

Dedicated teacher

Remote school caters to kids from ethnic group
CHINA, PAGE 5



Framework of trade with Africa set to broaden
BUSINESS, PAGE 8



Contemporary twist
Chinese opera fest revisits historical forms of art
LIFE, PAGE 15

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2024

Xi pledges to enhance IPR protection

Nation world's most active applicant for international patents for five years running

By MO JINGXI in Beijing and CHEN YE in Hangzhou

President Xi Jinping has expressed China's willingness to further strengthen international cooperation in protecting intellectual property rights and contribute its wisdom and solutions to creating an international environment conducive to innovation and development.

He made the remarks in a congratulatory letter sent to the 2024 International Association for the Protection of Intellectual Property World Congress, which opened on Saturday in Hangzhou, the capital of East China's Zhejiang province.

It was the first time that the annual world congress of the group, a global nongovernmental organization that uses the French abbreviation AIPPI and is dedicated to the development and improvement of IP-related laws, was held outside Europe and in China, since the association was formed 127 years ago.

Xi said in the letter that China has always attached great importance to the protection of IP rights and has actively promoted efforts to build itself into an IP powerhouse.

China is willing to work with all parties to firmly safeguard the international IP multilateral system, promote the development of a global IP governance system in a more just and reasonable direction, and make contributions to the well-being of humankind, he said.

In recent years, China has made historic accomplishments in IPR protection, which encourages innovation and provides a strong boost to the competitiveness of the Chinese economy.

Daren Tang, director-general of the World Intellectual Property Organization, said that as more countries around the world are turning to innovation, creativity and IP to drive growth, the hosting of the AIPPI world congress in China for the first time highlighted the importance of working in partnership to strengthen the global IP ecosystem.

"One of the most striking IP developments in recent decades has been its explosive growth," Tang said in a video address, noting that a clear example is China's use of the Patent Cooperation Treaty, an international agreement that helps inventors and businesses

apply for patents in multiple countries at the same time.

China has been the world's most active applicant for international patents for five consecutive years, with over 70,000 applications in 2023. The figure was just over 100 when the country joined the Patent Cooperation Treaty in 1994.

Hemant Singh, president of AIPPI India, said that in a global market where knowledge is driving economic development, nobody can benefit single-handedly without sharing knowledge with others.

He said that China, as a huge market with so much technical advancement and innovation, has the opportunity to lead the world in terms of how intellectual property should be protected, thus boosting the confidence of innovators and investors in China.

"So they are encouraged to come and invest more and more and China is encouraged to export more and more. It's a win-win thing for everyone," Singh said.

Speaking at the conference, Shen Changyu, head of the China National Intellectual Property Administration, said that China will make vigorous efforts to provide equal protection for all types of innovators and both domestic and foreign enterprises in terms of intellectual property rights.

Shen also said that China will work to accelerate the construction of an open, inclusive, equitable and beneficial international IP system on the basis of active participation and consensus-building.

The congress, which will run through Tuesday, attracted more than 2,300 delegates from over 92 countries and regions, including over 1,500 foreign delegates.

Pablo Fuentes, from Mexico-based IP firm Breakthrough, said that "our clients are looking more and more to file and protect their trademarks and patents in China".

"That's why we are here, and we are very interested in enhancing our relationship with China and for our clients as well," he said.

Themed "Balanced Protection and Innovative Development of IP Rights", the 2024 AIPPI World Congress was co-organized by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and the AIPPI.

Contact the writers at mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

Nowhere is safe



Palestinian rescuers search for survivors in a refugee camp in the Gaza strip on Saturday following Israeli strikes. At least 11 people were killed in the attack, while more were feared trapped under the debris. MARWAN DAWOOD / XINHUA

Redefining Chinese education in Southeast Asia

Since embarking on the process of reform and opening-up in 1978, China has witnessed over 40 years of remarkable socioeconomic achievements that have drawn global attention. Today, the country's economic miracle and growing national strength have made it increasingly influential in regional and international affairs.

China's influence in the Global South has expanded significantly. As of August 2023, 152 countries, most from the Global South, had planned or committed to participating in the Belt and Road Initiative. According to reports, for the first time, China's exports to BRI countries in 2023 surpassed those of the United States, Europe and Japan combined.

Unlike developed countries, China offers a model of peaceful coexistence and development as it engages with developing nations.

In recent years, as Sino-African economic, trade, and cultural exchanges have deepened, the African continent has seen a surge in Chinese language learning.

In South America, countries such

WORLD WATCH

By Pei Sai Fan

as Chile, Peru, Argentina and Brazil have witnessed a wave of interest in China following President Xi Jinping's visit to Latin America in 2014, with enthusiasm for learning Chinese reaching new highs.

Now, Middle Eastern countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran are also, in varying degrees, actively increasing the importance of Chinese language learning within their national education systems.

The rise of China has significantly driven the demand for Chinese education in Southeast Asian countries, too, due to motivating forces in several key areas.

First, economic and trade relations. According to the Southeast Asia Outlook 2024 report published by the ASEAN Studies Centre at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in April, China continues to be seen as the most eco-

nomically influential country in Southeast Asia.

China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner since 2009, and ASEAN has been China's largest trading partner since 2020.

Recently, in response to Western tariffs on Chinese goods and the trend of "friend-shoring" to enhance supply chain resilience, Chinese companies have shifted their business models from merely "exporting output" via international trade to "exporting capacity" by establishing local companies in Southeast Asia for production and distribution. This has stimulated interest in Chinese language learning, as employees who are proficient in Chinese are likely to be more competitive in the workplace, particularly since Chinese is often the working language within these companies.

Deeper understanding of system of values and social norms can also help bridge differences between Chinese companies, local authorities and the labor force.

China's proposal for a China-ASEAN community with a shared

future and the establishment of comprehensive, high-quality, forward-looking partnerships with some Southeast Asian countries highlight that in this strategic high level of collaboration, it requires the countries concerned to enhance cultural, educational and religious exchanges. Language carries the intellectual heritage of a culture and through language, people can better appreciate and embrace differences while seeking common ground for collaboration and development.

The June 2024 issue of The Economist featured an article titled "The Rise of Chinese Science". It noted that China had surpassed the United States and the European Union in terms of proportion of research papers in the top 1 percent of citations, and for the first time in 2023, based on Nature Index which tracks the affiliations of high-quality primary scientific research papers, China produced more high-quality research papers than the US.

See *Language*, page 3

Intelligent auto sector speeding up

By CHENG YU in Beijing and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

China is vrooming to shape the future of intelligent connected vehicles, with creation of a new industry road map underway, and is aiming for greater advancements in autonomous driving, high-end supply chains and global cooperation, according to government officials, company executives and industry experts.

Jin Zhuanglong, minister of industry and information technology, said the country will draft a comprehensive development plan for the intelligent connected vehicle, or ICV, industry, with the aim of harmonizing vehicle-road integration and enhancing software and hardware collaboration in the sector.

The term "intelligent connected vehicles" basically refers to "smarter" cars equipped with advanced technologies like artificial intelligence that enable them to communicate with other vehicles, the cloud and infrastructure like roads.

"Now, China has basically formed a

comprehensive industrial system spanning chips, sensors, computing platforms, chassis control and vehicle-cloud connection for the ICV industry," Jin said at the 2024 World Intelligent Connected Vehicles Conference, which ended on Saturday in Beijing.

Jin also said that accelerated steps will be taken to formulate a regulatory system for high-level autonomous driving.

Another official of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said at the conference that China's self-driving cars are "nearing readiness for public roads", with a group of autonomous driving vehicles awaiting evaluation and permission for the final rollout.

The remarks came as President Xi Jinping said that science and technology should spearhead the advancement of Chinese modernization, during a recent inspection tour of East China's Anhui province, where he took a close look at high-tech products including intelligent connected vehicles at an exhibition of scientific and technological innovations.

Buoyed by such accelerated efforts in developing high-tech and intelligent connected vehicles, Lei Jun, founder of tech heavyweight Xiaomi Corp, said at the conference that the company is expected to meet its goal of delivering 100,000 Xiaomi SU7s—

See *Cars*, page 3

DOMESTIC AI MODELS TACKLE UNIQUE DEMANDS OF CANTONESE

Cultural elements, colloquialisms require local solutions, experts say

By OASIS HU in Hong Kong oasishu@chinadailyhk.com

In-depth

Is there a wife in a wife cake? Heyson He Lixi, an influencer promoting Cantonese, asked.

"There is no actual wife in a wife cake, as it is just a traditional Hong Kong pastry," answered SenseChat, the world's first Cantonese large language model, a ChatGPT-like product, in fluent Cantonese.

He raised a more challenging question, "What is sorrowful rice?" "Sorrowful rice, a well-known

delicacy in Hong Kong, derives its name from the martial arts masterpiece *The Return of the Condor Heroes* by Hong Kong writer Jin Yong. In the novel, the character Yang Guo experiences deep sorrow after losing his beloved, Xiaolongnyu," SenseChat responded.

See *Cantonese*, page 2

Taking oath



Indonesia's new President Prabowo Subianto is sworn in at the House of Representatives building in Jakarta, on Sunday. AJENG DINAR ULFIANA / REUTERS See story, page 6

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

www.chinadailyglobal.com
Member of ANN Asia News Network
China Daily Global ©2024 All Rights Reserved



PAGE TWO

From page 1

He was impressed — it was the first artificial intelligence tool he had encountered that exhibited a profound understanding of Cantonese culture.

Born in 1998, He is fond of Cantonese and has been creating videos promoting the language since college. Over the years, he has amassed a fan base that surpasses 700,000 across various online platforms, including YouTube and popular Chinese mainland social media platforms like Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin. Due to the recent AI craze, He started producing videos evaluating the tools' ability to understand Cantonese.

The outcomes are underwhelming. Many AI large language models (LLMs) and AI software developed on the mainland fail to recognize Cantonese phonetically. Some Western-developed AI software can listen to Cantonese, but cannot speak it accurately. ChatGPT, for instance, often blends Cantonese with Mandarin. Suno, an AI large language model tool that specializes in generating songs, can pronounce Cantonese to a degree, but its primary focus remains music creation.

In July, the SenseTime Group, an AI developer based in Hong Kong, introduced SenseChat, a Cantonese version of its proprietary LLM, and announced that it would be available for free to Hong Kong users indefinitely.

Upon a friend's recommendation, He downloaded Sensechat.

"I felt 85 percent satisfied with SenseChat," he said. "The application still requires to be further refined, but it is one of the few that can truly understand Cantonese."

The application emphasizes one of the unique traits of Cantonese — its colloquial nature.

Pronunciation of Cantonese involves extensive use of modal particles, which are often used at the end of sentences to indicate mood. These particles usually go unnoticed by most AI tools, but Sensechat captures them effectively.

In terms of written text, Sensechat can understand and reflect the nuances between the two forms of written Cantonese. It has a standardized form used in formal situations, similar to Mandarin, and a phonetic style for everyday use. This characteristic, He said, is often overlooked by other large language models.

He recorded his interactions with Sensechat, and shared it online, garnering over 150,000 views. "Cantonese speakers truly need such a tool," He said.

Data size matters

Training an LLM typically involves three stages, said Cao Jiannong, the chair professor in the Department of Computing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The first stage requires pre-training using extensive data, followed by fine-tuning with high-quality data. In the third stage, humans are needed to align the output of the LLM with local culture, ethics, morals, laws, and other rules to restrict the risk of generating inaccurate, biased, or unlawful content.

Developing a Cantonese LLM faces difficulties in all three stages, Cao said.

While Hong Kong's internet infrastructure is relatively well-developed, there is a scarcity of Cantonese content available online. A major factor contributing to this scarcity is that while Cantonese is widely spoken in daily life, the written form of Cantonese is Chinese.

Moreover, English has long served as the official language in Hong Kong. Consequently, a significant portion of the city's online information, including official archived documents in areas such as law, finance, politics, and medicine, is predominantly available in English, Cao said.

LLMs rely heavily on abundant data for their training, said Francis Fong Po-kiu, honorary president of the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation, a local IT-related business association. Without data, there is simply no way to develop a language model, he said.

Literature scarcity

Cantonese web resources suffer not only from a shortage in quantity, but also a lack of quality, said Cao.

When it comes to written material, Hong Kong has not prioritized literature, resulting in a scarcity of quality Cantonese literary works, said Keith Li King-wah, chairman of Hong Kong Wireless Technology Industry Association.

Most available Cantonese texts come from online forums and social media, and often contain low-quality and even offensive language, potentially leading AI models to produce crude content, Li said.

Collecting speech data presents another problem.



Cantonese: When dialect meets cutting-edge tech



ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

Despite access to Cantonese videos online, such as movies and TV dramas, they cannot be used due to background noise, said Albert Lam Yun-sang, the chief technology officer and chief scientist at Fano Labs, a Hong Kong-based startup focusing on speech and language technologies.

Besides insufficient data, Cantonese's intricate linguistic characteristics are another obstacle in training an AI model.

The Economist magazine analyzed language learning time, and found that mastering Cantonese requires 88 weeks of study, placing it alongside Mandarin, Arabic, Japanese, and Korean in the top five most difficult languages to learn.

Lu Lewei, director of the SenseTime Research Institute, said that Cantonese is highly colloquial with numerous inflections. It has nine tones and even a slight variation in pronunciation can alter a word's meaning.

The language also features a blend of Chinese and English and a mix of old and modern terms.

In language modeling, the simplicity of a language offers advantages. The more complex the language is, the harder for the AI model to learn about it, Lam said.

Furthermore, underlying Cantonese is the local culture, which can be challenging for those tasked with aligning the output of large language models, Cao said.

Urgent need

Despite the difficulties involved in creating Cantonese AI models, demand for them is undeniable, said Fong from the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation.

The global Cantonese-speaking population is nearly 120 million, and 85.2 million of those are native Cantonese speakers.

In Hong Kong, 6.3 million residents, or 88.2 percent of the city's population, use Cantonese as their spoken language. In other cities within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Cantonese is the predominant dialect, with 67 million residents in Guangdong province conversing in it.

In the future, AI will be akin to today's computers and fundamentally a tool for the general public. Without Cantonese AI tools, Cantonese-only speakers may encounter significant inconvenience and marginalization in both the offline and online world, Cao said.

For a city, lack of AI expertise could result in decreased productivity in sectors such as education, healthcare, finance, and law. These limitations could impede the whole city's development, Cao added.

Fong said AI models from other countries or regions may struggle to grasp Cantonese culture accurately. This could lead to cultural or political misinterpretations, resulting in the spreading of incorrect messages.

Dependence on outside AI models could make privacy and security vulnerable, Fong said.

Government officials, for instance, might face national security risks and local companies might leak data if they inadvertently disclose sensitive information to the models developed in foreign jurisdictions, he added.

Fong urged the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government and

local organizations to develop Cantonese LLMs.

In July, Sun Dong, Hong Kong's Secretary for Innovation, Technology, and Industry, announced that the SAR government is cooperating with local universities to develop a Hong Kong-based large language model.

A document co-pilot application for civil servants is now being used on a trial basis.

The model has already been implemented in Sun's department and the system will eventually become available to all Hong Kong residents, the secretary said.

The bureau said plans are underway to expand the pilot application to three other government bureaus, but it gave no indication when Hong Kong residents would gain access to it.

Fong said if it could be launched successfully, the government LLM would have many benefits.

It would be a positive step in resolving the issue of some Western AI models limiting their usage in Hong Kong. Also, implementing a localized AI model could safeguard privacy and provide more convenience to residents, Fong said.

Cao said it's unclear what specific features the government's AI model could offer and how it would distinguish itself from other similar products.

"I don't think the government has done enough research on what they want to do," Cao said.

Local startups

Local technology companies, meanwhile, are actively meeting the needs of

the Cantonese-speaking market.

One startup, Votee AI, developed an open-source Cantonese LLM this year.

After years of operating in the local market, Votee AI has gathered substantial amounts of open-source Cantonese data along with primary data.

Taking a community-centered approach, they have also collaborated with local Cantonese linguists and AI researchers, including the team behind the online Cantonese dictionary "words.hk", to capture the nuances of Hong Kong speech.

SenseTime has also accumulated a vast reservoir of internal open-source data.

The company has synthesized data by leveraging advanced technologies and bought supplementary information from external channels to collect data.

To combat the shortage of high-quality Cantonese data, SenseTime also collected audio Cantonese data from hundreds of its local employees.

Sensechat's clients include customer service providers, financial institutions, legal firms, healthcare companies, and others.

For Hong Kong residents, the company promises to provide the service for free indefinitely for free on both the web version and mobile application.

A local tech industry insider, who chose to stay anonymous, said SenseChat should open-source its technology to allow more residents and organizations to access it freely, to benefit the city.

After trying the Sensechat platform, he said its understanding of some Hong Kong slang could be more precise. Nonetheless, "it should be recognized that SenseChat filled a void in the local market," he said.

Cultural roots

In addition to developing local AI models, existing mainstream language models should be encouraged to improve their Cantonese functions, said Li from the Hong Kong Wireless Technology Industry Association.

However, mainstream AI language models are primarily developed by commercial entities in the West. Without market demand, they may not be willing to enhance their products' Cantonese capabilities.

Li believes the Hong Kong SAR government and local organizations should take the lead in collecting Cantonese data, digitize cultural content, and share these resources openly to enrich the Cantonese body of information.

Cantonese speakers can also actively use the language to engage with mainstream AI language models.

These actions can demonstrate to AI model developers that there is a market demand for Cantonese, while interaction with these models can also enhance their understanding of Cantonese culture.

The key to encouraging more people to use Cantonese lies in making Cantonese culture appealing, Li said.

Language is not just a communication tool; it encapsulates the cultural essence and identity of its speakers, he said.

The marginalized status of Cantonese in the digital sphere is a reflection of the decline of the cultural significance of the region.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Hong Kong, although just a city, was so culturally influential that Cantonese was a popular language around the world, Li said.

"At that time, the whole world watched Hong Kong movies and TVB (television shows), knew Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee, and sang Cantonese songs. However, in the present day, even many students in Hong Kong cannot speak Cantonese," he said.

"The focus of government policies should not only be on technology, but also on culture."

