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# CHINA DAILY

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## Timely aid



A batch of emergency relief supplies being sent by the Chinese government to quake-hit Vanuatu is loaded onto a plane on Wednesday at Shenzhen Baoan International Airport in Guangdong province. The plane landed in Vanuatu's capital Port Vila on Thursday. The 35-ton aid package included tents, folding beds, solar lights, food, water purifiers and medical equipment. A 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck Port Vila on Dec 17, killing at least 14 people and injuring more than 200. LIANG XU / XINHUA See story, page 10

## China's railway network to reach 180,000 km by 2030

By LUO WANGSHU luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

As China continues to expand its vast railway network, particularly its high-speed rail system, the country's transportation infrastructure is reshaping not only the economy, but also the daily lives of millions.

By the end of 2024, China's railway network covered 162,000 kilometers, with nearly 48,000 km of high-speed rail, positioning the country as the global leader in high-speed rail development.

The continued expansion of the network will further boost the movement of people, as well as goods, facilitating economic growth across the nation, according to Guo Zhuxue, president of China State Railway Group, the national railway operator. Guo made the remarks at the company's annual meeting in Beijing on Thursday.

The rail sector is aiming for continued growth in 2025, with plans to invest 590 billion yuan (\$80.8 billion) in infrastructure and add 2,600 km of new rail lines.

By 2030, China aims to have built a world-class modern railway network covering about 180,000 km, including around 60,000 km of high-speed rail. This expansion will create a more efficient and interconnected transportation system, allowing passengers to travel between major cities in just one to three hours and ensuring the swift movement of cargo across the country.

In 2024, national railway investments reached 850.6 billion yuan, an 11.3 percent increase from the previous year, according to the group.

More than 3,100 km of new rail were added last year, including 2,457 km of high-speed rail, linking key cities and regions. Notable additions include the new high-speed

rail lines connecting Hangzhou, Yiwu and Wenzhou in Zhejiang province, and Chizhou with Huangshan in Anhui province, and these lines are already improving connectivity and accessibility for passengers and businesses alike.

For passengers, the growing rail network has made travel more efficient and comfortable.

John Lin, a 40-year-old Hong Kong resident, prefers the daytime high-speed rail service for traveling with his family between Beijing and Hong Kong.

"The departure and arrival times for the high-speed train are very convenient," Lin said, noting that he can depart in the morning and arrive at dusk.

"It's not too early, and it's not too late. I can take a good rest at noon on board the train," he said.

For Lin, the convenience of living near Hong Kong's West Kowloon Railway Station makes long-distance train travel even easier.

With many discounted flight options available, the cost of train tickets is nearly the same as that of flying. However, Lin found the cost worthwhile for the comfort and cleanliness of the journey.

"Eight hours on a clean train is much more comfortable than a flight, especially with a family," he said.

This is just one example of how China's expanding rail network is transforming the passenger experience. New high-speed trains like the Fuxing electric multiple unit bullet train and innovations like high-speed sleeper trains, which allow passengers to travel overnight between cities such as Beijing and Hong Kong, are making long journeys more comfortable and convenient. These innovations cater to business travelers as well as families, who appreciate the opportunity to rest while traveling.

See *Rail system*, page 3

## XI'S VISION | A SHARED FUTURE

# Chinese wisdom helps bolster global solidarity

Building a community with a shared future for mankind evolves into world consensus

By ZHAO JIA zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

The vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, has evolved from an initiative into a world consensus and practice that has been increasingly recognized as the most important global public good with profound international significance, officials and experts said.

The vision highlights the original mission of the Communist Party of China, namely striving for the happiness of the Chinese people and for the progress of mankind, and points the way for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics on the new journey, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

By integrating the fundamental interests of the Chinese people with those of people worldwide, and linking China's future with the common interests of the whole world, it transcends differences in social systems and ideologies, and bridges disparities in history, culture and development stages, Wang said.

It is China's solution to the question of what kind of world to build and how to build it, Wang said in Beijing on Thursday at the unveiling ceremony of a research center on building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Over the past decade or so, President Xi has, on many occasions, given high priority to the vision, saying that the international community is increasingly becoming an interconnected community with a shared future and no country can remain unaffected in the changing and turbulent world.

To date, dozens of countries and regions have joined China in building various forms of shared communities. Multilateral cooperation such as building a global community of health for all and building a community of life for mankind and nature, is advancing steadily.

The vision has also been included in the resolutions of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly for eight consecutive years.

Zhang Jun, China's former permanent representative to the UN, said that the vision, advocating unity and cooperation, helps to bridge divisions, rebuild trust and establish a common foundation to jointly address global challenges.

"It stands in stark contrast to the unilateralism, decoupling and exclusionary practices promoted by certain countries and individuals," he said.

Noting that the vision draws wisdom from the rich legacy of tradition-

al Chinese culture, such as valuing peace and universal harmony, Xu Bu, former president of the China Institute of International Studies, said it will contribute to the progress of human civilization.

"China's advocacy for humanity's shared values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom, differing from the universal values championed by Western countries, truly represents the aspirations of the broader international community, particularly developing countries," he added.

Zhang Weiwei, director of the China Institute of Fudan University said, "More and more countries come to realize that the vision is in line with the common interests of all mankind, and represents the greatest common denominator of people from all countries to build a better world."

He noted that China is one of the countries that has truly found its way to success and achieved its development through peace rather than violence and plunder, which he said was a remarkable feat.

China has put forward the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative since 2021, offering its wisdom and solutions to improve world governance and respond to global challenges.

Hu Jiping, vice-president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said that in a world where major powers are increasingly mired in conflicts and cooperation is hindered, the vision champions a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation.

"China's development is a beacon of hope for humanity, and the vision is not an empty slogan but a tangible path toward development," said Yang Guangbin, dean of the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, when talking about the Belt and Road Initiative which serves as a platform for practicing the vision.

"For instance, under the BRI, Chinese companies have helped countries in South America and Africa build digital communication technologies," he said, adding that this has enabled many developing nations to leap into the information age almost overnight.

So far, 155 countries and over 30 international organizations have signed Belt and Road cooperation agreements with China. Statistics showed that in the first three quarters of 2024, the total trade volume under the BRI was \$1.57 trillion, an increase of 4.53 percent compared to the previous year.

## European EV policy against Beijing may backfire

WORLD WATCH By Tom Fowdy

Some European Union countries last year voted to impose tariffs on electric vehicles imported from China. The vote can't be described as a consensus because less than half of the member states voted to do so, with the rest either opposing or abstaining. The levy does not just cover EVs made by Chinese firms, but also those made in China by European firms and imported back, notably, Germany's Volkswagen. China immediately reacted by launching a dumping probe into European brandy exports, and will presumably counteract a number of other exports too. The tariffs on Chinese-made EVs originated from the European Commission, headed by Ursula von der

Leyen, who has adopted an increasingly aggressive Atlanticist foreign policy since 2022. Her decision to blindly follow the United States has harmed the strategic autonomy of the EU considerably and overwhelmingly diminished the competitiveness of European industry. Now, the decision to initiate a trade conflict with China will be another hammer blow to the EU's growth, pursuing unrealistic protectionist goals that the European industrial base is simply not capable of attaining. All signs point to this being a strategic disaster for the bloc.

The eurozone economy, defined as the states in Europe that are economically integrated under the euro currency, grew by only 0.7 percent in 2023. Its growth forecast for 2024 is between 0.5 and 1.2 percent.

See *Tariff*, page 3

## BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE POISED TO UNLOCK REGIONS' POTENTIAL

Expanded network enhancing cooperation and opportunities, experts say

By SHAO XINYING shaoxinying@chinadaily.com.cn

For Gonzalo Rios, Chancay Port in Peru is more than just a workplace — it represents dedication and commitment. Since joining the port in 2019, Rios has closely followed its development, from construction to installation, and has been deeply involved in the preparation, building, and operational phases of the project.

Recalling its opening ceremony, Rios said: "Every detail was meticulously planned, and we witnessed the dedication that went into making this event happen."

In-depth

The port, a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative, was inaugurated on Nov 14 by President Xi Jinping and his Peruvian counterpart, Dina Boluarte, via video link.

"There is a deep sense of satisfaction in seeing the efforts of a great team, that has demanded many hours of work and coordination, come to fruition," Rios told China Daily.

See *BRI*, page 2

## Deadly attack



Police investigators surround the white pickup truck that crashed into a work lift after allegedly ramming into a crowd of New Year's revelers in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana, the United States, on Wednesday. The truck attack killed at least 15 people and injured 30 others. MATTHEW HINTON / AFP



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Newstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1 UK 1.5 EU 1.6 Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

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## PAGE TWO

## BRI: Leading growth across continents

From page 1

"It marked the beginning of the port's operational journey," said Rios, now the deputy general manager of the port, located about 80 kilometers north of Peru's capital, Lima. "This was a profoundly meaningful process, with each step contributing to facilitating commercial exchanges between our countries."

Construction of the port began in 2021. The mega project, invested by COSCO Shipping, is expected to become a major logistical hub for South America, with projections indicating it will generate \$4.5 billion in annual revenue for Peru and create over 8,000 jobs.

Rios highlighted the successful collaboration between the Chinese and Peruvian teams. "The structure and thoroughness of our Chinese team, have worked seamlessly with the adaptability and creativity of our Peruvian colleagues," he said.

On Nov 25, the *Xin Shanghai* vessel departed from Chancay Port, carrying the first shipment of goods destined for Shanghai.

Previously, shipping routes from South America to China often took detours through regions such as North and Central America, resulting in delivery times of 33 to 43 days.

Thanks to the opening of Chancay Port, the journey to Shanghai has been reduced to just 23 days.

The vessel arrived at Shanghai's Yangshan Port on Dec 18, carrying produce including blueberries, avocados and grapes, to be distributed to consumers across China.

"The development of the Chancay Port in Peru holds significant implications for Latin America, particularly in terms of trade and infrastructure," Alana Camoca, a professor of political science and international relations at Rio de Janeiro State University, told China Daily.

"The port's expansion and modernization are expected to enhance the efficiency of logistics and transport networks, facilitating increased trade between Asia, particularly China and Latin American countries," she said.

## Aligning with goals

The port is one of many new projects, including railways, highways, and other facilities, built under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Launched in 2013, the BRI aims to enhance global connectivity by improving trade routes and promoting economic cooperation.

The initiative aligns with Peru's goals and the needs of other South American countries, experts said.

While the Chancay Port project is a milestone for South America, under the BRI similar efforts are being made in other regions.

For instance, in Uzbekistan, PowerChina engineers are working on a power transmission project to deliver electricity from the Syrdarya thermal power plant to the Zafarabad substation.



The project, led by PowerChina, involves building two parallel 137-km 220kV transmission lines. This includes line design, the installation of towers and concrete poles, adjustments to transmission lines, and the protection of gas pipelines.

Li Xingde, the project manager, highlighted the project's contribution to the "small and beautiful" aspects of the BRI. "We are proud to be part of this effort," he said.

With 15 years of experience in Uzbekistan, Li also emphasized the company's commitment to bird conservation during construction. "We hired local environmental and bird experts to assess the project's impact. During the bird-breeding season, we avoided construction near habitats and trained workers on the importance of conservation," he told China Daily.

Sobit Mirzaev, a project assistant and translator, praised the Chinese team members for their efforts and meticulous work attitude. "They have taught me a great deal of knowledge. I value this experience a lot."

The project is scheduled to be completed this month and then handed over to local authorities.

"Once completed, it is expected to improve efficiency of local power transmission and provide reliable power," Mirzaev told China Daily. "It will also create jobs and promote social prosperity."

## Meeting different needs

Zhai Kun, a professor at the School of International Studies and deputy director of the Institute of Area Studies at Peking University, said both major infrastructure projects and the "small and beautiful ones" are key to promoting economic development and improving livelihoods, and also complement each other.

"The large-scale infrastructure projects aim to better connect countries and regions, creating an efficient and modern network, while the 'small and beautiful ones' focus more on local development needs, delivering a sense of happiness," Zhai told China Daily.

Meanwhile, the successful holding of the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing in September brought the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the BRI into focus.

Over the past decade, 52 African countries and the African Union Commission have signed Belt and Road cooperation documents with China.

China and Africa have not only completed major landmark projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Lekki Deepwater Port,

but also small projects like hybrid rice, juncao (fungi and grass) cultivation technology, Luban Workshops, and the "Connecting 10,000 Villages" program.

"Through the BRI, China has been able to support the economic development of Africa via infrastructure connection between African countries to enable both intra-trade and external trade to flourish," Gerald Mbanda, founder of the Africa China Review and a Rwandan researcher on China and Africa, told China Daily.

"It is exciting to note that China is a reliable partner of Africa's development as the BRI is in line with Africa's Agenda 2063," he said.

"The BRI brings practical and tangible developmental benefits," Mbanda said. Rwanda's capital Kigali now has some of the best roads in East and Central Africa, "thanks to the China Road and Bridge Corporation, which has been involved in most of these projects since the 1970s," he added.

In Africa, where infrastructure financing is limited, China has provided loans for the construction of roads, railways, ports, and bridges.

Mbanda rejected the "debt trap" narrative often used to criticize China's involvement in Africa, citing a research paper by Chatham House, a London-based think tank, which shows that African countries are more indebted to Western countries and institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

"The debt trap narrative peddled by Western countries against China-Africa cooperation in various fields including the BRI, is a lie and feeds into Western propaganda aimed at spoiling the good relationship between China and African countries," Mbanda said.

"The China debt trap narrative is fictitious and politically motivated to tarnish the image of China," he said.

Zhang Zhongxiang, director of the African Studies Center at Shanghai Normal University, said: "China has played a key role in alleviating Africa's debt repayment pressure, both through bilateral and multilateral channels, and is the largest contributor to the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative."

China's financial support has "significantly improved Africa's economic development environment and enhanced its capacity for self-sustaining growth," Zhang told China Daily.

"In the 11 years since the initiative's launch, significant achievements have been made in reducing Africa's infrastructure deficit," he said.

## Transport transformed

China-Africa cooperation has led to the construction and upgrade of nearly 100,000 km of roads, over 10,000 km of railways, almost 1,000 bridges, and nearly 100 ports, according to China's National Development and Reform Commis-



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

sion, citing a report on China-Africa Belt and Road Initiative development published in August.

"Partner countries have gained a deeper understanding of the initiative, highlighting its practical value for economic and trade cooperation, as well as China's strong commitment to global development," Zhang said.

In the first 10 months of last year, trade in goods between China and its BRI partner countries reached 16.94 trillion yuan (\$2.3 trillion), marking a 6.2 percent increase, while Chinese companies signed new project contracts worth over 1 trillion yuan in these countries, a 17.1 percent rise, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said at a news conference on Dec 6.

In 2024, China has signed Belt and Road cooperation plans with countries including Egypt, Timor-Leste and Peru. Brazil has also joined the Belt and Road international cooperation family.

"It's important that Brazil and China enhance cooperation as both countries hold significant untapped potential," Reinaldo Ma, a member of the Consulting Committee of the China-Brazil Business Council, told China Daily.

"Brazil and China have vast opportunities for collaboration," said Ma, who has provided legal services to Chinese companies investing in Brazil for two decades.

"Chinese companies bring substantial development potential, while Brazil offers a wealth of resources and opportunities for growth in sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure and technology," Ma said.

Camoca, the university professor, said Brazil should maximize opportunities brought by the BRI, while focusing on strengthening its domestic infrastructure, ensuring that projects align with long-term development goals.

So far, China has signed Belt and Road cooperation agreements with over 150 countries and more than 30 international organizations.

Dilma Rousseff, chief of the New Development Bank and former president of Brazil, has said that never before in history has any initiative brought together over 150 countries like the BRI has done.

In Asia, the China-Laos Railway has been operational for three years and is a vital transportation corridor.

The Jakarta-Bandung High-

Speed Railway in Indonesia, now over a year old, continues to provide smooth and convenient travel for local residents.

In Europe, Greece's Piraeus Port has undergone a transformation to become the continent's fourth-largest container port and a leading Mediterranean hub for container traffic.

In 2023, China proposed eight actions to support high-quality Belt and Road construction, aiming to advance construction in a "more pragmatic and efficient manner," said Zhai from Peking University.

The fourth symposium on Belt and Road construction in December provided "important guidance for the next decade of BRI progress," he added.

"Looking ahead, with the newly opened Chancay Port and the ongoing construction of the Hungary-Serbia Railway, the Belt and Road Initiative is expected to inject stronger and more resilient momentum into global trade and economic development," Zhai said.

For Rios and his team at Chancay Port, the journey is far from over. "The opening of the port is just the beginning," he said.

By SHAO XINYING

## China-Europe freight train services faster, greener

When the X8083 China-Europe freight train from Chongqing rumbled into the unloading station in Duisburg, Germany, on Dec 3, it set a record. It was the 100,000th trip, and marked the delivery of over 11 million twenty-foot equivalent units of goods valued at more than \$420 billion.

Carrying electronics and daily consumer goods, the train's cargo was eventually dispatched across Europe.

The journey began at Tuanjie Village Station in Chongqing on Nov 15 and crossed the border at Alashankou Port on Nov 20.

"This milestone is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the robust trade partnership between China and Europe," Michael Schumann, chairman of the German Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade, told China Daily.

"The China-Europe Railway Express has become a vital artery in the global supply chain, providing a reliable, efficient, and resilient alternative to traditional maritime and air transport," Schumann said.

The train service, initiated in

2011 and unifying its brand under China Railway Express in 2016, provides international container rail services running on fixed schedules, routes, and departure times, connecting China with Central Asia and Europe.

The train network now handles over 53 categories of goods, totaling more than 50,000. The annual transport value has grown from \$8 billion in 2016 to \$56.7 billion in 2023.

"We've seen an increase in high-value goods, such as home appliances and automobiles, especially after September 2022 when restrictions were lifted on transporting new energy vehicles," said Ouyang Bing, general manager of the Logistics Industry Development Center of China Railway Materials Corporation, a carrier for the China-Europe freight train service.

"Against the backdrop of building a high-quality Belt and Road Initiative, the main reasons for this change lie in the establishment of an efficient and diversified transport system, boosting

market vitality and catalyzing the upgrading of industrial structures," he told China Daily.

After years of development, the service now reaches 227 cities across 25 European countries and connects more than 100 cities in 11 Asian countries, with its network covering nearly all of Eurasia, according to China State Railway Group data.

This vast expansion, however, has also come with logistical challenges, particularly regarding the different rail gauges used across borders.

"At transfer stations, parallel railways are set up, allowing containers from one gauge to be lifted and loaded onto empty cars of the other to continue on different gauge tracks," Ouyang said.

In addition to overcoming rail gauge issues, technological innovations have played a crucial role in improving operational efficiency. The launch of the 95306 freight service platform has significantly reduced handling times.

"Clearance efficiency has improved with the nationwide inte-

grated policy, allowing better information sharing and coordination between customs, speeding up trade," Ouyang said, adding that logistics companies collect documents in advance and submit them for customs pre-approval, ensuring a smoother process.

In May 2024, the service surpassed 90,000 trips. The time required for the service to total 10,000 trips has been reduced from 90 months in its early days of operation to just 6 months now.

"The China-Europe freight train has achieved significant success in promoting cross-continental trade, with an improved transport network, reduced transaction costs, and more convenient shipping services being the key factors," said Jing Wenzhi, associate professor at the School of International Economics and International Relations at Liaoning University.

"It reflects the optimization of China's foreign trade structure," he told China Daily.

The share of return trains has risen

from less than 10 percent in the early stages to more than 60 percent, People's Daily reported.

"The surge in return train rates is driven by technological innovation and improved transport efficiency along the train routes," Jing said. "It has also boosted the logistics industry in countries along the train routes, driving the growth of related industries and increasing employment opportunities."

For example, in Duisburg, the China-Europe freight train has fostered the growth of new logistics and trade centers, as well as industrial parks, attracting over 100 logistics companies and creating more than 20,000 jobs locally, People's Daily reported. In Malaszewice, Poland, the launch of the network has led to a significant increase in business volume.

"The freight train service has unlocked unprecedented opportunities for European SMEs, including those in Germany," Schumann said.

"The China-Europe Railway Express has leveled the playing

field, providing SMEs with cost-effective and reliable transport solutions that make it feasible for them to export their goods to China and source raw materials or components from the Chinese market," he said.

"The transportation cost of the China-Europe freight train is about one-fifth of air transport, while the transit time is roughly one-fourth of sea transport, according to the China-Europe Freight Train Development Report, compiled by the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative and China State Railway Group published in 2022.

Its average carbon emissions are one-fifteenth that of air transport and one-seventh that of road transport, the report said.

"It provides faster delivery times compared to shipping by sea, striking a perfect balance between efficiency and environmental responsibility," Schumann said.

"Promoting such transportation modes not only advances sustainability but also underscores the shared responsibility of China and Europe in fostering a greener future for global trade," he said.

## TOP NEWS

## Xi praises China-Ecuador ties

Bilateral relations have developed with good momentum over past 45 years, president says

By WANG QINGYUN  
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President Xi Jinping and Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa exchanged congratulatory messages on Thursday, which marked the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Pointing out that China and Ecuador are comprehensive strategic

partners, Xi said that bilateral ties have developed with good momentum over the past 45 years.

In recent years, the two countries have further consolidated their political mutual trust and conducted fruitful pragmatic cooperation, and the bilateral friendship has been rooted more deeply in people's hearts, Xi said.

