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CHINA DAILY

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Neighbors slam Israeli action in Golan Heights

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong jam@chinadailyapac.com

Concerns are growing over the US-enabled "Greater Israel" aspirations after Israel approved a plan to double the settler population in the occupied Golan Heights, sparking condemnation from neighbors and prompting observers to accuse the Israeli government of creating more conditions for conflicts.

Report said the Israeli cabinet on Sunday unanimously approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's \$11 billion plan to double the population in the Golan Heights. The Israeli PM's office said the money would go toward education, renewable energy and the establishment of a student village. An estimated 50,000 people live on the Israeli side of the heights, comprising Druze and Jews.

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Israel captured most of the strategic highlands from Syria in the 1967 war and unilaterally annexed the area in 1981, despite international condemnation.

Analysts said that for Israel, defeating Hamas has now become secondary to the occupation of Gaza and other areas, given the continued civilian purging with bombings and strikes. The United States has approved at least \$17.9 billion in security assistance to Israel since Oct 7 last year.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry denounced Israel's plan, blaming Israel for continued "sabotaging of Syria's prospects for restoring its security and stability".

Abdul Wahed Jalal Nori, an analyst and lecturer at the International Islamic University Malaysia's Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies, told China Daily that the aim of Israel's plan to broaden the population in the Golan Heights is "to cement its control over this territory".

The move violates international law, he said, including the United Nations Security Council resolutions, which recognize the Golan Heights as Syrian territory.

"This action, Israel says, is justified under the pretext of so-called 'self-defense'. However, the distinction between legitimate self-defense and occupation is blurred when the occupation creates conditions for hostility and more conflict," said Abdul Wahed.

"Such actions undermine prospects for peace, a two-state solution and regional stability," he added.

Netanyahu's office said in a statement on Sunday that the prime minister reiterated leading the "change" in the Middle East. In his discussions with US President-elect Donald Trump, Netanyahu emphasized "the need to complete the victory".

"In order to ensure that this does not recur, ever, we have taken a series of intensive actions in recent days. Together with Defense Minister (Israel) Katz, I have directed the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) to thwart the potential threats from Syria and prevent terrorist elements from taking control close to our border," the statement said.

Belal Alakhras, a political analyst and researcher at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, told China Daily that the US has long been exploiting regional conflicts "for its own interest and strategic position in the region".

"It wanted every party (to be) weak, engaged in unlimited cycles of conflict without settlement or final resolution," Alakhras said. The US actions have only been "fueling the situation, rather than helping any party to genuinely win, even close allies," he said.

Syria was almost neutralized because of its internal calculus and challenges, but the situation on its border "is more vulnerable than ever," he added.

"The US and Israel are trying to use this change and exploit it for (their) own advantage, publicly announcing conditions for the removal of current rulers of Syria from terror lists. Israel foolishly thinks it can make advantage by more military advances. But this only widens its quagmire," he said.

Meanwhile in Gaza, the situation remains dire and attempts are underway to negotiate a prisoner swap deal, he added.

Omer Behram Ozdemir, a lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Ibn Haldun University in Turkiye, said Israel "will not make an unreasonable move" like occupying large provinces such as Daraa and Sweida, because such a move would be "irrational" for Israel, both demographically and militarily.

Agencies contributed to this story.



Military vehicles patrol the Syrian-Israeli border in the Majdal Sharns area of Golan Heights on Sunday as the Israeli army reinforced its ground forces in the region. SAEED QAQ / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

Trump's return: What it means for Middle East

Donald Trump scored a decisive victory in the Nov 5 United States presidential election, defeating his Democratic opponent Kamala Harris, thus putting himself on course to retake the White House as the nation's 47th president.

Trump's first term from 2017 to 2021 saw strengthened US ties with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, with the "maximum pressure" policy on Iran leading to the so-called Abraham Accords for normalization of ties between Israel and the Arab states. The period was also marked by major US military

WORLD WATCH By Gokhan Ereli

deals with Gulf nations.

Under US President Joe Biden, Washington's policy shifted to focus on Iran and Yemen, influenced further by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Palestine stalemate.

Now, with Trump's impending return, the question is: How will US-Gulf relations change again?

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Peace mission



Soldiers wave goodbye on Sunday as a new fleet of the People's Liberation Army Navy sets sail from a military port in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, for the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia. The fleet, China's 47th escort mission in the region, consists of a destroyer, a frigate and a supply ship, and carries two ship-borne helicopters and over 700 mission members. WANG NINGHUA / XINHUA

Data points to steady economic rebound

Further boosts in consumption, investment expected heading into 2025

By OUYANG SHIJIA, LIU YUKUN and ZHOU LANXU

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China's economy showed sustained recovery in November amid a raft of government measures aimed at stimulating growth, pointing to green shoots of a steady rebound, economists said on Monday.

They said they expect the growth momentum to strengthen further after the latest key economic meeting signaled a more proactive stance in 2025, with expansionary moves in macroeconomic adjustments to both fiscal and monetary policies likely to provide strong support.

The economists also said the key focus will be on tackling both short-term challenges from lackluster demand and longer-term structural issues, aiming to further boost domestic consumption and investment while fostering a more resilient economic framework.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's value-added industrial output grew 5.4 percent year-on-year in November, up from a 5.3 percent rise the previous month.

"China's industrial output saw a modest acceleration in November, driven by a pickup in manufacturing production," said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International. "This improvement reflects the impact of a series of incremental policy measures that have bolstered market confidence and supported demand recovery. And the strong export performance also provides a significant boost to industrial activity."

"With the government's ongoing push to expand consumption and investment, we expect industrial production growth to remain robust in December, likely in the range of 5 percent to 6 percent," he added.

NBS data showed that the growth of retail sales slowed to 3 percent year-on-year in November from 4.8 percent in October, while fixed-asset investment saw 3.3 percent year-on-year growth during the January-No-

ember period, down from 3.4 percent in the first 10 months.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said the latest data indicates that domestic demand was weaker than expected. He added that he believes the central government will ramp up the fiscal deficit and fiscal spending in 2025.

Citing the recently concluded Central Economic Work Conference, Lu highlighted that expanding domestic demand is in the top spot among the listed major tasks for the coming year, and the country will deliver a major boost to consumption and increase returns on investment.

"We forecast a total of 3.6 trillion yuan (\$494.3 billion) in incremental borrowing for 2025 as against 2024, or around 2.6 percent of GDP," he said. "We expect the official deficit ratio to be raised from 3 percent this year to 4 percent next year, and net financing from central government special bonds to be raised to 1.5 trillion yuan from 1 trillion yuan in 2024."

Betty Wang, lead economist with British think tank Oxford Economics, said: "There is a need for more

proactive fiscal policy. We expect more fiscal stimulus, approximately 2 percent of GDP, to be announced in March of 2025."

On the monetary policy front, she said her team expects a total of 40 basis points in rate cuts in 2025, but with the official position shifting to a "moderately loose" strategy for monetary policy. "There is a chance that they could cut by more," she added.

Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, said that China will enact more proactive fiscal policy and moderately loose monetary policy, with detailed measures to be delivered next year at the two sessions, the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies.

During an annual economic conference held by the China Center for International Economic Exchanges on Saturday, Han said the move marked a shift from the "prudent" monetary stance for the first time since China dealt with the 2007-09 global financial crisis.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said the focus should be on expanding domestic demand and spurring consumption.

Furthermore, it is advisable for the government to increase incomes and reduce burdens for low- and middle-income groups and guide them toward high-quality and healthy consumption choices, Wei said.

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JELLYFISH PRODUCTION HUB SPREADS ITS TENTACLES

Yingkou, Liaoning province, processes 3 billion yuan of the invertebrate, employs 50,000 people

Editor's note: In a series of reports titled "Claims to Fame", China Daily looks at how some regions have earned wealth and recognition through specific products to advance economic development.

By SUN SHANGWU, WU YONG and CHEN MEILING in Yingkou, Liaoning



Fearing by some for its ghostly appearance and toxic tentacles, and loved by others as a tasty treat, the jellyfish is generating currents of wealth for a city in Northeast China.

Fishermen in Yingkou, Liaoning

province, have conquered concerns about the marine creature's toxic tentacles and frightening image to bring it to a growing number of dinner tables in China and overseas.

"When we go fishing we wear

leather suits and leather gloves," said Wang Mingke, a fisherman from Yuye village, Bayuquan district, Yingkou, who has caught jellyfish for about 30 years. "Upon returning, we unload the jellyfish using the water tank on the boat. Protective measures are taken throughout the process."

Wang said he's not concerned about the threat of jellyfish stings that leave lacerations on a victim's skin, but are mostly nonlethal to humans.

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Above and right: Dishes of stir-fried jellyfish.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Jellyfish: Yingkou rises with tasty ocean treats



From page 1

"In case of a sting, I apply alum (an astringent that draws out fluids) to the affected skin and then rinse it with clean water. Generally speaking, we fishermen don't usually have big problems at sea," he said.

Bountiful bay

Since 1989, Yingkou has become famous for fishing and processing jellyfish. The techniques have been passed down through different generations, as demand for the delicacy has spread across the world.

The country's largest jellyfish breeding, processing and trading area, in 2019 the city was named the "hometown of Chinese jellyfish" by the China Fisheries Association.

Situated at the mouth of the Daliao River next to the Bohai Sea, Yingkou has mild sunlight and abundant plankton, one of the main food sources for jellyfish, along with small fish, crustaceans and mollusks.

With 1,507 square kilometers of sea, the city's marine area naturally produces 400 million jellyfish annually.

The artificial breeding area of jellyfish is about 55,000 *mu* (3,666 hectares), with 8,000 metric tons of jellyfish cultivated on average every year. This year, the total jellyfish catch reached 206,000 tons, a 20 percent increase from previous years, data from local authorities showed.

Jellyfish are usually caught in July and August.

Every year at Wanghaizhai pier, about a dozen small plants process them after they are taken off the trawlers, Wang said. "We sell jellyfish to them, and some of the products are exported to neighboring countries," he said.

Wang believes catching jellyfish is good for marine ecology, as "fish, shrimps and crabs may be numbed or killed by the venom of the jellyfish".

Wu Jiacheng, an official from the city's bureau of ocean and fisheries, said the potential of the jellyfish industry in Yingkou is enormous.

"On the supply side, Yingkou has unique advantages in natural resources. Coupled with the development of artificial cultivation, the supply is abundant and sustainable," he said. "On the demand side, jellyfish is rich in collagen. Its low calorie and high nutritional content is increasingly favored by consumers."

Yingkou has established a complete industry chain integrating cultivation, fishing, processing and trade, and is transitioning toward deep processing and branding.

"With the integrated development of agriculture, fishing and tourism, the added value of the jellyfish industry will be further enhanced," Wu said.

Detoxifying

The complex processing of jellyfish, which importantly involves removing the toxins, has laid the foundation for the industry to prosper in Yingkou.

Chen Dehui, head of the Gaizhou Yinghui Aquatic Products Processing Factory, one of the city's major jellyfish processors, is an expert in the field.

The first step is to separate the skin and the bell, the umbrella-like body of the jellyfish, Chen said.

"The second step involves removing the toxins, which is typically achieved by adding water to allow the jellyfish to decompose at around 25 C. This process generates bacteria that can control



Clockwise from top left: A visitor buys jellyfish products during the 2024 jellyfish festival in Yingkou, Liaoning province, in October; a fisherman holds up a jellyfish he caught in Yingkou in 2022; Workers process jellyfish in Bayuquan district of Yingkou in 2021; Fishermen with their jellyfish catches. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

jellyfish toxins. This is followed by rinsing with clean water," he said.

After washing the jellyfish, they are treated with alum to further detoxify them, which usually takes 12 to 24 hours.

Edible salt is used for preservation. For every 50 kilograms of jellyfish, at least 10 kg of salt are required. After being in brine for 72 hours, the jellyfish are ready for sale, Chen said.

Processing a jellyfish needs perfect timing. Since 95 percent of the creature is water, it can evaporate in sunlight.

Chen's company sends fleets to the Bohai Sea every mid-August to net mature jellyfish older than 80 days. It has a dock operation for the segmentation, slicing and salting of jellyfish. The workers use large water pumps to transport seawater for cleaning and to also keep the jellyfish fresh.

Tao Guofeng, chairman of Yingkou Chenguang Sea Product Co, said jellyfish are the most difficult aquatic product to process.

"A jellyfish contains water-soluble proteins. If it is only salted, it will become smelly. It needs to be combined with alum, and the processing is influenced by factors such as temperature, the season, and environment, with varying proportions of salt and alum used," he said.

The company has developed advanced techniques that enable jellyfish to be processed in one day. A shelf life of more than six months without preservatives or additives can be achieved, but "it requires high standards for equipment and workshops, leading to higher costs", Tao said.

Business spreads

Yingkou has more than 300 processing companies, family workshops and cooperatives employing around 50,000 people in jellyfish-related work.

Each year the city produces on average 236,000 tons of processed jellyfish, with about 81 percent of the raw material coming from outside the city. The total output value of jellyfish processing is approximately 3 billion yuan (\$413 million), data from local authorities showed.

Yingkou exports about 12,000 tons of



“As long as the ocean exists, jellyfish will survive, and as long as there are jellyfish, humans will eat them.”

Tao Guofeng, chairman of Yingkou Chenguang Sea Product Co

jellyfish to 33 countries and regions annually, mainly to Japan, South Korea, the United States, and European countries.

Gaizhou Yinghui Aquatic Products Processing Factory processes 4.1 million kg of jellyfish every year. Half of the amount is exported, while the other half is made into precooked food for domestic farmers' markets and hotels, according to Chen.

"Our Yingkou jellyfish, with high-quality standards and traditional processing techniques, quickly gained favor among domestic and foreign customers, creating substantial wealth for people," he said.

"High-quality jellyfish can promote digestion and slow down aging, and is food that supports the health of middle-aged and elderly people," he said, adding

he expects both demand and markets to expand in the future.

"Jellyfish processing does not cause any pollution. This industry can last for thousands of years with proper guidance from the government," he said.

Tao Siqing, general manager of Yingkou Chenguang Sea Product Co, said that in the past the company's focus was on quantity. Now, it relies on proper decomposing of the jellyfish, and deep processing, to ensure the quality of its products and the success of its brand, she said.

Founded in 1997, Chenguang has built advanced production lines and obtained multiple international certifications for the quality of its goods from the United States, Canada and the European Union. It has made breakthroughs in the development of innovative products such as instant jellyfish.

Tao Guofeng, the company's chairman, said jellyfish existed before the dinosaurs. "As long as the ocean exists, jellyfish will survive, and as long as there are jellyfish, humans will eat them," he said.

In 2014, Yingkou Jellyfish was recognized as a national geographical indication product, and a top 10 fishery brand of Liaoning.

Government efforts

Enhanced efforts are being taken by the Yingkou government to develop the jellyfish industry while maintaining sustainable development of the maritime environment.

Modern technologies, such as satellite positioning systems and drones to monitor fishing vessels in real time, ensure that fishing activities are conducted within specified times, areas and quotas, said Shu Shi, deputy director of the bureau of ocean and fisheries of Bayuquan district.

"We also ask fishermen to use proper fishing equipment and methods to minimize the impact on marine creatures," Shu said, adding that commercial fishing of the invertebrate is good for marine environments.

"A rapid increase in jellyfish numbers may directly put pressure on biodiversity

and the ecological balance," he said. "During their growth and reproduction, jellyfish can generate a significant amount of biomass, whose decomposition may deplete oxygen in the water, causing deterioration of water quality. The death and decay of jellyfish can release harmful substances, further affecting water quality."

The city also breeds jellyfish to meet market demand. Since 2020, it has released 520 million jellyfish larvae.

This has played a vital role in the recovery of jellyfish resources and also increased fishermen's income, according to Yang Zhuo, an official from Yingkou's publicity department.

In 2024, with an investment of 2 million yuan, the city released 70 million jellyfish larvae.

Since 2018, the city has hosted an annual jellyfish festival to attract investment and promote the opening-up of aquaculture. It also organizes for companies involved in the industry to attend large fisheries exhibitions and sales fairs in other provinces to seek business opportunities.

In recent years, the revenue from jellyfish processing companies saw a decline because of the COVID-19 pandemic and downward pressure on the global economy. The city is exploring ways to boost domestic demands, such as the promotion of hot pot jellyfish in Chongqing, Sichuan province and Guanglong province, said Yang.

The local government is also encouraging companies to improve deep-processing techniques, innovate in developing new products such as multiple-flavor instant food, and expand online selling channels.

Nutritional value

According to the *Compendium of Materia Medica*, an encyclopedic work of herbology and nature compiled by Li Shizhen in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), jellyfish has the effects of "clearing heat, detoxifying, resolving phlegm, lowering blood pressure and reducing swelling".

Every 100 grams of jellyfish contains 12.3 grams of protein, as well as being rich in calcium, iodine and various vitamins.

The late Hong Huixin, a renowned fisheries expert and jellyfish researcher, wrote that the nutritional value of jellyfish exceeds that of sea cucumbers.

"Essential amino acids for the human body account for 29.3 percent of the total amino acids in jellyfish, which is higher than the proportion in sea cucumbers at 23.9 percent," he wrote. Essential amino acids are ones the human body cannot synthesize on its own and must obtain from food.

While it has strong nutritional benefits, some diners simply enjoy fresh jellyfish for the taste.

"Jellyfish is tender and refreshing, rich in collagen, loved by the elderly and children. My family eats jellyfish once or twice a week, especially in the summer," said Sun Hui, a Yingkou resident.

Her most common dish is a cold salad, made by "slicing the jellyfish into shreds and adding minced garlic, coriander, vinegar — simple and appetizing," she added.

Liu Jun, another resident, said jellyfish is a special gift he takes when visiting friends and relatives.

"The ready-to-eat packages are convenient to carry, with prices ranging from tens to hundreds of yuan," Liu said.

Liu Shicheng contributed to this story.

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TOP NEWS

Rising higher

The Chinese character for the year 2024, *sheng*, is announced by the president of the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia on Sunday in Shah Alam, Malaysia. The character, which means rising, was chosen to reflect economic recovery and the firming of relations between China and Malaysia.

CHEN YUE / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Housing estate mirrors Macao's enhanced life quality

By STEPHY ZHANG and WU KUNLING in Macao

A wedding portrait of Leung Chung-lan and her husband, along with a photo of Leung and her granddaughter, holds pride of place at the entrance of their two-bedroom apartment on Seac Pai Van public housing estate on Coloane Island, Macao.

The complex, which is the Macao Special Administrative Region's largest housing project for low-income residents, has undergone remarkable transformations in terms of infrastructure in the past decade, significantly enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

Leung, who has lived on the estate for nearly 10 years, has been a firsthand witness to these developments. She moved into the house with her husband and granddaughter in 2015, a year after President Xi Jinping made an inspection tour of the area in the run-up to the 15th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland.

During his short visit to the housing community in 2014, Xi interacted with the residents and was deeply impressed by their spirit of love and harmony, their boundless optimism, and their great diligence in leading better lives.

Seac Pai Van serves as a microcosm of Macao's steady development in terms of improved livelihoods and social environment. In 2013, the estate welcomed its first residents. Today, it has approximately 18,000 people living in 9,515 housing units.

The complex comprises one block of social housing, available for underprivileged families to rent, and three blocks of economic housing, which allows low-income families to buy apartments at

affordable prices. The name of each block mirrors the hope of residents to live and work happily.

Leung recalled that when she first moved in, there were very few residents, and the infrastructure for public transportation and education was not well developed. Amenities such as well-stocked supermarkets and proper restaurants were also lacking.

Leung often had to take a one-hour bus ride to downtown to buy daily necessities, while her granddaughter had to commute daily to the Macao peninsula for elementary and secondary education, as there were no schools in the area.

The times have changed. The Seac Pai Van Public School, which opened in the 2020-21 academic year, is located right across the street from the housing estate, and offers kindergarten, elementary and secondary education.

"Now that we have a school nearby, nobody has to go that far for education. It saves a lot of time," Leung said.

Last month, the Seac Pai Van line of Macao's Light Rapid Transit system officially opened to the public. It is the first route outside the main Taipa line and has made commuting for work or leisure convenient for residents of the housing estate.

Acting on Xi's suggestions, the housing estate has added more green areas and other eco-friendly facilities for residents to relax both mentally and physically. There are also new shopping malls, tea houses and cafes, as well as a public library, in the area.

With the steady development of the area surrounding it, the estate has recorded a surge in residents. "Our housing community is more lively and cheerful now, which

brings us residents a lot of joy," Leung said.

As of the end of last year, 15,547 social housing units in Macao were occupied, an increase of over 21 percent compared with a decade ago. Similarly, 36,963 economic housing units were occupied as of the end of 2023, an increase of more than 12 percent from 2013.

