance, noting that *Wing Chun* involved a series of Chinese traditions and culture, which are being spread globally and that its birthplace, Shenzhen, is a city full of creativity.

Dance KOL Akamz, with more than 24.3 million followers on the social media platform TikTok, said the dance drama offered him deeper insights into kung fu and its characters.

Athena Sofia, a French fashion influencer with some 80,000 Instagram followers, praised the stunning costumes of *Wing Chun*,

highlighting how well they enhanced the dancers' movements. Sofia also mentioned that she loved all the female characters and felt the powerful energy they conveyed through the performance.

In addition to the large audience, the international status of *Wing Chun* was emphasized by its performance venue. Situated in the 17th arrondissement of Paris, the Palais des Congrès is a modern complex that integrates concerts, exhibitions and commerce.

It receives more than 1.2 million visits and hosts more than 200 domestic and international events annually, serving as an important

venue for cultural and artistic exchanges in France. Renowned productions such as *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake* have been performed there.

Moreover, the approval process for *Wing Chun* in Paris took only a few months, whereas it typically takes about two years for a French theater to introduce a new performance project. This indicates that *Wing Chun*, which has toured more than 38 domestic and overseas cities, is recognized in the international performance market and is capable of promoting cultural exchanges between China and the world.

The three-day tour attracted significant attention from mainstream media outlets in France. For example, the French daily *Le Figaro*, founded in 1825, published an article praising the martial arts masters in *Wing Chun* for their amazing acrobatic feats and graceful movements, which left the audiences in awe.

Additionally, France-Soir newspaper, whose reporter once traveled to Shenzhen to interview the troupe of *Wing Chun*, recommended the dance drama to its readers, giving recognition to its stage design and visual effects.

Max Armanet, editor-in-chief of *La Tribune* newspaper, commented on the dance drama from a cultural exchange perspective, focusing on the breakthrough innovations in Chinese art.

"I have been familiar with China for decades and the country has achieved many revolutionary innovations in the development of the arts. The Shenzhen-produced dance drama *Wing Chun* is one such example, offering us a new and rich form of dance drama expression," Armanet said.

Moreover, some media outlets did not focus solely on the visual presentation of the dance drama but delved into the spiritual essence of Chinese culture through it.

In addition, news agencies like PR Newswire and Sortiraparis, as well as bloggers on the French blogging platform Overblog, published articles praising the presentation of Chinese cultural heritage showcased in *Wing Chun*.

## BUSINESS

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# Bold measures to rev up Chinese economy

Economists call for balancing monetary easing with fiscal stimulus to rejuvenate consumer confidence, boost domestic demand

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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China's economy will likely pick up pace in the fourth quarter amid a slew of bolder-than-expected stimulus measures, providing strong support for achieving its annual growth target of around 5 percent this year, economists said.

As China grapples with lackluster domestic demand, economists suggest a multifaceted approach, balancing monetary easing with targeted fiscal stimulus to rejuvenate consumer confidence and boost domestic demand.

Looking forward, they believe the focus must be on tackling issues faced by enterprises, spurring consumption and stabilizing the real estate sector, as that will be pivotal in steering the country toward a more resilient and sustainable economic future.

Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges and former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, noted that while China's economy has demonstrated resilience — with key indicators reflecting stability — the fundamental issue of still-weak domestic demand remains pronounced.

"China's industrial output rose 5.8 percent year-on-year in the first eight months, slightly faster than in the same period over the past four years and higher than the (5 percent) GDP growth rate for the first half of the year," Wang said. "The rapid growth in industrial production is notably driven by exports, which saw a year-on-year increase of 4.6 percent in US dollar terms in the first eight months, primarily due to a recovery in global trade demand."

However, Wang warned that export growth is likely to decelerate in the fourth quarter amid slowing global trade and increasing trade restrictions, which may lead to a slowdown in industrial production and manufacturing investment and further exacerbate pressures from lackluster demand.

"The broader economy is still facing pressing challenges and difficulties, with supply recovering more rapidly than demand, and external demand outperforming domestic demand," he said.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics pointed to still-weak consumer confidence and demand, as China's consumer price index, the main gauge of inflation, rose by 0.6 percent year-on-year in August. Meanwhile, China's producer price index, which gauges factory-gate prices, slipped by 1.8 percent in August.

Given China's current low price levels, Wang said he expects the annual CPI increase will be significantly lower than the preset growth target of around 3 percent, and PPI will continue its negative growth pattern.

"That will lead to nominal GDP growth lagging behind real GDP growth, which directly impacts household incomes and corporate profits," Wang said. "Thus, it is particularly important to intensify macroeconomic policy measures to



Turbines at Fuqing Xinghua Bay Offshore Wind Farm in Fujian province on August 8. JIANG KEHONG / XINHUA



Left: Industrial robots produce an electric vehicle at a workshop of Volkswagen (Anhui) Automotive Co Ltd in Anhui province on Sept 25. RUAN XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: An employee works on photovoltaic module export orders at a new energy science and technology company in Sihong Economic Development Zone in Jiangsu province on Sept 11. XU CHANGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



achieve the annual economic and social development goals."

In response to the pressing challenges, a recent meeting by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee called for stabilizing the real estate market and strengthening fiscal and monetary policy support.

The country should effectively implement existing policies, step up efforts to roll out incremental policies and strive to accomplish the targets and tasks for this year's economic and social development, according to the meeting.

Wang suggested that the government should increase fiscal deficits or issue special treasury bonds, in a

bid to alleviate local government debt pressures, as many local authorities faced increased financial burdens due to heightened public health expenditures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wang emphasized that increasing investment funding can enable local governments to make overdue payments owed to businesses, which will help boost market confidence, spur corporate investment and stimulate domestic demand.

Looking ahead, he also called for forceful fiscal stimulus to boost investment in urban renewal and spur consumption.

China has already pledged solid

efforts to boost domestic demand, as the government allocated 150 billion yuan (\$21.26 billion) in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds in August to support trade-in deals for consumer goods.

"The push for driving trade-in deals for consumer goods has effectively stimulated consumption potential, directly driving rapid sales growth among key consumer goods, including automobiles, home appliances and home furnishings,"

said Wen Hua, deputy director-general of the Department of Resource Conservation and Environmental Protection at the National Development and Reform Commission, the

country's top economic regulator.

The policy measures also effectively boosted investment and profitability in related industries, further enhancing the development momentum of relevant enterprises, Wen said during a recent news conference held by the NDRC in Beijing.

In fact, the country's accelerated push for promoting trade-in products is paying off, with significant growth seen in consumer spending on key goods like automobiles and home appliances, providing a solid base for continued economic recovery in the following months, experts said.

From Sept 1 to Sept 22, sales of passenger cars grew 10 percent month-on-month, while sales of new energy vehicles rose 7 percent on a monthly basis, said the China Automobile Dealers Association.

NDRC data showed investment in consumer goods manufacturing rose 14.9 percent year-on-year in the first eight months, while output of consumer goods manufacturing increased by 4.2 percent year-on-year in August.

Despite facing challenges, China's economy will continue to recover with a series of stimulus policies taking effect gradually, including the use of funds for promoting trade-in programs for consumer goods, said Huang Hanquan, head of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research.

Zhu Baoliang, former chief economist of the State Information Center, said the key meeting held by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee has addressed market concerns, which will help stabilize expectations regarding China's economic future.

"While achieving the around 5 percent annual growth target may be challenging, the government's newly announced policies are expected to provide substantial stimulus for the economy in 2024 and beyond, ultimately enhancing the prospects for economic development," he added.

While the weaker-than-expected economic data in July and August suggest that China's GDP growth is likely to decelerate to around 4.5 percent year-on-year in the third quarter, Zhu believes China's economy will likely pick up slightly in the fourth quarter. "It is possible for China to meet its annual growth target this year."

Following the latest stimulus package announced by the People's Bank of China, Betty Wang, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said her team expects that China's central bank will cut the reserve requirement ratio by an additional 50 basis points in the fourth quarter.

It is also likely that the PBOC will cut the seven-day reverse repo rate by a further 20 basis points in the first quarter of next year in an effort to lower funding costs in the economy, Wang added.

"We believe the economy needs a consistent policy stance in the future and policy coordination from the fiscal side," Wang said. "On the fiscal side, increasing fiscal spending or upgrading the current government bond issuance plan could provide a synchronized effect on the macroeconomy in a positive way."

Citing PBOC's latest decision to lower the interest rate of existing mortgages and align the down payment ratio of first- and second-home purchases as well as the removal of some restrictions for homebuyers in first-tier cities, Wang said these moves will address some of the existing concerns on the demand side.

"However, it is subject to policy enforcement and will take time to feed through," Wang added. "Additional funding and supply-side measures to destock housing inventories are still needed to stabilize the sector."

## Regenerative farming shows transformative potential

### REPORTER'S LOG

By Ouyang Shijia

Beijing's crisp autumn air mingled with the earthy scent of freshly tilled soil as I visited Yinhuang Farm in Beijing's Changping district.

Yinhuang is the first Bayer ForwardFarming project in the Asia-Pacific region, and offers customized regenerative agricultural solutions to farmers in China.

Tucked away on the outskirts of the capital, this experimental plot embodies the future of agriculture, one that promises more yield with less input,

all while nurturing the planet.

The soil, water, and insects here are not merely resources to be exploited, but active partners in a delicate ecological dance.

I arrived curious about this cutting-edge approach known as regenerative agriculture, but left pondering over its transformative potential for China's vast agricultural landscape.

The tour began in the tomato greenhouse — a modern marvel where the scent of ripe fruit greets visitors like a warm embrace. These tomatoes, unlike the ones I'm used to, aren't grown in soil. Instead, they flourish in a carefully crafted mixture of grass ash, vermiculite, and perlite.

This soilless medium, I'm told, offers a unique advantage: it shields the plants from root-knot nematodes and other pests. As I walked

down the rows, I was struck by the clarity of purpose behind this method — every step, from planting to harvesting, is designed with soil health in mind. Regenerative agriculture, it turns out, is as much about what isn't used as what is.

Standing beside me, Qin Aiteng, general manager of Yinhuang Green Agricultural Ecological Park, explained that the regenerative agricultural solution has allowed farmers to cut pesticide use dramatically while improving yields.

"During the Spring Festival, we've seen our tomato prices climb as high as 60 yuan (\$8.5) per kilogram, and customers accept that because they understand the value," Qin said.

The confidence in her voice mirrored the farm's success story — a

tale of integrating innovation in order to boost both quality and profitability.

The most fascinating part of my visit, though, was Bayer's Phytobac system, a whole setup that farmers use to clean pesticide wastewater by microbial means, or bioremediation, that ensures no harmful chemicals seep into the water table.

It's a quiet, unassuming hero in the fight against agricultural pollution. As we passed by, Qin pointed to it with pride. "Farmers used to dispose of leftover pesticides in the fields. Now, we have a system that ensures zero pollution," she said.

Yet, it isn't just about technology. The farm itself felt like an ecological sanctuary, where the lines between agriculture and nature blur. Surrounding the greenhouses

were flowering plants, strategically placed to attract bees and other pollinators. Insect hotels and no-pesticide zones provide a safe haven for biodiversity, offering shelter to beneficial insects crucial to the farm's health. This is farming re-imagined, not as a war against nature, but as a partnership.

Bayer's project, I learned, goes beyond this farm. Over the next decade, the Germany-headquartered life science enterprise plans to launch 10 blockbuster agricultural products to help farmers worldwide transition to regenerative agricultural practices.

By embracing innovative practices, Bayer is on its way to scale regenerative agriculture on more than 400 million acres (161.94 million hectares) of land globally by the middle of the next decade.

At the Beijing Yinhuang Farm, Bayer has already seen significant results: a 10 percent increase in

income for farmers, 20 percent savings in costs, and the treatment of over 4,000 liters of pesticide waste from 2021 to 2023.

"Bayer ForwardFarming initiative is an open platform where we hope to bring global wisdom and experience to China and encourage innovation," said Guo Jingping, business development head in China at Bayer Crop Science, one of the three divisions of Bayer.

The sense of purpose here was palpable.

Li Lin, deputy head of Beijing Plant Protection Station, emphasized that regenerative agriculture offers a path to greater food security and ecological balance. With China being an agricultural powerhouse, she explained, the country is urgently seeking ways to shift toward a more sustainable, low-carbon model.

As my tour drew to a close, I was left with a profound respect for what I had seen.

## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Systematic approach to support economy

EAGLE EYE

By Lian Ping

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee held a meeting on Sept 26 to study and analyze the current economic situation and make further arrangements for economic work.

As the year draws to a close, this meeting may serve as the last comprehensive deployment meeting for economic work in 2024 ahead of the Central Economic Work Conference in December, highlighting the leadership's strong focus on stabilizing the economy, growing consumer confidence, and the real estate and stock markets, among other urgent tasks.

According to the meeting, the country should effectively implement existing policies, step up efforts to roll out incremental policies, make policy measures more targeted and effective, and strive to accomplish the targets and tasks for this year's economic and social development.

To achieve the annual growth target of around 5 percent this year, China's GDP growth must exceed 5 percent in the second half of the year.

Investment and consumption growth stabilized but remained moderate in the third quarter, while exports continued to perform well, with expectations for domestic demand's contribution to GDP declining even as external demand rose.

Despite the low comparison base in the previous year, third-quarter GDP growth is anticipated to hit around 4.9 percent.

Considering measures mapped out at the key meeting, if existing policies are effectively implemented and new policies provide substantial support, domestic demand should significantly improve in the fourth quarter with exports maintaining resilience, translating to a projected GDP growth of 5.2 percent for the fourth quarter. Thus, China will likely meet its preset annual growth target this year.