The free trade agreement between the two countries, which has been

successfully signed and has taken effect, has effectively upgraded trade cooperation and injected a new driving force into the ties between the two countries, the president said.

Xi also said he attaches high importance to bilateral ties, and hopes to work with Noboa to carry on the traditional friendship between China and Ecuador, and deepen bilateral exchanges and cooperation in various fields.

Noboa said Ecuador's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and the free trade agreement's taking effect have improved the well-being of people in both countries. He said Ecuador hopes to continue its close collaboration with China and deepen friendship, dialogue and cooperation.

The China-Ecuador Free Trade Agreement was signed in May 2023 and took effect in May 2024.



A Palestinian family sits inside a pit dug beneath their tent in central Gaza on Wednesday. The family sought refuge in the pit to protect themselves from the cold amidst ongoing Israeli attacks in the area. ASHRAF AMRA / GETTY IMAGES

## Israeli attacks have decimated Gaza population, report says

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong  
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The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken a huge human toll with as much as 6 percent of the population of Gaza being wiped off in 15 months of Israeli assault on the besieged territory, official Palestinian statistics showed.

With the number of Palestinian deaths surpassing 45,500, it is now the deadliest toll in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, according to a year-end report released by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, or PCBS, on Tuesday.

The estimated population of Palestine at the end of 2024 was 5.5 million, with 3.4 million in the West Bank. The population of Gaza in 2024 decreased to 2.1 million, a 6 percent reduction from its estimated population in 2023.

On Thursday, at least 13 Palestinians were killed and dozens injured in Israeli airstrikes targeting multiple areas in the northern and southern regions of Gaza.

The local Wafa News Agency reported that Israeli warplanes had struck a makeshift shelter for displaced families in the al-Mawasi

area, west of Khan Younis, in southern Gaza. It said the attack killed 11 people, including women and children, and left 15 others with varying degrees of injuries.

According to the report, two brothers were killed in an Israeli airstrike in northern Gaza, while Israeli artillery shelled the western areas of Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza.

Ola Awad, president of the PCBS, noted that since Oct 7, 2023, Israel has waged "a brutal aggression" on Gaza, "targeting all kinds of life there". Nothing has been spared, from human lives and buildings to vital infrastructure.

"There are catastrophic human and material losses, yet this brutal Israeli aggression against all of Gaza continues," the PCBS report said.

The report also noted that the West Bank "wasn't spared from this brutal Israeli aggression, and it suffered from continuous Israeli arrests, raids, closures and movement constraints".

According to figures released by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 45,484 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed so far.

“(The report serves as a) crucial official statement on the harsh realities confronting Palestinians.”

Iyad Eid, assistant professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the International Islamic University Malaysia

**2.1 million**

Estimated population of Gaza in 2024, a 6 percent reduction from its estimated population in 2023.

**Continued aggression**

"In the West Bank, the Israeli occupation continued its aggression, as 835 citizens were martyred and 6,450 others were injured as a

result of the attacks by the Israeli occupation forces and settlers," the report said.

Citing the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the PCBS estimated that 60,000 pregnant women were at risk at present due to the lack of healthcare in Gaza.

About 155,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women face challenges in accessing antenatal and postnatal healthcare services, the PCBS said. Thirty-six children have so far died of famine and malnutrition, the report said.

Iyad Eid, an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the International Islamic University Malaysia, told China Daily that the PCBS report serves as a "crucial official statement on the harsh realities confronting Palestinians", particularly in Gaza.

According to Eid, this suggests that while Israel may succeed in increasing the number of Palestinian casualties, it "will inevitably encounter relentless resistance".

The PCBS said some 22 percent of Gaza's population currently faces catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity, according to the criteria of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a global monitor.

Meanwhile, Israel's foreign ministry said the PCBS data was "fabricated, inflated, and manipulated in order to vilify Israel", Reuters reported.

## Nation imposes export controls on 28 US entities

By ZHONG NAN  
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China has added 28 entities from the United States, including Boeing Defense, Space & Security and Lockheed Martin Corp, to its export control list, the Ministry of Commerce announced on Thursday.

Taking effect immediately, this move aims to safeguard national security and interests while fulfilling nonproliferation and other international obligations, the ministry said in an online notice.

Under the new rule, Chinese companies are prohibited from exporting dual-use items to these 28 US entities. Any ongoing related export activities should be immediately halted, said the notice.

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

The US companies impacted by this decision also include defense contractors such as General Dynamics, Raytheon Missiles & Defense, Maritime Tactical Systems and Pacific Rim Defense.

A spokesperson for the ministry said on Thursday that China's decision to add 10 US companies, including Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control, to its unreliable entities list is in accordance with laws and related regulations.

These companies, which have been involved in arms sales to China's Taiwan region in recent years, are now subject to heightened scrutiny and restrictions.

The unreliable entities list targets foreign companies, organizations and individuals which disrupt market rules, breach contract norms, halt supplies for noncommercial reasons or significantly harm the legitimate rights and interests of China and its businesses, according to the ministry.

The Taiwan question is China's internal affair, related to its core interests and no external interference will be tolerated. China has consistently and firmly opposed the US sale of weapons to the Taiwan region, said the ministry spokesperson.

The spokesperson said that China has consistently handled the issue of the unreliable entities list with caution, targeting only a small number of foreign entities that harm China's national security. Foreign entities that operate with integrity and adhere to the law have nothing to be concerned about.

The Chinese government continues to welcome companies from around the world to invest and operate in China and is committed to providing a stable, fair and predictable business environment for law-abiding foreign enterprises, the ministry said.

## Rail system: Network boosts logistics, growth

From page 1

In 2024, China's national railway handled a record 4.08 billion passenger trips, with daily traffic reaching a high of nearly 21.45 million, according to China State Railway Group. The figures underscore the growing demand for rail travel as the system becomes increasingly accessible and efficient.

The rail system is also driving economic growth through improved logistics. In 2024, the national railway moved 3.99 billion metric tons of cargo, marking the eighth consecutive year of growth, data from the group showed.

The government's "road-to-rail" initiative, which encourages the

shift from trucks to trains for long-distance freight, has significantly boosted rail freight volume, making rail a more sustainable and efficient option for transporting goods across China.

Looking ahead, the expansion of China's railway network is expected to continue supporting both economic development and improved quality of life for travelers. By 2030, the goal is to have a world-class railway system capable of supporting the demands of a rapidly growing economy and a population that is increasingly mobile, said Guo, the China State Railway Group president.

For people like Lin, the Hong Kong resident, this transformation is already being felt.

"The railways have really transformed how I travel. It's easier, more comfortable and more reliable than before," Lin said.

China's railway expansion is not just about connecting cities, but also about creating a more interconnected, efficient society, Guo said.

## Book fair



Guests watch as the Chinese exhibition area of the Second South Asia International Book Fair in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, is unveiled on Wednesday. The book fair runs through Sunday.

CUI NAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Tariff: 'Lose-lose' approach is nothing but undermining global competitiveness

From page 1

For Germany, its largest economy and most significant industrial state, the scenario is even worse, with an expected GDP contraction of 0.2 percent. The stagnation of the eurozone is largely attributed to the surge in energy costs derived from the implications of decoupling Russian energy as a broader consequence of the conflict in Ukraine. This has caused production costs of European industry to surge, which has undermined its competitiveness and led to the phenomenon known as "deindustrialization".

The EU has long complained about the "lack of market access"

in China. Initially, the solution to this was to negotiate a mutually reciprocal solution that was known as the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which would offer greater European market access within China in exchange for the EU's upholding the status quo. This agreement was negotiated at the end of 2020, but following a comprehensive propaganda campaign by the US, aligned with the United Kingdom, the deal was scuppered as they successfully drove a wedge in EU-China relations and created opposition to it.

Since that time, von der Leyen has scuppered the deal altogether while simultaneously complaining

**The imposition of tariffs will not benefit domestic manufacturing, but will simply make the entire market more expensive for European consumers, contributing to the inflation crisis that has gripped the continent over the past few years.**

about the "lack of market access", instead trying to use tariffs and coercion to force unilateral concessions. When viewed in this light, China has been reasonable, but the EU has not. However, it must be stated that this decision will be hugely damaging to the respective EU economies. First of all, owing to the energy crisis and the smaller scale of Europe's industrial base vis-a-vis China, it simply is not possible for European companies to manufacture electric vehicles at the scale and affordability of which they are available from China.

This is not in fact a product of the so-called subsidies but simply economic reality. The surge in electric vehicle imports from China is

happening because there is, owing to the EU's emission and renewable goals, large-scale demand for EVs, and domestic markets are not capable of meeting that demand. China is the only country in the world that is capable of serving the broader demand for such cars, yet out of political motivations it is depicted as "market distortion" and "unfair competition". As a result, the imposition of tariffs will not benefit domestic manufacturing, but will simply make the entire market more expensive for European consumers, contributing to the inflation crisis that has gripped the continent over the past few years.

Likewise, China's tariff measures

will hurt European companies that rely on China as their largest export market. It should be made clear that the design of the European Commission to take this path is a "lose-lose" for itself. Europe should stop provoking geopolitical conflict and negotiate a mutually favorable solution because for the past few years, the policies emanating from Brussels have been nothing short of self-destructive, undermining the global competitiveness and affordability of European countries.

The author is a British political and international relations analyst. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## Colorful celebration



Many tourists attend the first day of the annual Yuyuan Garden Lantern Festival in Shanghai on Wednesday. The event, featuring diverse collections of lanterns to mark the upcoming Year of the Snake and the festival's 30th anniversary, will run until Feb 12. Like the previous edition, this year's show is also inspired by the book *Shanhaijing*, or *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a major source of Chinese mythology that dates back over 2,000 years. ZHU WEIHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

# China provides equal legal protection to foreign investors

Top court calls for judicial efforts to create business-friendly environment

By CAO YIN  
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China's courts have strengthened protections for foreign investors by efficiently resolving disputes, a move aimed at fostering high-level openness and creating a favorable business environment, the country's top court said Wednesday.

The Supreme People's Court highlighted five recent cases involving foreign investors, showcasing efforts to provide equal protection under the law to domestic and international litigants and to offer them comprehensive legal services.

The court emphasized the importance of accurately implementing laws such as the Foreign Investment Law, the Company Law and the Partnership Law to safeguard the rights of foreign enterprises and streamline dispute resolution.

"These efforts bolster foreign investors' confidence in the Chinese market, encouraging further investment," the court said in a statement.

In one notable case, the court illustrated how Chinese judicial authorities regulated the conduct of senior executives and provided judicial relief for a foreign-invested company that had incurred financial losses.

In September 2013, a French enterprise and several other foreign investors established a trading company in Shanghai, appointing an individual identified as Jiang as its general manager.

Four years later, the company decided to renovate its offices and signed a contract with a construction company to carry out the work. However, another company ultimately took up the project and was paid more than 1.5 mil-

lion yuan (\$205,000).

The foreign-invested company later discovered that the construction company that did the work was operated by Jiang's spouse and that Jiang had privately signed a separate contract with it. The company filed a lawsuit against Jiang, alleging misappropriation of company assets.

The Shanghai No 2 Intermediate People's Court ruled in favor of the foreign-invested enterprise, affirming that all market entities in China, regardless of their origin, are protected under the Company Law. Jiang was ordered to pay the company 300,000 yuan in compensation.

According to the law, directors and senior executives of a company are prohibited from signing contracts or conducting transactions with another company without shareholder approval.

"When foreign investors establish companies in China, they typically rely on executives to manage their operations," the Supreme People's Court noted. "Under Chinese

law, executives are required to act with loyalty and diligence, which serves as a vital legal safeguard for the legitimate rights and interests of foreign investors."

The court added that executives of foreign-invested enterprises are also subject to the same legal constraints as their counterparts in domestic companies, ensuring accountability. The ruling by the Shanghai court further promoted the orderly development of foreign-invested businesses.

Recognizing the critical role of foreign investors in advancing Chinese modernization, the top court highlighted the rapid growth of foreign-invested enterprises and investment projects in recent years.

It called on courts at all levels to maintain judicial efforts to create a more market-oriented, legalized and international investment environment, emphasizing the strict implementation of the Foreign Investment Law, which came into effect in January 2020.

## Incentives to benefit young Macao adults

By ZHOU MO in Shenzhen  
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The latest policy to boost employment for Macao youth in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin will expand their development opportunities and alleviate the financial burdens of enterprises, experts and businesses said.

The livelihood affairs bureau of the zone in Hengqin issued interim measures on Tuesday to broaden the career prospects of young adults from the special administrative region and draw more of them to work in the zone. The measures will take effect on Feb 1 and will remain valid for three years.

Under the measures, each eligible young Macao worker employed in the zone can apply for an employment subsidy of 4,000 yuan (\$548) per month for up to 36 months. Those who participate in vocational skill assessments at eligible organizations and receive certificates can also enjoy a one-time subsidy equal to 30 percent of the cost.

Employers in the zone are also eligible for incentives. For each young Macao adult they hire, employers can apply for a subsidy of 1,000 yuan per month for up to 36 months. Employers hiring 30 or more within the same year are entitled to an additional one-time incentive of 200,000 yuan. The total incentives granted to any single employer are capped at 1.5 million yuan annually.

Additionally, Hengqin employers can apply for a full subsidy covering their portion of the monthly social insurance contributions for Macao employees for up to 36 months.

Xu Fengmei, deputy director of the livelihood affairs bureau, described the policy as highly supportive and tailored to the needs of young Macao residents. She expressed hope that the measures would attract more of them to build their careers in Hengqin, opening a new chapter for the zone's development.

"Many enterprises in Hengqin are in the entrepreneurial stage. The provision of subsidies will reduce their operational costs and encourage them to recruit more young Macao people, allowing these enterprises to allocate more resources to R&D and production," said Mao Yanhua, dean of the Institute of Regional Openness and Cooperation at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

"Meanwhile, the income gap between Macao and Hengqin will narrow, thereby attracting more young Macao residents to work across the boundary," he said, adding that the policy is expected to show significant short-term effects.

The introduction of these measures coincides with the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland, celebrated on Dec 20. Located at the southern tip of Zhuhai in Guangdong, Hengqin is tasked with promoting the appropriate diversification of Macao's economy and facilitating better living and working conditions for Macao residents.

In addition to the latest policy, Hengqin has introduced various supportive measures to assist Macao entrepreneurs in setting up and expanding their businesses in the zone, including tax concessions and rent relief.

"Hengqin's preferential policies will boost the confidence of Macao youths," said Liu Xuemei, deputy general manager of the investment and development department at Zhuhai Huaafa Technology Industry Group Co in Hengqin.

Compared with Macao, which is limited in land and industries, Hengqin offers a larger development space for Macao youths. Liu said Huaafa is working with Macao universities to carry out training for Macao youths, who will have the opportunity to work in the Huaafa e-commerce industrial park and other companies in Hengqin after graduation.

## Milestone achievement



A China-Laos freight train prepares to leave Kunming, Yunnan province, for Laos on Thursday, marking a milestone with over 50 million metric tons of total freight volume transported on the route since full operations began on Dec 3, 2021. LIU RANYANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## HK to further revitalize economy, deepen intl ties

By WU KUNLING in Hong Kong  
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Hong Kong aims to prioritize reform and livelihood improvement in 2025 to further revitalize its economy, while the central government has expressed firm confidence in the city's development, welcoming global enterprises to share in the dividends.

Citing challenges ahead, local experts encouraged the city to strengthen business ties with non-Western countries and better leverage the nation's favorable policies to boost district economies.

In a social media post published on Wednesday, the first day of 2025, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu revealed that the government will focus on deepening reforms and strengthening domestic and international ties, further improving livelihoods and enhancing social harmony.

Describing 2024 as a "historic" year, Lee summarized Hong Kong's achievements in safeguarding national security, increasing economic momentum and improving residents' living standards.

He also highlighted significant projects set to make progress in 2025, including the Hong Kong

### 10,000 companies

of the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone, which will formally begin operations this year. Lee hailed the development as a milestone in promoting Hong Kong's bid to become a global inno-tech center.

The SAR government also plans to boost residents' well-being through various measures in 2025, including establishing 9,500 new light public housing units and opening three more community living rooms. Additionally, the city's first traditional Chinese medicine hospital will begin phased operations this year.

On Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning expressed the nation's optimism for Hong Kong's future development and welcomed global businesses to invest in the city, sharing the fruitful results of the "one country, two systems" principle and the city's progress.

Mao praised Hong Kong's

achievements in 2024, citing the city's nearly 10,000 mainland and overseas companies and approximately 4,700 local startups by the end of the year, both reaching record highs. She also highlighted Hong Kong's recognition as the world's freest economy in 2024 and its rise to third place globally as a financial center. The city saw over 30 percent year-on-year growth in tourist arrivals, welcoming 44 million visitors last year.

Citing challenges such as the global economic situation, geopolitical factors and the SAR government's continued financial pressures, Lau Siu-kai, a consultant with the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macao Studies, a Beijing-based think tank, suggested the city reduce its economic reliance on Western countries and deepen collaboration with emerging economies in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

He also advised Hong Kong to focus on cultivating new high-tech, high-value-added industries while boosting the competitiveness of traditional sectors.

Lawmaker Tan Yueheng, a Hong Kong member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, described finance and inno-tech as crucial

engines driving the city's high-quality economic development.

Tan expressed hope that in 2025, more efforts will be made to implement the HK\$10 billion I&T Industry-Oriented Fund, announced in Lee's 2024 Policy Address.

At the same time, he highlighted the challenges posed by Hong Kong's aging population, urging the city to develop a more age-friendly economic system, including pension finance and financial inclusion, to ensure that finance — one of Hong Kong's traditional strengths — can benefit those in need.

Tai Po district councillor Lo Hiu-fung urged the government to increase efforts in promoting telecommunications, medical care and transportation development in rural areas like Tai Po. He also encouraged local districts to explore ways to capitalize on the central government's favorable policies and strengthen the promotion of distinctive travel resources to stimulate their economies.

On New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, over 676,000 people visited Hong Kong, including 220,000 from the Chinese mainland. The city's New Year's Eve fireworks display at Victoria Harbour drew over 400,000 spectators.

## Spacesail Constellation completes successful test

By ZHAO LEI  
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The Spacesail Constellation, a massive internet network planned by State-owned satellite conglomerate Spacesail, has undergone its first application test, according to the Shanghai-based company.

The test took place on Wednesday onboard Piano Land, a cruise ship operated by Astro Ocean Cruise. It was conducted as the ship sailed near the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

During the test, a set of receiving terminals from China Mobile Hong Kong that were placed on the vessel's deck were linked with Spacesail satellites. The terminals downloaded data transmitted from the orbiting network, Spacesail said in a news release on Thursday.

The test was successful, proving that the Spacesail Constellation is able to provide access to broadband internet to all types of ships. It also demonstrated the commercial value of the domestic low-orbit internet network, the company noted.

Previously known as the G60 network, the Spacesail Constellation can provide high-speed, secure and reliable broadband internet services to users around the world. It is designed to consist of more than

10,000 satellites traveling in low-altitude orbits before the end of 2030, according to Spacesail.

The first 18 satellites in the network were launched in August. The second group, also consisting of 18 satellites, was deployed in October. The third batch, with the same number of satellites, was hauled into space in December. All of them were carried by the Long March 6A model from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in Shanxi province.

So far, the first 18 satellites have completed their orbital ascent, reaching their preset positions, Spacesail said.

According to the project plan, a total of 648 satellites will be deployed in orbit before the end of 2025 to form the first version of the Spacesail Constellation, which has been called by some observers as China's answer to SpaceX's Starlink system.

According to Yang Yuguang, a senior space industry observer in Beijing and chair of the International Astronautical Federation's Space Transportation Committee, compared with satellites traveling in high-altitude orbits, low-orbiting satellites can respond to users faster and can cover more places, especially those in high-latitude regions, so they are better suited for space-based internet networks.

## BUSINESS

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## Revved-up year for NEV biz

Electric vehicle sales in 2025 seen up 20% to over 12 million units

By LIU YUKUN  
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China is on the cusp of leading the global transition to electric vehicles with sales overtaking fossil fuel-powered cars in 2025 and outperforming other countries, said a recent report by the UK-based Financial Times, citing assessments from four investment banks and research institutes.

The report forecasts that EV sales in China will grow 20 percent year-on-year to exceed 12 million units in 2025. Meanwhile, sales of traditional fuel-powered vehicles will drop to under 11 million units, an annual decline of over 10 percent. The report underscores the fact that EV sales have surpassed both domestic and global expectations.

"The development of new energy vehicles — of which EVs make up the lion's share — in China is progressing rapidly. The country also leads globally in battery technology, boasts a highly developed industrial chain, and car manufacturers are boldly applying advanced technologies at the application end, continuously exploring new frontiers in automotive intelligence," said Chen Shihua, deputy secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Chen said the transition from traditionally powered cars to NEVs in other countries is relatively slower, with Japanese companies taking a



Workers seen at a new energy vehicle production line in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. JIN HAORYUAN / XINHUA

conservative approach toward the development path of pure electric vehicles, leaning more toward hybrid vehicles, hydrogen-powered cars and those using solid-state batteries.

