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CHINA DAILY

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New guidelines set to encourage, support fertility

Improving maternity leave system, upgrading provision for affordable childcare services key

By WANG XIAOYU
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China announced on Monday that it will double down efforts to encourage and support childbirth, including improving the maternity leave system and upgrading the provision for affordable childcare services.

According to a circular released by the General Office of the State Council, local authorities will be guided to include individuals in flexible employment, migrant workers and those working in new forms of job positions — such as ride-hailing drivers, delivery couriers and livestreaming sellers — in the nation's maternity insurance program, as part of a broader effort to build a fertility-friendly society and weave a stronger safety net for families looking to have a baby.

Efforts will be made to ensure that maternity-related time off, including maternity leave, additional maternity leave, paternity leave and childcare leave, will be fully implemented. Authorities are required to coordinate funding from multiple sources and establish a reasonable cost-sharing mechanism, as well as strengthen supervision of implementing the guidelines.

China recorded a population decline for the second consecutive year in 2023, primarily because of a decrease in the number of women of childbearing ages and low willingness among couples to have babies.

As different regions have rolled out fertility subsidy policies over the past few years, the circular requests formulation of more detailed action plans and management rules.

The nation plans to improve its overall reproductive and pediatric services as well as expand the scope of medical reimbursement to include certain labor pain relief methods, assisted reproductive technologies and more pediatric medicines.

The circular emphasizes the need to increase government-subsidized, affordable childcare services and simultaneously develop community-based childcare centers and childcare facilities at workplaces and homes.

It proposes a number of favorable policies to support childcare centers, such as issuing operation subsidies and offering them favorable policies on tax and use of water, electricity, gas and heating. It pledges to nurture more childcare professionals.

See *Childcare*, page 3

Uncertain future



Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba bows after addressing a news conference in Tokyo on Monday. Japan's ruling coalition failed to win a majority in the lower house for the first time since 2009.
KIM KYUNG-HOON/POOL VIA XINHUA

AI has potential to revolutionize education

The world is in the midst of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" and may soon enter the "Fifth Industrial Revolution". At the same time, the rapid development of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence has been impacting education at all levels, from primary and secondary to higher education.

Countries around the world are trying to find ways to more flexibly use AI in education, so as to impart education to students in remote areas and teach people the skills needed to build successful careers in the 21st century. China has become a leader in the application of AI in education and training by developing smart learning systems and intensifying research on AI. China is also working with other countries to advance the use of AI in education globally.

The fourth United Nations Sus-

WORLD WATCH

By Mohamed Ally

tainable Development Goal is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". In this context, organizations such as UNESCO are exploring ways to use AI to realize the SDG4.

AI can be used to meet individual learners' needs and provide one-to-one tutoring for students, as well as to facilitate lifelong learning. To achieve the SDG4, online classes using AI can be organized to teach students in different parts of the world, translate the course content into students' preferred language, and allow the students to interact with the tutor. This is important for

Transcending borders



Members of the Wuzhishan City Li and Miao Children's Chorus and the Paris-based children's chorus, Le Cœur des Polysons, perform together on Sunday in Wuzhishan, Hainan province. The two groups met in France in May during an event to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France and the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Panda conservation efforts lead to population growth

By YAN DONGJIE
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The population of wild giant pandas has steadily grown from around 1,100 in the 1980s to nearly 1,900 as of last year. China's successful giant panda conservation efforts have seen the species once categorized as endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature being listed as vulnerable in 2016.

While giant panda lovers around the world have cheered the growing tribe of China's national treasure, an article in the New York Times earlier this month voiced some concerns. Citing expert comments from 2006 and 2010, it said the methods used by China to survey the wild panda population were "not ideal" and that "China keeps its methodology a secret".

There have been four giant panda censuses since the 1970s, with the most recent being completed in 2015, a full five years after the 2010 comments of sources cited by the New York Times were made.

"Population assessment is a challenge in wildlife conservation research, especially for forest dwelling animals like giant pandas, which are often difficult to directly observe and count, and can only be assessed through collecting relevant trace information,"

said Xu Weihua, vice-president of the Institute for National Parks.

The nation's protected area for giant panda habitats has expanded from 1.39 million hectares in the 1980s to 2.58 million hectares today.

The establishment of the Giant Panda National Park in 2021, spanning the provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu, ensures the protection of about 70 percent of the wild habitat of giant pandas. Thanks to careful monitoring, the number of giant pandas captured on camera and encountered in the wild has increased, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

In the third national giant panda survey that commenced in 1999 and the fourth that began in 2011, researchers set up survey lines every two square kilometers in key areas within the panda distribution range. In areas with fewer pandas, survey lines were set up every six sq km.

"This is high-intensity information gathering density. Surveyors collected data on panda feces, bite marks, and used distance and bite mark differentiation methods for a comprehensive analysis to evaluate the population of giant pandas nationwide," Xu said, noting that both methods are scientifically validated and effective for conducting surveys on wild populations.

The distance differentiation

method involves calculating the distance between panda trace points obtained during field surveys, such as feces, footprints and hair, to determine if they come from the same panda, thereby confirming the number of pandas in the area.

"Giant pandas are solitary animals, and except during mating and seasonal vertical migration periods, their movement within a certain time frame is limited and stable. By determining the home range and dispersal ability of giant pandas, we can confirm whether trace points belong to the same panda. If the distance between two trace points exceeds the normal activity range of a giant panda, it is preliminarily determined that there is more than one panda in the area," said Xu, explaining the counting method involved.

When the distance between two trace points falls within the potential activity range of a single panda, further identification using bite mark differentiation can be applied to enhance the accuracy of the census.

"Ninety-nine percent of a giant panda's diet consists of bamboo, which they cannot fully digest. The undigested bamboo stem fragments found in their feces are called bite marks. Due to variations in individual digestive capabilities, there can be significant differences

in the average number of bite marks in feces," Xu said.

"By comparing characteristics like bite mark lengths, we can determine if the feces in an area were left by the same panda," he added.

In the New York Times article, some foreign experts proposed using infrared cameras and DNA analysis to assess the panda population.

However, Chinese experts have argued that due to their similar appearances, it is challenging to differentiate individual pandas from infrared camera photos. Additionally, DNA analysis requires fresh panda feces, making it impractical for large-scale operations and unsuitable for reflecting the total panda population nationwide.

"The survey methods used by Chinese giant panda experts have a complete process flowchart and calculation method, and are currently the most reliable among existing methods," Xu said.

"We are also exploring new technologies for giant panda population assessment and individual identification. With advancements in technology, especially the application of artificial intelligence, big data and the emergence of new equipment, future panda surveys will be more efficient, and population assessments will be more accurate," he added.

DESERT CORPS LAYS FOUNDATION FOR PROGRESS IN XINJIANG

For 70 years, XPCC has been protecting border, developing cities and industry, greening environment

Editor's note: This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. China Daily reports on the achievements of the XPCC in agriculture, industry and ecology over the past seven decades.

By MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi and CHEN MEILING in Beijing



Jin Maofang, 91, remembers driving a tractor during the severe winter of 1954 to farm desert land near Shihezi in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

With the temperature at minus 40 C, the tractor suddenly stalled, and Jin used her mouth to suck

diesel oil from a pipe until the engine restarted. However, her lips stuck to the pipe and the skin on her lips peeled off and she bled profusely.

Jin, then a young woman from

Shandong province, had volunteered to join the construction work in Xinjiang, despite its harsh environment.

She and her co-workers rose at dawn every day. They ate dry rations for their meals and slaked their thirst with canal water. At night, they slept under the stars and covered their skin with mud in an attempt to prevent mosquito bites.

They once set a record by planting eight hectares of land in a single day.

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Left: A child learns to paint at a community center of Xishan Farm and Pasture built by the 12th Division of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Nov 2. WANG FEI / XINHUA



Right: Staff work at a textile factory of the Seventh Division of the XPCC in Huyanghe, Xinjiang, on March 17. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Tourists take a boat ride through a poplar forest surrounded by water developed by the corps in Urumqi, on Oct 20, 2023. LI XIANG / XINHUA **Middle:** A fruit picker displays newly harvested grapes on Sept 6 in Shuanghe, a city established by the XPCC. GAO HAN / XINHUA **Right:** A farmer operates a harvester in the wheat fields of the Sixth Division of the XPCC in Wujiaqu, Xinjiang, on July 24. CHEN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Corps: Desert turned into fields of plenty

From page 1

Despite the hardships, Jin uses lines of poetry to describe her affection for Shihezi today. Back then, all she could see was the vast Gobi Desert, sparse clusters of reeds, and sand swirling in the wind.

"I have been to many places, but this city is the youngest. It is so beautiful that one falls in love with it at first sight," she said.

The vision of Jin smiling broadly while sitting on her tractor was turned into a city statue. Images of the "female tractor driver", with Jin as one of the prototypes, were printed on the 1-yuan (\$0.14) banknote of the country's third set of renminbi.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, following the peaceful liberation of Xinjiang on Sept 25, 1949, People's Liberation Army soldiers — in response to a national call — laid down their weapons and picked up hoes to embark on a new mission.

In 1954, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps was established as a special provincial-level unit directly under the central government. Nearly 200,000 people from all over the country joined in the construction work, in what was seen as a milestone for both national security and rural development.

The XPCC settled in the Gobi Desert and areas close to the border. They started from scratch, transforming the harsh environment into oases, and building modern cities and industrial parks in the desert.

Fertile land

One of the major tasks of the corps was to develop agriculture. The results have been remarkable.

In 2023, areas administered by the XPCC produced 4.059 million metric tons of food. With only 0.39 percent of the national planting area to farm, they achieved a food production increase of 906,000 tons last year, accounting for 10.2 percent of the national increase, according to local authorities.

Located at the edge of desert, the land is dry and there are scarce rains — not ideal conditions for growing. However, the XPCC has set national records for the highest per-acre yields of winter wheat, spring wheat, and spring soybeans.

How so? For one thing, it is a pioneer in water-saving planting technology.

At a cotton-planting base in Shihezi, countless fluffy buds adorn the branches, resembling an endless sea of white when viewed from afar.

However, not a single water channel is visible. "Large-diameter water pipes are shallowly buried underground, replacing traditional chan-

nels. It prevents water leakage and evaporation, achieving a water-saving rate of over 10 percent and improving water transmission efficiency," said Ma Zhandong, senior engineer of the Xinjiang Tianye (Group) Co, which developed the technology.

The drip irrigation method is now used on more than 40 types of crops nationwide and covers an area exceeding 66,667 square kilometers. It has also been exported to 18 countries and regions, Ma said.

In July, Qitai Farm in Qitai county, Changji Hui autonomous prefecture, known as the "grain barn" of the XPCC, again set a new record for winter wheat yield in Xinjiang, producing an average yield of 873.2 kilograms per mu (0.067 hectares).

The China-developed "Xindong 52" winter wheat variety planted at the farm has strong tolerance to cold and drought.

"It shows significant advantages in terms of the number of wheat ears and grains, and still has the potential for further yield increase," said Zhan Yong, director of the crop research institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Agricultural and Reclamation Science.

In 2023, the average wheat yield per mu of the XPCC was 466.1 kilograms, and the average corn yield per mu was 782.6 kilograms, which both significantly exceeded the national averages.

The XPCC has also taken the lead in establishing a national agricultural water-saving irrigation demonstration base, an agricultural mechanization promotion base, and a modern agricultural demonstration base.

The mature and efficient agricultural production conditions have been the foundation for the corps to continuously improve grain yields in recent years, said Hu Jianguo, chief agronomist of the XPCC's agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

The mechanization rate for crop



Farmers sort hops at a factory on Sept 5 in Tiemenguan, a city built by the Second Division of the XPCC in Xinjiang. HU HUH / XINHUA

cultivation and harvesting has reached 95.5 percent, and the water-saving coverage rate is at 94.8 percent, Hu added.

Starting from scratch

The corps has built a number of large and medium-sized enterprises to lay the foundation for the industrial development of Xinjiang.

In the winter of 1956, the XPCC's plan to establish a sugar factory in Shihezi was approved.

As one of the initiators of the factory, Li Tingzhi remembered all his comrades were asked whether they wanted to use their military severance pay to build a sugar factory, and they all agreed to the proposition.

When building key facilities for the plant, such as crystallization tanks, evaporation tanks and leaching tanks, steel plates needed to be pressed into curved shapes.

Due to the lack of a rolling machine, XPCC members had to hammer the steel plates by hand. The surface temperature of the heated steel plates reached up to 800 C and many members of the corps suffered nose bleeds and facial burns.

After more than a year of hard

work, the first large-scale modern sugar factory in northwestern China, the Bayi Sugar Factory, was completed and put into operation on Dec 7, 1959. At the time, the factory set an industry record for the speed and size of the construction work.

Other industrial achievements in the region quickly followed.

On July 20, 1960, the first glossy paper produced by the Bayi Paper Mill in Xinjiang was produced; on Aug 1, 1960, the second-largest cotton textile enterprise, the Bayi Cotton Textile Factory, was completed and began trial production; and on Dec 31, 1960, the Bayi Woolen Textile Factory produced the first wool top in Xinjiang.

Seven pillars

Over the past 70 years, the scale of industrial production of the XPCC has expanded from initial domination by manual workshops to modern mechanized production.

Xinjiang focuses on seven major industries — green chemical production, cotton and textile apparel, new materials, new energy, equipment manufacturing, distinctive services, agricultural products, and deep processing.

In the vast Gobi Desert stand

rows of tall wind turbines with huge rotating blades that belong to the Datang Santanghu Wind Farm in Xinxing city. In the wind farm's control center, electricity generation numbers can be seen constantly fluctuating on a large screen.

Jiang Na, who helps maintain operations, said the total installed capacity of the wind farm, with 250 wind turbines, is as high as 450,000 kilowatts.

The wind farm has an annual planned electricity generation of 930 million kilowatt-hours, with an expected annual addition of 440 million kilowatt-hours of green electricity, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 475,000 metric tons.

At the Huyanghe Economic and Technological Development Zone of Huyanghe city, the phase 1 production line for high-purity crystalline silicon, with an annual output of 50,000 tons, was put into operation in 2023.

"To build a modern factory in the desert, we feel proud," said Sun Chengliang, chairman of Xinjiang Jingnuo New Energy Industry Development, adding that the total amount of investment has reached 10 billion yuan.

In Shihezi, the "aviation town" has gathered a group of top enterprises and vocational colleges.

"In 2023, the Xinjiang aviation industry achieved its best-ever levels in terms of annual flight hours, operating revenue and operational efficiency," said Chen Bing, chairman of Xinjiang General Aviation Co.

Today, from aerial spreading of fertilizers and pesticides to aerial photography and surveying, emergency rescue operations, flight training, aircraft maintenance, and drone manufacturing, the XPCC's low-altitude economy is gaining momentum.

The added value of secondary industries involved in manufacturing and construction reached

140.224 billion yuan last year, an increase of 77.924 billion yuan compared with 2013, data from local authorities showed.

Green efforts

Over the decades, people have survived Xinjiang's harsh environment, with green change brought through the efforts of the corps.

During the National Day holiday, the unique scenery at Baisha Lake in Beitun city, featuring forests, lake and desert, attracted a large number of tourists. The tourist attraction, only several kilometers from the border, was once a barren desert wilderness.

By 2023, the urban green coverage rate in Beitun exceeded 41 percent, and in the built-up areas of various cities of the XPCC, the green area has reached nearly 10,000 hectares.

Transforming the barren deserts and wastelands into garden cities has brought opportunities for tourism.

Kunyu, located on the southern edge of the Taklimakan Desert, has average annual precipitation of only 34 millimeters, making its ecological environment extremely fragile.

Over the years, residents have accelerated greening efforts, built windbreaks, and planted vegetation to keep sand fixed in place. Every winter and spring, a large number of workers are organized to plant trees.

Since 2020, the corps has completed artificial afforestation of 17,700 mu, restoration and rectification of degraded forests covering an area of 22,044 mu, and restoration of 20,000 mu of degraded grasslands. Approximately 113 million yuan in total has been invested in afforestation projects.

With the increasing efforts in afforestation and ecological restoration, the landscape has been completely transformed. The forest coverage rate has reached 4.14 percent, and the green space in built-up areas has increased from 18 percent in 2017 to 40.21 percent today.

"During holidays, there are always a lot of tourists, and at peak times, we have to roast two or three sheep a day," said Mamatturdi Keram, who is a food seller at Kunlun Mountains scenic spot close to Kunyu.

He both herds and sells roasted meat. Mamatturdi said he can earn more than 30,000 yuan a year from selling roasted meat.

Xinhua News Agency contributed to this story.

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Left: A truck transports harvested cotton in Wujiaqu on Sept 29. HU HUH / XINHUA **Right:** A photovoltaic base is seen in Baiyang, a city built by the Ninth Division of the XPCC, on Sept 10. GAO HAN / XINHUA

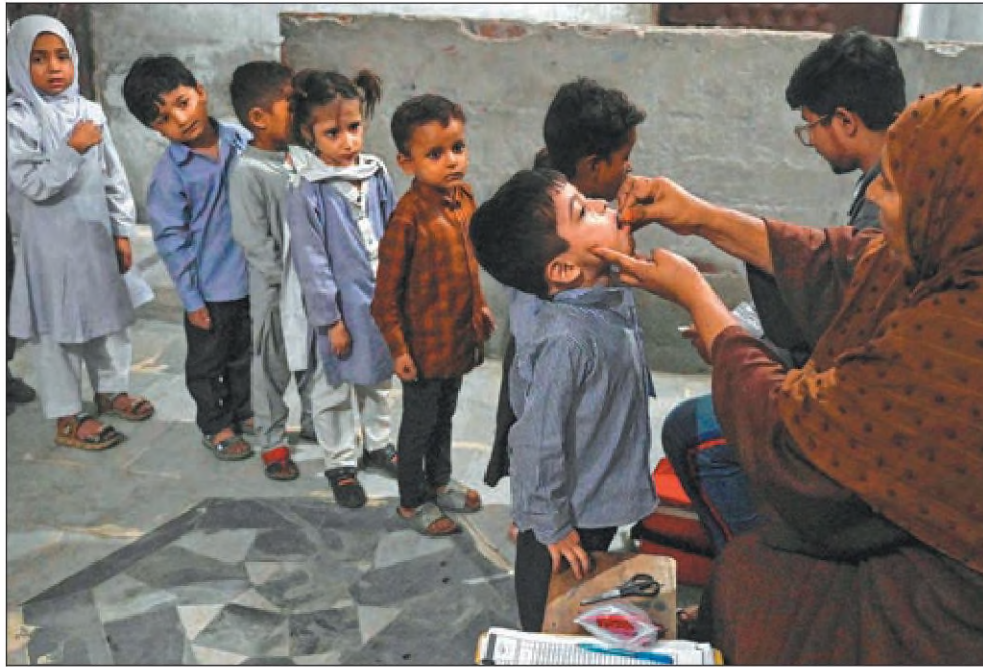


TOP NEWS

Health menace

Polio drops are administered to children at a school on Monday in Lahore, Pakistan, during a nationwide vaccination campaign, which aims to vaccinate more than 45 million children under five years of age. Pakistani officials reported more than a dozen new polio cases in October, bringing the total number of infections this year to 39.

ARIF ALI / AFP



Houston feels the void after consulate closure

Experts: China's consular presence in US needed for regular exchanges

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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It has been more than four years since the Chinese Consulate General in Houston was shut down by the administration of then-president Donald Trump. Its absence is still felt by many, including two people who worked with the consulate in the past to facilitate exchanges between the United States and China.

Immigration lawyer Charles Foster was the chairman of the Asia Society Texas Center for more than two decades. In that capacity and more, Foster has facilitated countless exchanges between the two countries — from moderating a US-China discussion to being instrumental in putting Houston on the itinerary of former Chinese president Jiang Zemin during his 2002 visit to the US.