This year, around 13,600 households in Macao are eligible for rent exemptions of up to 2,000 Macao patacas (\$249.6), with an expected total annual exemption amount of about 82 million Macao patacas.

President of the Macao Institute of Management Samuel Tong Kai-chung noted that although Macao has limited space, data shows that local residents have relatively low housing pressure.

The 2021 census shows that of the city's over 200,000 households, 73.4 percent are self-owned units and an additional 6.4 percent are social housing units. This means that at least 80 percent of residents have had their housing needs adequately addressed since Macao's return to the motherland.

The Macao SAR government has continuously improved its five-tier system for housing — social housing, economic housing, intermediate housing, elderly housing and private housing.

In addition to boosting the construction and supply of various categories of public housing, the government has also implemented measures to promote the healthy development of the private property market.

Notably, it launched the Macao New Neighbourhood project in the Guangdong-Macao in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin. The large residential complex covers approximately 620,000 square meters, addressing the housing needs of more residents.

Tong said the series of housing policies and measures implemented in the SAR have met the needs of a majority of the city's residents.

Citing the example of Seac Pai Van public housing estate, he said the area's improved infrastructure for transportation, education and recreation has earned praise from the residents of even traditionally developed urban areas.

Tong said he believes that Macao has the capability of ensuring that families with varied economic circumstances can live and thrive in the city.

Henry Hong Wai-tong, a member of Macao's Public Housing Affairs Committee, noted that current application figures suggest the city is poised to meet its residents' housing needs in the future, but cautioned that the SAR government should continue to closely monitor the growing public housing demand.

While social housing applications and allocations adhere to fixed schedules, economic housing units are subject to flexible timelines, posing challenges for gauging housing needs accurately, Hong said, adding that fluctuations in household sizes could also influence the demand.

Public housing plans should consider the needs of future generations of current dwellers, he said. Ensuring that the system can address such diverse needs to fundamentally enhance the society's living standards is a key issue the SAR government must take into consideration, he added.

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Online See more by scanning the code.

Role of BRI in developing nations lauded

Bosnia and Herzegovina leader says initiative promotes modernization, economic growth

By SONG PING songping@chinadaily.com.cn

Had it not been for the Belt and Road Initiative, many countries would have had little to look forward to from the rest of the world, former member of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mladen Ivanic said.

Speaking exclusively to China Daily, Ivanic, who is in China to attend the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Art and Media Vocational College, said the BRI offers developing countries the opportunities to modernize and grow.

Comparing China's approach with that of traditional Western institutions, he said, "There is just a World Bank with some sort of investments, but it's relatively costly and always under political conditions. In the case of China, there is no political pressure. This is just cooperation of different countries."

He said some Central Asian countries might still be struggling without the support of China's BRI. "I really believe this is a very good initiative. This is a real chance for development," Ivanic added. "Last year marked its 10th anniversary, and I hope it continues for many years."

According to him, the initiative was more than just about building roads and railways, but also about creating lasting changes that help countries break free from poverty and isolation.

The results of China's cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina are already visible. Ivanic recalled that until 15 years ago, the country "didn't have a single kilometer of highway," noting the significance of China's involvement in addressing the country's infrastructure challenges. "Now we are in a real effort to invest in that area," he said. "We don't have money. So cooperation with countries like China is very useful because Chinese companies can build the roads and they can also finance that."

In September, the Pocitelj-Zvirovici subsection of the pan-European Corridor Vc Highway was completed and opened. The China-built project marks Bosnia and Herzegovina's first north-south highway and is expected to significantly enhance connectivity, trade and regional economic growth.

In 2023, bilateral trade between China and Bosnia and Herzegovina hit \$362 million, a 17.6 percent increase compared to the previous year.

With the country continuing to develop its infrastructure, Ivanic highlighted the importance of expanding cooperation with China in other sectors, particularly energy. Advocating greener, more sustaina-

ble sources of energy, he stressed the need to diversify the country's energy mix, especially given its abundant water resources.

Drawing on China's expertise in hydropower, Ivanic expressed the hope that Chinese investment in this sector will help Bosnia and Herzegovina transition to cleaner energy sources.

Ivanic pointed to a thermal power plant built in collaboration with a Chinese private company, describing it as "a good example of private investment working alongside Chinese support, sending a strong signal for other countries in the region that this can be done."

When it came to the geopolitical environment, Ivanic warned that "after this conflict in Ukraine, you have basically a conflict between Russia and the West, which is very dangerous." He further emphasized that China can play a stabilizing role in this divided world. "The modern world is multipolar," he said, stressing that cooperation among multiple nations is crucial for global stability.

Despite some tensions in global trade, particularly with the European Union raising tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, Ivanic still saw opportunities for continued cooperation. "Bosnia and Herzegovina is a European country, but not an EU member," he said. As a result, the country's unique position allows it to act as a

bridge between China and the European market, he said.

Looking back on his first trip to China 24 years ago, he is deeply impressed by the significant improvements in infrastructure quality. "I remember when I drove from Beijing to Hebei, the roads were terrible. Now, China's roads are state-of-the-art. The improvement in road quality is amazing, and that's a real success."

"The biggest achievement of China is the fight against poverty. The benefits of economic development are reaching ordinary citizens, not just a small group. China has succeeded in that, which is not easy, and it offers a lesson for other countries," he added.

Ivanic advocated the key role of cultural diplomacy in rebuilding Bosnia and Herzegovina, noting that cultural exchanges, such as theater and music, are essential in reconnecting people.

In his views, cultural diplomacy is often more effective than traditional diplomacy in fostering understanding and friendship.

Ivanic commended China's efforts in promoting cultural exchange, especially through the Confucius Institutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which help people learn about China and its culture.



Mladen Ivanic

Gulf: China seen as appealing partner

From page 1

Analyzing foreign policy at the individual level, we can see that Gulf countries have welcomed Trump's reelection.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan had good relations with Trump even before his first term as president started in 2017. This early connection led to major policy alignments. During his first stint at the White House, Trump strengthened ties with these leaders, marked by significant military deals with Saudi Arabia, which he promoted as employment opportunities in the US. He also maintained the image of strong US security support in the region.

With the UAE President, Trump played a key role in the Israel-UAE normalization agreement, treating the UAE as a major partner alongside Saudi Arabia. In his first term, Trump also influenced the 2017-21 blockade on Qatar. Despite early challenges with Qatar's leadership, Trump later became a significant supporter as Qatar weathered the blockade with minimal impact.

In a new term, Trump is likely to promote cooperation among Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, aligning with his "economic nationalism" and "America First" policies. Strengthening Gulf ties could help limit other major powers' influence

in the region, a thinking that could prompt Trump to maintain strong relationships with Gulf leaders.

As many analyses suggest, Trump's transactional diplomacy, focused on short-term gains, implies that US-Gulf relations at the national level will prioritize economic and strategic interests. We can expect new agreements that align with the financial and economic goals of both sides, alongside increased military equipment supply, investments and energy partnerships.

Security cooperation is likely to deepen, with a stronger US presence in the Gulf and a renewed alignment in security policies.

Whether Trump revives the "maximum pressure" policy against Iran in a weaker or stronger form, it is clear that his main partners will be Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar.

Trump's preference for unilateral and bilateral engagements over multilateral ones suggests that US-Gulf relations will feature tailored agreements that reflect each Gulf state's unique geopolitical and economic priorities.

This could position Qatar as a valuable mediator due to its diplomatic ties, while potentially sparking competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE for the title of the US' top Gulf partner, further fueling their ongoing geoeconomic rivalry.

Trump's lack of emphasis on human rights, as seen in his first

term, could reassure Gulf leaders that US interference in their domestic policies will be minimal, fostering a stable environment for advancing shared strategic goals. Additionally, the US and Gulf countries might strengthen energy cooperation, managing oil production and pricing strategies, and navigating global energy fluctuations for mutual benefit.

A key question for Trump's new term is whether US policies will be proactive or reactive to potential Middle East crises. Under Biden, efforts have been focused on nuclear talks with Iran and ending the Yemen war. But also in the last four years, political and military crises have changed the region.

Trump's administration would need to balance US ties with Gulf states and manage Israel-Iran tensions. This would mean addressing Israel's actions in Gaza and Lebanon, as well as Iran's growing role in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen. Trump might bring back targeted sanctions to cut suspected Iranian funding for groups like Hezbollah, Houthis and Shia militias as part of a renewed "maximum pressure" policy against Teheran.

To support regional stability, Trump might advocate for deeper security and intelligence cooperation between Israel and Gulf states. This could lead to joint defense initiatives, building on the Abraham Accords to create a more compre-

hensive security framework.

Trump's administration would likely see the growing ties between the Gulf Cooperation Council and China as a competitive challenge. In recent years, the GCC has expanded its economic and technological relationships with China, particularly in sectors such as 5G technology, artificial intelligence and critical infrastructure.

These partnerships reflect China's increasingly constructive role in the Middle East region, providing investment and technological advancements without imposing political conditions. For the GCC, China represents a valuable partner that contributes to economic diversification and regional development.

Gulf countries prioritize their relationships with China not only due to their independent foreign policies but also because they perceive a multipolar world as more balanced, rational and pragmatic. This view makes China an appealing partner that aligns with their vision of stable, diversified global partnerships.

However, Trump might push the GCC to limit these ties to safeguard US strategic interests and prevent Beijing from gaining influence in the vital energy corridor. Still, China's balanced approach, seen as mutually beneficial and constructive by many in the region, could make such US efforts more challenging.

The author is a Gulf studies coordinator at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkiye. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Staff members prepare for the opening ceremony of the Pocitelj-Zvirovici subsection of the pan-European Corridor Vc Highway in Capljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on Sept 4. This highway was opened to the public on Sept 5. YIN XIAOSHENG / XINHUA

CHINA

Courts tighten noose around illegal fishing

Stronger protection for fishery resources offered to protect ecology, economy

By CAO YIN
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While calling for a sustained crackdown on illegal fishing, China's top court has also urged courts nationwide to prioritize environmental restoration, aiming to provide stronger legal protection for fishery resources.

The Supreme People's Court issued four case studies on Monday to guide courts across the country in their judicial efforts against illegal fishing and to enhance public awareness of environmental protection laws.

"Fishery resources are valuable natural assets that play a critical role in safeguarding ecological security and promoting economic development," the top court stated.

It emphasized that illegal fishing not only directly damages fishery resources but also disrupts biodiversity and ecological balance. In recent years, Chinese courts have intensified their efforts to address related crimes, including illegal fishing and the transportation and sales of aquatic products.

In one disclosed case, a group of defendants was found to have illegally harvested crabs during the fishing ban period from May to August 2021. They then transported the crabs by boat and truck to seafood markets in local areas and cities such as Fuzhou in Fujian province and Shenzhen in Guangdong province.

After an investigation, the Longgang District People's Court in Shenzhen said their actions constituted the crime of illegal fishing of aquatic products. Three harvesters and members of the group received prison sentences ranging from 13 to 15 months.

The court noted that they received leniency because the group voluntarily paid 50,000 yuan (\$6,869) to repair the aquatic envi-

ronment they had harmed.

Additionally, a defendant who knowingly sold the illegally caught crabs for profit was sentenced to 13 months in prison and fined 20,000 yuan for concealing the illicit gains.

"This case demonstrates that justice holds every step of the crime accountable," the top court said. "Those involved in illegal fishing and the transportation and sale of aquatic products are all subject to criminal penalties."

The court stressed the importance of combating illegal fishing, noting that it can also endanger lives.

In Renhuai, Guizhou province, a man surnamed Zhang was sentenced to three years in prison after an illegal fishing incident resulted in the death of another man, surnamed Lou.

On August 23, 2020, the two were fishing in a river using a high-voltage device. Lou slipped, came into contact with the electrified equipment and was fatally electrocuted.

"High-voltage electrofishing is an extremely destructive method," the top court said. "It not only severely harms fishery resources and the aquatic environment but also poses significant risks to personal safety and public security."

The court commended the Renhuai court's ruling and called on all courts to maintain a strict stance against such crimes to better protect the aquatic environment and safeguard human lives.

Over the past decade, China has stepped up efforts to protect the environment and biodiversity through the rule of law. It has enacted legislation to strengthen environmental conservation in major river basins such as the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, and has issued numerous judicial interpretations and guidelines to standardize the handling of related cases.

Jinan Biennale



Visitors view exhibits at the 3rd Jinan International Biennale, titled *The Age of Human Wisdom*, in Jinan, Shandong province, on Sunday. The event will take place from Sunday to April at two main exhibition venues — Shandong Art Museum and Jinan Art Museum — with the objective of exploring the influence of new technologies on contemporary artistic practices, as well as on society. It features various art forms including paintings, sculptures, installations, digital imagery, performance art and new media art. A total of 291 pieces from 215 artists representing 21 countries and regions are on display. HUANG ZHONGMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hainan launch center to carry out 2nd mission

By ZHAO LEI
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The Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center in Wenchang, Hainan province, is set to conduct its second mission, this time with a Long March 8 carrier rocket, according to the new spaceport.

In a brief news release on Sunday night, the center announced that the rocket was moved to Launch Pad No 1 on Sunday afternoon and is scheduled for liftoff in the coming days.

The mission marks the first launch from Launch Pad No 1, which is specifically designed to support the Long March 8-series rockets.

China Daily has learned that the mission, scheduled for next week, will deploy several satellites for the Spacelink Constellation network. The network currently operates 54 satellites in Earth's orbit, providing high-speed broadband internet services to users worldwide.

On Nov 30, the spaceport conducted its inaugural launch, which facilitated the maiden flight of the Long March 12 rocket from Launch Pad No 2.

As China's first spaceport dedicated to commercial operations, the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center is a joint venture between the Hainan provincial government and three State-owned space conglomerates.

Launch Pad No 1 was completed in December last year, while Launch Pad No 2 was finished in June.

The commercial spaceport is the fifth ground-based launch facility in China and the first to be operated by a local government. By contrast, the Wenchang Space Launch Center — also located in Hainan — and the three other Chinese spaceports in Jiuquan, Taiyuan and Xichang are administered by the central government and primarily serve State-led programs such as lunar exploration and manned spaceflights.

Designed and built by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, a subsidiary of China Aero-

space Science and Technology Corp, the Long March 8 rocket features two core stages and two side boosters. It is powered by six engines fueled by liquid oxygen, liquid hydrogen and kerosene.

The Long March 8 completed its maiden flight in December 2020 from the Wenchang Space Launch Center.

Capable of deploying various types of spacecraft into multiple orbits, the Long March 8 is primarily tasked with placing satellites in sun-synchronous orbits. This capability addresses the growing demand for launch services from commercial satellite companies in China and abroad, the academy said.

Homecoming moment



Lei Xiaofei (right), who was abducted and trafficked 18 years ago, reunites with his biological parents in his hometown of Chenzhou, Hunan province, on Sunday. WU LINHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Cities adding charging facilities for HK, Macao EVs

By ZHOU MO in Shenzhen
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Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area are accelerating the construction of charging facilities tailored for Hong Kong and Macao electric vehicles. The move comes as a growing number of private cars from the two special administrative regions are traveling across the boundary under preferential policies.

EV batteries on the Chinese mainland use the national standard, which differs from the European standard used in Hong Kong and Macao. As a result, Hong Kong and Macao EV owners previously had to carry their own adapters or plugs to charge their cars on the mainland — an inconvenient solution with higher usage risks.

"The growing proportion of EVs among Hong Kong and Macao vehicles traveling to and from the mainland has driven up charging demand," said Gu Jun, deputy general manager of the emerging business department at China

Southern Power Grid.

In the latest development, two charging piles at a station in Zhongshan, Guangdong province, were put into operation last week.

According to China Southern Power Grid, the constructor of the charging piles, all nine mainland cities in the GBA — Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Hui Zhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen and Zhaoqing — now have charging facilities compatible with the European standard, including 100 charging stations and 169 charging piles.

The facilities have been installed on major roads, in popular shopping areas, at innovation and entrepreneurship parks for Hong Kong and Macao entrepreneurs, and in areas frequented by overseas Chinese.

Shenzhen Bus Group has also built 12 European-standard charging piles in Shenzhen, primarily in Futian and Nanshan districts.

Data from Hong Kong's Environmental Protection Department shows that as of the end of



The construction of charging piles tailored for Hong Kong and Macao vehicles has made traveling to the mainland much more convenient."

Timothy Chui, EV driver from Hong Kong

October, Hong Kong had around 105,000 EVs, accounting for roughly 11.5 percent of the total number of vehicles.

The share of EVs among newly registered private cars in Hong Kong has risen significantly in recent years, jumping from 6.3 percent in 2019 to 64.6 percent last year.

Charging demand from Hong Kong and Macao EVs on the mainland has surged as more private

cars "drive north" for tourism, family visits and business, facilitated by two travel programs.

The Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles program, introduced on July 1 last year, allows eligible private cars from Hong Kong to travel between the city and Guangdong via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge without being subject to regular quotas.

A similar program for Macao vehicles was launched six months earlier.

According to official statistics, single-plate private cars from Hong Kong and Macao made over 2.44 million cross-boundary trips via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge this year, accounting for more than 60 percent of the total traffic at the port.

"The construction of charging piles tailored for Hong Kong and Macao vehicles has made traveling to the mainland much more convenient. We no longer have to worry about compatibility issues with charging equipment and can enjoy safer charging services," said Timothy Chui, an EV driver from Hong Kong.

Suspects caught trying to work with foreign spies

By CUI JIA
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State security organs across China have recently handled cases involving several suspects who attempted to sell classified information to foreign spy and intelligence agencies, the Ministry of State Security revealed on Monday.

Facing financial difficulties, the suspects actively reached out to these agencies to offer state secrets for monetary gain, the ministry said.

In one case, a suspect surnamed Zhong, who had previously worked for a subsidiary of a classified unit, contacted a foreign intelligence agency via its official website, seeking collaboration.

Zhong made the move in an effort to ease financial pressure after his entrepreneurial venture failed and his bank accounts were frozen. The foreign agency quickly responded, collecting Zhong's personal information and requesting details about the classified unit. Zhong falsely claimed to be a leader of the unit

and disclosed information about a classified project he had worked on in the past.

Through a thorough investigation, state security authorities gathered evidence of Zhong's illegal activities and apprehended him before he could meet with foreign agency personnel, effectively eliminating potential risks.

In another case, an employee surnamed Qi, who worked on classified projects, took advantage of his position and secretly copied and photographed confidential materials.

After incurring significant financial losses from failed investments, Qi sought to make money by selling state secrets.

Qi accessed the official website of a foreign intelligence agency to pledge allegiance and even took original copies of classified materials home to photograph and send to the agency.

Following an investigation, state security authorities confirmed that Qi's possessions included materials with state secrets. He was sentenced to two years and three months in

prison and was deprived of his political rights for one year for stealing state secrets on behalf of foreign entities.

In a third case disclosed by the MSS, an unemployed man surnamed Song tried to work with a foreign agency, offering to trade classified information for money after failing to secure a job.

Song downloaded publicly available information from a scientific research institution and contacted a foreign intelligence agency through its official website. Falsely claiming to be a researcher with access to critical scientific and technical materials, he expressed his willingness to cooperate with the agency.

State security authorities discovered his efforts. Although the materials he attempted to provide did not contain state secrets, his voluntary pledge of allegiance to a foreign spy agency violated China's Counter-Espionage Law.

Song was issued administrative penalties in accordance with the law. The MSS said that under the Counter-Espionage Law, people who steal, spy on, illegally purchase or provide state secrets or intelligence to overseas organizations, institutions or individuals can face imprisonment of five to 10 years. In especially severe cases, offenders may be sentenced to more than 10 years or even life imprisonment.

CHINA

Rise of 'China-chic' wins fans around world

Chinese dancers dazzle international audiences with artistic charm

By XUE JINGQI
and LIU LULU in Hong Kong

Nestled in the lush landscapes of Southwest China lies Yunnan province, a mosaic of ethnic diversity and the birthplace of a dance that has captivated the nation and the world beyond. It is here that the Dai ethnic group's peacock dance, a mesmerizing display of color and culture, took flight — and where the legendary 66-year-old dancer Yang Liping, affectionately dubbed the "Peacock Princess", first spread her wings.

Yang's journey began with the Xishuangbanna Song and Dance Ensemble, where at the tender age of 13, she embarked on a career that would see her become an ambassador of Chinese dance. Inspired by the stunning green peacocks native to China, Yang crafted a dance that reflected her deep appreciation for nature and beauty, a sentiment that resonates with people worldwide.

Green peacocks are the sole indigenous peacock species in China. Unlike the more common blue peacocks found in India and Pakistan, they are smaller but no less captivating. When they fan their tail, sunlight radiates through the feathers.

Yang would often conceal herself behind a Bodhi tree to observe these peacocks closely; how they walked and ruffled their feathers. She noted the crisp sound their feet made upon landing, akin to stepping on braziers.

