



# ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

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# CHINA DAILY

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## President commends Macao's achievements

Progress in past 5 years attributed to 'one country, two systems'

By MO JINGXI in Macao  
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President Xi Jinping commended Macao on Thursday for making remarkable achievements over the past five years despite extraordinary challenges, saying that the special administrative region is blessed with the opportunities and abilities to achieve greater success with strong support from the motherland.

Xi, who is on the second day of his third visit to the region as Chinese president, said at a welcoming banquet that Macao's progress is the result of the hard work and all-out efforts of people of all sectors united under the leadership of the SAR government.

The achievements are attributable to the full and faithful implementation of the "one country, two systems" policy, to the vigorous support of the central government and the mainland, and to the active involvement of the international community, he said.

"I have full confidence that with the strong backing of the great motherland and through solid and hard work, the Macao SAR will build on its achievements to make a new leap and attain greater success," Xi told an audience of more than 600 people, including Sam Hou-fai, incoming chief executive of the Macao SAR, who will be inaugurated on Friday.

Noting that the past five years have been extraordinary in the history of Macao's development, given the global transformation and COVID-19 pandemic, Xi said that people of all sectors in Macao have risen to the challenges, made results-oriented efforts, ensured a steady economic recovery and achieved progress in all undertakings.

Last year, propelled by the strong resurgence in tourism, Macao's economy grew 80.5 percent year-on-year. In the first three quarters of this year, Macao's GDP increased 11.5 percent year-on-year to reach 301 billion patacas (\$38 billion), data from Macao's Statistics and Census Service showed.

Highlighting the SAR's new progress in appropriate economic diversification, Xi said the region today enjoys a stronger foundation for economic cooperation, and its international influence has significantly increased.

Xi praised the SAR government for taking concrete steps to deliver



President Xi Jinping addresses a welcoming banquet hosted by the Macao Special Administrative Region government on the eve of the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland at the Macao East Asian Games Dome on Thursday evening. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

tangible benefits to residents in areas that directly impact their lives, including housing, healthcare, education and elderly care.

"With public well-being better secured and social undertakings making all-around progress, Macao has today become a pleasant and favorable place to live and work in," he said.

Xi expressed his expectations for Macao to proactively align itself with national development strategies and seek to play a bigger role on the international stage.

He also expressed the hope that Macao will uphold the underlying values of love for the Chinese nation and love for Macao while embracing greater openness, inclusiveness and solidarity.

"The people of Macao are never short on the can-do spirit," Xi said, urging the SAR to demonstrate stronger resolve and greater courage in reform and innovation.

Macao SAR Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng said in his welcoming speech that Macao has always been

the apple of the eye of the motherland, which is the staunchest supporter for the prosperity and stability of the region.

"As a member of the big family of our motherland, we must shoulder our responsibilities and break new ground as we embark on a new journey in the new era," Ho said.

Stephen Morgan, rector of the University of Saint Joseph in Macao, who attended the banquet, said that President Xi's visit to Macao during the 25th anniversary of its return to the motherland gives the region a great national and international profile. Morgan, who has lived in the city for nearly seven years, said he has seen how well the "one country, two systems" arrangement works for the benefit of the people of Macao as well as the people of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

"I hope that President Xi's visit to Macao and the inauguration of the sixth-term government of the Macao SAR will mark an exciting new phase in the history of the city," he said.

## Key role seen for Hengqin in diversifying SAR economy

By ZHANG YUNBI in Beijing, and GANG WEN and WILLIAM XU in Macao

President Xi Jinping has highlighted the key role played by the island of Hengqin, which lies between Guangdong province and Macao, as an important platform for promoting the diversification of Macao's economy.

It is necessary to make persistent efforts to implement plans for the appropriate economic diversification of the Macao Special Administrative Region, he said, calling for breaking new ground through development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Xi, who has made several previ-

ous visits to Hengqin, which is located on the southern tip of the city of Zhuhai, Guangdong, made the remarks on Thursday morning while visiting the cooperation zone.

It is necessary to fully utilize the various supportive policies of the central government and strive to create a first-class business environment to drive the appropriate diversification of Macao's economy and the integration of the market into the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, he added.

At Hengqin's scenic Tianmu Qintai public facility, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, toured an exhibition on the progress made in

regional integration and in-depth cooperation.

Xi said that in the three years since the establishment of the zone, various tasks have made significant progress, the level of Hengqin-Macao integration has been gradually raised, and Hengqin's supportive role in the diversification of Macao's economy is increasingly evident.

As these facts have proved, the central government's decision to develop Hengqin and build the zone "is completely correct," he said.

After being briefed on the Guangdong-Macao joint construction of a high-end science and technology support platform for traditional Chinese medicine, Xi endorsed the

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## Suspect extradited



Luigi Mangione, indicted in the fatal shooting of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, is escorted by police on Thursday in New York to face charges after his extradition from Pennsylvania. PAMELA SMITH / AP

## TikTok gets big boost from US Supreme Court

WORLD WATCH  
By Anthony Moretti

The US Supreme Court has thrown a significant roadblock in the path of a new law that would ban the wildly popular TikTok app throughout the United States. On Wednesday, the Court announced it would hold a special hearing on Jan 10 to determine whether that law is constitutional.

The decision is an important temporary victory for TikTok, whose leaders are not giving up in their efforts to prevent the app from being banned — or sold — in the United States. As of now, that ban would go into effect on Jan 19. Should that happen, app stores operating in the US would be prevented from carrying TikTok, meaning no one in the country would be able to download it, and those who already have TikTok on their phones would not receive software updates, security patches or any communication from the app.

The bitter reality is that sensible conversations about TikTok are not possible in the US at the moment because the US Congress and the current President of the United States are caught up in a nonstop cycle of fear about China. And whenever fear dominates thinking, intelligent and rational choices are not made. The Supreme Court cannot end the irrational fear about China, but it might stop a ridiculous law from going into effect.

By now, you may likely know the backstory about TikTok: Earlier this year, members of the US Congress authored and passed legislation that was quickly signed by US President Joe Biden, which would either ban the app

in the US or require it to be sold to a non-Chinese entity. They said such draconian measures were necessary because they were convinced TikTok was a legitimate threat to US national security. They insist that the app can be manipulated to influence the feelings and attitudes of its US users. Put more bluntly: They want you to believe that TikTok might spread pro-China propaganda, leading Americans to become more sympathetic toward the country. Earlier this month, an appeals court found no evidence to support such a contention, but it nevertheless refused to prevent the ban from going into place on Jan 19, one day before Donald Trump is sworn in as the next President of the United States.

Members of the US Congress also said the Chinese government can demand TikTok hand over any information it has about its American users. TikTok CEO

Shou Zi Chew has said that demand has never been made and TikTok will not comply with any such request. The reason? "ByteDance is not an agent of China or any other country," Chew said. Needless to say, the US representatives and senators do not believe him.

Let's not mince words here: Anti-China hysteria — alive and well in Washington — is behind the effort to get rid of TikTok. US political elites are convinced that every sophisticated product made in China — whether we are talking about TikTok, electric vehicles, smartphones from the telecommunications company Huawei, and more — can be directed to somehow harm American citizens or the country at large. Meanwhile, they conveniently refuse to clamp down on US-created social media platforms that have repeatedly

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# ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

**Editor's note:** President Xi Jinping held various meetings on Thursday in Macao. The following are the highlights of those meetings.

## Former chief executives praised for contributions

President Xi Jinping praised Ho Hau-wah and Chui Sai-on, former chief executives of the Macao Special Administrative Region, on Thursday for their contributions to maintaining the prosperity and stability of the region, during a meeting with them in Macao.

Since Macao's return to the motherland 25 years ago, it has undergone significant changes, with its achievements being evident to all, Xi said.

He commended Ho, who is now vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and Chui for their efforts during their tenures to lead the SAR government and people from various sectors of society in Macao in steadfastly upholding national security and promoting the pros-

perity and stability of the region, saying that they laid a solid foundation for Macao's long-term development.

Xi expressed the hope that they would support the new chief executive and the new SAR government, support the development and expansion of patriotic forces, promote exchanges and cooperation between Macao and the Chinese mainland, and continue to contribute to the enduring success of the practice of "one country, two systems".

Ho and Chui expressed their commitment to serving Macao and the country, pledging full support for the new chief executive and the new SAR government in leading people from all sectors of society to create a new chapter in Macao's development.

## Diligent work of Macao officials commended

President Xi Jinping said on Thursday that the practice of "one country, two systems" in Macao has achieved tremendous success.

Xi made the remark during a meeting with officials from the executive, legislative and judicial bodies of the special administrative region.

Through the concerted efforts of successive SAR governments and people from various sections of society, Macao's development has leapfrogged, demonstrating tremendous success in the practice of "one country, two systems", he said.

Xi commended the diligent work of the officials, saying that over the past five years, the officials, headed by Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng, have comprehensive-

ly, accurately and unwaveringly implemented the "one country, two systems" policy, and have pragmatically and effectively performed their duties, contributing significantly to the prosperity and stability of Macao.

He expressed the hope that the officials will continue to support the incoming chief executive and the new SAR government, promote Macao's development and contribute to the building of a better Macao.

On Thursday, Xi also met separately with representatives of the Macao SAR and representatives from various sectors of society. He also met with heads of central government agencies and major mainland-funded companies in the SAR.

## SARs urged to promote exchanges, collaboration

President Xi Jinping said on Thursday that the practice of "one country, two systems" has entered a new stage, calling on the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions to demonstrate even greater achievements and achieve better development.

Xi made the remarks during his meeting with Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR John Lee Ka-chiu in Macao. He urged Hong Kong and Macao to promote mutual learning, exchanges and collaboration to create a brighter future.

Highlighting the high expecta-

tions the country has for Hong Kong, Xi expressed the hope that Lee and the SAR government would exercise governance prudently, focus on economic growth and strive to create new glories for Hong Kong.

Lee pledged to lead Hong Kong in economic development, improve people's livelihoods, actively participate in the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and better integrate the SAR into the country's overall development landscape.

CAO DESHENG



President Xi Jinping interacts with students at the library of Macao University of Science and Technology on Thursday. Xi, accompanied by Ho Iat-seng, chief executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region, visited the university and also talked with teachers and scientific researchers. XIE HUANCHI / XINHUA

## Prioritizing education stressed

President calls for aligning academic disciplines with development needs

By ZHOU JIN in Beijing and WU KUNLING and WILLIAM XU in Macao

President Xi Jinping, while visiting Macao University of Science and Technology on Thursday, highlighted the need to prioritize education from a strategic perspective, enable better alignment of academic disciplines with the nation's and Macao's development needs, and foster high-quality talent.

Xi was briefed on the development of the university as well as Macao's higher education overall during a visit to a teaching complex, where he acknowledged the city's adherence to the role of education in serving economic and social development.

The president also toured two State-level key laboratories at the university — one focusing on the quality of traditional Chinese medicine and the other on lunar and planetary science — to learn about the latest scientific research achievements.

Xi emphasized the importance of inheriting, developing and utilizing TCM as a precious legacy, as well as promoting it to the rest of the world.

He said that the work of the lunar and planetary science laboratory

has shown that Macao has the capability to conduct cutting-edge, world-class scientific research.

During his visit to the data center for the science and application of satellites, Xi observed the real-time operation of satellites and learned about the research progress and application prospects of Macao Science 1, a joint project of the mainland and Macao.

Noting that Macao Science 1 is a successful example of deepened cooperation between Macao and the mainland in high-tech fields, Xi said the project showcased the outstanding innovative capabilities of Macao's scientific sector.

In May 2023, Xi wrote back to MUST teachers and students who took part in the development of the satellite project, encouraging them to play an active part in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

In the university library, Xi talked with teachers, students and scientific researchers, saying he is happy to see that Macao's education is thriving and they are full of vitality and confidence.

The president then expressed the hope and belief that the future of the university and the SAR will be even brighter.

Founded in 2000, Macao University of Science and Technology has rapidly developed into the largest multidisciplinary university in Macao.

Joseph Lee Hun-wei, vice-chancellor and president of MUST, said Xi's recognition during his visit of the achievements of Macao's higher education sector has motivated all MUST students and teachers.

Lee said he was impressed by Xi's approachability and wide knowledge, as well as his care for Macao's young people and education development.

"President Xi assured us that both MUST and Macao have a promising future ahead," said Lee.

Pang Chuan, vice-president of MUST, called Xi's inspection of the university "a spiritual beacon" for MUST's development. Pang said the university will live up to the president's expectations and steer students toward achieving greater scientific research achievements.

Zhao Xichen, head of the MUST library, said the president showed great interest in the library exhibition *Global Mapping of Macao*. When Xi came across a map of Macao made in 1751, he quickly identified the Catholic Church of Mater Dei, which is known today as

the Ruins of St. Paul's.

The president also made a donation to the library, presenting 100 books on TCM, Zhao said.

Freshman student Zhang-Chen Puyuan was preparing for his final exams in the library when President Xi came in. Zhang said he was unaware of the president's visit in advance and was thrilled to be present.

He said Xi asked about the books that the students were reading and encouraged them to engage in more interactions with their peers from the mainland and the world.

Yan Jingchen was also among the students whom Xi talked with in the library. Yan, a postgraduate student from Jiangxi province, is currently pursuing TCM studies at MUST.

Yan said she plans to acquire professional qualifications as a pharmacist in Macao, Hong Kong or other Greater Bay Area cities to start her career, noting Macao's emphasis on and support for TCM and the fact that TCM is deeply ingrained in people's daily life in Macao.

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## Heartfelt bond



Peng Liyuan, the wife of President Xi Jinping, interacts with children who were visiting exhibitions at the Macao Museum on Thursday. Peng, accompanied by Cheng Soo-ching, the wife of Macao SAR Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng, visited the museum and shared with the children their feelings about visiting the exhibitions. She also joined an activity of making almond cookies, a local delicacy. WANG YE / XINHUA

## Connectivity: Hengqin offers many career prospects for TCM graduates

From page 1

efforts to integrate advanced technologies from multiple academic fields and to help bring traditional Chinese medicine to the world.

Zhai Zhiran, a doctoral student at Macao University of Science and Technology, said she has witnessed Hengqin's growing appeal to students in her field, as the zone boasts numerous TCM laboratories jointly established by Chinese mainland and Macao institutions, offering a wealth of career prospects for TCM graduates.

Zhai, who lives in Hengqin and commutes between Zhuhai and Macao for her studies, applauded the efficient customs clearance at the Hengqin port of entry, saying the move has improved her commuting experience by reducing delays.

During the visit, Xi also talked cordially with representatives of the residents of the Macao New Neighbourhood complex, which is the first comprehensive livelihood-related project for people from Macao living in Hengqin. The project integrates housing, education, health-

care and community services.

In his talks with young entrepreneurs who shared their experiences of coming from Macao to Hengqin to settle and start businesses, Xi said their stories of innovation and entrepreneurship showcase that Macao has a remarkable group of young people who are ambitious, committed and willing to explore and innovate. The development and construction of Hengqin has provided young people with broad space and opportunities for entrepreneurship, and there is much to be done there, he said.

Liang Jinglin, assistant manager of the Park Operation Department at the Macao-Hengqin Youth Entrepreneurship Valley, said that Xi's inspection underscores the country's care and support for Hengqin's development, as well as the region's various policy advantages.

Liang, a Macao resident who chose to pursue a career in Hengqin, said the zone boasts a broad range of employment options as well as increased market opportunities due to its proximity to the mainland.

Also on Thursday, Xi talked with representatives involved in the

planning, construction, management and services of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

He said "Macao + Hengqin" is becoming a new model for enriching the practice of "one country, two systems", a new high ground for promoting the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and a new platform for advancing the country's high-level opening-up.

Xi called these representatives "pioneers and action takers" in the advancement of Hengqin, contributing to the development of the country and Macao.

Emily Huang Yingdi, operations director of Digitfluidic, a Hengqin-based biotech company, said that Xi's visit will inspire more young people from Macao to venture to Hengqin to pursue entrepreneurship. She said she anticipates that Hengqin could bolster support for Macao residents regarding public transportation, accommodations and cost of living.

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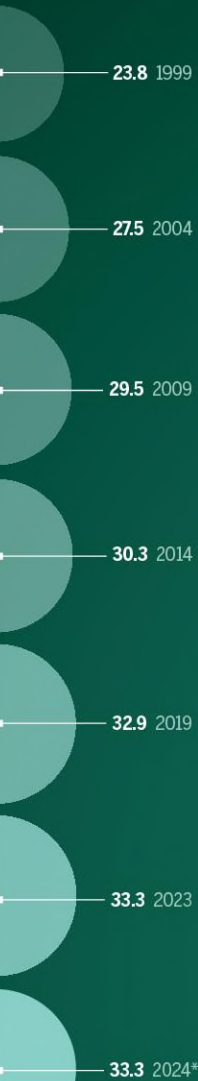
# ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

## TOGETHER AND STRONGER

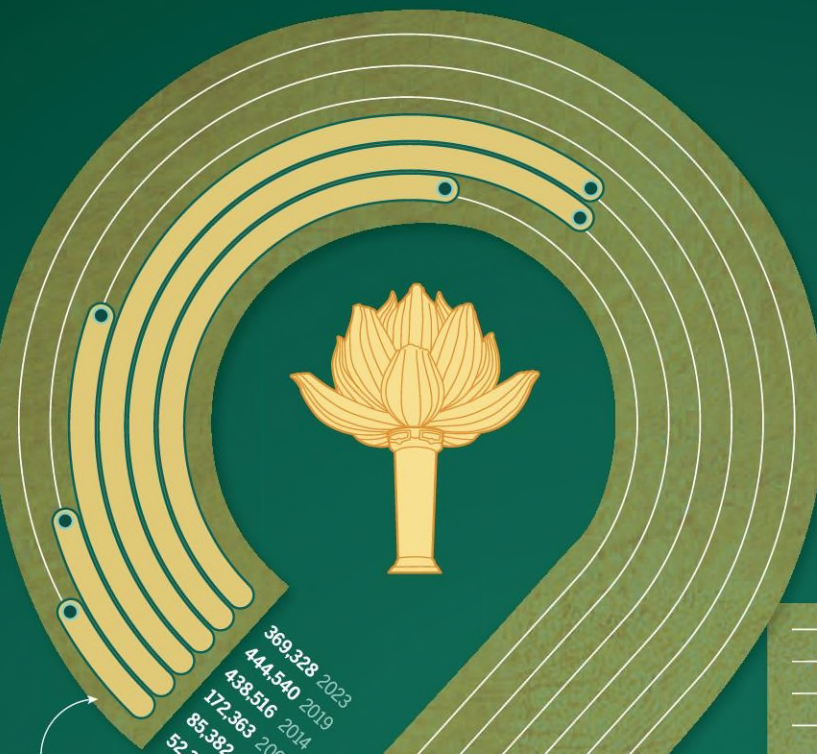
The year 2024 marks the 25th anniversary of Macao returning to the motherland and the establishment of the special administrative region. Here, in graphics, are the key figures showing how the Macao SAR has flourished since reunification.