"Having been active in the international community in Houston as well as in the consular corps for many years, I was very familiar with the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China located on Montrose Boulevard, not that far from my home. I would have attended many receptions in and other activities sponsored by the Consulate General," Foster said.

The Consulate General in Houston was closed in July 2020 over US allegations that it operated outside ordinary diplomatic norms, claims that China termed "malicious slander."

Foster said he never understood the shutdown "at a time of tense relations between the US and China."

"I had no knowledge of the actual

facts from any source other than the fact that embassies and consular posts worldwide provide useful data about the country in which their officials are serving in order to provide their home country a more complete picture of issues impacting the bilateral relationship," he said.

He said that "it is in the best interest of both countries to maintain diplomatic representation precisely with which there are significant business and other ties, and even more so if there is tension in the relationship."

Texas, like the rest of the US, has developed a strong cultural and economic relationship with China, thanks to a large population of Chinese Americans in the state, particularly in big cities such as Houston and Dallas.

Those people, with family and other ties to China, over the years have helped facilitate the extraordinary growth in business between the US and China, Foster said.

According to the 2023 US Exports to China report by the US-China Business Council, Texas ranked as the top state in the US in goods exported to China in 2022 worth \$21.8 billion, followed by California with \$17.7 billion.

In 2023, Texas' exports to China grew to \$25.7 billion, according to data from Statista, a German data agency. Energy products and machinery were among the top Texas exports to China, according to the state government.

The absence of the consulate impedes such exchanges, Foster said.

"Trade is facilitated through many

agreements and related documentation, much of which is required to be legalized," he said. "That requires the assistance of the consular post, and all of this has been complicated by the fact that these services are no longer available in this region."

Now, both individuals and companies seeking the necessary visas or legalization of documents have to do so in Washington, which results in "additional costs, time and frequent delays," Foster added.

Absence benefits no one

That sentiment was shared by David Firestein, CEO and president of the George H. W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations.

As a former diplomat who once worked at the US embassy in Beijing, Firestein said that he understands the need for a consular presence.

"Given the importance of Texas as a state, and Houston as a city, to say nothing of the entire consular district that was covered by the Consulate General, it just seems really unfortunate, from a US standpoint, to not have Chinese government representation there," he said.

"It's just as unfortunate for all involved that we don't have government representation in Chengdu anymore as a result, either."

China had to close the US consulate in Chengdu, Sichuan province, in 2020, a week after the Houston consulate was ordered to close.

The Houston closure doesn't benefit anyone, he said. "It obviously inconveniences a lot of people. It makes it more difficult for people in this region of the United States to

get visas and to engage directly in all the things that are associated with diplomacy, people-to-people exchanges and so on."

Firestein had communicated with the Chinese consulate on matters related to the work of the Bush China Foundation.

"We would see the consul general pretty regularly, and we would have opportunities to discuss the bilateral relationship, discuss delegations going in both directions, and exchange views," he said.

"When it comes to things like applying for visas, it was really convenient to be able to make a quick trip from Austin to Houston to be able to deal with those kinds of matters rather than having to go to DC," he added.

Firestein said that he has built "a strong and solid line of communication" with the Chinese embassy in Washington, which has taken over all the work in the eight US states and Puerto Rico, a self-governing commonwealth, under the area of the Houston consulate "for discussion on track-two diplomacy work and other bilateral issues."

However, it's no longer possible "to see each other face to face as often or as conveniently or as inexpensively as was the case when there was a Consulate General," he said.

The Chinese consulate in Houston was the first to open following the normalization of US-China relations and late leader Deng Xiaoping's historic visit to Texas in 1979.

"So, in the 45th year of normalized relations, it's particularly unfortunate that this particular consulate had to be the one that was the casualty at a symbolic level," Firestein said.

Firestein said that reopening both consulates would be an easy way to move the bilateral relationship in a relatively more positive direction, but he doesn't see that sentiment in Washington right now.

In this regard, Foster is a bit more optimistic. "It's possible that this will occur in the first term of the next president of the US," he said.

Nation called on to seize growth opportunities

By OUYANG SHIJIA
and ZHOU LANXU

China should seize the current window of improving expectations and rising confidence to build momentum going into 2025, economists said, calling for a forceful and extraordinary combination of macro policies next year.

Given the recently announced stimulus package, China's economy will likely pick up in the fourth quarter, providing strong support for meeting the annual growth target of around 5 percent this year, they said.

Huang Hanquan, head of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, which is affiliated with the National Development and Reform Commission, said the Chinese economy is likely to register a "U-shaped" recovery for the full year, with consolidated momentum in the fourth quarter amid strengthened social expectations, bringing the annual economic and social development goals within reach.

He said the recent incremental policies, ranging from reducing interest rates and banks' required reserves to lowering rates on existing mortgage loans, have been extraordinary and strong in intensity, demonstrating the government's "determination and courage to promote economic recovery".

"Looking ahead, we must seize the current window of stabilizing expectations and growing confidence to capitalize on the momentum. We need to launch a forceful and extraordinary combination of macro policies and initiate iconic reform measures," Huang added.

Zong Liang, chief researcher at Bank of China, said that China's economy is poised to pick up in the fourth quarter, with the stimulus policies gradually taking effect.

He said that China's GDP growth rate will likely hit above 4.8 percent for 2024, meeting the annual growth target of around 5 percent.

Their remarks came after Vice-Minister of Finance Liao Min highlighted, during a meeting between the economic working groups of China and the United States in Washington, DC, on Friday, the powerful package of stimulus policies that China recently introduced.

The two sides had in-depth, practical and constructive communication on the macroeconomic situation and policies of the two countries, the ministry said.

During the World Bank's 110th Development Committee meeting

on Friday, Liao said that China will intensify countercyclical adjustments of fiscal policy, with a series of strong measures implemented to resolve local government debt risks, stabilize the real estate market, increase the income of key groups, enhance people's livelihoods, and drive equipment upgrades and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

Zhang Bin, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said that expectations and confidence have been significantly boosted by the incremental policies, which sent a clear, strong signal that more policies will be announced to enhance economic vitality and tackle the immediate challenge of insufficient demand.

"The focus now is on how these policies will be implemented and whether their intensity is sufficient. In this regard, I believe the year 2025 is very much worth looking forward to," said Zhang, who is also a senior researcher at the China Finance 40 Forum, a leading think tank.

"I think policymakers need to further increase the intensity of (macroeconomic) policies. It's like a race — policies need to precede the market (expectations) to effectively reverse sentiments and kick off a positive economic cycle," he said.

As for fiscal policy, Zhang said it "deserves anticipation" if next year's fiscal expansion could be further strengthened based on recent policy signals, although specific plans still await legislative procedures.

He added that government spending should outpace GDP expansion to drive growth.

If the country's GDP growth target stays unchanged at about 5 percent for 2025, it may necessitate a reasonable increase in government debt by about 11 trillion to 12 trillion yuan to ensure adequate government spending and policy-oriented financial bonds worth 3 trillion yuan to 5 trillion yuan, he said.

On the monetary policy front, Zhang said there remains a large scope for interest rates to decline, as the rate cut should be significantly bigger than the slide in price levels to ensure easing real financing costs and spurring investment and consumption.

Dong Yilang contributed to this story.

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Childcare: More service facilities expected

From page 1

Local authorities are encouraged to roll out policies to help families with more than one child to enroll their children at the same school and buy homes, and to motivate employers to build a family-friendly working environment by allowing flexible office hours and remote working options.

The circular reiterated the nation's commitment to shaping a positive perspective on marriage, childbirth and family, promoting

marriage and childbirth at the appropriate age, and advocating shared child-rearing responsibilities between couples.

In a statement released on Monday, the National Health Commission said that in 2023, China increased the amount of tax deduction for children's education from 1,000 yuan (\$140) to 2,000 per child. The value of tax deductions related to childcare and children's education will be further raised.

So far, a total of 23 provincial-

level regions have launched fertility subsidies and more than 20 regions have expanded insurance coverage for assisted reproductive services.

All regions have extended the duration of maternity leave to 158 days or longer, introduced up to 15 days of paternity leave, and started five to 20 days of childcare leave for both parents.

The commission is also accelerating steps to realize the goal of increasing the number of childcare service facilities per 1,000

people to 4.5 by the end of next year.

Couples today prefer having fewer children to ensure a better growing environment, according to the commission. Financial burden, childcare responsibilities and concerns about career development among women have become major deterrents to childbirth, it said.

"The guideline has taken the public's varied demands into consideration and integrated policies on marriage, childbirth, child-rearing and children's education ... to form a systematic and comprehensive policy to encourage childbirth," it added.

Quiet remembrance



A family member of a victim lays flowers at the site of the Itaewon stampede, a tragedy that claimed 159 lives — most of them young adults — during Halloween celebrations on Oct. 29, 2022 on Monday in Seoul, South Korea, to commemorate the second anniversary of the incident. YONHAP

Learning: Institutions must accept AI as another beneficiary tool

From page 1

explored how an "automatic resource generation system" can help in teaching Chinese as a second language in schools.

The researchers developed a model to use AI to ensure the resources meet learners' needs, with studies showing the use of the teaching-learning model improved students' performance and their perception faculty. Students who

were taught lessons using the model more actively participated in the course.

In addition to teaching languages, AI can also be used to help students of all ages and from different countries to learn about different cultures. Researchers from Beijing Foreign Studies University, Athabasca University (Canada) and some Saudi Arabian universities have been exploring ways to use AI to help students

from different countries learn from each other and know about each other's cultures while sitting in the comfort of their homes.

AI applications should be designed in a way that they benefit learners and educators, for which policies for learners, teachers and other staff in educational institutions should be in place. For example, there should be policies on factors such as data privacy and security, copyright,

academic integrity, transparency and environmental concerns. A recent report by experts from Athabasca University and the Commonwealth of Learning identified 14 AI policies that staff at different levels of higher education institutions need to follow.

However, some educational institutions are reluctant to allow students to use AI because they think AI will not benefit them or it is not ethical to allow students to use AI.

But AI is here to stay, and educational institutions must accept AI as another beneficiary tool.

As we move toward the "Fifth Industrial Revolution", AI may develop the ability to think independently and become as creative as humans, and GenAI may become even more intelligent and capable of completing intellectual tasks like humans.

With the advancement of machine learning, AI systems may

start developing original ideas that can be applied in complicated situations and contexts. AI has the potential to revolutionize education if designed and applied properly. The challenge for higher educational institutions is how to keep up with the rapid development of AI, particularly when it comes to devising suitable policies to impart education to the future generations.

The author is a professor at Athabasca University, Canada. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Striving to boost campus diversity

By ATLAS SHAO in Hong Kong
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In just a decade, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, in Guangdong province, has grown into a leading educational institution with around 12,000 students, officials said Friday during a media tour showcasing the university's development.

The university, established in 2014 on a previously undeveloped tract in Shenzhen's Longgang district spanning 1.33 square kilometers, is now focused on increasing its contributions to China's talent pool with a spirit of innovation and inclusivity, according to Xu Yangsheng, president of CUHK-Shenzhen.

Starting next academic year, the university will begin accepting students through Hong Kong's Diploma of Secondary Education, a move aimed at attracting more Hong Kong students and boosting campus diversity.

The university currently operates seven undergraduate schools and a graduate school, offering a total of 28 undergraduate and 46 postgraduate programs.

Xu highlighted the institution's efforts in recruiting top-tier faculty members, particularly in economics and finance, noting that its 135 full-time professors in those fields were all recruited from prestigious global universities.

"Even top domestic universities like Tsinghua and Peking universities have only about 60 to 70 professors of this caliber," he said.

CUHK-Shenzhen also admits students from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan via specialized entrance exams, with 23 students from these regions joining this year — 20 of whom are from Hong Kong, said Cai Xiaoliang, the associate vice-president of the university.

Cai noted that the university's new Diploma of Secondary Education pathway would likely boost interest among Hong Kong students in popular programs such as medicine, which may have more enrollment spots than similar programs at the university's main Hong Kong campus.

The university's School of Medicine, led by founding Dean Davy Cheng, has the distinction of being the first Hong Kong medical school established on the Chinese mainland.

Cheng said he believes it will play an important role in developing medical professionals for the Greater Bay Area and potentially ease pressure on Hong Kong's healthcare system. Medical students who meet Hong Kong's licensing requirements will be eligible to practice there, he said.

In addition to CUHK-Shenzhen, three other Hong Kong universities — Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the City University of Hong Kong — operate in Zhuhai, Guangzhou and Dongguan, all in Guangdong. The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hong Kong Metropolitan University are also preparing new campuses in Guangdong's Shenzhen, Foshan and Zhaoqing.

Saturated roads



Waterlogged streets caused by heavy rainfall brought by Typhoon Trami disrupt traffic in Sanya, Hainan province, on Monday. The Sanya Meteorological Observatory issued a red rainstorm warning early on Monday morning, the highest alert level in the country's four-tier weather warning system.

YUAN YONGDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Village leaders facing spate of investigations

Scrutiny over grassroots officials ramps up as rural vitalization efforts intensify

By ZHANG YI
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In the first nine months of this year, 77,000 current or former village heads and Party chiefs have been investigated in China, an increase of 31,000 compared to last year, as the central government's anti-corruption campaign delves deeper into the grassroots level.

Data from the country's top watchdog showed figures from January to September this year exceeded the total number of such officials investigated last year — 61,000 — with the supervision of grassroots officials being strengthened amid intensified rural vitalization efforts.

From January to September, disciplinary watchdogs handled 642,000 cases across the country, including investigations into officials at various levels, with 58 at the provincial and ministerial levels, according to a recent release from the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

Among the officials investigated, about 3,260 are at the department

and bureau levels, 26,000 are at the county level and 89,000 are at the township level, data showed.

At the annual plenary session of the CCDI in January, the central leadership emphasized the need to extend the anti-corruption campaign to the grassroots level to better ensure justice for the people.

A targeted crackdown on corruption and misconduct in rural vitalization efforts was also stressed in the No 1 central document for 2024 released in February, which outlined the priorities for promoting rural vitalization this year.

As scrutiny on grassroots officials intensifies, cases of corruption involving village officials have been disclosed.

In September, Guizhou province revealed a case in which a village official was caught accepting kickbacks related to a toilet renovation project. And in another instance in August, a 32-year-old former village Party chief in Huizhou, Guangdong province, was found guilty of fraudulently obtaining compensation funds for crops. Measures have been implement-

ed to enhance the management and oversight of village cadres, especially those with significant responsibilities, as rural vitalization work progresses.

In November 2022, Guizhou issued regulations specifically targeting village heads to ensure they perform their duties with integrity. They encompass aspects such as standardizing village-level decision-making and implementing disciplinary supervision.

The document detailing the regulations stipulates that matters concerning village-level asset management must be deliberated by the village Party organization, and reported to the township Party committee for the record.

It also emphasizes strict implementation of the annual inspection system for rural collective assets and a regular reporting system.

It explicitly requires that supervision should be strengthened in villages with large collective economies, numerous construction projects and high integrity risks. Furthermore, each village Party organization under the jurisdiction of a county Party committee should be inspected at least once per term of service.

Former Everbright exec pleads guilty

By CAO YIN
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Li Xiaopeng, former chairman of China Everbright Group, a State-owned financial conglomerate, pleaded guilty to taking bribes while standing trial in Daqing, Heilongjiang province, on Monday.

According to an indictment provided by prosecutors, Li, from 1994 to 2021, was found to have taken advantage of his positions, including deputy head of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, general manager of the China Merchants Group and chairman of the China Everbright Group, to seek profits for many departments and individuals in various matters such as mortgage financing, project contracting and work promotion, and then accepted bribes worth more than 60.43 million yuan (\$8.48 million) in return.

Last week, Wang Yongsheng, former vice-president of China Development Bank, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for taking bribes worth over 23.51 million yuan.

The prosecutors submitted evidence to the Daqing Intermediate People's Court, saying that Li should be held criminally liable for bribery. During the trial, he confessed to the crime in his final statement.

The verdict will be announced at a later date, the court said.

More than 20 people, including national lawmakers and political advisers, attended the hearing. It was the latest in a series of recent investigations, trials and convictions of former officials involved in the financial sector. The handling of their cases has shown the country's strong determination and continuous efforts to fight against corruption in the industry.

Last week, Wang Yongsheng, former vice-president of China Development Bank, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for taking bribes worth over 23.51 million yuan.

Early this month, Fan Yifei, former vice-governor of the People's Bank of China, was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve for accepting bribes of more than 386 million yuan.

Tian Huiyu, former president of China Merchants Bank, was given the death penalty with a two-year reprieve for crimes including taking bribes, abuse of power, using undisclosed information for trading, insider trading and leaking insider information in February.

Sun Dushun, former president of China CITIC Bank Corporation Limited, was given a suspended death in November last year for accepting bribes of about 1 billion yuan.

Chinese news outlet Yicai reported in September that at least 53 senior executives who used to be engaged in the financial sector have been placed under investigation since the beginning of this year.

Top schools report more grads than undergrads

By ZHAO YIMENG
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The number of graduate students has surpassed that of undergraduates at leading universities in China, reflecting a growing trend in higher education while raising questions about its implications in the job market.

Last year, China enrolled approximately 1.3 million graduate students, a 4 percent increase from 2022, according to the Ministry of Education.

Meanwhile, Lanzhou University in Gansu province recently announced that this year, its total number of graduate students will exceed that of undergraduates for the first time, marking the "reversal" of graduate to undergraduate enrollment.

The reversal of enrollment at comprehensive research universities is a significant step toward building high-level research institutions and meets the country's development needs in the new era, the university said.

It has continuously optimized its majors over the past three years, adding a number of master's and doctoral programs in fields such as materials and chemical engineering, energy and power, and biosafety.

Majors from these newly established programs, aligned with national needs, have become an important component of the overall expansion of the graduate students, it added.

Other prestigious institutions such as Peking University, Tsinghua University and the University of Science and Technology of China in Anhui province have also reported similar trends.

This year, Tsinghua University enrolled around 10,000 graduate students, nearly triple the number of undergraduate students, the university said.

Also, about 296,000 students graduated from higher education institutes in Beijing, including over 160,000 master's and doctoral graduates, according to the capital's education department.

Chen Zhiwen, a member of the Chinese Society of Educational Development Strategy, said advanced education and high-level scientific and technological independence are key to supporting China's high-quality development.

"We need to strengthen the quality and capacity of our own talent development," Chen said, adding that initiatives have been launched since 2020 to expand the

scale of graduate education, particularly for doctoral students.

The number of candidates for the national postgraduate exam has increased dramatically from 1.65 million in 2015 to over 4.38 million this year, although a slight decline was seen this year for the first time in eight years, according to the 2024 China Undergraduate Employment Report released by education consultancy MyCOS.

The report also indicates that the proportion of students from top-tier universities seeking graduate studies has risen from 30 percent in 2019 to 37.3 percent last year.

However, the reversal of enrollment only exists in first-class universities and disciplines. The majority of institutes nationwide have more undergraduate students than graduate students, an expert said.

Fan Xiudi, director of the Education Evaluation Research Center of Tongji University in Shanghai, said "Double First Class" universities have relatively stronger research and teaching capabilities, and they are responsible for training over 80 percent of the nation's doctoral students and nearly 60 percent of its master's students.

According to the ministry's report on the basic situation of national educational development in 2023, undergraduate enrollment reached 4.78 million while graduate enrollment stood at 1.3 million.

"On a national scale, the number of undergraduates still far exceeds that of graduates," Fan said.

Moreover, the emphasis on graduate education has raised concerns about the potential devaluation of degrees and challenges in employment.

In recent years, graduates from prestigious universities have increasingly sought employment in smaller cities and counties, which is partly related to the significant growth in the number of graduates and postgraduate students, Chen said.

"It is neither possible nor realistic to expect that holding a higher university degree will directly lead to a decent job," he said, adding that choosing to pursue a master's degree solely for employment reasons is not a wise decision.

