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TRAVEL ON THE MIND

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SCHOLAR'S MISSION

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DRAGON BOAT FEVER

The Living Root club team races in the 45th annual Boston Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival on June 9. Sixty-eight teams with about 2,000 paddlers from across Massachusetts, other New England states and New York competed in 500-meter races. The Dragon Boat Festival, also called *Duanwu*, is a traditional Chinese festival observed on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. WILL WANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hard work sends deserts into retreat

When it comes to deserts, China may be one of the last countries most people would think of, but in fact it has more varieties of deserts than any place on the planet.

Nearly 18% of the country's land mass, 652,500 square miles, is classified as desertified.

However, several generations of hardworking and dedicated Chinese people have made it their raison d'être to push back the deserts. They have done so by thinking outside the box, or grid, planting trees and shrubs, and creating a green Great Wall that spreads across 13 provinces and autonomous regions in northern China and protects more than 370 million acres of farmland.

In 1978 the central government made a significant decision to implement the Three-North Shelterbelt Program to fight against desertification. Since then more than 45% of the desertified land has been controlled, 61% of the soil erosion area has been managed, and the forest coverage rate has risen from just over 5% to 13.84%.

Lu Qi, head of the Three-North program research institute, said: "Each desertification control project is now planned based on the conditions and resources of different areas backed by research findings, and a consensus has been formed that the goal of desertification control is to ensure that people's lives



A worker waters trees planted at the edge of sandy land in Tongliao, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA

and development will not be threatened by deserts, which also need to be protected because they are essential parts of the ecological system."

The innovative action taken in Zhangwu county, Liaoning province, was a step forward in sand control, said Dang Hongzhong, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Forestry and the Three-North program research institute.

In 1952 Zhangwu established China's first sand control research institute, with Liu Bin as its director. Liu and other pioneers in sand control decided to introduce the Mongolian Scots pine from the Greater Hinggan Mountains to control sandy areas.

"In traditional thinking, shrubs or grasses should be used to control shifting sandy areas, and planting trees on shifting sand dunes went against the laws of nature,"

Dang said. "The old experts were not bound by traditional rules, made bold breakthroughs and embarked on an innovative path that no one had expected."

Although they had found a drought-resistant tree species, planting trees on shifting sandy land was challenging. Liu and other sand control pioneers imported Mongolian Scots pines for three years. In the first year, almost all the saplings perished.

"The experts later found that in their original habitat, the Mongolian Scots pine was covered by thick snow in winter, providing insulation and moisture retention.

"However, Zhangwu is very dry in winter and spring, with strong winds, and only two saplings that were accidentally buried by sand survived," Zhang said.

Learning from that experience, researchers covered the next batch of planted pines with sand and soil. Those pine trees survived the winter, growing into the oldest existing forest in the sandy area.

Over the past 70 years the forest coverage rate in Zhangwu has risen from less than 3% to more than 30%, and more than 8,500 forestry technicians have spread the expertise of afforestation and sand fixation to more than 10 provinces, resulting in more than 2.4 million acres of forests being planted.

—YAN DONGJIE AND CUI JIA

Education has pivotal role in improving ties

Chinese President Xi Jinping has said that China-United States education exchanges and cooperation help promote mutual understanding and friendship between the people of the two countries, especially the youths, and this is a project for the future development of bilateral relations.

He made the remark in a recent reply letter to Lamont Repollet, president of Kean University in the U.S. state of New Jersey, adding that China-U.S. ties have a great bearing on the well-being of the two peoples as well as on the future of humanity.

In May 2006, under the care and facilitation of Xi, who was then secretary of the Communist Party of China Zhejiang Provincial Committee, Wenzhou University and Kean University formally signed an agreement to jointly establish Wenzhou-Kean University in the province.

In 2014, with the approval of the Ministry of Education, the new university was officially established.

Currently, Wenzhou-Kean University has about 4,500 students across its undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs, and over 3,300 have earned their undergraduate degrees over the past eight years.

Repollet recently wrote a letter to Xi, introducing the progress and achievements made in China-U.S. education cooperation.

He also voiced his readiness to actively respond to Xi's initiative to help more young people from the U.S. to come to China for exchanges and study, and promote further communication between the younger generations of the two countries.