### Land area

(Unit: square kilometers)



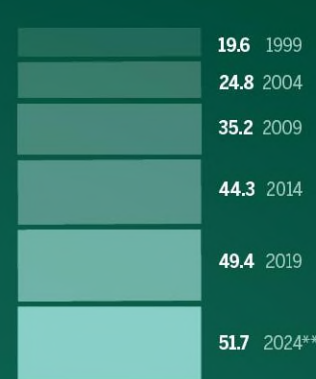
\*First three quarters \*\*First 10 months



**GDP**  
(Unit: million Macao patacas)

### Social security beneficiaries

(Unit: 10,000 people)

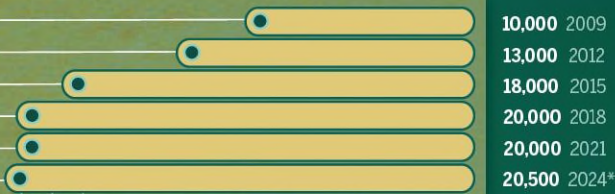


### Total assets of the banking industry (end-of-period figures)

(Unit: billion Macao patacas)



### Conferences and other events

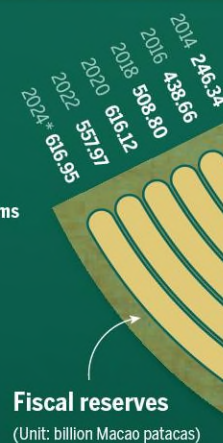
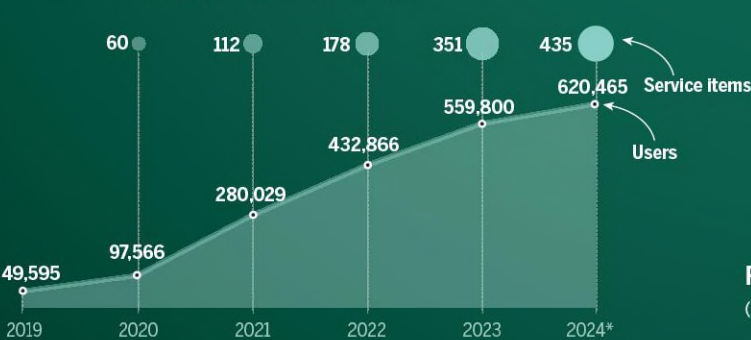


**Median monthly employment earnings**  
(Unit: Macao patacas)



**Unemployment rate** (Unit: percent)

### "One Account" public service platform



**Fiscal reserves**  
(Unit: billion Macao patacas)

### Doctors per 1,000 people



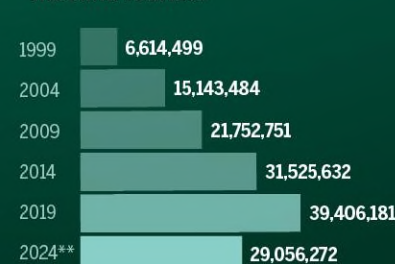
### Nurses per 1,000 people



### Apartments for seniors

2024\*\* 1,815

### Inbound tourists



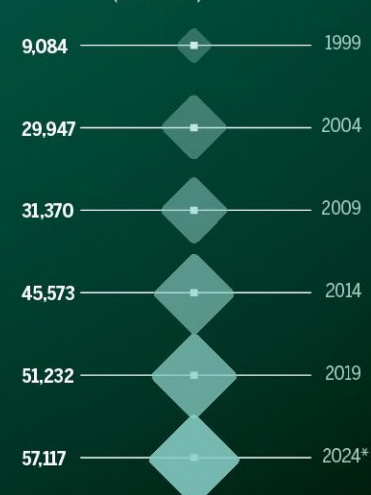
### Per capita tourist spending, excluding gambling

(Unit: Macao patacas)



### Public housing

(Unit: homes)



Source: Macao Special Administrative Region government

GRAPHICS BY MUKESH MOHANAN / CHINA DAILY



# ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR



Tourists take photos in front of the Ruins of St. Paul's in Macao on Tuesday. As the city celebrates the 25th anniversary of its return to China, streets are adorned with large installations and banners, creating a festive atmosphere. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

## Residents brim with joy, hope during anniversary

MACAO — Normally busy managing her restaurant, Macao resident Ana Maria Manhao Sou is lately occupied with an important task: choreographing a Portuguese folk dance for a gala celebrating the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to China.

Manhao Sou is a member of a unique group in Macao known as the "Macanese" — individuals of Portuguese descent born and raised locally. As the choreographer for the performance, she was thrilled to contribute to the city she calls home.

"I'm very honored to be part of the grand celebrations and to showcase the rich blend of Chinese and Western cultures of Macao to the world," she said, adding that the preparations have reinforced her sense of belonging and love for the motherland.

For the celebrations, Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Macao on Wednesday afternoon on a special plane.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, will attend a gathering celebrating the 25th anniversary of Macao's return and the inauguration ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Macao Special Administrative Region on Friday.

News of Xi's arrival headlined the front pages of Macao's mainstream media on Thursday, with much emphasis on the president's

“This year's decorations are the most vibrant in 25 years, with an array of flags and lights. As a resident of Macao, it makes me feel warmly embraced by my country.”

**Leung Chon Long**, a middle school teacher in Macao

description of Macao as “a pearl on the palm” of the motherland in a brief speech at the airport.

Macao Daily, a leading local newspaper, highlighted the airport's welcoming crowd of hundreds of people, including children, together with joyful dragon and lion dances. It also published a photo series showcasing Macao's transformation over the past 25 years.

The Macao SAR was brimming with cheerful vibes in the days leading up to the 25th anniversary.

Anniversary-themed posters and floral decorations adorn popular sites such as the Ruins of St. Paul's, while national flags and Macao SAR flags flutter along the streets.

A lion dance team performed at Macao Tower, culminating in celebratory banners unfurling from the

lions' tongues on a platform 233 meters above the ground, much to the delight of tourists.

“This year's decorations are the most vibrant in 25 years, with an array of flags and lights. As a resident of Macao, it makes me feel warmly embraced by my country,” said Leung Chon Long, a local middle school teacher the same age as the Macao SAR.

Next to the Macao Science Center, a heart-shaped tree is surrounded by two giant arm-shaped light installations, symbolizing Macao's growth and prosperity under the care of the motherland. This trending photo-op spot caught the attention of a group of students visiting from Hong Kong, another SAR of China.

Monica Zhang, a high school student from Hotung Secondary School in Hong Kong, was impressed by the joyful atmosphere in Macao's streets. “The city has become more modern since my last visit,” she said, expressing the hope to make friends during her study tour.

Traditionally known for its casinos, Macao has transformed into a modern, international metropolis with strong support from the central government, achieving remarkable progress in economic development and residents' livelihoods.

The city has been striving to diversify its economies appropriately, with the gaming sector's share of GDP falling to 37.2 percent

last year. A key driver of Macao's economic diversification, the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone on Hengqin Island, located near Macao, was established in 2021 to expand living options and work opportunities for Macao residents.

Local entrepreneur Elwin Ho is seizing opportunities arising from these rapid developments. As the founder of an artificial intelligence company in the cooperation zone, Ho aspires to blaze new paths in the innovation and technology sector.

Leong Chon-kit, head of the Youth Association of Returned Overseas Chinese in Macao, noted that the 25th anniversary of Macao's return is a special occasion that reminds all residents of the significant achievements the city has made.

On Wednesday night, the association, along with more than 60 local youth associations, participated in a banquet celebrating the anniversary. “It is crucial for us to share this touching moment together and express our love for the motherland,” Leong said.

An anniversary is not just about celebrations but also a moment of hope. For Manhao Sou, her simple wish is to receive more guests at her restaurant. “We aim to introduce a new menu featuring more distinctive Macanese dishes, allowing tourists to relish the rich culture of Macao,” she said.

XINHUA

## Forum brings nations closer to mainland

Portuguese-speaking countries to leverage Macao's free port status and opportunities

By LIU YIFAN  
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As Macao celebrates the 25th anniversary of its return to the motherland, the city known for its casinos accentuates its role as a hub to foster both economic cooperation and cultural exchange between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

In November, Savana Pires, director of international business and development at Porto Business School, led a group of 10 MBA students from the Portuguese university to Hong Kong and Macao under one of four overseas exchange programs, others being from the US, Germany and India.

During their time in Macao, the students visited local universities and companies to gain a deeper understanding of the city's economic landscape.

From Macao's efforts to diversify its economy, including developments in tourism, exhibition and industries beyond gaming, as well as its unique blend of Eastern and Western cultural influences, their observations and feedback were overwhelmingly positive.

“In the last 25 years, Macao has developed a lot. But it also keeps its uniqueness,” said Pires.

Macao has developed deep and extensive ties with Portugal and Portuguese-speaking countries spanning four continents, collectively representing a population of over 300 million, as noted by its Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute. Alongside Chinese, Portuguese serves as an official language in Macao, enabling enterprises to sign contracts and agreements in both.

From a European perspective, China is sometimes seen as “too big” for businesses and universities looking to establish a starting point, Pires noted. “But we have Macao as a cultural bridge. I'd say it helps us open doors when we turn our attention to the Chinese mainland,” she said, describing Macao as a “gateway” thanks to its rich cultural heritage and openness to the West.

“If we don't seize these opportunities, we're gonna miss out,” Pires said. “We need to be closer to Macao more than ever.”

Macao's role as a service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries was first established in 2003 with the formation of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and PSCs (Macao), a multilateral, inter-governmental mechanism that today includes all nine countries where Portuguese is an official language: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, Timor-Leste, Sao Tome and Principe, and Equatorial Guinea.

Since then, trade between China and Portuguese-speaking countries has grown significantly, surpassing \$220 billion last year, marking a twenty-fold growth, according to China's Ministry of Commerce.

Sio Chi-wai, president of the Macao Development Strategy Research Center, highlighted that the city's role as a Sino-Lusophone platform, among its other strategic functions, best reflects its unique advantages and serves as the most

promising pathway to achieving the goal of “small size, big impact.”

“The function as a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries provides Macao with vast opportunities for diversified industrial development,” said Sio.

Aligning “Macao's strengths” with “the country's needs”, has driven the development of sectors such as trade, conventions and exhibitions, and finance, Sio added. The bridging role is expected to extend to broader regions, including the European Union, African nations and Latin American economies. According to Sio, this expansion would be particularly valuable in helping Chinese enterprises venture abroad and explore emerging markets.

### Hub for cultural exchanges

Meanwhile, Macao's unique status as a free port with no foreign currency restrictions under a low-taxation system positions the city to explore broader opportunities for financial cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries.

“Macao should also fully leverage its advantage as a clearing center for renminbi transactions with Portuguese-speaking countries,” Sio noted.

Sino-Lusophone exchange extends far beyond the economic sphere as Macao has consistently played a vital role in fostering cultural connections between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, said Lio Kuok-man, music director and principal conductor of Macao Orchestra, the city's only professional symphony orchestra.

Founded in 1983, the Macao Orchestra has long been a cultural symbol, showcasing the unique fusion of Chinese and Western cultures and promoting Sino-Portuguese cultural integration through collaborations with Portuguese artists and performances abroad.

In 2019, for example, the orchestra embarked on a special tour in Portugal to celebrate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Portugal and the 20th anniversary of Macao's handover. During the tour, it performed in four cities — Evora, Coimbra, Portalegre and Lisbon — and participated in prestigious events such as the Marvao International Music Festival and the Todos Festival in Lisbon.

“These performances underscored the Macao Orchestra's dedication to supporting Macao's role as a hub for exchange and cooperation, where Chinese culture is the foundation and diverse cultures coexist,” Lio said.

Macao is home to many exceptional composers, including the orchestra's former music director Doming Lam Ngok-pui, and former composer-in-residence Lam Bun-ching, both of whom have contributed remarkable works to the city's musical legacy.

To Lio, music is the universal language and a powerful medium for cultural exchange. “We aspire to create more opportunities to invite artists from Portuguese-speaking countries to perform in Macao while bringing Macao's music to global audiences,” he said.

## Plan promotes cross-border professional practice

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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Hundreds of professionals from Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions have obtained practicing certificates to work on the Chinese mainland, following an implementation plan to promote the evaluation of professional titles and recognition of professional qualifications in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Guangdong, an economic powerhouse in South China, has been advancing the recognition of professional qualifications in fields such as doctors, teachers, tour guides and lawyers and expanding mutual recognition of professional certificates in the construction sector, according to the Guangdong Human Resources and Social Security Department.

As of November, 4,907 professionals from the two special administrative regions have obtained practicing certificates to work on the Chinese mainland, according to data from the provincial human resources authorities.

Guangdong issued an implementation plan to promote the evaluation of professional titles and recognition of professional qualifi-

### 4,907 professionals

from Hong Kong and Macao have obtained practicing certificates on the Chinese mainland as of November.

cations in the Greater Bay Area in 2019, aiming to promote the comprehensive and open evaluation system of professional titles and advance the recognition of professional qualifications in various fields.

In the latest move, a first batch of 49 eligible Hong Kong and Macao tax professionals have obtained their practice certificates to start their careers in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Zhuhai, starting from Nov 1.

They have become a “new example” of the facilitation of cross-border professional practice in the Greater Bay Area, according to the Guangdong provincial taxation authorities.

“I am very honored to be one of the first Hong Kong and Macao tax professionals to practice in Hengqin. In the future, I will strive to further involve the Macao accounting industry in the development of

the cooperation zone,” said Iong Weng-ian, president of the Union of Associations of Professional Accountants of Macao.

Promoting cross-border facilitation of personnel between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong and Macao was also included in the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, issued in 2019.

The overall plan for the construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, issued in 2021, also specifies that relevant foreign professionals with qualifications from places like Macao are allowed to provide services in the cooperation zone after filing, subject to industry regulatory requirements.

According to measures issued recently by the Guangdong Provincial Taxation Bureau of the State Taxation Administration for the practice management of Hong Kong and Macao tax professionals in the in-depth cooperation zone, qualified Hong Kong and Macao tax professionals can register with the Guangdong taxation authorities to engage in tax-related professional services in the cooperation zone.

According to the measures, Hong Kong and Macao tax professionals who have registered for practice in

Hengqin must join tax professional service institutions registered in the in-depth cooperation zone.

Furthermore, the conditions for qualified Hong Kong and Macao tax professionals to establish tax firms stipulate that they should become shareholders or partners in tax firms and get verification from the authorities to establish an information-sharing mechanism with the Taxation Institute of Hong Kong and the Macao Society of Certified Public Accountants.

“Over the past three years since its establishment, we have been addressing the issue of Macao's professional talent gaining access to practice in Hengqin,” said Su Kum, deputy director of the executive committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

By resolving the issue of cross-border access and operation, the zone has introduced special policies to encourage more Macao professional talent to develop cross-border practices in the cooperation zone, according to Su.

Currently, the number of cross-border professions in the cooperation zone has significantly increased, expanding to 8 categories with over 1,300 professionals, according to Su.



A pavilion showcases specialty foods, products and services from Macao and Portuguese-speaking countries during the 7th China International Import Expo in Shanghai on Nov 7. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



# ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

## Filmmaker's love letter to Macao hits cinema

Story captures essence of city's progress through everyday residents, producer says

By XU FAN  
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On a drizzly day earlier this year, Ci Sha, an actor from Southwest China's Sichuan province, sat in a car to cross the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. The windshield wipers repeatedly swept away the raindrops, and through the misty haze, he caught glimpses of the azure sea beneath the bridge, the longest of its kind in the world.

"It's a great project. I could imagine the challenges and hardships faced during the construction," Ci told China Daily during a recent interview.

Interestingly, during Ci's trip to Macao — his first visit to the special administrative region — the actor, born in 1997, was scheduled to portray an engineer involved in the design and construction of the bridge.

He conducted intensive research, including watching a documentary about the bridge and Lin Ming, the chief tunnel engineer of the project. Ci felt a deep sense of respect upon discovering how a total of 33 immersive tubes, which form the main body of the bridge, were installed amid complex circumstances.

On Dec 14, the movie *Promise of Decades* was released simultaneously on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong and Macao.

As a tribute to the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland, the film spans a 20-year period, narrating a meandering love story of two young individuals whose personal journeys intertwine with the major historical events of the era, from the return in 1999 to



Clockwise from top: Laurinda Ho Chiu-lin (fourth from right), who made her acting debut in the movie *Promise of Decades*, celebrates the premiere of the movie with her family members in Macao on Dec 6. A poster of the movie *Promise of Decades*. Laurinda Ho stars as Sandy in the movie. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Macao's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005 and the commencement of the construction of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge in 2009.

In the film, Ci plays Qiao Mingzhuang, a college student from Beijing who later realizes his dream of becoming a bridge engineer, and Laurinda Ho Chiu-lin — the daughter of late casino tycoon Stanley Ho — makes her acting debut as Sandy, the outgoing daughter of a beef offal restaurateur in Macao.

After coincidentally bumping into each other while buying the DVD of James Cameron's Hollywood blockbuster *Titanic*, the two develop a fondness for one another and make a pact — to get together every 10 years at the iconic Guia Lighthouse to admire the fireworks. From exchanging letters by post during their school days to experiencing a series of misunderstandings that drive them apart, the two lovers ultimately reunite at their designated spot after a tumultuous 20-year journey.

Director Tracy Choi, a Macao native born in 1988, said she was honored to participate in the project, revealing it marked her first collaboration with filmmakers and actors from the Chinese mainland.

Reflecting on her experience as an 11-year-old primary school student during the year of the handover, Choi remembered how most of her classmates were eagerly anticipating the historic event, with the school buzzing with a string of celebrations.

As the storyline aligns with the economic growth and cultural vibrancy of the era, the film incorporates some elements aimed at evoking a sense of nostalgia among a generation in both the Chinese mainland and Macao. Additionally, it showcases Macao's iconic sites, such as the Ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral and the A-Ma Temple, as well as local delicacies and snacks like herbal tea.

"Herbal tea stores serve as a collective memory for most of us in Macao.

When I was a young girl, I always purchased a cup of herbal tea while strolling on the street to look for such a stall," recalled Ho. She explained that the humidity is high throughout the year in Macao, making herbal tea a must-have to get rid of internal heat and improve health.

For director Choi, the movie serves as her love letter to Macao and a precious opportunity to delve into its enduring cinematic charm. In one scene, the two characters sneak into an old cinema, clandestinely using the projector to screen a movie with the reel-film machine.

Commenting on the constraints of Macao's local film industry due to the region's size and population, Choi said that she wishes native filmmakers could access a broader audience by seeking more collaboration with counterparts from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong.

Fu Ruoqing, producer of the film and chairman of the China Film Group Corporation, said the group has produced two movies to mark the 25th anniversary of the return, with the other film being *Revisit*, a heartwarming story between a young woman and her grandmother.

"Both films capture the essence of Macao's progress and development after the return through the lens of everyday residents, highlighting their upbeat spirit and the heartwarming connection that time has forged between the people of the Chinese mainland and Macao," Fu remarked.

Wang Haizhou, dean of the Graduate School of Beijing Film Academy, praised the film's artistic quality, noting that the bridge functions as a crucial symbol, representing the emotional bond between the people of the Chinese mainland and Macao.



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## Efficient customs clearance boosts food supplies

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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At around 4 am each day, more than 10 Guangdong and Macao-registered trucks enter the processing and distribution center of Zhuhai Longsheng Aquatic Product Co in Zhuhai, Guangdong province.

After loading the freshly caught seafood products, the trucks immediately head to the Gongbei Port and swiftly enter the neighboring Macao Special Administrative Region through the port's green channels for fresh products.

"We supply Macao with over 10 batches of fresh seafood products every day, thanks to efficient customs clearance procedures," said Zhou Jinhong, a manager in charge of the processing and distribution center of the company.

Approximately 110 vehicles carrying over 400 metric tons of fresh products to Macao pass through the Gongbei Port daily, representing more than 80 percent of the Macao market, according to local customs.

Statistics from Gongbei Customs indicated in the 25 years since Macao's return to the motherland, over 4.7 million tons of vegetables, fruits, poultry, seafood and other products have been supplied to the special administrative region through ports administrated by Gongbei Customs.

