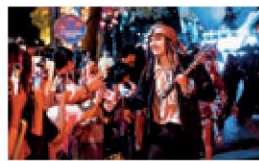


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CHINA DAILY

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Two men ride a motorcycle on Saturday through what remains of the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, outside Damascus, Syria. The camp, which was bombed during the Syrian civil war, was abandoned in 2018. The buildings that were not destroyed by bombs were demolished by the government or stripped by thieves. Now, residents of the refugee camp have started returning to their homes after the downfall of the Bashar al-Assad government. HUSSEIN MALLA / AP

Syria's future uncertain amid power struggles

International, regional stakeholders vie for control in strife-torn nation

By CAI HONG
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Early signs of some stability and progress in Syria have sparked cautious optimism among observers. However, experts continue to be wary about the country's uncertain future, and the potential regional and global ramifications of its trajectory.

In a notable development, a coalition of rebel groups appointed Mohammed al-Bashir as the head of an interim government tasked with governing Syria until March 1. Bashir has pledged to establish representative governance and promote religious tolerance.

Bashir said he will bring back millions of Syrian refugees, who were forced to flee their homes during the country's 13-year civil war.

"The country is moving toward development and reconstruction," said Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, leader of the main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, in an interview with Sky News. "It's going toward stability."

In another sign of easing tensions, the US-backed Kurdish forces and Turkiye-backed Syrian rebels agreed on a ceasefire, mediated by the United States, in the northern city of Manbij on Wednesday.

While these developments suggest progress, the road ahead for Syria remains fraught with challenges and complexities.

Fragile, complex reality

Analysts cautioned that Syria's precarious situation leaves little hope for a swift resolution to issues and return to normalcy. They highlighted the risks of sectarian violence, inter-

national power struggles within the rebel coalition, and the resurgence of extremist groups like ISIS.

Syria's political future remains deeply uncertain. HTS, the dominant force in the rebel coalition, is working to consolidate its control, while exiled political leaders are beginning to return.

The country's diverse population — Sunni Muslims, Shia Alawites, Christians, Kurds, and Palestinian factions — remains divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. Historically, these groups have often been in conflict. Additionally, Palestinian factions such as Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have maintained a presence in Syria as guests of the government for decades.

The rebel coalition currently governing much of Syria is led by HTS,

which is designated a terrorist organization by both the United States and the United Nations.

Niu Xinchun, a professor at Ningxia University's China-Arab Research Institute, warned of the devastating consequences if the power transition is not peaceful. "If Syria fails to establish a stable and efficient central government, it could plunge back into a larger-scale civil war, resulting in immense suffering for its people," Niu said.

While a smooth regime transition would be the ideal outcome, according to Niu, "the likelihood of such a scenario is very low. Syria is highly likely to remain unstable and turbulent."

Syria's economy is in shambles, marked by widespread unemployment and a lack of basic services. The newly formed transitional government faces enormous challenges in addressing these issues, particularly with international sanctions still in place.

Meanwhile, in a bid to consolidate power, HTS has informed Palestinian factions in Syria that they are no longer permitted to maintain weapons, training camps or military headquarters, according to Arabic media reports.

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Yoon impeached, but final court decision to take days

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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The parliament of the Republic of Korea impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol on Saturday over his shocking and short-lived martial law decree, sparking jubilation among supporters of the action, but the decision now needs endorsement from the country's Constitutional Court, which analysts said indicates that political uncertainty in the ROK is far from over.

The 300-member National Assembly passed the impeachment motion 204-85 in the afternoon, following which Yoon's presidential powers and duties were suspended, and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo took over as acting president pending a final decision from court.

Lam Peng Er, head of the Korea Centre and principal research fellow of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore,

called the parliament's decision "just the end of the beginning" of the political crisis in the ROK.

The Constitutional Court has up to 180 days to determine whether to dismiss Yoon as president or restore his powers. If Yoon is finally removed from office, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Lam said that while the court's decision will involve a complicated process, a potential fresh election will see intensified competition between the ruling and opposition parties, with factional politics adding to political uncertainty.

Saturday's secret ballot voting on Yoon's impeachment was the second held in the National Assembly within two weeks of his Dec 3 imposition of martial law. Ruling party lawmakers boycotted the first vote on the motion on Dec 7.

With all 300 members present this time, 204 voted in favor and 85 against. There were three abstentions and eight invalid votes. National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik said the outcome was driven by "the people's ardent desire for democracy, courage and dedication", The Associated Press reported.

Prime Minister Han, a seasoned politician who has previously held a string of top government posts, was quoted by Yonhap News Agency as saying, "I will give all my strength and effort to stably manage state

affairs in this difficult time."

Han convened a National Security Council meeting and vowed to maintain a strong security posture and manage international credibility in a stable manner.

Kweon Seong-dong, floor leader of ROK's ruling People Power Party, of which Yoon is a member, said on Sunday that they have rejected a proposal by the main opposition Democratic Party to set up a bipartisan consultation mechanism to stabilize the operation of state affairs, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Lee Jae-myung, leader of the Democratic Party, told reporters on the same day that his party will not consider an impeachment move against Han as of now.

Yoon is the third ROK president impeached while in office. In December 2016, the National Assembly impeached Park Geun-hye, the country's first female president, over a corruption scandal. The Constitutional Court took 91 days to uphold her impeachment and removed her from office in March 2017. In 2004, then president Roh Moo-hyun was impeached by the ROK parliament over an alleged election law violation, but the court later overturned his impeachment and restored his presidential powers. The court's decision came in 63 days.

According to ROK laws, an impeachment case in the Constitutional Court needs to be reviewed by seven of the nine justices, with at least six voting in favor. However, the court currently has six justices after three reached the end of their term earlier this year.

Cho Hee-kyoung, a law professor at Hongik University in Seoul, said the court is likely to uphold the impeachment, as it is clear that Yoon's imposition of martial law was unconstitutional. "Basically, the court only needs to be convinced that the order came from Yoon, and he knew what he was doing," she said.

Cho noted that nomination of new justices is in progress, with two candidates recommended by the main opposition party and one by the ruling party, but their final appointment could take time, because it calls for a consensus between the two parties.

David Tizzard, assistant professor of Korean studies at Seoul Women's University, said he expects to see a huge back-and-forth battle between the parties in terms of investigation and prosecution.



Participants of a rally react after hearing the news that the parliament of the Republic of Korea had voted to impeach President Yoon Suk-yeol outside the National Assembly in Seoul, ROK, on Saturday. The placards read "Impeachment Yoon Suk-yeol". LEE JIN-MAN / AP

Shifting from 'world's factory' to brand powerhouse

For much of its industrial history, China has been the world's manufacturing center, producing goods at scale for international brands, although it is yet to have many internationally renowned brands of its own. However, that is changing with the country shifting its focus toward building strong global brands. As a result, the Chinese market is no longer defined by volume alone, but also by value, quality and brand recognition on a global scale.

The shift began in earnest 10 years ago when President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of improving the quality of Chinese products and developing strong domestic brands that could compete on the global stage. It marked a

WORLD WATCH

By David Haigh

turning point for the country, which had previously focused on internal markets and manufacturing for external brands. Establishing the China Council for Brand Development and China's subsequent participation in the International Organization for Standardization were instrumental in setting international standards that helped Chinese companies expand globally and improved their understanding of brand development for domestic and international markets.

Around that time, I was invited to participate in an ISO committee on brand development and improvement, working closely with the council. The goal was to create a framework for brand development that could be applied worldwide, particularly benefiting Chinese companies. Ten years on, the results are impressive. China is now home to some of the world's fastest-growing brands, such as Huawei, Alibaba and TikTok, all of which have broken into the Brand Finance Global 500 ranking of the world's most valuable and strongest brands.

When I established Brand Finance nearly 30 years ago, China was barely a blip on the global branding radar. But today, China is

rapidly moving up the value chain by creating and nurturing its own brands, capturing more of the global market and establishing itself as a leader in key industries. In 2008, only 13 Chinese brands were in the Brand Finance Global 500, worth a combined brand value of \$62 billion. In 2024, that number has surged to 72, with a combined brand value of \$1.3 trillion.

The evolution from the world's manufacturing base to becoming a brand powerhouse has been remarkable. Ten years ago, China realized that Western brands were capturing much of the value generated by its industries.

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FAMILIES FACE REALITIES OF DEALING WITH OLD AGE DEPRESSION

Children seek help on ways to address parents' cognitive decline, improve understanding

By CHEN NAN
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At the age of 74, Wang Youlin had never imagined he would face the debilitating grip of depression.

His life, once filled with laughter,

In-depth

adventure, and the joy of watching his children grow up, began to unravel quietly in the months following his

retirement. A formerly active man, he had been a basketball coach, shaping young minds and building lasting friendships with his students.

But over time, something changed.

The first signs were subtle. Wang, who usually got up at six in the morning, began to sleep later and later.

His appetite dwindled, and the meals he once enjoyed now seemed like chewing sawdust. He would sit at the table, staring at his plate, unable to muster the energy to eat.

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Newstand prices:
US \$1 Canada C\$1;
UK 1.10 EUR 1.10
Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

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PAGE TWO

Seniors: Silent struggle unveiled

From page 1

Days blurred into each other, and the vibrant man who had once tackled the world with enthusiasm now spent hours in silence, his thoughts weighed down by a fog he couldn't shake.

Wang's family began to notice the changes. His daughter, Wang Lin, who lives and works in Beijing, recalls the transformation with a heavy heart.

"It wasn't just the lack of energy," she said.

"My dad used to tell jokes, laugh at old movies, and even dance around the house when he was in a good mood. But one day, it all stopped."

Wang Lin, 43, works for an advertising company and lives in Beijing. Her father, mother and older brother live in her hometown of Jinan in Shandong province.

"I usually go home once a month as Jinan and Beijing are close. I remember when I first saw my father staring out the window. His face was blank and his eyes had lost their sparkle. Once standing at an imposing 1.9 meters, he was a towering figure. But his frame seemed to have withered, leaving him unusually thin and fragile. And that's when I knew something was wrong," she recalled.

Over time, her father had withdrawn from the activities he once loved. Reading, fishing, and cooking became burdens.

He refused invitations to family gatherings and would often sit alone in his favorite chair, a cup of tea growing cold beside him.

"He seemed lost," Wang Lin said. "It was like we were watching him disappear in front of our eyes," she said, adding the hardest part was not knowing how to help him.

At first, the family chalked up his lack of energy and sleep disturbances to the natural decline that accompanies aging.

But when her father started to refuse food, and retreated into long periods of silence, Wang Lin became worried. His body grew frail, not because of physical illness, but because he had no interest in eating.

Global problem

After months of watching her father deteriorate, she insisted on taking him to the hospital in Beijing. The diagnosis was a shock, he had a major depressive disorder.

"I never expected that my father would be diagnosed with depression. Some of my colleagues suffer from the illness but they are young, in their 20s or 30s," said Wang Lin.

At the hospital, she saw many young people accompanying their parents who had similar symptoms, though the reasons for falling ill can be very different.

Depressive disorder, or depression, is a common mental health condition that can happen to anyone, according to the World Health Organization.

It is characterized by a low mood, and loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time. This is different from regular mood changes and feelings about everyday life.

Globally, an estimated 5 percent of adults suffer from depression, the

WHO said. An estimated 3.8 percent of people experience depression, including 5 percent of adults — 4 percent of men and 6 percent of women — along with 5.7 percent of those older than 60. Approximately 280 million people in the world have depression, the WHO said.

In China, 19.05 percent of elderly people are in a mild state of depression, and 12.17 percent experience moderate to severe depressive symptoms, according to the 2023 Blue Book of China's Mental Health released on Oct 10, World Mental Health Day.

Depression is often characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest, and fatigue, and differs significantly in older adults, said Yin Dongqing, a psychiatry specialist and doctor at Beijing Anding Hospital Capital Medical University, which is also the National Medical Center for Mental Disorders.

It frequently manifests alongside physical symptoms, such as chronic pain or cognitive decline, making diagnosis challenging. Anxiety disorders, on the other hand, involve excessive worry, fear, and physical symptoms such as restlessness and rapid heart rate.

For seniors, these conditions often coexist, creating a dual burden.

"There are many reasons for senior people to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders," Yin said.

"For example, retirement, the death of loved ones, and physical decline can trigger profound feelings of loss. With children grown and friends passing away, many seniors face loneliness, which exacerbates mental health issues."

Support measures

Yin opened an account on the social media platform Xiaohongshu to discuss depression. To his surprise, it was mainly used initially by young people, many of whom shared stories about parents suffering depression and anxiety, and are seeking help.

"Families often become the unsung heroes in the battle against these disorders. The most important thing is to approach these disorders with empathy and understanding. Aging doesn't mean suffering. With the right care, our elders can find joy again," Yin said.

Li Chun's mother, Wei Fengzhi, struggled with anxiety, which gradually worsened over time. Wei had always been a cautious woman, but after a

ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

Families often become the unsung heroes in the battle against these disorders. The most important thing is to approach these disorders with empathy and understanding. Aging doesn't mean suffering. With the right care, our elders can find joy again."

Yin Dongqing, a psychiatry specialist and doctor at Beijing Anding Hospital Capital Medical University

minor car accident a few years ago the 70-year-old's anxiety escalated to debilitating levels.

"At first, she just started worrying about the smallest things — 'Did I turn the stove off?' 'Are you sure the doors are locked?' But then, the worries grew bigger. She even became afraid of leaving the house. It was like her world became smaller and smaller," Li explained.

Wei's anxiety took over every aspect of her life.

She feared for the safety of her children and grandchildren, calling them multiple times a day, worried that something bad might happen to them. She avoided social gatherings, fearing that being away from home would expose her to danger.

Li, who had always been close to his mother, found herself caught between supporting her and trying to live his own life. "It felt like no matter how much I reassured her, it was never enough. She would always fall into panic, unable to calm down," he said.

A psychologist was consulted, who gave Wei coping strategies to deal with her anxiety, but the process was slow. "It was exhausting, both for her and for us," Li admitted. "We didn't know how to help, and we felt helpless. But now, I see a glimmer of the woman she used to be."

Worrying outcomes

Mystery headaches had plagued 75-year-old Mr Liu, who prefers using only his family name, for years.

His son Liu Yi had taken him to almost all the major hospitals in Shanghai, as well as some in Beijing, and consulted with specialists in headache disorders. However, the doctors always diagnosed that Mr Liu did not have a problem.

After taking his father to the hospital so many times, Liu Yi started to think his dad might be "making a fuss" and seeking attention from his children by pretending to have physical discomfort.

However, one expert suggested they try the geriatric psychiatry clinic, and Liu Yi decided to give it a try.

His father underwent tests and the results were a surprise.

"Although my father is usually introverted, his emotions have always been stable. It turns out that his depression was caused by anxiety, and it had already led to physical symptoms," Liu Yi said.

While the family had finally discovered the cause of their father's headaches, the revelation was accompanied by guilt.

"After my mother passed away a few years ago, I should have paid more attention to my father's mental health. I never imagined that depression was so close to us," Liu Yi said.

After the diagnosis, Liu Yi urged his father to open up about his feelings, which was a challenge for a man who is usually reserved.

Liu Yi said his father told him that many of his old friends had passed away, and he felt an unprecedented level of anxiety. However, loneliness scared him more than death.

The son said his father told him: "After your mother left, I felt an emptiness in my heart. The house became so quiet that it made me anxious, and I often needed medication to sleep."

After discussions with his wife, Liu Yi decided to bring his father to live with him and his family.

"Medication is one aspect, but what's more important is to spend more time with him, encourage him to go out and socialize more," he said.

"Every year, we plan family trips, and we make sure to include my father. I believe that with his active cooperation in treatment, and our support, he will be able to overcome his depression," Liu said.

Often misjudged

Han Xiaole, director of the geriatrics department of Beijing Huilongguan Hospital, said compared with younger people, the elderly's mental health issues are more subtle and often overlooked or misjudged.

"Relatives, related institutions, and even the elderly themselves tend to focus more on physical diseases, neglecting mental health issues. From our research, we found that very few elderly people are aware of their mental health problems and seek professional help proactively," Han said.

He added that, "As we face an aging society, it is essential for various sectors to work together to ensure the psychological needs of the elderly are seen and addressed."

For many senior people, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are still stigmatized, Han said.

In previous generations, mental illness was not openly discussed, and there was a significant cultural taboo surrounding seeking help.

The belief that emotional struggles should be kept private or managed on one's own is still ingrained in many elderly people, especially those who were raised in times when mental health was often seen as a sign of weakness or moral failure. This can lead seniors to ignore their symptoms or downplay them to avoid being labeled as "weak" or "crazy".

Many families dismiss signs of depression or anxiety in their elderly relatives because they assume it's a natural response to the inevitable changes that come with aging.

For example, a loss of interest in activities, sleep disturbances, or withdrawal from social interactions might be attributed to the aging process rather than signs of depression.

"Senior people may be reluctant to seek help for their mental health due to a variety of reasons. For example, many older adults are concerned about becoming dependent on others or losing their independence," Han said.

"Some seniors may not even recognize that they are suffering from depression or anxiety. They may attribute their feelings of sadness, hopelessness or worry to age-related issues, or assume that such feelings are unavoidable. This lack of awareness can prevent them from seeking treatment."

According to Yan Xue, a doctor in the psychology department of Guang'anmen Hospital China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, traditional Chinese medicine has advantages in treating mental disorders.

The integration of Chinese and Western medicine can improve efficacy, treat both the body and mind, and help prevent relapses. Treatments such as Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, and moxibustion are all effective, she said.

"Dealing with the reality that your parents are getting older and facing illness is undeniably challenging. It's particularly hard to deal with mental illness," said Yan.

"With the right treatment, understanding and support not only from the families but also from the society, these conditions can be managed, and recovery is possible. Only then can seniors face the future with the hope and dignity they deserve."

TOP NEWS

Brands: Soft power drives popularity

From page 1

This realization drove the country to build its own global brands, moving beyond manufacturing products to capture more value in the production and distribution chain.

This shift from "Made in China" to "Created in China" is part of a broader national drive to make high-quality, emotionally valued brands that can compete globally. For example, Bosideng, China's largest down-clothing brand, now operates widely outside its home market. The brand has reopened its flagship store in London, collaborates with international designers, and has hosted fashion shows in London, Milan and New York.

Brand Finance's global evaluation of brands has given us a unique perspective of China's economic progress. Today, we evaluate over 5,000 brands each year, many of which are Chinese. In recent years, Chinese companies have been moving from focusing solely on domestic markets to actively targeting international audiences. This is evident from the increasing number of Chinese brands expanding their reach beyond China's borders, such as Huawei, Xiaomi and BYD, which have all made significant inroads into Western and other markets.

One of the most striking aspects of China's brand evolution is the strategic decision many companies face when expanding internationally: Should they use their Chinese brand name or acquire a foreign brand? In some cases, authentically Chinese brands are establishing themselves in Western markets, such as the premium *baijiu* brand Kweichow Moutai and international bank China CITIC Bank. However, MG, a once-British brand now owned by China's SAIC Motor, demonstrates how Chinese companies can also successfully penetrate foreign markets by leveraging well-established Western brands.

Another example is State Grid, the world's most valuable utilities brand, which has expanded internationally through strategic acquisitions and partnerships to operate energy networks outside China. This dual approach — developing new brands while acquiring established ones — has enabled Chinese companies to quickly establish a presence in competitive global markets.

The country's increasing focus on soft power shows the rapid development of its brand-building capabilities. China has invested heavily in enhancing its global reputation, as seen in the rise of its Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index ranking from fifth to third.

The nation is now recognized for its business-friendly environment, technological leadership, and growing portfolio of globally recognized brands. This focus on soft power is not just about enhancing China's image. Greater soft power also directly impacts the success of Chinese brands abroad by making foreign consumers more familiar with and receptive to Chinese products.

Despite these gains, there are still areas where China has room for improvement, particularly in brand perception. While China ranks highly for its technological advancements and ease of doing business, it still lags behind Western countries such as the United States and Germany regarding the perceived quality of its products and brands. However, this gap is closing as more Chinese companies focus on innovation, quality and customer experience, all key factors driving brand loyalty and perception.

The coming decade will likely see even more Chinese brands entering global markets, further eroding the dominance of Western brands. As China continues to refine its brand-building strategies and focus on quality, the global marketplace can expect to see more Chinese companies challenging established industry leaders. The shift from "Made in China" to "Created in China" is well underway, but it has only just begun to influence the global economy.

The author is chairman and CEO of Brand Finance, a London-based brand valuation and strategy consultancy. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Spreading wings



An illuminated installation stands out at the Cologne Zoo on Friday during the opening of the China Light Festival in Cologne, Germany. YING TANG / NURPHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

Leaders back removal of tariffs on China's EVs

Importance of negotiations and protection of trade highlighted by all

By XING YI in Madrid
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Several former heads of European states have said that China-Europe trade benefits both sides, and expressed hope that the European Union's tariffs on China-made electric vehicles is "temporary" and that the two sides will be able to resolve the issue through negotiations, without hurting trade.

They made the remarks on the sidelines of the 2024 Imperial Springs International Forum, held on Thursday in Madrid, Spain.

The comments come after the EU finalized a decision in October to place additional tariffs of up to 35.3 percent on Chinese EV imports, even as the Chinese and EU technical teams continued discussions to reach an agreement.

The agreement, if reached, would likely include China agreeing to a mutually acceptable export price and volume for its EVs in exchange for the EU removing the tariff hikes.

Ivo Josipovic, a former president of Croatia, said the tariffs on China-made EVs were a result of the economic crisis in Europe and that the EU was trying to protect its industry and jobs.

"I think that we will see that restrictions are not leading to the best result. I hope that the tariffs

are a temporary approach and win-win trade policy can be good for both sides," said Josipovic, who was in office as Croatian president from 2010 to 2015.