In his reply, Xi praised Repollet's pledge to deepen education cooperation between the two countries and encourage more U.S. students to come to China for exchanges and study.

Recalling that he witnessed the signing ceremony for the two institutions' cooperation at Kean University in 2006, Xi wrote in his letter, "With

the joint efforts of both sides, Wenzhou-Kean University has achieved remarkable results in its operation, and has become a hallmark program of China-U.S. education cooperation, which is gratifying."

It is hoped that universities of the two countries "will strengthen exchanges and cooperation in various forms, cultivate young ambassadors who know both China and the U.S. well, and build more bridges to boost China-U.S. friendship", he added.

Xi also welcomed Repollet and other members of the U.S. education community to make more visits to China, and asked Repollet to convey his greetings to Dawood Farahi, former president of Kean University.

Currently, Wenzhou-Kean University, Tianjin Julliard School and Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University are among the signature programs of China-U.S. education cooperation.

Observers noted that China-U.S. cooperation in education has seen marked progress in areas ranging from student and academic exchanges to jointly running schools and collaborating on research.

Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. Xie Feng said in a speech this year that the two countries "have established an all-dimensional, multitiered and all-sectoral education cooperation framework, nurturing mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples."

As part of the thriving China-U.S. education exchanges and cooperation, there were nearly 290,000 Chinese studying in the U.S. as of January, accounting for about one-third of the total number of international students in the U.S., according to the Foreign Ministry.

To further boost mutual understanding among young people, President Xi proposed a program in November in San Francisco to invite a total of 50,000 young people from the U.S. to visit China for exchanges over the following five years.

—ZHANG YUNBI

CHINESE ART ACCORDING TO VISION AND VERSE

"As there happened to be a volume of Du Fu's poetry on the table, I selected one suitable couplet for inscription on each of my landscapes," wrote Wang Jian, a celebrated painter in 17th-century China, on the final page of an album of pictures he painted for a longtime friend.

Wang also wrote that he had enjoyed the friendship since the days "when we were young and vigorous".

For Joseph Dolberg, an expert on ancient Chinese painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the painted album, each page in the style of an old master who had come before Wang, is a priceless item of art.

It is also a testament to the friendship between two deeply cultured men who shared

not only a passion for art, but also pain and suffering.

Moreover, it provides a partial understanding of a phenomenon in Chinese art history. "When painters sat down to paint in ancient China, why were they so often painting poetic themes?" asked Dolberg, who has attempted to answer that question through a recent exhibition titled *Vision and Verse: The Poetry of Chinese Painting*. The exhibition at The Met Fifth Avenue galleries in New York featured 90 works drawn almost entirely from The Met's collection.

Although Wang made his choice of poems sound purely accidental, in reality this may not be the case, Dolberg said. "Based on my unscientific observation of Chinese painting

history, Du Fu (712-770) is the most often inscribed poet from the Tang Dynasty (618-907)," he said, referring to an era in Chinese history when the writing of poetry is believed to have reached an artistic pinnacle.

About 1,150 poems attributed to Du that have survived to this day offer proof to the immensity of his oeuvre, which a latter-day painter could "go to and grab whatever he wanted ... to deepen and expand his viewer's pictorial experience and imagination", Dolberg said.

However, that number alone cannot explain it all. "The prestige of Du Fu the poet started to grow posthumously, during the final century of the Tang Dynasty," said Zhang Yinan of the National Library



Azure Cliff with Red Maples by Ming Dynasty painter Wu Bin. This scene of human encounter with nature is accompanied by a verse by Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu inscribed by the painter. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of China, who specializes in ancient Chinese poetry. "It reached such a height in the succeeding Song Dynasty (960-1279) that Du Fu became a cult in himself, commonly worshipped by educated members of society,

some of whom, Su Shi included, used brushes to write and paint," said Zhang, referring to the Song Dynasty polymath who was in turn immortalized by his own words.

