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CHINA DAILY

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Xi's visits show care, concern for Macao SAR

Commitment to 'one country, two systems' principle advancing region's development

By **MO JINGXI** in Macao
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When recalling the visit made by President Xi Jinping to the Premier School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School in Macao, Chao Lin-chai said she didn't realize that it had already been five years.

Chao was then giving an open class in history to first graders at the school auditorium, ahead of the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland.

The topic was to explore the reasons behind the strong vitality of the "one country, two systems" principle, an institutional arrangement for ensuring sustained prosperity and stability in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions after their return to the motherland.

"I remember President Xi walked up to the students and said that history is the best subject, because by knowing our history, we can understand where we started from, what path we have taken, where we are now, where we are headed for and what the future holds," Chao said.

Xi also praised the students for being quick-witted, and expressed his confidence that the young people of Macao will mature into "a capable generation of which we are proud of" and serve as the backbone of both Macao and the country, Chao said.

Starting on Wednesday, Xi will be in Macao again to attend a gathering marking the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland. He will also conduct an inspection tour during his three-day stay.

"We are all very happy about President Xi's visit, which reflects his care and support for Macao. We also look forward to more opportunities for cooperation with the mainland that this trip might bring," Chao said, adding that local residents believe that Macao will continue to develop further and their quality of life will continue to improve.

This is the seventh time in 25 years that Xi will set foot on Macao, which has a total area of 33.3 square kilometers.

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ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

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Foreign tourists try out frozen and candied fruits on Dec 7 during an "ice collecting festival" in Harbin, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province. The festival marks the beginning of Harbin's ice collecting season, during which ice blocks are cut and lifted out from the frozen Songhua River to create spectacular sculptures, which are huge tourist attractions, across the city. WANG JIANWEI / XINHUA

China extends visa-free transit stays, expands list of entry ports

By **WANG QINGYUN**
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China announced on Tuesday a significant relaxation of its visa-free transit policy, extending the period of stay for foreign travelers and expanding the list of accessible ports and provincial-level regions, in order to further promote openness and people-to-people exchanges.

Eligible travelers are permitted to stay in the country for up to 240 hours, or 10 days, the National Immigration Administration said.

The period of stay was previously restricted to 72 or 144 hours.

The policy revision, effective immediately, also includes a substantial expansion of designated ports and travel regions, enhancing flexibility for international visitors.

Eligible citizens from 54 countries, including Russia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, can enter China visa-free when transiting to a third country or region. These travelers can now enter through any of the 60 ports across 24 provincial-level regions, up from 39 ports in 19 provincial-level regions, the NIA said.

The 21 newly included ports are located in the provinces of Shanxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong, Hunan, Hainan, Sichuan and Guizhou, and in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. The five newly included provinces for visa-free transit stays are Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hainan and Guizhou.

China, which first implemented its visa-free transit policy in January 2013, has been improving it over the years. Mao Xu, deputy head of the NIA, said the 72- and 144-hour visa-free transit policy has been warmly welcomed both at home and abroad.

From January to November, the number of visa-free transit travelers surged by more than 130 percent year-on-year, Mao noted. When the maximum duration of visa-free transit stay was restricted to 144 hours, more than 80 percent of travelers did not leave China until the last few hours, he said.

"Many foreign friends hope they could spend more time traveling within China," Mao said, adding that the updated policy will allow them to explore more scenic places in the country as well as help them to get better acquainted with Chinese culture.

Anastasiia Shimko, from Russia, said the extension of visa-free transit stay will make China a more attractive destination for foreign travelers.

The 37-year-old, who is pursuing a doctoral degree at Beijing Language and Culture University, said the policy revision may also encourage her friends and family members in Russia to plan a stopover to China.

"When they plan a trip to a third country, they will perhaps choose to transfer in large Chinese cities, spend more time in China and understand the country better," she added.

In recent years, China has taken a series of steps to streamline its inbound travel. Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said on Tuesday afternoon that China has reached full mutual visa exemption agreements with 26 countries, and adopted a unilateral visa-free policy for travelers from 38 countries.

Liu Jia, deputy head of NIA's Department of Foreigner Management, said a notable feature of the new policy adjustment is the introduction of cross-regional travel, allowing foreign visitors to move freely across the designated areas of 24 specified provincial-level regions.

The updated policy allows foreign travelers to better plan their itineraries and arrange flexible travel routes, enabling multicity tourism and business activities across various regions, he said.

Liu noted that the visa-free transit policy now covers not only eastern regions of China, which boast stronger economic prowess and a higher level of opening-up, but also destinations in central and western regions that are popular and capable of offering good services.

It will better serve China's major strategies to boost development of the central and western regions, "creating a comprehensive opening-up pattern of coordinated development between the inland and coastal regions and between the east and the west", he added.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

DECODING A 25-YEAR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL MIRACLE

City's success linked to proximity to mainland, strong economic integration

By **WILLIAM XU** in Hong Kong
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in-depth

It has only taken Macao 25 years to place its name alongside the world's most successful cities.

The Macao Special Administrative Region, spanning a land area of 33.3 square kilometers, slightly smaller than Beijing Capital International Airport, proudly sits near the top global rankings for per capita gross domestic product, life expectancy of its residents, and the extent of its social welfare system.

These are among many of the city's achievements after its return to the motherland on Dec 20, 1999. Since then, Macao has developed into a world-class tourism destination with boutique hotels, attractive monuments, and a wide variety of cuisine appealing to almost every taste.

Through its history and heritage, the city is where East meets West, which has laid the foundation for Macao's role as a platform for exchanges between Chinese and Western culture.

In a quarter of a century, Macao has transformed from a humble port into a cultural and leisure hub.

*See **Growth,** page 2*

Beauty extends from Notre Dame to the gardens of Suzhou

WORLD WATCH
By Benoit Vermander

The outpouring of joy and empathy in China and around the world at the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral is proof of the symbolic strength and value that we attach to monuments inscribed into our collective memory.

The celebrations indicate that exceptional places and monuments belong to no one nation or cultural group but to humankind as a whole: as was also evident from the outpouring of grief and solidarity that followed the devastation of Notre Dame in 2019. Masterworks activate the viewers' and visitors' sense of beauty and their longing for the sublime.

Also, some heritage structures and historical places are loaded with stories that continue to enchant us. Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* has fascinated generations of Chinese readers. Similarly, Western readers have been captivated not only by the narratives but also by the semi-real, semi-fictive palaces and gardens they encounter in the classical Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*. They are reminiscent of what they have read while wandering through the streets of Beijing and Nanjing and Suzhou in Jiangsu province, their minds coloring these locations with words and feelings borrowed from the great writers of the past.

For a long time now, China has been aware of the significance attached to architectural testimonials from the past. Since the promulgation of the Cultural Relics Protection Law in 1982, China has constantly been amending and improving laws for the protection of cultural relics. Specific measures have been taken to address particularly important monuments, as can be seen from the Regulation on the Protection of Great Wall in 2006. The same year also saw the enactment of measures meant to protect World Cultural Heritage sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Both central and local governments are thus in possession of a range of regulations enabling them to keep in check shorter economic interests, which often discourage the effective protection and revitalization of a nation's architectural inheritance. More generally, China has proved to be an extremely active partner of UNESCO's long-term efforts to protect both tangible and intangible cultural heritage throughout the world.

Of course, there were and remain cultural differences when it comes to the way Western and East Asian nations relate to historical sites. In the East, the wooden structures of temples are periodically rebuilt — often in a 60-year cycle. What counts most is the way the structure is built, the architectural techniques employed in construction, and the respect for the original design.

In contrast, Western nations were and still are focusing on the preservation of ancient material — one speaks sometimes of a kind of "veneration of the old stones", while progressively altering or expanding the original design of the edifice. Among professionals, a harmonization of conservation perspectives and techniques has taken place, a trend enshrined in the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964), which provides an international framework for protecting and restoring historic buildings.

Still, differences in cultural sensitivities as well as the debates around a possible actualization of the Venice Charter alert us to a point of paramount importance: protecting tangible heritage is not akin to automatically applying a set of regulations and techniques.

*See **Culture,** page 4*

Chaos prevails in Syria

Smoke can be seen billowing from the Najha military housing complex in Damascus, Syria, on Monday, after it was looted and set on fire. Similar looting and arson took place on Sunday at a residential complex in southeastern Damascus, where apartments were emptied out and fired upon. ARIS MESSINIS / AFP

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INSIDE
Flat world is nothing but a utopia
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25th ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

From left: Models present fashion creations in the pedestrian area of revitalized Fulong New Street in Macao in May; Women in traditional Chinese costumes take selfies at Mount Fortress in Macao. PHOTOS BY CHEONG KAM KA / XINHUA National flags of China and the Macao SAR's regional flags hang in a street to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Growth: A journey of sustainable reinvention

An aerial view of the Macao SAR showing the modern skyline in July. CHEONG KAM KA / XINHUA

From page 1

This evolution stands as a testament to the industrious spirit of Macao's residents, and is a compelling endorsement of "one country, two systems" — which incorporates Macao into the nation's development blueprint and guarantees a high degree of autonomy inside its territory.

Closer, stronger

Decoding the key to Macao's success starts with its close ties with the Chinese mainland. Every day, about 320,000 passengers enter or depart the city through the Border Gate — a land crossing connecting Macao to its neighboring city, Zhuhai, in Guangdong province.

In the early days of Macao's return, the checkpoint was far less busy. In 2003, the central government introduced the Individual Visit Scheme, which allowed residents of specified mainland cities to visit Macao without joining tour groups.

The policy, paired with the SAR's decision to open up its gambling industry a year earlier, reshaped the city's economic landscape.

Between 2003 and 2019, Macao's annual tourist arrivals soared from 11.9 million to 39.4 million. The portion of mainland visitors of the total number of tourists rose from 48.3 percent to 70.9 percent.

A steady influx of tourists helped forge a lucrative tourism industry, bringing wealth to restaurants, retail shops, pharmacies, hotels and casinos.

Sensing a golden business opportunity, Chan Kam-tat, then aged 27, and his wife, opened a pharmacy in 2011. Today, Healthy Life has grown into a chain of six retail outlets and two distribution centers.

"The early days aligned with a surge of mainland tourists, so our business thrived," said Chan. He also credited the implementation of the two-child policy in January 2016 to the rise in sales of milk formula at his pharmacies. "The course of our business growth is closely linked with the motherland," Chan said.

In addition to the impetus tourism provided, in October 2003, the signing of the Mainland and Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) granted Macao merchants preferential access to the vast mainland market, and also streamlined cross-boundary investment.

Since then, 10 supplements and multiple agreements have been ratified to enhance the CEPA, further deepening cooperation on trade in goods and services, and investment. As of September 2023, the arrangement had saved more than 90 million patacas ($11.3 million) in customs duties for Macao enterprises.

The arrangement facilitates market access, investment and cultural exchanges between Macao and the mainland, and bolsters the city's appeal as an international business hub, said Francisco Leandro, associate professor of the faculty of social science at the University of Macau. The strategy also underscores Macao's importance to the country's broader economic initiatives, added Leandro.

Transformation

Just a brief 10-minute drive from the Border Gate is a colorful downtown area where the lines between Mediterranean charm and the region's Lingnan culture blur.

Centered around the 620-meter Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, or "new avenue", Chinese markets and temples, as well as Southern European-style churches and residential buildings, dot the streets and hills. This area has served as the commercial heart of Macao for centuries.

Adorned with black-and-white *calcada* Portuguese-style pavements, and low-rise residential and religious buildings of Latin and Chinese designs, Macao's downtown is on most tourists' bucket list.

During the day, visitors can sample the treats of food stalls serving local favorites such as a fried pork chop bun and beef jerky.

The thriving cultural and commercial strip, along with 22 iconic buildings, was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2005 and is known as the "Historic Centre of Macao".

Wu Zhiliang, president of the board of directors of the Macao Foundation, said the inscription was affirmation by the international community of the city's contributions to dialogues between Eastern and Western cultures.

Wu's foundation — a semi-official body aimed at promoting various sectors of the city — has teamed up with the Macao SAR government to carry out educational and research projects on the historic center.

At the southern tip of the downtown district stands A-Ma Temple, a sacred site dedicated to the sea goddess Mazu. According to local lore, the temple is believed to be the etymological root of the city's name — Macao.

Children play in Seac Pai Van Park in Macao on Nov 29. CHEONG KAM KA / XINHUA

In 2023, a light rail station was opened near the temple, offering transit services that connect the Macao Peninsula to Taipa Island. Taking a 13-minute train journey from the station adjacent to A-Ma Temple, passengers can see opulent hotels and replicas of the Eiffel Tower and Big Ben. This is the new heart of Macao's leisure industry — Cotai.

Twenty-five years ago, the 6.1-square-kilometer stretch of reclaimed land was empty and awaiting planning approval.

With benefits resulting from the individual visit program and relaxed casino operation rules, Cotai has developed into a cluster of international hotels, shopping malls, casinos, performance venues, and sports facilities, providing tourists with exciting new experiences.

Cotai is home to another pillar of Macao's economy, the gaming industry. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, gambling revenue accounted for more than 60 percent of Macao's GDP at its peak, and casino operators paid more than 100 billion patacas in taxes every year.

The flourishing tourism and gaming industries have brought unimaginable wealth to Macao and its 700,000 residents.

This wealth has allowed the SAR government to build a comprehensive social welfare system envied by many other cities.

Macao provides free medical services to all residents aged 65 and above. The city inaugurated a 15-year free education program in the 2007-2008 academic year, covering from kindergarten to the end of secondary school, and subsidizes people who pursue further education.

The Wealth Partaking Scheme was initiated in 2008, to distribute cash to every resident holding Macao SAR permanent or non-permanent identity cards. In 2024, every permanent resident received 10,000 patacas, while non-permanent residents were given 6,000 patacas.

For over two decades, Macao has sustained an overall unemployment rate below 2 percent, and the median monthly income has swelled from 4,920 patacas in 1999 to 17,500 patacas in 2023.

Evolving economy

However, the substantial wealth has not blinded Macao to the potential pitfalls of dependence on the gaming industry. In recent years, the city has adopted different approaches to diversify its economy in a healthy and sustainable way.

By 2023, the non-gaming sector contributed over 60 percent of the city's GDP, exceeding the proportions 20 years ago. Key drivers of this surge included the real estate and business services sector, as well as the banking and insurance industry.

Entrepreneurs are pioneering innovative business models to adapt to the evolving economic landscape. Chan, the pharmacy chain owner, has recognized mainland customers' growing use of online shopping. This has prompted him to learn e-commerce from his mainland peers and revamp the services he offers.

In 2023, the Macao SAR government released a blueprint for economic diversification, which charted road maps to boost four emerging sectors: big health, financial services, high technology as well as the convention, exhibition, trade, cultural and sports industries.

Sam Hou-fai, the city's incoming chief executive, has made exploring forward-thinking reforms on the city's economic structure a cornerstone of his agenda. Other focuses include improving people's livelihoods, advancing integration with the nation's development, and strengthening collaboration with Portuguese-speaking countries.

Meanwhile, Macao has stepped up its economic and social ties with other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which was marked by the inauguration of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge in 2018.

Hengqin, a development zone under the jurisdiction of Zhuhai, located just 4 kilometers from the Cotai district, is a new key to Macao's transformation ambitions.

In 2021, the central government released a comprehensive plan to advance the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, deeming the 106-sq-km area — three times the land size of Macao — an indispensable base for the SAR's second transformation from a leisure hub to a moderately diversified economy.

Nurturing industries

The zone, jointly administered by Zhuhai and Macao authorities, offers land resources and favored policies to nurture key emerging industries pivotal to Macao's economic diversification strategy. These industries include high-end manufacturing, traditional Chinese medicine, and modern financial services.

As of June, the zone had over 17,000 companies active in emerging sectors, a 20.1 percent increase compared with the end of 2021. These enterprises contributed 47.1 percent to the zone's GDP.

The Macau New Neighborhood, a 190,000-square-meter community integrating residential buildings, schools, healthcare institutions and elderly care centers, has been built in the cooperation zone to provide quality living spaces and services for Macao residents.

By incorporating Macao-standard facilities and services, the project creates a seamless transition for Macao residents moving to Hengqin, said Duarte Alves, president of the general assembly of the Macanese Youth Association.

"The project, paired with Hengqin's unique tax incentives and simplified procedures for cross-border business, will attract both talent and investment, creating vibrant communities that support Macao's diversification efforts," Alves said.

The cooperation zone's development also benefits Macao's robust tourism sector. Since May 6, mainland travelers joining tour groups can make multiple entries between the cooperation zone and Macao over a seven-day period.

Morlin Teng Fong, president of the Macao Greater Bay Area Culture and Tourism Association, said nearly 1,000 Macao tour guides have secured working permits in Hengqin in recent years, enabling them to more effectively cater to mainland tourists.

Teng said Macao's tourism sector will ramp up training to deepen the entire industry's understanding of Hengqin's opportunities in the future.

With the advances of the past 25 years firmly in place, Macao is looking to the next quarter century with optimism. Ambitious plans are already in motion to refine its economic structure, and solidify its tourism and cultural attractions to help ensure the prosperity and stability of coming generations.

Tourists visit the Ruins of St. Paul's in Macao on Dec 17. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

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25th ANNIVERSARY OF MACAO SAR

Editor's Note: *This year commemorates the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland. China Daily asks prominent figures in the special administrative region for their reflections on this significant milestone and listens to their visions for the city's continuing prosperity.*

Envisaging continued prosperity

Wu Zhiliang
President of the Board of Directors of the Macao Foundation

Ji Xianzheng
Secretary-general of the Permanent Secretariat of Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao)

Duarte Alves
President of the General Assembly of the Macanese Youth Association

Francisco Leandro
Associate professor on the faculty of social science at the University of Macau

Zhu Haisheng
Secretary-general of the Macau Economic and Livelihood Alliance

Q1 How do you view Macao's development since its return to the motherland? Among the achievements made by Macao, which have impressed you the most? In your sector, has there been any major progress over the past 25 years?

Wu Zhiliang: Over the past 25 years, there has been significant progress in Macao's development. Macao's economy has become more integrated with the world, and her social structure has become increasingly diversified. The improved economic prospects have also made the Macao SAR government more capable of improving people's livelihoods and, as a result, improving their quality of life. Meanwhile, the city's community spirit of helping out one another remains the same, not to mention the desire of residents to carry out the spirit of patriotism.

Ji Xianzheng: Over the past 25 years, Macao has fully leveraged its advantages of strong support from the motherland and close connection with the world, achieving significant economic and social development, and is in its best period of prosperity and stability in history. Macao has actively participated in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Belt and Road Initiative and other national development strategies. The Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) has promoted economic and trade cooperation and exchanges between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. Today, Macao has developed into a vibrant international metropolis.

Duarte Alves: Macao's development since its return to the motherland in 1999 has been a fascinating journey. The region has transformed from a modest economy into a dynamic and thriving hub. The "one country, two systems" framework has been central to this success, providing the flexibility for Macao to preserve its unique cultural and economic identity while integrating more closely with the Chinese mainland. This balance, once viewed with skepticism, has proved its value, showcasing the foresight and wisdom of the central government in shaping a stable and progressive future for the region.

Q2 Many of the city's young people were born after the city's return to the motherland. How do you think this anniversary resonates with the young generation? What messages would you like to convey to them on this historic occasion?

Wu Zhiliang: Compared with their parents, Macao's emerging generation clearly has more opportunities to develop themselves, provided they follow the correct path. To the younger ones and those who are not so old, I would say: I hope you can maintain the enthusiasm and spirit of exploration in history and culture throughout your daily lives. Attaining knowledge through small details always brings surprising results.

Duarte Alves: To the younger generation, my message is twofold. First, embrace integration. As part of the country, Macao's success is closely tied to the opportunities within the GBA and the broader national framework. By engaging with the innovation, industries and talent in the region, young people can contribute to Macao's growth while forging their own paths. Second, treasure Macao's unique cultural heritage. This blend of Chinese and Portuguese influences is what sets Macao apart and makes it such a vital part of the national story. By celebrating and sharing this identity, the younger generation can help the city play a crucial role in telling China's story to the world.

Zhu Haisheng: I hope that Macao's younger generation will actively integrate into the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and the GBA, seizing the opportunities within the national development goals. Regardless of the industries they are in, the policy support provided by the nation for the Cooperation Zone and the GBA is a valuable platform for them to engage in deeper exchanges and cooperation with various industries across the mainland. Through such interaction, Macao's youth can not only broaden their horizons but also contribute to their personal career development and the long-term prosperity of Macao.

Q3 The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has seen many notable developments over the past few years. How has Macao's integration with other parts of the GBA impacted your career? What kind of collaboration are you anticipating in the GBA?

