

Knotty problem

Fewer marriages in Indonesia challenge wedding industry
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Blinken grilled on US withdrawal from Afghanistan

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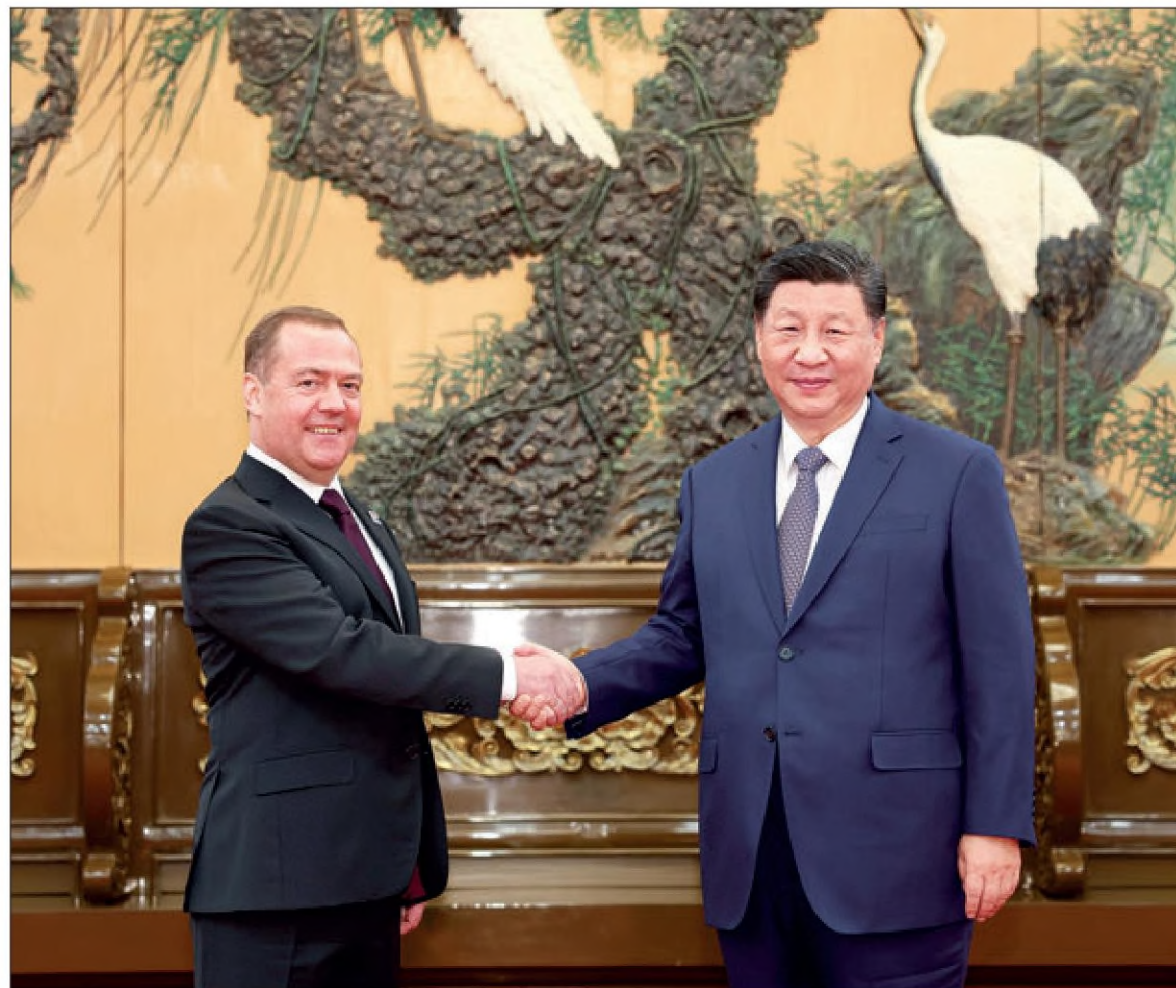


More than a game

Documentary offers glimpse into youthful passion of esports players
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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president, shakes hands with Dmitry Medvedev, chairman of the United Russia party, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Thursday. DING HAITAO / XINHUA

Xi: Sino-Russian ties set example for major countries

By CAO DESHENG
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President Xi Jinping reiterated on Thursday the principles of “no expansion of the battlefield, no escalation of fighting, and no fanning of the flames by any party” with regard to the Ukraine crisis, saying that China will work with the international community to create favorable conditions for a political settlement of the crisis.

He said the principles should be observed to promote the easing of the Russia-Ukraine conflict as soon as possible.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a meeting with Dmitry Medvedev, chairman of the United Russia party, who was on a working visit to China at the invitation of the CPC.

Medvedev presented to Xi a letter from Russian President Vladimir Putin, and said that Russia speaks positively of China’s stance on the Ukraine crisis and pays attention to the initiative for a “Friends of Peace” group proposed by China and Brazil.

China is willing to work with Russia to strengthen the alignment of development strategies, tap the intrinsic momentum of bilateral cooperation, and continuously bring benefits to the two countries and peoples, Xi said.

Russia is willing to actively promote a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, Medvedev added.

Xi hailed the development of Sino-Russian relations, saying the two countries have forged a new path of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation between major and neighboring countries, setting an example for a new type of international relations and ties between neighboring major countries.

China is willing to work with

Russia to strengthen the alignment of development strategies, tap the intrinsic momentum of bilateral cooperation, and continuously bring benefits to the two countries and peoples, he said.

Xi underlined that China and Russia should enhance communication and coordination within multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, firmly uphold the international system with the UN at its core, and practice true multilateralism, in order to make the international order more just and equitable and jointly safeguard global strategic stability and international fairness and justice.

He also called on both parties to work together on improving global governance, building up consensus among friendly political parties in countries worldwide, especially those in the Global South, and steering the world’s development in the right direction.

Medvedev said the current high-level cooperation between Russia and China is the result of joint leadership and promotion by Putin and Xi. Russia will steadfastly imple-

ment the consensus reached by the two heads of state and advance strategic coordination between the two countries, he said.

The United Russia party is willing, through the Russia-China dialogue mechanism between ruling parties, to promote the countries’ practical cooperation and facilitate the long-term development of bilateral relations, he added.

On Thursday, Medvedev visited the Museum of the Communist Party of China in Beijing, and he also met with Wang Huning, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, China’s top political advisory body.

China and Russia have maintained close interactions at various levels and across different sectors. The last time Medvedev visited China was in December 2022.

Sergei Shoigu, secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, attended Airshow China 2024 held in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, last month. Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov made a visit to Beijing in October.

Steps ready for stable growth of the economy

Policymakers reaffirm need to forge ahead with high-quality development in 2025

By XU WEI
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In setting priorities for its economic policy for 2025, China is emphasizing the need to maintain stable growth, employment and commodity prices through steps including higher deficit-to-GDP ratios, the issuance of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and interest rate cuts.

The nation’s policymakers set the policy agenda for the world’s second-largest economy at the annual Central Economic Work Conference in Beijing on Wednesday and Thursday.

Inside President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the

Central Military Commission, analyzed the performance of the economy and mapped out economic plans for 2025 at the conference.

While noting heightened negative factors from the outside environment and challenges now facing the economy, policymakers reaffirmed the need to forge ahead with high-quality development, comprehensively deepen reform, expand high-level opening-up and develop a modern industrial system.

They pledged to implement more proactive and effective macroeco-

nomical policies, boost domestic demand, drive the integration of science innovation and industrial innovation, and stabilize the real estate sector and stock markets.

The nation will maintain basic equilibrium in the balance of payments and better synchronize the income growth of residents and economic growth, they added.

The meeting reaffirmed the need to adopt a moderately loose monetary policy next year, including the rollout of rate cuts and cuts in the reserve requirement ratio at an appropriate time to ensure ample liquidity.

The policy stance is aligned with signals from a tone-setting meeting on Monday of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, which fueled expectations that Beijing will provide additional rate cuts and adopt an expansionary fiscal policy in 2025 to boost demand.

“China’s policy rates remain above the zero bound, suggesting there’s still room for further rate cuts,” Betty Wang, lead economist with British think tank Oxford Economics, wrote in a research note, referring to the lower limit that rates can be cut to.

“The People’s Bank of China is also exploring ‘unconventional’ measures to expand its balance sheet,” she added.

See *Economy*, page 3

Syrians get back to work



A man prepares food on Wednesday at a street corner in Aleppo, Syria. Syria’s Military Operations Administration announced the lifting of a curfew in the capital Damascus and its surrounding areas on Wednesday, urging residents to return to work. OZAN KOSE / AFP

State visits to Peru, Brazil boost pivotal relationships

President Xi Jinping’s recent trip to Peru and Brazil boosted the traditional friendship between China and Latin America, and reiterated China’s global vision of peace and common prosperity, which stands in stark contrast to the neoliberal hegemony of the Washington Consensus, with its wars, unilateral sanctions, economic coercion, tariffs and overseas military bases.

In Peru, Xi participated in the opening of the Chancay Port. A shared project of China and Peru, built as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the port will serve as a crucial gateway linking Latin America and Asia, as well as promoting Latin American economic integration.

Furthermore, it is Latin America’s first smart, green and low-carbon

WORLD WATCH
By Carlos Martinez

port, featuring advanced technologies such as automated cranes and electric driverless trucks.

With the opening of the port, the average transportation time from South America to the Asian market will be reduced from 35 to 25 days. In Peru alone, the port is expected to generate an additional \$4.5 billion in revenue — just under 2 percent of the country’s GDP — and create thousands of jobs.

Given that Peru shares borders with Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Bolivia, the port will serve as the starting point of a land-sea

corridor between China and Latin America, giving rise to a dramatic increase in trade, investment, cooperation and friendship.

On Nov 17, President Xi traveled from Peru to Brazil. The China-Brazil relationship has gone from strength to strength in recent years, particularly under the Workers’ Party governments of Dilma Rousseff and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

China has been Brazil’s largest trading partner for the past 15 years, and is a major investor in Brazilian industry and agriculture. Furthermore, Brazil is the largest supplier of agricultural imports to China.

At the conclusion of his bilateral meeting on Nov 20, Xi and Lula announced that China-Brazil ties will be elevated to a “community with a shared future for a more just world and a more sustainable planet.” The two sides will also cooperate closely to align Brazil’s development strategy with the BRI.

See *Latin America*, page 3

NATIONAL ETHNIC GAMES PROMOTE ANCIENT SPORTS, INSTILL HARMONY

From coconut tree climbing to spectacular acrobatics, event a winner with athletes, fans

By CUI JIA in Sanya, Hainan province
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Many spectators said they didn’t dare blink when Luo Jun from Hainan province shinned up a 9-meter artificial coconut tree in just 6.188 seconds, otherwise they might have missed it.

The rapid ascent won Luo the men’s coconut tree climbing event, which debuted at the 12th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minor-

in-depth

ities of China held in Sanya, Hainan, last month.

The 28-year-old from the Li ethnic group said thanks to the games, coconut tree climbing is no longer only popular among people from the Li and Miao ethnic groups on the tropical island, where coconut

trees are ubiquitous. It can now be promoted as a fun sport for people around China and even the world, he believes.

“I still prefer to train on real coconut trees because the reward of climbing to the top is instant and sweet — coconut water,” Luo said.

There are no games in the world quite like the National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities of China.

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Left: An acrobat from Yunnan province is photographed leaping in midair at Tianya Haijiao Scenic Area in Sanya, Hainan province, on Nov 26.

Right: A woman from Xinjiang team demonstrates Dawaz — acrobatic Uygur tightrope walking, on Nov 27, during the 12th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities of China.

PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Event: Ethnic sporting spectacles dazzle fans



From page 1

Besides coconut tree climbing, spectators enjoyed events such as single bamboo drifting, in which competitors stand barefoot on a piece of bamboo (or similar material) floating on the water, and use a thin bamboo pole to propel themselves forward. They also marveled at stilt racing, which involves athletes balancing on two long poles with foot loops that raise them 30 to 35 centimeters above the ground.

The competitions are all rooted in traditional customs and the daily life of people from different ethnic groups in China, and have evolved into sports events with participation from multiple ethnicities.

Single bamboo drifting, for example, originated in Guizhou province where local people cut bamboo and used it for river transportation. Stilt racing started among Miao ethnic groups, whose ancestors used to walk on stilts in ancient times to escape frequent floodwater.

Beginning with less than 400 athletes from 13 ethnic groups, the event was launched in 1953 with only eight sports.

At the 12th games held in Sanya from Nov 22 to 30, a total of 6,960 athletes from all 56 ethnic groups in China competed. The event featured 18 traditional sports and three demonstration ones.

All the equestrian competitions were held in July in Zhaosu, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Coconut craze

Climbing trees to harvest coconuts started as a traditional activity in Hainan and later evolved into competitions.

In 2010, it became an official event at the Hainan Provincial Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities.

At the recent national traditional games, it was one of the most popular events on social media. Many people said they couldn't believe there was a national tree-climbing event, which was so much fun to watch.

Born in Hainan's Ledong Li autonomous county, Luo grew up in a home surrounded by coconut trees. From the age of 9, he often climbed the trees to get coconuts, especially when he was thirsty, he said.

Despite occasionally being chased and shouted at by his parents, Luo honed his climbing skills. One particularly tall tree, nearly 15 meters high, was a favorite. "I was mischievous and fearless," he said.

But safety concerns led his father to cut it down. His unusual talent was spotted by his senior high school teacher Li Qingping, who asked Luo to start training and take part in a coconut tree climbing competition in 2014.

At that time, the rules for coconut tree climbing competitions weren't well established. Competitors climbed real coconut trees barefoot so their feet often blistered and bled during training sessions, Luo said.

After just one month of training, he competed in the Fifth Hainan Provincial Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities. He represented Team Sanya and came fourth in the individual men's event.

"Coconut tree climbing requires good coordination and strength in the hands, feet, waist and abdomen. It's like a combination of rock climbing and free-running," Luo said.

In 2022, Luo, who became a firefighter in Sanya, received a call from Li, the head coach of Hainan's coconut tree climbing team, telling him the event had been added to the 12th games.

"Sometimes when I walk past the coconut tree at the fire station I'll give it a try, or climb it a bit, just to stay in shape," Luo joked.

"Tree climbing skills have helped me climb ladders faster during search and rescue missions," he added.

In the future, Luo aims to promote coconut tree climbing nationwide, inspire more athletes, and push the sport's limits.

"Many athletes from outside Hainan who



Dancers perform during the opening ceremony of the games in Sanya on Nov 22.



Left: Competitors from Team Guizhou (front) coordinate their strides in board-shoes racing on Nov 27.



Right: Athletes compete in the single bamboo drifting final at the games.

have been training on artificial coconut trees told me that they have never climbed a real one, so I took them to the beach and we climbed the coconut trees together and they loved it," Luo said.

"I think such an experience is more important and precious than winning."

Luo believes the next champion will break six seconds, and an athlete from outside Hainan may be the one to do it, he said confidently.

Fiercer competition

As the sports have grown in popularity nationwide over the years, competition at the ethnic games has become more fierce.

At a high school stadium in Sanya where the wrestling event was held, people cheered for competitors from different ethnic groups in their own languages such as Uygur, Kazak, Tibetan and Mongolian. The event included six styles of wrestling: Tibetan, Uygur, Yi, Mongolian, Hui and Korean.

Kaharman Dawut, head coach of the wrestling team from Xinjiang, closely watched his charge in the group stage of the competition.

Yasar Tiliwaldi from the Uygur ethnic group took on an athlete from Yunnan province in the 74-kilogram weight division of the men's Uygur-style event.

Although Yasar won, Kaharman said the wrestler's opponent had given him a tough time. "Winning the Uygur-style wrestling category was tough for the team, even though the sport originated in Xinjiang," the coach said.

Kaharman said he competed in the event at the third and fourth national traditional games and won easily. Now, there are many tough opponents from other provinces and regions as more wrestlers



An athlete competes in a stilt race during the event on Nov 25.

take part in the sport nationwide, he said.

"But it's a good thing, because it means the event has been further promoted, especially among young people," the coach said. "Our athletes performed well in the Tibetan-style wrestling category. I think that's the charm of the games."

Yasar from Ily Kazak autonomous prefecture has been wrestling since he was 9 years old. He said the games offer a unique opportunity for wrestlers from different ethnic groups to meet and learn from each other.

"I've trained with wrestlers from the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and Xizang autonomous region who are very strong. We shared our wrestling tips on different styles and became friends," Yasar said in the training area, as wrestlers busily prepared for different events.

"I am glad to see people from other ethnic groups doing so well in Uygur-style wrestling. In fact, I don't think they need my tips," said Yasar, who won the 74 kg final.

Li Junyi, chief judge of the ethnic aerobics competition, said participation of 32 teams from across the country illustrated the growing diversity of the games.

Although the routines last only a few minutes, they integrate elements from more than 20 ethnic groups' dances, including Tibetan, Uygur, Mongolian, and Dai.

"Each participant, regardless of their ethnicity, learns and performs movements that come from other traditions, deepening their appreciation for diverse cultures. This is the beauty of harmony and integration," Li said.

Adil Uxur, nicknamed the "Prince of the Tightrope," and his team from Xinjiang provided a spectacular aerial visual feast when they demonstrated Dawaz — acrobatic Uygur tightrope walking.

The 54-year-old has taken part in 11 games and witnessed how the games have grown in scale and the number of participants.

"I performed at the second games with my father when I was just 11. It was nerve-racking then. And I feel exactly the same now," he said after his performance on a tightrope 21-meters high and 80-meters long.

In the past, there weren't many channels to promote ethnic sports. Without the games, people from different ethnic groups and areas don't have many opportunities to learn about each other's life and culture, Adil said.

"Now the number of sports and participants at the games have both grown significantly, which is beyond my imagination. I'm so happy to see so many young people who are proud of their cultural heritage and determined to make them thrive," he added.

Generational bonds

The Hua Pao competition held in a seaside stadium in Lingshui Li autonomous county, produced one of the games' most heartwarming moments when 46-year-old Qin Weiwei and his 21-year-old son, Qin Zhenyu, shared the field together.

With a history spanning over 500 years, Hua Pao began as a ritual among communities in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region as well as Guangdong and Yunnan provinces, and was traditionally held on riverbanks and mountain slopes.

It involves two teams of eight players competing on a 60 by 50 meter field. A team scores by tossing a rubber disc — resembling a colorful wheel — into the opponent's basket.

Due to its blend of physical strength, teamwork and strategic play, Hua Pao has been called "Chinese rugby."

It was recognized as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021.

For Qin Zhenyu, stepping onto the field wasn't just about competition, but also carrying forward a family tradition. Watching his father dominate the sport, Qin Zhenyu was inspired to join Guangxi's Hua Pao team after his talent was noticed.

On the first day of the competition, the father-son duo made their mark against the Hunan province team. Qin Zhenyu shone, scoring his first "cannon shot," while his father offered guidance from the bench before taking the field.

"Watching my son play is more nerve-racking than competing myself," said Qin Weiwei.

"I remind him of the details to watch out for (and) where he can improve," he said, adding that his son's debut was "not bad at all."

Guangxi's captain Wei Kaixuan, a high school physical education teacher, has worked to promote the sport and turned his school into a training center to help inspire the next generation of players.

Sports education student Wei Zongjiang, one of the team's newcomers, said his uncle introduced him to Hua Pao.

He said he has in turn introduced the sport to his fellow students, sparking interest in Hua Pao among younger people.

Team Guangxi lost to Team Beijing in the final. For many spectators, it was likely the first time they'd seen the sport live.

"By putting on our best performances and jointly lifting the competitive level of Hua Pao, we can make more young people interested in it and take part in it just like my son. Maybe one day there will be international Hua Pao events, just like rugby," Qin Weiwei suggested.