According to him, huge economies like China and Europe benefit from fair cooperation and there is a future with no restrictions for any side. However, to promote cooperative projects and activities, it is important to have similar standards for different measures like customs rules.

Valdis Zatlers, who was president of Latvia from 2007 to 2011, said the tariffs were a tool for the EU in the process of adapting to the new situation of trading with China, especially in the automobile sector.

"But if we want to go further with our economic relations... the tariffs are not forever," Zatlers said, adding that he would like to see the outcome of negotiations between China and the EU on this issue.

Esko Aho, who served as prime minister of Finland from 1991 to 1995, said he witnessed China's opening-up in the 1990s and understood the nation believing that it would lag behind if it was not able to get access to the global market and the best technologies in the world.

"I think it is very important to keep this in mind. For sure, China

is in a different phase now and China's role has changed, but I think this basic approach can remain the same," Aho said.

Aho said despite the issues surrounding market access and equal treatment of companies in China and Europe having always been present, the two sides have found ways to expand trade.

"It has been beneficial for both. Europe has benefited from Chinese products coming to the market, and China has benefited a lot as well because of European investment in China and imports of certain critical materials or parts from Europe," Aho said.

Wolfgang Schussel, who was chancellor of Austria from 2000 to 2007, said in his personal capacity that he was against tariffs on Chinese EVs and pointed out that a lot of European companies are producing EVs in China and selling them in Europe.

Schussel also noted that "everybody is talking about this problem", but the trade in EVs only represents a "tiny" proportion of the trade between China and Europe.

"The EU is absolutely prepared to negotiate and I think the Chinese counterparts are absolutely professional negotiators as well," he said. "Let's find a deal that does not damage the trade as such."

Chinese-made smart classrooms to benefit Kenyan university

By OTIATO OPALI
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A state-of-the-art digital audio-visual smart classroom donated by China was inaugurated at Kenya's Moi University on Friday. The smart classroom, together with a similar one that was launched earlier this month, are the first of their kind in the university, located in western Kenya's Eldoret. These are expected to significantly bolster the university's capacity to deliver high-quality education, promote interactive learning and better prepare students for challenges of the modern world.

Donated by the Shanghai Municipal People's Government and Donghua University in Shanghai, the smart classrooms are also the most advanced ones in Kenya. Isaac Kosgey, vice-chancellor of Moi University, said the classrooms will go a long way in advancing the university's capacity to expand its open and distant learning program.

"This classroom gives us an opportunity to expand our infrastructure for learning, training and researching. Through this technology, we will be able to complement yesterday's classroom, which requires lecturers and students to be physically present," Kosgey said at the launch ceremony.

Equipment for the two classrooms, all made in China, arrived in Kenya's Mombasa port in July. Installation of the first smart classroom was completed on Dec 7, according to the Confucius Institute of Moi University.

In an online address to the launch ceremony, Chen Ge, vice-president of Donghua University, said the digital classrooms will elevate the cooperation between the two universities in the field of technology by helping Moi University become more efficient in its open and distant learning program.

He added that the donation reflects China's willingness to widen cooperation with Kenya in the field of education and help the education sector in Kenya by resolving its challenges while tak-

ing advantage of opportunities presented by technology.

"The completion of the two smart classrooms is just the beginning. They will be brand new platforms for knowledge exchange," he said. "Through this platform, students and teachers from China and Africa will be able to conduct convenient and efficient interactions and cooperate across geographical boundaries."

Fan Xiuhua, director of the Confucius Institute of Moi University, said the facilities involved in the smart classroom are as advanced as those used in universities in China, which will greatly improve education and talent cultivation in the university.

"Digital education has become an important area of cooperation between China and Kenya, as digitalization promotes equality in education," she said. "Such smart classrooms will facilitate remote education and cultural exchanges."

Speaking after undergoing training on how to handle the equipment, Jared Ingare, a senior technician in information technology and communications at Moi University, said the launch of the smart classrooms is the beginning of a new phase in the University, especially in the adoption of modern technology.

Ingare added that the system will solve many of the challenges that have been faced in digital learning programs such as poor internet connection and limited features and options.

Medlyne Achieng, a third-year student at the university's School of Public Health, said the challenges faced with the old e-learning system included poor display, weak connectivity and missed classes due to technical issues. She said by enabling lecturers and students to interact remotely, the new system will allow them to save time as well as recover the time lost due to connectivity issues.

The fact that everything can be recorded and reviewed later will also solve the problem of missing classes, she said.



Teaching staff learn how to operate equipment on Friday in a smart classroom in Moi University, Kenya. The smart classrooms were donated by the Shanghai Municipal People's Government and Donghua University in Shanghai. WANG YUXI / CHINA DAILY

Chaos: Uncertainty reveals fragile, volatile nature of Syria's transition

From page 1

Reports of public executions of former government officials have also been coming in.

Foreign stakeholders

Zhao Beiping, deputy director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Shandong Normal University, emphasized the ongoing uncertainty in Syria, highlighting that the major powers supporting various factions will play a pivotal role in shaping the country's future.

"(Former Syrian president) Bashar al-Assad's collapse will inevitably alter the geopolitical map of the region," Zhao said. "Regional stakeholders are actively trying to influence the developments in Syria to align with their political interests."

Israel, in particular, appears to be capitalizing on the situation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently ordered his troops to swiftly seize the demilitarized buffer zone that separated Israel from Syria since the 1974 disengagement agreement. Netanyahu's office stated that troops would remain slight-

ly beyond the buffer zone for "strategic reasons".

The Israel Defense Forces announced on Thursday that it had "severely damaged" Syria's air defenses, destroying over 90 percent of identified strategic surface-to-air missile systems.

UN experts have strongly condemned Israel's extensive military operations in Syria, asserting that these actions constitute serious violations of international law.

Zhao Jun, an associate researcher at Shanghai International Studies University's Middle East Studies Institute, noted that the situation in Syria will trigger a new round of competition among international and regional stakeholders, each vying for influence and control over the country's future.

Turkiye, Iran, Russia and the US have vested interests in Syria, but their competing agendas create significant barriers to coordinated action, Zhao said.

Earlier this year, Gulf states took a step toward normalizing relations with Damascus, leading to Syria's readmission to the Arab League. Shamiran Mako, an assistant pro-

fessor of international relations at Boston University's Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, said that key Arab states will play a significant role in Syria's transition, with the aim of safeguarding their own interests while containing potential Islamist threats.

In his first address following the ousting of Assad, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei harshly criticized the US and Israel, accusing them of orchestrating the downfall of one of Teheran's key allies.

Assad's collapse represents a significant blow to Iran's "Shia Crescent", a geopolitical alliance that once spanned from western Afghanistan to the Mediterranean. Syria, at the heart of this corridor, was crucial for Teheran's ability to arm Hezbollah and project influence in Lebanon and across the Levant. With Syria's shift, Teheran now faces heightened regional vulnerability and a diminished strategic foothold, analysts noted.

Russia's military intervention in 2015 was pivotal in saving the Assad government from collapse, securing key air and naval bases in Tartus and

Khmeimim, and solidifying Moscow's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. From Syria, Russia has extended its influence into Libya, the Sahel and beyond, strengthening its broader Middle East and Africa strategy.

On Thursday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov confirmed that Moscow had established direct contacts with HTS and expressed the intent to maintain its military bases in Syria, citing the continued need to "fight international terrorism", according to Interfax.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Turkiye, Iraq and Jordan between Wednesday and Saturday to discuss Syria, signaling ongoing diplomatic efforts to navigate the region's shifting dynamics. He said in Jordan on Saturday that US officials also have been in direct contact with HTS.

US involvement in Syria began in 2011, following the Arab Spring's spread to the country. Diplomatic ties between the US and Syria were severed in 2012.

In recent days, the US has conducted a series of strikes on "ISIS

targets", citing the need to prevent ISIS from gaining ground after the collapse of the Assad government. The US currently maintains about 900 troops in northeast Syria as part of its efforts to combat ISIS. The future of the US presence in the region remains uncertain, especially with President-elect Donald Trump's stance that the US should "not get involved" in Syria.

Turkiye takes itself as the most important player in shaping new Syria's political landscape as it has troops there and stands behind some rebel forces, Niu Xinchun of Ningxia University said.

Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated on Friday that his country's "strategic goal" is to eliminate the Syrian Kurdish forces, which are supported by the US.

Experts have warned that as various armed groups vie for power and foreign stakeholders attempt to shape Syria's future, the country could descend into domestic chaos akin to what followed the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya or Saddam Hussein in Iraq. This uncertainty underscores the fragile and volatile nature of Syria's transition.

CHINA

Blue book on early childhood issued

More resources needed to support nation's 30m kids age 3 and under

By ZHAO YIMENG

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China's first blue book on the early development of children under 3 years old was released on Wednesday, providing targeted recommendations for addressing challenges related to caring for infants and toddlers, including insufficient investment, imbalances in urban and rural areas and a lack of professional talent.

The blue book, titled "China 0-3 Years Early Childhood Development Report (2024)", was released by the China Philanthropy Research Institute at Beijing Normal University. It urges the transition from a compensatory to a universal welfare approach in the early childhood development of the

approximately 30 million children under age 3 in the country.

Gao Huajun, head of the institute, said early care and development for children under 3 years old have become part of China's strategy to address its aging population and to improve the balance of its demographics.

An effort to create 4.5 childcare slots per 1,000 people was made a national target in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and reflects a new phase of universal development, the blue book said.

By February this year, China had nearly 100,000 childcare service institutions providing 4.8 million slots — 3.38 childcare slots per 1,000 people, it said.

"In China, we have been relatively late in paying attention to the

under 3 age group," Gao said, adding that the country is facing some structural challenges in the sector, such as misaligned population development strategies and insufficient support systems for childbearing.

China is at a turning point, transitioning from localized pilots and explorations toward comprehensive institutional development and widespread implementation. A universal approach to child welfare is particularly important to effectively focus on this age group, he said.

The blue book emphasizes the importance of scaling local innovative practices, training professional talent and urging collaborative efforts involving the government, enterprises and social organizations.

Specific budget lines in central government expenditure and philanthropic contributions are encouraged to enhance funding for children under age 3, it said.

Song Wenzhen, former deputy director of the National Working Committee on Children and Women of the State Council, highlighted the need for prioritizing family-oriented public services over solely building infrastructure.

"Many supportive policies have focused on building facilities rather than management or services," Song said, calling for balancing the investment in infrastructure and early childcare services.

She highlighted further strengthening family-friendly policies to improve comprehensive early childhood development, such as integrating parental education into public services and standardizing maternity benefits and parental leave policies to ensure equitable support across regions.

Lu Mai, former vice-chairman of the China Development Research Foundation, emphasized that addressing gaps in early childhood

development, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas, could yield sizeable returns.

Echoing Lu, Shi Yaojiang, a professor at the Center for Experimental Economics in Education at Shaanxi Normal University, emphasized the critical need for trained professionals and scalable interventions to bridge disparities between urban and rural areas, particularly in nurturing rather than simply providing childcare.

Most practitioners of early childhood development are trained to work with children between 3 and 6, with their roles now being adjusted to cover the group under 3, Shi said.

"Despite the decline in births, rural women still constitute the primary group for childbearing. Addressing the challenge of population growth hinges on effectively solving the problem of nurturing and educating children in rural areas," he said.

Shanghai targets outdoor smoking

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai

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Nine departments in Shanghai have jointly issued a notice aimed at reducing secondhand smoke exposure outdoors and promoting a smoke-free, healthy environment, the Shanghai Municipal Health Promotion Center announced on Wednesday.

The notice outlines precise requirements for individuals and managers at eight types of outdoor venues, including queuing and waiting areas. It builds on a previous directive issued in September, which required smokers to refrain from smoking while walking and to use designated smoking areas.

The initiative, led by departments including the Social Work Department of the CPC Shanghai Municipal Committee and the Shanghai Municipal Health Commission, marks the first provincial-level, multi-departmental effort on the Chinese mainland to address outdoor secondhand smoke exposure and minimize passive smoking.

A recent survey conducted by the Shanghai Municipal Health Promotion Center and other institutions highlighted outdoor queuing areas such as those at scenic spots, playgrounds, bus stops and entrances to shopping malls and office buildings as hotspots for secondhand smoke exposure. Survey respondents also noted frequent smoking at pedestrian traffic light stops.

Concerns about secondhand smoke at school entrances during student drop-off and pick-up times, hospital entrances and subway station exits were also strongly expressed in the survey.

The notice addresses these concerns with specific measures, including enhanced training for staff on the health hazards of tobacco and techniques to persuade individuals not to smoke, the installation of no-smoking signs and health warnings and the deployment of volunteers to discourage smoking in public spaces.

Additionally, "no-smoking" reminders will be added to voice broadcasts at equipped intersections, and no-smoking signs will be posted or spray-painted at bus stops.

By March, Shanghai had constructed 200 designated outdoor smoking zones at locations such as commercial complexes, sports centers, parks, transportation hubs, hotels and waterfront public areas. That figure is expected to reach 300 by the end of the year.

A study published in The Lancet Public Health in November by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Peking University underscored the positive effects of Shanghai's comprehensive smoke-free legislation, which was first implemented in 2017. The study found that the prevalence of smoking in the city decreased by 2.2 percentage points, equating to an 8.4 percent reduction in the number of smokers.

The research also projected that nationwide adoption of similar smoke-free legislation could boost China's GDP by 0.04 percent to 0.07 percent by 2035 through improved health outcomes, reduced medical expenses and enhanced human capital.

A significant milestone in Shanghai's tobacco control efforts was the inclusion of e-cigarettes in the public smoking ban in 2022. Official data indicates that cigarette and e-cigarette usage rates among middle school students in Shanghai are the lowest among China's 31 provincial-level regions.

Shanghai aims to lower the passive smoke exposure rate to below 36 percent for adult non-smokers and below 10 percent for minors by 2030. In 2022, the passive smoke exposure rate for adult non-smokers was 41.7 percent, a 9.8 percentage-point drop from the previous year.

By 2023, Shanghai's adult smoking rate had dropped by 7.5 percentage points to 19.2 percent since the enactment of the tobacco control legislation, achieving the targets set by the Healthy China 2030 Initiative ahead of schedule.

Concerns raised over toy kitchen use after girl burned

By CHINA DAILY

A 10-year-old girl in Wuhan, Hubei province, was severely burned recently while playing with a "mini kitchen" toy capable of heating food, raising concerns over the safety of toys that enable children to cook real food.

The child received the toy as a birthday gift from her parents, according to Liu Shuhua, director of the Pediatric Burn Center at Wuhan Third Hospital. The toy lacked any labeling indicating it was intended for children, Liu told China Central Television. The girl sustained severe burns to her face, hands and neck.

Liu said there have been other cases of children being burned or scalded by similar toys.

"Even if a toy induction cooker is not very powerful, certain areas can reach temperatures high enough to cause skin tissue degeneration and necrosis," Liu said.

Mini kitchen toy sets have gained popularity on e-commerce platforms, with one Taobao store reporting over 80,000 units sold. The sets typically include a small induction cooker, frying pan, stockpot, cooking utensils and tableware, with additional mini kitchenware available for purchase. A mother surnamed Qi described the toy as a scaled-down version of a household kitchen, capable of frying, stewing, and making hotpots or desserts.

In June, the Beijing Municipal Administration for Market Regulation issued a warning about potential risks associated with such toys. These include fire hazards from thin wires, injuries from sharp or poorly made utensils and health risks from excessive heavy metals in some kitchenware.

Experts have called for more stringent regulations. Mini kitchen toys and similar products blur the lines between playthings and real kitchen appliances, and current national toy certification standards may not be sufficient, industry experts say.

Lai Yang, a member of the expert committee of the China General Chamber of Commerce, told Beijing News that stricter safety standards and thorough audits by regulatory authorities are necessary. Manufacturers must also prioritize safety and quality control, he said.

Other toys also pose risks to children's health and safety, authorities warn. For example, toys with small parts could be accidentally swallowed, and some toys may contain banned substances or harmful materials.

The Beijing Municipal Administration of Market Regulation advises consumers to check for labeling information, including material composition, recommended age range, safety warnings and the CCC mark, China's compulsory certification for product safety.

Xu Nuo contributed to this story.

Beautiful Hukou



Iceicles and rainbows add to the spectacular scenery at the Hukou Waterfall on the Yellow River in Jixian county, Shanxi province, on Sunday. Cooler weather has led to the creation of the ice formations at the waterfall, drawing visitors to enjoy the breathtaking view.

LYU GUIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Y-9E aircraft being sent to first foreign customer

By ZHAO LEI

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Aviation Industry Corp of China, the nation's leading aircraft manufacturer, has commenced delivery of its Y-9E aircraft to its first foreign customer, the State-owned conglomerate announced.

The deal, finalized in early 2023, marks the Y-9E's first overseas sale. While AVIC did not disclose the buyer's identity or the number of planes ordered, it confirmed that the delivery process had begun.

Wu Jiancheng, an executive at AVIC subsidiary Shaanxi Aircraft Corp, which is responsible for

producing the Y-9E, highlighted the aircraft's appeal during a recent open-house event. He emphasized its robust carrying capacity and competitive pricing, making it an attractive option for international clients.

The Y-9E is the export version of the Y-9 tactical transportation plane. According to Wu, it is designed for carrying out missions such as transporting soldiers and equipment, as well as facilitating airdrops and parachuting operations.

"It features a long flight range, a spacious interior and a convenient loading and unloading mechanism," Wu said. "The air-

craft can operate in diverse environments, including tropical, icy and high-altitude regions."

According to specifications released by SAC, the Y-9E is approximately 36 meters long with a wingspan of 38 meters. It has a top speed of 660 kilometers per hour, a cruising altitude of 7 to 8 kilometers, and a maximum operational range of 5,200 km. With a maximum takeoff weight of 65 metric tons, the aircraft can transport up to 20 tons of personnel and cargo.

Founded in 1969, SAC is one of China's key manufacturers of large aircraft, specializing in mid-size transport planes and their

modified variants, including early-warning and electronic warfare models.

Its products are extensively used by the People's Liberation Army and have been sold to foreign countries.

One of SAC's newer offerings, the Y-8Q anti-submarine aircraft, was showcased at the 15th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, in November. Designed to detect, track and attack submarines, the Y-8Q has played a vital role in the PLA Navy's air patrol missions over the South China Sea, according to the company.

Wire rider



Tourists watch a performer during a rural cooking competition in Pingxiang, Jiangxi province, on Saturday. Pingxiang, renowned as the spicy food capital of China, has leveraged its food culture to drive integrated development across sectors such as culture and tourism, infusing vitality into the economy. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Capsized fishing boat found in Yellow Sea

A capsized fishing vessel was found in the central area of the Yellow Sea off the east coast of China at around 11 am on Saturday, according to the maritime search and rescue center in Shandong province. The vessel has been preliminarily identified as the one reported missing from an area nearby at around 11 pm on Friday. The vessel was reportedly carrying 12 people. Search and rescue efforts continue.

New fleet on Gulf of Aden escort mission

A new fleet of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy set sail from a military port in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, on Sunday to take over an escort mission from the previous fleet in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia. The 47th navy fleet comprises a guided-missile destroyer, a missile frigate and a supply vessel. It carries over 700 officers and soldiers, with two helicopters and more than 10 special force members on board.

1.71-kg black truffle unearthed in Yunnan

A giant black truffle weighing 1.71 kilograms has been unearthed in Yunnan province, setting a record for the heaviest black truffle ever found in the province. This truffle's weight far exceeds the typical range for black truffles — which usually weigh between 10 and 200 grams — and surpasses that of Yunnan's previous record holder, which weighed 1.25 kg.

XINHUA

CHINA

Collaborative kiwi lab yields fruitful results

10-year partnership with New Zealand preserves germplasm resources

By HUANG ZHILING and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

A kiwifruit laboratory established by China and New Zealand a decade ago has yielded fruitful results in preserving germplasm resources, as well as in breeding and promoting new varieties, researchers said.

Kiwifruit is native to China and was introduced to New Zealand in 1904 by a teacher named Isabel Fraser. Growers in New Zealand worked for years to develop the first commercial variety, and in the 1950s, as merchants began to promote the fruit overseas, they named the fruit after the country's national bird, the kiwi.

The China-New Zealand Belt and Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit, a collaborative effort between the Sichuan Provincial Academy of Natural Resource Sciences and the New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research, was inaugurated by the countries' top leaders in 2014 and became operational in Sichuan Tianfu New Area in 2018.

Zhuang Qiguo, the Chinese director of the joint laboratory, said it has established the world's largest germplasm repository for red-fleshed kiwifruit, preserving 90 percent of the global red-fleshed kiwifruit resources.

The academy began collecting and preserving wild kiwifruit germplasm resources in the 1980s and established a cooperative relationship with the New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research in the 1990s, said Zhuang, who is also director of the academy's kiwifruit research institute.

"There are 54 wild species of kiwifruit in the world, and China is home to 52 of them," he said, adding that the wild germplasm resources are important materials for breeding new varieties.

Wang Yongzhi, deputy director of the Sichuan Provincial Academy of Natural Resource Sciences, said that in the past decade the laboratory's core research team has grown from 10 to 40 members.

It has also established a 133.3-hectare demonstration base in Sichuan's Mianzhu and Deyang, as well as facilities in Shaanxi and Guizhou provinces, two major kiwifruit-producing provinces, to identify and promote varieties that are well-suited to the local altitude, soil and climate.

Wang said that the new varieties

of red-fleshed kiwifruit represented by "Hongyang", and the supporting technologies developed by the laboratory, have been applied to a cultivation area of more than 80,000 hectares in 15 provincial-level administrative regions across the country, accounting for 30 percent of China's kiwifruit cultivation area.