Ji Xianzheng: The Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) frequently interacts with other key GBA cities. For example, the secretariat has hosted delegations from Shenzhen and Zhuhai, and supported the hosting of seminars to introduce Portuguese-speaking countries' economic and trade opportunities to Shenzhen and Zhuhai enterprises during the 2024 Macao International Trade and Investment Fair. The secretariat also provides various training courses for professionals from Portuguese-speaking countries, organizing field trips to relevant institutions across the GBA to enhance participants' understanding of China's development, especially in the Bay Area.

Duarte Alves: The GBA has transformed connectivity in recent years, with projects like the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link playing a pivotal role. For my career, these advancements have been invaluable. Improved logistics and accessibility have turned once-complex travel into spontaneous opportunities for networking and collaboration across cities like Shenzhen and Guangzhou. The ease of movement has facilitated partnerships that leverage the strengths of the GBA, creating synergies that were previously out of reach.

Q4 What accomplishments do you hope Macao will achieve in the next 25 years?

Wu Zhiliang: As Macao's integration into national development deepens, there will be more, newer and better changes, and the ability of Macao residents to live a better life will become closer to reality. For this reason I am optimistic about Macao's future.

Ji Xianzheng: Standing at the starting point toward the next 25-year milestone, we look forward to Macao maintaining its long-term prosperity and stability, continuing to leverage its strengths to serve the needs of the nation, and consistently improving the construction of the China-Portuguese-speaking countries platforms.

Duarte Alves: Macao's accomplishments in the next 25 years should reflect its ability to balance tradition with progress. By embracing its distinct role as both a cultural and economic bridge, Macao can contribute to the nation's narrative of inclusivity, collaboration and global leadership.

Q5 This year marks the third anniversary of the establishment of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin of Zhuhai, Guangdong province. In your opinion, how should Macao continue to leverage the Hengqin zone's advantages to further develop itself and your sector?

Wu Zhiliang: Macao's cultural sector is setting foot in the zone, seeing it as an ideal springboard to promote exchanges and dialogue between different cultures and art forms. The cultural sector can surely take advantage of the zone to promote exchanges between the cities in the GBA, and also between the GBA and the outside world, especially through the world-class infrastructure recently inaugurated within the zone.

Francisco Leandro: A key focus of Macao's modernization efforts is on the Hengqin cooperation zone. This area has been pivotal in driving innovation and economic diversification, providing a space for new industries and fostering closer integration with the mainland. The zone exemplifies Macao's commitment to modernization and its strategic role in regional development.

Zhu Haisheng: Macao faces the dual challenge of limited land resources and a shortage of talent, whereas Hengqin boasts ample development space and a wealth of human resources, perfectly complementing Macao's shortages.

Q6 Macao is a unique blend of Chinese and Portuguese cultures. How do you think this fusion can help the nation enhance communication with the international community and tell good stories of China?

Wu Zhiliang: Different ethnicities, cultures, religions and faiths have co-existed and co-prospered in Macao throughout her history, thereby forming her unique features as a place where China meets the West, where the past meets the present, and where there are not only differences but also commonalities. Chinese wisdom calls for inclusion and tolerance of differences while always seeking commonalities. The historical experience of Macao has enriched the connotations and external influence of Chinese culture. It has built a bridge in academic and technological exchanges. It is an example of exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations.

Duarte Alves: Macao's unique blend of Chinese and Portuguese cultures is a powerful asset for enhancing communication with the international community and telling China's stories in a relatable and compelling way. As someone who identifies with this cultural fusion, I see Macao's role as a living demonstration of how the country's openness and diversity can connect with the world on multiple levels.

Francisco Leandro: The SAR's legal system is an area where this cultural blend is evident. Based on the Portuguese civil law system, it has been adapted to fit in with the local context under the "one country, two systems" framework. This dual legal system allows for a unique blend of Chinese and Western legal traditions, ensuring that Macao's legal environment is both familiar to its residents and accessible to international businesses.

William Xu in Hong Kong contributed to this story.

Q7 The central government has rolled out an array of policy initiatives for Macao. Does any particular policy benefit your sector? If so, how?

Wu Zhiliang: In terms of culture, for example, it is with the full support of the central government that the "Historic Centre of Macao" was successfully inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2005. This is an affirmation by the international community of the role of Macao as an exchange platform for promoting dialogue between different civilizations.

Ji Xianzheng: The central government has hosted six Forum Macao ministerial conferences, contributing to the signing of the Strategic Plan for Economic and Trade Cooperation by ministers from participating countries. China has also put forward measures promoting trade and strengthening cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries four times, including efforts in building Macao into the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform. Under the guidance of the central government, various government departments and sectors have actively engaged with the Macao SAR government, enriching the mechanisms and functions of the platform.

Francisco Leandro: The Mainland and Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement plays a crucial role in the GBA and in fostering ties with Portuguese-speaking countries. By promoting trade and economic cooperation, the CEPA strengthens the Macao SAR's position as a bridge between China and Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) nations. This agreement facilitates market access, investment and cultural exchanges, promoting Macao as a hub for international business.

Zhu Haisheng: In the field of cultural tourism and exhibitions, the central government has actively encouraged and supported Macao in building cooperative relationships with international exhibition organizations, participating in international exhibition activities, and enhancing the international reputation and influence of Macao's exhibition industry. At the same time, the central authorities provide policy support for talent development, encouraging Macao to cultivate and attract professional talent in the exhibition industry in order to raise the industry's expertise and service quality.

Cyclists ride in November on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge during the 2024 Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Road Cycling Race, which was also a test event for the 15th National Games, to be co-hosted next year by Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao. Since the 55-kilometer bridge opened in 2018, it has significantly strengthened connectivity and exchanges between the Chinese mainland and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

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TOP NEWS

Foreign policy priorities of nation outlined

Minister says country will continue to play constructive role in finding solutions to crises

By ZHANG YUNBI
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As senior Chinese diplomat Wang Yi elaborated on China's diplomatic priorities and major events to be held in the coming year, analysts said China's stability and its policy consistency are "of the greatest certainty for the world".

Speaking at an annual think tank seminar in Beijing on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Wang said that "unstable and uncertain factors will rise significantly" in the international situation next year, while China's diplomatic mission will continue to "hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation and a win-win approach".

There are a number of highlights on China's diplomatic calendar for next year, including hosting the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as China took over the SCO presidency in July.

Inside

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2025 will mark two major 80th anniversaries — the founding of the United Nations and the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War.

Wang said China "will solemnly commemorate" the 80th anniversary of the victory, carry forward a correct historical outlook, uphold genuine multilateralism, and firmly safeguard the international system with the UN at its core.

Aside from ensuring a successful "Year of China" for the SCO, China will also host the 9th Asian Winter Games, which will enable foreign friends to experience the colorful country through the charm of snow and ice, he noted.

Speaking on major events to be held outside the country, Wang said that China will support efforts in hosting the second China-Central Asia Summit in Kazakhstan, the BRICS Summit in Brazil and the G20 Summit in South Africa.

To boost the unity and self-reliance of the Global South countries, China will advance the implementation of cooperation and actions involving Africa, Arab countries, Latin America and the Caribbean region, according to Wang.

Behind Beijing's diplomatic agenda items next year is the fact that "China is one of the countries that best projects certainty and stability" at a time when political chaos and armed conflicts are emerging across the globe, said Wang Wen, dean of the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China in Beijing.

"That is the role China's major country diplomacy should play — a major stabilizer," he said.

As part of growing international support for China-led global initiatives, 82 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative, and 119 countries and international organizations have endorsed the Global Security Initiative.

As of this month, 155 countries have joined the big family of Belt and Road cooperation, according to Wang's speech.

On hotspot issues, Beijing will "continue playing a constructive role" in the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, the Palestine-Israel conflict, as well as in the Korean Peninsula and Myanmar, Foreign Minister Wang said.

Zheng Yongnian, dean of the School of Public Policy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Shenzhen campus, said Wang's speech shows that mitigating conflicts is still the top priority for hotspot issues, and development is key to this end.

"The chaos in many countries is closely connected with development, and failures in development and poverty lead to violence," he said.

"China is not a destroyer of the world order and it seeks to reform the world order. What Beijing subscribes to is multilateralism featuring inclusiveness and opening, not targeting a third party," he added.

Speaking of relations with major countries and economies, Foreign Minister Wang said Beijing hopes the new United States administration will "make the right choice, move toward the same goal with China, rule out disturbances and overcome obstacles, and strive for the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US relations".

China will deepen its comprehensive strategic collaboration and all-around practical cooperation with Russia, and push its relations with the European Union forward steadily along the direction of seeking autonomy, mutual achievement and benefit to the world, he said.

"We will lend strong support to global strategic stability with China's stability and respond to all uncertainties in the world with China's certainty," he said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (left) is seen before the start of a special meeting of the SPD parliamentary group on Monday after he lost the vote of confidence in parliament in Berlin, Germany. CHRISTOPH SOEDER / AP IMAGES

Germany heads for elections in Feb

By SHAO XINYING
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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz lost a vote of confidence on Monday, paving the way for an early election in February.

The latest development adds to the woes of a faltering German economy, casting uncertainties over a country that has long been regarded as the stabilizing anchor of the European Union, experts said.

Scholz received support from 207 lawmakers in the Bundestag, the lower house of the German parliament, while 394 voted against him and 116 abstained. Expecting the loss, Scholz had requested the confidence vote last week, invoking Article 68 of the Basic Law.

Scholz had been leading a minority government after his three-party coalition collapsed on Nov 6, following the dismissal of Finance Minister Christian Lindner over disagreements regarding the ways to revitalize the economy.

Leaders of several major parties agreed that a parliamentary election should be held on Feb 23, seven months ahead of schedule.

"While Lindner's departure triggered the vote, the underlying issue is the long-standing disagreements over economic and fiscal policies within the coalition," said Wu Huiping, deputy director of Tongji University's German Studies Center.

"The fragmentation and rising polarization of the political landscape have worsened Germany's economic and social problems, including that of migrants," she told China Daily.

Political turbulence hit Germany as it struggled to revive a stuttering economy hammered by high energy prices, especially after the Ukraine crisis.

The German central bank slashed its growth forecast for next year to 0.2 percent, down from the 1.1 percent it had predicted in June. It also said it now expected the economy, which shrank by 0.3 percent in 2023, to contract by 0.2 percent this year.

To make matters worse, multiple big companies in Germany have announced job cuts and plant closure plans to cope with rising manufacturing costs.

"The root cause of the vote loss lies in the poor state of the economy. Germany's political instability has severely hindered economic recovery, eroding investor confidence and increasing societal uncertainty," said Jian Junbo, deputy director of the Center for China-Europe Relations at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies.

"The automotive industry, for example, is experiencing relative shrinkage domestically, highlighting the need to maintain the advantages of the traditional industry while building up innovation," he added.

Following the confidence vote loss, Scholz met with President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to recommend the dissolution of the Bundestag. Steinmeier is expected to approve it after Christmas and call for a snap election.

No major policies

"This means no major policies or laws will be passed during this 'vacancy' period. Uncertainties will persist, further exacerbated by the external environment, including the potential for new tariffs with US President-elect Donald Trump taking office," Wu of Tongji University's German Studies Center said.

The focus has now shifted to the election campaign, which is now on in full swing, she added.

The main political parties are expected to present their election programs soon.

Scholz was nominated on Nov 25 as the Social Democratic Party or SPD candidate for chancellor in the next election. The other three candidates are Christian Democratic Union leader Friedrich Merz, current Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck from the Green Party, and Alice Weidel of the Alternative for Germany, or AfD.

The conservative CDU/CSU bloc is polling around 31-32 percent, with the far-right AfD polling at around 18-19 percent and SPD trailing at 16-17 percent, Agence France-Presse reported.

Scholz will continue to serve in a caretaker role until a new government is formed, a process that could take months if the coalition talks prove to be lengthy.

"Whichever party leads the new government, the current challenges will continue to exist, largely shaped by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and economic development issues," Jian from Fudan University said.

Berlin's troubles come even as its main EU partner France remains mired in a government crisis. President Emmanuel Macron named centrist ally Francois Bayrou as the new prime minister just days ago.

"With both Germany and France facing internal crises, their ability to push for reforms in Brussels or advance European integration is limited. This undermines EU's cohesion and strategic autonomy," Jian said.

Culture: Architecture implies symbolic significance

From page 1

Spirit has prevalence over letter. There are several ways to protect and renovate a monument so as to ascertain and enhance its symbolic significance.

China's specific love for culture shows in the way it protects not only buildings but also its gardens and it considers all of these as living entities. How gardens are kept alive and allowed to blossom constitute the best example of the way China relates to the past.

The garden endlessly increases its size through its internal divisions — mounds that break the perspective, walls running along the walkways, partitions all around its pavilions. These partitions are pierced by openwork windows, round doors and numerous small openings through which one can appropriate space and sight. Windows and doors gradually reveal the garden, like a painter's hand unfolding the scroll on which he has drawn a roaring waterfall, the trail on the side of the mountain, the grove pines and the sea of clouds.

The garden indeed is a scroll, a miniature world enlarged by our walks and our whims. Pierced with orifices, the garden is irrigated by vessels through which circulate life, breath and seasons. Water transforms a garden into a living body.

Throughout history, Chinese gardens were sometimes destroyed and then redesigned. Like the Notre Dame Cathedral, their spiritual energy has enabled them to deploy again and again their beauty and significance, giving our own lives accrued meaning and richness.

The author is a professor and doctoral adviser at the School of Philosophy, Fudan University, Shanghai. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Visits: Long-term prosperity sought by adhering to major principle

From page 1

On June 10, 2000, less than half a year after the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region, Xi, then governor of East China's Fujian province, visited Macao to hold discussions on further strengthening the economic and trade cooperation between the province and the SAR.

A year later, on Oct 23, Xi led a delegation to visit Macao and reached broad consensus with Ho Hau-wah, then chief executive of the SAR, on in-depth cooperation between Fujian and Macao.

On Jan 19, 2005, Xi, then secretary of the Communist Party of China Zhejiang provincial committee, led a delegation to visit Macao for an event on economic and trade cooperation.

Amid the global financial crisis in 2009, Xi, who was then Chinese vice-president, made a visit to Macao with the purpose of inspiring local people and helping them tide over the situation. During that trip, he announced that the central government had decided to commence the official development of Hengqin Island, Guangdong province, located less than 200 meters from Macao at its closest point.

In 2014 and 2019, Xi attended gatherings marking the anniversaries of Macao's return to the motherland as Chinese president.

Five years ago, in his speech marking the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland and the inauguration of the fifth-term government of the Macao SAR, Xi said that over the past two decades, the SAR government and the region's people had worked closely to usher in Macao's best period of development in history.

Noting that the world is undergoing changes unseen in a century and Macao is facing new internal and external dynamics, Xi urged the SAR government and all sections of society to "build on what Macao has accomplished and take all undertakings in the SAR to the next level".

New accomplishment

In the past five years, the SAR government has received strong support from the central government to overcome challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and launched a series of innovative measures to promote economic development, social stability and cultural inheritance, achieving remarkable results.

Last year, as the robust resurgence in tourism propelled Macao's economy to grow 80.5 percent year-on-year, the SAR was ranked fifth-wealthiest among regions globally, according to a report published by Global Finance magazine in May.

In the first three quarters of this year, Macao's GDP increased 11.5 percent year-on-year to reach 301 billion patacas ($38 billion), data from the Statistics and Census Service showed.

Macao was primarily relying on its casino industry to drive economic growth. However, the SAR government is now making dedicated and determined efforts to diversify Macao's industrial structure to reduce its dependence on the gaming sector.

Xu Chang, a professor with the "One Country Two Systems" Research Centre at Macao Polytechnic University, said that Macao has revised its gaming law and regulations to strengthen supervision of casino operations and tackle gambling-related crimes in recent years.

"Such efforts are of great significance for guiding this traditional lifeline industry toward legal, orderly and healthy development," he said.

Last year, the SAR government released a development plan for Macao's economic diversification from 2024 through 2028. It is the first such plan drafted for Macao.

The document outlines the "1+4" appropriate diversification development strategy that aims to enhance Macao's function as "One Centre" for integrated tourism and leisure, while facilitating the development of "four emerging industries", namely the traditional Chinese medicine and the health sector, modern financial services, high-tech industries, and cultural, sports and convention services.

According to Xu, a series of public service facilities to improve people's well-being, such as government housing units for the elderly and low-income residents, in addition to convenient traveling options between Macao and Zhuhai, Guangdong, via new ports and a light railway link, have substantially enhanced the quality of life for Macao residents.

"All these will help carry forward the fine tradition of loving the motherland and loving Macao, and speed up the SAR's integration into the modernization process of the motherland, thereby ensuring the steady implementation of the 'one country, two systems' principle," Xu said.

When meeting with Sam Hou-fai, Macao's incoming chief executive, in Beijing last month, President Xi said the central authorities will stay committed to fully and faithfully implementing the "one country, two systems" principle and ensure there is no deviation or distortion in its implementation.

The principle has proved to be the best answer to the question of Macao left by history and the best institutional guarantee for the long-term prosperity and stability of Macao after its return to the motherland.

Wang Yu, a professor with the Faculty of Law at the University of Macau, said it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the principle as an unprecedented pioneering cause.

"That's why President Xi has once and again emphasized that it must be applied without deviation or distortion to ensure Macao's steady and long-term progress," Wang said.

Guarantee of progress

Xu, from Macao Polytechnic University, said the fact that fellow compatriots in Macao can truly feel the care and concern of the motherland serves as the fundamental foundation for implementing the "one country, two systems" principle without deviation or distortion.

In recent years, the central government has launched a series of policies and measures that benefit Macao and its people, continuously injecting new impetus into the SAR's long-term prosperity and stability and fully demonstrating the central government's care and love for Macao.

In 2021, the central authorities decided to build the Guangdong-Macao in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin, making the island an important new growth point for Macao's economy.

As the nation moves to advance Chinese modernization, it was outlined in the resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee in July that efforts need to be made to improve relevant mechanisms to see Hong Kong and Macao playing greater roles in China's opening-up to the outside world.

During their meeting in Beijing, Xi told Sam that this expression has pointed out the direction for Macao to integrate into Chinese modernization and achieve better development, creating a new historical opportunity for the SAR's development.

Xu, from the polytechnic university, said that Macao should leverage its advantages in terms of location to advance China's reform and opening-up.

The region should also use its traditional relations with Portuguese-speaking countries, convenient customs clearance in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the unique policy advantages of "one country, two systems" to make pioneering contributions to exploring the successful path toward Chinese modernization, he added.

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CHINA

Nation revises occupational disease list

Updated catalog including 135 in 12 categories to take effect on Aug 1

By **WANG XIAOYU**
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Workers in the manufacturing industry who are experiencing pain or numbness in their wrists and emergency personnel suffering from PTSD will soon be eligible to apply for occupational disease certification and receive better compensation, according to an official document released on Monday.

China released its latest catalog on occupational diseases on Monday, marking the first revision in over a decade.

The new version, jointly issued by the National Health Commission and three other government departments, lists 135 diseases in 12 categories, compared to the current version, which includes 132 diseases in 10 categories. The updated catalog is set to take effect on Aug 1, 2025.

Among the newly added illnesses is carpal tunnel syndrome, a condition caused by pressure on the median nerve in the wrist's carpal tunnel, which can lead to tingling or numbness in hand muscles. While white-collar workers who type or use a mouse for extended periods are prone to developing the condition, the document states that only manufacturing workers engaged in prolonged, repetitive or strenuous wrist-related tasks will qualify for occupational disease certification under this category.

Another addition is post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental health condition triggered by extremely stressful or horrifying events. Certification for this condition will be limited to police officers, medical workers, firefighters and other emergency rescue personnel involved in acute emergencies.

"With this adjustment, China's occupational disease categories are now broadly consistent with those of the International Labor Organization and most countries worldwide," the National Health Commission said on Monday.

For decades, pneumoconiosis — a lung-damaging condition caused by prolonged inhalation of dust — has been the most common occupational disease in China. Authorities have dedicated significant efforts to preventing new cases and supporting diagnosed patients.

Meanwhile, public demand for revising the occupational disease catalog has grown in recent years due to changes in work habits and the emergence of new forms of employment.

Wang Jiandong, deputy director of the commission's occupational health department, said in a previous interview that lower back pain, neck pain and varicose veins caused by prolonged standing are classified as work-related illnesses rather than occupational diseases.

China has over 700 million employees, and the adjustment of the occupational disease catalog should align with socioeconomic development, focus on key populations and strive to avoid placing an undue burden on employers, Wang said. He also encouraged employers to conduct regular health checks, improve workplace environments and implement health education campaigns on work-related illnesses.