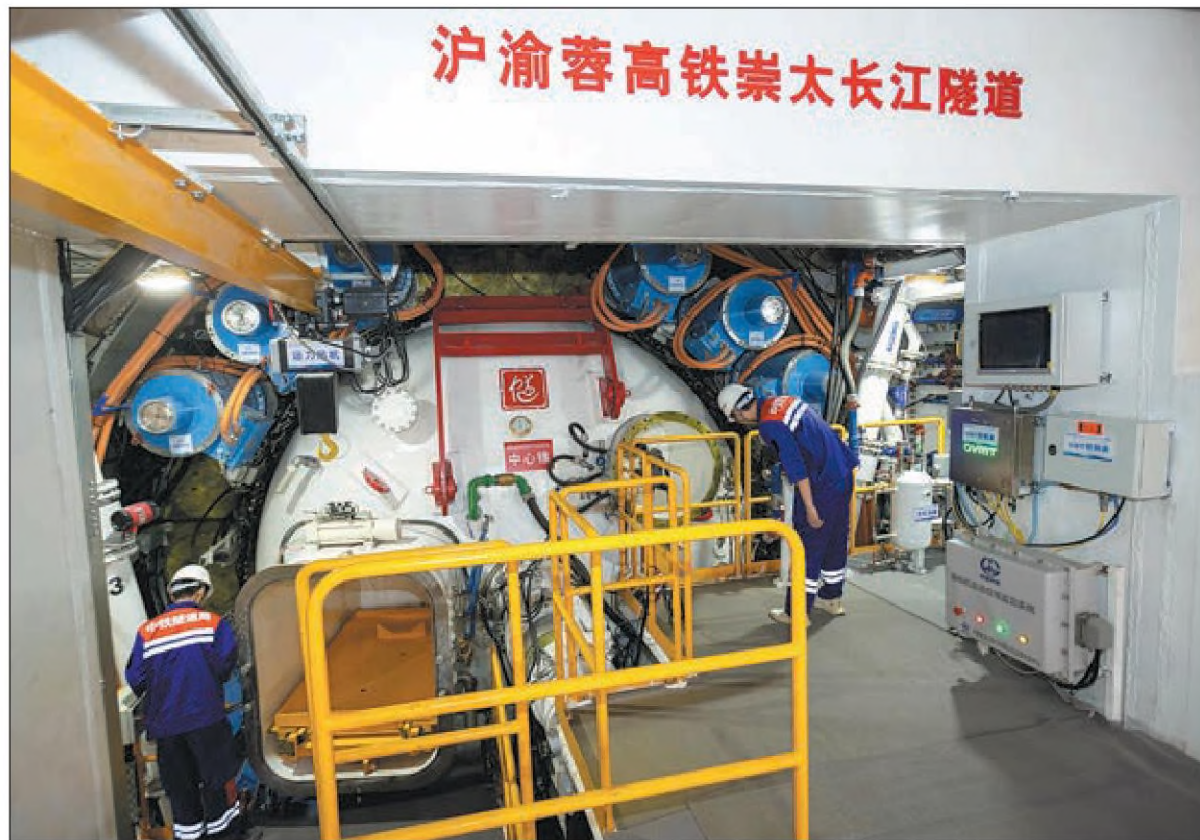
He, the influencer, said he learned Cantonese from his grandparents when he was a child, which later made him more proficient in the language than other school students. The confidence this gave him motivated him to become a Cantonese blogger.

However, as he aged, Cantonese became so marginalized that even voice-operated devices and software in his home failed to understand Cantonese commands.

While he could communicate with these devices in Mandarin and English, his grandparents, who only speak Cantonese, struggled to keep pace.

He hopes that Cantonese LLMs will one day help his elderly grandparents manage their daily lives through voice-controlled apps capable of understanding Cantonese.

TOP NEWS



Employees run checks inside the Linghang shield machine before operations commenced on April 29. It is the world's largest shield machine for railway construction, a tunneling device with a diameter of 15.4 meters. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

China-made tunneling machine passes milestone

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

The world's largest shield machine for railway construction, a tunneling device with a diameter of 15.4 meters, excavated its 1,000th ring segment on Sunday to reach 2 kilometers, a milestone in the construction of a tunnel beneath the Yangtze River for a high-speed railway.

The achievement also means that the shield machine, called Linghang, which was independently developed by China, is pressing ahead to a higher level of construction difficulty, according to China Railway Tunnel Group Co, constructor of what will be a 14.25-km underwater railway tunnel linking Shanghai's Chongming Island with Taicang, a city in Jiangsu province.

"With a gradual, slight downward slope, the pressure from the surrounding water on the construction project is escalating. Many parts of the tunnel to accommodate

railway tracks in both directions are to be built at 89 meters underneath the river, where the water pressure is 0.9 megapascal — as enormous as holding six people on a fingernail," said Fu Bowei, the project's deputy chief engineer.

"Such gigantic water pressure places high demands on the performance of our equipment and technologies," Fu said, adding that the 128-meter-long shield machine began work in April.

High-speed railways are expected to run at a maximum of 350 km/h in the tunnel, the world's highest speed in underwater tunnels. The trains will not slow down before entering the underwater section.

According to Shanghai's Jiefang Daily, the tunnel will be ready for the operation of the Shanghai-Nanjing-Hefei high-speed railway by November 2029.

So far, tunnel construction has crossed the embankment on the north side of the Yangtze River and proceeded more than 1,100 meters

into the riverbed, and the excavation environment has changed from soft soil to sandy formation.

"Moreover, hard cement is contained in the environment, which makes the shield cutter easy to wear during tunneling. The shield machine is equipped with a system to detect tool wear. Whenever wear is detected, we make corresponding adjustments," said Fu.

"Also, the construction is currently under a protection area for aquatic products, and we must optimize tunneling parameters, including those regarding slurry pressure, thrust and advancing speed, to make its operation adaptable to the environment," he said.

The entire tunneling project needs to cross nearly 20 risk sources, including the protection areas for aquatic products as well as docks and parks, said Fu.

Liu Jianping, deputy manager of the project, said eight smart construction systems, integrating technologies such as cloud computing

and virtual and real integration, as well as artificial intelligence inspection, are being deployed.

These smart systems will be used in tunneling, assembly, prefabrication, transportation, ventilation, detection and management and control.

The Shanghai-Nanjing-Hefei high-speed railway is the eastern section of the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu high-speed route, and is an important part of the high-speed rail corridor along the Yangtze River in the nation's "Eight Vertical and Eight Horizontal" rail network.

The project will create a fast new channel between the megacity cluster with Shanghai as the core as well as city clusters centered on Nanjing and Hefei.

It is expected to further bring cities in the Yangtze River delta closer to one another, serving the coordinated development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and promoting the integrated development of the delta region.

Nation not part of nuclear arms race, says envoy

US, with largest arsenal, called on to stop misrepresenting policies of others

By MINLU ZHANG at United Nations and SHAO XINYING in Beijing

A Chinese arms control official on Friday called on the United States to "stop misrepresenting China's nuclear policy" and said that China "has not, and will not, engage in a nuclear arms race."

A representative of the US on Friday told the First Committee of the UN General Assembly that Moscow is violating the New START Treaty and employing "irresponsible nuclear rhetoric" amid the Ukraine crisis, while claiming that China has not fully disclosed the extent of its nuclear weapons modernization.

Shen Jian, ambassador for disarmament affairs of China, told the committee that China's no-first-use policy "requires maintaining a certain level of ambiguity regarding its nuclear arsenal to ensure the survivability of its limited nuclear forces".

"As long as no country uses nuclear weapons against China, it will not face a nuclear threat from China. This is the most meaningful form of transparency," Shen said.

He said the US possesses the largest and most advanced nuclear arsenal, calling it "a first-strike nuclear policy, and even tailors nuclear deterrence strategies for other countries".

"The transparency of the US display of nuclear power is nothing more than a 'muscle show' that will not make other countries feel safe," he said.

"China has consistently maintained its nuclear forces at the minimum level required for national security and has not, and will not, engage in a nuclear arms race," the Chinese envoy said.

He said China must "appropriately" modernize its nuclear forces to "ensure the safety, reliability and survivability of its minimum nuclear deterrent", as "China's external security environment continues to deteriorate", noting that certain countries are developing global missile defense systems and other weapons that "impact

strategic stability".

He urged the US to "stop misrepresenting China's nuclear policy". For 60 years, China has adhered to a No First Use policy with a high degree of stability, consistency and predictability, he said. Recently, China once again formally proposed that nuclear-armed states negotiate a "No First Use Treaty" or issue a joint political statement on the matter as soon as possible.

China has engaged in arms control and nonproliferation dialogues with many countries around the world, including the United States, Shen said. As the current coordinator of the P5 mechanism, China is also actively promoting dialogue and cooperation among the five nuclear-weapon states.

The P5 mechanism is a dialogue process among the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US.

Shen said that the US should stop projecting its logic that "power inevitably seeks dominance" onto China.

Shen said over the past 20 years, the US has withdrawn from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Iran nuclear deal, and these moves undermine the international arms control regime.

According to The New York Times, amid ongoing global conflicts, the US plans to allocate an estimated \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years to modernize its arsenal.

Shen noted that while some countries criticized China and Russia with regard to their nuclear arsenals, they made "no mention of other nuclear-weapon states upgrading their arsenals". He called this a "double standard" and emphasized that such actions, which "draw lines based on ideology and stir up bloc confrontation", will not advance nuclear disarmament.

Contact the writers at minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

Cars: Integration of 5G key for auto industry

From page 1

electric vehicles launched by the company as a venture into the ICV sector — by November, which is ahead of its year-end target.

Li Shufu, chairman of Chinese automaker Geely Holding Group, said that Chinese automakers are racing into a new stage of development with intelligence as their core competitiveness. Like many leading car companies, Geely has made progress in human-machine interaction, intelligent driving, chips and low-orbit satellites, he said.

Such confidence was also expressed by international players. Ralf Brandstaetter, chairman and CEO of Volkswagen Group China,

said, "China is the future of the global automotive industry, and we are committed to being part of this journey in the era of intelligent connected vehicles."

In addition to building its largest development center outside Germany in Hefei, the capital of Anhui province, Volkswagen is strengthening cooperation with Chinese manufacturers like Xpeng and local high-tech companies such as Horizon Robotics, operating system provider Thundersoft and battery maker Gotion High-Tech Co, he said in a video speech to the conference on Thursday.

By 2027, the German automobile manufacturer will launch 40 new models in China across all brands,

including more than 20 new energy vehicles, which clearly demonstrates its commitment to the Chinese market, he emphasized.

The latest data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed that China is home to nearly 400 "little giant" companies in the intelligent connected vehicle sector. The term "little giant companies" refers to small and medium-sized enterprises that typically specialize in niche sectors, command high market share and boast strong innovative capacity.

To support the rapid expansion of the sector, more than 50 cities across China have designated over 32,000 kilometers of test routes for ICVs and upgraded

10,000 kilometers of roads with smart technologies.

Despite China's momentum in the ICV industry, some company executives still see room for improvement. Yu Chengdong, executive director of Huawei Technologies Co, said that while the 5G smartphone penetration rate has reached over 85 percent in China, less than 10 percent of the nation's passenger vehicles use 5G.

"The integration of 5G into the ICV sector should be put into place, as it will generate economic growth and enhance the global competitiveness of the sector as a whole," he said.

Contact the writers at chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Moonstruck



Visitors look at samples collected from the dark side of the moon by the Chang'e-6 mission during the 75th International Astronautical Congress in Milan, Italy, on Oct 14. DE YONGJIAN / CHINE NEWS SERVICE

Language: Learning Chinese is of strategic importance

From page 1

The article predicted that China will increasingly achieve self-sufficiency in science and technology and will no longer rely on Western frameworks for evaluating research, nor use Western journals as a standard for measuring scientific achievements.

The US' technology decoupling from China has spurred China's high-quality development and innovation in science and technology. China has overtaken the US in certain new areas of innovation such as high-speed rail, renewable energy, electric vehicles, navigation satellite system, 6G, smart computing and internet-based platforms for industrial supply chains, among others.

The recent popular video game

Black Myth: Wukong, a groundbreaking high-quality production in China's gaming history, smashed multiple sales records in the international gaming market and drew overseas audiences' interest in classic ancient Chinese novels and traditions, showcasing China's cultural soft power.

Western large language models, such as ChatGPT, are primarily trained in English data and reflect Western cultural and value biases, while non-English perspectives are sometimes considered irrelevant or erroneous. Currently the Chinese artificial intelligence industry is actively developing high-quality Chinese-language LLMs by collecting classical masterpieces, ancient novels, encyclopedias, public governance data, and data from various profession-

al fields in a massive exercise to incorporate China's 5,000 years of civilization and wisdom into AI model training.

Going forward, according to the IDC Global DataSphere 2023 report, the amount of data generated in China is expected to grow from 23.88 zettabytes in 2022 to 76.6 zettabytes by 2027, with an annual growth rate of 26.3 percent, the highest in the world. This vast Chinese language data pool will become a significant advantage in developing powerful Chinese language AI LLMs.

From the perspective of Southeast Asian countries, learning the Chinese language is of strategic importance.

First, it would mean seizing opportunities from China's new wave of businesses that are invest-

ing and localizing their operations in Southeast Asia. Through understanding of language and culture, the two sides can appreciate each other's corporate culture and foster closer business cooperation. This also facilitates seamless integration of production chains across China and Southeast Asia under the "China +1" business strategy.

Second, leveraging Asian wisdom to address issues facing Asia. China possesses massive data resources that represent a large chunk of Asian languages and cultures. Singapore is currently developing the Sea-Lion AI open-source AI LLM trained on data from 11 official Southeast Asian languages, including English, Chinese, Indonesian, Malay, Thai, and Vietnamese. If data in Chinese language

from China is incorporated, an "Asian Wisdom" AI LLM could offer better insights into Asian affairs and provide solutions suitable for Asia's economic and social development.

Third, promoting the ASEAN principles of diversity and openness in international relations. Learning Chinese language and culture aligns with these principles in Southeast Asia's multicultural and multilingual community, which fosters inclusiveness and cooperation between different ideologies.

Fourth, Southeast Asia should become a peaceful "blessing ground" rather than a new "battleground" for US-China relations. Countries in Southeast Asia should cultivate China's growing regional influence into a force for regional cooperation and shared prosperity. By integrating the wisdom of both East and West and learning from the frontiers of Chinese and Western technologies

and innovations, the region can elevate the "Asian era" development to even greater heights.

In fact, we are already witnessing the growing trend of more Southeast Asian students choosing to study in Chinese mainland universities. Other than tuition fees being much lower than that of Western universities, Chinese universities offer high-quality education in domains such as technology, telecommunication, engineering and e-commerce; offer opportunities to immerse in Chinese culture; and provide in-depth understanding of China's economic development and business opportunities.

The author is an adjunct professor at National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and an adviser to Nanyang University Alumni Academic Society. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

151 nations committed to carbon neutrality goals, Tsinghua says

By ZHAO YIMENG
zhaoyimeng@chinadaily.com.cn

As of May, 151 countries have committed to carbon neutrality targets, with 120 of them enshrining their dedication through laws or policy documents, according to a recent report by Tsinghua University.

The 2024 Global Carbon Neutrality Annual Progress Report, released on Thursday, also said 86 of the 151 nations have outlined detailed plans to meet their goals, signaling an important shift toward implementation.

Du Xiangwan, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the report shows the latest progress made by various countries in technological innovation and market applications, providing a detailed examination of the development goals, models and potential of low-carbon technologies worldwide. For China, it has become a leader in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies.

"China's efforts are not only crucial for its own development, but will also have a profound impact on global climate governance and the overall progress toward carbon neutrality," Gu said.

He emphasized the country's significant role in the global renewable energy sector.

"Clean energy sources like wind and solar power, along with energy storage technologies, are being developed and applied not only to meet domestic needs, but also to provide critical technological support for the global green and low-carbon transition," he said.

Renewable energy, which is critical in underpinning the carbon neutrality transition, is not growing fast enough to meet the COP28 target set in December. That goal sought a three-fold increase in global renewable energy capacity

by 2030, the report said.

Wang Can, a researcher with Tsinghua University's Institute for Carbon Neutrality, said if the historical growth rate from 2000 to 2023 continues, global renewable energy capacity will only reach 1.7 to 2.7 times the 2022 level by 2030, falling short of the three-fold target.

"However, the report points out that the rapid expansion of renewable energy in 2023 provides some optimism that short-term trends could improve the likelihood of meeting this goal," Wang said while introducing the findings.

"While this concentration has led to technological advances, it also underscores the need for technical assistance and international cooperation to boost deployment in less-developed countries," he said.

Moreover, the report indicates that although more countries are disclosing their climate finance needs, the global progress in climate investment and financing remains slow, posing challenges for scaling up carbon neutrality efforts.

"We have noticed that some countries have increased tariffs on key renewable energy products, probably hindering the global diffusion of low-cost carbon neutrality technologies," Wang said.

Although notable progress has been made in countries' efforts to set carbon neutrality targets, gaps remain in terms of policy, actions and outcomes, the report showed.

Bridging the gap between progress and targets requires recognizing the diversity of each country's carbon neutrality pathways. Countries will need to tailor their approaches while still contributing to the broader global goal, the report said.

"The implementation of the goal is still a major challenge, with more than half of the involved countries yet to establish a comprehensive policy system," Wang said.

Friendly farewell



The Russian coast guard's anti-submarine ship *Admiral Tributs* departs from a military port in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Sunday after concluding a three-day friendly visit following joint drills and patrol missions with the China Coast Guard.

WANG SONGQI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Kung fu comrades



Kung fu practitioners perform at the opening ceremony of the 13th Zhengzhou International Shaolin Wushu Festival in Dengfeng of Zhengzhou, Henan province, on Saturday. With 2,560 kung fu practitioners from 56 countries and regions participating, the festival provides an opportunity for cultural exchanges and mutual understanding based on a shared passion for kung fu. LI LIQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Heads roll in wake of canteen scandal

Principal sacked in Kunming after rotten meat served in school cafeteria

By LI LEI
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

Authorities in Kunming, Yunnan province, have announced the dismissal of the principal and the legal representative of a private middle school following an investigation that revealed the school cafeteria had served spoiled meat to its students.

The contract operator of the cafeteria — found to be unqualified for managing it — was fined nearly 5.8 million yuan (\$810,000) for the violation, said a statement released late on Saturday.

The investigation was prompted by videos shared online by parents of students at Changfeng School in Kunming's Guandu district on Wednesday.

The clips, which raised concerns about broader food safety issues, depicted parents responding to their children's complaints about the food in the cafeteria. The parents were filmed confronting cafeteria workers, alleging that trays of pork slices emitting strong and unpleasant odors were being used for cooking.

Some parents even reported that expired beef with a production date from 2015 was being served.

In response to the online outcry, the statement said the district gov-

ernment promptly assembled a joint investigative team to address the concerns.

The team confirmed that the pork slices in question had been freshly butchered on the same day and had proper food safety certificates.

However, the meat supplier, Yunnan Caiyunjian Catering Management Co, failed to maintain the cold chain during transportation, leading to spoilage after the meat had been left at room temperature for up to nine hours.

Regarding the allegations concerning the expired beef, the task force clarified that the term "2015 SIF" on the packaging denoted the manufacturer's registration number, not the production date.

The beef in question was actually produced in May and had a two-year shelf life, the task force said.

The school, owned by Yunnan Jinnuo Education Investment Holdings Group Co, had contracted Yunnan Runsheng Property Services Co in August to manage its cafeteria without reporting this decision to the local education bureau as required, the investigation found.

While Yunnan Runsheng was licensed for sales of prepackaged food, it lacked clearance for cafeteria operations.

Consequently, the school's principal and legal representative were dismissed, and a restructuring of the school's board of directors was ordered. The school, which was fined 100,000 yuan for the food safety scandal, was also directed to enhance transparency and parental involvement in school affairs.

"Changfeng School failed to conduct a thorough review of the operational qualifications of the cafeteria operator, and it had contracted out management without oversight and adopted a superficial approach in management," the statement said.

The statement also proposed the establishment of rules mandating school leaders and parental representatives to dine with students in the cafeteria.

Yunnan Runsheng, the cafeteria contractor, was penalized with the confiscation of 460,000 yuan in illegal income, and an additional fine of 5.78 million yuan for operating outside licensed categories and serving substandard food.

Yunnan Colorful Clouds, which supplies Yunnan Runsheng, was instructed to halt operations pending further investigation, with penalties to be imposed accordingly.

Some officials, including the director of the district's education and sports bureau and a deputy director of the district's market regulator, have been suspended from their duties indefinitely.

Mountain climbing milestone reached

By QIN FENG in Xi'an and PENG CHAO

A 36-year-old Chinese woman has become the first person from China and the third woman in the world to scale all 14 of the world's peaks over 8,000 meters without the use of supplemental oxygen.