Moreover, after Germany ended subsidies for NEVs in 2023, NEV progress in Europe decelerated. Chen highlighted that Europe's NEV industry chain manufacturing falls short of demand, prompting local companies to collaborate with Chinese manufacturers.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said that the growth rate of NEVs in China has outpaced the global average rate, with China holding a significant share in the global market for new energy passenger vehicles. In 2021, China maintained a 52 percent

global market share, which increased to over 63 percent in 2022, 64 percent in 2023 and continued to remain around 69.6 percent from January to November 2024.

According to the CAAM, on Nov 14, the annual production of NEVs in China exceeded 10 million units for the first time, making China the first country to achieve such a feat.

Looking at the specific sales data of individual companies, BYD's NEV sales in 2024 reached 4.27 million units, a year-on-year increase of 41.26 percent. Seres' sales of NEVs this past year were 426,885 units, a yearly increase of 182.84 percent. NIO delivered about 222,000 units in 2024, up 38.7 percent. XPeng delivered about 190,000 units in 2024, surging 34 percent, and Li Auto's total deliveries last

year reached about 500,000 units.

"Based on the strong growth in the production and sales of NEVs this year, it is estimated that China's total annual auto sales in 2024 likely surpassed 31 million units. Among them, sales of NEVs are estimated to have exceeded 13 million units, a significant increase from the previous forecast of 11.5 million units," said Chen.

"Looking ahead to 2025, challenges still exist, one of which is the increasingly fierce domestic market competition. While the industry's supply capacity is strong, companies' profitability is not particularly robust. We need to be vigilant about potential cash flow issues that car companies may face," Chen said.

## SOEs gear up to meet needs of crucial sectors

By ZHONG NAN  
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China's State-owned enterprises will focus on addressing critical needs in fields like aerospace, integrated circuits, machine tools and biotechnology, with the goal of overcoming technical challenges within the country's industrial system, the nation's top State-owned assets regulator said.

In an article published in this year's first issue of the Qiushi Journal, a flagship magazine of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, or SASAC, said these efforts will boost China's technological capabilities and innovation.

The government will support SOEs in advancing major technological equipment research projects and bridging the foundational and core technology gaps within China's industrial system, the SASAC said in the article.

It emphasized that SOEs must accelerate the development of autonomous industrial and supply chains, ensuring that the initiative remains firmly in their own hands.

As SOEs hold a pivotal position in China's industrial and supply chain system and are responsible for safeguarding industrial security, they should focus on addressing bottlenecks, blockages and gaps within China's industrial system, according to the article.

The total assets of China's SOEs grew from 71.4 trillion yuan (\$9.78 trillion) in 2012 to 317.1 trillion yuan in 2023, while their total profits rose from 2 trillion yuan in 2012 to 4.5 trillion yuan in 2023, demonstrating a significant improvement in both scale and quality of performance, data from the SASAC showed.

Experts said that once breakthroughs are made in basic research and original innovation, companies are likely to reshape industries and market competition, fundamentally transforming productivity. Therefore, SOEs must prioritize enhancing their innovation capabilities to better compete with established foreign rivals, they said.

SOEs should build more innovation consortia and strive to generate a number of original and disruptive outcomes, said Hu Chi, a researcher at SASAC's research center.

It is essential for SOEs to strengthen market-oriented applied basic research, enhance technological foresight, diversify strategies and master more "core technologies". They must drive the transformation of innovation within their businesses, shifting from being followers and imitators to becoming leaders and pioneers, Hu said.

Sharing similar views, Xiang Anbo, a researcher specializing in enterprise management at the Development Research Center of the State Council in Beijing, noted that it is also important to improve the diversified funding mechanism and make firm investments in areas where the government and industry urgently need innovation, but where other businesses lack the willingness or capability to invest.

"These measures will ensure long-term and stable support for basic research and original innovation, further cutting China's technological dependence on certain countries, optimizing SOEs' resource allocation and boosting exports in areas of tech-intensive green products and other high-end industrial goods," said Xiang.

Thanks to their ongoing green transformation, expansion in emerging markets and well-developed supply chains, Chinese SOEs saw their exports grow by 3.9 percent to 1.79 trillion yuan between January and November, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

CRRC Corp, a Beijing-headquartered centrally administered SOE and the world's largest supplier of rail transit equipment by sales revenue, secured a contract for the Dubai Metro's Blue Line project in the United Arab Emirates, according to information released by Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority last month.

Valued at \$5.6 billion, the contract encompasses a broad range of responsibilities, including line design, construction, commissioning, system maintenance and supply of rolling stock.

This project is expected to start operations in 2029.

China's SOEs generated more than 74.89 trillion yuan in operating revenue in the first 11 months last year, up 1.3 percent year-on-year, latest data released by the Ministry of Finance showed.

## Tesla's Megafactory initiates trial production

SHANGHAI — Tesla's energy storage Megafactory in Shanghai has begun trial production, serving as a good example of cooperation between China and the United States in addressing climate challenges.

The new plant is dedicated to manufacturing Megapacks, Tesla's energy-storage batteries, with mass production expected to commence fully in the first quarter, Tesla China told Xinhua News Agency on Tuesday.

The facility was built with an initial annual production capacity of 10,000 units, equal to around 40 gigawatt-hours of energy storage, according to the company.

The project is Tesla's second plant in Shanghai, underscoring the US company's commitment to investing in the world's second-largest economy, its confidence in China's manufacturing capabilities and the strengthened economic ties between the two countries in the new energy sector, said Wu Qisheng, a researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

Trial production was launched just seven months after construction began, setting a record for "Tesla speed" in China, with the Shanghai Gigafactory, Tesla's first plant in the country's eastern financial hub, having been built and

inaugurated within a year in 2019.

Covering an area of approximately 200,000 square meters, the new plant represents a total investment of about 1.45 billion yuan (\$198.7 million), according to the administration of the Lin-gang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone.

The Megafactory is the first of its kind that Tesla has built outside the US.

Lauding China's efforts to develop the new energy industry, including the energy storage sector, Tesla Vice-President Tao Lin said in May that the country offers a complete industrial chain, vast market potential and a production and business environment crucial for enterprise growth.

As a global renewables powerhouse, China is a major market for energy storage. In 2023, its installed renewable energy capacity surpassed its thermal power capacity for the first time, accounting for approximately 50 percent of all additions to the global renewable energy capacity.

Wu Xinbo, head of the institute of international studies at Fudan University, credited the rapid construction of Tesla's new factory to China's world-class infrastructure capabilities and the exceptional

business environment offered by Shanghai and the broader Chinese market.

Tesla has not been alone in strengthening its commitment to the Chinese market. A record 52,379 foreign-invested companies were established in China in the first 11 months of 2024, an 8.9 percent increase from the previous year. In November, foreign direct investment in actual use in the Chinese mainland also saw a 6 percent year-on-year rise, data from the Ministry of Commerce show.

In a bid to help foreign investors leverage its supply chain, market potential and innovation strengths, China has made significant strides in its opening-up.

Throughout 2024, the Chinese government rolled out a range of key measures to foster a more welcoming environment for overseas investors. These measures included expanding access to key industries and launching pilot programs to facilitate foreign investment.

A key move was the rollout of the 2024 national negative list for foreign investment, effective Nov 1, which removed all market access restrictions for foreign investors in China's manufacturing industry. This unprecedented breakthrough

overcame the final hurdles that global manufacturers face when entering a pillar industry in China.

In October, the 3-millionth vehicle produced by Tesla's Gigafactory in Shanghai rolled off the assembly line. Of the total, one-third have been sold to markets outside the Chinese mainland, including Europe and the Asia-Pacific, the company said.

The first three quarters of 2024 saw the Shanghai factory deliver 675,000 vehicles, accounting for over half of the company's global deliveries during the period.

"China-US economic and trade relations are fundamentally mutually beneficial. Attempts at 'decoupling' or severing industrial and supply chains will harm US industries," Wu said, emphasizing that half of Tesla's global vehicle production capacity is based in Shanghai, with China playing a dominant role in the new energy vehicle supply chain.

Tesla's two Shanghai factories showcase the mutual benefits of China-US cooperation, demonstrating that decoupling is impractical as US investors cannot afford to forgo the vast opportunities of the Chinese market, he said.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Employees operate a production facility at a State-owned tech enterprise in Lanzhou, Gansu province. LANG BINGBING / XINHUA

## Briefly

## Beijing office market enjoys strong Q4

Beijing's office market saw its net absorption volume exceed 120,000 square meters in the fourth quarter, making it the sixth straight quarter of positive absorption, said a report by Colliers International, a global real estate services provider. The capital's office market performance last year has almost recovered to levels seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. The full year's net absorption jumped 275 percent year-on-year to 330,000 square meters.

## Central bank conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 24.8 billion yuan (\$3.45 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.5 percent on Thursday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system at an adequate level, the People's Bank of China said.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Fixing bankruptcy woes of listed firms to help capital markets

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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The latest efforts by top authorities to further streamline the bankruptcy reorganization process of listed companies will help optimize resource allocation, which is conducive to the sustainable and high-quality development of the Chinese capital market, said experts.

The comments came in response to the minutes of a recently held symposium on effectively handling the bankruptcy reorganization cases of listed companies.

The minutes were jointly released by the Supreme People's Court and China Securities Regulatory Commission on Tuesday.

Companies that are delisted due to major violations of law, as well as listed companies that have major deficiencies in information disclosure or standardized operation and refuse to make rectifications, are not qualified for such reorganiza-

tion, according to the minutes.

The reorganization of companies should focus on recovering their operational capabilities. By deeply analyzing the troubled situation, companies should come up with reorganization plans that address the problems, according to the minutes.

By adjusting their equity structure, businesses and governance model, companies should substantially improve their operational capabilities, optimize prime businesses and asset structure and aim for high-quality development, the minutes noted.

Compared to bankruptcy liquidation and bankruptcy reconciliation, bankruptcy reorganization allows companies to repay their debts in diverse ways.

Companies are allowed to retain market entity qualification and continue their operations under bankruptcy reorganization, said Chen Li, chief economist at Chuancai Securities.

For creditors, the repayment rate can be increased and losses can be reduced under the bankruptcy reorganization process, he added.

Tian Xuan, associate dean of the PBC School of Finance of Tsinghua University, said bankruptcy reorganization can help companies reshape themselves in a timely manner. The latest minutes have provided a clearer basis for such actions, he said.

Major financial documents and evaluation reports related to the bankruptcy reorganization of companies, as well as those that may exert significant influence on companies' share prices, should be disclosed on time, according to the minutes.

Judicial and regulatory cooperation should be strengthened to prevent risks from spilling over and safeguard market order, said the latest minutes.

A new trial principle of promoting the sound development of the

capital market has been added. A notification mechanism has been set up regarding the violations of laws and regulations by listed companies, intermediaries and other related parties.

There will be stricter crackdown on acts infringing on the interests of creditors and individual investors, including administrative penalties and civil compensation, according to the minutes.

The CSRC, the country's top securities watchdog, started on Tuesday to solicit public opinion for a guidance on bankruptcy reorganization. By improving the quality and efficiency of such activities, resources allocation in the Chinese capital market will be optimized, said the CSRC.

In the three-year action plan to improve listed companies' quality, which was released in late 2022, the CSRC said that only qualified and valuable companies will be supported and saved via bankruptcy reorganization.

According to data from market tracker Wind Info, at least 44 A-share companies applied for bankruptcy reorganization or pre-reorganization by the end of November, up 40 percent from a year earlier.

While the number of such cases has been on the rise, more problems and violations have also surfaced, including insider trading. The number of regulations will help to enhance information disclosure and protect the interests of retail investors, as the whole process will be more transparent, said Yang Delong, chief economist at First Seafund Fund.

According to experts from CITIC Securities, public companies' bankruptcy reorganization will become more market-based and normalized in China amid concerted efforts by local governments, supervisory bodies and courts. This will also help in mitigating major financial risks, they said.

# Air Silk Road breaks record in Henan

Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport achieves milestone annual cargo volume of 800,000 tons



On Dec 22, a Boeing 747 freighter arrives at Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport from Chennai, India, marking the first time that the annual cargo throughput of the airport exceeded 800,000 tons. YAO ZILI / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

After a Boeing 747 freighter operated by China Central Longhao Airlines landed at Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport on Dec 22, 2024, the annual cargo volume of the airport surpassed 800,000 metric tons, setting a record since its opening in 1997.

Airport managers described this as a significant milestone, highlighting the airport's enhanced role as a global air cargo hub and its growing competitiveness in the international market.

Zhang Mingchao, Party secretary and chairman of China Henan Aviation Group, said: "Our company has been committed to advancing the construction of the Air Silk Road by integrating resources from key airlines and airport platforms, optimizing route networks and increasing transport capacity. Through the 'dual-hub' cooperation model, we have expanded Zhengzhou's air cargo network to support the development of the Air Silk Road."

## Dual-hub model

The breakthrough in cargo volume at Xinzheng Airport is largely attributed to the in-depth implementation of the dual-hub model by China Henan Aviation Group.

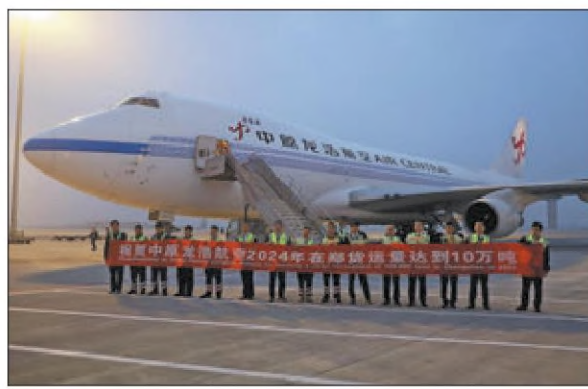
Since Henan Civil Aviation Development and Investment Group acquired a 35 percent stake in Cargolux Airlines International in 2014, the dual-hub model has injected new momentum into Zhengzhou's cross-border e-commerce and air logistics businesses.

In 2024, China Henan Aviation Group signed cooperation agreements in Luxembourg, propelling the dual-hub model into a new phase.

The model is now being replicated and expanded to cities such as Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Liege in Belgium and Baku in Azerbaijan, laying the groundwork for a self-reliant international air logistics supply chain.

To date, Xinzheng Airport has launched 57 all-cargo routes. The airport has attracted 29 cargo airlines, including seven of the world's top 10 cargo carriers.

By deeply integrating with the global logistics network, the airport has achieved comprehensive route coverage, which is connecting major economic regions in Europe, North Ameri-



## Clockwise from top left:

Xinzheng Airport handles a single cargo weighing 51 tons on Dec 14. On Oct 17, staff members from China Central Longhao Airlines celebrate an annual cargo volume of more than 100,000 tons at Xinzheng Airport. Xinzheng Airport is cooperating with 29 cargo airlines and seven world renowned all-cargo airlines have launched their services there.

XUE AOLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ca and Asia. This aligns with Henan province's strategic goal of building an inland open economy.

From handling 150,000 tons of cargo in 2012 to surpassing 800,000 tons in 2024, Xinzheng Airport has demonstrated its growing prominence in global air logistics. Airport managers emphasized that this achievement highlights the success of the dual-hub model and underscores the airport's critical role in international logistics.

## Enhanced capabilities

In recent years, Xinzheng Airport has continuously improved its cargo support services, excelling in oversized cargo transport.

On Dec 14, a Boeing 747 operated by Cargolux Airlines International transported a 51-ton turbine core component to the airport, representing a challenge in heavy cargo transport. The operation utilized two 100-ton cranes, two 35-ton platform vehicles and one flatbed truck to ensure seamless handling. This case exemplifies the airport's expertise in managing oversized and heavy cargo.

In 2024, the airport handled 209 shipments of oversized cargo and live animals, totaling more than 4,000 tons. These shipments

included industrial equipment, precise instruments, cross-border fresh produce and cold-chain logistics, demonstrating the airport's comprehensive cargo handling capabilities.

Additionally, Xinzheng Airport has excelled in dangerous goods transport, achieving certifications for handling nine categories of hazardous materials and obtaining Good Distribution Practice and Center of Excellence for Independent Validators in Pharmaceutical Logistics certifications for pharmaceutical logistics. The airport regularly sends professional teams to international aviation hubs for training and exchange to enhance its global service standards.

## Innovative logistics model

In terms of logistics development, Xinzheng Airport has achieved multiple innovative breakthroughs. As a pilot project for air cargo e-freight in the national civil aviation industry, the airport has significantly improved logistics information flow efficiency by standardizing, informatizing and establishing paperless operating systems throughout the entire air cargo logistics chain. It saves about 1 million paper documents annually

while reducing operational costs for businesses.

Xinzheng Airport is also promoting the digital transformation of regional logistics networks. By optimizing operational platforms and data sharing systems, the airport has realized real-time tracking and intelligent distribution of freight data, which has enhanced global cargo turnover efficiency. This innovation will strengthen the airport's competitiveness in the global air cargo logistics field.

Furthermore, Xinzheng Airport has initiated a joint transportation model between high-speed rail and aviation.

On Dec 8, 2024, a batch of fashionable clothing flying from Europe to Xinzheng Airport was rapidly transported to Chongqing, thanks to advantages of the air-rail joint transportation. This marks the completion of the first shipment under the new model of "international air cargo import plus domestic high-speed railway distribution" at Xinzheng Airport. Previously, the airport had completed full-process operations under the new model of "domestic high-speed railway transportation plus international air cargo export" in air-rail joint transportation.

The integration of air and high-speed rail transport enhances cargo aggregation and boosts the airport's competitiveness in cross-border e-commerce logistics, providing efficient solutions for local businesses to expand into overseas markets.

In the future, these innovative models will be extended to more international routes, solidifying Xinzheng Airport's position in the industry.

## Driving regional economy

The dual-hub model not only propelled the airport to breakthroughs in the international logistics sector but has driven economic development in the region.

Currently, the Henan Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone has attracted more than 400 logistics companies, forming an industry cluster represented by the global distribution center for United States technology giant Apple Inc, the international express distribution center for United Parcel Service and the distribution base for fashion brand ZARA. These clusters have greatly aided the development of emerging formats such as cross-border e-commerce and biopharmaceuticals, injecting new vitality

into the regional economy.

In recent years, the improvements in supporting facilities around the airport have attracted a large number of upstream and downstream enterprises, leading to the coexistence of multiple formats such as air cargo logistics, e-commerce and intelligent manufacturing.

Data showed that in 2023, the Zhengzhou Xinzheng Comprehensive Bonded Zone achieved a total foreign trade value of 407.3 billion yuan (\$55.8 billion), ranking first in the country in terms of import and export scale.

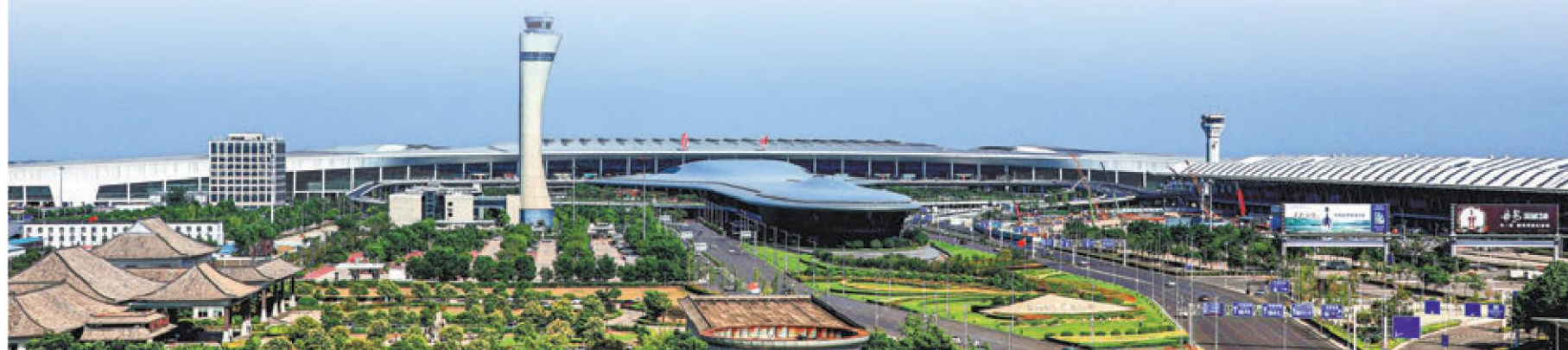
Tang Xiaochun, head of the air-freight department at Shanghai Yinhua International Freight Forwarding, said: "The efficiency of security checks, customs clearance and cargo station operations at Xinzheng Airport has saved us a significant amount of time and costs. It is one of the airports we think highly of and has achieved the most significant results."

Additionally, Xinzheng Airport has been promoting multimodal transportation and has established close cooperation with major logistics hubs in the Yangtze River Delta, the Pearl River Delta and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Through seamless connections between trucks, flights and railway transport, the airport has extended its logistics network, providing support for regional economic growth.

In the future, Xinzheng Airport said it will deepen the construction of the Air Silk Road, optimize the global route network, enhance cargo guarantee capabilities and further promote the high-quality development of cross-border e-commerce and air cargo logistics.

Liu Jianmin, general manager of China Henan Aviation Group, said: "The green, digital and low-carbon development path of Xinzheng Airport has set an example for the industry. Through innovative models and technological breakthroughs, the airport's air cargo logistics has entered a fast lane of development."

With the Air Silk Road extending domestically and globally, a strong support facility is taking into shape for the construction of the global air logistics network. Xinzheng Airport is gradually becoming an important engine facilitating the operation of both domestic and international circulation, playing its role as a frontier of openness.