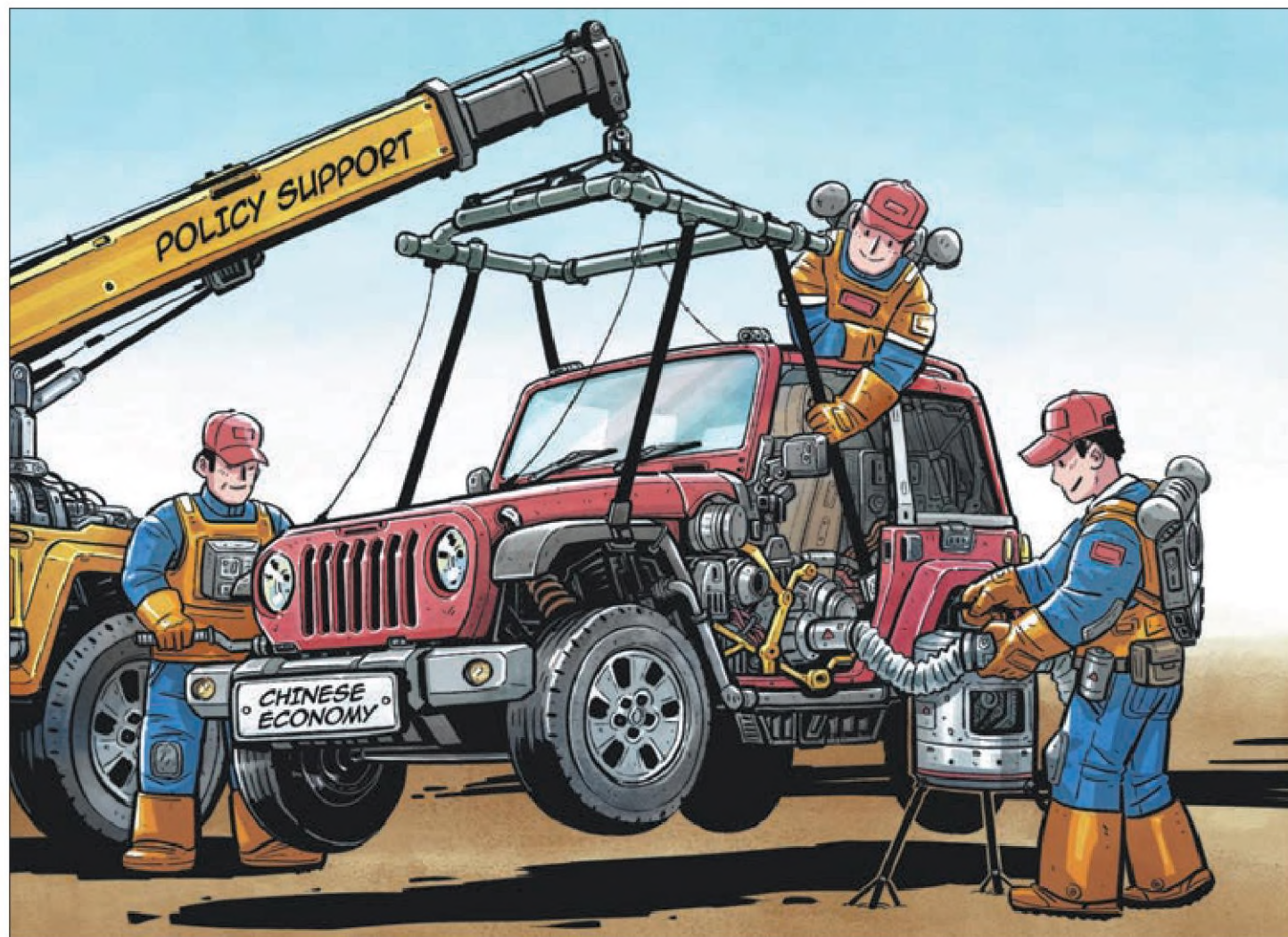
It was decided at the meeting to strengthen countercyclical adjustments of fiscal and monetary policies.

The strengthened fiscal policy is primarily reflected in the issuance and effective use of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and local government special bonds. A further six batches of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds are planned for issuance in October and November, and the issuance of local government special bonds will continue to pick up through November.

To ensure necessary fiscal spending and better leverage government investment, there is a possibility of additional treasury bond issuance or rollout of policy-based and developmental financial instruments in the fourth quarter.

The US Federal Reserve announced a significant 50-basis-point interest rate cut on Sept 18, with expectations for an additional 50-basis-point reduction by year-end, providing a favorable window for increasing countercyclical adjustments in China's monetary policy.

The meeting also underlined policies to promote the stabilization of the real estate market and stop it from further declining, marking the first time such a key meeting has explicitly outlined policies concerning the operation of the real estate market.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Expectations for the fourth quarter and early next year suggest that housing support policies will intensify, accelerating the pace for destocking housing inventories. The central bank will increase support for various financing tools to meet the reasonable financing demands of real estate companies, including private firms. It will also expedite the establishment of the real estate financing coordination mechanism to enhance liquidity support for developers, aiding in the smooth completion of ongoing projects.

Looking ahead, the real estate market is likely to reach a temporary bottom and stabilize thereafter, with home sales and housing price declines expected to narrow. This should alleviate the debt pressures on property firms and reduce liquidity risks, with land markets in first-tier cities and certain key second-tier cities potentially experiencing marginal recovery. Construction projects for government-subsidized housing, public infrastructure for both normal and emergency use, and urban village renovations may accelerate.

Looking forward, the next phase will see significant policy measures introduced in four areas.

First, the country will boost development of equity-focused mutual funds, focus on returns for investors, optimize registration

for equity fund products, and promote innovations in broad-based ETFs and index products to better serve investors and national strategies.

Second, the country will enhance the institutional environment for "long-term investment" by improving regulatory inclusivity for medium- and long-term equity investments, implement assessments for periods longer than three years, and overcome institutional barriers affecting long-term investments from insurance funds.

Third, it will continuously improve the capital market ecosystem by enhancing the quality and investment value of listed companies, creating a favorable environment for medium- and long-term funds to be attracted, retained, and developed.

Fourth, it will increase central bank resources and tools to support the capital market.

The meeting also stressed prioritizing employment support for key groups such as fresh college graduates, rural migrant workers, individuals just lifted out of poverty, and zero-employment households.

Assistance will be stepped up for those facing difficulties in securing jobs, including senior citizens, people with disabilities, and those unemployed for a long time, the meeting said, adding that more assistance will also

be provided to the low-income population.

Looking ahead, the next phase of livelihood work will focus on the following fronts.

First, it will likely implement a job priority strategy and improve employment support systems for key groups. This involves categorizing measures to encourage youth to engage in key industries and fields while refining job assistance systems for older and long-term unemployed individuals to ensure timely support. Additionally, it will broaden employment opportunities for rural labor and secure rural incomes by introducing new professions suited for rural revitalization.

Second, policymakers will make efforts to ensure the basic livelihoods of vulnerable groups, with measures already being taken by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to provide one-time subsidies to ensure funds reached those in need by Oct 1.

Third, it will increase support in education, healthcare, and elderly care to stimulate demand through improved livelihoods. Addressing residents' concerns in these areas will help alleviate their burdens and boost effective demand.

National policies have been continuously rolled out recently, exhibiting several noteworthy characteristics.

First, they are systemically comprehensive, involving multiple areas such as fiscal, monetary, real estate, consumption, and social welfare policies.

Second, there is a significant increase in policy intensity, with larger reductions in reserve requirement ratio and interest rate cuts reflecting the government's firm determination.

Third, policies are becoming more targeted, with measures addressing the current downturns in the real estate and equity markets.

Fourth, there is a focus on innovation, introducing structural monetary policy tools to support capital market financing, a first in history.

Fifth, policy coordination is emphasized, highlighting the need for monetary policy to support fiscal policy.

With the implementation of these policies, it is believed that a more comprehensive, systematic, and targeted approach will provide substantial support and impetus for the upcoming phase of economic operations.

The writer is chief economist at the Guang-kai Chief Industry Research Institute and president of the China Chief Economist Forum.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## China's exports showing remarkable resilience despite headwinds

MAIN STREET

By Xun Yugen, Liang Zhonghua and Li Jun

China's export performance has remained robust despite the restructuring of global industrial supply chains and the overall economic downturn, indicating the continued advantages of the country's manufacturing sector.

China's export share to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has risen significantly, surpassing both Europe and the United States to become China's largest export destination.

While China's trade ties with ASEAN, as well as ASEAN's linkages with the United States, have been steadily deepening, there is no obvious evidence of China using ASEAN as a transit route to the US market.

China's export performance has demonstrated remarkable resilience, with outbound shipments staging a sustained recovery since August 2023 and turning positive in November of that year.

The nation's export growth rate reached 8.7 percent as of August 2024, the highest level since March 2023, with the cumulative

year-on-year increase rising to 4.6 percent.

When factoring out price effects, China's actual export volume has performed even better, clearly outpacing the pre-pandemic growth trend line.

Notably, China has achieved this impressive export performance against the backdrop of a global economic downturn, underscoring the inherent advantages of the country's manufacturing production capabilities.

China's export share to ASEAN has been steadily rising since 2018, with particularly rapid increases seen between 2018-2020 and the mid-2022 to mid-2023 period.

As of August 2024, China's export share to ASEAN reached 16.7 percent, a 4.4 percentage points increase from the end of 2017. This has allowed ASEAN to surpass Europe and the US as China's top export destination since the beginning of 2023.

In contrast, China's export shares to Europe and the US have declined to 14.8 percent and 14.1 percent respectively, down 1.9 and 4.9 percentage points from the end of 2017.

The trend is also reflected in export growth rates. China's exports to ASEAN grew by 4.8 percent as of August 2024, significantly outperforming the -3.7 percent and -1 percent growth rates recorded for exports to Europe and the US during the same period.

As China and the US undergo industrial chain restructuring in the wake of the 2018

trade tensions, ASEAN has emerged as a major beneficiary, significantly boosting its exports to the US market.

However, an analysis of the trade data indicates that China is not using ASEAN as a conduit to re-export goods to the US market.

From the US perspective, its reliance on imports from China has been steadily declining since 2018. As of July 2024, China's share of US imports had dropped below 14 percent, a reduction of around 8 percentage points from the previous peak.

Meanwhile, US import dependence on ASEAN has risen to over 10 percent, an increase of more than 3 percentage points since 2018. The fastest phase of the increase in the US import share from ASEAN was from the beginning of 2019 to the beginning of 2021, which can explain 86 percent of the total change.

In contrast, the most rapid declines in the US import share from China occurred during 2018 to the end of 2019, and mid-2021 to July 2024, accounting for around 70 percent of the overall change. This does not align with the positive trajectory of ASEAN's exports.

An analysis of trade data from the ASEAN perspective also indicates that the bloc's growing exports to the US are not serving as a conduit for Chinese goods.

ASEAN's share of US imports has been on a steady upward trend since 2012, reaching

15.3 percent as of June 2024, surpassing China's share of 14.1 percent.

However, the fastest phases of the increase in ASEAN's export share to the US were from 2014-2017 and 2018 to mid-2021. In contrast, the period from mid-2021 to June 2024 had actually seen ASEAN's US export share remain relatively stable.

Meanwhile, the most rapid declines in China's US export share occurred from the end of 2018 to mid-2020, as well as the third quarter of 2022 to August 2024 — the latter of which can explain over 60 percent of the reduction in China's US export share. This does not align with ASEAN's performance.

A closer examination of the trade products exchanged between China, ASEAN and the United States further confirms that China is not using the ASEAN region as a conduit to re-export goods to the US market.

Prior to the 2018 China-US trade tensions, China's top exports to the US included products like mobile phones, automatic data processing equipment, monitors, motor vehicle parts, furniture, tricycles, and luggage, with the top 3 finished goods accounting for 23.5 percent of the total.

In 2023, China's key export products to the US remained mobile phones and automatic data processing equipment, but low-value, easy-clearance goods had risen to the third position.

Compared to 2017, the combined share of mobile phones, automatic data processing

equipment, and monitors had declined from 23.5 percent to 19.5 percent, while the share of low-value, easy-clearance goods had increased by 3.4 percentage points.

However, the products that China exports to ASEAN are significantly different. In 2017, China's top three export products to ASEAN were mobile phones, integrated circuits, and petroleum products, accounting for a combined share of 15.8 percent.

As of 2023, China's top three export products to ASEAN remained unchanged. Compared to 2017, the share of integrated circuits remained relatively flat, the share of petroleum products increased slightly, while the share of mobile phones decreased significantly by 2.7 percentage points.

In addition, China has also been exporting large volumes of LCD molds, semiconductor devices, and ships to ASEAN, which are distinctly different from the key product types in its exports to the United States.

The data indicate China is adapting its export strategies to the specific market demands, rather than using ASEAN merely as a channel to the US.

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The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## WORLD

# Southeast Asia trade prospects to get boost

Upgraded China-ASEAN ties unlock more opportunities for businesses

By YANG HAN in Vientiane, Laos  
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Businesses in Southeast Asia are eyeing more opportunities in the Chinese market following the announcement of a significant upgrade to the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area.

At the 27th China-ASEAN Summit in Laos' capital Vientiane on Thursday, the leaders of China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations announced the substantial conclusion of Version 3.0 China-ASEAN Free Trade Area upgrade negotiations, marking a milestone in their economic relationship.

"China is the biggest trading partner for ASEAN already, so ... this new version of the agreement just raises opportunities," said Nazir Razak, chairman and founding partner of private equity firm Ikhlas Capital in Singapore.

Nazir, who is also chairman of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council of Malaysia, told China Daily that the council will work to educate regional companies on the capabilities of the agreement and encourage greater trade with China.

The China-ASEAN Free Trade Area was established in 2010, with an upgraded Version 2.0 launched in 2019. Negotiations for Version 3.0 began in November 2022, aiming to address emerging areas such as the digital economy, green economy and supply chain connectivity.

China and ASEAN have confirmed they will promote the signing of the 3.0 upgrade protocol next year, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said.