Unlike other multisports events with tight competition schedules, the games have a day dedicated to a grand party and gala for all 56 ethnic groups to showcase their traditions and cultural heritage.

This time, the athletes from different ethnic groups shared their favorite music and watched the sunset together at the beach at Tianya Haijiao Scenic Spot, and gained a deeper understanding of each other.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

TOP NEWS

China ready to join other nations to boost global solidarity, forum told

By XING YI in Madrid
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President Xi Jinping has sent a congratulatory letter to the 2024 Imperial Springs International Forum, which opened in Madrid, Spain, on Thursday.

In the letter, Xi pointed out that since the forum was established 10 years ago, it has adhered to advocating multilateralism, conducted in-depth discussions on global governance issues, actively shared China's propositions, and played a positive role in enhancing exchanges and understanding between China and other countries.

Xi emphasized that in a world marked by intertwined changes and turmoil, peace and development remain the shared aspirations of all peoples.

China stands ready to work with other countries in the spirit of promoting global solidarity, upholding fairness and justice to safeguard global peace and stability, adhering to win-win cooperation to promote sustainable global development, and committing to inclusiveness and mutual learning to advance human civilization to new heights, Xi said.

The president's message has won wide recognition and support from the 130 participants of the forum, including former heads of state and government, business leaders, representatives of international organizations and academic experts from more than 40 countries and regions.

Upholding the forum's theme of "Collective Action for One Future", the participants engaged in in-depth discussions on topics such as challenges to global security and the world economy, reform of global governance, and artificial intelligence and green technology for sustainable development.

Hu Chunhua, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, attended the forum and delivered a keynote speech on China's initiatives on global security, development and civilization, pointing out that common development is the key to lasting peace and that China will stick to its opening-up policy to provide more development opportunities to the world.

He also highlighted the importance of mutual learning and exchanges among different civilizations to promote understanding, pushing forward the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Acknowledging that the world faces multiple challenges, the forum's participants praised China's initiatives and proposals, and emphasized the crucial role of multilateralism for collaboration and the need for practical implementation.

Danilo Turk, former president of Slovenia and president of Club de Madrid, one of the organizers of the forum, said there is no future without prosperity, and prosperity must not be confined to a selective few or limited regions in the world.

"Open trade is a vital engine for growth, innovation and poverty alleviation. ... It is very encouraging to hear today that China's policy of opening-up is continuing, and we share your vision of retaining high-level openness of the Chinese economy for the future," Turk said.

Csaba Korosi, a Hungarian diplomat who served as president of the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, said the current crises were the results of geopolitical competition and unsustainable ways of development, and to deal with these crises, the world needs well-functioning multilateralism now more than ever.

"However, there are strong voices in many countries claiming their interests are not well represented on multilateral platforms. This sentiment can be heard in Africa, in the United States, and in some European and Asian countries," Korosi said.

"But that doesn't mean we don't need multilateralism. It means we must sit down and think about how to adjust some institutions and their rules, and how to follow the goals we jointly agreed upon," he added.

Aminata Toure, former prime minister of Senegal, said that African countries look forward to expanding relationships with China, because they share similar experiences of unequal treatment in history and African countries have the ambition to reduce poverty.

"We have this big ambition like China to really strive and end poverty in a very short time, and also to work toward industrialization. This is the area we would be interested in working with China on," said Toure.

The forum was jointly held by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the Australia China Friendship and Exchange Association, the Guangdong provincial government, and the Club de Madrid.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Tribute to heroes

A performance takes place during the inauguration of a memorial park on Tuesday in Lusaka, Zambia, to honor Chinese nationals who lost their lives during the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway line.

PENG LUJUN / XINHUA

Xi calls for Sino-US cooperation

Continued care and support for business collaboration stressed

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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President Xi Jinping has emphasized that China is prepared to keep communicating with the United States to expand cooperation, manage differences, continue exploring the right way to get along with each other in the new era, and realize long-term, peaceful coexistence to the benefit of the two countries and the world at large.

Xi made the remarks on Wednesday in a congratulatory letter to the 2024 Gala Dinner of the US-China Business Council.

Noting that the China-US relationship concerns not only the immediate interests of the two peoples, but also the future and destiny of all humanity, Xi said: "We both stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation. We should choose dialogue over confrontation, and win-win cooperation over zero-sum games."

In his letter, Xi expressed his "sincere greetings" to people from various sectors in the US who have been caring for and supporting business cooperation between the two countries, hoping they would

continue to care for and support such collaboration.

The annual event, themed "Managing US-China Relations in 2025 and Beyond", was attended by business leaders, officials, scholars and other stakeholders in the US-China commercial relationship.

In his letter, read out by Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng, Xi told the US business community that the interests of the two countries are closely intertwined, and the room for cooperation is "infinitely vast".

"The two sides should properly handle differences through equal-footed consultation, and make the pie of cooperation bigger based on our complementary advantages," Xi said.

The success of one side should be an opportunity rather than a challenge for the other, and one's achievement should help rather than hinder the development of the other, he added.

Xi also said that China will always uphold the basic State policy of opening up to the outside world. "Chinese modernization, with its new achievements, will provide new opportunities for the world," he said.

The US-China Business Council represents more than 270 US companies that do business in China.

Its 2024 member survey results, released in September, found that 80 percent of the US businesses surveyed were profitable in China in 2023, and that 72 percent of respondents expected that the profit margins of their operations in China would be equal to or greater than their global average in 2024.

In a letter to the gala read by Marisa Lago, US undersecretary of commerce for international trade, US President Joe Biden expressed his appreciation for the USCBC's legacy of supporting commercial relations between the US and China.

"In the face of issues too big for any nation to solve alone, like the climate crisis and ensuring global food and health security, it is more important than ever that the United States and the People's Republic of China work together," Biden said.

"I am proud of the steps the United States and the People's Republic of China have taken toward that end," he said.

As the China-US relationship is ushering in a new year in which the US has a new administration, Xie, the Chinese ambassador, said he expects that the US will work with China and "ensure a smooth transition of the bilateral relationship and get it off to a good start".

At the gala, the envoy noted that China's policy toward the US at the new historical starting point is "consistent and stable".

"We believe a major country should stay steadfast in a shifting landscape, and have the wisdom to open up new horizons amid changes," he said. "China's goal of a stable, healthy and sustainable China-US relationship remains unchanged."

The USCBC Gala 2024 paid special tribute to Craig Allen, who is stepping down after leading the council since July 2018.

In his remarks as the distinguished honoree, Allen reflected on the history of US-China engagement, emphasizing that "the ability to keep commerce, ideas, people and investments flowing between the US and China will be a key determinant — perhaps the key determinant — of global peace and stability for the decades and even the centuries ahead", according to a release from the USCBC.

Sean Stein, the incoming USCBC president, reiterated in his closing remarks at the gala the organization's "enduring commitment to preserving the US-China commercial relationship", according to the release.

Zhang Yumbi in Beijing contributed to this story.

Latin America: 'Sphere of influence' is over

From page 1

Rather than treating Brazil simply as a source of primary commodities, China has promoted cooperation with Brazil on green energy, digital innovation, economic diversification, advanced infrastructure and industrial modernization.

Unlike the West, which has always jealously guarded its technological supremacy, China's vision of a global community with a shared future involves encouraging sustainable development and modernization throughout the Global South.

With China's support, the countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific are starting to break the chains of underdevelopment that were imposed by the colonial and imperialist powers.

Aside from the growing economic relationship, Xi wrote in a signed article in Brazilian media that "China and Brazil, embracing

The nations of Latin America are asserting their sovereignty, and are joining hands with the peoples of the world to reject hegemony.

Other key measures highlighted at the conference include the prevention and defusing of risks in key sectors to ensure that no systemic risks will arise.

The nation will make sustained efforts to stabilize the real estate market and halt its decline, intensify the redevelopment of urban villages

is a relationship that is not only of great benefit to the two countries, but to the world as a whole.

In his speech at the 19th G20 Summit, Xi insisted on the crucial importance of addressing global inequality, of supporting developing countries to achieve modernization and pursue sustainable development, of supporting developing countries to adopt and integrate digital technologies, and of cooperating globally to tackle the environmental crisis.

The speech resonated loudly with the people of the Global South. As the Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro wrote in 2004, "China has objectively become the most promising hope and the best example for all Third World countries ... an important element of balance, progress and safeguarding of world peace and stability".

For that reason, the US is desperate to throw a spanner in the works to disrupt the growing ties between China and Latin America, and more generally, between

China and the Global South.

In October, US President Joe Biden's trade representative Katherine Tai said she "would encourage our friends in Brazil to look at the risks" of closer ties with China, hinting that the US would punish such an unacceptable behavior.

US President-elect Donald Trump is, meanwhile, packing his cabinet with both China hawks and Latin America hawks, and will likely be even more aggressive in pressuring countries to toe the US line on China.

Such tactics will not work. The days of the Monroe Doctrine — enshrining the entire American supercontinent as the US "sphere of influence" — are over. The nations of Latin America are asserting their sovereignty, and are joining hands with the peoples of the world to reject hegemony and create a future of global peace and common prosperity.

The author is co-editor of *Friends of Socialist China*, a London-based platform promoting understanding of Chinese socialism. The views do not necessarily reflect those of *China Daily*.

Soccer mania



Soccer fans celebrate in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday, after the country won the bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2034.
REUTERS

Economy: Boosting domestic demand a top priority for next year

From page 1

Meanwhile, the boosting of domestic demand was highlighted at the conference as a top priority for next year, as policymakers pledged to roll out more initiatives to boost consumption, including greater strides in equipment upgrading and consumer goods trade-in programs.

Wang said in her note that she expects that the expansion of trade-in programs would contribute approximately 1 percentage point to overall retail sales growth next year.

The development of new quality productive forces through sci-tech innovation was underlined at the conference, with authorities set to launch an Artificial Intelligence Plus initiative and foster more emerging sectors.

The nation will ensure the implementation of landmark reform measures, including enacting a new law promoting the private economy, standardizing business-related law enforcement, and making guidelines on establishing a unified national market.

In expanding high-level opening-up, the policymakers reaffirmed commitments to stabilize foreign trade and the inflow of foreign investment, and to take proactive steps to further open up and expand institutional opening-up in a steady manner.

China will proactively develop trade in services, green trade and digital trade, while steadily opening up its services sector, they said.

Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao said in a televised interview on Thursday that the boosting of

consumption will be a pillar for economic growth next year. "We will promote the growth of trade in services through greater opening-up, in order to stabilize foreign investment," he said.

Other key measures highlighted at the conference include the prevention and defusing of risks in key sectors to ensure that no systemic risks will arise.

The nation will make sustained efforts to stabilize the real estate market and halt its decline, intensify the redevelopment of urban villages

and dilapidated housing, and promote the establishment of a new development model for the real estate sector.

The conference also pledged to prudently address risks associated with small and medium-sized financial institutions at local levels.

It called for heightened efforts to promote urban-rural integration, ensure that the total area of China's farmland remains above the specified red line, and guarantee the steady production and supply of grain and key agricultural produce.

The policymakers reiterated the necessity of taking concerted steps in cutting carbon emissions, reducing pollution, and pursuing green development to accelerate the green transition of socioeconomic growth.

China is set to make greater efforts in guaranteeing and improving public well-being next year, with actions to be launched for supporting the creation of jobs in key sectors, in urban and rural areas, and by small, medium-sized and micro businesses, according to the conference.

An initiative to build up the foundation of the healthcare sector and more policies to encourage childbirth are also in the pipeline, the policymakers said.

CHINA

New target set to curb HIV rate by 2030

By WANG XIAOYU
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China aims to keep its HIV prevalence rate below 0.2 percent by 2030, according to a policy document released this week, as high infection rates among men who have sex with men and covert transmission among heterosexual couples pose significant challenges.

Since around 2012, the country has effectively halted HIV transmission through blood transfusions, reduced mother-to-child transmission and curbed the virus's spread via injection drug use, the State Council General Office said in a plan released Wednesday.

"Sexual transmission has become the primary route for the spread of HIV," the document noted.

The mortality rate of HIV/AIDS patients has gradually declined in recent years due to increased access to standardized antiretroviral treatment. "The overall HIV epidemic in China remains at a low level," it added.

However, the control situation remains severe, with high infection rates among men who have sex with men and a rising covert transmission rate among heterosexual couples, making prevention efforts more difficult.

The document outlines several goals and measures to be implemented over the next five years. These include raising public awareness of HIV prevention and treatment to over 90 percent by the end of next year and curbing high-risk behaviors among men who have sex with men.

By the end of next year, comprehensive prevention measures — such as ensuring the availability of condoms in hotels and other public venues and encouraging vulnerable groups to undergo testing — should cover at least 95 percent of high-risk populations. Additionally, the rate of new infections among people undergoing maintenance therapy for drug addiction should be kept below 0.2 percent.

By 2025, the mother-to-child transmission rate should be reduced to below two percent, and the transmission rate from an HIV-positive partner within a family should be kept under 0.3 percent, the document added.

Looking ahead to 2030, the plan aims to ensure that at least 95 percent of people living with HIV are aware of their infection, 95 percent of diagnosed patients receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 95 percent of patients on treatment achieve viral suppression to levels where they are no longer infectious.

According to data released by the National Administration of Disease Control and Prevention this month, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in China is rising, although new infections are trending downward. More than 98 percent of new infections are sexually transmitted, with over 70 percent occurring among heterosexual couples.

The document also emphasizes the importance of reducing HIV infections among teenagers, middle-aged adults and senior citizens.

Braving cold



Tourists gather at a small island in Jilin city, Jilin province, to enjoy the magnificent rime ice scenery on Thursday. The small island, which is only 0.02 square kilometers in size and known for its spectacular rime ice scenery, received over 1,000 visitors on a daily basis recently. ZHU WANCHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Dedicated center for autistic kids launched

Special platform to enhance efforts to ensure integration of the special needs

By ZHAO YIMENG
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China's first national special education resource center for children with autism was launched on Wednesday in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, marking a significant milestone in the country's special education development.

The center is located at Zhejiang Normal University in the province.

During the launch ceremony, officials from the Ministry of Education announced that Chinese children with autism are now fully integrated into the nation's special education framework, with ongoing efforts to enhance access to compulsory education for this group.

This year, annual funding per autistic student during the compulsory education period increased from 6,000 yuan (\$825) to over 7,000 yuan, as outlined in an action plan for autism care and education promotion covering 2024 to 2028.

Jointly released by the Ministry of Education, the China Disabled Per-

sons' Federation and other departments, the plan includes measures to strengthen inclusive education for children with autism.

A national monitoring system has been established to ensure that autistic children receive appropriate education and suitable accommodations. Major cities are encouraged to set up specialized schools for children with autism while expanding access to early childhood and vocational education. A teaching assistant system will be implemented to provide personalized support, ministry officials said.

To address the shortage of qualified educators, over 20 provinces have introduced special education teacher staffing standards. For instance, Shandong province has stabilized the teacher-student ratio for autistic children at 1:1.5.

Universities and teacher training institutions are being encouraged to develop autism education programs. Last year, Nanjing Normal University of Special Education in Jiangsu province established a dedicated autism education program,

according to the ministry.

At the launch event, teachers from the Star Program — a public welfare initiative for special education introduced this year — were awarded certificates, and committee members of the national resource center were appointed.

The program has allocated an initial funding of 3 million yuan to support the training of autism educators and provide teaching services in central and western regions of China. A special education teaching award fund has also been established to honor outstanding teachers in autism education and related fields, the ministry said.

Additionally, China launched the Special Education section of its National Smart Education Platform for primary and secondary schools on Dec 3, marking the 33rd International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The new platform addresses the personalized learning needs of students with disabilities, creating a highly adaptable digital learning environment. It offers tailored services for schools, teachers and students with special education needs, while enriching the digital resources available for special education, the ministry added.

Persian glory

A visitor views artifacts of the exhibition titled *The Glory of Ancient Persia: Treasures from Iran* at the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Wednesday.

LIU XIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



2 former senior advisers face corruption charges

Two former senior Chinese political advisers are facing serious corruption charges, with one admitting to accepting bribes and the other expelled from the Communist Party of China and public office amid allegations of abuse of power.

During a trial on Thursday at the Nanning Intermediate People's Court in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Han Yong, 67, admitted to accepting bribes totaling over 261 million yuan (\$35.9 million).

Han, a former chairman of the Shaanxi Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, was accused of

misusing his positions from 1993 to 2023 to secure benefits for individuals and entities in exchange for illegal payments.

Prosecutors detailed how Han leveraged his influence in business operations, project contracting and personnel appointments.

Originally from Jilin province, Han's career spanned roles including deputy Party chief of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and general-procurator in Jilin province. He served in senior CPPCC roles until his retirement last year, when he was investigated in October.

During the trial, Han expressed

guilt and remorse. The court has yet to announce his sentencing.

Separately, Gou Zhongwen, a former member of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC National Committee, was expelled from the Party and dismissed from public office following an investigation by China's top anti-corruption watchdog.

Gou, who previously led the General Administration of Sport of China, was found to have violated the Party's frugality rules by accepting gifts, attending banned banquets and participating in prohibited tourist activities.

Investigators also accused him of trading power for sex and money, unlawfully possessing classified documents and abusing his power, leading to significant economic losses.

A statement released Thursday said Gou's actions constituted serious violations of Party discipline and laws, and he is suspected of bribery and abuse of power.

Authorities have confiscated his illegal gains, and his case has been transferred to prosecutors for review and potential charges.

CHINA DAILY

5 experts share inaugural global education award

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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Five leading education researchers received the inaugural Global Award for Innovation in Education Research Methods at the 10th Forum on Empirical Education Research held recently in Shanghai.

The award, the world's first of its kind, was designed to recognize breakthroughs in education research methodology and foster the international exchange of ideas, including those rooted in China's education system.

Described as the "Nobel Prize in Education," the award was initiated by the Faculty of Education at the East China Normal University. It honored Stephen J. Ball, Annette Lareau, Herb Marsh, Min Weifang and Andreas Schleicher for their innovative contributions to empirical education research.

At the forum, researchers and scholars said methodologies are pivotal in driving empirical education research and advancing education sciences in the digital age, laying a foundation for global education policy and development.

"Education research methods are critical to the advancement of pedagogy as a discipline and the broader field of education," said Yuan Zhengguo, head of the Faculty of Education at the university and a key planner of the award.

Herb Marsh, a professor at the Australian Catholic University's Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, was recognized for his extensive contributions to quantitative research methods, including structural equation modeling, factor analysis and multilevel modeling.

"He has broadened interdisciplinary research in areas such as self-concept and learning motivation through the use of scientific measurement and evaluation methods, significantly advancing contemporary educational psychology," the award citation noted.

Renowned for his Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect theory, Marsh emphasized the role of rigorous research methodology as a foundation for adopting new technologies and statistical models. "A solid methodology is crucial, just as critical reading skills are essential for distinguishing fake news from credible information," he said.

Min Weifang, honorary dean of the Graduate School of Education at Peking University, was celebrat-

The research emerging from China is not only propelling national progress but also driving global advancements in education."

Yuan Zhengguo, head of the Faculty of Education at East China Normal University

ed for advancing the economics of education in China.

The award citation praised Min for seamlessly integrating econometric analysis with the challenges of higher education in China. His work has profoundly influenced the development of educational economics in China, refining its theories, advancing methodologies and nurturing talent.

"Educational economics in China has distinct characteristics," Min noted. "While incorporating international theories and methods, it also addresses urgent practical issues in China's development. These contributions have profoundly influenced education policymaking in the country."

Min noted that China's approach to educational economics is distinct, reflecting diversity in academic teams, theoretical backgrounds, research fields and methods. While the discipline initially emerged in the 1980s, China's research has since focused on pressing practical issues related to the nation's development and transformation. These contributions have significantly influenced policymaking and practice in China's education sector.