Briefly

China executes former Inner Mongolia official

China on Tuesday executed Li Jianping, a former official in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, who was convicted of corruption, bribery, misappropriation of public funds and collusion with a criminal syndicate. The death sentence of Li, former secretary of the Communist Party of China working committee in the Hohhot economic and technological development zone, was initially handed down in September 2022 and upheld on appeal in August this year. Despite holding relatively modest local government positions, he was found guilty of embezzling over 1.4 billion yuan ($200 million) from State-owned enterprises, receiving gifts and money totaling more than 577 million yuan, and misappropriating over 1 billion yuan in public funds. In addition, Li was convicted of enabling illegal operations by a criminal syndicate under his watch.

Past vice-mayor of Chongqing sentenced

A former high-ranking official in Chongqing was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve on Tuesday for accepting over 148 million yuan ($20 million) in bribes while serving in several key government roles. Xiong Xue, who was once the city's vice-mayor and held other influential positions, was convicted of accepting illegal payments for helping individuals and companies secure government contracts and land deals. The Zhengzhou Intermediate People's Court handed down the sentence, which was suspended for two years, effectively meaning Xiong will not be executed unless he commits further crimes. The court also ordered the confiscation of all of his personal assets. Xiong's total illicit earnings amounted to more than 148 million yuan, with payments made directly or through intermediaries.

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Super snowman

Tourists view a giant snowman at Qunli Music Park in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Tuesday. The snowman began greeting the public on Tuesday and was constructed to welcome the winter tourism season and the 9th Asian Winter Games, which will be held from Feb 7 to 14 next year in the city. Built with approximately 2,000 cubic meters of snow, the sculpture is 10 meters wide and 18 meters tall.
ZHANG SHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

West urged to lift Xinjiang sanctions

By **MAO WEIHUA** in Urumqi
and **CUI JIA** in Beijing

International experts are urging Western countries, including the United States, to lift sanctions against the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, claiming the measures are based on unsubstantiated allegations of "forced labor" and have caused widespread job losses.

The comments were made on Monday during the International Symposium on Employment and Social Security in Xinjiang, held in Urumqi, the regional capital. More than 210 representatives from 44 countries, regions and organizations attended the event.

According to Xinjiang's regional government, by the end of 2023, sanctions had disrupted operations at more than 100 local enterprises. Sanctioned textile and garment factories were forced to cut production or shut down entirely, resulting in significant layoffs. Despite the challenges, Xinjiang continues to trade with 192 countries and regions, officials said.

Erkin Tuniyaz, chairman of Xinjiang's regional government, described employment as fundamental to improving livelihoods and said the region is committed to protecting workers' rights under the law.

"Some anti-China forces have ignored these facts and spread baseless accusations about so-called 'forced labor,'" Erkin said. "These unilateral sanctions are despicable acts, and their motives are becoming increasingly clear to the international community."

The sanctions have particularly affected Xinjiang's cotton, textile, tomato, photovoltaic and chemical industries, all of which are highly mechanized, officials said.

Experts at the symposium argued that allegations of "forced labor" are based on internet rumors and statements from anti-China groups, lacking legal or factual basis.

Alena Douhan, the United Nations special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures, criticized the sanctions and said they represent a reversal of the burden of proof.

"Anything associated with Xinjiang is now accused of being linked to 'forced labor,' and the accused must prove their innocence," Douhan said via video link. "I call on the sanctioning parties to lift and suspend all unilateral sanctions applied to China, its nationals and companies without the authorization of the UN Security Council."

Mark Levine, a US sociologist and professor at Minzu University of China, said the claims contradict his own experiences in Xinjiang.

"I have seen how the Chinese government has worked to improve the lives of its people over the past 19 years," said Levine, who has lived in China since 2005 and has visited Xinjiang three times. "Through my travels to cities and the countryside, I witnessed the successful eradication of extreme poverty."

Li Juan, director of the legislative affairs committee of the regional people's congress, said the sanctions target basic industries essential to Xinjiang's development.

"Unilateral sanctions under the pretext of 'forced labor' are depriving people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang of their right to employment," Li said.

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Xizang sees progress in palace protection

By **PALDEN NYIMA**
and **DAQIONG** in Lhasa

Tuesday marked the 30th anniversary of the designation of the Potala Palace in the Xizang autonomous region as a UNESCO World Heritage site, a milestone celebrated with ongoing efforts to preserve and digitize its cultural treasures.

Over the past three decades, the Chinese government has allocated nearly 800 million yuan ($109 million) for preservation projects, Xinhua News Agency reported. These include major renovations to the palace's structure, investments in ticketing systems and the preservation of ancient texts, according to officials at the Potala Palace Management Office.

Among the initiatives, nearly 1,000 *thangka* paintings have been cataloged, appraised and scanned in high definition since digitization efforts began in March, said Palden Tsering, a cultural relics librarian at the palace.

The palace, located in the regional capital of Lhasa, houses more than 6,000 *thangka* paintings spanning various historical periods. These works depict Buddhist stories, Tibetan history and culture, biographies of prominent figures, Tibetan medicine and traditional craftsmanship, Palden said.

Efforts to preserve other relics have also advanced. Since July 2023, researchers have completed documentation of the palace's 39,811 wooden carvings, including 1,718 classified as precious, according to Yangdrungthar, a researcher at the cultural relics office.

"This process has ensured a comprehensive and systematic record of the cultural relics," Yangdrungthar said, adding that digital documentation has enhanced research and preservation.

Yangdrungthar (right), a researcher at the cultural relics office of the Potala Palace, consults with an ancient literature expert on identifying the content of the printing woodblock in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, in January. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

The preservation of palm-leaf manuscripts — ancient Buddhist scriptures engraved on pattra leaves — has been a focus since 2019, when the palace established a restoration group. Palm-leaf scriptures, regarded as first-class cultural relics in China, are part of the world's largest collection of such manuscripts, with the most significant examples housed at the Potala Palace.

"Given the lack of restoration methods globally, we've been documenting and analyzing the condition of these manuscripts to prepare for large-scale restoration efforts," said Pema Dekyi, an ancient manuscript restoration specialist.

Built in the seventh century by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo and expanded in the 17th century under the fifth Dalai Lama, the Potala Palace has stood as a cultural and architectural landmark for over 13 centuries.

Kunga Tashi, deputy director of the Potala Palace Management Office, said the palace reflects the diverse interactions and cultural exchanges among ethnic groups in China. Since 2014, it has welcomed about 14.4 million visitors from around the world, making it one of the most popular tourist attractions in Xizang.

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Online
See more by scanning the code.

Foreign hospital gets license in Tianjin

By **YANG CHENG** in Tianjin
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China's first wholly foreign-owned tertiary general hospital, located in Tianjin, has obtained a license for medical services from the local health administration, demonstrating the nation's commitment to further opening-up its medical sector and addressing patients' diverse healthcare needs.

Perennial Holdings Private Limited, based in Singapore, announced on Monday in a news release that the Perennial General Hospital in Tianjin recently passed the Tianjin Health Commission's hospital inspection and received its license to operate as a medical institution.

The 500-bed tertiary general hospital, developed with a total investment of 1 billion yuan ($137.3 million), is expected to begin operations soon, the company stated. It is currently in negotiations with insurance companies to offer a range of policies to local patients. Tertiary hospitals represent the highest level in China's three-tier hospital system.

In September, China announced a policy allowing wholly foreign-owned hospitals to operate in several cities, including Beijing and Tianjin. Perennial Holdings, which already has a significant presence in China's medical care and eldercare sectors, swiftly aligned its healthcare business strategy with the policy to capitalize on the opportunity.

Located in Tianjin's Xiqing district, Perennial General Hospital Tianjin is located in the Perennial Tianjin South HSR International Healthcare and Business City, a multi-use complex that integrates eldercare, medical care and hospitality services.

"We highly commend China's open-door foreign investment policy in healthcare, which is rare globally," said Pua Seck Guan, executive chairman and CEO of Perennial Holdings.

"This forward-looking policy sends a strong positive signal to the international investment community, boosts confidence for investors in China's healthcare space, and promotes foreign investment and collaborations given the growth prospects in China. The policy also strengthens our commitment to our long-term strategy of building, owning and operating more hospitals within our integrated healthcare projects and healthcare-centric transit-oriented developments."

Perennial Holdings' hospital portfolio in China is expanding steadily. Beyond the 1,300 beds across its four facilities in Tianjin's complex, the group is developing over 3,000 more beds in healthcare-focused projects in Kunming in Yunnan province, Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

"Perennial's latest initiative marks a new era of deeper Chinese engagement with foreign nations, reflecting a shift toward high-end service sectors as part of the country's industrial upgrading efforts," said Zhang Ping, a professor at the School of Public Finance and Administration at the Tianjin University of Finance and Economics. "This development is expected to attract increased investment from multinational corporations.

"Multinationals are increasingly focusing on opportunities and resource allocation over political conflicts. Additionally, the new hospital will provide a wider range of specialized medical services for local residents, whose incomes have been rising in recent years."

She added that Perennial's presence highlights the improving investment environment in Tianjin, particularly in Xiqing district, which has seen a notable influx of pharmaceutical and high-end medical firms.

Pua further noted, "Perennial General Hospital Tianjin will attract more foreign patients seeking private medical treatments, driving growth in Tianjin's medical tourism industry."

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WORLD

Riding the Trend of the Times with A Strong Sense of Responsibility

Address by H.E. Wang Yi
At the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations
Beijing, December 17, 2024

Dear Experts and Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to join you at the year-end for an in-depth discussion about the international situation and China's diplomacy. Let me start by thanking all of you for your longstanding interest in and support for China's diplomatic efforts.

In 2024, the world witnessed further transformation and instability, marked by protracted and intensified geopolitical conflicts, repeated attempts to decouple and sever supply chains, and the rapid rise of the Global South. It has become all the more clear where the once-in-a-century transformations are heading.

In 2024, China acted on the blueprint drawn up at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and made big strides in deepening reform comprehensively. Marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of New China, China carried forward its great cause of national development and pressed ahead with Chinese modernization with vigor and determination.

In 2024, facing a critical juncture in history, we upheld fundamental principles while breaking new ground in diplomacy; and we responded to a fast-changing landscape with composure and confidence. Our diplomatic efforts have helped foster a favorable external environment for China's high-quality development and provided much-needed stability to a turbulent world.

Over the past year, a remarkable new chapter has been written in head-of-state diplomacy, which has steered the trend of the times toward peace, development and win-win cooperation.

President Xi Jinping attended three home-ground diplomatic events—the Conference Marking the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, and the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), made four important overseas visits—to Europe, to Central Asia, for the BRICS Summit, and to Latin America, and attended several multilateral summits. With the global vision, broadmindedness and sense of common good for humanity befitting the leader of a major party and a major country, President Xi has had in-depth strategic communications with global leaders and dignitaries to broaden converging interests for all and promote greater unity and cooperation of the international community.

In President Xi Jinping's interactions with foreign leaders, friendship and trust are the subjects they talk about most and mutually beneficial cooperation a prevailing consensus. It is the widely shared view around the world that President Xi keeps in mind the imperative of peace and development, that he upholds multilateralism, fairness, justice, openness and cooperation, and that he believes in a global response to global challenges. Such an approach is set to have a positive and far-reaching impact on human progress and development.

Through meetings, letters and many other means, President Xi Jinping has made personal efforts to reach out to the people of other countries, thus winning greater popular support for the healthy growth of state-to-state relations. We cherish old friends who have contributed to the friendship between their countries and China, and value the commitment and input of people from various sectors to developing friendly ties with China. We will work with our friends from around the world to build bridges of amity and bonds of affinity and turn the steady streams of friendship into a powerful force for world peace and development.

Over the past year, new breakthroughs have been made in building a community with a shared future for mankind, which has shaped the historical trend toward a shared future and greater solidarity in our global village.

Building a community with a shared future for mankind is an important vision put forth by President Xi Jinping. It provides an incisive answer to the important question of "what kind of world to build and how to build it." It envisions a historic progress in state-to-state relations from the pursuit of peaceful coexistence to that of a future shared by all. It shows the world a bright prospect of peace, security, prosperity and progress.

The building of a community with a shared future for mankind has become a great enterprise joined by various parties. In the course of 2024, China and Brazil have announced joint efforts to build a China-Brazil community with a shared future for a more just world and a more sustainable planet, demonstrating their sense of responsibility as two emerging countries; China and Serbia have launched efforts to build a China-Serbia community with a shared future in the new era, the first of its kind in China's relations with European countries. Globally, a growing number of countries have pitched in to build a community with a shared future. What's worth mentioning in particular is that Chinese and African leaders have agreed to build an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era, giving expression to the shared desire of the 2.8 billion Chinese and Africans to pursue common development in greater solidarity. China has also made efforts to build communities with a shared future with particular regions, including with Central Asia, ASEAN, countries in the Lancang-Mekong river basin, Arab states, and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These efforts are opening up new vistas of harmonious coexistence between different civilizations.

Building a community with a shared future for mankind also reflects the relentless pursuit of a fair world. At the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, President Xi Jinping comprehensively and systematically elaborated China's vision on global governance, offering insights and solutions from the perspective of long-term historical evolution and from the height of the shared future of all humanity. He put forward ideas and propositions for improving global governance in the economic, financial, trade, digital and eco-environmental dimensions, injecting strong impetus into the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. With the joint efforts of China and other countries, the notion of humanity sharing a common future has been written into multiple resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations (U.N.) and multilateral documents, and the goal of building community with a shared future has been established in various fields such as cybersecurity, climate change, and health. We have firmly upheld the authority and stature of the U.N., supported the U.N. in holding the Summit for the Future, and endeavored to promote an equal and orderly multipolar world, and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization. We have accelerated the implementation of the three major Global Initiatives. To date, 82 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative, 119 countries and international organizations have given support to the Global Security Initiative, and the 78th U.N. General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution proposed by China to establish an International Day of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Building a community with a shared future for mankind has been established as the noble goal for practicing major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. We have actively worked for the restoration of world peace and endeavored to save human lives. On the Ukraine crisis, we have always maintained an objective and impartial position, and actively pushed for peace talks. Over the past year, our special envoy conducted three rounds of shuttle diplomacy. China and Brazil jointly issued the six-point consensus on political settlement of the Ukraine crisis. We also brought other Global South countries together to launch the group of "friends for peace" to gather consensus for finding a path to peace.

The Gaza conflict has taken too many civilian lives. The immediate priority is a comprehensive ceasefire, the key is to ensure humanitarian assistance, and the fundamental way out is to realize the two-state solution. Over the past year, we have pushed for the adoption of the first resolution by the Security Council on a ceasefire in Gaza, facilitated the reconciliation dialogue and the signing of the Beijing Declaration by various Palestinian factions, and delivered multiple batches of humanitarian assistance to Gaza. We will continue to make unremitting efforts toward a comprehensive, just, and lasting solution to the Palestinian question. We have mediated peace in northern Myanmar and facilitated multiple rounds of peace talks among conflicting parties. We have supported Afghanistan in building an inclusive political framework and realizing peace and reconstruction. We have also made consistent efforts to promote the political resolution of the Korean Peninsula issue. Facing the dramatic change in Syria, China will continue to stand with the Syrian people and uphold the "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned" principle. China opposes the attempt of terrorist forces to exploit the situation to create chaos, and will help Syria maintain its sovereignty and restore stability.

Over the past year, we have provided new opportunities for the world with Chinese modernization, which has promoted the development trend of modernization in countries around the world.

China has blazed a path of modernization suited to its national conditions. With our successful exploration, we have given other developing countries greater confidence in pursuing modernization. At the same time, we are willing to work with the international community to promote modernization in countries around the world that features peaceful development, mutually beneficial cooperation, and common prosperity.

China has actively promoted global development. No country should fall behind on the path to modernization. We have made substantive progress in promoting high-quality Belt and Road cooperation in light of the urgent needs of participating countries. The China-Europe Railway Express has provided over 100,000 freight train services in total. The Port of Chancay is becoming the newest landmark of the new Asia-Latin America land-sea corridor. With 155 countries joining the big family of Belt and Road cooperation, this road to happiness is growing ever broader. In view of the widening development deficit, President Xi Jinping announced at the G20 Summit China's eight actions to support global development, which include strengthening cooperation with other countries in key areas such as poverty reduction, food security, and scientific and technological innovation. To answer the historical question of what kind of modernization to pursue, President Xi Jinping solemnly proposed that countries should jointly advance modernization that is just and equitable, open and win-win, that puts the people first and features diversity and inclusiveness, and that is eco-friendly and underpinned by peace and security. These six propositions meet the needs of the vast number of developing countries and point the way forward for modernization in countries around the world.

China has been promoting its high-quality development through high-standard opening up, and offered vast opportunities for the modernization of countries around the world. The appeal of China's institutional opening up has continued to grow, with further shortened negative list for foreign investment and fully opened manufacturing sector. China's supersized market has been offering benefits to the world at a faster pace, as it gave all LDCs having diplomatic relations with China zero-tariff treatment for 100 percent tariff lines and hosted the China International Import Expo for seven consecutive years. We are opening our market wider to the rest of the world. China has been introducing policies for easier travels to China, including unilateral visa waivers to 38 countries and visa-free transit for 54 countries. "China Travel" is gaining in global popularity. China has voluntarily subscribed to high-standard international economic and trade rules, generated renewed momentum for developing a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), and firmly advanced trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, powering global economic growth steadily.

Over the past year, China's cooperation with other developing countries has set a fine example, which has reinforced the trend of uniting for strength within the Global South.

The collective rise of the Global South in the current chapter of history is a distinctive feature of the great transformation across the world. China will always be an important member of the Global South and always be committed to unity and invigoration of the Global South.

China promoted new proposals and new developments of mechanisms and strengthened the force for unity and progress in the Global South. President Xi Jinping called for more open and inclusive Global South cooperation, and announced eight measures in support of Global South cooperation. He articulated the vision for countries in the Global South to work together as the staunch force for peace, the core driving force for open development, the construction team of global governance, and the advocates for exchange among civilizations, so as to leave their mark on the progress of humanity. Building on its historic expansion last year and setting off this year from the new starting point of greater BRICS cooperation, BRICS is bringing more partners into its big family to make the platform a primary channel for strengthening solidarity and cooperation among Global South nations. Considering the reasonable concerns of developing countries, China promoted the adoption of a U.N. General Assembly resolution on enhancing international cooperation on AI capacity-building, proposed the AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All, worked with fellow Global South nations to jointly launch an Initiative on International Cooperation in Open Science with fellow Global South nations, and pushed for the adoption of the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance at COP29. China called on developed countries to take concrete actions to earnestly fulfill their due responsibilities, provide sufficient financial support to developing countries, and uphold global climate justice.

China has stayed committed to the principle of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith, and helped fellow developing countries move faster in rejuvenation. At FOCAC, China and Africa agreed on the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Action Plan for stronger cooperation between the two sides in the next three years, and agreed on ten partnership actions for modernization covering 10 key areas such as trade and investment, industrial chain cooperation and green development in an all-dimensional boost to Africa's development. China and Arab states saw significant early harvests from the "eight major cooperation initiatives" and went on to develop "five cooperation frameworks" in five dimensions: innovation, finance, energy, economy and trade, and people-to-people exchanges. China deepened the synergy of development strategies with Latin American and Caribbean countries, and continued to upgrade its cooperation with Pacific island countries.

Over the past year, China has made new progress in pursuing all-round diplomacy, which has built up the trend toward a new type of international relations.

China has stood for dialogue and partnership rather than confrontation and alliance, fostered major-country dynamics featuring overall stability and balanced development, and worked with its neighbors for an amicable and harmonious home in Asia. China has developed a new approach to state-to-state relations featuring mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation.

China-Russia relationship, under the visionary guidance of the heads of state, has grown more mature and stable, demonstrated in a clearer way its independence and resilience, and set an example of friendly exchanges between major countries and neighbors. The three meetings between President Xi Jinping and President Putin this year further deepened the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination. The two countries maintained close communication and coordination on multilateral platforms, such as the U.N., BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and in regional affairs, fulfilling their responsibilities as major countries. China-Russia relations are based on non-alliance, non-confrontation and not targeting any third party, and are not subject to interference or coercion from any external factor. Amid shifting global dynamics, China and Russia will maintain a high degree of strategic mutual trust, support each other's development and revitalization, and jointly safeguard global strategic stability.

Europe holds an important position in China's diplomatic agenda. A healthier and more stable China-Europe relationship serves the fundamental interests of both sides and the common aspiration of the world. In May this year, President Xi Jinping paid a historic visit to Europe. The visit ushered the China-France diplomatic relationship, which has spanned 60 years, into a new 60-year cycle of further development, enhanced the ironclad friendship between China and Serbia, and elevated the China-Hungary relationship to an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership for the new era. President Xi Jinping also engaged in in-depth strategic communication with leaders of European countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy on bilateral and multilateral occasions, and encouraged the European side to take a long-term and strategic perspective, see China as a partner and strengthen dialogue and cooperation to the benefit of both sides and the world at large. China and Europe are two great civilizations of the world and two major forces of the times. China stands ready to work with the European side to handle differences and disputes properly, seek win-win solutions, and jointly safeguard free trade and multilateralism.