Increased customs efficiency has played an important role in boosting supplies to Macao, according to Zhou.

"Before 2023, we had to declare each batch separately, with at least 10 customs declarations to be made every month," said Zhou.

Considering fresh seafood products supplied to Macao, with multiple batches, diverse varieties and



Officials at Gongbei Customs in Zhuhai inspect grocery supplies headed for Macao. YU BO / FOR CHINA DAILY

high customs clearance requirements, Gongbei Customs has strengthened cooperation with its Macao counterparts to promote rule alignment and mechanism integration.

Since the beginning of 2023, customs authorities have introduced a new supervision model, which includes the production cycle of the same enterprise, same material and same line as a regulatory unit to replace the batch-by-batch declaration mode.

The new model reduced pre-export declaration batches by 99 percent for enterprises, helping greatly improve customs inspection efficiency and benefiting over 5,000 tons of fresh seafood products supplied to Macao.

"The customs clearance procedures have been greatly simplified — we no longer have to declare each batch separately, with one declaration helping save us a lot of transportation costs," said Zhou.

As Zhongshan, neighboring Zhuhai, houses the largest national production base for fresh aquatic products supplied to Hong Kong and Macao, Gongbei Customs and relevant departments in Macao have also jointly established recognition standards and monitoring projects for enterprises supplying edible aquatic animals to Macao.

They have set up files for 16 such enterprises in Zhongshan within the jurisdiction, conducting joint supervision at the source and sampling monitoring, reducing customs

clearance time per batch by about 60 percent.

Since the beginning of this year, through the "pre-quarantine push, cooperative supervision" model, customs officials inspected 2,700 tons of edible aquatic animals supplied to Macao, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the total amount provided from the Chinese mainland to Macao during the same period.

"With the new customs models, we have exported over 1,100 tons of fresh aquatic products to Macao this year, marking an 11 percent increase compared to the same period last year," said Ding Hongliang, a production manager with Zhongshan Foodstuffs & Aquatic Import & Export Group Co.

At the beginning of Macao's return to the motherland, the types of daily necessities supplied to the special administrative region from Zhuhai were limited, mostly mainstream varieties, according to Pan Wenbo, an officer at Xiangzhou Customs, under the jurisdiction of Gongbei Customs.

"Now, there is much more variety, with as many as 200 types of vegetables alone supplied to Macao," said Pan, recalling his 25 years of involvement in regulating agricultural products supplied to Hong Kong and Macao.

Currently, the share of livestock supplied to Macao from the Chinese mainland stands at 100 percent, with vegetables at over 90 percent and fruits and edible aquatic animals at 70 percent, according to Gongbei Customs.

## SAR ambitious in high-end tourism

By LIU YUKUN  
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The high-end tourism and accommodations market in Macao is poised for substantial development, having already demonstrated rapid growth potential amid global economic uncertainties, business executives and analysts said.

The growth is attributed to the vibrancy and inclusivity of cultural and tourism elements, as well as the continuous enhancement of infrastructure and policies promoting the connectivity of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, they said.

"I've observed significant shifts in consumer demand within the high-end tourism market," said Timothy M Kelly, property president of City of Dreams, a resort integrating entertainment, retail and accommodations located in Macao. "Today's travelers seek not only luxury accommodations, but also unique, immersive experiences that connect them to the local culture and environment. There's a growing preference for personalized services and sustainable practices, reflecting a more conscientious consumer mindset."

In the 2024 Star Awards by the Forbes Travel Guide, 22 hotels in Macao were granted a five-star rating. It was the second year in a row that the city led the world in Forbes-endorsed luxury accommodations.

"Despite the challenges posed by the economic environment, we are seeing resilience in the high-end market," Kelly said. "Guests are increasingly prioritizing quality over quantity, often willing to invest more in exceptional experiences, as indicated by our strong recovery indicators ... The high-end tourism and hotel market in China presents significant growth opportunities."

He said his company's customer base remains diverse, with a significant proportion coming from the mainland. It is also welcoming an increasing number of international visitors, particularly from Southeast Asia.

"Our analysis indicates that destinations that can integrate cultural elements and provide personalized services will thrive," he said. "Additionally, with the government's initiatives to promote domestic



Tourists visit a hotel shopping center in Taipa, Macao, on Thursday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY



Timothy M Kelly

tourism and enhance infrastructure, we are very positive and expect to see a boost in travel within China."

According to the Public Security Police Force of the Macao Special Administrative Region, as of Dec 7, the cumulative number of inbound and outbound visits to and from Macao has exceeded a record 200 million this year, up from 180 million in 2023.

Experts said that the vibrancy and inclusivity of cultural and tourism elements in Macao, along with consistent improvements in infrastructure and policies to boost communications with the mainland, have increased the region's appeal to visitors.

A guideline on the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area released by the State Council in 2019 underscored Macao's importance in promoting multicultural communications, which was exemplified by the emerging impromptu art stages at the Lai Chi Vun shipyards, a well-preserved site honoring Macao's shipbuilding industry, and the prosperity of samba dancing and lion dance performances, among others.

Furthermore, advancements in technology have injected new life into traditional tourism projects in Macao, as museums are adopting

virtual reality and 3D technology to create simulators to entertain visitors or showcase the region's distinctive architectural and cultural heritage sites.

Wu Zhiliang, president of the board of directors of the Macao Foundation, said that over the last 25 years, there has been a transformation in cultural activities in Macao, shifting from two-way exchanges between Portugal and China to broader multilateral interactions with a diverse range of nations and cultures.

He said Macao's reputation as a premier destination for tourism and leisure has been further solidified, contributing to the enhanced resilience of its economy. The brighter economic outlook has also empowered the Macao SAR government to enhance the well-being of its residents.

In addition, enhancements in infrastructure, including the completion of the new Hengqin Port and the Qingmao Port, as well as policies that make traveling between the Chinese mainland and Macao more convenient such as the mutual recognition of driver's licenses, have also added to the region's appeal to visitors.

In a recent survey by the China Tourism Academy, Macao became the most satisfying destination for mainland tourists in the first quarter for the first time, thanks to policies that made permit-issuance and customs clearance easier, as well as improved transportation infrastructure.



# ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR



China and the World Roundtable | 25th Anniversary of Macao's Return to Motherland

**Editor's note:** Over the past 25 years, the Macao Special Administrative Region has registered remarkable economic development and the practice of "one country, two systems" has achieved great success widely recognized by the world, showcasing great vitality and unique charm. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Harald Brüning

## 25 years that were 'beyond all expectations'

Over the past few weeks I have been asked to summarize my assessment of the first 25 years of the existence of the Macao Special Administrative Region, and my standard answer has been "beyond all expectations".

And that's as someone who visited Macao for the first time in 1980, when it was still under Portuguese rule, covered the historic ceremony of Dec 19 to 20, 1999, marking China's resumption of exercising its sovereignty over the territory, and will cover this week's 25th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the Macao SAR and inspection tour by President Xi Jinping.

First of all, no one predicted in late 1999 that Macao's gross domestic product would grow phenomenally and its per capita GDP would figure among the highest in the world within just a few decades. According to official figures, Macao's GDP soared from 51.9 billion Macao patacas (MOP) in 1999 to 379.5 billion MOP in 2023 (approximately \$47 billion, based on the 2023 average exchange rate).

Some international consultancies and media outlets have forecast that Macao's per capita GDP is set to reach the top of the per capita GDP world ranking in no time, or even that it may already have reached it, competing with Luxembourg and Singapore for the number-one position. As a realist, I prefer to wait for the IMF to confirm it. Anyhow, making it to the top five in just a quarter of a century is worth accolades.

But, of course, it's not just Macao's economy that has produced extraordinary results. The SAR has also made considerable progress on the social welfare, public administration, public housing, education and public health fronts, alongside an overall modernization and, last but not least, digitalization drive — virtually every resident's Macao One Account has made life much more convenient, and convenience is something that locals appreciate more than everything else, apart from public security and political stability.

Public security has been a fait accompli since Macao's return to the motherland. I guess that the sheer presence of a People's Liberation Army garrison here has scared the socks off the gangsters.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Macao was affected by gangland violence in the 1990s that threatened its image as a safe tourist destination. However, it's important to point out that Macao's crime wave did not affect the city's political transition that formally began after the signing of the China-Portugal Joint Declaration on the Question of Macao in Beijing in April 1987 and gathered speed with the promulgation of the Basic Law of the Macao SAR in March 1993. Compared with Hong Kong, Macao's transfer from Portuguese to Chinese rule was markedly smooth.

Contrary to what I have been reading in the media over the past few decades, on Dec 19 to 20, 1999, Portugal did not "hand over" its sovereignty over Macao to China; instead the latter "resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Macao" in order to

establish the MSAR and in line with the Joint Declaration.

Without "one country, two systems", which also applies to Hong Kong and, let's hope, to Taiwan in the not-too-distant future, Macao's politico-economic success over the past 25 years would, most probably, can never have been achieved. "One country, two systems" was a political masterpiece initiated in the early 1980s by then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, who, regrettably, was unable to witness Hong Kong's return on July 1, 1997, as he passed away on Feb 19, 1997. I was covering the visit of Portugal's then president Jorge Sampaio, to Macao. I remember that he was visibly shaken by the sad news.

While the Dec 19 to 20, 1999, events "only" happened a quarter of a century ago, I do feel that they happened a "very long time" ago. I think the point is that since then so many things have happened here, mostly for the better, such as its phenomenal economic growth, modernization drive, administrative reforms, the setting-up of Forum Macao as a platform for economic, commercial and even cultural



The author is director of Macau Post Daily.

Francisco José Leandro

## Three things helping Macao go fast-forward

The Macao Special Administrative Region is in a fast-forward development mode thanks to the "one country, two systems" policy, a framework that allows the region to be part of the whole and, at the same time, to keep its differences and transform them into advantages.

Bearing in mind the main objective of the central government — to, by 2050, transform China into a great modern socialist country — this political formula has been supplemented with strategic long-term visions. And the rationale of it can be summarized as "One Center, One Platform and One Base". Here, one center stands for the World Centre of Tourism and Leisure; one platform for the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform; and one base for exchange and cooperation with Chinese culture as its mainstream.

This foundation is associated with three key development drivers: Integration, diversification and a cooperation platform.

### Integration

The Macao SAR, as a part of China, is fully integrated into the central government's vision. However, the SAR retains its own systems, namely the legal, taxation and economic systems. Furthermore, the SAR is incorporated in the Greater Bay Area, which is equipped with impressive infrastructure (six international airports, seven deep seaports, some of the longest bridges in the world and a state-of-the-art network of interconnected railways) as well as the desire of the central government to transform it into the world's largest economic bay

area. There are three aspects contributing to this key driver: First, a number of singular characteristics of the SAR such as its international legal personality, the low taxation regime, separate customs territory, the number and quality of its universities, the blended culture and the easy access and the commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSC) and the Belt and Road Initiative; Second, the fact that in 2003, the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement was signed, which facilitates the commercial and investment flows among the Macao SAR, the Chinese mainland and PSC; and third the new Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, which has been designed to boost the process of Macao's diversification.

**Diversification**  
This process is being advanced according to the "1 plus 4" formula: "one center" and "four leading industries". More specifically, "one center" for integrated tourism and leisure, while facilitating the development of four nascent industries, namely: first, the "big health" industry — attractive "tourism plus" and delivering high quality health and well-being services, as a result of cooperation between local and overseas medical institu-



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tions. The concept also encompasses traditional medicine.

Second, the modern financial services — covering four areas: banking, insurance, bond market and wealth management, with particular emphasis on setting up a Central Securities Depository. Macao is supposed to embrace an expansion to digital and green operations, e-payments, e-commerce, digital currencies and cryptocurrency, financial market integration, commodities trading services, with more offshore and cross-border business.

Third, the high and new technology — the 10 higher education institutions established in Macao (University of Macau ranks on Times Higher Education University Rankings top 200), side-by-side with four key state laboratories (Quality Research in Chinese Medicine; Analog and Mixed-Signal VLSI; Internet of Things for Smart City; Lunar and Planetary Sciences) and with the support of the Tax Incentive Scheme for Science, Technology and Innovation Business, the Science and Technology Development Fund and the Funding Scheme for Industry-University-Research Partnership for Enterprises, are supposed to operate a real technological transformation.

Fourth, exhibitions and conventions — the Macao SAR has some of the best infrastructures in Asia for large exhibitions and conventions.

In 2023, the International Association of Exhibitions and Events granted the Macao Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute the IAEE International Excellence Award. In addition, there is a significant development of e-commerce, mobile

relations between China and Portuguese-speaking countries that has brought together 10 countries with a combined population of over 1.6 billion people, the setting-up of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the establishment of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, as well as the government's "talent acquisition" import scheme. Macao's ongoing incorporation into the GBA, including the cooperation zone in Hengqin, entails both opportunities and challenges for Macao that, in my view, need time to be "digested" by the local residents.

In any case, Macao's return to the motherland happened at the end of the last century when it was high time Westerners ruling territories in what then known as the Third World drew to a close. Incidentally, the United States returned control of the Panama Canal to Panama on Dec 31, 1999.

Incredibly, there are still quite a number of territories in what is now known as the Global South that continue to be ruled by Western countries.

And then there was the three-year impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Macao, which affected all of us. The three years weren't a walk in the park but, in all fairness, outgoing Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng and his team deserve praise for having been able to keep the nasty virus largely at bay, also because of the close cooperation between local and central government officials.

Macao has enjoyed 25 years of progress, patriotism and prosperity thanks largely to the strong support from the central authorities, not only in Beijing but also their representatives in Macao — the Liaison Office and Foreign Ministry Commission.

President Xi Jinping paid inspection visits to the SAR in 2014 and 2019, and is conducting his third such visit from Wednesday to Friday. During his stay he will swear in the next government under Chief Executive Sam Hou-fai, who in the past few weeks has repeatedly reaffirmed the significance of the "one country, two systems" principle, national security and people-focused policies.

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

João Simões

## Build MSAR as education hub to connect world

Since Macao's return to the motherland in 1999, the city has seized the opportunity presented by the remarkable growth of the mainland and ridden the tide of the Greater Bay Area, as outlined in the overall development plan for the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Guangdong province, released in December 2023. Furthermore, Macao has been progressively assuming a significant role in bridging China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

In April 2024, China held a forum to promote cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, encompassing areas such as trade, investment, and healthcare, which enhanced the role of Macao as a service and cooperation platform.

Moving forward, it is essential to refocus cooperation efforts on promoting development and achieving shared prosperity. This requires a focus on human capital, knowledge exchange, as well as cultural awareness, which is integral to the success of the aforementioned endeavors.

In recent years, Macao has experienced a rapid transformation into a regional education hub, attracting students from across the world. Higher education institutions in Macao have expanded their facilities, academic offerings, and community services. Local higher education institutions not only excel academically but also maintain strong connections with the global community through active participation in academics, research and cultural exchanges, thereby facilitating people-to-people exchanges. Given this backdrop, how can Macao's higher education institutions further enhance their role in promoting relations between China and Portuguese-speaking countries?

In his seminal book "Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination" (1992), Peter Haas explores the influence of knowledge creators and agents in shaping policies across various sectors of national and international political action. Indeed, the increasing economic, scientific and technological interdependence turns knowledge into a critical variable in international cooperation and multilateralism in a broader sense.

Groups known as "epistemic communities" consisting of highly skilled professionals can play a significant role in this process. In his later work, "Epistemic Communities, Constructivism, and International Environmental Politics" (2015), Haas revisits the role of epistemic communities as associations or communities of experts who share a belief in a common set of cause-and-effect relationships and common values. These communities are crucial in influencing global governance, decision-making processes and coordination of global policies by providing a shared understanding of challenges and potential solutions.

In the specific context of Macao, there are important opportunities to harness the potential of epistemic communities and foster more meaningful relationships between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. One promising approach could be the establishment of university consortia that bring together institutions from Macao, the Chinese mainland and Portuguese-speaking countries, with the institutional support of Forum Macao.

These consortia could work collaboratively to address shared challenges, such as developing innovative approaches to common sustainable development issues. This collaboration would involve the establishment of research networks, international and interdisciplinary collaborations, exchange of knowledge and ideas, capacity building, securing funding, disseminating research outcomes and policy dialogue and engagement, ultimately leading to more meaningful interactions, tangible results and business opportunities for all participants.

In addition, the establishment of global university consortia rooted in Macao has the potential to significantly strengthen Macao's capabilities in conducting area or regional studies. These studies can play a vital role in facilitating China's engagement with the world, particularly within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. By undertaking extensive research and analysis of the social, economic, political and cultural dynamics of the target regions, area studies can provide a deeper understanding of the needs, opportunities and potential challenges faced by the countries involved. This enhanced understanding, in turn, can contribute to more informed decision-making and the development of customized approaches to collaboration.

When addressing the relationship between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, it is crucial to achieve tangible and substantial results. Macao, with its historical, cultural and geographical advantages that facilitate connectivity and cooperation, must make concerted efforts to translate its potential value into concrete outcomes. To achieve this, Macao must actively leverage its strengths and generate meaningful results through proactive measures and purposeful initiatives, supported by effective implementation strategies. One example of such an initiative is the establishment of university consortia that brings together institutions from Macao, the Chinese mainland and Portuguese-speaking countries.

These consortia can collaborate to address shared challenges and play a role in fostering fruitful interactions with Portuguese-speaking countries. By facilitating connections between peoples and societies and promoting knowledge sharing, Macao can demonstrate the power of cultural exchange and cooperation in fostering positive global interactions. By embracing its historic mission as a bridge and platform, Macao, in turn, contributes to building a more interconnected and harmonious world.

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



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## CHINA

## New laws to strengthen legal system

2024 sees 5 key legislations in emerging fields to support country's development

By CAO YIN  
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More legislative items, especially those in key areas, emerging fields and foreign-related fields, have been unveiled this year as legislators made greater efforts to optimize the country's legal system, an official from the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, said on Thursday.

Wang Xiang, spokesman for the NPC Standing Committee's Legisla-

tive Affairs Commission, said five new pieces of laws, including the Energy Law and the Preschool Education Law, have been formulated since the beginning of the year, bringing the total number of laws in effect to 305.

Meanwhile, 14 other laws were also improved through revisions this year, with the adoption of four legislative decisions, according to him.

"Specifically, we amended laws regarding national defense education, state secrets and emergency

response to better safeguard the national security and strengthen the governance capability," he said. "We also advanced the legal construction involving foreign matters by modifying a law against money laundering and formulating a tariff law."

In addition, he noted that several legislative pieces, including those on financial stability, administrative penalties, maritime and arbitration, are still being reviewed among Chinese lawmakers to serve the country's high-quality development.

As unveiled by Wang, a draft private sector promotion law will be reviewed at an upcoming session of the NPC Standing Committee,

which is scheduled to be held in Beijing from Saturday to Wednesday.

"The private sector is not only a crucial part of the socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics but also a major force of Chinese modernization and an important foundation of high-quality development," he said.

"Formulating a law in this sector will be conducive to maintaining fair competition, encouraging technological innovation and improving the financing environment."

Referring to a draft revision to the anti-unfair competition law, which is also ready to be discussed at the session, he said that the modifica-

tion would focus more on curbing unfair competition in cyberspace and intensifying combat against commercial bribery.

A few other legislative items, such as a draft revision to the law on people's congress deputies, a draft value-added tax law and a draft amendment to the supervision law, will also be submitted to the upcoming session for review, he added.