The award also highlights China's growing role in global education research.

Yuan emphasized that despite China's rich history of educational thought dating back to Confucius, much of it remains underrecognized globally. However, increased international collaboration and empirical research are positioning China as a significant contributor to addressing global education challenges, particularly in the context of AI and digital transformation.

"The research emerging from China is not only propelling national progress but also driving global advancements in education," Yuan said.

AI devices help road users obey traffic rules

By ZOU SHUO
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Artificial intelligence-powered devices are being deployed in various regions to remind passengers and non-motor vehicle riders to obey traffic rules.

In areas with no or limited traffic police, AI-enabled devices and loudspeakers are used to alert people when they violate rules. For example, in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, an AI traffic monitoring system has been in operation at one road section for over a month, effectively reducing the number of traffic accidents, according to Jiangsu Satellite TV.

Liu Xiaowu, deputy dean of the Wuxi Research Institute at Tianjin University, explained that the device integrates AI and the internet of things. It uses surveillance video data and AI algorithms to identify misbehavior by pedestrians and non-motor vehicle riders in real-time, with a response time of just one second.

The system collects surveillance video data from four directions to conduct real-time traffic analysis at 32 positions. If dangerous behavior is detected, loudspeakers immediately issue alerts.

According to local traffic police, the device has significantly curbed such behaviors and operates continuously around the clock. Plans are underway to install the system at additional locations, covering 20 key road sections in Wuxi.

Meanwhile, in Shifang, Sichuan province, 25 AI surveillance cam-

eras have been installed in a local village to remind non-motor vehicle riders to follow traffic rules. When violations such as not wearing helmets, traveling on the wrong side of the road, or overloading are detected, the system delivers reminders in the local dialect. Many riders have corrected their behavior upon hearing the voice alerts.

In Luzhou, Sichuan province, AI-powered road safety systems have been deployed across 33,000 kilometers of rural roads in over 1,140 villages, according to cpd.com.cn, a news portal of the Ministry of Public Security. These digital reminders have been in place since 2022 and have formed a safety net for rural areas.

Xiang Yang, a traffic police officer in Luzhou, noted that non-motor vehicles have become a primary mode of transportation in rural areas. The system provides continuous reminders, and if a person receives three warnings, traffic police visit them for education and accountability.

As of May, the system had issued reminders to 810,000 rural residents, holding over 1,000 repeat violators accountable. Non-motor vehicle violations have significantly decreased as a result.

In Mianyang, Sichuan province, robots are being utilized as traffic police. These robots can travel at a speed of 5 kilometers per hour and jump up to 20 centimeters. They have been deployed at road sections to guide traffic and remind pedestrians not to cross during red lights.

WORLD

Yoon's address draws criticism

Opposition parties in S. Korea submit second motion to impeach president

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said on Thursday his martial law decree was "an act of governance" and accused the opposition of paralyzing state affairs...

In a televised address, Yoon said the opposition was the one that paralyzed the government and threatened national security. He said the opposition has been abusing impeachment provisions...

He said he used his presidential powers to declare martial law to protect the nation and normalize the functioning of the state.

Describing the opposition as "anti-national forces", Yoon said he would fight till the last moment.

"Whether it is impeachment or investigation, I will stand up to it," said Yoon, adding he will not avoid legal and political responsibility regarding the martial law decree.

Later on Thursday, South Korea's opposition parties submitted a second impeachment motion against Yoon over his martial law declaration...

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party, or DP, and five other minor parties submitted the motion after the first one was scrapped on Dec 7 as the ruling People Power Party, or PPP, lawmakers boycotted a vote.

The opposition bloc planned to report the motion to a plenary session of the National Assembly on Friday and put it up for a vote on Saturday afternoon.

Yoon's speech received mixed reactions. PPP leader Han Dong-hoon said the party's lawmakers should take part in the next impeachment vote to stop further confusion...



A member of the ruling People Power Party rises and protests against party leader Han Dong-hoon during a party meeting on Thursday in Seoul, after Han criticized President Yoon Suk-yeol's address earlier that day. YONHAP

News Agency. He also ordered party members to hold an emergency meeting to discuss the expulsion of Yoon from the party.

However, PPP's newly elected floor leader Kwon Seong-dong, a key confidant of Yoon, said the party is still against the impeachment motion but there will be a meeting of lawmakers to discuss whether to change the stance.

DP said Yoon's speech is equivalent to "declaring war on the people and the National Assembly".

'Unacceptable' intention

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik, who is aligned with the DP, said Yoon's purported intention to use the martial law declaration as a warning to the National Assembly is unacceptable.

"I suggest that the ruling and the opposition parties hold a meeting immediately," said Woo. "We need to clear up national instability as soon as possible."

Refuting Yoon's suspicions of election fraud, the National Election Commission said in a statement that the allegations are baseless.

During the martial law decree last

week, about 300 troops were sent to several election offices, and the election watchdog said Yoon's address proved the troop deployment was "unconstitutional and unlawful".

The National Assembly passed bills on Thursday to investigate Yoon's insurrection charge and scandals involving first lady Kim Keon-hee.

South Korean law gives a president immunity from prosecution while in office, except for allegations of rebellion or treason. This means that Yoon can be questioned and detained by investigative agencies over his martial law decree...

The new impeachment vote at the National Assembly on Saturday requires a two-thirds majority in the 300-seat parliament to pass.

If the motion is passed, the constitutional court will deliberate it for up to 180 days, during which Yoon's presidential power will be suspended.

The opposition bloc originally held 192 of the 300 seats, but Cho

Kuk, leader of Rebuilding Korea Party, lost his parliamentary seat on Thursday after he was sentenced to a two-year prison term by the Supreme Court.

Cho was convicted of charges including academic fraud involving his children. He also lost his right to run in presidential elections for five years, which means he cannot participate in the next presidential election if the court decides to impeach Yoon.

Cho's party said it plans to hand over the proportional representation seat, which can still be held by the party, as soon as possible to the next in line so the successor can participate in the impeachment vote in time.

In a survey released by pollster Realmeter on Thursday, 74.8 percent of the respondents said the president should be suspended immediately by resignation or impeachment and 16.2 percent of people said Yoon should resign in an orderly manner as proposed by the ruling party.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

Editor's note: China Daily presents the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

FRIENDS AFAR

Scholar seeks more talks on Sino-Philippine ties

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

For veteran foreign policy and security analyst Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, there is no better time for him to head the Philippine Association for Chinese Studies, or PACS. Pitlo was elected president of the Manila-based organization in June, and among PACS plans in 2025 is to hold several talks on Philippines-China cooperation...

"We will have these forums to discuss issues where the Philippines and China can work together, especially on the economic front," Pitlo told China Daily in an interview during a business trip to Hong Kong in late October.

Pitlo said scholars, industry executives and diplomats will be invited to talk about issues like the Belt and Road Initiative, joint ventures in electric vehicles, traditional Chinese medicine and tourism. Strained relations due to South China Sea issues would also be a topic of discussion as this is "unavoidable", he said.

However, he said the purpose of having several talks is to highlight the fact that there is more to the two countries' relations than the strategic waterway.

"We cannot ignore that the two countries have issues of concern, but they have to find ways to manage (them) properly so that it won't hurt bilateral ties," Pitlo said.

This reflects Pitlo's position on the China-Philippines relations — that the issue of the South China Sea cannot define the otherwise multifaceted relationship between the two countries.

After obtaining a degree in public administration from the University of the Philippines, or UP, in 2004, Pitlo ventured into business development consultancy. But he veered away from that career path after his interest was piqued by local news reports on the tension over the South China Sea.

Pitlo returned to the UP in 2008 to pursue an MA in Asian Studies, with a focus on China. It was at the university where Pitlo would later meet his mentor, Aileen Baviera. Baviera, who died in 2020, was a prominent Filipina Sinologist, dean of the UP Asian Center, and co-founder of PACS.

'Leading light'

Pitlo recalled that Baviera was "one of the leading lights" when it came to Chinese studies in the Philippines, and he appreciated Baviera's view that China-Philippines relations present both a challenge and an opportunity.

Pitlo worked as Baviera's research assistant at a time when Baviera was studying the territorial and maritime jurisdiction disputes regarding the South China Sea. The output from this research was published as an 80-page paper in 2013, with Baviera and maritime law expert Jay Batongbacal as co-authors.

It was also Baviera who encouraged Pitlo to join PACS — an association that comprises Filipino scholars and enthusiasts of Chinese studies and aims to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between the Philippines and China.

Joining PACS was pivotal for Pitlo as it was through the organization that he learned that Peking University was offering a scholarship for a master's degree in law. He received the scholarship, and

in 2014, traveled to China for the first time.

He was in Beijing from 2014 to 2015. It was this yearlong stint in China that would shape Pitlo's outlook on foreign relations. While the tension over the South China Sea may have intensified Sinophobia in the Philippines, Pitlo to this day maintains a more nuanced view of China-Philippines ties.

By living in Beijing, Pitlo learned that China is different from what he had learned and what he had read from books written by Western authors. He was impressed by the high quality of infrastructure and roads, as well as China's successes in poverty alleviation and advancements in digital technology compared to his home country.



Lucio Pitlo III speaks at a symposium on RCEP in Haikou, Hainan province, in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"China proved that kind of economic miracle is possible because of a strong central government policy. That's also one interesting area that I came to appreciate while I was in China," he said.

Pitlo observed that compared with their peers in the Southeast Asian region, very few Filipinos study in China. While studying at Peking University, Lucio met students from Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

"They are studying in higher learning institutions in Beijing and they're trying to make sense of China as an engine of global growth," he said, adding that while other ASEAN countries also have contesting claims over the South China Sea, they usually find a way to work with China.

Pitlo returned to Manila in 2015 and applied what he learned by teaching Chinese politics and economy at Ateneo de Manila University, and international relations at De La Salle University. He was also a contributing editor at Asian Politics & Policy, a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal, from 2015 to 2023. Since 2018, he has been a research fellow of the independent policy think tank Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation.

Pitlo writes and contributes opinion pieces for various local and international publications and has built a reputation as one of the most sought-after experts in security, defense and Philippines-China relations. He continued to deepen his scholarly knowledge by returning time and again to the academy. He was in Washington, DC, from 2018 to 2021, where he finished his MA in international relations at the American University's School of International Service.

As the current PACS president, Pitlo aims to expand the membership by reaching out to students and the younger generation of enthusiasts of Philippine-Chinese ties. He will also continue the PACS tradition of publishing the Chinese Studies Journal, an annual peer-reviewed journal that can be accessed for free, and holding several dialogues as a way to promote people-to-people exchanges.

Germany's Scholz to face vote of confidence

By EARLE GALE in London

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Wednesday formally set the wheels in motion that will culminate in a general election at the end of February.

The embattled national leader, who has seen his approval rating plummet in recent months, filed a petition with Germany's lower house of parliament, asking lawmakers to participate in a confidence vote on Monday that he is sure to lose.

The confidence vote defeat will oblige Scholz to ask President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to dissolve parliament and set an election date, which is widely expected to be Sunday, Feb 23.

Steinmeier must name the election date within three weeks of Scholz requesting dissolution of

the parliament. The DPA news agency said Steinmeier indicated he would move fast, quoting him as saying: "Our country needs stable majorities and a government capable of action."

The chancellor has been heading toward the confidence vote ever since he broke up his three-party ruling coalition on Nov 7 by firing his finance minister, Christian Lindner, who is also the leader of the pro-business Free Democrats.

Scholz, a Social Democrat, is set to face off in February against Friedrich Merz, leader of the center-right Christian Democrats, which is known as the CDU, Robert Habeck, leader of the Greens, and Alternative for Germany's co-leader Alice Weidel.

Scholz started campaigning on Tuesday and said during a visit to Warsaw, Poland on Tuesday that

he believes Germany should form a European contact group on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, alongside France, the United Kingdom, and Poland.

Merz unveiled the idea on Monday, during a visit to Ukraine, saying the contact group could jointly develop strategies to support Ukraine, especially in light of the United States' likely scaling back of its support under the new presidency.

The leadership crisis in Germany follows a similar situation in France, in which Prime Minister Michel Barnier lost a confidence vote and triggered the collapse of his government. The confidence vote in Germany will be the first the nation has experienced since 2005 when then-chancellor Gerhard Schroder lost such a contest and sent the country into an early election.

Merz was also out campaigning this week and said during a visit to Warsaw, Poland on Tuesday that

he believes Germany should form a European contact group on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, alongside France, the United Kingdom, and Poland.

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Most Brexit supporters now want closer EU ties: Study

By EARLE GALE in London

Most people who voted in the 2016 Brexit referendum for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union now want access to its single market and the freedom-of-movement principle, according to a study by the European Council on Foreign Relations, or ECFR.

The think tank said in a report released on Wednesday that many people in EU member nations also want much closer ties.

After surveying more than 9,000 people in the UK and the EU's five most populous countries — France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain — the study concluded there is a strong demand for closer ties on both sides. "There is a remarkable consensus

on both sides of the (English) Channel that the time is ripe for a reassessment of EU-UK relations," the report said.

On Thursday, new European Council President Antonio Costa made his maiden visit to Britain for talks with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer as the two sides press to improve ties, Brussels said. But, while UK and EU negotiators

are set to meet in January to explore closer ties, both sides have said they will not target the UK rejoining the political and economic alliance or its single market. The ECFR report said voters appear to be ahead of the politicians, and want to go further.

It said 54 percent of Britons who voted "leave" in the 2016 referendum would now accept free movement for EU and UK citizens

wanting to live and work throughout their shared territory, in return for access to the EU's single market.

In the past, free access was a major reason why many UK voters chose to leave the bloc, over fears EU citizens were outcompeting them for jobs.

The report said the desire for closer UK-EU ties increased significantly after Donald Trump secured the presidency of the United States, and has been fueled by worries about the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"The EU and the UK are both very vulnerable to prevailing global

events and a reset of relations is the single most effective way to make both sides stronger," the report said.

In general, 55 percent of UK voters want improved ties, while 10 percent want more distant ties, and 22 percent want the status quo.

Among EU nations, 45 percent of Germans want closer ties, the report said, as do 44 percent of Polish voters, 41 percent of Spaniards, 40 percent of Italians, and 34 percent of the French.

Agencies contributed to this story.

WORLD US

Appeal for levelheaded cooperation expressed

Export restrictions could lead to global technology bifurcation, US expert says

By LINDA DENG in Seattle
lindadeng@chinadailyusa.com

The president of a prominent business organization said that the United States and China have entered a new era in which technology is more tightly controlled, referring to the US expanded restrictions on semiconductor-related exports to China in the name of national security and China's retaliation measures, but he is hopeful about cooperation on global challenges.

Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council, made the point as the keynote speaker at the third annual Big Data China conference, hosted online on Tuesday by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. The theme of the conference was "The Turning Point? US-China Relations, Economic Growth, and the Race for Technology Leadership".

On Dec 2, the United States announced expanded restrictions

on semiconductor-related exports to China. The new rules ban the export of 24 types of semiconductor manufacturing equipment, three related software tools, advanced memory chips, and chipmaking machinery.

The restrictions extend to nearly 140 Chinese semiconductor companies, including major manufacturers, which have been added to the US Department of Commerce's Entity List.

Allen noted China's robust response: banning the export of materials like gallium and graphite to the US, which he said could disrupt US manufacturing and commerce significantly.

He said that increased reciprocal export controls could lead to the bifurcation of global technology ecosystems, including IT systems, code and innovation networks.

"Right now, the expansion of export controls by both countries is accelerating. If we do not

“I have great confidence that the incoming Trump administration will recognize the economic importance of a fulsome economic relationship with China, despite the calls for tariffs and whatnot.”

Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council

arrest that acceleration, then it will become more and more difficult for the two big data companies or systems to coexist," he said.

"I think that both governments should agree that we do not want a bifurcated IT system. We do not

want to bifurcate code; we do not want to bifurcate our technology, innovation, ecosystems, but that is the direction in which we are headed," he said.

"I would encourage both governments to have a serious talk about national security risks and clearly delineate what is go and what is no go," he said.

"I have great confidence that the incoming Trump administration will recognize the economic importance of a fulsome economic relationship with China, despite the calls for tariffs and whatnot," Allen said.

Allen also highlighted increasing pressure from the US Congress on technology regulations, with legislative initiatives like the National Defense Authorization Act signaling more stringent controls.

He expressed concerns over Congress' tendency to push for more restrictions and advocated instead for a flexible, regulatory approach led by the executive branch.

Companies on the Entity List must apply for export licenses, which are unlikely to be granted.

To close potential loopholes, the US will enforce the Foreign Direct Product Rule, limiting the ability of non-US companies that use US technology to supply restricted items to China.

That rule effectively prevents US companies from producing and exporting semiconductor tools in third countries to bypass the ban. While some US-aligned nations may receive exemptions, some have questioned the long-term efficacy of the measures.

In response, on Dec 5, China's Ministry of Commerce implemented stricter export controls aimed at the United States. The measures include a ban on the exporting of gallium, germanium, antimony and super hard materials, all critical for semiconductor, defense and optical industries. The export of graphite, another essential material, will now be subject to greater scrutiny.

Unlike previous restrictions, China's new rules introduce more rigorous assessments of end-uses and purposes, directly targeting US entities. The regulations hold all individuals and organizations

globally accountable if they transfer Chinese-origin dual-use items to the United States for military purposes, with violators facing legal consequences.

Despite the reciprocal restrictions, Allen argued for exploring opportunities for cooperation, particularly on global challenges such as climate change, public health and food security.

"China is extremely innovative. America is extremely innovative. We are intertwined. Indeed, we are entangled," Allen said. "So, let's have more discussions of that type and figure out how we maximize the benefits while recognizing with very clear eyes the national security threats that are engaged."

"Let us focus particularly on global public goods, which are so obvious, including climate change, public health, food, safety, anti-proliferation, anti-narcotics," he said.

"There's so much that the US and China can do together. We have a moral obligation to explore that, with great power and competition, let us not rule out great power cooperation."

Blinken grilled on US withdrawal from Afghanistan

WASHINGTON — US congressional Republicans on Wednesday grilled Secretary of State Antony Blinken over the chaotic withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Blinken appeared before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, capping a long period of animosity between his agency and the committee's Republican leadership, which has accused the top US diplomat of ignoring its numerous subpoenas.

Republicans, led by President-elect Donald Trump, have lambasted the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in August 2021, which saw 13 US soldiers killed in a suicide bombing at Kabul airport in the final hours of the retreat.

"This catastrophic event was the beginning of a failed foreign policy that lit the world on fire," said Committee Chairman Republican Michael McCaul.

It was clear "it was going to be a disaster," said Florida Republican Representative Brian Mast, who will take over as chairman of the committee in the next Congress.

The hearing, which was briefly interrupted by protesters against Israel's military assault in Gaza, came as Blinken headed to Jordan later on Wednesday to discuss the unrest in Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

It came at the end of Blinken's diplomatic service under President Joe Biden, with just under six weeks left before Trump takes office, and at the end of McCaul's time leading the Foreign Affairs Committee. It served as a capstone to nearly four years of animosity between the two over the end of the longest war of the United States.

There was little new ground broken on the US withdrawal, after years of blame-trading between Republicans and Democrats.

Blinken pointed to the planned 2026 release of a government-appointed Afghanistan War Commission's review as the best prospect of an independent full report on the disastrous events of the summer of 2021.

Previous investigations and analyses by a government-appointed special investigator for Afghanistan and some private policy groups have pointed to a systemic failure spanning the last four presidential administrations and concluded that Biden and Trump share the heaviest blame.

Blinken stressed that the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan had been made during Trump's previous administration in an agreement with the Taliban.

"To the extent, President Biden faced a choice, it was between ending the war or escalating it," Blinken said.