China and its neighboring countries share more converging interests and deeper friendship and mutual trust. Party and state leaders of Vietnam paid visits to China. The building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future got off to a good start. The new Indonesian President visited China twice, first following his election victory and then after his inauguration, with China being the first country he visited in each capacity. The "four wheels" of China-Indonesia cooperation have been upgraded to "five pillars." China and Malaysia celebrated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, and the building of "Two Countries, Twin Parks" has been vigorously advanced. The China-Singapore all-round high-quality future-oriented partnership is full of vitality. China's traditional friendship with Laos and Cambodia has become ever stronger and written new chapters. China and the five Central Asian countries have upgraded the comprehensive strategic partnerships, jointly ushering in another 30 golden years.

Regional cooperation, which China has been participating in and advancing, is brimming with strong vitality. The "Lancang-Mekong Visas" were launched. The China-ASEAN FTA 3.0 Upgrade Negotiations have been substantially concluded. The secretariat for the China-Central Asia mechanism started operation. The SCO admitted Belarus as a new member, and a new platform of "SCO plus" has been established. Chinese Premier and Prime Ministers of Russia and Mongolia held a meeting and agreed to expedite the building of China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor. Regional connectivity is also gathering momentum. The China-Europe Trans-Caspian Express opened. The intergovernmental agreement on the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project was signed. The "Tianfu" cross-border freight truck to Central Asia was launched. Important progress has been made in key projects such as the China-Vietnam cross-border railway, the China-Mongolia cross-border railway, the China-Singapore Land-Sea New Corridor and Malaysia's East Coast Rail Link. All these reflect regional countries' shared aspiration for regional integration.

China is having more trust and less suspicion with major countries in this region. When meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Xi Jinping put forth important propositions on improving China-India relations, which received positive response from Prime Minister Modi. The two sides agreed to step up strategic communication, safeguard peace and tranquility in the border areas, and strive to bring the bilateral relationship back to the track of stable development at an early date. China and Japan reaffirmed the commitment to promoting the China-Japan strategic relationship of mutual benefit in an all-round way, and to building a constructive and stable relationship that meets the requirements of the new era. In line with Japan's commitment on the discharge of nuclear contaminated water, China has recently started independent sampling and monitoring and will work with the international community to urge the Japanese side to earnestly fulfill its international obligations and responsibilities.

Dear Experts and Friends,

There is a lot of interest in China-U.S. relations. How China and the United States get along concerns the well-being of the two peoples and also the future of the world. This year, we have followed the guidance of head-of-state diplomacy, focused on implementing the San Francisco Vision, and worked to maintain the overall stability of China-U.S. relations. China and the United States held two rounds of strategic communication and five meetings of the Financial Working Group and the Economic Working Group respectively. The two sides advanced practical cooperation in such areas as counternarcotics, law enforcement and climate change, extended the science and technology agreement, and co-signed each other's resolution on artificial intelligence at the U.N. General Assembly. Nearly 15,000 young Americans visited China through the initiative of "50,000 in five years," sowing the seeds of friendship between the two countries.

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WORLD

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Such progress has been widely welcomed by Chinese and Americans across the sectors as well as the international community at large. This fully shows that as long as China and the United States cooperate with each other, they can accomplish many great things together. In the meantime, China firmly safeguards its sovereignty, security and development interests, and firmly opposes the illegal and unreasonable suppression by the U.S. side. In particular, with regard to the U.S.' gross interference in China's internal affairs such as Taiwan, China has to make a firm and robust response to resolutely defend its legitimate rights and interests and safeguard the basic norms governing international relations.

Last month, President Xi Jinping met with President Biden and sent a congratulatory message to President-elect Trump, providing strategic guidance for the growth of China-U.S. relationship at this critical juncture. President Xi Jinping summed up seven pieces of experience and inspiration based on a thorough account of bilateral exchanges in recent years, and drew four clear red lines that must not be challenged, namely, the Taiwan question, China's path and system, democracy and human rights, and China's development right. He stressed that China's goal of a steady, sound and sustainable development of China-U.S. relationship remains unchanged; its commitment to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation as principles for handling China-U.S. relations remains unchanged; its position of resolutely safeguarding China's sovereignty, security and development interests remains unchanged; and its desire to carry forward the traditional friendship between the Chinese and American people remains unchanged. This is not only the authoritative interpretation of China's U.S. policy, but also our earnest expectation on future China-U.S. relationship. The fact that China has maintained its U.S. policy stable and consistent demonstrates its firm strategic resolve and broad-mindedness as a major country. We will engage in dialogue, manage differences, enhance mutual trust, remove misunderstandings and expand cooperation with the U.S. side, and work with the U.S. to explore the right way for our two major countries to get along with each other on this planet to the benefit of the two countries and the world.

Dear Experts and Friends,

China's diplomacy is always under the CPC's leadership. We are unswervingly committed to the centralized, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee over diplomacy. We uphold Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era, especially Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, as the fundamental guideline, follow through the strategic planning of the CPC Central Committee on diplomacy, and work to bring about greater coordination and stronger synergy for China's diplomacy. The Party's leadership is the most defining feature of our major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, and our greatest political strength to overcome all risks and challenges.

China's diplomacy is always people's diplomacy. We wholeheartedly act on the abiding commitment of serving the people through diplomacy. Over the past year, we have safely evacuated over 10,000 Chinese compatriots from overseas high-risk regions. A safe passage back home from Lebanon was secured in just 48 hours. More than 50,000 consular help-seeking cases have been handled, and over 3,000 suspects for telecommunications fraud and online gambling repatriated. Our action is a clear proof to all compatriots that, wherever they are, the motherland will always be there for them.

China's diplomacy is always about standing up for responsibilities. We firmly safeguard the interests and dignity of the nation. We have resolutely countered the attempt of using Taiwan to contain China and the myth of seeking U.S. support for "Taiwan independence," firmly safeguarded China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and effectively strengthened the international community's commitment to the one-China principle. We have taken justified and firm measures to safeguard China's rights against certain countries' provocations in the South China Sea, and worked with ASEAN countries for peace and stability in the South China Sea. We have refuted false narratives hyping up the so-called "human rights issues," set the record straight, and gained overwhelming support from over 100 countries for China's just position. More countries have come to realize that playing double standards will only disgrace oneself and interfering in others' internal affairs is ultimately unpopular.

Looking back on the magnificent journey of China's diplomacy, we have noticed some important trends and changes in China's interactions with the world. **First, China's policies, especially major concepts and initiatives put forth by President Xi Jinping, are increasingly well-received and supported by the international community. Second, in addressing global challenges, major hotspots and difficult issues, the world increasingly looks to China whose active participation has become indispensable. Third, the Chinese path to modernization is gaining greater international significance, and more countries now understand and recognize the success of China's development path.**

These major achievements are fundamentally attributable to the stewardship of General Secretary Xi Jinping, who made strategic judgment at every crucial juncture and steered the major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era. They are also attributable to the scientific guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, which correctly defines China's relations with the world amid overall human development and the evolving world landscape, making sure that China's diplomatic vision and foreign policy always meet the shared aspirations of most countries, always conform to the laws of historical progress, and always hold international moral high ground. China today is already a responsible major country with enhanced international influence, stronger capacity to lead new endeavors, and greater moral appeal.

Dear Experts and Friends,

Next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japanese aggression and the world anti-fascist war. It will also mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the U.N., another key moment in the history of humanity. Looking ahead to the developments next year, one can anticipate a notable rise of uncertainties and instability in the international landscape. What choices countries make will determine the course of our times and have implications for the international landscape. In China's diplomatic endeavor, we will continue to bear in mind the larger picture, shoulder responsibilities for the greater good, and advance the right and just cause, and we will continue to hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, and do our best to promote world peace, tranquility and the common progress of humanity.

First, China will be a firm force for peace in a world of turbulence and conflicts. We hope the incoming U.S. administration will make the right choice and work with China in the same direction to avoid disruptions, overcome obstacles, and achieve the steady, sound and sustainable development of China-U.S. relations. We will deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination and all-round practical cooperation with Russia, and work for steady progress in China-EU relations toward independence, mutual success and benefit to the world. Stability in China will provide a strong underpinning for global strategic stability, and certainty in China will help cushion uncertainties in other parts of the world. We will carry forward the Chinese way of settling hotspot issues and continue our constructive role in the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and other hotspot issues such as the Korean Peninsula and Myanmar.

Second, China will be a firm force for unity in the face of division and confrontation. We support the holding of the second China-Central Asia Summit, and will work for the signing and implementation of the China-ASEAN FTA 3.0 Upgrade Protocol. We have properly handled differences and are working with India to find the right and bright path for big, neighboring countries to live in harmony and develop side by side. We will partner with Africa in implementing the ten partnership actions for modernization, expedite the building of "five cooperation frameworks" with Arab states, and use the 10th anniversary of the China-CELAC Forum as an opportunity to open a new chapter of cooperation. We will continue to pool the collective strength of the Global South through unity.

Third, China will be a firm force for openness in the face of decoupling and severing supply chains. We will deliver on the eight major steps of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, advance both the major flagship projects and the "small and beautiful" livelihood programs, and create new space for win-win cooperation of higher quality, enhanced resilience and greater sustainability. We are determined to pursue higher-standard opening up, accelerate the development of the FTAAP, and safeguard the global free trade system as well as the stable and unimpeded functioning of the industrial and supply chains. We advocate a world economy that is cooperative, stable, open, innovative and eco-friendly, and we are ready to join hands with all countries on the path toward modernization.

Fourth, China will be a firm force for justice in the face of the countercurrents of unilateralism and bullying. We will hold solemn commemorations for the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japanese aggression and the world anti-fascist war, promote a correct view of history, uphold true multilateralism, and firmly safeguard the international system with the U.N. at its core, the international order underpinned by international law, and the basic norms governing international relations based on the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter. We will effectively fulfill the role as the SCO rotating chair, support Brazil in hosting the BRICS summit and the U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP30), support South Africa in hosting the G20 summit, and work for a more just and equitable international order.

Fifth, China will be a firm force for inclusiveness in the face of ideological differences. We will promote the common values of humanity, deepen exchanges and mutual learning with other countries, join forces for the progress of human civilization, and enhance the mutual understanding and friendship among people of different countries. We will step up experience-sharing on governance and development, tell engaging stories of the CPC, of Chinese modernization, and of building a community with a shared future for mankind, and cement China's friendship with countries around the globe. We will expand two-way exchanges between the Chinese people and people elsewhere, and do our best to stage a successful Asian Winter Games to showcase a diverse China through the charm of ice and snow.

Dear Experts and Friends,

The monumental changes of our time call for a grand vision and a keen sense of responsibility. China's diplomatic service will rally more closely around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, study, contemplate, apply and grasp Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, follow the principles of self-confidence and self-reliance, openness and inclusiveness, fairness and justice, and cooperation and mutual benefit, steadfastly advance the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, keep breaking new ground for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and make new and greater contributions to building China into a great modern socialist country, to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and to peace and progress of humanity as a whole.

Thank you!

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CityDance双城记

Editor's note: *Amity between the people holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. China Daily will come out with a series of stories highlighting Chinese cities' special connections with sister cities, mutual understanding, trust and friendship between peoples of different countries and cultural backgrounds, and shining light on "city diplomacy".*

ALL ABOARD SISTER-CITY EXPRESS

Kunming, Vientiane ride on opportunities along China-Laos Railway

By HOU CHENCHEN and LI YINGQING in Kunming

A very special dish in a restaurant in Kunming has those who love good food licking their chops as they wait to be served. When the food arrives, the very sight of the crushed lemon grass that envelops minced pork, as well as the aroma that accompanies it, provides a foretaste of what's to come.

Everything has been grilled over charcoal and is served with a special sweet, spicy sauce all the way from Laos, about 500 kilometers away. The taste sensation begins with the delicate texture of the roasted pork, enhanced by the rich, savory sauce, followed by the citrus aroma of the lemon grass.

"Lemon grass is commonly grown in Kunming, but people here had never encountered this unique way of presenting it," said Fan Junfeng, founder of the restaurant, Sabaidee Lao Kitchen, in Kunming Old Street in the Yunnan capital.

This delicacy, the lemon grass chieftain skewers, was once a hidden recipe in the villages of Laos but has now become a part of Kunming restaurant fare.

However, there is a lot more to the relationship between the city and Laos than lemon grass skewers, thanks in part to the China-Laos Railway that opened three years ago.

Fan, 31, is one of 43 million passengers who have benefited from the high-speed link, allowing travel from Kunming to Vientiane, the capital of Laos, in 10 hours, and allowing him to explore local markets, night bazaars and, of course, the local restaurant fare.

For Teng Hailin, the general dealer of Beerlao in China, the railway has solved major issues with cross-border logistics. Before the railway opened, Beerlao's products being transported from Vientiane to the border needed at least four days to make the journey, she said.

"During the rainy season, the roads in mountainous Laos would be muddy, and beer bottles were often damaged. Sometimes. The trucks even overturned. In heavy rain, we generally lost 30 to 40 percent of the cargo.

"Now, with the railway, we can transport goods directly from Vientiane to Kunming and then distribute them to supermarkets in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou."

Just as those Lao lemon grass skewers have become de rigueur in Kunming, Lao coffee, hot pot and beer have also become a regular part of the city's dining scene. In fact, enjoying rice noodles in Kunming in the morning and sipping coffee in Vientiane in the afternoon has become a lifestyle for some thanks to the railway link, underlying the growing friendship between the two cities, which established a twin-cities relationship in 2011.

Despite the geographical proximity between the two cities, a mere 820 kilometers apart, the towering mountains and rugged terrain have long hindered communication between them. For thousands of years, these mountains only bore the footprints of wild elephants and the occasional caravan of horses carrying goods.

Friendly exchanges

Five years after the sister-cities ties were established, work on building the China-Laos Railway began, and since it opened in 2021, its trains — with a green livery that symbolizes nature and hope — have flourished, promoting friendly exchanges and deepening the long-standing friendship between Laos and Yunnan.

When a railway station was being built in 2019 near the home of Khamphilom Vannaphone, a young woman in Vientiane, one of eight stations on the railway line, her parents' thoughts turned to China when they pondered the career prospects of her and her siblings. Eventually, she enrolled to study tourism management at Kunming University and her siblings enrolled to study international economics and trade at Yunnan Normal University in Kunming.

Now, Vannaphone, 33, is not only living in Kunming but has become a veritable cultural ambassador, promoting ties between the two cities and between Laos and China.

When the China-Laos Railway officially opened on Dec 3, 2021, Vannaphone filmed a video of the trip and posted it on the internet, sparking a wave of interest in traveling to China by train.

"The video got 1.08 million views, and don't forget that the population of Laos is less than 8 million," Vannaphone said. "I got a lot of comments from Laos and Thailand."

Vannaphone has become a full-fledged travel vlogger and has used her video skills to tell the world about the beauty of Dianchi Lake in Kunming, Xishan Mountain and Yunnan food.

Cross-border tourism

Cross-border tourism produced by the railway has created many jobs in Laos, she said, adding flourishing business for hotels, restaurants and travel agencies has given a significant boost to local tourism and increased incomes for people.

"Experiencing the China-Laos Railway has become one of the most sought-after activities for Lao tourists," she said. "I hope to use my lens to help people from Laos understand China, and vice versa."

The similarities in the environments and cultures of Kunming and Vientiane add to the aura of their intimacy.

Since the China-Laos Railway's opening, the daily passenger traffic has risen from 20,000 to a peak of 100,000; the number of cross-border cargo trains running each day has risen from two to 18; and the number of countries and regions represented by inbound and outbound passengers has risen from just over 20 to more than 100.

Saonakhone Thongmixay, director of Chinese-language studies at the National University of Laos in Vientiane, said that in Laos the demand for those with Chinese-speaking skills has surged in recent years. The Ministry of Education and Sports of Laos has supported schools offering Chinese-language courses where possible.

In 2021, when the railway opened, the university had 60 students in its Chinese-language program — out of 2,953 applicants. The Chinese language has become the most popular subject among students registering for the university's bachelor's degree entrance exams, Thongmixay said.

Inthavong Phaphonepheng, 23, a Lao student at Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College, said, "The average monthly income in Laos is $100 to $150, but if you speak Chinese your income can double."

The number of Lao students studying in Kunming continues to grow. Vannaphone said this year alone she helped more than 10 Lao students enroll at Kunming University and helped more than 30 Chinese students studying at the National University of Laos.

Yunnan is the destination of choice for young people in Laos who wish to study in China, said Tang Zhiying, deputy of the International School at Yunnan Minzu University in Kunming. Among full-time international students, Lao students account for a significant number and are one of the largest source countries.

Lao students tend to pursue international economics and trade, tourism management, and journalism and media, Tang said. After graduating, they generally work in industries related to China-Laos trade, tourism and education.

Huang Muxia, associate professor and Lao-language director in the School of Foreign Languages at Yunnan Minzu University, said: "With closer ties between the two countries, students' enthusiasm for learning the Lao language has increased. The employment rate for Lao-related jobs is high, and many Chinese graduates choose to develop their careers in Laos. The geographical advantage makes it natural for Yunnan to offer this undergraduate program."

Mandarin interest

Yunnan Minzu University was one of the first tertiary institutions in China to establish a Lao language and literature program, in 2003.

When Huang graduated in 2002, the Lao language was still a niche subject. Now 10 public universities in China offer Lao-language programs, training nearly 200 students a year. Six of these universities are in Yunnan, with three of them in Kunming.

Anouphab Tounalom, party secretary of Vientiane and president of the Vientiane People's Council, said education and language learning are becoming increasingly important in promoting economic, trade and tourism collaboration, as well as in deepening the friendship between the sister cities, he said.

Chinese-language training should not only benefit Lao government workers but also reach more young people in Laos, he said.

"We encourage more Lao people to learn Chinese and seize opportunities to pursue higher education in China. Language and education are the bridges that bring our two cities closer as good neighbors, good friends, good comrades and good partners."

The Mayor of Kunming, Liu Jiachen, said, "Kunming has historically been an open and inclusive city, as well as an important transportation hub connecting both domestic and international regions."

Kunming aims to work with all sides to promote friendship, deal with cross-border transportation problems and develop a multinational transportation network along with the Belt and Road Initiative, he said.

Last month, Kunming and Vientiane set up a 10-city alliance that aims to improve the international competitiveness of cities and provinces along the China-Laos Railway through better regional transportation connectivity and logistics.

"With the China-Laos Railway City Alliance and international sister-city exchanges as a basis, Kunming is committed to deepening collaboration in trade, cultural exchange, tourism, education and health, advancing sister-city partnerships," Liu said.

Contact the writers at houchenchen@chinadaily.com.cn.

Watch the video by scanning the code.

Passengers enter the Vientiane Station of the China-Laos Railway in Vientiane, Laos, on Dec 2. KAIKEO SAIYASANE / XINHUA

The China-Laos Railway proves a hit among passengers. PHOTOS BY XINHUA; PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Attendants on the first train of the China-Laos Railway departing from Kunming display the railway map on Dec 3, 2021. WU XIAOHUI / CHINA DAILY

Train trainees in the driver's seat as they learn the ropes

By HOU CHENCHEN and LI YINGQING in Kunming

Three years ago when Souvannalath Koppy read about the opening of the China-Laos Railway he marveled at the technology.

"At the time, I thought, 'One day I want to stand in the driver's cabin of one of these trains and drive it," the Lao youth, now 22, said.

Koppy is now studying locomotive operations and maintenance at Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College, and it can be only a matter of time before he sits at the controls of the real thing as it hurtles toward its next stop.

Koppy said the first time he operated the control lever in the simulator he was both excited and nervous, feeling as if he were driving a real train.

In August last year, 40 Lao students at the college completed two years of training and headed back to the Lao Railway Vocational Technical College in Vientiane.

They are pioneers in establishing Laos' railway talent development system, becoming the first railway teachers in the country's history. These graduates will play a vital role in training future generations of Lao railway professionals.

This collaboration between Kunming and Lao railway schools is part of a broader Belt and Road Initiative and China-Laos collaboration.

Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College supports its Lao counterpart with infrastructure, training and a partnership involving two years of training in Kunming for Lao teachers, followed by five years of on-site technical support in Laos by Chinese experts.

In June, the President of Laos, Thongloun Sisoulith, praised the project, saying the Lao college is an exemplar of Laos-China collaboration that has filled a gap in railway technology education in his country.

"Railways are at the heart of development in Laos," the Lao News Agency quoted him as saying.

"I call on young people to continue the cause of national protection and development and develop our railway."