"Peacocks symbolize humanity's deep yearning and reverence for beauty and nature," Yang said. "I simply present these sentiments through my dance."

Wings of change

The trajectory of Chinese dance, much like the peacock's majestic plumage, has been expansive and vibrant, especially since the reforms of 1978. Yang's performance at the 1990 Beijing Asian Games marked a pivotal moment, showcasing the fusion of traditional Chinese dance with contemporary flair. Her influence has spread through the dance community, inspiring productions like *Dynamic Yunnan* and *Under Siege* that have captivated audiences in over 50 countries.

"As a Chinese dancer, I am very proud of being able to present Chinese culture to the world through my art," said Yang, balancing conviction with humility.

Amid the lush greenery of Yunnan and the ethereal mists of Shaanxi, a bird once on the brink of oblivion has taken to the skies — not just in the wild, but on the world stage of performing arts. The crested ibis, a symbol of fortune that once faced extinction, has been given a new lease of life, both in its natural habitat and in the realm of cultural expression.

In the quiet corners of Yangxian county, Shaanxi province, what seemed like the final chapter for the crested ibis was being rewritten. Seven surviving birds, discovered by vigilant Chinese scientists, became the seed of hope for a species that had vanished elsewhere due to over-hunting and pesticide use. From these fragile beginnings, a conservation triumph emerged, and the crested ibis began its steady return from the shadows of extinction.

Shanghai Dance Theatre, recognizing the profound narrative woven into the ibis' resurgence, brought its tale to life through the dance drama *Soaring Wings: Journey of the Crested Ibis*. Premiering in 2014 with Zhu Jiejing as the lead, the production earned accolades as the Eastern counterpart to *Swan Lake*, masterfully blending the grace of ballet with the essence of Chinese dance.

Yet, the path to reviving such an obscure avian character was not without its challenges. Zhu Jiejing, whose own dance aspirations were once stirred by childhood dreams of beautiful dresses, ventured to the crested ibis' ancestral grounds in Sado, Japan. There, she observed the minutiae of their existence, from their drinking rituals to their foraging habits. Zhu's dedication to her art was clear: to dance like the ibis was to understand its very soul. "It's not about imitation; you have to dance with your heart," she said.

Zhu's journey with dance, a testament to resilience and passion, had



The dance drama *Soaring Wings: Journey of the Crested Ibis* is staged in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, in November 2017. TIAN JIANMING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Zhu Jiejing as the lead dancer in *Soaring Wings*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

led her from being a young hopeful at the Shanghai Dance School to the distinguished principal dancer she is today. The rigors of training, once a stark contrast to her initial vision of dance, had become the foundation of her artistic integrity.

In 2015, Zhu and the *Soaring Wings* troupe embarked on an exhaustive two-month tour across Japan, performing 57 times in 64 days. "It takes a lot of confidence to conduct such a large-scale commercial tour of a Chinese dance drama overseas," Zhu said.

As the drama unfolded, the auditorium descended into an intense silence — so profound that one could hear a pin drop. To Zhu's amazement, the silence was shattered by a thunderous eruption of applause at the conclusion of the show.

"The audience's applause was so overwhelming that it felt like a tidal wave crashing onto the stage," recalled Zhu. "I realized that the audience was showering us with their utmost approval."

The profound adoration and support from the Japanese audience uplifted the performers' spirits. The final performance even brought them a big surprise.

"After our last show, just when we believed everything had concluded flawlessly, the auditorium was suddenly illuminated; fireworks erupted and ribbons danced through the air, and our emotions soared beyond control," Zhu shared. "The audience unfurled a banner bearing the words 'Eternal Sino-Japanese Friendship' and 'Thank You!'"

Over the past decade, Chinese dance has accelerated its global reach. From the Nasdaq screen in Times Square to the hallowed halls of the

Kennedy Center in Washington DC and the Lincoln Center in New York, Chinese stories like *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Red Detachment of Women* have captured the imagination of audiences worldwide.

The journey continued in January 2018 when *Soaring Wings* brought its poetic interpretation of the crested ibis' flight to the Lincoln Center. Despite a historic "bomb cyclone" snowstorm and temperatures plunging to -15 C, the theater, with nearly 2,000 seats, was filled.

Zhu, reflecting on these milestones, sees a bright future for Chinese dance on the international stage, saying, "Now, armed with confidence, the authentic artistic creations that we wholeheartedly support have received acclaim from the West."

Young power

In the tapestry of modern globalization, short-video platforms have emerged as vibrant threads weaving together the cultural exchanges of our time. It is through these digital stages that the allure of Chinese art and the burgeoning trend of "China chic" have pirouetted into the global spotlight.

Gen Z dancer Liu Yu rose to fame through his performances that incorporate traditional Chinese elements, which he showcased on a reality TV show where artists from various countries competed for idol status.

Back in 2021, as Liu graced the stage, greeting the audience with a traditional Chinese bow, a foreign contestant was visibly moved, exclaiming, "This is why I came to China — to embrace Chinese culture."

The audience applauded loudly after Liu's performance, with contestants from Japan and Russia imi-

tating his bow in admiration of the Chinese performers on stage.

Even amid a constellation of dance champions and internet celebrities, Liu's embodiment of "Chinese style" secured him first place and a ticket to global stardom.

Fast forward to the present, and his influence resonates with fans across the world. In Foshan, Guangdong province, admirers from the United States and Vietnam donned *hanfu* — traditional Chinese attire — as a tribute to the culture that Liu champions. "Liu left me with a very positive impression of traditional Chinese culture and inspired me to consider wearing traditional Chinese attire," one of his fans said.

In a departure from the focus of "going global" in the past, Chinese dance has further transcended onto mainstream platforms. It has captivated a diverse global audience to experience the unique charm of Chinese culture.

"Nowadays, people start to categorize 'China-chic' across various domains. Whether in music, dance, fashion, or even everyday essentials, traces of 'China-chic' can be discerned," said Liu. "Young Chinese are growing more self-assured with their cultural heritage."

Rivers to the East

The profound emotional impact of Chinese culture on foreign audiences extends far beyond the confines of the dance stage.

Seven years ago, video blogger Li Ziqi gained global popularity on YouTube with videos showcasing traditional Chinese culture and lifestyle, leading her to set a Guinness World Record for the most subscribers for a

Chinese language channel. Despite a three-year hiatus, her fan base remains nearly 20 million strong.

Chinese stories and elements are also permeating Western media, with titles like *Mulan*, *The Three-Body Problem*, and dramas like *Joy of Life* and *Love Between Fairy and Devil* being featured on mainstream Western media platforms including Disney+ and Netflix.

In the gaming industry, *Black Myth: Wukong*, the first China-made 3A video game, has shattered records and ignited interest in the classic novel *Journey to the West*, with players seeking to understand its cultural references and mythology.

"To understand the story, I searched for *Journey to the West* online and read it using translation software. I was deeply impressed by the story of the *Women's Country*," an Italian player commented. Many foreign players have posted interpretations, reactions and even "fan works" about the game on social media.

"I believe that 'China-chic' embodies much more than just a phrase. It represents the spirit of our nation. In a broader context, it signifies our values. It reflects the ideals we uphold, the traditions we cherish and the beliefs we stand by," said Zhu.

The narrative of sharing traditional Chinese culture with the world continues, promising an enduring journey of cultural exchange and enlightenment. As Yang said: "Our efforts to spread Chinese culture are like drops of water slowly coming together. While they may not appear grandiose at first glance, we have to do it, right?"

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Nation's culture growing in global influence

By XUE JINGQI
and LIU LULU in Hong Kong

In recent years, Chinese dance drama has embarked on an international ascent, with Hong Kong often serving as the initial gateway. This vibrant city, a confluence of East and West, has proven to be an ideal springboard for Chinese cultural productions to captivate a global audience. From there, Chinese dance dramas have traversed continents, enthralled audiences with a blend of traditional storytelling and contemporary performance art.

At the forefront of this cultural expedition is Yang Liping, whose breathtaking peacock dance, rooted in the traditions of the Dai ethnic group from Yunnan province, has transcended geographic boundaries. Yang's storied career, sparked in her youth, has blossomed into a role as a cultural ambassador, bringing the elegance and spiritual connection to nature inherent in Chinese dance to an international audience. Her work reflects not only the artistry of human expression but also an intimate dialogue with the natural world.

As the curtain falls on this article, it's clear that the ascent of Chinese dance drama is not merely a passage of performances across borders; it's a bridge connecting stories, emotions and cultural heritage. The international voyages of dance productions like *Soaring Wings: Journey of the Crested Ibis* and the viral fame of Gen Z artists such as Liu Yu in the digital arena exemplify the universal resonance of Chinese aesthetics.

The article underscores the impact of Chinese culture across various domains, from the viral lifestyle videos of Li Ziqi to the fantastical realms of gaming, with *Black Myth: Wukong* leading players on a cultural odyssey. As Chinese narratives find their way onto Western media platforms, the universal appeal of stories like *Mulan* and *The Three-Body Problem* continues to grow.

In this panorama of cultural exchange, Chinese dance, like the peacock and the ibis, has spread its wings. It is a journey of enlightenment, marrying the ancient with the contemporary, and it promises to continue sharing China's rich heritage with the world, one step, one story, one dance at a time.

CHINA

Village doctor dedicated to rural community

Medical professional provides crucial lifeline to those living in countryside

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang
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On a chilly midnight in early spring, village doctor Hu Yiwen received a call and quickly left home on his motorcycle.

Tongmu village, located in Yichun city, Jiangxi province, is home to just over 200 residents, more than 100 of whom are elderly individuals aged 60 and above.

The caller was the son of 74-year-old Yu Rongying, who reported that his mother was unable to eat and was coughing severely.

Upon arriving at the elderly woman's home, Hu discovered that she had difficulty swallowing due to the aftermath of a stroke and needed a gastric tube. He promptly provided treatment, alleviating the patient's suffering.

Caring for the health of the elderly in the village is a crucial part of this

young doctor's daily routine.

Born in 1999 in another village in Yichun, Hu is the sole medical provider serving Tongmu.

Growing up in a rural area, he experienced a lack of medical resources in his childhood, which motivated him to become a village doctor after graduating from Yichun Vocational College in 2020.

From the start, Hu's journey was challenging.

"The clinic's equipment was in disrepair, and medical services were almost nonexistent. I was so nervous that my palms were sweating the first time I went out to see patients alone," Hu said.

Another challenge was his youthful appearance.

"During consultations, villagers often didn't trust or cooperate with me because they saw me as a young man and mistook me for an intern," the 25-year-old said.

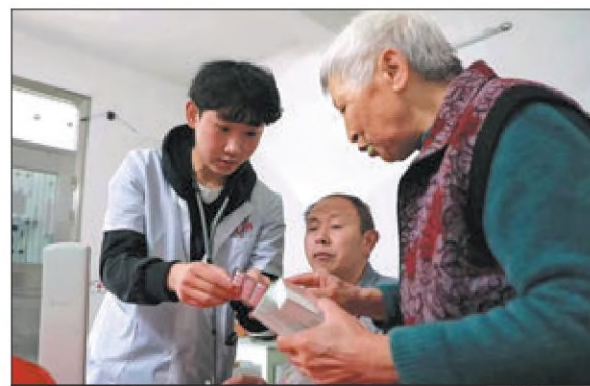
Residents in the small village are scattered: some live on hillsides, while others travel several kilometers by motorcycle to reach the clinic.

"My job is to be in the health center, but many elderly people have mobility issues and can't come to the center, so I have to make house calls," Hu said.

Whenever villagers need him, Hu is on call. He is well-acquainted with the villagers' circumstances, such as families with centenarians, those frequently working away and pregnant women about to give birth.

"Whenever patients need me, I make house calls. My phone stays on all night, placed by my bedside so I can answer calls at any time."

Hu recalled a memorable experience from last November when he visited 73-year-old Zhong Chengyun and suspected a stroke. He promptly arranged for urgent care at Fengxin County People's Hospital, ensuring Zhong received timely treatment.



Hu Yiwen (left) instructs a patient on medication usage at the patient's home in Yichun, Jiangxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

One villager with skin cancer has received Hu's dedicated care, including regular visits to adjust treatment and provide emotional support.

"Although our village's medical resources may not be as advanced as

those in big hospitals, I strive to be patient, meticulous and compassionate," Hu said.

Over the past four years, he has also participated in training sessions at township hospitals to enhance his medical skills.

According to the national census in 2020, the proportion of people aged 60 and above in rural areas was 23.8 percent, nearly 8 percentage points higher than that in urban areas.

Since 2021, China has been focusing on adjusting its poverty alleviation measures to align with the goal of rural revitalization, while also strengthening the provision of basic healthcare in rural areas.

The National Health Commission, along with four other government departments, launched a plan in April last year to nurture college-educated rural doctors, and nearly 7,500 graduates have been hired.

When asked why he didn't pursue a job in a big city after graduating, Hu shared that his dream was to be a rural doctor and improve healthcare for those with the most need for it.

"As long as the villagers need me, I'll be there," Hu said.

Wu Chenrui contributed to this story.



Ma Fang (left) prepares dishes at her restaurant kitchen in Tongxin, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. LIU ZHEN / XINHUA

Vocational training serves up success for aspiring chefs

YINCHUAN — As noon approaches, Ma Fang, the owner of a wedding banquet hall in Tongxin county in the city of Wuzhong, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, is busy preparing a bowl of the local traditional soup, adding sliced green radish, tofu, wood ear mushrooms and rice noodles.

After seasoning it with soy sauce and salt, she allows the mixture to simmer briefly. Once the ingredients are perfectly cooked, she serves the soup in a bowl, crowning it with steamed meatballs and thinly sliced beef. With a sprinkle of green onions and cilantro, and a final drizzle of broth, Ma presents a steaming, aromatic bowl of Tongxin soup.

"We usually start our preparations around 5 am, and on our busiest days we can dish out over 2,000 bowls by noon," Ma said.

She and her husband, Ma Yulu, launched the Chengbei Home Banquet Hall in August, and the orders have been piling up, with reservations already booked two months in advance.

Nestled along the banks of the Yellow River, Wuzhong has cultivated a unique culinary culture through centuries of trade and cultural exchange.

In recent years, the city has bolstered its support for private vocational training institutions, offering cooking courses in Chinese cuisine, pastries and snacks, thereby nurturing a batch of "Wuzhong chefs". With the magic of modern cooking techniques, the trainees have helped enhance the flavor of their local delicacies, satisfying customers across the country.

Zhao Liang, general manager of Suzi Morning Tea, has witnessed this transformation firsthand. "On weekends and holidays, our restaurant is almost always full of customers, and private rooms require reservations," he said.

Established in 1992, Suzi Morning Tea has grown from a humble noodle shop to a chain of four locations. Wuzhong's morning tea restaurants typically offer beef noodles, dim sum and side dishes. "It's not just locals enjoying morning tea, as many tourists from other regions also come to experience it," Zhao added.

The restaurant's thriving business is partly attributed to the improved skills of its chefs. "In the past, chefs mainly learned through apprenticeships, but now we have formal voca-

tional training, making our chefs more professional and standardized," Zhao said.

He highlighted events hosted by the city, including morning tea festivals and culinary competitions, which have provided an important platform for local chefs to exchange ideas and refine their craft.

Many of the chefs in Wuzhong's flourishing food scene were once young women without stable employment. Li Pingping, a cook at Ma Fang's banquet hall, used to work on construction sites, which was both physically demanding and unstable. Vocational training has since transformed her life.

"Here, I earn around 5,000 yuan (\$700) a month and haven't looked for work elsewhere," Li said. Becoming a chef has significantly improved her family's life, enabling her to buy a new car and even build a new house in her hometown.

Wang Jingwen, principal of a local vocational training school, said: "Our residents are more aware of the benefits of vocational training, and the demand for courses has risen substantially. Many restaurant workers even sign up on their own initiative."

Ma Yulu sends his staff for training each year. Previously, he and his wife ran a small restaurant without any formal culinary knowledge, managing their operations in a haphazard manner. However, after undergoing training, the more than 10 chefs in their kitchen have become more professional.

"After the training, their knife skills, heat control and cooking processes have all become more professional, making their dishes taste better. Consequently, our revenue has increased," Ma Yulu said.

With the business flourishing, the couple were able to build the Chengbei Home Banquet Hall, significantly expanding their operations.

Leveraging the targeted vocational training, the catering industry in Wuzhong has embarked on a path toward standardized industrial development. Capitalizing on the unique tourism development advantages of Ningxia, the city is also striving to develop its characteristic catering sector into its signature industry, while retaining more tourists that are attracted to the region, local officials said.

XINHUA

Harbin provides free rooms for young migrant workers

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
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The Harbin Committee of the Communist Youth League of China in Heilongjiang province has launched a "Youth Talent Community" for young people coming to Harbin to seek employment.

The first five stations, including four hotels and one employment service station, will provide up to three days of free accommodation for young people, as well as related occupational guidance, according to the committee.

"It is a public service project aimed at meeting the transitional accommodation needs of young people coming to Harbin to seek employment," said Zhang Yingying, director of the youth development department of the committee. "In the past, young people sometimes encountered problems when they came to Harbin to seek employment. They couldn't find a place to stay when they arrived in the city for inter-

views or registration for their posts."

Therefore, the committee called on hotels and related operators in the city who are enthusiastic about public welfare to recruit urban youth partners and jointly build Youth Talent Communities.

"They will provide up to three days of free accommodation for young people from other places for employment, helping them stay safely and succeed in their careers in the city," she said. "We also hope to make young people feel warmth when they arrive here. We want to attract more young people to settle in Harbin, fall in love with Harbin and stay in Harbin."

The participating hotels have prepared rooms with decor specially prepared to cheer on young people.

"We are very happy to participate in such a public welfare project," said Guo Daming, manager of a participating hotel. "We will do our best to provide good services, in order to attract more talent to settle

in Harbin and contribute to the city's development."

Through a WeChat mini-program named "Erbin Youth", young people can browse information and apply for accommodation with proof of their employment or interview notices.

After approval, they can check in on the agreed date. To facilitate young job seekers, the hotels will implement rent discounts after a three-day stay.

Applicants must be graduates of colleges or higher education aged 18 to 35, with their household registration outside the city, who are seeking employment in Harbin.

They must also have interview information from companies registered in Harbin.

There is also a youth employment service station in the city, which will provide free employment services, entrepreneurial guidance, policy promotion, vocational training as well as policy interpretation for talent settlement and tourism consultation for young

people, local officials said.

To better help graduates find jobs, many cities across the country have issued policies for free accommodation during their job-hunting period.

The "Youth Hostel" program in Shanghai was launched in late November, according to a report by China Youth Daily.

Under the program, over 70 stable, safe, high-quality and public welfare-oriented youth hostels have opened to young people who come to Shanghai to find a job.

It focuses on serving graduates within two years of graduation from college.

Eligible young people can apply for up to three days of free accommodation and a total of up to 15 days per year.

Xiamen in Fujian province introduced a policy offering free accommodation for college graduates within three years of graduation.

Eligible applicants can enjoy up to a total of 12 months of free accommodation in the city.

China's breadbasket province hits record grain output

HARBIN — Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, known as the country's "grain barn", produced about 80 million metric tons of grain this year, maintaining its role as China's top grain producer for 15 years in a row, official data showed on Saturday.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Heilongjiang's grain output exceeded 80 million tons for the first time, accounting for 11 percent of the country's total.

This year's harvest was hard won, challenged with the strenuous tasks of boosting soybean production and dealing with extreme weather that caused multiple natural disasters, inflicting losses in some grain-producing areas, said Pang Haitao, director of the provincial department of agriculture and rural affairs.

He attributed the harvest to black soil conservation measures, the cultivation of high-quality seeds, and modern agricultural management. The province plans to lift its grain production to 90 million tons by 2026 to help safeguard the country's food security.

Soybean production

As the country's largest soybean-producing province, Heilongjiang has been a pioneer in boosting domestic production to reduce the country's reliance on imports.

China's soybean planting area remained above 10 million hectares this year, and the output is expected to exceed 20 million tons for the third consecutive year.

Wang Xiaohui, chief analyst of the China National Grain and Oils Information Center, said that the price of domestic soybeans with low protein content in Heilongjiang has dropped below that of imported soybeans. Such soybeans are good for oil-pressing, and their growers have reported better profits from last year.



Soybean is harvested at a farm of Beidahuang Group in Jixi, Heilongjiang province, in October. WANG JINBIN / XINHUA

Liu He, a grain grower in Youyi county, made a bold choice to grow a new variety of soybean this year after examining the crop growth in an agricultural demonstration field last year.

"I was impressed by the growth of the Heinong 87 soybean variety in the demonstration base and decided to try it in my field this year. It yielded 4,000 kilograms per hectare for me, much higher than the varieties I planted before," he said.