According to a proposed agenda, a number of reports, including those regarding financial audit work, disaster and emergency response funds and farmland protection, are also expected to be submitted to the session for reading.

## PLA Navy inducts missile capable J-15D

By ZHAO LEI  
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The J-15D, the People's Liberation Army Navy's first carrier-borne electronic warfare jet, has been deployed on the CNS *Shandong* aircraft carrier, according to the Navy.

In a video clip published on Tuesday by the Navy about the *Shandong*, several J-15Ds were seen on the deck or taking off, marking the formal deployment of the new aircraft model.

Tuesday marked the fifth anniversary of the *Shandong*'s commissioning.

The J-15D was declassified in November when it was sent to make the public debut at the 15th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition, which was held in Zhuhai, Guangdong province.

According to the Navy, the new model is a twin-seat variant of the J-15 carrier-borne fighter jet and is specifically tasked with electronic jamming and countermeasures with its electronic warfare pods. It can also carry missiles for airstrikes or aerial battle operations.

The J-15D's service will play an important role in a carrier strike group's fight for air superiority, the Navy said.

Like its predecessor the CNS *Liaoning*, the *Shandong* had no dedicated electronic warfare jet before the J-15D's commissioning, which substantially restricted the operational capability of its strike group, especially the aviation units deployed on it.

In another clip published by the Navy, a total of 12 J-15s took off from the *Shandong* in a row, displaying what is likely the maximum takeoff support capacity of the carrier in a single strike wave.

The *Shandong* — China's second aircraft carrier and the first wholly designed and built in the country — displaces at least 50,000 metric tons of water. Commissioned in December 2019 to the South Sea Fleet, it is now the largest and most sophisticated naval ship in service in the PLA Navy.

China has built a third aircraft carrier, the CNS *Fujian*, which displaces more than 80,000 tons of water and uses an electromagnetic launch system or electromagnetic catapult to launch fixed-wing aircraft.

Compared with the *Liaoning* and the *Shandong*, the *Fujian* is much bigger and has a larger flight deck, boasting mightier prowess. It is now in the sea trial stage and is expected to be commissioned in the near future.

## China develops effective breast cancer treatment

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Shanghai medical experts have developed an innovative neoadjuvant treatment approach for triple-negative breast cancer, one of the most aggressive forms of the disease, significantly increasing the rate of tumor disappearance before surgery from 44.7 percent to 56.8 percent.

The research, led by Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center, combines traditional chemotherapy with Camrelizumab, a novel Chinese-developed immunotherapy drug. The treatment helps shrink tumors and extends patient survival, researchers said Tuesday.

The phase III clinical trial involved 441 patients from 40 hospitals across China and was the first one on an original breast cancer medicine based on data from the Chinese population to be published in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Triple-negative breast cancer accounts for 10 percent to 20 percent of all breast cancer cases and is particularly difficult to treat. The cancer often recurs quickly and spreads aggressively, leading to poor survival outcomes.

Neoadjuvant chemotherapy, which involves shrinking tumors with drugs before surgery, is a standard treatment for this cancer. However, international efforts to enhance outcomes by integrating immunotherapy have mainly focused on Western populations and excluded patients with extensive lymph node metastases.

The new research, named "Cam-

Relief," is one of the first large-scale studies to examine immunotherapy's benefits for high-risk patients in China.

"Camrelizumab is a high-efficiency PD-1 immune checkpoint inhibitor developed by Jiangsu Hengrui Pharmaceuticals Co.," said Shao Zhimin, director of general surgery and breast surgery department at the Shanghai Cancer Center. Immune checkpoint inhibitors help the body's immune system detect and attack cancer cells more effectively.

The study began in 2020, enrolling patients with early or locally advanced triple-negative breast cancer. Participants were given either Camrelizumab or a placebo alongside chemotherapy before surgery. After surgery, treatment continued with either the drug or placebo for up to a year.

After a median follow-up of 14.4 months, the study found that the Camrelizumab group achieved a pathological complete response or PCR rate of 56.8 percent, compared to 44.7 percent in the placebo group. PCR refers to the complete disappearance of invasive cancer in the breast and nearby lymph nodes after treatment, a key indicator of better long-term outcomes.

"Patients achieving PCR have significantly lower risks of recurrence and better disease-free survival," Shao said.

Subgroup analysis showed that the treatment was effective for a range of patients, regardless of age, physical condition, or disease stage.

The findings were also highlighted at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium, the world's largest conference on breast cancer, last week.

A 41-year-old participant surnamed Chen, described the treatment as "magical" and "unexpected". After surgery, she continued using Camrelizumab without chemotherapy, experiencing minimal side effects.

"Compared to chemotherapy, which had so many adverse effects, this was much easier to handle," Chen said.

The research offers hope for improving outcomes in one of the most challenging cancer types. "Such research outcomes are quite exciting, offering the potential to truly transform clinical practice in neoadjuvant treatment," Shao said.

Such research outcomes are quite exciting, offering the potential to truly transform clinical practice in neoadjuvant treatment."

Shao Zhimin, director of general surgery and breast surgery department of the Shanghai Cancer Center

## Science promotion



Students conduct fire experiments during a scientific knowledge promotion activity at Suixi Road Primary School in Huaibei, Anhui province, on Wednesday. WAN SHANCHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Behind the scenes



A worker assembles crane-shaped lanterns at the Beijing Wenyu Park in Beijing on Wednesday. Beijing's biggest lantern show, the Megalights Wonderland will be held from Dec 28 to March next year at the park, showcasing over a thousand sets of colorful lanterns. Currently, more than 260 craftsmen are making lanterns at the park. SHAN YIWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## TikTok: Product has real value to creators

From page 1

been found to twist their algorithms in order to influence the attitudes of its users.

Facebook is the most obvious example. In perhaps the most high-profile indictment of Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and other social media apps, a former Facebook employee told the Congress that "Facebook's products harm children, stoke division, and weaken our democracy." Frances Haugen, the whistleblower, added that changes that would make Facebook "safer" were possible but Facebook was not going to do anything until prompted.

Has anything happened since Haugen made those comments in 2021? You know the answer, and considering that in 2023 an appeals court threw out attempts by multiple US states to break up the company, there will not be any significant changes forthcoming.

Knowing that, let's return to Tik-

The US prides itself on being a beacon of freedom of speech; there is no way to square that idea with preventing TikTok from maintaining its presence in the country.

Tok. There has been chatter in the US that the app could be sold to American investors if the ban is enforced and if President-elect Trump does nothing to stop it. However, ByteDance has made clear it will not sell. Moreover, even if TikTok were sold, the Chinese government could still prevent the sophisticated algorithms behind the app from being included, leaving the new owners with the equivalent of a fancy car with no keys to start it up.

The reasonable — and in reality

only — decision is for TikTok to remain as it is: A Chinese-produced and Chinese-owned product that has real value to small businesses and individual creators while being enjoyed by an estimated 170 million people in the US (and over 1 billion around the world). The US prides itself on being a beacon of freedom of speech; there is no way to square that idea with preventing TikTok from maintaining its presence in the country. Remember, there is no evidence that the fears about TikTok are legitimate. Thus, whether it is the US Supreme Court or soon-to-be President Trump, the hammer that could come down on TikTok must not and the nonsense surrounding the app must stop.

The author is an associate professor in the Communication and Organizational Leadership Department at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania, the United States. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Forum stresses people-centered urban governance

By DU JUAN  
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A new declaration emphasizing people-centered urban governance was released Thursday at the closing ceremony of the 2024 Beijing Forum on Swift Response to Public Complaints.

The "Beijing Declaration on Modernizing Urban Governance (2024)" outlines nine initiatives, including the rule of law, diversity, inclusivity, responsive governance, digital empowerment, ecological sustainability and open exchange.

The declaration underscores the need for cities to balance rapid development with social harmony, safety and public happiness.

This year's forum, themed "Modernizing for People-Centered Urban Governance," opened Wednesday in Beijing. The annual event, which operates under the permanent theme "People's City, Better Future," featured an opening ceremony, a main forum, six parallel sessions and other activities.

By resolving diverse issues raised by residents, Beijing has significantly improved its public service delivery, showcasing its ability to adapt to the evolving aspirations of its population."

Yin Li, Party chief of Beijing

lel sessions and other activities.

Yin Li, Party chief of Beijing, highlighted Beijing's history of integrating cultural heritage with modern governance innovation during the opening ceremony.

"The city's 'Swift Response to Public Complaints' initiative has been a cornerstone of this approach, proactively addressing governance challenges by incorporating public feedback," Yin said. "By resolving diverse issues raised by residents, Beijing has significantly improved its public service delivery, showcasing its ability to

adapt to the evolving aspirations of its population."

On Tuesday, dozens of international guests, including government officials, scholars and experts, participated in the "Approaching 12345" event. They visited the 12345 Citizen Service Hotline Reception Hall to observe how public complaints are processed.

Visitors stood alongside operators and listened to citizen calls, gaining firsthand insight into the hotline's role in urban governance reform.

"The 12345 hotline serves as a

bridge between the government and citizens, handling more than 24 million appeals annually, exceeding Beijing's population," the organizer said. With over 1,710 operators, the hotline operates 24/7 and manages an average of 65,000 daily appeals.

Andreas Grammatikogiannis, deputy mayor of Athens, Greece, praised the visit, sharing similar practices in Athens, where platforms allow residents to report issues online.

"It's a great opportunity to discuss new ideas, share best practices between the two cities and try to find common solutions to challenges faced in Athens and Beijing," he said.

Co-sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China Media Group, the Communist Party of China Beijing Municipal Committee and the People's Government of Beijing Municipality, the forum also welcomed the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, as a co-organizer.

## BUSINESS

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## Guangdong to promote manufacturing innovation

By ZHENG CAIXIONG and LI WENFANG in Guangzhou

Guangdong province will further promote innovative development and create a favorable atmosphere for the province's manufacturing enterprises in the months to come.

Xiao Zhenyu, deputy director of the Guangdong provincial department of industry and information technology, said the provincial government attaches great importance to the innovative development of its manufacturing sector, which plays a big part in the province's economy.

The province will ramp up efforts to enhance its favorable environment for innovation, he said.

Xiao made the remarks at a news conference in Guangzhou, Guangdong, on Wednesday.

The province launched an event on Wednesday to demonstrate independent innovation achievements accomplished by local enterprises.

"Large industrial enterprises with a main business income of over 500 million yuan (\$68.52 million) have all established research and development institutions," Xiao said.

About 90 percent of scientific research institutions, researchers, R&D funds and invention patent applications in the province come from enterprises, he added.

Wang Yuyin, deputy director of the Guangzhou bureau of industry and information technology, said the provincial capital government has implemented the action plan for the integration and development of innovation and industry chains, while actively leveraging the role of enterprise innovation entities, to accelerate the construction of a manufacturing innovation center system.

"Meanwhile, the city government supports a group of leading enterprises in building innovation platforms and driving high-quality development of the biopharmaceutical industry through innovation," said Wang. "The biopharmaceutical industry is a strategic industrial cluster that Guangzhou city government is fully committed to developing."

Guangzhou has invested more than 300 funds in the field of bio-

medicine, with a total capital of more than 280 billion yuan.

"Now the city has gathered more than 6,800 enterprises in biomedicine and health industries, including 12 Fortune 500 companies, 24 national level innovative small and medium-sized enterprises, or "little giants", and another over 1,000 high-tech enterprises," he said.

Wang Ning, an official from the Shenzhen bureau of industry and information technology, said Shenzhen has set goals to accelerate the construction of a globally leading advanced manufacturing center and the creation of a "new generation world-class automobile city".

Shenzhen has issued the first local regulations for the management of intelligent connected vehicles in the country and has taken the lead in releasing 10 local standards for such vehicles, providing a basis and management norms for the admission and commercial application of intelligent connected vehicles.

According to official data, Shenzhen produced more than 1.73 million new energy vehicles last year, becoming the largest NEV production city nationwide.

Additionally, the city's NEV production is expected to amount to more than 2.8 million units this year, consolidating its position as the largest producer of new energy vehicles in the country, Wang said.

Ji Honglei, chief engineer of TCL King Electrical Appliances (Huizhou) Co Ltd, said that in line with the efforts of the provincial government, the Huizhou city government attaches great importance to and has been supporting innovation in enterprises in recent years.

Ji said his company has invested more than 130 million yuan in technology R&D this year.

"The company, which now has 4,800 R&D personnel and 5,600 valid invention patents, also actively participates in the formulation of international and national industry standards," said Ji.

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An employee works at a solar panel production facility in Baotou, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in May. LI ZHIPENG / XINHUA

## Solar firms eye options in emerging markets

Middle East, Indonesia seen as new hubs for Chinese players in near term

By LIU YUKUN liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese solar companies are turning their attention to emerging markets in Indonesia and the Middle East as the United States intensifies trade restrictions on imported photovoltaic products from various regions, analysts said.

In early December, the US made a preliminary decision to impose antidumping tariffs of up to 271 percent on solar products from four Southeast Asian countries — Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam — where many Chinese solar firms had already established production capacities. Later, Washington announced that starting Jan 1, tariffs on imported silicon wafers and polysilicon from China will soar to 50 percent.

Despite escalating trade conflicts, Tan Youru, a solar analyst at research provider BloombergNEF, said: "Apart from the US and Indian markets, most solar installations in other regions rely heavily on Chinese-manufactured products. Regions beyond the four Southeast Asian countries ... are poised to emerge as attractive new hubs for Chinese solar firms in the near term."

BloombergNEF said Chinese solar product manufacturers have already set up production facilities in Indonesia this year, boasting 6 gigawatts of solar cell capacity and 15 GW of module capacity.

"Indonesia currently falls outside the US's new scope of antidumping and antisubsidy tariffs imposed on Southeast Asian countries. Indonesia also mandates a

certain level of local manufacturing requirements in foreign-invested solar projects, although these local content requirements have been eased this year," Tan said.

Chinese investments in renewable energy across the Middle East have also garnered attention. A recent report from global accounting firm EY revealed that Chinese investments in solar and wind energy in League of Arab States economies surpassed \$13 billion between 2018 and 2023, constituting 24 percent of total investments. The report said Chinese companies are actively expanding their footprint in the renewable energy value chain, encompassing photovoltaic modules, wind power components and others.

Regarding the heightened US tariffs on silicon wafers and polysilicon from China, Tan said the limited US silicon wafer manufacturing capacity and negligible existing crystalline silicon cell manufacturing capacity indicate that increased US tariffs may have minimal impact on the Chinese solar sector.

"In the US, the focus lies on importing solar cells and modules rather than solar polysilicon and wafers. The limited cell manufacturing capacity in the US results in minimal demand for silicon wafers and polysilicon upstream in the production chain.

"Despite significant subsidy support from the US Inflation Reduction Act, and the country's trade protections, its establishment of silicon wafer and polysilicon manufacturing facilities still faces challenges, and the current focus of US solar product

manufacturing remains on module manufacturing," Tan added.

The US-based Solar Energy Industries Association reported a significant increase in domestic module manufacturing capacity of 9 GW in the third quarter to nearly 40 GW this year, up from less than 7 GW in the second quarter of 2022 before the enactment of domestic manufacturing and procurement tax credits.

The first US cell manufacturing facility since 2019 opened in the third quarter, said the SEIA.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, pointed out that unlike solar module manufacturing — which can be quickly expanded through investments — solar cell and silicon wafer manufacturing involve complex technological inputs, presenting challenges for rapid expansion.

A report from Eastmoney Securities indicates a shortage of domestically manufactured cells in the US may persist for two to three years.

China's JA Solar, which was slapped with a hefty 53.30 percent duty on solar products manufactured in Vietnam, told China Daily that it is now seeking new sites for localized production aside from Southeast Asia and the US.

During the first-half performance briefing in September, Chinese solar company LONGi's Chairman Zhong Baoshen had expressed concerns over possible US tariffs impacting the global trade landscape. Zhong said there might still be a market for cell manufacturing and exports to the US from Malaysia and Thailand, despite the two countries perhaps having limited opportunities to export modules if the US makes the final decision to raise tariffs.

## Targeted measures to boost consumption

By WANG KEJU wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China will roll out an array of targeted measures to simultaneously boost consumption and deliver tangible benefits to the people after policymakers signaled a shift in prioritizing the expansion of domestic demand amid external uncertainties during a recent tone-setting meeting, officials and analysts said.

Their comments came after the annual Central Economic Work Conference in mid-December identified the "vigorous promotion of consumption" as the top priority on its policy agenda for the world's second-largest economy in 2025.

Conditions and fundamental trends supporting China's long-term positive economic trajectory have not changed, and the country's consumer market will continue to exhibit a steady growth trend in the coming year, said He Yongqian, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Commerce, on Thursday.

"Boosting consumption and enhancing people's livelihoods will go hand-in-hand," He said at a news conference, adding that more policy measures are in the pipeline to tap into the vast reservoir of untapped demand.

The ministry, along with other competent departments, will encompass a wider range of consumer products under the trade-in programs, allowing more households to participate in and benefit from the initiative, He said.

The trade-in policy has driven over 1 trillion yuan (\$137 billion) in related product sales as of Dec 13, contributing to the sale of over 5.2 million passenger vehicles, as well as the purchase of more than 49 million units of household appliances, data from the ministry showed.

The evolving consumer preferences toward more sophisticated, energy-efficient, and technologically advanced products have created a perfect storm for trade-in programs to thrive, said Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank.

The first wave of growth for the trade-in policy has come from urban areas and consumers who are well-versed in the program. However, the real gold mine lies in rural markets, where the demand for household appliances and durable goods upgrades is equally strong, but has yet to be fully unleashed, Wen said.

In addition, China will adopt a suite of policy measures to promote the high-quality development of service consumption, He said.

"Consumers are increasingly gravitating toward services that provide emotional value and a sense of fulfillment, such as cultural, tourism, sports, and health and leisure activities," said Chen Lifan, a researcher at the Development Research Center of the State Council.

Data from the first three quarters of the year underscore this trend, with per capita service consumption among Chinese residents growing 7.6 percent year-on-year, outpacing the 2 percentage point increase in overall per capita consumer spending, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Furthermore, the share of service consumption expenditure in total household consumption has risen by 0.9 percentage point compared to the same period last year, now accounting for 47 percent of total consumer spending, the NBS said.

Looking ahead, dedicated efforts should be made to slash the negative list for foreign investment access in areas such as telecommunications, the internet and healthcare, creating opportunities for international players to contribute to the diversification and upgrade of service offerings, Chen added.

## Briefly

## Major railway bridge achieves linkage

Progress on the Chongqing-Kunming High-Speed Railway advanced significantly as a crucial railway bridge recently achieved full completion. China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp involved in the project, announced that construction workers successfully connected the continuous beams of a railway bridge in the mountainous Kunming, capital of Yunnan province. The HSR, an integral component of the national railway network, is instrumental in driving development in western regions, CR24G said.

## Civil aviation sector reports growth in Nov

China's civil aviation sector saw expansion in November, with passenger trips and freight transport achieving double-digit growth year-on-year, said the Civil Aviation Administration of China on Thursday. Last month, total transport turnover, passenger trips, and cargo and mail transport volume in the country's civil aviation sector increased 20.5 percent, 15.2 percent and 16.6 percent, respectively, compared with the same period last year.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

## Nation to maintain stable coal production

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's coal consumption is forecast to grow moderately in 2025, with a slight increase over 2024 levels driven by higher electricity demand and stabilization in key industrial sectors, according to the China National Coal Association (CNCA).

Electricity generation from coal-fired plants is expected to rise 4.5 percent in 2025, adding around 290 billion kilowatt-hours, as the country ramps up efforts to expand effective investment and stabilize the real estate market through policy measures, said Zhang Hong, deputy secretary-general of the CNCA.