An elevated view of Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport Terminal 2. XUE AOLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ADVERTORIAL

# GLOBAL LENS



People gather to mark New Year's Eve in Damascus, Syria. AMR ABDALLAH DALSH / REUTERS



Fireworks are seen above one of Cairo's pyramids amid new year celebrations on Dec 31. KHALED DESOUKI / AFP



A woman wears glasses as part of new year celebrations in Rio de Janeiro on Dec 31. DANIEL RAMALHO / AFP



A light show illuminates the Arc de Triomphe as fireworks are set off during new year celebrations at the Champs-Elysees in Paris on Jan 1. THIBAUT CAMUS / AP

By CHINA DAILY

## NEW YEAR, NEW BEGINNINGS

Communities across globe greet 2025 with joy, hope amid challenges

As the clock struck midnight across different time zones, celebrations erupted around the world. From dazzling fireworks to heartfelt embraces, communities everywhere kicked off 2025 with unforgettable moments of joy and hope.

Auckland, the first major city to celebrate, saw thousands gathering downtown or ascending the city's volcanic peaks for a prime view of the fireworks.

In Asia, preparations were underway for the Year of the Snake, with Chinese New Year just around the corner. The Year of the Snake under the traditional Chinese zodiac symbolizes rebirth, echoing the snake's ability to shed its skin. Across China, Japan and other Asian countries, snake-themed products flew off the shelves.

Paris wrapped up 2024 with its iconic countdown and a spectacular fireworks display along the Champs-Elysees. The summer's Olympics and Paralympics in the French capital had brought the world together for a few brief but unforgettable weeks.

Cairo transformed into a spectacle of light and sound. The air was crisp, filled with the aroma of seasonal treats from bustling

street vendors. New year fireworks were displayed at the pyramids and the Great Sphinx of Giza.

On Brazil's Copacabana Beach, crowds joined the main New Year's bash, with at least 10 ferries offshore hosting a 12-minute fireworks show. Thousands of tourists on six cruise ships watched from the water.

As revelers packed Times Square in New York for the countdown, 2025 had arrived in most corners of the world.

The celebrations were held even as the year was marked by ongoing conflict, accidents and the growing impact of climate change. Amid these concerns, people came together to usher in 2025 with hope, resilience and a shared desire for a better future.

Jeju Air flight at Muan that killed 179 people.

Hours before Germany rang in the new year, Chancellor Olaf Scholz called on its 84 million residents to stick together despite the many global crises and wars, the country's ailing economy and a deadly Christmas market attack that shocked the nation.

With a storm forecast to bring bitter weather in the north of the United Kingdom, festivities in Edinburgh — including the renowned Hogmanay street party, garden concert and castle pyrotechnics show — were canceled in advance.

In South Korea, celebrations were cut back as the country observed a period of national mourning following the Sunday crash of a

Muted start

In regions affected by conflict, the celebrations marking the arrival of 2025 were subdued.

"The year 2024 was one of the worst years for all Palestinian people. It was a year of hunger, displacement, suffering and poverty," said Nour Abu Obaid, a displaced woman from northern Gaza.

Obaid, whose 10-year-old child was killed in a strike in Al-Mawasi in Rafah, said she did not expect anything good in 2025.

"The world is dead," she told AP. "We do not expect anything, we expect the worst."

Lebanon is in the grip of a severe economic crisis and many areas were heavily damaged during the conflicts, which ended with a shaky cease-fire.

In Syria, people expressed mixed emotions and cautious hopes for the coming year after the unexpected ousting of former president Bashar al-Assad. While crowds gathered in Damascus for fireworks, residents reflected on a country still recovering from war and ongoing crises with many cautiously optimistic about the future.

Sudan marked its second new year under the shadow of war between the regular army and paramilitary forces, with many voicing their hopes for peace.

Violent conflict has continued to devastate the northern African country since 2023, deepening the humanitarian crisis that has claimed nearly 30,000 lives and displaced more than 14 million — about one-third of Sudan's population — since the brutal clashes.

"We hope to come back to our houses safe and sound this year, for this war to end and just to be able to see home once more," Fatma Mohamed, a local resident, told AFP in Port Sudan.

Agencies contributed to this story.



From top: Fireworks are seen at the harbor area of Sydney on Dec 31. BIANCA DE MARCHI VIA REUTERS Children play with fireworks at the Bureij camp for displaced Palestinians on Dec 30. EYAD BABA / AFP



Residents view fireworks as they celebrate the new year at Ancol Beach in Jakarta on Jan 1. YASUYOSHI CHIBA / AFP



From top: People take part in an annual tar barrel festival in Allendale, Britain, on Dec 31. LEE SMITH / REUTERS Tourists take photos with new year decorations in Hanoi on Dec 31. NHAC NGUYEN / AFP

# Bortala prefecture builds blueprint for high-quality development

Booming business sectors, cultural tourism spur impressive economic growth



From left: A picturesque view of the Bortala River National Wetland Park in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. ZHANG JING / FOR CHINA DAILY Egrets take off from Sayram Lake. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By WANG JINHUI

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Bortala Mongolian autonomous prefecture in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is an important hub in China's land route access to Central Asia, West Asia and Europe. It has also become an integral node in the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt, forging high-quality development of the industrial economy, cultural tourism and opening-up.

## Thriving industry chains

By leveraging the advantageous resources of its counties and cities, Bortala is advancing development of 12 key industry chains across six major sectors including the deep processing of agricultural and sideline products; cultural tourism; green mining; new energy and materials and on-site processing for imports and exports. It has achieved a cumulative increase in the added value of its enterprises above designated size for 10 consecutive months, with a growth rate of over 20 percent.

The prefecture's traditional limestone industry is one example of the strong growth momentum. Bole Juxin Mining Development, a company that is based in Bortala's Bole city, is now engaged in equipment commissioning and debugging. Once completed, it will mine 3.6 million metric tons of limestone and produce 400,000 tons of calcium oxide annually.

"Bortala has rich limestone resources and a good business environment, so we chose to establish our operations here," said Zhao Chun, the company's general manager. "We are committed to building the complete limestone industry chain, including mining, initial processing and calcium oxide production. We will further increase our focus on technological innovation to integrate the upstream and downstream of the industry chain."

Meanwhile, Chinese goji berries from Jinghe county, Bortala, have achieved fame far and wide. Focusing on the quality of the source, the prefecture has nurtured multiple enterprises and cooperatives for goji berries, developing more than 30 innovative products and techniques. The Suoxian variety of goji, for example, can maintain freshness in long-term storage through technology that solidifies and cools the moisture inside the berries and then achieves a drying effect while retaining their waxy outer layer.

Liu Dongdong, general manager of a local goji enterprise, said: "We showcase various extended products of Jinghe goji berries, including goji enzyme and peptide drinks developed in collaboration with Xinjiang University. We will continue to extend the industry chain, enhance the added value of Jinghe goji berries, and contribute to the development of the industry."

In the green energy field, a 100,000-kilowatt thermal storage co-generation project is under construction in Bortala. Li Juan, supervisor of the planning department of the power dispatch control center at State Grid Bortala Power Supply Company, said the photovoltaic part of the project was scheduled to start operation in December, while the solar-thermal part will commence operation in the first half of 2025, providing a guaranteed power supply of 100,000 kW.

Another industrial breakthrough is Bole's modern agriculture science and technology demonstration park — built in cooperation with Shouguang of Shandong province — a project that was signed at the eighth China-Eurasia Expo in Urumqi in June. To date, three greenhouses have been put into use for vegetables such as bell peppers and tomatoes.

"Based on the temperature and soil of Bortala, we have designed a greenhouse type that has the characteristics of wind and drought resistance. In the future, we will cooperate with local enterprises, cooperatives and farmers to develop facility agriculture with Bortala features," said Zhang Huayou, who is in

charge of the local project. "We will also explore foreign markets and actively integrate into the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative."

Local government departments are striving to optimize the business environment and boost enterprises' confidence with convenient services and guarantees to further strengthen characteristic industries. In 2024, the Bole Border Economic Cooperation Zone established an enterprise service center, allowing companies to complete project approvals and permits without leaving the industrial park.

## Natural assets attract visitors

When it comes to tourism in Xinjiang, the popularity of Sayram Lake continues to fuel the daily visitor flow. In 2024, the Sayram Lake scenic area launched tourism products such as low-altitude flights, featuring immersive experiences, aerospace-themed halls and other new formats. The ice and snow tourism season at Sayram Lake is currently in full swing, with the scenic area preparing for an ice and snow carnival, inviting top domestic experts to plan a series of fun and exciting activities.

All staff members are undergoing comprehensive training for excellence in offering services and guest reception etiquette to create a comfortable and high-quality travel experience for visitors.

"We will develop winter tourism projects that integrate culture, entertainment, fun and participation, covering areas such as ice and snow experiences, sports and folklore, promoting Bortala's winter ice and snow tourism economy to a new level of high-quality development," said Wu Lan, a member of the Party committee of the management committee at the Sayram Lake scenic area.

Over the past year, Bortala has also played a pivotal role in bolstering development of Xin-

Bortala has rich limestone resources and a good business environment, so we chose to establish our operations here."

Zhao Chun, general manager of Bole Juxin Mining Development

jiang's cultural tourism ecosystem through measures such as deepening institutional reforms, improving industry mechanisms and implementing cultural projects for the benefit of the people.

Meng Hui, deputy secretary of the Party group and director of the Bortala culture, sports, radio, television and tourism bureau, said the prefecture will launch a series of activities including cross-country skiing championships, competitions, snow football, skiing winter camps, Sino-Kazakh intangible cultural heritage exchanges, hotpot food festivals, horse racing on snow, a hot spring ice and snow carnival, ice and snow parent-child tours, and more than 60 characteristic ice and snow festival events. It will also invite domestic and foreign ski athletes to interact with tourists.

Gao Xinxin, secretary of the Party group and deputy director of the culture, sports, radio, television and tourism bureau in Wenquan county, Bortala, said: "In 2024, Wenquan county launched an array of preferential packages including trips to Sayram Lake, hot springs and skiing, with the newly opened hotels and spa centers, and the joint operation of wetland parks and ski resort products, allowing visitors to enjoy free lake tours, discounted hot

springs, and half-priced hotel stays."

Gao noted the hot spring snow lotus soaking pool in the wetland park is open to the public for free, where visitors can enjoy views of snow-capped mountains, grasslands and playful swans. "At the same time, we are actively preparing for the operation of the Wenquan cross-country skiing resort, offering a unique experience of hot springs and skiing."

In 2024, Bortala added a total of 35 hotels and launched campaigns to upgrade the tourism industry in various regions. In particular, Bole has improved tourism formats such as catering, shopping, bathing and spa, performing arts and dances; Jinghe county has developed Xinjiang specialty foods, fresh goji berries, highway shopping, and hotel homestays; and the Alashankou national border tourism pilot zone is steadily advancing in its creation and has reached an intentional border tourism cooperation agreement with relevant departments in Kazakhstan.

Leveraging its rich cultural and tourism resources, Bortala also participates in programs such as *Homeland Dreamland*, a travel television series by China Media Group, and joins exhibitions such as the China-Eurasia Expo and local tourism expos. Furthermore, the prefecture hosts cultural tourism promotion events in Chengdu, Sichuan province, and Wuhan, Hubei province. Collaborating with the Cyberspace Administration of Hubei, Bortala has launched the "tour Bortala, know Xinjiang" national network celebrity tour, attracting over 60 million fans. It has reached cooperation with 16 cultural and tourism enterprises, with the promotion activities receiving over 6.2 million exposures on various media platforms.

## Westward opening-up

Under the BRI, Bortala has made solid strides in high-level opening-up.

On Dec 4, a train loaded with mechanical parts, daily necessities, electronics and other goods departed from Alashankou Port for Malaszewicz, Poland, on the China-Europe freight train route. In 2024, Alashankou Port set a record with the highest daily transit volume of 29 trains, with the average daily transit volume remaining at 21 trains.

"We mainly handle agency services for the Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe and Zhengzhou-Xinjiang-Europe freight trains," said Qi Shuai, a customs broker at Xinjiang Alashankou Jean Logistics. "The business volume significantly increased last year, with agricultural and electronic products as the main goods. Thanks to the double improvement in the quality and efficiency of train transport, our business foundation has been solidified."

In recent years, Alashankou Customs has facilitated efficient customs clearance of goods by implementing models such as embedded supervision, parallel operations and touchless clearance. It has also explored the "road port and direct access" format by carefully constructing an integrated intelligent customs supervision system and streamlining the clearance process.

On Sep 29, 2024, with the opening of the Alashankou comprehensive inspection yard, the second line along the Jinghe to Alashankou section of Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway was in full operation, increasing the narrow-gauge transport capacity by 15 percent and the wide-gauge transport capacity by 30 percent. This has given Alashankou an advantage in serving and integrating into the new development pattern, laying a solid foundation for its participation in the construction of the BRI.

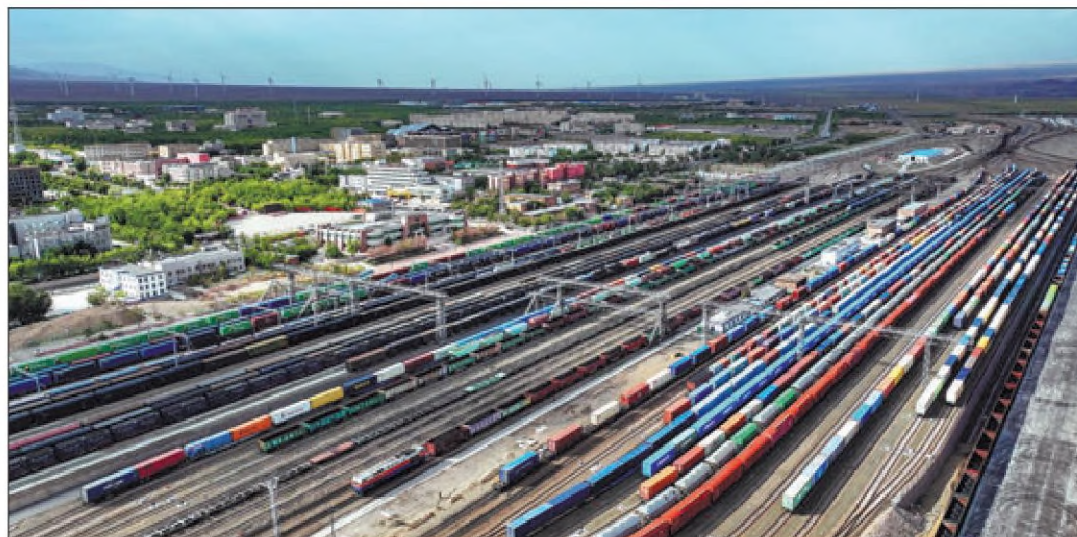
At the Alashankou highway port joint inspection hall, daily inbound and outbound tourists lined up for security checks in the Year of Tourism of Kazakhstan in China. In response to the growing demand for inbound and outbound travel, the Alashankou border checkpoint has introduced advanced inspection equipment and established credit checks and risk prediction mechanisms, among other measures. This has significantly optimized the clearance process.

Duan Xiaoyan, deputy team leader of the fifth team on duty at the border checkpoint, said: "We will continuously optimize service processes, further improve clearance efficiency, and spare no effort to create a convenient, efficient and safe clearance experience for every traveler, building a solid and reliable barrier for customs clearance in the BRI construction."

According to statistics from the Alashankou border checkpoint, as of Dec 3, the number of inbound and outbound travelers in 2024 had reached 201,278, a significant surge of 70.1 percent compared to the same period of 2023.

For decades, Alashankou has always regarded foreign trade as a top priority, grasping enterprise needs and development trends. It encourages companies to participate in domestic and international well-known exhibitions such as the China International Import Expo, the Canton Fair, and the China-Eurasia Expo, supporting them in expanding in international markets.

Alashankou's emerging industries, such as cross-border e-commerce and market procurement trade, have opened new paths for foreign trade growth, building a bridge for companies to reach global markets. For example, the Alashankou Comprehensive Bonded Zone, as Xinjiang's first comprehensive bonded zone, fully leverages its unique location advantages and policy dividends to promote the prosperity of the import and export trade.



Clockwise from top: Workers process Chinese goji berries on the production line of a company in Jinghe county of Bortala, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Employees spin yarn in a production workshop of a local textile company. YUSUFU AINI / FOR CHINA DAILY Freight trains loaded with goods are ready to depart Alashankou Port in Xinjiang. YUSUFU AINI / FOR CHINA DAILY

ADVERTORIAL

## WORLD

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
julian@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Whether it was the conflict in Ukraine surpassing 1,000 days or a record number of deaths among migrants trying to cross the English Channel, the mass movement of displaced populations in and around Europe remained a grim headline fixture in 2024.

The United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, projected Europe's forcibly displaced and stateless population to increase by 2 percent to 24.9 million people in 2024, and its effect was felt everywhere.

In June, elections took place for the European Parliament, whose cross-border structure means voters can sometimes find issues that do not necessarily directly affect their own country end up influencing the overall outcome, which, in turn, makes those issues locally relevant. One issue above all affected all 27 European Union states, and the result: migration.

Just a month prior to the elections, the EU adopted the Pact on Migration and Asylum that aimed at "managing migration and establishing a common asylum system at EU level".

The pact envisions sharing out migrants among EU countries, with the people having no say in where they are sent, and countries either accepting their quota or offering logistics support or financial contributions to assist others.

However, it is already facing opposition, as national attitudes toward the welcoming of migrants, and also the ability and willingness to accommodate them, vary sharply, and the election outcome presented a very different vision of the future.

While no single political bloc won a majority of the 720 seats, there was a swing to the right, fueled by migration.

Heading into 2025, the migration challenge remains as big as ever, and the successes of parties, such as France's National Rally and Germany's Alternative for Germany, at the national and EU levels suggest that the prevailing mood is becoming less tolerant and more hostile.

Two of the biggest sources of migrants have been Syria and Afghanistan, and the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria has led many European countries to halt asylum claims for Syrians, or to suggest that they should return home.

For all their differences, immigration is one topic on which Europe's right-wing parties share much common ground, and 2024's results tightened their grip on the policy steering wheel.

It was noted in a paper published by the Chatham House think tank after the June election that one consequence of the emboldening of the right is that "centrist parties have tried to adopt far-right narratives on immigration at both national and EU level, hoping to retain voters who might otherwise consider defecting to far-right parties".

One suggested remedy is return centers. Details remain vague, but it would mean if an asylum application

# Far right drives Europe's migration policy

Continent faces mounting challenges as public sentiment shifts, political divisions deepen



Migrants board an inflatable dinghy on Bleriot Beach in northern France on Oct 30, attempting to cross the English Channel. SAMEER AL-DOUMY / AFP

2024  
year in  
Review

is rejected, the person would be moved to a facility outside EU territory as the start of their ejection process.

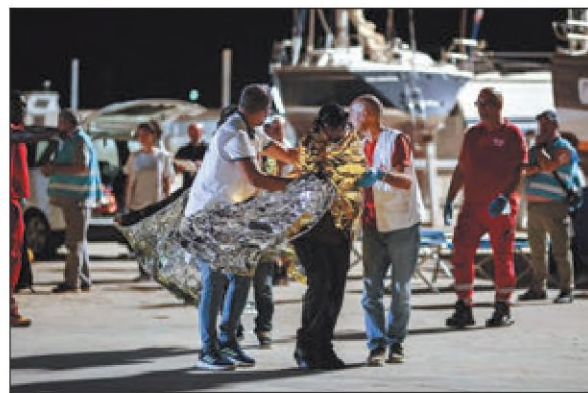
These were discussed at an EU summit in October, and referred to in a letter from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to EU leaders.

"We should ... explore possible ways forward as regards the idea of developing return hubs outside the EU, especially in view of a new legislative proposal on returns," she wrote.

However, they would be a minefield of complexity, something Italy has already encountered in its plan to send asylum-seekers to detention camps outside EU territory while their applications are processed.

Italy's geographical location, sticking out into the Mediterranean Sea, puts it on the migration frontline. In the first six months of 2024, 25,345 migrants reached Italy, many by boat, a 60 percent decrease from the corresponding period in the previous year.

In November 2023, Italy agreed to a five-year deal with Albania to host Italian-built and funded camps, with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni telling newspaper *Il Messaggero* at the time, "I believe (the deal) could become a model of cooperation between EU and non-EU countries in managing migration flows." But the detail has been more complex than the headline.



Members of Doctors Without Borders help a migrant with a blanket at the port of Roccella Ionica, Italy, on Sept 29. An Italian Coast Guard patrol vessel had taken 79 migrants from Iran, Iraq and Egypt to the port after their departure from Türkiye. VALERIA FERRARO VIA NEWS.COM

The first group of 16 people were sent in October, only to come back after a court ruled the countries of origin to which they may be returned if their bids failed could not be regarded as safe, and a month later, staff members also returned home.

"What remains in Albania is a colossal structure built by local entrepreneurs with Italian taxpayers' money, destined to decay," former prime minister Matteo Renzi wrote on X.

"What remains in Albania is Giorgia Meloni's face, responsible for an unprecedented waste of resources driven only by an electoral whim. And the judges have nothing to do with this, make no mistake: the Albania operation doesn't hold up, both in terms of numbers and the law."