The college principal Bounyalith Khanthachak said the initial enrollment quota was quickly exceeded, and 1,000 students are now expected over three years.

"To make the China-Laos Railway a lasting driver of socioeconomic growth, Laos must cultivate its own railway talent," said Feng Tao, vice-dean of the Electrical Engineering School at Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College.

"Our goal is to help Laos build a sustainable talent system within seven years, enabling its railway industry to grow from scratch."

Feng, an expert in bridge and tunnel construction of railway engineering, is the leader of the third Chinese expert team assisting the Lao Railway Vocational Technical College, trained Lao instructors in China in 2022 and is now in Vientiane for on-site teaching.

The college, about 15 kilometers northeast of Vientiane, is the first of its kind in Laos. Its setting reminds Feng of Yunnan province's rugged terrain and his own childhood curiosity about railways, inspired by his parents, his father having been a train driver and his mother a railways teacher.

Transforming landscape

Decades ago, Yunnan's development was limited by its mountainous landscape, with goods transported by mule caravans. Today high-speed trains traveling back and forth on railway bridges have transformed the region. Feng sees his mission as being to take railway education to Laos, where resources are scarce. "Laos, like Yunnan, relies on railways for progress. Teaching in Vientiane is my way of passing on this legacy and inspiring the next generation."

The "bridge" that needs to be built goes far beyond just connecting mountains.

The absence of specialized railway terminology in the Lao language poses a significant challenge in teaching, with technical terms often requiring direct translation between Chinese and Laos.

To tackle this problem, the academy has simultaneously begun to develop Lao railway course plans and Lao-language teaching materials for students.

The academy has compiled the first 10 bilingual Chinese-Lao textbooks to support future teaching at the Lao Railway Vocational Technical College and assist Chinese teachers conducting instructional activities in Laos. The second series of 13 bilingual textbooks are being prepared.

Liu Yajing, an expert in railway signaling at Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College, said the school has specifically arranged Lao-language training courses for teachers involved in the aid projects.

"We've taken basic Lao-language lessons to facilitate smoother communication, bridging the gap between two peoples. Once we understand each other, our hearts grow closer."

Silivong Phouthachack, one of the 40 students who graduated and now teaching in Vientiane, said: "China hasn't just built a railway for us; it's given us the tools to build our own railway professionals. This reflects China's commitment to sharing achievements in railway development with the world.

"We have learned China's railway technology and talent cultivation system, and I'm really excited to be able to bring what I've learned back to Laos."

In August, 14 Lao nationals who successfully completed a self-driven test were awarded train driver certificates. This marks the first time Lao people have received this recognition, according to the Laotian Times.

As of September, there were 992 Lao employees working on the front lines of the railway, including 14 train drivers, according to the Laos-China Railway Company, which is responsible for operating the Lao section of the China-Laos Railway.

Lao students attend a lecture inside a bullet train model at Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College in 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lao students take part in an internship program at the China Railway Kunming Group in 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Transport network plays key role in keeping region connected

By HOU CHENCHEN and LI YINGQING in Kunming

The Kunming Dry Port train, part of the China-Laos-Thailand Railway, has begun operations from Anning, Yunnan province, passing through Vientiane and eventually reaching the coastal city of Ranong in Thailand in November. This marks the successful connection of Kunming and Vientiane, two inland cities, to Ranong, on the Indian Ocean.

Anouphab Tounalom, party secretary of Vientiane and president of the Vientiane People's Council, said the collaboration between Kunming and Vientiane has been significantly upgraded as part of the Lao national strategy to transform Laos from a landlocked country to a land-linked one and as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

"The railway has brought many benefits. Economic ties between Laos and China, particularly between Vientiane and Kunming, have been significantly strengthened, promoting passenger transport and goods logistics, as well as collaboration in areas such as economics, culture, tourism and education."

The railway has provided Laos with an opportunity to play a key role in better connecting China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, he said.

"Such close collaboration extends beyond our two cities and is gradually expanding across Southeast Asia, promoting broader collaboration and development to create a better future."

Bounyavath Niraxay, director general of Vientiane's Department of Public Works and Transport, said: "Vientiane is at the center of regional land transportation, and the China-Laos Railway is a crucial link connecting Laos, China and ASEAN countries.

"We are exploring ways to connect with the China-Europe Railway Express, extending to Russia, and truly transforming Laos from a landlocked country into an interconnected country."

Driving economy

In 2020, the Vientiane-Vangvieng Expressway, a key section of the Laos-China Expressway and the Kunming-Bangkok Expressway, opened to traffic. One year later in 2021, the China-Laos Railway opened. This ended Laos' history without highways and railways, marking a significant step in its infrastructure development.

> "Economic ties between Laos and China, particularly between Vientiane and Kunming, have been significantly strengthened."
>
> **Anouphab Tounalom,** party secretary of Vientiane and president of the Vientiane People's Council

The expressways and railways make Vientiane and Kunming important logistical hubs, and this has had big economic impacts, particularly with trade, said Somdeth Bodhisane, a researcher at the Institute for Industry and Commerce of Laos in Vientiane.

"The growth in international trade, especially with China, has brought tangible benefits to the people of Vientiane, including creating jobs, improving access to goods and increasing economic opportunities."

The variety of goods transported across the border has also grown, from more than 500 types to more than 3,000. The railway has handled more than 10.6 million tonnes of imported and exported goods since it opened, with a total value of more than $6.11 billion, China State Railway Group said.

The people of Vientiane are benefiting from the transportation network, Bodhisane said. It allows for the import of affordable goods from China, and Laos can export products such as bananas and cassava to China, which benefits local industries, particularly agriculture.

"There has been a significant collaboration between Vientiane and Kunming in areas such as special economic zone development and hydropower initiatives, boosting poverty alleviation, rural development and capacity-building," Bodhisane said.

The Vientiane Saysettha Development Zone, a joint project between the two governments, with Kunming and Vientiane playing key roles in attracting Chinese investment, has further strengthened economic ties.

A total of 155 enterprises from nine countries, including China, Laos, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, have settled in the zone. Once fully operational, it is expected to achieve an annual output exceeding $3 billion and create more than 17,000 jobs, Kunming Daily reported in early December.

Chinese companies invested in 17 projects worth $986 million in Laos last year, compared with $339 million on 30 projects in 2022, the Vientiane Times newspaper said.

Furthermore, regional economic integration has been enhanced. Both Kunming and Vientiane are key partners in the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program, which aligns with the BRI's goals to improve connectivity and trade in the region, Bodhisane said.

Tounalom, the Vientiane official, said: "In recent years, collaboration between Laos and China has strengthened at all levels, from the highest to the grassroots, with significant progress in both scope and depth. ... Both sides have signed strategic cooperation agreements to build long-term partnerships, establishing us as reliable partners who can depend on one another."

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BUSINESS

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Stimulating demand tops policy agenda

Commerce Ministry eyes larger scope for consumer goods trade-in program

By LIU YUKUN
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More policies are in the pipeline to supercharge domestic demand, with analysts forecasting a doubling of ultra-long special treasury bonds targeting consumption and an expansion of the scope of trade-in programs to encompass a wider range of product categories.

Citing the recently concluded Central Economic Work Conference, analysts said stimulating domestic demand is a top priority among announced major tasks for the coming year, especially amid escalating external challenges. The meeting emphasized that "efforts should be made to vigorously boost consumption and improve investment efficiency".

Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce, said that against the backdrop of external uncertainties and trade tensions, measures to boost domestic demand are envisioned to promote the integrated development of domestic and international trade, facilitate smooth transitions between the two markets and offer strong support for economic development.

"We expect the support for consumption through ultra-long special treasury bonds to rise from this year's 100 billion yuan-150 billion yuan ($13.7-20.6 billion) level to an estimated 200 billion yuan-300 billion yuan level. By 2025, consumer electronics and home furnishings are likely to be included among supported categories under the trade-in policy," said Yu Xiang, chief analyst of policy research at CITIC Securities.

Yu said that following the reinforced countercyclical policies in late September, the impact of intensified consumer goods trade-in policy on retail sales growth has been substantial.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, retail sales of household appliances/audiovisual equipment, furniture, automobiles, and construction and decoration materials saw respective increases of 22.2 percent, 10.5 percent, 6.6 percent and 2.9 percent, buoyed by the consumer goods trade-in policy.

The total retail sales of consumer goods amounted to 4.3763 trillion yuan in November, marking a 3 percent year-on-year increase. From January to November, total retail sales of consumer goods reached 44.2723 trillion yuan, showing a 3.5 percent year-on-year growth.

The research institute at China International Capital Corp Ltd estimates that fiscal subsidies for the trade-in program in the fourth quarter could reach around 120 billion yuan. If this momentum is sustained throughout next year, the required subsidy amount is expected to see a significant increase. Potential areas for future expansion include communication products, consumer electronics, various small household appliances and household items.

"Further efforts are needed to boost the development of new consumption sectors ..."

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce

Sheng, the vice-minister, said that moving forward, active collaboration with the National Development and Reform Commission — the country's top economic regulator — and other departments will be crucial to broadening the scope of coverage of the consumer goods trade-in policy, ensuring more consumers benefit tangibly.

Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of cultivating and expanding new forms of consumption to invigorate retail sales vitality, such as developing a "first-launch economy" — economic strategies where businesses introduce new products, launch new formats, models, services and technologies, and open flagship stores.

More efforts are also expected to boost digital consumption, advance sales of new energy vehicles and green smart home appliances, develop the ice and snow economy such as ice skating and skiing, and promote the silver economy catering to seniors, Sheng added.

"Further efforts are needed to boost the development of new consumption sectors like eldercare, health and cultural tourism. Bold reforms, comprehensive measures to promote consumption, and the innovation and upgrade of consumption scenarios should be advocated to attract more consumers," said Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce.

Wei called for enhancing coordination between government and enterprises, accelerating optimization of enterprise-related services, making the business environment more vibrant, innovating consumption scenarios and boosting consumption growth.

Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, pointed out that the goods consumption market may have reached a saturation point, necessitating a shift in policy focus toward services consumption.

Overcoming institutional barriers and enhancing distinctive product offerings in the services sector are deemed essential to cater to the diverse service consumption demands of various demographics, Wang said.

Briefly

Construction begins on new port line

Construction of the Jiujiang Hongguang port special railway project commenced on Monday, said a State builder participating in the project. Apart from the special railway, which has a total length of 6.9 kilometers, the 1.27 billion yuan ($174.3 million) project also includes establishment of a major loading and unloading station, aiming to promote the integration of rail and water transport, enhance the functionality of Jiujiang Port and drive the integration of transportation systems, said Fang Guokai, project manager of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp.

Air passenger trips hit record high

Chinese airlines have recorded over 700 million passenger trips so far this year, marking a record high in the civil aviation history of the country, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said. As of Sunday, the country's airlines reported a total of 700.48 million passenger trips since the start of the year, the CAAC said on Monday.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Customs officials inspect samples of products bound for export at Liaoning Creative Arts and Crafts Co Ltd in Shenyang, Liaoning province, last week. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Firms in high gear for year-end sales

By ZHONG NAN
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With Christmas and year-end sales approaching in many Western countries, Chinese manufacturers are ramping up shipments to these markets via both air cargo and maritime container services, while experiencing a surge in sales on cross-border e-commerce platforms.

December and January are peak shopping seasons in Europe and the United States, and China's cross-border e-commerce exports to these markets — especially Christmas-themed products and small electronic products — have shown strong growth in recent weeks.

Christmas-themed products encompass a wide range of festive items that are popular during the holiday season. These include Christmas decorations like artificial trees, ornaments and lights, as well as figurines of Santa, reindeer and snowmen. They also cover gifts, Christmas cards, specialty food items and holiday-themed apparel such as sweaters and Santa hats.

To meet the soaring demand from Chinese exporters shipping Christmas-themed goods and other high-value items ordered through cross-border e-commerce platforms to global markets, Nanjing Lukou International Airport, located in Nanjing, capital of East China's Jiangsu province, boosted its freighter routes by adding 48 extra flights between November and December.

Customs authorities at the airport supervised foreign trade cargo volume of 67,200 metric tons during the January-November period, a year-on-year increase of 29.3 percent. Among this, exports of cross-border e-commerce goods amounted to 18,000 tons, jumping 51.8 percent on a yearly basis, statistics from Nanjing Customs show.

Jiangsu Changxin Weaving Co Ltd, a Changzhou, Jiangsu province-based textile manufacturer, has been shipping about 10 containers abroad daily via containerships over the past two weeks.

In addition to exporting Christmas-themed products, such as pillows, socks, blankets and carpets, the Chinese company has introduced Christmas tree sets with innovative designs this year to enhance the competitiveness of its products in overseas markets.

"In the past, our exported Christmas products were relatively simple and had low added value. However, this year, we established a dedicated design team for Christmas items. From traditional Santa Claus and reindeer designs to modern cartoon styles, we now offer a diverse range of products that are popular in many countries," said Chen Lin, head of the export unit at the company.

Liaoning Creative Arts and Crafts Co Ltd, a handicrafts manufacturer in Shenyang, capital of Northeast China's Liaoning province, secured over 4 million yuan ($549,018) worth of export orders to the US this year, mainly for various handicrafts made from bamboo, wood and grass weaving.

Demand for Christmas and other holiday decorations has been strong in the second half of this year, said Xie Pengfei, the company's general manager.

Shenyang Customs has supervised the export of Christmas-themed products, primarily made of bamboo, wood, rattan and grass weaving within its Customs territory in the first 11 months of this year, amounting to 350 million yuan, with exports covering 50 countries, including the US, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Australia.

"Instead of sea and air transportation, some Christmas goods bound for Europe can be exported via China-Europe freight train services," Xie said.

Peruvian port helps spur trade with China

By WANG KEJU
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China and Peru, separated by the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, stand worlds apart. Stretching across thousands of miles of open water, the distance between the two nations has long seemed a challenging geographic barrier.

Yet, like a beacon of connectivity, Chancay Port — an important project under the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation — has emerged in Peru, bringing these distant lands closer.

The port is set to be a transformative gateway not just for bolstering the trading competitiveness of the Andean nation, but also for the broader Latin American region — developing new shipping routes and catalyzing deeper economic integration into global markets, experts said.

Situated about 60 kilometers north of Peru's capital Lima, the deepwater port is co-invested by China's COSCO Shipping and Peru's Volcan Compania Minera SAA — a collaborative project between China and Peru under the BRI.

The project, which was initiated in 2021, opened for operations on Nov 15. The first phase of the port features four dock berths, with a maximum depth of 17.8 meters. This substantial depth enables the port to host mega container vessels with carrying capacities reaching up to 18,000 twenty-foot equivalent units, COSCO said.

Before construction of the port, the country lacked a deepwater port capable of accommodating large container ships, said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

This meant that cargo shipments from China destined for Peru had to be transshipped through intermediate hubs in locations like Mexico, Panama and other regional centers. This transshipment process added time and cost to the overall supply chain. But with the launch of direct shipping services, that burden has been dramatically alleviated. The first phase of the project will reduce the sea shipping time from Peru to China to 23 days, thus cutting logistics costs by at least 20 percent, Zhou said.

Containers are loaded onto a truck at Chancay Port, Peru.
LI MENGXIN / XINHUA

The newly opened Chancay Port is poised to deliver significant economic and social benefits to Peru as well, beyond its transformative effects on the country's international trade and logistics capabilities.

According to estimates from the Central Reserve Bank of Peru, the port is expected to contribute 0.3 percent to the country's GDP during its initial phase of operations. And once all planned infrastructure is fully developed, the port could account for as much as 0.9 percent of Peru's total economic output.

The port's development is creating thousands of new jobs — both directly and indirectly — for local communities. Construction of the port facilities has generated around 1,300 direct jobs so far, with an additional 8,000 indirect jobs supported through supply chains and ancillary industries, according to the bank.

Chancay Port is expected to have significant effects not just on the Peruvian economy, but on trade flows across Latin America, said Liang Haiming, dean of the Belt and Road Research Institute at Hainan University.

With the direct maritime connections, the transit time for cargo between Latin America and Asia is projected to decrease from 35 days to just 25 days. It will unlock new trade and investment opportunities between Latin America and Asian economies, Liang said.

China's efforts to deepen economic and infrastructure ties with Latin America through the BRI reflect a long-term vision to foster shared prosperity across the Global South, Liang said.

So far, a total of 22 Latin American and Caribbean nations have joined the BRI by signing different cooperation memoranda. The strengthening partnership between China and Latin America carries significance for the region, providing an avenue to reduce reliance on traditional economic powers and explore more diverse international trade models, Liang added.

Govt wealth seen as key to boosting consumption

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's ongoing efforts to boost consumption can be significantly enhanced if the government's substantial wealth and assets are mobilized to support household incomes and social welfare, leading economists said.

Liu Shijin, former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council and a prominent economist, said that a relatively high share of State-owned equity in social wealth could be a key factor behind the country's insufficient consumption.

Liu explained that such an equity is primarily reinvested to generate new capital, rather than being spent to stimulate consumption.

Citing research results by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Liu said that government net wealth accounted for 37.6 percent of total social wealth in China as of 2022, far exceeding the less than 5 percent seen in major developed economies in Europe and the United States.

Government net wealth, according to CASS, includes the assets minus liabilities of central and local governments, public institutions, State-owned enterprises and State-owned stakes of joint ventures, totaling 291.6 trillion yuan ($40 trillion) as of 2022.

Liu proposed that institutional mechanisms could be introduced to channel State-owned capital into promoting consumption in areas such as education, healthcare, and social protection, while also addressing income inequality through redistribution measures.

Transitioning State-owned equity from primarily supporting investment to also supporting consumption would not only significantly boost consumption, but also showcase the country's capacity to mobilize resources for major initiatives, Liu said.

Liu made the remarks on Sunday at the launch of the book *China's National Balance Sheet 1978-2022*, in which a CASS research team compiled the country's national balance sheets for 45 consecutive years since the country's reform and opening-up.

Zhang Xiaojing, head of the Institute of Finance and Banking at CASS and lead author of the book, said transferring some of the government's existing wealth to the household sector could help strengthen China's unconventional countercyclical adjustments and further support the economic shift toward consumption-driven growth.

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July had called for exploring the introduction of national macro balance sheet management.

Last week, the Central Economic Work Conference further stressed the importance of coordinating the relationship between optimizing incremental resources and making good use of existing resources.

Zhang said compared with major developed economies, where real estate accounts for around 50 percent or more of total social net assets, China's figure is relatively low, less than 40 percent.

This, he said, leaves room for the development in the country's real estate sector and suggests that the opinion that China's real estate sector has reached its peak does not hold water.

Factors such as ongoing urbanization and the cultural importance Chinese people place on homeownership are expected to support the sector's high-quality development, Zhang said.

Liu added that the potential for long-term development in China's real estate sector could help promote greater consumption over time.

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COMMENT

Editorials

European Union should not let anti-China hawks foul the nest

In the 15th package of restrictive measures it adopted on Monday, the European Council sanctioned 84 entities and individuals from different countries alleging they are providing material assistance to Russia's military in its conflict with Ukraine. Seven of them are from China.

This is the first time the European Union has imposed "comprehensive sanctions" on Chinese entities and individuals, including travel bans, asset freezes, and prohibitions on providing financial resources, which, previously, mainly referred to export controls.

In its statement, the European Council claims the Chinese entities and individuals concerned help Russia circumvent European Union sanctions or supply sensitive drone parts and microelectronics components to the Russian military.

In so doing the EU is undoubtedly sending a strong signal to China, intimating that if Beijing continues to stick to what the bloc alleges is a pro-Russia stance on the Ukraine crisis, it may become a factor affecting the EU-China economic and trade relations.

During her confirmation hearing in Brussels last month, Kaja Kallas, the bloc's new high representative of foreign affairs and security policy, said that China should pay a "higher cost" for what she claimed was its support for Russia's military, saying that without China's support, Russia would not be able to continue to fight "with the same force". But she also admitted she has not yet verified the hearsay that China is providing such support.

Since China has not caved in to the sanctions the United States has imposed on it over the Ukraine crisis, which are of a much larger scale and have a wider impact than the EU sanctions against it so far, Brussels should realize that Beijing will by no means compromise its neutral stance on the Ukraine conflict or alter its normal economic and trade relations with Russia.

When the whole world is waiting to see what the US president-elect has up his sleeve to fulfill his election promise of resolving the Ukraine crisis soon after taking office on Jan 20, faithfully doing the Joe Biden administration's bidding to heighten its "Beijing has to pay" sanctions does no good to the EU's interests.

No matter how many China hawks have been hatched in the EU nest over the past four years, Brussels should be well aware they could become a hindrance over the next four years, depending on how the new US administration decides to overhaul the US' foreign, trade and security policies.

The US president-elect said on Monday that Beijing and Washington could work together "to solve all of the problems of the world" shortly before hosting TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew at his Florida resort.