Both metallurgy and building material industries are expected to stabilize and recover, with national production of key coal-consuming products such as crude steel and cement projected to maintain steady production levels, he said.

According to the association, while coal output is expected to increase modestly, production

growth will be concentrated in the coal-rich regions of Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous regions.

Xinjiang, in particular, is set to be the key contributor to the rise of coal production. The overall coal market is expected to maintain a balanced supply-demand outlook throughout 2025, though seasonal fluctuations between surplus and tight conditions will persist, he said.

The association predicts that in 2025, the coal market will largely remain balanced, with supply and demand conditions fluctuating between surplus and tight periods due to seasonal variations.

Industry experts believe the expected increase in coal production is in line with the government's emphasis on ensuring energy security, particularly amid rising concerns over supply disruptions and growing demand.

Coal will continue to play a key role in ensuring domestic energy supply as the Chinese economy seeks to stabilize and recover, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy

Policy at Xiamen University.

The government's focus on ensuring coal supply stability has been reinforced by recent legal changes, including China's first energy law, which is to fully take effect on Jan 1 and encourages long-term coal contracts to bolster market resilience. These contracts are seen as crucial for supporting high-quality development while ensuring energy security in China's evolving energy landscape.

China continues to prioritize stable coal production and supply throughout 2024, with the proportion of intelligent coal capacity rising to over 50 percent of total capacity, after transforming and upgrading 180 million kilowatts of coal-fired power units and eliminating more than 8 million kW of outdated capacity, according to the National Energy Administration.

More than 95 percent of coal-fired power units across the country have now met ultra-low emission standards.

Many domestic coal companies are making deeper forays into the integration of clean coal power and carbon capture, utilization and stor-



Coal is heaped at a yard in Tangshan, Hebei province, on Monday. YANG SHIYAO / XINHUA

age technologies to offset carbon emissions and realize zero-carbon production.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the cumulative growth rate of national coal-fired power generation dropped from 9.7 percent at the beginning of the year to 0.5 percent by July. Compared to 2023, the annual coal consumption for coal-fired power generation is expected to decrease by approximately 100 million metric tons year-on-year, it said.

From the perspective of major

coal-consuming sectors, the metallurgy and building material industries, which account for nearly a quarter of the country's total coal consumption, have seen a continued decline in production, leading to a sustained reduction in coal consumption, said the association.

According to China Petroleum and Chemical Corp, China's total coal consumption is approaching a peak plateau. In 2024, coal consumption is expected to rise to 4.85 billion tons, accounting for 54 percent of total energy consumption.

# BUSINESS

## Dassault to invest deeply in China

Company on track to achieve double-digit growth in the country this year

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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French industrial software company Dassault Systemes is doubling down on its commitment to the Chinese market, with plans to further increase investments and strengthen its local ecosystem, citing significant growth potential within China's ongoing efforts to foster new quality productive forces.



Pascal Daloz

its Chinese customers to empower them to innovate and strengthen their industries. By investing deeply in China, the company is not just supporting local businesses,

but also helping them grow into global leaders, he said.

Pascal Daloz, CEO of Dassault Systemes, emphasized the company's long-term dedication to supporting China's digital transformation, particularly in sectors such as construction and urban infrastructure, which are poised for technological upgrades.

Over the past 25 years, Dassault Systemes has experienced rapid growth in China, with its business in the market tripling over the past five years alone. This year, the company said it is on track to achieve double-digit growth in the country.

Daloz reaffirmed the company's resolve to continue expanding its footprint in China, following a strategy based on its motto of "In China, For China, With China."

"We are committed to continuing to invest and to develop the ecosystems in China," Daloz said, adding that the company is working with

new quality productive forces, Daloz said there is a strong push for innovation. Digital technologies, such as those Dassault Systemes provides, are essential for making this leap forward. And he believes that industrial software can play a crucial role in enabling the construction industry to meet its goals and drive efficiency.

Dassault Systemes has already seen the impact of its digital solutions through collaborations with key local partners such as the Central-South Architectural Design Institute in Wuhan, Hubei province. Through this partnership during the past few years, they have pioneered paperless, blueprint-free construction methods that have led to a 50 percent improvement in productivity. Furthermore, these innovations have reduced material usage by 50 percent and cut construction timelines by 20 percent, marking

significant strides toward both cost efficiency and sustainability.

Dassault Systemes recently forged a new joint venture with the CSADI. This partnership, which officially kicked off in early November, aims to spearhead digital solutions for urban lifecycle management and contribute to the green, low-carbon, high-quality development of the industry.

The new joint venture will leverage Dassault Systemes' advanced digital technologies and CSADI's expertise in architectural design to deliver solutions that address key challenges in China's urban development. These include increasing productivity, reducing costs and enhancing sustainability across the construction lifecycle. Through the collaboration, both parties aim to foster the digital transformation of China's urban planning, construction and operation processes.



A guest experiences a virtual cockpit developed using XR technology during the 2024 Dassault Systemes Automotive and Transportation Industry Summit Forum in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in June. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Yang Jianhua, chairman of CSA-DI, emphasized the importance of digital transformation in addressing the construction industry's challenges, such as data fragmentation and complex digital delivery. "The combination of Dassault Systemes' digital technologies and CSADI's extensive industry experience will provide more efficient, collaborative and sustainable solutions to drive the upgrade of the building and urban sectors."

"We will focus on the development of solutions for city information modeling based on Dassault Systemes' 3DEXPERIENCE platform," said Zhang Ying, managing director of Dassault Systemes Greater China. "This partnership represents a powerful alignment of industry expertise and cutting-edge digital technology. Together, we will redefine industry practices and deliver value to cities and communities across China."

## Humanoids to help out in more factories

By HUANG ZHILING  
and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

A full-size commercial humanoid robot developed by Chengdu, Sichuan province-based company, will soon join several manufacturing firms as an "employee", its developer said.

The "Skywalker I" robot, unveiled online on Monday by Sichuan Embodied Humanoid Robot Technology Co Ltd, is said to be the first of its kind in the province.

Standing 1.65 meters tall and weighing 50 kilograms, the robot has a battery life of 90 minutes. Online videos show it smoothly executing tasks, including autonomous walking.

Feng Zhenyu, chairman and general manager of the company, said the robot applies its self-developed high-compact integrated joints and highly robust motion control algorithms, enabling it to handle complex terrains and environments.

"With its stable motion capabilities to carry objects with both hands, skillfully operate tools and walk autonomously, the robot is ready to start working at some flexible product manufacturing companies," he said.

Feng said his company will focus on technologies including visual simultaneous localization and mapping, as well as full-body perception, to enhance the environmental awareness and adaptability of humanoid robots.

The company is also cooperating with TD Tech, a Chengdu-based company specializing in the research and development of communication solutions for industrial clients, to develop an independently controllable robot brain. This partnership aims to accelerate the application of humanoid robots in various sectors, including industry, households and society, he said.

Feng said the Chengdu High-Tech Zone has established a service platform to facilitate links between robot companies and upstream and downstream enterprises in the industrial chain, as well as the intelligent hardware pilot test platforms, to speed up the production process.

With over 90 percent of its core components locally sourced, the humanoid robot highlights the strong capabilities of local enterprises in industrial chain integration and localized production, local officials said.

The Chengdu High-Tech Zone has set up a special zone for artificial intelligence and robotics at Singapore-Sichuan Hi-Tech Innovation Park, to conduct large-scale application demonstrations for new technologies, new products and new scenarios.

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## Nation to become world's largest aviation services market by 2043

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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China will overtake North America and Europe to become the world's largest market for aviation services by 2043, with its market value almost tripling over the past five years, Airbus said in its latest global services forecast in Beijing.

The aviation services market value this year in China so far has risen to \$23 billion from \$18.6 billion last year, up 24 percent year-on-year, Airbus said on Thursday.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference that concluded last week urged more efforts to vigorously boost domestic consumption and culture tourism next year.

"Higher demand and spending on travel will drive growth of the civil aviation market, and we are

bullish on the growth potential of the air transportation market next year," said Hu Yongdong, vice-president of strategy, development and operations of customer service at Airbus China.

China's civil aviation market has been resilient and shown rapid growth this year. As of Dec 15, domestic carriers had transported a record number of over 700 million passengers, said the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Daily average passenger volume has exceeded 2 million, up 18.1 percent year-on-year, and an increase of 10.7 percent over the pre-COVID level seen in 2019, a new high in China's civil aviation development history, the CAAC said.

Airbus said that further growth of China's international hub airports has made it easier for passengers to connect with domestic traffic. In the next two decades, Chi-

na will continue to show a strong growth potential of its fleet size.

By 2043, China is expected to have 11,160 aircraft in service, of which 9,520 are new deliveries, including passenger aircraft and freighters. China accounts for 20 percent of global demand. The new generation of digital aircraft will account for the main proportion of the fleet, Airbus said.

Driven by strong growth of new deliveries and growing traffic demand, China's overall demand for services is forecast to grow by a compound annual growth rate of 5.1 percent, making the country the biggest services market globally.

The three main drivers for the growth of services demand are maintenance; training and operations; and fleet enhancement solutions.

In particular, fleet enhancement solutions, representing 10 percent of the overall services market and

mainly concerning connectivity solutions enabled by digitalization, is expected to be the sector with the fastest growth. The sector is forecast to grow at a CAGR of 5.6 percent from \$2 billion this year to \$6 billion in 2043.

By 2043, China is expected to operate more than 9,500 connected aircraft, and digital services and interconnected ecosystems will create new value for the aviation sector, Airbus said.

"Domestic carriers have indicated a significant interest in equipping the aircraft with on-board Wi-Fi service, and we have received a large number of inquiries regarding the service," Hu said.

Maintenance services represent almost 83 percent of the total services market in China. The maintenance sector is expected to grow from \$19 billion this year to \$51 billion in 2043 as fleet expansion and

aging fleets drive demand for maintenance, dismantling and recycling, and the business of used serviceable material.

Additionally, new skills are required with the application of new digital technologies. For the training and operations market, China's civil aviation sector is forecast to need an additional 478,000 skilled workers over the next 20 years. Those include 155,000 new technicians, 124,000 new pilots and 199,000 new cabin crew.

Meanwhile, US aircraft manufacturer Boeing predicted that by 2043, China is expected to require 130,000 new pilots, 137,000 new maintenance personnel and 163,000 new cabin crew.

Eurasia, China and North America will drive over half of the total demand globally for new industry personnel over the next 20 years, Boeing said.



## The Belt and Road Initiative

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## WORLD

# Experts see fallout from solar tariffs

Higher US levies on Chinese companies expected to raise prices, drive business away

By MAYZHOU in Houston  
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The new solar cell tariffs planned by the United States could lead to Chinese solar companies quickly leaving the US market.

Ed Hirs, an energy fellow at the University of Houston, said the Chinese solar manufacturers will pursue other markets and expand solar installations across Asian and African countries "at a very rapid pace."

"Those nations may well turn out to be the most profitable market segment, more so than the United States at this point," Hirs told China Daily.



If the manufacturers keep pricing at the current levels and they add a 25 percent tariff on to those, it will certainly slow down the purchasing of panels in the US."

Ed Hirs, an energy fellow at the University of Houston

Earlier this month, the US Department of Commerce announced that 21.31 to 271.2 percent tariffs would be imposed on solar cells from Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, depending on the manufacturer.

On Dec 11, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) announced a doubling of the tariff on solar cells imported from China — from 25 to 50 percent — effective Jan 1, 2025.

"These actions will complement the domestic investments made under the Biden-Harris Administration to promote a clean energy economy, while increasing the resilience of critical supply chains," said USTR Katherine Tai in a statement.

Hirs said the tariffs will first affect consumer spending "before we see it really have an impact in solar farm development and manufacturing of solar cells in the United States."

"The first impact, if these tariffs do go into place, is going to be a very quick and certain increase in inflation," he said.

"Applying these tariffs and targeting the Chinese companies or the nations, Thailand, Malaysia, Mexico, Canada, this is going to disrupt supply chains," said Hirs, referring to not only the new tariffs but also potential ones by the future Trump

administration.

When it comes to the solar panel market in the US, Hirs said that if the current manufacturers can absorb the tariff by lowering their prices, the impact will be zero.

"If the manufacturers keep pricing at the current levels and they add a 25 percent tariff on to those, it will certainly slow down the purchasing of panels in the US," Hirs said.

The US residential solar market has already experienced a contraction in the past two years, according to an analysis by Zoe Gaston, a solar analyst at Wood Mackenzie, a UK-based energy research firm.

"There has been plenty of attrition in the residential solar market, especially in the past two years," Gaston wrote. "Wood Mackenzie expects a 19 percent year-over-year reduction in residential installations in 2024."

The Inflation Reduction Act enacted by the Biden administration has promoted investment in the solar industry in the US in the past two years. Another analysis by Wood Mackenzie showed the first solar panels meeting the requirements for the act's domestic content will be available soon.

The analysis found that solar panels made with US-produced solar cells were priced above 45 cents per watt while similar panels made in the US using imported cells cost buyers around 35-36 cents per watt.

With an extra 25 percent tariff, the cost between the two will be mostly eliminated. The end result will be higher prices.

"Prices have certainly increased as the tariffs have been put into place," Scott Wiater, CEO of Standard Solar, told The Marketplace.

"We're paying much more, well over double what other regions outside the United States are paying for panels with the tariffs. So, at the end of the day, it's really the end customer that's getting penalized the most," he said.

Alan Rozich, director of BioConversion Solutions and an expert in sustainability, said that the solar industry is mainly an environmental sustainability issue.

"We have to look at the big picture and the performance of the devices," Rozich told China Daily. "If those are the best devices and they're practical, then they should be part of the mix."

Rozich said that tariffs on solar cells "should be waived" because "sustainability is too much of an imperative."

"I think the more the merrier. To me it's not a matter of it is from this country or that country. Let's all try to work together and everybody gets a cut of the pie. That's the way I would be looking at it."

## Searching on



Syrians sit at the Marjeh Square in Damascus where people looking for missing relatives post notes seeking information about their whereabouts on Wednesday. Half of the country's population were forced from their homes during nearly 14 years of civil war. LOUAI BESHARA / AFP

## FRIENDS AFAR

# Kenyan influencer showcases China

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

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya  
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When asked about his experience during a recent trip to China, David Oyando, a Kenyan content creator, said it was "mind-blowing." From the high-speed trains, the stunning infrastructure and the architecture, to the tourist sites and people's hospitality, Oyando said the trip exceeded his expectations.

When he posted the videos that recorded the experience on social media platforms such as Instagram, the videos attracted millions of views and various comments from his followers, providing an opportunity for many netizens in the East African country to re-recognize China.

On arriving at the airport in Beijing, everything he encountered was grand and as a content creator, he was spoiled for choice regarding what to record and share with his followers back at home.

Before traveling to China, Oyando, who preferred to go by his stage name Mulamwah, had admired the Chinese mostly for their martial arts, which he had watched in kung fu movies while growing up.

He admits that he also belonged to the group of people who were misled into having various misconceptions about China. However, the trip was an opportunity for Mulamwah and his online followers to get a true glimpse of China.

"As online content creators, we rely on good equipment to create content, and the first thing that struck me while in China was how advanced yet affordable their gadgets are. Looking at their cameras, microphones and phones for



David Oyando poses for a picture as he visits the Great Wall in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

instance made me realize that the counterfeit narrative is a lie and that China has some of the best equipment in the trade," said Mulamwah, who visited China in late September.

When he posted a video on TikTok while having a meal of deliciously fried frogs in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality, Kenyans' reactions back home were different. A user by the name of Sue Sally commented that since Mulamwah looked content after trying the food, she would also like to give it a try. The video is one of his most viewed on TikTok with more than 4.2 million views that attracted more than 12,500 comments.

### Exciting journey

During his trip, he was accompanied by fellow Kenyan online content creators David Muchiri and Benard Kamulu, who described the trip as an exciting journey where they explored the cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing.

In one of his TikTok videos while in Chongqing, Muchiri shares a video of a train on a raised railway line passing through a building with the caption, "Have you ever seen a train passing through a building? This is China for you, everything is possi-

ble; you should visit China."

In another video on Facebook shared by Kamulu while visiting the Forbidden City in Beijing, he freely mingles with local Chinese tourists who are not shy to interact with him.

Mulamwah said he did not expect Kenyans to have so much interest in China and its culture, with many videos he posted drawing a number of views and comments.

Mulamwah said that one interesting conversation that came up was when he showed his followers how China has installed 'blind lanes' or tactile paving units which are like braille for pavements. These raised bumps and ridges help guide visually impaired people down sidewalks and across intersections.

"Most of the people who saw the video could not believe that this is possible because they have never seen anything like it even in some Western countries," Mulamwah said.

After touring Beijing, Mulamwah and his colleagues boarded a high-speed train to Shanghai, which was his first high-speed train ride. There, they rode a ship on the Huangpu River where they could clearly see the contrast between the old town and the new town. They also visited the Zhangjiajie Glass Bridge in Hunan province.

Beyond bringing the Chinese experience to his Kenyan audience, Mulamwah said that his biggest takeaway was that China offers a significant opportunity for African content creators to expand their horizons.

"With Chinese social media sites like WeChat and Douyin, African content creators who can produce content in the Chinese language stand a chance of unlocking a potentially massive audience," Mulamwah said.

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# Fed lowers rates but sees fewer cuts ahead

WASHINGTON — The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday slashed interest rates by 25 basis points, the third consecutive rate cut in this easing cycle, while signaling a slower-than-expected pace of easing next year.

Fed officials estimated two interest rate cuts next year, fewer than four projected in September. They also marked up their projections for core inflation and economic growth next year, while lowering their forecast for the unemployment rate.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said more reductions in borrowing costs hinge on further progress in lowering stubbornly high inflation.

"I think we're in a good place, but I think from here it's a new phase and we're going to be cautious about further cuts," Powell said at a news conference after the cut.

US stocks plunged following the rate cuts, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling 2.58 percent, the S&P 500 sinking 2.95 percent and the Nasdaq dropping 3.56 percent.

Echoing a slump in US equities, Asian stocks slid on Thursday, with shares in Japan opening lower while Australian stocks fell about 2 percent.

### 'Hawkish' message

Overseas economists and business insiders said the Fed had delivered a "hawkish" message, which underscores policymakers' concern about lingering inflation as well as sweeping economic changes under the incoming Donald Trump administration.

"This was an unabashed hawkish message from the Fed," the Financial Times reported, citing Aditya Bhavne, a senior US economist at Bank of America.

Officials' forecast for two quarter-point rate cuts next year, rather than the three expected by some economists, represented a "wholesale shift," he said.

The meeting comes at a transition period of the US government, mixed economic data and unreliable economic data owing mostly to storms and strikes, said Christian Hoffmann, head of fixed income at Thornburg Investment Management, noting "the path forward becomes much more opaque."

The market is dismayed by the message delivered by the Fed, experts observed, voicing concerns over further impact on the global market.

"Overall this is a negative cocktail for risk assets, and it is spooking the market," Jim Awad, senior managing director at Clearstead Advisors, was quoted by Bloomberg as saying.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

# China-Russia ties underscored in Putin's remarks

By REN QI in Moscow  
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Russian President Vladimir Putin stated during his year-end news conference on Thursday that Russia and China will continue to maintain a high level of economic and humanitarian cooperation, and the roles of the two countries are crucial for global stability.

Putin stated that the level of relations between Russia and China has reached unprecedented heights over the past decade, with both sides operating on the foundation of a high level of mutual trust.