Albania emphasized that this arrangement was exclusively on offer

to Italy, rather than for general hire, because of what Prime Minister Edi Rama called the country's "unconditional love" for Italy, which some observers have linked to Albania's own bid for EU membership.

## Warning to all

However, Eva Singer, from the Danish Refugee Council, told Euronews that Italy's experience should be a warning to all.

"EU countries are talking about (outsourcing) as if you can just decide what happens outside of the EU, but we're talking about independent countries that have their own interests," she said. "I don't see why these countries would accept taking over the responsibility from Europe."

For the second half of 2024, Hungary held the rotating presidency of the

Council of the European Union, and in October, Prime Minister Viktor Orban made his position clear.

"I have been chest-deep in the bloodbath of the migration debate for quite some time," he said. "Since 2015, I have been saying the same thing: We can try all kinds of pacts, but there is only one way to control migration — the external hot spot."

"The only immigrants who stay out are the ones we don't let in ... in the end, there will be agreement between states to have external hot spots."

Meloni and Orban met twice during Hungary's presidency, and after their second meeting they issued a joint statement confirming their commitment to tackling irregular migration through "enhanced collaboration with countries of origin and transit".

Although, as someone who has attained power, Meloni may be seen as a standard-bearer for Europe's right-wing parties, the reality is more nuanced.

"In the elections in 2022 (when Meloni came to power), a record low number of Italians voted, just 63.7 percent, a 20 percent drop compared to the 2008 election," Simona Guerra, a senior lecturer in comparative politics at the University of Surrey in England, told China Daily.

"At the European elections, commentators expected massive gains for the radical right, which happened to a degree, but with the vote in Germany (Alternative for Germany finished with the second-largest vote share) and France (National Rally won nearly one-third of the vote) disproportionately affecting the overall figures."

Meloni's confidence in the Italy-

Albania deal was enough for von der Leyen to tell EU leaders "we will also be able to learn from this practical experience".

Reality has proved otherwise, however, with the deal so far involving great outlay and no concrete results.

"The operation costs 9 million euros (\$9.3 million) annually to Italian taxpayers and the cooperative managing the hub was awarded a 133-million-euro contract," Guerra said.

"At the same time, according to the Italian Statistics Institute, there are now more than 5 million Italians (9.7 percent of population) living in absolute poverty. Also, the agreement between the two prime ministers bypassed the Albanian constitution, which would have required the consent of the president of the republic."

In the European Parliament, the Patriots for Europe bloc, which includes Orban's Fidesz party, supports the idea of external repatriation centers, so is Meloni really an inspiration in this way? "Not according to European law," Guerra said.

However, Meloni remains committed to the policy, going as far as to say in a speech in December that "the centers ... in Albania will work, even if I have to spend every night there from now until the end of the (term of the) Italian government."

Guerra explained, "It enables her to control two narratives — on one side the protection of the country, and the other the hostility of the judiciary, against the interests of the nation."

## Comparative stability

With France in a state of turmoil, and Germany facing an election next month, Meloni represents a figure of comparative stability on the European political landscape.

In addition, Donald Trump's return to the White House will turn world politics on its head, with huge implications for migration and for Europe — he has already promised mass deportations in the United States — and the increased likelihood of the Russia-Ukraine conflict ending, meaning more turmoil and displacement there, which will have a huge impact on Europe. The point of the piece is how everything is connected, nothing is stand-alone.

Trump's second presidential term is the great unpredictable event for world politics in 2025, but for Meloni, it could be a chance to entrench herself as the leader of the European right, as she has a history with him.

In 2018, Trump's adviser Steve Bannon attended Meloni's Atrēju political festival, and in 2020, she was a guest at Trump's Washington National Prayer Breakfast.

Before he is back in office, Meloni is positioning herself to be a bridge between Brussels and Washington. "She has been telling the Italian Parliament not to be hostile to Trump, as it doesn't create conversation," Guerra said.

How Europe's challenge in handling migration in 2025 changes remains to be seen, but the issue will not go away.

## Labels and language stoke Britain's 'small boats' debate, obscuring reality

By JULIAN SHEA in London

In November 2023, the British newspaper *Sunday Express* featured a front-page headline about a message reportedly being sent by Conservative members of Parliament — who knew a general election was coming — to then-prime minister Rishi Sunak: "Stop Small Boats or We're Sunk".

The warning underscored growing frustration within the ruling party as Sunak, who had pledged to curb small boat crossings in the English Channel since becoming leader in October 2022, struggled to deliver results.

By mid-2024, the failure to address the issue contributed to the Conservative Party's defeat in July's general election, which ushered the Labour Party into power with the responsibility of tackling the United Kingdom's immigration challenge.

A 2023 study by Durham University in England found that Brexit was a major factor behind the surge in small boat crossings. With Britain no longer part of the European Union, it lost the mechanisms to return asylum-seekers arriving from mainland Europe.

According to the House of Commons research library, these crossings grew exponentially, from 299 people in 2018 — when they were first detected — to 45,774 in 2022. Last year, 36,816 people were detected in the channel, a 25 percent increase from the 29,437 who arrived in 2023, provisional figures from the Interior Ministry showed on Wednesday.

The lack of return facility means many people are now willing to take greater risks to cross the channel — often with tragic consequences.

By Oct 9, the International Organization for Migration confirmed that 2024 had become the deadliest year for channel crossings, with 52 fatalities. By early December, the figure had passed 70.

The circumstances in which people attempt crossings are becoming more desperate, with the British Home Office reporting that the average number of people per boat had risen from 10 in 2019 to 53 in 2024.

According to a German investigator cited by *The Guardian* newspaper, human trafficking has become more lucrative than drug smuggling.

The Conservative Party's "Stop the Boats" slogan has been ditched in favor of Labour's "Smash the Gangs" approach, with a Home Office spokesperson vowing to "dismantle (smuggling gangs') business models and bring them to justice".

The new, more open approach to cooperation with European law enforcement does seem to be producing results. In December, a joint operation involving British, French and German police deployed more than 500 officers in raids across France and Germany, targeting people who are believed to have been arranging small boat crossings.

In the summer, just weeks after Labour's election victory, the volatile nature of migration as a political



Protesters confront the police during a demonstration in London on July 31, held in response to the government's handling of the fatal stabbings of three children in Southport on July 29. BENJAMIN CREMEL / AFP

issue was laid bare. Following the killing of three children, misinformation spread on social media falsely identified the suspect — a Wales-born individual whose trial is set for this month — as a migrant.

The false claims fueled riots across the UK, with hotels housing migrants becoming frequent targets. "There was a clear connection between online activity and violent disorder seen on UK streets," said Melanie Dawes, chief executive of media regulator Ofcom.

This incident highlighted the importance of responsible language in migration discussions and the danger of oversimplified slogans and headlines that obscure key details.

James Hampshire, a professor of politics at the University of Sussex and deputy editor of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, said the issue of small boats has been inflated out of all proportion.

"I'd try to de-emphasize the small boat arrivals, because it's only a very small part of the immigration picture."

"Most people who come here come on work visas or study visas. Maybe the focus of the immigration debate should be on why our economy and education sector are so reliant on people coming from outside."

"But it's perceived that people want to hear a simple message, and it's hard to think of politicians of any persuasion who will go beyond

36,816  
crossings

were detected in the English Channel last year, a 25 percent increase year-on-year.

simple sloganeering," he said.

Helena Wray, an associate professor of migration law at the University of Exeter, backed up his point.

"Of course the small boats are a terrible concern because they're putting people at such risk, but in fact they only account for around 3 or 4 percent of the migrants who come into the UK," she said.

"There has been a raising of the tone as if it is a major immigration crisis, and it's not. It's a small number of people from (other) countries who have understandable reasons for wanting to come here, and I have sympathy with the government having to address such a heated issue when you have people presenting such simplistic answers and screaming headlines."

Clara Devlin, chief executive of *Breaking Barriers*, a charity that helps migrants into meaningful employment, said the summer riots showed the danger of the labels and language.

"We need to change the narrative and make people understand that this group of people known as 'refugees' are not a homogenous mass, they are individuals with stories and talents, but people have the percep-

tion of what the media are feeding them," she said.

"In this era of misinformation, it's a huge challenge but it's up to organizations like ours to tell their stories."

Trying to change the situation should be a top political priority, Devlin said, but she acknowledged that "it takes a brave politician to try and address it" as it is not a vote-winning issue.

Wray said Britain is only "midway" in Europe when it comes to the number of asylum claims it receives, but the absence of safe routes meant desperate people would take desperate measures — previously, on foot through the Channel Tunnel or on lorries, and now, increasingly, in boats.

"I don't think there is an answer apart from to acknowledge that all prosperous countries receive asylum claims," she said. "We live in an unstable world where people try to flee danger."

That instability is unlikely to end any time soon, but even in the darkest days, Devlin said, flickers of hope, if not exactly reasons for optimism, do exist.

"After those horrendous riots, we had so many people come to us, saying, 'I feel helpless, tell me what I can do,'" she said. "These people like that are out there, but they don't make the news. There's so much going on behind the scenes that most people don't know about, but I feel privileged to be in the position I am, because I do see it, and it's uplifting."

## WORLD

# Xi's address shows China's confidence

New Year speech reflects willingness to play key role in global cooperation

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels, ZHENG WANYIN in London and JIANG XUQING in Tokyo

Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year address has showed China's confidence in its future as well as the country's willingness to play a more active role in global cooperation, observers have said.

The Chinese president, in his New Year message on Tuesday to usher in 2025, brought to light the momentum in economic and social development in China as well as the willingness to work with other countries to make the world a better place for all.

Jasna Plevnik, president of the Geoeconomic Forum Croatia, said the New Year message underscored that "China's journey of development will continue into 2025", a reminder to the people of China that the country is open to ambitious new plans.

"It highlights President Xi's profound confidence in the political unity of the country, which is essential for advancing reforms aimed at achieving high-quality development," Plevnik said.

China's development remains steadfast, Plevnik noted, adding that the International Monetary Fund has again revised its growth projections for China upward, a trend the IMF has been following for decades.

The address, which stated China will continue to leverage its influence at BRICS, APEC and G20 to promote peace and cooperation with other nations, "prioritizes the interests of peace and shared development over national egotisms", Plevnik said.

"President Xi's message has reiterated that the primary purpose of China's development is to serve the best interests of every Chinese, enabling them to pursue their full measure of happiness," she said.

Michael Dunford, an emeritus professor at the University of Sussex, said the New Year speech reflects on a year of "considerable progress on many fronts and of peace and harmony in China".

"The domestic situation is a clear

reflection of the effectiveness of China's system of governance," Dunford said.

Satoshi Tomisaka, a professor at the Institute of World Studies at Takushoku University in Tokyo, said inclusivity and confidence are two key points of the speech, underlining China's role and responsibility as a major country.

It "reflects a traditional Eastern approach that emphasizes inclusivity and acceptance", Tomisaka said.

## People's welfare

The address, which mentioned issues such as employment, income growth, elderly and child care, and education, "shines a spotlight on people's welfare", Tomisaka said.

Confidence is reflected in China's approach to global governance reform, particularly deepening solidarity among the Global South, he said.

"Given China's significant contribution of approximately 30 percent to global economic growth, its perspective on the world naturally attracts great interest," Tomisaka said, adding that the New Year message provides reassurance to those watching closely with concern.

Muslim Imran, director of the Asia Middle East Center for Research and Dialogue in Malaysia, said the address revealed the high level of confidence the Chinese leadership has in the nation and its future.

"This confidence was reflected in the emphasis on the need for more cooperation with the Global South, and the need to enhance mutual cooperation among different cultures, in order to build a better future for the world," Imran said.

"The address was more than just a domestic message to his people, but a universal declaration that China will play a more active role in evolving the world order," he added.

Jan Yumul in Hong Kong and Shao Xinying in Beijing contributed to this story.

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## Rich tradition



Aymara indigenous people celebrate the "Roscasiri" in Pomata District of Chucuito Province, southern Peru, on Wednesday. The ancient Aymara event, in which people decorate themselves with breads and fruits that represent abundance for the new year, celebrates the change of local authorities.

CONNIE FRANCE CALDERON MARTEL / AFP

## Iraqi oil project taps Chinese expertise

By CUI HAIPEI in Basra, Iraq  
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Iraq has experienced a mutually beneficial oil and gas partnership with China, and anticipates a fresh beginning following China National Petroleum Corporation, or CNPC, taking over from ExxonMobil as the lead contractor for the West Qurna 1 oilfield, officials have said.

On New Year's Day, nearly 200 guests attended a groundbreaking ceremony of the new operation headquarters of the project in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city and most important port hub.

Hayan Abdul-Ghani, Iraq's deputy prime minister for energy affairs and oil minister, said via video that the field's production has now reached 550,000 barrels a day. He lauded the Chinese company for providing sufficient job opportunities and services to local communities.

West Qurna 1, located about 50 kilometers northwest of Basra, is a major oilfield with the largest production potential in Iraq. It has an annual crude oil output of more than 25 million metric tons with recoverable reserves of more than 22 billion barrels.

Leading operations of West Qurna 1 reflects the shared vision of Chinese and Iraqi leaders, deepening economic and trade cooperation, said Chen Mingzhuo, general manager of the project.

"It also serves as our commitment to bolstering Iraq's economy and playing a part in its journey toward prosperity," he said.

Iraq has long relied on oil exports for 90 percent of its revenue and the new operation center is essential for the field to further increase production.

Spanning 800,000 square meters, the upcoming complex will entail a total construction area of about 50,000 square meters. It is slated for completion in two phases, with the first phase scheduled for 2027 and the second for 2028.

The initial phase can house 540 employees with two production command center buildings, a canteen, a multipurpose building, a clinic, a maintenance workshop and other support facilities.

The CNPC successfully completed the handover across seven fields

within six months, with the comprehensive handover carried out, the group said in a news release.

By last year, the average yearly production had surged to 541,000 barrels a day. Production has steadied at 550,000 barrels a day, hitting a record peak of 568,000 barrels on July 28.

The achievements were made with the work of 2,569 staff members of West Qurna 1, coming from more than 10 countries, including China, Japan and Indonesia, with 76 Chinese employees.

## Close teamwork

"The Chinese collaborate closely with both international and local employees. We are akin to three differently sized cogwheels, where only through close cooperation can we ensure efficient operation," said Guan Lei from the maintenance department. He leads a team of nearly 300 workers and he is the sole Chinese within the team.

In the new year, the successive commissioning of four key projects will contribute to the increase in production capacity by 200,000 barrels a day.

Cai Kaiping, the project's sub-surface manager, said, "We expect production capacity to reach 800,000 barrels per day by 2028 and 1 million barrels per day by 2030, and in the next phase, production capacity will reach 1.2 mil-

lion barrels per day by 2035."

"We value the friendship formed in our work. We once took our Iraqi colleagues to visit the oilfields in Daqing, China's largest onshore oilfield, and the garden-like environment left a profound impression on them, strengthening their confidence in cooperating with us," he said.

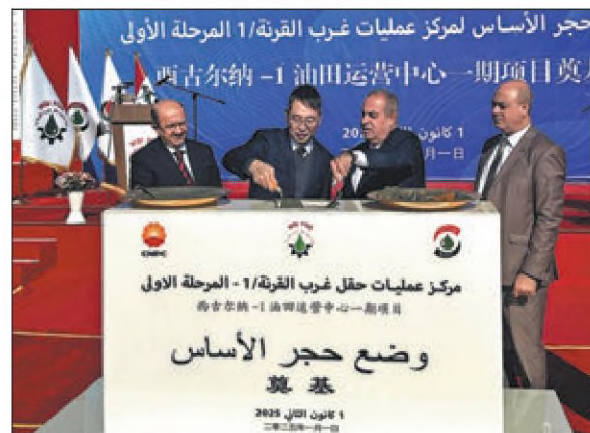
Green development has also been a major feature of West Qurna 1 since the transition began.

On Dec 17, the DS6 degassing station of West Qurna 1 successfully eliminated most of the "black smoke" from burning associated gas. It was seen by many locals as one of the key green achievements after the CNPC took over the oilfield.

Hasan Hanoon, 35, an engineer in the operation department, said the smoke used to seriously affect local residents in the area. The Iraqi, who is married with three children, said the job helps his family to have a decent life in Iraq.

"Since joining the Chinese enterprise, I have felt the changes in the oilfield, and admired China's speed, strength and spirit," he said, adding that he has also learned more about the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

"Iraq-China cooperation has not only improved our lives. More importantly, it has opened up more possibilities for our future development."



A groundbreaking ceremony is held for the new operation headquarters of the West Qurna 1 oilfield in Basra, Iraq, on Wednesday.

CUI HAIPEI / CHINA DAILY

## Emergency relief sent to quake-hit Vanuatu

By ZHOU JIN  
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China has delivered a batch of emergency relief supplies to Vanuatu, to meet the needs of those affected by a 7.3-magnitude earthquake that hit the southwestern Pacific island country on Dec 17.

A chartered plane sent by the Chinese government carrying 35 metric tons of supplies, including tents, folding beds, solar-powered lights, food, water purifiers and medical equipment, arrived in Vanuatu's capital Port Vila on Thursday.

The supplies were provided at the request of the government of Vanuatu and reflected the friendship of the Chinese people toward the people of Vanuatu, said Li Ming, spokesman for the China International Development Cooperation Agency.

Li Minggang, the Chinese ambassador to Vanuatu, said at the handover ceremony on Thursday that as a good friend and brother of Vanuatu, China feels for the great loss caused by the recent quake.

China is willing to continue providing assistance within its capacity for post-disaster reconstruction in Vanuatu, Li said.

Vanuatu's caretaker Prime Minister Charlot Salwai expressed appreciation for China's assistance at the ceremony, saying that the Vanuatu government will ensure that the aid reaches those affected by the quake as soon as possible.

The tremor that hit Port Vila killed at least 14 people and injured more than 200, with the city's infrastructure severely damaged.

After the earthquake, China immediately provided emergency humanitarian assistance to better support Vanuatu's disaster relief work, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a daily news conference on Thursday.

Post-disaster assessment engineers from China have been carrying out intensive work in Vanuatu, providing support to the local government and people, she said.

At the request of the government of Vanuatu, four Chinese earthquake engineering experts arrived in Port Vila on Monday — the first post-disaster assessment team that China has sent to a Pacific island country.

Mao said that China believes the people of Vanuatu will overcome the difficulties and rebuild their homes soon.

## Briefly

### MONTENEGRO Gunman kills 12, dies by suicide

A man shot dead 12 people in Montenegro before dying from self-inflicted injuries early on Thursday, authorities said, in one of the nation's worst mass killings. The attacker, named by police as 45-year-old Aleksandar Aco Martinovic, initially killed four people when he opened fire after a brawl at a restaurant in Cetinje town on Wednesday afternoon. He then shot dead eight people, including two children, at three other locations, prosecutor Andriana Nastic said.

### SOUTH KOREA Impeached Yoon vows to 'fight until end'

South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol told supporters in a letter he will "fight until the end" as he faces an attempt by authorities to arrest him over his short-lived imposition of martial law last month, a lawyer said on Thursday. Police scuffled on Thursday with Yoon supporters who laid down in the road to try to block access to his residence. Police issued dispersal orders and then forcibly removed some protesters, Reuters reported.

XINHUA

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Ukraine's halt of Russian gas transit raises supply, price concerns

VALLETTA, Malta — A halt in Russian gas transit through Ukraine has sparked fears of supply shortages and soaring energy costs, particularly in landlocked European nations like Slovakia.

Both Ukraine and Russia announced the stoppage on Wednesday, pushing some EU countries to resort to costlier energy alternatives.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico on Wednesday said that stopping gas transit through Ukraine to Europe will have "severe consequences for all of us in the European Union, but will not harm Russia".

The stoppage follows Ukraine's decision not to renew a 2019 gas

transit agreement between its state-run Naftogaz and Russia's Gazprom, which expired on Tuesday.

"In the interests of national security, the transportation of Russian natural gas through the territory of Ukraine was stopped," the Ukrainian Energy Ministry said in a statement on Wednesday. Similarly, Gazprom confirmed that it has stopped the gas supply due to the expiration of key agreements and Ukraine's refusal to renew them.

In a letter to the European Commission on Sunday, Fico condemned Ukraine's gas transit halt as irrational and warned that it would heighten tensions and harm the EU

more than Russia. He also indicated that his government might consider measures such as cutting electricity supplies to Ukraine.

Slovakia, heavily dependent on Russian gas, is among the worst-hit countries. It has been importing about 3 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Russia through Ukraine annually, accounting for two-thirds of its demand.

However, the European Commission downplayed the potential impact of the latest move, with a spokesperson saying that the European gas infrastructure is "flexible enough" to provide gas of non-Russian origin to central and eastern

Europe via alternative routes, and that it has been reinforced with significant new liquefied natural gas, or LNG, import capacities since 2022.

Mark Cigoj, editor-in-chief of the Croatian weekly 7 Dnevo, has said that Slovakia, Austria and Hungary are particularly vulnerable, given their reliance on Russian gas and lack of direct access to LNG imports.

Slovakia's Regulatory Authority for Network Industries, the country's energy regulator, has forecast household gas price increases of 15 percent to 34 percent in 2025 without state energy assistance.

To cushion the impact, the Slovak government has allocated about 235

million euros (\$244 million) for energy aid, further straining the country's tight budget.

SPP, Slovakia's state-owned gas utility, on Wednesday assured continued supply but acknowledged the increased costs of alternatives.