Sichuan, a major cultivation area for these new varieties, has emerged as the world's largest production base for red-fleshed kiwifruit, with the annual output of the province's kiwifruit industry exceeding 10 billion yuan (\$1.38 billion), Wang said.

"The new varieties have obtained plant variety rights in 14 countries and the European Union, and have been authorized for cultivation on a total area of over 3,500 hectares across 11 countries," he added.

To promote international exchange and cooperation, the laboratory has been organizing a science and technology exchange conference and an international symposium on kiwifruit innovation and development.

It has also been organizing an international training workshop, drawing the participation of scientists and technicians from countries including Egypt, Pakistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran and Nepal.

Looking ahead, Wang said the laboratory will focus on research in fields including genome sequencing for red-fleshed kiwifruit, pest and disease control and safe production techniques for kiwifruit orchards, while also promoting its new varieties and technologies worldwide.

Xu Luyuan, a senior official of the Deyang science and technology bureau, said the city government signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the academy last year to establish a red-fleshed kiwifruit technology innovation center, focusing on research areas including cultivating new varieties, green pest and disease control, and standardized cultivation techniques.

The bureau has been organizing regular events to foster partnerships between the laboratory and local fruit companies, agricultural enterprises and growers, driving the application of high-quality varieties and advanced cultivation techniques, she said.

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Zhuang Qiguo, the Chinese director of the China-New Zealand Belt and Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit, conducts an experiment to evaluate the resistance of kiwifruit varieties to certain diseases. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China-made window cleaning robot wins customers

TAIYUAN — A window cleaning robot developed by a Chinese company in Shanxi province became an instant hit on a major global e-commerce platform last month. Shortly after its launch, the new electronic sensation sold out.

"We are expediting deliveries to meet the surging demand abroad," said Feng Fenfen, foreign trade manager of Shanxi Jiashida Robot Technology Co, developer of the robot.

The surge in popularity of intelligent cleaning devices is largely linked to the rising aspirations for a higher quality of life among consumers, according to Feng. However, with more people living in high-rises, cleaning exterior windows has become a challenge, and the advent of robots provides an intelligent solution.

Jiashida, a high-tech enterprise mainly engaged in the development of intelligent home cleaning robots, has obtained dozens of overseas and domestic patents for invention and design.

"Our window cleaning robots are not just popular in China, but have also been exported to more than 50 countries including Germany,



Engineers from Shanxi Jiashida Robot Technology Co discuss the product specifications of a window cleaning robot. XINHUA

France and Japan over the years, and are well received by overseas consumers," said Sun Xiaopu, deputy general manager of the company.

"The core components of our robots are all independently developed," added Pu Yong, the company research and development director.

The latest product, a rounded window cleaning robot, mimics manual wiping, which solves the

problems of poor grip and low efficiency associated with traditional window cleaning robots, according to Pu.

Pu said the company is constantly upgrading its window cleaning robots, with three to four new products launched every year.

Sun said, "To better introduce our window cleaning robots to the overseas market, we actively participate

in international exhibitions such as the China Import and Export Fair and the China International Fair for Trade in Services, inviting foreign merchants to see our products on site."

According to the deputy general manager, a German guest at an exhibition told him that it usually costs him \$500 to hire a cleaner to clean windows. However, with a robot he can get it done for just over \$200.

Feng said annual sales of the window cleaning robot have increased by more than 50 percent since entering the overseas market, and this year's overseas sales are expected to top 60,000.

On Amazon.com, a US consumer commented: "I have wanted a window cleaning robot since I first heard about them. It's fun to not be cleaning the window and watch the window getting clean, with no step stools, chairs or ladders."

Sun said, "We will continue to innovate and develop better products, and engage with the international market to make window cleaning robots a new name card of Chinese intelligent manufacturing."

XINHUA



Huizhou Ancient Town in Shexian, Anhui province, attracts tourists to experience the architecture, folk lifestyle and culture of Huizhou. PHOTOS BY SHI YALEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Rural tourism thriving in Anhui ancient town

HEFEI — Dressed in traditional *hanfu*, Wang Zijun, manager of a coffee shop, gracefully serves steaming coffee and snacks to his customers.

The coffee shop nestled in Huizhou Ancient Town, a popular tourist destination in Shexian county, Anhui province, is adorned with traditional Chinese calligraphy and decorations such as colorful fish-shaped lanterns.

"The leisurely pace in Chinese-style coffee shops aligns perfectly with the charm of the old street," Wang said.

The town has embraced the role of introducing visitors to cultural products, martial arts performances and local snacks.

In Huizhou Ancient Town, an immersive performance based on local history and folklore captivates spectators.

According to Jiang Guangyu, the performance director, a single show attracts an audience of over 1,800 during the peak season.

"Our stories are inspired by local folklore, blending entertainment with cultural preservation," said Jiang.



Hanfu lovers showcase the traditional Chinese dress in Huizhou Ancient Town in September.

In the first three quarters of this year, rural tourist areas across China received some 2.25 billion visits, a year-on-year increase of 15.5 percent, with total revenue reaching 1.32 trillion yuan (\$183 billion).

In Yihuawan Cultural Tourism Town, located in Anhui's Susong county, visitors can hike through lush valleys, pick fresh fruit

and vegetables, and admire seas of flowers that bloom throughout the year.

According to Wang Huiwen, head of Yihuawan Cultural Tourism Town, the town's greenhouses nurture dozens of premium flower seedlings. These greenhouses function not only as an industrial base supplying plants to Fujian and Jiangxi provinces,

but also as a venue for themed activities.

The town offers visitors farming experiences, science education and activities to learn about intangible cultural heritage.

Last year, the town has sold over 1 million flower seedlings. It has also created more than 400 local jobs, boosting average annual household income by 6,000 yuan.

In recent years, with ongoing improvements in infrastructure such as transportation, logistics and the internet, along with the promotion of rural cultural activities through short videos and livestreaming, events like Village BA, Village Super League and Village Gala have gained significant popularity.

Xiang Yong, dean of Peking University's Institute of Cultural Industries, said that in developing rural tourism it is important to protect local resources, build distinctive local industries and nurture a vibrant, human-centered economy.

XINHUA

Geothermal heating warms households in Jilin province

CHANGCHUN — Geothermal heating is helping to keep the cold winter air out of 700 households in Datun township, Northeast China's Jilin province, thanks to an expansion of the clean energy source.

Since November, more than 1.1 million people in 11 provincial-level regions including Tianjin, Shaanxi, Jilin and Shanxi have benefited from geothermal heating projects implemented by Sinopec Group.

The country's largest oil refiner,

Sinopec has begun operating over 1,000 heat exchange stations to supply heating to buildings covering more than 110 million square meters.

After several rounds of snowfall, the daytime temperature in Jilin has dropped to -15 C. Nonetheless, children can play barefoot on warm tiled floors in homes in Datun township courtesy of geothermal heating, with indoor temperatures reaching 24 C.

Wang Lirong, a 70-year-old woman living in the township,

tends to a potted plant in her home that is thriving despite the freezing conditions outside.

"This bougainvillea is a good indicator of the room environment, as it cannot flower if the indoor temperature is not warm enough," she said while pointing to it blooming near a window.

Geothermal projects drill underground to access subterranean heat, which is then brought to the surface.

Geothermal heating in Datun township replaces about 3,000

metric tons of coal consumption, which has been the annual source of winter heating. This energy substitution has reduced carbon emissions by more than 7,000 tons per year, said Dong Hailin, the township chief.

He added that geothermal heating is also much cheaper than coal. Even with the heating period extended by roughly a month, geothermal heating is still expected to save around 1 million yuan (\$138,000) for the township, compared to its previous annual heat-

ing bill of 2.6 million yuan.

Geothermal is a stable and low-carbon form of renewable energy with large reserves and widespread distribution in China. In Datun, for example, geothermal water used for heating is sourced from 1,300 to 2,000 meters underground. It is pumped to a heat exchange before being carried by pipelines to each household, said Zhang Yong, a local geological engineer.

He added that the geothermal project retrieves the water after its use for heat energy, thereby conserving underground water resources.

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A worker checks data from a valve on the geothermal heating system in Zhenlai, Jilin province, this month. TANG CHENGZHUO / XINHUA

Editor's note: China Daily is publishing a series illustrating the country's efforts to achieve its carbon peak and carbon neutrality goals.

CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY



Yangtze 'digital twin' helps mitigate impact of flooding

By LI PEIXUAN
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Since its first hydroelectric generator came online in 2003, the Three Gorges Project has generated over a trillion kilowatt-hours of low-carbon electricity.

In the process, the use of 528 million metric tons of coal has been averted and over a billion tons of carbon dioxide emissions mitigated.

Last year, joining these green credentials, a "digital twin" of the Three Gorges Dam and the entire Yangtze River, came online aiming to allow people to be more than a step ahead when it comes to flooding along Asia's longest watercourse.

According to the developer of the digital twin, it has already helped to reduce casualties and property loss during flooding events on the Yangtze.

The digital twin is a digital copy integrating a data-driven virtual representation of the Yangtze River and the Three Gorges Dam. With a simple click of a mouse, key metrics of the Three Gorges Dam can be displayed, allowing monitoring of dam pressure and ensuring the safety of the Three Gorges Project, according to Yang Min, who works for the publicity center of the Changjiang Water Resources Commission of the Ministry of Water Resources.

The digital twin can simulate past flood events, and in real time, based on existing flood data in the upper reaches, predict future flood trends in the middle and lower reaches, Yang added.

As a result of the digitalization and simulation, early warnings for floods can be made earlier allowing people to evacuate more safely. It also makes flood defense more targeted.

When floods come, the areas that are severely affected are often the raised embankments separating agricultural land, known as polders.

There are many polders accompanied by dikes that run along both banks of the Yangtze River. The quality of these dikes is weaker and poses significant hidden dangers during flood defense, said Li Anqiang, deputy chief engineer of the Changjiang Institute of Survey, Planning, Design and Research Corporation of the Changjiang Water Resources Commission.

"This year, we established a comprehensive database for all 706 polders, as well as the entire mainstream and dynamic flow of the Yangtze River. When floods threaten the polders, we can notify local departments in advance," Li said.

On July 2, having calculated through the digital twin, the Changjiang Water Resources Commission issued warnings that approximately 2,430 kilometers of dikes in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze would exceed the water warning level, spanning Hubei,

Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui and Jiangsu provinces. On July 3 and 4 alone, 101 polders received warnings allowing authorities to take relevant action, according to Li.

A typical example is the warning issued on June 30 for the Guliangzhou area in Jiayu county, Hubei, where immediate preparations for evacuation were advised due to rising water levels. On July 2, proactive measures such as breaching the dike were taken for flood diversion. Early warnings on June 30 allowed for the evacuation of people and property, greatly reducing flood damage, Li said.

Yang said the digital twin is able to demonstrate the three-dimensional extent of flood inundation in real time. The command staff, although physically in the meeting room, can visualize every part of the Yangtze River, enabling them to perceive the current state of flood control in the basin, reservoir operations, water anomalies and forecast trends with key data.

With the data, they can know the risks of scheduling decisions and fully comprehend the pros and cons of plans with a "God's-eye view," Yang added.

Li sighted the afternoon of July 5, when a sudden breach occurred in the main dike of the Tuanzhou area in Dongting Lake. To construct a new line of defense, the Changjiang Water Resources Commission used the flood diversion platform of the digital twin to quickly develop a flood inundation risk map and was able to dynamically analyze impact range, losses, population to be transferred and water depth under different scenarios.

After the floods, technicians examined the dikes for possible dangers and evaluated their stability.

This meticulous identification of vulnerable areas in the dikes forms the groundwork for future preventive actions and flood control strategies. "Without this process, we would have no idea what the dikes' present condition is," Li said.

"Presently, radar technology is employed to detect gaps and leakage in the dikes directly, offering a fundamental evaluation of their state, much like a medical examination."

Li Yi, a staff member at the Changjiang Institute of Survey, Planning, Design and Research Corporation of the Changjiang Water Resources Commission, was quoted by China Central Television as saying: "In late May this year, before the water levels rose, we conducted the first health check on the dikes. In early September, during the receding period, we conducted another check. By comparing the data from before and after the water rise, we provided scientific evidence for the safety assessment and reinforcement of the dikes."

County uses blue carbon trading to offset emissions

Algae producers profit from selling quotas generated from cultivation

By SHI JING in Xiangshan, Zhejiang
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Coastal Xiangshan county in Zhejiang province has turned to blue carbon trading to use the power of the market to mitigate carbon emissions and make a profit.

Zhu Wenrong founded Xiangshan Xuwen Seaweed Development Co in 2008. It now accounts for about 75 percent of all sales of moss in China.

Moss, seaweed and kelp, which are widely grown in the coastal areas of Zhejiang, can effectively absorb carbon dioxide. As part of the company's efforts to help China reach its goals of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, Zhu and his company teamed up with the local government in 2020 to calculate just how much carbon



Top and above: Environmentally friendly composite materials such as carbon fiber are used to replace wooden and foam fishing pontoons in Xiangshan's Huangbi'ao township. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the local algae companies collectively absorb.

Based on this, a blue carbon auction was held in Xiangshan on Feb 28, last year, the first of its kind in China. A local manufacturing company won the bid to

expand its carbon sink.

Jointly built by Ningbo Property Exchange Center, Xiamen Property Rights Trading Center and the Xiangshan local government, a cross-provincial blue ecological carbon account was launched in

Xiangshan in March. The account mechanism is responsible for the registration, trading, cancellation and application of blue carbon ecological products.

The financial incentives of blue carbon trading have interested the county's algae farmers, Zhu said.

More financial products, such as carbon insurance, can be derived from blue carbon trading, he said, adding that as a result, more eco-friendly materials are being used in fish farming, another local industry.

In 2021, Huangbi'ao township in Xiangshan piloted the replacement of traditional wooden and foam pontoons used in fish farming with environmentally friendly composite materials such as carbon fiber and polyethylene.

As a result, up to 20 percent of breeding space has been saved while the survival rate of fish fry has been lifted by 15 percent. These simple environmental steps have helped profits reach 600 yuan (\$83) per square meter, up from 200 yuan per sq m, a local official said.

Shandong's green expressway sets example for others

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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A 161.9-kilometer stretch of road from Jinan to Weifang in Shandong province became China's first zero-carbon expressway in September last year.

From the air, the expressway resembles a winding dragon whose scales are made of photovoltaic panels. This project has used the road's verges, service areas, toll stations and building rooftops to form an integrated solar power generation installation.

The panels on the verges on both sides of the expressway stabilize the soil as well as generate electricity. In addition, the panels installed on isolated spots along the road utilize otherwise idle land, providing a stable power supply for the expressway, said Xie Guomu, director of the Jinan-Weifang expressway project office of Shandong Hi-Speed Group.

"Achieving 'zero carbon' involves long-term and comprehensive planning. Through emission reduction measures, the total carbon emissions during the expressway's operational period are equal to or less than the total carbon reductions, achieving 'zero emissions,'" Xie said.

3,046 kilometers

Length of the sand-blocking green belt encircling the Taklimakan Desert

The photovoltaic facilities and smart systems have significantly contributed to the expressway's carbon reduction efforts.

The photovoltaic power installations along Jiwei Expressway have a capacity of 68 megawatts. Over a 25-year operational period, the total electricity generated is expected to reach approximately 1.7 billion kilowatt-hours, with a total carbon reduction of about 1.52 million metric tons, Xie said.

The photovoltaic panels installed above tunnel entrances provide electricity directly to the tunnel's equipment. Among the equipment used in the tunnels is an adaptive lighting system that automatically adjusts brightness based on external light conditions and vehicle speed. This system ensures safe driving while

reducing energy consumption.

Lu Youfu, business manager of the energy and environment department of Shandong Hi-Speed Group, said, "The company has also launched a smart road network management system and promoted the use of electronic toll collection, which has greatly improved traffic efficiency and is expected to reduce vehicle carbon emissions by 140,000 tons annually."

The expressway also uses a radar and video roadside sensing system to detect traffic events, with a key event detection accuracy rate of over 97 percent. By utilizing comprehensive monitoring, reliable emergency response, and real-time forecasting and warning technologies, the expressway ensures precise vehicle dispatching and guidance, enhancing driving safety and traffic flow.

In response to winter snow conditions, the expressway employs technologies to improve driving conditions on critical sections such as major bridges, continuous slopes, shaded areas and tunnel entrances and exits.

Service areas are another major area where carbon emissions can be reduced due to their relatively concentrated nature, said Lu.

At the Jinanong service area, which covers 20 hectares, photovol-

taic panels have been installed on roofs and carports, creating a photovoltaic power station with a total installed capacity of 3.2 megawatts, complemented by energy storage equipment.

The photovoltaic system at the service area generates over 10,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity daily, equivalent to saving 1,200 tons of standard coal annually.

"The green electricity ensures the power needed for new-energy vehicles running on the expressway," said Lu.

In the first half of this year, the daily average traffic flow on expressways nationwide was 35 million vehicles, with new energy vehicles accounting for 4.7 million, according to the Ministry of Transport.

As new-energy vehicles on the road increase, the demand for electricity means that service areas will need to accelerate going green.

By the end of last year, 17 provinces had started building zero-carbon service areas along their expressways.

Shandong Hi-Speed Group aims to construct more than three additional zero-carbon expressways and over seven zero-carbon service areas by the end of 2025, it said.



Photovoltaic panels are installed along the Jiwei (Jinan-Weifang) Expressway in Shandong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Tailwinds favoring foreign trade enterprises

Financial aid, new growth engines to unlock momentum in critical sector

By WANG KEJU
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China will ramp up financial support, cultivate new growth engines, and strengthen services for foreign trade enterprises in order to unlock momentum and foster resilience in the country's foreign trade sector — a critical pillar underpinning overall economic growth, officials and analysts said.

As global trade faces strong headwinds and protectionist pressures, China is strengthening the coordination of its trade, fiscal, financial, and industrial policies to provide holistic support for enterprises in stabilizing orders and expanding markets, they added.

"Over the past 11 months, China's total imports and exports have reached 39.79 trillion yuan (\$5.47 trillion), up 4.9 percent year-on-year. The country's export share in the global market has remained largely stable," Wang Shouwen, vice-minister of commerce, told a news conference in late November.

In recent years, the global economy has faced a backlash against globalization, with trade protectionism on the rise. Over the past decade, global trade growth has fallen behind global GDP growth, Wang said.

Foreign trade companies have said that the coverage of export credit insurance needs to be further expanded, smaller firms are facing certain financing difficulties, and they are also encountering bottlenecks in sea freight transportation, Wang added.

Against this challenging backdrop, China's foreign trade has maintained a stable growth trajectory. However, the country has seen a slight moderation in the pace of expansion since August, Wang said.

Foreign trade has been a bright spot in the Chinese economy over the past months, as sluggish domestic demand and a tepid property market have to some extent dragged down overall economic expansion, analysts said, calling for strengthened support in key areas.

Increasing financial support, and leveraging financial instruments to hedge against the uncertainties that enterprises may face, as well as reducing capital turnover cycles, are of utmost importance for foreign trade companies, especially smaller ones, said Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank.

The Export-Import Bank of China will be tasked with strengthening credit allocation in the foreign trade domain. The bank will better tailor its financing products and services to meet the diverse needs of different types of trade enterprises, as laid out in the policy package introduced by the Ministry of Commerce.

Additionally, financial institutions across the board will be encouraged to increase lending to small and medium-sized foreign trade businesses in accordance with market-oriented and rule-of-law principles, according to the ministry.

Over the course of the year so far, the one-year and five-year-plus loan prime rates have declined by 0.35 and 0.60 percentage point, respectively, according to the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

As a result, the weighted average



Automated vehicles deliver cargo at Qingdao Port's fully automated terminal in Shandong province on Dec 3.

ZHANG JINGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: A China-Europe Railway Express departs from Chongqing to Duisburg, Germany, on Nov 15. ZHANG JINHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Right: Employees work on a photovoltaic module production line for export orders at a new energy technology company in Sihong Economic Development Zone, Jiangsu province, on Dec 2. XU CHANGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

interest rate on new corporate loans extended in September was around 3.5 percent — a 0.31 percentage point drop compared to the same period last year, reaching a historic low, said Liu Ye, an official at the central bank.

The central bank will also work to keep the renminbi exchange rate stable at an adaptive and balanced level, while strengthening guidance to prevent the market from tilting to one side, Liu said.

As part of the new initiative, dedicated efforts will be made to expand the scale and coverage of export credit insurance, aiming to empower enterprises in exploring more diversified overseas markets, according to a notice issued by the ministry.

Asia Best Partner Logistics, a company located in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, provides sea, land, and air transportation and has begun to transform its business to focus more on the cross-border e-commerce sector in recent years.

"In the past, our working capital

was mostly self-funded. Due to the rapid growth of the international logistics market, our business volume has surged. In order to maintain operations, we had to give up some high-profit but longer-receivable businesses," said Chen Chunhong, head of the company.

In 2021, Bank of China's Shenzhen branch learned about Asia Best Partner Logistics' situation and adjusted its credit policy to provide the company with a dedicated 4 million yuan startup guarantee loan.

Building on this initial cooperation, in 2022 the bank further optimized its support, offering Asia Best Partner Logistics an 8 million yuan credit line along with international settlement and payroll services to address the company's frequent foreign exchange needs.

With the strong financial support, the company has signed premium airline routes, expanded its service offerings, and deepened partnerships with major export and e-commerce firms. Over the past three

years, the company has achieved steady 30 percent annual growth on average, Chen said.

In addition to robust financial services, catalyzing the growth of the cross-border e-commerce sector is also high on the work agenda, and a key priority is the continued advancement of overseas smart logistics platforms, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Meanwhile, the country will encourage local authorities to explore the establishment of cross-border e-commerce service platforms to provide enterprises with legal advisory, tax guidance, and other crucial business services for navigating overseas markets, the ministry added.