Addressing US soldiers' relatives present in the hall, Blinken said: "I deeply regret that we did not do more, and could not do more to protect them."

The US withdrawal saw Taliban fighters sweep aside Afghan forces, forcing the last US troops to mount an evacuation from Kabul's airport that got more than 120,000 people out of the country in a matter of days.

Biden has long defended the decision to leave Afghanistan, which critics have said helped cause the catastrophic collapse of Afghan forces.

During the hearing, McCaul also announced that White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will also testify in front of the body on Dec 17 on the matter, which has been a key part of Trump's election campaign against Vice-President Kamala Harris.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's testimony is disrupted by protesters at the House Foreign Affairs Committee during a hearing on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, at the Capitol in Washington on Wednesday. J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE / AP

Inspired by ink paintings



An audience member uses brush to write Chinese characters on Thursday at the exhibition *Qi Baishi, Inspiration in Ink* at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. On the wall behind her, Qi's drawing *Dove of Peace* was displayed. One of the most revolutionary and innovative Chinese artists, who transformed traditional ink painting, Qi (1864-1957) is considered a modern master in China's art history. The exhibition features more than 40 pieces, including Qi's drawings, calligraphy and seal cuttings, which offer a glimpse into Qi's artistic pursuit, love of nature and fondness of tranquility. The exhibition, which opened on Thursday and runs through April 7, was co-organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and the Beijing Fine Art Academy. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

China, US: Connecting through tourism

By MINGMEI LI
in Marco Island, Florida
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China and the United States are continuing to enhance their tourism connections, working to overcome any travel obstacles.

The China National Tourist Office partnered with the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) during its annual conference and marketplace in Marco Island, Florida, on Thursday to share the latest information about China travel with international tourism suppliers.

The USTOA serves as a tourism platform that connects North American travel agencies with global tourism suppliers and destinations.

More than 800 participants gathered for a sidelines event hosted by the China National Tourist Office in partnership with the USTOA. The event provided a networking platform, bringing together tourism agencies from the US and around the world with Chinese tourism representatives and suppliers.

The luncheon discussion focused on exchanging ideas, building new partnerships and exploring strategies to enhance global tourism, as China is a popular destination for cultural exchange and a big market for business opportunities.

"It's always good to be reminded that, although our governments may have differences, it doesn't change the people," Terry Dale, the president of the USTOA, told China Daily.

Dale visited China in May for the 14th China-US Tourism Leadership

“We have identified a range of problems they might encounter during their journeys and developed solutions to make travel easier and more comfortable, including improvements in transportation, accommodation and more.”

Zhang Zheng, vice-minister of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China

Summit and said he found the Chinese people to be "nice and generous" and that travel represents the "human connection".

The US and China remain the world's strongest travel and tourism markets, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. Both countries have actively implemented measures to revitalize and promote their travel industries to also promote economic growth.

China has enhanced its visa policies to attract international visitors. Travelers from 38 countries can now enter China visa-free and stay for up to 30 days for purposes such as business or tourism.

Citizens from 54 countries, including the United States, can take advantage of 72-hour or 144-hour visa-free transit options at select entry ports.

The US State Department has eased its travel advisory for China, lowering it from Level 3 ("Reconsider Travel") to Level 2 ("Exercise Increased Caution"), aligning China's advisory status with that of countries like the UK and Germany.

"This is amazing news and a huge signal. This is such a positive step forward," Dale said. "It signals that the travel industry is truly the bridge between our countries, and we are encouraging this exchange of cultures between the people who call the US home and people who call China home!"

"These supports are highly necessary and very smart on China's part," he said. "They are tools we can give to travelers to make them feel like, 'You know what, I can do this!'"

Dale said that travelers will feel confident traveling to a new place across the ocean with complete infrastructure and language support.

"China is simplifying the visa-free transit policy for international travelers," Zhang Zheng, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, said in a speech. "To better accommodate the trips of our international travelers and consumers, we have identified a range of problems they might encounter during their journeys and developed solutions to make travel easier and more comfortable, including

improvements in transportation, accommodation and more."

Zhang said that China has been working hard to simplify the visa process and provide information to foreign travelers. He expressed excitement about sharing travel information about China, beyond the 850 travel agencies but also "friends" who have been actively promoting international travel.

Zhang, who traveled from Beijing to Shanghai, then to New York, and finally to Florida, said he wanted to collaborate with the USTOA to ensure smooth travel experiences.

Ma Yunfei, the director of the China National Tourist Office, said, "We are truly grateful for the opportunity to connect with so many esteemed leaders and partners in the travel community and industry."

He added that the USTOA plays an important role in connecting suppliers and travelers, facilitating better sharing of travel resources.

Sonia Neto, the commercial director of Montebelo Hotels & Resorts in Portugal, won a trip to China at the luncheon Thursday.

"I'm very excited. I've never been to China before, and it's a big country I would like to visit," she said as she waved the tickets for an eight-day trip to Beijing, Xi'an and Shanghai.

"She said she was looking forward to the nature part of China, the big buildings, and the industrial cities."

"We have lots of connections between China and Portugal," Neto said, adding that she would recommend a trip to China to her clients in Portugal.

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), of which China Daily is among its 20 leading titles.



STAYING AFLOAT

Green finance deemed necessary to plug climate problems

An aerial photo shows a river inundating farmland and houses in the Ilagan area of Isabela in the Philippines on Nov 12. VILLAMOR VISAYA / AFP

To the rest of the world, Pari Island may be just another of the thousands of islands that make up the vast Indonesian archipelago with some of them so tiny they do not have names.

But nonprofit Friends of the Earth Indonesia is fighting for more visibility for the plight of its 1,500 inhabitants, who are facing the loss of their homes and fishery livelihoods as sea levels rise.

The island was partially inundated an unprecedented 10 times last year by exceptionally high tides.

Island communities in Southeast Asia, like those on Pari, have long grappled with worsening climate impacts but often find it difficult to access the funds they need to become resilient against floods and typhoons. Countries in the region also need assistance to phase out coal.

But the recently concluded COP29 UN climate change conference could offer some hope, with developed countries agreeing to channel \$300 billion a year to developing countries by 2035. The ultimate aim is to raise \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 for countries in need, through various forms of finance.

The \$300 billion core amount was still criticized as woefully insufficient by climate-vulnerable countries and civil society, who expected richer countries — considered the historical emitters — to commit more.

It is also uncertain how the amount will be raised. While developed countries will take the lead, the COP29 decision stated that the amount will come from "a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including alternative sources".

Gao Xi, a research associate at the Energy Studies Institute, or ESI, under the National University of Singapore, said: "Most Southeast Asian countries are coastal, making them particularly vulnerable to threats such as typhoons, floods and droughts caused by climate change. Frequent extreme weather events often result in significant financial losses and social disruptions."

In 2024 alone, the Philippines was struck by six typhoons within a span of 30 days — between October and November — killing more than 170 people, displacing more than 214,000 people and causing damage worth about 470 million pesos (\$8.1 million). While the archipelago is prone to tropical storms, such back-to-back typhoons within a month is unusual.

As most countries in Southeast Asia are still developing and have relatively weak economic foundations, climate finance is necessary for the region to take climate action, added Gao, with funds particularly needed for clean energy generation and low-carbon transport.

According to the International Energy Agency, the Association of



From top: Residents push their vehicles through a flooded street under the impact of tropical storm Trami in Naga of the Philippines on Oct 24. ZALRIAN SAYAT / AFP A shop owner prepares customers' orders at her food stall, where she had to raise the floor due to rising sea levels at Timbulsloko village, Indonesia, in 2023. BAY ISMOYO / AFP

Most Southeast Asian countries are coastal, making them particularly vulnerable to threats such as typhoons, floods and droughts caused by climate change."

Gao Xi, a research associate at the Energy Studies Institute of the National University of Singapore

Southeast Asian Nations area will need \$21 billion in investments annually from 2026 to 2030 just to upgrade its energy infrastructure. To build resilience against climate impacts, the region needs \$422 billion until 2030.

Tapping potential

The finance outcomes from the UN conference in Azerbaijan could benefit other developments in Southeast Asia, such as the future regional power grid and carbon trading, which can also benefit Singapore.

tal required, especially for building the grid and transmission infrastructure. The resulting long payback periods can put off traditional investors, who seek quicker returns, Beni said.

Climate finance can alleviate these gridlocks, with these funds often coming in the form of concessional loans with low interest rates, grants, or guarantees which lower the financial risks for private investors, according to analysts.

When forms of finance like green bonds, blended finance and funding from the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank are injected into a mega-project first, the risks are lowered for private investors to participate.

Blended finance refers to bringing together monies from the public sector, the multilateral development banks, philanthropies and the private sector.

"This is where climate finance can step in — by bridging these gaps, mitigating risks, and enabling investments that otherwise might not materialize," he added.

Balancing act

Southeast Asia is in a tricky position when it comes to receiving climate finance as stipulated by COP29. On the one hand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia were, until 2019, among the 20 countries most exposed to climate risks, according to the Global Climate Risk Index, which is published by nonprofit Germanwatch.

But Southeast Asia is expected to continue its fast economic growth, accompanied by more greenhouse gas emissions, said Kim Jeong Won, a senior research fellow at ESI.

This growth has reclassified many ASEAN nations as middle-income countries, reducing their eligibility for development financing, she added.

Among the developing nations, the least developed countries and small island developing states are recognized as having the greatest need for support.

Given the competition for funding, a significant gap exists between the required investments and actual finance that the countries have received. For example, only 9.7 percent of investments from the UN's Green Climate Fund — the world's largest fund of its kind — has been channeled to Southeast Asia.

Similarly, only 6.3 percent of investments from the UN's Adaptation Fund has been allocated to ASEAN countries, Kim said.

She added, "Southeast Asian countries are expected to compete for limited bilateral and multilateral public funding with other low-income developing countries."

If they want to attract a greater share of private funding, it is vital that countries develop more innovative finance models and attractive climate-related projects, she said.

Marriage decline hurts Indonesian wedding industry

The wedding sector is feeling the negative effects of demographic change, with the number of marriages in Indonesia falling in recent years, according to latest industry figures.

Last year, the archipelago saw 1.57 million couples tying the knot, according to government institute Statistics Indonesia, a drop from over 2 million in 2018.

The share of young married individuals continued to shrink to 30.61 percent last year, from 44.45 percent recorded a decade ago, Statistics Indonesia figures showed. The share of unmarried young individuals rose over the past years, from 54.11 percent in 2014 to 68.29 percent last year.

Yunarsih, who chairs the Indonesian Wedding Organizer Association, said that the trend of fewer marriages over the past years has taken a toll on the industry.

"Hotels and wedding organizers for the middle to upper scale were affected," she said, adding that in past years organizers would see a peak season around the end of the year but that has not been the case this year.

Many Indonesians see marriage as a burden, with more young adults opting to pursue a career, an education or socializing and traveling, according to industry reports.

Some young people also prefer not to have children, while others suggest one can live without being formally married.

The average age of marriage in Indonesia has increased to 22.3 years last year from 20 years in 2012, according to Statistics Indonesia figures, which indicated that more people are postponing getting married.

Tutus Wahyu, a wedding organizer in Surabaya, East Java, said that the trend has been hurting his business and others in his region, adding that this year saw the lowest takings compared to previous post-pandemic years.

Shifting trends and lifestyle choices among the young combined with a weakening economy in the country, Tutus said, have significantly influenced their reluctance to get married.

Established in 2016, his business normally handles 150 clients a year but it has seen a 30 percent drop in bookings this year.

But Natasza Kurniawan, head of marketing at a wedding platform in Indonesia, said she remained optimistic, that the wedding industry will still grow in the country amid the declining number of marriages.

Event visitors at the group's wedding exhibition remained stable at 100,000 people, while its website and app channels averaged 1.4 million visits and 390,000 visits, respectively, during the first nine months of this year.

"Weddings in Indonesia are still considered sacred and important; thus, it remains anticipated and prioritized by grooms and their families," she said.

Some weddings still incorporate traditional settings, with a series of events that involve family members, resulting in large arrangements, she said.

But the company recorded "intimate weddings" as consistently topping the list of concept trends preferred by married couples from the first to third quarter of this year.

Intimate weddings typically focus on quality over quantity, requiring less financial resources.

Natasza said that an intimate wedding is more personal, with challenging details and adjustments to fit the customer's preferences.

Tutus pointed out that the intimate wedding trend could affect the profit margin for wedding organizers, given the smaller budget required. But he also perceived the trend as an opportunity to attract more young couples.

Intimate weddings are more cost-efficient, so they can attract young couples that prioritize the value of time spent with their close ones, he said.

Tutus said that the market from young generations, including millennials born between 1981 and 1996, could still give the industry an optimistic outlook.

"Approaches to millennials require creativity, efficiency and personal communication. Focus on creating added value through personalized services and relevant promotion based on their digital preferences. This will help wedding organizers stay competitive amid shifting market trends," he said.

Tammy Vanya, a wedding organizer operating in the greater Jakarta area, Bandung, West Java and Bali, said the outlook for the industry remains bright.

Her business has been operating for five years and remains resilient despite industry challenges.

The key to surviving comes from a personal and emotional approach to clients, she said.

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA

Focus on creating added value through personalized services and relevant promotion based on their digital preferences. This will help wedding organizers stay competitive amid shifting market trends."

Tutus Wahyu, a wedding organizer in Indonesia

1.57 million couples

tyed the knot in 2023 in Indonesia, a drop from over 2 million in 2018, according to Statistics Indonesia's figures.



A bride smiles for the digital lens before a mass wedding event organized by local authorities for about 330 couples, in Surabaya, Indonesia, on July 2. JUNI KRISWANTO / AFP

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE



The Shanghai World Financial Center (first from left) and the Shanghai Tower (second from left) are landmarks of the city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

'Five centers' focus on high-caliber resource

Shanghai intent on keeping, cultivating, introducing and better using international talent

Shanghai, which has been promoting its "Five Centers" development strategy, namely establishing itself as an international economic center, international financial center, international trade center, international shipping center and international scientific and technological innovation center, takes talent as the city's most valuable resource.

"Talent is the primary resource. A city's competitiveness depends on the caliber of talent it possesses," said Shanghai Mayor Gong Zheng at a news conference on promoting high-quality development, organized by the State Council Information Office in March.

Gong, who attended the opening of the 22nd Conference on International Exchange of Professionals in November, re-emphasized the importance of talent in supporting development of a city.

He said Shanghai will draw global talent with an open and inclusive mind and foster a better ecosystem for talent growth to serve professionals from near and far.

To this end, it will keep, cultivate, introduce and better use international talent, strengthen its international talent communication, and build a world-class platform for global talent to realize their dreams.

The city looks forward to more outstanding global talents coming to Shanghai for innovation, entrepreneurship, exchange, and cooperation, jointly creating a wonderful chapter of mutual achievement where talent and the city thrive together, said Gong.

According to official data, the city's talent pool has continued expanding in recent years, with 172,000 domestic and overseas professionals introduced in 2023, a 12 percent year-on-year increase.

As of March 28, the city had issued a total of 441,000 work permits to foreigners and received more than 310,000 Chinese stu-

dents who had returned from overseas to work and start businesses. The city's total talent base had exceeded 6.75 million.

Recognized qualifications

In recent years, Shanghai has been enhancing the services it provides to attract and retain global talents.

In November, Shanghai expanded its recognition of professionals holding overseas occupational qualifications to attract them from around the world to boost its vitality.

The Shanghai List of Recognized Overseas Occupational Qualifications 2.0 Version, released by the Shanghai Human Resources and Social Security Bureau on Nov 15, has expanded the Category A list of recognized overseas occupational qualifications to 111 items, up from 48. Holders of these qualifications can receive support services, including prioritized entry and exit, and work permit and residence permit facilitation.

The latest version of recognized overseas occupational qualifications also has 22 qualifications classified as Category B, or urgently needed ones, with extra premium services provided.

Another 33 qualifications are deemed category C, and the holders can acquire corresponding professional titles in China. Their overseas professional experience, work achievements, and innovative contributions may be considered as

evaluation criteria. Category D, a new supplementary list, has been introduced, aiming to facilitate mutual recognition between Chinese and overseas professional qualifications, certifications, and technical titles in fields such as construction, finance, accounting and human resources.

In September, Shanghai also introduced 13 new measures to enhance services for foreign talent in Shanghai. The measures, released at the fourth Shanghai Talent+ Summit, include streamlined procedures for obtaining visas, residence permits, permanent residency, work permits and financial services.

Bolstering business

Workforce solutions provider ManpowerGroup Greater China initiated its operations in the Chinese mainland in 2003. So far, the company has established a network covering more than 300 cities in China. The company relocated its China headquarters to Shanghai in 2016. Over the span of more than 20 years, ManpowerGroup Greater China has observed Shanghai's vibrancy in attracting global professionals.

"With rapid economic growth and continuous industrial upgrades, the talent market in Shanghai is thriving, with a constant demand for professional talent in different fields. This not only provides us with broad market opportunities but also drives us to continuously optimize servi-

ces, enhance professional standards and meet the increasingly diverse needs of both enterprises and individuals," said Cui Zhihui, executive director and CEO of ManpowerGroup Greater China. "Shanghai also places great emphasis on cultivating local talent by providing education and training to continuously enhance the overall quality and competitiveness of its workforce. These efforts not only offer robust talent support for Shanghai's economic development but also present our human resources company with additional talent resources and service opportunities."

Cui also praised the efforts made by the Shanghai government in promoting management and service innovation in the talent sector.

"Shanghai actively promotes harmonious and stable labor relations, providing an equitable, just, and transparent employment environment for both enterprises and employees," said Cui. "Shanghai is a city full of vitality and innovation, where corporate culture exhibits diverse and inclusive characteristics. Through our collaborations with numerous enterprises, we have witnessed their efforts and achievements in building corporate culture. These corporate cultures not only enhance employees' sense of belonging and cohesion but also inject new vitality and drive into the development of enterprises."

Haleon, a British multinational

consumer health group that demerged from GSK in 2022, has achieved rapid expansion in China in the past few years.

According to the company, Haleon's sales growth reached double digits in 2023 in China. Several of its brands such as Centrum, a multivitamin brand, and Bactroban, a cream product for wounds, are leading in their respective market segments.

The company also put a new innovation center in Shanghai into operation in 2023 to further support local development and foster an innovation culture.

The company attributes its success in China to the growing awareness of health management among the populace, the rapid expansion of its sales network both online and offline, and its people-centered company culture and talent cultivation strategy.

Shanghai's efforts in supporting talent also strongly support the company in attracting professionals from around the world.

"Shanghai has established a globally competitive talent attraction mechanism with a series of measures to bring more conveniences to attract and retain talent, which support us in the recruitment of more high-caliber professionals," said the company.

Over the past three years, Shanghai has promoted cross-border mobile payment options through UnionPay, Alipay and WeChat Pay, enabling overseas users to use foreign bank cards for mobile pay-

ments at domestic merchants. More than 70,000 point of sale terminals which accept foreign cards across sectors such as catering, tourism, accommodation and transportation have been installed. Foreign card transactions exceeded 1.9 million in the first half of 2024, totaling 3.5 billion yuan (\$481.9 million).

Shanghai has launched a nine-language international service portal, designed to provide a one-stop, multilingual, user-friendly platform for foreign nationals. The portal offers comprehensive information and services for working, traveling, living, doing business and studying in the city.

Foreign contributors

On Nov 23, 50 expats from 18 countries who engaged in sectors such as trade, finance, technology, shipping, healthcare, education, culture, sports and agriculture were awarded the 2024 Magnolia Silver Award at Shanghai's Grand Halls, which offers stunning views of the city, including the historic Bund on the west bank of the Huangpu River and the modern Lujiazui financial area, home to landmarks such as the Oriental Pearl Tower and the Shanghai Tower. The award, which has been given out annually since 1989, is among the highest honors foreigners can receive in the city for their contributions to the city's development and international exchanges.