Moldova, which imports about 2 billion cubic meters of gas annually from Russia via Ukraine, enacted measures on Wednesday to cut electricity usage by at least 30 percent.

The measures include limiting street lighting and stopping escalators in some public and commercial buildings.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Sanctions show that Beijing will brook no challenge to China's core interests

By putting 10 United States entities on its Unreliable Entity List and 28 US entities on its Export Control List on Thursday, the first work day of the new year, Beijing is not only responding to the most recent arms sales to Taiwan and the probe into China's conventional semiconductor sector that the Joe Biden administration announced late last month, but also reminding the incoming US administration of China's resolve to guard its red lines.

All of the 10 US companies that China has identified as "unreliable" have participated in arms sales to Taiwan island and carried out so-called military and technical cooperation with its secessionist-minded authority despite Beijing's strong opposition. In doing so, they have violated the one-China principle and the provisions of the three Sino-US joint communiques, and seriously undermined peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Beijing's move is thus fully justified as they have sought to undermine China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Taiwan question is China's internal affair, concerns China's core interests, and brooks no external interference. The one-China principle is a recognized basic norm of international relations and a universal consensus of the international community. China has therefore always firmly opposed the US selling weapons to the island, which is a breach of the US administration's avowal of not supporting "Taiwan independence".

The entities added to the Unreliable Entity List are prohibited from engaging in import and export activities related to China or making new investments in the country. Their senior managers are prohibited from entering China, and the work permit, stay or residence qualification of the senior managers of these enterprises in China has been revoked.

The decision to sanction the 10 US entities was made in accordance with the Foreign Trade Law, the National Security Law and the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, according to the statement the Ministry of Commerce of China issued on Thursday when the sanctions came into force.

The decision to sanction the other 28 US entities was made in accordance with the Export Control Law and the Regulations on Export Control of Dual-Use Items, with the purpose of safeguarding national interests and fulfilling international obligations such as nuclear nonproliferation, the ministry said in a separate statement issued at the same time.

Dual-use items are prohibited from being exported to those on the Export Control List, and exporters must apply to the ministry for approval if there are exceptional circumstances.

Although the ministry has not specified the background for the sanctions on the 28 US entities, almost all of them are involved in weapons manufacturing or arms selling that are overtly and covertly related to some key issues that have close bearings on China's national security and interests and nuclear proliferation problems in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The 38 entities are the most US entities China has sanctioned in one go, reflecting how the US under the Biden administration has intensified its challenging of China's red lines and core interests while carrying out its China-containment strategy, which is fundamentally flawed as it is based on a false perception of China's development.

"It is important to rise above estrangement and conflict with a broad vision," President Xi Jinping said in his New Year message. But when it comes to China's core interests, the space for that "rise" and "vision" have been defined clearly. It is to be hoped that the incoming US administration can accurately heed the unspoken part of the New Year message from Beijing and it is perceptive enough to give up any illusion that it can challenge Beijing on relevant issues.

Neither the Taiwan question nor China's aspiration to seek development obstructed the establishing of diplomatic relations between China and the US 45 years ago, when the two countries' differences were much larger and across a broader field than today. So neither of the two factors, which are essentially unchanged, should obstruct the healthy development of Sino-US relations today, when the two countries' common interests are much larger than they were then. The US can continue to benefit tremendously from China's development, so long as it displays the same courage, vision and wisdom that it did then.

## Welcome signs neighbors looking to build trust

Mutual distrust seems to have been the hallmark of relations between China and Japan over the past two decades. Prospective thaws in their frosty relations have proved to be the warming rays of false dawns, and each time the two close neighbors have become only further estranged. Thanks to the dedicated efforts from both sides, it now seems there is the real possibility that the bleak picture is about to change.

In Lima, Peru, President Xi Jinping had a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba during which the two leaders agreed to comprehensively advance the strategic relationship of mutual benefit between the two neighbors in accordance with the principles and directions stipulated in the four political documents between the two sides.

This upturn was further highlighted by Ishiba in a recent program on TBS, in which he said it is extremely important that as Japanese Prime Minister he visit China. That the trust between the top leaders of the two countries cannot be superficial and that it must be developed through interactions.

Considering that Ishiba has previously emphasized the importance of relations between Japan and the United States, and that US president-elect Donald Trump has reportedly informed Tokyo, that he would like to hold talks with Ishiba in mid-January, that Ishiba prefers to hold their first formal bilateral summit when he visits the United States in February or possibly later has led to speculation he is seemingly hoping to talk face-to-face with the Chinese leader before speaking with the new US president in person, which would be a marked change of Japanese practice.

There has been no further indication that Ishiba may change the tradition of recent years, in which a Japanese prime minister is among the first group of foreign leaders to visit the US when there is a power transition in Washington. Yet, it is still good to learn that Ishiba highly values his country's ties with China and is hoping to build more trust with Beijing through high-level interactions. After all, for two close neighbors such as China and Japan, estrangement will only draw the two sides further apart while engagement and cooperation cater to the interests of both countries.

Ishiba's favorable remarks can be seen as the latest signal of goodwill following a series of efforts both sides have been taking lately to try and thaw relations and get bilateral ties back onto a normal track. Last week, the two neighbors reached 10 important consensus to boost exchanges during the visit to Beijing by Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeshi Iwaya.

Marking an important step in improving bilateral ties, the 10-point consensus agreed on by China and Japan covers such areas as vigorously promoting youth exchanges, building more platforms for exchanges between their sister cities, strengthening sports exchanges and cooperation and encouraging cooperation in cultural and media fields. The two countries have also vowed to work together to make Expo 2025 Osaka a platform for communication and friendship between the two peoples. Fostering better people-to-people ties can provide a solid foundation for better understanding and friendly relations between the two peoples.

In another effort to build political mutual trust, China and Japan also held consultations under their high-level political dialogue mechanism in Beijing in November. All this has helped lay the groundwork for more high-level exchanges, which have been scarce in recent years and which, judging by Ishiba's latest remarks, has become an urgent issue that needs to be addressed by the two countries.

In the face of the increasing global turbulence, China and Japan, as two important countries, whose development is closely linked to each other, should demonstrate strategic composure and steer clear of disruptions instigated by third parties, such as the push for decoupling and building "small yards with high fences".

China's development is an opportunity for the world, not a challenge, and this is especially true for neighboring countries such as Japan. It is essential that both countries look to the future and the large picture of bilateral ties, properly handle major issues of principle and manage differences in a constructive manner so as to consolidate the political foundation of bilateral relations and open new horizons for bilateral cooperation.

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## Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## Strengthened momentum for deepening all-round reform

The top leader's New Year message and his important speech delivered at the New Year tea party held by the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, show the central authorities' confidence and determination to overcome various difficulties and to deepen reform to improve people's livelihood and promote high-quality development.

The message demonstrates to the world China's determination to advance Chinese modernization. As a clarion call has been sounded for further deepening all-round reform, China will take great strides to advance reform and opening-up and embrace even broader prospects in pursuing Chinese modernization.

The New Year message covers various fields such as the economy, and contains not only grand ambitions but also concrete and pragmatic goals

to improve people's livelihoods. "Of all the jobs in front of us, the most important is to ensure a happy life for our people," the top leader said.

From filling China's bowls with more Chinese grain, to raising the basic pensions, from the expansion of cross-province direct settlement of medical bills, to making it easier for people to seek medical treatment, from lowering mortgage rates for home buyers, to the launch of consumer goods trade-in programs, a series of measures the country has taken over the past year have brought tangible benefits to the Chinese people.

The New Year message also paints a rosy picture for China's development. From the fostering of new quality productive forces to the emergence of new business sectors, from breakthroughs made in integrated circuits, artificial intelligence, quantum communications and many

other fields, to the Chang'e 6 lunar probe collecting samples from the far side of the moon, all of these are expected to take China's development to a more solid footing.

Some Western countries have not stopped pointing accusing fingers at China's development policy, but it is undeniable that a series of positive economic policy measures China has implemented in the past year has also benefited the rest of the world.

China's development will not be stopped, and its concept of development for the benefit of its people and the rest of the world will not change. Past difficulties and challenges could not stop China's development; future difficulties and challenges won't either. The visions described in the top leader's New Year message will provide an unending source of momentum for China's development.

— WUYIXUE, CHINA DAILY

## New retirement policy displays human touch

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and two other departments jointly issued an interim guideline on Wednesday, allowing workers to choose their retirement age.

Rather than being mandatory, the guideline gives people the option of choosing from a flexible range of three years, before or after the retirement age, when to retire.

Some also negatively portrayed the minimum contribution period for pensions as having been raised from 15 to 20 years. However, this adjustment will be gradually implemented starting from 2030. That means, for

all those who are retiring anytime in the period from 2025 to 2029, the requirement for the minimum contribution period remains unchanged at 15 years. Workers who have already completed or are close to completing 15 years of contributions will not be affected.

Also, for workers retiring after 2030, the minimum contribution period will not abruptly increase to 20 years; it will increase gradually.

Older unemployed individuals face greater difficulties finding employment again. The decision takes into account their actual difficulties, relieves their concerns and ensures a

smooth transition to retirement.

Moreover, workers engaged in special types of work defined by the State, such as underground, in high-temperature areas, particularly those engaging in heavy physical labor, and those working in high-altitude areas, may apply for early retirement if they meet the conditions.

It can be said that the delayed retirement policy is imbued with humanism. As the delayed retirement policy is officially implemented, we hope that the situation will further improve for Chinese workers.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Manila's 'gray zone' tango with US shunned by neighbors

The Philippines' new navy chief, Ambrosio Ezepeleta, has recently suggested that the military could adopt a "gray zone" strategy in the South China Sea to counter Beijing in the disputed waterway, using nonmilitary means to realize military objectives.

Actually, Manila has never ceased using such tactics against Beijing over the past two years.

The "civil ships" Manila sends to transport "life supplies" to its military personnel living on the old battleship it grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef since 1999 are actually operated by plainclothes Philippine troops, and among the "life supplies" are building materials that can be used to consolidate the rusty ship as well as weapons.

The "social organizations" of the Philippines that send comforts to the Philippine soldiers on the ship or organize so-called yacht races in the disputed waters near Chinese islands and reefs are actually funded by the Philippine government.

The Ferdinand Marcos Jr government has suspended some railway projects in the country that were to be built by China which were

approved by the previous government, and thereafter tried to use reinstating these projects to pressure China to make concessions on the South China Sea issue.

Over the past year, the Philippines has carried out so-called scientific research at China's Tiexian Reef and Xianbin Reef using Philippine Coast Guard patrol boats to carry out the "scientific expeditions", which are in fact official actions in an attempt to assert the "sovereignty" of the Philippines over the Chinese territories.

The Marcos government has also tried to open another front in its "gray zone" by waging a propaganda war against China, with the help of the United States. Manila has thus been leaving no stone unturned in its efforts to smear China, spread lies and portray China as a "bully" and itself as a "victim", calling black white.

The Joe Biden administration regards the "gray zone" strategy as an important means to promote the implementation of its "Indo-Pacific" strategy. Sometimes the US throws itself to the front to help the Philippines to challenge China directly on

the South China Sea issue.

The US Department of Defense, the State Department, intelligence agencies, and government-funded think tanks and social organizations all coordinate with each other, taking a whole-of-government approach, to try and add pressure on China over the South China Sea issue. They try to label China as a regional threat that is militarizing the South China Sea, while the Philippines and other US allies are portrayed as "guardians" of freedom of navigation, openness and the regional order.

Despite this, Manila and Washington should know their "gray zone" tango, which is to defend the US' hegemony by nature, runs counter to the aspirations of the majority of members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for peace and development, seriously undermines regional cooperation framework centered on ASEAN, and harms the overall and long-term interests of regional countries. No matter how effective they think the strategy is, it is doomed to failure.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | AI Predictions for 2025

**Editor's note:** AI has emerged as a critical frontier for various sectors and is expected to continue to reshape technological landscape with unprecedented advancements, transforming industries and challenging traditional operational paradigms. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Wang Feiyue

## An era of broad societal shift

From the meteoric rise of generative language models such as ChatGPT to the shockwave caused by video model Sora's performance in February 2024, to the rapidly expanding market share of NVIDIA, the year 2024 witnessed an array of breakthrough developments in artificial intelligence technology and its applications, signaling a transformation that is reshaping industries, economies and societies.

Apple's proprietary AI is positioning the tech giant to continue its leadership in consumer products, while others, such as Tesla's humanoid robot Optimus and TikTok's Doubao — continue to push the boundaries of AI in the physical world.

But perhaps the most profound aspect of the year was the emergence of AI as an ever-present force. The Nobel Prizes in Physics and Chemistry, typically awarded for groundbreaking discoveries in traditional scientific fields, were bestowed upon AI researchers and entrepreneurs in 2024. More interestingly, a portrait of AI pioneer Alan Turing created by a robot sold at Sotheby's for nearly 10 times its expected value, showing how deeply AI has permeated the cultural and intellectual zeitgeist.

This rapid advancement is beginning to unsettle professionals in the tech industry.

The definition of "professional knowledge" is undergoing a radical shift. What was once exclusive expertise in fields such as law, medicine and engineering will soon become a set of essential skills accessible to everyone. As reports indicate, a new school in the US state of Arizona is now teaching courses entirely via AI.

This transformation signifies the arrival of a new era — one in which AI is rapidly becoming a core element of everyday life. As generative models evolve, we are transitioning from what we once called "artificial intelligence" to "agentic AI".

The reality is, AI's reach is expanding across all domains, and the implications are profound. From autonomous vehicles to unmanned aerial drones, the

future of "New AI" is already taking shape. China's burgeoning low-altitude economy, along with its ecological industries, represents one of the most significant application areas for this new wave of AI.

At the heart of this transformation lies a fundamental question: What does AI mean for the future of work? As AI continues to evolve, it will not simply replace existing jobs — it will redefine them. In the short term, emerging job roles such as prompt engineers, alignment engineers, and prescription engineers are taking shape to support the growing "old", "past", and "new" AI industries. These roles will enable workers to interface



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with AI technologies and ensure they align with human values.

In the long term, however, AI will bring about a more profound change: it will redefine the very concept of employment, with tasks that once seemed mundane or outside the realm of traditional work becoming essential components of a new, AI-driven economy.

Furthermore, the rise of AI and intelligent technologies signals a broader societal shift — one that extends beyond the economy and touches on governance, security and international relations. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, we must also address the governance challenges it presents. AI models must be understood and controlled, and this requires a strong regulatory framework that prioritizes transparency, ethics and human oversight.

As we consider these transformations, it is important to recognize that the governance of AI is not just a technical issue; it is a matter of global importance. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently

remarked humanity's fate can't be left to algorithms.

To ensure that AI serves the common good, we must establish global norms and regulations that keep humanity at the center of the AI conversation. Economies around the world are beginning to take notice. The European Union AI Act, which came into force in August 2024, sets a precedent for how AI technologies should be regulated to safeguard public interests.

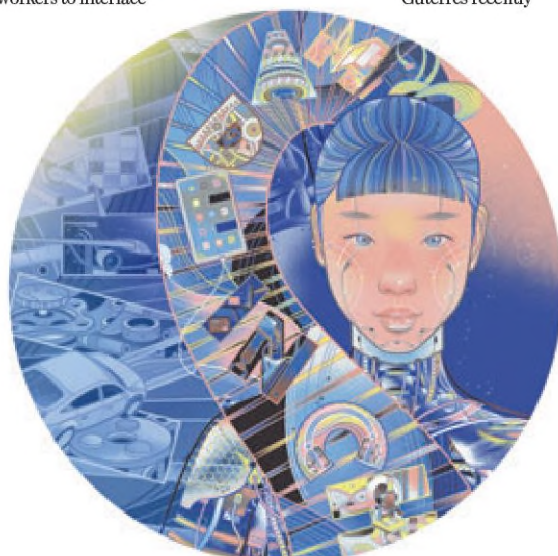
Looking ahead, three key areas will accelerate from 2025. First, AI for Science (AI4S) and digital human intelligence will penetrate all disciplines, creating "parallel scientists" by integrating AI agents, digital humans, robots and bio-humans, transforming industries.

Second, breakthroughs in autonomous smart organizations will allow individuals to create digital-human-powered companies, greatly enhancing personal capabilities. This will increase societal polarization, with a growing demand for higher education.

And third, AI governance will increasingly rely on blockchain, smart contracts and decentralized autonomous organizations, shifting governance into the realm of hard technology. Events such as the Middle East's "paper bombs" and the rise of the "digital nomads" movement highlight the need to rethink governance and industry practices. AI and intelligent technology will drive this transformation.

China's AI industry holds immense potential to make a significant global impact. However, there is a gap between China and global AI leaders. To bridge this gap, we must shift our mindset, focus on pragmatic progress and accelerate basic research while staying grounded. This requires respecting development laws, avoiding opportunism, planning for the long term, adopting new approaches, and focusing on global cooperation for the benefit of all.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Massoud Amin

## Smart grids empower sustainable development

China's rapid development and ambitious goals of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060 require a robust and adaptable infrastructure that goes beyond energy. Smart grids and artificial intelligence are critical technologies for optimizing energy management, integrating renewable resources, enhancing disaster resilience, and securing critical infrastructure.

The scope of smart grids and AI applications is continually expanding, playing a crucial role in China's energy transition. Smart grids enable the seamless integration of renewable energy while reducing inefficiencies in energy generation and distribution.

AI plays a pivotal role in several key areas. One of the main contributions is predictive maintenance, where AI continuously monitors grid components for signs of wear and tear, helping to prevent outages. Digital twins — virtual replicas of grid infrastructure — allow operators to simulate and optimize grid operations. For instance, in Hebei province, a wind farm's digital twin reduced curtailment rates by 20 percent. Another critical application is real-time demand response, where AI-powered systems dynamically adjust energy distribution during peak demand. In Shanghai, an AI-driven grid management program helped reduce peak loads by 30 percent during the heat wave in 2023.

Additionally, advanced energy storage technologies, such as flow batteries and compressed air energy storage (CAES), are optimized by AI to ensure energy is available when and where it is most needed. In Jiangsu province, a CAES plant currently provides 350 MW of long-duration storage, stabilizing grid performance.

AI and smart grids are revolutionizing transportation infrastructure by electrifying mobility and seamlessly integrating transportation systems with energy networks. Key innova-

tions in this area are driving significant transformation.

Vehicle-to-grid (V2G) integration is one such innovation, where electric vehicles (EVs) serve as mobile energy storage units. These vehicles can feed power back into the grid during peak demand, enhancing grid stability and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. By 2025, over 1 million EVs in China are expected to be part of V2G systems, contributing to a more resilient and sustainable energy network.

Another critical development is the implementation of smart charging networks. AI-driven charging stations optimize the charging schedules of EVs, reducing their impact on the grid and lowering energy costs. For example, a pilot project in Guangdong province reduced peak charging loads by 15 percent in its first year. That not only alleviated the pressure on the energy grid during high-demand periods but also improved the overall efficiency of EV charging.

The impact of smart grids extends beyond energy management to support broader urban infrastructure, ensuring sustainability and efficiency in smart cities — for instance, in cities such as Tianjin, AI is being leveraged to integrate heating, cooling, and electricity systems, which helps reduce emissions and improve overall efficiency.

AI is also playing a critical role in water and wastewater management, with algorithms optimizing the distribution of water and treatment processes and ensuring more efficient use of resources. In Beijing, for example



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AI-driven water management systems have reduced leakage rates by 12 percent.

Also, AI is transforming traffic flow optimization in smart cities, helping to alleviate congestion and enhance fuel efficiency. In Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, for example, the AI-based traffic management system has reduced travel times by 20 percent on major corridors. These AI applications are central to building smarter, more sustainable urban environments.

China's infrastructure is exposed to significant risks from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, and typhoons. And smart grids and AI play a vital role in enhancing disaster resilience by providing advanced tools for monitoring and response. AI-powered real-time monitoring systems track environmental conditions, detecting potential risks and preventing cascading failures.

For instance, Guangdong province's smart grid initiative reduced fault detection times by 40 percent in 2022. In addition, disaster simulations using digital twins are helping to identify vulnerabilities and improve recovery strategies. In the case of the Yangtze River Flood Control System, a digital twin is used to coordinate dam operations during floods, minimizing damage.

The more interconnected smart grids become, the more vulnerable they become to cyberattacks. With AI playing a crucial role in strengthening grid security, anomaly detection becomes easier as AI algorithms analyze network traffic in real time to identify and respond to cyber threats. For example, in 2023, China's State Grid deployed an AI-powered cybersecurity platform, reducing intrusion detection times by 60 percent. Another important tool is quantum cryptography, which leverages quantum key distribution (QKD) to provide unbreakable encryption for high-voltage grid control systems. A QKD system deployed in Beijing has significantly improved data security.

Beyond energy infrastructure, AI and smart technologies are also enhancing the security of other critical systems. For instance, in Sichuan province, a pilot program using AI to monitor high-speed rail tracks resulted in a 25 percent reduction in maintenance costs. In the field of telecommunications, AI helps secure data transmission and prevent service disruptions in 5G networks.

AI-driven solutions contribute significantly to the circular economy by optimizing resource use and minimizing waste. One key application is recycling rare earth elements, where AI technologies are used to identify and recover valuable materials from electronic waste. A pilot project in Guangdong achieved an 85 percent recycling rate for rare earth elements in discarded batteries and electronics.