SEE EXHIBITION, PAGE 2

SOCIETY

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The live show *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* portraying a royal love affair is among the attractions that impress U.S. attendees of the 14th China-U.S. Tourism Leadership Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China and U.S. look to tourism boom

Vincenzo Perretta, chief executive of Volatour, a travel agency in New York, says he looks forward to the implementation of more favorable tourism policies. "The rate of visitors from China to the United States is quite low, partly because we don't have enough flights," Perretta said during a recent trip to Xi'an, Shaanxi province. "So there is not enough airlift to sustain high volumes," Perretta said at the recent 14th China-U.S. Tourism Leadership Summit held in the city. "But there is definitely potential for both countries to generate more business."

Perretta has visited China many times. "I love China and I think that it is a great place for Americans to discover," he said, adding that many Americans have a very different concept of what China is today, and that he would love to bring more people to explore what the country has to offer. "What we saw in Xi'an was amazing. I visited the city 20 years ago to see the Terracotta Warriors, and it was nice to see that again."

His company signed a cooperation agreement with the government of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, during the summit. "We will help to promote each other's countries and build up what is needed and what is missing," he said.

Perretta's wishes may be met, government officials and those in the tourism industry having proposed the facilitation of travel at the summit, during which 400 industry representatives discussed boosting bilateral tourism collaboration and people-to-people exchanges between the world's two biggest economies. They expressed high expectations for concrete action to improve the visa application process and access to tour information, as well as transport and payment to remove tourism barriers between the two countries.

"The Chinese government has adopted various measures to improve convenience for inbound tourists such as using payment procedures, simplifying the visa process and optimizing the service environment for international tourists," said Gu Huimin, a tourism science professor at Beijing International Studies University, during a forum focusing on facilitating inbound travel

and diversifying experiences. "In addition, China is working on an inbound tourism promotion plan, and the government and companies are working together to provide international guests with more convenience to show how beautiful China is."

Dai Haiyong, head of foreign exchange business with Tencent Financial Technology, said the company has come up with two offerings for international travelers to China. The first is binding international bank cards to the social media app WeChat for QR code payments, and the second is using overseas e-wallets for direct payments, Dai said.

The company has been accelerating cooperation with e-wallets around the world, he said.

"We also launched a solution for small payments without verification. Tourists coming to China don't need to fill out any information and can make quick payments, greatly enhancing overall convenience."
DAI HAIYONG

"We also launched a solution for small payments without verification. Tourists coming to China don't need to fill out any information and can make quick payments, greatly enhancing overall convenience."

Millions of inbound visitors to China have used the company's payment service since July last year and have given positive feedback, Dai said.

More investment will go into diversifying payment methods such as facial recognition, and product functionalities will be streamlined.

"In terms of identity recognition and customer service, we will leverage visual or deep-learning capabilities to better serve everyone," he said.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, said the city has applied an electronic customs clearance system that has played a positive role in facilitating travel for inbound visitors.

Last year the city's financial management bureau worked on a service to convert foreign currencies directly into

Macao's scanning payment system.

"We hope to enhance convenience for our travelers in spending in Macao in the future."

Macao is also using advanced technology to deal with other issues, including making it easier for inbound travelers to search and understand Macao.

Wan Qingchao, executive vice-president of China Eastern Air Holding, said that after five rounds of increased flights, the number of flights between the two countries has now risen to 92 flights a week.

Nevertheless, that is only 28% of the number before the pandemic.

"My colleagues and I are looking forward to more direct flights between the two countries to meet the needs of communication and exchanges, and to continue and deepen the friendship."

U.S. representatives at the summit said they are also working to win back Chinese travelers.

Julie Stufft, deputy assistant secretary for Visa Services with the U.S. Department of State, said China was the No. 1 demand market for U.S. visas, and the U.S. is keen to get back to that level.

"We've done a few things to make that easier," Stufft said. One is to have as few touch points as needed between the government and the traveler and to make it easier to get the interview that is needed, she said.

Another thing is removing the interview requirement when possible. This policy was expanded last year, she said.

"For example, a Chinese student studying in the United States coming back to China a year ago would have needed an interview to get a tourist visa after studying in the United States. Today an interview would not be necessary and we would just process that visa."

The U.S. is also working on keeping the wait time for visas as short as possible and trying to accommodate a visa applicant from any country on a business trip to places such as Tokyo, Frankfurt or Paris, she said.