Modern agriculture

At the beginning of the year, the provincial agricultural department issued a list of 135 recommended high-quality varieties of major crops. There are 16 crop breeding demonstration bases in the province, where farmers can check the crops in the field before selecting the right seeds.

Over the years, Heilongjiang's provincial government has allocated 300 million yuan (\$41.2 million) annually to support the development of the seed industry, said Meng Linghui, an official of the Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Meanwhile, reinforcing disaster resistance is crucial for ensuring the province's bumper harvest.

During spring sowing, a cold spell and rainy weather hit Hailun city, Heilongjiang, freezing seedlings. The local authority immediately launched emergency disaster relief, helping farmers purchase seeds for replanting. During summer flooding, 89 large and medium-sized reservoirs in the province prevented 2.23 billion cubic meters of water from flooding some 56,900 hectares of farmland.

According to the province's agricultural department, Heilongjiang has developed over 8 million hectares of high-standard farmland that boast sound soil conditions for grain cultivation and are resilient to drought and flooding.

As of the end of July, Heilongjiang had 11.4 million hectares of grain covered by agricultural insurance this year, an increase of 4.3 percent year-on-year.

Han Zhimin, a corn farmer in Yilan county, was a victim of the summer flood.

"Agricultural insurance paid me more than 6,000 yuan per hectare for severely affected corn plots, which helped dismiss my worries about the planting risks," said Han.

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An employee examines equipment at a production line supported by smart robots in Fuzhou, Jiangxi province, on Thursday. ZHU HAIPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Innovation seen as 'core element' of new drivers

Experts call for more support for fundamental R&D, bigger role of firms

By FAN FEIFEI
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China's emphasis on bolstering the development of new quality productive forces through scientific and technological innovation will inject strong impetus into high-quality economic growth, advance industrial upgrades and boost the nation's core competitiveness globally amid headwinds and external uncertainties, according to experts and company executives.

Highlighting that nurturing new growth drivers has been high on China's development agenda, they called for accelerated efforts to achieve breakthroughs in crucial technologies by devoting more resources to fundamental research, enhancing the dominant position of enterprises in boosting technological advancements and stepping up financial support for innovation-oriented tech companies.

Their comments came after the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference that concluded last week urged more efforts to make sci-tech innovation drive the development of new quality productive forces and better build its modern industrial system.

"Sci-tech innovation is the core element for developing new quality productive forces. The high-profile meeting sent a clear signal that China will further implement the innovation-driven development strategy and facilitate the in-depth integration of the real economy and the digital economy, so as to drive a shift from old growth drivers to new ones," said Luo Zhongwei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics.

Luo said the move to accelerate the establishment of a modern industrial system is of significance in propelling the intelligent,

high-end and green transformation of traditional industries, consolidating the economic recovery momentum and enhancing the country's buffer against external challenges.

To gain an upper hand in the increasingly intense international competition, Luo emphasized the need to improve indigenous innovation abilities by strengthening investment in technological frontiers, and vigorously develop strategic emerging sectors and future-oriented industries, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, high-end equipment manufacturing, biotechnology, new energy and new materials.

"It is important to give full play to the role of enterprises, especially small and medium-sized ones, in bolstering sci-tech innovation, speeding up the industrial applications of innovation achievements and strengthening the training of high-tech talent," said Huang Hanquan, head of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research.

More measures should be taken to deepen reforms in fields like technology and education to create a favorable environment that encourages innovation, expands international cooperation and exchanges in sci-tech, and supports foreign enterprises in carrying out technological research and innovative practices in collaboration with Chinese research institutes and companies, Huang said.

In recent years, the country's strength in sci-tech innovation has taken a major leap. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, China has moved up to 11th place in the rankings of the world's most innovative economies and remains the only middle-income economy in the top 30.

The country is home to 26 of the world's top 100 sci-tech innovation clusters, maintaining its position

as the global leader for two consecutive years, based on the WIPO's Global Innovation Index 2024.

Sci-tech innovation is crucial for cultivating new growth engines and competitive advantages, said Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy.

"China's sharpening focus on leveraging cutting-edge digital technologies, such as AI, 5G and big data, is conducive to propelling the upgrading of traditional industries, reducing the operational costs of enterprises and improving production efficiency."

Zhou Hongyi, founder of Chinese internet enterprise 360 Security Group, said building a modern industrial system is key to improving the country's economic strength.

The company will focus on digital security and AI, and bolster digital and intelligent upgrades in traditional industries, Zhou said.

"Looking ahead, the growth potential of China's economy will come from industrial upgrading driven by technological innovation, while AI technology represented by large language models will give birth to new production and business models in traditional fields such as manufacturing, agriculture and services, creating more social value," he added.

Chinese enterprises should strive for independent innovation and pour more capital into core technologies, in the face of tightened export control measures from some developed countries, said Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp.

Technology and innovation are key to bringing disruptive changes to the Chinese economy, while foreign companies can play a bigger role in supporting China's transformation in fields such as decarbonization, and digitalization of industrial and supply chains, said Denis Depoux, global managing director of global consultancy Roland Berger.

New energy output aligns with demand

By ZHONG NAN
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The growth of China's new energy industry is closely aligned with significant anticipated demand in the sector, and the country has already created a favorable environment for international participation, said a report released by the Development Research Center (DRC) of the State Council on Monday.

The new energy sector focuses on developing and utilizing alternative energy sources that are more sustainable and environmentally friendly than traditional fossil fuels. This includes electric vehicles, solar and wind power, energy storage and hydrogen energy.

The study — China Development Report 2024 — said major players such as Tesla from the United States, BMW and Mercedes-Benz from Germany, and Japan's Toyota have all set up EV production facilities in China.

Xu Wei, head of the DRC's macro-economic research department, said that the new energy sector is in a rapid growth phase in China, with capacity building primarily aiming at meeting expected future demand.

It shouldn't be simply judged as "overcapacity" based solely on

current demand, said Xu, adding that industry competition and trade frictions between countries are inevitable. This is a natural part of global economic interactions.

However, using the "overcapacity" argument to justify restricting exports of China's new energy products will only delay the development of the global new energy sector, slow technological progress, and hinder the global green and low-carbon transformation process, he added.

According to the International Energy Agency, global demand for EVs is expected to reach 45 million units by 2030, about four times the level in 2022.

In addition to importing a large number of EVs from other parts of the world — especially Germany — China imports a large quantity of high-end EV components, including lighting, braking systems, tires and shock absorbers. Chinese exports also include many products manufactured by foreign companies, according to the DRC's report.

For instance, Tesla alone accounted for 28.6 percent of China's EV exports in 2023, said the study.

"China's well-established supply chain and infrastructure for the new energy industry have made it easier

for foreign companies to set up operations and integrate into local ecosystems," said Chen Jianwei, a researcher at the Beijing-based University of International Business and Economics' Academy of China Open Economy Studies.

Echoing that sentiment, Sun Fuquan, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development, said that more than half of global green and low-carbon technologies remain underdeveloped, creating a significant gap between growing demand for low-carbon development and the limited supply of affordable green technologies. This disparity hinders global progress in tackling climate change.

"China, through its own efforts, has found viable technological pathways for decarbonization in the energy and transportation sectors," said Sun. "By applying these technologies on a large scale, the country has significantly reduced the cost of new energy products."

China's new energy vehicle exports amounted to 1.14 million units during the January-November period, marking a year-on-year increase of 4.5 percent, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

EU policy on green products criticized

By LI WENFANG in Guangzhou
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The European Union's policy on lithium batteries, photovoltaic products and electric vehicles is a trade protectionist move under the guise of green transition, and may jeopardize global development, according to a recent blue book.

The policy may threaten the stability of the global industrial supply chain, and will intensify the global subsidy race and impede the efficient use of global resources, the blue book said.

Named *The EU's Industrial Subsidy Policy for Lithium Batteries, PV Products and Electric Vehicles in the Name of Green Transition*, the blue book was released on Saturday by the WTO Law Research Society of China Law Society and the Center for WTO Legal Studies, China University of Political Science and Law.

The EU's related policy may undermine the development of similar industries in other countries and harm its own interests. It represents a double standard protectionist approach and violates World Trade Organization rules, said Shi Xiaoli, director of the WTO Law Research Center.

The EU policy on lithium batteries, photovoltaic products and the EV industry has a long history and has become a strategic development objective, said Shi during the release of the blue book in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

The bloc has issued a number of industrial policies involving these products and implemented all-around subsidies. While criticizing the United States for its subsidies under the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, the EU has concurrently increased its subsidies for domestic industries of lithium batteries, photovoltaic products and EVs.

At the EU level, the subsidies take the forms of grants, preferential loans and loan guarantees. At the level of member states, the subsidies are provided by using their own public funds, preferential loans, loan guarantees and tax incentives.

In 2022, 27 EU member states provided a total of 227.98 billion euros (\$239.17 billion) in state aid, according to data released by the EU's executive arm European Commission.

EU's subsidies for EVs encompass the industrial chain, value chain and the infrastructure, said Sun Xiaohong, secretary-general of the

automotive branch of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products.

The European Commission initiated last year a countervailing duty investigation against passenger EVs originating from China to protect its EV industry from alleged unfair competition and to provide additional space for its transformation and growth.

In October, the European Commission issued its final determination, imposing countervailing duties ranging from 7.8 percent to 35.3 percent for five years, in addition to the existing 10 percent most-favored-nation tariff rate.

This move has attracted significant international attention with direct reactions from EU member states, automotive industry associations and companies, think tanks and academics, with many arguing that fostering the growth of the EU's EV industry should not entail avoiding external competition, the blue book said.

The development of China's EV industry is mainly attributable to technological progress, market competition and the hard work of its people, Sun said.

Green heart

A metro runs through a wooded area in Longquan Mountain Urban Forest Park in Chengdu, Sichuan province. Known as the green heart of Chengdu, the park harmoniously blends urban convenience with serene natural beauty. Ecological rehabilitation in the park area is still ongoing, in which State builders such as China Railway 23rd Bureau Group Corp have participated. The builder leverages drones in material delivery to avoid disruption to the environment. LIU GUOXING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Targeted visa-free travel policy boosts tourism

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha
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An increasing number of tourists from South Korea are visiting Zhangjiajie, Hunan province since China allowed visa-free travel for those from the neighboring country since last month, according to local authorities.

The natural beauty, mountainous scenery and yearlong efforts to offer targeted travel services to South Korean visitors in Zhangjiajie have made it a perfect travel destination for people in the country, tourism insiders said.

Since Nov 8, China has allowed 15-day visa-free travel for tourists from South Korea and on Nov 30 extended the number of days they could stay to 30.

According to the Zhangjiajie bureau of culture, tourism, radio, television and sports, the number of South Korean visitors to the city from Nov 9 to Dec 4 has increased by 108 percent year-on-year to reach almost 27,000.

Zhangjiajie immigration authorities said the number of South Korean travelers arriving via international flights to the city from Nov 8 to Dec 4 reached 19,700, with 73 percent of them pursuing visa-free entry.

Data from the online travel agent Ctrip show that from Nov 8 to Dec 2, the number of bookings made by visitors from South Korea to China increased by 15 percent month-on-month and more than 150 percent year-on-year during the same period.

Among the bookings, almost 40 percent chose to arrive in China on Friday or Saturday for weekend travel, the platform said.

South Korean TV station SBS reported that many young people in the country travel to China after work on Friday and spend the weekend there.

Ding Shibiao, deputy general manager of Hunan Star Tours International Travel Service Co, a travel agency in Zhangjiajie, said the visa-free travel policy is expected to increase the number of South Korean visitors to Zhangjiajie by up to 50 percent next year.

Previously, many of the South Korean visitors to the city were elderly people who wanted to appreciate the mountains in the

city, he said. Ding expects that there will be more young people from South Korea to the city next year as they become fans of visa-free travel.

Cai Long, a tour guide in Zhangjiajie, said since the visa-free travel policy was issued, the number of travel groups from South Korea has increased greatly.

Winter is not a peak season for traveling in Zhangjiajie, but this year the number of travelers from the country has increased a lot, he said.

South Korean travelers like to go mountain hiking in Zhangjiajie and there are Korean travel signs as well as authentic Korean food in the city, which caters to their needs, he said.

Briefly

New air cargo route links Xinjiang, London

The Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region recently opened its first air-freight route to London, said local authorities on Monday. The maiden flight, carrying some 50 metric tons of cross-border e-commerce cargo, left Urumqi Diwopu International Airport for London on Saturday. With the rapid development of cross-border e-commerce, the sector's volume of goods at the airport has been steadily increasing, said the airport's Customs.

Utilization of wind, solar power stays high

The nation has maintained high

utilization rates of wind and solar power so far this year, said the National Energy Administration. Utilization rates of wind and solar power remained above 95 percent this year. By end-2024, the country's installed wind power capacity reached 510 million kilowatts, while its solar power capacity stood at 840 million kW.

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 6 pips to 7.1882 against the US dollar on Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

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A photograph taken in September shows the construction site of a nuclear power plant in Zhangzhou, Fujian province. LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA

Nation to approve, launch more nuclear power projects

Move part of intensified efforts to ramp up non-fossil energy consumption

By ZHENG XIN
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China currently ranks first in the world in the scale of its operational and under-construction nuclear power, with the share of this non-fossil source in the country's energy mix set to keep climbing, according to the National Energy Administration.

China has become the world's largest nuclear power producer, with the country's total nuclear power generation capacity ranking tops in the world, said Wang Hongzhi, head of the NEA, during a national energy work conference held in Beijing on Sunday.

A total of 102 nuclear reactors are currently in operation or under construction with a total installed capacity of 113 gigawatts in the country, Wang said.

China plans to approve and begin construction of a batch of mature coastal nuclear power projects in 2025, while steadily advancing the construction of ongoing nuclear plants. Nuclear power capacity in operation by the end of next year is expected to reach 65 GW, he said.

China approved five new nuclear

power projects earlier this year, including 11 nuclear power units that involve a variety of independent nuclear power technology routes, demonstrating the nation's constant effort to increase the share of non-fossil energy consumption in the country.

The nuclear power projects were approved with a total investment exceeding 240 billion yuan (\$34.20 billion), of which private capital accounts for 10 percent, which is seen as favorable in further stimulating the vitality of the sector.

Among the projects, Jiangsu Xuwei nuclear power heating plant, which encompasses three units and is operated by China National Nuclear Power Co Ltd, is the world's first to combine high-temperature gas-cooled reactors with pressurized water reactors.

In recent years, there has been steady progress in the approval of domestic nuclear power projects in China, with 10 new nuclear power units approved in 2022 as well as in 2023.

The first unit of the Zhangzhou nuclear power plant, currently the largest "Hualong One" nuclear power

base in the world, started power generation in November, a significant milestone in the mass construction of the "Hualong One" nuclear reactors.

"Hualong One" refers to China's third-generation nuclear power technology with full intellectual property rights, which is also one of the most widely accepted series of third-generation nuclear power reactors in the world.

The total number of "Hualong One" nuclear power units in operation or under construction, both domestically and internationally, has reached 33. It is the most numerous third-generation nuclear power technology in terms of units in operation or under construction worldwide, marking China's nuclear power technology and overall competitiveness as being in the world's top tier.

Industry experts believe China has been actively and safely developing nuclear power in recent years and that future power supply growth in the country is likely to come mostly from non-fossil energy sources amid its green energy transition.

Currently, nuclear power accounts for less than 5 percent of China's electricity generation, leaving substantial room for growth, said Zhang Tingke, vice-chairman of the China Nuclear Energy Association.

The association forecasts that China is set to further expand its installed nuclear power capacity, which will account for 10 percent of China's total power output in 2035, up from 5 percent in 2021.

Nuclear power generation's share is expected to reach 18 percent by 2060, which is similar to the current average level for members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it said.

CITIC Securities believes the value of investments in new nuclear power plants will hit 231 billion yuan by 2025 in China, as the accelerated approval of nuclear power projects is expected to boost China's related industry chain, helping the country achieve its carbon emission reduction targets ahead of schedule.

S&P Global Commodity Insights believes nuclear power's role has become increasingly important in recent years in China, and the country's energy policy is leaning toward strong growth in nuclear, in line with several European countries where it has assumed greater importance with the diversification away from Russian oil and gas.

The agency projects that China's nuclear generation capacity will reach 145 gigawatts in 2035, more than double the 2025 target level.

Influencers' role in culture, tourism underlined at forum

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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Experts at the 2024 "Family of Maritime Silk Road" ASEAN online celebrity conference in Haikou, Hainan province, commended the role of internet celebrities in enhancing brand recognition and societal impact within the cultural and tourism sector.

Huang Xiaoqin, associate professor and director at the center for Sino-foreign cooperative programs and chief researcher of the center for British studies, Communication University of Zhejiang, highlighted influencers' unique strengths in boosting the popularity of cultural tourism.

"The directness and immediacy of internet celebrities allow for swift responses to market dynamics and consumer needs, establishing direct connections with audiences through social media," Huang said.

At a roundtable dialogue, she further explained how influencers' precise positioning within specific interest areas enables targeted marketing strategies tailored to distinct follower demographics, enhancing market positioning accuracy.

Xie Jiangbo, founding partner of Xinhua Tongyun Group, underscored the importance of matching key opinion leaders in online marketing for the cultural tourism industry. Xie suggested selecting internet users with corresponding target audiences, such as adventure-seeking YouTubers for promoting natural landscapes and food Instagrammers for sharing local specialties.

Xie said influencers have the opportunity to collaboratively design content with internet users, such as engaging them in experiences like surfing programs or exploring Li ethnic culture in Hainan, which can boost the authenticity and appeal of the content.

Vietnamese influencer VI Bella, who has 3.2 million followers on TikTok and more than 5 million followers all over the internet, emphasized the significance of understanding target markets and cultural backgrounds to conduct precise promotions in the cultural and tourism sector.

"Cooperation with local enterprises and scenic spots is very important, which can not only provide more valuable resources and information, but also make the promotion more targeted and effective," she said.

Jeremy Grinan, overseas communication officer at the Hainan International Media Center and Hainan tourism recommendation officer, specifically highlighted the benefits of leveraging influential personalities and professionals from various fields to foster cultural exchange and collaboration between Hainan and markets in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The directness and immediacy of internet celebrities allow for swift responses to market dynamics and consumer needs, establishing direct connections with audiences through social media.

Huang Xiaoqin, chief researcher of the center for British studies, Communication University of Zhejiang

Thai internet celebrity Muangphum Harnsiripetch, an overseas Chinese in Thailand, expressed a keen interest in promoting Hainan's culinary delights in Thailand, leveraging his travel agency and online posts to engage followers and organize trips across China.

Chinese internet personality Luo Ling, better known as Xiaoling's Travelogue and boasting over 220,000 followers on Douyin, echoed the sentiment, emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural exchanges with ASEAN internet celebrities to showcase Hainan's cultural heritage on an international stage.

"The conference serves as a platform for mutual learning and appreciation of diverse beauty among influencers from different regions. We can collaborate on planning tourism and cultural marketing together to create value in the internet economy," Luo said.

Hainan is fostering global connections, particularly with ASEAN as a pivotal partner, displaying an unparalleled level of openness, said Su Qiya, deputy director of the department of tourism, culture, radio, television and sports of Hainan.

In recent years, Hainan has been a key hub linking China and ASEAN member countries, actively organizing cultural and tourism activities to enhance economic and trade cooperation. "ASEAN has remained Hainan province's top trading partner for three consecutive years," Su said.

He noted that in the realm of data exchange, Hainan has engaged in collaborative data initiatives with ASEAN countries, delving into the advancement and leveraging of data reservoirs, infusing fresh vigor into digital economic progress. He added that Hainan has been championing traditional Chinese culture and the unique cultural tapestry of the island province while enhancing cultural interactions and partnerships with Southeast Asian countries.



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CHINA UP-CLOSE

Energy self-sufficiency rate reaches 85%

Total output has surpassed 5 billion metric tons, forecast to hit 6 billion in 2060

By ZHENG XIN
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Oil and gas have reinforced supply security throughout this year as China navigates the path between energy transition and its carbon neutrality goals, said industry experts and company executives.

As the world's second-largest economy intensifies efforts to align energy security with its carbon-neutral ambitions, oil and gas are playing central roles as advancements in exploration and production technology have boosted output, ensuring stronger energy resilience, they say.

"China's oil and gas industry in 2024 has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, leveraging advanced technologies to increase domestic production while reducing reliance on imports," said Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the Economics and Technology Research Institute under China National Petroleum Corp.

Breakthroughs in ultra-deep drilling and offshore exploration have significantly enhanced the country's capacity to tap into its abundant but challenging reserves, securing a more robust foundation for energy independence, he said during the International Energy Executive Forum 2024 held in Beijing earlier this month.

Oil and gas are expected to maintain their share of the energy mix over the medium to long term, making it critical to avoid disruptions caused by the energy transition. Stable investments and forecasts are essential to maintaining high supply levels and ensuring global energy security, he said.