He Jing, from Xi'an in Shaanxi province, reached the summit of the 8,027-meter Mount Shishapangma in China's Xizang autonomous region on Oct 9, completing her historic quest.

"I did what I was supposed to do, just at the right time," He told China Daily on Friday upon returning home, noting it was her personal way of celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

He, who grew up on the Guanzhong Plain, didn't start mountaineering until she was 18. Her first climb, in 2006, was in the Qinling Mountains, and it sparked a passion for the sport.

In 2012, grieving the loss of her grandmother, He attempted her first mountain over 5,000 meters — Mount Siguniang in Sichuan province. The experience provided her with a sense of peace and relief.



He Jing reaches the summit of Mount Shishapangma on Oct 9. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"As I approached the summit and saw the rosy light on the snow, I found peace and a release from my inner turmoil," she recalled.

Since then, He has been dedicated to climbing high-altitude peaks. She realized she could handle the extreme altitude, she decided to attempt future climbs without oxygen, a move partly motivated by cost savings. Each climb above 8,000 meters can cost between 100,000 yuan (\$14,000) and 400,000 yuan.

Climbing without oxygen carries significant risks due to the thin atmosphere at high altitudes. To prepare, He trained rigorously, running at least five times a week, climbing 200 flights of stairs with a 20-kilogram load three times weekly, and using an oxygen-restricting mask to simulate high-altitude conditions.

Her first successful summit without supplemental oxygen came on Sept 25, 2017, when she reached the top of Mount Manaslu in Nepal.

"At altitudes above 8,000 meters, the human brain experiences extreme hypoxia, and the body becomes lethargic. I kept telling myself not to fall asleep, as I might never wake up again," she said.

On May 14, 2022, He became the first Chinese woman to reach the summit of Mount Qomolangma (Everest) from the south side without using bottled oxygen.

"I didn't set many specific goals for myself," she said. "I simply love to pursue my dreams, one step at a time. I enjoy both the climbing process and the view from the summit."

He has lost climbing companions to avalanches and altitude sickness and has narrowly escaped death herself. In her diary, she wrote, "Death reminds us of life's fragility. Only by realizing this can we strive to make each moment meaningful."

Contact the writers at pengchao@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing continues green push, makes effort to reduce parking woes

By ZHANG WEI
zhangwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing is ramping up efforts to build a comprehensive transportation system aimed at providing safer, more convenient public services, city officials said at a recent news conference.

"Our goal is to improve city life by offering supportive and efficient transportation," said Li Zejun, spokesperson for the Beijing Municipal Committee of Transport.

The capital is making progress in shifting to sustainable transportation, with an increasing number of residents opting for new energy

vehicles. To support this, the city has been rolling out a network of supercharging stations, ensuring that residents enjoy a more sustainable urban lifestyle.

Beijing Public Transport Group has installed supercharging stations at bus stations and along roadsides, offering 15-minute charging services for NEV users. One of these stations, located in Fengtai district's Muxiyuan area, is equipped with four supercharging piles capable of delivering up to 240 kilowatts of power, allowing vehicles to drive as far as 400 kilometers on a 15-minute charge.

"This station handles an average

of over 100 vehicle charges daily, consuming more than 2,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity," said Xin Tao, general manager of Longrui Sanyou Co, which operates the Muxiyuan station. He added that since early this year, the station has been using green electricity, contributing to Beijing's "zero carbon" goal for powering NEVs.

Since last year, 35 supercharging stations have been up and running in Beijing's urban areas, supporting 400,000 vehicle charges and consuming over 9 million kWh of electricity.

The city aims to have 50 supercharging stations by the end of the

year, and 100 by the end of next year, further promoting green, sustainable travel for residents, Xin said.

Meanwhile, as the number of vehicles in Beijing grows, parking has become an increasingly pressing issue. In response, the city has been promoting shared parking to ease the strain. Behind the Muxiyuan supercharging station, a staggered shared parking lot offers 15 spaces for local vehicle owners.

"Since launching with 21 locations and 366 parking spaces, we've opened over 200 bus parking lots for staggered shared parking, providing more than 3,000 parking spots for small vehicles," said Feng

Xu, business manager of asset manager center at Beijing Public Transport Group.

The staggered shared parking model operates on a "park at night, leave in the morning" system, making unused bus parking spaces available to the public during off hours.

Beijing has over 900 paid staggered shared parking lots, offering more than 60,000 parking spaces, according to Zhao Hanlu from the Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport. Zhao highlighted the positive impact of these efforts in alleviating residential parking challenges and optimizing parking lot usage.

Forest food industry takes root under China's canopy

By YAN DONGJIE
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

China's forest food production has surpassed 200 million metric tons — about 140 kilograms per person — annually, making it the nation's third-largest agricultural product after grains and vegetables, the National Forestry and Grassland

Administration said on Friday.

The country's forest food production capacity is growing, with 46.7 million hectares dedicated to economic forest plantations and over 40 million hectares of forest land used for understory industries, according to Wang Junzhong, director of the administration's reform and development department.

"This enhances the stability of China's food supply and provides a strong foundation for food security," Wang said.

Forest food products include edible oils, red dates, pine nuts and specialty products such as mushrooms and ginseng. More than 2,400 of China's 2,800 counties have economic forests, with their combined

annual output value surpassing 2 trillion yuan (\$281.6 billion). Understory economic activities, such as growing mushrooms, generate another 1 trillion yuan annually, benefiting millions of forest farmers.

In the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, where abundant sunshine supports forest fruit farming, 1.4 million hectares of land yield 14

million tons of forest fruit annually, with red dates being a major product.

"This year, Xinjiang established 16 red date demonstration gardens, and the average yield per hectare has reached as much as 12 tons, with an income exceeding 44,700 yuan per hectare," said Cai Lixin, chief economist at Xinjiang's forestry and grassland bureau.

In Jilin province, the ginseng industry is booming, with 77,000 hectares devoted to planting the herb, yielding over 780 tons annual-

ly. The industry is valued at close to 10 billion yuan.

"Changbai Mountain ginseng has high national brand recognition, and the province has developed more than 1,000 ginseng-related products," said Li Dongyou, deputy director of the Jilin Provincial Forestry and Grassland Bureau.

"For 15 to 20-year-old larch tree forests, we manage the canopy to maintain sunlight levels favorable for both tree maturation and ginseng growth," Li explained.

CHINA



Teacher dedicated to kids at 'micro-school'

Meng Rongda watches a student playing basketball during a physical education class at Zhongzhai Teaching Point in Xishan town of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province, on Sept 6. PHOTOS BY YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

Children from Yao ethnic group find education at remote campus

By YANG WENBIN and CHEN LIANG
Xinhua-China Daily

After a quiet summer break, the school campus springs to life as Meng Rongda rehearses the drum dance of the Yao ethnic group for the children.

In Xishan town of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province, Zhongzhai Teaching Point is a "micro-school".

This semester it accommodates 23 kindergarten children and 17 first and second grade students, with 59-year-old Meng the only regular teacher.

In 1985, Meng graduated from Qiandongnan Minzu Normal School and was assigned to teach at various primary schools in Xishan.

In 2015, when the original teachers at Zhongzhai Teaching Point were reassigned to other schools, local education authorities appointed Meng,



Meng teaches his students at the school on Sept 6.



Meng instructs the students playing a traditional instrument of the Yao ethnic group on Sept 6.

who had rich experience teaching in rural schools, to work at Zhongzhai.

The school is nestled in a remote mountainous village of the Yao ethnic group.

It posed a unique challenge as the newly enrolled children did not speak Mandarin. Undeterred, Meng tirelessly conducted bilingual lessons using his self-taught Yao language, guiding the children in learning Chinese characters and Mandarin.

For 39 years, he has silently stood at the forefront of rural education.

At Zhongzhai, he is not just a teacher but also a caretaker for the children, overseeing the academic curriculum, sports and music, as well as introducing ethnic culture into the school.

He also manages the school's nutrition program and ensures student safety, quietly dedicating himself to rural education and watching over the children's dreams of venturing beyond the mountains.

He will retire next year, and his greatest wish is to see young teachers take up his work, ensuring that the school continues to operate so that the children can receive education closer to home.



Meng helps several of his students move a drum to the square for the rehearsal of the drum dance on Feb 16 last year.



Two students eat their lunch at the school's canteen on Sept 6.



From left: Meng walks three of his students, who live far from the school, home on Sept 5. Students leave their classroom after a class on Sept 6.



WORLD

Xi sends greetings as Prabowo takes office

President stands ready to work with new Indonesia leader to improve bilateral ties

By CAO DESHENG in Beijing, LEONARDUS JEGHO in Jakarta and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory message to Prabowo Subianto on Sunday on his assuming the presidency of Indonesia, pledging to work with the new president to promote bilateral ties.

Xi said in his message that China and Indonesia are traditionally friendly neighbors, and the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries has been growing steadily, entering a new era of building a community with a shared future.

Noting next year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Indonesia, he said the anniversary will provide a new opportunity for both countries to advance bilateral cooperation.

Xi expressed his willingness to maintain close strategic communication with Prabowo to guide the building of a China-Indonesia community with a shared future to a higher level, and write a new chapter of seeking strength through unity, promoting solidarity and coordination, and achieving mutual benefit and win-win results between the two major developing countries.

China's Vice-President Han Zheng, as the special representative of President Xi, attended the inauguration of Prabowo in Jakarta on Sunday.

On Saturday, Han met with the outgoing Indonesian president Joko Widodo in Jakarta, with both sides speaking highly of the development of bilateral relations in recent years.

Over the past decades, under the guidance of the two heads of state,

the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Indonesia has been developing with sound momentum and bilateral cooperation has achieved fruitful results. The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway is a landmark cooperation project between the two countries and a symbol of their friendship.

Prabowo has vowed to reduce poverty and attain food security as he starts his five-year term as the leader of Southeast Asia's biggest economy. Prabowo and his running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, were sworn in on Sunday at the Parliament building in Jakarta.

Prabowo, a former defense minister, replaced Widodo, who concluded his second five-year term. Gibran is Widodo's eldest son.

The challenges Indonesia is facing include food and energy insecurity, Prabowo said, and his administration is committed to attaining food resilience by four to five years, and will continue to extend subsidies to the underprivileged.

He said many Indonesians live below the poverty line and that "many of our children go to school without having breakfast."

One of Prabowo's campaign promises is to provide free lunch to all primary and secondary school students. This program is estimated to cost more than 1 trillion rupiah (\$65 million).

Apart from poverty alleviation, Prabowo will lay the groundwork, especially in infrastructure, for building regional connectivity and consequently for eliminating regional disparities as expressed in his election campaign.

Shinta Widjaja Kamdani, deputy chairwoman of international relations

at the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the business community "needs consistency in the maintaining of development continuity," alluding to the downstreaming policy initiated by Widodo.

The downstreaming policy has led to the banning of nickel ore and bauxite exports so that Indonesia can develop the processing industry and export more value-added products.

Josua Pardede, chief economist at PermataBank in Jakarta, said China plays a key role in Indonesia's aim to develop the downstreaming industry.

"The new administration will likely encourage more investment from China to sustain growth in the mining, energy and infrastructure sectors," Pardede said.

The Ministry of Finance will need to increase the state revenue while ensuring the tax increases do not burden the economy, especially the middle class who are vulnerable to the rising costs of living, Pardede added.

Sawidji Widodoatmodjo, dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business at Tarumanagara University in Jakarta, said the new government would find it easier to deal with economic challenges as the country has a consumption-driven economy.

He added that Indonesia has to work harder to tap the huge Chinese market.

Fahmy Radhi, a senior economist at Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia, said Prabowo would need to fulfill his commitment to bring in more Chinese investments. He said Indonesia needs stronger technology transfer from China to develop the downstreaming industry.

Leonardus Jegho is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Contact the writers at caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn



The first 12 migrants that Italy sent to a newly opened asylum processing center in Shengjin, Albania, disembark in the Italian harbor of Bari on Saturday. VALERIA FERRARO / AP

Court rejects Italy's Albania program

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

A Rome court decision to outlaw outsourcing asylum-seeker processing in Albania in the so-called "return hubs" has dealt a huge blow to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and many other European Union leaders.

The Rome Court's immigration unit ruled on Friday that migrants sent to Albania by Italy cannot be detained and also cannot be released in Albania. Instead, they will be vetted in Italy for asylum eligibility or potentially sent back to their countries of origin.

According to the ruling, the first batch of 12 migrants, from Bangladesh and Egypt, were returned to Italy on Saturday from the newly opened asylum processing centers in Albania, just three days after their arrival.

The court decision was based on concerns about the safety of the migrants in their home countries.

Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi vowed on Friday he would appeal the court ruling. Meloni criticized the ruling by

saying that deeming countries such as Bangladesh and Egypt unsafe means that virtually all migrants would be barred from the Albania program.

She said during a trip to Lebanon she would convene a cabinet meeting to address the issue on Monday. "We will meet to approve some norms that will allow us to overcome this obstacle," she said.

"I believe it's up to the government and not magistrates to establish which countries can be considered safe."

Meloni has touted the return hubs as a model for other EU members to follow.

Italy and Albania reached a deal in February last year in which Albania agreed to receive up to 36,000 male migrants intercepted in international waters each year in its two processing centers for asylum-seekers in northern Albania.

The centers received the first batch of 16 migrants who arrived on an Italian navy ship on Wednesday, but four were rejected by the centers because of health and young age concerns.

Respect for international law,

human rights and dignity must be the pillars of any measure to address migration challenges," Iratxe Garcia Perez, a Spanish MEP and president of the Group of the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, said on X after the court ruling on Friday.

"The return hubs are clearly against those principles and now it's confirmed by the court of Rome." At their summit in Brussels on Thursday, EU leaders called for urgent new legislation to increase and accelerate migrant returns.

"The European Council calls for determined action at all levels to facilitate, increase and speed up returns from the European Union," the EU leaders wrote in conclusions of the summit. They asked the European Commission to submit new legislation.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in a major shift to the right, has endorsed the "return hub" concept by describing it as an example of "out-of-box thinking" in dealing with the migration into the bloc.

Agencies contributed to the story.

Dynamic moves help China navigate economic landscape

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Officials have expressed confidence in China's financial market and called for more efforts to ensure its constant stable development.

Recently, the People's Bank of China has pushed for the implementation of a reduction in the reserve requirement ratio, a reduction in interest rates, four real estate financial policies and two policy tools to support the stable development of the capital market. These measures have bolstered market confidence, Pan Gongsheng, governor of the PBOC, said at the opening ceremony of the Annual Conference of Financial Street Forum 2024 held in Beijing on Friday.

"To promote high-quality economic development and sustainable growth, it is necessary to grasp the dynamic balance between the economic growth rate and growth quality, internal and external factors, consumption and investment. Macro policies should focus more on expanding consumption, better managing the relationship between the government and the market, and creating a favorable legal and business environment," Pan said.

The PBOC will improve its monetary policy framework, focusing on five major areas in finance: technology finance, green finance, inclusive finance, pension finance and digital finance, Pan said. He underscored that efforts will be made to enhance the capacity, intensity and level of financial support for technological innovation.

The bank will strengthen the framework for macro-prudential policies and systematic financial risk prevention and disposal mechanisms. It will steadily promote the institutional opening of the financial services industry and financial markets, facilitate trade and investment, prudently advance the internationalization of the renminbi, and promote the balanced and sustainable development of the Chinese and global economies.

With the theme "Trust and Confidence — Work Together to Promote Financial Openness and



The opening ceremony of the Annual Conference of Financial Street Forum 2024 is held in Beijing on Friday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cooperate for Shared Economic Stability and Growth", the opening ceremony of the annual conference gathered more than 350 attendees to share their insights.

Li Yunze, head of the National Financial Regulatory Administration, said: "Currently, the overall operation of our country's economy is stable and making steady progress, with high-quality development being solidly promoted."

Li noted that the regulatory administration will adhere to the principle of taking action as a top priority, emphasizing the administration's commitment to implementing the decisions and arrangements of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, implementing a pack-

age of incremental policies, guiding financial institutions to increase financial supply, optimizing resource allocation, accelerating the circulation of funds and supporting the improvement of the economy.

To better leverage the role of banks, Li said more efforts will be made to optimize credit management models, strengthen credit capacity construction, improve incentives and constraints mechanisms, implement due diligence and exemption requirements to make financial institutions "dare to lend, be willing to lend and be able to lend" to private enterprises.

Focusing on key areas and weak links, Li called for increasing financial support, expanding effective demand, boosting the stabilization of the real estate market, supporting the

development of new quality productive forces, and helping to relieve the difficulties of small and micro enterprises.

He also requested support for expanding the opening-up of the financial industry in Beijing, so it can contribute more financial strength to the high-quality development of the capital's economy and society.

As an important destination for international financial investment, Beijing witnessed a growth of more than 5 percent in its GDP over the first three quarters of 2024. During this period, the city established 40 new domestic and foreign financial institutions and attracted nearly 600 billion yuan (\$84.4 billion) in direct financing. Also, it saw the establishment of 1,255 new foreign-funded

enterprises, an increase of 16 percent.

"Looking to the future, Beijing will accelerate the construction of a vibrant modern financial system and comprehensively enhance the level of serving the country's financial management functions," said Yin Li, secretary of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee.

Yin stated that efforts will be made to improve the financial service infrastructure system; support the construction of nationally important financial platforms; assist the layout of international financial facilities in Beijing; and enhance the functions of Financial Street, the Lize Financial Business District, and the green financial demonstration zone in the Beijing Municipal Administrative Center.

He also underscored the need to build a financial market system conducive to innovation; support the deeper reform of the Beijing Stock Exchange; nurture top-tier investment institutions; develop patient capital; advance the construction of an international science and technology innovation center; and establish a global benchmark city for the digital economy.

In addition, he stressed the importance of creating a vibrant financial development ecosystem, expanding institutional openness in the financial sector and strengthening international financial exchanges and cooperation.

On top of that, Yin emphasized upholding a safe and stable financial environment, improving the financial regulatory system, enhancing the construction of the financial rule of law environment and safeguarding the bottom line of financial security.

Agustin Carstens, general manager of the Bank for International Settlements, said in his video speech at the opening ceremony that trust is a key factor for the success of public policies, forming the foundation of their effectiveness and legitimacy.

As a crucial engine driving global economic growth, strengthening domestic demand in China will benefit the world, injecting new momentum into the global economy and safeguarding global monetary and financial stability, Carstens said.

The BIS supports central banks across the world to achieve monetary and financial stability by providing a platform for communication and cooperation, fostering innovative practices, offering banking services and liquidity support, Carstens said. He added that the BIS remains a significant partner for countries, helping them maintain and promote monetary and financial stability.

As an important platform for the nation's open development, the conference was held from Friday to Sunday, attracting more than 500 heavyweight participants from more than 30 countries and regions to hold discussions revolving around international cooperation in more than 40 activities.

WORLD

Experts call for US-China AI collaboration

Balance sought between innovation and regulation in the developing industry

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

As the debate intensifies over how to build guardrails around artificial intelligence, experts are calling on the United States and China, the two leading nations in AI development, to foster collaboration on safety and the ethical use of this rapidly evolving technology.

The recent veto of California Senate Bill 1047 by Governor Gavin Newsom on Sept 29 has reignited discussions about the balance between innovation and regulation in the AI industry. The bill, which aimed to hold large AI model developers responsible for potential "catastrophic" harm caused by their models, was rejected due to concerns that it might jeopardize California's leadership in AI development.