To maximize the potential of smart grids and AI integration, China should focus on several key areas. The development of national standards is essential to ensure seamless communication between diverse infrastructure systems, facilitating greater interoperability. While talent development is essential to expand training programs to cultivate a skilled workforce in AI, improve energy management, and boost infrastructure resilience, a strong focus on rural electrification is necessary to bridge the urban-rural divide.

The integration of smart grids and AI extends far beyond energy, transforming transportation, urban infrastructure and disaster resilience, while securing critical systems against emerging threats. By leveraging these technologies, China can achieve a more sustainable, resilient and interconnected future. Strategic investments, robust policies, and collaboration between sectors will ensure that smart grids and AI contribute to China's long-term stability and global leadership in innovation.

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Zhang Linghan

## AI 'resurrection'? Let bygones be bygones

The advent of AI technology has unlocked a fascinating, yet controversial, possibility: the "resurrection" of deceased individuals. This process involves inputting a person's voice, image, and other personal data into an artificial intelligence model, which is then trained to generate a digital avatar capable of interacting as though the deceased person were still alive.

While the underlying technology is not new, the application of deep synthesis and generative AI to create these avatars raises complex questions about its legal and ethical implications, particularly regarding privacy, consent, and potential misuse.

At its core, the purpose of AI's "resurrection" technology is to preserve the memory of loved ones. However, when misused, it could result in serious violations of personal rights and lead to a host of potential dangers, including fraud and the manipulation of public opinion.

First, violation of posthumous rights. The creation and use of a digital avatar of a deceased person involves processing a vast array of personal data, including images, voices, and other private information. Misuse of this data can directly infringe on the posthumous rights of the deceased. In China, the Civil Code (Article 994) and the Personal Information Protection Law (Article 49) provide legal protection for the personal rights of the deceased, granting their immediate family members the right to control and protect their data. Unauthorized use of such data can undermine these protections.

Second, compliance risks. At the heart of AI resurrection lies the application of generative AI to process sensitive personal data, including biometric features. This raises several compliance concerns. Key issues include the sourcing of training data, the risk of generating misleading or false information, and ensuring the security of the data. If AI-generated content misrepresents the deceased or is used to deceive others, it could lead to widespread misinformation and potential harm.

Third, ethical challenges: The ethical governance of AI has become a central issue in global technology regulation. Documents like the position paper on strengthening ethical governance of AI and the Global AI Governance Initiative advocate for a human-centered, benevolent approach to AI development. However, China's ethical framework for AI is still evolving. The use of AI resurrection technology offers a critical opportunity to refine these regulatory mechanisms and ensure that AI development aligns with ethical standards.

Given the potential risks associated with AI resurrection, it is essential to establish clear principles to guide its responsible use.

The following principles should form the foundation of AI resurrection technology's application, ensuring both legal protection and ethical integrity.

Consent is the cornerstone of the ethical use of AI resurrection technology. Before creating a digital avatar of the deceased, it is crucial to produce his or her pre-written consent (if available) or, if not, the written consent of his or her immediate family members. This consent should be clear and unambiguous, ensuring that the technology is applied in accordance with the wishes of the deceased and/or that of his or her family.

And the entire process of collecting, processing, and using data must adhere to the principles of legality, necessity, fairness, and transparency as outlined in the Personal Information Protection Law. This includes safeguarding privacy, ensuring that AI interactions respect the image of the deceased, and preventing the generation of discriminatory, biased, or harmful content. Special care must also be taken to ensure that data is not used for fraudulent or malicious purposes.

AI "resurrection" technology must be legally sound. To prevent misuse, such as fraud or deceit, clear identification markers should be introduced to inform users that they are interacting with the digital avatar of a deceased person. Additionally, since such technologies are capable of collecting private user data during interactions, it becomes essential to prevent unauthorized data leakage, which could have significant personal and financial consequences for individuals.

In addition to legal safeguards, AI resurrection technology must be governed by a robust ethical framework. This framework should ensure that the technology respects individual freedoms and human dignity, and that digital avatars are not treated as legal entities. Clear boundaries must be set around where and how these avatars can be used, ensuring they do not replace or overshadow the rights of living individuals.

As AI continues to evolve, the ethical implications are becoming an increasingly significant aspect of its regulation. Laws are beginning to shift from focusing solely on technical concerns to addressing broader ethical questions. In this process, ethics are increasingly becoming the foundation for legislation, and AI governance is evolving to address these ethical challenges directly.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to ensure that AI resurrection technology is developed in a way that maximizes its positive impact while minimizing its potential harm. This will require the combined efforts of legal authorities, technologists, and ethicists to create frameworks that guide AI development in a way that benefits humanity and avoids misuse or exploitation. Only through these efforts can AI technology be steered toward becoming a force for good, aligning with evolving legal and ethical principles.

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



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## GLOBAL VIEWS



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

MARCOS CORDEIRO PIRES

## Weather the storm

Latin American countries are expected to come under tremendous pressure from the new US administration to distance themselves from China

Since the early 2000s, China's presence has become a key variable in Latin America's economic performance. Due to Chinese demand, the balance of payments crisis in the region has been significantly decreased. In general, South American countries have a surplus with China, enabling economic stability in an area historically marked by successive recessions resulting from imbalances in external accounts.

Latin American countries have joined the Belt and Road Initiative in large numbers. Even Brazil, which has not formally joined the BRI, has many synergies with the initiative's projects. The long-standing infrastructure deficit in the region has been mitigated with several investments made jointly with China in hydroelectric plants, clean energy, ports, highways and telecommunications. In this regard, it is important to note that the Chinese investment pattern has forced rich countries and multilateral institutions to prioritize investments in expanding production capacity, something that was abandoned at the height of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, it was believed that the World Bank and regional development banks should only support institutional reform in countries so that the free market could allocate the investments necessary for economic growth. But this did not happen.

In 2021, pressured by the new pattern created by China, US President Joe Biden announced at the G7 summit the creation of the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative that would supposedly provide an alternative to the BRI for infrastructure development in low- and middle-income countries. After difficulties implementing the Biden administration's domestic plan, the B3W was re-branded as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. The initiative sought to bridge the \$40 trillion infrastructure-investment gap needed by developing countries by 2035. Neither of these initiatives has materialized.

Another aspect of the relationship between China and Latin America concerns structuring industrial production chains in the region and investments in the agricultural, service and financial sectors. Companies such as COFCO, BYD, GWM, Chery, Huawei, Didi, Bank of China and Alibaba are increasingly present in the local market, helping to improve the economic competitiveness of the countries. In this regard, it is also worth considering the expansion of the use of the renminbi in bilateral transactions and the formation of international reserves.

Unfortunately, the relationship between China and Latin America is viewed with suspicion by the United States. The persistent Cold War mentality in Washington colors every partnership established with China as an existential threat to the security of the US. A bridge in Panama, a space observatory in Argentina, a transmission line in Brazil, or a port in Peru are seen as military assets, not as opportunities to stimulate local development.

In this regard, it is essential to note the first announcements made by president-elect Donald Trump. Containing China appears to be the number one priority of the new government. Trump has already promised to increase tariffs on products imported from China. He has warned that he will impose additional taxes on imports from Mexico and Canada to curb illegal immigration. He is also pressuring Mexico to curb the operations of Chinese enterprises in the country and trying to block local production of electric vehicles by Chinese companies. Another threat concerns the use of alternative currencies to the dollar in international trade with other countries. In this regard, he promised to impose 100 percent tariffs on products exported by the BRICS countries if the group organizes an alternative system to the US dollar or SWIFT.

One specific point deserves attention: the imposition of surcharges on imported goods that pass through the new Port of Chancay in Peru, developed by Cosco Shipping Ports Chancay Peru S.A. and inaugurated via video by Peruvian President

Dina Boluarte and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Nov 14. Washington sees this deepwater port as a threat. Because of this, Mauricio Claver-Carone, former president of Inter-American Development Bank and now adviser to the Trump transition team, said that the new government should impose 60 percent tariffs on goods that pass through the Peruvian port.

It is interesting to note that the new Trump administration promises to use tariffs to solve all of the country's real or imagined problems, like a charlatan in old movies who sells a panacea that promises to cure all kinds of diseases. However, it is also worth remembering that all medicines have side effects and that the damage can affect the US population, whether due to the increase in inflation, the drop in productivity, or even the creating of new jobs.

In conclusion, Latin America's geographical position, "so far from God and so close to the US", as an old Mexican saying goes, places it at the center of global geopolitical and economic disputes. The leaders of Latin American countries will be under tremendous pressure to distance themselves from partnerships with China. The administrations of Biden and Trump have already made many threats. However, Latin America has learned that third parties cannot define its interests. We can see this perception when Brazil incorporated Huawei into its 5G infrastructure, when the Peruvian government resisted pressure against the construction of Chancay, or when Argentina maintained its renminbi swap agreement to stabilize its international reserves. The Latin American region needs peace and stability to maintain its development path and refuses to relive the worst moments of the Cold War. Therefore, it must pursue its own objectives and understand that China is an essential partner, just like the US.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

ZHANG YUYAN

## In need of a silver lining

Present trends cast dark clouds over the prospects for the global economy over the next decade

The world economy is forecast to grow by 3.2 percent in 2024, down slightly from 3.3 percent in 2023, according to the latest World Economic Outlook published by the International Monetary Fund. The report projects that developed economies will expand by 1.8 percent in 2024, while emerging markets and developing economies will grow by 4.2 percent. The better-than-expected estimates reflect the resilience of the global economy, particularly the developed economies. It shows the United States and Europe have, in a sense, achieved a soft economic landing.



The recovery in world trade is both a key driver and a consequence of the better-than-expected performance of the world economy. According to the World Trade Organization, the global trade volume is projected to increase by 2.7 percent in 2024, a robust rebound from the negative 1.1 percent recorded in 2023.

Looking forward, there are several issues that will impact the global economy in 2025.

The first is the economic policy that the US will adopt after Donald Trump takes office. Trump has said he plans to impose tariffs of 25 percent on products imported from Canada and Mexico, and threatened to extend the tariff list to US partners and allies. However, it is the deteriorating China-US relations that are viewed as a grave threat to the world economy.

Jamieson Greer, who has been nominated by Trump as the next US trade representative, views China as a "generational challenge" to the US. Trump has already vowed to raise tariffs by an additional 10 percent on all Chinese goods entering the US, and said he would consider a tariff of up to 60 percent on Chinese products.

These policies will have a profound impact not only on China, but also on the entire world. As the world's leading economic power, the US with the new Trump administration's economic policies will have huge global ramifications.

Second, multilateral mechanisms such as the WTO are being marginalized. Despite some progress made in the recent WTO ministerial meeting, it is a mechanism that is increasingly being sidelined by major developed economies. For example, the US and Canada, in disregard of the WTO's rules, have levied 100 percent tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, while

the European Union is also negotiating with China over additional tariffs on Chinese EVs.

A recent WTO report suggested that the organization's capacity to safeguard free trade is declining: unilateral trade restrictions adopted by member states sharply expanded from October 2023 to October 2024, with the trade value involved rising to \$887 billion, a year-on-year increase of \$550 billion.

In addition, Trump threatened to withdraw the US from the WTO during his first term, which he may put into practice after being reelected. The gloomy outlook for the global trade system is not an isolated case in the waning global multilateral governance system. In November, two important ceasefire resolutions were vetoed at the United Nations Security Council by two different permanent members, reflecting the impotence of the global governance system to coordinate international relations.

It is true that some consensus was reached at the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro and the COP29 climate conference, indicating that multilateralism is still alive, but its influence is waning and its binding force is weakening. In key economic and political realms, multilateralism has been paralyzed to some extent, and in some other areas it plays only a limited role.

Third, the global supply chains are being restructured to "supply clusters". In its Rise of Discriminatory Regionalism report, the IMF said that major economies including the US and Europe are pushing for regional economic integration, with the number of regional trade agreements increasing from nearly 50 in 1990 to more than 350 in 2023. But without the support of multilateralism, regional trade agreements will become more discriminatory and eventually turn into trade barriers, especially as competition between major powers escalates.

The World Openness Index, compiled by the Institute of World Economics and Politics under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has recorded a decline for three years. The index underlines the damage done to the openness of the global economy by the supply chain restructuring policies of some developed economies, including "near-shoring", "on-shoring" and "re-shoring".

Fourth, artificial intelligence is having a profound and far-reaching impact on the economy. AI technology is expected to increase the global output by 7 percent over the next decade by improving productivity. It will make our lives easier. At the same

time, its impact on the labor market is becoming more and more prominent. While low-skilled workers bear the brunt of job losses, some high-skilled workers also face the pressure to adapt to the era of AI.

The world is facing problems such as a growing shortage of high-skilled jobs, the widespread use of AI and smart robots, an accelerating aging population and declining birthrates, and the consequential financial strain on pensions and healthcare programs.

Fifth, non-economic factors are having a growing impact on the world economy. According to the Global Risks Report 2024 released by the World Economic Forum, among the 10 most severe perceived risks over the next two years, seven are non-economic ones: misinformation and disinformation, extreme weather events, societal polarization, cyber insecurity, interstate armed conflicts, involuntary migration, and pollution; while only three are economic risks: lack of economic opportunity, inflation, and an economic downturn.

As for the most severe global risks anticipated over the next decade, the economic risks are all replaced by non-economic ones, which are critical changes to Earth systems, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, natural resource shortages, and adverse outcomes of AI technologies.

The National Security Strategy released by the Joe Biden administration in October 2022 said that the world is now in the early years of a decisive decade in which the terms of geopolitical competition between the major powers will be set. Given that the incoming Trump administration will probably inherit its predecessor's judgement of the global landscape, we should not be optimistic that the next decade will be a peaceful period.

The world economy is expected to continue growing at around 3 percent for the next few years. But the risk of economic slowdown due to extreme events cannot be ruled out. As for China, in the face of high risks and uncertainties, particularly the possible negative outcomes of the US' China policy, it should objectively evaluate external factors and remain committed to its own development path.

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SONG CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE



# Traditions are at the heart of Spring Festival

Exhibition builds anticipation for family reunions, celebratory rituals, regional cuisine and good fortune, **Lin Qi** reports.

The completed dragon boat by Lin Shunkui, a seasoned handicraft artist living in Dongcai village, Beibaixiang town, Yueqing, Zhejiang province, will be burned on the village grounds on the night of the Lantern Festival, which falls on the 15th day of the first month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar.

The colorful wooden dragon boat will burn in a huge fire — a climactic ritual during Spring Festival celebrations — when villagers will wish away bad energy and hope that good luck will arrive.

The dragon boat, standing several meters in height and length, is called the “decorated dragon head”, a handicraft traced to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in Yueqing.

Lin, a national-level inheritor born in 1956, is the fifth generation of his family to carry on the intangible cultural heritage.

It takes him several months to even a year to make the heavily decorated dragon as villagers commission these works from him.

The multistoried boat displays layers of bright colors and is richly decorated with engraved gates and windows, and mythological and folk tale characters are installed on each level. They are connected with hundreds of gears and move in different directions controlled by a handler at the bottom of the dragon.

The dragon is not built for sailing in water and, after it is complete, will be transported to the village’s ancestral hall the day before the Lantern Festival for worshipping.

The next day, villagers will push the wheeled boat for a parade and dance past every household to drive away evil spirits, bid farewell to the past and anticipate good fortune, prosperity and harmony in the new year.

This time-consuming craft won Lin the top prize in folk arts at the Shanhua (mountain flower) Awards in 2022 by the China Folk Literature and Arts Association.

Some of Lin’s dragons have survived and he has one placed in front of his ancestral house so visitors can learn about this unique tradition.

“I will not allow the dragon to become



**Top:** A “decorated dragon head” made by artisan Lin Shunkui is part of *Guo Nian: Exhibition of the Spring Festival* at the Chinese Traditional Culture Museum in Beijing. **Above left and right:** A New Year fair at the exhibition attracts visitors from across the country. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



‘extinct’ in my generation,” he says. “I want to sail it elsewhere and everywhere into the visions of more people.”

One of Lin’s dragon boats is displayed at the Chinese Traditional Culture Museum in Beijing.

A highlight of the *Guo Nian: Exhibition of the Spring Festival*, running until March 2, is the boat mounted above to elevate the festive mood ahead of the Chinese New Year, which falls on Jan 29. Lin’s dragon boat thrills visitors with a glimpse into the richness and diversity of Chinese New Year celebrations. *Guo Nian* means celebrating the arrival of the New Year.

On Dec 4, Spring Festival and its social practices for celebrating the traditional New Year were added to UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The practices include celebration preparations, clan worshipping activities and fairs, and folk performances shared by communities across the country, with differences varying in the southern, northern, eastern and western regions. The celebra-

tions are held to bind family and community members and teach morality, family values and solidarity. Arts and crafts, photos, interactive installations and performances featured at the exhibition give vivid demonstrations of New Year festivities.

Wang Chenyang, Party secretary of the museum and the exhibition’s chief planner, says the exhibition covers the whole process of preparing for and celebrating the traditional New Year, bringing an immersive experience.

The first day of the solar term *dongzhi*, or the Winter Solstice, is the longest night of the year with the shortest daytime.

There’s an old saying that *dongzhi* is more significant than the New Year. After that day, the days start to become longer and the nights shorter, and anticipation for the New Year and spring grows stronger.

“The opening date of the exhibition on Dec 21 (the past *dongzhi*) added spice to the festive mood,” Wang says.

The exhibition features various national intangible cultural heritage items that reflect unique festive customs from

region to region. For example, a black pagoda-like installation is meant to replicate the custom of a coal pile fire prevailing from Huairou city, Shanxi province, known for its rich coal reserves. There, people make a pile of big coal bricks and create a bonfire while making wishes for a thriving new year.

Wang says that besides community-based celebrations, the exhibition also highlights the rituals and activities held in homes to strengthen family ties. “In a time when people migrate and travel outside their hometowns, returning home for Spring Festival is important to many,” he adds.

At the exhibition, an altar table has been re-created to show how people in Gaomi, Shandong province, prepare for worship.

On the table are articles of offerings, such as colored Gaomi steamed buns that have intricate relief patterns. Above the altar table, classical Chinese ancestor paintings are hung on the wall.

Dining together is another important ritual for New Year celebrations.

A copper hot pot rests in the center of a

large round dining table at the exhibition — a culinary tradition at family reunions during Spring Festival — accentuating a feeling of warmth and excitement for family gatherings.

Digital images of different dishes from across the country are projected on the table to show its gastronomic diversity.

“Paying tribute to our ancestors, sharing details of our lives and work with parents, and preparing food for ancestor worship and the family reunion feast are activities that evoke the best memories of New Year celebrations,” Wang says.

“It is personal experiences that make us feel touched and remembered. We want to carry on these traditions.”

Contact the writer at [linqi@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:linqi@chinadaily.com.cn)



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

What's on



**Confronting adversity**  
The exhibition, *Enjoyable Journey After Passing Great Hurdles in Life*, in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, summarizes the attitude of the late ink artist Song Wenzhi (1919-99). He didn't receive formal training in painting but taught himself and learned from ancient artists and lead-

ing painters of his time. He experienced ups and downs and optimistically confronted and sailed through difficult situations, depicting his experiences in his landscape paintings.

The exhibition at Shenzhen Art Museum's new venue until April 6 focuses on his paintings of rivers and streams through the high mountains that embody an optimistic tendency toward hardships.

Song is recognized as a core member of the New Jinling School of Painting, which gathered prominent painters hailing from and active in Nanjing, referred to as Jinling, in Jiangsu province. The artists' group inherited the techniques of the Jinling School that emerged in the 17th century while adapting it to exploring aspects of social life in the 1950s and '60s.

10 am-6 pm, closed on Mondays. 30 Tenglong Lu, Longhua district, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. 0755-2806-2004.

**Vibrant colors**  
Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) is one of the most popular Chinese artists

of all time and is also internationally renowned. His works are displayed in museums and galleries around the world. He traveled and lived extensively — from China and



Europe to Brazil and the United States, making him highly regarded as a skilled and consummate painter of various styles.

Zhejiang Art Museum in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, opened *Transcendent Spiritual Realm*, an exhibition tracing Zhang's legendary life and how this shaped his art world, promoting him to become a great figure of 20th-century Chinese art.

The exhibition, running until Feb 16, shows his extraordinary techniques, which were grounded in his intensified studies of ancient artists — his copies of their landscape paintings were sometimes mistaken for originals. He was inspired by the Dunhuang murals in the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province. He employed the smooth lining and vibrant colors of figures depicted in the caves to create a body of female portraits deemed classics of modern art. His *pocai* (splashed colors) painting peaked in the later years of his career.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 138 Nanshan Lu, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. 0571-8707-8700.



**Father and son**

Lotus is a recurring motif in the works of Pan Tianshou (1897-1971) as he modernized the flower-and-bird genre.

His semiabstract strokes possess a majestic spirit of tenacity in the paintings. His son Pan Gongkai continues to experiment with lotus and his approach is even more abstract and minimalist.

The works of father and son artists are now on display at the Pan Tianshou Art Center, a new addition to the cultural scene in Zhejiang province situated in Pan Tianshou's hometown of Ninghai county in Ningbo.

The architecture, resembling a lotus from high above, was designed by Pan Gongkai.

Pan Tianshou's paintings include his donations to Ninghai and collections from other institutions such as the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, where he taught for many years.