A genuine passion and interest in the field of study is crucial for graduate education, which aims to cultivate high-level talent, he added.

Aesthetic preservation



A worker splashes paint on the exterior wall of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on Monday. The annual beautification of the palace not only serves an aesthetic purpose but also plays a crucial role in protecting the structure.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Notice calls for improving Chinese character writing

By ZHAO YIMENG

China recently issued a notice on improving Chinese character writing in primary and secondary schools in an effort to promote the country's linguistic and cultural heritage, the Ministry of Education said.

The notice focuses on not only improving handwriting skills, but also integrating such skills into school curricula. It marks the first

time that China has emphasized the educational functions of standardized Chinese character writing and language learning in schools, a ministry official said.

A key goal is to help students appreciate the historical and cultural value embedded within Chinese characters, the notice said.

Chinese characters are a symbol of the inheritance of Chinese culture, with their structure remaining

stable for over 3,000 years.

"The exploration and utilization of the rich traditional cultural values embedded within Chinese characters is insufficient," the official said, adding that currently, some primary and secondary schools lack guidance on the rules of stroke order and character structure.

Furthermore, incorrect writing posture not only hinders the development of students' physical and

mental health, but also restricts the cultivation and improvement of their aesthetic abilities.

The notice aims to instill correct writing posture, cultivate habits for good handwriting and enable students to write standardized Chinese characters accurately. It outlines eight key goals, including encouraging good writing habits to support eye health and prevent spinal problems.

"We must prioritize the comprehensive development of students," the official said.

Students are also encouraged to participate in the recitation of Chinese classic poems and national art exhibitions, combining class and extracurricular activities to further their cultural understanding.

The notice also calls for promoting teachers' exemplary roles through competitions in pen, chalk and brush calligraphy. It is important to leverage digital tools to support handwriting education and involve it in the evaluation system, the notice said.

Schools are urged to use digital resources such as the Chinese language and writing digital "museum" — part of the Smart Education online portal — and the national language resources service platform, so that everyone can access standardized Chinese character education anytime and anywhere, the ministry official said.

Local education departments are urged to recognize the significance of handwriting education and ensure schools meet requirements for desks and lighting, it added.

CHINA

Rehabilitated eagle soars into the wild

Beijing Raptor Rescue Center provides injured bird over a year of innovative treatment and dedicated care

By CHEN LIANG
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On the afternoon of Oct 17, under a canopy of gray clouds and intermittent drizzle, a team of rehabilitators from Beijing Raptor Rescue Center ventured to a patch of grassland nestled within Wild Duck Lake Wetland in Beijing's Yanqing district.

Nearly 100 kilometers north of downtown Beijing, the park served as the backdrop for the release of a rescued short-toed snake eagle (*Circus gallicus*) back into the wild.

Li Zhisai, a raptor rehabilitator at the center, and her colleagues released the raptor — which had a pale colored underside and a dark brown head. Being outside a cage for the first time since May last year, the eagle soon flew away into the cloudy sky.

The release of the snake eagle marked yet another milestone for the center. Established in December 2001 through a collaborative effort between Beijing Normal University and the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the institution stands as the country's first facility dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of birds of prey. Over the years, it has received and treated over 6,000 raptors and organized more than 1,000 wildlife conservation and environmental education activities, according to Zheng Zhishan, manager at the center.

Among the many successful rescue stories, the bond forged with this short-toed snake eagle holds a special place in the hearts of Zheng and her team. This remarkable bird represented the 40th raptor species to find refuge at the center in its 23-year history.

Identified as No 230501 within the center, the eagle became a focal point of the team's efforts, requiring over a year of dedicated care and innovative treatments, including the intricate procedure of feather grafting.

"Compared to the many raptors we've nurtured back to health, No 230501 demanded an extraordinary amount of our time and expertise," Zheng said.

Chance sighting

In the early morning of May 1 last year, wildlife photographer Zhang Ge, while bird-watching on the north shore of Guanting Reservoir, which is near Wild Duck Lake, noticed a raptor on the ground behaving unusually, surrounded by a congregation of magpies.

Zhang told Beijing Youth Daily that with 15 years of bird-watching experience he immediately recognized the bird as a short-toed snake eagle, a raptor comparatively rare in Beijing. Despite magpies typically driving away raptors, the eagle, with disheveled feathers, did not take flight during the confrontation but instead hopped around on the ground, seeking refuge in nearby reeds.

Approaching cautiously, Zhang managed to scare off the magpies and found the eagle lying on the ground, unable to fly due to injuries. Wearing gloves, he covered the eagle's eyes with a cloth bag, gently picked it up and placed it in his car.



Li Zhisai (left) and Zhang Shuai, raptor rehabilitators from Beijing Raptor Rescue Center, release a rescued short-toed snake eagle into the wild at Wild Duck Lake Wetland in Beijing's Yanqing district on Oct 17. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The eagle showed no resistance during the encounter, indicating its weakened state. By around 10 am, Zhang arrived at the center in Beijing Normal University and handed the eagle over to the rehabilitator, Zhou Lei.

In the past, Zhang had encountered injured birds of prey and tried to send them to rescue centers, but the birds died on the way. This was his first close encounter with a raptor that was rescued successfully, and he hoped that through professional care, the eagle would soar once again.

In China, raptors are classified as first or second-class wildlife under State protection, playing a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. Beijing serves as both a habitat for raptors and an important stopover site on their migration routes.

The short-toed snake eagle, also known as the short-toed eagle, is a medium-sized raptor that can be found in Europe, Asia and Africa. It is a rare migratory bird in Beijing. It typically inhabits hilly areas, open grasslands or areas with sparse trees, feeding mainly on reptiles such as snakes, lizards and frogs, occasionally preying on small rodents such as wild rabbits and mice.

"When I saw the eagle, my heart sank — it was barely moving, with very weak vital signs," Zhou recalled. "Thankfully, its eyes were open, and although its claws were slightly shorter than those of similar-sized raptors, it could still move slightly."

Zhou and her colleagues immediately gave the bird a comprehensive health check. Upon examination, they found that the eagle was malnourished, with underdeveloped chest muscles and several soft tissue injuries. Its beak was unusually long, indicating possible previous human captivity.

"Most concerning were the few remaining primary flight feathers — only about one and a half primary feathers were left out of the original 20," Zhou said, adding that some feathers were broken at the base, while others were broken in the middle, rendering it unable to fly and hunt effectively.

On the first day, they treated the bird's injuries on its breast and a toe, and cut short an unusually long part of its beak.

Many difficulties

With very few of its primary flight feathers remaining, the bird needed molting to facilitate the growth of new feathers. As a result, the rehabilitators initially decided just to provide enough nutrients to promote feather growth.

However, they soon met the first challenge — the bird refused to eat.

"We offered the bird a variety of food such as rats, mice, bullfrogs and chicken meat, trying to provide as rich a diet as possible," Zhou said. "But it refused to eat any of it."

To sustain its life, she and her colleagues gave infusion treatments and force-fed the bird, and gave it drugs with each feeding to improve digestion. Despite their

efforts, the bird's weight dropped from its initial 1,454 grams upon arrival to a low of 1,274 grams. The situation persisted for over 20 days, during which it only very occasionally ate voluntarily until the issue was significantly improved on May 27.

Just as its eating habits were starting to improve, a second new issue arose. Twenty days after arriving at the center, its blood test showed a sudden increase in its white blood cell count.

Since its injury on the keel bone — a major bone running along the front of its chest — had not yet healed, the rehabilitators treated the bird with antibiotics. A week later, its white blood cell count dropped to the normal level.

Over the following month, they continued to monitor its blood tests, during which time its wound healed, and its blood stabilized.

During a health check on June 26 last year, a new feather began to grow, pushing out the old feather, a process known as molting. The new feather that emerges is called a blood feather.

After resolving the first two issues, Zhou said, the biggest problem for the eagle was feather damage. Extensive feather damage can only be resolved through natural molting, and the appearance of blood feathers indicated that the eagle had started molting.

By October last year, the bird's flight and tail feathers had mostly been replaced.

However, before Zhou and her

colleagues could celebrate, its newly grown feathers began to deteriorate in November last year, and this damage continued until the end of last year, with its feathers essentially reverting to their condition when it arrived at the center.

Due to the significant loss of flight feathers, Zhou explained, the new feathers grew out alone, lacking the protection of other feathers, making them prone to breakage.

"Any raptor unable to grow and maintain normal flight feathers cannot be released back into the wild," Zhou said. "We found ourselves in a dilemma where, aside from providing it with adequate nutritional support, we were unsure of what else we could do. Our only hope lay in its next molting season."

Feather grafting

Just when they felt helpless, a turning point arrived.

In March, Neil Forbes, a British veterinary expert, visited the center for a tour. The rehabilitators consulted him regarding the feather issue with the eagle, and he proposed a treatment plan: first, to perform protective feather grafting, where grafted feathers would protect the new growing feathers; second, to regularly add vitamin H to its food to promote feather growth.

With a solution in hand, they immediately took action.

As it was the first short-toed eagle received at the center, their "feather bank", where they collect feathers from raptors that couldn't be saved in order to graft them onto other

birds, did not have short-toed snake-eagle feathers.

As a result, they used feathers from owls, falcons, buzzards and large raptors for the grafting operation and regularly added vitamin H to its diet.

In March, they performed "protective feather grafting" for the eagle, attaching six feathers to its left wing and nine feathers to its right wing, Zhou said. After the feather grafting, the eagle initially showed some discomfort in the enclosure and even broke off a newly grafted feather shortly after. "But it quickly regained its composure," she said.

As expected, during this year's molting season, the grafted feathers helped the new feathers grow in good condition. In August, Zhou told Beijing Youth Daily that the eagle had grown 15 new flight feathers, most of which were growing well. The eagle could fly within the enclosure. As the new feathers gradually filled in, only about three old feathers remained grafted.

"The process of new feathers replacing the old is somewhat akin to humans shedding baby teeth and growing adult teeth," Zhou said.

The bird's weight reached 1,778 grams on Sept 26.

Zheng said: "The autumn wind is blowing and it is right during the migration season for birds. The Wild Duck Lake area teems with diverse wildlife and offers an ideal environment for the bird to readjust to life in the wild. We hope it can soon catch the wind to embark on its journey."

Dogs and drones hunt down wild boars

By QI XIN in Zhengzhou and LIANG SHUANG

With dogs and drones, teams of "field guardians" have become a vital force in helping farmers protect their yields by tracking and hunting down excessive boars, as the wild animals have rampaged crops and become a major headache, local media reported.

Zhang Guomin, a farmer in Xixia county, Henan province, contacted one such local team on Oct 12, as he found out his sweet potato field had been damaged when he came to check his vegetable plants.

Based on the footprints, Chu Feng, head of the team, estimated that the culprit was a boar of around 100 kilograms. "As boars are social animals and tend to live in groups, it's likely there are a group of them here," Chu told Ele-

phant News, which is affiliated to Henan Broadcasting System.

He said that as the autumn deepens, boars need to gain weight for the winter. Meanwhile, as food is getting scarce in the mountains, some boars come down and may be attracted by the scent of crops, he added, saying that his team would gather their gear and hunt down the boars.

Chu's team is among nearly 20 teams organized by Xixia's forestry bureau, each consisting of 10 to 20 members. The bureau said in a statement that there are around 2,000 boars in the county based on its estimation, and the bureau has issued 292 permits for hunting the wild animal. It added that methods such as electricity nets, traps and poisoning are banned.

Xue Yunlong heads another such team in Xixia. Named "White

Neck", the team sends out drones in the morning, when boars are usually more active and can be tracked more easily. Upon finding a target, the team lets out dogs, mostly pit bulls, to hunt the boar down. After a fierce fight, which often results in scars and wounds on the dogs, the boars become the dogs' treat.

"We have been using drones since last year, and the thermal imaging of drones really helped us a lot, especially in darkness," said Shi Fuxun, an official with the Xixia forestry bureau.

According to the bureau, it hunted down 383 boars in 2022 and 392 last year, and has also busted three illegal poaching cases this year.

On the other hand, the county is encouraging villagers to buy insurance for their crops. Some 600

hectares of farmland have been insured, and more than 3 million yuan (\$421,000) has been paid as compensation for those affected, the forestry bureau said.

Excessive boars have become problematic in many locations in China, as their high fertility and adaptability help them thrive as the country's ecological situation has improved over the years. When their numbers surpass an area's capacity, boars often look for food in agricultural fields, leading to conflicts with humans.

The National Forestry and Grassland Administration carried out a pilot project in 2021, allowing the establishment of specialized teams to hunt down boars in 14 provincial regions severely afflicted by the wild animal.

Last month, forestry authorities in Xiji, Ningxia Hui autonomous



A herd of wild boars is seen on the outskirts of Xi'an in Shaanxi province in July last year. NING FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

region, sent out a recruitment advertisement looking for "bounty hunters" and planned to award 2,400 yuan for each boar killed, which sparked public interest.

They explained that excessive boars posed severe conflicts with local farmers and threatened the crops, and set a quota for the hunt

of no more than 300. In June last year, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration removed wild boars from its list of protected animals, meaning they can be hunted legally with permission.

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BUSINESS

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Auto joint ventures eye revved-up performance, former official says

By CHINA DAILY

Joint venture automotive companies in China will achieve a stunning transformation as China is cultivating a market-oriented and internationalized business environment that treats both domestic and foreign enterprises impartially, Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said at an automobile forum held over the weekend in Beijing.

"JV auto firms need to transition from being 'outsiders' to 'locals' and become part of the family. Whether they are Chinese enterprises or vehicle JVs, we should embrace a family-oriented mindset," Wei said.

He added that these companies should shift from the old adage of "being in China for China" to "being in China for the world". The world is vast, offering ample opportunities for JV automotive companies to showcase their prowess.

In 2024, it is expected that the export volume of passenger vehicles from China will exceed 5.4 million units, a year-on-year increase of 35 percent, with highlights such as continuously enhanced international influence and competitiveness.

Wei said the vast market advantage of China has not yet been fully realized, and the synergistic effect of complementary advantages between China and foreign countries has not been fully demonstrated.

"Chinese automakers possess unique cooperative potential and advantages, and this enormous potential for cooperation will undoubtedly play a greater role in the next 10 years.

"I have always believed that the growth and development of China's automotive industry are closely linked to the growth of JV car companies over the past 40 years," he said. From simple "technology for market" to now leading the world in electrification, intelligence and networking, complementary advantages in today's comprehensive strategic cooperation are evident, Wei said.

"Next, we should aim for the global market, researching how to leverage the strengths of both parties to jointly develop new technologies, and maintain a leading position in fierce global market competition through technological and managerial innovations.

"With the development of the green economy, the need for transitioning to new energy and intelligence is becoming increasingly urgent. It requires both Chinese and foreign parties to leverage their respective strengths, accelerate scientific research and innovation, and achieve transformation, upgrading and replacement. This is an imminent matter."

He added that the forum marks the beginning of automotive JVs continuously innovating, exploring new forms of collaboration and adjusting their development strategies.

"I believe that in the near future, JV automotive companies will be able to make a magnificent transformation and better venture into the global market," Wei concluded.

Yin Mingyue contributed to this story.



Employees work on the assembly line of a carmaker in Qingdao, Shandong province. LIANG XIAOPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Shenzhen to prioritize AI, NEV, healthcare

Shenzhen, a tech hub in South China's Guangdong province, has opened three dedicated offices to prioritize the development of artificial intelligence, new energy vehicles and medicine and medical apparatus. The city government said it will select young, high-caliber talent to staff the three offices, which will run relatively independently of the exist-

ing governmental structure.

PBOC starts using outright reverse repos

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said on Monday that it has begun using outright reverse repos, a tool of open market operations, to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



A view of China Merchants Bank's booth during a recent expo in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Policies target risks in banking sector

Analysts say measures will help steer economy toward stable recovery

By WANG KEJU
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China's recent introduction of a forceful policy package, which includes support for local governments to resolve debt risks and efforts to stabilize the real estate market, will help mitigate financial risks in the banking sector and steer the economy toward a stable recovery, analysts said.

Although the number of high-risk financial institutions has decreased in recent years, the risks associated with small and medium-sized financial institutions still remain a concern that requires comprehensive measures to tackle, they added.

"A considerable amount of the risks faced by commercial banks, especially city commercial banks, are directly linked to local government debts and the real estate market," said Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, in late September authorized lenders to cut interest rates on existing mortgages, lowered the interest rate of seven-day reverse repos, a key short-term policy rate, and revised the reserve requirement ratio, the amount of cash that banks are required to have on hand.

These easing measures could alleviate repayment burdens for borrowers, and regulatory forbearance extended to property developers and medium and small-sized enterprises could also help mitigate near-term default risks, said Elaine Xu, director of Asia-Pacific Financial Institution at Fitch Ratings.

This is particularly the case for small regional banks as they tend to have higher exposure to developers, local government financing

vehicles and MSEs, Xu said.

Due to shifting market liquidity, major State-owned banks trimmed their deposit interest rates on Oct 18, with many smaller commercial banks following suit recently.

Although it is difficult to fully offset for the decline in net interest margins due to lower existing mortgage loan rates, the deposit rate reductions will help alleviate the pressure on commercial banks' funding costs and interest rate spreads, Dong said.

Analysts expect that there is still some room for deposit interest rates to decline further, which would help alleviate the pressure from narrowing interest margins and ensure the stable operations of commercial banks, enabling them to continue increasing their financing support for the real economy.

On top of this, the Ministry of Finance announced its plan in mid-October to increase the debt ceiling on a relatively large scale in a one-time move, to replace existing hidden debts of local governments.

As of June, China's total local government debt amounted to about 100 trillion yuan (\$14 trillion), with local government bonds accounting for 42.23 trillion yuan and LGFV interest-bearing debt came in at 57.16 trillion yuan, said Li Jianjun, vice-president of Central University of Finance and Economics, at the Annual Conference of Financial Street Forum 2024 in Beijing earlier this month.

The government's heightened efforts to address local government debt risks may lead to a slight near-term drag on banks' interest rate margins due to their involvement in debt swap programs, as China Galaxy Securities stated in its report.

However, the long-term benefits for banks will outweigh the short-term impact, as banks are set to gain in the long run from the clearance of nonperforming assets and the improvement in local economic fundamentals, according to the report.

The forceful one-two punch will greatly shore up business sentiments and facilitate economic recovery, and set the stage for addressing the risks faced by financial institutions, especially smaller ones, analysts said.

In addition, China authorities have increased capital replenishment through special purpose bonds for weak smaller banks in recent years. However, the improvement for small banks' overall capital adequacy remained marginal and was largely offset by those banks' growth appetite and weak profitability, said Xu of Fitch Ratings.

"We expect consolidation among small banks to be the main approach to addressing near-term risks, which may ease the burden on regulatory oversight," Xu said.

That said, this alone may not permanently address the risks that small banks face, as the surviving entities still face significant pressure from economic headwinds, Xu added.

Sustainable capital replenishment mechanisms should be in place to enhance the resilience of small and medium-sized banks and enable them to better serve the real economy, said Dong of Merchants Union Consumer Finance.

This involves appropriately optimizing shareholder eligibility conditions and simplifying approval processes to facilitate qualified shareholders' capital injections, Dong said, adding that relaxing access conditions to support small and medium-sized banks' issuance of preferred shares, perpetual bonds and convertible bonds is also a viable option.

ETF market sees rapid growth

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's exchange-traded fund, or ETF, market is undergoing rapid growth with booming product innovation and diversification, and this is a multi-year trend that will present significant opportunities for global ETF managers and service providers, according to New York-based global financial services firm Brown Brothers Harriman.

"The overall maturity of the ETF market here isn't at the same scale as the more mature markets like Europe and the United States. But the pace (of development) is increasing rapidly," said Chris Pigott, head of Asia ETF services at Brown Brothers Harriman, which has a global network of fund custodian services covering over 90 markets.