According to the institute, China's energy self-sufficiency rate has climbed to an impressive 85 percent in 2024, a five-percentage-point increase compared to a decade ago. The figure is expected to further climb to 95 percent by 2060, driven by accelerated innovation in exploration and the scaling up of renewable energy systems.

The energy output this year surpassed 5 billion metric tons of standard coal equivalent, and projections for 2060 suggest it will reach 6 billion tons. This growth reflects China's strategic dual focus: securing a stable fossil fuel supply and scaling renewable energy as a major contributor to its energy mix, it said.

Wu said China's oil and gas sectors remain indispensable to its energy strategy, even as the nation advances toward its goal of carbon neutrality before 2060.

Technological breakthroughs, such as those related to ultra-deep



A worker fuels up a car at a gas station in Qingzhou, Shandong province, in December. WANG JILIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

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oil and gas reserve exploration — as well as deep sea oil and gas exploitation — play a key role in China's energy supply, he said.

A Chinese ultra-deep oil well broke through the 10,000-meter depth mark in March 2024, with the country's first well exceeding a vertical depth of more than 10,000 meters, setting the record for not only the deepest well in Asia, but also the world record for the shortest time taken to drill a 10,000-meter deep well.

In the oil drilling industry, wells that are between 4,500 and 6,000 meters deep are called deep wells. Wells between 6,000 and 9,000 meters deep are called super-deep wells, and those deeper than 9,000 meters are classified as ultra-deep wells.

With a designed depth of 11,100 meters, the Shendi 'Lake 1' ultra-deep well, located in the Tarim Basin in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is part of China's efforts to expand domestic oil production, said its operator CNPC.

It shows that China has inde-

pendently overcome the bottleneck in extra-deep well drilling technology, and that its deep-earth oil and gas drilling capability and supporting technology have reached internationally advanced levels, it said.

At present, China's onshore deep and ultra-deep oil and gas resources account for 34 percent of the country's total oil and gas resources, and the proportion of new deep and ultra-deep oil and gas reserves is increasing year by year.

China is the world's largest crude oil importer and relies on imports for nearly three-quarters of its needs. It has been investing billions of dollars to maintain its domestic crude oil production at above 4 million barrels a day.

Offshore oil and gas resources, in particular, are also gaining prominence. China National Offshore Oil Corporation reported record growth in both crude oil and natural gas output this year, supported by advanced engineering technologies.

The nation's offshore oil discovery rate has reached 30 percent, exceeding the global average of 24 percent, while offshore natural gas discovery remains an area of significant untapped potential, said Wang Zhen, head of the CNOOC Energy Economics Institute, during the forum.

"As global offshore crude oil contributes over 70 percent of new discoveries, China's offshore resources are set to play an increasingly vital

role in energy security," he said.

Industry experts believe investment in offshore oil and gas exploration is expected to increase further, with more than half of this year's domestic oil increment likely to come from offshore sources.

China's offshore oil and gas production is expected to rise further this year, while the country's ongoing investment and focus on upstream production will be crucial for ensuring its energy security, said Li Ziyue, an analyst with BloombergNEF.

Natural gas, often hailed as a transition fuel in the journey to a low-carbon future, has also seen steady production increases in China this year.

The CNPC institute expects annual natural gas output to rise from 250 billion cubic meters currently to over 310 billion cubic meters by 2035, with further growth projected through 2060.

The combination of domestic natural gas development and the adoption of new technologies like coal gasification ensures that gas will remain a cornerstone of China's energy system, said Wu.

Wu said China has been tapping into unconventional resources to expand its energy supply, with significant advancements in shale gas exploration and coalbed methane extraction currently reshaping the country's resource landscape.

The untapped reserves, such as low-maturity shale oil and under-

ground coal gasification, could unleash vast new potential in the coming decades, he said.

"Unconventional resources will see exponential growth with continued technological breakthroughs," said Li Guoxin, deputy chief geologist of CNPC. "These resources will not only enhance self-sufficiency, but also provide a buffer against external market uncertainties."

While oil and gas remain critical, China's energy demand is undergoing a transformative shift. The country's leadership in renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power, has set the stage for a multi-faceted energy structure by 2060, said Wu.

Currently, coal accounts for 55 percent of the energy mix, with oil and natural gas at 18 percent and 9 percent, respectively. By mid-century, renewables are expected to dominate, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the energy portfolio, he said.

"Fossil fuels will transition to serve as a safety net and a source of key materials, while non-fossil fuels will become the backbone of energy supply," Wu said.

Under such a circumstance, the CNPC institute expects the country's oil consumption to peak around 2025 at 770 million tons, five years earlier than previous estimates.

China's oil demand has reached a historic turning point. In 2023, oil consumption for transportation peaked, driven by

the rapid adoption of electric vehicles and advances in public transit electrification.

Over the long term, oil's role in China will increasingly pivot toward industrial and chemical applications. By 2060, petrochemical feedstocks are projected to account for 60 percent of oil consumption, up from 50 percent today. Meanwhile, transportation fuel use will decline to less than 20 percent, it said.

"The rise of renewable energy manufacturing, which relies heavily on petrochemical materials, ensures that oil will remain indispensable for decades to come," said Wu.

Despite the fact that China has emerged as a powerhouse in scaling renewable energy systems, with non-fossil energy production expected to surpass 5 billion tons of standard coal equivalent by 2060, making up nearly 80 percent of the energy mix, oil and gas will remain indispensable in the near term, he said.

"With bold ambitions and a clear roadmap, China's energy sector stands at the forefront of a transformative — one that will define the country's economic and environmental legacy for generations to come," said Wu. "The sheer scale of industrial and transportation needs, coupled with the current limitations of renewables, means fossil fuels are still vital for the foreseeable future."

China has stepped up its international cooperation in the oil sector in 2024, expanding partnerships with key energy-producing countries to secure stable supplies and enhance technological collaboration.

China's three State-owned oil giants — China Petroleum and Chemical Corp, CNPC and CNOOC — have ramped up efforts to strengthen international collaboration in oil and gas development throughout the past year, with an increasing focus on transitioning to green energy.

Dai Houliang, chairman of CNPC, said the oil sector should expand oil and gas cooperation to jointly secure global energy supplies while emphasizing the importance of increasing openness and collaboration to accelerate transformation and upgrade efforts.

The emphasis on expanding oil and gas cooperation remains critical in ensuring global energy security amid growing demand and geopolitical uncertainty, said Wang Lining, director of the oil market department under the economics and technology research institute of CNPC.

Deepening collaboration serves as a strategic buffer against the volatility induced by geopolitical uncertainties and market disruptions. This approach reinforces energy diversification, supply chain resilience, and long-term sustainability in the face of shifting geopolitical and economic dynamics, he added.

2024 turning point for country's refined oil market

By ZHENG XIN

China's economic structural transformation and the rapid rise of renewables will make 2024 a turning point for the country's refined oil market, with demand set to shrink for the first time, industry experts say.

Due to the accelerated replacement of traditional energy with renewable sources and economic structural transformation in China, demand for refined oil products is expected to decline for the first time in 2024, except for during the COVID-19 period, as peak consumption was reached earlier than expected, according to the Economics and Technology Research Institute under China National Petroleum Corp.

China's road transport fuel use, including gasoline and diesel, has entered a phase of decline, with total refined oil consumption for the year estimated to be at 394 million metric tons, a 1.3 percent decrease year-on-year,

said Li Ran, a senior expert at the institute.

Li expects that by 2030, consumption will drop to between 344 and 310 million tons, a reduction of 12 to 20 percent compared to 2024.

However, given China's ongoing efforts to stabilize and strengthen its domestic economy, Li believes that demand for chemicals is expected to keep growing in the coming years. This growth will further drive demand for chemical products, shifting oil demand as it increases production of clothing, tires, detergents, fertilizers and countless other everyday products.

According to the International Energy Agency, as China's petrochemical sector expands, demand for feedstocks derived from oil is shifting to the country from other long-standing petrochemical centers, significantly affecting global markets for the products made from petrochemicals.

China is driving the global petrochemical industry through a momentous period of transition,



A drilling platform in Kaiping South Oilfield in the South China Sea in December 2023. XINHUA

with an expansion speed and scale dwarfing any historical precedent, it said.

IEA projections show that global road fuel use is set to decline from 2025. Total oil consumption by advanced economies is already

nearly 10 percent below 2007 levels and shows no sign of recovering, even to its 2019 mark. Oil use is also expected to plateau before 2030 in China, long the driving force of rising global demand.

"Under the circumstance, foreign

investments, including those from Saudi Aramco, are increasing their focus on China's petrochemical industry," said Fei Huawei, an analyst from the CNPC institute. "On the policy front, China has essentially removed restrictions on foreign investments in the oil and chemical sectors. A stable business environment, a well-established industrial base, and a vast downstream market are attracting global multinational companies to ramp up their investments in China."

Saudi Aramco, for example, has signed strategic cooperation agreements with domestic refining and petrochemical companies such as Rongsheng Petrochemical Co, one of China's refining giants, and Hengli Group Co Ltd, BASF and other multinational companies are also expanding their investments, signaling strong international confidence in China's petrochemical market, he said.

It is expected that by 2030, China's demand for chemical oil will reach 198 million tons, a 30.7 percent increase compared to 2024, he said.

Fei said annual demand for basic chemical raw materials is estimated to reach 169 million tons, a year-on-

year increase of 11.1 percent in 2024. Demand for synthetic resins is also expected to grow, reflecting strong market momentum for chemicals in the coming year. According to the institute, significant progress has been made in low-carbon development cooperation.

China Petroleum and Chemical Corp has signed a joint research agreement for a four-party carbon capture and storage cooperation project in East China with Shell, Baosteel and BASF, providing a case study for large-scale domestic CCS projects.

China National Offshore Oil Corporation, along with the Guangdong government, Shell and Exxon Mobil, has signed a memorandum of understanding for a carbon capture, utilization and storage cluster research project in the Daya Bay area, with plans to jointly build China's first large-scale CCUS project in the region.

The projects not only underscore China's leadership in sustainable energy, but also align with global efforts to combat climate change. Successful implementation of CCS could significantly accelerate the decarbonization of key industrial sectors in the region, said Fei.

WORLD

US families to bear brunt of new tariffs

Households have to pay more for goods from China and other partners: Experts

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Families in the United States could soon have to pay thousands of dollars more for furniture, clothes, cars, electronics and household items imported from China and other key trading partners if US President-elect Donald Trump follows through with a new round of tariffs, according to economists and trade organizations.

The tariffs could cost a typical family an extra \$1,700 to \$2,350 per year, according to the non-profit American Action Forum. Household budgets already have been strained by persistent inflation.

Trump has floated tariffs of 10 percent to 60 percent on Chinese imports. In November, he wrote on his Truth Social media site that he plans to impose a 25 percent tariff on products imported from Mexico and Canada, two of the US' top three trading partners, unless they tightened their borders with the US.

Mary Lovely, professor emerita of economics at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs of Syracuse University and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, or PIIE, in Washington, DC, told China Daily that a household with a median US income could pay "\$1,700 more each year in import taxes."

Trump had said the tariffs would benefit US consumers at a Wisconsin campaign rally in September.

"I'm not raising your taxes. I'm raising China's and all of these countries in Asia and all over the world, including the European Union, by the way, which is one of the most egregious," he said. "And they're going to have to pay a price now because we've been supporting them for a long time, and it's no longer sustainable."

However, in a recent interview that aired on NBC on Dec 8, Trump said he could not "guarantee" consumer prices wouldn't rise under his proposed tariffs.

The US and China are key trading partners. In 2023, out of nearly \$4 trillion in imported US goods and services, \$448 billion was from China, according to US Census Bureau data.

Ed Frank, director of policy communications at the Consumer

Technology Association, told China Daily that the organization's research shows that a universal tariff of 10 percent and a 60 percent flat tariff on all imports from China would cause major price increases for US consumers.

The tariffs could mean a \$799 iPhone 16 would cost \$213 more. On cell phones, China has gone from having a market share of 63.59 percent in 2018 to 42.14 percent today — a decline of 33.73 percent, Forbes reported.

Trump has also threatened to impose 100 percent tariffs on BRICS nations Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates if they don't conduct trade in the US dollar.

Mexico is a top source of food imports, sending \$9.9 billion worth of vegetables and \$11 billion worth of fruit and juices to the US in 2023.

In the furniture industry, total imports were \$21.2 billion in 2023. China accounted for \$9.4 billion, down 29.7 percent from the \$13.3 billion in 2022, according to investment bank Mann, Armistead & Epperson.

Costs to go up

Several economists who have studied the impact of tariffs drew the same conclusion: The US consumer will see the costs going up.

Those who will suffer the most will be "lower-income US consumers," Thomas Fullerton, an economist and economics professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, told China Daily.

While tariffs were used by the US at the beginning of its history as a source of government revenue, by the 20th century, the policy was dropped after the federal income tax went into effect.

Lovely and co-author Kimberly Clausen, economists from the PIIE, wrote that tariffs are "regressive" and an "antiquated" way of raising government revenue in their May study "Why Trump's Tariff Proposals Would Harm Working Americans."

They contended that only 2 percent of government revenue in high-income countries came from import duties.

Trump put \$300 billion of tariffs on Chinese-made goods in his first administration, sparking a trade war and retaliatory tariffs.

inflation, possibly massive, will come with tariffs."

The Millers said they would rather spend the money now before the dollar's purchasing power is diminished.

George Miller said he doubted that tariffs would bring manufacturing back to the United States.

"Even if it does, let's face it, the prices of domestically produced products will have to reflect the cost of investment and higher labor costs here at home," he said. "It can only lead to higher prices."

Lily Zhang, a resident of Tri-Valley in California, rushed to the outlets on Black Friday to fill up her family's wardrobe. "I want to buy at least one whole year of clothes, shoes and accessories for my son and daughter," the mother of two teenagers said, adding that her husband also needs some jackets and sneakers.

Renee Shields, 19, a student majoring in economics at New York University, can also feel the pressure from Trump's threat of more tariffs. "I know that Trump wanted to put in higher tariffs, but that's just going to raise prices of everything and also like complicate a lot of things politically," Shields said.

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Cyclone Chido causes extensive damage on a hill in Mayotte on Sunday. MEDECINS DU MONDE VIA AP

Cyclone Chido may have killed 'hundreds' in Mayotte

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
jonathan@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Cyclone Chido has wreaked havoc across the island of Mayotte, leaving a trail of destruction with roofs ripped off houses and numerous buildings destroyed.

Authorities estimate that "hundreds" of people may have lost their lives in what officials are calling the most severe storm to strike the French territory in 90 years.

"I think there will certainly be several hundred, maybe we will reach a thousand, even several thousand," Prefect Francois-Xavier Bieuville told local media channel Mayotte La Jere.

Chido struck with winds exceeding 200 kilometers per hour on Saturday, causing extensive damage across Mayotte, the nearby islands of Comoros and Madagascar, before moving on to Mozambique.

The cyclone's impact has been

especially severe on Mayotte's poor populations, particularly undocumented migrants who sought asylum in the territory, as their makeshift housing provided little protection.

Recording an accurate death toll is further complicated by the Muslim tradition of burying the dead within 24 hours, according to the prefect.

Agence France-Presse reported that emergency response teams are struggling to reach the affected areas of Mayotte.

Located in the northern Mozambique Channel of the Indian Ocean, Mayotte is an overseas department and region and a single territorial collectivity of France. It lies off the southeastern coast of Africa between northwestern Madagascar and northeastern Mozambique.

French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau was due to visit Mayotte on Monday as France mobilizes hundreds of emergency personnel

and supplies, including additional soldiers and firefighters joining those already on the ground.

Aid efforts include medical supplies, rescue teams, and equipment from Reunion Island, with authorities working to establish an air and sea bridge to restore essential services like electricity and drinking water.

Tough task

Determining the full extent of casualties is complicated by the presence of an estimated 100,000 undocumented residents in Mayotte, according to France's Interior Ministry.

Many of these individuals have avoided seeking help, "fearing it would be a trap" to deport them from Mayotte, said Ousseni Balahachi, a former nurse quoted by AFP.

"Honestly, what we are experiencing is a tragedy, you feel like you are

in the aftermath of a nuclear war... I saw an entire neighborhood disappear," Mohamed Ishmael, a resident of Mayotte's capital Mamoudzou told Reuters.

Another resident of the capital, John Balloz, said: "I was screaming because I could see the end coming for me. Everything is damaged, nearly everything, the water treatment plant, electric pylons, there is a lot to do."

"There's nothing much people can do, people are keeping still, they haven't moved, they are waiting for help, help for food, for the electricity to be back up, and for water also, there is no running water."

In a statement, French President Emmanuel Macron said: "My thoughts are with our compatriots in Mayotte, who have gone through the most horrific few hours, and who have, for some, lost everything, lost their lives."

'Bridging worlds': Introducing China's baijiu culture to Canada

By YANG GAO in Toronto
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To Wan Bing, *baijiu* is more than just a liquor.

"It's a symbol of cultural heritage, a tool for bridging worlds, and a calling," said Wan, president of the newly formed Chinese Liquor Culture Canada Association (CLCCA), who wants to share the rich history and artistry of Chinese *baijiu* with the world.

"My relationship with *baijiu* started when I was 30," Wan recalled. He had been working in Chengdu, Sichuan province, as a government official and was in charge of investigating local *baijiu* industries.

"I was shocked by the unique aroma of fermentation, the intricate craftsmanship and the cultural depth behind the *baijiu*. That experience made me see *baijiu* as more than just an industry — it was a cultural treasure," he told China Daily.

Wan's introduction to *baijiu* ignited a passion that landed him in the liquor industry just as China was undergoing rapid reforms.

"The sector changed from state-controlled distribution to dynamic market competition," he said. "I witnessed how adaptability and innovation became critical for survival."

He said *baijiu*'s attraction lies not only in its taste but in its place in the culture. "It's a liquid symbol of China's 5,000 years of civilization."

That philosophy shaped Wan's approach to promoting *baijiu* internationally. In 2010, he founded a company dedicated to introducing *baijiu* to the Canadian market.

"At the time, Canadian awareness of *baijiu* was minimal," he said. "I saw an opportunity to share this unique aspect of Chinese culture and create connections

through a shared appreciation of fine spirits."

The idea to establish the CLCCA came from Wan's experiences in the *baijiu* industry and in cultural diplomacy. "Many Canadians, including those in the Chinese diaspora, don't fully understand *baijiu*," he said.

His association, which was just established on Nov 23, aims to inform with education, tastings and storytelling.

"I wanted to create a place whereby we could showcase its uniqueness, but also as a cultural ambassador," he said. "We're sharing an experience. *Baijiu* is not just about taste; it's about the stories and traditions behind it."

"Through this association, we can introduce *baijiu* as part of a bigger narrative about Chinese culture," he said.

The association also wants to create economic opportunities for Chinese *baijiu* producers and introduce their brands into the Canadian market.

Wan plans to establish new trade routes and expand the global footprint of Chinese distilleries. "We're helping businesses thrive while promoting cultural heritage," he said.

"We are preparing a series of events for the Canadian audience: tasting, cultural festivals and educational workshops," he said.

A charity auction with vintage *baijiu* is one such upcoming event aimed at raising awareness of and appreciation for the craft of Chinese spirits.

Despite his enthusiasm, Wan realizes that *baijiu* faces an uphill battle in a market more familiar with wine and whiskey. "Cultural differences play a big role," he said.

"*Baijiu*'s high alcohol content and unique flavor profile can be unfamiliar to Western consumers," he added.

The association is also looking

at creative ways to introduce *baijiu* to younger, more international audiences.

"We plan modern packaging designs, collaborating with mixologists on creating *baijiu*-based cocktails, and using VR (virtual reality) to immerse people in the history of Chinese *baijiu* production," he said.

"We want to make *baijiu* relevant for today's world while honoring its roots," Wan said.

The association is also looking to use social media platforms like TikTok to reach younger consumers.

Regulatory hurdles are another barrier.

"Canada's strict liquor laws make it difficult for new products to enter the market," Wan said. "We need to educate not just consumers but also regulators about *baijiu*'s cultural and commercial value."

The association is exploring matching *baijiu* with Western cuisine and touting its mixed-cocktail potential.

"We want to prove that *baijiu* can be adapted into different cultural contexts but still keep its identity," Wan said.

Wan also sees the rich heritage of *baijiu* as its greatest strength. "It's a drink that embodies harmony between people and nature," he said. "This philosophy resonates universally and can help *baijiu* find its place in global markets."

To Wan, the CLCCA represents the highest level of his relationship with *baijiu*. "It's not a career pursuit; it's some kind of personal calling," he said.

Wan also said that in Canada's multicultural society, "there is every possibility that interest in newer traditions exists."

"It could become a kind of cultural bridge, binding people through shared experience," he said. "*Baijiu* is not just a drink; it is a story of resilience, innovation and connection."