During the first three quarters of the year, China's cross-border e-commerce imports and exports grew by 11.5 percent year-on-year, accounting for nearly 6 percent of the country's total foreign trade, data from the ministry showed.

The rapid expansion of China's

cross-border e-commerce sector underscores its growing significance in driving the overall growth of the nation's foreign trade, analysts said.

Lan Qingxin, a professor in the School of International Trade and Economics at the University of International Business and Economics, said that China's cross-border e-commerce has achieved significant breakthroughs in diversifying its foreign trade markets, with business in emerging economies growing rapidly.

A number of influential international e-commerce companies have emerged, and an efficient and smart global logistics network has been established, strengthening China's international competitiveness, Lan said.

While China's cross-border e-commerce sector has experienced rapid growth, it also faces a range of challenges and shortcomings that require attention.

Policies related to the cross-border

Over the past 11 months, China's total imports and exports have reached 39.79 trillion yuan (\$5.47 trillion), up 4.9 percent year-on-year. The country's export share in the global market has remained largely stable."

Wang Shouwen,
vice-minister of commerce

der e-commerce industry have further room for improvement, and some enterprises have only a vague understanding of compliance requirements. The digital infrastructure supporting the sector is still not fully developed, with online service platforms needing stronger functionalities, and Customs clearance processes still facing certain bottlenecks, Lan said.

To this end, the government will enhance demand-supply matching by facilitating connections between exporters operating businesses on cross-border platforms and overseas logistics providers, said Vice-Minister Wang.

The authorities will provide compliance training to help over 120,000 cross-border e-commerce enterprises, many of which are small businesses, and navigate Customs clearance, taxation, product quality, and intellectual property issues, Wang said.

China's foreign trade is heavily dependent on sea freight, with 95 percent of cargo volume transported through maritime logistics. The challenges faced by major shipping corridors this year, including the Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Panama Canal, have had a tangible impact on the international trade environment.

The next step is to facilitate matchmaking between local foreign trade companies and freight forwarding firms, enabling better alignment of demand and supply in the sea freight market, said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

The government should also encourage shipping companies to develop online platforms to better cater to the booking needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, Zhou added.

Provincial-level regions with fairly large trade volume should take the lead in driving the implementation of these initiatives as they have a crucial role to play in stabilizing the overall foreign trade performance, Zhou said.

China's major economic powerhouses — Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces — have emerged as crucial engines propelling the country's foreign trade growth. During the first 10 months of the year, these three provinces recorded import and export value increases of 10.6 percent, 7.6 percent, and 7.1 percent year-on-year, respectively.

The success of these leading provinces in sustaining their foreign trade growth through the year-end sprint will be critical, as their strong performance has been a significant contributing factor to China's total foreign trade numbers, Zhou said.

'Investing in China is investing in our future'

REPORTER'S LOG

By Wang Keju

Even as the global economy encounters headwinds, a key takeaway from my interviews with business executives is that China's unwavering commitment to further opening-up its markets has created important opportunities for the growth of foreign companies during these trying times.

"Success in China makes you stronger worldwide. That is why we firmly believe that the next 'China is China'! And that 'investing in China is investing in our future'," Jean-Paul Agon, chairman of L'Oréal Group, told me during the seventh China International Import Expo in Shanghai last month.

"Honeywell has built a complete value chain in China, covering innovation, research, production, procurement, sales and services. We will collaborate with more partners in China to co-create new business models and innovative applications that benefit enterprises globally," Yu

Feng, president of Honeywell China, said to me during the second China International Supply Chain Expo in Beijing in late November.

Maximilian Foerster, president and CEO of Zeiss Greater China, said to me in an inclusive interview: "As China matures technologically, we are seeing more and more local competitors within China's ecosystem. If we want to be a successful global company, we must be an integrated part of that ecosystem. If not, we're missing out on the markets of tomorrow."

The importance that these multinational corporations attach to the

Chinese market, as well as their confidence in it, is not without a sound basis. The numbers speak for themselves.

China has cemented its status as a major trade partner for over 150 countries and regions, maintaining its position as the world's top goods trading nation for seven consecutive years, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

In 2023, China attracted \$163.3 billion in foreign direct investment, retaining its rank as the second-largest FDI destination globally, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Furthermore, China's outbound direct investment reached \$177.29 billion, accounting for 11.4 percent of the global total and ranking among the top three in the world for the 12th consecutive year, the MOC added.

Rebeca Grynspan, secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, said that she believes in the contribution of open trade and investment to global development, and noted that China has set an admirable example of such practices in recent times.

From the China International Import Expo to the China International Fair for Trade in Services, from the development of free trade zones to the building of Hainan

Free Trade Port, and from signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement to promoting accession into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, China has taken consistent steps to further open up its economy.

Through these multifaceted efforts, China has steadily expanded the pie of international cooperation, inviting more partners around the world to share the dividends. Its steady commitment to opening-up and rule-based global economic integration has injected stability and vitality into the world economy during uncertain times.

BUSINESS

Rich cultural heritage at heart of fridge magnets

BEIJING — At the National Museum of China in Beijing, visitors queued up to catch a glimpse of the renowned empress' phoenix coronet, in the form of a fridge magnet.

The phoenix coronet, unearthed in 1957 in the underground palace of Dingling Mausoleum — part of the Ming Tombs in Beijing — is famous for its decoration featuring nine dragons and nine phoenixes. It boasts a distinctive design and exquisite craftsmanship, which vividly reflects the material and cultural standards of the mid to late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

"Fortunately, I managed to get one of the fridge magnets. There are two types: one made of wood and the other of metal. You can also scan a code on the metal magnet to experience the AR effect," said a Beijing resident surnamed Lin, who visited the museum recently.

In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese citizens have chosen museums and other cultural venues as must-visit destinations, igniting a trend of experiencing the charm and educational values of traditional Chinese culture.

Accordingly, cultural and creative products such as fridge magnets inspired by original museum artifacts have also become popular among young people.

On Chinese social media platforms like Xiaohongshu, refrigerators are no longer the only display board for fridge magnets. More and more young enthusiasts of Chinese traditional culture are also creating their own "fridge magnet museums" on display boards.

A report released by market research firm, Zhiyan Consulting, shows that the market size of China's cultural and creative products reached \$16.38 billion in 2023, up over 13 percent year-on-year.

"After the National Day holiday this year, almost all cultural and creative products with 'Zaojing' (caisson ceiling) in the Xiannongtan Cultural and Creative Space were sold out, sparking a 'Zaojing craze,'" said Zhou Hairong, director of the cultural and creative product affairs from the Beijing Ancient Architecture Museum, highlighting the museum's renowned "Zaojing" ceiling decorations.

To better meet the consumers' enthusiasm to purchase such products, the museum introduced an online reservation system for

the glow-in-the-dark "Zaojing" fridge magnets, with a daily limit of 400 and a purchase limit of one per person.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics show that in the first three quarters, per capita expenditure on education, culture and entertainment in China was 2,295 yuan (\$316), a year-on-year increase of 10.1 percent, accounting for 11.1 percent of the total per capita consumption expenditure.

Zhang Jianshuo, an expert on cultural relics, believes that "museum cultural and creative fever" reflects the increasing cultural confidence of people, and the exquisite appearance and rich connotation of cultural and creative products have promoted the upgrading of cultural consumption.

Our well-preserved cultural heritage provides creative inspiration and abundant nourishment for the development of these cultural and creative products, Zhang said.

Huang Yi, deputy director of the Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum, said that the museum's double-layer magnets and flowing sand fridge magnets, based on its Diamond Throne Pagoda and the surrounding ginkgo and persimmon trees, are among the most sought-after products, and are all currently out of stock.

"The Diamond Throne Pagoda has rich historical and cultural connotations and is a relatively well-preserved structure in the northern region. It is the most representative cultural symbol of the Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum," said Huang.

The fever has also led to an increasing number of cultural relics protection institutions, cultural enterprises and the like increasing their investment in the development of cultural and creative products.

Recently, the museum collaborated with other cultural institutions to hold a cultural and creative market, during which, not only were all the popular fridge magnets sold out, but a record for daily tourist reception was also set on the days that followed.

"In the future, we will accelerate the speed of introducing new cultural and creative products to meet the diverse cultural and tourism experience needs of tourists," Huang added.

XINHUA



A fridge magnet in the shape of a gold mask is displayed in Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan, Sichuan province, on May 16, 2022.

WANG XI / XINHUA



A view of the China Securities Regulatory Commission in Beijing on Dec 2. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China steps up efforts to open up its capital market

Revised rules on foreign investors' strategic investment in public firms

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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China's ongoing efforts to further open up its capital market, with the latest attempt to ease foreign strategic investment in listed firms, will help to improve the quality of A-share companies and inject more liquidity into the market, said experts.

The revised rules on foreign investors' strategic investment in public companies in China took effect on Dec 2. Under the revised version, which was jointly released by six government departments — including the Ministry of Commerce and China Securities Regulatory Commission in early November — foreign natural persons are allowed to make strategic investments in listed companies. Prior to this revision, only foreign legal persons or institutions were allowed to make such investments.

Capital requirements have also been relaxed. While potential foreign strategic investors were required to either possess a minimum \$100 million worth of overseas actual assets or manage at least \$500 million actual assets in overseas markets according to the former regulations, the threshold has now been lowered to \$50 million and \$300 million, respectively,

as long as the foreign investor does not serve as a controlling stakeholder in the invested Chinese company.

Tender offers are acceptable for strategic investment under the revision. Private placements and share transfer agreements used to be the only two options for such investors. Meanwhile, foreign strategic investors are allowed to use shares of non-listed overseas companies as consideration shares for acquisition payment if they invest via private placements or tender offers.

A strategic investor is an individual or firm that invests in companies with the goal of gaining strategic advantages from the partnership rather than primarily focusing on financial returns.

China published the first foreign strategic investor management regulations in 2005. More than 600 A-share companies have attracted foreign strategic investment so far, as calculated by the MOC.

According to Tian Xuan, associate dean of the PBC School of Finance of Tsinghua University, foreign investors will thus have more flexibility and payment options under the latest changes. Their investment costs will effectively be lowered, he said.

The required lock-up period for

acquired shares is now set at 12 months under the new rules, which used to be a minimum of three years.

This change has helped to lower investment risks for foreign investors, which will help them stabilize their investment in Chinese listed companies, said Tian.

Prior to the latest amendments, the proportion of shares of listed companies acquired by foreign investors through their first strategic investment was set at a minimum 10 percent. The bar has now been lowered to 5 percent.

Xue Yangyang, senior consultant at Everbright Law Firm's Shanghai Office, explained that the lowered requirement on shareholding can help foreign investors to adopt more diversified investment strategies. They can adjust their investment structure by taking into consideration the exit mechanism, capital flow and corporate governance, he said.

Foreign strategic investors can use other investment channels such as qualified foreign institutional investors and stock connect programs to make their investment more flexible, said Xue.

He Yongqian, an MOC spokesperson, said at a news briefing in early November that the new rules will help to direct more quality foreign capital to Chinese listed companies, advance the development of industries and facilitate the sound and stable development

of the Chinese capital market.

As the new rules have also set a framework integrating market self-discipline, government supervision and social supervision, risks can be effectively avoided and alleviated when China steadily opens up its capital market, she added.

According to Tian of Tsinghua University, the new measures have addressed the major difficulties currently holding up foreign capital's entry into the Chinese market.

"Each measure can be considered a major breakthrough, which will significantly increase A-share market's appeal to foreign investors. More vibrancy can be expected in the A-share market," he added.

Pi Haizhou, an independent financial analyst, said that the target A-share company can leverage the resources of the foreign strategic investor to offer their products or services in more overseas markets. The idea of value investing will be more widely and deeply rooted in the Chinese market, he said.

"Given the fact that the lock-up period for such investors is 12 months to the minimum, they cannot make short-term speculation. Value investment will be their best choice against that backdrop. Chinese investors will keep an eye on the moves of these foreign investors. They will follow their choices and invest in the target A-share companies," said Pi.

Creating a global desire, market for Shandong cuisine

By HAN JINGYAN
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When Gao Yingjie, a teacher at Yantai Vocational College of Culture and Tourism (YVCCT) in Shandong province, opened a Shandong cuisine restaurant in Norway back in 2015, he didn't expect it to be so popular.

Fushan Restaurant, offering such dishes as Chinese fried prawns, kung pao chicken, kung pao beef and assorted beef, was well-received in the Nordic nation.

Besides winning high praise from Norwegian statesmen, the restaurant has ranked first for many years in Google's ranking of local Chinese restaurants.

"The reason why Shandong cuisine is welcomed by foreigners is that it relies on our rich China taste — flavored with rich Chinese stories and my excellent cooking skills," he said.

Besides Gao, over 80 YVCCT alumni are being employed in enterprises in Japan, South Korea and other countries, while six others are

working as chefs at Chinese embassies based in Japan, France and the Central African Republic.

Bao Shusheng, deputy director of the Yantai Shandong Cuisine Research Institute, said: "Shandong cuisine is not only China's, but also the world's."

YVCCT, which was set up in August 1979 and is known as the "Academy of Shandong Cuisine", "R&D Base of Shandong Cuisine", as well as a training base for skilled talent, has tried every effort to boost the globalization of Shandong cuisine, said Jing Xiaoling, president of YVCCT.

Jing said that by aligning with the Belt and Road Initiative, the college has taken a three-pronged approach to deepen the job — expanding international exchanges, absorbing overseas culinary excellence to elevate the "Circle of Connections" and innovating talent training to cultivate more Shandong cuisine professionals.

In expanding international exchanges, she said, YVCCT has sent 13 delegations to visit institu-

tions such as Japan's Hollywood Graduate School of Culinary Arts, Seoul National University and Hyejeon College in South Korea, as well as institutions in Germany, promoting Shandong cuisine stories abroad.

"Meanwhile, we also invited international students from over 20 countries to experience Shandong cuisine through on-campus activities. In addition, we dispatched over 30 faculty and students to visit Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, and received delegations from more than 10 countries, including Italy and Switzerland, to come to our college to facilitate exchanges," she said.

By participating in events such as the National Day banquet food festival hosted by the Chinese Consulate-General in Osaka, Japan, unique Shandong cuisine creations like roasted pear with white fungus and stir-fried rice with sea intestines were showcased, Jing said.

"These efforts effectively narrate the story of Shandong cuisine as dis-

tinctive, exquisite, and balanced, highlighting its visual and culinary appeal," she added.

Lyu Shiqiang, Party secretary of YVCCT, said: "Shandong cuisine, as one of the most influential cuisines in China, also needs to borrow the excellence of other culinary flavors," adding that the college has helped standardize the dishes, promotion and evaluation criteria for Shandong cuisine.

Zhang Renshan, a teacher at YVCCT, stressed that the college has also expanded talent cultivation for more professionals, as it thinks that talent is the primary resource for Shandong cuisine's globalization.

By partnering with institutions in Japan, South Korea, Australia and some other countries, the college has co-trained over 1,300 professionals since 2022, he said, adding that it has developed digitalized training standards and curricula, contributing to culinary education in countries such as Spain and Australia.

Moreover, by encouraging entre-



Li Mingsheng (left), a teacher of YVCCT, teaches a foreign student to cook braised pork meatballs in gravy sauce during an on-campus activity on Feb 9, which draws over 30 international students from 20 countries. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

preneurship and global outreach, YVCCT has also exemplified its success in promoting entrepreneur-

ship, influencing and training over 4,000 Shandong cuisine enthusiasts worldwide, Zhang noted.

BUSINESSINSIGHT

EAGLE EYE

By Guan Tao

With the final chapter of the US presidential election now written and President-elect Donald Trump's strong return to politics, market concerns are rising that the United States might again implement policies that could weaken the Chinese yuan, or the renminbi.

In early 2018, the Chinese renminbi's rebound was stopped by then US president Trump's initiatives to escalate US-China trade tensions. The Chinese currency briefly tested the 7 per dollar mark at the end of 2018 and mid-2019 and finally broke below that level in August 2019. This is what could be considered Trump 1.0's impact on the yuan.

During the 2024 election campaign, Trump threatened to impose high tariffs on goods directly or indirectly exported from China to the United States.

He highlighted plans to escalate trade frictions with China in major aspects — removing permanent normal trade relations with China, imposing tariffs that could possibly amount to 60 percent on all Chinese goods exported to the United States and gradually halting imports of essential goods from China.

Influence channels

These measures would influence the yuan exchange rate via China's balance of payments and supply-demand dynamics in the foreign exchange market.

On the one hand, if the proposed tariffs are implemented and China cannot find large-scale alternative export markets in the short term, this could affect China's foreign trade and trade surplus.

On the other, if the United States imposes higher trade barriers on Chinese goods, foreign direct investment into China will likely decrease, and Chinese firms may increase overseas investments and factory construction, accelerating the relocation of Chinese industries abroad.

Trump's presidency may also impose indirect effects on the yuan exchange rate via two main channels. First, the financial and confidence channel. Based on the experience of Trump 1.0, heightened US-China trade tensions have generally been bearish for the yuan, while easing tensions have been favorable.

For instance, in 2018, Trump announced tariffs on Chinese goods, which ended the yuan's rally and prompted China to implement measures to stabilize the exchange rate. In 2019, when US-China trade negotiations stalled, the yuan fell below 7 against the dollar, but the subsequent first-phase trade deal led to a recovery in the yuan's exchange rate.

The other indirect channel is the impact of the Trump administration's tariffs on US inflation, which in turn influences the US Federal Reserve's interest rate policy and the US dollar index.

If Trump 2.0's fiscal, trade and immigration policies lead to persistent high inflation in the United States or even a second wave of rising inflation, the Fed may suspend rate cuts or even re-initiate rate hikes.

If so, the Fed policy would be less accommodative than expected, potentially

It's time to guard against excessive RMB exchange rate adjustments



strengthening the US dollar, let alone any disruptions in investor sentiment and exchange rates caused by Trump's potential comments on US interest rates and exchange rates. This has been one of the key elements of the recent "Trump trade" in the market.

Nation's response

Compared to the US-Japan trade relationship, there is still room for adjustments in US-China trade dynamics. If the Trump administration's tariff measures cause a significant short-term drop in China's exports and trade surplus with the US, the potential negative impact on China's economy should not be underestimated.

This reflects the increasingly complex and challenging external environment facing China's economy, with growing uncertainties and instabilities.

To address this, the priority is to engage with various stakeholders in the United States, guiding trade policies in a more cooperative direction. Over recent years, China's significance in the US trade imbalance has diminished, while the United States still faces relatively high inflationary pressures. As a result, the incoming Trump administration

may not be strongly motivated to immediately or fully implement the tariff threats.

Second, China must take advantage of the opportunity window that has emerged since late September, marked by a shift in the macroeconomic policy stance and marginal improvements in economic performance.

China should continue to deepen reform and opening-up, ensuring that the economy returns to a reasonable operating range, reversing investor expectations and boosting market confidence.

In October 2020, US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell stated that the US economic recovery had not yet been completed and that the risk of insufficient policy intervention outweighed the risk of excessive intervention. Even if it turned out that policy actions went beyond what was necessary, they would not be in vain — economic recovery would be stronger and faster.

This philosophy offers a valuable reference for China's macroeconomic policies. By increasing countercyclical adjustments and staying ahead of the market curve, China can position itself more advantageously in future trade negotiations.

Furthermore, China must closely moni-

tor the development of Trump 2.0's trade policies toward China, conduct scenario analysis and stress tests, and take proactive measures to prepare for potential risks, all while looking for opportunities in challenging circumstances. By preparing for the worst while striving for the best outcomes, China can better navigate these turbulent times.

It is worth mentioning that the impact of tariff threats on the yuan exchange rate cannot simply be modeled on the experience of Trump 1.0.

During Trump 1.0, the US administration initiated the decoupling between the United States and China with technological competition, shocking the market and leading to the renminbi exchange rate overshooting. By the later stages of Trump 1.0, the market grew fatigued with his extreme pressures on China, and market reactions became increasingly muted.

Trump 2.0's renewed high-profile efforts to pressure China's economy may once again draw market attention, but this is likely to be event-driven. If efforts from relevant stakeholders can help reduce the intensity of Trump 2.0's tariff policies, it would miti-

gate the related shocks.

Recently, multiple international investment banks predicted that the renminbi exchange rate could weaken to 7.5-7.6 by the end of 2025, implying only limited adjustment from the current level.

Meanwhile, maintaining the renminbi exchange rate's flexibility to fluctuate within a reasonable range can help absorb external shocks and prevent excessive market pressure from building up.

Policymakers should also develop response plans based on scenario analysis and stress testing, ensuring the timely use of the "micro-regulation plus macro-prudential" policy toolbox when necessary.

By taking a comprehensive approach, strengthening expectation management and preventing one-sided market forecasts from materializing, China can guard against the risk of excessive exchange rate adjustments.

The writer is global chief economist at BOCI China.

The article is translated from a piece published on China Business News.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Best way forward for property recovery high on agenda

MAIN STREET

By Zhong Zhengsheng and Zhang Lu

By analyzing indicators reflecting the latest real estate sector adjustments, experts issued comprehensive judgment on whether fundamentals are strong enough to support China's property market, reversing the downward trend and bringing about stabilization, and endeavoring to recognize major challenges facing the sector's recovery.

Issues addressed include whether the current adjustments in the real estate sector have come to an end; how to achieve stabilization in the property market; and how to strike a balance between new supply and local government fiscal revenue. These are the questions we need to take into consideration when trying to chart a course forward for achieving property market stability.