"That has been a game-changer for us in terms of processing numbers."

The 10-year visa came out in 2014, and Stufft said she expects many Chinese travelers issued one then will want to renew it next year.

— YANG FEIYUE

Exhibition: Paintings and poetry cast light on soul

From page 1

This was despite — some may say because of — the fact that for a large part of his life, Du endured, if not outright anonymity, then repeated rejection and constant poverty.

"Du's personal travails certainly struck a strong chord with those subjected to similar experiences at one point or another, and who constituted the bulk of the literati group in pre-modern China," Zhang said.

In a painting at the exhibition a speck of a figure stands atop a low cliff facing the magnitude of nature. The painter, from the 17th century, adorned his fanned-out work with two lines from a Du poem that goes: "The emerald cliff catches the breeze, a lone cloud thin; Red maples, their backs to the sun, ten thousand trees dense."

For Dolberg, the sense of solitude permeating the painting is all too familiar.

In the same gallery a not-so-distant echo was emitted by another painting, done in the 12th century, depicting a man hurrying through a bare-branched winter forest on the back of a donkey. A boy attendant runs ahead of him, suggesting that the protagonist was a scholar, albeit a slightly woeful one who, seeking warmth, clasps his hands inside the opposite sleeves.

His broad-rimmed hat seems barely to shield him from the chilly blast, his boy companion offering little consolation. The painting does not identify the man, but Dolberg believes he is Du's contemporary Meng Haoran (689-740) who, by the time of the Song Dynasty, had come to embody what the curator calls "the visual iconography of the donkey rider", providing Chinese art history with the image of a suffering poet-intellectual.

"These days we see paintings of travelers in forests, and scholars sitting by waterfalls that don't have a specific title," Dolberg said. "Yet we have to be aware of the fact that a painter from the 12th century was painting for a very different audience than the one com-

ing into The Met Museum in 2024. Those were people who were constantly reading and writing poems. And to speak to that level of scholarship, a painting, rather than being generic, was more likely to have depicted a famous poet or poem that was very much on the minds of people in pre-modern China."

In talking about "scholars sitting by waterfalls", Dolberg was thinking about one man — Li Bai, Du's hedonistic friend who famously wrote, probably after some good drinking, "A cascade plunges a sheer three thousand feet, as if the Milky Way is tumbling down from the sky."

Both Du and Li had once been associated with the image of a donkey rider. But Meng clinched the deal partly thanks to his poet-painter friend Wang Wei (693-761), "one of the first famous Chinese poets who also painted", to quote Dolberg.

Then there is the friendship between Wang Wei and Meng Haoran. "Stay inebriated with rustic wine, read ancient books in mirth," was the poetic advice Wang gave to a disillusioned Meng who, having failed to find fame and a position in the Tang Dynasty capital, was heading back home for a sequestered life.

Self-expression, filtered through literary sensibilities, was at the heart of a unique Chinese art phenomenon known as "the literati painting", of which Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) was a powerful exponent. Zhao came up with the idea that "calligraphy and painting share the same source."

"The idea of a painter writing his own poem rendered in his own calligraphy to create this kind of total artwork fundamentally changed the landscape of Chinese art for the next 600 years," Dolberg said. "That's why we need to take a deep look into the poetry of Chinese painting, not just as a way to gauge feelings and emotions, but also as a resource for understanding what it means to be part of the Chinese culture."

— ZHAO XU



From top: The landscape painting of an album by Wang Jian was made according to a line of poetry by Du Fu. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. Visitors appreciate the artworks of the exhibition *Vision and Verse: The Poetry of Chinese Painting at the Met Fifth Avenue galleries in New York*. SU QIANG / CHINA DAILY



Wangchuan Villa, by an unidentified artist, depicts China's eighth-century poet and painter Wang Wei's country estate in Lantian county, Shaanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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From left: Visitors from the U.S. view a model of the ancient city while touring Xi'an, Shaanxi province. The U.S. guests pose with actresses in traditional costumes. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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BEIJING SPECIAL

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A visitor takes photos of porcelain vases at the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing during Beijing Museum Month on May 18. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

Centuries of art and culture goes on show

From exhibitions to films and book fairs, Beijing residents enjoyed a variety of activities during Beijing Museum Month, which launched on International Museum Day, May 18, and ended on June 18.