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COMMENT

Editorials

India will benefit from cooperation not by turning away from its neighbor

In his meeting with President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit held in Kazan, Russia, on Oct 23, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that maintaining the steady growth of India-China relations was critical for the two countries and peoples. It not only concerned the well-being and future of 2.8 billion people, but also carried great significance for peace and stability in the region and even the world at large. Against a complex international landscape, cooperation between India and China, two engines of economic growth, could help drive the global economic recovery and promote multipolarity in the world, he said.

But the two most populous countries have disputes over border issues, and despite repeated talks and agreements to ease tensions, it seems there is still a long way to go before the two countries and two peoples develop enough mutual trust for cooperation in a wider range of areas.

In his meeting with Modi, President Xi pointed to the need for both countries to maintain a sound strategic perception of each other, and work together to find the right and bright path for big, neighboring countries to develop side by side.

Despite the fact that China has emerged as the largest trading partner of India with \$118.4 billion two-way trade in 2023-24, slightly edging past the United States, there have been reports in recent years about how the Indian government has adopted policies that have made it very hard for Chinese companies to operate in India.

In his meeting with Modi, President Xi said that development is now the biggest shared goal of China and India. Xi said that the two sides should continue to uphold their important understandings, including that China and India are a development opportunity for each other rather than a threat, and a cooperation partner rather than a competitor.

Yet the Indian government has been reluctant to share that view, having sought to cash in on the China Plus One supply chain strategy of some developed economies whereby companies seek alternatives to Chinese manufacturing. India is the only country with a labor force and market size comparable to China, and it offers comparable cost-savings to China. However, as reported by The New Indian Express, the Indian government think tank NITI Aayog admitted in its latest quarterly report that India has seen limited success so far in capturing the China Plus One strategy in comparison with Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia, which the report said have become bigger beneficiaries of the strategy due to factors such as cheaper labor, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs and proactiveness in signing free trade agreements.

Despite this "de-risking" strategy, China remains the global manufacturing powerhouse, and it has the most complete supply and industry chains. The report fails to talk about how India could benefit by cooperating with China in as wide a range of areas as possible, as the Indian and Chinese economies are complementary to each other in many ways.

If India looks at how it can strengthen cooperation with its neighbor to promote the economic development of both countries, there will be indeed a lot of opportunities and potential for bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas.

China has drawn up a grand blueprint for further comprehensively deepening reform and advancing Chinese modernization. It is determined to promote high-quality development and high-standard opening-up from which other economies can benefit.

India needs to change its perception of China, not only that of its government but also the Indian people. It is important for India to recognize that China is not a threat to it, and that the disputes over border issues should be settled through talks.

Since the beginning of this year, China-India relations have enjoyed the momentum of improvement and development thanks to the high-level communication they have maintained. It is hoped that the two largest developing countries will continue to build mutual trust, on the basis of which New Delhi will make things easier for Chinese enterprises to invest and operate in India, and promote the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

'Syrian-led' must not be just lip service

Soon after the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government of Syria on Dec 8, Israel bombed military targets in Syria and quickly occupied the United Nations-recognized buffer zone of the Golan Heights to "protect its own security".

In a bid to avert some of the international pressure, Tel Aviv claimed its occupation of the Golan Heights will be "temporary", and it has "no intention" of intervening in Syria's internal affairs.

However, Israel seems to have changed its stance after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had what he called a "very friendly, very warm and very important" telephone call with the US president-elect on Saturday on the Middle East situation.

The day after their talk, the Israeli government approved a plan put forward by Netanyahu to expand Israeli settlements in the occupied Golan Heights, according to a statement from the prime minister's office, in defiance of regional countries accusing Israel of looting a burning house.

"In light of the war and the new front against Syria, and out of a desire to double the population of the Golan Heights, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu today submitted for government approval the first amendment to the plan to encourage demographic growth in the Golan Heights and Katzrin Heights," the statement said.

Israel captured two-thirds of the strategic plateau from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, annexing it in 1981. Its occupation is not recognized by the international community. Israel founded the Katzrin settlement for Israeli people there in 1977.

The Israeli government unanimously approved a more than 40-million shekel (\$11 million) plan to encourage demographic growth in the Golan Heights. "Strengthening the Golan Heights is strengthening the state of Israel, and it is especially important at this time. We will continue to hold on to it, make it flourish, and settle it," Netanyahu said, according to the statement.

Tel Aviv should be reminded that despite its decades-long occupation of the Golan Heights, which has seen about 31,000 Israeli people settling on the Syrian plateau as of this year, the plateau is still home to 24,000 Druze, an Arab minority who practice an offshoot of Islam, and most of whom identify themselves as Syrian.

That US Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted during a news conference in Aqaba, Jordan, on Saturday, where he met with local leaders discussing the future of Syria, that the United States has been in "direct contact" with the Syrian rebels, who appear not to have the intention of driving Israel out of Syrian territory so far, suggests that the US is working for some deal between relevant parties at the cost of Syrian interests.

Although the top US diplomat of the outgoing Joe Biden administration said the US and its partners agreed that the power transition should be "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned", Washington's acquiescence with Israel's invasion, occupation and bold, if not shameless, attempt to annex the whole of the Golan Heights just serves to expose its hypocrisy.

This begs the question: is its ally taking advantage of the power vacuum in Syria to grab the whole of the Golan Heights part of the US' rebuilding plan for the war-torn country, or a precondition for the role the US had overtly and covertly assumed in the unexpectedly quick fall of the Moscow- and Tehran-friendly Assad government?

China is highly concerned about the volatile situation in Syria, and supports the country finding a rebuilding plan that meets the wishes of the people through inclusive dialogue. In that process, the principle of "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned" should by no means be hijacked by any external force.

The international community should earnestly safeguard Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, respect Syria's ethnic and religious traditions, and allow the Syrian people to make independent decisions.

If the US really cares about the Syrian people as Blinken claims, it should lift the illegal unilateral sanctions it has imposed on the country for years as soon as possible, as these have only served to aggravate the grave humanitarian situation in Syria.

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Shen Tiancheng



Opinion Line

Fundamentals and policies ensure recovery on right track

China's overall economy has maintained stable development with increasing positive factors.

According to data released by the authorities on Monday, the value added of China's industrial enterprises above designated size grew 5.4 percent year-on-year in November, 0.1 percentage point more than in October, and the total retail sales of consumer goods hit 4.38 trillion yuan (\$601.2 billion), up by 3 percent year-on-year. The service sector production index grew 6.1 percent year-on-year in November, with the production indexes of information transmission, software and information technology services, and leasing and business services increasing by 9.3 percent year-on-year. The total import and export of goods hit 3.75

trillion yuan, with a growth of 1.2 percent year-on-year, and the trade structure continued to improve.

At the same time, the employment situation has generally remained stable, with the average surveyed urban unemployment rate from January to November being 5.1 percent, down 0.1 percentage point from the same period last year, and consumer prices rose 0.2 percent in November from a year earlier. Investment in fixed assets has also shown steady growth.

However, it should be noted that China's economic development is still facing a complicated external environment and insufficient domestic demand.

As the Central Economic Work Conference held last week indicated, the

country must face up to difficulties, strengthen confidence, and strive to transform the positive factors into actual development achievements. China will therefore adopt a moderately loose monetary policy and a proactive fiscal policy.

China's economic fundamentals have not changed, and a series of favorable conditions underlying its sustained and high-quality development, such as the great potential of its superlarge market and its strong economic resilience, have not changed. All these, together with the Chinese government's strong macro-economic control capacity and efficient policy implementation, will surely bring the economy onto the track of sustained recovery.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Energy sector going greener by the day

Data show that by 2024 China's operational and approved under-construction nuclear power units already had installed capacity of approximately 113 million kilowatts, making its nuclear power sector the largest in the world. In 2025, the nation will approve a batch of new coastal nuclear power projects, steadily advancing the construction of ongoing nuclear power projects, with the goal of reaching about 65 million kW in operational nuclear power capacity by the end of 2025.

By the beginning of 2024, the Qinshan nuclear power plant, one of China's major nuclear facilities, had been operating safely for over 160 cumulative reactor-years (a year of operation for one reactor). Now,

with 2024 coming to an end, domestic nuclear reactors have set new records of staying safe, which greatly enhances the nation's energy sector greater confidence of reaching higher goals.

Nuclear power might account for a limited percentage — as low as 1-2 percent — of the domestic energy structure, but the importance attached to it demonstrates the nation's efforts to develop new power sources to replace its coal-fired power stations. As of 2024, the total installed capacity of wind power in China was approximately 510 million kW and photovoltaic power about 840 million kW, with utilization rates above 95 percent.

China has cumulatively built over

60 million kW of new energy storage, with the continuous emergence of innovative technologies in new energy storage. The country is also trying to improve the part of thermal power that has to be retained. The annual national coal production is about 4.76 billion metric tons, with 180 million kW of coal-fired power units upgraded and transformed, and more than 8 million kW of outdated capacity eliminated.

There is no set percentage goal, but with the country stepping up its efforts to increase the share of renewables, the nation's energy structure will be greener, honoring China's carbon-cutting promise to the world.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Refinancing enables local governments to battle debts

As of Dec 5, 23 provincial-level regions had issued refinancing bonds, with a total issuance of 146.95 billion yuan (\$20.05 billion), accounting for 73 percent of the 2024 issuance quota. That's part of the series of policies the central authorities have recently rolled out to help local governments prevent impending debt crises.

The lawmakers approved an increase of 6 trillion yuan in the debt ceiling to swap local governments' hidden debt. Starting from 2024, the central government will arrange 800 billion yuan from the newly added local government special bonds every year for five consecutive years to supplement government fund financial resources, specifically for debt reduction. At least 2 trillion yuan of hidden debt caused by shantytown renovation due in 2029 and later years can still be repaid according to the original contract, and there is no need to repay the debt in advance.

To ensure the smooth circulation of capital flow, debt leverage will inevitably be used. So debt financing should

not be demonized but regulated to control local governments' hidden debts preventing them from sucking local economic vitality and squeezing local governments' policy space.

As of the end of 2023, the central authorities confirmed that the hidden debt balance of local governments nationwide was 14.3 trillion yuan, and required that all of it be resolved by the end of 2028. It was against this backdrop that the aforementioned local government debt bailout policy portfolio was released, of which the crux is the debt swap.

The debt swap is not to allow local governments to evade their liability, but to gradually change their hidden debts to bank loans, open market bonds, nonstandard debt, etc, by issuing local government bonds with more optimized structures and lower interest rates. That is expected to help make the management of the hidden debt of local governments standardized and transparent.

Local governments still bear the debt repayment responsibility, but the repayment period can be delayed, the

interest rate can be lower, so as to ease the pressure on them to repay short-term debts. Effective debt swaps allow the local government to have more funds and space to promote economic growth and ensure people's livelihoods.

China should take the move as an opportunity to improve its local government debt management system, establish a full-caliber local debt monitoring and supervision system and a long-term mechanism to prevent and resolve hidden debt risks, accelerate the reform and transformation of local financing platforms, and resolutely prevent the increase of hidden debts.

Local financing platform companies are the main channel for the increase of hidden debts. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the reform and transformation of these local financing platforms, turning them from financing firms to investment companies that can focus on promoting high-tech industries and providing patient capital for local industrial transformation and upgrading.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

COMMENT

Dan Steinbock

Chinese economy can brave external risks

If the 2021-23 inflation surge in the United States helped Donald Trump's election triumph, his likely tariff wars will penalize world trade and exacerbate bilateral ties with China, again. But China has its toolbox for counter-moves, as demonstrated by the just concluded Central Economic Work Conference.

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

Recently, president-elect Trump threatened to put a 100 percent tariff on BRICS countries if they seek to create an alternative currency to the US dollar. The bloc countries are more interested in trading in their local currencies than creating a bloc-wide currency as an alternative to the dollar. But economic coercion is a taste of things to come. And the world is watching closely over his pledge to impose more tariffs during the presidential campaign.

Since September, China has launched

extensive fiscal and monetary stimulus packages, which are likely to limit the detrimental impact of heightened trade tensions. By some estimates, Trump's blanket tariff hike could penalize China's real GDP growth by 0.5 to up to 1 percentage point. Yet, the support packages could contribute 0.7 percent or more to GDP growth thereby likely offsetting the impact. And there is more coming.

China has a large toolbox for counter-measures. In the policy space, the central authorities can use fiscal and monetary instruments to foster domestic demand in the event of the likely decline in US-based external demand.

Recently, the CEWC chose to implement a more proactive fiscal policy, seeking to respond more actively to the economic downturn, boost domestic demand and stabilize the housing market. Fiscal easing is augmented by the decision to also adopt a "moderately loose" monetary policy next year.

The Chinese leadership is confident that the country's goal of recording around 5 percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth will be achieved. The tacit message is unambiguous: Trade wars or not, China's economy will move ahead.

The decision to foster "unconventional" countercyclical adjustments heralds more than just a major stimulus. It

reflects the biggest policy change since 2008. It means a comprehensive shift in policy, coupling demand-fostering measures with reforms and structural adjustment.

US tariffs will impact not just the Chinese economy but much of the world. What is different this time is that the US is less important to the Chinese trade networks than before. It attracts less than 15 percent of Chinese exports, whereas ASEAN and the EU account for over 16 and less than 15 percent, respectively.

The EU seeks to emulate the US tariffs, but it is more divided and prefers targeted rather than across-the-board tariffs.

Finally, Chinese competitiveness is increasingly premised on innovation, which is more resistant to tariff wars. I am currently touring Guangdong province. In the "Chinese Silicon Valley," research and development as of GDP is over 2.4 percent; higher than in France. In Shenzhen, it is over 6.5 percent; more than in any country worldwide.

Today, China is a world-class science leader and benefits from broader, more diversified innovation.

Chinese leaders have cautioned that in "tariff wars, trade wars, and technology wars, there will be no winners."

In early December, Washington added more than 100 Chinese companies to a

restricted trade list and banned the sale to China of some of the fastest semiconductors and the equipment to make them. China responded by banning the exports of three rare minerals — gallium, germanium, and antimony — and other items to the US. US sources project the likely total cost to the US economy of gallium and germanium alone at more than \$3.4 billion.

It was the first time China included a broad ban on so-called transshipment in a government regulation on exports. Moreover, China began an antimonopoly investigation into NVIDIA, the US giant dominating the world market for the most advanced chips needed for artificial intelligence.

China is not promoting the misguided geopolitical fragmentation the West has touted in the past seven years. Instead, these reluctant moves signal to the incoming Trump administration that unilateralism has no future in a multipolar world economy. They reflect a desire for a sensible bilateral dialogue.

The author is the founder of Difference Group and has served at the India, China and America Institute (US), Shanghai Institute for International Studies (China) and the EU Center (Singapore). The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Letting go of formalism a year-end necessity

As another year comes to a close, students are preparing for their semester exams, while employees are required to sum up their performance during the year and working units are busy writing work reports that could be as thick as a book.

Such self-checking and summarizing are good for the further development of relevant individuals and the working units if lessons can be drawn from the previous year. But unfortunately, on many occasions, annual self-checking has become a formality and the work reports are like sandwich without nutrition.

While going through such work reports, one might get the impression that they all look alike, with parts showing off achievements and parts talking about ambitious plans for the next year. Failures and lessons to be drawn are mostly neglected and, where mentioned, if at all, they are followed by a list of explanations to indicate it was not the fault of the person writing the work report.

Individuals are lucky because they usually have to write only one or two such annual reports. To make sure that the employees take this task seriously, some official or non-official organizations demand that a report should be a few thousand words long. These reports are then handed in to the supervisors to become one of the criteria for assessing the employees' annual performance.

For some bureaucratic departments, the best way to show their authority is to order their subordinate units to report to them.

But I doubt the supervisors read the reports at all. In any case it would be dangerous to assess an employee on the basis of his or her report.

Complaints come mostly from grassroots organizations such as township-level governments. Such an organ usually employs only a dozen or so officials but has to report to a few dozen county departments. When all the superior departments asked for reports from towns in December, it was a disaster. For some towns with no good writers, it was a mission impossible.

However, if there is demand, there is supply. Online, there are ads selling summarized reports. You tell them what your requirement is and they write your reports for you, the way you want them. Payment ranges from a few hundred to a few thousand yuan, depending on the degree of difficulty. If you are reluctant to pay, there are hundreds of ready copies available online that you could download. With a little editing any report could become your report, but make sure you sign your name on it before handing in.

The central authorities are aware of the overflow of formality and have taken measures to curb it, by even decreasing the number of meetings, documents and reports. But inertia remains strong.

For some bureaucratic departments, the best way to show their authority is to order their subordinate units to report to them. With the information from the reports, they can compose their working reports which they hand in to their supervisors. As for giving timely feedback to those who, painstakingly or otherwise, wrote the reports, to help them improve their work, no, that's none of their business.

For many years now, by year-end, higher departments have been asking lower-level organizations to hand in their reports. However, now that the central authorities are restricting the number of documents in order to clamp down on formalism, they pick up their phones to ask their subordinates to do the same. While central authorities restrict year-end inspections of grassroots units to lighten the burden on those low-level units, they go there anyway. However, it is not called inspection anymore; they have given it a different name.

Formalism is sometimes necessary for image building. But it often leads to waste of resources, to bureaucratism, to corruption and may lead to the eventual downfall of a government, as has been proved by Chinese and world history.

Yao Mianzi (being keen on face-saving) is part of Chinese culture that makes it even more difficult to contain formalism in this country. While accepting we may have to survive with formalism, we have to keep fighting against it to prevent it from going too far.

Wu Ni

Shrinking graduate applications reflect a market shift

In recent years, China has expanded graduate school admissions to cultivate talent in key sectors. However, despite these efforts, the number of graduate school applicants has declined for two consecutive years. The number of applicants in 2024 for graduate school entrance exams in 2025 fell by 500,000 from that a year ago, and by 860,000 from that two years ago.

From an employment perspective, the job market has become more diversified, and many students feel that academic qualifications are not the only path to career success. Traditionally, a graduate degree was considered essential for career advancement. However, graduates from certain fields often struggle to adapt to industry changes, leading many to prioritize work experience before pursuing further education.

Additionally, the popularity of government exams, particularly the national civil servant exams, has drawn more undergraduates, further reducing the number of graduate school applicants. In 2024, a record more than 3.4 million people passed the qualification review for the 2025 national civil servant exam, reflecting the growing preference for stable jobs.

Rising tuition fees and living costs, particularly for professional master's programs, also deter many students. Some universities in first-tier cities have stopped offering dormitory accommodation, which has led students to seek more expensive off-campus housing.

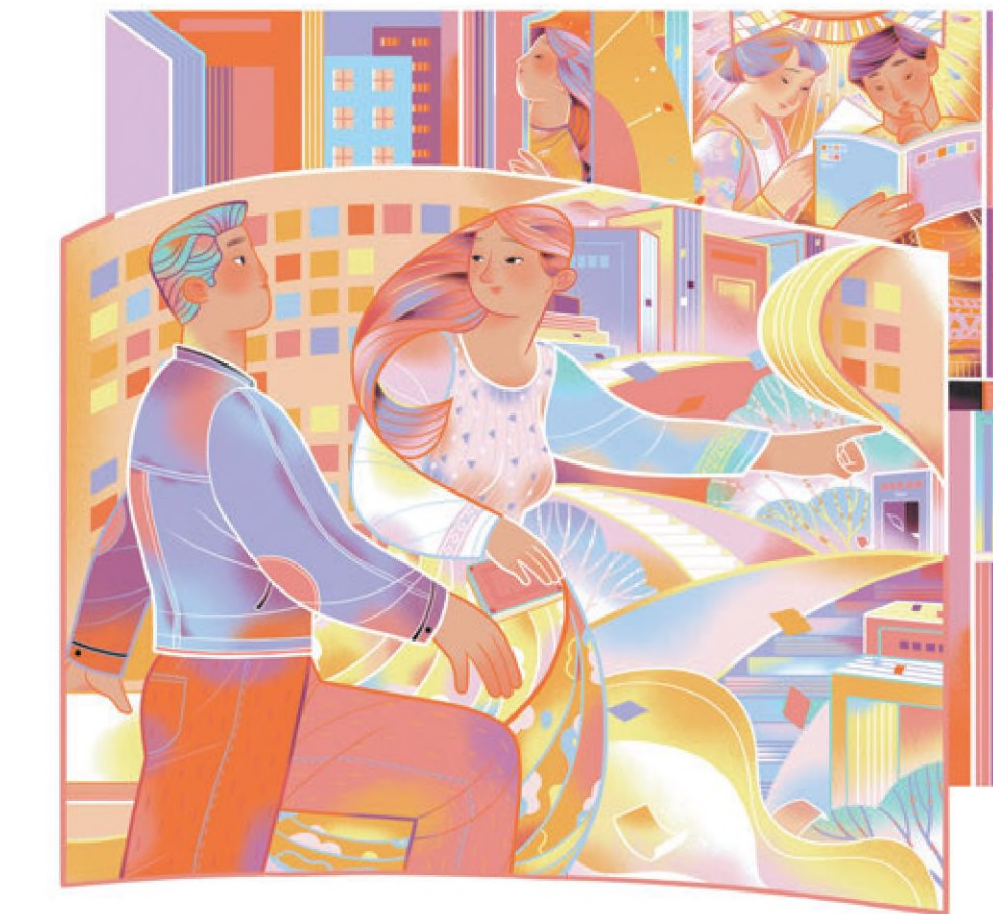
Besides, the rise in direct admissions (where top students can bypass entrance exams) has reduced the number of available spots in the national admissions system, intensifying competition. Additionally, reforms to entrance exams have made them more challenging, causing some students to reconsider applying.