Kong Fu'an, director-general of the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office, highlighted the pivotal roles that foreigners, foreign-invested enterprises and foreign institutions play in the city's development, noting that they have been "not only witnesses, but also active participants and contributors".

By setting up this award, Shanghai hopes to inspire more foreign talent to come to Shanghai, stay in Shanghai, integrate into Shanghai, and help to accelerate the progress of Shanghai. So far, more than 1,000 foreign nationals have received the award.



From left: The Shanghai office of Haleon, a British multinational consumer health group. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY The office of ManpowerGroup Greater China in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A woman uses the self-service system at the new site of Shanghai Hongqiao One-stop Service Center for Overseas Talents. ZHANG HENGWEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

ADVERTORIAL

Great potential for AI companies in Shanghai

City has seen artificial intelligence industry grow at rapid rate in recent years



A view of Shanghai's Pudong New Area. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanghai, which has identified the artificial intelligence industry as one of its three leading future industries, has achieved outstanding results in such development and is awaiting more global AI businesses to unlock its potential.

The scale of Shanghai's AI industry has surged from 134 billion yuan (\$18.47 billion) in 2018 to 380 billion yuan in 2023, according to official data released in June. The number of large-scale enterprises has risen from 183 to 348, positioning it among the highest in the country. Shanghai has also cultivated a talent pool of 250,000 individuals, a notable increase from 100,000 in 2018, constituting approximately one-third of the national total.

Pudong New Area was one of the earliest regions in China to develop the AI industry. By the end of 2023, Pudong New Area had more than 600 key AI enterprises, with the scale of the AI-related industry exceeding 140 billion yuan.

In recent years, Shanghai has implemented policies and provided financial support to the AI sector. For example, a fund of funds with an initial capital of 22.5 billion yuan was established in July to bolster the development of AI in areas such as intelligent chips, smart software, autonomous driving, and intelligent robots. Then in October, a 10-billion-yuan fund was established by the Shanghai State-owned Capital Investment to support AI development in the city.

In recent years, Shanghai has emerged as a prime choice for AI businesses due to its wealth of resources.

Right connections

Rockwell Automation, which has long been a leader in industrial automation, digital transformation and smart development, is keen to use its expertise in AI to support businesses in China to optimize their performance and achieve sustainable development.

"As China undergoes a transfor-

mation in its industrial landscape, Rockwell must also evolve into a leading enterprise within the productive service sector," said Ian Shih, president of Rockwell Automation China. "We are poised to bring together partners from diverse industries to address both industrial and societal challenges, ultimately empowering the sustainable development of our society," he added.

Shih said that the rapid industrial automation in China has significantly enhanced production efficiency. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, it has outpaced market demand.

"Dark factories are renowned for their advancements in technology. However, without orders, these facilities may not be able to activate their operations," said Shih. "This means that companies must explore avenues for advancing technological innovation, service innovation and industrial chain innovation, transcending the confines of the factory's 'four walls', aligning with market demands, and spearheading industry trends," he said.

So far, Rockwell has been helping companies to address issues in intellectual property protection, production efficiency enhancement, marketing and upstream and downstream supply chain coordination.

"Rockwell will leverage its advantage in automation to gather global partners to create new demand," said Shih.

In 2023, Rockwell partnered with Caohejing High-Tech Park in Shanghai to establish a net-zero co-innovation center. This center is dedicated to incubating scientific innovation, advancing green development and enhancing the local supply chain.

Shih, who was awarded the Shanghai Magnolia Silver Award in 2024, said that Shanghai is a place where it's easy for companies to get connected with governments and industries, which is ideal for the research and development of AI technologies.

380
billion yuan
scale of the artificial
intelligence industry that
Shanghai reached in 2023

140+
billion yuan
scale of the AI-related
industry that Pudong New
Area reached in 2023

"The business environment in Shanghai is highly open. There are multinational companies and leading Chinese companies gathering in Caohejing High-Tech Park and Shanghai. The industrial park is active in assisting us to communicate with businesses and promote the application of our new products and services," Shih said.

Rich resources

This year, Dun & Bradstreet, a leading business data and analytics provider from the United States, introduced generative AI solutions such as D&B Hoovers SmartMail AI and ChatD&B into the Chinese market to empower the decision-making of its clients. According to the company, the D&B Hoovers SmartMail AI, which is designed to boost sales prospecting and lead generation, was launched in China in the first half of 2024. This product can assist Chinese foreign trade companies in streamlining their targeted outreach processes by automating messaging and deploying them to highly targeted contacts.

"Leveraging D&B Hoovers' nearly 300 million active businesses and more than 450 million commercial contacts, SmartMail AI can help users quickly generate customized multilingual outreach emails, significantly improving the efficiency and effectiveness of reaching potential customers," said Andrew Wu, general manager of Dun & Bradstreet China.

During the 2024 China International Import Expo in Shanghai, Dun & Bradstreet made the Asian debut of ChatD&B, the company's generative AI assistant that produces instant business insights on companies and professional contacts.

According to the company, ChatD&B can surface learning across the company's data blocks, delivering actionable insights to its users ranging from prospecting to company due diligence. ChatD&B users can ask questions in conversational language, and it has the intelligence to access and analyze the underlying data to deliver the most relevant and accurate output.

"ChatD&B combines cutting-edge generative AI technology with Dun & Bradstreet's compliant, high-quality and trusted global data," said Wu.

He continued: "Leveraging Dun & Bradstreet's database which covers nearly 600 million enterprises worldwide, users can obtain information about a business in seconds through natural language conversations.

"This enables users to access and utilize data more conveniently and efficiently, significantly reducing user barriers, cutting down on manpower and time costs, and enhancing productivity.

"Since we launched ChatD&B at the CIIE, we have seen a significant number of interested users inquiring about it. Some early users are trying out this product and we have also received positive feedback."

Dun & Bradstreet, established in China more than 40 years ago, has been expanding its reach to support clients' expansion and enhance productivity by using its expertise in AI technology.

Wu said that the company will increase investment in data, technology and expertise in various application scenarios to embrace the Chinese market.

"We will consolidate global data resources and conduct R&D for the goal of 'in China, for China'. We will

also accelerate the application and promote the integration of AI technology across various industries to better facilitate the decision-making of businesses," Wu said.

Shanghai, a city for Dun & Bradstreet to begin its venture in the Chinese mainland, has identified AI as one of its three leading future industries. It is deemed a preferred destination by AI companies, according to Wu.

Wu said that Shanghai has strong government funding and policy support, high-quality data resources that form the foundation for AI technology development, abundant application scenarios, and a massive talent pool, all of which are crucial for the development of companies.

"Shanghai can provide business opportunities for companies like Dun & Bradstreet and support the construction of an AI ecosystem," Wu said.

World-class showcase

The CIIE, scheduled to take place annually from Nov 5 to 10 at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, has emerged as a prime platform for global AI businesses to showcase their latest products and engage with industry players. The AI subsection, introduced at the 2022 CIIE, has attracted numerous industry giants over the past three editions to share their insights and latest developments with their partners.

AMD, a high-performance and adaptive computing leader from the US, showcased its leading end-to-end AI infrastructure products and solutions under the theme of "AI + New Productive Force" at the 2024 CIIE. It also marked AMD's fourth consecutive time participating in the event.

At the 2024 edition, AMD's demonstration spotlighted AI technologies in commercialization scenarios including enterprise intelligence, smart manufacturing, content creation, office collaboration and intelligent vehicles. Using PCs, workstations,

servers and automotive solutions as devices, AMD showcased its computing AI chip products, technologies and solutions developed in partnership with outstanding independent software vendor partners for the Chinese market, covering cloud-edge-endpoint solutions.

"AI is a strategic priority at AMD. With our continuous efforts in AI, AMD has achieved new innovations and significant breakthroughs in AI deployments and applications. The CIIE provides a high-level international platform for us to showcase our broad range of AMD end-to-end AI solutions and applications with our ecosystem partners.

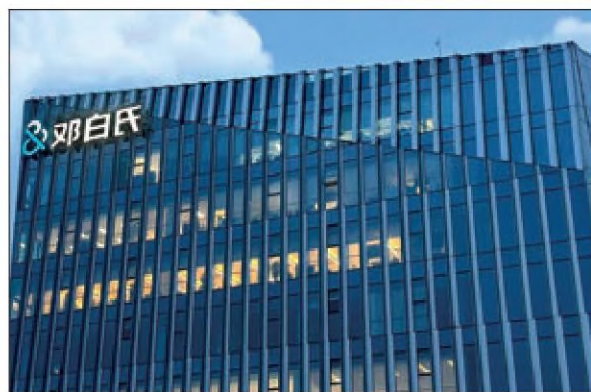
"Through expanded cooperation with Chinese partners, we are accelerating the digital transformation and industrial upgrade, providing a robust AI computing engine for new quality productive forces," said Spencer Pan, AMD's senior vice-president and president of AMD Greater China.

"Leveraging the high-profile platform of the CIIE, we fully showcased a broad spectrum of AMD AI solutions across smart office collaboration, data center and intelligent vehicles, highlighting our vision of using high-performance and adaptive computing to transform our lives," he said.

AMD's headquarters in Beijing for China marked its 20th anniversary in 2024, and Pan said the company is keen to join hands with more local partners toward a better future.

"2024 marks a significant milestone of the establishment of AMD Greater China. In these two decades, we've deeply felt the huge market potential and dynamics here.

"Today, AI has become a new quality productive force that empowers industrial upgrading, we are looking forward to working with more Chinese partners to empower productivity in all walks of life with AI and shape a more intelligent and efficient future together," Pan said.



From left: AMD displays vehicles featuring artificial intelligence at the seventh China International Import Expo. A view of the Dun & Bradstreet office building in Shanghai. Rockwell Automation's booth at the seventh CIIE. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Experts optimistic for FMCG sector in 2025

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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While growth of China's fast moving consumer goods has been slowing down in the past three quarters of the year, experts still hold a cautiously optimistic outlook on this sector for 2025, thanks to economic stimulus packages.

The forecast was made on Tuesday when the 13th China Shopper Report 2024 Vol 2 was jointly released by market consultancies Bain & Company and Kantar Worldpanel.

Positive signals can be found in the October data, as sales of FMCG products increased year-on-year and the decline in prices slowed, said Rachel Lee, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China.

The consumption coupons issued by local governments around the National Day holiday boosted consumption in October. The Singles Day online shopping carnival started around Oct 14, which was 14 days earlier than that in 2023, resulting in the increase of online sales, explained Lee.

Meanwhile, the lowered mortgage rate, which was announced in late September, led to a stock market rally after the National Day holiday. Consumer confidence was lifted and shoppers became more generous with their consumption budgets, she added.

"It can be anticipated that the government will continue its strategy to further boost consumption. We estimate that China's FMCG sector will grow by low single-digit in 2025, but higher than that of this year. It takes time for all the economic stimulative policies to really influence the market and consumption," said Lee.

China's FMCG sector registered a mild 0.8 percent year-on-year value growth in the first three quarters of the year, with the sales value up by 4.6 percent on a yearly basis and average selling prices down by 3.6 percent, according to the report released on Tuesday.

"The growth deceleration in China's FMCG is due to the average selling price deflationary trend which we had identified since 2021. We are seeing this year the highest average selling price decline since 2021, while the consumer price index rose by 0.3 percent during the same period. The intensifying market competition and the escalating demand for value for money are the primary drivers behind this trend," explained Lee.

Home care, such as laundry detergent and kitchen cleaning

"We estimate that China's FMCG sector will grow by low single-digit in 2025... It takes time for all the economic stimulative policies to really influence the market and consumption."

Rachel Lee, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China

supplies, was the only segment that maintained three full quarters of growth. Chinese consumers' heightened health and hygiene needs, as well as a growing demand for improved quality of life at home were the major driving forces, according to the report.

The market share of e-commerce contracted by 0.6 percent as of end September, the first time for this channel to show a decline since its inception. Although overall online sales volume grew by 6 percent, driven by various promotions, sales revenue dropped slightly due to a 6 percent decline in selling prices.

While short-video platform Douyin's e-commerce continued to grow at a double-digit rate of 35 percent, it was much slower than the 65 percent growth seen in 2023. The e-commerce platform of Kuaishou, another video-sharing site, declined by 12 percent.

Derek Deng, head of Bain & Company Greater China Consumer Products practice, pointed out that a big challenge for FMCG brands at present is consumer loyalty, which has been steadily declining over the past decade.

Therefore, brands need to maintain higher penetration rates in the market, which is more important than repeated purchases or purchase frequency, he said.

FMCG companies need to seize out-of-home opportunities, as research finds that Chinese people now make more such consumption at scenarios related to office, travel, outdoor activities and even commuting, suggested Deng.

Meanwhile, given the persistent deflationary environment, FMCG companies need to continue their cost management, including looking for more partnership opportunities or building asset-lite operating models, he added.



A view of Tencent's booth during an expo in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Private firms primed as economic drivers

Digital tech, including internet, plays key role in reigniting momentum

By CHENG YU
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China's private enterprises are confident of their capacity to navigate challenges and seize opportunities in an evolving global landscape, as the government has rolled out a series of supportive policies to boost the private sector, said leading entrepreneurs on Thursday.

In a People's Daily column on Thursday, Ma Huateng, chairman and CEO of tech company Tencent Holdings, said that a powerful package of incremental policies has been rolled out by the government recently, helping tackle the pressing pain points and bottlenecks that have hindered the economy.

"These measures are responding directly to the market's calls, injecting businesses with renewed confidence in the government's unwavering determination to drive a steady economic recovery. This has also emboldened enterprises, reinforcing their belief in taking bold, decisive action to move forward with unyielding resolve," Ma said.

He sees the digital technology sector, including the internet, as playing a pivotal role in reigniting economic momentum. Tencent, he said, has been exploring new avenues in digital consumption, creat-

ing diverse models and scenarios to stimulate demand.

"Looking ahead, Tencent is committed to ramping up investment in line with government encouragement, championing the spirit of entrepreneurship, and weaving together technological innovation and industrial advancement more deeply than ever before," Ma added.

Among the country's latest efforts to drive the private sector, Zhang Xinghai, chairman of automaker Seres, pointed out that the private economy promotion law draft was opened to the public for feedback, which will better address concerns, build consensus and play a vital role in promoting the sustained, healthy and high-quality development of the private sector.

Reflecting on how fiscal and monetary policies have also strengthened market confidence, Zhang called for more efforts to seize opportunities and accelerate the cultivation and growth of new quality productive forces, including new energy.

"We are intensifying efforts to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies to deliver an exceptional driving experience for our users. With steadfast confidence in China's economic future, we remain committed to action, inno-

vation and driving progress, and we're determined to contribute the strength of private enterprises to the nation's high-quality economic development," he said.

Echoing this sentiment, Xu Guanju, chairman of Transfar Group, a leading chemicals manufacturer, said that amid intense market competition, private enterprises at this new stage of development must not only consolidate their market presence, but also prioritize technological advancements, including the development of new quality productive forces.

"Such efforts involve increasing investment in technology, using industries as platforms to tackle technical challenges and fostering breakthroughs in product innovation, application innovation, foundational research, and original cutting-edge technologies," Xu said.

"The greater the challenges we face, the stronger our confidence must be. The steeper the climb, the more resolute and spirited we must become, fully integrating the development of our enterprises with the destiny of the nation," he added.

Building on this focus on innovation, Liu Yonghao, chairman of agricultural firm New Hope Group, highlighted how new technologies can breathe new life into traditional industries, and stressed the need for private enterprises to align with national strategies for industrial transformation.

Enterprises urged to sharpen biz edge

By WANG KEJU
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Despite escalating geopolitical tensions, rising economic uncertainties and increasing protectionist actions, Chinese enterprises should sharpen their competitive edge, embrace global cooperation, and contribute to a more stable and prosperous global economy, officials and executives said on Thursday.

As Chinese companies compete globally, it is not only about using their growth to strengthen China, but also about serving the higher purpose of benefiting the entire world, they added at the Chinese Enterprise Global Image Summit in Beijing — the twelfth edition of its kind.

As Chinese companies have rapidly expanded their global footprint in recent years, they have not only effectively promoted sustainable development worldwide, but also increasingly become bridges facilitating cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and other nations, said Du Zhanyuan, president of China International Communications Group.

In 2023, China's outbound direct investment rose 8.7 percent to reach \$177.3 billion, accounting for 11.4 percent of the global total and ranking among the top three for 12 consecutive years, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

That said, Chinese enterprises are facing severe challenges in their globalization efforts and image-building due to the profound changes in the international landscape, Du said, stressing that it is crucial for Chinese enterprises to intensify their efforts to tackle core technological bottlenecks in key areas and develop new quality productive forces.

Enterprises that can consistently deliver high-caliber offerings will be best positioned to thrive in the global marketplace, said Qiu Xiaoping, vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce.

Chinese enterprises should embrace next-generation information technologies like big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence to strengthen innovation in products, services, and business model — all with the goal of laying a solid foundation for their global image through high-quality growth, Qiu said.

In the Global Innovation Index ranking of 130-plus economies, China has reached the 11th position, making it one of the fastest 10-year climbers, according to a report released by the World Intellectual Property Organization in September.

Luo Lin, vice-president of WeRide, a Chinese autonomous vehicle startup, said that the company has been providing smart mobility solutions to multiple countries around the world by leveraging its proprietary research and development capability as well as extensive public road operation experience.

In the process of localized deployment and collaboration, WeRide is not only able to help its partners establish the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks for autonomous driving, but also facilitate the aggregation and upgrading of the global industrial chain, Luo said.

Since 2021, WeRide has partnered with local collaborators in the United Arab Emirates to launch publicly accessible commercial autonomous vehicle services in Abu Dhabi, making it the Middle East's first city with self-driving taxis.

Through continuous collaboration with local and global partners, WeRide has not only expanded its own international footprint, but also catalyzed the rapid development of artificial intelligence and autonomous driving industries in its partner regions, Luo added.

This is the ultimate destination Chinese enterprises should strive for — to be a force for good that benefits all of humanity. It is a vision they will relentlessly pursue when taking their place on the global stage, said Zhang Yiwu, a professor at Peking University.



Shoppers buy groceries at a supermarket in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. JIA MINJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Ministry issues treasury bonds in HK

The Ministry of Finance has issued yuan-denominated treasury bonds worth a total of 6 billion yuan (\$835.2 million) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The issuance included additional two-year bonds, three-year bonds, and five-year bonds, according to the ministry. Each of the three types of bonds has an issuance value of 2 billion yuan. The bonds' respective interest rates are 1.7 percent, 1.7 percent and 1.8 percent. The issuance was well received by investors, with the total bid amount 3.58 times the amount in circulation, the ministry said.

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 11 pips to 7.1854 against the US dollar on Thursday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the inter-bank market each business day.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

China backs legitimate drone exports

By ZHONG NAN
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China supports its companies to carry out international trade and cooperation in the civil drone sector, and firmly opposes the illegal use of civil drones for non-peaceful purposes, said the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

This approach not only helps fulfill international non-proliferation obligations, but also contributes to ensuring the safety and stability of global production and supply chains, said He Yadong, a ministry spokesman.

Speaking at a weekly news briefing in Beijing, He said that the Chinese government has always strictly controlled the export of all dual-use items, including drones, in accordance with laws and regulations.

The term "dual-use items" refers to goods, technologies and services that can be used for both civil and military purposes.

China's export control list of dual-use items, which took effect on Dec 1, aims to enhance the transparency and standardization of policies governing the export of dual-use items, according to the Commerce Ministry.

With a new administration due to take office in the United States next month, He said China's Ministry of Commerce has maintained close communication with the US Department of Commerce through the communication and exchange mechanism.