During the event's launch ceremony, officials from the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau, one of the event's organizers, announced the four themed weeks of the event, each focusing on exhibitions, cultural and creative products, films and reading.

It's designed to build a "bridge" between the public and museums, promoting the integrated development of museums and education and attracting more people to museums, said staff members of the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau.

More than 100 museums including the National Museum of China and the China National Film Museum participated in the exhibition week from May 18 to May 24, with nearly 1,000 exhibitions held and 10,000 free tickets provided to local people each day.

Of them, the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing, or the eastern branch of the Capital Museum, opened a special exhibition on the coordinated development of Beijing and neighboring Tianjin city and Hebei province on May 18.

The exhibition is jointly organized by the Capital Museum, the Tianjin Museum and the Hebei Museum in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province.

Covering an area of 19,160 square feet, the exhibition is composed of three sections, with 398 cultural relics and archives, according to Zhang Jie, deputy director of the preparatory division of the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing.

By visiting the exhibition, people can learn more about the history of the three regions and how Beijing's metropolitan area



has developed, Zhang said.

The exhibition will last until the end of this year and is open for free to the public.

Additionally, the special exhibition *Zhenguan: Li Shimin's Saga of Prosperous Era* is underway at the National Museum of Classic Books in Haidian district.

Zhenguan refers to the reign of Emperor Li Shimin from the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

During his 23-year reign, Li made achievements including battlefield triumphs, an emphasis on agriculture and a receptive attitude toward good advice, leading to an era of prosperity.

As the first in Beijing to focus on this iconic figure, the exhibition gathers 249 cultural relics from 15 museums around the country including pottery figurines, gold and silver artifacts, stone statues and epigraphs.

It showcases Li's growth from a young general to a great emperor, offering a panorama of the thriving Zhenguan, said staff members from the museum. The exhibition will run until Aug 25.

After seeing the exhibition, Yang Wenjie, a middle school student in Beijing, said she has gained a fuller understanding of the emperor.

"It's interesting for me as I learned something that books didn't tell me before. The emperor in the exhibition is more like an ordinary person," Yang said. "I hope to see more exhibitions like this."

Other exhibitions include one on dinosaur egg fossils at the Geological Museum of China from April 26 to Nov 16 and the exhibition on landscape-themed cultural relics at the Beijing Art Museum from May 21 to May 10, 2025.

During the event's launch ceremony, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau also released the Beijing Museum Guide Map and the Beijing Museum Guide to draw more tourists.

The guide provides detailed information about the 213 museums in Beijing including their history and important collections. It also lists scenic spots, business districts and cultural facilities within a 1.24-mile radius of each museum.

The map divides the 213 museums into seven categories and illustrates where they are sited around the city. On the reverse side are images of the museums along with their basic information including the address, opening hours and contact information.

The last week of May was for cultural and creative works, during which many Beijing museums gave a discount on their official merchandise.

On May 25, the 2024 Museum Cultural Heritage and Innovative Design Competition of Beijing kicked off at the National Natural History Museum of China.

At that weekend, six museums and historical sites such as the Beijing Art Museum and the Miaoying Temple held cultural and creative markets.

The movie week ran from June 1 to 7. With the support of the Beijing Film Administration, nearly 30 museums extended their operating hours to screen some 10 films and held numerous movie-related activities including the online lecture *Understanding a Museum*.

Differing from cinemas, films were shown in the museums' public areas or outdoors, offering visitors a novel experience.

The reading week, running from June 8 to 14, featured an array of activities including book fairs and readings. The Capital Museum and the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing were the main venues of the event.

Capital leads the way with high-profile institutions

At the 2024 Beijing Museum Month launch event on May 18, 10 museums in the capital were named national first-class museums. With this fifth batch, Beijing has increased its number of national first-class museums from the original 18 to 28, leading all cities in the country in terms of quantity.

The 10 museums are the Overseas Chinese History of China; China National Museum of Women and Children; China Customs Museum; the Former Residence of Soong Ching Ling, Honorary President of the People's Republic of China; the Cultural Palace of Nationalities; Civil Aviation Museum; National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature; China Railway Museum; The Museum of Chinese Gardens and Landscape Architecture; and the Xiangshan Museum of Founding of New China.