Despite the veto, discussions continue over how to best govern this technology. Experts interviewed by China Daily emphasized the

importance of finding a balanced approach through international collaboration and information sharing.

"Whenever technology advances, there's always the misapplication of technology. And the best disinfectant is openness and sharing," Randy Schekman, professor of molecular and cell biology at the University of California, Berkeley, and a 2013 Nobel Laureate, told China Daily. He said that access to information about global AI activities is crucial for identifying potential misuse and also highlighted the need for societal controls on advanced technologies like AI.

"Scientists can't make all the decisions. These decisions have to be made by society, and there has to be some way of controlling the misapplication of technology through societal intervention," he said. "We live in a diverse world and there are different standards. There needs to be international cooperation on standards for the misapplication of

any new technology."

Kai-Fu Lee, chairman and CEO of Sinovate Ventures and author of *AI 2041* and the New York Times bestseller *AI Superpowers*, echoed concerns about the potential dangers of AI. He pointed out generative AI's capabilities, such as planning wars, designing weapons or autonomously deciding to kill, and advocated for international collaboration on threats like autonomous weapons.

"These larger issues ... will require countries to sit down together to work on them," he said. Lee suggested that the US and China, along with other nations, should prioritize tackling common threats and sharing technological developments to ensure AI safety. "I think the countries will see that as a common interest, and they may have the motivation to work together," he added.

A new study by Florence G'sell, a visiting professor at Stanford University's Cyber Policy Center, compared the AI governance approaches of China, the United States and the European Union.

The study highlighted the United States and China as "the clear

front-runners" in AI development, with data from the Stanford AI Index Report 2024 showing that 61 AI models were developed by US-based institutions in 2023, while 21 were developed in the European Union and 15 in China.

The author noted that China is one of the leading nations with the most extensive AI legislation, particularly concerning generative AI. The country's Global AI Governance Initiative makes a commitment to developing ethical norms, privacy protections and legal structures. It also emphasizes international collaboration and equitable governance of AI technologies.

China has also introduced measures for scientific and technological ethics reviews, signaling its dedication to "enforcing its ethical standards in science and technology, and safeguarding societal welfare against the backdrop of rapid technological advancement," said the study.

Unlike the European Union or China, the United States lacks a comprehensive federal framework for AI governance. Instead, it relies on voluntary commitments from major

AI companies.

The study suggests that there does not appear to be much appetite in the US to ameliorate AI risks with a new federal agency or sweeping new rules, with most proposed legislation revealing a reluctance to overregulate or stifle innovation.

Despite geopolitical tensions, experts argue that the US and China have the responsibility to ensure the ethical use of AI technologies and the two countries can learn from each other's practices to lead global AI governance.

"AI is having a transformative impact on every aspect of life in modern society, so it's very important for us to think very carefully how to inform the policymakers and the lawmakers to regulate and help to guide the development and usage of AI to ensure that it is ethical and responsible and will help improve life for all people in our global society," said Tsu-Jae King Liu, dean of the College of Engineering at University of California, Berkeley.

"Today, the US and China have the leading technologies on AI so I think it's very important for us to be able

to collaborate and together chart a path for a safe and secure future that will be healthy and beneficial for all," she added.

Yangqing Jia, founder and CEO of Silicon Valley-based Lepton AI and a former AI expert with Alibaba, pointed out similarities between the US and China, describing both as "pro-development" with a vivid venture capital industry in terms of technology.

He sees the potential for more frequent technological collaborations between the two countries and emphasizes the need for a collaborative environment in a rapidly changing world.

"We're both building great technologies, not only AI, but also cloud and other software that are open source and shared with the world," said Jia. "As someone who has studied in the US and worked in both China and the US, I've seen that there are many opportunities for technological collaboration between the two countries. I believe a collaborative environment is always what we need, especially in our rapidly changing world."

Encountering Sanxingdui civilization in NYC

By MINGMEI LI in New York
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Spanning millennia, the history and mystery of Sanxingdui's ancient civilization is reaching international audiences through modern digital platforms.

The exhibition *Sanxingdui Encounter: A 12K Micro-viewing of National Treasures* opened on Saturday at the Memor Museum in New York, offering visitors an opportunity to have an immersive virtual experience of the relics and also see the physical replicas of these treasures.

The display will last until Jan 19. Sanxingdui, an archaeological site located in modern-day Guanghan, Sichuan province, China, illustrated the civilization of the ancient Shu kingdom, which flourished from around 1700 BC to 1050 BC. Sanxingdui was not discovered until the 1920s and ongoing archaeological efforts continue to reveal new discoveries.

By the end of 2022, fieldwork on six newly uncovered sacrificial pits was nearly complete, yielding a wealth of precious artifacts. Over 4,000 items, including jade, stone and pottery, were unearthed during this phase of excavation. Archaeologists are piecing together the history of the ancient Shu civilization and presenting these findings to the public.

The Shu kingdom, which arose in the Sichuan basin during the Bronze Age, is thought to have developed independently from the Yellow River Valley societies, long regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization. Its people produced finely crafted bronze, jade, gold and ceramic artifacts, depicting mythical creatures, rulers, gods and shamans with exaggerated features such as bulging eyes and enlarged ears.

"Sanxingdui's rich heritage deserves international attention, with its vast cultural significance needing to be shared with a broader audience," the director of Memor Museum, Willa Ao, told China Daily.

"Sanxingdui's culture is an integral part of Chinese culture, and our goal is to share China's history, culture and civilization with more international audiences in a way that is accessible, understandable, engaging and approachable. We want to present the Sanxingdui relics through a blend of digital and physical experiences," Ao said.

One example Ao gave is a bronze figure, which strikingly resembles the stance of an American fitness coach performing a deadlift. Additionally, the bronze tree is adorned with numerous small hanging artifacts, reminiscent of ornaments used to decorate Christmas trees.

This is not the first time Sanxingdui has made an appearance in New York. Its unearthed bronzes were previously



The exhibition *Sanxingdui Encounter: A 12K Micro-viewing of National Treasures* opens on Saturday at the Memor Museum in New York, displaying 1:1 replicas from the Sanxingdui Museum collection in Sichuan province, Southwest China. The exhibition will last until Jan 19. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

showcased at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2002 as part of a broader exhibition on bronze artifacts, but Ao said this time she wanted to provide New Yorkers a younger and interactive way to feel the relics in person through 1:1 replicas from the Sanxingdui Museum's collection, using ultra-high-definition 12K technology, AI interaction and VR immersion, which required three years of preparation.

UHD 12K technology refers to a video resolution of approximately 12,000 pixels across the width of the image, significantly higher than 4K and 8K resolutions.

Among the highlights of the exhibition are bronze masks, ceremonial altars and the renowned gold mask, each offering a glimpse into the sophisticated artistry and spiritual depth of the Shu civilization.

Visitors will have the opportunity to view the famous *Bronze Mask with Crown and Protruding Eyes*, a rare artifact that provides insight into the ceremonial and spiritual practices of the ancient Shu people.

Also on display is the striking *Bronze Head Wearing a Gold Mask*, first unearthed in 1986, which illustrates a unique blend of social status and ritual significance.

"Although they are replicas, they remain highly valuable," Ao said. She explained that the replicas were created with permission from the Sanxingdui Museum, using the same materials to faithfully reproduce the

original artifacts. They were also transported across the ocean according to the same standards used for authentic relics.

Visitors will be able to explore the relics using VR technology, which brings large artifacts like the *Large Standing Man* and the *Bronze Sacred Tree* into the gallery through virtual exploration. The exhibition also employs 12K video capture to document smaller artifacts, delicate bronze bells and bird sculptures, magnifying them for a closer look.

"We use the highest resolution technology to capture every element of the artifacts. With 12K resolution, even the smallest artifacts are magnified, revealing intricate patterns that are invisible to the naked eye in a museum display," Ao said.

"Digitization is not only a crucial method for preserving relics but also an essential tool for their protection," Ao said. "Archaeological work now includes digital methods to gather artifact data, and it's important for us to make use of this. Simply preserving these cultures isn't enough, we must better promote our culture."

Visitors can also use VR experience to view the 3.96-meter-high *Bronze Sacred Tree* and 2.62-meter-tall *Large Standing Man* through an interactive experience where, through VR headsets and controllers, visitors can enter a 3D-scanned replica of the Sanxingdui archaeological cabin and immerse themselves in the first-person

perspective of archaeologists.

"Visitors will gain a direct understanding of what the archaeological process is really like," the organizers said.

Sanxingdui is an incredibly important archaeological discovery, not just within Chinese archaeology, but within the world of archaeology, Kristen Martucci, one of the curators, told China Daily.

Martucci, 26, has been studying Chinese since high school and pursued East Asian studies, particularly ancient Chinese history, at Harvard University. "I'm particularly interested in early Chinese history, so Sanxingdui is certainly part of that," she said.

She primarily helps translate materials into English and curates the exhibition in a way that is approachable for American and international audiences.

"There's never just one perfect translation. Scholars spend months, sometimes years, figuring out the correct interpretation of something. And even then, there's debate," she said, explaining that her work is also a learning process in both Chinese and history while uncovering the "mystery."

"I've never been to the Sanxingdui Museum. I learned about Sanxingdui in my grad school courses, but even for me, seeing these replicas and using this exhibition and VR to experience it — that's new to me, so it's really exciting," she said.

London seeks to elevate relations with Beijing

By ZHAO JIA
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

When meeting with his British counterpart David Lammy in Beijing on Friday, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi specially mentioned a documentary titled *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, saying the China-Britain relationship is rooted in history and now "stands at a new starting point".

“The UK still needs to take concrete actions and overcome difficulties to promote stable ties, particularly due to some voices at home skeptical and critical of China.”

Cui Hongjian, director of the Center for the European Union and Regional Development Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University

The film, which recounts the heroic efforts of Chinese fishermen to rescue and shelter hundreds of British prisoners of war in a sinking Japanese transport ship during World War II, once again brought alive shared memories of China and the United Kingdom fighting together against fascism when it was screened to the public in September.

Lammy, the first British cabinet minister to visit China since the Labour government took office in July — the second visit to China by a top UK diplomat in six years — concluded his two-day tour on Saturday.

He held talks with Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang and Wang on Friday before heading to Shanghai, China's economic hub, to meet British business leaders and seek commercial cooperation.

Analysts said the visit marks an important step in bringing China-UK relations back to normal.

They say it demonstrates the new Labour government's necessary and pragmatic approach to resetting bilateral ties frayed in recent years by London's confrontational stance against Beijing, while also seeking to increase engagement with the world's second-largest economy.

Since the beginning of the year, China and the UK have carried out high-level interactions in various fields such as diplomacy, economy, finance and defense, sending a signal of stabilizing bilateral ties. Britain's finance minister Rachel Reeves is also considering traveling to

Beijing in early 2025, Reuters reported, citing Sky News.

During talks, Wang positively evaluated the Labour government's plan to develop a "long-term, stable and strategically significant relationship with China" and highlighted the importance of nurturing stable and mutually beneficial relations.

China would fully resume dialogue and cooperation mechanisms, and actively carry out cooperation with the UK in areas such as trade, finance, green development, science and technology, health, education and culture, Wang said.

He also urged mutual respect for each other's concerns and equality in dialogue to foster an atmosphere conducive to engagement.

No 'iron curtain'

Noting the UK and China enjoy extensive shared interests, Lammy emphasized there should be no "iron curtain" between the two countries.

Lammy said the UK government would maintain consistent relations with China and hoped to work with Beijing to embark on a new journey of robust growth of partnership.

China and the United Kingdom are both permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and major economies in the world. China and the UK shoring up cooperation is also beneficial for the international community to unite in addressing global challenges, observers said.

Wang stressed that competition among major powers should not be the backdrop of the era while Lammy said the UK and China should jointly uphold free trade and address complex challenges through diplomatic means.

Cui Hongjian, director of the Center for the European Union and Regional Development Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said that despite differences, Beijing and London can have frank discussions about their disagreements and find common ground to pursue closer exchanges.

With no fundamental conflict of interests, China sees the UK as a major country with influence while London aims to strengthen economic ties with Beijing to boost growth, a priority for the Labour government, he added.

According to China's Foreign Ministry, the UK is China's third-largest trading partner in Europe while China is the UK's largest trading partner in Asia.

While acknowledging constructive efforts to improve its China policy, Cui cautioned that the UK still needs to take concrete actions and overcome difficulties to promote stable ties, particularly due to some voices at home skeptical and critical of China.

CHINA DAILY USA
NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
Telephone: 212-537-8888
Fax: 212-537-8898
editor@chinadailyusa.com
readers@chinadailyusa.com
Subscription: 212-537-8899
Advertising: 212-537-8916
Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily
facebook.com/chinadaily
usa.chinadaily.com.cn
These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.
WASHINGTON
National Press Bldg, Suite 1108
529 14th Street NW
Washington, DC 20045
Tel: 202-662-7249
Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San Francisco,
CA 94104
Tel: 415-348-8288
Fax: 415-348-8388
SEATTLE
800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100
Seattle, WA 98104
Tel: 206-922-2868
HOUSTON
1001 South Daily Ashford Suite 100
Houston, TX 77077
Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA / TORONTO
471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K6
Tel: 416-481-5706
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.

Vol. 38 - No. 1440

BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

Trade frameworks linking China, Africa set to broaden

Business volume between two sides surged to historic peak of \$282.1 billion last year, an increase of nearly 35 percent compared to 2013



Employees work on a solar thermal power project in Northern Cape, South Africa, on August 20. ZHANG YUDONG / XINHUA

By WANG KEJU

wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

In the face of a turbulent global landscape, characterized by escalating geopolitical tensions and rising protectionism, China and Africa should lean toward embracing globalization and win-win cooperation more than ever before, to benefit their own populations and catalyze the modernization of the broader Global South, experts said.

As an industrialized nation partnering with less industrialized counterparts, the deepening cooperation between China and Africa has emerged as a model example for other developing regions seeking to emancipate themselves from the constraints of the traditional North-South divide, they added.

Their comments came after the overall characterization of China-Africa relations was elevated to an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era during the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing in early September.

Collaboration between the world's largest developing country, China, and the continent with the highest concentration of developing nations, Africa, transcends mere economic development, said Ye Hailin, dean of the China-Africa Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Through channels such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the FOCAC, the two sides have been expanding trade and investment ties, enhancing infrastructure connectivity, and fostering cultural exchanges, Ye added.

For the 15th consecutive year, China has firmly cemented its status as Africa's number one trade partner, with the volume of China-Africa trade continuing to account for a steadily increasing share of the continent's overall foreign trade.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that the trade volume between China and Africa surged to a historic peak of \$282.1 billion last year, marking an increase of nearly 35 percent compared to 2013 figures.

To ensure greater market openness and trade facilitation with Africa, China announced its decision at the summit to grant 100 percent tariff-free treatment on products from all the least developed countries that have established diplomatic relations with China — 33 nations across the African continent.

This initiative aims to transform the vast Chinese market into a significant opportunity for African nations and enhance their integration into the global economy, said Sang Baichuan, dean of the Institute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics.

In recent years, African countries have encountered obstacles in their development path, struggling to boost export volumes. China's move comes as timely and much-needed support, Sang said.

Nevertheless, there are fundamental issues that require attention, notably the necessity to broaden the trade frameworks linking the two regions. Sectors like e-commerce and sustainable development offer auspicious prospects, Sang added.

While trade acts as a key element of China-Africa collaboration, another notable facet emphasizing the strength of the partnership is the considerable increase in direct investment, especially from China into Africa.

As of the end of 2023, China's cumulative direct investments in Africa had surged past the \$40 billion mark, solidifying its position as one of the primary sources of foreign capital for countries across the continent, according to the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

China's investments in Africa are increasingly expanding beyond traditional industries, said Wang Xiaosong, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of Economics.

While infrastructure, manufacturing and agriculture have long been the focus of China's engagement on the continent, the country is now directing more funding toward emerging sectors like green development and the digital economy, Wang said.

Major Chinese e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba and Pinduoduo have launched dedicated efforts to penetrate African markets, leveraging their extensive product catalogs and logistics networks to cater to the continent's growing consumer class.

Cross-border e-commerce represents a significant opportunity for China to deepen its economic ties with Africa. By bringing their proven e-commerce models to African consumers, Chinese platforms can open up new channels for trade and investment, Wang added.

Chinese enterprises have already established a strong presence across



Middle: An African journalist interacts with an intelligent robot during the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing on Sept 3. LI HE / XINHUA

Bottom: Chinese investors (right) communicate with Tanzanian business representatives during the China Tanzania Investment Forum Zhejiang (Jinhua)-Tanzania Trade and Investment Conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on March 27. XINHUA

Africa, but there is tremendous untapped potential to grow these relationships further, Wang said.

The Chinese government has announced plans to facilitate at least 70 billion yuan (\$9.9 billion) in investments by Chinese companies in Africa over the next three years. Meanwhile, China and Africa will establish a joint digital technology cooperation center and announce plans for 20 flagship digital demonstration projects.

Lei Jun, founder and chairman of Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi, said that Africa's economic dynamism and policy focus on sustainable development make it a compelling investment destination for Xiaomi.

Africa continues to outpace global economic growth, buoyed by the

launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which has driven greater cross-border trade and market integration, Lei said.

"We see tremendous potential to partner with African businesses in emerging sectors like new energy vehicles and other green technologies," Lei said, adding that building on its presence in 16 African countries, including Egypt, Nigeria and Kenya, Xiaomi is gearing up to increase its investments across the continent.

That said, without closely interconnected infrastructure, discussions about unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people exchange would be impossible, experts said.

Infrastructure is the cornerstone of Africa's development. Improving

infrastructure conditions is a common expectation and urgent desire of African countries, said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee.

However, the African Development Bank estimated that infrastructure development requires between \$130 billion and \$170 billion annually, with a funding gap of \$68 billion to \$108 billion.

While infrastructure investment has faced headwinds in certain regions, China's infrastructure push in Africa has persisted, to deliver much-needed transportation, energy, and telecommunications projects, Xu said.

Over the past decade, Chinese firms have constructed or refurbished an expansive network of critical transport, energy, and communications systems that are helping to integrate Africa's economies and facilitate greater regional connectivity, from a major new port facility in Djibouti to a transnational railway network linking Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan.

The numbers speak for themselves — Chinese companies have built or upgraded over 10,000 kilometers of railways, nearly 100,000 kilometers of roads, around 1,000 bridges, close to 100 ports, 66,000 kilometers of power transmission lines, and 150,000 kilometers of backbone communication networks, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

Chinese firms have played an outsized role in bridging Africa's massive infrastructure gaps. This has been a game-changer, paving the way for accelerated economic growth, boosted local job creation, and integration across the continent, Xu said.

Going forward, China will implement 30 major infrastructure connectivity projects across the African continent, in a move aimed at deepening China-Africa cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative and supporting the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

However, a narrative has been propagated by some Western media outlets, attempting to sensationalize China's engagement in Africa through BRI projects by labeling it as a form of "debt trap diplomacy."

The strategic partnerships forged through infrastructure projects, trade agreements, and diplomatic engagements have not only bolstered Africa's path toward sustain-

able development, but also strengthened bonds of friendship and mutual benefit between China and Africa, Ye, who is with the China-Africa Institute, said.

Amid these advancements, a shift in dynamics is becoming increasingly evident, with Western influence in Africa encountering economic setbacks similar to those experienced in other regions, Ye said, adding that African nations are no longer willing to be coerced by Western powers.