China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years, while ASEAN has held the position of China's top trading partner for the past four years. Last year, their bilateral trade volume reached \$911.7 billion, the ministry said.

Nguyen Thanh Hung, chairman of the Vietnamese conglomerate Sovico Group, said the upgrade of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area "will strongly support enterprises in trade and investment and bring more benefits to businesses in ASEAN countries and China to grow together".

The upgraded agreement will enable ASEAN companies to further expand their business ties with China, Hung said.

Seeing the bright prospects, Hung, who is also vice-chairman of Vietjet Air, said the airline is planning to increase its routes connecting to Chinese cities for both passenger and cargo transport.

Currently, Vietjet operates 84 routes linking 46 Chinese cities from Vietnam, and 46 routes from Thailand to 30 Chinese cities. Over the past 10 years, the airline has transported 12 million Chinese passengers to Vietnam, he added.

"We even plan (to establish) some joint ventures in China and in Vietnam," said Hung, adding his company also works closely with its Chinese counterparts in e-commerce, infrastructure and logistics.

Tee Chee Seng, vice-president of the Vientiane Logistics Park, said the conclusion of the negotiations on the China-ASEAN FTA 3.0 is a good start for Laos, as the country

can play a more significant role in facilitating regional trade and logistics under the upgraded agreement.

Laos stands to benefit as the only ASEAN country connected to China by rail, Tee said, citing the China-Laos Railway that began operations in December 2021.

The 1,035-kilometer railway connects Kunming in China's Yunnan province with the Laotian capital, Vientiane. In the first eight months of this year, it handled more than 3.58 million metric tons of imports and exports, a 22.8 percent increase year-on-year.

As the FTA upgrade will encourage more people to look for opportunities in both China and ASEAN, Tee said it will usher in a new era for the Vientiane Logistics Park and for Laos in terms of trade and investment.

Vilakorn Inthavong, manager of the marketing department at Alo Technology Group in Laos, said he hopes the upgraded FTA can further ease the process for ASEAN products to enter the Chinese market, especially by shortening the approval time for new products — a critical factor for small and medium-sized companies.

Vilakorn said he welcomes more Chinese investment in renewable energy to develop Laos' supply chain. "Our group is also working with a company in China's Yunnan province to develop a supply chain for electric vehicles in Laos."

Noting that his group operates an e-commerce marketplace for made-in-Laos products and exports Lao agricultural products to China, Vilakorn said he hopes the FTA upgrade will promote greater China-ASEAN cooperation in digitalization to stimulate regional trade.

# Israel widens Lebanon strikes as troops fight Hezbollah

BEIRUT — Israel expanded its aerial bombardment of targets in Lebanon, hitting areas both in and outside traditional Hezbollah bastions, as its troops battled militants across the border on Sunday.

In areas where Hezbollah holds sway, Israeli warplanes hit a marketplace in the southern city of Nabatiyeh on Saturday, and then a mosque in a village near the border on Sunday, Lebanon's official National News Agency reported.

The mayor of Kfar Tibnit, where the National News Agency said a strike destroyed a mosque, said he felt he had lost a beloved site that brought people together.

"It was a significant place because families used to gather in the square right next to it on special occasions," Fuad Yassin told Agence France-Presse, adding the mosque was at least 100 years old.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said strikes on three villages on Saturday killed 15 people.

Israel has alleged that militants use civilian infrastructure in Lebanon and Gaza to conduct operations — a claim the groups have denied.

Hezbollah said it clashed with Israeli troops who tried to "infiltrate" twice into a border village, sparking an hourlong battle. It later said it shelled Israeli soldiers gathered in Maroun al-Ras village.

Early on Sunday, Israel said it intercepted five more projectiles fired from Lebanon.

The military said Hezbollah launched about 320 projectiles into Israel over the weekend of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

It also said roughly 280 "terror



The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon patrols the streets in Marjayoun, southern Lebanon, on Saturday. RAMIZ DALLAH VIA GETTY IMAGES

targets" were attacked in Lebanon and Gaza over the same period.

Israel's expanded operation has displaced more than 1.2 million people, according to Lebanon's government, which says more than 2,100 people have been killed and 10,000 wounded since Sept 23.

Meanwhile, at least five United Nations peacekeepers have been wounded in recent days in Israel's escalating conflict with Hezbollah.

Israeli strikes have shook the peacekeepers' main base in southern Lebanon, prompting UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to condemn the attacks. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon, or UNIFIL, called it a "serious development" and said the security of UN personnel and property must be guaranteed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday urged the UN to withdraw its peacekeeping force from southern Lebanon.

"Mr Secretary-General, get the UNIFIL forces out of harm's way," Netanyahu said in a public video statement. "It should be done right now, immediately."

On Saturday, 40 countries that contribute to UNIFIL said they "strongly condemn recent attacks" on the peacekeepers.

"Such actions must stop immediately and should be adequately investigated," said the joint state-

ment posted on X by Poland's UN mission and signed by countries, including leading contributors India, Indonesia and Italy.

Other signatories include China, France, Ghana, Malaysia, Nepal and Spain — all countries that have contributed several hundred troops to the peacekeeping force.

With no signs of a lull in the violence, UN peacekeepers in Lebanon warned against a "catastrophic" regional conflict.

Andrea Tenenti, spokesman for UNIFIL, told AFP he feared an Israeli escalation against Hezbollah could soon spiral "into a regional conflict with catastrophic impact for everyone".

There is "no military solution", Tenenti said.

In the Gaza Strip, Israeli strikes killed at least 29 Palestinians on Saturday, medics said.

Israeli forces have focused on an area around Jabalia in the north, causing more suffering for hundreds of thousands of people trapped there, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Residents of Jabalia, the largest of the enclave's historic refugee camps, said it was being pounded by Israeli forces from the air and ground.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# At Carnegie Hall, AI-backed music's possibilities take stage

By MINGMEI LI

As the conductor guided the orchestra's musicians with precision, he suddenly reached for a laptop computer, tapping commands that synched the digital with the symphonic.

That nuance stood out as Orchestra Now from Bard College in New York state performed at the Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall on Saturday to open the seventh annual China Now Music Festival in New York City with the theme Composing the Future.

At the weeklong festival that runs through Saturday, Oct 19, different generations of Chinese composers form the 1960s to the present will feature pieces that merge traditional elements with emerging music techniques, including the use of artificial intelligence.

Sun Yuming, a composer, music producer and lecturer on electronic music composition at the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM) in Beijing, introduced his piece *Starry Night* to the New York audience.

Instead of offering a composer's traditional acknowledgment after the symphony while seated in the audience, Sun took to the stage with his laptop, programming in real time with conductor Cai Jingdong, who also was equipped with a laptop and the full musical score.

The composition featured AI-driven visual algorithms and real-time timbre rendering to blend physical and virtual instruments.

"Sound has countless forms of expression, and through technological means, we create simulated sounds, as if crafting a virtual instrument that fuses electronic and traditional music," Sun told China Daily. "This approach combines the unique characteristics of traditional instruments with the innovations of electronic music, integrating AI throughout the entire performance — not only in

“Sound has countless forms of expression, and through technological means, we create simulated sounds, as if crafting a virtual instrument that fuses electronic and traditional music.”

Sun Yuming, a composer and lecturer on electronic music composition at the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM) in Beijing

sound but also in the visual effects on stage.”

Sun said that the collaboration between AI programming and musical composition brings a new dimension, allowing artificial intelligence to be woven throughout the creative process — from brainstorming and concept development to arranging instrumentation, refining and editing.

Sun's "instruments" — his laptop and mouse — allowed him to precisely control pitch, note duration, rhythm and sound location simultaneously.

And when Cai — the director of the US-China Music Institute and Bard College Conservatory of Music in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York — raised his hand to various levels, AI technology was used to simulate different instrument sounds, interpreting the movements through skeletal recognition software.

The CCOM also created an "Artificial Intelligence Composition System", featuring two pieces: *Overture: Welcome and A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*.

Li Xiaobing, the director of the Department of Music Artificial Intelligence and Music Information Technology at the CCOM, told the media at a pre-concert panel discussion that CCOM has a leading position in AI-driven music making and research.

"Creative endeavors drive the evolution of art, and artificial intelligence similarly propels creativity forward," he said. Li said he would try to bring a "robot conductor" to New York so that it could not only keep up with the speed and rhythm of human performers but also provide real-time cues and even imitate the styles of different conductors.

"We don't know what the future holds for AI technology with music — it might reach an ideal state or even surpass our expectations," he said.

Cai said he expected more music and art exchanges between China and the United States.

"We have such AI technology, and we want more and more talented Chinese composers to present their work to larger audiences," he said.

Anthony Paul De Ritis, a composer, professor and former chair of the music department at Northeastern University told China Daily that dialogue between the two countries on music is needed.

He has been working as a scholar in China since 1999 and exploring music-making with traditional Chinese instruments, featuring electric or electric acoustic effects based on Chinese poems.

"The exchange of ideas over this 25-year period has been incredibly beneficial for me. Music is a means of intercultural dialogue," he said. Ritis also is the research coordinator of the International Computer Music Association, where he encourages more connections through music.

"China is very much supportive of the exchanges of these academic ideas," he said, which "is going to cross multiple cultures".

# Hong Kong icon visits NYC area to encourage visitors

By MINGMEI LI

in East Rutherford, New Jersey  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Prudence Mak said she hopes to inspire a connection between the Greater New York area and Hong Kong.

The celebrated designer, who created the iconic cartoon doll character Fatina Dreams for her creative crafts brand Chocolate Rain, told China Daily on Saturday that "as a girl from Hong Kong", she grew up in "a melting pot of cultures, where East meets West — it's an integral part of who we are".

Fatina took center stage over the weekend at the *Hong Kong Meets America - Pop Art Exhibition by Chocolate Rain* at the American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

This immersive event from Friday through Sunday — presented by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York (HKETONY) — offered visitors a unique opportunity to experience Hong Kong through interactive do-it-yourself workshops and artistic displays.

Founded in 2000 by Mak, Chocolate Rain is popular for its designs inspired by childhood dreams and whimsical adventures.

The brand also has previously been featured at New York City venues such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, gaining international acclaim for its distinctive artistic style.

This time, Mak's art brought Hong Kong's vibrant street food culture and iconic landmarks to life alongside similar scenes from New York. She noted the similarities between the two cities — both



Acting Consul General of China in New York Ma Xiaoxiao (third from right); Maisie Ho, director of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York (fourth from right); and Prudence Mak (center), creator of Fatina Dreams and founder of Chocolate Rain, along with other guests cut the ribbon at the *Hong Kong Meets America - Pop Art Exhibition by Chocolate Rain* at the American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, New Jersey, on Saturday.

vibrant and fast paced with towering skyscrapers.

Mak features iconic landmarks in her 3D artworks, such as the Statue of Liberty and yellow cabs of New York alongside Hong Kong's Big Buddha and the Star Ferry crossing Victoria Harbor.

She said while she brought Fatina this time, she also has a deep appreciation for traditional Chinese art.

"I personally practice art with the bamboo brush. I remember my grandpa ... would come home and practice calligraphy with me. That's how I was introduced to ink and brush for the first time. Art is for every lifestyle," she said.

Mak said she hopes to create a platform, especially for children, where people can engage with art through their own creativity. She said that both Hong Kong and New York are rich in art and creativity.

"All of the 18 different districts throughout Victoria Harbor have all public artwork installations. We are just one of them. There are over 20, 30 going on the public up the front, so it's a beautiful, nice scene there, Mak said.

"And then also you can enjoy art. Hong Kong is a tiny gem. We call it a little pearl, right?" she said. "Sometimes, maybe you pass by, you miss it, because the great China has so many things, but don't forget Hong Kong!"

Maisie Ho, the director of the

HKETONY, told China Daily: "We are excited to share a facet of Hong Kong's culture with the American audience through our partnership with Chocolate Rain. This exhibition beautifully melds tradition with contemporary aesthetics, celebrating the vibrant creativity of our homegrown talent in the United States.

"We wanted to bring Chocolate Rain here just to remind us of the joy they have in their hearts," she said. "Culture can do that — link the hearts between the two peoples. [People] also have a lot of passion for Hong Kong, the Hong Kong food and the Hong Kong icons."

Ho invited people to visit Hong Kong to try authentic foods such as pineapple buns, egg tarts and dim sum, and to explore the city, which offers experiences that may seem familiar to Americans yet are uniquely Hong Kong in style, reflecting its distinct place in Chinese culture.

"There are lots of similarities between Hong Kong and the US. I encourage everybody to either discover or rediscover Hong Kong," she said. Ho said that visitors will be amazed by the latest development of the city, and China has been welcoming to international visitors.

She said that because Hong Kong is an international hub with direct weekly flights from New York, it is easily accessible and also serves as a gateway to the Chinese mainland.



A colored statue of Avalokitesvara in Shuanglin Temple. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The city of Pingyao is one of the most globalized regions in Shanxi province, past and present.

The ancient city is the county seat of Pingyao in the central part of the North China province. It was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites List in 1997 for being a well-preserved ancient city and for its two famed Buddhist temples of Shuanglin and Zhenguo in the suburbs.

According to the evaluation report by UNESCO's World Heritage Convention in 1997, Pingyao is recognized as "an exceptional well-preserved example of a traditional Han Chinese city, founded in the 14th century".

The report added that "its urban fabric shows the evolution of architectural styles and town planning in imperial China over five centuries. Of special interest are the imposing buildings associated with banking, for which Pingyao was the major center for the whole China in the 19th and early 20th century".

The banking sector the report referred to was a part of the business of Shanxi merchants, also known as Jinshang, over the past centuries. Pingyao was the business hub of these merchants.

The Jinshang merchants were the first group of Chinese businesspeople piloting the move toward globalization.

These pioneers of foreign trade usually started their business as small vendors, selling products like tea and silk to overseas regions that included the Far East and Europe.