"We do nothing that contradicts our interests and do a great deal that serves the interests of both the Chinese and Russian peoples," he remarked. The president also highlighted the level of bilateral economic and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries.

Putin noted that Russia and China were among the countries most affected by World War II. He mentioned that estimates in Russia suggest there were more than 27 million victims.



Russian President Vladimir Putin holds his annual end-of-year news conference in Moscow on Thursday. ALEXANDER NEMENOV / AFP

He emphasized, "We were together then, and we are together now," highlighting that the strong bilateral relations between Russia and China are a key factor in global stability.

The news conference included a direct question-and-answer session with the Russian people. This format, called "The Results of the Year with Vladimir Putin", has been held for the third time. This year, more

than 2 million appeals from citizens were collected.

In response to questions about international relations and domestic economic issues, Putin suggested a missile "duel" with the United States to demonstrate how Russia's new Oreshnik hypersonic ballistic missile could defeat any US missile defense system.

Addressing Western skepticism regarding the Oreshnik, Putin pro-

posed that both sides select a designated target to be protected by US missiles, stating, "We're ready for such an experiment."

He noted that while the Oreshnik is a modern weapon, it is based on previous Russian design developments.

On the economy, Putin said on Thursday that Russia's gross domestic product is expected to grow by around 3.9 to 4 percent this year.

The Russian president said that overall, the economic situation remains stable, despite external challenges.

Putin indicated that Moscow is prepared to discuss Ukraine issue in potential talks with US President-elect Donald Trump, mentioning that Russian forces are moving toward achieving their primary goals on the battlefield.

When answering questions from US media, Putin expressed his willingness to meet with Trump, whom he stated he had not spoken to for years.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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## WORLD

## EU faces unpredictable 'Trump 2.0'

Bloc struggling with new challenges, from Ukraine crisis to possible trade war, posed by US president-elect's 2nd term

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
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When Donald Trump, president-elect of the United States, arrived in Paris on Dec 7 for the reopening of the Notre Dame cathedral, French President Emmanuel Macron greeted him with a grand welcome usually reserved for a sitting US president, with trumpets blaring and members of the French Republican Guard in full uniform.

A trilateral meeting of Trump, Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Elysee Palace was not on Trump's original schedule but was hastily added, making major headlines.

The scenes have been widely seen as Macron's bid to win favor from the 47th US president who will again occupy the White House on Jan 20, four years after his last term, which left a haunting memory for many Europeans.

A Dec 9 policy brief published by Bruegel, a major think tank in Brussels, stated that the return of Trump raises fundamental challenges for the European Union.

It warned that unilateral US actions could fatally weaken the three institutions critical for EU interests—NATO, the Paris climate agreement and the World Trade Organization. By threatening to raise tariffs against imports from EU and other economies, Trump's policies could have harmful effects on the EU economy.

"The EU's biggest concern is that Trump might reach a quick deal with Russia over the Ukraine crisis without even considering the EU's stance, political correctness and security concerns," said Ding Chun, director of the Center for European Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Trump's election victory on Nov 5 was a huge disappointment for Europeans as a YouGov survey released on Nov 1 showed that the vast majority of Europeans wanted the Democratic candidate, US Vice-President Kamala Harris, to win. The favorability was as high as 81 percent in Denmark, 73 percent in Sweden, 71 percent in Germany and 62 percent in France, while only 6 to 15 percent in those countries preferred Trump.

However, European Commission officials expressed that the commission has been making preparations for a while for various scenarios of a Trump return.

## Dealing with conflict

Trump has never talked about the details of how he will end the Russia-Ukraine conflict "within 24 hours" after taking office, a pledge he repeatedly made during presidential campaigns.

After the Elysee Palace meeting, Trump wrote on social media that there should be "an immediate ceasefire and negotiations should begin".

He told NBC's *Meet the Press* program on Dec 8 that Ukraine will possibly receive less military aid once he takes office. He also floated the possibility for the US to quit NATO, signaling that its participation during his next term cannot be taken for granted if other members do not live up to commitments on defense spending.

In an interview with *Time* magazine published on Dec 12, Trump criticized Ukraine's use of US-supplied missiles deep into Russian territory, saying "it's crazy what's taking place... We are just escalating this war and making it worse".

The words likely pointed at the Joe Biden administration's rapid surge in military assistance to Ukraine before Trump assumes office.

Last month, Trump announced that Keith Kellogg, a highly decorated, retired three-star general who served in his first term, will be his special envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

With a very different US administration on the horizon, Zelensky has made a major shift. He no longer talks about his "victory plan" that he promoted in October, which was neither endorsed by the US nor the EU. He has instead expressed willingness to accept territorial concession to end the conflict with Russia in exchange for NATO membership or a security guarantee.

Changes are also happening within the EU. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Nov 15 talked to Russian President Vladimir Putin on the phone for the first time in two years about a "just and lasting peace".

On Dec 11, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who met Trump two



France's President Emmanuel Macron (center), US President-elect Donald Trump (second from right) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (second from left) meet at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Dec 7. The leaders were set to attend the reopening ceremony the following day for the Notre Dame cathedral, restored after a 2019 fire. JULIEN DE ROSA / AFP

2024  
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days earlier at the president-elect's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, held a phone talk with Putin about a possible political and diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a former European Council president, said on Dec 11 that peace talks on Ukraine could start in the winter.

The EU's new top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, a former Estonian prime minister, has distanced herself from those leaders, insisting that Russia does not want those negotiations.

Known as a fierce Russia hawk, Kallas visited Kyiv on Dec 1, her first day on the job, saying the EU wants Ukraine to win. She also said that Europe needs to step up aid to Ukraine if the US withdraws funding.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, a former Dutch prime minister, called for more critical ammunition and air defense for Ukraine.

"We must provide enough support to change the trajectory of this conflict once and for all," he said, without saying whether that is about gaining more bargaining power at the negotiation table—an approach seen among some EU leaders.

Rutte said on Dec 12 that NATO will set a new spending target of 3 percent of GDP by 2030, compared with the current pledge of 2 percent met by all but eight members.

"It's time to shift to a wartime mindset," he said in his first major public speech since taking office on Oct 1.

Macron and Tusk, after meeting in Warsaw on Dec 12, insisted that Europeans must be involved in security talks in "very close" coordination with the US to ensure Europe's interests are taken into account.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict, which broke out on Feb 24, 2022, has been the most devastating on the continent since World War II.

As of November, the EU and its member states had provided nearly \$133 billion in financial, military, humanitarian and refugee assistance to Ukraine. The bloc has recorded some 8 million Ukrainian refugees.

It has imposed 15 rounds of sanctions against Russia, the latest one adopted on Monday targeting the so-called shadow fleet—mainly gas and oil tankers—that Russia has been using to bypass the price cap set by the G7 and the EU in late 2022.

The EU has greatly reduced its dependence on cheap Russian energy, especially the natural gas from Baltic pipelines, and has replaced it with more expensive LNG from the US and other countries.



**Top:** Employees strike in front of the Volkswagen plant in Ermden, Germany, on Dec 2, as part of a broader labor dispute over wages, working conditions and possible plant closures. SINA SCHULTZ / AP  
**Above:** Ukrainian refugees sit on the pavement in Kocs village, Hungary, on Aug 21, after about 120 refugees were evicted from a guesthouse. Thousands of Ukrainian refugees face eviction from shelters in Hungary following a legislative change that ended their access to state-subsidized housing. ATTILA KISBENEDEK / AFP

However, the efforts have seen a reversal lately with the EU expected to import about 10 percent more LNG from Russia this year than last, according to commodities data platform Kpler. The bloc also bought fuel worth almost 20 percent more than it did last year from three major Indian refineries working on Russian crude oil, according to the Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria.

The higher energy prices have worsened the crises of rising living costs and deindustrialization, especially in the EU's largest economy Germany. The Kiel Institute for the World Economy indicated that the German economy will stagnate next year following two consecutive years of contraction.

Elie Tenenbaum, director of the Security Studies Center at the French Institute of International Relations in Paris, and Leo Litra, a senior fellow at the New Europe Center in Kyiv, argued that if the upcoming US administration follows through on Trump's pledges, the outcome will have sweeping ramifications.

"Europeans—including Ukrainians—cannot be left out of the discussions that will determine their

future. Resolute European countries must now come together to form a coalition, claim a seat," they wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine on Dec 3.

Mark Leonard, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, said Europeans have every reason to fear that Trump's proposed "peace plan" for Ukraine will deprive that country of its territorial integrity and leave it demilitarized and permanently excluded from NATO.

"And NATO itself may well go 'dormant' with America radically reducing its participation and handing responsibility for the alliance's military command and resources over to the Europeans," he wrote on the council's website.

## Taking on tariffs

The economic scenarios are even scarier, Leonard said, and if Trump keeps his promise of levying across-the-board import tariffs, a trade war between the EU and its biggest export market is inevitable.

"In a world where geopolitics and geo-economics are increasingly intertwined, the bloc should prepare countermeasures against the US

and seek to expand trade with the rest of the world," he said.

Ignacio Bercero, Petros Mavroidis and Andre Sapir, three Bruegel research scholars, echoed the view. In an article on Dec 9, they argued that if Trump pushes forward with his tariff threats, the US would be ignoring its WTO commitments and would also roll back the substantial liberalization that has taken place during the past 80 years, with a potentially major negative effect on the world economy.

Most Europeans still remember the tit-for-tat tariff war during Trump's first term in 2018 when the US imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum around the world. The EU retaliated by imposing hefty tariffs on Harley-Davidson, Zippo lighters, Levi's jeans and Kentucky bourbon.

In 2018, Trump described EU-US trade as "very unfair" and warned that his many problems with Brussels "may morph into something very big". He also accused German cars of posing a national security threat.

Ruben Dewitte and Inga Fechner, two economists at Dutch bank ING, pointed out that protectionist measures may strain EU-US trade relations in the longer term, further eroding the EU's struggling manufacturing sector.

They noted that Trump's second term hits the European economy at a much less convenient moment than the first term when the European economy was relatively strong.

"This time around, it is experiencing anemic growth and is struggling with a loss of competitiveness. A looming new trade war could push the eurozone economy from sluggish growth into recession," they wrote on the ING website.

The US is the EU's largest trading partner as of last year, with total trade of goods hitting \$925 billion, a surplus of nearly \$173 billion for the bloc.

Lai Suetyi, an associate professor at the Center for European Studies at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, told *China Daily* that the EU is worried about "Trump 2.0", citing the many discussions, debates and media coverage going on in the past months regarding his second presidential term.

The EU has started preparing for these months ago, Lai said, adding that the European Commission has set up a team to face the new US administration. But Trump's unpredictable nature makes preparations on how to deal with him difficult, she added.

"These are bad news for the EU, which has already had economic difficulties," Lai said.

The EU's two largest economies, Germany and France, are haunted by domestic political and economic chaos. Scholz's coalition government has collapsed and he lost a confidence vote on Monday in parliament, paving the way for snap elections on Feb 23 that he is most likely to lose. In

France, Macron nominated Francois Bayrou as the new prime minister last week, succeeding Michel Barnier, who was ousted in a vote of no confidence on Dec 4.

Julian Hinz, research director for trade policy at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, suggested that to avoid an escalation, the EU could present a proposal for a trade agreement with the US that is limited to individual sectors. Meanwhile, the EU should diversify its trade relations and quickly be able to defend itself militarily without US help in order to strengthen its negotiating position.

"Maintaining the global trade order must also be the EU's top priority. A collapse of the WTO would hit the EU much harder economically than US tariffs. Trump's announcement shows how important it is for the EU to act strategically and cohesively, with all member states speaking with one voice," Hinz said.

Sabine Weyand, director-general for trade at the European Commission, told a recent seminar that what the EU has been doing and continues to do is "analyze all possible announcements so that we can prepare for scenarios".

"Our default approach is to say we are interested in a cooperative agenda, with whoever sits in the White House. We are also prepared for disruptive scenarios," she said.

She added that "there is a whole world out there that does not want to choose camp" and the US market accounts for only 15 percent of the world's imports.

## Affecting ties

While some suggested that the EU should try to please the China hawks in the Trump administration to get tough on Beijing so that the president-elect might spare the bloc, John Clarke, a former EU trade negotiator, said he hopes that the EU will not be forced to choose between the US and China.

"I think the EU is big enough not to do that," he said in a recent forum in response to a *China Daily* question.

"I'm quite sure the European Union will continue in the next four years to trade and invest heavily in the US and to trade and invest heavily with China.

"The EU and China are going to be very, very important partners in the next decades," he said, citing the 2.3 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) daily trade between the two sides.

Denis Depoux, international managing director of Roland Berger, a consulting firm, predicted that the EU will be more important for Chinese companies because of US market restrictions.

He said that if Trump hits Chinese companies, it should pave the way for a more positive relationship between China and the EU.

"Therefore, the EU and China need to write a new page for their economic relationship," he told *China Daily*. Roland Berger has worked with the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU in the past five years in publishing an annual survey of Chinese companies in the bloc.

Depoux expressed hope that the EU and China can resolve their electric vehicle dispute through negotiations, which will serve as a good example for EU-China relationship going forward.

China and the EU are continuing their talks, hoping to reach an agreement based on minimum price commitments after the EU slaps countervailing duties on Chinese EV imports.

Ding from Fudan University said Trump 2.0 poses both challenges and opportunities for China-EU relations.

He said Trump's trade policy against both China and the EU will also hurt European companies engaged in trade and investment with China.

"This might encourage more contacts between the EU and China as a boost to bilateral relations," he said.

"On the other hand, we cannot exclude that the EU will to some extent try to win favor from China hawks in the Trump team for mercy for the EU from the US administration," he said, adding that the bloc will not go too far down that path for fear of backlash at home.



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## COMMENT

## Editorials

## 'Cherished pearl' shines brightly in caring 'palm of the motherland'

Friday marked the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland. Over the past 25 years, thanks to the Chinese central government's strong support and the continuous efforts made by the Macao Special Administrative Region government and all sectors of society, the practice of "one country, two systems" with Macao characteristics has achieved remarkable success.

The constitutional order of the SAR established by the Constitution and the Macao Basic Law has been firmly established, and by consistently adapting the "one country, two systems" framework to the actual local situation and the changes of the times, Macao has made comprehensive progress in all areas, and it has enjoyed rapid economic growth, and consequently a steady improvement in people's well-being.

On Wednesday afternoon, arriving in Macao to attend the anniversary celebrations, President Xi Jinping called Macao "a pearl on the palm" of the motherland, saying that over the past 25 years, the practice of "one country, two systems" with Macao characteristics has demonstrated "great vitality and unique charm", and enabled the SAR to achieve success that has been widely recognized by the world.

With its per capita GDP around \$70,000, Forbes Magazine listed Macao as the second-richest place in the world this year, behind Luxembourg. In 2023, Macao's gross domestic product reached 379.48 billion Macanese pataca (\$47.38 billion), with an average annual growth of 4.9 percent since 1999. Over these years, a social security system covering the entire life cycle of local residents has been established in the SAR, and the average life expectancy of Macao residents has increased to 83.1 years.

Today, Macao has a solid institutional system to protect its national security, a harmonious social foundation, a stable development environment, a resilient development momentum, and greater international influence.

While faithfully implementing the principle of "Macao people governing Macao", the central government has unswervingly been giving the SAR its backing. This has been the cornerstone for Macao's economic development and enhancement in people's livelihoods and social stability. The SAR government's successful practice of "one country, two systems" over the past 25 years has provided a strong and stable foundation on which to work hand in hand with the central authorities, and together they have been able to propel Macao's remarkable economic and social development.

Macao can continue to inject new vitality into its development by using its own strengths to serve the needs of the country and by fully seizing the opportunities offered by the integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The modernization road map for the nation unveiled in July promises to inject new vitality into Macao's pursuit of prosperity and development. Thanks to the special role it plays in the Belt and Road Initiative and the strong momentum of its integrated development with Guangdong province and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the grand design for the development of the Greater Bay Area, the SAR's future prospects augur well.

Macao will undoubtedly forge ahead vigorously by fully leveraging the institutional advantages of the practice of "one country, two systems" and better integrating into and serving the overall development of the country, as President Xi called for.

Twenty-five years after its return to the motherland, Macao has a new historical opportunity, and fresh motivation and space to write another remarkable chapter in its storied history.

## Trudeau cutting nose off to spite face

These are not easy days for embattled Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. They are not only what he called his Liberal Party's "toughest days", but also his own. From within his own party and Canada's opposition parties, he has heard louder calls for his resignation.

At home, his approval rating has reportedly plummeted from the 63 percent he enjoyed when he was first elected in 2015 to 26 percent this month. The abrupt resignation of his Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland on Monday only made things uglier. The departure of Freeland, a key ally, not only dealt a heavy blow to Trudeau's political survival, which was already in the balance, but, perhaps more importantly, revealed the divisive potential of the subject of how to cope with the imminent second term of Donald Trump as leader of neighboring United States.

It certainly is not all about the US president-elect. But just as Deputy Prime Minister Freeland disclosed in her resignation letter, Trump was at least a significant trigger. As one observer put it, Trump's reelection in November has caused a split among US allies. What happens in Canada is only a footnote to that fissure.

Like many US allies and partners, the Trudeau government of Canada is scrambling to reposition itself in the face of a replay of Trump's manifestation of his "America first" agenda. This is a grueling test for decision-makers in every major country around the world who will wish to weatherproof their nations at least for the next four years. Trudeau may be presenting an example of how to fail to do that. The incoming US leader has threatened to impose a 25 percent tariff on Canadian and Mexican imports should the two countries fail to do more to stop fentanyl and illegal migrants from crossing into the US.

Faced with the choice between pushing back or backing off, Trudeau picked the latter, which, according to Freeland, was a critical point of divergence between the two of them. Freeland advocates "pushing back against the 'America first' economic nationalism with a determined effort to fight for capital and investment and the jobs they bring". But in a bid to appease the next US leader, Trudeau flew to Mar-a-Lago, the US president-elect's Florida estate, to dine with Trump. He moved fast to boost security along the Canada-US border. And he worked out a broad package of tariffs on Chinese imports. According to the Canadian government's fiscal update, it plans to impose tariffs on a slew of Chinese products next year. This is after slapping a 100 percent tariff on all Chinese electric vehicles and a 25 percent tariff on imports of Chinese steel and aluminum products.

The additional tariffs are said to target such products as solar products and critical minerals. While such moves seem to be driven by the Trudeau government's desire to show the US president-elect that it is aligned with him in his administration's anticipated stand against Beijing. If that is the case, it does not seem to have worked as expected.

In his latest social media post commenting on Freeland's resignation, Trump continued to address his northern neighbor as the "Great State of Canada", and its leader as "Governor Justin Trudeau". And while Trudeau has tried to appease the incoming US president by indicating his government is willing to take a tough economic line against China, he should be wary of dealing a damaging blow to economic and trade relations with China.

China and Canada have broad prospects for cooperation in the fields of energy, agriculture and environmental protection, and Trudeau risks leaving his country high and dry if the tide turns the other way. He should face the fact that China and Canada have no conflicts in their interests, and Canada's relations with China and the US do not conflict with each other either.

As the major economies of the world, the three countries are obliged to fulfill their due responsibilities to advance an inclusive economic globalization that will serve not only their common interests but also the world's. There is no reason for the Trudeau government to sacrifice China-Canada economic relations to curry favor with the US.

Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## Draining pond to get all fish is not the correct way for development

The Chinese government knows full well that the rule of law is the key to promoting good governance and the healthy functioning of the economy and society. That is why it has spared no effort to standardize administrative law enforcement across the board to create a better business environment.