As Western powers witness a waning of their influence in Africa, they are grappling with a need to deflect attention from their own shortcomings and find a scapegoat to mask their ineffectiveness, Ye said.

Looking ahead, China and Africa will deepen the alignment between the BRI and the African Union's Agenda 2063, to empower African nations not just by "providing fish, but by imparting the art of fishing," Ye said.

Central to this collaboration is the goal of facilitating Africa's industrialization and fostering localized production of industrial goods, aiming to address the historic imbalance in industrial and agricultural development that has persisted since the colonial era and prevent African countries from being mere markets for Western industrial products, experts said.

Chinese industrial products have strong competitiveness in Africa, helping improve the livelihoods of many people in African countries, boosting economic development, and catalyzing the pace of their local industrialization, Ye said.

However, this is not enough. Therefore, it's important to further encourage the localized realization of industrialization in Africa. This means manufacturing products in Africa are tailored for the African market, so that industrialization in Africa can directly benefit the African people. China has sufficient experience, technology, and funding to assist Africa in achieving this goal, Ye said.

As the world grapples with a multitude of global challenges, from climate change to the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, China-Africa cooperation has demonstrated the potential for developing countries to work together, leverage their complementarities, and foster innovative solutions that prioritize their common interests and development aspirations, Ye added.

BUSINESS



A visitor (second left) experiences a local craft at the booth of Embassy of the Republic of Ghana during the 2024 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing on Sept 12. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Africa poised to leverage China's vast consumer market potential

Zero-tariffs policy to help continent export more goods, up competitiveness

By WANG KEJU
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

In a major effort aimed at deepening economic ties with Africa, China announced recently that it will grant duty-free access to 100 percent of products originating from 33 African countries.

The sweeping elimination of tariffs is expected to significantly lower the cost barriers for African goods entering the Chinese market and enhance their overall price competitiveness, thus allowing African exporters to more effectively leverage the vast opportunities of the Chinese consumer market, experts said.

This expansion of preferential trade policies builds on previous commitments made by China. In 2009, the nation said it would provide 95 percent tariff-free access for products from the least developed African countries that have formal diplomatic ties with China, in a well-paced manner. In 2010, China started to apply zero tariffs on 60 percent of all goods from these African nations.

"By opening up our markets and eliminating tariffs on all products from these least developed African

countries, we aim to further catalyze industrialization and prosperity in Africa through enhanced trade," said Ye Hailin, dean of the China-Africa Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In particular, the two sides have agreed to expand market access for African agricultural products, and deepen collaboration in e-commerce.

China's imports of agricultural items from Africa have seen a sustained increase, with the value of such imports rising for the seventh consecutive year, Customs data show.

In the first seven months of this year, China imported 25.35 billion yuan (\$3.58 billion) worth of agricultural products from Africa, a 7.2 percent increase compared to the same period last year. This growth rate outpaced the overall increase in China's agricultural imports, according to the General Administration of Customs.

The rapid growth of cross-border e-commerce platforms is opening up new sales channels for African agricultural products seeking to enter the Chinese market, Ye said.

However, in contrast to the well-established e-commerce land-

scapes of Europe and North America, Africa's online retail market remains relatively underdeveloped, Ye added.

As Africa's urbanization process accelerates, growing domestic consumer demand, improved logistics infrastructure and increasing acceptance of e-commerce are converging to boost cross-border trade, Ye said.

Meanwhile, China is willing to work with African partners to sign a framework agreement on a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. This would provide long-term, stable, and predictable institutional guarantees for trade and investment between China and the continent.

Trade between China and Africa reached a historic high of \$282 billion in 2023, representing a 1.5 percent increase from the previous year, said the Ministry of Commerce.

While the total volume of trade between China and Africa has continued to grow, the imbalance in the bilateral trade structure remains an obstacle for sustained growth, said Mei Xinyu, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Many African nations still primarily export raw materials and unprocessed commodities, while relying

on imported industrial finished goods from China, a dynamic that may result in trade deficits for these countries, Mei said.

China's imports of nuts, vegetables and flowers from Africa saw remarkable growth in 2023, with the respective categories increasing by 130 percent, 32 percent, and 14 percent year-over-year, according to Customs data.

At the same time, electromechanical products emerged as China's top exports to the African continent, while shipments of new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products witnessed growth of 291 percent, 109 percent and 57 percent, respectively, compared to the previous year.

The move to grant zero-tariff treatment to imports from the least developed countries in Africa is expected to foster a more balanced and mutually beneficial trading environment, said Wang Zhimin, a researcher at the Academy of China Open Economy Studies, which is part of the University of International Business and Economics.

The zero-tariff initiative is also seen as an important gesture of South-South cooperation and China's willingness to use its economic clout to support the development priorities of the Global South, Wang added.

German company's Chinese success story

TIANJIN — Over the past 28 years, Flender, a leading global supplier of mechanical drive systems, has flourished in Tianjin, growing from a small workshop with a dozen employees to a sprawling 255,000-square-meter facility with over 2,000 staff.

"The Tianjin factory has become Flender Group's largest gearbox manufacturing base worldwide," said Gou Jianhui, chairman of the board and CEO of Flender Ltd, China, at the group's recent 125th anniversary celebrations, noting that this century-old German enterprise regards China as its "second home".

Andreas Evertz, CEO of Flender Group, said the company has grown in China from a small unit to become a key part of the company's global network.

"We have our own development capabilities, sourcing, manufacturing, ascending, and strong sales team to serve the Chinese market. We are very proud of our team and our business in China," Evertz said.

China's vast market and a resilient industrial chain have been key to Flender's rapid growth. Goldwind Technology, one of Flender's earliest partners in the Chinese wind power industry, has been in cooperation with the company since 1989, according to Li Fei, vice-president of Goldwind Group.

A retired 150 kilowatt Flender gearbox still stands in Goldwind's Beijing Yizhuang Smart Park, telling the story of Goldwind's wind power journey and its decades-long partnership with Flender, Li said.

According to Gou, the company has nurtured numerous suppliers in China, becoming an indispensable part of the industry and supply chains.

As Flender explores the Chinese market, the upgrading of industrial structures and the concentration of innovative resources have facilitated its transformation from a manufacturing company into a research and development-focused enterprise.

Dozens of engineers collaborate online daily with their German counterparts to develop

high-quality products. For instance, the newly developed single-stage gearbox significantly reduces power loss and overall machine weight.

In China, Flender has undertaken 10 phases of capital increase and expansion projects, with a total investment of 3 billion yuan (\$423.5 million), resulting in an annual output value of 5 billion yuan.

The Tianjin factory has become Flender's largest and most competitive gearbox manufacturing base outside Germany, serving as the sole R&D hub for mechanical transmission in both China and the Asia-Pacific region, and playing a pivotal role in supplying global customers.

Continuous investment in China has become a vital strategy for German companies like Flender in their pursuit of growth.

According to a report issued by the German Economic Institute, direct investment from Germany in China reached a record high of 11.9 billion euros (\$13 billion) in 2023. During the same period, German investment in China accounted for 10.3 percent of Germany's total overseas investment, the highest level since 2014.

"China's favorable business environment and comprehensive local services have bolstered Flender's confidence in its long-term integration into the Chinese economy," Gou said.

Flender's success story in China is not an isolated case. The Tianjin Beichen Economic and Technological Development Area, where the company is located, was founded in July 1992 and upgraded to a national economic and technological development zone in 2013. Covering an area of about 50 square kilometers, BEDA is home to more than 10 German-funded enterprises.

"Flender has catalyzed the growth of numerous supply chain enterprises in Beichen, making an irreplaceable contribution to regional development," said Ni Bin, Party secretary of Beichen district in Tianjin.

XINHUA



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (second right) visits the Tianjin factory of Flender Group on April 13, 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



CHINADAILY 中国日报

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Breakthroughs to push new industrialization

EAGLE EYE

By Wang Yiming

As China works to fully modernize its socialist system, advancing new industrialization and accelerating the construction of a strong manufacturing industry have become its key priorities.

It is critical to carefully assess both domestic and international changes in the coming years in light of profound and complex shifts in the global environment, a new wave of technological and industrial revolutions, and China's push for high-quality development.

The world is experiencing rapid and unprecedented changes. Global supply chains are being restructured at an accelerated pace, and the global economic landscape is undergoing significant shifts. Against this backdrop, China faces new challenges in its push for new industrialization.

The latest technological and industrial revolutions are being led by artificial intelligence, which is intersecting with fields like quantum technology and life sciences, leading to breakthroughs on multiple fronts.

The race for global tech leadership is intensifying, reshaping the competitive standing of nations and the global competitive landscape.

Competition among major powers for dominance in cutting-edge technology is growing fiercer. The United States is building "small yards with high walls" by expanding its control on high-tech exports to China, and in some cases, cutting off technological cooperation with China.

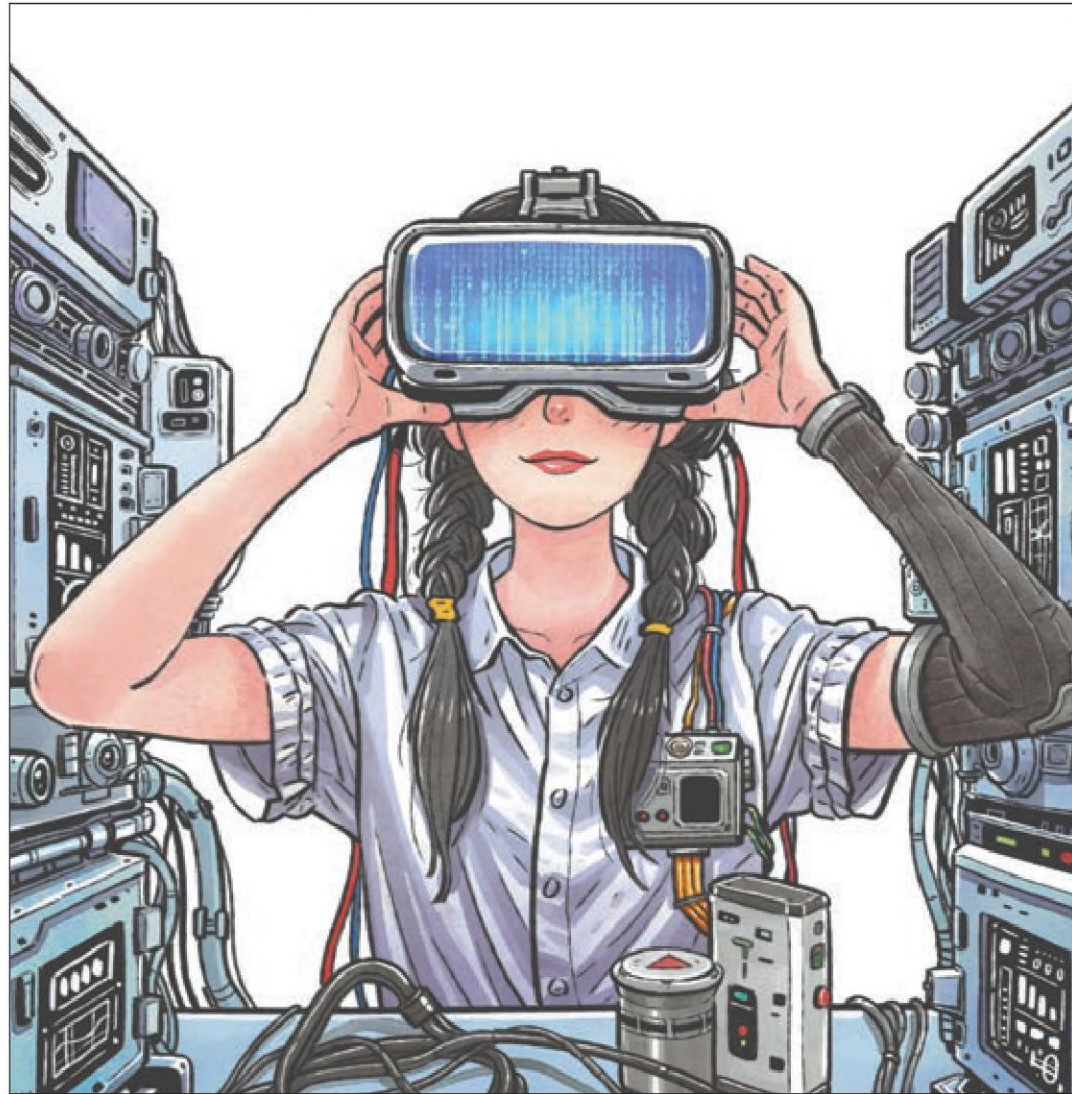
Meanwhile, this new technological revolution is shifting from replacing physical labor, as previous revolutions did, to replacing intellectual labor and expanding human intelligence.

Developed nations are leveraging smart manufacturing to offset high labor costs and are strengthening their control over high-value segments of the industrial value chain, further solidifying their competitive edge.

While AI is driving transformative changes in productivity, it also brings significant risks, making it urgent for major powers to collaborate in addressing the threats it poses, such as spreading disinformation, infringing on personal rights, creating security vulnerabilities, and deepening the intelligence gap.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis, and global inflation, the world economy is slowly recovering, but growth remains sluggish. In the medium to long term, factors like aging populations, rising debt, income inequality, and slowing productivity growth will likely keep global economic growth subdued.

As the world's largest manufacturing hub, China faces significant challenges but also new opportunities.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Thanks to its massive domestic market and active participation in global trade, China has become a key player in global production. The ongoing reorganization of global supply chains offers China the chance to leverage its complete industrial system and vast market size.

On the supply side, the country is moving from a low- to mid-end manufacturing base to a major player in high-end manufacturing and technological innovation. This shift, along with China's rising position in the global value chain and increased openness to global markets, will strengthen its ability to integrate international production factors and control critical nodes in the supply chain.

On the demand side, China's capacity to absorb foreign goods and services continues to grow, making it the primary trading part-

ner for over 140 countries and regions. China's massive market is becoming increasingly important, with many economies around the world deepening their dependence on Chinese demand, leading to closer economic ties between China and the rest of the world.

However, China's push for high-quality industrialization still faces challenges of unbalanced and insufficient development. The industrial system is large but not strong, comprehensive but lacking precision, with key core technologies still reliant on others.

The industrial foundation remains weak, and there are gaps in the supply and industrial chains. It is essential to overcome key core technological barriers, strengthen industrial capabilities, promote deep integration

between the real economy and the digital economy, and enhance the resilience and security of the supply and industrial chains.

Advancing new industrialization also demands strengthening the industrial foundation. In recent years, China has made significant strides in closing the technological gap with global leaders in areas such as nuclear power, hydropower turbines, high-speed rail, construction machinery, and telecommunication equipment, gradually building international competitiveness.

However, basic products remain weak. It is critical to implement the industrial foundation rebuilding project on key areas related to industrial security so as to achieve self-reliance and improve the quality and competitiveness of essential components, materials, and software.

Additionally, new industrialization requires the deep integration of the real economy and the digital economy, and the resilience and security of supply chains and industrial chains.

Looking ahead, China is moving toward achieving its goal during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period. It is important to promote China's industrial growth from being primarily factor-driven to innovation-driven, and drive breakthroughs in the quality of new industrialization.

First, the innovation strategy needs to shift from focusing on "catching up" to building "localized leading advantages". In the context of significant changes in the external environment, it not only serves as countermeasures, but is also a strategic choice to gain an edge in international technological competition.

Second, the innovation path needs to shift from "end-product integration" to strengthening innovation in "intermediate products". While some of China's end products, such as high-speed rail, construction machinery, and communication equipment, have already gained strong international competitiveness, there is still a heavy reliance on foreign sources for intermediate goods, such as components, parts, and basic materials.

Third, innovation policies need to shift from encouraging integrated innovation to encouraging original innovation. Whether it's about building localized leading advantages or strengthening intermediate product innovation, enhancing original innovation capacity is crucial to addressing key technological challenges. Only by improving the ability for original innovation and achieving more "zero-to-one" breakthroughs can China establish a solid foundation for achieving high-level technological self-sufficiency.

At the same time, it is necessary to focus on strengthening weak areas such as core components, critical software, advanced fundamental processes, essential materials, and industrial technology foundations. These will promote the advancement of industrial infrastructure and enhance its ability to support new industrialization.

Efforts should also be made to accelerate the application of next-generation digital and intelligent technologies across the entire manufacturing industry and supply chain, as well as to promote the digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Developing and promoting cost-effective digital products, services, and solutions that meet the needs of SMEs is critical. Moreover, the implementation of smart manufacturing projects should be deepened, especially in foundational technologies like computing power, algorithms, and data, to enable the full-chain application of artificial intelligence across industries.

The writer is vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Mexico increasingly important destination for Chinese overseas investments

MAIN STREET

By Xu Yanzhuo

In recent years, Mexico has emerged as a popular destination for Chinese outbound investment, with the cumulative amount reaching \$2.3 billion between 2018 and 2023, according to Mexico's Secretariat of Economy. In 2023 alone, China's new investments in Mexico amounted to \$150 million.

The deepening economic engagement between China and Mexico has triggered serious concerns within the United States, with senior officials from both the Republican and Democratic parties warning that Mexico could become a "back door" for Chinese companies to gain tariff-free access to the US market through the North American Free Trade Agreement.

However, this narrow focus on Mexico as a conduit for Chinese influence fails to recognize Mexico's appeal as a global economic powerhouse and its ability to attract foreign investment and develop its industrial capabilities, and overlooks the significant economic contributions that Chinese investments have made to the country and the broader Latin American region.

The long-standing economic interdependence between the US and Mexico has played a crucial role in enhancing the global competitiveness of US firms.

The high degree of specialization and integration of manufacturing and assembly operations on both sides of the US-Mexico border has enabled US companies to effectively leverage economies of scale and improve the global competitiveness of their products.

The Biden administration's near-shoring policy, launched in 2021, aims to position Mexico as a key component of the "US-Mexico-Central America" regional value chain.

However, Washington's efforts to leverage Mexico's cooperation in addressing supply chain issues have been accompanied by a lack of genuine concern for maintaining a stable and mutually respectful relationship with its southern neighbor.

According to analysts, the Biden administration has frequently exerted pressure on newly elected Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, urging her to review and even block Chinese investments, as part of the US-led push to "de-Sinicize" supply chains.

The Biden administration's efforts to leverage Mexico's strategic location and manufacturing capabilities as part of the "near-shoring" initiative have not translated into tangible economic gains or compensation for Mexico, as originally promised.

According to a Bank of Mexico survey, as of September 2022, only 16 percent of Mexican businesses reported that their operations had benefited from the "near-shoring" policy over the past year.

Furthermore, the Citibanamex survey found that the "near-shoring" policy has had a negligible impact on improving industrial real estate vacancy rates in Mexico, even in manufacturing cities like Tijuana, located along the US-Mexico border.

President Sheinbaum had campaigned on a platform that emphasized the importance of developing the country's new energy industries and technological innovation, while also expressing a desire for pragmatic cooperation with China to support Mexico's own industrial development.

However, since taking office, Sheinbaum has found herself caught between the competing geopolitical pressures exerted by the US, and has imposed temporary import tariffs ranging from 5 percent to 50 percent on

President Sheinbaum had campaigned on a platform that emphasized the importance of developing the country's new energy industries and technological innovation, while also expressing a desire for pragmatic cooperation with China to support Mexico's own industrial development.

544 different products while also implementing additional tariffs on Chinese-made rigid PVC, steel and aluminum products.

These actions, driven by the US demand for Mexico to align with its decoupling and supply chain disruption agenda, have effectively bound the neutral Mexico to the US camp, damaging the already well-established economic and trade relationship between Mexico and China.