The Jinshang merchants reached their peak of prosperity in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. They are said to have dominated the international trade sector in North China during the period.

The Jinshang merchants invented a number of new business models that still operate in the modern age. One is *biaoju*, companies that combined courier and safety guard duties; another is *piaohao*, which were entities to issue China's earliest banking drafts.

The banking draft — or *huipiao* — business of *piaohao* firms was a historic innovation made by Jinshang merchants in China's fledgling financial industry.

The invention of *huipiao* in the early 19th century aimed to replace the long-distance cash transportation provided by *biaoju* firms, enabling Jinshang merchants to do business anywhere that they traveled, paying for things conveniently.

Some Western researchers of that period noticed that the emergence of *huipiao* significantly improved the settlement method, allowing China's circulation of cash to enter a more rapid and convenient era.

Joseph Edkins, a British missionary and sociologist, traveled to Shanxi in the late 19th century to see "the magnitude of what Jinshang merchants made". After visiting *piaohao* firms in Pingyao, he considered the business as the inception of China's banking system.

In today's Pingyao, there are still a number of properties of the old-time *biaoju* and *piaohao* firms, giving people a glimpse into the innovations that aided the Jinshang merchants' global success.

The Jinshang merchants' business began to decline in the early 20th century, when new international trade hubs emerged in China's eastern coasts and sea transportation overtook the traditional overland routes. Since then, Pingyao had seen its recognition fade on the international stage.

The inclusion on the World Heritage Sites List once again brought Pingyao to light, attracting a great number of international tourists to the city over the decades.

#### International events

In recent years, a number of international events held in Pingyao have improved its global profile, especially in culture and arts.

The earliest international cultural event hosted by Pingyao was the Pingyao International Photography Festival, with its first session held in September 2001.

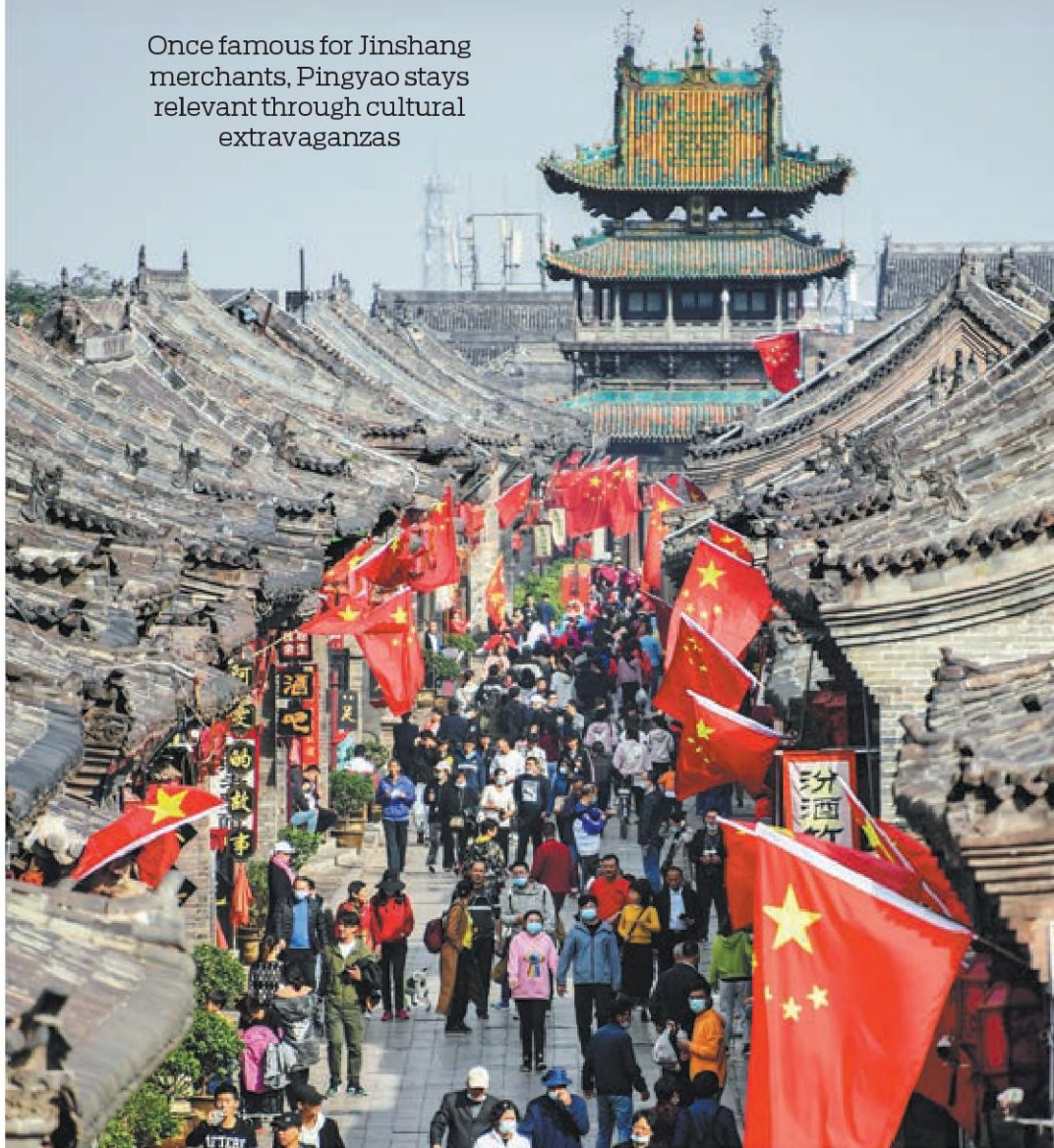
Since then, the festival has attracted the participation of about 50,000 photographers from more than 100 countries and regions, with a total of 370,000 photographic works on display. The festival has also attracted more than 5 million visitors,



The urban area of Pingyao has a complete city wall of more than 6.1 kilometers, 199 old streets and alleys, and 3,798 residential and commercial properties dating from the Ming and Qing dynasties. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

# Historic city offers modern twist on global influence

Once famous for Jinshang merchants, Pingyao stays relevant through cultural extravaganzas



The ancient city of Pingyao is now among the favored destinations for tourists in Shanxi. LIANG SHENGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

according to Wei Jiangfeng, secretary of the Pingyao county committee of the Communist Party of China.

This year's photography festival opened on Sept 19, with the theme of "Twenty-four years, new quality images".

The five-day event featured five sections and 16 subsections held in four venues across the city.

More than 3,000 photographers from 28 provinces, municipalities and autonomous

regions of China had 20,000-plus photos on display. The event also exhibited more than 1,800 pictures by 246 photographers from 30 foreign countries and regions.

Wei said the photography festival has blazed a new trail for Pingyao's international exchanges, pushing its cultural and tourism industries onto the global stage. Following this festival, Pingyao has hosted a number of international cultural events

including sculpture and painting.

#### Film festival

Among the international activities, another heavyweight event is the Pingyao International Film Festival, founded by reputed Chinese movie director Jia Zhangke in 2017.

The eighth edition of the festival was held on Sept 24-30.

This year's festival screened 52 films



Tourists visit Zhenguo Temple following the release of video game *Black Myth: Wukong* on Aug 20. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Tourists view pictures during the Pingyao International Photography Festival. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

and featured six academic activities. The official screening section — which was called *Crouching Tigers, Hidden Dragons* — included films from 22 countries and regions, with 44.7 percent of the films debuting globally; 73.7 percent making their Asian debut and all of them making their Chinese mainland debut.

Over the eight sessions, the Pingyao International Film Festival has seen the participation of more than 5,000 filmmakers from across the world, the exhibition of more than 400 works and the attendance of more than 1.7 million visitors.

This time, the festival's founder Jia talked about why he selected Pingyao as the locale of this international event.

"Pingyao is an ancient city that has kept many forms of traditional Chinese culture alive," he said. "It's a place where traditions are interwoven with people's daily life. This should be something inspirational to professionals in the movie industry — scriptwriters, producers, directors, actors and actresses."

He added that, with a well-preserved city wall and a great number of ancient buildings, Pingyao offers ideal shooting locations for movies, TV dramas and other forms of visual arts.

Jia, who is a Shanxi native, noted that in China, most of the international film industry events are held in megacities like Shanghai and Beijing.

"I hope people in small cities can also have better access to excellent global cultural resources and artists in the cities can have better opportunities for international exchanges," he said. "That is why Pingyao is now the only county seat in China to host an international film festival."

Jia added that the rapid development and the drastically increasing influence of the event have exceeded his expectations.

"The enthusiasm of audiences is incredible this year," he said. "Within the first hour following the opening of the online ticket booking platform, we received 24 million visits. (This is) considering there were no more than 5,000 tickets for one screened film."

#### Gamers' pilgrimage

It is noteworthy that Pingyao was one of the shooting locations for the hit video game *Black Myth: Wukong*, with the city's two Buddhist temples of Shuanglin and Zhenguo featured.

The global success of the game, which was released in August, has strengthened Pingyao's appeal to tourists. The temples are becoming popular tourist destinations, especially among those who wanted to "travel Shanxi with Wukong".

On Sept 14, representatives of more than 20 media outlets from home and abroad visited the two temples, exploring the valuable cultural assets and introducing the details to the audiences worldwide.

Zhenguo Temple was initially built in the middle of the 10th century. Although it had been renovated several times in the past millennium, it still has some well-preserved relics of that period. Its main hall is among the country's only three preserved structures from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-960). The wall painting in the hall is the only remaining mural of that period.

Shuanglin Temple features more than 2,000 colored statues created during the Ming and Qing dynasties, which earned it the fame of "a treasure house of colored statues" in China.

Shortly after the release of the game on Aug 20, Shuanglin Temple received more than 36,000 visits during the 20 days running to Sept 10, an increase of 500.52 percent from the same period of 2023. Zhenguo Temple welcomed more than 15,100 visits in the same period, a year-on-year increase of 598.8 percent.

With an urban area of 2.25 square kilometers, the city of Pingyao is said to be the best-preserved ancient county seat in China. It has a complete city wall of more than 6.1 km, 199 old streets and alleys, and 3,798 residential and commercial properties dating from the Ming and Qing dynasties. It boasts 143 sites of historical interest and 1,075 unmovable cultural heritage items.

During a conference on inbound tourism held in Hefei, Anhui province, on Sept 10, Pingyao was recognized as one of China's top 10 ancient towns and cities favored by overseas tourists.

Feng Siquan contributed to this story.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Machiavellian schemes won't take US anywhere in the Asia-Pacific

As expected, Washington couldn't wait to throw itself behind Taiwan island's secessionist-minded leader Lai Ching-te after the latter delivered a "pro-independence" speech on Thursday.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken went to the extent of warning Beijing against taking any "provocative" action against the island after Beijing criticized Lai's performance, in which he tried to drive home his central point in a subtle and mild manner: China has no sovereignty over the island.

"China should not use it in any fashion as a pretext for provocative actions," Blinken said at a news conference on the sidelines of an ASEAN meeting in the Laotian capital of Vientiane on Friday, ignoring the fact that his remarks constituted a grave interference in China's internal affairs and violated the one-China principle, the political foundation of Sino-US diplomatic relations.

Although he tried to marshal support of other leaders in Vientiane for his call, saying that "we want to reinforce — and many other countries want to reinforce — the imperative of preserving the status quo, and neither party taking any actions that might undermine it," Blinken's grandstanding was met with cold shoulders.

That should serve as a reminder to the top US diplomat that Washington needs to stop playing the "Taiwan card" — and the "South China Sea card" which tries to take advantage of China's maritime disputes with some of its neighbors — to destabilize the situations across the Taiwan Strait and the Asia-Pacific at large to achieve its narrow anti-China goals.

The US has not only intensified its arms sales to Taiwan to try and turn it into a "porcupine," but also pushed its regional proxies, such as the Philippines, to ceaselessly provoke China in the South China Sea while trying to smear it as a bully and troublemaker — the very roles that Washington has been playing.

Worse, the US is trying to pave the way for the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the Asia-Pacific by using Japan as a facilitator, irrespective of the fact that countries across the world know the ugly role the US has been playing in the Ukraine and the Middle East crises, and are vigilant against the US triggering a similar crisis in the Asia-Pacific.

If the US really cares about "maintaining peace and stability, preserving the status quo of the Taiwan Strait, and avoiding any kind of conflict that could disrupt things that are so essential to the global economy", as Blinken said, it should abandon its Machiavellian schemes regarding the Taiwan question, honor the commitment it has repeatedly made to Beijing on it, and immediately stop supporting Taiwan secessionists.

It should also stop forcing regional countries to choose sides between Washington and Beijing, sowing discord between China and its neighbors.

The fundamental status quo of the Taiwan Strait, as Beijing has been reiterating, is that both sides of the strait belong to one China, while the "status quo" the US tries to maintain is actually a ploy to split China.

The more the US tries to drive a wedge between China and its neighbors, the more Beijing will do to promote regional integration and common development. The crucial breakthroughs China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations achieved in the negotiations on "Version 3.0 China-ASEAN Free Trade Area" in Vientiane last week are a powerful reply to the US' divisive machinations.

As for the Taiwan question, Beijing has every reason and legitimacy to take countermeasures in response to the provocative "pro-independence" show staged by Lai. Any intervention by the US, or any other party, in the process should be deemed as a blatant interference in China's internal affairs and an open support for Taiwan separatists.

## Attacks on UN peacekeepers tellingly lawless

Deliberate attacks on United Nations personnel involved in peacekeeping operations, including armed members, are unlawful and amount to war crimes.

Such attacks are a grave violation of international humanitarian law and UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006), according to a statement issued by the United Nations after the recent attacks on UN peacekeepers by Israeli forces, which have a long history of such attacks.