That a palpable unease has thus been understandably apparent in Brussels since the dust settled on the US presidential election last month serves to expose the US' European allies are at a bewildering loss facing future uncertainties in the transatlantic alliance, a sequela of their all-in bet on the Biden administration.

As its sanctions against Russia are now up to the 15th round, the EU should also realize that the Ukraine crisis cannot be resolved by sanctions, and it is the US that is stoking the fire for both the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

It is the Biden administration that has been trying to mislead the EU to jump onto its sanctions bandwagon and form a united front with it against China in trade and high-tech sectors.

Instead of calling for a coordinated and systemic approach to dealing with China to prevent the bloc from dividing on security and trade issues, as some EU lawmakers did recently, it is high time the bloc's core decision-makers reflected on the root cause of the division, which is a result of the EU allowing the Biden administration to drive a wedge between it and China, which has in effect divided the bloc itself.

That the Ukraine crisis was effectively prevented when the EU sought to uphold its strategic autonomy before then-German chancellor Angela Merkel stepped down should prompt Brussels to realize that Washington does not have the EU's best interests at heart.

Whitewashed ram-raiding with US-made paint

Both Japan and the Philippines have maritime disputes with China, and both have a security alliance with the United States, which both have been intent on strengthening. Since the US is seeking to contain China and choke its development, it has encouraged its two allies to kindle a fire under their maritime disputes with China to raise the heat and create sparks.

Emboldened by the US' support, Japan and the Philippines have stepped up their provocative actions infringing upon China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, leaving China with no other option but to respond to their attempted nautical ram-raids with beefed-up law-enforcement measures in relevant waters.

The US, Japan and the Philippines have sought to whitewash their aggressive posturing with the "China threat" paint manufactured by Washington.

In the joint statement released after the inaugural trilateral summit of the three countries in April, the leaders of the US, Japan and the Philippines defended their agreement to enhance military ties to cope with "China's threats", and expressed their "serious concerns" about China's actions to safeguard its sovereignty, which they termed as "dangerous and aggressive behavior" in the South China Sea, and "attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea".

It was perhaps only to be expected therefore that China's alleged assertiveness should be applied with a broad brush as the justification for the new defense pact between Japan and the Philippines, that the Philippine Senate announced it had ratified on Monday, saying it would "enhance the interoperability" between Japanese and Philippine forces. The deal is now awaiting the approval of Japanese lawmakers before it takes effect.

Both Manila and Tokyo have talked up the pact being conducive to regional peace and security, but it not only allows for increased joint combat drills but also gives a green light to the two countries' armed forces being deployed on each other's soil, it is akin to giving two testosterone-addled adolescents matches and a tinderbox.

It spells trouble for the region.

What has happened over the past two years should be proof enough that Manila will be further emboldened to walk further along the dangerous path it has chosen, jeopardizing regional peace and stability.

On Tokyo' s part, the defense pact with Manila is the first of its kind that Japan has signed in Asia. This fact itself is alarming. Since World War II, countries in the region have always kept an eye out for any sign that may indicate a revival of Japan's military past and refrained from any move that may encourage it. As a consequence of its selfish strategic calculation, Manila is offering that chance to Tokyo by helping expand the scope of operations for Japan's Self-Defense Forces. Considering that Japan's alt-right politicians have been dreaming of such a chance in recent years, it is tantamount to inviting a wolf into the fold.

This ill-advised Japan-Philippines defense pact shows how the two countries have become starry-eyed swallowers of Washington's tall tales of China's "aggressiveness" as it serves to condone their claim jumping.

And the deal is a further advancement of the US' efforts to create a NATO-style collective in Asia, which is irresponsible and extremely dangerous.

The US frequently flexes its military muscles on China's doorstep, it has gathered its allies into "small cliques" surrounding China, and it even gets proxies such as Japan and the Philippines to try and rile China into an ill-considered move with their provocations.

China's responses to such malicious behaviors are reasonable and justified.

China strongly opposes the unruly practices of the three countries and it will firmly oppose any acts that stoke and enflame tensions, and which undermine the security and interests of the region as a whole.

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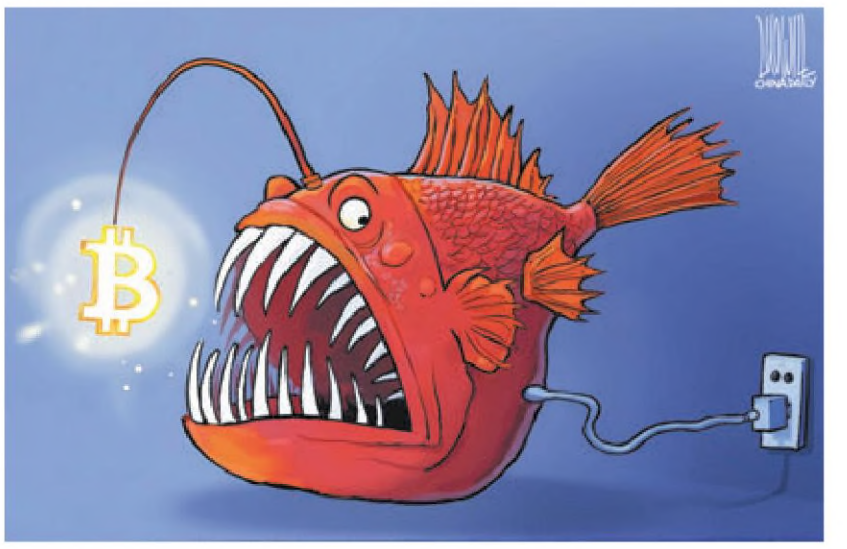

Opinion Line

Economic and financial exchanges intensify macro policy coordination

The China-US Economic Working Group held its seventh meeting in Johannesburg on Dec 12.

And the China-US Financial Working Group held its seventh meeting in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, from Sunday to Monday.

At a time when the macro policies of both China and the United States are in a critical period of adjustment, with the US being in a government transition, the renewed communication sends an important signal that the two countries will maintain smooth communication channels in economy and finance.

At the Johannesburg meeting, the two sides held candid, in-depth and constructive talks on their macroeconomic policies and their joint response to global challenges. The Chinese side expressed concern over the economic and trade restrictions the US is imposing on China.

And at the Nanjing meeting, the two sides had professional, pragmatic, candid and constructive communication on the global economic and financial situation and monetary policy, financial stability and supervision, international financial governance, securities and capital markets, anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing, and other financial policy issues of concern to both countries.

The China-US economic and financial working groups are part of a communication mechanism established to implement the important consensus reached between the heads of state of the two countries at the Bali and San Francisco summits.

China's central authorities have made clear that the country will implement a more proactive fiscal policy and a moderately loose monetary policy, while the US is in a transition period, during which its future policies remain rather uncertain.

When the specific details of the macro policies of the two countries are yet to be further analyzed and deployed, this is a good opportunity for mutual communication and coordination.

Since the beginning of this year, the US has hyped up China's "excess capacity" and even imposed export control measures on 136 Chinese entities in the semiconductor industry. That the US recently said it would impose higher tariffs on China has also caused grave concern in China. In fact, Chinese industries that have been subject to the US' punitive tariffs have maintained a growth trend, while it is US consumers that have to pay the price for higher tariffs.

The two sides should continue to strengthen their dialogue and communication to enhance mutual understanding and consensus on many issues of common concern.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Ending the year with one more Long March

A Long March 2D rocket launched in Shanxi province on Tuesday successfully placed four PIESAT-2 satellites into their designated orbits.

Among the nine launches of the Long March rockets this year, this last one stands out as it involved sending four satellites into space via a single rocket. To meet the requirements for satellite deployment, the rocket has a diameter of 3.8 meters. Its larger internal space allows for omnidirectional wave transmission, providing ample space for the satellites and making satellite-to-ground communication more convenient.

Reports indicate that next year, at least eight more satellites of the PIESAT-2 series will be launched, including four sun-synchronous orbit X-SAR satellites and four low-angle C-SAR satellites. The 20 satellites in orbit will fully realize global network operations, significantly enhancing satellite response capabilities.

During the launch of the Long March 2D rocket, its team encountered snowy weather, with temperatures dropping below minus 20 degrees Centigrade. Low temperatures are always a challenge for the aerospace industry. In 1986, the US space shuttle Challenger blew up primarily because extremely low temperatures caused rubber O-rings in the solid rocket boosters to become brittle and fail to seal properly.

More than 30 years later, human space technology has made significant leaps forward, but dealing with low temperatures remains a concern. To mitigate the adverse effects of cold weather, researchers applied thermal insulation layers to the rocket's fairing and critical sections and used ground air ducts at the launch tower to continuously supply warm air to the rocket.

This mission marks the 553rd flight of the Long March rocket series. Years of continuous flights have fully demonstrated its excellent performance and high reliability, providing a strong endorsement for Chinese rockets to serve the world.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Local govts must rein in 'involutionary' competition

The Central Economic Work Conference, which concluded last week, stressed the urgency of addressing "involutionary" competition.

The dog-eat-dog competition is mainly manifested in fierce homogeneous competition among enterprises. In the case of excessive consumption of resources without improving productivity, the competition leads to price competition, which continuously transmits cost pressure and profit loss to enterprises. If unchecked, the enterprises will have no energy to open new markets, seek innovation or enhance efficiency.

Such competition is emerging in the new energy vehicle, lithium battery and photovoltaic industries in particular. The lack of international competition has prompted enterprises to try and seize market share through price competition and then reduce costs through large-scale production.

That calls for the central authorities to standardize the enforcement of local investment promotion laws and regulations to avoid illegal policy support and subsidies, and improve the pricing mechanism that should be determined mainly by market supply and demand to prevent the local governments from improperly intervening in these industries.

Preventing local governments from intervening in market competition, optimizing the performance evaluation of local officials, and establishing a unified national market can all promote healthy competition.

Local protectionism is another reason for the overcapacity of some low-end and backward production and the formation of "involutionary" competition. Local governments usually pay more attention to expanding investment and production because they can quickly boost the local GDP, tax revenue and employment. This provides space for the survival of low-end and backward production capacity, which is easier to be expanded, and helps them reduce costs and gain advantages in price competition.

Apart from curbing the irrational support of local governments, the healthy development of platform enterprises is also conducive to addressing the issue. The algorithms of the platform companies are oriented toward the highest efficiency and lowest cost, and are reinforced by various scoring and penalty mechanisms, which exacerbate the "involutionary" competition on the sales side, generating a strong transmission effect on the production side. Therefore, platform companies have an important role to play to address the "involutionary" competition.

The government must thus create a rule-of-law business environment that runs on long-term investment, fair competition, stable policy expectations, and a clearly defined relationship between the government and market entities. In particular, intellectual property protection should be implemented so that enterprises can focus on improving their innovation and management rather than trying to lower their production costs to survive the cutthroat "involutionary" competition.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT

Li Ke

Graduates must embrace AI revolution

Employment is the most basic component of people's well-being. So the annual Central Economic Work Conference held from Dec 11 to 12 stressed focusing more on an employment-first strategy and ensuring stable employment for key groups.

The priority here is employment for college graduates, as promoting their high-quality and full employment has a bearing on the country's basic employment situation, the interests of every graduate and the healthy development of the economy and society.

Against the backdrop of the complex and ever-changing global situation, the authorities should pay attention to talent needs and lead the new trend of industrial development to balance the supply and demand of talent and alleviate structural employment contradictions. They should also strive to boost high-quality and full employment of graduates, who will face a more severe employment situation next year.

According to the Ministry of Education, the number of university graduates across China is projected to reach 12.22 million in 2025, up 430,000 from the previous year. Predictably, the number of graduates will remain high in the coming few years, and the job market will be overburdened from the oversupply of job-seeking graduates.

It is worth noting that a growing number of fresh university graduates will not start working right after graduation. The severe employment pressure has led many graduates to opt for delayed or flexible employment in their quest for stable jobs. While this has eased the tension in the job market to a certain extent, it has also made the overall employment situation more complicated.

From the perspective of employers, new changes have taken place in the labor market. On the one hand, China's employment market is facing prominent overall pressure and structural problems due to rapid demographic changes, economic restructuring, and in-depth adjustments in the global industry chain. As a result, some traditional industries are undergoing transformation and upgrading, resulting in a decrease in job positions and a changing demand for talent.

On the other hand, while new industries have generated fresh job prospects, they are unable to accommodate all graduates. Overall, total employment pressure will coexist with prominent structural problems, and the demand has shifted from low-skilled and low-cost workers to high-quality employees.

Currently, there is a mismatch between graduate supply and demand in the job market. An increasing number of youth graduate every year, but some of them can hardly find suitable jobs.

Plus, the development of artificial intelligence has impacted the concepts and models of traditional employment. The widespread application of AI has polarized the job market, with an increase in demand for high-skilled and highly creative jobs and significant reduction in low-skilled and repetitive jobs. But the supply and demand of such talents is unbalanced. One reason for this is that universities cannot cultivate enough talents to work in industries such as AI, new energy and semiconductors.

It will help if universities adjust the structure of disciplines to adapt to the economic and social development. Some newly emerged and interdisciplinary majors fail to cultivate sufficient talent to meet demand, while some traditional majors are producing an excess of graduates. It is noteworthy that many universities struggle to nurture students' core abilities such as innovation and creativity, resulting in a devaluation of academic qualifications.

As such, the governments at different levels, universities, enterprises and society should cooperate to introduce measures to optimize the supportive system of employment and improve the adaptability of talent supply and demand, to promote high-quality and full employment of graduates.

First of all, favorable policies should be implemented to boost an employment-first strategy. Efforts should be made to strengthen coordination among fiscal subsidies, tax incentives, financial support and social security to unleash employment dividends.

Amid a new wave of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, it is imperative for the government to institute a predictive mechanism for human resources. This mechanism should promptly release a catalogue of urgently required occupations, elucidating the labor market's demand orientation.

Furthermore, it is essential to promote modern industries to generate more employment opportunities. China should prioritize support for industries and enterprises with robust job creation capabilities to cultivate new drivers of growth. By developing new technologies and tapping into new markets, a modern industrial system can be established to create more fitting employment opportunities for graduates. Encouraging private firms and small to medium-sized enterprises to hire more graduates is also paramount.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to improve a legal guarantee system for entrepreneurship to drive employment, introduce labor standards for new employment groups and encourage graduates to start their own businesses and find flexible employment. Hence, the pressure of economic transformation can be turned into employment potential.

Last but not least, universities should reform by integrating their academic traditions, the expertise of their faculty, and regional advantages to establish emerging disciplines that can educate individuals capable of meeting the demands of new industries and business models. University personnel should engage with employers to understand evolving job requirements and innovate educational approaches. Moreover, graduates should receive guidance to make informed career decisions and adjust their salary expectations. Support should also be extended to assist economically disadvantaged young graduates in securing employment opportunities.

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

JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Amakobe Sande

2024 policies signal a promising future for children

This year has seen the framing of a range of new policies for children in China, which hold the promise of significant advances across a range of children's issues. This is especially important for those children who have been left behind — such as those with disabilities or affected by migration — despite China's rapid modernization in recent decades.

Global Lens

A series of recent initiatives, including the National Action Plan for Migrant Children, the Preschool Education Law, and the Employment-First Strategy demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the lives of children and young people across the country. UNICEF welcomes these measures. The Chinese government's move of taking comprehensive action on children and family issues is commendable. These are also issues that UNICEF has advocated on.

The National Action Plan for Migrant Children, for example, is a landmark policy that addresses the specific needs of a particularly vulnerable group. In 2020, 138 million children in China — nearly half the country's child population — were affected by migration. Of these, 67 million were left behind by migrating parents, particularly in rural areas, while 71 million moved to cities with their parents, who migrated in search of work.

By ensuring that migrant children have access to quality education, healthcare and social services, regardless of their parents' *hukou* (household registration) status, China is taking a significant step toward ensuring a more equitable and family-friendly society.

The Preschool Education Law is another important piece of legislation that has the potential to transform early childhood education in China. By setting higher standards for educators, improving infrastructure and expanding access to preschool education, especially for children with disabilities, this law provides a stronger foundation to help children develop the skills and knowledge they need. Importantly, this law confirms the right of all children to access education, including in remote and less well-off parts of China.

Children's issues apart, China is also making strides on family-friendly policies to address its declining birth rates. These include a set of new policies called "Several Measures on Accelerating the Improvement of the Birth Support Policy System". By introducing nationwide child grants, expanding maternity insurance coverage to a wider range of workers, and increasing the supply of inclusive childcare services, the government is taking concrete actions to support people who want to raise a family.

These measures, some of which were informed by UN research and advocacy, are important for enhancing China's human capital. Child grants, for example, are a globally proven way of improving child development outcomes in areas such as education, health and nutrition. They also promote family integration, ensuring that parents can cover the basic expenses involved in raising children, especially during the critical early years.

China's Employment-First Strategy, meanwhile, is a comprehensive approach to ensure stable and high-quality employment. By promoting job creation in emerging sectors such as the digital economy and green industries, this strategy can help alleviate poverty and improve living standards for families across the country, particularly young people who are entering the work force for the first time.

China's green transition is not only essential for environmental sustainability, but also for the long-term well-being of its children. By investing in renewable energy, clean technologies and sustainable agriculture, China can help create a healthier and more resilient planet for future generations.

Children also benefit when policies improve the environment for working mothers. By providing maternity and paternity leave, childcare support and flexible work arrangements, China can create a more favorable environment for working mothers and their families. This is an area where more can be done by the government and the private sector.

While the recent policy changes are undoubtedly positive for children, some challenges remain. Key issues are coordination across different parts of government and the ability of sub-national governments to adequately fund, implement and monitor these important measures.

By working together, central and local governments can ensure consistent and effective policy implementation. Investing in the training and development of teachers, healthcare workers and social workers will enhance the quality of services provided to children. Public awareness campaigns can empower families to access services. Regular monitoring and evaluation will help track progress and identify areas for improvement. Collaboration with the private sector, academia and community-based organizations can strengthen service delivery. Last but not least, it is critical to listen to the children themselves to know about the challenges they face, and include them in the decision-making processes on the issues that affect them.

UNICEF is committed to supporting the Chinese government and other partners in implementing these policies for children and families, as well as to advocate for the rights of every child. We hope that we can grasp the opportunity presented by these new policies — and others that will follow — to create a more inclusive and equitable society where every child in China can thrive.

The author is the UNICEF representative to China.
The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Zhang Yongpan

Border peace serves shared interests of China, India

Both China and India are ancient civilizations whose interactions transcend even the formidable barrier of the Himalayas. Despite this historical connection, the border issue between China and India has persisted unresolved for over a century. Since India's independence and the founding of the People's Republic of China in the mid-20th century, bilateral relations have navigated through phases of honeymoon, confrontation, and ongoing enhancement and growth.

The border standoff since 2020 dealt a blow to the bilateral ties of the two biggest developing countries, which does not serve the fundamental interests of China and India and their peoples.

In reality, China has consistently emphasized the significance of resolving the border issue through peaceful and diplomatic channels, maintaining open lines of communication with India. This approach has facilitated the management of disputes and the containment of potential conflicts. The establishment of a working mechanism for consultation and coordination on border affairs between the two nations, along with various meetings and the implementation of a military exchange mechanism, has proven beneficial in this regard.

The meeting between President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit held in Kazan, Russia, on Oct 23, the first one in five years, set the stage for narrowed differences, greater consensus-building, ease, cooperation, peace, and tranquility in the border areas.

The border issue remains a lingering challenge stemming from a bygone era of colonialism and hegemony. It can be easily exploited by various forces to strain the bilateral relations between the two largest developing countries.

India now seems to acknowledge the adverse effects of these actions and is demonstrating a readiness to engage with China in a more genuine and constructive manner. In recent years, New Delhi had intensified its scrutiny of Chinese investments, disrupted direct flights, and nearly imposed a blanket ban on visas for Chinese nationals. However, these measures backfired, leading to substantial economic setbacks for India.

By actively engaging in joint efforts to address climate change, China and India can set a positive example for the world and make significant contributions toward a more sustainable planet.

In response, chip manufacturers and other related industries within India protested against these restrictions, emphasizing that such measures were detrimental to India's high-end manufacturing sector. They called on the Indian government to ease these restrictions to prevent further harm to the industry.

As one of the countries that initiated the Non-Aligned Movement, India should be well aware of the severe consequences of fully joining the Western camp. Thankfully, all successive Indian administrations have underscored that non-alignment remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy. India continues to prioritize fostering relationships with nations across the globe, thereby playing a crucial role in both regional and international affairs.

It is a significant fact that China has surpassed the United States to become India's largest trading partner, fostering increased collaboration in areas such as electronics manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, electric vehicles, investment, water monitoring, ecological protection, and low-carbon development.