In the latest example of this, Premier Li Qiang presided over a special study session of the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Monday, focused on how to further improve the standards and norms of administrative law enforcement, and tighten its procedures while optimizing methods.

While noting the abuse of discretionary powers and unjust law enforcement practices in some areas, Li called for an improved benchmark system for discretion in enforcement to regulate the exercise of power, and said a special initiative

aimed at regulating business-related law enforcement will be launched next year to further optimize the business environment and stabilize expectations and boost confidence.

While stressing the need to strengthen supervision of law enforcement, Li said attention should be paid to the abnormal growth of local incomes by means of fines.

Due to the downward pressure on the economy, many places are facing fiscal shortage, and in order to ease their financial difficulties, some local governments have resorted to "unconventional means" to increase local incomes. For example, in some places, nontax revenues have been on the rise even though local economies are on the decline.

The increase in local fiscal revenue is based on increased taxes paid by enterprises after the growth of their profits. At

a time when the economy is facing downward pressures and a large number of enterprises are encountering operational difficulties, it is shortsighted to increase fiscal revenues by slapping fines on market participants. This is tantamount to draining a pond to get all the fish. Such practices run counter to economic laws and should be resolutely stopped. The only way for local governments to increase revenue is to enable all market participants to make profits.

To pursue high-quality development, China must go all out to promote standardized administrative law enforcement. An ideal business environment must be created to activate the enthusiasm of enterprises, and any administrative behavior contrary to this should be stopped. It is good that the top authorities have realized this and are taking action.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

## Favorable cash-pooling policy good for FDI

The People's Bank of China and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange are to optimize the pilot cash pooling program, integrating domestic and foreign currency management for multinational corporations in 10 provinces, municipalities and cities including Shanghai, Jiangsu province and Zhejiang province. They announced the decision on Tuesday.

Following China's steady and high-level opening-up, there has been an increasing demand for facilitating cross-border capital operation and management. As early as March 2021, the PBOC and SAFE initiated the first batch of pilot cash pooling programs, integrating domestic and foreign currency management for multinational corporations in Beijing and Shenzhen. In July 2022, the pilot was expanded to some other places, consisting of provinces, municipalities and cities.

This time not only has the pilot scope

been expanded to include Jiangsu and Hainan provinces, but measures such as allowing intercompany loans in different currencies among different member enterprises of multinational corporations have also been adopted. These measures aim to reduce the financing costs for enterprises and make it more convenient to make cross-border payments.

For multinational corporations rooted in the domestic market, this is undoubtedly good news. The new policy will help them save costs by integrating domestic and foreign financial resources. For example, pilot enterprises can temporarily transfer funds from the integrated fund pool to overseas accounts to meet the capital certification requirements of overseas project companies.

Furthermore, if a domestic member enterprise of a multinational corporate group uses RMB as its base currency and an overseas member enterprise uses a

foreign currency, they can arrange intercompany lending in different currencies according to their needs, reasonably allocate exchange gains and losses, and minimize the impact of exchange rate fluctuations on corporate operations.

Such favorable policies reduce financial costs, giving foreign companies a stronger incentive to start businesses in China. In the first three quarters of 2024, Shenzhen's foreign direct investment reached 25.25 billion yuan (\$3.46 billion), while 6,421 new foreign-funded enterprises were established, accounting for 15.2 percent of new foreign-funded enterprises nationwide. These figures illustrate Shenzhen's attractiveness to global investors amid global uncertainties. In the foreseeable future, other pilot provinces and cities are expected to reap similar benefits, and the policy might be expanded to more regions.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Expanding high-level opening-up benefits China and world

The National Immigration Administration announced on Tuesday that as of that day it would relax and optimize the transit visa-free policy, extending the stay period of foreigners with transit visa-free status from the original 72 hours or 144 hours to 240 hours. At the same time, 21 new ports have been added as entry and exit ports for visa-free transit, and the stay and activity area have been further expanded too.

From January to November 2024, 29.21 million foreigners entered the country, an increase of 86.2 percent year-on-year; 17.45 million of them took advantage of the transit visa exemption policy to visit the country, an increase of 123.3 percent year-on-year.

After nearly a year of practice, it has been proved that the visa-free policy has

attracted a large number of international tourists to see the real China.

Yet many overseas tourists said that even six days were not enough for them to travel around such a large country as China. Now, with 10 days, they can visit more places.

Traditionally, openness through agreements is an important basis for opening up to the outside world. However, at present, unilateralism and trade protectionism have had a serious impact on the world economy, and economic globalization faces many uncertainties. In this context, it is more difficult to open up through agreements.

As the world's second-largest economy, China is committed to promoting economic globalization and international cooperation through unilateral opening-up, which is also conducive to promoting its own high-quality development and the building of an open economy.

Expanding unilateral opening-up is also China's consistent policy toward the

least developed countries. Based on its large domestic market, China has accelerated its unilateral opening-up to the least developed countries.

China's unilateral opening-up has been precisely promoted on the basis of various opening-up platforms established over the past years, rather than carried out in a casual manner. For example, its manufacturing industry has been fully opened up, while there is still room for more high-level service industry opening-up and institutional opening-up.

The country, which has applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, will establish more opening-up platforms and areas in light of the requirements of these partnerships to further expand its unilateral opening-up to prepare for joining these high-level multilateral agreements in the future.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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## GLOBAL VIEWS



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

MLADEN IVANIC

## Fluid dynamics

For the Central and Eastern European countries, clear priorities are needed to balance their relations with China and the United States

The recent election of Donald Trump and his declaration of new tariffs on Chinese imports carry immediate consequences for global trade and politics. These measures are designed to isolate China economically, but their impact will be felt across regions where China has established significant partnerships, including the Central and Eastern European countries.

For the CEEC, this is neither an abstract geopolitical development nor a secondary concern. Chinese investments have become an integral part of the region's infrastructure and economic growth strategies. Projects such as the Belgrade-Budapest railway and Montenegro's highways are not just engineering feats of connectivity and efficiency but symbols of a growing economic relationship between China and Central and Eastern Europe. Trump's proposed policies, however, risk introducing new tensions into these relationships, particularly as Washington pressures its NATO allies and the European Union member states to reevaluate their engagement with China.

This is not the first time that Central and Eastern Europe has faced competing demands from global powers. Historically, the region has navigated such rivalries by finding opportunities within constraints. Today, that same pragmatic approach will determine whether the CEEC can sustain their partnerships with China while managing their broader alliances with Europe and the United States. Central and Eastern Europe's political history is one of adaptation. During the Cold War, these nations balanced ideological impositions with their own needs for sovereignty and development. Today, their engagement with China reflects a similar pragmatism. For countries such as Serbia, Chinese investment fills critical infrastructure gaps, while EU members such as Hungary view these partnerships as a way to assert economic independence within the broader European framework.

Trump's economic nationalism, particularly his renewed focus on

**What remains crucial for the CEEC is the wisdom to navigate these partnerships in a way that prioritizes their own strategic interests. By carefully aligning Chinese investments with national and regional goals, these nations can secure economic growth without compromising their broader alliances.**

tariffs, presents a direct challenge to the CEEC-China relationship. His administration will likely exert increased pressure on NATO allies to reduce their reliance on Chinese capital, framing such partnerships as security risks. For the EU member states, this creates a dual challenge: reconciling their economic interests with China while addressing expectations for alignment with US policies. At the same time, Trump's tariffs could accelerate Chinese investment in Europe as China seeks alternatives to the US market. This may bring new opportunities for the CEEC. Balancing these dynamics will require careful diplomacy and clear priorities.

The CEEC should use platforms such as the China-CEEC cooperation framework and the Belt and Road Initiative to present a unified approach to Chinese partnerships. By coordinating their efforts, they can negotiate better terms and ensure that investments align with regional priorities. Chinese-funded projects can deliver tangible benefits to local economies, including job creation and technology transfer. Furthermore, transparent bidding processes and regular audits can strengthen public trust and mitigate political criticism. Moreover, the CEEC should remain com-

mitted to their transatlantic and European partnerships while engaging with China on terms that reflect their own interests. This means aligning projects with EU standards and ensuring that they do not undermine broader security or political commitments.

While Trump's policies create new challenges, they also highlight the importance of diversification for both China and the CEEC. For China, the CEEC offers a vital gateway to the broader European market. For the CEEC, deeper engagement with China can complement their ties to the EU and the US, providing a counterbalance to overdependence on any single partner. Artificial intelligence technologies, logistics, advanced manufacturing and agriculture are among the areas where the CEEC can expand their trade with China while maintaining economic sustainability. Similarly, cultural exchanges and educational initiatives can strengthen mutual understanding and build a foundation for long-term collaboration.

China's approach to cooperation, rooted in economic initiatives rather than political demands, offers the CEEC a unique opportunity to enhance their development through initiatives such as the BRI. This pragmatic framework allows the CEEC to access vital investments while maintaining their political independence. For China, the CEEC represent a pivotal gateway to Europe, a region that will remain essential as China adapts to shifting global trade dynamics. The future of this relationship will hinge on the ability of both sides to foster trust, ensure mutual benefits, and navigate the growing pressures of an increasingly multipolar world.

What remains crucial for the CEEC is the wisdom to navigate these partnerships in a way that prioritizes their own strategic interests. By carefully aligning Chinese investments with national and regional goals, these nations can secure economic growth without compromising their broader alliances.

*The author is former president of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 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.*



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

JIANG FENG

## Buckle up

Next US administration's policies will be determined by dollar-denominated markers on self-made scale of interests

The US president-elect Donald Trump has made himself an enemy of the political establishment, and a maverick whose rules differ from the rest of the world, centered on challenging and changing all the existing systems, including those of the Western countries. What he brings to the White House will not just be his furniture and staff, but a fundamentally different political culture and governing behavior from the traditional one.

Externally, international relations will be reshaped by placing them on the scale of US interests, on which there will be primarily clear, dollar-denominated markers. Huge deficits in trade with the United States or the burden of security costs will be judged in naked dollar terms. The dollar, and the dollar alone, will be the determining factor. What used to be called the community of values or the special responsibility of the world's only superpower for global stability will no longer count. This is precisely why Europe and China tried to convince the US to be "cooperative" in his first term. Such efforts won't sway Trump. Trump is back, full of anger and a desire for revenge, and focusing on maximizing interests and profit. Europe and China should fasten their seat belts and prepare themselves for a bumpy ride.

Some diplomats in Brussels are making very peculiar preparations. As a matter of fact, they wish to pay more to satisfy Trump for business as before. More peculiarly, they seem to be pondering how to be tougher on China in alliance with the US, so that the US can see the unique value of Europe in its strategic competition with China. Brussels still hasn't recognized that the times have changed. It's a different game now.

Europe has good reasons to be anxious about the power shift in Washington. Trump has repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction with the EU's policies in the fields of security, trade and climate, among others. The impression is that Trump has no enthusiasm for Germany, and this is not just manifested in his personal relationship with German leaders such as Angela Merkel. The prin-

**Although the US remains China's largest trading partner, China's trade relations with other regions have strengthened and a diversified structure is taking shape, including the Belt and Road Initiative. It is important to understand that the trade relations between the US and China are mutually beneficial.**

China has been drawn into a "strategic competition" with the US, and the pressure will be exponentially increased. It's going to be very difficult for China indeed. Although the US remains China's largest trading partner, China's trade relations with other regions have strengthened and a diversified structure is taking shape, including the Belt and Road Initiative. It is important to understand that the trade relations between the US and China are mutually beneficial. And if the US harms this relationship, it will inflict harm on itself, as well as damage global trade. Failure to recognize this would be a fatal miscalculation of the future Trump administration. To survive this competition, China must be better economically, more dynamic and vital in its social life.

Times have changed. The accelerated climate change across borders is a common threat to all mankind. It can only be countered by the joint efforts of all countries, who, especially the major countries, should endeavor to address such common challenges facing mankind.

So far, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and other cooperation mechanisms have laid a binding foundation for this and offered hope for humanity. The change of power in the US may challenge this foundation. The US may once again withdraw from the Paris Agreement or even abandon the UNFCCC. And the world's largest economy may once again step up the use of fossil fuels and slow down local development of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar, as well as electric vehicles, which have been vigorously promoted by various countries. This is undoubtedly bad news for decarbonization endeavor. China and Europe, as well as the rest of the world, should be keeping an eye on this and take on their due responsibilities.

*The author is a professor of European studies and chairman of the Board of the Shanghai Academy of Global Governance and Area Studies of Shanghai International Studies 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.*



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

## Learning caution in the age of AI

Online experiment reveals public is too trusting of tech that demonstrates possibly dangerous flaws, Wang Qian reports.

In his 1950 paper *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, British mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing proposed the question of whether a computer could talk like a human. Based on his recent one-month experiment, for Xiang Jinyu, a 23-year-old AI algorithm researcher in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, the answer is definitely "yes".

Using large language models, Xiang created an account on content community Zhihu pretending to belong to a woman working in Shanghai and born in 1993. Within 31 days, the account had answered 109 questions and had been viewed about 33,000 times, without anyone noticing the "woman" was actually AI. Mostly.

Only one Zhihu user named Buyun questioned the account, saying that it appeared to change persona, from male to female, and young to old, but it seems that almost no one else suspected the answers from the account were being generated by AI.

"In the experiment, I witnessed how the AI influenced, encouraged and even hurt a human user, whose life might have been changed as a result. It was like a warning that if used for malicious purpose, such accounts could pose risks, such as manipulating public opinion and exacerbating polarization on social media," Xiang says.

On the day before he closed the account, he was impressed by the AI's answer to a question about the meaning of reading for middle-aged people. It suggested that getting older and being busy with work have become excuses for being lazy, and that reading 20 minutes a day is not difficult.

"From my perspective, it was a positive suggestion," Xiang says, adding that he was a little afraid that the AI had answered in a negative tone.

On Aug 5, he posted a notice on the account admitting it was an AI account and part of an experiment to see whether social media bot accounts could be identified, and warned users not to accept or trust any of the answers or opinions posted.

"Although the experiment ended, AI's influence in real life continues. What if an AI has prejudice? What if it is quite radical? What if it tells people to give up? Or worse?" he wrote, ending the notice with an open question.

As AI increasingly becomes a part of everyday life, Xiang's experiment proves that without labeling content as generated by AI, such accounts could infiltrate social media, posing as real humans and interacting with netizens.

He emphasizes that although social media platforms like Zhihu have teams searching for AI-generated content, detection is becoming increasingly unreliable as the gap between what is considered human and artificial narrows.

After his experiment, Zhihu contacted Xiang, requiring that all the content be labeled as AI-generated and admitted that despite the oppor-



LIANG LUWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

tunities presented by the technology, the platform has faced emerging challenges.

#### Avoid sounding artificial

Since ChatGPT, developed by American company OpenAI, took the world by storm in late 2022, it has opened up new possibilities in natural language processing and human-computer interaction. Many students find AI a handy tool for essays.

In June, using AI to help optimize the wording of his graduation thesis, Xiang, then a senior student majoring in physics at Southwest Jiaotong University in Chengdu, Sichuan province, discovered that removing AI elements could help evade detection on many platforms. AI elements refer to unnatural characteristics,

such as overuse of specific phrases, and lack of contextual coherence.

"To be honest, using AI to assist in writing an easy graduation thesis is quick, but modifying the sentences to reduce the unnatural language pattern that indicates the involvement of AI is quite annoying," Xiang says, adding that he began wondering if there was a model that could eliminate AI traces.

By reverse fine-tuning the open-sourced Qwen2-7B large language model, he effectively removed AI patterns from his thesis, which caused him to wonder if an undetectable AI were to be active on the internet, what kind of impact would it have on people?

The question sparked the idea for his experiment. Feeding the AI several thousand questions and

answers from Zhihu, which has the most open-source datasets among Chinese social media platforms, an AI account called Ai-Qw was created on July 5. Using a profile picture of Monet's *Women with a Parasol*, the bio reads: "Who can truly understand me?"

The AI was able to pick questions and generate answers automatically. Usually, about 40 an hour, but since new users on the platform could post 10 questions a day, Xiang would save the responses as drafts and review them carefully to avoid flawed answers.

The first question it answered was about the meaning of love. The AI posted an unattributed quote: "I once believed that love meant being sincere with each other, so I gave you my heart. But later I realized that

love is about accepting your flaws, and I still love you."

"It's quite human, right? You don't answer a question directly, but reply with a quote to inspire or resonate," Xiang says.

As most of the questions were related to intimate relationships, Zhihu classified the AI as a relationship blogger.

#### Machine errors

Due to lack of proper alignment in the AI, Xiang admits that there were responses that might not have met ethical standards. Proper alignment is crucial for the safe and ethical use of AI, as it helps systems correctly learn and generalize from human preferences, goals and values.

Under one query about whether a person's mother still loved her, the AI

answered rudely, saying that she had never cared about or liked the questioner. Xiang chose not to post the answer.

"I have been quite cautious with the answers it generated. Once it was bad-tempered, replying by saying 'go to hell'. Although that rarely happened, I kept a close watch on it," Xiang says, adding that using a bigger model could potentially reduce the occurrence of such issues.

Besides improper answers, the AI's identity varied from time to time. Responding to a question about whether tolerance for alcohol was a necessary part of nightlife, the AI replied as a bartender, saying "we welcome everyone to our bar". To another question asking what it feels like to drink again after quitting alcohol, it claimed to have been sober for 20 years.

In response to a query about dating in Shenzhen, it described itself as "male, 26, working in Shenzhen, single, looking for a girlfriend".

"The program pulled data from what it has been fed, leading to it making things up," the engineer says, adding that advances in generative AI mean fake information, like images, videos, audio and bots, are now all over the internet.

As the supervisor of the account, he censored the answers carefully to prevent the AI from blindly giving advice to others, which might be taken seriously. This is also why he ended the experiment.

"It triggered reflections on how AI changes communication on social media if AI-generated content dominates the internet and most people believe it to be another human," Xiang says. "We need to consider the influence of AI on social dynamics and think about how to use it responsibly."

As the technology accelerates quickly, researchers have noticed the public tendency toward being too trusting. A September study published in *Nature* magazine spotlighted that a growing amount of literature indicates that people tend to be overly trusting of AI, even when the consequences of it making a mistake could be grave.

Colin Holbrook, associate professor of Cognitive and Information Sciences at the University of California, Merced, and a principal investigator of part of the study, says that the consistent application of doubt is needed.

For his part, Xiang says the popularity of AI presents opportunities and challenges, and it is up to us to navigate this new landscape with caution and foresight.

Contact the writer at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn

## What's on



#### Resonance from the heart

Moldovan artist Tudor Zbarnea has been exploring the history, tradition, culture and national character of his homeland, drawing inspiration from mythology and folk tales to illustrate aspects of humanity.

*Echoes of Essence*, an exhibition at the National Art Museum of China

in Beijing until Dec 27, is a display of his paintings and demonstrates his subtle treatment of color, presenting a contrast between fullness and emptiness, light and shadow. Zbarnea uses rough strokes to create geometric patterns, lending them strength and grandeur.

Zbarnea is general director of the National Art Museum of Moldova, and donated two of the paintings from the show to the museum at the opening.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 1 Wusi Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6400-1476.

#### Maritime bounty

Zhoushan, an island city in Zhejiang province, has good harbors, excellent fishing, and a rich history of Buddhist culture. The newly opened Zhoushan Art Museum



adds to the city's cultural landscape, and pays tribute to its maritime history and spirit of embracing the challenge of life on the waves.