In 1987, an Israeli tank squad opened fire on a village where a UN Interim Force in Lebanon command post was located, killing an Irish peacekeeper. In 1996, Israel shelled the UNIFIL's Fijian battalion in southern Lebanon's Qana, when more than 120 Lebanese civilians were killed and about 500 injured. Four UN soldiers, too, were injured. In late November 2023, Israeli forces fired at a UNIFIL patrol close to Aitaroun in southern Lebanon, although no peacekeepers were injured.

In their latest attacks on UN peacekeepers, Israeli forces repeatedly fired at a guard tower at the headquarters of the UNIFIL on Thursday, injuring two members of the force, and fired at a watchtower, injuring two more peacekeepers, on Friday.

If Israel's initial strikes against Hamas in the Gaza Strip could be considered retaliation for the latter's surprise attacks on its civilians on Oct 7, 2023, it is a brazen and serious breach of international law for its military forces to deliberately fire at the UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

Given what it has done to UN peacekeepers previously, the only explanation is that Israel takes it for granted that it can act with impunity to fulfill its military objectives.

It seems that Israel considers everyone is a valid target, even UN peacekeepers and civilians, in pursuit of its war aims.

If Israel considers it justifiable to flout international law by deliberately firing at UN peacekeepers, it absolves itself of the right to condemn Hamas for its Oct 7 attacks and the launching of rocket attacks against it by Hezbollah, as well as other military organizations in the Middle East.

By killing innocent civilians in Gaza and targeting UN peacekeepers in Lebanon, Israel is telling the world that it does not obey international law and, instead, considers itself to be a law unto itself. But if it follows the principle that the end justifies the means, then it should not be surprised that the military organizations which are fighting against it adopt the same principle.

This mutual no-holds-barred approach is the prime reason why the vicious cycle of violence between Israel and the militant forces it is fighting shows no sign of abating — why there seems to be little hope of peace in the Middle East.

For Israel, the more brutal and violent its military actions are, the more impossible it will be for it to achieve the lasting peace and security it hopes to attain.

Support from the United States makes a great difference to what Israel can do in flexing its military muscles. Without the military and other aid from the US, Israel does not have enough of the resources it needs to sustain its protracted military actions both in Gaza and southern Lebanon.

In this sense, the support Israel gets from the US is the key to how far Israel can go in pressing ahead with its military campaigns. The influential role American Jews play in US politics is a factor in the US election, which explains why Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is bold enough to challenge US President Joe Biden without fearing losing the support of the US.

As far as the role of the US is concerned, it should shoulder its responsibility and use its leverage to keep Israel in check. The longer it fails to use its influence on Tel Aviv to end the military conflict or at least realize a cease-fire, the more it will become complicit in Israel's flouting of international law, and thus the more it will be viewed as being an accomplice, further undermining its claim to be upholding common values. Might does not make right, as Washington and Tel Aviv seem intent on proving.

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## Opinion Line

## Upgraded China-ASEAN FTA to boost regional development

The leaders of China and ASEAN member states announced the conclusion of the upgraded negotiations on "Version 3.0 China-ASEAN Free Trade Area" in Vientiane, capital of Laos, on Thursday, paving the way for the formation of one of the world's most populous and robust free trade areas, which will play a bigger role in boosting regional development amid growing global protectionism.

The conclusion of the negotiations will provide institutional safeguards for China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to build the super large-scale market together. The two sides have confirmed that they will expedite work on legal reviews and domestic procedures to promote the signing of the Version 3.0 China-ASEAN FTA next year, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday.

The China-ASEAN FTA was established in 2010, and negotiations on Ver-

sion 3.0 China-ASEAN FTA started in November 2022. The upgraded FTA aims to achieve a higher level of openness, further reduce tariff and nontariff barriers, facilitate trade and deepen cooperation in multiple emerging fields. This will not only help build a super-large market but also enable China and ASEAN to lead regional economic integration based on the principles of free trade and multilateralism.

The upgraded China-ASEAN FTA will be conducive to promoting trade and investment, especially in nine major areas including the digital economy, the green economy, supply chains, standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures.

If the new FTA is well implemented as planned, the annual trade volume between China and ASEAN could exceed \$1 trillion in the next few years. The upgraded FTA will help consoli-

date the cooperative relationship between China and ASEAN, and deepen cooperation between China and the member economies of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement.

The conclusion of the upgraded negotiations on Version 3.0 China-ASEAN FTA should be regarded as an important achievement of China and ASEAN in promoting pragmatic cooperation to boost economic globalization.

By strengthening collaboration in areas such as the digital economy, green development, service trade, and regional industry and supply chains, China and ASEAN member states have demonstrated the importance of multilateral cooperation, and boosted global economic recovery while promoting sustainable regional development.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Enough room to roll out new fiscal policies

China will introduce a package of targeted incremental fiscal policy measures in the near future to boost the economy, Minister of Finance Lan Fo'an told a news conference in Beijing on Saturday.

The package includes increasing the debt ceiling on a relatively large scale in a lump sum to replace existing hidden debts of local governments and help defuse their debt risks.

The countercyclical adjustment involves not just policies that are already going through relevant decision-making procedures but also other policy tools in consideration, such as debt issuance and deficit rise.

For the property market, the country will apply a set of fiscal policy tools

including local government special-purpose bonds, special funds and tax-deduction policies to help stabilize the sector.

The government will also issue special treasury bonds to support large State-owned commercial banks in replenishing the core tier-1 capital, according to Lan. The move is aimed at enhancing banks' risk resilience and lending capacity to help boost the real economy.

China's fiscal system is resilient enough to achieve a balance between revenue and expenditure and meet the annual budget target by taking comprehensive measures.

The government should also increase support for key groups, provide more living allowances to the

people in need, and increase the number of awards and assistance to jobless college and vocational school graduates, so as to further improve the overall consumption capacity of society.

China's retail sales grew only modestly over the last few months, and the country's real estate slump has shown few signs of turning around.

That Minister Lan noted that other policy tools are also being studied, as the central government still has large debt and deficit room, indicates more well-targeted bailout packages are going to be unveiled in the foreseeable future, if necessary, to release more liquidity for the benefit of some needy sectors and groups of people.

— XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

## What They Say

## DPP's smears reflect badly on itself

That the recall of Keelung Mayor George Hsieh Kuo-liang was rejected after a vote on Sunday in the northern port city of Taiwan island indicates local residents have seen through the nature of the recall vote as a political farce staged by the Democratic Progressive Party.

A member of Kuomintang, Hsieh took up the position of Keelung mayor on Dec 25, 2022, having been a three-term legislator representing Keelung between 2005 and 2016.

The campaign to recall Hsieh was initiated by senior figures in the Democratic Progressive Party led by former Keelung mayor Lin Yu-chang, who is now the party's "secretary-general", in March following a dispute over the changing of the operator of Keelung E-Square Mall.

Ironically, Lin called on Hsieh and Kuomintang to address the

demands of civic groups, instead of viewing the recall campaign as a political matter, which it is.

Basically, Hsieh has fulfilled his duty well, and continuously improved the public services and governance of Keelung since he took office. That's another reason why he could pull through the recall vote.

Although the DPP has tried to weaken people's trust in Hsieh citing the Keelung government's performance in response to a recent flood and even resorting to tricks to manipulate public opinion against him, people can see clearly that the Keelung local government tried its best in its response to the flood, which was caused by a hurricane, and subsequent relief work.

The harder the DPP tries to smear Hsieh, by bending facts to suit its own ends, the more its efforts will backfire. If the DPP really intends to win back

people's support, it needs to turn its attention from winning partisan points to meeting the people's practical needs.

An important reason why Taiwan's economy and employment situation face mounting pressure these years is the DPP authorities' denial of the 1992 Consensus — that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China — and their willingness to do the United States' bidding as a proxy in its geopolitical game. This has only served to shrink the development space for the island.

As it has formed the government on the island, the DPP should devote itself to a practical modernization agenda instead of playing such games.

The DPP authorities brag about "democracy" in Taiwan. But, as the farce over Hsieh's recall vote demonstrates, it is the DPP authorities themselves that are denying people their democratic rights.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Raising the Retirement Age

**Editor's note:** Raising the retirement age is a major reform measure implemented to offset the effects of population aging in China, and it is conducive to the utilization of China's human resources. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Yuan Xin

## A necessary and pragmatic reform

With China entering the era of rapidly rising aging population, raising the retirement age has become a priority issue for the country. The decision to gradually increase the retirement age of men and women raises seven key points that are necessary for both policymakers and the public to understand.

Raising the retirement age according to gender and role: Over a 15-year period, starting in 2025, the government will raise the retirement age of men from 60 to 63 years and women blue-collar workers and women cadres from 50 to 55 years and 55 to 58 years, respectively. The gradual and phased approach will see male and female civil servants retire three months later each year, and female blue-collar workers six months later, until the new thresholds are reached by 2040.

Flexible retirement options: One of the most significant aspects of this reform is the flexibility it offers. Workers will be allowed to choose their retirement date within a three-year window, either retiring earlier or later than the statutory retirement age, provided they do not retire more than three years before or after the extended retirement age. This flexibility will allow workers to tailor their retirement plans according to their personal and professional circumstances.

Increasing minimum pension contribution period: Beginning in 2030, the minimum period for contributing to the basic pension program will gradually increase from 15 to 20 years. This incremental change, adding six months each year, reflects the reality of longer life expectancy and is aimed at ensuring that individuals contribute adequately to sustain the pension system.

Support for unemployed workers nearing retirement: For people close to retirement who are unemployed and getting unemployment benefits, the reform will provide extended unemployment benefits until they reach the new statutory retirement age. Also, during the transition period of delayed retirement, unemployment insurance funds will cover the pension contributions of such individuals.

Early retirement for workers in hazardous occupations: Workers engaged in physically demanding or hazardous jobs — such as mining, working at high altitude or in extreme temperatures — will be eligible for early retirement under a policy that remains unchanged,



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employment discrimination based on age, and encourages employers to hire older workers, in order to develop a more inclusive labor market.

Improving eldercare and childcare services: As part of broader reforms, the government plans to improve the eldercare and childcare systems, focusing on home-based and community-based services, alongside the development of affordable childcare. The idea is to support working families and ensure that retirees have access to necessary care services.

The reform not only aligns with Chi-

na's changing demographic situation but also represents a necessary step toward sustaining social security and addressing the challenges of an aging society. Raising the retirement age is not a choice but a necessity, driven by several factors:

First, we are witnessing what can be termed "low-age aging": Between 2020 and 2050, the number of people aged between 60 and 69 is expected to increase from 150 million to 210 million, offering a window of opportunity for delayed retirement.

Second, China's life expectancy has significantly increased — from just 35 years in 1949 to 78.6 years in 2023. For those retiring at the ages of 50, 55 or 60, their post-retirement life has increased by several decades. We are entering an era of longevity, and the trend will only intensify.

Third, the dependency ratio — the number of working-age people supporting each elderly person — has become increasingly imbalanced. In 2023, each retiree was supported by roughly 2.96 working-age people, but by 2054, this figure will drop to just 1.15, putting tremendous pressure on the pension and social security systems.

In general, the health of elderly people, particularly those aged between 60 and 69, has been improving. In 2020, 93 percent of people in this age group were in good health or were basically healthy, creating a solid ground for extending people's working life.

People's education level, too, has been rising. The average number of years of schooling for the population aged 16 or above increased from 5.3 in 1982 to 9.9 years in 2020. With their education level improves, people are entering the workforce later, meaning if the retirement is not raised, the productive years of their lives will be shortened.

Advances in technology, automation and digitalization have made workplaces more accommodative for older workers. Heavy physical labor has decreased, and jobs have become more inclusive of both age and gender, providing opportunities for older adults to remain in the workforce longer.

The decision to raise the retirement age emphasizes three core principles: voluntarism, flexibility and gradualism. Workers will not be forced to retire at a specific age; instead, they can choose when to retire within a flexible period of time. The gradual implementation of the retirement system reform, across 15 years, ensures minimal disruption to the labor market and gives workers time to plan out their future.

China is not alone in facing the challenges of an aging population. Many developed countries have already raised their retirement age to 65 or above, with countries like Italy, Greece, Norway and the United States setting their retirement age at 67 or above. Most of these countries offer flexible retirement options and have been gradually raising the retirement age over time. China can learn from these experiences to create a system that balances the needs of individuals with the broader societal imperative to address the aging population problem.

Raising the retirement age in China is not just a pragmatic response to the demographic changes but an essential reform for the betterment of country's future. It offers flexibility for individuals, addresses the challenges of an aging society, and will help sustain the pension system. The sooner these reforms are enacted, the better China will be positioned to manage the inevitable aging of its population.

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

Dong Yuzheng

## Raising retirement age a much-needed and practical move

China has decided to gradually raise the retirement age of men from 60 to 63 and women cadres and women blue-collar workers from 55 to 58 and 50 to 55, respectively, in the course of 15 years starting from 2025.

This is an important step toward deepening comprehensive reform, and will affect the allocation of human resources, talent training and social development. How to handle the dialectical relationship between creating and sharing social wealth, and implement a retirement system that is compatible with the country's socioeconomic development level is important for guiding social reform in the right direction.

The government has always attached importance to the statutory retirement age. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the central government introduced the retirement system to protect the legitimate rights and interests of workers. In the 1950s, the retirement age for men was fixed at 60 and women cadres and women blue-collar workers at 55 and 50, respectively. This arrangement has not changed.

But the retirement age needs to be raised in line with China's development level and demographic changes. Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the country has been deepening comprehensive reform, including the reform of the retirement system.

A country fixes the retirement age mainly based on its people's life expectancy and their physical health. According to the National Health Commission, China's life expectancy in 2023 was 78.6 years compared with 57 years in 1957.

After the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, Chinese people's life expectancy has increased by more than 10 years. The 14th Five-Year National Health Plan said China's life expectancy could increase by one year between 2020 and 2025, and increase to 80 by 2035. Also, the average years of education the working-age population received increased from eight years in 1982 to 11.05 years in 2023.