These distinctive museums cover a range of categories with their high standards of collection, research, exhibition, education and management. They have been playing a pivotal role in the development of culture and museums nationwide and in the efforts of Beijing to build itself into a "City of Museums", according to the event organizers.

During the recent May Day holiday, more than 2 million visitors entered Beijing's museums, marking a historical high with a year-on-year increase of about 30%. The top five museums in terms of visitor numbers were the Palace Museum, the China Science and Technology Museum, the National Museum of China, the Yonghe Lama Temple's Tibetan Buddhist Art Museum and Prince Kung's Palace Museum.

During the holiday, Beijing's museums held 109 exhibitions and activities. About 20 museums provided extended opening hours. Meanwhile, the National Nature History Museum of China, Beijing Art Museum and the Miaoying Temple provided discounted cultural and creative products.

During the holiday, many museums launched themed cultural activities for family visitors. The Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum orga-

nized a series of science lectures for children, the Beijing Planetarium held activities on cosmic knowledge and orchestral music concerts, while the China Railway Museum Eastern Suburbs Museum conducted digital script activities. Those activities were welcomed by families with young children.

In recent years, Beijing has been introducing foreign exhibitions by relying on its high-quality museum resources and flourishing cultural market. Residents can enjoy global exhibitions without leaving the city. Leveraging the exhibitions, the city is building a bridge for exchanges between China and the world and promoting cultural tourism.

In July 2023, Western modern art master Henri Matisse's China solo, titled *Matisse by Matisse*, chose Beijing as its first stop, which became a nationwide hit. The exhibition held at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing showcased more than 280 works and collections, presenting the Frenchman's artistic career on the Chinese mainland for the first time.

Sophie Le Flamanc, deputy director of Musee Matisse, a museum dedicated to the artist, said this exhibition allowed Chinese audiences to appreciate almost all of the Matisse collections. Visiting this exhibition was like visiting the Musee Matisse in France.

In 2020, Beijing officially proposed the construction of a "City of Museums" and included it in the long-term plan for promoting the construction of the national cultural center and the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). Chen Mingjie, head of the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau, said in January that the Beijing City of Museums Construction and Development Plan (2024-35) will be officially released shortly.

Chen mentioned that in 2024, a batch of new museums in Beijing will be built or opened. Projects such as the renovation of the Great Wall of China Museum will complete the underground main structure, while the Yongding River Museum will be awarded a construction permit.

—YUAN SHENGGAO



Visitors take photos of artworks by Henri Matisse at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

City museums attracted more than 80m visits in 2023

Over the past year, Beijing's museums have collectively organized about 700 exhibitions and received more than 80 million visits. As a result, there is a growing interest among young people to visit museums.

This year's Beijing government work report emphasized the need to boost culture innovation and advance the construction of the "City of Museums". Officials and experts brought proposals related to that effort at the 2024 Beijing's two sessions — the annual gathering of Beijing's legislative and political consultative bodies.

"The themes of museums can cover various aspects such as science, history, culture, art and nature, showcasing rural life, traditional crafts and the ecological environment. Museums can be established in places with a certain historical and cultural background.

"Based on resources such as traditional rural residences, old houses in villages, vacant buildings and open spaces, organiz-



Visitors at the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing during the Beijing Museum Month. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

ers can create characteristic exhibition spaces using modern design concepts," said Liu Xue, deputy secretary-general of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Ren Zhe, a member of the political consultative conference from the literary and art field, said that visiting museums can become a norm of life wherever one lives. It is possible to introduce mobile museums, and conduct mobile exhibitions

or temporary displays in places such as parks and shopping centers. Additionally, some museums can be established in neighborhoods by setting up small museums or exhibition spaces to make museums more accessible to the public.

May 18 marked the 48th International Museum Day with the theme "Museums for Education and Research". Liu Chaoying, deputy head of the Chinese Museums Association, said during the event

that museums should not be monotonous; they should have their own style. Museums should enlighten aesthetic enjoyment for people, rather than solely teaching knowledge. Good museums should stand at the forefront of culture and lead the public well.