The US has repeatedly accused Chinese companies of leveraging Mexico's status within the North American trade agreement to circumvent US tariffs on Chinese goods, labeling Mexico as a potential "back door" for Chinese exports to the US market.

However, according to the manager of the first Chinese industrial park established in Mexico — Hofusan Industrial Park — the costs of setting up and operating manufacturing facilities in Mexico are actually around 15 percent higher than in China.

A firsthand investigation of Mexican manufacturing enterprises across various sectors, including automotive parts, small appliances, furniture, machinery and chem-

icals, has revealed that existing reports may have underestimated the significant rise of production costs in the country.

The higher costs associated with Mexico's infrastructure, labor, upstream and downstream supply chains, as well as raw material prices, have contributed to a substantial increase in overall manufacturing expenses, contradicting the US government's claims about Mexico's cost advantages.

The Mexican government's efforts to protect its domestic industries have further complicated the calculus for Chinese enterprises. Mexico has imposed temporary import tariffs ranging from 5 percent to 50 percent on 544 different product categories in two separate actions, first in August 2023 and then again in April 2024.

The reality on the ground is that Mexico does not host any large-scale Chinese automobile manufacturers. The 12 Chinese car companies operating in the country are primarily focused on importing and selling vehicles locally, rather than using Mexico as an export base to the US.

The only Chinese automotive manufacturer with an assembly plant in Mexico is Anhui Jianghuai Auto, but the facility does not export any Chinese-made vehicles to the US.

The stringent rules of origin requirements under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement have effectively excluded supply chains with a non-North American makeup from accessing the lucrative US auto market.

Despite the US government's efforts to intervene in Mexico's internal economic affairs and disrupt the operations and investments of Chinese enterprises in the country, data from a study conducted by the National Autonomous University of Mexico suggest that China's investment footprint in Mexico is relatively modest compared to that of the US.

According to the research, between 2020 and 2023, Chinese (including Hong Kong)

companies invested approximately \$7 billion in Mexico, while US enterprises invested a staggering \$57 billion over the same period.

Furthermore, as of 2023, China's total investment stock in Mexico amounted to only \$22 billion, a figure that pales in comparison to the colossal \$315 billion the US investment in the country.

In contrast to the US' attempts to interfere in Mexico's internal affairs, China's investment in Mexico has been focused on actively promoting the development of key sectors, including transportation infrastructure, manufacturing, telecommunications, traditional energy and clean power, according to experts.

These investments, without imposing any undue restrictions or pressure, have brought about tangible economic benefits for Mexico, including economic growth, infrastructure improvements and increased employment opportunities.

According to the head of the Mexican subsidiary of State Power Investment Corp, prior to the company's entry into the Mexican market, Chinese enterprises in the country relied on fossil fuels for 60 percent of their energy needs. However, within two years of State Power Investment Corp's operations, the share of renewable energy usage has reached 68 percent.

Chinese technology and automotive enterprises, as shown by a firsthand investigation, are focused on expanding their foothold in the Mexican market and aligning their strategies with the overall development of the Latin American market, not on using Mexico as a platform to penetrate the US market.

The writer is an assistant research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorial

Ishiba faces tough test trying to reconcile contradictory agenda

Beijing is firmly opposed to Washington cobbling together exclusionary and confrontational groupings and abusing the concept of national security to undermine China's normal trade and economic cooperation, not only with the United States but also with other countries.

As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman stressed once again last week, such behavior is not conducive to maintaining the stability of the global industry and supply chains, and does no country any good. She called on the US "to right its wrong and provide a fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese companies".

Therefore, it's not surprising that just two weeks after taking office Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's political agenda is inherently contradictory. He wants to rebalance the alliance with the US to increase Japan's strategic autonomy and foster "constructive, stable" relations with neighboring China through dialogue and cooperation. Yet at the same time, he wants to pursue an "Asian version of NATO".

The Japanese leader is not helped in trying to reconcile his more-or-less conflicting goals by Washington being so set on weaponizing its alliance with Tokyo to serve its own strategic competition with Beijing.

Washington is determined to confront Beijing, not only with an all-of-government approach at home, but, more importantly, also with all the US' allies and partners on board. From Washington's perspective, it is with us or against us.

Despite a decent, productive China-US relationship being in no way exclusive of a closer US-Japan alliance, Washington won't allow Japan to have it both ways.

That message was bluntly explicit in the Oct 15 letter from the top Republicans and Democrats on the US House China Select Committee to Japanese ambassador to the US. In that letter, Committee Republican Chairman John Moolenaar and top Democrat Raja Krishnamoorthi urged Japan to align with the US on imposing further restrictions on sales of chipmaking equipment to China. In addition to the previous emphasis on cutting-edge chips and equipment, they asked Tokyo to extend present restrictions to undermine China's capacity to make less-advanced chips. Failing to do that may subject Japanese companies to US restrictions, or have them denied access to US semiconductor subsidies. And they threatened that the US could invoke its "foreign direct product rule" to regulate goods made overseas that contain even the tiniest amount of US technology.

Despite its allies' reluctance to make such self-damaging moves before next month's presidential election in the US, the Joe Biden administration is clearly determined to announce complementary export control regimes to close loopholes in the existing ones. Compared with Washington's strategic need, which has been raised to the level of national and international security, the economic interests of its allies are clearly of no concern to the US. The US lawmakers, for instance, have ignored Japanese concerns about such restrictions hurting domestic companies, claiming they "do not appear to stand up to scrutiny".

But there is no denying the fact that China has been the biggest and most lucrative market for all the chip and chipmaking equipment vendors in the world. Not to mention Tokyo's legitimate concerns that ruining ties with China may affect its supply of critical materials.

That Tokyo's desire for strategic autonomy is at odds with Washington's endeavor to counter China is also undeniable. Washington has made it crystal clear that it considers its allies' interests expendable in its efforts to contain China.

Japan, as an industry leader in the global semiconductor sector, will be the first for the US to enlist in its geopolitical considerations, as Deputy US Secretary of State Kurt Campbell indicated at a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies event. "Supply-chain support integration between the United States and Japan is essential," he said.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has made it clear that Beijing regards Washington's efforts to form exclusionary groupings as confrontational. So to what extent the supply-chain support integration the US is demanding of Japan compromises Ishiba's stated desire to improve Japan's relations with its neighbor will be a test for him and his Cabinet.

NATO chief assumes predecessor's mantle

Before Mark Rutte assumed the NATO general secretary's post on Oct 1, there were hopes he would make more balanced and independent decisions than his predecessor Jens Stoltenberg, even try to persuade Russia and Ukraine to end their hostilities at the earliest. Yet a gathering of NATO defense ministers the former Dutch prime minister presided over last week belied those hopes.

The NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels on Thursday and Friday was by no means a gathering to exchange views on the global security situation. Instead, it was an occasion for the new NATO chief to assume the mantle of his predecessor as a US yes-man.

With North Atlantic Treaty Organization's close partners in the Asia-Pacific region — Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea — and the European Union taking part in the executive-level meeting of NATO, the organization, under Rutte's leadership, has taken a big step forward in transforming their symbolic presence at the NATO summits in Madrid last year and Washington earlier this year into a worrisome routine practice.

Although details of the meeting remain unknown, the selective information NATO has chosen to release shows China's growing national strength was cited as the main "reason" for NATO to justify its expansion to the Asia-Pacific.

Rutte said the participation of NATO's "Indo-Pacific" partners and the EU in the defense ministers' meeting is "a clear sign of our deepening cooperation in the face of shared challenges".

"The war in Ukraine has shown that instability in Europe can have far-reaching consequences across the world, and that countries thousands of miles away — as far away as Iran, China and even North Korea — can become security spoilers in our own backyard. Our world is closely linked — and so is our security," Rutte told journalists.

Rutte even outdid his predecessor by publicly declaring that he is willing to fulfill Ukraine's wish to become a NATO member, a move widely seen as a grave provocation to Russia and will further complicate the Ukraine crisis. "At the moment it seems that it will be Ukraine as number 33, but maybe somebody else pops in front of him. But Ukraine will be a member of NATO in the future," Rutte said. "That is what we decided in Washington. So the question is now about the timeline ... Then the question exactly about ... when I cannot answer now ..."

Allies need "to move further and faster to meet the growing threats we face", he said, adding that "this requires more forces, capabilities and investment to meet the ambitious targets set by our defense plans". It is apparent that Rutte was carrying out Washington's task of merging security with technology, trade and climate action by overgeneralizing the concept of "security", which the United States-led West believes will prove effective in countering the China "threat".

However, neither NATO's promise to help Ukraine nor its so-called commitment to contain China is new. While the former has worsened the security situation in Europe, the latter has soured relations between China and NATO, which is a pity because before the Ukraine crisis broke out, China and NATO could still communicate with each other in good faith to seek to work together to deal with common security threats.

As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, China has the best track record among major countries when it comes to maintaining peace and security. So it is to be hoped that NATO will take a hard look at what it has done to Europe's security architecture, reflect on the consequences of triggering bloc confrontation, and stop smearing China and see China for what it is: a peace-loving, development-oriented nation.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

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

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

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1618, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

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

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

Shi Yu



Opinion Line

London must find a way to align interests with new global order

UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs David Lammy paid an official visit to China from Friday to Saturday, the first visit by a senior UK official since the Labour Party took power in July.

The visit attracted widespread attention, especially as it marked the reengagement between the two countries after several years of tensions.

In 2015, the two nations' leaders jointly announced that Sino-British relations had entered a "golden era", and the United Kingdom even became the first Western country to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

However, since 2019, relations between the two countries have hit a

low, especially during the fag end of the Tory rule.

By sending a Cabinet member to China within three months of taking office, the UK Labour government has demonstrated its pragmatism in handling relations with China. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has made it clear that the UK will maintain dialogue with China while protecting national interests.

Although the new Labour government faces pressure from British allies and domestic conservatives, it may still adopt a pragmatic diplomatic stance based on the UK's economic interests and common interests on global issues.

Lammy's visit to China involved talks on the green economy, technology secu-

city, and broader international and regional security topics. He also visited Shanghai to meet British businesspeople and corporate representatives to promote further development of Sino-British commercial relations. The initiative will not only help restore economic and trade ties between China and the UK but also is in line with the UK public's call for economically pragmatic policies.

Despite the diplomatic pressure exerted by the United States on the UK, cooperation is a common need for both China and the UK. Through continuous dialogue and coordination with China, the UK is expected to explore a diplomatic path that aligns with its own interests in the new international environment.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Data show economy on path to steady recovery

That China's GDP grew by 4.6 percent, higher than the 4.5 percent market expectations, in the third quarter shows government policies are having the desired effect, even though the growth rate was slightly lower than the 4.7 percent in the second quarter, according to the macroeconomic data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Friday.

Compared with previous periods, the latest round of policies has increased in intensity and scope, as the authorities have taken steps to boost market confidence through measures such as reducing the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates, lowering the interest rate on existing housing loans, and issuing a stimulus package.

According to a NBS survey that cov-

ered about 100,000 large enterprises, the percentage of industrial enterprises above designated size optimistic about their performance in the fourth quarter increased by 1.3 percentage points month-on-month and 0.9 percentage points year-on-year. Also, the condition of some key enterprises, both in the traditional and emerging industries, has improved significantly, reflecting that market expectations are turning positive.

The financial market, too, has reacted positively, with the stock market seeing a reversal, with the transaction volume in the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges increasing by 32.7 percent in September after declining 15.3 percent in August.

Besides, the real estate sector is

becoming more active, as the narrowing decline in sales in terms of area and amount shows.

In fact, incomplete data for October show that both new and secondary housing transaction volumes in key cities have seen a significant year-on-year increase, which means the real estate sector is showing early signs of stabilization.

However, China's exports may continue to decline in the fourth quarter. But the stimulus package issued by the government will help boost the country's economic recovery. As the effects of these policies unfold, recovery is likely to stabilize in the fourth quarter and help China realize its GDP growth target of about 5 percent.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

Regulation merges development with security

The export control regulation on dual-use items, which will come into effect on Dec 1, is expected to both enhance the effectiveness of the control and create a predictable trade regulatory environment for domestic and global businesses.

Dual-use items are goods, technologies and services that can be used for both civilian and military purposes or can contribute to enhancing military strength. As is the international practice, since the 1990s, China has implemented several export control regulations on dual-use items, while fulfilling its international obligations such as nonproliferation. In 2020, the Export Control Law was implemented, establishing a unified export control system. The new regulation on the export control of dual-use items was developed following this law.

For enterprises engaged in the export of dual-use items, a unified written regulation creates a stable, transparent and

predictable regulatory environment, compelling them to comply with the law during production and to know how to avoid legal risks, thus avoiding the problem of being restricted or even banned from exporting the goods after production. The regulation aims to achieve high-quality development while ensuring high-level security.

Furthermore, the new regulation, based on domestic realities, improves the export control system and aligns it with international norms, meeting the needs to fulfill international obligations such as nonproliferation while also facilitating smoother exports of China's dual-use items. Moreover, the regulation is formulated on the basis of laws such as the Export Control Law, detailing and solidifying specific measures for export control of dual-use items, thereby further enhancing regulatory effectiveness.

Notably, the regulation explicitly stipulates, in accordance with the Export Control Law, that if importers or end-users violate end-user or end-

use management requirements, potentially endangering national security and interests, or use dual-use items for terrorist purposes, the Ministry of Commerce under the State Council may decide to include them in a controlled list.

This provision directly supports national security and the global fight against terrorism. The regulation says that the ministry can include importers or end-users in a controlled list if they use dual-use items for the design, development, production, or use of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles.

By focusing on improving the efficiency of export controls on dual-use items and creating a predictable trade regulatory environment, the regulation holds the promise of facilitating a positive interaction between high-quality development and high-level security, providing institutional support and legal guarantee for safeguarding national security and interests.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | BRICS Summit

Editor's note: BRICS has become a leading cooperation platform which aims to safeguard the interests of emerging economies and developing countries, and help the Global South build a fairer and equitable global financial system. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Renato Baumann

Enlarged BRICS can cement supply chains

One of the policy tools to deal with the so-called middle-income trap has been the deepening of trade and economic relations with other countries, mainly neighboring countries. Production processes that can be divided into different stages to take place in different countries have become natural candidates to form value chains.

Experience shows that the access to goods produced at lower costs — be it because of relatively cheap labor, more abundant raw materials or other determining factors — helps foster competitiveness and, hence, is considered a source of gain in international trade.

This type of productive process has allowed several developing economies to more closely participate in international merchandise trade, even if they lack competitive advantage. Being geographically closer to the main markets — for instance, being in a neighboring country — reduces transportation costs and stimulates some stages of the production process. Good infrastructure and natural conditions, and well-trained workers, too, are required to ensure the free movement of goods and services.

A country's government cannot determine whether the country will become part of a value chain. Instead, a country must prove its worth to be eligible to be part of it. And yet being part of a value chain is not necessary for every production sector. Also, unlike economies that are highly competitive in manufacturing, economies with comparative advantages in some natural resources need not necessarily try to become part of a value chain.

After all, fragmented production depends on the technological nature of each sector and the geographical location of each country. Fragmented production refers to the production of goods and services using separate suppliers and component-makers to reduce production costs.

However, fragmented production involves higher governance costs and frequent traveling by engineers, technicians and management officials between production plants. In such cases, therefore, value chains tend to be a regional rather than a global process.

However, some advanced economies have resorted to "re-shoring", that is, relocating manufacturing and production operations from overseas back to a company's home country, which suggests they will take more protectionist measures and further tighten their immigration policies. It's possible that the restrictions imposed during the COVID pandemic, which had a huge impact on the global supply chains, may have influenced the "re-shoring" decisions.



MAX XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

But offshoring, in which businesses move their production units to foreign countries to capitalize on low labor costs and other economic benefits, remains mutually beneficial for both the mother and host countries of enterprises, as well as the enterprises and their employees.

The geographical distance among most of the BRICS member states and the availability of natural resources and other goods in some of the countries can become obstacles to creating a strong BRICS value chain.

This is not to say that economic complementarity of BRICS members is nil. For some products that have a long life and commercialization cycle (furniture for example) even geographically distant partners can build joint production bases.

In fact, the scope for cooperation among BRICS members to help foster industrial competitiveness is not narrow. Indeed, more proactive policies should be adopted by the

grouping to ensure the members provide mutual support for each other so they can improve their performance. The exchange of technologies, easier access to parts and components, capacity building, trade facilitation and other initiatives are measures that will help improve the production performance of the BRICS members.

More intense bilateral and multilateral cooperation and collaboration among BRICS members may become an important policy tool in the future. The consumer market of the expanded BRICS is massive. Hence, initiatives that facilitate fluid merchandise flow among member countries will certainly provide economic benefits to all, by bypassing the increasing protective measures taken by certain economies.

Empirical evidence shows that some BRICS members have already started replacing the traditional suppliers of certain products and services, suggesting the

degree of interaction within the grouping will only increase with the passage of time.

BRICS member states should share their expertise in production with each other so their complementarity in new sectors can be fully realized. BRICS has admitted new members at a time when the global landscape is marred by trade protectionism disguised as environmental protection or national security, and decoupling of traditional economic partners.

So middle-income countries looking for complementary trade and economic partners should try and maximize the benefits that might accrue from their membership of BRICS, provided the group adopts the right measures leading to such purposes.

The views herein do not necessarily correspond to the institutional position nor do they necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Adnan Akfirat

Queuing for membership reflects Global South's choices

In an era marked by escalating conflicts and disputes, the world is growing increasingly volatile. Amid global uncertainty and heightened tensions, BRICS has emerged as a beacon of hope for the Global South. At the 16th BRICS Summit, to be held from Tuesday to Thursday, a pivotal agenda item will revolve around the potential admission of new members into BRICS. Reportedly, two dozen countries are vying to join BRICS, underscoring its growing significance on the global stage.

In August 2023, the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, made the decision to expand BRICS was made. On Jan 1 this year, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia officially became members of the BRICS group. The fifth new member, Saudi Arabia, is yet to formally join the grouping.

But why have so many countries applied to join the grouping?

To begin with, BRICS is a grouping that believes in human values, respects diversity and upholds multilateralism, which is in stark contrast to other blocs' policies. The world yearns for cooperative groupings where people respect each other, live in harmony and share the fruits of development regardless of their religion, race and color, and the language they speak. BRICS is an association that upholds these spirits.

Facing escalating conflicts and tensions, it is thus crucial for the Global South to unite and work together to preserve their sovereignty and territorial integrity. And BRICS, a grouping of developing countries united in their struggle to safeguard their independence, provides them with a platform to do so.

Moreover, BRICS represents emerging and developing economies. The US and Western economies such as the European Union, Japan and Canada, which closely follow the US, are experiencing an economic downturn. In contrast, BRICS is a grouping of emerging economies such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa, Iran and Egypt, which together make up a significant portion of the world economy.

BRICS stands for human values and is also a civilizational project. When we look at BRICS, we see the acceptance of differences, family values and socialism. Even if there were no threat from the West, BRICS would be a more suitable option for Türkiye.

Unlike certain powers or blocs that subscribe to the notion of clash of civilizations, BRICS member states are as diverse as they can be in terms of their culture, ethnicity and the faith they follow. BRICS has a wide ethnic, cultural and religious spectrum — from Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics to Hindus, and from Muslims, both Sunnis and Shiites, to Buddhists and nonbelievers. Also, the grouping includes a socialist country, secular states and Islamic republics. BRICS is a formation based on equal relations. It is a formation where no country shapes the future of the others, interferes in their internal affairs or looks down upon them.