Take female PhD candidates for example. They might be about 30 years old by the time they get their doctoral degree. If such highly educated women have to mandatorily retire at 55, their working years will be only about 25 years. Especially, since Chinese women's life expectancy is more than 80, their working years will account for only one-third of their life, which would limit their contribution to the country's socioeconomic development.

Therefore, raising the retirement age is necessary to ensure women make their due contribution to the country's socioeconomic development, and the people understand and adapt to the demographic changes including the low fertility rate and aging population.

China will improve its population development policy in response to the rapidly rising aging population and declining fertility rate, and build a sound system to provide lifelong population policy-related services for all in order to promote high-quality population development.

As a large number of elderly people are physically fit, capable and skilled, the gradual increase of the statutory retirement age will help limit the waste of human resources, extend the time they spend in creating social wealth and promoting social development, and reduce elderly people's dependency ratio.

As such, it is necessary to raise the statutory retirement in a prudent and orderly manner to offset the effects of the low fertility rate and rapidly rising population.

China's working-age population — people between the age 16 and 59 — started declining in 2013 and labor supply began shrinking in 2017. From 2022 to 2023, that is, in just one year, the working-age population declined by a whopping 10.75 million.

In the long run, China's working-age population will decline and the country could face a shortage of labor. One way of addressing these challenges and promoting high-quality demographic development is to gradually raise the retirement age, which will enable the "young elderly people" — those aged between 55 and 70 — who are highly qualified and in good health, and want to continue working to contribute to the country's socioeconomic development.

Life expectancy is high in most developed countries. Even such countries have raised (or are in the progress of raising) the retirement age to offset the effects of an aging population and shortage of labor despite having adopted relatively open immigration policy. In most developed countries therefore working age is between the ages of 15 and 64, and only people who are aged 65 or above are considered elderly.

Understandably, some people have raised concerns that if the retirement age is increased, more and more graduates will find it difficult to get a job. But a deeper analysis shows that raising the statutory retirement age is not a harsh move, and there is a certain structural difference between the vacancies created by retirees and the positions sought after by graduates. The impact of the reform will be generally mild on youth employment. The reform, which would necessitate adjustments in basic pension insurance, salary, employment and talent training, would require top design and meticulous planning.

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

Kimihiro Fukuyama

## China, Japan can cooperate to address aging

The aging populations of China and Japan present both challenges and opportunities for the two countries. As the percentage of elderly people in a country's total population increases, so too does the demand for age-appropriate goods, services and care. This leads to the emergence of the "silver economy", a sector focused on meeting the needs of the elderly.

While both countries face similar demographic trends with a decade's time gap, Japan has made significant strides in adapting to an aging society and developing its silver economy.

Both China and Japan have rapidly rising aging populations. Based on several Japanese institutes' studies, in 2020, about 18.7 percent of China's population was aged 60 or above compared with 28.7 percent in Japan. These figures are projected to increase in the coming decades, with the elderly population expected to account for one-third of the total population of China and 37.7 percent of Japan by 2050 — both figures being above the critical one-third threshold. The aging of these populations has significant implications for both countries, including:

A decline in the working-age population, which can lead to labor shortage, reduced economic growth and a strain on the social security system; a drastic rise in the demand for healthcare services, long-term care and social support; and the creation of new opportunities for economic growth through the development of the silver economy. Given the advancements in medical care and people's awareness, we have to redefine the "silver age" as 70 or above. This means people in their 60s can still be



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part of the workforce. Japan has been at the forefront of adapting to an aging society, because it has implemented a range of policies and initiatives to address the challenges and seize the opportunities associated with a rapidly rising aging population. Japan's success in this field can be attributed to the heavy investments it has made in industries such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals and eldercare services, which provide services to the elderly people. Also, the Japanese government has expanded social security programs, and has been promoting "active aging" through initiatives such as raising the official retirement age from 65 to 70 for both men and women, while raising the pension receiving age, and arranging for re-skilling and lifelong learning programs.

Moreover, Japan has been a leader in developing technologies that can help the elderly, such as robotics, autonomous vehicles and artificial intelligence.

As a result of these efforts, Japan has developed a robust silver economy, and is home to a number of globally leading companies in the healthcare, eldercare and technology sectors. In particular, grown-up children of almost every elderly person use the services of eldercare and nursing care centers, and elderly people's homes for their parents, signif-

icantly reducing the burden of caring for their parents.

All Japanese citizens buy national nursing care insurance, which is similar to the national healthcare insurance or income tax. And the two sides can explore new opportunities for cooperation in developing the silver economy.

The two countries, for example, can share the best practices and lessons learned in addressing the challenges of aging populations. Especially, the Japanese national nursing care insurance system is well designed and its ecosystem includes eldercare centers, elderly people's homes, nursing care centers and hospitals. All that one needs to provide eldercare services are covered by these national insurance systems.

Also, China and Japan can collaborate to conduct research into aging-related issues, such as healthcare, social services' advanced technology, autonomous vehicles, shopping drones, remote medical care and other medical related equipment like cameras, robotics and hearing aid.

The companies in the two countries also can form partnerships to develop and market products and services for the elderly people, and Chinese and Japanese investors can invest in companies that are part of the silver economy in each other's countries, promoting economic growth and job creation.

People in their 60s can no longer be called elderly, because they are active, eager to work, want to earn and spend more money.

To meet such people's increasing needs and realize mutual benefit, China and Japan should establish cooperation in each other's silver economies. First,

Japan can share its experience in developing the silver economy with China, while China can share its own knowledge and resources with Japan. Such exchanges can be mutually beneficial especially because in terms of healthcare, Japanese and Chinese peoples' requirements are quite similar.

Second, collaboration can help reduce the cost of developing and implementing programs and services for the elderly people. The fact that Japan and China cumulatively have about 300 million elderly people should give an idea about the huge potential of the silver economy, which will only expand because the aging populations in both countries are likely to grow.

And third, by working together, China and Japan can improve the quality of life of the elderly people in both countries. Since many elderly people in China and Japan want to visit each other's country, the two governments should consider easing visa facilities, because people-to-people exchanges will boost the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors, which in turn will benefit the two economies.

The aging populations of China and Japan present significant challenges and opportunities. But by working together to develop the silver economy in each other's countries, Chinese and Japanese officials can address these challenges and improve the lives of their elderly citizens. It is hoped this analysis will contribute to the dialogue and grassroots collaboration between China and Japan.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ENDALKACHEW SIME

## Model for Africa

China's National Day is an exemplary example for nations of the Global South that are striving for economic transformation

China's National Day, celebrated on Oct 1, commemorates the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The first celebration took place in Beijing's Tian'anmen Square, where Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the PRC and raised the first national flag of New China.



Since then, National Day has become a major public holiday in China, being celebrated with grand parades, fireworks and various cultural and patriotic events. The holiday kicks off a week-long vacation known as "Golden Week" since 1999, during which many Chinese people travel domestically and internationally. Over the years, the National Day holiday has evolved to become not only a celebration of the founding of the PRC but also a reflection of China's rapid development and achievements. It serves as a reminder of the country's journey from a war-torn nation to a global economic powerhouse, fostering a sense of national pride and unity among the Chinese people, which is an exemplary model for nations of the Global South that are striving for economic transformation.

China's journey from being one of the poorest countries in the world to a global economic powerhouse is a remarkable journey celebrated globally. This transformation, which began with the transition to a market economy in 1978, offers valuable lessons for South-South cooperation, specifically for African nations striving to maximize their economic transformation in their current post-colonial era.

Before 1978, China faced severe economic challenges. At around \$156, China's per capita GDP was less than one-third of the average for sub-Saharan African countries, which stood at approximately \$490 at that time. Exports accounted for only 4.1 percent of GDP, and imports 5.6 percent. A staggering 75 percent of exports were agricultural or processed agricultural products, showing the then dependence of the economy on agriculture. About 81 percent of the population lived in rural areas, with more than 70 percent of the labor force engaged in agriculture. Additionally, 84 percent of the

population lived below the international poverty line.

The economic reforms initiated in 1978 set China on a path of rapid growth and development. For decades after that, the average annual GDP growth rate was an impressive 9 percent, and the average annual foreign trade growth rate was 14 percent. As a result of these reforms, China achieved several significant milestones: by 2010, China had become the second-largest economy in the world and the largest exporter, with more than 95 percent of its exports being manufactured goods. By 2021, China's per capita GDP had risen to \$12,551.

The recently concluded Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasized deepening reforms to advance Chinese modernization, focusing on economic development, innovation, urban-rural integration, and improving people's well-being. Key goals include establishing a high-standard socialist market economy by 2035 and building a great modern socialist country by 2049.

Looking forward, China aims to complete significant reform tasks by the 80th anniversary of the People's Republic of China in 2029.

These past performances and future plans offer several key lessons for African countries. Embracing market-oriented reforms can drive significant economic growth. Moving from an agriculture-based economy to one focused on manufacturing and services can enhance economic stability and growth. Actively participating in global trade can boost economic performance. Improving access to education and healthcare is crucial for sustainable development. Investing in infrastructure can facilitate economic activities and attract foreign investment.

The wave of independence that swept across Africa in the mid-20th century marked a significant turning point in the continent's history. Between 1957 and 1962, numerous African nations gained independence from their colonial rulers, starting with Ghana in 1957, which set a precedent for others to follow. This period, often referred to as the "Year of Africa" in 1960, saw 17 countries achieve sovereignty. The struggle for independence was characterized by a mix of peaceful negotiations and violent

conflicts, reflecting the diverse experiences of African nations as they sought to reclaim their autonomy and identity. Among African nations, Ethiopia and Liberia stand out as unique cases. Ethiopia successfully resisted colonization by European powers, maintaining its sovereignty except for a brief occupation by Italy from 1936 to 1941. Liberia, founded by freed American slaves in the 19th century, also avoided colonization, establishing itself as a republic in 1847. These countries' ability to remain independent amid widespread colonization highlights their unique historical and geopolitical circumstances, which allowed them to navigate the pressures of imperialism differently from their neighbors.

The post-independence era in Africa has been a period of significant transformation and challenges. Newly independent nations faced the daunting task of building stable governments, fostering economic development, and addressing social inequalities. Despite these challenges, many African countries have made remarkable progress, leveraging their independence to pursue development goals and strengthen their positions on the global stage. The experiences of Ethiopia and Liberia, alongside the broader decolonization movement, continue to inspire contemporary efforts toward self-determination and sustainable development across the continent.

When African nations celebrate their national day, they can draw inspiration from China's experience to chart their own paths toward economic prosperity and global integration. By learning from China's successes and challenges, African countries can harness their independence to build robust, diversified and resilient economies that benefit all their citizens and beyond, making the aspirations of the South-South cooperation a reality.

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AMADOU DIOP

## All aboard

FOCAC is a platform for Africa to embark on its modernization journey

Launched in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, as a platform for strengthening and promoting China-Africa relations in various fields, has created greater prosperity for Africa and continues to strengthen the partnership between the two sides.



Its launch and the implementation of its agreements have led to the construction of majestic infrastructure of all kinds in African countries that have benefited the African people, and the strengthening of close diplomatic, economic, commercial, cultural and health ties between China and African countries.

Examples of the two sides' cooperative achievements on the African continent abound.

In Senegal, where China is now the country's largest trading partner, China has made a major contribution to Senegal's opening-up, economic development, culture and sport.

The Ila Touba Highway, built by China, allows the Senegalese people to move around freely. The Grand National Theatre, the Museum of Black Civilizations, the Diamniadio Children's Hospital, the National Wrestling Arena — all, fruits of the cooperation between China and Senegal — contribute to the promotion of health, culture, art and sport in Senegal. Meanwhile, let's not forget the Foundiougne Bridge, the longest in West Africa, built as part of a partnership between China and Senegal, which is now helping to open up the department of Fatick and facilitate access to neighboring Gambia, while helping to sell fish products in the area and to other parts of the country. And it is always with pride and a deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude that I enjoy such high-quality infrastructure built in Senegal by China with unprecedented speed, and which today have an immense positive impact on my daily life and that of the people of my country, in general. Because they provide us with greater convenience, facilities and collective well-being.

At the very most, and to a large extent, thanks to the impetus of solidarity and shared prosperity on the part of China, many African countries have been able to benefit from numerous and diverse high-quality infrastructures as part of their cooperation with China.

China has contributed to Africa's economic and social development,

building thousands of kilometers of roads, railways, airports, bridges, hydroelectric dams, industrial parks, stadiums, universities, schools and hospitals across the continent. It is now Africa's leading trading partner, and has been for over a decade.

What's more, in the space of over two decades, China-Africa trade has increased more than 20-fold, topping \$280 billion to date. And more than 3,000 Chinese companies are now present in Africa, where they have invested more than \$100 billion.

In short, China's support for African countries has helped advance African modernization. If this momentum is maintained, it will help to advance global modernization.

China also remains the African Union's leading partner in the implementation of Agenda 2063. And China stands by Africa and openly and strongly supports the continent within the United Nations and the various international bodies, defending African interests and working for a decisive place for the continent within international decision-making bodies.

China's policy of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries and its foreign aid policy with little attached political or economic conditions are two of the practices that help to promote its cooperation with Africa and other countries around the world. A policy of cooperation that is also beneficial to developing countries, with whom China continues to identify by sharing their realities and remaining close to them. From this angle, the future seems to promise China and Africa, as well as the other developing countries of the Global South, a more prosperous and equitable partnership for the benefit of their respective peoples. This will certainly inspire the rest of the world, and clear up any misgivings about unfounded Western attacks and criticisms of cooperation between China and developing countries in general.

However, for more sustainable, inspiring and radiant cooperation, it will be even more advantageous for China and Africa to explore and deepen, within the framework of the FOCAC, areas of cooperation linked to technology, space, digital technology, telemedicine, the modernization of African agriculture with an effective transfer of skills in the construction of various infrastructures.