Partly due to the previous confrontation with China, India's economy suffered a significant blow. Though in June Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared victory for his alliance in India's general election, his party lost seats to a stronger than expected opposition.

Recent statements by India's External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, suggest a shift in perspective. Jaishankar's remarks indicate that Chinese enterprises could actually contribute positively to India's economic growth and development.

In the future, realizing common national rejuvenation between the two most populous countries has gone beyond the scope of ordinary bilateral relations. Against this backdrop, China and India should enhance mutual trust.

Both countries should actively pursue avenues to bolster people-to-people exchanges, engage in dialogue, and foster mutual understanding. While striving for closer ties, India and China must address various challenges with wisdom and diplomacy. It is crucial for both nations to uphold their commitments; historically, China has demonstrated reliability in keeping its word, and it is crucial for India to reciprocate with the same level of integrity and commitment.

China and India have the potential to forge stronger cooperation agreements on climate change. As the two most populous countries, their collaboration is vital for the well-being of all humankind. By actively engaging in joint efforts to address climate change, China and India can set a positive example for the world and make significant contributions toward a more sustainable planet.

Certain Western political entities are attempting to exploit the border disputes between China and India to sow discord. However, India should remain steadfast in its practice of maintaining a balanced and multifaceted diplomatic approach.

The year of 2025 marks the 75th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties between China and India. The longstanding history of peaceful interactions between the two nations underscores that peace is the cornerstone of China-India relations and aligns with the prevailing sentiment of global communities and regions. As ancient civilizations and emerging economies in the East, it is in the best interest of both countries to steer back toward cooperation and mutual understanding. This trajectory reflects the shared aspiration of peace-loving individuals worldwide.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

GUO JING

Damage control

Uncertainty in the global economic outlook has put a brake on the engine of global growth and led to the rise of statism

For more than a decade, elections taking place in the world's major countries, such as the United States, have not only intensified political divisions, but also increased their external influence. This reflects a remarkable feature of the world — it is undergoing a period of adjustment. Statism, which is playing an increasingly important role, has become a new tool to achieve global economic circulation and a rebalancing of national power. Its core objective is to safeguard and enhance national interests in the context of economic globalization.

The year 2024, hailed as a "super election year", has witnessed national elections in more than 70 countries across the world. It has served as a "thermometer" and "weather vane" for the world.

This year's elections have continued the existing trends. First, the traditional big parties, such as the center-left and center-right parties, have embraced far-right policies in certain sectors, for instance, putting in place stricter immigration policies and higher trade barriers, and justifying them in the name of "national security".

Second, the priority of livelihood issues has been significantly increased. Major parties in different countries are paying more attention to responding to the needs of the people. This year, the parties that have won elections with a large increase in votes, including some far-right parties, have downplayed extreme nationalism and put forth new propositions on economic issues and redistribution issues such as taxation, education, medical services, income, employment and immigration, thus winning the support of the middle-income and lower-income groups.

Third, the lack of a leading political party that can control the situation and the fact that "large parties are not strong, while small parties are not weak" have made policymaking a political game with high uncertainty.

Since the 1990s, globalization has accelerated and national economies have become highly interconnected. International trade, capital flows, technology transfer and multinational corporations have made countries increasingly dependent on global markets.

The global economic circulation driven by global capital flow has benefited many countries, especially emerging economies, which have enjoyed rapid development.

ZHANG TING / FOR CHINA DAILY

But while enjoying the economic growth brought about by the global market, many countries have also faced new challenges. The increasingly extended global industrial chains have exacerbated the wealth gap and structural imbalances.

These problems have become more acute in recent years. In particular, global supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic, frequent global trade frictions and intensifying geopolitical tensions have led to the soaring prices of daily goods and energy. Moreover, many countries and regions that rely on external markets have more fragile economic structures. These issues have led to the debate on whether national sovereignty has been weakened. Major political parties in many countries have an increasing tendency to advocate statism in their campaigns. The outcry to adjust and change the existing global economic rules has become increasingly strong.

Statism does not entirely mean opposing globalization or moving toward isolation. Rather, it means using national sovereignty to create protectionist policies and industrial policy tools, reset international trade rules and reshape the global industrial chains by forming new regional markets, alliance-driven markets and domestic markets, so as to maintain a country's advantageous position in the global value chain and foster domestic industries that are competitive in the global economy.

At the same time, the national tax policy should be innovated, by cultivating new tax sources for new forms of economic business, innovating fiscal and tax tools, such as rectifying tax evasion and increasing windfall profits tax. These measures could enhance a country's financial resources, improve the national redistribution capacity and beef up fiscal expenditure to improve people's livelihoods, so as to more effectively enhance national competitiveness and improve social welfare.

Statism, which has accompanied the process of globalization, has undergone four waves. The first wave was before the Industrial Revolution. Back then, Western Europe promoted colonial expansion and established a global economic circulation system in which colonies provided resources for the industrialized countries. The state machinery directly served capital accumulation and overseas expansion.

The second wave was when some countries turned to the "war state" model to serve their military buildup, in order to compete for colonial resources and international markets, which eventually led to the two World Wars.

The third wave, after World War II, saw the rise of national liberation and independence movements across the world, which completely disintegrated the colonial system.

The fourth wave began in the 1960s, when developed countries dominated the global market by virtue of their technological innovation and capital advantages, and established "welfare states". East Asian countries achieved rapid growth through export-oriented economies, benefiting other developing countries and boosting their growth too. This wave of statism was characterized by countries' active participation in and promotion of economic globalization, which promoted the formation of "hyper-globalization".

Statism is once again on the rise across the globe because the "hyper-globalization" system cannot be sustained. Under this model, the markets of developed countries are the terminals of global economic circulation, and the global production and supply chain of goods and services is ultimately designed to meet the needs of developed countries. In the global industrial chain, developed countries profit from their dominance of the design, research and development and other high value-added links, while developing countries are mainly responsible for low-end production and raw material supply. The final income and consumption demand are concentrated in developed countries.

Since 2008, there has been a serious crisis in the global economic circulation that centers on the market and technology of developed countries. Since then, Western countries led by the US have tried to "decouple" from China and promote the transfer and return of industries. However, they have failed to solve their internal problems, with their national fiscal deficit widening and fiscal austerity leading to the increasing poverty of the middle-income and lower-income groups.

Judging from the rise of far-right parties, if this problem is not effectively solved, the conservative wave will continue to gain strength in Europe and the US. Under this pressure, mainstream political parties in Europe and the US have promoted the adjustment of interests domestically.

The rise of statism in European nations and the US, which stand in the center of the global economic circulation, is more destructive than constructive. The global industrial chains and supply chains have been severely disrupted, and countries have suffered huge economic losses. Global economic development is facing the danger of interruption and stagnation. Uncertainty in the global economic outlook has put a brake on the engine of global growth.

In the face of this situation, more and more political parties in developing countries are vigorously seeking to enhance national political stability and governance effectiveness, optimize domestic economic and social order, foster internal growth momentum, and promote international cooperation for common development.

The author is a researcher at the Institute of Political Science at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LI WEI

Flat world is nothing but a utopia

The overt and covert competition between China and the US has made it extremely difficult for companies to walk a tightrope between the two countries

As a cornerstone of the information and communications technology industry and the burgeoning artificial intelligence industry, semiconductors are becoming the battlefield of industrial competition between major countries. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the global leading manufacturer of semiconductors with cutting-edge technologies in the fabrication of advanced chips, in reality is caught in the rivalry between superpowers and faces a strategic dilemma.

On the one hand, TSMC's production should be highly concentrated given the comparative advantages of factor endowments and the characteristics of the chipmaking industry, while on the other hand, the company has been forced to build new factories across multiple regions due to political pressure and security concerns, which has significantly pushed up its operating costs.

The plight TSMC faces is essentially that of a super company caught in geopolitical pressures. As geopolitical relations worsen and industrial competition escalates, super companies of strategic significance are forced to take sides between major countries, thus making it difficult to balance security and efficiency.

The predicament of TSMC lies in the fact that, as a highly globalized enterprise, it is both dependent on the United States and the Chinese mainland. The company relies on the US for technology and funding, while it needs the Chinese mainland in terms of market and production.

When China and the US jointly pushed forward economic globalization, TSMC developed rapidly by capitalizing on the resources of both sides. But as the growing rivalry between the two nations splits the current international economic order and geopolitical tensions spill over to the commercial world, TSMC has got caught in the crossfire and is forced to pick a side between these two powers. The enterprise is increasingly worried about the security risks brought by the weaponization of economic issues. Stuck in the middle of the China-US competition, the Taiwan-based company faces the dilemma of being forced to choose whether to "lean toward one side", or strive to maintain "having it both ways".

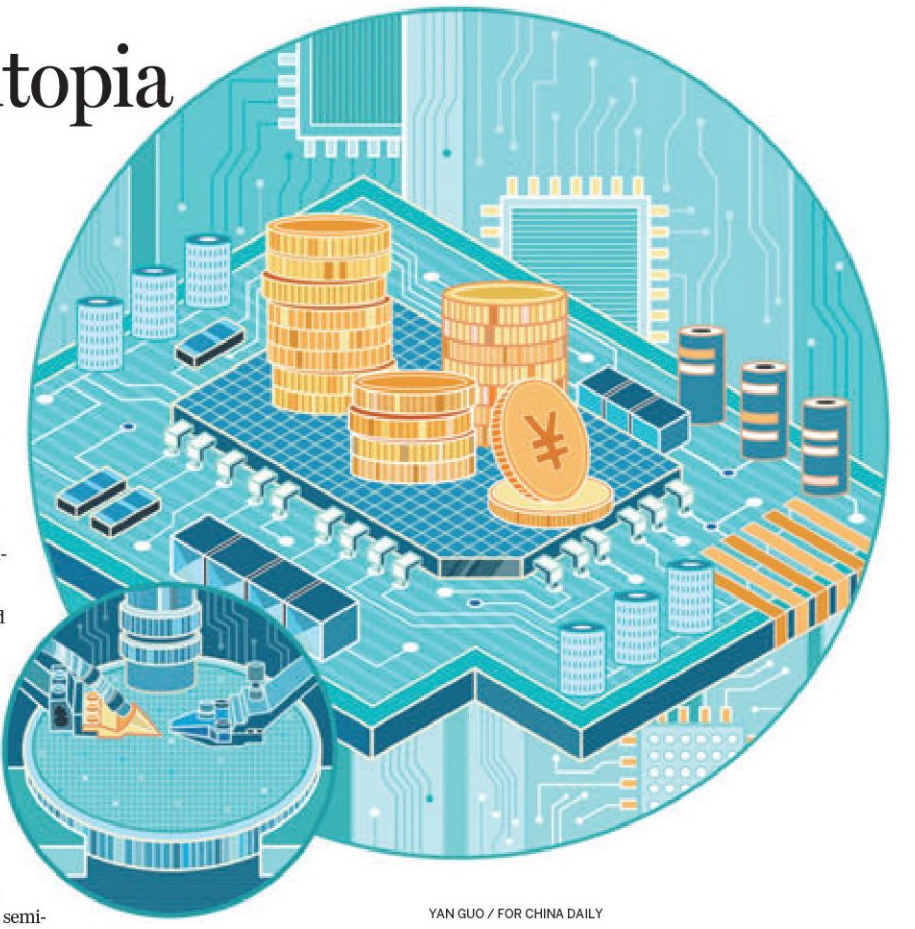
The story of TSMC epitomizes how super companies that have achieved immense success because of globalization become vulnerable amid the torrents of geopolitics. Unable to stay away from politics, these companies have to make cautious decisions in a worsening geopolitical environment and struggle to survive major-country competition.

On the one hand, the US provides critical technological support for TSMC to seek its own benefits. In the 1960s, the outsourcing of the US' semiconductor industry helped Taiwan gain a foothold in the field.

In the 1980s, when a trade conflict broke out between the US and Japan over semiconductors, the US chose to support the development of the semiconductor industry in China's Taiwan region and the Republic of Korea in a bid to reshape the industrial landscape in East Asia. It is in this background that TSMC was born and then grew rapidly, thanks to contracts from semiconductor giants Intel and Apple. Today, TSMC still relies heavily on the US upstream suppliers for technologies and services, and is subject to the technology system dominated by the US.

On the other hand, the US provides vital financing support to TSMC, which is a capital-intensive enterprise. Listed on the Taiwan Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange, TSMC is largely dependent on the latter for financing. Depository institutions represented by Citibank are major platforms through which TSMC raises funds.

At the same time, TSMC is reliant on the Chinese mainland for its market and production capacity.



YAN GUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

First, as the "world's factory", the Chinese mainland has a well-established ecosystem for semiconductors and related industries, abundant labor force, advanced infrastructure and supportive policies, thereby attracting TSMC and related industrial chains from around the world.

Since TSMC was founded in 1987, the Chinese mainland has been the company's only destination for setting up factories outside of Taiwan — except for the past few years when it expanded overseas in the context of escalating geopolitical competition. TSMC built a foundry in Shanghai in 2002 and another one in Nanjing, East China's Jiangsu province, in 2016. As for its US foray, TSMC began to build its first fab in Arizona in April 2021, but delayed its full production until 2025 because of a shortage of specialist workers.

Second, the Chinese mainland is the biggest export market for Taiwan's integrated circuits, and the world's largest consumer market for semiconductors. This makes it impossible for TSMC to completely give up the Chinese mainland market and throw itself into the arms of the US.

These factors mean TSMC is caught in a complex dilemma. It is compelled by the US to sacrifice efficiency and build factories in the US, Japan and Europe, where manufacturing costs are higher; and it also needs to "fight" the US' high-tech ban on China, and seek an exemption for the export of semiconductor manufacturing equipment so as to expand its production lines in Nanjing. The overt and covert competition between China and the US revolving around TSMC has made it more difficult for the company to walk a tightrope between the two countries.

The story of TSMC epitomizes how super companies that have achieved immense success because of globalization become vulnerable amid the torrents of geopolitics. Unable to stay away from politics, these companies have to make cautious decisions in a worsening geopolitical environment and struggle to survive major-country competition. In this sense, the so-called flat world is nothing but a utopia created by liberalism.

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Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Social Media Digest

Table for one

Last month, a man dining at a hotpot restaurant in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, found himself in an awkward situation when he returned to his table after briefly stepping away to fetch more dipping sauce, only to discover it had been cleared. This incident highlights some of the uncomfortable scenarios solo diners may face in China.

Portion sizes can also be a challenge: one dish may be insufficient, two dishes may be too much, and adding soup could exceed one's budget. Solo diners often find themselves making trade-offs between their finances, taste preferences, and nutritional balance.

The number of single individuals has been steadily increasing in China in recent years. According to the *China Population & Employment Statistical Yearbook 2023*, China had 240 million single people in 2023, with projections suggesting this number will likely surpass 300 million by the end of 2024.

However, dining alone is not always a necessity; it can also be a deliberate choice. As a netizen shared with 36Kr, a news website, she found dining alone to be more time-saving than dining with others, as it allows one to choose freely without having to consider other people's tastes and preferences.

From the restaurant's perspective, catering to solo diners is also more efficient and reduces food wastage. Some hotpot restaurants have already responded by introducing one-person sets and "stepping out" signs for solo customers.

The number of solo diners has been increasing in China. VCG

Flawless no more

In a world where filters can turn us into flawless versions of ourselves — if only temporarily — social media platforms are beginning to rethink their impact on self-image, especially among teenagers.

At its recent European Safety Forum in Dublin, TikTok announced that it will prohibit users under 18 from using beauty filters and prevent those under 13 from accessing the platform in the coming weeks. By the end of this year, TikTok will also launch a new automated system that employs machine learning to accurately assess user ages and detect those attempting to bypass age restrictions.

Underage users will no longer be able to apply filters that enlarge their eyes, plump lips, smooth skin, or alter skin color. However, decorative and fun filters, such as adding bunny ears or a dog nose, will still be available.

This move comes in response to widespread criticism that TikTok's beauty filters could lead to negative emotions among teenage users, particularly girls, who may feel pressured to conform to an unrealistic standard of beauty.

"Teens and parents raised concerns about 'appearance' effects, including that those viewing the content might not realize it had been altered," Christine Grahn, head of TikTok's Public Policy & Government Relations in Europe, wrote in a newsroom statement. "By fostering a culture of authenticity, respect, and support, we can create a digital world where everyone feels empowered to be their true self."

LI XINRAN

Anxiety about their appearance is common among teenagers, especially girls. VCG

The ties that bind

Young people reflect on the connection between Macao and the Chinese mainland and the changes that have transpired over a quarter century.

LIANG GUOXIU / CHINA DAILY

"Many elderly people in Macao still speak it today. I was pleasantly surprised to hear my hometown dialect when I visited."

Wong Kuan-wai, 21, a student at Shanghai International Studies University

"I truly value the development opportunities Macao has today, and after graduating, I aim to use what I've learned to contribute to Macao's growth."

Ng Wan-hei, 19, a student at Renmin University of China

"Watching my classmates from Beijing perform and sing our local music made me realize how music truly unites us."

Chan Hou-fong, 25, a cellist

"These differences don't create distance between us; instead, they become interesting conversation starters that help bring us closer together."

Song Wei, 28, a student at the China University of Political Science and Law

"Many people from Macao now work on the mainland, which has greatly narrowed the cultural and lifestyle differences between the two places."

Iao Weng-u, 20, a student at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

By MENG WENJIE
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Chan Hou-fong, a 25-year-old cellist from Macao, was born in 1999 — the same year Macao returned to China.

"I grew up alongside the Macao Special Administrative Region", Chan said. "My mom often tells me that she was holding me, just 2 months old, when we both witnessed this historic moment."

In 2017, Chan moved to Beijing to study cello at the Central Conservatory of Music. He recalled that the school regularly organized orchestra performances and exchange events with universities in Macao, featuring a mix of folk songs from Cantonese-speaking regions.

"Watching my classmates from Beijing perform and sing our local music made me realize how music truly unites us," Chan said.

The connection between Macao and the Chinese mainland is also reflected in their shared language and culture.

The family of Wong Kuan-wai, a 21-year-old student at Shanghai International Studies University, is a perfect example of this bond, with his mother from Macao, and his father from Zhongshan in Guangdong province.

Wong discovered that, over a century ago, the dialect spoken in Macao was the same as in Zhongshan, both being variations of the Shiqi dialect.

"Many elderly people in Macao still speak it today. I was pleasantly surprised to hear my hometown dialect when I visited," he said.

Wong's grandparents moved to Macao in the 1960s and 70s. Before Macao's return to China, travel between the two regions was difficult. However, the historic reunification 25 years ago helped many families reunite.

In addition to cultural and family ties, 20-year-old Iao Weng-u has noticed that young people from Macao and the mainland are increasingly connected through popular culture.

"Mainland brands are opening stores in Macao, and young people there are also enjoying mainland TV dramas," said Iao, a translation major at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Jiangsu province. "Many people from Macao now work on the mainland, which has greatly narrowed the cultural and lifestyle differences between the two places."

Bridging cultures

Despite this growing common ground, Iao acknowledges that differences remain due to Macao's unique blend of Chinese and Western influences.

"China is a vast country, and it's natural that different regions have their own unique characteristics and customs," he said. "I enjoy introducing Macao to my mainland friends, and they often share their hometown traditions with me as well. This exchange deepens our mutual understanding."

Song Wei, 28, holds a similar perspective, noting that the differences between Macao and the mainland are part of a broader cultural diversity across China. "These differences don't create distance between us; instead, they become interesting conversation starters that help bring us closer together," she said.

Currently pursuing a PhD at the China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing, Song was born in Fujian province and moved to Macao as a teenager.

She has witnessed significant economic growth in Macao since its return to China, particularly through the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the establishment of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin in 2021. Both initiatives have brought new economic opportunities to the region.

"Macao is small, but the In-Depth Cooperation Zone has expanded its potential for growth, helping diversify the economy beyond its traditional dependence on the entertainment industry," Song explained.

For example, she noted that Macao has been investing in its healthcare sector, attracting leading mainland medical institutions.

One notable development is the Islands Healthcare Complex — Macao Medical Center of Peking Union Medical College Hospital, a joint initiative between the Macao SAR government and Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

Song's studies focus on medical and administrative regulation. "By studying the mainland's systems, I hope to bridge the two regions and foster greater cooperation in healthcare," she said.

Thriving together

Ng Wan-hei, 19, has deep roots in Macao, with her family tracing back to her grandfather's generation. She learned from her elders that before 1999, Macao struggled with poor security and an unemployment rate consistently above 5 percent.

"After Macao's return to China, the most noticeable change was the improvement in the social environment. People found stable jobs, which gave Macao renewed confidence and hope for the future," Ng said.

She added that, over the past 25 years, Macao has made great strides in housing and education, significantly improving the quality of life for its residents.