Logically, the real estate market turnaround should start from the stabilization and rebound of the property sales' growth rate, and the recovery in sales will facilitate price stabilization and then drive up property investment. Historical data prove such a logic. Since 2005, the growth rate of commercial housing sales by area has been about four months ahead of the price increases of new home sales in the 70 large and medium-sized cities.

Historically, the growth rate of new residential construction moved forward at the same pace as the new home price growth rate, which indicates that the reaction time of

real estate developers' new project construction is similar to market price adjustments.

The potential demand strength of China's real estate market could be measured in three parts, which are incremental demand driven by growing urban population, improved living demand in space per capita, as well as depreciation demand associated with aging homes.

By taking the above factors into consideration, China's potential housing demand rose from 980 million square meters in 2002 to a peak of 1.78 billion sq m in 2017, and is going to gradually decline to about 1 billion sq m in 2025, and fall further to 600 million sq m in 2035 and 300 million sq m in 2050. After three years of rapid adjustment, residential sales area stood at 770 million sq m in the first nine months, which is below the potential new demand of 1.04 billion sq m for the full year. Therefore, this round of real estate adjustments has all the markings to stop the falling and achieve stability.

In the abovementioned estimates, the changing trends of Chinese real estate's potential demand can be evinced. But in reality, growing urbanization, desire for improved lifestyles and housing upgrade trade-ups will impact the changing trends in uneven and sometimes sporadic ways. Factors to impact housing demand include people's income expectations, purchasing power confidence and restrictions posed on homebuying and mortgages.

At present, people's recovering purchase power appetites have become the main supportive factor for stabilizing China's real estate market, especially taking into consideration people's rising savings, and significantly reduced homebuying costs.

Currently, the main hurdle to realizing the stabilization of a falling market is changing

household expectations for home prices and take-home incomes. This also indicates that although home prices in China are not excessively prohibitive, to unleash people's homebuying willingness needs support from long-term stable income expectations.

Whether current real estate sector adjustments have come into an end remains a pressing question.

China's property market has undoubtedly experienced drastic adjustments since 2021. As of September of this year, when current supportive measures were not yet introduced, annual housing sales area shrank to half that of 2021, pre-owned home prices dropped 15 percent in China's 70 large and medium-sized cities, real estate development investment fell by about 30 percent from 2021 levels, and the destocking period of generalized home inventories was extended from 21 months of 2021 to 30 months, reaching 2014 levels.

So, are such adjustments adequate? As above analysis has shown, property sales have been below potential demand levels for three consecutive years, people's homebuying capability has improved along with their accumulated savings over the past three years, homebuying costs are 15 percent lower than before, and down payments and mortgage interest rates are also shrinking. As a result, property market stabilization has an objective basis in practical reality.

If effective measures are adopted to overturn market expectations, potential buyers will be encouraged to reenter the housing market. Based on our analysis of major countries' housing price adjustments since 2000, we discovered that many of them have experienced home price adjustments of above 20 percent or even 50 percent. In contrast, the average decline in Chinese main-

land home prices is still comparatively mild.

By analyzing the lead-lag relationship between China's home sales and housing prices, we notice that the year-on-year decline of commercial housing sales by area has narrowed since June 2024, which is expected to lead to the narrowing of such declines of home prices beginning in October of this year — though figures will stay in the negative growth range for some period. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, in October, the year-on-year decline of used home prices in the 70 large and medium-sized cities narrowed by 0.1 percentage point to reach -8.9 percent, and that of new home prices in first-tier cities narrowed by 0.1 percentage point to -4.6 percent.

So how to achieve stabilization in the property market?

The starting point for a real estate market rebound would always be sales, be it historic experience, or the relationship between real estate investment capital and sales. Following the spirit of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee's meeting on Sept 26 — which stressed that efforts will be made to stabilize the property market and reverse its downturn — clear improvement in both new and pre-owned home sales area was evident.

In addition to the existing measures, including lowering down payments and cutting home mortgage interest rates, more efforts with regards to stabilizing the economy, employment and expectations are needed to further undergird the improved property sales trend. Real estate is overwhelmingly the chief asset of Chinese families. Therefore stable home prices matter to the health of Chinese households' balance sheets, and is part of future lifestyle expectations of Chinese families with home owner-

ship. This will also further impact people's consumption tendencies. Therefore, as we are at this stage of turning existing homebuying wishfulness into homebuying willingness, stable income expectations are especially needed during the formation of a benign circle in the real estate market.

So how can we strike a balance between new supply and local government fiscal revenue?

The latest real estate adjustments have greatly impacted local government fiscal revenue. As much as 8.7 trillion yuan (\$1.2 trillion) was generated in local land transfer revenue in 2021, and the 2024 full year amount is projected to be nearly halved to 4.4 trillion yuan.

The previous local land transfer revenue is no longer sustainable in the mid to long-term, therefore, local governments need to exploit new sources for their local fiscal revenue.

This is because China's real estate market is gradually entering into a new era of having more existing homes being traded than the transaction volume of newly built homes. In the meantime, local land transfers may potentially raise land and home prices. Furthermore, existing land supply has already presented huge stocks of undeveloped land.

The focus should be placed on destocking property inventories over the short term. We suggest the introduction of multiple measures to activate real estate sales, and encourage property developers to launch projects and acquire land. Proactive market activities will help to promote local land transfer recovery, therefore striking a balance between new supply and local government fiscal revenue.

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The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Pact renewal reflects wish to collaborate

Sino-US science agreement highlights joint efforts in tackling shared priorities

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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The United States and China have renewed their long-standing science and technology agreement, marking a cautious continuation of collaboration amid heightened tensions.

The revised US-China Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement, announced on Friday, is set to last five years and aims to balance national security concerns with the need for joint efforts on global challenges such as climate change and public health.

Despite persistent geopolitical strains between the world's two largest economies, experts said the pact underscores the importance of sustained cooperation in addressing shared global priorities.

Denis Simon, a former professor of global business and technology at the University of North Carolina and an expert on China's technology and innovation strategies, described the updated agreement as a vital instrument for advancing efforts to address shared global challenges.

The renewed pact is more transparent and limited in scope, reflecting an effort to balance collaboration with heightened sensitivities, Simon said.

"The symbolic value of the agreement is significant, as it demonstrates a mutual commitment by both governments to collaborate despite broader tensions.

"It also offers practical reassurance to scientists, signaling that their cross-border projects have the backing of their respective governments."

First signed in 1979 following the normalization of China-US diplomatic relations, the agreement has served as a foundation for collaborative research and innovation, involving more than 1,000 joint projects and more than 30,000 US scientists.

The bilateral collaboration has yielded significant benefits for both countries, with key achievements under the pact spanning climate science, agricultural productivity, renewable energy and public health.

"Many of these projects have focused on basic rather than applied research, and while not all have been equally successful, many have proven to be mutually beneficial," Simon said.

A notable example is the use of folic acid supplements for pregnant women, which has reduced neural tube defects in newborns by up to 85 percent. This single initiative has transformed public health outcomes, helping millions of mothers give birth to healthy children.

"This is just one of many impactful outcomes resulting from such collaborations, demonstrating their value to global public health," Simon said.

He emphasized that it is crucial for addressing global challenges such as climate change and pandemics, as both countries are major innovation leaders. "It is very clear that there is no way to find any meaningful solution unless you have the participation of both the US and China," he said.

Despite the agreement's legacy of success, it has faced opposition from critics within the US government. A letter signed by 14 US Republican law-

makers had urged Secretary of State Antony Blinken to delay the renewal, citing national security concerns.

Simon countered these claims, arguing that major projects conducted under the agreement have posed no security risks.

"If you look at the history of bilateral science and technology collaboration from 1979 to the present, I would argue that over 90 percent of the projects have not involved any threat to national security," he said, adding that critics tend to overstate risks and ignore the overwhelming benefits.

"A proper cost-benefit analysis would reveal that the agreement has more than paid for itself, stimulating progress in both countries."

Liu Liang, a researcher at the Institute of Applied Economics of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said the updated pact highlights "a shared understanding between China and the US in fundamental research, offering directions for cooperation in science, economy and society, thanks to efforts of both sides."

"It provides a viable basis for bilateral academic and technological exchanges, ensuring a stable and rules-based approach, which strengthens the continuity of scientific partnerships," Liu said.

Despite current tensions, the pact, which advocates "seeking common ground while reserving differences," serves as a framework for addressing shared global challenges such as artificial intelligence, aerospace and environmental sustainability, fostering hope for stronger bilateral relations amid uncertainties, he added.

Better outcomes

Simon further pointed to research studies showing that international collaboration consistently yields better outcomes than individual efforts. "Collaborative research tends to produce higher-quality results, while the vast majority of activities under the agreement have been innocuous and nonthreatening to either side."

As the US and China navigate their complex relationship, the renewal of the Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement underscores the critical role of science diplomacy in fostering mutual understanding and addressing shared global challenges, particularly in light of the upcoming Donald Trump administration, Simon said.

While the agreement's renewal marks a positive step, Simon said trust and confidence between the two nations remain fragile. "This pact lays the groundwork for continued collaboration, but expanding its scope will depend on how both governments address broader geopolitical issues."

The US-China Business Council, representing more than 270 US companies operating in China, expressed strong support for the renewal. "The updated agreement provides robust intellectual property protection, data transparency, and reciprocity, and security for researchers," the council's President Sean Stein said.

Shao Xinying in Beijing contributed to this story.



Palestinian residents and civil defense teams conduct a search and rescue operation on Saturday in the Al-Majida Wasila school in Gaza City following an Israeli strike. MAHMOUD ISLEEM VIA GETTY IMAGES

18 Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes

GAZA — Gaza's civil defense agency said on Sunday that overnight Israeli strikes across the Palestinian territory killed at least 18 people, including four displaced individuals who had sought refuge in a tent.

Agency spokesman Mahmoud Bassal told AFP that rescuers worked through the night, recovering the bodies of 18 people, while dozens more were injured in the "ongoing aggression and Israeli aerial and artillery bombardment" across Gaza.

Bassal said the dead included four people killed in an Israeli strike targeting a house in central Gaza City.

Another four were killed and eight injured when an Israeli missile struck a tent sheltering dozens of displaced people in Deir el-Balah city in central Gaza.

AFP photographs showed heart-wrenching scenes as relatives retrieved the bodies of their loved

ones from a hospital in Gaza City, while others lay covered in blankets within the facility's ward.

On Saturday, Bassal said Deir el-Balah's mayor, Diab al-Jaro, was killed in a similar strike.

The Israeli military later claimed responsibility for that strike, accusing Jaro of being "an operative in Hamas' military wing."

Another strike in Gaza City on a United Nations school housing displaced people targeted Hamas fighters, the Israeli military said.

Bassal said seven people were killed, including women and children, and at least 10 wounded.

The school was run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, but like many such facilities, it had been turned into a makeshift shelter for those displaced by the conflict.

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis demonstrated on Saturday for a deal to release the remaining

hostages still held in Gaza.

"We all can agree that we have failed until now and that we can reach an agreement now," Lior Ashkenazi, a prominent Israeli actor, told a crowd gathered in the commercial hub of Tel Aviv.

Itzik Horn, whose sons Eitan and Iair are still being held captive in Gaza, said, "End the war, the time has arrived for action and the time has arrived to bring everyone home."

There has been guarded optimism in recent days that a cease-fire and hostage release deal for Gaza might finally be within reach after months of abortive mediation efforts.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Saturday discussed with visiting US officials efforts to reach a cease-fire in Gaza and a hostages-for-prisoners deal in the Palestinian enclave, El-Sisi's office said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

GEORGIA Ruling party loyalist elected president

The ruling Georgian Dream party's candidate, Mikheil Kavelashvili, has been elected president of Georgia, the Central Election Commission said on Saturday. Kavelashvili received 224 votes in an electoral college of 300 members, the commission said, surpassing the 200 votes required for victory. This marks the first time in Georgia's history that the president has been elected not by direct vote.

JAPAN Protest against US military breaks out

Japanese citizens gathered outside the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo on Friday to protest sexual violence by US military personnel in Japan. The protest followed a district court sentencing a US Air Force serviceman to five years in prison for abducting and sexually assaulting a Japanese girl under 16 in Okinawa last year. Protesters decried the leniency of the sentence and called sexual violence by US military personnel intolerable. They slammed the government and police for withholding case details from Okinawa authorities.

UNITED KINGDOM London joins bloc for trans-Pacific trade

Britain officially became the 12th member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership on Sunday as it seeks to deepen ties in the region and build its global trade links after Brexit. The accession means Britain will be able to apply CPTPP trade rules and lower tariffs with eight of the 11 existing members from Sunday.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Arab countries back Syria transition, slam incursions

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Senior diplomats from eight Arab countries affirmed their support on Saturday for a peaceful, inclusive and fair political transition in Syria while denouncing Israeli incursions and bombings in the country.

At the Arab Ministerial Contact Committee on Syria in Aqaba, Jordan, foreign ministers from Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also called for supporting the role of the United Nations envoy to Syria.

They sought necessary resources for establishing a UN mission to assist Syria in supporting and overseeing the political transition process in accordance with the Security Council Resolution 2254.

The diplomats condemned Israeli incursions and attacks on Syria, emphasizing that the Golan Heights is "occupied Arab Syrian land" and calling for an end to the occupation. They demanded urgent action from

the UN Security Council to halt Israeli violations of international law, including its military operations in Gaza and Syria.

On Saturday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Israel fired 61 missiles at Syrian military sites in less than five hours on Saturday evening.

Israel has conducted about 800 airstrikes across Syria since the downfall of Bashar al-Assad's government on Dec 8, destroying military capabilities and infrastructure and leaving Syria without air defenses against its attacks, Al Jazeera reported on Sunday.

Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani, who led the military operation that resulted in the collapse of Assad's government, accused Israel of justifying its attacks on Syria in the guise of security concerns.

"Israeli arguments have become weak and no longer justify their recent violations. The Israelis have clearly crossed the lines of engagement in Syria, which poses a threat of unwarranted escalation in the

region," he said in an interview published on the website of Syria TV.

In a note to reporters on Thursday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was deeply concerned by "the recent and extensive violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity," highlighting the urgent need to "de-escalate violence on all fronts throughout Syria."

The 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement remains in force, he said, condemning all actions that would be inconsistent with the agreement.

'Vacuum' on border

Israel said on Thursday that the "collapse of the Syrian regime created a vacuum on Israel's border" and in the buffer zone established by the 1974 agreement.

It called the incursion into Syrian territory a limited and temporary measure to ensure border security. The US has defended the recent Israeli takeover of the Syrian side of the Golan Heights.

Arhama Siddiqi, a research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies

Islamabad in Pakistan, described the Arab Ministerial Contact Committee's communique on Syria as a polished reiteration of familiar themes: peace, inclusivity and the long-standing principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

The Arab world's post-pandemic pivot toward economic priorities "further explains the cautious, almost superficial approach to Syria," Siddiqi told China Daily.

"Stability is the goal, not out of altruism but necessity — regional peace is a prerequisite for economic recovery and cooperation," she said.

"Inclusivity remains the cornerstone of any genuine resolution, yet it is conspicuously absent in practice. Syria's fragmented society demands a process that engages opposition groups, civil society actors and marginalized voices — yet these stakeholders are often sidelined in favor of expedient but fragile agreements," she said.

Xinhua and Reuters contributed to this story.

China urges unfreezing of Afghanistan's overseas assets

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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China reiterated its call for concerned states to unfreeze and return Afghanistan's overseas assets to aid the country's economic recovery and improve people's lives, a stance that analysts have praised.

On Friday, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2763, extending for 14 months the mandate of the team monitoring sanctions against the Taliban and associated individuals or entities that "threaten Afghanistan's peace, stability and security."

China welcomed the resolution's adoption. Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, said, "We support the monitoring team in strengthening its engagement with the Afghan interim government and look forward to an early visit by the team to Afghanistan."

China urges concerned countries to immediately and unconditionally unfreeze and return in full Afghanistan's overseas assets, stop imposing illegal unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan and support Afghani-

stan's efforts to improve its people's livelihoods, he said.

Resolution 2763 reaffirms the need to help Afghanistan address its economic and humanitarian challenges, restore its banking and financial system and utilize the central bank's assets for the benefit of the Afghan people.

Salman Bashir, former Pakistani ambassador to China, told China Daily that China's position aligns with the UN Security Council's decision to extend the mandate of the monitoring team overseeing sanctions against the Taliban and Taliban-linked individuals and entities under Resolution 2763.

"While the Taliban needs to do more to check terrorists from operating from Afghanistan, it is fair to note that the situation in the country is generally stable," he said.

Bashir agreed that human rights issues do not fall within the monitoring group's scope. More importantly, "the freezing of Afghanistan's overseas assets and unilateral sanctions are an anomaly, given the Taliban's cooperation and expanding role with the outside world," he said.

Intiaz Gul, executive director of

the Center for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan, said China's position on Resolution 2763 reinforces its previous stance that terrorism and human rights issues should be addressed separately.

"The underlying message to other nations may be that human rights should not be used as a weapon against target nations," Gul said.

Afghanistan's overseas assets remain frozen because of sanctions on the Taliban, and the Taliban regime is demanding access to those funds, he said. However, the United States and its allies have refused and linked it to human rights in Afghanistan.

Stability and peace

"No doubt that over three years of Taliban rule has seen enough stability and peace in Afghanistan that demands unfreezing of Afghanistan's assets abroad," he said.

Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN, told a Security Council briefing on Thursday that Afghanistan faces a critical stage of peaceful reconstruction.

"The Afghan people are facing complex challenges such as food

shortages, displacement, natural disasters and contamination of explosive ordnance," he said. "Nearly 24 million people need humanitarian assistance."

At the same time, Fu said, over the past three years, the Afghan interim government has made efforts to promote economic reconstruction and strengthen economic ties, trade, investments, connectivity and cooperation within the region.

China has reiterated the urgency of unfreezing and returning Afghanistan's overseas assets, while calling for an end to unilateral sanctions. This appeal reflects China's commitment to helping Afghanistan overcome its current economic and humanitarian crises, said Khalid Taimur Akram, executive director of the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future.

It is imperative for the global community, especially the concerned states, to acknowledge past missteps and fulfill their obligations toward Afghanistan, he said. Lifting sanctions and returning frozen assets is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic step in fostering regional peace and development, he added.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Hollowing out of tech pact symptomatic of US' problematic approach to China relations

That China and the United States on Friday signed a protocol to amend and extend the Agreement between the United States and China on Cooperation in Science and Technology for an additional five years, effective from Aug 27, 2024, is encouraging news.

On Jan 31, 1979, then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and the 39th US president Jimmy Carter signed the agreement during Deng's visit to the US, and it has been renewed approximately every five years since then, paving the way for sci-tech exchanges between the two countries. But the document was only extended for six months in August last year, and again in February this year, in spite of China's openness to renewing it for the usual five years, exposing the resistance bilateral sci-tech exchanges face from the US China hawks.

Therefore, it is to be hoped that the renewing of the agreement is not just symbolic of the US administration's claims that it wants to cooperate where it can, rather than signifying a genuine commitment to cooperating with China in the high-tech field.

According to a Reuters' report on Friday, the Joe Biden administration is intending to empower companies such as Google and Microsoft to act as gatekeepers worldwide for highly sought-after access to AI chips. Under the scheme, to be released as soon as this month, these US companies would have to comply with strict requirements, including reporting key information to the US government and blocking Chinese access to chips used for artificial intelligence applications.

The new rules, as observers say, indicate that despite its stated claim that it does not seek the decoupling of the US from China, the Biden administration is scrambling to do just that in the chip sector in its waning days in office.

Although Beijing has repeatedly reiterated the importance of Washington developing a correct perception of China's development and discarding its zero-sum, Cold War mentality, in an interview with the media on Friday, the outgoing US ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, said he spends 80 percent of his time on competition with Beijing and 20 percent on engagement, calling it the right balance.

Many issues between the two countries are attributable to the Biden administration sticking to such a "balanced" approach in dealing with China relations. But that approach has not thwarted China's high-tech development, nor has it been separated from the world economy. It has also been harmful to some US companies, which have not benefited as they should from the development of China over the past four years.

It was also on Friday that US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told the media the US will not rule out sanctions on Chinese banks citing their alleged involvement in dealing with Russia over the Ukraine crisis. That's a typical example how the Biden administration tries to resolve a self-made issue by casually severing the hard-earned cooperative bonds between China and the US. That also appears to Beijing to be another attempt of Washington to try and decouple China's financial system from the world.

That serves to reinforce that under the Biden administration the US has been squandering tremendous amounts of time and resources of both sides to seek cooperation just so it can ruin or squander it in the name of competition and confrontation overnight.

China's foreign policy, including its policy toward the US, is consistent. No matter what changes happen in the US, China will always be committed to developing Sino-US relations based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation. Stable Sino-US relations are in line with not only the actual needs of the two nations, but also the trend of the times, and the general expectations of the international community.

The incoming US administration should bear in mind the big picture of Sino-US relations, and properly handle the issues between the two countries, so as to stabilize and improve the relationship. Against the backdrop of the current complex and turbulent international situation, China and the US jointly exploring the right way to get along can inject more certainty and positive momentum into world peace and development.

Dialogue spins wheel of fortune forward

Sixty years complete one cycle in the traditional Chinese calendar. The 60th year is the point that bridges the past and the future. This year, China and France celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations. Sixty years in which the two countries have forged a resilient friendship and mutually beneficial partnership of result-oriented cooperation.

France was one of the first Western nations to offer diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China, for this reason, and the generally friendly bilateral ties over the past six decades, Beijing regards France as a dependable partner. It has touted the China-France relationship as an example of countries with different political systems and cultures transcending ideological divergences and getting along.

There are no clashes of fundamental interests between them and there is no reason for not bringing out the best in their relations through the dialogue mechanisms that have been put in place for that purpose.