But also, and above all, China and Africa should develop and deepen environmental cooperation to better address the threats and challenges

posed by climate change. And African countries can draw inspiration from China's ecological initiatives, in particular the promotion of clean and green energy through the development of green technologies. They can work with China to develop multilateralism within the FOCAC in order to better coordinate cross-border projects between countries.

China and Africa must therefore continue to work together, to engage in frequent dialogue through meetings such as the FOCAC, to move forward together and build a common language, specific to their orientations, visions and expectations, in order to better communicate and easily support their various development and research programs together, and also to better communicate on the difficulties and challenges they face, to better achieve their various objectives.

It is also clear that, over and above the infrastructural and material aspects, the strengthening of cooperation between the various countries that make up the FOCAC plays a decisive role in the relations of a more united, dynamic and open Global South. It also plays a role on the international stage, promoting a fairer and more harmonious global balance for the benefit of an inclusive, prosperous and balanced world. The FOCAC therefore plays an important role in a turbulent global context by promoting the modernization of the African continent, and sharing the dividends of the close collaboration between China and Africa with the world.

Faced with colossal environmental, economic, commercial, agricultural, industrial and health challenges, Africa and China must pool their efforts and strengthen their cooperation. And the FOCAC remains the primary platform for dialogue, proposals and assessment. It remains not only a means of vitalizing and deepening China-Africa relations, but also a means of helping Africa to emerge from the tenuous post-COVID-19 economic difficulties and of fostering the multilateral cooperation.

In short, the FOCAC, an excellent example of large-scale cooperation, will help to promote a spirit of sharing and solidarity that will benefit both Africa and China.

*The author is a journalist at the Senegalese national daily newspaper. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## LIFE

## Cross-border tourism on the right track

New transport option allows travelers the opportunity to view the sights of Laos from the comfort of a high-class train, Yang Feiyue reports.



Wetlands are framed by a carriage window on the cross-border tourism train, StarExpress, that connects Kunming, the capital of Southwest China's Yunnan province, and Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

Lao guide Geng Vang took a special group of Chinese guests to savor the blend of natural beauty, history and culture that his hometown Luang Prabang offers late last month.

Fluent in Mandarin, the man in his 30s ensured the group was well-informed of the cultural relics on display at the Royal Palace Museum, which was built in 1904 and originally served as the residence of the founding king of the Kingdom of Laos, Sisavang Vong, and his family. He also took them to enjoy a stunning bird's-eye view of the whole city on top of Mount Phousi.

They wrapped up the trip at a big night market, where the Chinese travelers could buy local handicrafts, textiles and street food.

"It was a half-day trip, so I tried to cram in as much detailed information as possible about those scenic spots," Vang says.

His guests were part of about 60 Chinese travelers, who were on the maiden voyage of the newly developed cross-border tourism train StarExpress that connects Kunming, the capital of Southwest China's Yunnan province, and Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

It was developed by CTG Asset, a subsidiary of the Hong Kong-headquartered China Tourism Group, to implement the Belt and Road Initiative and promote cultural and tourism exchanges between the two countries.

Departing from Kunming, the train crosses the Tropic of Cancer, passes through the UNESCO World Heritage city of Luang Prabang, and arrives in Vientiane.

During the inaugural package of three nights and four days that concluded on Sept 27, passengers enjoyed beautiful landscapes, diverse cultures and ethnic customs.

In addition to strolling through the Buddhist land of Luang Prabang, they explored French colonial architecture, Buddhist temples and a relaxed riverside vibe traveling in Vientiane.

"I've been to many countries, but it is the first time I visited Laos, thanks to the



From left: Crew members perform for passengers on the train. The train prepares to board passengers.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

train," says Liu Yaling, a guest on the train tour.

Liu works for Beijing Yumei International Travel Agency and heard a lot about tourism trains at home and abroad but had never experienced one.

"The rich amenities and services on the train are alluring and it also offers cross-border experiences," Liu says about her decision to get on board.

The train was designed and renovated by professional teams from home and abroad, considering environmental protection and safety.

It features leading domestic high-speed rail soundproofing technology and an integrated intelligent information system, complemented by a user-friendly smart operating system.

Entertainment facilities such as on-demand movies and interactive games are available to enhance travelers' experiences.

Liu says the butler service, catering and cultural experiences on the train, including tea rituals and ethnic dances, made her trip sweet and relaxing. "I feel the

crew really put their heart into it," she says.

Most of Liu's clients are 45 to 65 years old, an age group she considers having the time and money to travel and showing interest in customized trips, including those to the polar regions. "Many of them made inquiries about the train," she adds.

Plans have been made to introduce a six-night, seven-day tour package after the National Day holiday. Liu believes the market potential will be great. "They will surely appeal to those who seek novel travel experiences," she says.

Tourists on the China-Laos Railway initially used it as a means of transportation and would buy a ticket and travel to Laos for sightseeing, says Jia Lei, an official with the StarExpress train operations.

"What sets this cross-border tourism train apart is that we are treating it as a tourism product and an upgrade of the original China-Laos Railway tourism experience," Jia says, adding that the train will be a vehicle to promote more



tourism train products across the country.

The initial plan involves two product lines, he says. One line will focus on high-quality trains, similar to that of the StarExpress and the other line is said to be more akin to sightseeing tourism trains in Japan, Europe and Canada, according to Jia.

He notes that China boasts a high-density railway network. In addition to the high-speed rail, the previous conventional system is suited for tourism as it covers areas where high-speed rail is not as prevalent.

Areas in China such as the Northeast, Northwest and Southwest have a strong railway infrastructure and abound in tourism resources along the way, which makes them ideal for tourism trains, he says.

The launch of StarExpress is not only a significant breakthrough for China's tourism train industry but also an important milestone in CTG Asset's efforts to deepen tourism cooperation between China and Laos and promote the development of tourism along the China-Laos

Railway, according to the company.

"The opening of the China-Laos Railway in 2021 is a tangible achievement of the BRI and a prime example of China sharing development opportunities with the world in a more open manner," says Lu Lu, chairman of CTG Asset.

The StarExpress train operating on the China-Laos Railway traverses mountains and rivers and will strengthen the friendship between China and Laos, supporting the BRI, Lu adds.

Chinese travelers have warmed to Laos since the China-Laos Railway went into operation and the recent visa-free policy has fueled their enthusiasm, says Guan Jian, an official with the Guangdong-based travel agency EC Walk.

The Lao government has introduced a visa-free policy for Chinese travelers accompanied by certified travel agents since July 1.

The announcement of the policy on June 26, which will end in June 2025, saw searches the next day for Laos tours on major travel agency Trip.com Group surge by 87 percent over the previous day, according to the agency.

Orders from mainland travelers to Laos have more than doubled year-on-year, with summer travel orders increasing by over 140 percent over the same period last year, data from Trip.com reveals.

Vang is happy about the operation of the tourism train and believes it will benefit his job as a tour guide.

"Chinese tourists have greatly increased since the opening of the China-Laos Railway and I receive two to three groups, each with 20 Chinese travelers, daily," Vang says.

He had trouble finding a job as an English teacher after graduation and decided to pick up Mandarin after seeing the potential increase in tourists from China.

"More are expected to come now that the tourism train is up and running," Vang says.

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## Food, song and dance: Bouyei route to preserving cultural heritage

By FELIX BACHAND  
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The Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture lies within the picturesque landscape of Southwest China's Guizhou province. The population of the Bouyei ethnic group in the prefecture exceeds 790,000 and this region is renowned for its unique traditions, language, and customs that have withstood the test of time.

Efforts are underway to safeguard this vibrant cultural heritage, from preserving traditional attire to the iconic slate house villages that dot the landscape. The region actively celebrates the essence of Bouyei identity through lively festivals, captivating performances, and educational programs, nurturing a deep sense of community pride and belonging.

A China Storyteller Partnerships tour of Guizhou, organized by China Daily, offers guests a unique oppor-

tunity to immerse themselves in the cultural legacy of the Bouyei ethnic group. At the heart of these preservation endeavors lies the Fenglin Bouyei scenic spot in Xingyi city, displaying over 600 Bouyei-style residences on the mountainside. This beautifully illustrates how Guizhou's karst topography intertwines with centuries-old Bouyei cultural traditions, showcasing cone-shaped karst formations, peaks, stalagmites, and caves.

Visitors to the region are treated to mesmerizing dances and melodic songs performed by the Bouyei people. Their artistic traditions have been honored as national intangible cultural heritage. Among these treasures is the Bouyei's "eight-tone sitting singing" music, renowned both at home and abroad for its harmonious melodies.

One gem awaiting exploration is the Yanyu village in Zhenfeng county, a veritable tourism haven. Regard-

ed as the oldest and largest Bouyei village, Yanyu is a testament to the rich cultural history of the Bouyei people, comprising 11 villager groups containing 656 households with more than 2,500 residents.

Upon arrival at Yanyu village, hosts greet guests with the rice wine set to the dynamic cadence of traditional songs and dances. Immersive activities await, offering a glimpse into the unique Bouyei culture, from the art of bamboo pole dancing to the time-honored traditions of glutinous rice cake pounding, spinning, weaving, and the artful craft of creating indigo-dyed clothing.

The Bouyei people are revered for their masterful handicraft and batik techniques. They employ a distinctive resist printing process that lends a cracked appearance to cotton fabric.

Intricate embroidery and craftsmanship define Bouyei clothing. They serve as garments and expressions of cultural heritage, reflecting



Villagers demonstrate the traditional spinning technique at Yanyu village, Zhenfeng county, Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the deep-rooted connection of the Bouyei people to nature and their surroundings. Each garment weaves a narrative, intertwining elements of history and identity.

It is a privilege to encounter the well-preserved intangible cultural heritage and unique ethnic customs of the Bouyei people in China. They predominantly live in south-

ern China, particularly in Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces.

Tourism and development in Guizhou can help promote the unique culture of the Bouyei people, while preserving the authentic agricultural practices, craftsmanship, language, and artistic performance integral to their way of life.

The intersection of tourism and development serves as a powerful catalyst for celebrating the Bouyei people's distinct culture, honoring their customs, and paving the way for sustainable initiatives to continue their rich heritage.

By promoting community involvement and meaningful engagement through responsible tourism, the Bouyei traditions can flourish, captivating and inspiring future generations.

Guizhou's Bouyei culture is upheld by vibrant festivals, thriving tourism, and progressive development, ensuring its enduring legacy.

## LIFE

## Commissioned music creates cultural bonds

Beijing audiences receive auditory feast as Western techniques enhance Chinese traditions, **Chen Nan** reports.

In 2010, composer Zhou Long was commissioned by the Beijing Music Festival and Boston Opera House to write *Madame White Snake*, an opera based on a famous Chinese folk tale that earned him the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2011.

Soon after, when Zhou met his old friend maestro Yu Long, founder of the Beijing Music Festival, Yu initiated the idea of commissioning the composer to write a new piece based on *Jiu Ge*, or Nine Songs, a classical Chinese poem series by patriotic Chu state poet Qu Yuan during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

"Yu showed great passion for the idea sparked by *Jiu Ge*, an ancient text that has long fascinated him. As our conversation went deeper, I was equally enthralled," recalls Zhou, who is known for using traditional Chinese motifs while applying the techniques and structures of Western opera traditions, a combination that defines his international reputation.

Trained in Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music and moving to the United States in 1985 under a fellowship to attend Columbia University in New York and receiving a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 1993, the composer is deeply grounded in the spectrum of his Chinese heritage and is a pioneer in transferring the sounds and techniques of ancient Chinese musical traditions to modern Western instruments and ensembles.

*Jiu Ge* is a series of ritualistic songs intended for religious ceremonies and sacrifices. The poems in *Jiu Ge* are notable for invoking deities, nature spirits and mythical figures, blending religious devotion with human emotions. They reflect a combination of spiritual reverence, human longing and natural imagery typical of Qu Yuan's style, particularly his deep concern for the fate of his country and his exile.

In 2013, the music piece *Nine Odes*, written for a symphony orchestra and solo singers, premiered during the 16th Beijing Music Festival by the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Lin Daye and singers including soprano Huang Ying and tenor Warren Mok.

Last year, Zhou readapted the music piece and turned it into a symphonic poem of the same title, debuting it in Guangzhou. On Tuesday, during the recent 27th Beijing Music Festival, it premiered in Beijing, performed by the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Huang Yi and accompanied by *erhu* player Lu Yiwen.

Also consisting of 11 chapters, the new version, without human voices, sees a conversation between Western symphonic music and the Chinese *erhu* (two-stringed fiddle).

"Again, it was the idea of Yu to create this new piece based on the 2013's *Nine Odes*. Without lyrics and therefore no language barrier, the music will travel to more places, allowing the world to enjoy the poems, which hold an important place in classical Chinese literature," says Zhou.

In the new version, Yu says, the



**Clockwise from top:** (Front, from left) Conductor Huang Yi, composer Zhou Long and *erhu* player Lu Yiwen greet the audience during the concert by the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra in Beijing on Tuesday; French pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet and cellist Gautier Capucon perform in the concert; conductor Huang (left) and composer Zhou; (from left) Zou Shuang, artistic director of the Beijing Music Festival, Chen Qing, director of the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, and Yu, founder of the Beijing Music Festival, pose with other musicians; and *erhu* player Lu plays during the concert. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

*erhu* plays a key role, like a narrator telling the audience about the different characters portrayed in the poems, such as the Lord and Lady of the Xiang River and the Mountain Spirit.

"Dedicated to gods, many poems express human emotions, particular-

ly themes of love, longing, separation and the transient nature of life," says Yu. "These poems provide valuable insights into the culture, beliefs and rituals of ancient Chinese people."

*Erhu* virtuoso Lu is known for performing contemporary music pieces using the traditional instru-

ment. For the 54-minute-long *Nine Odes*, Lu says that it is a test of physical strength and endurance.