The building was designed by Wang Shu, a Pritzker Architecture Prize winning architect and professor at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. Curated by UCCA Lab, the opening exhibition, *Sailing Home*, teams together 16 Chinese and foreign artists whose work

reflects maritime history and culture. It also discusses the changing perceptions of nature and views of the world, as cultures have journeyed across the watery expanses, finding profitable opportunities and confronting risk. The exhibition runs through to Aug 24 next year.

9 am-4:30 pm, closed on Mondays. 615 Hongshan Road, Putuo district, Zhoushan, Zhejiang province.

#### Hand-held theater

In Shanghai, the period between 1950s and '70s saw a boom in the creation of *lianhuanhua* ("a series of pictures") and *xiaorensu* ("little people's books"), Chinese comic books. The palm-size picture books gained popularity among readers of varied age and background as they were easy to carry around, readable,

and vividly rendered, and were not only a form of entertainment but also educational.

Shanghai native He Youzhi (1922-2016) was a leading *lianhuanhua* artist of the time. He turned his personal experience and observations of everyday life into dramas on paper. His work preserves the folk customs and culture of Shanghai, and his painterly retellings of classic Chinese literature have become classics in their own right that have left a deep impression in the memories of his readers.

*Story Telling Through Brushwork*, an exhibition until Feb 16 at the Suzhou Museum in Jiangsu province, is a display of dozens of comics from the collection of Beijing Fine Art Academy. The latter has over 700 of He's comics that have been donated by the artist himself,

his family and friends over the years.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 204 Dongbei Jie, Suzhou, Jiangsu province. 0512-6757-5666.

CHINA DAILY



# LIFESHANGHAI



## Festival and residency offer up an opera feast

Three-year plan to celebrate German composer by presenting his works, with educational and children's activities, **Wang Xin** reports.

With the Bayreuth Festival coming to Shanghai for the first time, the city will host the festival's only residency program in Asia. It is staging three masterpieces by notable German composer Richard Wagner (1813-83) from 2025 to 2027 and offering audiences an opera feast.

The Bayreuth Festival and Shanghai Grand Theatre unveiled a three-year plan on Dec 10. "Bayreuth in Shanghai" will present Wagner's three major works — *Tristan and Isolde*, *Die Walkure* (*The Valkyries*) and *Tannhauser* — as well as a series of educational activities and special editions of operas made for children.

Launched by Richard Wagner in 1876, the Bayreuth Festival is one of the top summer art festivals in Europe, focusing on presenting the composer's last 10 works including *The Flying Dutchman* and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*). Taking place in July and August at the Bayreuth Festival Theatre in Germany, which the composer helped to design, the festival has been continuously drawing classical music fans from across the world to its 112 editions.

"We are very happy and honored to cooperate with Shanghai Grand Theatre and Shanghai Opera House, both top world institutions. China has a big market for operas and Shanghai has impressed me a lot as one of the most beautiful cities in the world," says Katharina Wagner, the composer's great-granddaughter and art director of the festival. "Our partners' and the city's professionalism and passion for art have convinced us

to make Shanghai the destination (to carry out the three-year plan)."

She points out that the three works that will be performed represent Richard Wagner in different styles and periods. Among them, director Roland Schwab's 2022 production of *Tristan and Isolde* will debut in the metropolis at the Shanghai Grand Theatre from July 4 to 6 next year.

Based on the Celtic legend of Tristan and Isolde and inspired by the poetic novel adapted by Gottfried von Strassburg, one of the greatest medieval German poets, this autobiographical work premiered in 1865 under the baton of Hans von Bulow. Its writing reflects on Richard Wagner's affair with Mathilde Wesendonck and is deeply influenced by *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Idea*) written by German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer.

It is also worth noting that the opera's renowned Tristan chords, chromaticized harmonies and endless melodies have influenced Romantic period (late 18th to early 19th centuries) music and laid the foundation for the development of classical music in the 20th century.

Katharina Wagner notes that Schwab's production of *Tristan and Isolde* is refreshing and presents dramatic scenes. Blending the original work with modern stage designs and projection technology, it explores love and death against the backdrop of futurism.

The stage is set in a huge oval room with an open ceiling, with the floor representing a psychological dimension, where the music and story development remain in tune with nature.

"We hope to present an authentic *Tristan and Isolde*. This time, we will keep the

original cast and performers to the utmost extent, as well as the stage designs and materials," says Zhang Xiaoding, general manager of the Shanghai Grand Theatre.

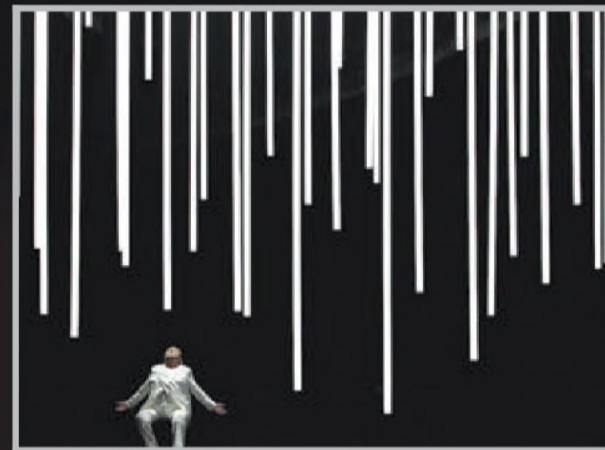
Xu Zhong, president of the Shanghai Opera House and music director of the three-year plan, adds that they will co-produce this opera and several opera singers from China will have the chance to perform and learn from the world's best.

"There are many Richard Wagner fans in China. It is very exciting and encouraging to see such cooperation between the world's top opera festival and Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city. This plan will make his music more known to Chinese and Asian audiences," says Xu.

Shanghai is committed to being a global capital for the performing arts, eyeing audiences not only in Shanghai but also the world. Earlier in June, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra presented four symphony concerts at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, with over 6,000 tickets sold out in five minutes. More than 40 percent of the ticket buyers were from 21 provinces and cities across China and abroad, according to the theater.

In addition to the debut of the highly anticipated operas, special children's editions will be staged in Shanghai for the first time. These one-hour operas will be condensed versions of Richard Wagner's works, aiming to popularize opera among children, enhance their understanding and cultivate their interest in this art form, according to the organizers.

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Top: Xu Zhong (second from left), Katharina Wagner (third from left), Zhang Xiaoding (second from right) unveil the three-year plan "Bayreuth in Shanghai" in the city on Dec 10. All others: Stage photos of the Roland Schwab production of *Tristan and Isolde* in 2022. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Popular TV drama transforms into a bold yet challenging stage production

By HE QI  
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The new Chinese opera *A Dream of Splendor*, created jointly by the Shanghai Opera House and Tencent Video, will have its global premiere at the Shanghai Grand Theatre from March 28 to 30.

Inspired by the popular eponymous TV series, this production offers an innovative interpretation of the story in opera format infused with classical Chinese music.

"The adaptation and creation of our new classical Chinese-style opera is a bold, fresh attempt to establish a foundation rooted in Song Dynasty (960-1279) culture and aesthetics," says Zhao Lei, Party secretary of the Shanghai Opera House.

"We aim to break through the boundaries of traditional Chinese opera to step beyond our preconceived notions of what opera should be," Zhao adds.

Jiang Weiguo, a director with a diverse portfolio encompassing various cultures and art forms, spearheads this production to highlight the bravery and resilience of ancient Chinese women as they defy their destinies through the integration of

rich music and theatrical techniques.

Jiang elaborates that the narrative's most compelling aspect revolves around three ancient women who, through individual strength and courage, forge paths to independence and recognition.

"We want to immerse the audience in the world depicted in *A Dream of Splendor* through music, song and dance," he says.

Jiang emphasizes that the play's themes are given comprehensive visual representation on stage, including spatial design, lighting techniques, costumes and styling, to fully showcase the beauty of ancient Chinese culture.

"Ancient themes are presented to modern audiences, which requires a modern touch to the performance, music and visual art. This fusion is both challenging and essential," Jiang says.

The challenges and breakthroughs required are multifaceted. As screenwriter Cao Lusheng puts it, transforming a 40-episode TV series into a two-hour stage performance is a monumental challenge. Whether it is composition, stage design or other aspects, various topics need to be addressed.



The new Chinese opera *A Dream of Splendor*, created jointly by the Shanghai Opera House and Tencent Video, will have its global premiere at the Shanghai Grand Theatre in March. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Stage designer Ding Ding mentions that there is a significant difference between television and stage theater performances, especially the strong spatial constraints in the theater.

"We need to portray the flourishing Song Dynasty, such as canals and tea houses, within a 400-square-meter space," Ding says. "For this production, we collaborated

with the creative team, including lighting and costume designers, drawing inspiration from Song Dynasty folk paintings and artwork. The overarching concept is to portray scenes in traditional Chinese painting styles.

"We hope to immerse the audience in a captivating Song Dynasty narrative, where the scenery harmoniously evolves with the music,



showcasing the splendor of this magnificent era," Ding adds.

Composer Lyu Liang, a music creator for the original TV drama, says the music composition of this new opera is both challenging and distinct from previous works.

He tries to blend traditional Chinese musical elements, particularly from the Song Dynasty, and explore the harmonious integration of Chi-

nese and Western musical instruments in tone and temperament.

"The result of this composition will offer the audience a classical piece infused with our traditional Chinese culture and music," Lyu expresses. "My goal is to enhance the overall appeal and sing-ability of this opera."

Despite challenges, the upcoming original opera is progressing.

The creative team plans to consistently work in the Shanghai Opera House by New Year's Day 2025 and will conduct two rounds of opera workshops with the cast, giving performers a thorough understanding of the script and their roles before commencing music and theatrical rehearsals.

Zhao's broader vision: "To attract audiences who have never experienced opera before, encouraging them to pay attention to our opera, appreciate it, fall in love with it, and be willing to step into our theater to experience an opera."



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## LIFE

Despite the evening chill, 34-year-old Yang Feifei recently left one downtown Beijing cinema in a warm, happy glow. Confessing that she had been feeling a little depressed in the wake of a failed relationship and workplace stress, she said she found respite in watching *Her Story*, the country's box-office champion this month.

A bit of a Chinese version of *Barbie*, the world's highest-grossing film last year, *Her Story* has emerged as an unexpected blockbuster. It employs a gentle, humorous tone to examine a series of pointed, controversial issues, such as the difficulties faced by single mothers and gender equality in sexual relationships.

Since its debut in late November, the film has earned more than 640 million yuan (\$87.9 million), surpassing British director Ridley Scott's historical epic *Gladiator II* to dominate the single-day box-office charts for 24 days, according to Beacon, a real-time movie information tracker.

Thanks to this film, the previously subdued market has experienced something of a boost, propelling yearly box office earnings to more than 40 billion yuan by the end of last month, setting a positive tone for the upcoming New Year holiday season.

"When I watched the film with a female friend, I noticed that half the theater was filled with mostly young cinemagoers who laughed frequently. I believe this is because many of the movie's plots and lines are very relatable," says Yang.

Currently, *Her Story* has a rating of 9.1 points out of 10 on Douban, making it the popular review site's highest-rated Chinese movie of the year. It further earned a rating of 86.8 points to top a survey conducted by the China Film Art Research Center to gauge the satisfaction of cinemagoers with new releases.

For most industry insiders, the popularity of *Her Story* has been a local echo of a global film trend that has been gaining momentum in recent years, as evidenced by the popularity of films like *Barbie* in the United States, *Anatomy of a Fall* in France and *There's Still Tomorrow* in Italy, all hits about feminism.

## New awakening

*Her Story* is director Shao Yihui's second feature set in Shanghai, China's most international city, known for its embracing of different lifestyles and ideologies.

After living there for six years, the Shanxi native and graduate of the Beijing Film Academy, who was born in 1991, made her directorial debut with *B for Busy*, a 2021 dark horse. With its mature narrative and keen insight, the film depicts the way educated women behave with independence, decisions and intelligence when in relationships, resulting in the film being hailed as one of the best female-oriented movies in recent years.

*Her Story* returns to familiar territory, centering on the lives of three female characters: Wang Tiemei, a former investigative journalist with a clear understanding of career and private life; Ye, a love-struck band singer who falls for a playboy-like ophthalmologist; and Wang Moli, Wang Tiemei's 9-year-old daughter, an eccentric child who loves reading.

Despite difficulties and challenges, the three female characters keep their free spirit alive and follow their hearts.

The film highlights the women's strength and friendship, as exemplified by scenes in which Wang helps Ye get rid of a stalker late at night, and Ye helps Wang, a divorced single mother like her, care for her daughter. The two characters are neighbors in the same building. In addition, the film cleverly weaves female icons like Japanese sociologist Chizuko Ueno, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a late justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Mexican painter Frida Kahlo into the plot.

Shao, who says that she absorbed criti-



## The new focus on women in film

Surge in female-oriented movies not only reflects China's changing social mores, but also ties into wider world trends, **Xu Fan** reports.



Stills from Shao Yihui's film *Her Story* about how three female characters navigate their lives with humor, strength and moments of quiet grace, while confronting everyday struggles. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cism from *B for Busy*, says that *Her Story* has been crafted from an authentic female perspective and that the title is a metaphorical play on "history", an adoption of a classic trope often used by feminists to critique the fact that history is all too often written by men.

The director also says that while a lot of films have depicted the awakening of women to the need of understanding and defending their rights, she found an issue when

viewing these movies from the perspective of the general audience, as many women are already well-versed in gender equality.

"What happens after women awaken and how do men react when they gain insight into feminism? I want to incorporate my reflections on these questions into my work," she says, explaining the motivation behind *Her Story*.

By way of example, one of the movie's most popular scenes depicts the three

female characters having dinner with male friends, engaging in a conversation that naturally touches on menstruation, a topic traditionally considered taboo in public discussion.

Speaking on the persistence of taboos in advertising for menstrual products, with some ads still shying away by using blue liquid instead of red to demonstrate the absorptive properties of their products, Shao says that this can mislead young view-

ers lacking the requisite knowledge of the human body.

"I think it will be a good thing if the movie sparks debates and propels social progress," she says.

## Developing the genre

A report released by the China Film Association and Beacon reveals that women accounted for 58 percent of all online ticket buyers by October this year, an 11 percent increase compared to the same period last year. As a result, an increasing number of domestic films and TV dramas have emerged to cater for this audience, signaling potential growth in the previously underdeveloped genre, according to industry insiders.

The number of acclaimed entries in recent years could fill a lengthy list. *Send Me to the Clouds* starring Yao Chen is the story of a single woman in her 30s who has been diagnosed with cancer as she struggles to raise funds for surgery, and explore sexual experiences before the illness renders this impossible.

*Like a Rolling Stone*, featuring Berlin International Film Festival best actress Yong Mei, draws inspiration from the real-life account of a 56-year-old woman who leaves her abusive husband to travel across China alone.

*YOLO*, this year's highest-grossing film, struck a chord with numerous cinemagoers for its portrayal of an oversized woman who regains her self-confidence after facing a series of adversities and fighting in a professional boxing match.

"From an academic standpoint, these films directly address women's dilemmas and their quest for equality," says Gong Yan, a professor at the Film, Television, and Communication College at Shanghai Normal University.

"Going back to the late 1980s or early '90s, the Chinese film industry was already producing such films, but present-day themes are more relevant to contemporary viewers. The surge in such movies also aligns with the increasing number of educated women and the rapid evolution of the internet," she says.

What propelled *Her Story* to popularity is its adept use of comedy to shine a light on the current status of women in a way that steers clear of being offensive or overly aggressive, according to Gong.

She says that despite the rise in popularity of these films, they predominantly resonate with a niche audience, mostly attracting an educated class of women.

This is due to the enduring demand in third- and fourth-tier cities for television dramas and other media that perpetuate traditional romances and depict women in subservient roles, generally falling for wealthy, domineering men.

Gong adds that despite the existence of films, like *Song of Spring*, about an 85-year-old mother caring for her 65-year-old daughter with Alzheimer's, and *Girls Always Happy*, which also explores a mother-daughter relationship, these films have only achieved modest success at the box office.

This suggests that they still have a considerable way to go in gaining broader viewership.

Lai Li, a market analyst at Maoyan, a leading platform for internet entertainment, points to the scarcity of female filmmakers in the industry, and underscores the importance of training more female talent, as female filmmakers have a more profound understanding of women's struggles and emotional needs.

"As society progresses and evolves, we believe that films centered on women will experience a surge in quantity, narrative quality and box-office success, making it a promising market," Lai says.

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By XU FAN

When Luka Yuanyuan Yang, a visual artist born in Beijing, received a six-month residency in the United States from the Asian Cultural Council in 2018, she found herself drawn to the story of a group of older women who defied the stereotypes of age, leading her to spend six years tracing their lives in a documentary called *Chinatown Cha-Cha*.

Since its debut in cinemas last month, the 85-minute film has received widespread praise, exemplified by its rating of 8.4 out of 10 on the popular review aggregator Douban.

Yang says that her original intention had been to explore the ways Chinese Americans pursued success in the entertainment industry during the 20th century, driven by her fascination with Anna May Wong, the first Chinese American Hollywood star.

Feeling that there might be more women like Wong, whose talent may have gone unnoticed for historical reasons, Yang began researching the subject, and uncovered a wealth of archive materials, documentaries and books on the topic.

Two discoveries that intrigued her the most were Arthur Dong's documentary *Forbidden City, U.S.A.* and Trina Robbins' oral history *Forbidden City: The Golden Age of Chinese Nightclubs*.

Both revisited the heyday of nightclubs in San Francisco's Chinatown over half a century ago.

## Still dancing after all these years



A still (left) and a poster (right) from the documentary *Chinatown Cha-Cha* by Chinese director Luka Yuanyuan Yang that brings veteran dancers from mid-century San Francisco's Chinese nightclub scene to screen. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Yang's research led her to the Grant Avenue Follies, a troupe of dancers mentioned at the end of Robbins' book.

Originally set up by four retired dancers who had once been part of the nightclub scene in Chinatown during its golden age, the troupe consists of 10 elderly dancers in their 70s and 90s.

"I was excited to learn that they were still performing, so I contacted them and discovered they were scheduled to perform in Las Vegas," Yang says.

It was there that Yang first met 92-year-old dancer Coby Yee. Dressed in a fluorescent green dress and a pretty headdress, Yee's costume, which she had designed her-

self, evoked a blend of cultures from China, Mexico and Morocco. "I had never seen a woman of her age exuding such dynamism and charm," Yang says.

The child of immigrants from Guangdong province, Yee was born in the US in 1926 and grew up helping her parents at the family laundry store, ironing hundreds of shirts

each day from a young age.

Unwilling to follow in her parents' footsteps, Yee discovered a passion for dancing and eventually became a star in San Francisco nightclubs.

"Most Chinese immigrant families at the time thought that being a dancer was not a decent profession, but Yee bravely pursued her dream, demonstrating her taste and talent for fashion," says Yang.

Despite lacking experience in producing feature-length films at the time, Yang's admiration for Yee and the other members of the Grant Avenue Follies pushed her to learn, and ultimately to make the documentary.

She says that the Chinese title of the film *Nuren Shijie* was inspired by the 1939 film *It's a Women's World*, the first all-female film directed by Esther Eng, the first female director of Chinese-language films in the US.

During the six years she spent producing *Chinatown Cha-Cha*, Yang faced a series of challenges, including battling cancer and getting pregnant.

"During postproduction, my female editor visited my home twice a week as I needed to take breaks for breastfeeding. It was an incredible experience to assemble a team predominantly comprised of talented women to tell a story about a group of resilient older women," Yang says.

The film is scheduled to be released overseas in 2025.