The 26th China-France Strategic Dialogue was held on Saturday in Beijing between Diplomatic Adviser to the French President Emmanuel Bonne and top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi, who participated in his capacity as a member of the Communist Party of China's political bureau of the Central Committee and director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs. The theme was implementing "important consensus between the countries' heads of state" and "deepening China-France strategic cooperation", according to a statement of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

A routine diplomatic meeting such as this would usually merit little particular attention at other times, because, as the Chinese Foreign Ministry indicated in a statement, it was meant not to tackle specific issues, but rather to reaffirm a general mutual commitment, in this case to bilateral strategic cooperation, on which the two sides reached "broad consensus" through "in-depth communication".

But given the general reassessment of relations with China underway in Europe, prompted by the continent being startled out of its complacent conviction of its place in the world by the conflict in Ukraine, the meeting has drawn more attention than it otherwise would have. Not only because it did dive a little deeper to enumerate the potential realms of bilateral cooperation going forward. But also because it took place at a time when consolidating a mutual commitment to Sino-French cooperation matters more than announcements of specific collaborations.

That the two sides exchanged vows to sustain their strategic cooperation at this point is significant, for, as Wang said, it is regarded as the kick start for "another 60 years" in which the two countries will carry forward their comprehensive strategic partnership, help each other succeed and make progress together. That is indeed something both countries can celebrate.

Paris' role as a leader and staunch advocate for European strategic autonomy naturally appeals to Beijing as the European Union faces mounting pressure from Washington to join a geopolitical campaign to isolate China. For all the differences it may have with China, France has found broad similarities with China when it comes to their positions on key international issues, from political solutions to the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East to UN reforms and climate action. As the Saturday dialogue showed, the two sides have considerable common ground when it comes to strategic autonomy, climate change, multilateralism and UN centrality in global affairs.

The "China-France spirit", which Wang defined on Saturday as "independence and autonomy, mutual understanding, strategic foresight, and mutual benefits", is a vivid illustration of Beijing's ideal of state-to-state relations. As more and more countries find themselves under pressure to take sides in Washington's push for an increasingly divided world, such a formula represents a resolute blow against the push for "camp confrontation". Bonne's reiteration of French opposition to such divisiveness, commitment to independent diplomacy, and advocacy of mutual respect and inclusive cooperation in international relations is no doubt conducive to the wide-ranging cooperation the two sides have envisioned.

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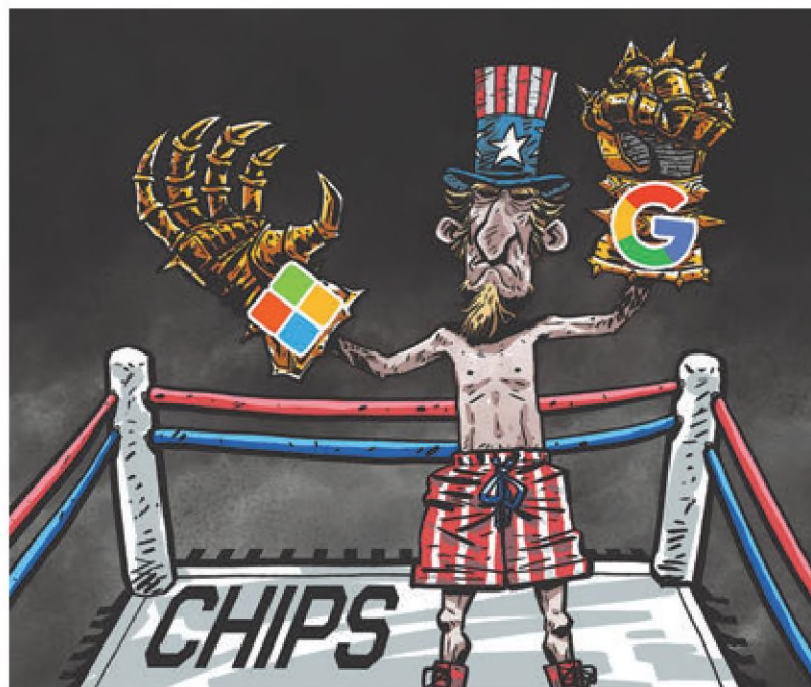
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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Strengthened supervision to avoid systemic risks and bolster confidence

On Friday, the day after the conclusion of the Central Economic Work Conference, the national work conference for the financial system was held in Beijing. This is the first time that these two conferences have been held back-to-back.

It is essential to coordinate efforts to prevent systemic financial risks and support high-quality economic and social development with high-quality financial services. During the Central Economic Work Conference, when discussing the difficulties and challenges faced by China's economy, three specific areas were mentioned: real estate, local small- and medium-sized financial institutions, and illegal financial activities. These became the focal points of the national work conference for the financial system.

Regarding real estate, the conference proposed fully leveraging the

urban real estate financing coordination mechanism to consolidate the market's stabilization, accelerating the establishment of a financial service system that matches the new model of real estate development.

To address the risks of small- and medium-sized financial institutions, multiple measures can be taken to guide improvements in internal governance and boost capital replenishment channels, such as supporting small- and medium-sized banks to supplement capital through special bonds.

Notably, the conference also specifically addressed "external shocks". An official from the monetary policy department of the People's Bank of China stated in an interview that next year will see further deepening of exchange rate market reforms, strengthened management of exchange rate expectations, effective

responses to external shocks, which are expected to effectively prevent excessive exchange rate adjustments and maintain the basic stability of the RMB exchange rate at a reasonable and balanced level.

The conference called for intensified financial regulation across all industries, further improvement of the regulatory system, enhancement of regulatory enforcement and accountability, strengthening of regulatory coordination, rapid filling of gaps in financial legal frameworks, and continuous improvement of regulatory efficiency.

The State Council has issued documents on enhancing supervision of the capital market, insurance industry, and futures market, all highlighting the approach of preventing risks, and bolstering confidence.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Central leadership shows its mettle and capability

From Wednesday to Thursday, the annual Central Economic Work Conference was held in Beijing.

It demonstrated the central leadership's understanding of the economy, as defined by three keywords.

The first keyword is "as planned". This year has seen increased external pressure and more internal difficulties, yet despite the headwinds, the conference assessed that China's main goals and tasks for economic and social development are about to be successfully completed on schedule.

The second keyword is "expectations". The conference mentioned that to do well in next year's economic work, it is necessary to stabilize expectations and stimulate vitality.

Data from September and October show that consumption in real estate, automobiles, and travel has grown rapidly over the past two months, categories that have a close relationship with people's medium- and long-term income expectations.

Next year, the intensity of the policies encouraging consumption will be further strengthened, and its support scope will be further expanded, which brings high expectations.

The third keyword is "cycle". The Central Economic Work Conference mentioned that the adverse impact brought about by changes in the current external environment has deepened. As China has become a global manufacturing and trade center, it

must address challenges amidst the turmoil of the current historical cycle. China's response is to expand its high-level opening-up.

In the first 11 months, 52,379 new foreign-funded enterprises were established in China, a year-on-year increase of 8.9 percent, and the nation's nonfinancial direct investment abroad increased by 11.4 percent year-on-year in 2023, covering more than 190 countries and regions.

China has completed each phase of its economic tasks for the year on schedule. With flexible and efficient policymaking, regardless of what challenges arise, China will continue to develop steadily forward.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

What They Say

No sign of turmoil in the ROK abating

On Saturday, the Republic of Korea parliament voted on a second impeachment motion against President Yoon Suk-yeol just one week after the failure of the first impeachment motion against him. That the motion was passed this time shows that the domestic political situation in the ROK has taken a new turn, driven by multiple factors.

First, Yoon's approval rate has hit a record low. Gallup Korea released poll results on Friday showing that Yoon's approval rating had fallen to 11 percent with his disapproval rating rising to 85 percent. Since the martial law controversy, rallies demanding the resignation of Yoon have been held daily across the ROK. Perhaps under public pressure, the ruling party maintained its decision to oppose the impeachment motion against Yoon before the parliamentary vote but allowed its members to participate in the voting, giving an

opportunity for forces within the party opposing Yoon to play a role.

Second, internal contradictions within the ruling party have continued to escalate. Han Dong-hoon, leader of the ruling People Power Party, and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo stated on Dec 8 that they would orderly proceed with ending Yoon's term early, but Yoon delivered a speech on Dec 12 defending his earlier implementation of emergency martial law. Analysts believe that Yoon's speech further intensified the split between him and the ruling party, eventually leading to defections among party members enabling the second impeachment motion to be pushed through.

The impeachment case will now be submitted to the constitutional court for review, with a maximum review period of 180 days. During this time, Yoon will be suspended from presidential duties. If the Constitutional Court rules that the impeachment

case is valid, a presidential election must be held within 60 days, quickly intensifying the political maneuvering among various forces.

If the Constitutional Court rules that the impeachment case does not stand, Yoon will still face multiple investigations. On Dec 10, the ROK parliament passed a resolution calling for Yoon's immediate arrest, and on Dec 12 it passed a special law on investigating charges of sedition against Yoon and others, with police and prosecutorial investigations also underway. There is a possibility that Yoon might become the first sitting president in ROK history to be summoned as a suspect by prosecutors, potentially plunging the country into greater uncertainty. Regardless of the outcome of Yoon's impeachment trial, it is unlikely that the political situation in the ROK will become calm anytime soon.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China's Diplomacy

Editor's note: The year of 2024 is a critical year full of challenges for the whole world and the trends of transformation are evolving. Faced with different situations, China has demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility as a major country and continued to promote solidarity and cooperation with other countries. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Shen Dingli

Sino-US relations need new chapter

China-US relations are likely to enter a new stage of uncertainty when Donald Trump assumes office as US President on Jan 20. While Trump has assembled a Cabinet to better execute his grand vision of "make America great again", if his first term (2017-2020) is any indicator, the second is not going to be easy for Sino-US relations in the coming years.

From 2018 to 2020, Trump launched a trade war against China, seriously undermining the economic and trade ties and hurting both countries. During this term, China-US interaction shrank drastically, with inter-government dialogue decreasing sharply.

However, Trump may have drawn some lessons from his turbulent first term. In order to promote his "Make America Great Again" mission through "Buy American and Hire American", he should think about the cost-effectiveness of doing business with China. In his second presidency, the US could either trigger trade war 2.0 by levying more tariffs on China and forcing Beijing to slap counter-tariffs, or encourage China to significantly increase imports from the United States by lifting the 25 percent tariffs that his administration imposed in 2018-2020.

When Trump won his first election in 2016, the Republican Party had won both the House and the Senate. However, two years later, his party lost the House in mid-term elections. Certainly, Trump's inability to secure China's cooperation in trade partnership played a role in that defeat. The US has given Trump another opportunity by choosing the Republican Party to lead the White House and both chambers of the Congress. However, if there were another trade war against China without delivering on the promise of "Buy American and Hire American", Trump's party may repeat what happened in 2018.

On the contrary, talking to China about fully implementing



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



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"The Phase One China-US Economic and Trade Agreement", signed on Jan 15, 2020, in Washington, with the aim of pausing the trade war, could help the US increase its total exports by 3 per-

cent, significantly boosting Trump's MAGA credibility. He doesn't need to wage another trade war on China at all. He just needs to order his new trade team to reinstate trade talks with the Chinese team. It is that easy.

Lately, Trump has threatened to impose a 10 percent tariff on all goods from China if the China-US dispute on fentanyl is not settled by January. Beijing has long committed to both the Trump and Joe Biden administrations to take this issue seriously, by executing any smugglers of such precursors of poison. While China is unhappy to be under a tariff threat from the US, China

has been showing its commitment by deepening action. The two countries could set up joint working groups by investigating relevant cases together and expediting legal proceedings.

Trump has indicated that members of his team contacted their Chinese counterparts in the past few days. There is reason to believe that such a longtime thorny issue cannot be resolved to both sides' satisfaction.

Cooperation is a two-way street. While China has reason to respond to the US' legitimate concerns with compassion and swiftness, it would be ideal for Washington to take care of China's reasonable demands too.

China's first and foremost national security concern is its sovereignty over Taiwan. From Trump 1.0 to Biden, the US has systemically increased its political and military support to Taiwan. Not only did then US House speaker Nancy Pelosi visit the island in 2022, the US even regularly talked about its plans to deploy troops on the island. This has seriously challenged the foundation for normalizing bilateral relations. While the US tries to justify its action by saying it will stabilize cross-Strait relations, it is the US' infringement of the one-China principle that is increasing tensions in the region.

China's other concern is the US' disruption of the global supply chain. The Trump 1.0 administration started "decoupling" with China, while the Biden administration expanded the width and depth of "de-risking" with China by adopting a "small yard, high fence" approach.

However, China-US trade relations may not necessarily be gloomy during Trump's second term. Beijing and Washington can reasonably settle their fentanyl dispute and implement their Phase One China-US Economic and Trade Agreement collaboratively to avoid a new trade war.

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

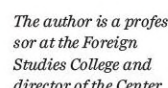
Chen Haiming

Neighborhood diplomacy conducive to regional peace and development

Since China is geographically and culturally connected with its neighboring countries, sharing mutual interests, it is committed to a foreign policy of good-neighborliness and friendship in its immediate vicinity. Guided by the philosophy that "close neighbors are better than distant relatives," China prioritizes its neighborhood diplomacy, adhering to the principles of "amity, sincerity, reciprocity, and inclusiveness" to promote peace, stability, development, and prosperity in the region and beyond.

China's diplomatic strategy is characterized by proactive engagement with neighboring countries through high-level visits and dialogues. Chinese leaders regularly meet with their counterparts from neighboring countries to build mutual understanding and trust. These interactions go beyond mere formalities, laying the groundwork for significant agreements that strengthen bilateral collaboration.

Trade and investment have become the backbone of China's ties with its neighbors. The Belt and Road Initiative exemplifies this, as it seeks to enhance connectivity and economic integration particularly across its neighboring countries. Through infrastructure investments and trade partnerships, China has facilitated economic growth in many neighboring countries, creating a win-win situation that fosters regional stability. The increase in trade volumes and investment flows is a testament to the success of these diplomatic efforts.



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In recent years, trade between China and its neighboring countries has reached unprecedented levels, reflecting the deepening economic interdependence that benefits all parties involved.

Beyond economics, China recognizes the importance of cultural and educational exchanges in its neighborhood diplomacy, as it is beneficial to building lasting relationships. Initiatives such as the Confucius Institutes promote Chinese language and culture, fostering goodwill and understanding among neighboring nations. Scholarships and exchange programs for students and professionals further enhance people-to-people connectivity, creating a foundation of mutual respect and collaboration. Such exchanges have proven invaluable in dispelling stereotypes and building a sense of community among nations. As individuals from different backgrounds come together, they contribute to a broader understanding of each other's cultures, thereby fostering genuine relationships that are essential for maintaining peace and stability.

Moreover, China's neighborhood diplomacy is also anchored in multilateral cooperation mechanisms that emphasize openness and inclusiveness. Platforms such as the China-Central Asia Summit, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization provide frameworks for addressing common challenges and enhancing regional stability. These platforms allow for dialogue on security, economic development, and environmental issues, fostering a collaborative spirit among member states.

For instance, the SCO has become a critical forum for addressing security concerns in Central Asia, promoting counter-terrorism cooperation, and enhancing economic ties. Similarly, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism has facilitated collaboration on sustainable development and resource management among countries sharing the Mekong River, highlighting China's commitment to addressing regional challenges collectively. It is also apparent in fostering deeper and more substantive China-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation. By working together, these nations can bolster their collective influence and contribute to regional stability, showcasing that cooperation is more effective than rivalry.

China's approach to building partnerships with neighboring countries is rooted in the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind." By establishing comprehensive strategic partnerships, China aims to create a framework where mutual benefits and common interests are prioritized. In recent years, neighboring countries like Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia, and Malaysia have committed to establishing a bilateral community of shared future with China.

In addition to its diplomatic engagements, China's unilateral expansion of its openness to foreign investment and goods and the implementation of visa-free policies have further strengthened its ties with neighboring countries. By November 2024, China has decided to expand the list of visa-free countries to 38, including neighboring countries such as Singapore, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, and Thailand. By simplifying visa processes and promoting trade liberalization, China has made it easier for businesses and individuals to connect, fostering economic growth and cultural exchange. Such initiatives not only benefit China but also create opportunities for its neighbors, reinforcing the idea that cooperation leads to mutual prosperity.

It is natural for territorial disputes to arise between neighboring countries. Upholding the principles of "peace is the most precious" and the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", China advocates for resolving territorial and maritime disputes through diplomatic channels to promote regional peace, stability, and prosperity. For instance, China has made efforts to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea through diplomatic channels, advocating for dialogue while refraining from unilateral actions that could escalate tensions.

Additionally, China has engaged in dialogue with India over the border dispute, underscoring its commitment to peaceful coexistence despite historical tensions, and it has eventually resulted in the smooth resolution of the dispute. Through these efforts, China aims to demonstrate its willingness to work collaboratively with its neighbors and foster a sense of regional stability.

In a word, neighborhood diplomacy holds a critically important position in China's foreign relations. Through a combination of high-level bilateral interactions, economic collaborations, cultural and educational exchanges, and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, China is not only enhancing its relationships with neighboring countries but also contributing significantly to regional and global stability.

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Hisham AbuBakr Metwally Mohamed

China's pivotal role in Global South

In 2024, the world was facing major challenges in terms of economy, security, climate change and the possibility of the global order collapsing.

The countries of the Global South suffer from all these challenges more than the developed countries. Therefore, the countries of the Global South need to cooperate with each other and show solidarity more than ever before, and they also need to benefit more from China as an economic superpower and a country with political clout to lead the countries of the Global South in shaping a more stable and just world.

China's efforts to confront challenges faced by countries in the Global South can be analyzed under the following heads.

Investment and infrastructure

Through the Global Development Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative, China has become a major investor in infrastructure projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These include transportation networks, energy systems, and industrial parks, helping to drive economic development and trade in the Global South. China provides financial and technical assistance to many Global South countries, particularly through grants and concessional loans. These are often tied to Chinese construction and development companies, which strengthens China's economic presence. This form of aid is seen as an alternative to the



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more traditional Western aid models, and, in many cases, China's assistance is welcomed because it comes without any political conditions attached.

Technology and innovation

China has long advocated technology transfer to the Global South. As it is increasingly becoming a global leader in technology and innovation, many countries in the Global South benefit from China's technological advancements. China's telecommunications companies, such as Huawei and ZTE, are integral to the development of 5G networks and other technological infrastructure in many Global South countries. Chinese e-commerce giants like Alibaba and Tencent are also expanding their influence in the Global South by facilitating trade, digital finance, and connectivity.

Climate change and sustainability

China is increasingly engaged in climate diplomacy and plays a central role in promoting green devel-

opment in the Global South. Its experience in renewable energy, as well as its leadership in climate financing, makes it a key partner for countries facing the dual challenges of development and environmental sustainability.

There are many examples of the important role China plays in global development. Take the case of Egypt. With investments exceeding \$3 billion, the Egyptian-Chinese economic zone in the Suez Canal area has been able to establish more than 200 factories, creating more than 30,000 job opportunities. These factories export their production and help the Egyptian economy. Clean energy projects such as the Benban Solar Park in Aswan, the electric train in the new administrative capital, and the satellite assembly station are success stories of technological cooperation between Egypt and China.

Political and diplomatic challenges

In 2024, China participated in all the forums involving Global South members, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the Asian Cooperation Dialogue, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the G20, and presented important proposals and policies.

China's importance to countries of the Global South can be gauged from the number of countries of the Global South that are rushing to join the BRICS grouping. They are attracted by effective and useful ini-

tiatives, such as the establishment of the New Development Bank and its contributions to many projects through low-interest financing without imposing any conditions. There is also the initiative of trade between BRICS members in local currencies, while the group discusses the idea of issuing a new currency that could arrest the United States from using the dollar as a tool to impose economic sanctions, or of printing it in a big way to harm the global economy through waves of inflation.

At the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for rallying the countries of the Global South to promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity. He emphasized the need for true multilateralism and a governance approach characterized by extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits.

The pivotal role China plays for the benefit of countries in the Global South is also evident in the UN Security Council. This was in stark contrast when the United States prevented the Security Council from issuing a binding resolution to stop the war in Gaza.

At this critical hour, China's role is not only required but also necessary, as the challenges are very great and failure to confront them will have disastrous effects not only on the countries of the Global South but on the entire world.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

HANY BESADA AND JOSEPH INGRAM

Collaborative evolution

By fostering partnerships that prioritize capacity-building and long-term development, China can align its investments with the development aspirations of African countries

The evolution of China-Africa relations reveals a compelling narrative of growth, opportunity and challenges. While initial engagements focused on infrastructure and extractive industries, recent developments signal a transformative phase, influenced by the Belt and Road Initiative. This framework, often heralded as a beacon for South-South cooperation, seeks to elevate China's role from a development partner to a strategically capable of addressing global challenges collaboratively.



Hany Besada



Joseph Ingram

However, as the BRI expands in a rapidly changing global environment, it must demonstrate its effectiveness in addressing the emerging challenges particularly related to sustainability, equity and the fostering of mutual benefits amid growing geopolitical complexities.

China's engagement with Africa is evolving against a backdrop of shifting global dynamics. The intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, exacerbated by potential US policy retrenchments on climate action and foreign aid, offers African nations leverage to negotiate more favorable terms both with foreign investors and with donor governments. This strategic positioning could drive South-South cooperation to align more closely with Africa's sustainable development goals, particularly in areas such as climate adaptation, mitigation and natural resource management.