Academic credentials have traditionally served two main purposes: selection and empowerment. "Selection" refers to using academic qualifications as a threshold for entering certain professions, while "empowerment" involves the educational process itself.

In today's fast-changing world, higher education remains crucial for building foundational knowledge. However, it struggles to keep up with the evolving job market. Traditional academic programs often leave students ill-prepared for the practical needs of industries.

As a result, instead of being seen as a mere "gateway to the workforce," academic credentials are becoming a "validation of skills" and a "catalyst for development". The focus is shifting from qualifications solely related to employment to a broader, more dynamic approach to career growth.

The decline in graduate school applications does not indicate a devaluation of academic credentials. Rather, it reflects a shift in how these credentials are perceived in the job market. Despite the decrease in applicants, there is still a demand for graduate-level talent, especially in local government positions. However, many graduates prefer to work in first-tier cities, leading to a



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

The educational model will also evolve to accommodate various student groups, including those pursuing online, adult, and vocational education.

mismatch between supply and demand. Consequently, employers are raising educational qualifications to streamline hiring. Since 2021, the central authorities have been promoting the reform of educational evaluation, trying to avoid overemphasis on scores, admission to higher education, diplomas, theses, and titles.

Therefore the decline in graduate school applications could also represent a natural adjustment in China's education system.

So in the future, graduate programs should emphasize emerging, interdisciplinary

fields while reducing enrollment in areas with lower demand.

Professional master's programs should emphasize practical skills, while encouraging interdisciplinary integration to cultivate well-rounded, adaptable talent.

Strengthening mentor systems and improving guidance for graduate students will raise the overall quality of graduate education.

Universities should collaborate with businesses to offer more practical opportunities and career guidance, helping students navigate the job market more effectively.

Combining academic education with vocational training will equip students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. A diversified evaluation system that considers qualifications, skills, and experience will help align education with vocational needs.

Looking ahead, China's graduate education system will increasingly emphasize diversification. New academic offerings will focus on emerging fields such as artificial intelligence and bio-

technology to meet demand. The educational model will also evolve to accommodate various student groups, including those pursuing online, adult, and vocational education.

Universities will integrate entrepreneurship and innovation into their curricula, offering practical experiences to foster creativity. The trend of combining academic credentials with vocational training will help students enhance their skills throughout their careers.

Government policies such as the "1+X" certification system will further promote this integration, encouraging students to earn vocational certificates alongside academic degrees, improving their adaptability in an ever-changing job market.

Wu Ni is the director of the Institute of Educational Strategy and Macro-Policy, China National Academy of Educational Sciences. This is an excerpt of his interview with China Daily's Li Wei. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

VLADIMIR NOROV

Catalysts of change

How effectively the countries of the Global South can realize their potential on the world stage will determine if there is a more just and multipolar world order

Since the beginning of the 21st century, we have seen a shift in wealth from traditional Western centers to the Asia-Pacific region, altering the structure of the global economy. This economic shift goes hand in hand with the increased political visibility of the latter. The present century is also rapidly changing in geopolitical priorities. Today, there is increasing evidence that the future belongs to the countries of the Global South. According to demographers' forecasts, by 2100, the majority of the world's population will be from Asia and Africa, making up 83 percent of all people on Earth.

It can be argued that many countries of the Global South in Latin America, Africa and Asia are no longer passive players on the world stage but act independently from the West in many respects.

This became evident more than a decade ago when the United States, the world's most powerful country, led a global campaign to persuade countries not to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. Yet, more than 150 countries went ahead and joined.

Changes became noticeable on the global stage as developing countries began to actively influence international agreements and policies related to the economy, climate and security. Amid this transformation of the international relations system, maintaining and strengthening ties with developing countries offers significant opportunities in terms of enhancing geopolitical influence. Moreover, the rapid population growth in most countries of the Global South, along with a rising share of the working-age population, could, under certain conditions, contribute to economic growth.

Despite the obvious successes and progress of the countries of the Global South, there are a number of challenges that hinder the full realization of their potential on the

world stage. First, there are issues such as inequality, poverty, corruption and political instability that need to be addressed in a number of regions. Despite the fact that the countries of the Global South were formally freed from colonial dependence back in the 20th century, the economic structures built during the colonial period are still preserved: the countries of the Global South continue to export raw materials, remaining dependent on imports of high-tech goods from developed countries. At the same time, unequal trade relations with the countries of the Global North and debt dependence only reinforce this situation.

Second, the situation of the countries of the Global South in the context of their representation in international organizations raises questions. It is important to note that the countries of the Global South are under-represented in key international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations, where their voice remains weak.

The real problems faced by developing countries are often ignored. The issues of reform of multilateral agencies, equal access to resources and elimination of global inequality remain on the periphery of discussions. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz noted that developing countries are unhappy with the "unequal application" of international norms and demand honest representation.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Added to all this is the problem of climate change, which is getting worse every year. And despite the fact that the "contribution" of the countries of the Global South to this problem is the smallest, they, due to their underdevelopment, are the most vulnerable to climate change. Without significant investments in renewable energy sources over the next decade, many countries, especially those in the Global

South, will continue to rely on traditional forms of energy to develop their economies and ensure security of supply, which will further exacerbate the climate change situation in these countries. In 2022, the Global South, which represents most of the world's population, received only 20 percent of global investments in clean energy, despite the fact that many of these countries have rich wind and solar

resources. Sub-Saharan Africa, where 600 million people live without access to electricity, has more than 1,000 times more renewable potential than energy demand.

Despite clear demand and abundant resources, investments in African renewable energy sources have accounted for only 2 percent of the global total over the past two decades and, with an average annual investments of only \$5 billion from 2010 to 2020, which are still far from the \$60 billion needed annually by 2030.

China, which is the most developed among all the countries of the Global South, plays a huge role here. China shares its technologies in the field of renewable energy, manufacturing and agriculture, is the largest source of investment for developing countries, and this is not accompanied by demands to carry out any economic or political reforms. China, which has successfully lifted nearly 800 million rural population out of abject poverty over the past four decades, has excellent opportunities to share its accumulated experience with the countries of the Global South.

China is focused exclusively on mutually beneficial cooperation and does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, including the developing countries. Moreover, China is opening its market to the countries of the Global South, increasing the competitiveness of goods from these countries, which is reflected in the complete abolition of duties on all goods from 33 least developed countries

in Africa, as previously announced. It is also important to develop mechanisms for international North-South cooperation that can contribute to a more equitable distribution of resources and technologies and ensure inclusiveness in global governance.

However, despite significant efforts, the rapprochement of the countries of the North and South still faces difficulties. The problem is that the countries of the North often continue to maintain the old models of relations in which they stay strong and the countries of the South remain weak.

At the same time, we see positive trends in the expansion of initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, which unite the countries of the Global South, aimed at creating a more equitable global system. It is important to note that the SCO, BRICS and other regional associations are already playing an increasingly important role in shaping global solutions aimed at economic growth and security.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the future of the international order depends on how the countries of the Global South can effectively use their internal resources and external relations to form a new, more just and multipolar world order. The role of the Global South in the global process continues to grow. In order to create effective strategies for sustainable development, it is necessary to recognize current problems and actively work together to solve them. This is the path to a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable world order, where all countries will have equal opportunities for growth and development.

The author is former director of the International Institute of Central Asia, former secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Uzbekistan's former foreign minister. 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.

LIN BOQIANG

Greener, step by step

China is scaling up its efforts to strengthen its carbon footprint management

In the years to come, China's national carbon market should gradually include the energy demand side in the coverage of the industry, and gradually introduce demand-side industrial enterprises and even individual consumers to participate in market transactions.

The first task is to establish and improve a carbon footprint management system and build the carbon footprint calculation methodology. On this basis, China should further explore the interaction mechanism between carbon footprints and the carbon market, which could provide support for the inclusion of the energy demand side into the carbon market.

To date, the national carbon emissions trading market in China has achieved fruitful outcomes, with a cumulative turnover of approximately 27 billion yuan (\$3.72 billion) since its inception three years ago, becoming the world's largest carbon market in terms of greenhouse gas coverage.

China has pledged to speed up the establishment of a carbon footprint management system for products. By 2027, China aims to preliminarily establish a unified national system for managing carbon footprints. By 2030, the national carbon footprint management system will be further refined and applied in more diverse scenarios.

At present, China has made some progress in carbon footprint policy formulation and system building.

To start with, the carbon footprint calculation standards for industrial products have been preliminarily established, laying a foundation for industrial enterprises to participate in carbon footprint management.

Various government bodies have issued pilot carbon footprint calculation methods for the products in

key industries, such as iron and steel, cement and other energy-intensive industries, to provide more detailed and targeted calculation methods.

Second, China has preliminarily explored the carbon footprint management mechanism for individual consumers and examined the feasibility of incorporating individual consumers into the carbon market.

For example, Guangdong province has established a carbon inclusion mechanism to convert the approved low-carbon behaviors of residents into accumulable carbon credits, which residents can exchange for diverse incentives — they can redeem a 5-yuan voucher with nine subway trips. And Hubei province has combined carbon inclusion with electricity consumption and explored the formulation of carbon inclusion methodology. The carbon reduction amount for each kilowatt-hour of electricity saved by residents corresponds to about 0.02-0.04 yuan in the carbon market.

Third, a market pattern involving multiple parties has been initially formed, and a number of regions and industries have launched pilot programs for carbon footprint certification.

For example, Shanghai has taken the lead in piloting product carbon footprint certification in key industries such as iron and steel, and issued a white list for the first batch of products, including key export products such as steel, new energy products and daily consumer goods.

Fourth, the Tiangong database was officially launched on Nov 27, 2023, marking an important step toward aligning China's carbon footprint rules with international ones.

However, there are still many challenges to be overcome to build a carbon footprint management system.

First, it is difficult to quantify the carbon footprint on the consumption side.

At present, most enterprises on the energy demand side have not established a sound carbon footprint data collection, analysis and reporting system. And there's a lack of human resources and financial input in this regard. Thus, they can hardly get a clear picture of their own greenhouse gas emissions.

For individual consumers, there is no scientific accounting method or unified quantification standards for household carbon emissions reduction. And there are problems such as low accuracy and double calculation of individual carbon credits.

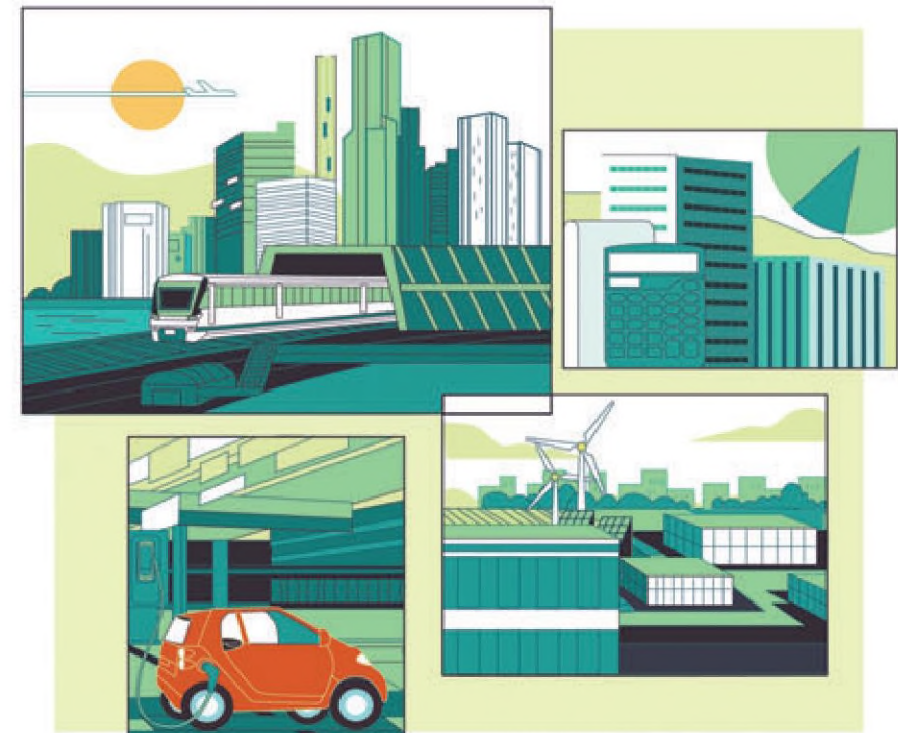
Second, the stimulative effect of carbon footprint management is limited, and the consumption side's willingness to participate in the system is not high.

There are additional costs for companies to calculate and publish their carbon footprints. At present, most carbon management policies are voluntary, with a lack of mandatory regulations and standards, and thus a lack of external pressure for companies to participate.

At the same time, economic incentive policies are yet to be improved, and the economic motivations for enterprises are not enough. For individual consumers, the direct economic benefits from the carbon footprint management mechanism are limited, resulting in weak enthusiasm for participation.

Third, actors on the consumption side lack awareness of carbon footprint management.

Many companies are not fully aware of the role of carbon footprint management in environmental protection and sustainable development. As a result, many enterprises have not formulated specific targets and corresponding action strategies for carbon emissions reduction, and have not yet incorporated carbon management into their overall sustainable development planning. Moreover, most individual consumers lack the awareness of carbon trading and



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

low-carbon lifestyle, resulting in low willingness to participate in carbon footprint management.

Fourth, there exist difficulties in international mutual recognition of carbon footprint management systems.

In terms of the carbon calculation and pricing mechanism in the global commodity trade, Europe and the United States are unilaterally formulating and implementing rules. Most of the internationally renowned carbon footprint databases are commercial in nature. Their carbon calculation methods are often not entirely transparent to the public. Some countries may use this as a basis to monopolize the discourse power on carbon emissions calculation, and use it as a tool for trade protection and setting technical barriers to trade.

To establish a carbon footprint management system in China, the country should first integrate the carbon footprint management system with existing mechanisms.

Priority should be given to the management of pilot enterprises'

carbon footprints, and carbon footprint requirements should be included in China's tax incentive and subsidy system. Industry leaders should be encouraged to participate in carbon footprint management and invest in low-carbon technologies and carbon reduction projects.

At the individual consumer level, the extension of carbon inclusion incentive mechanisms should be promoted in the field of daily consumption. In the future, the inclusion of carbon accounts in the financial credit system can be considered.

Second, the carbon footprint management system should be deeply integrated with enterprises' green and low-carbon development strategies.

The quantification of carbon footprints and the establishment of carbon accounts are key steps. In the meantime, great importance should be attached to the security of personal data. The construction of a carbon footprint management system by transitioning from the

quantification of individual carbon credits to docking with carbon trading platforms should be promoted.

Third, the awareness of carbon footprint management on the consumption side should be enhanced.

There should be more publicity to enhance the awareness of carbon emissions and carbon footprint management among consumption-side entities, and to improve the awareness of consumption-side enterprises and the public on key policy tools such as carbon markets and carbon inclusion platforms.

Fourth, the quality and credibility of China's carbon footprint data should be improved to boost the influence of China's carbon footprint database.

The author is a chair professor at the School of Management and dean of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University. 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



From left: A visitor walks past a painting by French artist Gaspar Willmann at his solo exhibition, *Compression*, at Yishu 8 gallery in Beijing. Willmann, a 2023 Yishu 8 French Young Artist Award winner, works during his two-month residency in the capital. A corner of the exhibition, showing his video and artworks. The exhibition will run until Jan 17. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

New impressions of Beijing

Artwork is collection of capital's images that sees French painter adopting a visual complexity, **Li Yingxue** reports.

During his two-month residency in Beijing in late autumn and early winter, French artist Gaspar Willmann found inspiration in the city's quiet details — mingling hues of fallen leaves and the charm of the *hutong* (alleyways).

These moments became the foundation of success for Willmann, a 2023 Yishu 8 French Young Artist Award winner.

On Dec 7, his solo exhibition *Compression* was unveiled at Yishu 8, an art platform providing residencies for artists from France and China. The venue is located inside the historical building of the former Sino-French University in Beijing.

The show presents eight paintings created during Willmann's time in the capital, offering a glimpse into his vivid impressions of the city. The exhibition runs until Jan 17.

Christine Cayol, founder of Yishu 8, describes Willmann as an artist who transcends binary thinking to explore contemporary themes.

"He moves seamlessly between digital tools and traditional brushes. During his two-month residency in Beijing, he brought a sharp, inquisitive perspective, countless questions and a unique approach to painting," she says.

"Willmann's work embodies the essence of painting — a quiet, contemplative pause in a world hurtling toward virtualization," Cayol adds.

Willmann, born in 1995 and a graduate of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, lives and works in Paris. In recent



“In the digital world, compression transforms data into something shorter and more efficient without losing its essence. It's like storing memories in a coded form for later. I like that idea.”

Gaspar Willmann, French artist

years, his solo exhibitions have been held in Paris, Marseille and Basel.

His practice, spanning painting and video, delves into the processes of editing and transformation. His work examines how people consume and share images and explores the emotional and collective meanings embedded within them.

The exhibition reflects a concept central to Willmann's creative pro-



From left: Willmann with Nicolas Pillerele, minister counselor for culture, education and scientific affairs, the French embassy in China, and Christine Cayol, founder of Yishu 8, at the exhibition's opening on Dec 7.

cess. He explains that he is drawn to the idea of packing as much information, memory or emotion as possible into a single square, compressing it into a cohesive whole.

"In the digital world, compression transforms data into something shorter and more efficient without losing its essence. It's like storing memories in a coded form for later. I like that idea," he says.

Willmann describes himself as something of an image collector.

"There are two types of images I'm drawn to: those from search engines, often the top results, which evoke a sense of déjà vu and carry collective meaning," he explains. "And then there are images from my daily life, captured on my smartphone — more intimate, serving as witnesses to fleeting

memories or moments."

His artistic process begins with images layered in Photoshop, where one obscures the next in a series of overlapping compositions. This approach creates a visual complexity that makes the original sources nearly impossible to discern.

Once the digital composition is printed onto canvas, Willmann transitions to traditional tech-

niques, using a paintbrush to reinterpret the imagery. For him, painting is a way to pause, reflect and reconnect with the images, breathing new life into them. Amid the dynamic, chaotic brushstrokes, new landscapes emerge.

His residency in Beijing became a rich source of inspiration, captured using this same method.

"I particularly liked this season in Beijing, especially for the quantity of leaves scattered in shades of green and yellow. It sometimes looked like an infinity of pixels that would compose foliage," he says.

The eight works on display, whether horizontal or vertical, share a consistent size — a deliberate choice by Willmann. He explains that the dimensions mirror the windows in his Paris studio.

"The history of windows is fascinating, as it weaves through both the evolution of art and the advancement of technology," he notes.

Nicolas Pillerele, minister counselor for culture, education and scientific affairs at the French embassy in China, highlighted the significance of the exhibition, describing it as a key cultural event in Beijing commemorating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and France. He also thanked the gallery and its founder "for their unwavering dedication over the past decade, fostering communication and creation among young artists from both countries," he says.

Contact the writer at liyingsxue@chinadaily.com.cn

Artisan makes pottery the name of the game

Artisan Peng Cheng-xiong (right) works in his studio and applies color onto pottery with his wife (bottom left), Zheng Baozhu, in Dehua county, Quanzhou city, Fujian province, early this month. His pieces include single-character ceramic artworks that integrate Chinese characters into traditional sculptures (bottom right).

Dehua has a long history of ceramic production. As early as the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties, the area's ceramics were major exports on the ancient Maritime Silk Road. Today, the local ceramic industry is flourishing with many practitioners, such as the couple, exploring development of the old art form and passing down their skills from generation to generation.

Peng uses 3D porcelain sculptures to present the two-dimensional lines of characters, creating an effect similar to pictographs.

"Ancient oracle bone script was 'characters' that depicted 'objects', but I create 'objects' that resemble 'characters,'" he says.

His series depicting zodiac signs and family surnames are collectors' favorites. PHOTOS BY XINHUA



Vloggers help improve lives in the countryside

YINCHUAN — Looking sharp, Ma Liang stood on a podium surrounded by farmland and spoke in English and his local dialect about the specialties of the area where he grew up in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region in Northwest China.