Ng was actively involved in the General Association of Chinese Students of Macao, where she represented students in public consultations with the Macao SAR government. This experience sparked her passion for political studies and deepened her understanding of Macao's society and the well-being of its people.

Now pursuing international politics at Renmin University of China in Beijing, Ng hopes to become a policy researcher in the future. "I truly value the development opportunities Macao has today, and after graduating, I aim to use what I've learned to contribute to Macao's growth," she said.

Chan is currently preparing for a special performance on Dec 19 at Hou Kong Middle School in Macao, his alma mater, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to China. The school is historically significant, as the first place in Macao to raise the Chinese national flag on Oct 1, 1949, the day the People's Republic of China was founded.

"Returning to my alma mater at such an important time, performing with friends from both Macao and the mainland, and sharing our experiences with the younger students in Macao — it really fills me with pride," Chan said.

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Youth forge stronger ties

Dialogue brings together youth leaders from China and Africa to explore modernization, foster cultural exchange, and strengthen bilateral cooperation.

By **GUO JIATONG** and **LIU KUN** in Wuhan

Phelendaba Pearl Chunga, a 32-year-old diplomat at the Zambian Embassy in Beijing, was amazed by the stunning landscapes, rich culture, and well-preserved history during her first visit to Hubei province, where the fourth China-Africa Future Leaders' Dialogue was held.

From Dec 7 to 11, organized by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the event brought together Chinese and African youth leaders in Hubei under the theme "Joining Hands to Advance Modernization".

It aimed to foster cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and win-win cooperation while deepening discussions on modernization.

The five-day journey began in Yichang, located at the boundary between the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze River, where the delegation observed how China has balanced economic development with environmental sustainability through the world's largest water control and hydroelectric project, the Three Gorges Dam.

Lamek Aluvilu Nauta, a 38-year-old Namibian student at the Shanghai National Accounting Institute, was impressed by how the dam effectively leverages the region's large water flow and steep terrain to achieve multiple functions.

He learned that the dam separates two water reservoirs at different elevations. When its gate opens, water flows from the higher reservoir to the lower by the force of gravity, converting hydro-energy into electricity through turbines that supply 10 percent of the country's electricity consumption.

Chunga shared a similar sentiment. "The dam stands as a symbol of technological innovation, renewable energy, and flood control, while also boosting local industries, tourism, and transportation," she said. "This offers valuable lessons for Africa on achieving sustainable economic progress through responsible resource management."

In addition to harnessing its natural resources for economic growth, Hubei is also nurturing emerging industries with a focus on high-tech advancements.

For example, Voyah, a leading Chinese brand in the new energy vehicle sector, integrates cutting-edge technology to promote green and low-carbon development.

African youth leaders visit the Three Gorges Project Museum in Yichang, Hubei province, on Dec 8. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Victor Alfonso Obiang Ondo Ayetebe, a 28-year-old computer science and technology student from Equatorial Guinea at Beijing Institute of Technology, was particularly impressed by the company's autonomous driving vehicles.

"The car can park itself without the help of the driver, which is amazing. I hope companies like Voyah will expand to countries in Africa, such as Equatorial Guinea, which has good bilateral relations with China," he said.

Rim Dif, 36, an Algerian graduate student at the Shanghai National Accounting Institute, was also captivated by Voyah's innovative approach to combining speed, comfort, and stability.

"No matter how divergent our views may be, our strength and wealth rely on our differences. Hand in hand, we can achieve better and bigger results than we can on our own."

Rim Dif, an Algerian student at the Shanghai National Accounting Institute

"We had the opportunity not only to witness their wedding traditions but also to be part of them. I felt like we were one big family with everyone at the wedding."

Lamek Aluvilu Nauta, a Namibian student at the Shanghai National Accounting Institute

She discovered that its vehicles can accelerate from 0 to 100 km/h in less than four seconds — an attribute typically associated with sports cars — while ensuring safety.

"Integrating this feature into both a seven-seater minivan and an SUV model underscores the level of innovation and technology that Voyah has achieved, especially considering that all of the company's cars are either hybrid or electric," Dif said.

For Nauta, the highlight of the event was visiting the Tribe of the Three Gorges scenic area, where he was touched by the warm hospitality of the Tujia ethnic group at a joyful local wedding.

"We had the opportunity not only to witness their wedding traditions but also to be part of them. I felt like we were one big family with everyone at the wedding," said Nauta.

Chunga was also deeply moved. "Visiting the tribe made me feel connected to the local people and their customs," she said. "The use of music for storytelling reminds me of Zambian cultures, where history and traditions are also preserved through music and storytelling."

For Dif, the most significant takeaway was how exchange activities like this help young people understand each other's visions and see the world from different perspectives.

"No matter how divergent our views may be, our strength and wealth rely on our differences. Hand in hand, we can achieve better and bigger results than we can on our own," she said.

Patrick Mushitsi, a 32-year-old Burundian PhD student in international relations at the University of International Business and Economics and president of the Association of Burundian Diaspora in China, reflected on how the trip highlighted the shared histories between China and Africa.

He noted that both regions boast ancient civilizations, rich cultural traditions, and have faced similar challenges in the past, such as poverty and inequality, which have deepened their solidarity and cooperation.

"When I return home, I will share with my peers what I have learned from China," he said. "I also intend to organize a similar event in my country and invite young Chinese leaders to experience Burundian culture to foster greater people-to-people exchange."

Deng Zhiyan, an undergraduate student from Hubei University and a volunteer at the event, spoke at the farewell gala, calling for joint efforts to advance modernization and build a better world.

"The young generation of China and Africa are the architects of our shared future. Together, I believe we will navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities that lie ahead, confident that our partnership will continue to grow stronger, lighting the path for future generations," she said.

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A better society through voluntary work

By **GUO JIATONG**

For Wan Shiyu, a 20-year-old social work major at Wuhan University of Technology (WUT) in Hubei province, voluntary work goes beyond her studies — it represents a commitment by young people to social development and mutual care through selfless devotion and compassion.

From Dec 1 to 3, Wan joined thousands of students from across the country at the seventh China Youth Volunteer Service Project Competition and Volunteer Service Exchange Meeting in Shantou, Guangdong province.

Wan's voluntary project, named "Xingxinxiangyin" (Star and Heart Intertwined), which provides rehabilitation services for children with autism, was selected as one of the top 10 projects out of 601 submissions.

A volunteer (right) in the Xingxinxiangyin project plays basketball with a boy with autism. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Unlike many existing commercial rehabilitation services, which offer short-term professional assistance, Wan's project focuses on lifelong and all-around recovery, with activities tailored to the specific needs of children with autism.

The project covers four main areas: connecting professional organizations with families, organizing family activities, raising awareness about autism, and managing an online forum for mutual support among parents.

According to Yu Yanping, head of the department of sociology at WUT and the project's mentor, the most notable aspect of the project is the team's dedicated effort to engage with both parents and professional organizations.

"Parents are happy to see young people working to build a more tolerant and supportive society, which encourages them to be more proactive in seeking help for their children and getting involved," she said.

Yu led the team in designing a questionnaire to assess autistic children's independent abilities, which has proven effective. For example, Wan found from the assessment that some children were sensitive to environmental sounds. Therefore, when she and her team organize basketball activities, they pay special attention to the surroundings, ensuring that the sound environment is suitable for these children.

"If we overlook the noise, such as a sudden car horn, it can irritate the children," said Wan.

Zhu Yufeng, a 22-year-old graduate of the School of English for International Business at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, won a gold prize in the competition for his project, "Yaolan" (Cradle for Yao ethnic group), which focuses on poverty alleviation and rural revitalization in Ruyuan Yao autonomous county, Guangdong.

Zhu organizes students from various majors to combine their expertise in incorporating Yao embroidery with market trends, selling the products to local shops and students in the neighborhood.

The project has boosted the income of villagers and brought new vitality to Yao embroidery. According to Zhu, the annual sales of the Yao embroidery workshop have increased from around 5 million to over 14 million with the assistance of the Yaolan project.

"It has also fostered a deeper sense of identity and solidified friendships between the Han and Yao ethnic groups as we worked together to improve the lives of villagers in the county", Zhu said.

The team is currently developing a new WeChat mini program that integrates AI technology with intangible cultural heritage, enabling users to create personalized embroidery patterns by entering a few keywords.

In the Public Service Venture sector of the competition, Dong Zexin, a 24-year-old student majoring in information and communicating engineering at Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications won a silver prize for leading his team "Xingyaoxiangcun" (Sparked Country through Youth Power and Technology).

The main goal of the project is to connect college students with voluntary activities in rural areas around Beijing, bridging volunteerism to campuses and supporting rural revitalization.

Dong shared that the competition broadened his perspective, offering a diverse range of voluntary work. For example, while multiple teams focused on the theme of rural revitalization, each approached the project from a unique angle.

"It reminds me of the charm of volunteer work. Whether it's young people, those in their middle age, or even the elderly, everyone can find a role in promoting social welfare and contributing to a better society," he said.

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The ever-evolving composer

Renowned Chinese composer Chen Kun explores new musical vistas by blending traditional music with cutting-edge technology.

By GUI QIAN
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Red Sorghum (1988), *A Bite of China* (2012), *The Wandering Earth* (2019) — these films and television works owe much of their sensational success to their brilliant soundtracks.

Behind these iconic scores stands a single name: Chen Kun, also known by his stage name Roc Chen.

As a renowned Chinese composer and music producer, Chen has contributed to over 150 projects, with the films he has worked on collectively earning more than 20 billion yuan at the box office.

Now, Chen has curated his classic film and television scores for a live concert titled *Roc Chen's Universe*.

Performed by an electronic band together with orchestral musicians, this auditory feast premiered in his hometown of Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Oct 7 and will hit Shanghai on Dec 31, New Year's Eve.

Chen regards this concert as the "culmination and selection" of his career in film scoring.

In addition to familiar classics, he also introduced *Space Station Falling* from *The Wandering Earth* — a track that has never been released on music platforms. To the audience's surprise, the piece was performed by an AI-generated digital singer named Leah.

"This piece is about the collapse of human hope — an apocalyptic feeling, conveyed through a female voice," Chen explained. "I initially considered inviting a female singer, but as a film composer with a technological edge, I wanted to offer the audience something truly fresh."

Chen places great emphasis on integrating technology into music, describing his approach as "playing the piano keyboard with one hand and pressing the computer keyboard with the other".

During his middle school years, he won top awards in municipal programming competitions. He later pursued a degree in communication engineering at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, where he was exposed to both electronic science and symphony orchestras. His journey into music composition began when he enrolled at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music for graduate studies.

> "With the help of AI, the threshold for making music nowadays has been lowered. But to go far, you still need to build a solid foundation and deeply study and understand those, perhaps ancient and boring, theoretical aspects."
>
> **Chen Kun,** a composer

"You can compose music using numbers, formulas, or by applying digital processing methods to music creation," Chen explained.

On a TV reality show, he composed a melody based on the birthdate of Chinese actor Wang Yibo, which received widespread acclaim.

He also frequently uses computers to process the timbre of musical instruments in innovative ways.

"We can use scientific methods to achieve harmony in music, such as controlling chords, rhythms, and synthesizing sounds," Chen said. But that's just the rational part of music. "The interpretation by singers completes the emotional expression," he said.

"Both rationality and emotion are crucial aspects of our humanity. Music is a perfect blend of both," he added.

Chen deeply admires the French composer Claude Debussy for his ability to evoke both Western and Eastern musical sensibilities. He aspires to become a "tech-savvy Debussy", aiming to create a fusion of music that bridges Eastern and Western cultures, as well as traditional and modern technologies.

"Music serves as an international language, allowing us to tap into shared human emotions — sorrow, happiness, or a sense of achievement — regardless of our backgrounds," he said.

Chen's musical score for the Chinese historical fantasy television series, *Love Between Fairy and Devil*, has garnered significant praise from international viewers on Netflix.

"Even when composing for Chinese period dramas, I take a 'borderless' approach, which has undeniably resonated with audiences globally. I find this particularly intriguing," Chen said.

He believes that what is national can also be global and that music with Chinese characteristics does not necessarily have to rely heavily on traditional Chinese instruments.

For example, *The Wandering Earth* franchise features extensive use of Western symphonic music, but the themes of family and country it conveys are distinctly Chinese.

The music for the first installment was recorded with musicians from Sydney, Australia, while the sequel's score was performed by an orchestra from Vienna, Austria.

According to Chen, foreign musicians found this type of Chinese music both novel and relatable.

Making the film's original soundtrack more youthful is also important to Chen. He mentioned that for the ending credits of *The Wandering Earth*, he composed a piece called *New Journey*, which incorporates a lot of electronic music.

"Many viewers said they were glued to their seats in the cinema, unwilling to leave because they were captivated by this piece," he said.

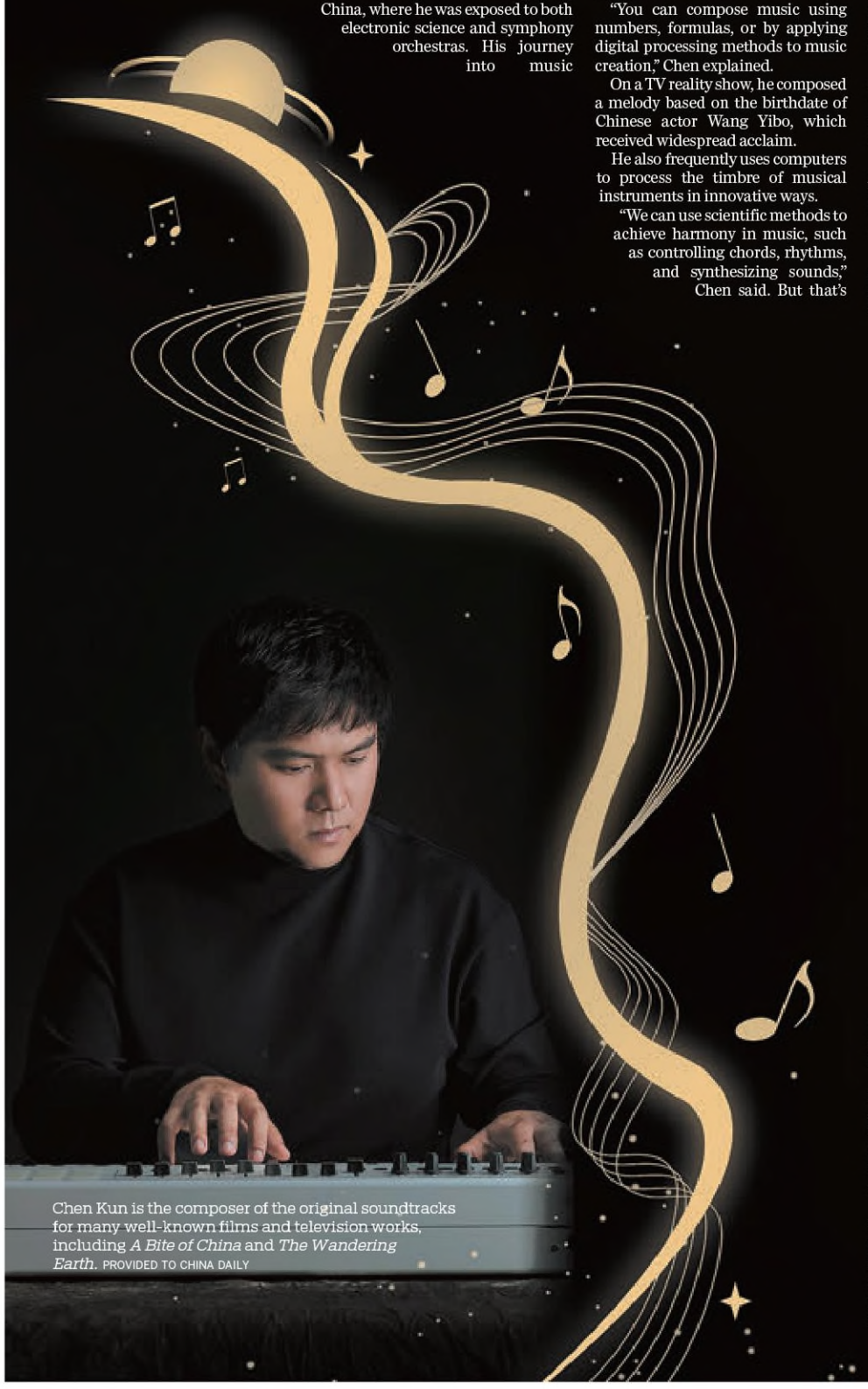
Chen has observed that the new generation of young listeners is highly interactive and creative. "When they listen to music, it's as if they are searching for hidden codes," he said.

For instance, *550W/Moss*, one of his compositions for *The Wandering Earth*, features a little girl singing in a pattern of long and short notes, giving Moss — the intelligent quantum computer in the film — a sense of heartbeat and breath. Some young listeners translated these sounds into Morse code and deciphered their meanings, adding to the film's sci-fi flavor.

Chen said he did not anticipate this while composing but was pleasantly surprised by the audience's interpretations.

As more Chinese films gain international audiences, a new generation of young musical talents is thriving. Chen welcomes this trend but cautions young musicians to focus on mastering the fundamentals of music.

"With the help of AI, the threshold for making music nowadays has been lowered. But to go far, you still need to build a solid foundation and deeply study and understand those, perhaps ancient and boring, theoretical aspects," he said.



Chen Kun is the composer of the original soundtracks for many well-known films and television works, including *A Bite of China* and *The Wandering Earth*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Global Insights

Weddings without the price tag

Shamim Zakaria (second from right) at a family friend's wedding in Guwahati, Assam, India, on Nov 17. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Growing up in India, I often saw our domestic help or less affluent relatives approach my family for financial aid to fund their children's weddings.

My father, always charitable, would help within his means. Yet, as a child, I often wondered: why organize a grand wedding if finances don't permit? While seeking help for medical emergencies seemed justifiable, asking for contributions to host a wedding party puzzled me.

As I grew older and began to understand the societal fabric of India, I realized the question wasn't as simple as it seemed.

In India, weddings transcend the union of two individuals; they symbolize the coming together of families, communities, and age-old traditions. A wedding is not merely a celebration but a reflection of familial pride and societal expectations. Grand affairs, with music, dance, and lengthy rituals, are seen as a commitment to ensuring a couple's auspicious start to married life.

A major driving force behind such extravagance is perhaps the cultural philosophy of "Atithi Devo Bhava", which signifies treating guests as gods. Under this philosophy, societal expectations often compel families to spend beyond their means, fearing judgment or social stigma for not "measuring up". For many, the wedding's grandeur becomes a symbolic statement of success, leaving little room for financial prudence.

Less is more

Having lived in China for nearly a decade, I've found striking parallels between Indian and Chinese wedding customs. My first experience attending a wedding in southern China left me awestruck. The lavish decorations, multi-day ceremonies, and community celebrations mirrored the opulence of Indian weddings.

However, China has witnessed a significant cultural shift in recent years. Many young couples are now opting for minimalist weddings focused on meaningful experiences. For instance, some forego elaborate receptions in favor of intimate gatherings or choose symbolic photo shoots in natural settings.

This trend aligns with younger generations' aspirations for authenticity and sustainability. It also reflects evolving societal values, economic realities, and the government's advocacy for frugality and simplicity.

A notable example is Zhejiang province's initiative to reduce wedding costs by encouraging smaller guest lists and discouraging extravagant dowries. This effort aims to curb outdated customs and alleviate the financial burdens associated with traditional wedding practices.

Critics may argue that minimalism undermines cultural heritage. However, traditions thrive when they adapt to societal needs. Simplifying weddings doesn't mean discarding rituals; it means preserving their essence in ways that resonate with modern realities.

By focusing on love, family unity, and community connection — values central to traditional weddings — minimalist celebrations strike a balance between honoring the past and addressing present challenges.

Lessons for India

It might be more difficult for similar changes to take place in India due to the societal expectations surrounding Indian weddings, where external displays are often prioritized over individual preferences.

India can certainly draw inspiration from China's approach. Public campaigns and community initiatives in China have successfully normalized frugal weddings. By celebrating couples who opt for minimalist ceremonies, the Chinese government has made modesty a socially accepted choice.

This shift is not about abandoning culture but reinterpreting traditions to align with modern realities. By fostering an ecosystem that educates and encourages minimalist celebrations, India can help couples break free from the financial and social burdens of extravagant weddings.

Minimalist weddings are not just practical; they also represent cultural evolution. By prioritizing personal values over ostentation, couples ensure that their celebrations focus on what truly matters — love, unity, and genuine joy — proving that less can indeed be more.

In both India and China, the path forward lies in striking a balance between tradition and modernity. By reimagining how we celebrate, we can create weddings that honor cultural heritage while embracing sustainability and authenticity, ensuring that these cherished customs remain vibrant for generations to come.

Written by Shamim Zakaria, a media professional based in Beijing.

Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

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