Data compiled by BBH show that aggregate net new inflows into the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan ETF markets in the first eight months of the year stood at \$166 billion, accounting for 72 percent of the net new flows into Asia-Pacific listed ETFs.

Of the \$166 billion, \$119 billion has gone into the Chinese mainland market, over 90 percent of which went into equity-based ETFs.

The strong fund inflows have helped the Chinese mainland ETF market reach 3.5 trillion yuan (\$491 billion) in assets as of the end of September, representing about 3.5 percent of the global ETF market, which has eclipsed \$14 trillion in asset size, according to BBH.

This proportion is likely to rise in the coming years, Pigott said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

It will be driven by Chinese institutional investors' increasing adoption of ETFs, regulatory support to promote the ETF market and burgeoning retail distribution channels, he added.

Wu Qing, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said in September that the commission will actively promote the innovation of index products such as broad-based ETFs, and encourage the launch of more ETF products focusing on Shenzhen's ChiNext and Shanghai's STAR Market to better serve investors and develop new quality productive forces.

"We expect to see increased utilization of ETFs in the Chinese mainland, be it domestically for inbound strategies, or as part of outbound diversification in terms of portfolio management," Pigott said.

While it is still early days to forecast how the recent rally in Chinese equities will influence the overall development of China's ETF market, Pigott said BBH has witnessed renewed global interest in onshore equities and a growing tendency of investors turning to ETFs as a vehicle to participate in the ongoing rally.

The rapid development of China's ETF market will attract more global ETF issuers, Pigott said, as continued product innovation will bring in more products and strategies, many of which global issuers are experienced in, such as when it comes to actively managed ETFs and ETFs with overseas exposure.

The BBH survey found that 77 percent of mainland respondent institutional investors were planning increased exposure to actively managed ETFs in the next 12 months, while 78 percent have used or plan to use ETFs through the qualified domestic institutional investor, or QDII, scheme to invest in overseas assets. QDII is a quota-based system whereby asset managers raise money at home and allocate it overseas.

"We will continue to see more diversification of the mainland ETF market, not only from a product perspective, but also in terms of the ETF issuers," Pigott said.

He added that China's financial opening-up and the growing appetite for overseas assets from domestic investors have also presented BBH with a significant business opportunity as the bank provides global custody capability for domestic banks, who in turn serves the QDII funds.

Supply chain heft opportunity for global firms

By ZHONG NAN
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China's proactive support for global supply chain cooperation will enable both domestic and foreign companies to capitalize on new business opportunities and boost their confidence in investing in its market, the country's top foreign trade and investment promotion agency said on Monday.

Speaking ahead of the second China International Supply Chain Expo, which will run from Nov 26 to 30 in Beijing, Zhang Shaogang, vice-chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, said the event has already attracted over 600 exhibitors this year, with an expected attendance

of more than 200,000 visitors from over 100 countries and regions.

As global industrial and supply chains have been significantly impacted in recent years by factors like geopolitics and the COVID-19 pandemic, he said that hosting the expo will bolster the resilience and stability of these networks, fostering increased investment and trade activities across the world while promoting the development of an open world economy.

Several multinational corporations, including Cargill Inc, FedEx Corp and Corning Inc from the United States, Maersk Group from Denmark, and Siemens AG and Bosch Group from Germany, will showcase their latest products and technology solutions, with several

debuting innovations at the expo next month.

The Beijing-based CCPIT recently conducted a survey of over 400 major foreign-invested enterprises, with more than 65 percent of respondents recognizing the effectiveness of foreign investment policies introduced by central and local governments. Many also highlighted China's firm commitment to high-standard opening-up.

This year, international exhibitors at the second CISCE made up 32 percent of the total — surpassing last year's participation — with companies from the US leading the count, followed by a substantial rise in European and Japanese companies compared to the first edition, according to information released by the CCPIT.

This underscores the sustained optimism of foreign investors toward the Chinese market, reaffirming the nation's status as a preferred supply chain partner in global resource allocation, Zhang added.

Echoing that sentiment, Poh-Yan Koh, senior vice-president of FedEx Express and president of FedEx China, said that China's endeavors to build a modern industrial system will facilitate global trade and encourage its companies to invest in overseas markets.

The US express transportation service provider and two-time CISCE participant announced last week a major upgrade to its Shanghai international express and cargo

hub at Shanghai Pudong International Airport. The upgrade will transform the facility into an inter-continental transit hub.

As China moves up the value chain, it has increasingly become an exporter rather than an importer of intermediate goods used by manufacturers in other regions. This shift strengthens connectivity and, in turn, enhances the competitiveness of global supply chains, said Lin Meng, director of the Modern Supply Chain Research Institute at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

In addition to helping businesses of all sizes from various countries leverage this platform for better integrated development, the expo also seeks to promote the deep integration of emerging economies into the global supply chain, said Yu Yi, head of the CCPIT's general office.

BUSINESS

Beijing plans global hub for green economy

By ZHANG WEI and DU JUAN

Beijing has launched an initiative to establish itself as a global green economy hub, with a focus on technological innovation, industrial development and sustainable urban planning, aiming to achieve the goal by 2035.

The plan's first phase target is that by 2027, Beijing would see a 10 percent annual growth in green technology patents, improved urban green infrastructure, and deeper regional and international cooperation in the green economy.

Yang Xiuling, director of the Beijing municipal development and reform commission, outlined the city's efforts to accelerate the construction of an international benchmark city for green economy at the fifth Beijing Municipal Administrative Center Green Development Forum, which was held from Saturday to Monday.

Beijing has pursued a green development strategy for years, achieving significant milestones such as a 60 percent reduction in PM2.5 concentration and a 50 percent decrease in carbon emission intensity over the past decade via pollution control measures and carbon neutrality initiatives, according to the commission.

"Beijing boasts rich resources in green technology, robust financial backing, and a strong foundation in green professional services, providing a conducive environment for green economy development," Yang said.

To achieve the 2035 goal, the city plans to accelerate the construction of a global benchmark city for green economy in Beijing, including fostering innovation in green technologies such as hydrogen energy, synthetic biology, and solid oxide fuel cells.

The city will support the growth of green industries in areas like the Daxing International Hydrogen Energy Demonstration Zone, and Changping district's Energy Valley. Meanwhile, Beijing will enhance the functions of green trading, product innovation and a new vehicle for international cooperation at the green exchange.

Hu Jiulong, deputy director of the sub-city center management committee, said that green transportation is an important support for green development.

"Beijing is ramping up the establishment of a cutting-edge autonomous driving demonstration zone, driving forward the eco-friendly and low-carbon intelligent overhaul of the energy infrastructure," Hu said.

"The capital is also focusing on enhancing recycled water transmission and distribution," he added.

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Key conduit



A photograph taken by a drone shows an aerial view of the Jianhe-Liping expressway in Guizhou province last week. Construction of the vital local passageway in the mountainous province was undertaken by major State contractors such as China Railway Construction Corp's 17th, 18th and 24th bureaus. The north-south expressway opened to traffic on Friday, shortening travel time between Jianhe and Liping counties from three hours to about one hour. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

New HSR in Guangxi to boost trade

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

Pingxiang, which borders Vietnam and is a county-level city under the prefecture-level city of Chongzuo in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, is set to usher in a new high-speed railway to boost passenger flow and border trade.

The Chongzuo-Pingxiang HSR, part of the railway linking Pingxiang with Nanning, the regional capital, started to lay tracks on Monday on all its lines, said Lu Shen, manager of the track-laying project from State builder China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd (CREC4).

The Chongzuo-Pingxiang railway, which is expected to be operational by the end of 2025, can be extended to Vietnam over the long run if conditions allow, Lu said.

As the third self-invested HSR in Guangxi, the Chongzuo-Pingxiang HSR runs in the east from Jiangzhou district under Chongzuo, traverses Chongzuo's Ningming and Longzhou counties in the west, and terminates at Pingxiang.

With four stations — Chongzuo South, Ningming East, Longzhou and Pingxiang East — on the 81.52-kilometer line, 85.63 percent of the Chongzuo-Pingxiang HSR will be railway bridges and tunnels, Lu said.

Earlier, the Nanning-Chongzuo section of the Nanning-Pingxiang HSR was opened to traffic in December 2022.

Upon operation of the Chongzuo-Pingxiang section, Nanning and Pingxiang can be connected



CREC4 employees lay tracks on the Chongzuo-Pingxiang high-speed railway in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region on Monday. ZHAO MENGTING / FOR CHINA DAILY

fully by a high-speed railway and be reached within one hour, said Wu Huaqiu, publicity chief of CREC4 Eighth Engineering Co Ltd.

Meanwhile, the western end of the entire line can link with Vietnam's Dong Dang-Hanoi railway via the railway between Hunan province and Guangxi, providing travelers with trips to as far as Vientiane in Laos, Bangkok in Thailand, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, and Singapore, he said.

Via the Nanning hub, the eastern end of the Chongzuo-Pingxiang HSR can join the existing Nanning-Guangzhou HSR, Liu-zhou-Nanning Intercity Railway, Nanning-Kunming HSR and the Guiyang-Nanning HSR, which is under construction.

All these will help largely elevate the three-dimensional transport capacity of Guangxi in linking the country's eastern and western regions, and in connecting with

ASEAN markets, Wu said.

Lu said that in order to ensure the smooth progress of track-laying construction, CREC4 builders work 24-hour shifts to ensure that the average track-laying is not less than 1.5 km per day, safeguarding the on-time full completion in terms of both quality and quantity.

Guangxi Communications Investment Group Corp Ltd, which invested in the Chongzuo-Pingxiang section, said the section had achieved full completion in terms of building roads, bridges and tunnels by mid-October, and now it is time for 165.75 km of track laying, including 159.51 km of tracks on the main line, and 6.24 km of tracks within railway stations.

Lu added that there will be 28 sets of turnouts, four sets of telescopic regulators and 628,200 cubic meters of ballast.

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Hisense ups R&D efforts for global edge

Amid push for bigger presence, home appliance firm also focuses on green biz

By FAN FEIFEI fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese home appliance maker Hisense Group is ramping up efforts to achieve breakthroughs in fundamental technologies and expand its presence in overseas markets, with the aim of building a world-class enterprise and global brand.

Jia Shaoqian, chairman of Hisense, said over the past five years, the company has made significant progress in artificial intelligence-powered chips that are used to improve image quality and semiconductor devices, while its total revenue surpassed 200 billion yuan (\$28.07 billion) last year for the first time, nearly double that of 2019.

Jia made the remarks at the company's 55th-anniversary celebrations held in Qingdao, Shandong province recently, saying that Hisense has set up a batch of industrial clusters covering smart life, smart energy, semiconductors, automotive electronics, network information, finance, trade, real estate and healthcare.

Jia said the company will continue to strengthen core competitiveness in technology and products, build its self-owned brands and expand its global footprint in high-end markets as Hisense strives to become a world-class enterprise and enhance its technological capabilities.

With a focus on technological innovation, Hisense has dedicated approximately 5 percent of its annual revenue to research and development.

At present, the company has established a strong global presence with 36 industrial parks and production bases, 30 R&D centers and 64 overseas offices in Europe, the Americas, member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Middle East and Africa. Its overseas sales last year stood at 85.8 billion yuan, accounting for more than 42.5 percent of total revenue.

Hisense is accelerating its manufacturing footprint globally. The Qingdao, Shandong province-based company has invested heavily in African countries, and it is speeding up its business footprint in Nigeria, Angola, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco by establishing new production bases or facilities.

In ASEAN economies and Latin America, Hisense is increasing localized production and research

capabilities. This strategic expansion will enable Hisense to better serve customers and strengthen its global competitive position, the company said.

According to global market consultancy Omdia, global shipments of Hisense televisions reached 26.11 million units in 2023, ranking second globally and increasing 6.4 percent year-on-year.

Moreover, Jia said the company will achieve a carbon peak in its own operations by no later than 2026, and will reach carbon neutrality by no later than 2050, as it is pressing ahead with its green and low-carbon transition strategy.

He said revenue from Hisense's smart energy industrial cluster will reach 50 billion yuan in the future, with a competitive advantage in the global new energy market.

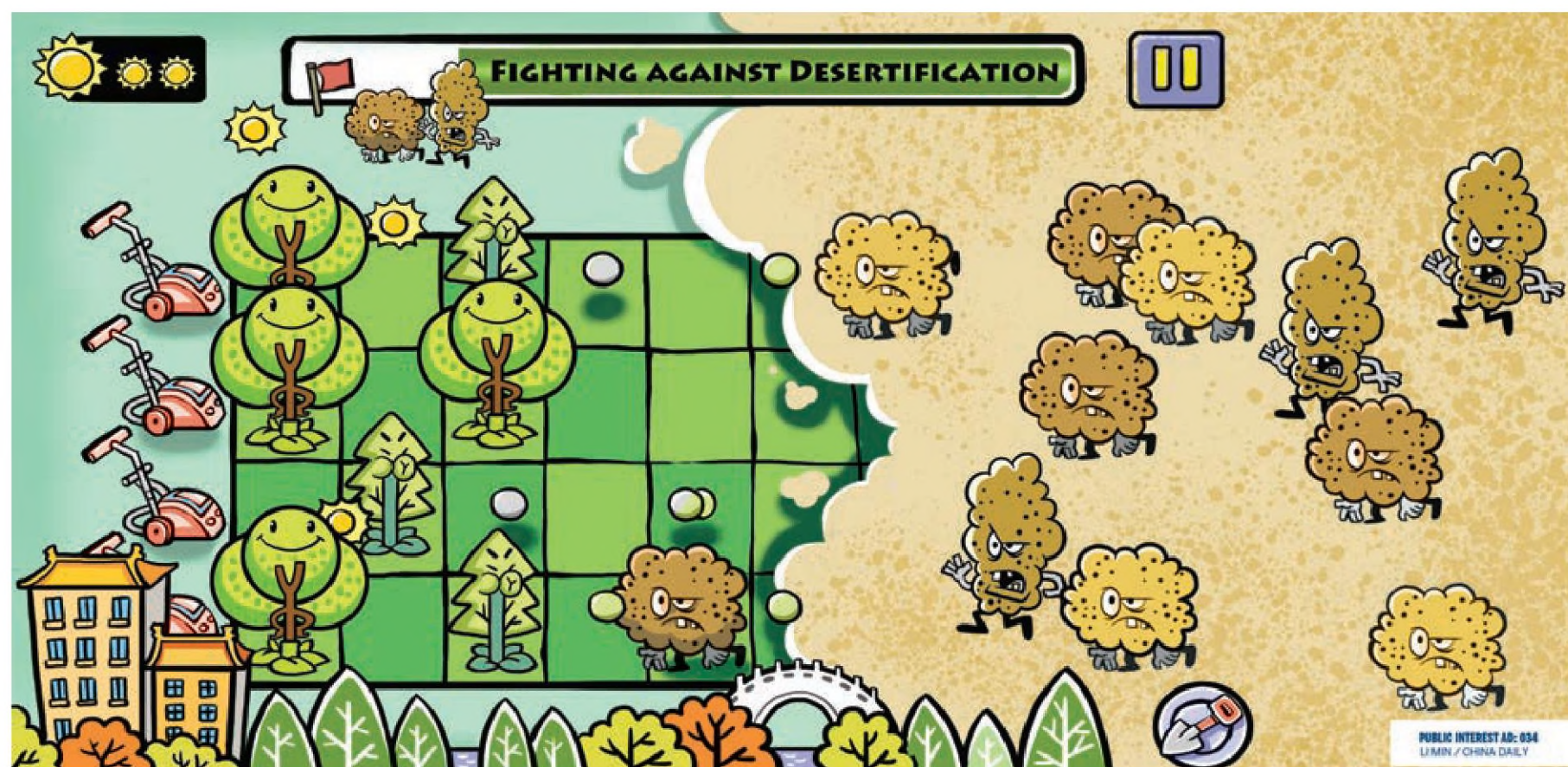
Hisense is also committed to ongoing improvements in corporate governance. By benchmarking against global best practices, the company will promote the diversification of its board of directors, establish a more scientific and modern enterprise system, greatly improve its corporate governance level and accelerate the journey toward becoming a world-class enterprise, Jia said.

Dong Min, secretary-general of the China Video Industry Association, said in the past, most Chinese enterprises adopted the original equipment manufacturer or OEM model. But nowadays they have built up self-owned brands in a bid to bolster competitiveness on the global stage.

Dong said Chinese household appliance companies should attach greater importance to products R&D, pour more resources into technological innovation and optimize product functions to cater to the diversified needs of shoppers overseas.

"Building a global industrial chain and enhancing operational capacity in overseas markets will help Chinese home appliance companies make better use of global resources, reduce operational costs and improve management efficiency," said Zhao Meimei, assistant president of Beijing-based market consultancy All View Cloud, which specializes in home appliances.

Globalization is both an opportunity and a challenge for Chinese home appliance manufacturers, Zhao said, adding this will promote the sector's high-quality transformation and upgrading.



THE HANDS OF TIME



Traditional arts and crafts are supreme examples of Chinese cultural heritage. China Daily is publishing this series to show how master artisans are using dedication and innovation to inject new life into heritage. In this installment, we explore wood, stone and brick carving in architecture in the Huizhou area.

THE DELICACY IS IN THE DETAILS



Top: A memorial arch features delicate stone carvings. Above: A brick carving depicts a joyful scene of harvest. Right: An intricate wood carving work at a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) residence. PHOTOS BY FANG LONG / FOR CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Special relationship between ancient merchants and craftspeople has left a stunning legacy of art, report Wang Ru in Huangshan, Anhui, and Zhu Lixin in Hefei.

For Kuai Zhenghua, a 62-year-old national-level intangible cultural heritage inheritor of Huizhou wood carving, who is based in Huangshan in Anhui province, restoring ancient wood carvings is initially a game of detective work, and requires experience, intuition and imagination.

For example, when he was restoring one piece on which there were traces of an elephant farming, he knew it was a depiction of story of the legendary ruler Shun, who is believed to have lived over 4,000 years ago.

"It's a famous story about the cultural importance of filial piety. I have seen so many carvings about it, and can recognize it at a glance. In the story, Shun's display of filial obedience touched heaven and led to elephants building bigger buildings and so instead, they resorted to luxurious decoration to display their hard-earned prosperity.

Wood carving is widely believed to be the most important among the "three carvings". "People often say, 'even if the walls collapse, Huizhou houses will not,' because their wooden structures make use of *sunmao* (mortise-and-tenon) joints. That's why for interior decoration, the wooden beams and window lattices are the primary choices, and that's where wood carving comes into play," says Chen.

He further explains that brick carvings typically adorn the entrances of ancient residences to signify the owners' status, while stone carvings are commonly found on pillar bases and are more prevalent in ancestral temples and on *paifang*, memorial arches.

Lasting influence

Chengzhi Hall in Huangshan's Yixian county is a classic example of Huizhou architecture. The former residence of Qing Dynasty salt merchant Wang Dinggui, it is known for its outstanding wood carvings. Visitors often feel their eyes can barely take in all the beautiful examples around the complex.

One beam in the main hall is decorated with a carving depicting a Tang Dynasty (618-907) prince's party, which many officials are attending. The carving is intricate, and all the figures are painstakingly carved, including the servant in the right corner brewing tea, and another in the left corner



Wu Zhenghui, 58, master of Huizhou brick carving.



cleaning the ears of an official. The carving symbolizes the owner's wish to become an official, says Huang Jie, vice-president of the Yixian Huizhou Tourism Development Group, which is responsible for promoting scenic spots in the area.

craftsmen, a group known during the Ming and Qing dynasties for their skill at various art forms including carving and woodblock printing.

Their success was tied to the support of Huizhou merchants, who devoted a great deal of wealth to the best materials. Artisans were given plenty of time to build the splendid homes in which the merchants sought to retire. As a result, craftspeople had both the money and the time to work meticulously, and satisfy their patrons, Chen says.

He makes particular mention of the wood carvings in a residence in Yixian county's Lucun village, which are said to have been worked on by two artisans for nearly 20 years, a demonstration of the determination and devotion of Huizhou merchants to have the perfect dwelling, no matter the cost.