"I have a strong sense of mission to create a new image of my home region by using English as well as local expressions to change the impression people may have of Ningxia," Ma says, adding that this is why he chose to return home to make short videos.

Ma graduated from Xi'an International Studies University in 2009 as an English major. He held a variety of jobs, took part in cultural exchange, and visited many countries.

In 2022, he decided to return home to Xiji county, Guyuan city, to start a new business with his friend Ma Haodong, a documentary film director.

"When I was younger, I ran away from this mountainous area, but now I've come back to develop a new understanding of my home," he says. "The loess landscapes of Ningxia are a big stage on which to start businesses."

To help make videos that best showcase his home, Ma Liang has sought inspiration in novels, poems and essays about the area. He has posted videos online promoting apples, potatoes and pumpkins, the latter taking him four months to make.

That hard work paid off, as the video drew 17 million views on social media platform Douyin and helped sell 60,000 kilograms of

Xiji county pumpkins in just two weeks.

The success of Ma Liang and his team spotlights the booming e-commerce sector in rural China. In recent years, the country has boosted development of e-commerce in rural areas, helping 1,489 counties build 3,000 county-level e-commerce public service centers and logistics distribution centers, as well as 158,000 village-level e-commerce service sites.

As a result, produce and products can be quickly sent between cities and villages, and vice versa. As an important engine for promoting the development of rural industry, e-commerce has become a significant part of the national rural vitalization quest.

Another example worth noting is a video featuring Peng Bo, which introduces a local specialty in another part of China. Rice is the focus of this video, in which Peng speaks both English and a local dialect, and which went viral. To date, more than 200,000 kilograms of this rice from Wanjin village, Yuhong district, Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province, have been sold.

"Through our videos, people have seen the beautiful rural scenery in Yuhong district and learned about its simple and honest folkway, as well as our agricultural products," says Peng, deputy head of the culture and tourism bureau of Yuhong district, Shenyang, adding that she wants to help bring real benefits to local people.

XINHUA

LIFE

LIVING HERITAGE

Guarding lacquerware's lustrous legacy

Artisan dives deep into researching craft's history to master the tradition while adding innovations and passing his skills on to future generations, **Zheng Zheng** reports in Huangshan, Anhui.



Gan Erke, a master of Chinese lacquerware and inheritor of the Huizhou lacquerware decoration technique, a national-level intangible cultural heritage. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In a gray-tiled house along Liyang Old Street in Huangshan city, East China's Anhui province, sits an extraordinary studio. It is the workshop of Gan Erke, a master of Chinese lacquerware and inheritor of the Huizhou lacquerware decoration technique — a national-level intangible cultural heritage.

Gan devoted his life to creating exquisite lacquerware pieces while reviving some elements of the craft that were close to being lost. His aim is to elevate this ancient art form to new heights while preserving its essence and maintaining China's world-class standards.

Lacquerware, an ancient decorative technique, involves coating objects with natural sap from lacquer trees. China is considered its birthplace, as evidenced by findings from the Jingtoushan site in East China's Zhejiang province, revealing that ancient Chinese were among the first to utilize lacquer tree sap some 8,000 years ago.

The Huizhou lacquerware technique, with its thousand-year history, is known for its refinement and elegance, contrasting with northern China's more robust style. The local craft reached its zenith during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Creating lacquerware demands patience and precision. A single piece requires at least three to four months, or even a year, to complete. The process involves multiple steps — forming the base, sanding, applying coats of colored lacquer, drying, repeating lacquer coats and drying dozens of times, followed by sanding the finish, buffing and polishing — resulting in a brilliant surface with dynamic patterns in contrasting hues.

Gan's journey began at a local arts and crafts factory from 1979 to 1986, where he gained deep insights into the lustrous craft's heritage. He found that although it originated in China, a concerning gap exists between China's traditional lacquer techniques and contemporary works, particularly compared to Japan's modern lacquer mastery. This realization prompted Gan to conduct deep research.

"Made-in-China lacquerware should stand equal to, if not surpass, any other lacquerware globally," Gan says.

Determined to elevate Chinese lacquerware to its deserved eminence, Gan



Huangshan-based lacquerware artisan Gan Erke has devoted his life to reviving the ancient craft.

embarked on an artistic quest. His breakthrough came with reviving the nearly lost craft of rhinoceros leather lacquer, named for its patterns reminiscent of the textures on the animal's hide. This style was once celebrated as the "prime of lacquerware" by Ming Dynasty painter Dong Qichang. A brief description in the Ming Dynasty treatise *Xiushi Lu* (A Record of Lacquerware Craft) sparked Gan's inspiration to re-create and enhance the technique.

The 20-character depiction that guided Gan states: "There are patterns like floating clouds, round flowers and overlapping pine bark textures. There are pieces with a glossy red surface, pursued as the beauty of extreme smoothness."

Gan recalls his early efforts to create an antique-style inkstone box based on ancient texts: "I knew what I needed to achieve, but the path was unclear. Each failed attempt meant grinding off the surface and repainting countless times."

Through the meticulous study of ancient documents and persistent experimentation, he successfully decoded the nuances of rhinoceros leather lacquer crafting, which had only been briefly documented in historical records. After numerous attempts, he was finally able to re-create the classic rhinoceros leather lacquer design in layers of red, yellow and black.

Yet Gan found the texture lacking the dynamic quality he envisioned, considering it too monotonous. "Since I've undertaken this mission, I aim for perfection. I want to keep improving this technique and give it a modern look."

While traditional masters used red, yellow and black lacquer, Gan began incorporating gold to replace the traditional yellow tones, creating enhanced brilliance. He also enriched the layering from the typical six to 16 coats of antiquity to up to 102 layers, achieving depth and movement in the patterns.

Qian Wenzhong, a history professor at Fudan University, says Gan's works don't just catch people's attention; they capture it completely. People used to refer to the craft as a divine skill, and these works are truly, divinely masterful.

To Gan, lacquerware transcends pure artistry while remaining functional. In his studio, ordinary household items like tea caddies and furniture are lacquered. Each handcrafted object adheres to the same standards, with seamless joints and surfaces polished to mirror-like perfection.

"We never calculate labor costs. Every piece, large or small, takes over a year because only in that time can we achieve perfection," Gan explains. "My works are treated equally inside and out — you can see the reflection of your eyes from the buffed interior or when looking through the tiny opening."

Gan's mastery of the mirror finish on interior surfaces is unprecedented, enabling his pieces to possess reflective qualities similar to ancient bronze mirrors. "Such refinement was unimaginable even in ancient times. This represents our ultimate pursuit of craftsmanship," he proudly states.

"Looking at these lacquerware pieces, we see not only the inheritance of China's traditions, but also modern aesthetics and a contemporary radiance shining through," says Zhang Lan, former director of Shanghai History Museum.

Gan views the revival of ancient lacquer crafts as a multipronged endeavor — providing technical training to apprentices to ensure generational continuity; fostering public appreciation of this Chinese cultural heritage in daily life; securing government policy support and funding; and promoting the craft worldwide.

"Our mission is to share the profound



From top: A lacquer box, bowl and vase, with patterns reminiscent of textures on rhinoceros' hide.

beauty of Chinese lacquer not only with our countrymen but with the entire world, allowing all to witness the brilliance of our traditional culture," Gan says.

His dedication has earned recognition at home and abroad. In 2011, one of his rhinoceros leather lacquered round boxes was inducted into the permanent collection at Beijing's Palace Museum. His works have appeared at Christie's auctions in 2014 and 2015 and were featured in an exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris this July.

Major museums, such as the British Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States, and the Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts in France, have acquired Gan's pieces for their permanent collections, with a Dutch museum currently in acquisition talks, says Gan, recalling with joy how a French artist inspired by the rhinoceros leather lacquer patterns attempted to re-create the technique.

"When artwork achieves true beauty, it transcends borders — its allure takes flight, reaching audiences worldwide," he adds.

While leading a team of 18, Gan also teaches at prominent institutions like the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Tsinghua University and Tongji University, mentoring and introducing lacquerware art to young people as a visiting researcher and graduate adviser.

Many enthusiasts also visit his workshop to observe and learn firsthand where Gan shares insights and encourages innovation in contemporary applications like home decor and cultural creations to help proliferate lacquer crafts.

For Gan, lacquerware represents more than artistry — it embodies Chinese civilization's brilliance. Through its restoration and reinvigoration, he aims to amplify the resounding voice and vision of Chinese aesthetics to the world.

"Our predecessors achieved remarkable feats. Today, we aim higher. By carrying forth this heritage perfected over thousands of years, each generation can elevate it further, creating an eternal testament to Chinese cultural civilization's evolving glory," he says.

He Qi contributed to this story.

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Traditional Mongolian ethnic attire symbolizes cultural revitalization

HOHHOT — For Meng Genhua, a dedicated Mongolian artisan, her greatest joy stems from seeing her traditional ethnic attire business grow from a humble 200-square-meter workshop to a thriving 500-square-meter store in nearly four decades.

This transformation not only underlines her entrepreneurial success but also symbolizes the revitalization of China's ethnic heritage.

Growing up in a herding family in Otog Front Banner in Ordos, a city in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Meng was very young when she began learning how to make traditional Mongolian clothing from her mother, a well-known local tailor.

Once used as daily wear, Mongolian attire, characterized by silk and satin fabrics, intricate designs and vibrant colors, gradually became less common with the increasing popularity of modern apparel. Meng, however, felt a deep responsibility to preserve and renew the traditional cultural treasure.

In 1985, Meng began her career by opening a small family workshop. "Initially, customers rarely came for clothing but for mending clothes or sewing on buttons," she recalls. At that time, the shop functioned more as a tailoring service than a clothing store.

Occasionally, Meng's traditional Mongolian robes caught the eye of older customers

who were amazed by her mastery of an almost forgotten traditional technique. Word began to spread and Meng's business flourished.

In 2011, Meng founded a company specializing in the trade of Mongolian ethnic attire. A year later, she was recognized as a municipal-level inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Mongolian clothes manufacturing in Ordos.

With the rise of cultural tourism across China in recent years, public interest in traditional craftsmanship has been reignited. Seizing this opportunity, Meng advanced her career by blending traditional elements with innovative designs.

Today, in addition to daily wear, Meng's

store offers wedding garments, performance costumes and accessories.

Meng is dedicated to passing on her craft. Since 2015, her company has partnered with a local vocational high school to offer training courses, which has benefited over 300 students. More than a dozen of her apprentices have gone on to open businesses.

Among these inheritors is Sarula, Meng's daughter. "Mom taught me to sew as a child. The sewing machine was my plaything," she says.

After graduating from university, Sarula taught art at a local vocational high school from 2004 onward. However, in 2017 she decided to shift her focus to garment design.

"We're preserving Mongolian ethnic features like the mandarin collar, frog buttons and trim colors in everyday wear. We also draw inspiration from traditional Chinese garments and modern clothes, simplifying designs and opting for low-maintenance, washable cotton and linens," Sarula says.

In 2023, the government of Otog Front Banner invested over 2.88 million yuan (\$395,400) in preserving traditional Mongolian attire. The government plans to promote cultural tourism, train professionals and build exhibition halls to further protect and celebrate ethnic clothing.

XINHUA

LIFE



Writer delves into home truths

Memories and thoughts of childhood appeal to readers beyond the confines of her village, **Yang Yang** reports.

A photo taken by Shen Shuzhi captures the moment as residents gather in the summer dusk, at the entrance to their village in Nanling county, Wuhu, Anhui province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From top: The four books that Shen published since 2013: *Yanzi Feiqi* ("where have all the swallows flown"), *Ba Pu Ge* ("song of pulling cattails"), *Yueliang Chulai* (Take Me Home), and *Ba Jiu Shi Hua* ("eight, nine, and 10 sprays of flowers").

Wild fruit in the mountains, countryside plants and birds, bamboo utensils, home-cooked meals, festival customs and stories, and the heartwarming moments of seasonal changes — all these memories of her childhood hometown are ones she can never truly return to.

In her latest essay collection *Yueliang Chulai*, or *Take Me Home*, Shen Shuzhi, now living in Beijing, recalls those memories about her hometown in the countryside of Nanling county, Wuhu, Anhui province. Seemingly ordinary and personal, they are also local chronicles and a record of the time.

Born in 1984, Shen and her twin sister were the fourth and fifth daughters in a poor farmer's family. Named Shi Yanping by her parents, Shen grew up in the countryside, where many struggled to feed their families.

Sericulture boomed in the village, allowing young Shen to enjoy mulberries, before fading soon. In an era of material scarcity, a cup of sweet soup was a rare treat for a high school student like her. On Chinese New Year's Eve, parents kept the light in the sty on the whole night, which was a luxury at that time.

By bringing out these memories of bygone years, Shen re-presents a hometown of not only hers, but a whole generation.

"A good author must be able to turn a unique personal experience into a complex life experience that all the readers can relate to," writer Liang Hong said at a book event about *Take Me Home* in September.

"Her language, like a gently flowing brook, is clear and bright, and meanwhile full of details and warmth of everyday life ... giving you an especially real and warm feeling," Liang says.

Commenting on the book, writer A Yi said at a book event in November that Shen's writing is "elegant", "accurate", "detailed" and "naturalistic".

"In a naturalistic style, she tries to return home through words, to a village that's physically impossible to reach," he says.

Shen started writing about the landscapes and life in her hometown in 2010 when she was a postgraduate student of ancient Chinese literature at Nanjing University, inspired by other writers on social media plat-

form and review site Douban. She posted the essays online and attracted many readers.

On Douban, she also got to know some plant enthusiasts who led Shen to learn about the obscure plants and flowers often seen in the surroundings of everyday life. Knowing the name of each tree on campus and their appearance in different seasons thus became a hobby for her. But what's most intriguing for her was to know the wildflowers and plants she saw in the countryside every day as a child.

In her writing, she recalls her childhood life in the countryside, capturing the moods of past days through memories of the plants, customs, food and daily life.

These essays, in a simple language, are natural, poetic and refreshing. Through a pair of warm naturalistic eyes, all the details about the plants, flowers, cooking festive food, making utensils, or farming, impart these works a unique flair that makes nostalgia concrete and heartwarming.

In 2013, Shen published her first book *Ba Jiu Shi Hua* (literally, "eight, nine, and 10 sprays of flowers"), which collected essays written from 2010 to 2012, mainly about the delights in her childhood such as the starry sky or spring flowers.

In an article about the book, she talked about the influence she got from the writers she likes — one is Zhou Zuoren and the other is Zhou's student Feng Wenbing, pen-named Fei Ming. In Zhou's works, she found the beauty of a simple writing style and humanitarian spirit and gained an enthusiasm for natural history. From Feng's essays, she learned how to describe the world from a child's eyes.

Besides, she also tried to imitate the writing styles of prestigious essayists Shen Congwen and Wang Zengqi, following the tradition of Chinese classic essay writing.

In 2014, Shen Shuzhi won the Zijin People's Literature Star award for best essay writing organized by one of China's top literary periodicals People's Literature. In 2015, her essay *Jiejie* ("my elder sisters") won the top nonfiction prize in the writing competition organized by the reading platform of Douban.

In 2017, she published her second book *Yanzi Feiqi* (literally, "where have all the swallows flown"). This was about the stories of the five daughters in a poor rural family.



Writer Shen Shuzhi.

In a plain and reserved voice, Shen Shuzhi recounts the emotional bonds of the sisters and their own lives, faithfully representing the subtleties of daily existence. With heart-wrenching or heartwarming stories, she records the growing-up process of a generation, faithfully mirroring the changing life in the countryside and representing the refreshing feeling a generation of rural residents had when they left for cities to work or study and also the inevitable pains.

In 2019, the third essay collection by Shen Shuzhi was published, titled *Ba Pu Ge* (literally, "song of pulling cattails"), still about her hometown in South Anhui — the games played in the countryside in her childhood, the flowers and plants in the rural area, snacks and dishes in the south, a youth's secrets and the "current" life in the countryside and the city. Written between 2013 and 2018, when China was experiencing fast urbanization, the book records the life in the countryside from the past to the present, building a spiritual native land for generations of readers.

All the three books rank high on most popular literary or folk-custom book lists in their publishing years on Douban.

The latest book *Take Me Home* includes similar subjects in the previous three, but the last essay, spanning 30,000 words, titled *Xiangxia De Chenhan* (literally, "the dawn and dusk of the countryside"), focused on something different. It's not only about the mellow and tender childhood memories, the harsh part of which have been filtered by time, but also the darker, painful and obscure aspects of the present life in the countryside that she understands deeper through the eyes of a mature writer and an adult woman.

In this essay that the writer spent eight months completing, Shen Shuzhi reveals the imperfect sides of herself and her family, which gave her a deeper understanding of family bonds.

"I wrote this piece because I felt painful. Unless I write it down, I can't write anything else," she says.

"If you can't truly write about the more real and painful parts of your life but the brighter things that you're very used to writing about, it feels like a kind of evasion and deception.

"I must write down the present, so as not to betray the place where I grew up and my parents."

For people who leave for school or work, hometown, even if unchanged over the years, is a place one can never really return to.

As Shen Shuzhi writes in the essay, several times in a year, she would take her son back home to live for a while. Even if she physically lived in the old village, she knew that, "I am a person who now lives in my hometown but whose only connection to it lies in the past."

Shen Shuzhi found similar feelings in the essay by US writer James Wood, *Secular Homelessness*, who writes that he left home twice, once for university, and then for the US where he had been living with his wife for many years.

"What is peculiar, even a little bitter, about living for so many years away from the country of my birth is the slow revelation that I made a large choice many years ago that did not resemble a large choice at the time; that it has taken years for me to see this; and that this process of retrospective comprehension in fact constitutes a life — is indeed how life is lived."

At the end of the essay, Shen Shuzhi also writes that people were unaware that their journey from village school to out-of-province university was a gradual farewell, and that leaving meant they could never return to how things once were.

"Now, within each cycle of return and departure, we felt the alienation, comfort, loneliness, incompleteness, and sorrow. In our own ways, doing what we can, perhaps including recording these moments, we can complete a part of our lives," she writes.

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From top: Hirsute raspberries; cakes made with vegetables, preserved pork and glutinous rice flour by Shen's mother in spring; tender green tea leaves; homemade rice dumplings.

Keeping the authentic taste of China alive in India

On a recent visit home to Kolkata in eastern India, I made it a point to keep one afternoon free to explore

Tangra, one of the two Chinatowns in the city. Once famous for its tanneries and its labyrinth lanes and by-lanes, Tangra is where the locals head today for authentic Chinese food that does not cost the earth. And



Madhusree Mallik
Second Thoughts

where else but in Tangra would one find industrial quantities of the

sauces that are so vital to Chinese cuisine being made?

Having moved from Guangdong to what was then known as Calcutta after World War II, F.S. Young realized that the nearly 30,000-strong Chinese community in the city had no access to a regular supply of soy sauce. So in 1954, he set up the Sing Cheung Sauce Factory, churning out soy sauce made in the traditional manner, which much like whiskey, includes a long aging process to get the right flavor.

The ingredients were, and still are, sourced from Sikkim, North

Bengal, and northeastern India. The clientele then was the local Chinese community, while today, Chinese restaurants across India use sauces made by Sing Cheung or Pou Chong, another sauce maker from Kolkata that opened shop in 1958.

Young's 69-year-old nephew Chong Hsin Wong, who runs the Sing Cheung Sauce Factory now, is understandably proud of how successful the family business has been. From soy sauce, the company now makes 15 different kinds of sauces and condiments, including the pungent mustard paste called

kasundi, which is so beloved of Bengalis. The experimenting with local ingredients is obvious in flavors like the coriander chili sauce on offer.

On the other hand, the founder of Pou Chong Foods — and another Guangdong native — Lee Shih Chuan is credited with creating the green chilli sauce, without dollops of which the famous *kathi* rolls, or meat wraps, of Kolkata would probably not have become so famous. The Pou Chong list of products even includes a vegetarian oyster sauce made with mushrooms.

When asked if the newer multinational-backed brands have made a dent in profits, 37-year-old Janice Lee, who heads Pou Chong now, is dismissive. She says that the authentic taste that the two Chinese brands offer cannot be replicated by the newbies and therefore, there is no competition. She should know. From a single factory in Tangra, there are now two units in Kolkata producing tons of sauces every day for Pou Chong. The story is the same for Sing Cheung. People just can't seem to get enough of either. So what is the advertising budget

like, I ask? Wong of Sing Cheung laughs. Zero, he says. Publicity is entirely word-of-mouth.

Wong looks pensive when asked about the future of the business. Many of the young Chinese residents of the city have moved abroad, mainly to Canada. With the population shrinking, land sharks have moved into Tangra, taking over what is now prime property to build incongruous high-rises that are slowly erasing a unique community's way of life.

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