In the case of Türkiye, BRICS is not a dream; it is a realistic project.

BRICS offers many opportunities for the Turkish economy. In the EU, the Customs Union, introduced before Türkiye was made a key strategic partner of the European economic bloc, made Turkish producers uncompetitive. BRICS, alternatively, is a different proposition for Türkiye. If it joins, BRICS will give Turkish producers access to a huge market and low-cost energy. Besides, investors from BRICS countries will find a destination in Türkiye that is much more favorable to business.

Türkiye is already an important partner of BRICS with its strong military and economic potential, and influence in the Turkic states and the Islamic world. Türkiye's place in the world economy can also play an important role in global monetary system reform.

But to join BRICS, Türkiye needs to change its pro-Western foreign policy and build trust with existing BRICS members.

The BRICS Summit will shape the future of not only Global South but also the world.

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

Xu Wenhong

Emerging economies' payment system a historical necessity

The 16th BRICS Summit, the first since its historic expansion, will be held in Kazan, Russia, from Tuesday to Thursday. Two subjects that have attracted global attention are whether BRICS would expand its membership and, more important, whether this is the right time to introduce a BRICS international payment system.

Since the dawn of civilization, humans have been exploring more convenient and efficient ways of exchanging goods and services to adapt to the continuously expanding economic activities. With the development of society and the improvement of productivity, payment methods have advanced from the barter system to metal currency, from negotiable instruments or fiat currency to plastic money, and from credit currency to digital payment.

The evolution of payment methods reflects the progress of social productivity and technological prowess. No wonder the fragmented regional monetary and payment systems gradually gave way to the current global monetary and global payment systems after the Bretton Woods agreement.

The monetary and payment systems have not been constant; they have evolved with the development of the social economy. Currency itself has gone through a process of evolution from simple to complex, and from physical (gold and silver) to virtual. The payment system, too, has gradually modernized.

However, the current international payment system, established after the end of World War II, is plagued with increasingly



The author is deputy secretary-general of the Center for Belt and Road Studies, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

serious problems such as a long processing time and high costs. With the application of new technologies such as blockchain, big data and artificial intelligence, the global payment system, too, should keep pace with the times. This makes the development of new payment systems a historical inevitability.

As a platform for strengthening cooperation and promoting common development among emerging economies and developing countries, BRICS has made remarkable achievements in recent years. After the formal enlargement of BRICS on Jan 1, its member states represent 45 percent of the global population and account for 28 percent of the global economy, with their economic scale surpassing that of the G7 economies.

With the close economic relations among BRICS member states, promoting economic cooperation within the grouping, using local currencies or a common currency to settle business deals within BRICS, reducing economic risks caused by the fluctuations of the US dollar, enhancing the international competitiveness of their own currencies, reducing cross-border payment costs through technological innovation, and improving transaction efficiency are all nec-

essary for the further improvement of the global payment system.

The current global payment system is dominated by the Belgium-based Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication and the US-based Clearing House Interbank Payments System. The two systems are great innovations in global payment methods and a huge contribution made by advanced economies to society, which promoted economic globalization.

Unfortunately, in recent years, some Western powers have weaponized these financial infrastructure facilities, imposing restrictions on the economic activities of many countries across the world. At present, about 10 percent of the countries and one quarter of the global population are under US sanctions, including BRICS member countries.

The current global financial infrastructure facilities were set up by and for the Western countries. By excluding some countries from the SWIFT system and prohibiting them from using the dollar (and the euro), the Western powers have tried to cripple their economies. In order to respect for civilizational diversity, provide the world with more choices in global payment systems, promote a fairer and more free global transactions and payments, and reduce the dependence on the West-dominated global payment systems, the BRICS members want to develop an alternative cross-border payment and settlement system.

The establishment of a BRICS global payment system will help strengthen the autonomy of BRICS members and allow

them to have a greater say in the international financial and global governance systems. Also, the BRICS payment system will help achieve one of the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: promoting the implementation of global development initiatives, and jointly building a global development community.

The BRICS members have been reiterating that the global payment system BRICS will develop will not be anti-West; instead, it will be non-West. The BRICS members just want to provide the world with more and better choices when it comes to global payment systems. The establishment of a BRICS payment system is key to promoting global financial system reform and helping build a more just and reasonable international financial order.

It is therefore clear that the introduction of a BRICS payment system is important for reducing the Global South's dependence on the West-dominated global monetary and global payment systems, and stopping some powers from further weaponizing the global financial infrastructure. It is also important for promoting economic cooperation among BRICS members and strengthening their financial autonomy, supporting the sustainable development of emerging economies, and reforming the global financial system. It should write a new chapter in the history of global payment systems.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG YUN

A core force

The Global South represented by BRICS is not a loose aggregation of states, but those with shared experiences that will drive the course of history

The upcoming 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia from Oct 22-24, is an important meeting in the backdrop of significant global security challenges, such as the ongoing Ukraine crisis and the spillover of conflicts in the Middle East. While doubts and disbelief about global security governance are increasing, the United Nations seems lacking in its ability to prevent security crises from escalating. There are also widely divergent views on how to rebuild regional security structures.

As BRICS nations have achieved tremendous economic growth after the Cold War and are increasingly becoming a main force in international politics, they can assume a more proper role in building the security perspective of the Global South.

BRICS countries are practitioners of the "endogenous security concept" within the Global South, which insists on achieving security goals by providing national resilience through economic and social growth.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his speech at the BRICS-Africa Outreach and BRICS Plus Dialogue in August 2023, "development embodies our people's aspiration for a better life. It is the top priority for developing countries and a timeless theme for humanity". The Global Development Initiative was proposed to draw the world's attention on growth and to support the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During the Cold War era, the military security agenda between superpowers occupied the core

position in international politics, leading to an arms race, proxy wars, and the persistent underdevelopment of peripheral countries.

China's tremendous achievements over the past few decades are attributed to its consistent focus on growth as the top priority and an endogenous security concept that promotes development-driven security. Many successful emerging states, including some BRICS states, have followed the same path. In today's world, any country that artificially elevates the military security agenda excessively, engages in bloc confrontation or proxy conflicts, or even places it above the development agenda, is going against the tide of history. Such actions are unpopular internationally and unsustainable domestically. Security and development are complementary. No country should pursue development at the expense of security, nor should there be a one-sided approach that sacrifices development for the sake of security. As an important member of the BRICS, China has proposed the Global Development Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative which can better serve the global political agenda. This is the common wish of most countries and the foundation for achieving global security governance. For a long time, the goal of China's foreign policy has been to create a favorable external environment for its economic and social progress. With its continuous rise and increasing international expectations, China is contributing wisdom for creating a favorable international environment for global common development. This concept and policy logic are coherent and consistent.

At the 2023 BRICS summit held in South Africa, the bloc achieved a historic membership expansion. The larger BRICS framework will



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

help to continuously deepen and disseminate the Global South's concept of seeking security through development, focusing on macroeconomics, global poverty reduction and development, and reform of international economic and financial institutions.

BRICS countries will become pioneers in resolving international security crises through political dialogue and diplomatic mediation based on negotiation, rather than on military deterrence. Traditional international security studies emphasize military deterrence and balance of power. However, the strengthening of one party's military deterrence often leads to an escalating cycle, resulting in the so-called security dilemma. To break the dilemma and reduce the security deficit, we should abandon the old path of unilaterally strengthening one's military forces or reinforcing collective defense

through military alliances. The dilemma is also a cognitive issue. Overemphasizing the security dilemma between nations, and negative topics such as suspicious prevention can make us "insensitive" to the possibility of resolving the root causes of conflicts.

In 2023, China published the Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, proposing a different vision for security governance that seeks security through cooperation, respects national sovereignty and international law, and resolves conflicts through diplomatic mediation, rather than relying on military deterrence. Based on this concept, China facilitated the historic normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two long-standing adversaries, in Beijing in March 2023. History has proven that decades of military deterrence and economic sanctions against Iran did not bring peace to the Mid-

dle East; only diplomatic mediation and political reconciliation are the right path. Apart from symbolizing the success of China's Middle East diplomacy, mediation of the Saudi-Iranian relations has significant international implications beyond China's diplomacy.

China's global debut in mediating diplomacy aligns with the urgent contemporary need for new ideas and wisdom to resolve international disputes and will serve as an important safeguard to prevent the world from sliding into a new Cold War.

International politics is once again facing a risk. Rejecting a new Cold War requires preventing regional disputes from escalating into "global security issues" to avoid further deterioration of regional security situations due to the intervention of major power politics. China's Middle East mediation diplomacy sends an important signal to the global audience that

regional countries are capable of resolving their disputes autonomously under the mediation of a trusted third party.

After the outbreak of the Gaza crisis, China engaged in mediation diplomacy once again. In July, 14 Palestinian factions gathered in Beijing and reached the most important consensus to achieve a grand reconciliation under China's mediation. They signed the Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity. China's endeavors to achieve security through diplomatic mediation are not limited to its own efforts but also actively engage in international cooperation. In May, in response to the ongoing spillover of the Ukraine crisis, China and Brazil issued the six-point consensus on the crisis' political settlement, reflecting the will of BRICS countries to create security through dialogue and cooperation. At the beginning of 2023, China established the International Mediation Institute Preparatory Office in Hong Kong.

It will provide an important platform for Global South countries, including BRICS nations, to achieve common and lasting security through diplomatic mediation. This year, the office began cooperating with the African Union, which will also bring hope to the African region with frequent security issues, to solve security crises with the Global South security concept.

The Global South represented by BRICS nations is not, as some analysts believe, a collection of countries without common ideas and values, or a loose aggregation of states. Instead, it is a core force with shared experiences and interconnected perceptions that will drive the course of history. In terms of global security governance, BRICS countries and the Global South cannot be absent in the practical diplomacy.

The author is an associate professor of international relations at Niigata University in Japan and a non-resident senior fellow at the Center on Contemporary China and the World at the University of Hong Kong. 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.

XU YANZHUO AND ZOU ZHIBO

More members, more challenges

As BRICS expands, the bloc should remember that it was founded to strengthen cooperation, promote common development, fairness and a just world

From Oct 22 to 24, BRICS will hold the first-ever summit since its expansion with the inclusion of Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia.

The leaders will jointly talk about the extraordinary times and circumstances, which is critical to the future of the group. With the addition of new members, BRICS faces new challenges from both the current international order and the expanding club itself. Ultimately, the trajectory of BRICS and its global dynamics of leading cooperation in the Global South will depend on how



Xu Yanzhuo



Zou Zhibo

effectively the member states navigate these external pressures and internal differences.

The world has witnessed a historic transition of "rising South, declining North". At the start of the 21st century, the top 10 developed countries in the West accounted for about 64 percent of world GDP; by contrast, the share of the top 10 developing countries was only 12 percent. However, by 2022, the former decreased to 46.5 percent, and the latter grew to 31.3 percent. The developing economies' continued catch-up not only reflects a historic change in the world's landscape, but also provides an unprecedented opportunity for developing countries as a whole. As the leading force of South-South cooperation, BRICS should seize the momentum and advance a unified stand of emerging and developing countries to build a fairer and more reasonable world order. That is a common priority of the developing bloc.

The unveiling great power strategic rivalry and geopolitical competition in "world major changes" has impacted BRICS' mechanism and roles. The United States is taking



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

advantage of rising geopolitical tension to contain China and weaken Russia, increasingly complicating concerted BRICS actions. At the same time, several member states with miscellaneous objectives are also seeking to reap profits from the power politics. On the one hand, they try to use inducements offered by the US, while on the other hand, they also want to benefit from BRICS. The conflicting interests will undermine

BRICS' ties and cooperation.

BRICS is a community of shared interests and destiny. Only the success of BRICS as a solid, unified, leading cooperative platform for the Global South and as the promoter of a fair and reasonable international order can safeguard the collective rights and interests of member states, as well as the developing countries as a whole. All the members, including the

five new ones, have to show strategic vision and unity, and demonstrate the determination to jointly safeguard BRICS development and position. They also have the responsibility to avoid activities that undermine the institutional mechanism and priorities. They should keep in mind that BRICS was formed to strengthen cooperation, promote common development, fairness and a just world, and build

a fair and reasonable international order.

The rise in number of BRICS members from five to 10 also indicates an expansion in the size of its population, area and economic outputs, thus increasing the influence it wields. For example, according to International Monetary Fund data, BRICS now accounts for nearly 36 percent of global GDP, larger than that of the G7 (29.9 percent) when adjusting for purchasing power parity. The expansion also significantly transforms the world's energy landscape. The overall strength of the bloc places it at a strong position in global governance. BRICS has a very bright future and potential to influence and change the world historically.

However, the expansion has also brought with it new challenges. First, diversity. Given the increased difference of regions, cultures and development paths, BRICS countries also differ in their strategic orientations and priorities, which might undermine the integration within the group. For example, some member states seek to advocate their individual position on the United Nations Security Council reform on this platform, while new members require more support from the mechanism, which might fragment and dilute the loans from the New Development Bank. In terms of policymaking mechanism, China's "seeking common ground while reserving difference" approach provides a spirit of compromise to address the problems. Take the UN Security Council reform as an example. The advocating states might achieve the goals through unified stands in full consultation and consensus, or by "shelving differences", rather than imposing its own vision on the

group. In terms of new economic demands, BRICS has a responsibility to negotiate resources distribution and priorities of NDB loans to seek a meaningful solution.

Second, complexity. New members bring additional resources and opportunities, but some conflicts and disputes over territory and resources are also put on the table, which will inevitably have an impact on the decision-making mechanism. However, the practical differences do not necessarily deviate the group from its original intention to be a multilateral platform for emerging economies. Conflicts and disputes should not block the way of cooperation. It is necessary to keep in mind that the goal behind BRICS' expansion is to strengthen rather than weaken the development and cooperation of common interests and goals.

Third, efficiency. BRICS cannot be reduced to becoming a talk shop when introducing new members with more topics and agendas. BRICS members are required to focus on pragmatic and effective cooperation. One is to prioritize issues on development for developing countries, such as NDB mechanism construction, especially the investment on green development and digital transformation for developing countries. The other is to maintain flexible and effective decision-making mechanisms. For instance, in addition to strengthening cooperation within BRICS, the "BRICS+" model could also provide a way to promote diversified and pragmatic dialogues with non-BRICS states.

Xu Yanzhuo is a research fellow of Foreign Policy Division at the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Zou Zhibo is deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a committee member of the National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CULTURAL HERITAGE



The Great Wall, stretching across vast swathes of time and geography, is regarded as a wonder of the world. While standing as a testimony to China's profound history, the winding walls still carry with them stories of the ordinary with a touch of warmth.

Just a 30-minute drive away from its famed Badaling section lies a small village held by the Great Wall in its embrace. Surrounded by the walls on three sides, Shixia village used to be a military stronghold, first established in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

For the villagers, the Great Wall is not a must-visit destination in a lifetime but an everyday sight — they can raise their heads from almost anywhere in the village and see the Great Wall meandering its way along the mountain ridges.

The village features simple and modest buildings with an antique flair, typically single-story with gray brick walls. Yet, these buildings serve various functions that cater to those seeking diverse experiences, including a village history museum, hotels, a brewery, a cafe and a bookshop.

According to Li Handong, director of the village committee, the people of Shixia village have been committed to protecting its section of the Great Wall, and its development and prosperity were made possible by this heritage.

Earlier this year, Li and nine other village representatives wrote a letter to President Xi Jinping, in which they told of their love of the Great Wall, and the village's transformation from an impoverished hamlet to a countryside getaway.

On May 14, they received a reply from Xi, applauding their effort in safeguarding the Great Wall, passing on its culture and leveraging its resources to achieve prosperity.

The president underscored the Great Wall's role as "a symbol of the Chinese nation and an important emblem of Chinese civilization", embodying the spirit of unyielding perseverance and patriotic unity, while encouraging its guardians to pass down "this precious heritage left by our ancestors for generations to come".

Liu Hongyan, a village representative and a dedicated Great Wall protector, says that she and other villagers were overjoyed by the reply, feeling immense pride. In the meantime, reflecting on her role as a protector, she also felt the weight of responsibility.

"We were all thrilled to receive the response. Shixia is just a small, remote mountain village, so I never thought that the president would attach importance to our village, and the work we've done to preserve the Great Wall. It's an encouragement for me and I'll continue to protect the Great Wall and protect my homeland," Liu says.

Her uncle Mei Jingtian, now 80, pioneered the village's Great Wall protection efforts since 1980. As he could not bear to see the wall crumble, Mei regularly patrolled the mountains for the past four decades, trying to prevent damage and safeguard the heritage.

"He started his voluntary patrols in 1980, the year I was born. So ever since I was little, I'd often see him pass by my house after a day of patrolling, and he'd tell me what he saw on the mountains. When I grew



Village steps up for Great Wall mission

Residents protect iconic structure and cater to growing number of visitors, Cheng Yuezhu reports.



Top: Liu Hongyan is a full-time protector of the Great Wall at Beijing's Shixia village, which used to be a military stronghold, first established in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Above: Shixia village lies at the foot of the Great Wall in Yanqing district.
Below left: The village is a popular countryside retreat with a thriving hotel business.
Above left: The Shixia Pass of the Great Wall was first built in the Ming Dynasty. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



older, he'd take me along and tell me about the history and legends of the Great Wall. Over time, I developed a deep affection for it," Liu recalls.

In 2006, Mei consulted with the village committee to establish a voluntary protectors' team, which received enthusiastic support, with more than 40 villagers signing up. Since then, the villagers have been regularly going on patrols to the Great Wall to tackle pollution and damage.

Now, the village has a permanent

population of around 130 people, nearly all of whom are involved in the heritage protection efforts, Li says. During these patrols, they'd dispose of litter, remove weeds, pick up and arrange the bricks that became dislodged, and report damage or hazards to cultural heritage authorities.

Liu herself is now a full-time Great Wall protector. In 2019, upon learning about a recruitment drive for Great Wall protectors in Yanqing

district, she immediately signed up. After passing a written exam, an interview and a physical fitness test, she became one of the first six individuals selected as Great Wall protectors in the village.

"I remember that on my first day, we went up to the Great Wall and saw a lot of litter, especially plastic rubbish tourists had left behind. We brought our own trash bags and each one of us collected three to four bags," Liu says.

For five days a week, the team members go on a patrol of nearly 20 kilometers, which takes them five to six hours to complete. During their patrols, they regularly take photos of the walls and the watchtowers, especially areas with cracks or fallen bricks, and upload the images to a specialized app linked to the cultural heritage management office of Yanqing district.

"Since becoming a full-time protector, I've noticed that with each trip

up the mountain, the amount of litter has decreased, perhaps because of both our collective efforts and growing public awareness," she adds.

Reciprocating the love and care given by the villagers, the Great Wall also brought the village vitalization and prosperity. While the village used to be very poor, with muddy roads and insufficient infrastructure, it has now become a destination for weekend retreats.

A prominent figure in the village's tourism development is He Yuling from Yanqing district. An entrepreneur in the catering industry in central Beijing, she observed the trend of city dwellers going to the countryside for weekends, and thought of establishing a high-quality countryside getaway. Then, a trip to Shixia in 2014 revealed to her an ideal spot for her vision.

"At the time, the village was full of old houses and courtyards, but the local community was very welcoming, and the aging buildings were well-maintained and clean," she recalls.

"What I saw in it was its rich historical and cultural resources. The Great Wall is visible from almost anywhere in the village, and it has historical remains. The natural scenery was stunning, with lush vegetation and flowers blooming all over the mountains in spring."