Although Huizhou's craftspeople were highly skilled, apart from being known for their accomplishment, most failed to leave their names in history. But their legacy continues to shine.

"The artisans behind the 'three carvings' are nameless today. They were known only during their times, and didn't enjoy high social status, but it was precisely these ordinary people who made such breathtaking work," says Chen.

Refined skills

According to Kuai, Huizhou wood carving emphasizes simplicity, yet smooth, simple lines and intricate yet modest carving techniques that render beauty in an elegant and poetic way, in harmony with the cultural atmosphere of the area.

He says that since wood is softer than brick and stone, and is easier to carve, it can be more richly detailed and express a more delicate sentiment than the latter.

According to tradition, when carving a representation of a 3-year-old child, the eyes should dominate nearly half of the face, while the jawline ought to be rounded. For a depiction of a 10-year-old, the eyes should be positioned higher on the face, occupying a smaller area. In the portrayal of adults, the eyes should occupy a smaller proportion of the face, often set in a more angular facial structure.

"From 3-year-olds to adults, the carving of different age groups varies based on observations of the maturing process. This is the basic principle of our wood carving tradition," says Kuai.

According to Wu Zhenghui, a 58-year-old national-level intangible cultural heritage inheritor of Huizhou brick



Kuai Zhenghua, 62, master of Huizhou wood carving.

carving, the tradition is known for its multiple layers, which can result in an almost three-dimensional effect that makes them look more dynamic.

"By making recourse to multilayered carving, Huizhou brick carving transcends flat, two-dimensional presentation, and introduces techniques of perspective that advance toward three-dimensional art," says Wu.

A native of Shexian's Beifan village, the birthplace of Huizhou brick carving, Wu was immersed in the art form from a young age, fostering a passion for this time-honored craft since childhood. He learned from local artisans, and opened his own studio to restore old brick carvings in 1989.

Years of involvement in the craft and continual improvement have made Wu a leading figure in the field, and he demonstrated his skill by spending six months re-creating the ancient technique of nine-layered carvings, which had been lost to history.

"Working from the front, you can carve at most seven layers before being unable to go any deeper. As a result, I was confused as to how I could add the other two layers," says Wu.

He read widely and examined carvings on historical buildings, thinking about how to add those two extra layers.

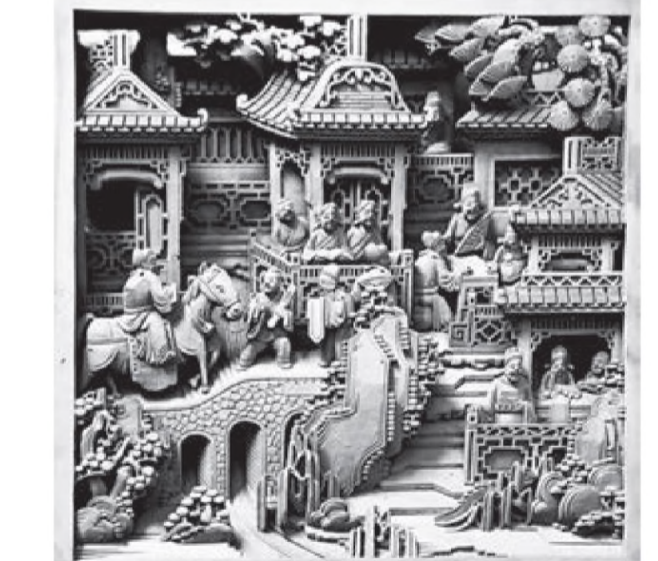
One day, as he was looking at some old brick carvings he collected, he noticed openings on the sides of the bricks. At first, he thought they were to help install the carvings, but after close observation, he realized that he could insert a knife through these openings, and carve two more layers. This was when he was able to successfully re-create the technique.

Shuhui, who is a city-level inheritor of Huizhou wood carving, has been engaged in the craft for 11 years. From a young apprentice, whose hands hurt every day from sharpening knives, to a mature craftsman with many award-winning pieces, Tang wants to continue to follow the path walked by his predecessors.

He says that people often compare Huizhou merchants to camels, noting their pioneering, enterprising spirit, and endurance. He believes this comparison can be applied to Huizhou craftspeople as well.

"I want to learn the skills and spirit they passed down, advance the techniques with modern tools, and try my best to add new vigor to this traditional craft," he says.

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Top: Historical memorial arches are prime examples of Huizhou's traditional stone carving. Above: Huizhou's multilayered brick carving usually features a three-dimensional presentation. PHOTOS BY WANG RU / CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Hongcun village, a World Heritage Site in Huangshan, Anhui province. Center: A 200-year-old residential complex is transformed into a homestay in Yixian county, Huangshan, Anhui. Right: The beautiful scenery in Hongcun village draws a big crowd of art students. PHOTOS BY FANG LONG / FOR CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By WANG RU in Huangshan, Anhui and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

When businessman Huang Zhiyong walked into a traditional complex in Shiting village in Anhui province in 2012, he found the majority of the buildings lay in ruins. Parts of the wooden structures had decayed and walls had collapsed.

Located in Yixian county, Huangshan, Anhui, once a part of ancient Huizhou prefecture, the complex had served as the residence of an eminent merchant family for 10 generations. However, at that time, only two elderly people were living in it.

As rundown as it was, Huang was still attracted by the old buildings, especially the relatively well-preserved wood, brick and stone carvings, which in his eyes implicitly told stories of the past.

After hard negotiations over four years with 27 property owners of the complex and more than two years' renovation, he

changed the 200-year-old complex into a village homestay, which is attracting people in hordes.

"The restoration process was just like an in-depth communication with historical buildings, which has endowed me with fulfillment and happiness," says Huang.

According to him, when talking about beauty, modern people often seek what only delights their eyes, but the beauty of traditional Huizhou buildings goes beyond that and can deeply touch one's heart. The wood, brick and stone carvings play a big part in the buildings' attractiveness.

"Since owners, often Huizhou merchants, had a major say in the design of the carvings, each piece was a tailored artifact containing creators' emotions and conveying owners' ideas about the pursuit of beauty, morality and goodness or family traditions to educate their offspring. No two carvings are alike. In this way, the carvings actually help make the

Enduring allure of Huizhou carvings in modern times



Left: Hongcun village, a World Heritage Site in Huangshan, Anhui province. Center: A 200-year-old residential complex is transformed into a homestay in Yixian county, Huangshan, Anhui. Right: The beautiful scenery in Hongcun village draws a big crowd of art students. PHOTOS BY FANG LONG / FOR CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Therefore, I renovated the dilapidated complex into a homestay, aiming to extend its life through application, so that future generations will be able to appreciate its charm," says Huang.

Carvings, as integral components of traditional architecture, represent invaluable cultural heritage in contemporary society, imparting messages from bygone eras.

When veteran architect Cheng Jiyue worked as the general designer of the restoration project of Huizhou Prefecture Office, a historical site in Shexian county, Huangshan, he also applied

proper carving elements based on building standards of the middle period of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the time when the complex was rebuilt to its largest size in history.

Cheng says carvings are also widely used in pseudo-classic buildings. For example, he built Chunhua Garden, a Huizhou-style complex in Frankfurt, Germany, in the 1980s with many carvings,

all of which were handmade to show the superb skills of Huizhou craftspeople.

Pan Guodong, manager of a Huangshan-based company specializing in the restoration and construction of historical and pseudo-classic buildings, says about 70 percent of their businesses are designing and constructing pseudo-classic buildings, mostly with Huizhou-style carvings.

These are often landscape architecture built in scenic spots, historical and cultural areas and in the public spaces of residential areas, or hotels and restaurants, says Pan.

In individual homes, families often prefer Huizhou style and add carving elements as interior decorations. Although that makes it more expensive, Pan says that about 10 percent of their customers requiring home decorations still want them.

"Huizhou-style buildings symbolize Huizhou culture, and there are people who love them. Even if three types of

carvings are not practical now, people still want them for cultural inheritance," says Xiao.

Cheng says besides directly applying carvings in pseudo-classic buildings, designers also gain inspiration from such old architectural elements and apply their language to modern buildings and other artistic forms.

Just as he says, three carvings continue to inspire modern people. In picturesque Yixian, which is famous for the World Heritage sites Xidi and Hongcun villages, one can come across people practicing portraying three carvings.

Xiao Xiao, a local postgraduate student at Ma'anshan Teacher's College, is one of the people who often practice painting skills there.

"I have found the lines of carvings to be very smooth. When portraying them, I often wonder how ancient craftspeople could carve them so beautifully and dynamically. Some patterns only made by several lines are vivid enough to catch your attention. They are totally different from the stiff lines carved by machines," says Xiao.

She is also impressed by the light and shadow effects of wood carvings.

"Huizhou residences often have open interior courtyards allowing sunshine to enter the rooms. When the sunlight shines through the carved wooden windows, it can cast dappled and varied light and shadows on the wall. With the movement of the sun, the light and shadow effects change as well. What an artful design!" says Xiao.

"Beauty is made by humans and nature together. It reflects the traditional Chinese idea that people are an integral part of nature. I believe that concept is useful for modern design as well."



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

LIFE

By YU RAN
for China Daily

'Smart' young shoppers know when the price is right

With an eye out for discounts and good deals, frugality is the new buzzword for the youth, study reveals

Young shoppers in China are finding out that you really don't need to blow your money in order to shop till you drop. A yuan saved here, a yuan saved there might just do the trick. You only need to know where to look. So, what's better than scouring supermarkets for discounts or leveraging digital platforms for deals?

In a society that has rapidly transformed from scarcity to abundance, these young consumers are carving out a middle path — one that balances the pleasures of consumption with the security of savings.

The 2024 Interesting Lifestyle Report by China Newsweek further illuminates this trend. It reveals that 46.7 percent of respondents are attracted to significant discounts, indicating a more calculated approach to spending.

For instance, they're now "conquering" supermarkets, particularly the discount sections. This isn't necessarily due to lack of funds, but rather a newfound awareness of price value.

Wu Mei, a 30-year-old living in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, shares her journey of smart shopping. "I started paying attention to supermarket discounts when I was in university. In 2020, I began going to the gym in the evenings, and I'd finish around 9 pm, just in time to stop by the supermarket and check out the discounted goods," says Wu.

She mainly focuses on items for daily needs, such as buy-one-get-one-free fruits, 50-percent-off vegetables, 20-percent-off beef and salmon, and almost expired milk and juice that are also buy-one-get-one-free. She also stops by the bakery near her home, tracking the discount times and offers, choosing discounted products based on her preferred flavors.

The discounts may not be significantly high but for Wu, this habit evolved out of practicality. "Sometimes, the savings are just a few cents, and promotions change frequently. I've learned to recognize the pricing patterns. If you understand the general cost of items, you know when a discount is worth it," says Wu.

The sentiment is echoed by Lu Yu, a 24-year-old corporate clerk from Fuzhou, Fujian province. Lu's initiation into the world of discount shopping was sparked by late-night walks that took her past supermarkets during their markdown hours.

"I remember seeing people swarming around the fresh produce section at a Hema (Freshippo) store, I found it fascinating," she recounts with a chuckle. Since then, she often goes out for walks in the evening, and the supermarkets are part of her route. For Lu, one of the highlights of discount shopping is the thrill of finding good deals on quality items.

"The fun part is realizing that the same product from earlier in the day is now being sold for a fraction of the price. The challenge is making sure you pick out the items that are still in good condition, especially when it comes to fresh food," says Lu.

The rise of this frugal mindset among young Chinese consumers is not just anecdotal, but often rooted in experiences abroad. This trend is



Clockwise from top: Sales at a Yonghui superstore attract throngs of buyers in August; a Hema store in Shanghai's Baoshan district offers discounts on food to draw community residents; customers look at clothes on sale in a shop in Nanjing, Jiangsu province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Young adults' frugal habits ... offer a fascinating glimpse into how today's youths are redefining their relationship with spending, by saving money without compromising on essentials.”

Zhu Di, research fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

exemplified by Liang Jinjin, a 30-year-old baker from Foshan, Guangdong province, whose three-year stay in Australia while pursuing her master's degree from 2018 to 2021 significantly shaped her approach to saving money.

"The habit of paying attention to supermarket discounts comes from when I lived in Australia. Every week, there would be regular supermarket promotions, which cut my monthly expenses into half," says Liang.

Upon returning to China, she found that while the shopping landscape had changed, her frugal mindset persisted.

"Ten years ago, we relied on newspaper discounts and big flyers at supermarkets. Now, with e-commerce so developed, most people

don't pay much attention to discounts anymore. Whatever you want to eat can easily be ordered online," says Liang.

Despite the convenience of online shopping, Liang and many of her peers continue to seek out in-person bargains, especially in large cities.

Liang points out that most discounted products in supermarkets tend to follow a regular pattern of half-price or even greater discounts, especially at fixed times. There are also regular discounts on fresh food.

"After work, more people are heading to supermarket discount areas or opting for fast food to meet their dinner needs, and this fixed time slot is almost always filled with young people," says Liang.

She gradually discovered that,

aside from designated discount days, Mondays are particularly good for bargain hunting because many people choose to shop for a week's worth of groceries over the weekend. This means that on Mondays, shoppers can pick up some items that didn't sell over the weekend, often at relatively large discounts.

This meticulous approach to shopping extends beyond just supermarket runs, as Wu has her strategies for maximizing savings across various online platforms.

"It's about being resourceful. For example, I use platforms like Meituan and Alipay to take advantage of coupons, and sometimes I'll get great deals, like a 0.1-yuan pack of tissues with a 2-yuan coupon," says Wu.

A survey conducted by Beijing News Shell Finance in October shed light on the nuanced spending habits of young consumers nationwide. While they're willing to splurge on experiences, their consumer decisions remain rational. The survey found that 54.3 percent of respondents would reduce expenses if they found cheaper alternatives. Moreover, 51.4 percent would forgo certain expenditures if they felt they lacked novelty or had already been experienced.

"Young adults' frugal habits, particularly their evening trips to supermarkets for discounts, offer a fascinating glimpse into how today's youths are redefining their relationship with spending, by saving money without compromising on essentials," says Zhu Di, a research fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Zhu adds that they're not just changing their shopping habits, but they're reshaping the very notion of what it means to be a smart, modern consumer in China today.

"Falling in love with yellow discount labels is actually an upgrade in consumer attitude — after all, being able to afford expensive items doesn't mean one should overpay," Wu echoes.

Wu adds that any money-saving method helps individuals accumulate savings, and as they observe their savings grow, they become less inclined to spend recklessly, creating a reinforcing cycle that encourages more thoughtful and deliberate spending habits.

Lu has found various ways to save, from collecting free samples during promotional events to reusing packaging, and she learned that frugality is about the little things, like turning a milk teacup into a pencil holder or repurposing shopping bags for storage.

"But it's also about finding balance. Initially, I was so focused on saving every penny that I became obsessed with the idea. Now, I'll grab a good deal if I see one, but I won't go out of my way. It's about being smart with money without letting it take over your life," says Lu.

While Lu's parents' generation might have equated frugality with deprivation, these young professionals see it as a smart lifestyle choice. This new approach to spending reflects the diverse interests of China's youth. For Lu, the difference lies in how money is spent.

"Our consumption philosophy is 'save where you can, spend where you should.' The older generation might say the same thing, but where we choose to spend might be different. I might spend on anime merchandise, game top-ups, or blind boxes," says Lu.

For her, it's become a lens through which she views the broader challenges of life and the value of financial resources. This perspective has profoundly influenced her approach to consumption and spending.

"Discount hunting has taught me the true value of money. It's not just about saving — it's changed how I view all my spending. The more I save, the better I understand how to spend money wisely. It's become a lifestyle that makes me think twice about every purchase," says Lu.

The author is a freelancer for China Daily.

A realization after 20,000 staggering steps to Pillar-of-Heaven Peak

Growing up in the United States, most of my introduction to China came through the lens of film. Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan taught me to become one with water to master the body to devastating effect.

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon and *Hero* fine-tuned the idea so that I understood that physical mastery was more about attunement to the balance of nature and creating calmness and peace within oneself. As with all film-based education, these lessons were shallow, rooted in metaphor and narrative rather than fact. But there is one place where one can catch those impressions.

One autumn morning in 2013, I arrived at the foot of Wudang Mountain in Hubei province. My mother and younger brother were with me. Mom planned to ride the cable car to the top, but my brother and I had backpacks filled with water bottles and granola bars. Twenty thousand stone steps spi-

raled up the mountain ahead of us toward the Pillar-of-Heaven Peak, often accredited as the birthplace of Taoism.

I took the first step and counted "one" aloud. It was not a steep step, and I felt confident I would be fine getting to the top, having counted along the way. Around the 100 count, my brother asked me if I planned to count all morning. I inferred he was annoyed by the sound and began counting in my head.

After 500 steps, my thighs burned. I glanced at my watch. We'd been trekking for 30 minutes. Only 30 minutes? I thought. The visitor's center had told us the climb should take about four hours. Either my math is wrong, or I'm slow. We decided to take a break.

As we sat and refreshed our throats with cool water, I began to notice the surroundings. Oak and pine trees dotted the mountainside, their roots occasionally jutting out between weatherworn boulders. Some of the leaves had turned hues of orange and red. Glancing back, I saw that our starting point was no longer visible behind the web of tree branches.



Left: Buildings at the Taizipo (Princess' Slope) scenic spot on Wudang Mountain. YANG DAOSAN / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Tourists ascend to Jinding (Golden Peak), the top of Pillar-of-Heaven Peak on the mountain. PENG HUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

A man dressed in a kasaya and straw hat came up the steps at an inhuman pace. He carried a drum filled with vegetables on his back. He passed us by, his worn leather sandals clapping rhythmically against the steps. My brother and I shared a look of embarrassment at seeing how easily the encumbered man climbed while we already needed a break and decided to continue.

Time passed, one step after the other. I could no longer remember how my legs felt without the burn of fatigue. My thoughts gradually emptied. I began to smell oak and pine and osmanthus. The weight of my backpack felt as if it was my own weight. I heard birds twittering among the trees. From here came a blazing high-pitched melody, and from there came a low-pitched whine. Are they talking

about me? I wondered. We came upon a lone man with a basket of fresh cucumbers. I saw no buildings or infrastructure around him and realized he must have made this climb early in the morning to supply weary travelers with sustenance. Five yuan (\$0.7) bought us each a cucumber. I bit into it, desperate for the sweet juice that embraced my tongue. My American palate was

not trained for the subtlety of vegetables. I could have sworn I was tasting the great riches of an emperor.

Again, we climbed. Now I felt the sun just over my head. Wind brushed across my cheeks and forehead like silk. Each breath filled my tired lungs with life.

We began to hear voices above us. We'd reached the top. We came to a crowded pavilion. Tourists took pictures here and there. Children chased each other across cobblestone paths.

We took turns examining each building. Their walls were an aged red. Curved ceramic tiles angled downward from the roofs, bearing the wear and tear of ages of rain, wind and snow.

The mountain plunged below us, giving way to neighboring mountains among misty clouds. My muscles ached, and my breath was uneven. In those moments, I understood what the old movies were trying to tell me. This was the spirit of China. We rode the rail car back down the mountain.

Contact the writer at haydn@chinadaily.com.cn

COMMENT

Editorial

Dialogue, not tit-for-tat violence, the way to resolve burning issues

China has called on all parties to engage in more actions conducive to safeguarding regional peace and stability after yet another act of aggression by Israel that threatens to enflame and expand the conflict in the Middle East.

Just before dawn on Saturday, scores of Israeli jets completed three waves of strikes against missile factories and other sites near the Iranian capital of Teheran and in western Iran.

Whether Tel Aviv informed Teheran in advance of its attacks on Saturday and how precise the attacks were in targeting only military targets do not alter the fact they will herald the start of a new round of tit-for-tat violence in the region.