Yet, concerns about debt sustainability are growing. African nations' growing indebtedness has reignited debates about the ethics, transparency and efficacy of existing financing models in South-South cooperation. Critics cite the risk of "debt traps" while emphasizing the urgent need for greater transparency, accountability and concessionality from all external financing sources. Recent reports from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank also advocate for accompanying reforms that can bolster governance in resource-rich African states. Such measures would not only reduce financial risks but also attract private capital on more manageable terms essential for long-term development.

Not unlike Western financed investments, Belt and Road projects in Africa have not been immune from criticism for their environmental and

social consequences. Reports of deforestation, biodiversity loss and labor rights violations underscore the need for stronger safeguards. However, these challenges also present opportunities. Africa's pivot toward green development, coupled with global trends such as carbon border taxes, suggests a recalibrated approach from China. By elevating the priority of environmental sustainability into South-South cooperation, China can position itself globally as a champion of green innovation, aligning its investments with Africa's climate resilience and sustainable growth aspirations.

The global race for rare minerals highlights Africa's strategic importance. The increasing focus on minerals critical for the clean energy transition presents both opportunities and challenges for South-South cooperation. With actors such as the US and European Union member states eyeing Africa's resource wealth, China must navigate this landscape carefully. A balanced approach, emphasizing technology transfer and value chain development, could help Africa harness its resources for sustainable industrialization. This strategy aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which envisions a continent moving beyond resource dependence to diversified economic growth.

China's recent diversification efforts are noteworthy. Investments in digital infrastructure, particularly in Ethiopia and Kenya, demonstrate a shift from extractive industries to sectors such as technology and healthcare. These initiatives highlight the potential for South-South cooperation to catalyze resilience and independence, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. By supporting digital sovereignty and health security, China can foster partnerships that prioritize capacity-building and long-term development.

A defining feature of modern South-South cooperation is the growing agency of African nations. Countries across the continent are leveraging platforms such as the African Continental Free Trade Area to shape trade and investment frameworks that align with regional priorities. This proactive stance challenges traditional donor-recipient dynamics, paving the way for equitable partnerships and greater continental self-reliance.

African governments are increasingly setting conditions for collaboration, emphasizing technology transfer, local capacity-building and shared governance. For instance, partnerships within the BRI framework are beginning to reflect African aspirations for integrated trade and industrialization. By aligning with initiatives such as the AfCFTA, China can ensure that South-South cooper-

ation remains relevant and responsive to Africa's evolving needs.

The next phase of the BRI must address previous shortfalls while embracing inclusive growth and improved governance. Transparent, socially responsible, and environmentally friendly practices are not merely ethical imperatives — they are strategic necessities. By integrating these principles, China can align its projects with Africa's development aspirations and frameworks, enhancing both impact and perception.

Expanding digital and health cooperation offers another pathway for strengthening South-South cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the fragility of health systems across the Global South, while the rapid adoption of digital technologies highlighted the potential for leapfrogging traditional development hurdles. China's investments in these sectors can build resilience and reduce dependence on external systems, fostering genuine partnerships grounded in mutual benefit.

The dual interest of China and the US in Africa's mineral wealth underscores the continent's centrality to global energy transitions. African leaders must leverage this interest to negotiate terms that advance regional industrialization and clean energy objectives. For example, North African states are exploring solar and wind projects to supply electricity to Europe. These initiatives exemplify how Africa can position itself as a leader in green innovation, benefiting from South-South cooperation frameworks that prioritize sustainable development.

China's success as a global leader in South-South cooperation hinges on its ability to dispel any perceptions that its presence might be nothing more than a 21st century version of neo-colonialism. To achieve this, China must strengthen its commitment to a leadership that prioritizes collaboration over mercantilism. Publicly committing to enhanced global partnerships, especially in addressing climate change, will elevate China's standing in the Global South and beyond.

The future of South-South cooperation lies in fostering partnerships that transcend transactional relationships. This requires a shift from resource-centric engagements to diversified investments that help move more African economies up the value chain thereby reflecting Africa's regional aspirations.

As China, the US and other major powers vie for influence in Africa, African leaders have a unique opportunity to shape South-South cooperation frameworks that align with their development priorities. By leveraging external interests strategically, Africa can advance its industrialization, green energy transition and digital transformation. This vision, rooted in equity and sustainability, represents the true promise of South-South cooperation.

China's partnership with Africa is at a crossroads. By embracing meaningful reform and responding to contemporary challenges, China can foster a new era of collaboration — one that is ambitious, responsible and reflective of today's development imperatives. Such a partnership would not only redefine South-South cooperation, but also solidify China's role as a strategic ally in the Global South.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

ZHENG QI AND PANG XIAO

Another string to its bow

CO2 removal has the potential to contribute to and accelerate the delivery of China's carbon neutrality goal

The world needs to complement rapid and deep emissions cuts with pulling carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere at a large scale to keep the Paris Agreement's global warming target alive. In this context, novel carbon dioxide removal (CDR) methods have increasingly gained the attention of policymakers and investors because of their high carbon storage durability. China can build on existing knowledge to expand its CDR portfolio.



Zheng Qi



Pang Xiao

CDR options vary, ranging from conventional approaches such as afforestation and reforestation to some novel ones such as bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), direct air carbon capture and storage (DACCS), biochar, enhanced weathering and marine CDR. For example, BECCS involves the sequestration of atmospheric carbon by biomass during its growth and the capture and geological storage of carbon dioxide emitted upon conversion of this biomass to energy. Some BECCS applications are at present commercialized in bioethanol production, biomass and coal co-firing plants, pulp and paper mills, cement plants, and steel blast furnaces. DACCS refers to chemical processes to capture ambient carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it underground. The earliest operational DACCS plants were developed in Switzerland and Iceland by Climeworks.

Notable progress is being made to advance research, development and demonstration, and regulations in a number of jurisdictions, including the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom, and through voluntary markets. The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on the governments to support CDR development while highlighting, "these technologies are not a silver bullet and they cannot be a substitute for drastic emissions cuts or an excuse to delay fossil fuel phase-out". In addition, Mission Innovation — an intergovernmental initiative catalyzing collaboration action for technology and innovation with the participation of more than 24 countries including China — has

created a CDR mission that focuses on catalyzing novel CDR industries.

CDR is not new to China. The country launched national reforestation and afforestation programs decades ago to address other environmental challenges such as desertification, which were later repurposed as a key climate action. Several policies to incentivize China's forestry sector to contribute to climate action have also been introduced, including bringing it into China's Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement, as well as the country's voluntary carbon emissions trading system.

For China to achieve its 2060 carbon neutrality goal, experts argue that significant volumes of CDR will be needed. The mitigation cost of relying on conventional CDR could be much higher than that of a diversified portfolio of CDR options. China faces mounting international pressure to take more ambitious climate action and a tough domestic challenge in accelerating the green transition while ensuring development and energy security objectives. To meet this challenge, policymakers may consider expanding the CDR portfolio to go beyond conventional measures and carefully investigate the social, economic, technical and sustainability implications associated with all different options.

Although considerable research has been dedicated to novel CDR measures in China, policy discussion around novel CDR technologies and their role in China's decarbonization pathways has been slow. Earlier this year, the government decided to join the CDR mission under Mission Innovation, which could help catalyze meaningful domestic policy discussions.

All CDR measures carry both risks and benefits, particularly if deployed at scale, requiring a holistic approach to manage the trade-offs.

First, the underestimation of CDR feasibility constraints and overly optimistic assumptions of their potential deployment risks dampen necessary ambition on emissions reductions and provide an excuse for the fossil fuel industry to delay its phase-out.

Second, despite progress in advancing research and reducing cost, most novel CDR options, in particular DACCS, remain costly.

Third, most novel CDR technologies are still at a nascent stage of their development. It is uncertain whether they can be deployed at the expected levels and pace. Over-reliance on these technologies may put the world at the risks of greater and longer

climate impacts. Near-term emissions cuts must be prioritized and hard-to-abate sectors need to be clearly defined.

Fourth, sustainability constraints pose a significant challenge. For instance, BECCS deployment depends on the availability of sustainable biomass feedstock, which raises concerns over competition for agricultural land and water resources. Large-scale DACCS deployment may create significant demand for renewable energy, land and water. To evaluate the scalability of these technologies in China, it will be necessary to conduct comprehensive assessments for large-scale deployment by considering sustainability factors, including energy, land, water and raw materials.

Last, there is a lack of a robust measurement, reporting and verification system.

Despite the challenges, China has advantages by building on its knowledge in conventional CDR measures and the increased research and innovation in this space. Moreover, there are several opportunities that China can seize to expand its CDR portfolio.

As the country is designing its 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) and exploring new quality productive forces relying on scientific and technological innovation, it may be desirable to integrate CDR into green transition strategies and national research plans for low-carbon technologies, and to make sure that CDR development will not undermine emissions reduction efforts.

China is also actively expanding the compliance market and re-opening the voluntary market, offering an opportunity to set robust rules and regulations related to CDR that are aligned with international ones, in particular those discussed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change relating to the market mechanism and the methodology report on CDR and CCUS being developed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

It is urgent that China carefully consider expanding its CDR portfolio while ensuring that its emissions reduction efforts are not undermined.

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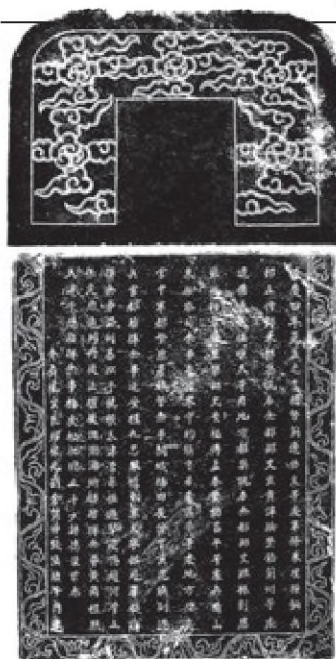
SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

CULTURAL HERITAGE



Digging up our knowledge of the past

Archaeologists continue to add to the fascinating history of Beijing as a capital city, **Wang Ru** reports.



Fresh stories of Beijing's long history are gradually emerging, thanks to hard work by archaeologists. Details of new discoveries spanning 2,000 years from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) have recently been released by the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau.

The city's stint as the national capital began 871 years ago when the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) moved its capital to Beijing in 1153, calling it Zhongdu ("the central capital"). It was located mainly in what is today's Xicheng and Fengtai districts.

The recent discovery of a gate from the Jin Zhongdu era is among the highlights revealed by archaeologists.

"This is our first discovery of a Jin Zhongdu gate, and also our first time excavating one of them," says Ding Lina, a researcher at the Beijing Institute of Archaeology. "It's a rare example of a large-scale building foundation on this site discovered with its structure intact."

Historical records

The gate is composed of two piers on the eastern and western sides of a 6-meter doorway, which reveals traces of wheels and possibly hoofs, suggesting the coming and going of carriages and people on horseback, Ding says.

Outside the gate is a horseshoe-shaped *wengcheng*, a type of defensive enclosure often built out of city gates in ancient China.

Inside the city, the remains of two streets have been discovered.

According to Guo Jingning, director of the Beijing Institute of Archaeology, although the rulers of the Jin Dynasty were the Jurchen people, nomads from what is now northeastern China, they made use of many Confucian ideas from the Central Plains in the building of Zhongdu.

"For example, they built gates for the city, whose names included the characters for *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety) and *zhi* (wisdom), some basic moral principles advocated by Confucianism. Among them was a southern gate called the Duanli Gate," Guo says.

Ding says that the location of the discovery accords with historical records, and its shape and size all suggest that it was the Duanli Gate.

"In the past, our understanding of Jin Zhongdu was limited to literature and a few archaeological discoveries, but we had failed to find such a landmark structure. The study of an ancient city is not complete or satisfactory before finding its gates and



Top left: The earliest known stone tablet found from a lookout tower of the Jiankou Great Wall, Beijing, which records the date of construction and the names of builders of the tower. **Top right:** A ceramic vase found from the newly discovered imperial family at the foot of Xiangshan Mountain in Beijing.

Clockwise from top: Archaeologists and technicians work on the excavation of the Ming imperial graveyard last year. A bird's-eye view of the lookout tower at the Jiankou Great Wall from which archaeologists discovered traces of the color red. The newly excavated part of Jin Zhongdu Site in Fengtai district, Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

streets, and efforts this time helped fill in the blank," Guo says.

Zhang Lixin, director of Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau, says the discovery was testimony to Beijing's history as a capital for more than 870 years.

Great Wall in color

Beijing boasts eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, among them the Great Wall. Ongoing archaeological efforts on the Jiankou Great Wall in Huairou district, a section built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and known for its steep ridges and rugged terrain, have revealed surprising details about its color.

According to Shang Heng, an associate researcher at the Beijing Institute of Archaeology, traces of red were found on the window of a lookout tower on the Jiankou Great Wall in June, which echoes

details of a Ming Dynasty map in which the wall was painted red.

"This was the first time we found red pigment on the Ming Great Wall," Shang says. "At first, we thought it was decoration, but later we realized the window was probably red during the Ming period."

The traces are clearly visible and linear. Shang adds that as windows are exposed to the elements, their surface is often weathered, leading to bleaching, so it's rare for color to be identifiable after nearly 400 years.

Shang says the major requirement of the Great Wall during the Ming period was that it be solid and imposing, and painting it red was probably a way to add its grandeur.

"In the past, our understanding of the Great Wall was that it was gray, but this new discovery has shown us that its red color would have looked more beautiful in

the wild," Shang says.

Archaeologists also discovered the earliest stone tablet found so far on the Jiankou Great Wall in another lookout tower, which records its date of construction and the names of its builders.

"We have pursued archaeological studies on the Great Wall for many years, achieving remarkable progress. This time we discovered the red pigment, which indicates that our excavation has become more precise," Guo says.

Royal resting places

The latest discoveries have also shed light on another World Heritage Site: the imperial tombs of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Beijing has long been known for the tombs of 13 Ming emperors and their families in Changping district, but in 2022, archaeologists discovered a new imperial graveyard at



the foot of Xiangshan Mountain, and began excavating.

Zhang Lifang, an associate researcher at the Beijing Institute of Archaeology, says the graveyard is ringed on three sides by mountains, and has three south-facing cemetery complexes ranged from east to west.

"The three complexes have clear layouts and intact structures of tombs and memorial halls," Zhang says.

Based on epitaphs found on the site, and the layout of the tombs, archaeologists believe the eastern complex was for imperial children who died young, among them, Princess Yunmeng, one of Emperor Wanli's daughters. Lying beside her is a tomb inferred to belong to her sibling Zhu Changxu, who died soon after birth and whose mother was Emperor Wanli's beloved concubine.

Zhang says the layout of this complex is very similar to the tomb of Emperor Wanli, which has been excavated and is open to the public.

The middle complex belonged to Emperor Jiajing's concubine, surnamed Wang, and the western complex possibly contained the tombs of several concubines buried together.

Archaeologists also found sacrificial vessels, stone tables, thrones, bottles and wooden figurines in the tombs.

"This is the largest imperial tomb group we have excavated since the Ming tombs in Changping. Although some have been destroyed or looted, their remaining layout, size and artifacts demonstrate their scale and strict building methods," Guo says.

"This provides a direct reference for understanding imperial burial customs, rites and the engineering of the dynasty."

Other discoveries released include the analysis of female bones found in a well at the Luxian Gucheng Site in Tongzhou district, identified as the location of Luxian county during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), which revealed how they died, and the possible reasons for their deaths, as well as an imperial stone road dating back to the Qing Dynasty in Fengtai district.

"We have uncovered many of the human stories behind the heritage," Guo says. "Through archaeological discoveries we can make guesses about life and death in ancient times, as well as the experience of those who lived then to develop a better picture of society at the time."

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DNA helps uncover ancient ordinary families linked through marriage

By WANG RU

DNA technology has decoded information about a newly discovered cemetery and the intriguing relationship between two extended families living nearly 3,000 years ago in what is now Beijing.

The cemetery at the Liulihe Site in the capital's Fangshan district is a large-scale tomb area in the presumed capital of the Yan state of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) in what is now Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province.

Yan was once one of the seven leading states of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) but was conquered by Ying Zheng in 221 BC, the year before he established the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and became China's first emperor, Qinshihuang.

Earlier studies show the city site in the Liulihe Site had the rammed earth remains of palaces and sites related to handicrafts. Ancient DNA studies further revealed the secrets of the relationship between the buried individuals.

According to An, the earliest tomb was found to be from the early Western Zhou Dynasty. Others are mostly from the middle stage of the dynasty. Considering their positioning, archaeologists believe the ditch was abandoned not later than the middle period of the Western Zhou Dynasty, offering clues for further studies on when the entire site was deserted.

They have discovered pits where people dumped garbage, tombs and an ancient ditch beyond the city.

They found 39 tombs in a cemetery cover-



From left: Guo Jingning, director of the Beijing Institute of Archaeology (center, back row), with students who worked as interns at the Liulihe Site in Beijing in June. Remains of a buried dog from a newly excavated tomb at the site. The burial of dogs with humans was a custom of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing 800 square meters to the north of the walled city and excavated 33, which belonged to members of two families. Ancient DNA studies further revealed the secrets of the relationship between the buried individuals.

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The tombs are believed to belong to non-titled people. "The size of the burial tools and tombs directly reflect the status of the tomb owners. Most of the tombs only have a coffin and are relatively small," An says. "Only nine have inner and outer coffins and are larger. None of them have bronze vessels as funerary objects, often seen in tombs of the aristocracy of that time."

She says this is the first time finding these types of tombs on the site.

According to An, nearly half the tombs have dogs buried with humans, a custom favored by people of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) but not so

much by Zhou people.

As a result, archaeologists infer that the people were descendants of the Shang people, although they lived in the Yan state.

"We all know that King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty ended the rule of the Shang Dynasty," says Guo Jingning, director of the Beijing Institute of Archaeology. "But from the study, we can surmise that some descendants of Shang still lived in the realm of the Western Zhou Dynasty. This is an interesting phenomenon."

Ning Chao, a researcher at Peking University, has conducted DNA tests on the human bones discovered at the tombs and

shed light on their detailed relationship.

According to An, those buried there belonged to two families — researchers refer to them as A and B — related by marriage. The cemetery is found to have buried at least four of their generations and three male tombs from Family A appear to be siblings.

One sibling's adult daughter is buried beside him. At that time, women were often buried with their husbands as a characteristic of a patrilineal family. The fact that the woman had scoliosis helped archaeologists realize that she was disabled and could not marry. As a result, she was buried with her father, An says.

The two families are buried in clusters. A female individual buried in the middle of the two clusters is found to be a descendant of their intermarriage.

"The research findings combining DNA tests indicate that during the Western Zhou Dynasty, ordinary people who lived at the Liulihe Site were buried with extended family members in groups. That's why the three siblings were buried together," An says.

They applied DNA analysis on more than 30 ancient individuals, forming large-scale and systematic studies on their family trees.

"This is a rare example of such technologies being used in China's archaeological studies of the Western Zhou Dynasty. As a result, the discoveries and the new technologies applied this time are vitally important," Guo says.

LIFE



From left: Summer vacationers flock to Shanghai Haichang Ocean Park. A large parade is one of the highlights at Happy Valley in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. Acrobatic performances draw a big crowd in Happy Valley in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Xiao Ru accidentally discovered her parents' new soft spot when she took them with her son to the Universal Beijing Resort earlier this year.

The capital resident said her son had twisted her arm to go to the theme park in the Tongzhou district because he wanted to meet Megatron, a character who has become an internet sensation for his witty responses to visitors.

As her retired parents had never visited a large theme park before, Xiao decided to make the trip a three-generation family experience.

"They're getting older, so there will be fewer opportunities to visit places like this in the future," says the woman in her 40s.

Initially, Xiao thought her parents probably wouldn't enjoy the park much, and that they would be content taking photos and strolling around. But to her surprise, they had a wonderful time.

"They didn't miss out on much; they watched the shows, ate the food, and enjoyed a number of attractions."

When she asked her parents if they would go back again, they said yes, and even suggested visiting other theme parks with their grandson.