The exhibition is a celebration of a family's commitment to conserving the ink tradition.

9 am-4:30 pm, closed on Mondays. 66 Tianming Zhonglu, Ninghai county, Ningbo, Zhejiang province.

# CULTURAL HERITAGE



The 14-volume Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts.

## HIDDEN WORLD OF PRE-QIN POLITICS

Three newly organized bamboo manuscripts reveal details of governance in early Western Zhou Dynasty, **Yang Yang** reports.

Researchers of the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips announced the latest findings that revealed three newly organized bamboo manuscripts at a recent launch event of the *Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts (Vol. IX)* at Tsinghua University.

Previously unknown and never seen before in surviving historical literature, the three bamboo manuscripts record the political thoughts of the early Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC), offering important historical insights into the pre-Qin era.

In 2008, Tsinghua University received an alumni donation of nearly 2,500 pieces of bamboo slips, making it the largest-known collection of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) relics.

The collection, covering a wide range of subjects, including Confucian classics, historical records and philosophical texts, is hailed as one of the most significant archaeological finds in recent decades.

Since 2018, the research team at Tsinghua University has been releasing annual reports on its research, with 13 volumes already published.

The recently released 14th volume contains three bamboo books titled *Chenghou*, *Zhaohou* and *Liangzhong*, all of which are previously unknown texts that were lost to history for centuries.

Researchers have found for the first time in *Chenghou* and *Zhaohou* the materials on governance and political thoughts during the reigns of King Cheng and King Zhao in the early Western Zhou Dynasty. Meanwhile, *Liangzhong* offers the latest-known record of the second king of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC), Xia Qi, who reigned as the ruler of "all under Heaven".

Originally, *Chenghou*, consisting of nine slips, and *Zhaohou*, seven, were compiled into a single bamboo volume, with each slip measuring about 41 centimeters long and 0.6 cm wide.

Literally, *Chenghou* and *Zhaohou* refer to King Cheng and King Zhao of Western Zhou, respectively. Both bamboo books, written in ancient

Chinese, discuss early Western Zhou history and the political ideas of kings Cheng and Zhao, identified as important historical literature transcribed in the state of Chu that has been lost for a long time.

*Chenghou* traces the legacy of ancient sage kings and praises the virtues of the previous kings of the Zhou Dynasty — King Wen, founder of the Zhou Dynasty, and his son King Wu, including King Cheng's governance principles.

*Zhaohou* recounts King Zhao's reign, where he emulated past kings, cared for his people, reformed governance, respected the power of heaven, constantly reminded and corrected himself, learned from the mistakes of the Xia and Shang dynasties, diligently handled political affairs, and ruled as a virtuous king.

The two manuscripts, although narrated from different perspectives, are related in content, reflecting the governance ideas of the two

kings. They corroborate other ancient texts such as the *Shangshu* (Book of Documents), inscriptions on bronze vessels and bamboo slips and silk manuscripts, offering a better understanding of politics during the reigns of the two kings.

The text of *Liangshu* is longer, originally consisting of 88 bamboo slips, though one is now missing. Framed as dialogues between Xia Qi and two other figures, Gui Zhong and Xiang Zhong, it delves into the governance and political thoughts of the early Xia Dynasty.

In the dialogue, Xia sought advice on governance, to which Gui Zhong and Xiang Zhong emphasized the importance of balance, virtue and adherence to heavenly laws. Including content such as historical legends in early Xia and ancient political thoughts, the text is of great value for research in these areas.

The entire organization work of the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips will be

completed in the next two to three years, according to Huang Dekuan, director of the Research and Conservation Center for Unearthed Texts of Tsinghua University.

Over more than a decade, the preservation, organization and research of the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips have become increasingly difficult as the slips become more fragmented, he says.

For example, the bamboo slips of *Liangzhong* are rather fragmentary without serial numbers, forcing researcher Jia Lianxiang with the university to spend considerable efforts in restructuring them.

Organizing these bamboo slips is just the first step, Huang says, adding that the center has already begun research into the bamboo manuscripts' deeper meanings and promoting their transmission and application.

Like the previous 13 volumes, the latest volume of the *Tsinghua Uni-*

*versity Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts* is also published by Zhongxi Book Company. An indigo thread-bound book in a six-panel format, it weighs more than 2.5 kilograms.

To help the research results reach a wider audience, especially global readers, the research team also launched the first four volumes of *Annotations to the Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts: Studies and Translation* and the English translation of *Approaching the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips*.

Published by Commercial Press, *Annotations to the Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts*, containing a total of 18 volumes, covers all the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips that have been organized and published. Based on the latest studies, the book offers a comprehen-

sive revision and annotations to the original text and translates obscure Warring States bamboo manuscripts into clear, modern Chinese.

The series, *The Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts: Studies and Translation*, is published by Tsinghua University Press, with a planned total of 18 volumes. Each volume presents the latest research in the field and includes annotations and translations of the bamboo manuscripts. The original Tsinghua bamboo manuscript text, its transcription into clerical script, modern Chinese characters, and the English translation will all be provided.

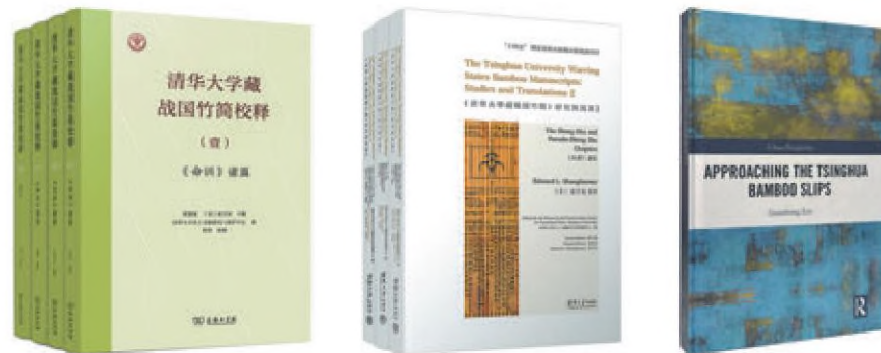
This series is the result of a collaboration between scholars from around the world. The process involved 30 video conferences and a series of offline workshops to convert the Chu script into modern Chinese characters and then into English, which was a very challenging task.

"Sometimes, even after we complete a report, we haven't fully understood it and there's no choice but to rely on continuous research by future generations," Huang says. "However, when translating into English, you can't avoid the issue — you must have a clear explanation. Therefore, we especially want to express our respect to the team of US Sinologist Edward Louis Shaughnessy."

Xie Weihe, former vice-president of Tsinghua University, says that the books are greatly significant to the evidence of China's over 5,000-year-old civilization and to preserve and promote China's rich traditional culture.

The ongoing publication of the English translation series will help scholars around the world understand and use the Tsinghua bamboo slips. It will also increase the international influence of these and other unearthed Chinese documents, fostering greater exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and global civilizations, he says.

Contact the writer at [yangyang@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:yangyang@chinadaily.com.cn)



From left: *Annotations to the Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts*, *The Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts: Studies and Translation*, and *Approaching the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips*, books recently released by a research team of the university. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By WANG RU  
[wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn)

The discovery of a new cemetery has shed light on the existence of an "elite" group of people at the foot of the western Taihang Mountains during the transitional period between the Xia (c. 21st century-16th century BC) and Shang (c. 16th century-11th century BC) dynasties in close communication with China's Central Plains, archaeologists said at a news conference in Beijing last week.

Through archaeological excavations this year, the Zhongcun Cemetery Site in the Zhongcun community, Xiyang county, Shanxi province, has unveiled five high-level tombs during the period, which are distributed in a concentrated way and arranged in order, yielding more than 50 pottery vessels, lacquerware and turquoise artifacts, says Fan Wenqian, director of the Shanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology.

Archaeologists found 13 tombs from the cemetery, among which five are from the Xia and Shang periods. The No 10 tomb is the one with the largest scale among them and remains the tomb of the highest level of its time nationwide, says Fan.

The nearly square tomb spans 46 square meters. Within it lies a stone

outer coffin encasing a wooden inner coffin that holds three wooden inner coffins. The central man, adorned with cinnabar paint, is crowned with a scallop and bears a turquoise plaque beneath his femur. Flanking him are two women similarly marked with red cinnabar, albeit in a lighter application compared to the man.

On the tomb wall there is a niche wherein lies a male body, likely a human sacrifice for the tomb owner.

The special burial customs exhibit rich local characteristics, says Fan. However, the pottery vessels and the patterns on them are similar to those from the Erlitou Culture, a Neolithic culture in the middle reaches of the Yellow River that existed from the 18th to 16th centuries BC and believed to be associated with the Xia Dynasty, and Xiaqiyan Culture, a Neolithic culture believed to be created by ances-

tors of the Shang people, says Fan.

The phenomenon of covering one's head with a scallop is not unique either. In the past, archaeologists found similar situations in sites located in China's Central Plains from the period before the Shang Dynasty to the late Shang, says Cao Jun, a researcher at the Shanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology.

Moreover, similar turquoise plaques had been discovered from Erlitou Site in Luoyang, Henan province, widely believed to be a late capital of the Xia Dynasty, as funerary objects for the aristocracy. The one found from the Zhongcun site suggests the site probably had close cultural communications with the Erlitou Site, he adds.

Multidisciplinary studies have been made on the time of the tombs, origins of the people, their relationships and crafts in making pottery vessels. As of now, studies have indicated the tombs were from 1505 BC



The No 10 tomb at the Zhongcun Cemetery Site in Xiyang county, Shanxi province, is of the highest level during the transitional period between the Xia (c. 21st century-16th century BC) and Shang (c. 16th century-11th century BC) dynasties nationwide. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to 1413 BC that make up a family cemetery of local people.

Studies on the components and source of turquoise show the stones from this cemetery were from the

area to the east of the Qinling Mountains, the same origin as those from the Erlitou Site.

Cao also mentions the No 10 tomb could be that of the leader of a group.

"Tombs of such scale may have belonged to the leader of a state coexisting with the central kingship of the Xia and Shang dynasties," says Cao.

During the Xia and Shang periods, many local vassal states appeared surrounding the central kingship, with its central areas located in present-day Henan province. Wang Wei, a veteran archaeologist, says scholars have paid close attention to the surrounding areas of Xia and Shang but haven't known much about them. As a result, this site enriches the understanding of such a state in northern China during the transitional phase between the Xia and Shang dynasties.

Fan says that, in the next step, they will work to discover the possible settlement site these people once lived in.

"The tombs in Zhongcun are grand in scale with unique funeral customs. They not only bridge the archaeological gaps in the western Taihang Mountains during the Xia and Shang periods but also enrich our understanding of ancient China from that era. They have introduced fresh archaeological perspectives for exploring the pluralistic and integrated pattern of Chinese civilization," says Fan.

## LIFESHANGHAI

At the 2025 Michelin Guide Shanghai event, esteemed chefs, restaurant owners and industry professionals gathered to celebrate the top in the food and beverage sector. Among the mostly male chefs, Chen Lina, a graceful woman in a blue hat, stood out. Her artisanal *xiaolongbao* (steamed stuffed buns) restaurant Wu You Xian received one Michelin star, making it Shanghai's first dim sum restaurant to achieve such an honor.

At that moment, Chen was not entirely clear on what Michelin meant, much like the array of accolades adorning the entrance of her restaurant, most of which she didn't even recognize until later.

As the owner and chef of Wu You Xian, Chen holds the prestigious title of a national first-class dim sum chef who likens her *xiaolongbao* to her "cherished children" and the "work of art".

At 19, she apprenticed at time-honored restaurant Lyubolang in Shanghai and was sent to Japan in 2005, where she introduced the famous Shanghai dim sum to Osaka.

After achieving great success in Japan, Chen returned to her homeland and started afresh in Zhaojialou, an ancient town in Minhang district.

Chen elucidated that the name Wu You Xian is derived from the Japanese term "Oishii", which means delicious or tasty, and also symbolizes the concept of "freshness within the establishment" in Chinese.

"We've had lines since the opening of Wu You Xian; it has always been very popular," Chen notes. Starting with *xiaolongbao* with pork filling, her passion for dumplings drove her to create diverse flavors like crab *xiaolongbao*.

"The first time I made crab *xiaolongbao*, I sold 11 baskets. I was so thrilled, I couldn't sleep." Apart from daily crowds, many touching stories have unfolded at her restaurant, which has deeply moved Chen and provided her with the motivation to persevere.

Chen always remembers a tearful embrace from a stranger.

"Your *xiaolongbao* have changed our family. Last night, my wife completed the household chores in anticipation of enjoying your dishes this morning. We have never experienced such delight in dining out," the emotional stranger expressed.

At that moment, Chen realized that recognition from her customers had fulfilled her greatest expectations, surpassing the mere significance of the delicacies.

In 2023, Zhaojialou town's renovation forced Wu You Xian to relocate. Eight months later, a new store opened in the downtown area of South Maoming Road.

Over the years, Chen single-handedly developed the 28 flavors of *xiaolongbao* currently on the menu. These soup dumplings feature a variety of delicacies, ranging from the meat, roe and milt of hairy crabs to sea cucumber, truffle, abalone, mantis shrimp, mushroom and scallops.

When it comes to ingredients, she spares no expense.

One of her favorite dishes *Jiejie Gao*, a *xiaolongbao* with mantis shrimp and crab meat, takes a whole mantis shrimp to make just one. For *Baoping'an*, each *xiaolongbao* can yield two or more pieces of abalone together with crab pincers.

"Each bun weighs around 40 grams. Whether it's matsutake

mushrooms or wild vegetables, there are no added seasonings — only natural ingredients," Chen explains.

Beyond the buns, vinegar pairings are meticulously chosen with at least five to six varieties to complement the different *xiaolongbao* flavors.

"For a pure crab filling, the vinegar needs to be slightly richer, while meat-filled ones require a lighter

As we savor their delicious *xiaolongbao*, we not only enjoy exquisite flavors and innovation but also witness a dedication to perfection in every product detail despite its street-side setting."

The Michelin guide's judging panel, commenting on Wu You Xian's winning.

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"For a pure crab filling, the vinegar needs to be slightly richer, while meat-filled ones require a lighter



Under Chen Lina, *xiaolongbao*, or the steamed stuffed buns, work magic.

## Journey of good taste has star appeal

One of few female chefs to win the Michelin honor, passionate dim sum restaurant owner cherishes recognition from her customers, **He Qi** reports.



Chen, a nationally renowned chef, secured a Michelin star for her dim sum restaurant Wu You Xian, establishing it as Shanghai's first dim sum restaurant to receive such an accolade. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

touch. A dash of lemon goes into those with crab roe and a hint of sugar for those with crab milt.

"I love *xiaolongbao* so much that I ponder tirelessly on perfecting each flavor each day," Chen says.

The dim sum restaurant has amassed numerous awards, including "China's independent innovation products", Dianping's "Must-Eat List", and the Michelin Bib Gourmand Award. For Chen, the swarming customers are the ultimate form of recognition.

"At peak times, the queues extend across the street, sometimes serving more than 1,000 customers in one day. By as early as 12:30 pm, the freshly prepared *xiaolongbao* are nearly sold out," Chen says.

Beyond warmly welcoming customers, Chen deeply values her employees. The shop's fixed working hours from 9 am to 6 pm ensure that staff have time for personal lives. "I would not want my employees to be exhausted. I always treat them like family members."

### A double-edged sword

Despite Chen's dedication and hospitality over the years bringing numerous honors to the restaurant, fame seems to be a double-edged sword.

The constant influx of customers often leads to long queues. Witnessing guests who make a special trip but cannot be accommodated leaves her feeling guilty.

When faced with some negative online reviews, Chen meticulously reads through each one, feeling aggrieved by the controversies. She struggles to understand why her diligently crafted products and establishment attract certain negative feedback.

Nevertheless, her innate optimism allows her to swiftly overcome these emotions. She says: "Say what you want to say. I have a clear conscience. I just want to offer the best to everyone. Those who come into the restaurant are my guests and I treat them like family."

Chen warmly addresses each customer as "little brother", "little sister", "brother" or "sister". Her employees demonstrate to customers how to eat each *xiaolongbao* with enthusiasm.

Living alone in Shanghai while her husband and daughter live in Japan, Chen longs for family reunions but can't bring herself to let go of her employees and customers.

"Even though I sometimes feel frustrated and tired, I see my employees working diligently and I feel refreshed. I want them to earn more to support their families. It's more about responsibility. I haven't seen my family for a long time but I don't know which side to give up."

Despite many hardships, *xiaolongbao* remains her source of joy.

"I've tasted sour, sweet, bitter and spicy in my life but whenever I think of *xiaolongbao*, all my troubles fade away and my emotions disappear," she says.

In December, Wu You Xian launched an English menu with clear instructions on how to enjoy *xiaolongbao*. When she sees foreign guests, she gestures and requests help all around. On the day of the interview, customers from Japan, Singapore and France were seated.

"I tried *xiaolongbao* in hotels and they were good but these are better for sure. You can taste the sophistication and freshness," remarks Jullien Florent, a Parisian. A friend recommended that he try the *xiaolongbao* based on the Michelin Guide.

As far as the future, Chen hopes to build her small restaurant into a century-old establishment passed down through generations.

"As I age, I aspire to settle down, observe the bustling activity from my office, and document the images and stories of everyone and everything that have happened at Wu You Xian."

The essence of her restaurant's warmth shines through every detail, echoing the Michelin judging panel's words: "While our focus typically centers on the food when awarding stars, Wu You Xian goes beyond. As we savor their delicious *xiaolongbao*, we not only enjoy exquisite flavors and innovation but also witness a dedication to perfection in every product detail despite its street-side setting. Their hospitable treatment of guests exudes a genuine human touch."

Contact the writer at heqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Online Watch the video by scanning the code.



## Sleep No More awakens immersive theater

By ZHENG ZHENG  
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The Macbeth-inspired immersive theater experience *Sleep No More* celebrated its 8th anniversary in Shanghai in December. The Shanghai version, jointly created by SMG Live and the UK theater company Punchdrunk, has shattered records and boosted the development of immersive entertainment in China.

Over the eight years, *Sleep No More Shanghai*'s total revenue has exceeded 550 million yuan (\$75.35 million) and welcomed over 620,000 participants, with 60.5 percent from outside the city or country.

In celebration of this eight-year milestone, *Sleep No More Shanghai* unveiled an *Infinity Carnival* featuring three new immersive party experiences over the New Year period themed on the carnival star, the rising ship and a brand-new Manderley. "Shanghai is an incredible city

with audiences from all over the world possessing unrivaled passion and enthusiasm. I don't think we ever thought it could take root here for eight years. It's showing no signs of stopping its exploration and growth," says Felix Barrett, the show's director and artistic chief.

The show has also earned global recognition, including the Themed Entertainment Association's Thea Award for Outstanding Achievement, and was selected for the national tourism performance excellence list and named one of the Top 10 Shanghai cultural brands.

Since SMG Live brought this immersive experience to Shanghai in 2016, the show has earned ratings of 9.2/10 on the review site Douban and 9.1/10 on the film data platform Maoyan.

"I believe the key factors in the Shanghai version of *Sleep No More*'s success are the decade of cultural prosperity, the explosion of people's

demand for high-quality works, the artistic quality of this IP (intellectual property), and the production of the Shanghai version," says Pan Tao, general manager of Shanghai Shanyan Culture Investment Management Co, the show's operator.

"At the same time, we are constantly exploring new models and actively integrating audiences' consumption needs and societal trends," Pan adds.

The McKinnon Hotel Shanghai, where the show takes place, is a venue that integrates culture and commerce by fusing retail, dining and accommodation. Capitalizing on its IP, the show has also driven creative cross-industry collaborations spanning fashion, real estate, e-commerce and more.

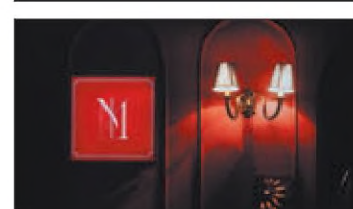
To cater to diverse demands, the team launched the premium Lounge M experience this August, maintaining an 85 percent daily occupancy rate.

Comparing the data, the opera-

tion team also found that year-on-year revenue beyond ticketing has grown substantially, particularly the tremendous market potential for integrated cultural, commercial and tourism offerings.

China's immersive entertainment industry is experiencing explosive growth and innovation. By late 2023, the domestic market had 32,024 immersive experience projects, with a consumer market size of 92.7 billion yuan, according to the China Immersive Industry Report 2024 by the industry's observing platform illuithion.com.

Within this boom, SMG Live has evolved from single revenue streams to a new retail theater model centered around *Sleep No More Shanghai* as its pilot case. Based on the IP, it expands into merchandise licensing, venue partnerships and integration across related consumer verticals, which is also applied to SMG's other original IPs.



Above: *Sleep No More Shanghai* has driven cross-industry collaborations. Left: A premium Lounge M experience was launched in August, maintaining a high daily occupancy rate since. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

As an imported IP adapted with Chinese cultural elements and Shanghai's heritage influences, *Sleep No More Shanghai* imbues a distinctive Eastern aesthetic compared to the London and New York versions.

On Chinese online travel agency

Ctrip's overseas platform, the show covers 39 countries and regions and supports 24 languages and 35 currencies to facilitate international audiences. Ctrip bookings surged 120 percent year-on-year since the show's overseas listing, with over 60.5 percent coming from abroad.