China is open to engaging with the new US government's economic and trade team, he added, stressing that China's position against unilateral tariff measures has been consistent.

China is willing to strengthen dialogue and coordination with the US, based on the principles of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, properly manage differences and promote the steady and long-term growth of bilateral economic and trade relations, said He.

The US remained China's third largest trading partner between January and November, with bilateral trade value growing by 4.2 percent year-on-year to 4.4 trillion yuan (\$605.7 billion), statistics from the General Administration of Customs showed.

As the US House of Representatives prepares to vote on a new defense bill to assist US telecommunications companies in

removing and replacing equipment produced by Chinese companies Huawei Technologies Co and ZTE Corp, the Ministry of Commerce said the US claims that Chinese information and communication products pose a security risk to the US, but there is no factual basis for this.

China firmly opposes the US generalization of the concept of national security, violation of market economy principles and fair competition, and interference with normal economic and trade cooperation between Chinese and US companies, said He.

It would be beneficial for China to deepen cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union, enhancing the breadth and depth of regional economic cooperation, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

Participating in multilateral trade mechanisms helps counter the pressures of unilateralism by providing a platform for countries to collectively shape international trade rules and standards, he added.

COMMENT

Editorials

Policies to advance Chinese modernization will also release new opportunities for world

Despite the palpable downward pressure on the Chinese economy from both domestic and external factors, the series of incremental policies China has resolutely carried out in the second half of this year have effectively enhanced the performance of the economy, as shown by the pickups in several key indicators. And China's macroeconomic policies have a direct influence on the world economy through the role it plays in the global industry and supply chains, and its position as a major trading partner of more than 120 countries and regions.

That explains why the Central Economic Work Conference that concluded in Beijing on Thursday has caught so much attention from around the world. And that attention speaks volumes of the high hopes the international community pins on China continuing to share its development dividends and opportunities with the world.

That hope also originates from the world's confidence in China's hallmark macroeconomic control ability and high execution efficiency, which is based on the dynamic balance the country has managed to strike between using both the visible hand of the government and the invisible hand of the market to adjust relations between supply and demand, self-reliance and opening-up, new growth impetus and old

growth drivers, quality and quantity, and development and security.

As the conference indicated, going forward, China will implement a more proactive fiscal policy and a moderately loose monetary policy, and tolerate a higher deficit, enrich and improve its policy toolbox, strengthen extraordinary countercyclical adjustments, and give good play to the bailout policy portfolio.

These policies show that the Chinese policymakers are exercising tremendous prudence and strengthening anticipation management to minimize the risks and uncertainties while pursuing new quality productive forces, and innovation, and comprehensively deepening reform and expanding high-standard opening-up to the outside world.

That China's commitment to opening-up remains unchanged and it will continue to liberalize and facilitate trade and investment was also a core message of the congratulatory letter Chinese President Xi Jinping sent to the Gala 2024 of the US-China Business Council in Washington on Wednesday.

It is clear from this that advancing Chinese modernization will provide new opportunities for the world. It is ready to appropriately resolve differences with all countries through dialogues and negotiations so that win-win cooperation can be realized.

Cross-Strait blood ties cannot be denied

Blood is thicker than water. Except that which flows through the veins of Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party it seems. Yet whatever ulterior motives the DPP secessionists on the island harbor by trying to de-sinicize the island, it will be almost impossible for them to dilute the blood ties between people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait as they hope.

It is true that there are differences between both sides in terms of political systems and other institutional operations. Yet what cannot and will never change is that both sides of the Strait belong to one country and Chinese people living on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are members of the same family, sharing ties of blood and a common destiny.

The recent nine-day visit by a delegation of mainland college students, including Olympic table tennis champion Ma Long and shooting champion Yang Qian, should have been a testament to the blood ties between both sides of the Strait. The warm welcome they received from various sectors in Taiwan spoke volumes about how people in Taiwan cherish the cordial relations between both sides. Yet the DPP vampires have tried to drain the blood from these exchanges.

Yet reaffirming that such blood ties will not be sucked dry, Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, will lead a group of Taiwan youth to the mainland provinces of Heilongjiang and Sichuan later this month to participate in a major ice-themed event and

engage in other exchange activities.

This visit will be Ma's second trip to the mainland this year, following a tour starting from the end of March, during which he led a Taiwan youth delegation to Guangdong, Shaanxi and Beijing. The visit concluded with a meeting between Ma and Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

That the mainland continues to do whatever it can to support and promote cross-Strait youth exchanges points to the fact that the Chinese mainland has not given up its efforts to seek the peaceful reunification of the motherland.

Just as Ma Ying-jeou said, the more exchanges there are between young people across the Strait, the fewer misperceptions there will be and the less chance of conflict in the future.

The mainland does not exclude the option of taking back the island by force, as there are some secessionists on the island who seek "Taiwan independence" through collusion with external powers, but what the mainland has been doing to facilitate youth exchanges across the Strait is a bid to lay a solid foundation for the peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question.

It is to be hoped that what the mainland has been doing in response to the DPP's de-sinicization attempts pays dividends in the form of increased affection and understanding between youth across the Strait. And this in turn promotes the peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question.

US and Canada thrown from their high horse

It is beyond doubt that China has achieved enormous progress in its efforts to protect human rights. Adhering to its people-centered development philosophy, the country has continually strengthened the protection of human rights under the law.

Yet, even though their own human rights records are not spotless, some Western governments make baseless allegations against China in the name of human rights and impose illicit sanctions on Chinese personnel.

Tuesday marked Human Rights Day. To "observe" it, the United States added two Chinese companies to a trade restriction list for allegedly enabling human rights violations. Canada announced sanctions on eight former and current Chinese officials, citing alleged "state-led" human rights violations. Those in glasshouses shouldn't throw stones. Both countries have glaring human rights issues that give them no saddle on which to sit on a high horse tilting at windmills by smearing and vilifying China by spreading lies about alleged human rights abuses in the country.

The US and Canada — and others — are in no position to lecture countries about human rights and point fingers at the human rights situation of others, nor do they have any grounds to act as a judge and arbitrarily impose sanctions.

China has repeatedly called on the US and its allies to stop trying to politicize human rights, and to stop trying to harm the Chinese people's interests under the pretext of human rights.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has called for the US and Canada to immediately lift their unlawful sanctions against relevant Chinese personnel and stop such malevolent stunts.

Given Washington's well-known attempt to suppress China as an identified strategic competitor, adding more Chinese companies to its entity list hardly raises eyebrows these days. But there is no need for Ottawa to so cravenly fall in behind the US.

Washington is something of a lost cause when it comes to acting with decorum, with the Republicans and Democrats having sunk into a petty game of one-upmanship when it comes to fabricating human rights smears against China. But there is no need for Ottawa to join in.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman responding to a question about Canada's move at a daily news briefing strongly urged Canada to reflect on its actions, stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and to stop undermining China's interests and image under the pretext of human rights.

Upbraiding China in a bid to curry favor with the incoming US administration is a fool's game. It only shows weakness, and the US president-elect will take advantage of that.

By acting in concert, Washington and Ottawa have cemented Beijing's perception of a coordinated US-led offensive against itself, which will only further poison relations and undermine what could otherwise be constructive dialogue, and potential cooperation on the advancement of the global human rights cause.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

By abusing veto power, Washington is aggravating Palestine-Israel crisis

The United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on Wednesday in favor of a resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and the immediate release of all detainees. Not surprisingly, the United States voted against it, as it has done in the past.

The UNGA resolution would not have been legally binding and may not have deterred Israel from further action in the region, but it was still important as an expression of the international community's desire for peace.

Ever since the latest round of the Israel-Hamas conflict erupted, Israeli forces have killed nearly 45,000 Palestinians and injured more than 106,000 in Gaza, while survivors are struggling in the absence of basic supplies. Nobody with a conscience can turn a blind eye to Israel's appalling disregard for civilian lives in Gaza and the selective application of

international law and double standards.

The adoption of the UNGA resolution represents the just call of the international community. The world cannot go back to the law of the jungle. A cease-fire in Gaza is a prerequisite for saving lives and restoring peace; setting preconditions for a cease-fire is actually giving a green light to the continuation of the war. Gaza should not be made an exception when it comes to upholding the authority of international law and fulfilling international law obligations.

As the architect of Gaza's disaster, Israel must fulfill its obligations under international humanitarian law, remove all obstacles to humanitarian access, ensure the unblocked distribution of humanitarian supplies throughout Gaza, and guarantee the safety of humanitarian agencies and personnel in Gaza.

While pushing for cease-fire in

Gaza, the international community should also try to address the root causes behind the Palestine-Israel conflict, and promote the implementation of the two-state solution with the greatest sense of urgency, because that seems like the only way to achieve lasting peace in the region.

As a responsible country and promoter of peace between Palestine and Israel, China wants Palestine to become a full member of the UN and the international community should make greater efforts to formulate a timetable and road map for the implementation of the two-state solution.

The US can play a key role in resolving the Palestine-Israel conflict, but its partiality toward Israel is in the way. As one of the framers of the existing world order, the US should use its power responsibly to promote the settlement of international issues such as the Palestine-Israel issue.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Tokyo must stop flattering its uncaring master

Reportedly, US President Joe Biden is mulling over whether or not to block Japanese Nippon Steel's \$14-billion bid to purchase the US Steel on the grounds of national security concerns.

US Steel, founded in 1901, supported the country's industrialization by supplying valuable steel. It even provided steel to the US Navy during World War II.

As early as December 2023, when Nippon Steel announced it would purchase US Steel, and this April, when US Steel's shareholders approved the purchase, there were voices saying it was symptomatic of the US' decline.

Some joked that life had come full circle for the steel company that built

ships to defeat Japan during WWII, as the defeated country was now trying to buy it.

By losing the 2016 and 2024 US presidential elections, Democrats have been taught a lesson, never to underestimate the power of the so-called Rust Belt states.

The Biden administration may not agree with US president-elect Donald Trump's "America First" policy, but letting Japan buy US Steel could haunt them for a long time to come.

That's probably why Nippon Steel issued a statement saying, "It is inappropriate that politics continue to outweigh true national security interests".

So far so good, but saying the

transaction will bolster American economic and national security by countering the threats posed by China was an effort to shift attention to China, thus letting politics decide the outcome — just what they claimed to be against.

Their stating, "especially with the indispensable alliance between the US and Japan as the important foundation", shows how Nippon Steel and a number of influential political and economic figures in Japan are subservient enough to treat some US politicians in Washington as their masters.

It's time they gave up this mentality as the master is not bothered about its servant's interests.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

China's soccer requires cash injection at grassroots

It has been announced that Portugal and Spain will be the hosts of the 2030 World Cup, and that Saudi Arabia will host the 2034 World Cup.

That is big news for soccer fans around the world, except for those in China who remain dismayed by the Chinese soccer team's failure to make it to the highest stage.

After making its debut in the 2002 Japan-ROK World Cup, and its only appearance on the World Cup stage so far, Chinese men's soccer has drifted farther and farther from the world's soccer pitches, for many reasons with "Chinese characteristics". The FIFA ranking of the men's national team had fallen from around 50th to 90th as of last month.

That is in stark contrast to the trajectory of its neighbors, including Japan and the Republic of Korea. Chinese soccer has declined quickly along with the fast increase of input, largely due to the bursting of the real estate bubble and the reduction of ill-supervised capital of State-owned enterprises, over the past 20 years.

The false prosperity of the Chinese soccer climaxed in 2013, when Guangzhou Evergrande FC became the Asian club champion — thanks

to many world-class players it bought from European and South American clubs at a price they couldn't refuse — 20 years after its founding with investment from a real estate group bearing the same name as the club, which was plunged into a huge debt crisis more than four years ago.

Attracting naturalized players with high payment to play for the Chinese men's national soccer team was regarded as a shortcut for the country to make its mark on the game. But that has not been the case. Meanwhile, the dozens of foreign players on the clubs' payroll have not only squeezed the space for Chinese players but also guzzled the money that the clubs should have spent on youth training.

No wonder during that course of time the number of Chinese players playing for major foreign clubs has fallen from 20 at the peak to zero since three years ago.

After the bursting of the real estate bubble, the authorities launched the latest anti-graft campaign. That a high number of soccer officials, referees, players, coaches and club managers have been found guilty of corruption, match fixing, and other misbehaviors also high-

lights the role corruption has played in sucking the lifeblood from the game in China.

With the money no longer flowing to the clubs, the naturalized and foreign players are leaving the country in batches.

And the lack of funding is further compounded by the weak economy which has seriously restricted the recovery of the country's youth training system, leaving Chinese soccer in an indefinite gap period, when other Asian countries are quickly integrating into the world soccer following in the footsteps of Japan and the ROK.

The difficulties faced by Chinese soccer are an epitome of the overall challenges confronting the Chinese socioeconomic development. To resolve these difficulties also entails institutional reforms to let the law of the market play a decisive role in allocating resources and attracting more young people to the soccer fields.

It is also imperative that Chinese soccer opens up to the world by encouraging more Chinese players to play in foreign leagues. Only by going global can the country do its things well in soccer.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Xu Shengquan and Fan Lujing

Only profitable university patents boost progress

The Chinese leadership has emphasized the importance of integrating technological innovation resources to spearhead the development of strategic emerging industries and future industries, thus accelerating the formation of new quality productive forces. In recent years, China's technological innovation capabilities have steadily improved, with the total number of valid invention patents nationwide reaching over 4 million as of the end of 2023.

The patent conversion rate has also seen a steady increase over the past five years. As of the end of 2023, Chinese universities held 794,000 valid invention patents, accounting for 19.8 percent of the country's total. However, in 2022, the patent conversion rate for Chinese universities was only 3.9 percent, significantly lower than the industrialization rate of valid invention patents and far behind other leading countries such as the United States (50 percent) and Germany (over 80 percent).

To unlock the full potential of university patents in driving economic growth, the Chinese government has initiated measures to enhance patent quality and strengthen policy incentives for patent commercialization. As early as 2013, the China National Intellectual Property Administration issued guidelines to improve patent application quality in universities. In 2024, several government bodies launched the work plan for activating existing patents in universities and research institutions, aiming to address the challenges in patent commercialization. Local governments, intellectual property management departments and universities have since introduced various policies to promote effective and efficient patent commercialization.

Thanks to these efforts, the commercialization of university patents in China is showing positive trends and achieving notable results. For instance, some universities and regions have developed successful models for patent commercialization. Zhejiang University National Science and Technology Park has implemented an "organized technology transfer" approach, while Zhejiang province has piloted a "use first, transfer later" model, expanding the scope of enterprise-university joint patent pools.

Moreover, despite the relatively low conversion rate, university patents are increasingly contributing to productivity and economic development. In 2023, the average industrialization revenue of university-enterprise collaborative invention patents reached over 10.33 million yuan (\$1.4 million) per patent, 24.5 percent higher than the average revenue of enterprise patents.

However, advancing university patent commercialization is a long-term, systemic task. Drawing on successful experience from abroad and building on domestic reforms, there is still significant room for improvement in China's approach.

First of all, improving patent quality at the source is crucial. Many university patents in China are not initially intended for commercialization, often lacking practical application prospects or market relevance. To address this, China has proposed several



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

strategies within its high-value patent cultivation efforts. These include fostering innovation in university research models and emphasizing "high-value patents" as a metric for evaluating research outcomes. Some universities, such as Nanjing University of Science and Technology, have pioneered pre-application quality management systems, using platforms such as IP-Genie to assess the potential of each technology comprehensively. Such source management practices can enhance patent quality and utilization efficiency, providing a solid technical foundation for commercialization.

What's more, expanding market channels for patent commercialization is essential. Effective patent commercialization relies on robust collaboration between universities and market entities. Strengthening industry-academia partnerships can help researchers better understand market needs and align their innovations accordingly. Many regions in China are already promoting the establishment of innovation

consortia — a new type of industry-academia alliances focused on tackling bottleneck technical challenges. These consortia facilitate the integration of research, patent application, and commercialization. Universities should be encouraged to participate in or lead these consortia, leveraging them to connect with market needs. Additionally, external technical service platforms such as WIPO Green, which has matched over 1,000 technologies with market demands, can further boost patent commercialization.

Equally important, optimizing patent commercialization management within universities is vital. Establishing and improving technology transfer offices and patent resource databases, along with adopting open patent licensing models, can significantly enhance commercialization efforts. Leading global universities such as Stanford have successfully used technology transfer offices to match research outcomes with market needs. Professional technology

transfer offices should not only handle administrative tasks but also manage patent portfolios from a technical perspective, integrating with national intellectual property service platforms to activate high-quality patent inventories. Universities can adopt open patent licensing models and utilize government platforms to better connect supply and demand, thus further driving patent commercialization.

Improving university patent commercialization rates is a gradual process requiring a multi-faceted approach. By learning from international best practices and continuing to innovate domestically, China can make significant strides in this critical area.

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Chen Weihua

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EU must improve business climate, and do it soon to be competitive

When I first joined China Daily in Beijing in the late 1980s as a reporter for its Business Weekly, much of the coverage was about how China was trying to expand foreign trade and attract foreign investors by focusing on improving the business climate.

China was not well prepared for the arrival of foreign investors. The government red tape, poor infrastructure, from roads to power supply, and a scarcity of professionals were among the major complaints.

The launch of China Daily in 1981 was partly to help improve the soft investment environment for foreigners coming to work and live in China. The same was the case for Shanghai Star, a China Daily tabloid launched shortly after the city's Pudong New Area project kicked off in 1990.

Probably no one had foreseen then that 30 years later Pudong would boast one of the most futuristic skylines in the world.

Despite the fact that Shanghai was already China's most modern city compared with other Chinese cities, foreign ventures then complained about issues such as a shortage of electricity, transport bottlenecks and the numerous chops required for business approval.

I returned to Shanghai in 1988, just before Zhu Rongji became the mayor. One of his many efforts was to push for the "one stop" service so that foreign companies didn't have to run from place to place to get the many chops.

The catchphrase then was to learn and adopt international practices. A straight talker, Zhu "criticized" my fellow Shanghaiese for being "shrewd but not wise". Basically he argued for making a bigger cake. So even if you get just a slice of the cake, that slice could still be bigger than the earlier entire small cake.

For decades, foreign investors in Chinese joint ventures got a lion's share of the profits due to their expertise from technology to marketing. Many foreign business executives received outrageous salaries, often equivalent to the sum of 30 or even 100 Chinese employees.

It was a time before 2000, when China's economy was smaller than Italy's.

Fast forward to today and China's GDP is now eight times the size of Italy's. Chinese companies have made great strides in research and development and have fast moved up in the global supply chains. Many have also become peer competitors of Western multinationals.

China's electric vehicle industry is a typical example that has taken many in Europe and North America by surprise. Equally impressive are China's world-class infrastructure such as ports, airports, high-speed railways, bridges and e-commerce.

The trendy Chinese word, *nei juan*, or intense competition, means that foreign companies no longer have the luxury as they had in the 1980s when they could afford to ignore Chinese competition.

The fact that the EU's future competitiveness report by former European Central Bank president Mario Draghi says that the EU is lagging behind not just the United States but also China shows exactly the new reality today.

Despite the phenomenal progress, China still has a lot to improve in its business environment, and eagerness to learn has been vital to China's success story.

Ever since I came to Brussels six years ago, I also found that improving the business climate has become no less urgent in the bloc than in China.

The China Chamber of Commerce to the EU, in its annual survey report released on Monday, warned that Chinese companies' rating of EU business climate has declined for the fifth year consecutively. Uncertainty caused by EU regulations and practice, discrimination against companies of Chinese origin and the politicizing of trade and investment are among key concerns.

To me, that is partly why the EU has become less competitive in the past years. EU leaders like to tout the bloc as the most open market, but if the Draghi report is an indication, the EU faces a daunting task to improve its business climate, in particular in welcoming Chinese companies and treating them fairly.