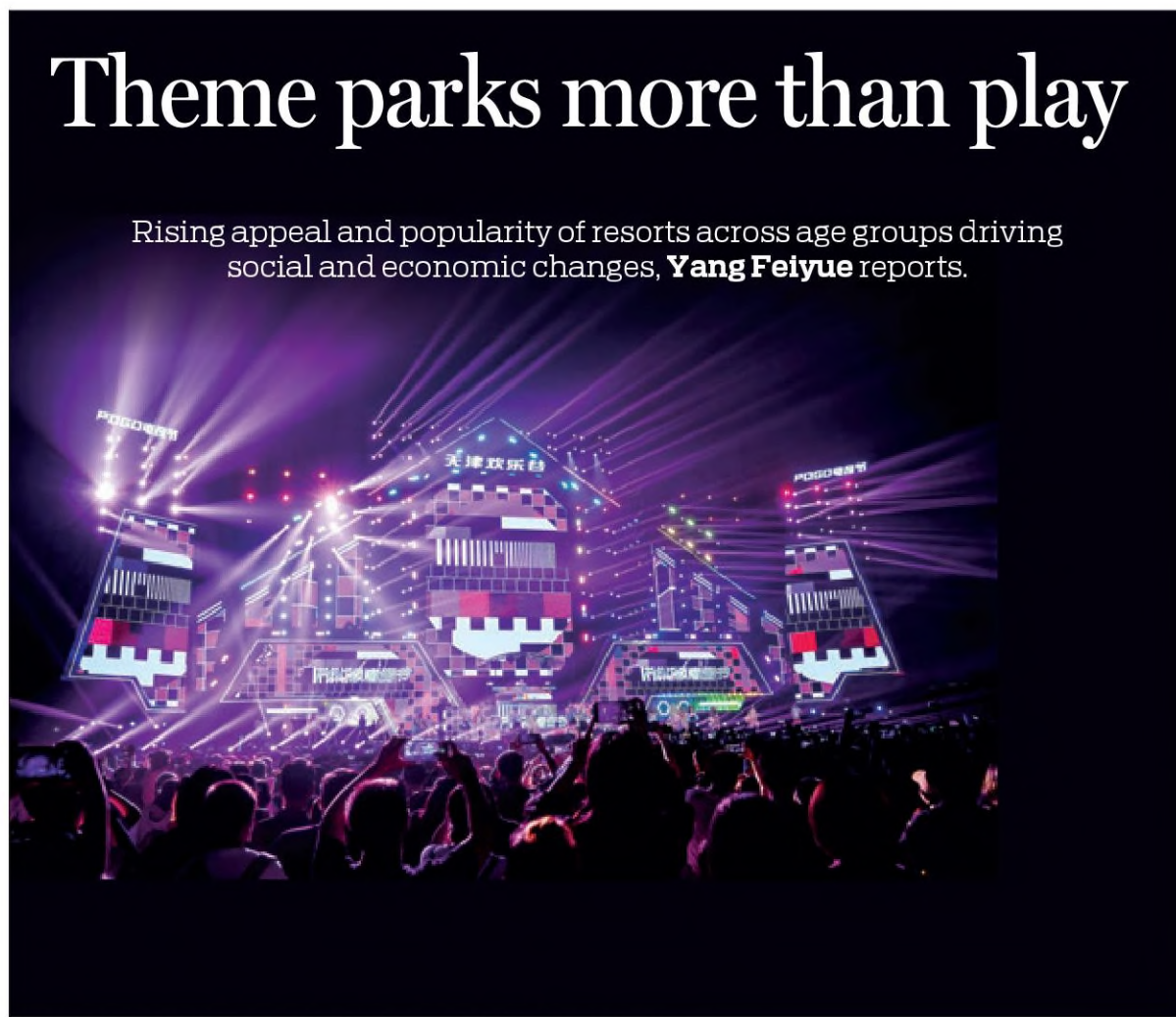
An increasing number of elderly Chinese, like Xiao's parents, are showing an interest in visiting theme parks, according to the 2024 theme park development report. This was presented at the 8th Development Conference of Theme Park and Resort, hosted by the State-owned Beijing Tourism Group's subsidiary, the Beijing Shouhuan Cultural Tourism Investment Co, and the newspaper Beijing Business Today, in early December.

Since theme parks offer emotional experiences, they are no longer exclusively the preserve of children and young people, especially now that Chinese theme parks are increasingly focusing on meeting the needs of different age groups, and so more elderly visitors are enjoying a variety of experiences. The report surveyed 20 major theme parks and hundreds of seasoned theme park enthusiasts.

The Universal Beijing Resort reports that two 96-year-old grandmothers are among its oldest visitors so far.

According to Shanghai Disney Resort, the number of elderly visitors purchasing one-day and two-day tickets in 2023 increased by about 75 percent over 2019, before the pandemic hit.

The resort notes that elderly guests often wear its famous head-



The carnival has been a hit with visitors to Happy Valley in Tianjin over the summer.

Theme parks more than play

Rising appeal and popularity of resorts across age groups driving social and economic changes, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

bands, sample a variety of park foods, and enjoy the daily parade with their families.

The majority of those surveyed in the report expressed a strong desire to revisit a theme park, and spending time at one has become a way of blowing off steam.

According to research by the Shanghai Disney Resort, most of its annual pass holders visit on average 12 times a year.

For visitors to theme parks like Haichang Ocean Park and Happy Valley, which have locations around the country, the trend has shifted from one-time visits to multiple returns, transitioning toward more in-depth themed experiences, according to the administrations of both parks.

Cheaper prices and exclusive benefits tied to new IPs (intellectual properties including new characters, designs and music), events, and merchandise lie behind the rising popularity of annual pass sales, the report reveals.

Universal Beijing Resort says that it has launched 200,000 entertainment shows, and staged more than 10,000 seasonal events over the past three years.

Some 1,800 performers from 14 countries and regions have participated in the shows, accumulating more than 4,100 performing hours, says Joe Hoskin, general manager at the Universal Beijing Resort, which has also increased its appeal with 1,800 food items and 4,000 themed products.

Hoskin emphasizes that the key to keeping the visitors engaged lies in continuously launching seasonal and themed events based on classic characters.

Haichang Ocean Park stated that while repeat visits to theme parks are influenced by a variety of factors, building an influential IP system is key.

Theme parks must create a sense of identity for visitors, and introduce new activities and products to stimulate repeat visits, according to one employee at Haichang.

Lin Huanjie, director of the Institute for Theme Park Studies in China, believes that the introduction of new IP, activities and products allows theme parks to not only increase the number of visitors but

also maintain loyalty.

"On the one hand, this attracts new visitors, and on the other, this draws old customers back," Lin says.

The report also reveals the power of theme parks in upgrading culture and tourism, and in increasing an area's appeal on the county and city levels.

From the urban development perspective, theme parks add to tourism. They have a spatial effect on their locations, driving urban spending outside the parks.

One Singaporean woman, who gave her name as Betty, says she made the Universal Beijing Resort her first stop during her visit to Beijing this year, adding that she had wanted to visit Beijing ever since she heard of its opening.

The report stated that many



On the one hand, this (introduction of new IP, activities, and products) attracts new visitors, and on the other, this draws old customers back."

Lin Huanjie, director of the Institute for Theme Park Studies in China

inbound travelers like Betty are also placing theme park visits high up on their itineraries, before exploring other attractions.

The Universal Beijing Resort, Happy Valley in Beijing, and the Pop Mart theme park, Pop Land, have emerged among the top 10 sites for inbound family travelers this year, according to major travel agency Trip.com Group, on a par with the Great Wall and the Palace Museum in terms of popularity among foreign travelers.

Lin says that 1 yuan (\$0.14) of theme park revenue generally drives 3.8 yuan of income for the city, further stimulating 6-15 yuan worth of income in industries and sectors upstream and downstream.

Therefore, every 1 yuan of park revenue can potentially leverage up to 18.8 yuan in additional income, making a significant contribution to the local economy, Lin says.

Bai Fan, chair of the Beijing Tourism Group, told the development conference that the theme park economy is emerging as a core driver of the cultural and tourism industry, and the parks should offer more content-rich and human-centric products and services, as travelers are placing greater emphasis on experiential, self-focused tourism and spending.

Xu Zhenhao, deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, says that the future direction of theme parks, the opportunities and challenges they present, and their impact on cities are topics that government agencies, the industry and businesses must carefully consider.

The capital will optimize planning to promote tourism development, flesh out tourist offerings and improve services to elevate visitor experience, driving quality and the growth of tourism, Xu says.

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Young Chinese look to snapshot of the past for a perfect present

SHENZHEN — In a twist, the long-forgotten CCD digital camera, once deemed "electronic waste" and pushed aside by the technological tide, is making a comeback among young Chinese as the new darlings used for documenting their lives.

Despite their slightly blurry images and less vibrant colors, these devices, once available for a few tens of yuan, are now going for thousands. The surge in price and popularity is being fueled by the retro nostalgia trend sweeping China's youth.

"Prices have multiplied more than tenfold, and all my friends are buying them," says Tang Lili, a post-90s woman working in the southern metropolis of Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

She sold her first camera, a Canon CCD digital she bought when she was in high school, for a pittance after graduation, by which time it had become outdated. Now, lured by the soft, bright photos she sees on social media, she's shocked to find that the price for such devices has skyrocketed

beyond her wildest imagination.

On social media platforms like Xiaohongshu, Douyin and Sina Weibo, the enthusiasm for sharing secondhand, or even multiple-hand digital cameras, is growing. Owning one makes it possible to shoot images with an old-fashioned hue, the texture of film, and the coveted "cold white skin" tone.

A CCD, or a Charge-Coupled Device, is the light-sensitive component in a digital camera. While it excels in well-lit conditions, producing clear, bright images, it has limitations. Poor performance in low light, a small sensor size, and a low pixel count led to its gradual replacement by CMOS sensors after 2010.

Yet, a search for CCD cameras on e-commerce platforms like Taobao, Xianyu and Douyin reveals a wealth of vendors still selling them. Moreover, stores in the famous electronics hub of Huaqiangbei in Shenzhen, now include small yet bustling CCD stands.

Each stall, no larger than a few square meters, is a mini-museum of CCD cameras, an array of dif-



Customers choose digital CCD cameras at a store in Huaqiangbei, an electronics hub in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. WANG FENG / XINHUA

ferent brands and models, in a range of ages and conditions.

"Nowadays, CCD has become an aesthetic style and most people who use it do so as a result of

online posts," says Zhou Xingwang, the owner of Xidi Digital, a retro CCD specialty store in Huaqiangbei. Zhou says they sell around 100 CCD cameras a

month, at prices ranging from a few hundred to around 2,000 yuan (\$275.3).

For youngsters, especially students, the appeal of CCD cameras lies not only in their photographic style, but also in their portability, making them ideal for everyday use. "They're small, convenient, and feel good in your hands. They also produce great shots, and there's a sense of occasion when you take them out to shoot," says Zhang Nana, a high school student in Bao'an district in Shenzhen.

With the prevalence of smartphones in recent years, major manufacturers have discontinued their compact camera lines. However, the rise of vlogging has reignited demand for portable digital cameras.

An increasing number of netizens who have bought CCD cameras as a result of the fad are now discouraging others from doing so due to their technological obsolescence, saying that for the vast majority, the latest camera or smartphone is still more user-friendly for serious photography.

Insiders have warned that many low-priced cameras may be second-hand inventory from merchants of varying quality, and with outdated functions. Moreover, the retro tones and film-like feel of many CCD cameras is often the result of outdated technology and sensor aging. Misleading online promotions not only confuse consumers about CCDs, but may also lead them to purchase products that do not match their expectations.

However, others believe that retro cameras are providing the young with a new way of expressing themselves. "Sharing photos has become a social ritual. The process of sharing is not only a display of self-awareness, but also means a strengthening of group identity," says Wang Ning, professor of sociology and anthropology at the Sun Yat-sen University.

"As an aesthetic trend, the nostalgia behind the fad reflects the yearning of young people for a better life and represents the development of the time," Wang says.

XINHUA

CULTURE

Under a magnifying glass, more than 100 Chinese characters of *shou* (longevity) in different fonts manage to set themselves clearly apart from one another on a cloth the size of a match box.

They were all embroidered by Zhao Hongyu, 66, stitch by stitch on the tiny cloth, forming a part of her masterpiece *Baishoutu* (*Hundred Longevity Painting*), which features a benevolent-looking man in his advanced years and such auspicious patterns as peaches and deer.

Zhao astounded many people in 1982 when she completed the piece. Its patterns were embroidered on both the front and back and looked exactly the same.

It was widely considered an innovation of Wuxi fine embroidery, which had traditionally been done on just one side.

A branch of Su embroidery originating from East China's Jiangsu province, the art from Wuxi, at the southern part of the province, boasts a history of more than 2,000 years and was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008.

The art form distinguishes itself through its intricate utilization of needlework, thread, fabric and color, demanding elevated technical proficiency and introducing additional layers of complexity.

"Silk thread for this exquisite embroidery can be split into as many as 70 or 80 strands, making for a vivid expression of delicate details," says Zhao, who was recognized as a national inheritor in 2009.

From minuscule figures and horses the size of a bean to characters as diminutive as a fly's footprint, every intricacy hinges on the flawless synchronization of the artisan's hands, eyes and heart to attain perfection, she adds.

As the stitches securing the thread ends are meticulously woven into the needlework, the outcome remains impeccable even under magnification.

"A well-crafted piece should be admired both from a distance and up close," Zhao says.

The artisan has never failed to draw gasps of amazement from crowds whenever she pulls out a strand of silk around 1 millimeter in diameter and then splits it into half, quarter and even more parts for her embroidery work.

Before getting into the action, Zhao cautions that one should have their fingernails trimmed carefully to avoid catching and tearing the delicate silk.

Then, various stitching methods are applied, with the neat stitching mostly creating smooth lines, gradient stitching used for natural elements featuring transitioning hues, and layer stitching for facial expressions or furs that require more dimension.

Other stitching types, such as thickening stitching, are sometimes applied



Master of embroidery shows how a delicate touch can create works that will last, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Stitching together tradition with modernity

to deliver a more dense and voluminous effect in the design of rolling clouds or animal tails.

"The most challenging part is facial detailing," Zhao notes, adding that it is intricate because the expressions through curved eyebrows and the eyes need to be crafted meticulously through multiple stitches.

In most cases, facial detailing consists of strands that are as thin as one 70th or one 80th of a silk thread.

"This meticulous approach results in embroidery that is richly colored and highly three-dimensional, inviting viewers to appreciate every fine detail," she adds.

Innovative exploration

Wuxi has long been known for its silk production. Local embroidery flourished during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

"Back then, most people mastered embroidery techniques as a way to pursue the beauty of life," Zhao says.

After graduating from middle



Top: An embroidery work by Zhao Hongyu. **Above:** Zhao instructs young artisans at her workshop in Wuxi, Jiangsu province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

school in the 1970s, Zhao joined the Wuxi embroidery factory. Thanks to her quick learning and grasp of essential skills, she was sent to the now-defunct Wuxi arts and crafts research institute, where she began specializing in the research and cre-

ation of local embroidery.

Yet, as industrialization advanced around the 1990s, traditional handicrafts like Wuxi embroidery began to decline.

Zhao says she and her colleagues went through a dark time after the

market economy took hold, since manual work faced significant challenges from mechanization.

"At the worst of times, I even considered switching careers, but I couldn't bear to leave," she says.

She then tried to evolve Wuxi embroidery in the wave of social progress, from refining the traditional craft to using new materials and aesthetic standards.

Her bold innovation won recognition. Embroidering luminous diodes onto phoenix tail feathers and a female crown with a fine copper wire cleverly stitched in between earned her multiple prizes, including the Baohua award, one of the country's most prestigious honors in the field of arts and crafts, in 1990.

Although it was a meaningful advancement in her trade, Zhao later abandoned the light technique in her works after some reflection.

"The art is meant to be beautiful and tranquil, never ostentatious. So, I decided to return to the gentle

elegance of Wuxi embroidery," she explains.

This episode deepened her understanding of innovation, guaranteeing that her creations continue to be grounded in the tradition of Wuxi embroidery.

In 2005, Zhao opened a workshop and began recruiting apprentices to help carry forward the embroidery art.

Over the years, she has never stopped exploring, learning and perfecting her craft.

"At its core, embroidery techniques are universal. What you truly embroider in the end are deeper meanings, personal refinement, and vision," Zhao says.

In her eyes, the intricate, subtle elegance of Wuxi fine embroidery aligns seamlessly with the gentle spirit of Jiangnan, the southern region of the lower reaches of Yangtze River.

Growing popularity

The growing public enthusiasm for traditional cultural products in recent years has seen the creations by Zhao and her apprentices hotly sought after in the market.

Shen Yulan from Wuxi has been following Zhao in crafting the fine embroidery since 2008.

"I took a shine to its delicacy the moment I laid my eyes on it," recalls Shen, who is in her 30s.

Already something of a deft hand in the trade, Shen says she still faces challenges in each new creation.

"Aside from a sense of freshness, creating a new work always poses difficulties, such as subtle hue transition and contrasting effects of real and abstract elements," she says.

Shen admits there is still a long way for her to navigate the microscopic world of needlework. "Fortunately, Zhao could always intervene when I was about to go astray," she says.

Zhao takes joy in the fact that the craft she has pursued all her life has seen a vigorous revival. She is often at the center of attention during various cultural events and exhibitions.

To date, she has nine apprentices and says she still feels obligated to promote the traditional art.

Decades of practice saw her realize that learning embroidery might not be too difficult, but without a deep sense of understanding, it's impossible to achieve truly remarkable work.

"Teachers can pass on techniques, but the quality of the embroidery depends on the artist's personal artistic refinement," Zhao says.

"Progressing from crafting to creating is a transformative journey every artisan must undertake. It is through relentless learning and innovation that we can elevate our traditional techniques, safeguarding them from the erosion of time and imbuing them with renewed vigor."

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Musician helps build cultural bridge between China and Ireland

By **JULIAN SHEA** in London
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China and Ireland may be more than 8,000 kilometers apart, and vastly different in geography and demographics, but there are some things that bind the countries together.

Both are famous for their expat communities, and the food and drink they have taken around the world.

Both are renowned for their artistic heritage, and when it comes to music, Ireland holds a particular fascination for China.

An example of this is Li Yan, a 65-year-old originally from Beijing, who lived in Zhangjiakou city in North China's Hebei province; Jinzhou city in Northeast China's Liaoning province; Luoyang city in Central China's Henan province; and Guangzhou city in South China's Guangdong province, before coming to London, where he is part of the city's vibrant Irish music scene.

His instrument is the bodhran, a goatskin drum played with a wooden beater that is an essential part of traditional Irish music.

On Thursday nights, he can be found in an Irish pub in Kingston upon Thames, playing with a group called Hungry Grass in a session, which is a social and musical gathering found wherever there are Irish communities around the world.

On Friday nights, Li is a regular and popular member of another session, at the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, West London.

"My background is as a poet, not a musician," he told China Daily. "In China, I had a Canadian English teacher called Glen Allen, who introduced me to Irish culture, particularly its writers."

"When I came to London, I saw Hungry Grass play and was so attracted to the stories of their songs that I wanted to translate them, but I realized that to present the words in the right way, I must have some basic musical knowledge. With lyrics, it's not just about straight translation of words, they have to sit right with the music."

As with so many Irish stories, the turning point happened in a pub. "Once, I was listening to Hungry Grass and drumming along on the table when an old Irishman told me I was doing it all wrong, and that I should learn how to play Irish music properly, so I looked up bodhran classes and found the Irish Cultural Centre."

Philip Cashin is the founder of the Friday night session group that performed for King Charles III when he visited the cultural center in March 2022. He rates Li's musicianship highly.

"When he first appeared, I was astonished," he said. "He started to sing a Gaelic song in Chinese, and he did it perfectly, I thought 'this is special, very special!'"

Another session stalwart is Ben Gunnery, a former All Ireland Under-16 Fiddle champion who has traveled the world with numerous productions, including touring in China. "Whenever I play a session, I tell everyone else to shut up when he (Li) starts singing,



"We have age-old books of poetry in China, when I hear Irish songs, it feels like someone is bringing their spirit to life."

Li Yan, Chinese musician



Chinese musician Li Yan (center) is part of the regular Friday night session at the Irish Cultural Centre in London. **BRIAN CHANG / CHINA DAILY**

because it's magical," he said.

Li is not the only person building this cultural connection. Gourd flute (*hulusi*) player Jaylin Chu has found online fame playing Irish music, even moving to Ireland to do a master's degree after being inspired by seeing the global sensation *Riverdance* as a teenager.

The world of academia is also doing its bit. In July 2024, the Confucius Institute at University College Dublin hosted a performance by the Jinan Children's Folk Music Ensemble from

East China's Shandong province, after which the youngsters were taught the basics of traditional Irish dancing.

The following month, music students from Southwest University, in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality, spent two weeks at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick, strengthening a cultural connection that predates China and Ireland even having diplomatic links.

In the early 1980s, Chinese embassy workers in London attended a concert

by one of the most influential traditional Irish music groups of all time, The Chieftains, and were impressed.

Once the countries established ties, the music group's leader Paddy Moloney built connections by first inviting Chinese musicians and dancers from the Tianjin Ensemble in North China to play with The Chieftains at Dublin's National Concert Hall.

This paved the way for their historic visit in 1983, where The Chieftains performed in Beijing, Suzhou and Shanghai, and on the Badaling Great Wall. The tour finale in Shanghai was televised to an estimated audience of 700 million people.

In the group's official biography, Sun Sheng, vice-chairman of the Musicians' Association of China at that time, was quoted as saying: "I think through The Chieftains' music, I have seen the images of the Irish people. Music knows no boundaries for it is a unique and comprehensive language."

Two years later, The Chieftains released an album inspired by the trip and incorporating instruments from both musical cultures.

In 1994, there was another moment of creative connection, when the *Riverdance* phenomenon launched an updated version of traditional Irish dancing on the global stage.

While for some countries this was totally new, in China its popularity built on existing foundations, with dancers performing on the Great Wall in 2003 and subsequently making several tours to sell-out houses in several cities.

Last winter, *Riverdance's* 25th anniversary tour included a nine-week visit to China, with seven performances in the Shanghai Culture Square, eight at the theater of the Beijing Exhibition Center, and dates in 23 other cities. The rival show, *Lord of the Dance*, estab-

lished by *Riverdance's* creator Michael Flatley, has also proved hugely popular, first being performed in Beijing in 2004, and being part of the opening gala of the Beijing International Horticultural Exhibition in 2019, as the *Lord of the Dance* Troupe of Ireland danced with Chinese schoolchildren who had studied Irish dancing.

The modern cultural link between China and Ireland is clear to see, but as Li points out, it is built on artistic similarities that date back many centuries.

"We have a long drumming tradition in China, going back to ancient times, so when I hear the bodhran, it feels part of that tradition," Li said. "There is also the poetry. China is a country with a great history of poetry, but in Ireland, poetry feels more current and alive. We have age-old books of poetry in China, and when I hear Irish songs, it feels like someone is bringing their spirit to life."

As a Chinese enthusiast of Irish music, Li is by no means alone. But in the British Chinese community, he is slightly more isolated.

"A lot of people in China love Irish music and are interested in what I do, but there aren't many Chinese musicians in the community here, and among those few, people have very different tastes," he said.

"I've been going down my Irish path for years and for a long time, it felt like I was traveling alone. But since I met the crowd at the Irish Cultural Centre, we're on a musical journey together."