As a world-renowned ancient capital, Beijing has a history of more than 3,000 years of urban construction. The city is home to seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 3,840 immovable cultural relics, 5.01 million pieces or sets of State-owned movable cultural relics and 102 national-level representative projects of intangible cultural heritage. In 2020, the Beijing city government proposed the construction of the "City of Museums". In 2023, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau released the draft of the city's development plan for the construction of "City of Museums" (2023-35).

The plan emphasized the displaying role of the two key spatial axes of the city: the Central Axis and its extension and

Chang'an Street and its extension. It said the city will promote Dongcheng and Xicheng districts to take the role of the core functional areas of the capital. It also supports the construction of demonstration zones in Chaoyang, Haidian, Fengtai and Shijingshan districts under the framework of the "City of Museums" and guides innovation-driven development in Shunyi, Daxing, Changping, Fangshan and the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area. The plan also encourages the districts of Mentougou, Pinggu, Huairou, Miyun and Yanqing to refine local cultural resources and become a model of developing ecological environments.

By the end of 2023, there were a total of 226 registered museums in the Beijing area. Ten museums were named national first-class museums in the 2024 Beijing Museum Month on May 18, according to government officials. The plan sets a target for the total number of museums in the city to exceed 260 by 2025.

—YUAN SHENGGAO

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Reflections of a China original

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When Kenneth Pomeranz started to become interested in China more than 40 years ago, he was entering a field that few others outside the country had delved deeply into.

Over the ensuing four decades Pomeranz, a history professor at the University of Chicago, transformed himself into an expert on China. He is the only two-time winner in the 50-year history of the John K. Fairbank Book Prize, one of the most important honors for a scholar of Asian studies. He also served as president of the American Historical Association in 2013-14.

When Westerners are doing research on China, they need to bear in mind its uniqueness and let go of stereotypes and prejudices, he says.

When people adopt open attitudes toward one another, recognize their differences and engage in more cultural and academic exchanges, everyone wins, he says.

Pomeranz developed his interest in China as a student at Cornell University where he received a bachelor's degree in history in 1980. A course on China prompted his interest in studying comparisons between the societies.

Despite the predominant focus on European history among his peers in the United States, China was considered a niche interest at the time, but was starting to attract the attention of U.S. researchers as the two countries established diplomatic ties in 1979.

Part of the appeal of China to him was that it was a wide-open field, he says, and the idea of exploring outside the West and trying to think about a huge part of the world that was very different was important to him.

Less developed scholarly literature on China provided an opportunity for broader thinking. In addition, China's unique position as both distinct from the West but also resembling it allowed for fruitful comparative analysis, he says.

"It offered the opportunity to have something that was outside the West but that still resembled the West in certain ways. That made it possible for it to be a comparative or partner."

Pomeranz then became a graduate student at Yale University, where he studied under Jonathan Spence, a world-renowned expert on Chinese history. He started to learn Chinese in the summer



From top: Students from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania visit the Forbidden City in Beijing on May 17. College students from the U.S. try on Peking Opera costumes at Jixiang Theater in Beijing. U.S. students pose for a selfie in front of the Nine-Dragon Screen at the Forbidden City.

PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



of 1981 and did three years of Chinese at Yale, a year and a half of classical Chinese and was then able to read a lot of published material.

"There weren't that many people in the United States

who were on the ground ahead of me. There were some, of course, but it wasn't like in European history where there was just enormous establishment already in place."

In 1985 Pomeranz embarked

"It was still early in China's reform and opening-up era. Nobody knew exactly where things were going, but there was a general sense of great possibilities."

KENNETH POMERANZ



province, where he spent an entire autumn, with weeks in the countryside. His trip also covered a few days in Shanghai and nearly a month in Beijing, a city he thought was already "globalized" at that time.

"Part of what was interesting then in an early time in Chinese-Western relations was how eagerly most of the Chinese I met would talk about the outside world. There was a sense of openness and change.

"It was still early in China's reform and opening-up era. Nobody knew exactly where things were going, but there was a general sense of great possibilities."