Xie Guihua

Colleges must strike right balance

In recent years, Chinese universities have been trying to align their courses with the evolving needs of both society and industry. An example is China Civil Affairs University launching an undergraduate program called "marriage services and management". This program aims at cultivating professionals who can manage the full cycle of marriage, preparing graduates for careers in matchmaking, wedding planning, marriage counseling and more. The idea is to better match academic output with market demand, while navigating the fine line between vocational training and academic integrity.

The Ministry of Education has made it clear that universities must not only respond to the demands of the labor market but also foster an educational environment that prepares students for the challenges of an ever-changing world. In 2021, China issued a set of guidelines for promoting the high-quality development of modern vocational education, emphasizing that vocational education is an indispensable part of the national education system, playing a crucial role in the development of a skilled workforce.

China aims to have a modern vocational education system in place by 2025, and to build a skill-based society by 2035. In this context, universities across the country are rethinking traditional academic offerings and prioritizing programs that address specific industry needs.

Yet, as higher education adopts a vocational focus, it raises important questions: Do all professions require university education? Take, for instance, the marriage services sector. Even before the establishment of

the marriage services and management program, matchmaking and wedding planning were already well-established industries, often relying more on experience and enthusiasm than formal education.

Does such an industry truly require a degree-driven workforce? If universities begin to offer large-scale programs for every niche industry, will we risk inflating educational requirements and raising unnecessary barriers for entry, leading to waste of resources and more intense competition for jobs? If universities are reduced to being vocational training factories, how will they continue to foster critical thinking, creativity, and cultural enrichment? These are important questions that must be addressed in the debate on the future of higher education in China.

Despite these concerns, the growing demand for marriage services reveals a clear trend toward professionalization in this sector. According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the number of marriage registrations in China reached nearly 6.84 million in 2022, and the wedding industry alone is worth over 100 billion yuan (\$13.77 billion). As wedding services become increasingly diversified — from Korean-style crystal weddings to new Chinese-style outdoor ceremonies — the need for professional expertise is becoming more pronounced.

Furthermore, marriage counseling, an emerging field in China, is becoming a well-established profession in many Western countries. In the United States, marriage and family therapists have become an established profession, with 76,000 practitioners in 2023, and the number is expected to grow by 16 percent over the next decade.

The success of such professions demonstrates that marriage services are becoming an increasingly specialized field that requires both academic knowledge and practical skills.

In China, the marriage services industry also faces challenges: wedding planning remains highly imitative, and marriage counseling services are still in their infancy, with significant variation in quality. These issues highlight the need for systematic training and professional education to meet the growing demand. The China Civil Affairs University's new program aims to address these gaps. The program's launch not only meets the demand for skilled professionals but also marks an important step in the modernization of the industry. From a broader perspective, such initiatives reflect the role of vocational education in driving industrial transformation. For example, in service industries such as wedding planning, professional training can improve the quality of services, help shape market demand, and ensure that the sector remains responsive to the evolving expectations of consumers.

However, this transformation must be approached with caution. While universities should embrace market demand, they must also remain committed to their core educational mission: to foster intellectual inquiry, critical thinking, and social responsibility. The introduction of the Marriage Services and Management program illustrates a successful intersection of academic rigor and market need. It demonstrates how universities can respond to societal demands without compromising the intellectual foundation of their education.

The question, then, is not whether higher education should adapt to market needs, but how it can do so while retaining its broader educational values. Universities must find a balance between vocational training and academic integrity, between immediate job market needs and long-term social responsibilities. The launch of programs like marriage services and management is a step in the right direction, but it is only one part of a larger transformation that must continue. Going forward, universities should optimize their academic offerings, strengthen industry-academic collaboration, and ensure that they are equipping students not only for today's job market but also for the challenges of tomorrow's world. Only by achieving this balance can higher education in China truly undergo meaningful reform, fostering talent that will drive the country's continued growth and prosperity.

As China's higher education system continues to evolve, it is crucial that the country's universities take a proactive approach, one that blends the demands of the marketplace with the long-standing ideals of academic rigor and social responsibility. The future of higher education will depend on this dynamic, thoughtful balance, and the success of initiatives such as the marriage services and management program will offer valuable lessons for the broader transformation ahead.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategic Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

STEPHEN NDEGWA

Tapping Africa's potential

The Belt and Road Initiative has transformed the continent's ineffective development model, helping it embrace opportunities to position itself as a global powerhouse in the 21st century

Africa has long been a region brimming with untapped potential, yet perpetually trapped in cycles of underdevelopment. For decades, Western-led frameworks like those championed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank dominated the continent's economic landscape. These models, often tied to conditional loans and structural adjustment programs, focused on austerity measures and liberalization at the expense of industrialization and infrastructure development.



They left a trail of hollowed-out industries, stagnating economies and burdensome debts. However, the emergence of China's Belt and Road Initiative has ushered in a transformative era, offering African nations a fresh approach to development that prioritizes infrastructure, connectivity and collaboration.

Launched in 2013, China's ambitious BRI is aimed at building trade and investment links through infrastructure projects across Asia, Europe, Africa and beyond. The initiative is reshaping Africa's development narrative, bringing investments that address historical challenges while laying the groundwork for long-term economic growth. With over \$155 billion in investments across African nations, the initiative has delivered tangible benefits, including ports, railways, roads and energy projects that connect the continent's fragmented markets and unlock economic potential.

The transformative power of the BRI can be seen in projects such as Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway, which has significantly reduced travel and freight times between the port city of Mombasa and the capital, Nairobi. This \$4.7 billion project, funded and constructed by China, has not only enhanced trade but also created thousands of jobs and boosted local economies along its route.

Similarly, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, another flagship BRI

project connecting Ethiopia and Djibouti, has revitalized logistics in a landlocked country by cutting transportation costs and improving access to global markets. These projects demonstrate the initiative's capacity to address Africa's infrastructure deficit, which has long been a bottleneck to development.

Yet, the BRI has not been without its critics. Concerns about debt sustainability, labor practices and environmental impact have been raised by various stakeholders. Critics often cite examples such as Zambia, where debt levels have spiked amid heavy borrowing for infrastructure projects.

However, these challenges should not overshadow the broader opportunities the BRI presents. Instead, they should serve as a call for African nations to engage more strategically. Governments must negotiate terms that align with their national priorities, ensure greater transparency in project selection, and actively involve local expertise to maximize benefits and address long-standing inequities.

The shift the BRI represents is particularly striking when juxtaposed with the West's historically top-down approach to Africa's development. While Western models often came with prescriptive policies that undermined local agency, China's engagement is characterized by a partnership model emphasizing mutual benefits.

This approach resonates deeply across Africa, where sovereignty and self-determination are highly valued. Nigeria, for instance, has leveraged Chinese financing to expand its infrastructure base while diversifying its economic output. The Lekki Deep Sea Port, developed under the BRI framework, is set to transform Nigeria into a regional



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

trade hub, fostering economic integration and boosting commerce across West Africa.

One of the most promising aspects of the BRI is its focus on regional connectivity. Africa has historically suffered from fragmented markets and poor intra-continental trade, with most trade directed toward Europe, Asia, or the Americas. Projects such as the Trans-African Railway and the East African Crude Oil Pipeline are fostering greater integration, reducing the cost of doing business, and enabling African nations to collaborate on shared economic goals.

These developments align seamlessly with the aspirations of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which seeks to create a single market for goods and services

across the continent. By bridging gaps in infrastructure, the BRI is providing the physical foundation for the AfCFTA to thrive, potentially unlocking a \$3.4 trillion market.

Another significant advantage of the BRI is its emphasis on digital infrastructure, which positions Africa to leapfrog traditional stages of development. With over 40 percent of the population under the age of 15, Africa's youth hold the key to its future. Investments in fiber-optic networks, data centers, and smart city initiatives are equipping the continent to harness the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

For example, Huawei and other Chinese companies have been instrumental in expanding internet access and building 5G networks in countries such as South Africa and

Kenya. These advancements are not only boosting connectivity but also fostering innovation in sectors such as fintech, e-commerce and digital entrepreneurship.

However, the long-term success of the BRI in Africa depends on the continent's ability to learn from past mistakes. Transparent governance, prudent financial management, and inclusive development practices will be critical to ensuring that these investments yield sustainable benefits.

Encouragingly, some African nations are already taking proactive steps. Ethiopia, for example, has implemented policies to improve debt management and maximize the local impact of Chinese-funded projects by prioritizing technology transfer and skills development. These measures are vital for avoiding the pitfalls of dependency and ensuring that Africa remains an active participant in its development journey.

Critics often argue that the BRI represents a new form of dependency, likening it to the neo-colonial dynamics of the past. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that unlike historical arrangements that prioritized donor interests, the BRI is fundamentally a negotiation-driven model.

African governments have the opportunity to shape agreements that reflect their priorities, whether that means focusing on energy, agriculture, or industrialization. By asserting themselves as equal partners, African nations can ensure that the BRI serves as a catalyst for sustainable development rather than a liability.

Looking to the future, the initiative holds immense potential to redefine Africa's role in the global economy. As the continent becomes

more connected internally and externally, opportunities for trade, investment, and innovation will multiply. Projects such as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor are emblematic of this transformative vision, linking East Africa to global markets while fostering regional integration.

Additionally, the BRI's emphasis on green energy presents an opportunity for Africa to address its power deficit sustainably. Investments in hydropower, solar farms, and wind energy projects are not only meeting current needs but also positioning Africa as a leader in renewable energy production.

The BRI is not a panacea for all of Africa's challenges, nor does it claim to be. However, it represents a significant departure from the ineffective development paradigms of the past. By focusing on connectivity, inclusivity, and long-term growth, the initiative is empowering African nations to take control of their futures. The onus is now on African leaders to harness this momentum, ensuring that their participation in the initiative is guided by strategic vision, robust planning, and a commitment to their people's welfare.

In the coming decades, Africa has the potential to emerge as a dynamic, interconnected, and prosperous region, contributing meaningfully to global economic and political systems. The BRI provides a framework for realizing this vision, but the ultimate responsibility lies with African nations to ensure its success.

By embracing opportunities while addressing risks, Africa can transcend its historical challenges and position itself as a global powerhouse in the 21st century. This is the promise of the BRI: a partnership that transforms potential into prosperity, rewriting the continent's development story for the better.

The author is executive director of South-South Dialogues, a Nairobi-based communications development think tank. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

MWANGI WACHIRA

An order in transition

With the rise of the Global South, the pressure for reform of the global governance system is growing

The G7 led in creating and maintaining the post-World War II global economic order. But in recent years, there have been persistent calls for an overhaul of this order.

Responding to these calls, in 1999 the group extended membership to 12 other countries as well as the



European Union. The G20 was born. But the pressure for reform continued. The financial crisis of 2007-08, the result of violations of rules for prudent lending, threatened to unleash an economic meltdown on the scale of the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

To its credit, the United States led the effort to return the global economy to normalcy with swift steps—guaranteed funds, lowered interest rates, increased liquidity, the injection of capital into banks and lower taxes. Other countries took similar steps, albeit on a smaller scale.

In addition, participation was elevated to heads of state. And the G20 began the now familiar rotating of the hosting of the summits among its member countries.

In the most recent response to calls for reform of the G20, membership was extended to the African Union in 2023.

Today the G20 accounts for about 85 percent of global GDP in terms of purchasing power parity, over 75 percent of global trade, and roughly two-thirds of the world's total population.

But simply expanding the G20's membership seems to miss the

All in all, the G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration presented the summit's consensus on social inclusion, the fight against hunger and poverty, measures for the energy transition, the global governance reform, and the acceleration of climate action.

point of the call for reform. Broadly stated, the call for the reform is driven by the conviction that the rules of the Western-dominated world order, especially those for global economic governance, are stacked against the Global South and serve to promote Western interests and values at the expense of all others which are just as deserving.

Hence, BRICS was launched in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India and China, and later South Africa, as a platform for the Global South to voice its concerns and needs. Now the expanded BRICS has grown to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. And there is a long waiting list.

Work is under way to create the institutions that will enable the expanded grouping to serve its members on the global stage. This work includes the New Develop-

ment Bank, mechanisms to facilitate non-dollar denominated transactions as well as trade and investment in local currencies, and diversifying currency reserves.

So far, the expanded BRICS represents roughly 45 percent of the world's population and accounts for more than one-third of the global economy. The GDP of the expanded BRICS is larger than G7 economies combined.

Significantly, Brazil, China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa are members of both G20 and the expanded BRICS.

Against this background, Brazil hosted the 19th G20 Summit in November.

The presentations of the host of the summit, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and those of the standard-bearers of G20 and BRICS, were a snapshot of a global order in transition.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called on the G20 to continue being constructive in global governance by supporting the United Nations and its Security Council in its lead role of fostering the peaceful settlement of crises. China, too, joined other G20 members in supporting the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty while highlighting China-led flagship initiatives ranging from trade to food security.

As President Xi mentioned in his speech in Rio de Janeiro, progress will be achieved by improving global trade based on openness, prioritizing economic development, liberalizing trade and investment, reforming the World Trade Organization and restoring the trade dispute-settlement mechanism. Above all, the key to progress is avoiding



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

unilateralism and protectionism.

Taken together, these suggestions from China carry a common message: the challenges facing the world are two-fold, namely carrying out structural reform in terms of making changes in the control of the engines of the global economy, and summoning the will to subscribe to, and adhere to, rules.

Just as President Lula stated, the world needs to review the UN Charter itself.

For President Lula, that review should be extended to the Bretton Woods institutions which have contributed to making the external

debt of small- and medium-sized economies unsustainable. Hence, there is a need for a new global economic order with a renewed financial architecture. Above all, there is a need to come to terms with the reality that "the future will be multipolar."

Coming as it does from a member of G20 and a pillar of BRICS, this is a broad indictment of the global order that rose from the ashes of World War II and in the absence of much of today's Global South.

All in all, the G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration presented the

summit's consensus on social inclusion, the fight against hunger and poverty, measures for the energy transition, the global governance reform, and the acceleration of climate action.

But the devil is in the details. Clearly, the transition continues.

The author is a former economist with the World Bank and an advisor for the Kenyan government. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

Internet operation officer Gao Qingmeng, 24, from an internet enterprise in Shanghai, was in a reflective mood while working overtime from home one weekend. To tackle her ennui, she scrolled through social media platforms, and suddenly came across a post from Jellycat, a UK-headquartered soft-toy company, and was instantly smitten by it.

She immediately felt an urge to buy one. Without hesitation, she left home and took an hourlong subway ride to purchase one — a Bartholomew Bear, a popular product from the company.

This was just the beginning. One toy led to another, and one by one, her legion expanded into a large collection.

Her workstation in office is now home to a zoo of plush toy creatures, and many also in shapes of green plants and flower pots. “They took up all my desk space! Then, my colleagues offered more space,” Gao says, adding that now her colleagues’ desks have been “invaded” by her surplus stuffed creatures.

“Whenever I work overtime or face challenges at work, my toys are a great comfort to me,” Gao says. “They make me feel at ease and help me avoid anxiety and irritability, and offer me much emotional comfort whenever in need.”

On various social media platforms, many young people are showing off their plush toy collections. There has been an increasing demand for plush toys in the Chinese market, not merely from their targeted customers — children — but also including young adults.

According to a report by the China Toy and Juvenile Products Association, a nationwide nonprofit trade association in the related industry, sales of plush toys on Alibaba’s e-commerce platform Tmall during the June 18 shopping festival increased by 37.3 percent year-on-year, ranking first among toy categories.

Consumers of the post-2000 generation account for 43 percent of the market, followed by 36 percent by those of the post-1990 generation.

This trend is attracting attention and some experts, such as psychologists or psychotherapists like Zhang Chun, who works for Pencil Psychology, a company based in Xiamen, Fujian province, have begun to use such toys for the comfort of clients who come to their offices for counseling.

Zhang, 42, has stationed some of these toys in her counseling room in case clients, who come for psychotherapy, or talk therapy, may relax more. She says she hopes that these toys could help her clients merely by their presence, although she found few clients touched them.

Zhang describes them as “hyperlinks” to evoke imagination. Touching these toys, according to psychological hypothesis based on studies, such as the US psychologist Harry Harlow’s monkey experiment during the 1930s, is “like clicking a hyperlink.” “Generally, they can connect people instantly to their favorite works or characters,” says the psychotherapist.

The experiment sought to uncover preferences for “bare-wire mothers” or “cloth-covered mothers” in different situations. The “mothers” had different changeable attractions; the wire mother holding a bottle with food, and the cloth mother holding nothing, or with the wire mother holding nothing, while the cloth mother held a bottle with food. The monkeys overwhelmingly chose the cloth mother, with or without food, only visiting the wire mother that had food when needing sustenance.

As more young people see eye to eye in these fluffy toys, the careers of some influencers even began to prosper, thanks to the growing



Gao Qingmeng, 24, an internet operation officer from an internet enterprise in Shanghai, has many plush toys on her desk.

Toying with an idea of companionship

Young adults turn to fake furry friends to bolster their spirits



Clockwise from top left: Influencer Wang Yaowei (first from right) brings a toy to class at the Macau University of Science and Technology last December. Qiu Jiayi, HR worker, selects toys at a store in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. A plush toy in psychotherapist Zhang Chun’s office in Xiamen, Fujian province. Wang with his toys at home in Hangzhou. Gao’s toy-packed desk. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

trend. Wang Yaowei, 26, a graduate from the Macau University of Science and Technology, is one of them.

The online influencer, based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, has more than 6,000 followers on the Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu. Besides being an internet operation officer of an internet enterprise, he earns extra money by testing and commenting on new plush toys for toy-making companies.

Before being an influencer, he bought each of his own toy collections.

Among all the plush animals, his most favorite one is LinaBell, an energetic pink fox, from the Disney toyline Duffy and Friends introduced by Shanghai Disneyland in 2021.

“Her unique design, naughty personality and interactions with visitors all bring me joy that temporarily relieves my worries,” he claims.

It was said that more than 80 small plush keychains of the character were released, including ones with holiday-themed costumes. Wang would take corresponding small plush toys to work during festivals, such as the Halloween or Christmas, to create a sense of ceremony, he says.

Qiu Jiangyi, 30, a Hangzhou-based human resources worker from the jewelry industry, also loves collecting plush toys.

In order to acquire out-of-stock editions, she scours platforms selling secondhand goods, private groups and US e-commerce company eBay, or asks overseas buyers, representatives or friends to shop for them.

In order to obtain her favorite toys, once she finds there are stocks of them online, she would often click quickly to snap them up, or even pay more money, say several times the original price, to secure her purchase.

Qiu dresses her toys, takes them on outings and even seeks out craft enthusiasts on social media to customize toys’ faces — a process referred to as “face reshaping”, which involves tailoring techniques to make the plush toys look cuter.

While these activities resemble parenting, to Qiu, her actions don’t carry any deeper meaning.

“They’re just toys to me — visually appealing and providing aesthetic satisfaction, but I don’t attach deeper emotions to them,” she says.

Similarly, Gao buys clothes for her toys, and wears “parent-child outfits” — identical clothes as that of her toys, but she denies that it’s a maternal mindset.

“My relationship with them is more of friendship, and I’d feel better when these toys of mine accompany me during many moments,” Gao says.

To cater to the increasing buying power of the young people and their aesthetic preferences, more and more organizations making or selling cultural and creative products have embraced this trend.

For example, the Gansu Provincial Museum released “Gansu spicy hotpot” plush toys, making cute characters based on meat balls, fungus and crabs. Another creative product making company from Xi’an, Shaanxi province, gave birth to a plush toy brand, Romomo, making “weirdo” roujiamo (Chinese-style meat-stuffed hamburger).

To attract more young adults, these cultural and creative products have all added expressive faces to furry toys.

Yu Hexin contributed to this story.