By warning its arch foe not to hit back after the latest strikes, Tel Aviv is trying to justify its Saturday campaign as a retaliation for Iran's Oct 1 missile attacks on Israel, seemingly telling Teheran it is now even. But that is just window dressing, as Iran's belated, measured retaliation had provided the warmongering Benjamin Netanyahu Cabinet with the excuse to immediately move on to the next part of its long-prepared agenda, taking Iran's Oct 1 attacks as the excuse to attack Iran directly.

It is Iran that had more reasons to say it was even after its Oct 1 missile attacks, which the Israel Defense Forces said caused no operational impact. And Teheran did, unequivocally telling Tel Aviv it is not intent on fighting a war with Israel. Iran's attacks four weeks ago were in retaliation to Israel's assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran on July 31, and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps general Abbas Nilforoushan on Sept 27.

Although Israel defends its killings of the three figures as righteous actions, its intensifying preparations for Iran's anticipated retaliation, particularly after Haniyeh's death, speak volumes of the fact that the killings were part of its efforts to force Iran to throw itself into the fray.

Another key fact Tel Aviv has intentionally ignored is that, thanks to the persuasion of many pro-peace countries, including China, Teheran exercised remarkable restraint after Israel's assassination of Haniyeh in its capital so as not to disturb the then ongoing Gaza cease-fire talks that were believed to be nearing a deal at that juncture.

Even after the cease-fire talks broke down, Iran hinted that its retaliation could be shelved as long as there remained hopes for an early cease-fire in Gaza.

Finding Teheran had not bitten its bait, Tel Aviv intensified its provocations by instantly upgrading its conflict with Hezbollah and its assassinations of Hezbollah leaders, one after another. It was Nasrallah's death, as well as Israel's serial assassinations of his successors in the following days, that prompted Teheran to act on Oct 1.

Israel and the United States spent that intervening period carefully deciding on the list of Iranian targets to be attacked. With the US undoubtedly using Israel as a batman to eliminate some Iranian targets it cannot attack directly itself.

The Netanyahu government has long envisioned a war with Iran that it can take advantage of to effectively mobilize the United States to markedly enlarge its unconditional aid and military support, divert the world's attention from its sins in Gaza, and survive the domestic criticism and opposition to its aggression.

More than one year after the Israel-Hamas conflict broke out in Gaza, Tel Aviv has finally created the conditions to concentrate on dealing with what it deems to be Israel's real threat.

By escalating the tensions in the Middle East days before the US presidential election, the Israeli leader is also trying to provide one of the US presidential candidates he favors with a political asset so that the one he bets on to become the future president-elect can exploit it to that end.

All that being said, the focus of a meeting the United Nations Security Council convened on Monday at Iran's call to discuss Israel's latest attacks should not be on how they should be defined according to international law, but for how long the US will allow the Middle East crisis to continue.

China remains stabilizing economic force

With global geopolitical rivalries intensifying and more economies resorting to protectionism, the world economy faces gloomy prospects of low growth and high debt which could leave countries with shrinking resources to improve their peoples' well-being and work together to tackle common global challenges such as climate change, the International Monetary Fund has said.

The IMF released its new economic forecast last week, saying the global economy will grow by an "anemic" 3.2 percent this year after the 3.3 percent growth in 2023. The growth rate is expected to remain 3.2 percent next year, too, well below its 2000-19 average of 3.8 percent.

Another major problem facing the world is that global government debt is set to exceed \$100 trillion for the first time this year and will continue to rise. The 190-nation lending organization said that government debt as a share of GDP, now at 93 percent, is set to reach 100 percent by 2030, exceeding its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic. "These are anxious times," the fund's managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, told reporters during the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank in Washington last week. "Trade is no more a powerful engine of growth," she said. "We live in a more fragmented global economy."

Rarely has the global economy faced the level of uncertainties it is encountering today, especially because of the presidential election in the world's largest economy, which could usher in a new era of protectionist trade policies and create trillions of dollars in new government debt.

Former US president and current Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has threatened to impose 60 percent tariffs on Chinese goods, and tariffs of up to 20 percent on everything else the US imports if he is elected, because he believes that "tariffs are the greatest thing ever invented".

The US currently carries nearly \$35.7 trillion in federal debt, which is only expected to grow regardless of whether Trump or Vice-President Kamala Harris is elected next month.

The two presidential candidates put forward their respective tax and spending plans during the election campaign, and if implemented, they would both likely further increase deficits and debt above levels projected under current law, according to the analysis released recently by the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

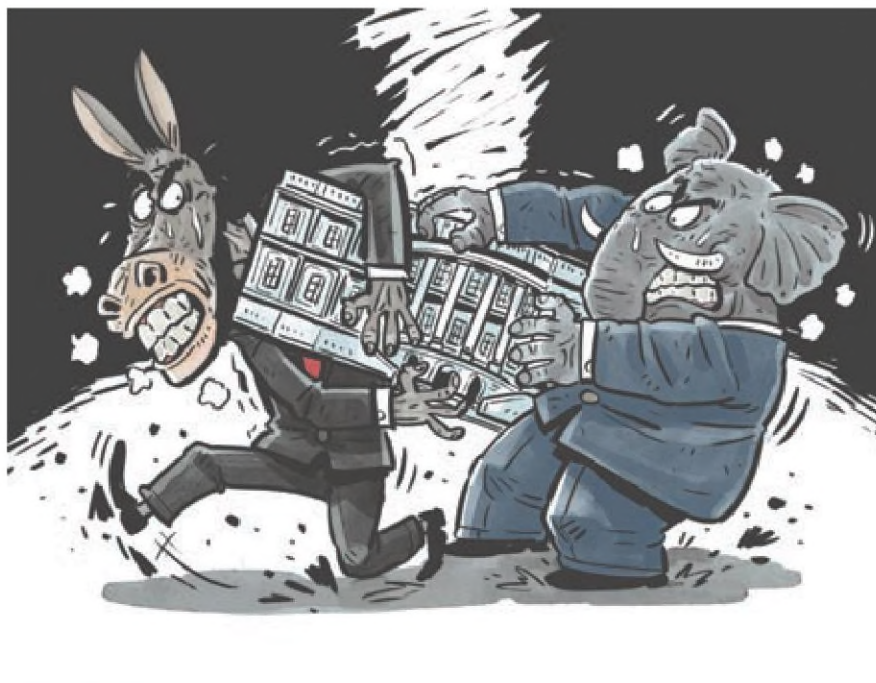
The IMF had earlier warned that the increasing level of US government debt risks driving up borrowing costs around the world and undermining global financial stability. In the face of mounting difficulties and challenges, the IMF suggests that countries deepen structural reforms to boost long-term growth and accelerate the green transition because such moves remain as necessary as ever.

These are the exact paths China has taken to maintain a healthy growth momentum. The country has vowed to deepen structural reform in order to develop a modern socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics and pursue high-quality development to advance Chinese modernization.

The Chinese economy grew by 4.8 percent in the first three quarters of this year, greatly contributing to global growth and reflecting the stabilizing role China has been playing in the global economy thanks to the government's favorable policies and the development of new quality productive forces. The Chinese government is confident that it will be able to achieve this year's growth target of about 5 percent with incremental pro-growth measures such as fiscal adjustments and monetary stimulus aimed at easing local government debt and injecting new vitality into the sluggish property market. In fact, the policy support has already achieved positive results.

As Vitor Gaspar, head of the IMF's department that advises governments on fiscal affairs, said, "Fiscal capacity can help China reach a different plateau in terms of its economic ambition, in terms of its economic prosperity."

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Policy measures help restore confidence in country's market

The total profit of China's industrial enterprises above designated size was 5.24 trillion yuan (\$734.34 billion) in the first nine months of this year, up 575.43 billion yuan over that of the first eight months.

However, because of insufficient effective demand, falling prices of industrial products and significantly higher base in a certain period of the previous year, the value was down 3.5 percent year-on-year, as data from the National Bureau of Statistics show.

Although the profit of industrial enterprises has declined to a certain extent, driven by the rapid growth of production, the profit of the high-tech manufacturing sector increased by 6.3 percent year-on-year from January to September, 9.8 percentage points higher than the average profit of industrial enterprises above designated size, driving an industrial profit growth of 1.1 percent. That highlights the resilience of China's industrial economic development.

Despite a declining profit of industrial enterprises in the first nine months, the resilience of China's new industrial drivers has further intensified, and with the expected stabilization of industrial enterprises and increased confidence, the profit of industrial enterprises is expected to recover and grow. A top-level meeting held in late September said that the country will better implement the policies already adopted, accelerate the introduction of incremental policies, and further improve the accuracy and effectiveness of policy measures.

China's GDP in the first three quarters increased by 4.8 percent year-on-year at constant prices, as showed by data released on Oct 18, indicating that the Chinese economy is generally stable and making steady progress.

Given that China's external pressures have increased because of the complex global environment and that its domestic economy is in a critical period of structural transformation, it is normal for China's economic growth to

fluctuate slightly, but it has withstood various kinds of pressures, and its overall economic dynamics and momentum have not changed.

More important, China's economy is gaining added momentum for new progress, in which the cultivation of new quality productive forces has accelerated.

In response to the new situation and new problems, the central authorities have decisively introduced a package of policies focused on increasing counter-cyclical policy regulation, expanding domestic demand, giving more help to enterprises, promoting the recovery of the real estate market, and boosting the capital market.

The central authorities will continue to introduce incremental policy measures to further stabilize expectations and boost market confidence, which will provide a good business environment for the development of industrial enterprises and help them enhance their profitability.

— WUYIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Corruption teaches LDP a lesson in Japan polls

Latest results from Japan's general election on Monday show that the ruling coalition comprising the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito has failed to cross the 233-seat majority required to gain power in the 465-seat House of Representatives. Unless it attracts more coalition partners, the long-ruling LDP risks losing power.

The major reason for the LDP's crushing defeat is corruption. In the past two years, the party has been plagued by numerous scandals. To quell the public's anger, several Cabinet ministers were replaced or asked to step down. However, that had little impact and former prime minister Fumio Kishida's approval rating continued to dip, leading to his ultimate

resignation. Shigeru Ishiba, a peripheral figure who took over a troubled LDP leadership on Oct 1, hoped to cash in on the enthusiasm generated by his rise by dissolving the House of Representatives on Oct 9 and unleashing an "election blitzkrieg" on an unprepared opposition. However, the outcome of the sudden election shows it has been a great disappointment for him too.

This is the first time since 2009 that the LDP has lost its majority in parliament; it is also the biggest crisis the LDP faces since 2012.

There are now two options before the LDP: Either it attracts one or two more coalition partners apart from the Komeito to form a ruling coalition, or the Constitutional Democratic Party of

Japan forms a coalition government with smaller parties, resulting in another historic fall from power for the LDP.

Regardless of the outcome, one thing is certain: a multiparty government, marked by constant bickering and relentless criticism between the ruling and opposition parties, signifies a highly unstable period in Japan's political arena. The possibility of frequent changes in prime ministers cannot be ruled out.

If there is a lesson to be learned from all this it is that corruption can indeed erode security. Not only has the LDP suffered a significant loss of seats in this election, but several of its senior members failed to win.

— NIUTANQIN WECHAT ACCOUNT

What They Say

Inclusive well-being focus of civil affairs work

The central authorities recently called for efforts to enhance inclusive public services to meet the essential needs of the people and ensure basic living standards for those facing difficulties.

Although relevant departments at various levels have made new progress in almost all aspects of civil affairs work in recent years, they should continue to follow a people-centered approach to resolve the most practical problems that are of the greatest and most direct concern to the people.

The civil affairs work is related to people's livelihoods and connected to people's sense of well-being.

The civil affairs departments

should speed up the improvement of the systems for policy implementation, and strengthen their service guarantees, supervision and management. They should broaden the social coverage and provide stratified social assistance. And they should ensure the provision of welfare services for children and the disabled, and better meet the needs of the aging population and people facing difficulties.

In particular, they should take the initiative to enhance the benefits for those in need, and help them overcome practical difficulties.

The central authorities have urged the civil affairs departments to shift their focus from ensuring services for specific groups to groups in need of help, from focusing on material security to combining material assistance, social

services and spiritual care, from enlarging the service scale to improving the service quality, from relying on government resources to playing up the roles of the market and society, from using traditional service methods to applying digital and other service methods.

These moves are all conducive to promoting the high-quality development of civil affairs work, and enhancing people's sense of gain, happiness and security.

All relevant departments should bear the bigger picture in mind, actively support and closely cooperate to provide strong support for civil affairs work. In the process, they should adhere to the people-centered approach and solve the most direct and practical concerns of the people.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Fan Hongda

US should reflect on its role in Middle East

Following Israel's strikes on Iran's military facilities on Saturday, the Middle East crisis has worsened. The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, which has lasted more than one year, and the resulting Israel-Hezbollah conflict have been intensifying. Since Iran launched a retaliatory attack on Israel on Oct 1, a possible war between the two countries has been hanging like the sword of Damocles over the Middle East and the regions beyond.

Some view the ongoing Middle East crisis as an opportunity for China. But I don't agree with this view. If a full-scale Israel-Iran war were to break out, China's losses would far outweigh its potential benefits.

China does not want to see the Middle East crisis escalate, as a volatile Middle East would create innumerable challenges for China, and many other countries. So the argument that the Middle East crisis is conducive to China challenging the United States' position in the Middle East is untenable. To begin with, China has no plans to challenge the US over its role in the region.

For decades, China's interactions with the Middle East have primarily focused on trade and economic cooperation, with the scope of collaboration continuously expanding. China respects its trade partners' sovereignty and territorial integrity, and has been working to foster regional stability and peace, earning praise from the international community.

Although China and the US have serious disagreements on many issues, both agree that it is necessary to prevent a possible Israel-Iran war.

However, the damage caused by the US to the Middle East has become increasingly clear. True, many Middle East countries have strengthened their relations with China in recent years, partly because they are unhappy with the US' role in the region. But they view China as a reliable partner, one that offers an alternative to the US, not as a "rival" of the US.

But if the Middle East crisis deepens further, especially if an Israel-Iran war breaks out, China's advantages could be undermined. Although most Middle East countries may have grown increasingly resentful of the US, their heightened security needs in a time of crisis could prompt them to depend more heavily on the US. This increased dependency could, in turn, lead to the US interfering in their cooperation with China, potentially complicating, if not restricting, the development of China's economic and diplomatic ties with the countries in the region. In such an emergency scenario, the strategic balance may shift back toward the US, despite

many Middle East countries being frustrated with the US.

Also, since China does not have enough influence to reason with the conflicting parties, its efforts to help restore peace in the Middle East, if unsuccessful, will disappoint the countries in the region. Not to mention that despite provoking widespread resentment among Middle East countries, the US' unique allure in the region is yet to fade.

Many Middle East countries have been known to be angry with US policies but simultaneously yearn for US support. This remains a fundamental reality in the Middle East.

When analyzing the potential impacts of the Middle East crisis on China, experts often focus on the competition between China and the US in the region. But does such a competition truly exist? In fact, Beijing does not see it that way. To the best of my knowledge, China has not formulated plans or policies aimed at competing with the US in the Middle East.

China is aware that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to undermine the US' position in the Middle East, not least because Washington has numerous military bases there. China is also aware of the influence the US exercises in the region. Therefore, I believe that rational thinkers in China do not consider it feasible for the country to directly challenge the US' position in the Middle East.

Many view the Belt and Road Initiative

as China's ambitious overseas expansion plan, but this is a misconception. The initiative is primarily a response to China's internal development challenges. Similarly, some interpret China's increasing focus on international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS as its intention to confront the US and other Western powers. In reality, Beijing's efforts, and the Belt and Road Initiative, are more of a response to the US' growing China-containment strategy.

Instead of challenging, let alone making efforts to replace, the US in the Middle East, China seeks to focus on its development and fostering cooperative relations without engaging in direct rivalry with Washington.

Although China and the US have serious disagreements on many issues, both agree that it is necessary to prevent a possible Israel-Iran war. I believe that like China, the US too hopes for peace in the Middle East; the difference between them lies in the approach to achieving it. As the two most influential global powers today, the US and China have the responsibility to make positive contributions, both separately and jointly, toward restoring and maintaining peace in the Middle East.

The author is professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Govts tackling population aging problems one at a time

At a dinner with old friends and former colleagues recently, our conversation turned from our health to our grandchildren's performance in school, and from our travel experiences to our eldercare plans. Yes, eldercare has become a hot topic of discussion in China.

A media report last month said the number of Beijing residents aged 60 or above had reached 4.31 million by the end of last year, making up 30.2 percent of the capital's registered permanent residents. The aging problem is not better in other parts of the country. With China's life expectancy increasing to 78.6 years, millions of people are joining the elderly population every year. By the end of last year China had 297 million elderly people.

Dealing with the aging population problem has become part of the national policy. Over the past few years, the government has issued documents and taken measures to ensure the elderly people lead a decent life.

According to a Ministry of Civil Affairs report, by the end of June, China had about 410,000 eldercare institutions, of which 369,000 were service centers operated by communities. In fact, more than half of the eldercare centers were established in 2019 or later — showing the efforts the central and local governments have been making to deal with the aging problem.

Though one has to pay for such services, the reasonable price and the fact that one can receive professional services while sitting at home have made the arrangement popular.

Many people aged 80 or above have chosen to live in eldercare centers. But they may soon find that a room in a high-end old age home could cost them a fortune. Three of my former colleagues are now living in such a center about 30 kilometers east of Beijing. Each of them pays about 10,000 yuan (\$1,404) a month for a small apartment where they also can have dinner, take part in entertainment and recreational activities and get timely help if and when needed. An aged couple have been paying the center more than 10,000 yuan a month to ensure the center has an apartment ready for them when they decide to shift there.

Additional services, such as expensive full daycare, make it unaffordable for most pensioners, unless they have fat bank deposits. There are cheaper old age homes where an elderly person can get a bed in a dormitory-like room for a few thousand yuan a month. But one may have to wait in a long line to get a bed in such centers, and even if a person is fortunate enough to get one, he or she has to make do with poor services and outdated facilities.

The Chinese tradition of respecting and supporting the elderly people prevents many young people from sending their parents and/or grandparents to eldercare centers even if they can afford to pay for it. My mother-in-law's question, "Why should I leave home and live in an eldercare center when I have my sons and daughter to take care of me?" must have been echoed by millions of elderly people.

The central and local governments are promoting community eldercare service centers, with governments offering preferential policies to help communities operate such centers locally. These centers not only provide in-center daycare services for the elderly people but also coordinate with service companies to provide door-to-door services for the elderly. In cities such as Beijing, emergency devices have been installed free of charge in senior citizens' homes that allow elderly people to seek help by just pressing a button.

Though one has to pay for such services, the reasonable price and the fact that one can receive professional services while sitting at home have made the arrangement popular. The arrangement is probably unique to China and difficult for other countries to emulate. China reportedly has more than 5 million social workers working in about 40,000 townships, communities and other institutions. Without their coordination and help, a project involving millions of people can't be put into operation.

The former colleagues living in the eldercare center are still trying to persuade me to join them, saying the services there are excellent. Despite being in my mid-60s, I am enjoying traveling, and rarely think about eldercare arrangements. I hope that by the time I have to make a decision, the system would be developed enough to provide me with the necessary services that I enjoy at home.

Shen Dingli

BRICS offers both opportunities and challenges

The two major aspects of the just-concluded 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, were a possible major expansion of BRICS membership, and de-dollarization efforts.

The then four-nation BRIC held its inaugural summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009, and welcomed a fifth member, South Africa, in 2011, turning BRIC into BRICS. The participation of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in BRICS cooperation is, therefore, a more significant enlargement.

The expansion of BRICS is important for many reasons, one of them being the cumulative GDP of the grouping's member states is now higher than the collective GDP of G7 members. Over the past 15 years, the growth of BRICS, comprising emerging market economies and developing countries, has represented the natural and logical demand for a fairer world economic order and global governance system.