After subsequent visits over the decades he witnessed significant changes in China, particularly in the economic well-being and physical health of its population. This prosperity is coupled with increased connectivity and awareness, both globally and locally, he says, with a notable rise in material wealth and improved environmental quality.

Pomeranz's research has focused on three primary areas: reciprocal influences of state, society and economy in late imperial and 20th-century China; the origins of a world economy as the outcome of mutual influences among various regions; and comparative studies of labor, family organization and economic change in Europe and East Asia.

Several things about China are important to bear in mind, he says. First, its immense size sets it apart, being among the largest in terms of land area and population.

"And the complexities ... in terms of how to govern the place, but also what it means to be a member of this society, whether it even makes sense to talk about it as one society."

China-U.S. relations have gone through a rough patch in recent years, and even with a good commitment from both countries to engage in open dialogue, it is evident not all issues will be resolved, he says. However, he sees scope for much more openness and a lot less prejudice.

Interactions between individuals, the translation and publication of literature, the exchange of films and popular culture and various other activities can each serve different purposes to varying extents, he says.

— CHEN YINGQUN AND LIU JIANQIAO

No turning back after a crossroads decision in a new country

Donning a worn-out coat and pedaling a dilapidated bicycle, Ryan Norman seeks to recapture the quintessential elements of traditional rural lifestyles in North China through videos documenting his experiences.

In the videos, liked by hundreds of thousands of viewers, the 40-year-old Californian immerses himself in daily life in Rizhao, Shandong province — bargaining at markets, preparing regional dishes and taking part in traditional festivals.

His fluency in Mandarin, marked by a distinctive, soothing Shandong accent, has endeared him to more than 1.5 million followers on Chinese video-sharing platforms.

Norman says his profound love for Chinese culture, his addiction to the local cuisine and the support of his followers propel him to continually

push boundaries.

"I have traveled to over 50 countries, and China was just the country that fits me for my personality," he says, recounting his 18 years of living and working in China.

Norman's initial foray into China was in 2006, when he was a fresh graduate from the University of Southern California with a computer science degree. In the ensuing years he embarked on a journey in which he set up his own business and eventually became a social media influencer.

His venture into China started with a job offer from a Chinese-American medical device company in Rizhao but quickly took a turn when the company faced bankruptcy.

Norman stood at a crossroads, a moment he describes as pivotal in his life.

"Nobody knew what was going to happen. I couldn't

speak the language and knew nothing about China. I could have gone home, but I saw all the opportunities in international trade, so I decided to stay."

That decision led to the creation of his own firm, focused on importing and exporting products, marking the beginning of an international trade venture that thrives to this day.

Norman's personal life blossomed alongside his business. He met his future wife during the Beijing Olympics in 2008. They married in 2010, and their sons, 7 and 13, have further solidified his ties to China.

"For family life I have absolutely no regrets. For business life I have absolutely no regrets. So now, in retrospect, I know for a fact I've made the right decision."

Throughout the years Norman has witnessed firsthand the rapid development and

technological advances that have made living in China as a foreigner increasingly easier.

Digital payments and streamlined government services are changes that have significantly improved people's lives and made doing business and living in the country easier, he says.

"I can say 100% that China is a very hospitable country toward citizens from any country. It doesn't matter if you're from the U.S. or any country."

Norman's online content, which often focuses on traditional Chinese culture and cuisine, resonates with audiences in China and abroad.

One of the key purposes of his content, he says, is to offer people, especially those born in the 1970s and 1980s, a sense of nostalgia by incorporating a lot of cultural and historical elements.

It also resonates strongly

with his family in the U.S., who follow his updates closely.

"My mom loves them all. Her friends (laugh) like crazy. They love it because they are learning about Chinese culture."

Cooking, a hobby that has turned into a passion, allows him to connect more deeply with the culture and people of his adopted home. Over the years he has become addicted to Chinese food, from the spicy delights of Sichuan to the unique flavors of Shandong. The rich variety of seafood in Rizhao has also offered him abundant choices in addition to his favorite — pancake roll stuffed with scallions.

In China Norman sees no turning back; it is a place where he has found love, success and fulfillment.

"Shandong and Rizhao is my second home," he says. "I will never leave this place."

— XUWEI



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