CHINA DAILY

What’s on



Authentic beauty

Beijing Fine Art Academy has in its collection several works that are considered iconic in the depiction of Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, such as *A Harvest of Delight* in which late painter Huang Zhou (1925-97) drew a vivid harvest scene of singing and dancing.

In September, resident painters of Beijing Fine Art Academy traveled to Kashgar prefecture, Xinjiang, for sketching. The 12-day trip exposed them to the panoramic views of the Pamir Plateau, the primitive beauty of ancient residential compounds and booming bazaars.

Paintings from this trip are now on show at *Self-cultivation in Art*, running at the Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy until Jan 12. The exhibition takes the audience on a journey to the embrace of nature and the crisscross of cultures along the ancient Silk Road.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 12 Chaoyang Gongquan Nanhu, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6502-5171.

Poetry in art

Ocean on Paper, an exhibition at Gravity Art Museum until Feb 16, shows dozens of works that resulted from collaboration between printmaking artists and poets. The cross-disciplinary presentation also opens up a cross-border dialogue — participants are from home and Europe — on emotions, imagination and identity.

In a digital age when fragmented reading is favored, the texts on show allow people a moment of slow, deep reading of the underlying mood and rich feelings between the lines. Artists have visualized these unsaid emotions into combinations of surfaces, lines and colors. It offers dual experiences of the strength of words and the poetic hues of art.

10 am-5:30 pm, closed on Mondays.



days. Huahengboyuan Design Industrial Park, 57 Wujiaocun Lu, Shijingshan district, Beijing. 010-5365-3265.

Meeting point

After touring Beijing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and Macao, dozens of oil paintings and maps that offer a view of the landscapes and social life of Guangdong and Macao in the 19th century

have returned to their home, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan, in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region. They continue to be on show at a longtime exhibition, *The Meeting of Chinese and Western Art*.

The paintings — oil works, watercolors and gouaches — were made by European painters who traveled to live in Guangzhou and their Chinese students. It was a cultural product of the exchanges between the East and the West, prompted by the Maritime Silk Road and the sea routes of the Age of Discovery.

These paintings show booming trading scenes at major ports of southern China back then. Other revisited motifs include Chinese gardens and courtyards, as well as the daily life of their owners.

10 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 12 Hele Lu, Xingqing district, Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. 0951-8426-111.

CHINA DAILY



LIFESHANGHAI

Ancient books get a new chapter

Institute shares its knowledge with the world as it restores and conserves old literature using cross-disciplinary research and technology, **Zhang Kun** reports.

The first institute in China dedicated to the conservation and preservation of ancient Chinese books celebrated its 10th anniversary recently in Shanghai. Experts in this field of work look to more international collaborations and experiences to continue preserving these books.

Chief Librarian of Fudan University and Professor Chen Sihe proposed the institute's founding in 2014.

Through 10 years of development, the Institute for Preservation and Conservation of Chinese Ancient Books at the Shanghai-based Fudan University has conducted cross-disciplinary studies on traditional Chinese paper, ink and pigments, reviving the renowned *Kaihua* paper, a handmade material known for its unique peachy spots and endurance.

"We extended our studies to ancient palm leaf manuscripts, birch bark scrolls and microorganisms on ancient books," says Yang Yuliang, head of the institute who is the former president of Fudan University and an academican of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The 72-year-old is a leading scientist in polymer physics. "Before I began working in the field of ancient book protection, I thought it was not as much fun as cutting-edge technological projects like nanoscience," Yang says at the 10th-anniversary celebration for the institute on Nov 22. "But once I dived deep into it, I found infinite fun and enjoyment."

The conservation of artifacts on paper has been one of the biggest challenges because, similar to the crystallization of civilizations and collective memories of all human beings, they are important but extremely fragile and likely to disappear, Yang says.

It is common all over China and the world that ancient books have a high proportion of damage after being circulated for hundreds of years.

"Incomplete statistics show that there are 50 million ancient books across China, of which 15 million need restoration. Some books have suffered damage caused by improper restoration methods in the past decades," Chen recorded in 2014.

Traditionally, mostly craftsmen engaged in the conservation and restoration of ancient books, who passed on their skills and experience one generation after another, were insufficient in cross-disciplinary research on the paper itself, which is the very carrier of ancient knowledge and information.

A big headache for the conservation workers of ancient books is that ancient paper could easily last for thousands of years, but paper made in the modern age often had a much shorter life span. A batch of ancient books was restored in the 1960s and "decades later we found the modern paper used in the restoration began



Clockwise from top: Professor Yang Yuliang (center) and colleagues at the rare books room in the Library of Fudan University. A student works in the laboratory at the Institute for Preservation and Conservation of Chinese Ancient Books at the university. A specialist of the institute works on the restoration of a Chinese painting. Yang speaks at the 10th anniversary celebration of the institute.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to decompose, which caused further damage to the original artifacts," Yang says.

When he took the job as the director of the new institute in 2014, he decided that research should begin with the paper, "which is essentially a polymer material and coincides with my major field."

"We have combined knowledge in physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences to make comprehensive studies on the protection, authentication

and restoration of cultural relics.

"We are ahead of the world in this field," Yang says. Many ancient Chinese books are in the collections of universities and museums around the world for historical reasons. "We have often been invited by foreign institutions to speak at seminars and share our experiences in the protection and restoration of ancient books."

Yang says, at the advice of the Chinese institute, a laboratory for the

conservation of ancient books was established at the University of British Columbia in Canada.

"When we talk about sharing Chinese culture with the world, it's not just the content but how we protect it, and the knowledge of the material carrier of the culture such as paper," Yang says. "This helps to expand the influence of Chinese civilization in a most legitimate way that can be accepted by the world."

The Fudan University institute is

calling on the establishment of an international alliance for the protection and conservation of ancient Chinese books, where resources, experiences, latest scientific findings and technological achievements can be shared internationally, Yang says.

During its 10th anniversary celebration, the institute joined Fudan University Library to publish a photocopied edition of *Shi Jing*, or *The Book of Songs* or *Classic of Poetry*,

the earliest existing collection of Chinese poems from the university library's collection.

With more than 400,000 volumes of ancient Chinese books in its library, Fudan ranks second among Chinese universities in terms of volume following Peking University. Among the most renowned collections are more than 1,000 copies of *Shi Jing* from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The first series of the photocopied edition of *Shi Jing* consists of 81 books printed in the Yuan and Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), with 15 books being sole copies.

"The publication of these books is of great value for the studies of *Shi Jing*, classical Chinese literature, ancient Chinese culture, the history of publishing and books, along with other fields," says Du Zexun from Shandong University.

Publishing the photocopies "enables the academic community to see the whole picture of these ancient books, which could change some of the previous understandings and conclusions of the study of *Shi Jing*," says Liu Yuqing from Shanxi University.

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Chinese delicacies create a symphony for the ears

By ZHANG KUN

From prawns sizzling in hot oil to the crispy skin of Peking duck and the rich flavors of "Buddha-Jumps-over-the-Wall" soup, a new melody celebrating 10 Chinese delicacies by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra premiered recently.

Chinese Kitchen is a 10-movement composition by Hong Kong musician Elliot Leung Ho Yat. It is the second work of the composer commissioned by the Shanghai orchestra to celebrate the company's 145th birthday.

"I want to create a small-big piece, which consists of many short movements," Leung tells the media before the premiere at Shanghai Symphony Hall on Nov 23. "I want to create something similar to a tasting experience because people today enjoy music differently from the previous generations. They may not have the patience for a music piece lasting as long as 90 minutes."

The first movement features a sip of the Da Hong Pao (the red robe) tea. From there, each movement depicts a Chinese dish — from the appetizer of jellyfish salad to sweet-and-sour mandarin fish, Sichuan water-cooked beef and glutinous rice in a bamboo tube, till the final movement featuring deep-fried ses-



Left: Hong Kong musician Elliot Leung Ho Yat (front center) and conductor Zhang Jiemin (front right) at the premiere of Leung's composition *Chinese Kitchen*. **Right:** Ocean drums are used to simulate the sound of prawns sizzling in oil. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ame balls for dessert.

When Leung visited the kitchen of the historical Jinjiang Hotel in downtown Shanghai last year, chef Guo Yuwen looked at him in disbelief and confusion. "I cannot imagine how to talk about food through music," Guo says.

But when he heard the sound of frying prawns, "it sounded exactly like oil sizzling in the wok and took me right back to the kitchen," he says in amazement.

"I kept the whole orchestra quite busy in this movement, especially the percussion section," Leung says.

To replicate the vivid sound of prawns sizzling in oil, Leung used the ocean drum, which looks like a colorful plate with sandy grains on the bottom. It normally emits soothing waves of sounds that are often used in meditation sessions.

Along with the ocean drum, the percussion section in *Chinese Kitchen* also included a wok, a kitchen knife, chopsticks, bamboo tubes, and more.

Using novel and unusual instruments, such as everyday utensils to create unique sounds that traditional instruments can't make, has

been a popular way to expand the possibilities of musical expression in contemporary composition. It also helped bring classical music closer to ordinary people's lives, says Zhou Ping, director of the Shanghai orchestra, who hopes to expand music appreciation and take the composition to different contexts.

"I love the humor that ripples everywhere in this work," Ma Junfeng, a Shanghai-based theater director, says after the concert. As fun a piece of composition as it is, Ma says he can't help but notice the rich

emotions flowing deep in the music.

Sun Mengjin, a cultural critic, says that "aside from the colorful imagery ... we also find the deep emotions the young composer has for traditional Chinese culture."

Earlier this year at the closing concert for Music in the Summer Air festival, the orchestra premiered *Wuxia*, a symphonic poem by Leung in commemoration of martial arts novelist Jin Yong (Louis Cha's pen name) jointly commissioned by the Shanghai orchestra, Chengdu Symphony Orchestra in Sichuan province,

and Hangzhou Philharmonic Orchestra in Zhejiang province.

As the youngest recipient of the Huabiao Film Awards for Music, 29-year-old Leung has built a prolific career composing a series of Chinese blockbuster movies, such as *The Battle at Lake Changjin* and *Operation Red Sea*, as well as *Cesium Fallout*, which was released nationwide in November.



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LIFE



From left: The Chinese team winning the gold medal in the Arena of Valor Asian Games Version at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 in the documentary *More Than a Game*. The six players representing Team China in the Arena of Valor Asian Games Version at the Asian Games encourage each other before a game. Director Ni Meng (center) watches the players during training. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Young Turk takes to Chinese innovation

SHENZHEN — Mehmet Nemo Turker, a young Turkish man, has made the southern metropolis of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, his home and base for entrepreneurial ventures. He has set up several companies that focus on the research and development of energy-related products, including battery cells and energy storage solutions.

Born in 1990, Turker has always had a passion for electronic products. During high school, he developed a social media website and uncovered a vulnerability in the school computer system. Subsequently, the school entrusted him with managing its website, and he even got his own office.

With his sights set on broader horizons, Turker left university to study abroad, choosing Shenzhen, a leading global tech hub.

"Nemo" means 'no one' in Latin. In the realm of technological innovation, I am a nobody, but I aspire to seize China's development opportunities and start anew," the young man says, riffing on his name.

Turker's entrepreneurial journey began with a desire to help a disabled friend, who became a quadriplegic at the age of 18 after a car accident, and was able only to move his head. His search for devices to aid his friend was a limited success and the quest led him to many others with similar disabilities who yearned to reintegrate into society, but lacked the means.

“In the realm of technological innovation, I am a nobody, but I aspire to seize China's development opportunities and start anew.”

Mehmet Nemo Turker, Turkish entrepreneur in Shenzhen, Guangdong province

Huaqiangbei, one of the world's largest electronics markets, provided the answer for which he had been desperately searching.

"Facial recognition was too costly but strolling through Huaqiangbei, I saw a motion-sensing gaming console demonstration and had an epiphany. Why not leverage sensor technology?" Turker says.

He combined sensors with normal glasses, and after a great deal of development and refinement, launched the GlassOuse series. The aid enables those unable to use a mouse or keyboard to operate smartphones and computers with their heads.

"Look, even if a person cannot move their limbs, they can control the mouse by shaking their head, blinking, biting, or even exhaling, leveraging modern technology to enable people with disabilities to return to normal social interaction, life and work to the greatest extent possible under their physical limitations," Turker explains from his office in Longgang district, as he demonstrated the head-controlled mouse he has developed.

His other companies include EnnoPro Group, which is focused on energy product R&D. His team's continuous perfection of its products eventually caught the attention of Sony Group and led to the sale of a patent.

Turker says that his company's focus on hybrid vehicle batteries, supported by the mature industrial chain in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, is allowing its global market share to steadily increase.

"As Turkiye is my homeland and China is my second, I will offer my GlassOuse products for free to those in need in either country. I hope that one day, a 'Mr Nobody' like me will become somebody who contributes to society."

XINHUA

The hidden depths of esports players

Insider documentary reveals a side of gamers that may surprise many, **Li Yingxue** reports.

At the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023, China's 201 gold medals included one that, while seemingly inconsequential, represented a milestone for its esports industry: a gold medal in the first Arena of Valor Asian Games Version.

The team behind the win was equally distinctive: six players, aged 22 on average, who, after months of rigorous training, reached the pinnacle of Asian esports. It was both their debut on the national stage, and most likely, their last appearance.

Esports careers tend to be brief, often lasting just six or seven years, with players peaking quickly. It is a rapidly evolving discipline, one in which new stars emerge constantly, and the Asian Games — held once every four years — is a rare opportunity for players to represent their country at the highest level.

The six contestants, from five different clubs at that time competing in the King Pro League, a professional esports league in China dedicated to the mobile multiplayer online battle arena game *Honor of Kings*, and one of the most prestigious mobile gaming competitions in the country featuring top teams and players, came together for a moment that is unlikely to be repeated.

The months leading up to the Asian Games were precious to the players. Their shared journey — marked by intense training, passion and uncertainty — was carefully documented on film.

Now, a year later, 32-year-old director Ni Meng has brought their story to the big screen in *More Than a Game*. Released nationwide on Dec 6, the documentary invites viewers to relive the triumph, the camaraderie, and the youthful vigor that defined this historic moment.

"This is a film without gaming barriers. I wanted to create an esports documentary that parents could understand," Ni says.

Duan Xiaoxiong, a teacher at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts and a film critic, admitted that as someone who isn't an esports fan, he hesitated before watching the film, concerned it might be too specialized for someone like him who has never played video games.

"After seeing it, I realized this is a film for anyone with a dream," Duan says. "As the director aptly put it, this is a movie about people. The title has a dual meaning, reminding us that its significance extends far beyond the competition or the film itself."

It begins with 22 young players selected to take part in a rigorous 15-day training camp to compete for one of six spots on the national team for the Asian Games.

At the heart of the camp are Chen Zhengzheng and Peng Yunfei, both strong contenders, neither of whom made the final cut despite giving it their all.

At 26, Chen was particularly eager to represent his country. He had been a torchbearer at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, an experience that left a lasting impact. His wish for success, fueled by that memory, didn't come true.

Peng, who was 23 at the time, made a concerted effort to support the emotional well-being of his teammates, but struggled to perform at his best during the selection trials.

"Peng is from Chongqing and was raised by his grandmother. He worked in a hotpot kitchen to save the 2,000 yuan (\$275.8) he needed



Top: Twenty-two players, with an average age of 22, participated in the national team training camp.

Middle: Director Ni Meng (right) and coach Liu Xuexiang during a film road show in Chengdu in November. **Above left:** Ni (second from right), Xu Bicheng (second from left), who made the final six-player roster, and Xie Chengjun (left), who was a participant in the training camp, at a film road show in Beijing. **Above right:** Ni takes part in the recording of the film's theme song.

to buy his first smartphone, and start his esports career," Ni says.

"He was determined," she continues. "After facing failure or emotional setback, many people struggle to bounce back, and their negativity affects others, but Peng didn't let that happen. When he was cut from the national team, he said, 'It's OK. I did my best. I'll try again next time.' Chen and Peng's stories are relatable — they poured everything into something they care about. There's no such thing as a perfect life, but they give it their all, every time."

The two share a parallel career path, both entering the professional esports world in the same year — one as a film director, the other as a King Pro League player.

Ni worked on shows for the Olympics, World Cup, and the UEFA Champions League and began creating esports content in 2017.

Like many others, she initially thought of the players as little more than talented gamers, but after seven years, she came to realize they display aspects that the outside world often overlooks, from their resilience in the face of youthful

tribulations to their transformative journeys.

Portraits of Youth

For Ni, the most compelling aspect of esports lies in the collective stories of its players. Her film seeks to capture the energy and camaraderie that define the world of competitive gaming.

"I saw a lot of idealism and innocence in their stories. People are drawn to group portraits because, in a crowd, they find a reflection of themselves — someone who represents their own hopes and dreams," Ni explains.

Although she has vivid memories of each player's journey, Ni and her team had already compiled 6,000 to 7,000 words of background material on the competitors before filming began. The profiles of players like Chen and Xu Bicheng, one of the six who ended up in the national team, exceeded 30,000 words.

"While the media already provides ample coverage of the games and tournaments, I felt it was essential to understand these individuals on a deeper level," Ni says. "When they speak to me in the documenta-

ry, it's as if they're speaking directly to the audience."

Ni was more than a director and became an integral part of the team, collaborating with the coach on training plans, and earning the trust of the players as a close confidante.

"This is the magic of esports — it brings together a group of people who are fully dedicated to one goal," Ni says. "The true appeal of competitive sports lies in the emotions of the players. Win or lose, I experienced those emotions with them — even though I wasn't the one competing."

Through the nuances of everyday life and training, Ni captures the personalities of each player, presenting an intimate portrait of the team dynamic.

The latter half of the story focuses on the training for the six finalists and the competition itself.

She says the six finalists shared one key trait: They were all children from humble beginnings. One was the son of a truck driver, another grew up helping his parents work in the city, and another was raised by a single mother who

ran a hardware store. Esports changed their lives and opened doors to new opportunities.

Ni and her team visited several of the players' hometowns, offering glimpses into the environments that shaped them.

"Some of the players demonstrate surprising contrasts," Ni says. "Take Xu Bicheng, for example, he seems like the cheerful one, but at home, he carries a lot of responsibility."

As a child, Xu traveled the country with his father on his truck. Following a car accident, and worried about his father's safety, Xu decided to keep him close by renting and running a fishpond in their village.

The Asian Games not only allowed him to develop his skills, but may have also brought him a bit of luck. In an interview in the documentary, he recounted a dream in which he was lifting a trophy in a packed arena as the crowd chanted his name.

Last month, that dream came true as Xu led AG Super Play, the club he normally competes with, to victory at the 2024 KPL finals in Beijing, as the crowd roared his name.

Since its national preview last month, the documentary has drawn emotional responses, with many viewers reflecting on their own youthful ambitions and saying they were inspired by the protagonists' struggles.

Go player Ke Jie, who also competed at the Asian Games, is particularly moved by a line from Xu's interview: "The worst thing you can hear is 'You've done your best,' but deep down, I know I could have tried harder. I could have done better."

"I felt that deeply," Ke says. "In competitions, people often say you've done your best, but you know there are always areas where you could improve."

One online user who goes by the name of Choufeizhiren Wangxiaoxia comments on the changing view of gaming. "Older Chinese people have long seen video games as a threat ... but in this film, these young men, wearing the Chinese national team uniform at the Asian Games, are challenging those stereotypes. Gamers can be kind, warm and full of light."

Ni says that 22 is both the prime age for esports players, and the threshold of the rite of passage into adulthood.

"For the public, 22 marks a turning point. It's when you graduate, start supporting your family, and take on adult responsibilities. At 18, life is still uncertain," she says, adding to her comment in the documentary that, "if you're not yet 22, embrace it with courage. If you've passed it, face every challenge with the same bravery."

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