Thanks to economic globalization, the North-South economic and trade bond has deepened. But the unbalanced international development calls for further reform of the world order, which the Global South has been seeking by deepening South-South cooperation, which has been made possible because of the rise of emerging economies such as China, Russia and India.

BRICS' major expansion has opened a new page. The grouping has become more representative and inclusive with the inclusion of African and Middle East countries. This will encourage the grouping to play a more important role in the global economy in a fairer and more balanced manner.

The global economic democratization the grouping is trying to promote includes an alternative international financial settlement mechanism. While the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) system is still the dominant mechanism facilitating global trade transactions, there is no harm in allowing parallel systems to grow. In fact, TARGET2 (a real-time gross settlement system for the eurozone) and CIPS (a renminbi-based settlement system) are both developing steadily, offering an alternative but safer and more robust global settlement system. Such endeavors are needed to reform the international financial system.

The BRICS Summit in Kazan not only formalized the grouping's expansion but also attracted a number of dialogue partners, some of which have already applied to join the grouping.

More important, there is a need to ponder what President Xi Jinping said in his speech at the Kazan summit: that BRICS should be built into a "peaceful", "innovative", "green" and "humanitarian" grouping. It goes without saying that the creation of a BRICS-based settlement mechanism could improve the overall global settlement mechanism, and ena-

The formal expansion of BRICS will certainly create new opportunities. Yet all BRICS member states should work to help end the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

ble the grouping's member states to make more contributions to international development.

However, BRICS faces various challenges, some of which arise from within the grouping. Most of the member states are more interested in sharing the economic opportunities, and may or may not share the political and strategic motivation of the major economies that make up the

grouping. Member states that disagree with transforming a geo-economic BRICS into a political grouping could be wary of the grouping's political and strategic activity. In this regard, the Russia-Ukraine conflict could have affected the cohesiveness within BRICS.

Russian President Vladimir Putin did not physically attend the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, due to the Moscow-Kyiv conflict. And the Western sanctions and restrictions, which have reduced Moscow's global visibility, go against BRICS' efforts to help build a "peaceful" and "prosperous" world.

Addressing, if not resolving, the important differences between BRICS members could also take time. Thankfully, the BRICS Summit saw Chinese and Indian leaders meeting on the sidelines and agreeing to take measures to restore peace along the disputed borders. Simul-

taneously, the two countries' armies reached a deal on patrolling their disputed borders to end a military impasse last week.

The formal expansion of BRICS will certainly create new opportunities. Yet all BRICS member states should work to help end the Russia-Ukraine conflict. While economic collaboration is often conducive to enhancing members' mutual political trust, resolving member states' strategic differences is more crucial for laying a solid foundation for intra-BRICS cooperation. And before further expansion of BRICS, the existing member states should strengthen the grouping's internal unity.

The author is a professor emeritus at and former executive dean of the Institute of International Studies, Fudan University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS

CAI CUIHONG AND LIU BEINING

Ensuring 'win-win cooperation' philosophy wins

As the EU recalibrates its semiconductor strategy, China should pursue chances to collaborate with it to avoid isolation due to technological decoupling

As global technological competition heats up, the semiconductor industry has emerged as a critical battleground for great power rivalry. To avoid being sidelined in this competition, the European Union is recalibrating its semiconductor strategy in response to the fierce



Cai Cuihong



Liu Beining

confrontation between China and the United States. With China's rapid progress in semiconductor technology and the US' ongoing push for technological decoupling from China, the EU faces unprecedented pressure and challenges. To address these issues, the EU is not only focusing on enhancing its technological sovereignty, but also adjusting its semiconductor strategy through multiple perspectives, including geopolitics, economic security, and technological competition. These adjustments will not only profoundly affect China-EU relations but also reshape the global technology landscape, potentially transforming the global semiconductor supply chain.

In formulating its semiconductor strategy, the EU places significant emphasis on geopolitical security. Given the highly interconnected nature of the semiconductor supply chain in today's globalized world, technological sovereignty is intrinsically linked to geopolitical security. China's rapid ascent in the semiconductor sector has heightened the EU's fears of becoming overly reliant on external suppliers, potentially compromising its role in the global supply chain. Such dependence, particularly amid potential international tensions or trade conflicts, could prove to be a strategic liability.

French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that Europe "in the long run will disappear geopolitically" amid the current competi-

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

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SUN CHENGHAO AND SUN YUHAN

Aiding one and all

China and the US should not only enhance the capacity for risk assessment and safety supervision in AI, but also help developing countries in the field

As the world's two largest economies and leading powers in science and technology, China and the United States promoting cooperation in the field of artificial intelligence will not only benefit both sides, but also make a positive impact on the world.



Sun Chenghao



Sun Yuhan

China and the US held the first meeting of the inter-governmental dialogue on AI in May this year. It has not only enhanced exchanges and understanding between the two sides, but also demonstrated the complexity of AI technology and the governance challenges brought by differences in national conditions between the two countries.

Different from other governance actors such as tech companies and social organizations, Chinese and US governments should shoulder more responsibilities, join hands to promote "AI development for good", and enhance the ability of AI technology regulation.

of the US, ranking first in the world.

In the field of technology, Chinese and US governments can start from complementary technologies and associated industries, guiding various sectors to engage in more direct and effective dialogue and cooperation to bridge cognitive gaps and advance technological progress. Exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and US tech professionals and industry representatives can enhance technological mutual trust and promote technological complementarity. Meanwhile, the application of technological innovation requires the support of industrial foundations. For example, although Tesla has world-leading technologies, it cannot win in global commercial competition without the support of China's complete new energy production supply chain. China and the US can guide their scientific and technological communities and industries to establish stable, in-depth and sincere communication channels on the basis of mutual respect, so as to make full use of their respective advantages and achieve mutually beneficial cooperation.

In the field of ethics, China and the US have common expectations for AI technology to protect basic human rights, maintain social equity and manage development risks, but there exist differences in data use, algorithmic transparency and automatic decision-making. Bridging differences is always hard and time-consuming. But China and the US can cooperate to build up comprehensive ethical standards.

With regard to the business environment and AI regulation, both China and the US face the challenge of how governments and tech com-

panies can work together to address the risks of AI. The "enterprise-independent" market economy model, also known as "liberal market economy", pursued by the US has declined. It all began during Donald Trump's presidency, when his "America First" stance prompted the US federal government to further intervene in the market and industrial development, luring the manufacturing industry back by imposing tariffs and subsidizing mergers and acquisitions. The Joe Biden administration has, to a certain extent, continued Trump's "America First" strategy. Furthermore, it has required enterprises to cooperate with the government and assume more social responsibilities, which enables the US government to use the technological power of tech giants to strengthen the country's competitive advantage.

Based on this, the two governments can further communicate on how to implement more predictive compliance regulations for AI tech companies and how to guide companies to play a more active role in AI governance.

In terms of building global consensus, China and the US should not only play an exemplary role in ensuring technological security and improving human well-being, but also bear the common responsibility of helping developing countries enjoy the dividends of AI development, given that the misuse or even loss of control of AI technology may bring catastrophic risks to all mankind.

In terms of technology safety, the two governments should discuss the establishment and operation of AI risk and accident detection departments. Furthermore, on the basis of establishing a communication mechanism on the develop-

ment and potential risks of AI technology, the two governments should guide their scientific research institutions, tech companies and other technology development entities to actively promote exchanges and cooperation, so as to share risk detection and prevention experience to nip security risks in the bud.

In terms of improving the well-being of all mankind, China and the US should give full play to their respective advantages and exchange views on building a global AI cooperation platform and helping developing countries promote AI capacity-building.

According to a recent research by the International Monetary Fund, developing countries such as Cambodia and Tanzania face conditions that are very different in terms of the economic environment and potential sources of growth that China and the US enjoyed in the earlier stages of their economic development. The birth of a series of new technologies represented by AI will bring about an automation revolution in the production process, and developing countries with labor advantages as the lifeblood of economic development will bear the brunt. Due to emerging technologies, more investment could be shifted to advanced economies that have already accomplished automation, further widening the gap between rich and poor countries.

In this sense, China and the US should give full play to their respective advantages and guide relevant enterprises and social organizations to actively promote fairness and efficiency in global AI technology development.

In terms of talent cultivation, the two countries can make use of their existing expert teams and educa-



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tion and training systems to establish exchange forums and training platforms for AI talent worldwide. They can provide basic AI technology and application training for researchers from developing countries, so as to narrow the technology gap.

In terms of computing resources, the two countries can, on the basis of reaching consensus on infrastructure construction and platform interface standards, carry out specific cooperation with developing countries such as joint construction of AI infrastructure and sharing of computing resources network platforms. In addition, they can promote the independent operation of the AI industry in recipient countries, in conjunction with local AI talent training outcomes.

In a nutshell, in the face of rapidly changing AI technologies and increasingly complex governance challenges, it is imperative for China and the US to seize and deepen

existing consensus, and conduct diversified cooperation in technology, ethics, regulation and global governance through pragmatic dialogues. The two countries should not only further enhance the overall capacity in AI risk assessment and AI safety supervision, but also work together to provide support for developing countries' AI capacity-building, so as to build and share a sustainable global AI ecosystem that benefits everyone.

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WORLD

Cease-fire hopes falter amid killings in Palestine, Lebanon

UN condemns 'harrowing' toll on Gaza civilians as casualties, regional tensions grow

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Any momentum in recent cease-fire talks mediated in Qatar was again overshadowed by Israel's weekend strikes on Iran and continued killings in Lebanon and Gaza, with the toll in northern Gaza in particular shocking the United Nations.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said the plight of Palestinian civilians trapped in northern Gaza is "unbearable", as hundreds have been killed just in the past few weeks, while more than 60,000 others have been forced to flee yet again.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said on Monday that at least 43,020 people have been killed since October last year.

"The secretary-general is shocked by the harrowing levels of death, injury and destruction in the north, with civilians trapped under rubble, the sick and wounded going without lifesaving healthcare, and families lacking food and shelter amid reports of families being separated and many people detained," Dujarric said in a statement.

"The secretary-general underscores that the parties to the conflict must respect and protect civilians, including humanitarian workers and first responders whose vital work must be facilitated and protected — not impeded and jeopardized. In the name of humanity, the secretary-general reiterates his calls for an immediate cease-fire."

The statement came just as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrapped up a weeklong Middle East trip, a last-ditch effort by the Joe



Palestinians gather to buy bread from a bakery in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday.
MOHAMMED SALEM / REUTERS

Biden administration to secure a cease-fire deal before US elections next week, but which ended in vain.

Jawaid Iqbal, chairman of the Department of West Asian and North African Studies at Aligarh Muslim University in India, told China Daily, "The Palestinian resistance factions have laid out clear conditions for any negotiations: a permanent cease-fire, full withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, lifting the siege, rebuilding Gaza and establishing a serious prisoner exchange deal."

However, these demands threaten Israel's control over Gaza, which is why Israel insists on maintaining control of Gaza's southern border with Egypt and setting up numerous checkpoints, he said.

On Sunday, Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi proposed a two-day cease-fire in Gaza, Ahran Online reported. The initiative would

involve the exchange of four Israeli captives for a number of Palestinian prisoners.

El-Sisi said negotiations would then proceed within 10 days to finalize measures in the Gaza Strip aimed at achieving a complete cease-fire and ensuring the entry of aid. The plan was announced in Cairo alongside Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

Seeking justice

Meanwhile, Nasser Abu Bakr, a member of the Arab Parliament, said on Sunday that the Arab Parliament had approved a proposal to establish a parliamentary team that will approach the International Criminal Court to file lawsuits against Israel, Wafa reported.

The General Secretariat, represented by Deputy Speaker Ahmad al-Jabouri, will work with the Pales-

tinian delegation to determine the process and content of the complaint.

On Oct 22, the Arab League, in an emergency meeting, issued a statement calling for more punitive measures against Israel. The bloc reiterated its support for a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, along with arrest warrants for Israeli leaders. It also criticized US military aid to Israel.

Responding to Israel's attack over the weekend, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said on Monday that Iran "will use all available tools to deliver a definite and effective response to the Zionist regime (Israel)."

The nature of Iran's response depends on the nature of the Israeli attack, Baghaei added, without elaborating.

Reuters contributed to this story.

Olive trees stand silent as harvests lost to conflict

BEIRUT — Hassan Naim, a 60-year-old farmer displaced from the village of Rab El Thalathine in southeastern Lebanon to Rachaya el-Wadi in the country's east, used to harvest olives in his fields at this time of year.

However, for the second consecutive year, the joy of the harvest has been overshadowed by the sounds of shelling in southern Lebanon amid the continuing escalation of the Hezbollah-Israel conflict.

"A long distance separates us from the olive fields and the seasonal blessings we used to anticipate each October," Naim told Xinhua News Agency.

"The armed confrontations and forced displacement have deprived farmers in border areas of their olive harvest, their main source of livelihood amid the worsening economic situation."

Tensions along the Lebanon-Israel border have escalated since Oct 8 last year, when Hezbollah launched rockets at Israel in support of Hamas, displacing tens of thousands of Lebanese and disrupting agriculture in the south.

Walid Daher, a farmer from the southeastern Lebanese town of Shebaa, said olives in border areas are a source of livelihood for more than 85 percent of families who rely on this "season of abundance" to meet urgent needs before winter.

"Olives protect farmers from poverty and provide them with oil, which is used in most dishes."

Daher urged Lebanese authorities to exert maximum effort through international actors and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to establish a truce that would allow olive farmers in the border area to harvest this season.

Lebanese Agriculture Minister Abbas Hajj Hassan told Xinhua that more than 50,000 olive trees were burned and thousands more damaged because of Israeli bombs.

Continuing Israeli bombardment of the agricultural sector, particularly olive fields, has devastated farmers who have lost two consecutive seasons, with many orchards destroyed, he added.



The armed confrontations and forced displacement have deprived farmers in border areas of their olive harvest, their main source of livelihood amid the worsening economic situation."

Hassan Naim, a displaced Lebanese farmer

Once the conflict subsides, the ministry will assess the damage to the agricultural and livestock sectors, including the olive fields, which span about 12,000 hectares in southern Lebanon, in preparation for compensating the owners, he said.

"The Lebanese government has notified the United Nations of the agricultural losses caused by Israeli bombing."

According to the Agriculture Ministry, Lebanon has more than 15 million olive trees, producing 150,000 to 250,000 metric tons of olives annually, which yields 15,000 to 25,000 tons of olive oil. Of this, about 5,000 to 8,000 tons are exported.

Nahida al-Zein, displaced from the southern village of Aitaroun to Joub Jannine in the east, told Xinhua that she inherited an olive grove from her father, which has about 100 mature trees producing about 30 cans of oil each year.

She used to send the oil to friends as gifts, but now she longs for just one bottle, which has become difficult to obtain.

"Now we use vegetable oil from donors instead of our southern olive oil, which won an award at the 2023 NYIOOC World Olive Oil Competition in New York City," she said.

XINHUA

Saudi Arabia advocates enhanced cultural ties

By YANG RAN
yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn

Saudi Arabia's Tourism Minister Ahmed Al Khateeb has emphasized the robust political and economic ties between China and Saudi Arabia, expressing hopes for deeper cultural and tourism exchanges to further enhance bilateral relations and mutual prosperity.

Describing the relationship as "amazing", Al Khateeb said China is Saudi Arabia's main trade partner, with Chinese construction companies and investors actively involved in his country's Vision 2030 projects.

Since 2001, Saudi Arabia has been China's largest trading partner in the Middle East, and in 2013, China became Saudi Arabia's top partner overall. Bilateral trade reached \$107.23 billion last year, surpassing \$100 billion for the second consecutive year and accounting for more than 35 percent of China's trade with Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

In 2022, China and Saudi Arabia signed agreements to align China's Belt and Road Initiative with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, alongside cooperation documents in energy, investment and education. This has accelerated their collaboration, with a current focus on expanding cultural and tourism cooperation to enhance people-to-people connections.

Al Khateeb emphasized the importance of cultural exchanges, which play a crucial role in both the BRI and Vision 2030. "Both countries are completely aligned to connect the Middle East with the East and build bridges," the minister said during his visit to Beijing on Oct 17.

He expressed a strong desire to expand travel and tourism ties with China, highlighting Saudi Arabia's range of attractions — from seaside



Visitors taste Saudi coffee during the Saudi Tourism Festival at the Temple of Heaven Park in Beijing on Oct 21. The festival, held from Oct 18 to 26, featured interactive booths and live performances.
DU JIANPO FOR CHINA DAILY

resorts and historic sites to modern cities and sports events — that appeal to Chinese tourists.

In the first half of this year, more than 100,000 Chinese tourists visited Saudi Arabia, a 29 percent increase year-on-year. The influx of Chinese tourists, both for leisure and business, has had a profound effect on Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, Al Khateeb said.

Easier travel

To attract more Chinese tourists, Saudi Arabia has launched initiatives to make travel easier, including simplified visa processes, Chinese signage at airports and increased flight frequencies.

It has also been granted Approved Destination Status for Chinese group tours since July 1, with major Chinese travel agencies launching Saudi tour packages.

"We are working with the Chinese government to expand the training program for Mandarin-speaking tour guides," Al Khateeb said.

Chinese language education has rapidly developed in Saudi Arabia, with four universities now offering Chinese majors and the Confucius Institute at Prince Sultan University in Riyadh opening in June last year. The Education Ministry has also introduced Chinese language education in schools across six regions.

"We have more than 1,000 Saudi students studying in China, who will help us develop the tourism industry," Al Khateeb said. "Additionally, we have received about 180 teachers from China to teach Chinese in public primary and middle schools."

Saudi Arabia is also embracing Chinese culture, with widespread Chinese restaurants and the Chinatown in Riyadh's Boulevard World zone.

"Saudis are very familiar with Chinese culture," Al Khateeb said. "China now stands as one of the top destinations for Saudis. In the past, many Saudis visited China for business; in recent years, we are encouraging more Saudis to visit China for leisure."

China welcomed more than 20,000 Saudi tourists last year, and the number is expected to continue growing, supported by initiatives to boost tourism and deepen bilateral relations, according to Saudi tourism authorities.

"In the old days, we had the Silk Road connecting Saudi Arabia and the Arab Peninsula with China," Al Khateeb said.

"Now, we are rebuilding and reinventing that history by connecting the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, with China. We want Saudis to enjoy Chinese culture while inviting the Chinese to experience the Arabian culture represented by Saudi Arabia."

US traders eye return to Chinese market

NEW YORK — Pecan growers, processors and traders in the United States have expressed their eagerness to return to the Chinese market after struggling with declining prices, thin profit margins, rising input costs and overseas market setbacks in recent years.

Major players in the industry stressed the need to reduce tariffs between the US and China to reopen access to the Chinese market, once the leading export destination of US pecans.

Industry insiders said low wholesale prices and higher input costs have largely squeezed the profitability of upstream businesses recently.

Last year, US pecan growers received an average sales price of \$1.68 per pound, down from \$1.8 in 2022 and \$2.16 in 2021, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

The US pecan industry used to earn higher prices before China imposed tariffs in 2018 in response to additional US tariffs targeting imports from China, said Will Easterlin, co-owner of Easterlin Pecan in the US state of Georgia.

Easterlin said his company shipped about 200 containers of pecans to China in recent years, much fewer than the 600 to 900 containers shipped annually before the trade conflict.

Currently, the pecan price is

about \$2 to \$2.5 per pound, with little profit margin, said Brad Ellis, co-president of Ellis Bros Pecans. Production expenses have also increased because of higher costs of fuel, labor and chemicals.

Inflation is "killing us on the production side because the price of fuel and labor is making it where it's not profitable for the farmer to stay in business", Ellis said.

Randy Hudson, CEO of Hudson Pecan and former president of the US Pecan Growers Council, said, "Growing pecans and selling pecans in the US right now is a losing proposition."