She rented 20 courtyards from local villagers and transformed these into her own brand, the Stone Light Hotels. Each of these courtyards has its own characteristics, but overall the designs kept the buildings' original simplicity, coziness and antique flavor.

Along with the guesthouses, her company also set up public spaces such as the cafe and bookshop to enrich the lives of residents and tourists alike, and involved the locals in establishing a brewery, a teahouse and an oil mill, which allows visitors to learn about folk culture and help the villagers sell local specialties.

Since the guesthouses opened in 2015, she has been providing villagers over 65 with an egg and a packet of milk every day, and the guesthouse employees also participate in the village's Great Wall preservation.

"Although my hometown is 30 kilometers away from Shixia, I've always considered myself a local. The entire atmosphere of the village is harmonious. It feels like a big family with the villagers and the visitors," she says.

In her observations for the past decade, what has changed about Shixia is not only the environment, but also the villagers' increasing awareness of the preservation of their historical and cultural resources.

For the next steps, Li says that the village aims to continue to make good use of its natural and historical resources to promote economic development and rural vitalization.

In the meantime, Great Wall preservation remains the most important. "It is an emblem of our Chinese civilization, and living right beside the Great Wall, we have been improving our living conditions because of it. So we will continue to protect the heritage. Even when our generation grows old, the future generations will take up the baton," Li says.

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

By CHENG YUEZHU

Over the span of around 2,000 years, multitudes of workers contributed to the construction of the Great Wall. Today, countless individuals are still working to continue this endeavor, this time to preserve this icon of heritage.

One of the earliest and most influential preservation projects was the "Love China, Restore the Great Wall" campaign, initiated in 1984 by a number of institutions, including the Beijing Evening News, the Beijing Daily, and the former Badaling Great Wall special zone administrative office.

Xi Zhongxun, then member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Deng Xiaoping, then director of the Central Advisory Commission of the CPC, produced calligraphy versions of the campaign slogan, which were published in the Beijing Evening News, greatly enhancing its impact.

The campaign pioneered public participation in the country, and drew in individuals and organizations from both China and abroad, who contributed a flood of donations for the wall's preservation.

On Sept 26, an event to celebrate the campaign's 40th anniversary was hosted in Beijing's Yanqing district by the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

In 2016, the administration released a document on the management of the wall's protectors, which institutionalized and normalized public participation in the preservation of the Great Wall.

Giving preservation efforts a priority



From left: A bird's-eye view of the Great Wall's Badaling section. LYU HAOJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY Great Wall protectors step onstage to receive donations by Tencent Foundation at a fundraising event in Badaling last month. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Li Qun, director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, said in his keynote speech at the celebratory event that according to partial statistics, 72 percent of the fortresses along the wall have subsequently evolved into villages, towns and even cities.

"We want to mobilize and unite a wider range of forces to collectively protect the Great Wall, share in the achievements of its preservation, and infuse new vitality into preservation efforts," Li says.

Future measures will cover three main

aspects — promoting volunteer action to protect the wall, enhancing public education on the importance of the cause, and ensuring that the outcomes of protection benefit the public.

The 2024 edition of the "Protecting the Great Wall, Count Me In" fundraising campaign was launched at the celebratory event. The campaign was initiated by the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation and the Tencent Foundation in 2016 under the administration's guidance.

According to Liu Yuzhu, chairman of the

China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, the campaign marked the beginning of the foundation's efforts to increase public participation.

Over the past eight years, it has raised nearly 70 million yuan (\$9.83 million). Liu says the money has been used in restoration projects along the Jiankou and Badaling sections in Beijing, as well as the Xifengkou section in Hebei province. The latest project is the ongoing fifth stage of restoration of the Jiankou section, which started in June. This year, the Tencent Foundation donat-

ed 5 million yuan to purchase 7,481 gear packs for protectors.

"Public involvement is comprehensive and multifaceted," Liu says. "It not only to some extent fills the financial gaps in preservation work, but also includes material support, technological advancement, improving awareness, exhibitions and volunteer services. Regardless of method, all these efforts are aimed at protecting and passing on our shared heritage."

He says that while laws and regulations are encouraging more people to get involved, it is essential to improve participation mechanisms, provide accessible ways for the public to get involved, and strengthen coordination and collaboration among different organizations.

"The practice of Great Wall preservation has proved that it is impossible to complete the task solely by relying on government efforts, or the efforts of a particular institution or organization. Even more than 7,000 protectors cannot cover every corner of the Great Wall. Collective effort is required to protect our cultural homeland together," Liu adds.

College students also play a substantial role in preservation. Recently, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau worked with the Beijing committee of the Communist Youth League of China to establish the Beijing University Student Great Wall Protection Volunteer Service Team. Volunteer teams from the Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, the Beijing Union University and the Beijing City University were certified as volunteer service team subgroups.

LIFE



From left: Scenes from the Cantonese Opera *The Imperial Decree*, Kunqu Opera *Jin Shengtan*, and Peking Opera *Er Chou*, which will all be performed as part of the 11th edition of the Xiqu Opera Black Box Festival. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Opening tradition up to today

Chinese opera festival continues to tinker with historical forms of art, **Chen Nan** reports.

When the audience walked into Star Theatres one Saturday night recently, they were presented with an unusual sight. The stage had been transformed into a courtroom and the audience, who sat on three sides, were not merely observers but active participants in the exploration of themes that resonated deeply — love, betrayal and redemption.

They were attending a contemporary production of the Yuju Opera *Resurrection*, which had its Beijing premiere on Oct 11. The performance opened the 11th edition of Xiqu Opera Black Box Festival, which is a showcase of contemporary presentations of traditional Chinese operas. The festival runs until Dec 31.

Small theaters have become trendy venues for young people in urban areas to get a taste of traditional Chinese opera with a contemporary twist — changes to anything from the method of storytelling, to the music, stage design and costumes. With three auditoriums, each with a capacity of about 200, Star Theatres was the first venue of its kind in Beijing and since it was founded in 2007, it has become a center of attraction for drama aficionados in search of experimental productions.

For artists striving to popularize theater among the young, such venues are a platform on which to experiment with new technology, explore the psychological portrayal of characters, and enhance appreciation of Chinese operatic genres among the young.

Adapted from the last novel written by Leo Tolstoy in 1889, the Chinese stage production of *Resurrection* features veteran Yuju Opera actors, giving both the novel and the opera a contemporary twist.

Yuju Opera is one of the most popular Chinese regional operas and has a rich history and distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other forms. Its musical style incorporates a variety of traditional instruments, including the *erhu* (a two-stringed fiddle), the *pipa* (a four-stringed lute), and the *yangqin* (a hammered dulcimer), and the singing style is characterized by its clear articulation and emotional expressiveness.

Tolstoy's novel is a social panorama of Russian life in the late 19th century, from the upper to the lower classes. The plot follows Dmitry Nekhludoff, a young man from high society, who seduces Maslova, a maid in his aunt's household. When she becomes pregnant and is dismissed, she spirals downward into prostitution. Ten years later, Nekhludoff is doing jury service at a murder trial and meets up with the defendant, who turns out to be Maslova. He feels guilty, and comes to see his actions as the source of her downfall — all the more so when she is mistakenly convicted and sentenced to hard labor — and decides to devote himself to saving her.

In the Chinese adaptation, the story takes place against the backdrop of early 20th century Shanghai. The protagonists are Liu Daofu, a young man from a wealthy family, who has returned to Shanghai after studying abroad, and a young maid, Qiu Hua.

As the audience are immersed in the unfolding drama, they are invited to explore the interplay between personal salvation and societal upheaval.

The cross-shaped stage represents the crossroads of existence, on which characters face pivotal decisions that will shape their destinies. At the intersection, Liu and Qiu embark on a journey of redemption, confronting their pasts and the weight of their choices.

The very design of the stage encourages the audience to reflect on their own lives, emphasizing the universal nature of struggle and the quest for forgiveness. Surrounding the stage are stones that symbolize a mire, evoking the challenges and entanglements that often impede progress. This imagery



Scenes from Yuju Opera, *Resurrection*, an adaptation of the Leo Tolstoy novel of the same name, which opened the 11th edition of Xiqu Opera Black Box Festival on Oct 11. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

powerfully conveys the sense of being trapped in circumstances that seem insurmountable. The presence of broken furniture serves as a poignant reminder of the turbulence and instability of the times, grounding the narrative in a historical context that resonates with viewers.

"This is our first stage production for small theaters. The three-sided seating allows spectators to be enveloped in the performance, and breaks down the barriers typically present in traditional theater," says Yuju Opera actress Zhang Yanping, who plays the role of Qiu. "As the audience sit in close proximity, they see every nuanced expression, and hear every whisper, making the emotional highs and lows of the characters more palpable. This intimacy creates an atmosphere where the audience feel they are not just observers, but integral parts of the story, sharing the characters' joy and sorrow."

Zhang, who is the director of the Center for Protection, Inheritance, and Development of Theatrical Arts of Zhengzhou, Henan province, has been performing Yuju Opera since she was 11. In 2015, the 55-year-old was awarded the China Theatre Plum Blossom Award — the country's top award for theater and opera performers.

She says that Yuju Opera encompasses a wide range of themes, including historical events, folklore, love stories, and moral tales. Its narratives often focus on human relationships, loyalty and justice, reflecting the values and

traditions of Chinese culture.

"It's a challenge for us to tell a romantic story with Yuju Opera, and it's also very hard for me to play the role," says Zhang, adding that Yuju Opera performers emphasize physical expression and movement, using gestures, facial expressions, and body language to convey narrative. "I used two different singing styles to interpret the role. *Huadan* is a specific role reserved for lively and youthful women characters. The vocal style used for singing this role is also bright and lively and requires a clear, high-pitched voice. I used it to portray Qiu as she falls in love. When her life becomes miserable after she is abandoned, I turned to the *qingyi* role, which is usually used to depict mature, elegant and reserved women, and sang with a more controlled voice to express deeper emotion."

"Although we only had six performers and four band members onstage, far less compared to bigger stage productions that involve nearly 100 people, we got warm feedback from the audience, especially young people," she says.

Over the course of the next three months, the 11th edition of Xiqu Opera Black Box Festival will present 18 productions of traditional Chinese operas by 15 troupes at Star Theatres.

Highlights include the Peking Opera production by students of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, *Er Chou*, which is adapted from *The Gov-*

ernment Inspector, the Russian comedy by Nikolay Gogol, and Cantonese Opera production *The Imperial Decree*, produced by the Xiqu Center at the West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong.

"The most appealing thing about staging traditional Chinese operas at smaller theaters is that it breaks the routine of traditional opera, and the creative team is able to employ a different way of storytelling, including flashbacks and interposed narration," says Lyu Jia, director of the Kunqu Opera production, *Jin Shengtan*, which will also be staged during the festival.

It follows the story of Jin Shengtan, a prominent literary critic, essayist during the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

"We used absurdist techniques to portray Jin Shengtan, weaving divergent thinking that transcends time and space through multiple layers of dreams," the director says. "Sharp, dark humor will be combined with the storytelling, immersing the audience in intense emotions."

Zhou Long, artistic director of the festival's organizing committee, says: "Traditional Chinese operas are ancient and highly stylized. We want to present traditional Chinese opera artists, who are trying to break the frame of old art forms, to present new and creative productions."

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

Hong Kong artist makes chocolate rain on New Jersey

By MINGMEI LI in New Jersey
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

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

The celebrated designer, who created the cartoon doll character Fatina Dreams for her creative crafts brand Chocolate Rain, told China Daily on Oct 12 that as a young woman from Hong Kong, she grew up in "a melting pot of cultures, where the East meets the 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 Oct 11 to 12 — presented by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York — 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 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 landmarks to life alongside similar scenes from New York. She noted the similarities between the two cities — both 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 that crosses Victoria Harbor.



Maisie Ho (fourth from right), director of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York, Prudence Mak (center), creator of Fatina Dreams and founder of Chocolate Rain, and other guests cut the ribbon at the exhibition in New Jersey. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

She says that 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 says.

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

"All of the 18 different districts around Victoria Harbor have public artwork installations. We are just one of them. There are over 20, 30 public installations, so it's a beautiful, nice scene there," says Mak.

"And then also you can enjoy art. Hong Kong is a tiny gem. We call it a little pearl, right?" she says. "Sometimes, maybe you pass by, you miss it, because 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 hometown 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 says. "Culture can do that — linking the hearts between the two peoples. People also have a lot of passion for Hong Kong — Hong Kong food and Hong Kong icons."

Ho invited people to visit Hong Kong to try authentic offerings 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 says, adding that visitors will be amazed by the latest developments to the city, and China has been welcoming to international visitors.

CULTURE

Sharing the Silk Road's treasures

Artists with a passion for history make perfect copies of ancient murals, so everyone can enjoy their beauty.



A reproduction of the mural *Procession of Zhang Yichao* from Cave 156 of the Mogao Grottoes is showcased at the China Cultural Center in Paris, France. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Top: A reproduction of *Thousand-hand Guanyin* from the Damagou Buddhist Temple Remains in Hotan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is a copy of the original held by Hotan Museum.
Above: A reproduction of *Bodhisattva in Contemplation* from Cave 57 of the Mogao Grottoes.

By LI CHUNYAN in Paris
For China Daily

The *Silk Road Danqing* — Exhibition of Murals along the Ancient Silk Road opened at the China Cultural Center in Paris, France on Sept 18.

Initiated by the Chinese National Academy of Arts and co-hosted by the China Cultural Center in Paris, the exhibition showcased reproductions of 23 murals from key sites along the Silk Road, from regions including Qiuci, Gaochang, Yanqi, and Yutian in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, as well as Dunhuang in Gansu province, that span 1,000 years, from the third to 13th centuries.

More than 160 Chinese and French guests attended the opening ceremony and viewed the exhibition. Curator Zhang Jian explained that, due to transport and gallery limitations, larger works could not be included.

The exhibition, which ran until Sept 24, offered French audiences a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of the ancient Silk Road.

Zhou Qingfu, director of the Chinese National Academy of Arts, said: "The rich variety of character designs and the flexibility of styles and forms not only directly reflect the exquisite craftsmanship of traditional murals but also highlight the unique features that emerged from the exchange and fusion of Eastern and Western cultures."

Liu Hongge, director of the China Cultural Center in Paris, said the Silk Road murals are a mark of mutual learning and integration between Chinese and Western civilizations.

"These works, crafted with great finesse and unmatched artistic richness, tell stories thousands of years old while serving as a living connection between the past and present," said Didier Bernheim, a member of the Academy of Fine Arts of the Institute of France.

And Bernheim praised the restoration techniques used by the Chinese National Academy of Arts, describing them as cutting-edge.

"France and China share a deep attachment to their cultural heritage, and I hope that our two countries can continue to collaborate in the protection and promotion of the arts," he said.

Thierry Prouvost, founder and president of the Association of Lineages of France, added: "These works are not merely art on walls. They are witnesses of time, reflecting eras, civilizations, and beliefs."

Colette Illouz, a former marketing director at an insurance company, said she was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the work.

"When I listened to our guide, I learned that these murals predate even Marco Polo," she said.

Michel Combredet, who accompanied Illouz, was impressed by the finesse of the lines of the paintings.

"I even believed, at one point that the reproductions were made of paper, and I was told that it was really mineral. It struck me. I hadn't imagined it," he said.

Representative murals

Curator Zhang Jian emphasized that the exhibition follows a logical narrative of time and space, using murals as important physical artifacts to weave together a cultural Silk Road. The murals vividly reflect the social customs, ethnic transitions, ideological concepts, and other cultural phenomena of their time, Zhang said when he highlighted three works that best represent the exhibition.

The first, *Procession of Zhang Yichao* from Cave 156 of the Mogao Grottoes, vividly depicts the majestic momentum of Zhang Yichao leading an army to fight against the Tubo kingdom and recover Hexi area in northwestern China. The painting provides insight into the ceremonial practices of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) military, as well as the era's cultural and ethnic diversity.

The second, *Music and Dance Performance* in Yulin Cave 25 from the Tang Dynasty features lively figures, delicate lines, and rich colors, capturing the essence of Tang Dynasty music and dance. It reflects the cultural integration and aesthetic tendencies of the era while providing a glimpse into the dynamic social landscape of the time, Zhang said.

The third, *Thousand-hand Guanyin* from the Damagou Buddhist Temple Remains in Hotan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is unlike the other pieces, which are replicas of murals from original sites. This piece is a copy of a mural that is currently preserved in the Hotan Museum. The Damagou Buddhist Temple, which dates back to the Southern and Northern dynasties (420-581), is the smallest known Buddhist temple from the medieval period, both in China and globally.

In this particular piece, Guanyin has a full face, slightly arched eyebrows, a small mouth, a small nose, long and slender eyes that are half-open, gazing slightly downward with the corners of the eyes slightly raised, and a vertically open eye in the middle of the forehead. One of her left

“These works are not merely art on walls. They are witnesses of time, reflecting eras, civilizations, and beliefs.”
Thierry Prouvost, founder and president of the Association of Lineages of France

hands holds a moon, featuring a rabbit pounding medicine, while one of her right hands holds a spherical object, likely the sun. The mural's elegant colors and harmonious lines reflect the distinct style of Khotanese Buddhist art from this period.

Dedicated work

Since 2016, the Gongbi Painting Institute of the Chinese National Academy of Arts has led the ancient Silk Road mural reproduction project.

More than 200 meticulously selected mural experts have been involved in the vast project, conducting research across more than 10 countries along the ancient Silk Road and in at least 20 cities and regions in China. The project has completed academic reproductions of murals from more than 30 grottoes, temples and tombs, ranging from large-scale masterpieces to small fragments. It is the world's largest mud-based mural reproduction project.

"We began our reproductions in Xinjiang. In particular, the Kizil Caves were the first stop for Buddhism entering China, where the earliest murals can be found. Then there's the Dunhuang Caves, another key site along the Silk Road in the Hexi Corridor," explained mural copyist Han Maoyuan. He added that the images chosen for reproduction must align with their aesthetic standards, have strong artistic value and a high degree of completeness, or represent endangered murals.

To faithfully reproduce the murals, the copyists used local mineral materials to capture the original works'

authenticity as closely as possible.

"If we used paper for reproduction, it wouldn't fully capture the murals' current appearance," said Han, who explained that the original murals could be seen as a type of shallow relief, having undergone weathering and the passage of time.

"Their surface holds not only the information of the mural itself but also the traces of history, including restoration details which we need to replicate," he said.

To ensure the colors are accurate, the copyists also take color reference cards into the caves, ensuring consistency under the same lighting conditions. Additionally, the artists face challenging working conditions, as they often work on-site in desert locations. A small-scale copy by a single artist usually takes two to three months to complete, while larger works, involving multiple artists, can take several months.

Han said the mural reproduction project will continue. One of the team's current endeavors is a collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where members aim to reproduce a large-scale Yuan Dynasty mural from Guangsheng Temple in Shanxi province, titled *Buddha of Medicine Bhaishajyaguru* (Yaoshi Fo).

"Our ultimate goal is to deepen the common emotional resonance and cultural understanding among humanity in the context of the integration of civilizations," concluded Zhou.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Top: A reproduction of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) *Music and Dance Performance* from Yulin Cave 25 reflects the cultural integration and esthetic tendencies of the era, while providing a glimpse into the dynamic social landscape of the time.
Above: A reproduction of *Disciples in Mourning* from Cave 33 of the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves in Turpan city, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is on display.