"The composer wrote the music in a unique way, allowing the *erhu* to have a conversation with other classical musical instruments. These instruments work together

harmoniously while also 'confronting' one another," says Lu, adding that for traditional Chinese musical instruments like the *erhu*, new contemporary pieces are valuable since they inspire creativity in the players based on their solid techniques, which keep the old

instruments alive and fresh.

Launching the Beijing Music Festival in 1998, now considered one of the largest classical music events in the capital every autumn, Yu is devoted to commissioning new music works and supporting young musicians.

The first commissioned work was a cello concerto by American composer Philip Glass, which premiered on Oct 21, 2001, with British cellist Julian Lloyd Webber and the China Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Yu.

The Beijing Music Festival has commissioned and premiered new works collaborating with composers from home and abroad. For example, at the festival's 10th anniversary, Polish composer and conductor Krzysztof Penderecki performed his *Symphony No. 8, Songs of Transience*. In 2017, the festival premiered the violin concerto *La Joie de la Souffrance* (The Joy of Suffering) by composer Chen Qigang.

"Commissioning new music allows festivals to push the boundaries of artistic expression and introduce innovative ideas. It provides composers and musicians the opportunity to explore fresh concepts, sounds and forms. By encouraging creativity, the festival stays at the forefront of musical development and remains relevant to contemporary audiences," says Yu.

During the concert on Tuesday, another commissioned work premiered in Beijing — *Eros Athanatos Op. 69* — a concerto for piano, cello and orchestra composed by French-Swiss composer Richard Dubugnon.

Performed by French pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet and cellist Gautier Capucon, the music piece had its world debut in 2018.

"We have been friends for 24 years and this music piece is a gift for us," says Capucon, referring to Thibaudet.

"We once asked the composer, also a great friend, to write something for the cello and piano. We love the idea and here we are," Thibaudet says.

Thibaudet and Capucon are old friends of the Beijing Music Festival. Thibaudet can still recall the first time he played an outdoor concert during the festival in the city in 2005, "which was very cold," the pianist says.

Capucon also notes that premiering a new piece creates excitement and anticipation among audiences. It offers a one-of-a-kind experience. This sense of discovery helps draw in both seasoned concertgoers and new audiences curious about novel music.

"I enjoyed *Jiu Ge* when I watched the performance in Guangzhou and I particularly like the sound of the *erhu*, an instrument I adore. Maybe there will be a new piece for the cello and *erhu*," Capucon says. "For us instrumentalists, it's our mission to play music pieces. These new pieces often foster collaboration between composers, performers and the audiences, creating bonds between cultures."

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## 'Doctors' use technology to help ancient trees turn over a new leaf

CHENGDU — Armed with advanced diagnostic tools, a team of "tree doctors" navigates through bustling crowds in a park to reach its latest patient — a venerable ginkgo tree that has stood the test of time for over 1,700 years.

The team begins meticulously examining the tree as part of a citywide initiative aimed at assessing the health of ancient and famous trees and establishing health records for these natural treasures in Chengdu, the capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province.

Liu Fangling, a plant pathology expert on the team, uses a sonic tomograph to detect internal decay inside the tree.

"It's similar to a human CT scan," she explains. "With the help of specialized software, we can visualize the condition inside the trunk and estimate the extent of the decay."

Meanwhile, Gou Yubo, another "doctor", applies a light detection and ranging, or LiDAR, scanner to

create a 3D model of the tree to record its vital data, such as height, crown width and trunk diameter.

Then, soil samples and leaf specimens are collected for further laboratory analysis.

"Using technology and equipment, we conduct comprehensive diagnostics to identify issues, such as pest infestation, soil compaction and nutrient deficiencies, providing a basis for precise intervention," says Gou.

Within half an hour, the health check is complete — a routine part of the team's fieldwork. On average, they can inspect at least four to five trees each day.

Known as the hometown of giant pandas, Chengdu also boasts over 9,400 ancient and famous trees scattered across diverse locations from residential areas and village courtyards to remote mountain fields.

Ancient trees are more susceptible to health issues such as trunk decay, crown dieback, pest infestation and disease.



Liu Fangling (right), a plant pathology expert, and her colleague Wang Hong, who are part of a team of "tree doctors", inspect an ancient tree in Dujiangyan's Lidui Park in Chengdu, Sichuan province. TANG WENHAO / XINHUA

To enhance the protection of these natural treasures, the Chengdu Botanical Garden formed the ancient tree doctor team in 2014. Since then, the team

has conducted health assessments on more than 5,000 ancient trees throughout the city.

However, conducting health checks on them is a tall order. The

team frequently encounters hazards like insects and snakes in remote areas. But the biggest challenge is often just locating the trees.

Gou recalls a particularly challenging mission in Dayi county where the team had to carry its equipment on foot along a rugged mountain path for over an hour to reach a single tree. Some trees are hidden away in abandoned schoolyards, while others cling to cliff sides with no accessible paths, making their preservation efforts all the more demanding.

Despite hardships, the work is immensely rewarding.

In 2017, the team members diagnosed a severely decayed ginkgo tree in another park in Chengdu. They recommended targeted treatments like removing parasitic plants, revitalizing the root system and applying waterproof and insect-proof treatments.

"By 2022, the once-dying tree had flourished, with lush, green foliage," Liu says, beaming.

A 2022 survey recorded over 5.08 million ancient and famous trees in China.

Chengdu's efforts to protect these natural treasures are part of a nationwide movement to preserve botanical heritage. In recent years, initiatives to safeguard these living relics have gained momentum, in line with the country's broader goals of sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Last year, a big data platform to manage ancient and famous trees was launched in Huangling county, Northwest China's Shaanxi province. Meanwhile, in East China's Jiangsu province, authorities aim to achieve a protection rate of over 98 percent for ancient and famous trees with archive cards by next year.

"Ancient and famous trees are priceless legacies of nature and our ancestors. It is our responsibility to protect them," Gou says.

XINHUA

## CULTURE

## Reaping green gains

Ginger cultivation hub taps tradition and innovation for sustainable development, **Alexis Hooi, Ma Chenguang** and **Zhu Lixin** report in Tongling, East China's Anhui province.



Ginger farmers in Tongling, Anhui province, process their crop during the August harvest season. PHOTOS BY CHU ZHUCHUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

For villager Sheng Yiwu, what goes on in the backyard always seems to be on his mind, even when he is asleep at night.

That is because his livelihood depends on the 11 earthen huts behind his living quarters.

"I have to make sure the temperature, humidity, and other conditions inside the buildings are just right," said Sheng, 56.

For at least six generations, Sheng's family has been maintaining "ginger pavilions" — typically two-story structures of earthen walls and tiled roofs heated by burning wood for an optimal environment to store freshly harvested ginger, as part of the first few steps to process the popular plant for consumption.

The constant care and attention Sheng gives to the crops reflect local residents' pride in the pillar agricultural sector.

China is a major producer of ginger for the world and, here in Tongling in East China's Anhui province, people have long cultivated an indigenous type of the plant.

In November 2023, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO, included the Tongling White Ginger Plantation System on its list of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, in line with what it recognizes as agricultural practices amid stunning landscapes "that create livelihoods in rural areas while combining biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and tradition and innovation in a unique way".

Since 2005, the FAO has designated at least 86 systems in 26 countries as agricultural heritage sites. China ranked first in the world in the number of the heritage systems by 2023, with 22 entries.

In July 2022, President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the World Conference on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, saying that it is the common responsibility of humankind to protect agricultural heritage. China has actively responded to the program initiated by the FAO and the country has been protecting and inheriting agricultural heritage, Xi highlighted.

In Tongling, the earliest record of its white ginger can be traced to the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), boasting a cultivation history of more than two millennia, according to the FAO.

Tongling residents "make ingenious use of local resources and pay respect to the theories and methods of ecological agriculture ... the unique ginger cultural landscape that has emerged from Tongling's characteristic natural environment, climate, and soil contributes to the diversity of farming culture worldwide", it said.

The area's "microtopographical features of ginger ridges on high plots ... constitute a unique landscape of ginger fields. Ginger is interspersed with rice, vegetables, and rivers as in a mosaic picture. Together, they form



**From top:** Ginger farmers in Tongling, Anhui province, work the land back in August this year; Villagers gather at the Shuanglong Cave in Tianmen town of Tongling, Anhui province, during the summer to wash and peel white ginger crops. The site is known among local residents for being cool and a suitable location to process ginger; Locals check out white ginger sold at a market in Tongling, Anhui province back in September 2019; Workers at a ginger processing facility prepare the local produce for packaging in Tongling, Anhui province in August.

an amazing hill-field landscape with ginger fields/paddy fields", the organization cited in Tongling's UN listing.

"A characteristic ginger culture has emerged from time-honored ginger cultivation in Tongling, blending itself into all aspects of local life ... A ginger-pavilion opening ceremony is held every year ... and people sing pavilion-opening chants," according to the FAO.

#### Crisp taste

Local residents are now leveraging their ginger-growing heritage with their latest global accolade, combining deep agricultural traditions with green innovation for the next stages of sustainable development.

Li Jingming, president of the White Ginger Research Association in Tongling, said its main ginger production involves more than 2,000 households that can tend to 0.27 hectares of farmland each.

"Our white ginger, prized for its crisp taste, tender flesh, and nutritional and medicinal benefits, is a specialty item and its production scale is a fraction of the common yellow ginger, but the UN listing is set to boost our presence significantly and give us a major platform to promote our product," Li said.

The industry will need to focus on growing its farming expertise to meet the latest green standards, retain talent and fuel interest in its main crop, especially among younger residents, and build a strong brand leveraging global best practices, among its many pressing priorities, he said.

Yao Jigui, a researcher at the municipal bureau of agricultural and rural affairs, said one of the main challenges of cultivating Tongling white ginger has been the need to fend off plant diseases and pests in line with green farming practices.

"Our tradition of rotating other crops such as rice on our ginger plots, shaded naturally with thatch, shows the wisdom of our ancestors in maximizing our yields," Yao said.

"We're now studying how we can effectively build on these sustainable practices, such as protecting and improving soil quality."

The growing global recognition of Tongling white ginger will help spur the public and private sectors to work toward the development of the crop, including raising its quality and demand for it, said Cui Guangqing, deputy director of the municipal bureau of agricultural and rural affairs.

White ginger cultivation in Tongling is already set to hit more than 450 hectares in 2024, an increase of 11.5 percent year-on-year to cover a record planting area, latest industry figures showed.

A high-quality development plan for the ginger industry aims to grow a cultivation hub for the crop to cover more than 660 hectares by 2026, with an output value of the whole industrial chain reaching 2 billion yuan (\$280 million), according to

"A characteristic ginger culture has emerged from time-honored ginger cultivation in Tongling, blending itself into all aspects of local life."

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, in Tongling's UN listing

local authorities.

Tongling plans to achieve a relatively concentrated and contiguous planting area of more than 1,300 hectares of white ginger with an output value of 4 billion yuan by 2028, according to the industry road map.

Measures rolled out to grow the sector include transforming and upgrading 2,600 square meters of seed preservation and germination facilities, which can collect and store 150 metric tons of Tongling white ginger seeds, while technological advances will cover information-based and intelligent processing facilities, and new atmospheric-controlled and cold storage capabilities.

#### New offerings

Tongling's ginger-related businesses set to reap the benefits of these advances include the Jinfengyuan brand, which taps a major production area covering nearly 147 hectares, cultivating white ginger and related crops with an annual output value of up to 100 million yuan.

Jinfengyuan includes more than 20 product categories offered at home and abroad, with its focus on product quality extending to research and development helping achieve 13 patents, nine domestic trademarks, three copyright labels and other industry benchmarks.

"Beyond the traditional pickled ginger products, our new offerings include beverages, with marketing and R&D strategies pointing to much potential extending abroad, such as Southeast Asia and South Korea," said Qian Xueqin, who heads the group behind the brand.

"We're at the nascent stages of growth but the UN accolade, coupled with the sector's high-tech push in farming and production processes, and local government and policy support, should position us well for the opportunities ahead," she said.

Jin Rulin, who is accredited as a provincial-level inheritor of Tongling white ginger production skills, said the area's rich farming heritage continues to be its calling card.

"We must treasure this special crop tied closely to our lifestyle and linked to every resident in one way or another," said Jin, who also runs a company producing Tongling's ginger products that have collected multiple industry awards for helping to preserve and promote the local produce and interest related to its traditions and techniques.

Bao Shuangjiu, 60, who heads a cooperative involving 30 farming households in Tongling's Dayuan village that can reap 10 tons of ginger a

year, said his area is at the traditional heart of white ginger cultivation.

"We follow sustainable farming practices that have stood the test of time, including the changing climate; for example, the yield this year may be affected by irregular dry and wet weather conditions, but the support from the cooperative means farmers can readily face these challenges," Bao said. "What's crucial is keeping young residents involved. We need them to help us in the next steps of our development."

To that effect, Dayuan villager Hu Tingting has returned to her roots with her husband, Cheng Ling, taking her place at the forefront of young entrepreneurs heading home and promoting Tongling ginger products with innovative approaches, such as through using the latest digital and technological trends.

Their ginger-related food, drink, and fragrance products, under the label Shanli Wenhua, helped rake in 5 million yuan in a year, with e-commerce and livestreaming channels contributing significantly to their revenue.

The couple's business is attracting a growing clientele offline and online, with nearly 10,000 fans on social media platform Xiaohongshu alone.

"About 40 percent of our customers are young, aged below 35," said Hu, 32.

The duo also opened a restaurant, right below the house where Hu grew up and overlooking a picturesque pond beside her family's white ginger plot, offering novel dishes themed on the specialty produce that have proven to be a hit with diners who bring in 1.4 million yuan in revenue a year.

"We want to give our customers and visitors a full, immersive experience of our white ginger culture," said Cheng, 34.

Hu added: "The local government has also been very supportive, providing infrastructure such as roads and improved landscaping, so that more people can enjoy our attractions. All of us here in Tongling are eager to share the natural bounty of our white ginger."

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