Hurricane Helene recently dealt a severe blow to Georgia's pecan farmers, with about one-third of growers in the state affected, said Mary Mikelyn Bruorton, executive director of the Georgia Pecan Growers Association.

Preliminary data showed the hurricane affected about 19,000 hectares of pecan orchards and destroyed about 400,000 pecan trees, Bruorton said.

Hudson, whose orchards are mainly located near Ocilla in Irwin County, said he lost 30 to 40 percent of his trees to the storm.

Although efforts are underway to save as many trees as possible, "it'll take 10 years before we start harvesting enough nuts" to cover

the maintenance costs of raising a tree, Hudson said.

Given the scale and readiness of the Chinese market, US pecan business insiders are calling for a return to it to overcome current difficulties.

"China has always been a really good friend to the US pecan producers, and we would really like to open those channels up back to China," Hudson said.

Chinese tariffs posed significant challenges to US pecan exports, putting them at a disadvantage globally, he said. "Personally, I am not fond of tariffs. Because quite honestly, the tariff is passed back to the consumer with higher priced goods."

The tariffs were introduced during former president Donald Trump's administration, effectively halting US pecan shipments to China, he said. "President Joe Biden had the opportunity to work with China and remove those tariffs through bargaining processes. And it was not done."

Ellis, who manages 1,200 hectares of pecan orchards, said he hoped the tariff dispute would be resolved.

"We would like to see relationships with China go back to a level where we can easily trade US agricultural products to China because they have a big consumer base."

XINHUA

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WORLDUS

Pride in *thangka* tradition motivates artist

Niangben recently held an exhibition in New York, where he featured detailed works from the ancient Tibetan art

By MINGMEILI in New York
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Once he was a 12-year-old boy painting strokes and grinding pigments from dawn till dusk. Now, four decades later, Niangben stands as a *thangka* master, passing on the ancient technique to a new generation.

Niangben recently concluded his latest exhibition, *Inheritance and Beyond*, in New York, presenting 16 pieces that celebrate Tibetan Buddhism — a culture deeply tied to the Xizang autonomous region, known for its towering mountains and sweeping river valleys.

The exhibition, held at the Rockefeller State Park Preserve art gallery in Pleasantville, New York, in the Hudson Valley, mirrors the essence of Northwest China — particularly Qinghai province, and Xizang in Southwest China — with its picturesque terraces, plateaus, rivers and mountains at a gentler elevation, making Niangben's art "feel like home."

"I felt truly proud, as an artist, bringing such rich cultural heritage to the United States and the world," Niangben, 53, told China Daily.

"It's more than just art, it's a record of history. This painting tells the stories of the past. I want more people to see the value of *thangka* art and culture. My goal is to bring *thangka* to the world so that those who've never seen it can understand its beauty," he said. "I believe people will appreciate it, learn to preserve and build upon it, and share it," Niangben said at the exhibition's reception, wearing traditional Tibetan clothing that he said represents himself and his culture.

Regong art, which includes *thangka* painting, clay sculpture, applique, and wood and stone carving, has been passed down through generations by local artisans. The distinctive art form from the Regong region, especially *thangka*, is recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage and also has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO.

Growing up in the Regong region of Huangnan Tibetan autonomous prefecture in southeast Qinghai, his family and the village faced poverty.

With two younger brothers and four elder sisters, Niangben took on the responsibility of supporting his family and began an apprenticeship under *thangka* master Xiawu Cairang, who himself was a student of the renowned artist Zhang Daqian, one of the most famous Chinese artists of the 20th century.

Initially, painting *thangka* was merely a way for Niangben to earn money, but he soon developed a deep passion and talent for the art. Over the years, he dedicated himself to studying Regong *Thangka* and Tibetan Buddhism.

In August 2006, Niangben established the Qinghai Huangnan Regong Painting Institute, the first *thangka* art institute in the region, and became its director.

"Our goal in starting this institute was to open up learning opportunities for more people," Niangben said. "Traditionally, this art was passed down within families, from father to son, one-on-one, but that just wasn't enough. At first, I could only take in about a dozen kids to study at my place, but now we're able to accept over 70 each year."

The institute covers 120,000 square meters, with a building area of 7,000 square meters, focusing on protecting, preserving and promoting the intangible cultural heritage of Regong art, as well as training local artists. Niangben said that this large space allows more children to learn and engage with the art.

"Every year, we check how many students graduate and how many new kids we can take in. Our institute is really here for kids from low-income families, the 'left-behind' children (who remain in rural areas while their parents migrate to cities for work). We cover their meals, housing and education — all free of charge," Niangben said.

The institute has been recognized as a National Cultural Industry Demonstration Base, a National Intangible Cultural Heritage Productive Protection Demonstration Base, and a Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Training Base.

"Painting *thangka* is time-consuming and requires sincerity and patience," Niangben said. "It takes an artist weeks or months to finish



Top: *Thangka* master Niangben often spends weeks or even months completing a single piece, depending on its size. He said that painting *thangka* is time-consuming and demands sincerity and patience. **Left:** *Avalokitesvara With One Thousand Hands and One Thousand Eyes* by *thangka* master Niangben. Painted on cotton, Niangben used pure gold and other mineral pigments for the colors. **Above:** In August 2006, Niangben founded the Qinghai Huangnan Regong Painting Institute, the first *thangka* art institute in the region, where he serves as director. The institute provides opportunities for children from low-income families and "left-behind" children (those who remain in rural areas while their parents work in cities) to learn *thangka* painting. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"I felt truly proud, as an artist, bringing such rich cultural heritage to the United States and the world."

Niangben, *thangka* art master

a painting."

The pieces he brought to New York took an average of two to three months each to complete. Visitors can view not only the vibrant, colorful Buddha figures but also the line-drawn sketches. They can observe the detailed color-mixing Niangben uses, with precious mineral pigments like gold, silver and cinnabar, along with natural dyes from plants such as saffron and gardenia, which

can make the art last for decades.

"It's amazing to see how so many beautiful works have been preserved because artists used this type of mineral pigment. Take the murals at Dunhuang or in the Potala Palace, for example — they've stayed vibrant for hundreds of years without fading. That's really something unique about our Eastern murals," Niangben said.

The use of natural mineral

pigments allows *thangka* paintings to endure for millennia, giving them exceptional collectible value. The high-quality materials are also very costly.

He said that the use of the pigments makes the art form hard to replace with today's digital painting — as *thangka* art has strict requirements for color-mixing, outlining and more. It not only requires the meticulous techniques of traditional Chinese painting but also demands the artist's skill in grinding pigments and controlling temperature and humidity.

When painting Buddha figures, he likes to use bold, exaggerated colors alongside the statues' graceful forms, blending reality with imaginative settings to create a vivid artistic world. In contrast, when depicting real-life scenes, he uses natural colors to capture the simplicity of the landscape.

"These colors aren't just basic watercolors or oil paint colors — they are all carefully mixed and ground by hand. The progress is also pretty complex. We need to grind the minerals daily, and even small changes in pressure can subtly shift the color. For example, heavier grinding might produce one shade, while a lighter grind gives you another," Niangben said.

"Each step — drafting, coloring, shading, adding gold lines and drawing fine details — tests the artist's skill. The artist has to keep learning

all the time: studying Buddhist culture, understanding the deeper meaning and putting real heart into *thangka*," Niangben said. "We need to continue to refine our artistry and keep learning."

Thangka is also considered a spiritual practice of Buddhism and a historical representation of the religion.

"This *thangka* art form has over 2,000 years of history in Tibetan and Buddhist-related culture. It is a heritage. ... *Thangka* itself is an art form that originated in Buddhism as a way to represent faith. The core message is to be kind to others, to do one's best to help others," he said.

Niangben said that his faith has been his reason for persevering all these years — not only his dedication to Buddhism but also his commitment to introducing this niche form of traditional Chinese and ethnic art to more people.

He traveled to Chengdu, Sichuan province, from 1995 to 1997 to deepen his understanding of traditional Chinese *gongbi* painting techniques. He said he believed that *thangka* holds great potential for creativity, capable of portraying everything from astronomy to geography, bridging ancient and modern themes.

In July 2008, to celebrate the successful hosting of the 29th Olympic Games in Beijing, Niangben created three paintings of the Fuwa mascots, later collected by the Beijing

Olympic Committee.

In 2009, he painted two works, *Princess Wencheng's Journey to Tibet*, symbolizing unity between Han and Tibetan peoples, and *The Founding Ceremony*, celebrating the establishment of the People's Republic of China, both donated to the State Council.

In November 2009, he created *The Tenth Anniversary of Macao's Return to China*, which he donated to the Macao Special Administrative Region. Niangben received the first Chinese Youth Arts Award in December 2011 and, in January 2013 earned the title of Chinese Master of Arts and Crafts.

"Our Chinese nation is home to 56 ethnic groups, each with its rich cultural heritage. As an artist from a minority region, creating works with such themes fills me with pride," he said. "These pieces reflect the harmony and unity among our 56 ethnic groups, and anyone who sees them feels a deep connection."

Promoting *thangka* art overseas is difficult, Niangben said, but his passion for sharing its beauty keeps him motivated.

"It's my responsibility, and I hope this culture of Tibet can be preserved by more artists like me," Niangben said. "Art knows no borders, and this painting technique is truly rare. We hope that *thangka* art can be appreciated and loved by more people in the US and the world."

SPORTS

TENNIS



China's Zheng Qinwen poses with her trophy after winning the Pan Pacific Open at Ariake Coliseum in Tokyo on Sunday. The title was world No 7's third of the year. AP

Zheng Qinwen hails consistency after third title of the year in Tokyo

TOKYO — Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen hailed her newfound consistency after capturing her third title of the year on Sunday, beating Sofia Kenin in the Pan Pacific Open final in Tokyo.

China's Zheng beat American Kenin 7-6 (5), 6-3 to extend an impressive run of form this year for the world No 7.

The 22-year-old became the first Chinese player to win an Olympic singles tennis gold when she triumphed in Paris.

She also won in Palermo and finished runner-up in Wuhan and at the Australian Open.

Zheng struggled for consistency after losing to Aryna Sabalenka in Melbourne at the start of the year, and she said it had forced her to reevaluate her mindset.

"When I made the final at the Australian Open, everybody said it was really good, but afterward, I had ups and downs at the other tournaments," she said.

"I started to repair myself and start thinking again about the kind of mentality I need."

Zheng, the top seed in Tokyo, kept her cool to delay a tight first set, despite two rain delays, before pressing home her advantage to take the second comfortably.

She hit a total of 16 aces to finally lift the trophy, having lost to Russia's Liudmila Samsonova in the final two years ago.

"I did some good preparation here," she said. "In all the matches I played, only one went to three sets, so I would say it's a quite successful tournament for me."

Kenin injury scare

Kenin, the 2020 Australian Open champion, had an injury scare when she retired from her doubles semifinal on Saturday.

She played the final with heavy strapping on her upper leg and said she "felt it," but "Qinwen played well and deserved to win."

It was the world No 155's first final of 2024, and she was looking

to end a title drought that stretches back more than four years.

"I expected nothing but the best from her because she's been having an amazing year and she's a top-10 player," said Kenin.

"I just wanted to see where I stand. I feel like, overall, it was a great match."

Neither player was allowed to get into a rhythm early in the match, as rain twice brought play to a halt.

The roof was eventually closed and Zheng edged ahead with the slimmest of margins to take the first set in a tiebreak.

Backed by a large contingent of Chinese fans, the 22-year-old took control of the second set early.

She closed it out when Kenin hit a return that was called in, but overturned when Zheng successfully appealed.

"I was pretty sure the ball was out because I saw the mark," said Zheng.

"In my eyes it was far away, but when the challenge came out it was really close, only a tiny bit."

Zheng has already qualified for next month's season-ending WTA Tour Finals in Saudi Arabia.

"It's tough to say if it's going to help me in Riyadh, because every tournament is different," she said.

"The conditions change a lot. Of course, it's going to help with my confidence."

Zheng earned her third title of the year and first on a hard court since winning in Guangzhou last year. She has gone 28-4 since Wimbledon, including a 12-2 run during the tour's Asian swing.

The 25-year-old Kenin had one of the best performances of the season. The American was ranked as high as No 4 early in 2020. However, a series of injuries, including ankle and quadricep ailments, made her WTA ranking drop to its current 155.

The WTA Finals begin Nov 2 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

AFP

Danilovic wins WTA Guangzhou Open

Olga Danilovic claimed her second career WTA Tour title after beating qualifier Caroline Dolehide 6-3, 6-1 in the WTA Guangzhou Open final on Sunday.

Danilovic dropped only one set during her Guangzhou title run, besting Erika Andreva, Diane Parry, Mananchaya Sawangkaew and top seed Katerina Siniakova in the semifinals.

"I'm so happy about the way I played the whole week, the whole tournament," Danilovic said.

"I'm so proud of myself and my team. I showed what I can do and proved it to myself. I'm so happy and very excited to be finishing the season this way," the 23-year-old Serbian added.

In the doubles final, top seeds Siniakova and Zhang Shuai eased past Katerina Piter and Fanny Stollar 6-4, 6-1. Siniakova and Zhang

had not lost a single set during the week.

With the doubles title, Zhang has won two single titles and two doubles titles in Guangzhou in 12 years.

"Guangzhou Open is the most special one for me. I made my WTA tour debut here and won my first WTA title here," Zhang said.

The victory marks Siniakova's 27th career doubles title and fifth of the season. This is also Zhang's 14th career doubles title and first of the season.

"It is an event that has long history, when I was a kid, I watched Li Na win her first title here, and I am very happy to see a growing number of Chinese players enjoy victory here. I want to offer my gratitude to all who made this event happen," Zhang added.

XINHUA

BASKETBALL

Cui makes his point

Young Chinese star scores on NBA debut with the Brooklyn Nets



By SUN XIAOCHEN
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One point, one missed free throw, yet a lot more buzz than he'd expected to spark with such an insignificant stat line — the Brooklyn Nets rookie Cui Yongxi's low-key start on Sunday in the NBA has drawn the attention of the league's biggest overseas market.

With the crowd at the Barclays Center clapping the Nets' first win of the 2024-25 regular season, those watching from China on Monday morning celebrated with a little extra pride, after Cui, a Chinese national team forward, ended the country's long wait to see another of its own to score in the world's top league, following on from former Houston Rockets' center Zhou Qi's exploits in October 2018.

Cui was subbed on with the Nets leading 111-92 against the Milwaukee Bucks and one minute and 58 seconds to go, becoming the seventh Chinese player to ever appear in a regular season game, before the 21-year-old drew a foul from the Bucks' Andre Jackson Jr on a lay-up attempt with 56.8s on the clock.

The big-time nerves kicked in, of course, as Cui missed his first shot on the line before nailing the second to help the Nets close out a 115-102 win against the Bucks, the franchise's first victory this season in its third game under new coach Jordi Fernandez.

The one-point finish made Cui only the second Chinese player in six years to score in the league since Zhou's two-point performance in Houston's 85-104 defeat by the Portland Trail Blazers on Oct 30, 2018.

Not the most talented, nor the most decorated — not even in China's domestic league — Cui's journey from going undrafted this summer to making his regular-season debut on Sunday, despite spending barely over a minute in action, has made China's young hopefuls dare to dream big again.

It was already quite a big boost for the sport's struggling profile in the country, with China's national program failing to keep up with the world in the fast-evolving game.

Cui has reiterated in previous interviews that it was the tough experience of missing out on the Olympics with his national squad, due to a disappointing campaign at last year's FIBA World Cup, that provided the biggest push for him to step out of his comfort zone and try to hone his skills in the world's most competitive league.

"I was kind of nervous with the first free throw, but feel much better after making the second," Cui said of the milestone moment in his fledgling career.

"I approached the start of the game as I did with the preseason games: I would focus on playing the first one or two minutes well enough, and then try to do well in



Cui Yongxi of the Brooklyn Nets dribbles the ball up court during an NBA game against the Milwaukee Bucks in New York on Sunday. He is the first Chinese player to take to the court in an NBA regular season game since Zhou Qi played for the Houston Rockets in 2018. Cui converted one of his two free throws for his only point of the game during the Nets' 115-102 victory. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

my next opportunity, whether playing more minutes or fewer, whether it's 30 seconds, or the last three minutes. I only focus on preparing myself to be ready all the time and to do the right thing on the court."

The Nets, owned by Joe Tsai, chairman of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, announced on Sept 20 that it had signed Cui to a two-way contract as part of the franchise's preseason recruitment.

Twenty-one-year-old Cui, a versatile swingman, went undrafted in the summer, after training in the United States following the completion of his second season in the Chinese Basketball Association with Guangzhou Loong Lions in April.

Despite being given the cold shoulder at the 2024 NBA Draft, Cui chose to stay in the States to work out at trials with six different NBA

teams, including Brooklyn, before he played in the Summer League, representing the Trail Blazers on an Exhibit 10 contract.

A busy off-season has seen the CBA's Rookie of the Year (2022-23) grow stronger and sharper, eventually helping him get a foot in the door of the NBA.

Third time's the charm

Cam Thomas scored 32 points as the top contributor in Brooklyn's demolition of the Bucks, which were led by All-Star combo Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard, on Sunday night.

After second-half struggles in recent games at Atlanta and Orlando, the Nets gave rookie coach Fernandez his first career win by outscoring Milwaukee 32-24 in the fourth.

Dennis Schroder added 29 points to the team's tally. The veteran guard made 8-of-15 shots, and, along with Thomas, the duo combined to hit 18-of-36 shots and sink seven of Brooklyn's 16 3s, while going 18-of-19 from the free-throw line.

Noah Clowney and Cameron Johnson contributed 13 apiece for the Nets, who shot 42.9 percent overall. Nic Claxton contributed 10 points and 11 rebounds as the Nets avoided their first 0-3 start since dropping their first seven games of the 2015-16 season under then-coach Lionel Hollins.

Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 22 points, 12 rebounds and seven assists, but never got a chance to dominate. Lillard added 21 points, reserve Bobby Portis contributed 16 points and Brook Lopez, scored 15.

A winning journey from Spain to Brooklyn

Jordi Fernandez kept the game ball from his first NBA win, which he said will be a reminder of where he came from and where he hopes his career will lead.

"I'm going to put it in my office," Fernandez said, "because my wife does a great job decorating the house and she doesn't want my basketball stuff there."

The rookie head coach earned the victory in his third game in charge, when the Brooklyn Nets beat the Milwaukee Bucks 115-102 on Sunday. Fernandez, a native of Badalona, Spain, said his wife and kids were at the game, along with his parents, friends and extended family.

The celebration was the culmination of a 15-year journey that started when Fernandez left Spain at 26. He began coaching in his teens and, after arriving in the United States, worked his way up from head coach of the Canton Charge in the NBA G League to become an assistant on



Brooklyn Nets head coach Jordi Fernandez during an NBA game against the Milwaukee Bucks on Sunday in New York. AP

playoff teams in Denver and Sacramento, before getting his first chance to run his own NBA team last spring.

"It's very special to come all the way from starting at the bottom in the NBA, and working really hard to move up. There have been some good moments, some tough moments, dif-

ferent teams, friends, memories," Fernandez said. "And it's really cool, now you look back, and you have to enjoy this moment because there's only one time that you're a head coach and win a (first) game."

"On the other hand, I also feel like, what's the next step? And we've got to move on to the next thing, and I

want to be in this league, I want to be with this club for a long time."

Fernandez deflected the credit toward his players, who treated him to a postgame celebration that Fernandez said was fun and wet.

"I mean, a guy from Europe, from Spain, being a head coach in the NBA, that's big time," said Nets guard Dennis Schroder, who is German.

Fernandez coached Canada's Olympic team this summer, after leading the Canadians to their first men's basketball medal in 2023, a bronze at the World Cup. He was an assistant with Nigeria's Olympic team at the previous Olympics.

Now, he has his own club in Brooklyn and, after Sunday, a new basketball.

"It represents a moment in my life," Fernandez said, "and you look at it, and it's the beginning of something special."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA