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# CHINA DAILY

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## Colossal loss



A man sifts through his mother's wildfire-ravaged property on Saturday in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles. Six simultaneous blazes that have ripped across Los Angeles County neighborhoods since last Tuesday have killed at least 24 people in Southern California as of Sunday. The fires have damaged or destroyed 12,000 structures, officials said. JOHN LOCHER / AP

See story, page 10 & 11

## Thaw bodes well for Sino-Japanese relationship

By CAI HONG

There is a new warmth in Sino-Japanese relations and experts believe that a fresh chapter is unfolding.

During a meeting with senior officials from Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner, Komeito, on Thursday, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba once again expressed his strong desire to visit China at the earliest.

A delegation of LDP and Komeito officials are in China this week at the invitation of the Communist Party of China for the ninth meeting of the China-Japan ruling party exchange mechanism, which will run from Monday through Wednesday.

Analysts said the meetings could lay the groundwork for Ishiba's anticipated visit.

Japanese media outlets reported that Ishiba has shelved plans to visit the United States and meet with President-elect Donald Trump before the latter's inauguration on Jan 20.

The last Japanese prime minister to visit China was Shinzo Abe, a trip that took place in late December 2019.

Kyodo News reported that Beijing and Tokyo are coordinating a possi-

ble visit by Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Tokyo in February. They are also preparing to hold a high-level bilateral economic dialogue during Wang's visit — the first in nearly six years — while exploring the possibility of organizing a trilateral meeting for the foreign ministers of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Relations between Beijing and Tokyo began to thaw noticeably in the latter half of last year. A significant breakthrough came in November when President Xi Jinping and Ishiba held a crucial meeting on the sidelines of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Lima, Peru. It marked a recalibration of bilateral ties and set a positive tone for future engagements.

The momentum continued into December, with Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya making a visit to China — the first by a Japanese foreign minister in 20 months.

In a further sign of rapprochement, China reinstated its unilateral visa-free policy for Japanese citizens in November. Japan reciprocated by easing visa restrictions for Chinese travelers, including the introduction of 10-year multiple-entry tourist visas. The moves seek to foster deeper people-to-people connections.

### Economic links

Wu Jinan, a senior researcher at the Shanghai Institutes for Interna-

tional Studies, said that "Ishiba stands out as one of the few Japanese politicians willing to actively engage with and understand China," adding that "known for his familiarity with China's positions, Ishiba has earned the reputation of being a 'pro-China' figure in Japanese politics."

Ishiba's political priorities have long centered on improving livelihoods and revitalizing local economies. With local governments across Japan eager to attract Chinese tourists and secure investments from Chinese companies, Wu suggested that Ishiba is likely to emphasize stronger ties with China as a means of advancing his commitment to economic revitalization at the local level.

"Ishiba has limited connections with the United States and has consistently advocated for 'equal footing' in Japan-US relations," Wu said. The scholar added that Ishiba has voiced reservations about the strongly pro-US stance of his predecessor, Fumio Kishida, and has championed a more independent diplomatic approach. "Some observers in the US have even dubbed him Japan's Charles de Gaulle," Wu remarked, referring to the former French president known for his assertive and autonomous foreign policy.

This perspective aligns with a broader reevaluation of Japan's foreign policy by a growing number of

Japanese politicians and scholars, many of whom are advocating a shift away from overreliance on the US.

### Policy adjustment

However, Wu cautioned that Japan's China policy is marked by historical inertia, thus making significant changes a gradual process.

"For instance, during its final years, the Kishida administration deviated markedly from the right path for Sino-Japanese relations," Wu said. "It labeled China an 'unprecedented and greatest strategic challenge,' promoted the notion that a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency, and substantially expanded military capabilities aimed at deterring China. These negative factors still linger today."

With Trump's return to the US presidency, Japan may find itself under renewed pressure, in a replay of his first term. Analysts said that this could prompt Tokyo to reassess its alignment with Washington, potentially creating an opportunity for Japan to somewhat distance itself strategically from the US.

"Regardless of how these dynamics evolve, China remains steadfast in its commitment to foster constructive and positive interactions between China, Japan and the US," Wu said.

See **Ties**, page 3

## XI'S VISION | STRICT PARTY GOVERNANCE

# CPC deepens self-reform to advance path

Party's self-improvement seen as political guarantee for nation's social development

By CAO YIN

Upholding the spirit of reform and deepening the Communist Party of China's self-reform are keys to the Party's leading all walks of life in advancing Chinese modernization and achieving national rejuvenation in the new era, experts said.

They emphasized that while facing difficulties and challenges on the path to modernization and rejuvenation, it is even more crucial for the Party to firmly uphold the spirit of reform and continuously intensify self-reform, as the Party's self-improvement is a political guarantee for social development.

They made the comments after the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection session concluded its fourth plenary session in Beijing last week.

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, delivered an important speech at the session, stressing the significance of rigorous Party governance with the spirit of reform and reiterating that the battle against corruption is an unceasing endeavor.

Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, noted that it is imperative to make greater progress in governing the Party to ensure that the Party will continue to be the strong leadership core in building socialism with Chinese characteristics and to guarantee the steady advancement of Chinese modernization on the new journey in the new era.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, Xi has highlighted on multiple occasions the implementation and improvement of rigorous governance of the Party, and unprecedented anti-corruption efforts have been made across the country.

In January 2023, when the 20th CCDCI, the country's top anti-corruption watchdog, opened its second plenary session, Xi stressed the need for ceaseless efforts to promote full and rigorous Party self-governance.

In October last year, when conducting an inspection tour in Anhui province, Xi emphasized the need to uphold Party leadership, clarifying that it is necessary to consistently strengthen Party building.

See **Self-reform**, page 3

## Loud protests



Protesters take part in a demonstration against impeached South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol in Seoul on Saturday. Yoon will not attend the first hearing of his impeachment trial, Yonhap News reported on Sunday. YASUYOSHI CHIBA / AFP

## FOREIGN VISITORS GET TOURISM OFF TO FLYING START IN NEW YEAR

Recent policies to improve convenience poised to drive strong travel trend

By YANG FEIYUE

Takemoto Akitoshi decided to act on his New Year wish after he learned China had waived visa applications for Japanese travelers in late November.

"I've long looked forward to visiting China, especially now that I have time on my hands after retirement," said Akitoshi, aged in his 70s and from Tokyo.

He had planned to apply for a visa, and was thrilled to be spared the trouble.

"It was a smooth arrival," said



Akitoshi who traveled with his wife to the country for the first time, and celebrated the arrival of the new year in Beijing.

He said he was stunned by the hutong alleys, Central Axis, Palace Museum, and Great Wall.

"It's impressive that the city has so many world cultural heritage sites, and you can get a good taste of the profound history," he said.

See **Tourism**, page 2

## Washington's tariff policy will increase its domestic taxes

Every week, the United States seems to unveil new plans for a colossal tariff scheme, which could reshape global trade dynamics in the quest to "Make America Great Again".

US President-elect Donald Trump said in November he planned tariffs of 25 percent on all imports from Canada and Mexico and 10 percent on all imports from China on day one of his new administration.

The US has already imposed a 25 percent tariff on a vast range of Chinese goods, dating from Trump's first presidential term in office. US president Joe Biden imposed a new 100 percent US tariff on all Chinese electric vehicles, a 25 percent tariff on lithium-ion EV batteries, and a 50 percent tariff on photovoltaic solar cells. A 50 percent tariff on semiconductors made in China has gone into effect since the start of this year.

Subsequent discussions on all these extant and proposed tariff measures have been dominated by

### WORLD WATCH

By Richard Cullen

an examination of the grave threat they pose to healthy, desirable levels of global trade.

There is, however, another less-headlined, crucial change embodied in all this prodigious tariff planning. If even half of the tariffs being proposed or threatened are implemented, the US is set to experience the most radical reform of its taxation system seen in decades — all unfolding behind an extraordinary political smoke screen. It is instructive to consider how this has happened.

Here is the Oxford online dictionary's definition of a tax: "A compulsory contribution to state revenue, levied by the government on workers' income and business profits, or added to the cost of some goods, services and transactions."

A curious aspect of the US tax-

ation system is the comparatively low fiscal importance of consumption or sales taxes. Unlike most developed jurisdictions, the US has no modern valued added tax or goods and service tax that applies to consumption — only old-style retail sales taxes. Major changes to this outdated system have long been stoutly resisted. However, things now look set to change dramatically.

Consider this figure from a recent CNN report: the US today is massively reliant on the annual import of more than \$3 trillion in consumer goods — above all from China — to sustain its preferred lifestyle. As they arrive in the US, new, front-loaded consumption taxes are thus about to be imposed at greatly increased levels on a vast range of crucial, imported consumer items.

But wait — Trump says that is not what is about to unfold (and perhaps water is not wet). He claims that China and other countries will pay "trillions and trillions of dollars into the United States Treasury" under his burgeoning tariff regime.

According to Douglas Irwin, an economics professor at Dartmouth College quoted in the CBS report, this is a "very misleading way to say what is going on". It is US consumers who will pay these imposts. This is a federal tax whereby money is transferred "from consumers to the federal government".

A recent study by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, requested by the Senate Budget Committee, confined itself to examining a 10 percent across-the-board tariff lift combined with a 60 percent additional tariff on all goods coming from China — notably less than an entire sequence of Trump tariffs threatened so far.

The consequences arising from introducing this limited spectrum of new tariffs, according to the CBO, include a 1 percent increase in inflation by 2026, an average increased cost to every US family of \$1,560, and significant price increases of consumer and capital goods.

See **Tariff**, page 3

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## PAGE TWO

## Tourism: Cultural wonders unfolded

From page 1

He hiked on the Mutianyu Great Wall to watch the sunrise on the first day of the year, observed giant pandas at close quarters at the Beijing Zoo and savored distinctive dishes including roast duck and mutton hotpot.

The couple, along with 20 other Japanese travelers, were among the first overseas tourists to visit China without visas in 2025.

"It marked a good beginning," said Xie Lin, an inbound tour guide based in Beijing who received the Japanese travelers.

He said many Japanese travelers have shown a strong desire to visit China and experience Chinese culture with the recent advent of the visa-free policy. "Many of them wanted to come as soon as possible," Xie noted.

## Sweet deals

The capital is one of the major cities across the country that have benefited from a slew of favorable policies to stimulate inbound tourism.

From January to October, the city welcomed 3.17 million inbound tourists, a 198.8 percent surge over the same period the previous year, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism reported.

The growth in inbound tourism is partly attributed to the optimization of visa-free and transit visa-free policies, according to the "2024 Beijing Tourism Consumption Report" by Tongcheng Travel, a major domestic travel agency based in Jiangsu province. Spain, Malaysia, Italy, Indonesia and Thailand have significantly benefited from the optimization of visa policies, the report said.

In recent years, authorities have continuously sweetened deals to woo inbound travelers.

In December 2023, the country implemented a visa-free policy for passport holders from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia.

Since then, more countries have been included. To date, ordinary passport holders from 38 countries can enter China without a visa for business, tourism, visiting relatives and friends, exchange visits, and have a transit period of no more than 30 days.

China also announced in mid-December further relaxations of the visa-free transit policy, with extension of foreign travelers' period of stay, and expansion of the list of accessible ports and provincial-level regions.

Eligible travelers transiting to a third country or region will be permitted to stay in the country for up to 240 hours, or 10 days, up from 72 or 144 hours, according to the National Immigration Administration.

Those favorable policies have given rise to the growing eagerness of international tourists to visit the country.

## See the sights, feel all right

Dou Junjie, who has arranged cycling tours to Beijing's historical and cultural areas such as the Central Axis and hutong alleys for over a decade, said the number of his guests from abroad doubled last year.

"European guests have been in the majority, and they have shown great enthusiasm for the Central Axis and Peking Opera," Dou said.

From January to November 2024,



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

2024  
year in  
Review

29.21 million foreigners entered the country, an increase of 86.2 percent year-on-year, the immigration administration reported.

It added that 17.45 million of them took advantage of the transit visa exemption policy to visit the country, an increase of 123.3 percent year-on-year.

On New Year's Day, the immigration administration tracked 185,000 entries and exits of foreign nationals, up 33.6 percent on the same period last year.

On Jan 1, more than 300 South Korean tourists arrived via a cruise ship in Yantai in East China's Shand-

ong province for a three-day trip.

Electronic self-service entry cards have been developed for foreigners, biometric data collection equipment has been set up in advance, and the information collection and inspection processes optimized to further improve the efficiency of customs clearance, said Sun Feixiang, an official with Yantai border inspection station.

Wuzhen water town in Jiaxing, East China's Zhejiang province, received 26 Thai travelers on the same day.

Signs at its major scenic areas have both Chinese and English explanations. Dedicated tour guides who speak English, Thai and Japanese are also available to help inbound travelers.

Fu Yifu, a senior official with the Star Atlas Institute of Finance based in Jiangsu, said these are all proof of the country's successful measures to facilitate international exchanges. Convenience brought by related poli-

cies will encourage international tourists to explore cultural landscapes across China and help promote development of the tourism industry.

## Convenience key

In addition to the visa and transit policies, government organs, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Ministry of Commerce have worked together in recent years to improve the convenience of travel, payment and communication services, and accommodation for foreign nationals in China. This has driven the development of related industries such as tourism, transportation, and catering.

Wang Wei, a senior official with major online travel agency Trip.com Group, forecast the inbound tourism market was about to enter a stage of high-quality development. Government support for policies related to inbound tourism has

brought new opportunities for the market, he said.

"For example, the new visa-exemption policy for foreigners in transit, not only extends the stay of international tourists but also addresses the issue of cross-regional movement," Wang said.

"In the past, those tourists might only stay at the airport when transiting through China, but the new visa-exemption policy will further utilize China's rich tourism resources, and there will be great market opportunities in the future," he added.

Overseas searches for popular China routes climbed more than 500 percent year-on-year in the first 11 months of last year, Trip.com reported.

In the first half of 2024, inbound tourism bookings surged nearly 200 percent, exceeding the level of the same period in 2019, according to the travel agency. In the third quarter, hotel bookings for inbound tourists grew by about 100 percent.

"It is worth noting that 25 percent of inbound tourists visited China multiple times, which reflects the strong appeal of China's tourism resources to international tourists," Wang said.

Among them, bookings from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and European countries with visa exemptions, saw significant growth compared with 2019, he added.

At its Global Partner Summit in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on Dec 18, co-founder and chairman of Trip.com Group Liang Jianzhang announced the results of a survey which revealed that safety, cleanliness, a long history, friendly people, and delicious food were among the most frequently mentioned aspects of China by foreign tourists.

"The potential for the development of inbound tourism is enormous, and the various 'pain points' are being gradually addressed," Liang said.

These rapidly growing numbers have brought business to domestic partners, including scenic spots, hotels, and other travel agencies, according to the travel agency.

## Domestic appeal

The country's rich culture and tourism resources hold equal appeal for domestic travelers, who made 1.95 billion visits nationwide during the summer vacation from June to August, up 6 percent over the same period the previous year, according to the China Tourism Academy.

Tourism spending over the three months grew 8.3 percent year-on-year to 1.31 trillion yuan (\$180 billion).

In the 2023-24 snow season, the country's winter tourism market hit over 400 million trips and generated over 550 billion yuan, setting a new high, according to Dai Bin, president of the tourism academy.

Structural data such as the travel radius of urban and rural residents during holidays, rural residents' travel rate, and the proportion of self-driving tours also showed a continuous expansion trend, Dai noted.

Major cities with rich and diverse tourism resources, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu of Sichuan province, Guangzhou of Guangdong province, and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, remained the top domestic destinations last year, according to Trip.com. Small getaways that offer off-the-beaten-track attractions, such as Altay in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Tianshui in Gansu province, were also hotly sought by domestic travelers.

Increased numbers of flights and hotels, and reduced travel costs helped stimulate the wanderlust of domestic travelers, experts said.

For Akitoshi, his four-day trip had only piqued his interest in all of what China has to offer.

"People here are very friendly and hospitable, and the country is just amazing," he said.

He was greatly impressed when the Chinese tour operator arranged for a professional chef to deliver traditional Japanese cuisine for the holiday, so he could enjoy a touch of home amid the Chinese environs.

"I'll definitely come back and recommend my family and friends to travel in China," Akitoshi said.

"There are simply too many places worth seeing."

## More outbound travelers seeking 'personalized' experiences

By YANG FEIYUE

Li Jie had a frenzied 2024, as he spent more than 200 days leading Chinese travelers across multiple European countries.

"The number of tours I led increased by 40 percent in 2024 compared with 2023," said the Beijing-born tour guide, aged in his 30s. "It was busy, yet fulfilling and exciting."

Li has noticed the way people travel has changed. Over 80 percent of his groups used to consist of 30 or more people, but smaller groups of 15 to 20 are now more common, accounting for over 60 percent of his clientele.

This has allowed him to focus on creating more personalized experiences.

"Chinese tourists are no longer content with whirlwind itineraries abroad. They want to stay longer, dive deeper, and really understand

the places they visit. It's about living like a local," Li explained.

During a 13-day tour across Europe, Li arranged for his guests to visit Murren, a mountain village in Switzerland.

"To get there, we took a cable car and then a small train. It's a secluded place where we shared a traditional cheese fondue with locals," he recalled, adding that experiences like these are what his guests cherish most.

Outbound tourism in 2024 continued to recover, nearing the levels of 2019, said Yang Jinsong, director of the Institute of International Research with the China Tourism Academy.

Major features of outbound tourism last year included tourists' high expectations for quality travel experiences, demands for high-quality product development and supply chain optimization, and improve-

ments in convenience, including visas and flight services. All these have fueled the rise in outbound tourism, Yang said.

As short-haul destinations, Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia continue to be popular among travelers, and Belt and Road countries are attracting more Chinese tourists, he said.

Outbound destinations, such as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, that offer Chinese travelers visa-free entry, have proved to be big drawcards.

Thailand received 6.7 million Chinese tourists last year, making China the largest source of tourists for the country, according to Thai tourism authorities.

Malaysian tourism authorities reported more than 2.5 million Chinese travelers from January to September, surpassing the same period of 2019, before the pandemic.

"Visa-free policies allow tourists to flexibly decide their travel schedule one to two weeks before departure, truly experiencing the convenience of 'just pack and go,'" said Li Mengran, marketing manager at the Beijing-based travel agency Utour, adding that it is a big incentive.

Li said Chinese tourists traveled farther afield last year, with South America, Central Asia, and niche destinations becoming more highly sought after.

"They are asking for more experiential activities, such as making local specialty dishes, visiting local homes, and trying unique modes of transportation," she said.

In-depth tour products have been in high demand, with the length of a single trip gradually increasing.

"For example, the typical Spanish tour was originally 12 days, but now it is extended to over 20 days. Long-haul destinations

like Australia, North America, and South America are offering ultra-long trips of 30 days or more," she added.

Travel service platform Fliggy reported that a group of destinations with unique natural and cultural landscapes, along with distinctive experiences, emerged as hot spots for outbound tourism last year.

Bookings to countries such as Nigeria, Zambia, Chile, Türkiye, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Belgium grew rapidly, Fliggy said.

Major online travel agency Trip.com Group stated that tourists from first- and second-tier cities have taken outbound travel to the next level. They are traveling farther, spending more, and increasing their travel frequency, with European countries, Australia, and New Zealand being popular long-haul destinations.

Meanwhile, tourists from third-

and fourth-tier cities contributed faster growth to outbound travel orders last year than those from first- and second-tier cities, with a year-on-year increase of over 130 percent, Trip.com Group said.

Destinations for tourists from third- and fourth-tier cities are mainly short-haul, with 17 out of the top 20 nearby countries. South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan topped the list.

Notably, more young people, especially those born after 1995, have flown abroad to attend concerts, with outbound performance-related bookings on Trip.com growing by 193 percent year-on-year.

The most popular destinations for mainland travelers to attend performances last year were Hong Kong, Macao, Bangkok of Thailand, Incheon of South Korea, Osaka of Japan, and Singapore, the travel agency reported.

## TOP NEWS

# China, UK agree on more cooperation

High-level bilateral dialogue revived to foster exchanges on economy and finance

By WANG KEJU and ZHOU LANXU

China stands ready to work together with the United Kingdom to further expand cooperation in the economic and financial sectors, according to the 11th China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue held in Beijing on Saturday.

The meeting was co-chaired by Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng and British Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves, the lead individuals of the dialogue, which has been reactivated after six years.

Based on their positioning as strategic partners, China is willing to work with the UK to enhance communication, further expand economic and financial cooperation, and provide more impetus for stable and mutually beneficial bilateral ties, He said.

Reeves said the UK is committed to strengthening practical cooperation with China in economic and financial areas to achieve the goal of developing a consistent, lasting and mutually respectful relationship between the two countries.

During the dialogue, the two sides reached a series of mutually beneficial outcomes and points of consensus. He and Reeves also attended the fourth China-UK Financial Services Summit.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China and the UK restarted their high-level economic and financial dialogue after a hiatus of six years, and the talks are aimed at implementing the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries.

Since China and the UK are two of the world's major economic powers and financial hubs, the strengthening of exchanges and cooperation between them in the economic and financial sectors "not only serves the interests of both nations, but also meets the expectations of the international

community", Guo Jiakun, a spokesman for the ministry, said at a news conference on Friday.

China and the UK have achieved advancements in capital market cooperation. In 2019, the Shanghai-London Stock Connect program was launched, enabling cross-listings between the Shanghai and London stock exchanges.

In 2022, the program was expanded to include Shenzhen, thereby upgrading into the China-UK Stock Connect. To date, six Chinese listed companies have issued global depository receipts that are listed on the London Stock Exchange's main board.

Meanwhile, financial institutions on both sides have been increasingly active in each other's market, becoming a crucial link in bilateral economic and financial cooperation.

British financial institutions currently hold stakes in eight securities and fund management companies in China, while four Chinese securities and futures companies have established subsidiaries in the UK.

Notably, Standard Chartered Securities (China) became the first newly established wholly foreign-owned securities company in China since the country lifted foreign ownership caps in the sector in 2020, while Standard Chartered Bank (China) became the first foreign bank to obtain a domestic fund custody license and trade onshore treasury bond futures.

In October, HSBC Bank (China) also received a domestic fund custody license.

According to the Foreign Ministry, the China-UK economic and financial dialogue mechanism was established in 2008, serving as an important platform for the two countries to engage in discussions and cooperation on critical, overarching and long-term issues in the economic and financial sectors.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

# Concerted efforts made to combat human trafficking

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

Authorities in Thailand are making concerted efforts to strengthen border security to prevent human trafficking gangs from using the country as a transit point.

**Inside** Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra is scheduled to hold a meeting on Jan 27 to outline policies for fighting border-related crimes in the wake of a recent trafficking case.

The meeting will be attended by 14 provincial governors, 14 provincial police chiefs, 51 district chiefs and the commanders of 76 police stations, according to Thai Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai.

Last week, the Thai Ministry of Defence issued a warning to governors and district chiefs in 14 border provinces. Transfers await top officials in these provinces if they are unable to curb cross-border smuggling of drugs, call center scams and human trafficking within six months.

Phumtham, who is also Thai deputy prime minister, said it is important that all sides cooperate to seal the borders against drug smuggling and operations carried out by call centers and human trafficking gangs.

The measures follow the case of Chinese actor Wang Xing, who went missing at the Thailand-Myanmar

border after arriving in Thailand's Tak province for a supposed film shoot on Jan 3, causing widespread public concern in both China and Thailand.

On Tuesday afternoon, Wang was retrieved safely at a border crossing point from Myanmar to Thailand. Thai police said he had fallen victim to a human trafficking gang using Thailand as a gateway.

The actor flew back to Shanghai from Bangkok on Friday night, a week after his ordeal began.

Apart from Wang, several other Chinese nationals were recently reported to have lost contact with their friends or families in or near Thailand.

Thai police are investigating at least two such cases — one involving Chinese male model Yang Zeqi, who went missing last month, and another involving a Chinese woman, Wu Jiaqi, whose disappearance was brought to their attention this week.

The Bangkok Post, a local newspaper, quoted a Thai police source as saying that both cases are suspected to involve human trafficking gangs, and are similar to the recent disappearance of the Chinese actor.

Colonel Nathakorn Ruentip, commander of the Ratchamanu Task Force based in Thailand's Mae Sot district, said on Saturday that hundreds of foreign nationals were found near the border since October and were detained for illegal entry.

These individuals are from 21 countries, including China, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Ethiopia and India, he said.

Local news portal The Reporter quoted the colonel as saying that Myanmar's cybercrime network has expanded in recent years, particularly in its southeastern town of Myawaddy, which borders Mae Sot.

Thai authorities have drafted eight points for negotiation with the government of Myanmar, he said, adding that power supply and equipment exports to Myawaddy should be stopped to make the operation of cybercrime gangs harder.

"We planned to visit Samui (an island in Thailand) in February, but may now cancel the trip due to safety concerns, as there have been several trafficking cases," said Zhang Yue, a resident of Chongqing in southwest China.

On Friday, the Tourism Authority of Thailand released a statement, reassuring Chinese tourists of the Thai government's determination to strengthen safety measures and maintain the country's reputation as one of the top travel destinations.

The authority is hoping for at least 8 million Chinese tourists this year. During the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, Thailand is expected to record 20,000 to 30,000 daily arrivals from China.

"We will work closely with related departments and the private sector to

provide convenience and high-quality services," TAT Governor Thapanee Kiatphabool said in the statement.

She added that Thailand's tourism industry has prepared various promotion packages for Chinese tourists.

On Saturday, the Thai-Chinese Tourism Alliance Association also released a statement, highlighting the long and historical friendship between the Thai and Chinese people and blaming criminal gangs in another country for trying to ruin such close bonds.

"We hope to give a gentle reminder to Chinese tourists to be vigilant and alert. Do not trust information or services provided by strangers. If you encounter any suspicious situations, please contact the police. We should unite and work together to address illegal activities and jointly maintain our friendship and peace," it said.

After actor Wang's return, the Chinese embassy in Bangkok expressed its gratitude to the Thai government for prioritizing the case and promptly launching a rescue operation to ensure his safe homecoming.

On Saturday, the embassy posted a reminder on its social media platform urging Chinese citizens visiting Thailand to be cautious of employment scams and not get drawn to jobs promising high salaries, meals and accommodations without proper verification.

## Inside

Editorial, page 11



## Vital care

Members of a Chinese medical team provide free services to local residents of Zanzibar, Tanzania, on Thursday. Around 400 people benefited from free medical services provided by the team stationed in the Indian Ocean island.

XINHUA

# Ties: Nation remains open to Japan's positive initiatives

From page 1

"The overarching goal is to avoid a resurgence of bloc confrontation and the zero-sum thinking that defined the Cold War era," Wu added.

"Policy adjustments under the Ishiba administration are not just a short-term necessity but also a pragmatic and realistic approach for the long term," said Liu Qingbin, a former professor at Yokohama National University's Institute of Advanced Studies.

While acknowledging the relative weakness of Ishiba's government and the uncertainties surrounding Japan's future policy direction, Liu noted that China remains open to any positive initiatives from Japan aimed at fostering stronger ties.

Liu Jiangyong, professor of international relations at Tsinghua University, underscored the significance of this year's historic milestones — the 80th anniversaries of the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War and the founding of the United Nations, as well as the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, which united Asian and African nations in their pursuit of independence and cooperation.

"China and Japan must join hands with ASEAN nations to reaffirm their commitment to peaceful multilateralism and open regionalism, and oppose violent multilateralism and closed-door trade protectionism," Liu Jiangyong asserted. "In so doing, the region can work collectively toward sustainable development and security."

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# Self-reform: 628,000 individuals disciplined since 2022

From page 1

According to the latest data released by the CCDI, a total of 73 officials at minister level or above were placed under disciplinary and supervisory investigation last year, with cases also filed against 104,000 current or former village committee heads or at the grassroots level.

A year ago, at the third plenary session of the 20th CCDI, Xi pointed out that leading the great social revolution is the fundamental purpose of advancing the Party's self-reform, which he said should be promoted so that its governance will better serve its main tasks.

Zhuang Deshui, deputy head of the Research Center of Public Policy at Peking University, said, "The current task of the Party is to advance Chinese modernization and national rejuvenation, which is also our country's ongoing social revolution."

"Whether the task can be accomplished and whether the social revolution can succeed depend on the Party," Zhuang said. "Specifically, it's up to the Party to arrange the work of various industries, gather the force of all sectors and solve problems in different

fields on the way to modernization.

"Therefore, the Party must optimize its own governance through self-reform, with sustained efforts to eradicate the soil for corruption. Only in this way can the Party be the 'backbone' of the people in the social revolution."

Zhuang praised the spirit of reform that was highlighted by Xi last week, saying that it is consistent with the self-reform that Xi has repeatedly emphasized in recent years.

In Zhuang's view, the spirit of self-reform will be more conducive to the Party solving difficulties and challenges at home and abroad in the new era.

"The more difficulties the country encounters, the more it must unswervingly exercise full and rigorous Party governance, because the Party's self-improvement is a political guarantee for the realization of social revolution," Zhuang added.

Yang Weidong, a law professor at China University of Political Science and Law, said that the spirit of reform will be more helpful to the self-improvement of the Party and thus enable it to lead the people in overcoming difficulties in various areas.

# Tariff: US set to face major reform of consumption taxation

From page 1

The CBO also estimated that the tariffs studied would shrink the US economy by \$165 billion by 2034, raising around \$3 trillion in fresh revenue over the same period.

Somewhat more gloomy estimates from the Tax Foundation confirm these figures.

According to the US Treasury, the country's national debt in 2024 was \$35.46 trillion or 123 percent of GDP. Many commentators expect

the debt level to rise, partly to allow the new Trump administration to reduce taxation levels that apply to the super-wealthy (many of whom have spent heavily to ensure Trump's election).

Treasury funds raised by the projected imposition of greatly increased de facto consumption taxation on over 300 million US citizens are also, according to this argument, set to be deployed to assist in this same tax relief project.

The two experts also noted that the increasingly rigorous governance of the Party has played a bigger role in ensuring that Party members and officials do not dare to, are unable to, and have no desire to indulge in corruption.

"For example, the disciplinary supervision of Party members and officials was previously limited to their working hours, but now it has been extended to include outside working hours and their families," Zhuang said.

A documentary recently aired in China showed that Tang Yijun, former governor of Liaoning province and minister of justice, used companies controlled by his wife, Xuan Minjie, as a cover-up for his corrupt activities to present them as market operations.

Based on clues and thanks to big data, the investigators uncovered shadow companies, suspected proxies and bribe givers linked to Xuan, who had extensive experience in finance and economics and ventured into business in 2005, after holding a senior position at a State-owned enterprise.

In October, the Supreme People's Procuratorate approved the arrest of

Tang on suspicion of accepting bribes. He was expelled from the Party and dismissed from public office earlier.

Zhuang said that such extensive investigation is necessary to regulate the behavior of Party members, noting that the Party's self-governance has also been improved by disciplinary education, amendments to the disciplines and campaigns against misconduct closely related to people's well-being.

According to data released by the CCDI, 768,000 cases of misconduct and corruption that directly affected people's daily lives, including school meals and medical insurance, have been handled since 2022, with 628,000 individuals disciplined.

"All the efforts mean that the standards or requirements for Party members and officials have been increased, and are higher and more rigorous," Zhuang said.

Yang, the law professor, said that self-improvement as well as self-reform will make the CPC more confident and capable in solving problems on the journey of Chinese modernization and in promoting the people's sense of fulfillment, happiness and security in the new era.

Trump. Have the US' primary political parties and the mainstream media conspired against the voters? It is undoubtedly hard to recall a comparable example in the developed world where primary taxation reform has been achieved by relying to such a degree on collective, influential stealth.

The author is an adjunct professor in the faculty of law, Hong Kong University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## Icy performance



Young violinists from the Harbin Schoenfeld Children's Arts Society perform in a musical flash mob at Harbin Snow and Ice World in Heilongjiang province on Sunday. The event was held to promote the upcoming 9th Asian Winter Games, which will be held from Feb 7 to 14 in Harbin. ZHANG TAO / XINHUA

## China moves to improve public education

By ZHAO YIMENG

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China plans to enhance public education services by adapting to demographic changes, revitalizing county-level high schools and reforming high school entrance exams, officials said at the 2025 National Education Work Conference.

The conference, which was held on Thursday and Friday in Beijing, set priorities for the year to advance the country's goal of becoming an "education powerhouse" emphasizing a people-centered approach to education development, the Ministry of Education said.

Measures to improve the quality of schools and regulate off-campus tutoring aim to ensure equality for vulnerable groups, the ministry said.

Wu Yongming, head of Jiangxi province's education department, highlighted the success of the province's restructuring of small-scale schools last year, which improved

**We will explore forward-thinking strategies to meet demographic challenges and ensure equitable education."**

Jiang Yuanshao, head of Qingdao's education bureau in Shandong province

resource allocation without adding financial burdens on families or local governments.

"We'll keep exploring solutions to the challenges posed by demographic shifts," Wu said.

In Shandong province, Qingdao's education bureau plans to pilot teacher rotation programs between primary and middle schools to address uneven resource distribu-

tion and prepare for a surge in middle school enrollments, bureau head Jiang Yuanshao said.

"We will explore forward-thinking strategies to meet demographic challenges and ensure equitable education," Jiang said.

The meeting also underscored the education sector's role as a strategic pillar in boosting China's innovation capabilities. This year, the government aims to optimize higher education programs, align academic disciplines with technological advancements and national priorities, and foster the integration of technology and industrial innovation.

Vocational education will play a key role in cultivating skilled workers to support new quality productive forces, officials said.

Anhui province shared its experience with a pilot program in advanced research institutes where enterprises invest in training engineering master's and doctoral students to tackle practical challenges, said Qian Guilun, head of the pro-

vincial education department.

Strengthening the teaching workforce remains a top priority. The ministry plans to enhance professional ethics, improve teacher training systems and bolster recruitment efforts.

China also intends to expand international education cooperation, increase its influence in global education governance and advance digitization in the sector, according to the conference.

Li Ping, head of the Ministry of Education's educational technology center, said the Smart Education of China platform has amassed 147 million users who have access to 3 trillion pieces of information.

"This year, we will upgrade the platform to become the world's largest digital education database," Li said.

Authorities also stressed the importance of campus safety and stability, with plans to reinforce safety measures and improve governance across the education system.

## Power restored in quake-hit Xizang region

State Grid reconnects electricity for those worst affected by the temblor

By PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa

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900+

rescue workers

All tents and makeshift houses inhabited by residents affected by the earthquake in Dingri county, Xizang autonomous region, were provided with a stable power supply by Saturday afternoon, according to the State Grid Xizang Electric Power Co.

A 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck Southwest China's Xizang on Tuesday morning, killing 126 people and injuring 337 others. The quake's epicenter was located in Tsogo township of Dingri county in the city of Shigatse.

In the wake of the earthquake, State Grid Xizang swiftly mobilized its resources to ensure affected areas received an uninterrupted supply of electricity, undertaking urgent repair and restoration tasks, a company representative said.

The company deployed over 900 emergency rescue personnel and 112 sets of power maintenance equipment, with a total power generation capacity exceeding 20,000 kilowatts, to the earthquake-hit areas.

Approximately 75,000 pieces of emergency rescue equipment were also urgently allocated to the sites in greatest need.

Venturing into the heart of the disaster zone, the State Grid Lhokha Power Supply Co, the Lhokha city branch of the State Grid, embarked on a mission to restore power to villages such as Changkar and Thongley, part of Dramso township in Dingri.

Despite harsh conditions and logistical challenges, the dedicated team worked tirelessly to restore electricity to the resettlement sites and provide essential relief to affected residents.

Wang Tianyou, an employee of the State Grid Lhokha Power Supply Co, said he and his colleagues are proud to have contributed to the rescue and recovery efforts for disaster-stricken communities.

"Despite the harsh conditions, including high altitudes, cold temperatures and relentless sandstorms, our commitment to restoring power and providing essential services remains unwavering," he said.

"The earthquake-stricken area is at a high altitude, and it is very cold.

In the afternoon, a sandstorm struck the villages, making it difficult to open one's eyes due to the strong winds and dust," Wang said. He added that many of his colleagues have experienced hypoxia, headaches and difficulty breathing.

In recent days, Wang and his team started work at around 8:30 am and continued until midnight. They stayed in tents at night, where tremors made normal sleep nearly impossible.

"Whenever we make small donations, such as giving the children toys or snacks, they are very moved. Sometimes, we all burst into tears together," Wang said.

The State Grid's efforts have not only illuminated the lives of those in need, but also brought a sense of normalcy and hope to a community grappling with the aftermath of a natural disaster.

The resettlement sites in Thongley of Dramso were reconnected to the State Grid's power supply by Thursday afternoon.

Tashi, a 36-year-old villager, said he is able to charge his mobile phone and access the internet thanks to the restored electricity.

"In the first three days after the devastating quake, we experienced the inconvenience of electricity shortages. It was difficult at night because we couldn't see anything. Going to the toilet was hard, as one could easily fall," Tashi said. "The electric heaters in the tents are working now. It's very warm."

"What makes me happiest is that my family is safe. Our nation and society care so much about us and have provided a lot of help. Now, we lack nothing," he said. "I also believe that the government will help us rebuild our houses and support us as we return to our lives before the disaster."

The earthquake was the most severe in the area in the past five years. About 47,500 people are living at 224 resettlement sites after more than 3,600 houses collapsed, local officials said.

## Hong Kong wildfire nearly out, no casualties reported

By LI LEI in Hong Kong

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A wildfire in a hiking area that had been burning since Saturday in the northwestern New Territories, near the boundary between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Shenzhen, Guangdong province, was largely extinguished by 2:08 pm on Sunday.

As of press time, no casualties had been reported.

The blaze — the second to break out in Yuen Long district in two weeks — occurred during exceptionally dry weather, which is expected to persist through Monday.

A staff member at the Yuen Long Fire Station told local media on

Sunday that while dry weather was a contributing factor, the exact cause of the wildfire was still under investigation. Authorities also advised the public to avoid visiting the region for now.

The fire started shortly after 5:30 pm on Saturday at Kai Kung Leng, a popular hiking area in Yuen Long, and was reported to be under control by about 10:40 am on Sunday.

Local media reported that the flames had extended more than 500 meters in length at the peak of the blaze, posing a threat to a nearby stray animal shelter housing some 170 dogs and cats.

A couple hiking in the mountains reported being trapped on Saturday and were later airlifted to safety.

According to the Fire Services

Department, firefighters equipped with fire beaters managed to contain the blaze on Sunday morning after working through the night. Helicopters conducted water-bombing operations to provide aerial support. To prevent the fire from spreading, the fire department established two fire breaks around the affected area.

The Big Tree Animal Sanctuary and Adoption Centre in Kam Tin reported that the section of the fire threatening its shelter was extinguished by 5:30 am on Sunday, and all the animals were safe.

The Hong Kong Observatory stated that as of Sunday afternoon, a red fire warning remained in effect, indicating an "extreme" risk of fire. It added that a winter monsoon had brought very dry weather

across coastal Guangdong, resulting in lower humidity levels in Hong Kong.

The forecast predicted continued clear and dry conditions overnight, with moderate to fresh winds from the north to northeast through Monday.

The Civil Aid Service, which also participated in the firefighting effort, noted on social media that high winds and dry conditions create an environment conducive to the occurrence and spread of wildfires.

Kai Kung Leng, also known as Rooster Ridge, is a steep, grassy trail located in Lam Tsuen Country Park in the northern New Territories. The area is popular among hikers for its scenic views of Shenzhen's skyline.



Villagers and volunteers build a makeshift house in a resettlement site for residents affected by the earthquake in Dinggye county, Xizang autonomous region, on Saturday. Dinggye, next to Dingri, was one of the worst-hit areas of the earthquake. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

## Young people develop passion for retro photo prints

By CHINA DAILY

Retro photography and instant print cameras have regained popularity among young people in China in recent years, with many reverting to the old ways of capturing moments and seeking pleasure in the nostalgia of printed photographs.

In Beijing's Shichahai and Drum Tower areas, an increasing number of freelance photographers and hobbyists can be seen offering to take Polaroid-style photos and digital pictures with retro filters of

tourists. A 4-inch Polaroid photo typically costs 20 yuan (\$2.80), while a digital photo from a Fuji camera goes for 10 yuan.

In 2022, sales of Polaroid cameras on e-commerce platform JD reached 2.5 million units, with total sales exceeding 470 million yuan.

"The camera gives a filmlike retro vibe, which is superb," one photographer said.

Some of the photographers are students, young professionals or photography enthusiasts looking to make extra income.

A 21-year-old arts graduate surnamed Zhang said she began photographing people in Shichahai after class and during holidays.

"These Polaroid photos with vintage filters have unique colors. Since the resolution isn't very high, facial blemishes are naturally concealed without editing," Zhang said. "A bright smile and colorful outfit can make a great photo."

Another photographer surnamed Shi said she enjoys the challenge of interacting with customers, negotiating prices and teaching them how to pose.

Most customers are young travelers or city residents drawn by recommendations on social media. For some, it's a chance to follow the retro trend; for others, it's a way to preserve memories.

Peng Liying, a product designer in Beijing, bought her first Polaroid photo from a photographer while on a solo city walk.

"The scarcity of an instant print makes it more valuable than dozens of mobile phone photos," the 29-year-old said. "I didn't use to take many snapshots, but I've realized my appearance has

changed over the years, and printed photos are a wonderful way to reminisce."

The growing demand has also spurred the opening of vintage photo studios. Near Shichahai, one such studio offers a curated experience with shelves of retro cameras, 1990s CDs from Hong Kong singers, and old-fashioned telephones and CD players.

"The background and lighting are pre-adjusted to ensure the best shot, and we provide props like cartoon dolls to create a retro vibe," said the shop owner surnamed Yuan.

Yuan believes the appeal of printed photos lies in their emotional value.

"When you hold a photo print, it

takes you back to the moment it was taken. The anticipation of waiting for the image to develop is part of the charm, like opening a blind box."

For many young people, this nostalgia is deeply meaningful. Wu Xinyu, a middle school teacher who spent an hour taking photos with her boyfriend at the shop, said the experience brought her back to her childhood.

"With society developing so quickly, some people start to miss things from the past," Wu said. "Taking Polaroid photos lets us relive what our parents saw and experienced back then."

Xu Nuo contributed to this story.

## CHINA

# Blind couple sets milestone by completing marathon

Guides running alongside provide the eyes to stay on course and avoid obstacles

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

Fifty-year-old Chen Hong and 40-year-old Lei Na from Chongqing have inscribed their names in the annals of history by becoming the first blind couple in China to complete a full marathon.

During the 2024 Shanghai Marathon on Dec 1, assisted by five escort runners, Chen and Lei accomplished a 42.19-kilometer full marathon in 5 hours and 47 minutes.

"As we crossed the finish line hand-in-hand, the overwhelming cheers and praise enveloped us in a moment of indescribable happiness and joy," Chen recalled.

"A marathon is all about resilience, perseverance and faith. Now every time I meet obstacles, I remind myself that I am a marathon runner."

Their marathon journey began on Oct 15, 2022 — the 39th White Cane Safety Day — with the founding of the Chongqing branch of Running in the Dark.

Originating in Shanghai in 2016, Running in the Dark, a national charity that supports partially sighted runners, has grown to 27 branches across the country. The organization has also broadened its scope to incorporate sports such as hiking, cycling and swimming.

Among the earliest participants and dedicated attendees in Chongqing, Chen and Lei seldom miss any of the branch's monthly or bimonthly running events. Despite both losing their eyesight a few years ago due to congenital glaucoma, the couple has steadily honed their running skills, with their escort runners alongside.

The participants run in pairs, holding a short rope between them.

One person is visually impaired and the other acts as an escort runner, who alerts the former to turns, obstacles on the track and running techniques.

"We serve as their eyes, but they help us see from our souls. Each makes the other better," said Lu Wei, founder of the Chongqing branch. "By removing the obstacles they face during exercise, we hope to create a closer bond with each other."

Lu, 52, started running full marathons in 2015. He was previously the escort for famed marathon runner Yan Wei, the first partially sighted runner from the Chinese mainland to finish the Boston



Chen Hong (front right) and Lei Na celebrate after completing the 2024 Shanghai Marathon on Dec 1. ZHANG ZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

**"A marathon is all about resilience, perseverance and faith. Now every time I meet obstacles, I remind myself that I am a marathon runner."**

Chen Hong, marathon runner from Chongqing

Marathon, the world's oldest annual marathon and one of the six major global marathons.

Lu said the majority of the over 200 partially sighted members in the Chongqing branch have totally lost their eyesight and earned their living as masseurs.

The branch boasts a volunteer base of more than 400 people from diverse backgrounds, spanning ages from their 20s to 50s, with many either professional or seasoned runners.

"In one event with the most volunteer participation, four escort runners accompanied and coached me," Lei said.

In March last year, the couple completed their first half-marathon in Chongqing's Yongchuan district.

To prepare for the full marathon in Shanghai, they spent eight months diligently engaged in running and various exercises such as rope skipping, wall sits and planks, to enhance their physical and core strength.

"I think more people with disabilities should connect with society, which gives them love and respect, rather than isolating themselves at home. We only live once, so why not reveal our true colors?" Chen said.

Chen lamented that he and his wife failed to get chance to attend the 2025 Chongqing Marathon on March 2. However, he said they hope to inspire more people.

By 2023, approximately 85.9 million people in China were living with disabilities, accounting for 6.3 percent of the population, according to China Disabled Persons' Federation.

The white paper "China's Paraports: Progress and the Protection of Rights" released by the State Council Information Office in March 2022, said historic progress has been made in paraports since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012. The report noted that partici-

tion rates of disabled people in grassroots cultural and sports activities in China have soared from 6.8 percent in 2015 to 23.9 percent in 2021.

Chen has run a massage parlor with his wife in the city's Shapingba district for almost 20 years.

In his spare time, the man with a deep passion for Chinese literature finds enjoyment in writing short poems to express his thoughts and feelings, and posting them on his WeChat moments.

Recently, the Chongqing branch introduced a Chinese literature class aimed at enriching the knowledge of traditional Chinese studies among the partially sighted. "It's just the beginning of their brand-new lives," said Lu, adding that these partially sighted members, many of whom were initially struggling to run one lap, are now enthusiastic about running a marathon.

So far, some 30 of their partially sighted members have participated in a marathon.

"Despite being unable to see the world themselves, they not only showcase their efforts, but also present an optimistic outlook on life, truly deserving of our admiration," Lu said.

Contact the writers at dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

## Excitement builds as village soccer league returns to rural Guizhou

GUIYANG — With the warm winter sun at their backs, residents of Dali village in Guizhou province are busy preparing for the influx of tourists during the Village Super League soccer tournament.

Nestled among mountains and lush greenery, Dali is a traditional village with centuries of history. Over 1,300 villagers of the Dong ethnic group live in well-preserved wooden houses on stilts, continuing the traditions of embroidery and singing Dong folk songs.

Visitors come from around the world. Activities such as weaving, embroidering and catching fish in rice fields offer tourists a vibrant array of experiences. In 2023, the Guizhou Village Super League, affectionately known as Cun Chao, became a sensation, catapulting the small mountainous county of Rongjiang into the spotlight.

The event attracted over 9 million tourists last year, generating tourism revenue of more than 10.4 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion).

Last year, Dali village received nearly 100,000 tourists, while the number of homestays in the village increased from 18 in 2022 to 46 last year — with 90 percent run by locals.

Yang Bo, a villager who once worked at a hydropower station, left his high-paying job to transform his home into a homestay. He said the Village Super League resulted in a surge of tourists, which allowed him to earn nearly 200,000 yuan last year.

"I love my hometown, and I believe the homestay industry has immense potential," Yang said, adding that he hopes his efforts will attract more tourists to enjoy the village's natural beauty and cultural richness.

This year, the village has organized a team to participate in the third season of the Village Super

League, which began on Jan 4. Yang, now assistant coach of the village's soccer team, said their participation is not just for entertainment but also to strengthen community bonds and village cohesion.

Beyond the soccer matches, the Village Super League features a wealth of ethnic cultural performances.

Baibei village in Guizhou has been participating for three years. In 2023, the village organized a cheerleading team, whose members debuted on the soccer field in festive costumes and showcased intangible cultural heritage, making the village an internet sensation.

The village has released a series of promotional videos. It has also organized local artisans to create handicrafts and soccer-related products for sale online. Since June 2023, sales of these products have generated revenue exceeding 800,000 yuan.

Driven by love for their hometowns and encouraged by improved economic opportunities, more young people are choosing to return home to start businesses.

Tan Youyun from Setong village, who used to run a company selling ultrasonic equipment in Zhejiang province, saw the popularity of the Village Super League as an important business opportunity in her hometown.

Confident in the charm of the local natural landscape and the Miao ethnic culture, she decided to rent a house there and turn it into a homestay.

"I'll use videos and online streaming to promote local agricultural and cultural products. I hope to attract more tourists to experience the village's charm," Tan said.

XINHUA



An aerial photo shows the opening ceremony of the Village Super League soccer tournament in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province, on Jan 4. YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

## Fossil tracks found in Gansu were from flesh-eating dinosaurs from Cretaceous

Scientists have confirmed that a group of fossilized tracks found in Northwest China were left by flesh-eating dinosaurs over 120 million years ago, providing insights into the social behaviors of these ancient creatures.

The track site is located in Wulan town, Gansu province.

Scientists discovered at least 67 three-toed tracks on a cliff at the base of a 6.2-square-meter sandstone. The lengths of these tracks range from 11 centimeters to 21 cm.

Scientists estimated that the creatures had a hip height between 60 cm and 90 cm, with the largest one having a body length of up to 2.5 meters, and identified them as belonging to *Grallator ssatoi* — a carnivorous dinosaur that roamed the Earth during the Cretaceous period.

The study results were recently published online in the international journal *Historical Biology*.

According to the study, the area where the track site is located was submerged by the Yellow River until a few decades ago. In the 1970s, as rock walls were blasted and roads constructed, these tracks were likely exposed.

A resident recalled discovering these unusual footprints in 2006. Recognizing their potential signif-



A fossilized track of *Grallator ssatoi*, a carnivorous dinosaur, found in Wulan town, Gansu province. XINHUA

icance as dinosaur tracks, she reported her findings to the local cultural relics bureau in 2020.

In June 2023, researchers had the opportunity to examine the site.

The site is situated about 100 kilometers east of the Lower Cretaceous Hekou Group, an area renowned for having one of the highest diversities of Cretaceous four-footed tracks in China. To date, 31 Lower Cretaceous tetra-

pod footprint sites have been recorded there, featuring over 1,000 dinosaur tracks, including a wide variety of three-toed theropod footprints, such as those belonging to *Grallator*, *Eubrontes* and *Asianopodus*.

Such dense tracks can also offer insights into the behavior of the creatures who made the tracks.

According to lead author Xing Lida, associate professor at the China University of Geosciences

in Beijing, previous studies have shown that some groups of small biped dinosaurs had demonstrated gregarious behavior.

In the new study, scientists discovered 12 similar-sized tracks. Some of them run parallel to each other, moving in the same direction — which indicates that these species might have exhibited social behavior.

"Such behavior could have been a strategy for small dinosaurs to protect themselves from predators," said Xing. "By staying close to one another, they may have reduced the pressure on each individual to remain vigilant."

The dinosaur expert also noted some surprises produced by the study.

"Some of the tracks feature lateral drag marks, which suggest that while walking, the dinosaurs may have slipped sideways but were able to regain their balance promptly," Xing told Xinhua.

These well-preserved footprints offer new scientific evidence concerning the distribution of dinosaurs in China and provide clues that can help scholars gain a deeper understanding of dinosaur footprints and behaviors.

The reconstructed tracks hold significant scientific and educational value, Xing said, adding, "They are much like a prehistoric documentary, bringing to life the world of dinosaurs during the Cretaceous period."

XINHUA

## Chinese scientists decode popular sugarcane variety

NANNING — A Chinese research team from Guangxi University has successfully decoded the genome of the modern cultivated sugarcane variety Xintaitang No 22 (XTT22), shedding light on the highly complex allopolyploid genome of sugarcane and its evolutionary mechanisms.

Sugarcane plays a vital role in the production of sugar, alcohol and bioenergy, offering substantial economic and agricultural value. XTT22 was once the leading sugarcane variety in terms of planting area in China for 15 years. More than 90 percent of the country's fourth and fifth-generation sugarcane varieties were developed using it as a parent.

According to Liu Yaoguang, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the genome of XTT22 decoded in this study is the most complete and highest-quality genome assembly of modern cultivated sugarcane to date.

However, earlier genome drafts of sugarcane faced significant issues, including incomplete chromosomes and highly fragmented sequences. As a result, obtaining a complete and accurate genome of modern cultivated sugarcane has remained elusive.

"This study is like drawing a

detailed map of the sugarcane genome. In the past, the map was so vague that we could only roughly navigate it," said Zhang Jisen, research team leader from Guangxi University.

"Now, however, every 'street' and even every 'room' on the map is clearly marked," Zhang added.

Previously, sugarcane breeding primarily relied on traditional hybridization methods, where parent plants were selected based on experience to observe the performance of their offspring. However, this approach proved to be both time-consuming and inefficient.

Leveraging advancements in genomics, scientists can now use the "genomic map" to precisely pinpoint genes closely associated with sugarcane yield and sugar content, enabling more targeted improvements and optimization.

"With the widespread application of genomics in sugarcane breeding, the yield, sugar content and disease resistance of sugarcane are expected to see further improvements," Zhang said.

The research was recently published in the journal *Nature Genetics*.

XINHUA

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

### CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY

By YAN DONGJIE

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For award-winning academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Zhang Tao, scientific research involves two pursuits – making results available to be further developed to serve society, and making results available in academic papers for further study around the world.

Zhang, a researcher at the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics of the CAS, specializes in the development of single-atom catalysis, the results of which when put to use at an industrial scale could bring about drastic reductions in carbon emissions.

Last year, Zhang was awarded the Physical Science Prize by the Future Science Prize, together with Li Yadong, for their groundbreaking contributions to the development and application of single-atom catalysis.

Although the term catalysis may sound unfamiliar to some, it is frequently encountered in daily life. For example, brewing alcohol is a typical catalytic process, where starch in grains is transformed into alcohol under the action of microorganisms, with the microorganisms acting as catalysts. Similarly, the process of making yogurt from milk is also a catalytic process.

"Catalysis is a core technology in the chemical industry, which can accelerate chemical reaction rates, and over 80 percent of chemical processes are related to catalytic technology," Zhang said. "Therefore, developing efficient catalysts and corresponding feasible synthetic methods is one of the most important research goals in the field of chemical engineering."

Many catalysts contain precious metals, and catalytic reactions occur on the surface of these metals.

Due to the scarcity and high cost of precious metal resources, enhancing the efficiency of precious metal atom utilization has become one of the core issues in catalyst preparation science.

"Gold is an inert metal that doesn't usually tarnish due to oxidation. In the 1980s, foreign experts discovered that when gold particle size is reduced to three to four nanometers, gold powder becomes highly active and can promote catalytic reactions, sparking a nanocatalysis trend," Zhang explained.

At that time, China had only just started its reform and opening-up.

Reflecting on his youth when he entered the realm of scientific research, Zhang recalled the enthusiasm for science sparked by writer Guo Moruo's speech "The Spring of Science" at the National Science Conference closing ceremony in 1978.

The motto "Master math, physics and chemistry, and you will be fearless wherever you go" became the rallying cry for many young people.

Under the national advocacy of "early talent development, fast talent development", Zhang, while in



Zhang Tao shares his thoughts on the spirit of good scientists as he introduces the development of the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences during a scientists' seminar in Beijing in March. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Pioneering at an atomic level

Researchers developing new methods to help nation achieve carbon goals



Left: Zhang Tao (fourth from left) receives the Physical Science Prize by the Future Science Prize in Hong Kong in November. Right: Zhang works in his office. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



the first year of high school, was recommended by Ankang Middle School in Shaanxi province to take the college entrance exam early, and was admitted to the department of chemistry at a local university.

"Chemistry is the study of the mysteries of matter. After delving into it, I found synthesizing new

substances quite fascinating," said Zhang, who, at the age of 15, was 20 years younger than the oldest student in his class.

Zhang dived into the world of chemistry and catalysis. Eleven years later, Zhang obtained his PhD from the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics.

In 2011, Zhang and his collaborators reported the preparation of single-atom catalysts for the first time internationally, and based on this, they proposed the concept of "single-atom catalysis".

In these catalysts, all platinum atoms are in a single-atom dispersed state, exhibiting not only

outstanding stability but also catalytic activity several times higher than traditional nanocatalysts, maximizing the utilization of precious metals.

In October last year, a research achievement in which Zhang participated moved from the laboratory to the real world. The technology

involved the catalytic conversion of biological raw materials such as corn stalks into ethylene glycol, passing a 1,000-metric-ton experiment, indicating that mass production was feasible.

"This pioneering technology developed in China has bridged the gap from basic research discoveries to 1,000-ton scale applications, paving the way for the green production of ethylene glycol in the future," Zhang said.

Ethylene glycol is a crucial industrial raw material. Common items in daily life such as plastic bottles and fabrics made of synthetic fibers rely on ethylene glycol as a raw material. The global annual consumption of ethylene glycol exceeds 30 million tons, and as a major manufacturing country, China's annual consumption of ethylene glycol exceeds 20 million tons.

Zheng Mingyuan, a member of Zhang's team and a researcher at the Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics, said: "It took us over 10 years to progress from basic science to practical applications. Having completed the 1,000-ton production test, we have cleared the final obstacle for the application of this technology on a 10,000-ton scale, marking the 'last mile' of industrial application."

"Next, we can establish a 10,000-ton production line to truly turn this technology from a theoretical concept in textbooks into practical production," he said.

As early as 2008, Zhang's team pioneered a new reaction for the direct catalytic conversion of cellulose to produce ethylene glycol, providing a new pathway for the production of bio-based ethylene glycol.

The industrial production of ethylene glycol through biomass catalysis is a condensed representation of Zhang's many years of research achievements.

He Mingyuan, a professor at East China Normal University and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said: "Ethylene glycol is primarily produced from petroleum ethylene or coal, with non-renewable raw materials, high carbon dioxide emissions and high energy consumption."

"In terms of resource utilization, biomass is the only organic carbon source that has the potential to replace fossil fuels." He emphasized that the effective utilization of biomass is a crucial issue in green and sustainable development, which scientists have been addressing since recognizing the energy value of biomass.

In September 2020, China stated its goals of reaching peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

"The technology of catalytic conversion of biomass to produce ethylene glycol is of great significance for achieving China's 'dual carbon' goals and will make a significant contribution to the global ecological environment," He said.

## 'Super giant reed' biomass could replace fossil fuels for power generation

By CHINA DAILY

After genetic transformation, "super giant reed", a bamboo-like grass, has become a high-yield renewable resource, according to a Chinese biotech company.

This "super giant reed", an improved version of the giant reed, includes more than 40 varieties developed using a gene database tailored for specific applications such as biofuels.

According to Landuo Biotech based in Wuhan, Hubei province, the biomass of super giant reed – an indicator of its potential as a fuel source – surpasses that of wild giant reed three times over.

These new varieties have a calorific value of 4,000 to 4,500 kilocalories per kilogram, or two-thirds of that of standard coal, making them a potential substitute for fossil fuels. Planting some 13,000 hectares of super giant reed is equivalent to creating a green coal mine with an annual output of 0.45 to 1.5 million metric tons, the company said.

"Super giant reed can replace coal in power generation, chemicals, construction materials and civil heating," said Song Xin, Landuo Biotech's general manager. "This will not only reduce fuel and material costs for enterprises but also help lower carbon dioxide emissions."

According to some estimates, planting 40 million hectares of super giant reed could replace 2.2 billion tons of coal used in power generation in China, cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 4 billion tons. The green power industry could generate an annual revenue of 250 million yuan (\$34 million).

However, Song noted that replacing coal for power generation is just one of the low-value uses of super giant reed. "The real potential of transforming the fossil fuel industry lies in the high-value bio-based energy and chemicals produced from the reed."

Super giant reed is being developed for a wide range of applications, including bio-based power generation, oil refining, chemicals, biodegradable plastics and the fiber industry.

The company has also pioneered a processing technology for super giant reed. By isolating the plants in an oxygen-free environment, high-temperature pyrolysis can convert them into hydrogen, carbon monoxide, methane, natural gas, biochar and other products, which could be further used to generate energy, according to the manager.

"We create specific growing and nutrient conditions for each variety," Song explained. "Since the giant reed does not produce seeds, we



Left: "Super giant reed" is planted in an experimental field. Right: A researcher tends to various seedlings of super giant reed being bred at Landuo Biotech in Wuhan, Hubei province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



propagate it by cloning cells." Inside the company's factory, hundreds of super giant reed seedlings are grown in glass bottles.

"Once the reed is established, it can be harvested multiple times over the next 15 to 20 years, streamlining the planting process and boosting productivity," said Song.

Since 2012, the company has collected over 1,000 samples of wild

giant reed germplasm. Using a large germplasm collection and gene database, these reeds have undergone several years of targeted breeding.

"Biomass is long recognized as a potential substitute for fossil fuel. However, existing biomass resources like agricultural waste often have inconsistent calorific values and quality, making them unsuitable for large-scale industrial use," Song said.

In response, Landuo Biotech decided to scale up industrial production to cultivate large numbers of resource plants with high quality and low cost, according to the manager.

The company's annual production of super giant reed now reaches 1.2 billion plants, covering an area of about 113,000 hectares, according to Song.

Wang Fan, deputy secretary-gen-

eral of the China Energy Research Society, highlighted in an interview with China Economic Times that each ton of super giant reed produced absorbs 1.7 tons of carbon dioxide from the air. Its carbon sequestration capacity is 25 to 50 times that of the average for forests in China.

"Super giant reed is one of the strongest carbon capture plants in the plant world," he said. "Utilizing it to produce resources and bio-based materials not only offers alternatives to fossil fuels, but also continuously sequesters carbon, making the energy industry carbon-negative."

By the end of last year, over 3,300 hectares of super giant reed had been planted across 53 regions in China, including Hubei, Hunan, Hebei and Hainan provinces.

The strong adaptability of super giant reed makes it well-suited for growing on non-cultivated land such as beaches, wetlands, saline-alkaline land, degraded soil and abandoned mine sites.

"The reeds not only contribute to ecological restoration of soils and waters but also could help develop local industries such as livestock and poultry feed, green hydrogen, and green natural gas," Song said.

Liu Kun and Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

## BUSINESS

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## Private pension plan to boost capital markets

Program will focus on long-term investments, stimulate more financial product innovation, say experts

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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The implementation of a private pension program nationwide will serve as an important driver for the increased maturity of Chinese capital markets, but there is still room for it to attract more users with a willingness to open accounts and invest, said experts.

According to a notice jointly released by five central government departments, including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Finance and the State Taxation Administration, the private pension program began to be fully implemented across the country from Dec 15.

Under the plan, all Chinese employees covered by the country's basic pension insurance system — also called the first pillar — can voluntarily open private pension accounts at designated commercial banks.

Data from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security suggest that more than 1 billion Chinese could be eligible for the program.

Individuals can deposit a maximum of 12,000 yuan (\$1,645) every year into their private pension accounts. The deposit can be completed on a monthly or yearly basis.

"The nationwide implementation can be interpreted as the erection of a third pillar in China's pension system in the real sense. It is an important step forward in the construction of a multilayered pension system in the country," said Dong Keyong, a professor at the School of Public Administration and Policy of Renmin University of China.

In November 2022, the private pension program experiment started in 36 major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

According to data from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, 72.79 million Chinese had opened their private pension accounts by end-November.

A major achievement of the private pension pilot program over the past two years has been to educate people on the account's function as financial preparedness for people during their old age, said Jin Weigang, deputy director of the China Association of Social Security.

More importantly, the program will significantly aid in the further maturity of the Chinese capital market, according to industry mavens.

Based on international experiences, pensions, as a long-term capital, serve as the cornerstone of a stable and sound stock market, said Wan Li, a financial industry analyst at BOCOM International.

As more people open accounts and deposit money, private pensions are likely to become an important incremental capital inflow into the A-share market. Such capital usually focuses on long-term investments, which is conducive to the sustainable development of the Chinese stock market, she added.

CITIC Securities has calculated that the value of China's private pension market will rise to 12 trillion yuan by 2035, by which time 40 percent of the capital will be directed to investments in equities, up from 20 percent at present. This substantial increase will significantly boost capital market vitality, said experts from CITIC Securities.

Zheng Zheng, a portfolio manager at asset management firm Bosera Funds, said the full implementation of the program is a "milestone" in the Chinese capital market as it will stimulate more financial product innovation.

The investable scope under private pension accounts has been expanded upon full implementation of the private pension mechanism, and it is "a major highlight," said Yan Zhipeng, a professor from Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance at Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Savings deposits, wealth management products, commercial pension



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

insurance and mutual fund products used to be open for investment for private pension accounts. Following the latest full implementation, treasury bonds and designated pension deposits have now also been included.

According to Yan, these two newly added financial products incur little credit risk. Their asset prices are more stable, which can address the financial security concerns of retirees, he said.

Yan further said that the bond ladder strategy is widely adopted for pension investments. It is a diversification technique that involves investing in bonds with staggered maturity dates. This strategy can reduce risks by spreading investments across different bonds and provides a predictable source of retirement income.

"For example, an individual can divide 100,000 yuan of deposit into five equal parts. The first 20,000 yuan can be invested in bonds or savings products that mature in one year, and the second 20,000 yuan can be invested in those with a two-year maturity, and so on," he said.

"This will secure a safe and stable cash flow every year in the following five years. Treasury bonds are suitable for such an investment strategy," he added.

Index funds have also been included as an investable product under pri-

“The nationwide implementation (of a private pension program) can be interpreted as the erection of a third pillar in China's pension system in the real sense.”

Dong Keyong, a professor at the School of Public Administration and Policy of Renmin University of China

ivate pension accounts, according to the notice released in mid-December.

Instead of investing in a single stock, index funds focus on a part or all constituents of one index, which can help individual investors alleviate risks and make investment decisions, said Dong of Renmin University of China.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog, has included 85 equity index funds into the product catalog for private pension investment, among which 78 track various broad-based indexes, while the rest track those generating higher and stable dividends.

Including index funds into the private pension product catalog will usher in more long-term capital, optimize investor structure and stabilize stock market performance, said Gao Ying, investment director of fund-of-funds at Ping An Fund Management Co Ltd.

Index products will thus be facilitated to seek rapid growth, which may be translated into a slow but longer-lasting bull run in the A-share market, she added.

Liu Xiangdong, chief analyst of Eastern Spring Equity Investment Management Co Ltd, said index products are being increasingly preferred by Chinese investors thanks to their lower fees, risk diversification features and higher liquidity.

On the other hand, index products can largely lower trading frequency as they usually adopt long-term investment strategies. This will effectively reduce market volatility, especially in the short run. The expansion of index products means more capital inflow, lower trading costs and higher market efficiency, he added.

But there are also some issues that need to be addressed before the private pension program can really make a big difference in the market. According to a report jointly

released by Shanghai Pudong Development Bank, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, China Pacific Insurance (Group) Co Ltd, and Guotai Junan Securities, about 9 million people had actually deposited money in their private pension accounts by March 2023, which was only 22 percent of all the people who had opened such accounts.

The report, which aimed to illustrate financial institutions' efforts to serve China's elderly care sector, showed that a large number of private pension accounts are in an "idle" state. People's willingness to deposit funds needed to be further activated, according to the report, which was released in mid-December.

The longer maturity cycle of private pensions is also a double-edged sword, as it is a long-term investment but with lower liquidity. As the money cannot be withdrawn before retirement, people will be more reluctant to deposit funds into the accounts due to liquidity concerns, said Yu Fenghui, an independent financial expert.

Therefore, Yu suggested more withdrawal methods under the private pension account, allowing individuals to use part of the capital for special cases, such as home purchases.

In addition, private pension accounts are managed in a closed manner, said Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union

Consumer Finance Co Ltd.

According to the interim measures for private pension capital management among commercial banks and wealth management firms, which were released in November 2022, an individual can only choose one qualified commercial bank to open one account.

This means the choice of pension products is limited to those provided by the bank. If the bank has an affiliated insurance company, it may even guide its private pension clients to purchase its own insurance policies, further narrowing down the choices, Dong said.

According to the national social security public service system, 26 wealth management products for private pension plans had been introduced as of Jan 3. The number of deposit products had reached 466 and that of fund products stood at 287.

However, choosing the right product among this large pool is not an easy task, even for someone like Yan from SAIF who has tracked the financial markets for about 20 years.

"When I opened my own private pension account two years ago, the easiest solution was to do a simple math of risks and yield. But the decision was still made in haste, as the product I chose has reported a 3 percent loss up to now," he laughed.

"Making the right investment decision can be difficult for even professionals like me, let alone an ordinary individual investor lacking in financial knowledge. In other words, the freedom to choose among a large variety of different products is not necessarily the best," Yan said.

But more services can address such difficulties.

Financial institutions are encouraged to provide investment consultation services to individuals opening private pension accounts, according to the announcement released in mid-December. Private pension products should be introduced to clients based on their risk appetite and age. Financial institutions should give full play to their professionalism to help clients manage their capital, according to the notice.

Allowing financial institutions to conduct consultations will help to bridge the gap between product providers and individual investors. This will help to improve the long-term returns of investors, which is in line with the inclusiveness of private pension services, Yan added.

Building a channel connecting the second pillar — enterprise annuity and occupational annuity — with the third pillar is also of much importance, according to Helen Huang, managing director of Fidelity International China.

"When a candidate starts working for another company or retires, he or she may encounter much complexity if the different accounts are isolated," she said.

Zeng Gang, director of Shanghai Institution for Finance and Development, a think tank, suggested that a unified private pension account management platform should be set up to manage accounts and products across different financial institutions.

Efforts should be made to explore the establishment of a minimum income guarantee mechanism or a similar policy to enhance the public's trust in private pension investment. Private pension products should be more diversified and personalized, he added.

While tax exemptions, as high as 5,400 yuan upon the 12,000 yuan annual deposit, should serve as an impetus in opening a private pension account, the incentive is not strong enough, according to Sun Yudong, a professor at the School of Public Administration and Policy of Renmin University of China.

"Only people having an annual income of 960,000 yuan can enjoy the maximum 5,400 tax exemption on a yearly basis. In other words, people with lower incomes are not entitled to such a tax exemption. More attractive deduction measures should be introduced to enhance people's willingness to open private pension accounts and deposit money into them," he said.

# BUSINESS



People line up outside a Bank of Shanghai branch to receive their pensions in Shanghai on Feb 6. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Private pension program creates new opportunities

Trials begin in November 2022 and are fully implemented nationwide in mid-December

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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As soon as the private pension program was promoted nationwide in mid-December, Yuan Jinwen, 36, an interior designer in Shanghai, started her research, looking for the bank providing the best incentive or bonus plans for new clients opening such accounts.

Most banks reward such new clients with shopping cards or lucky draws, which may include very alluring cash returns. After doing her homework over a period of a week, Yuan chose Bank of China Shanghai branch.

As she explained, China Construction Bank and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China both provided higher rewards, respectively 676 yuan (\$93) and 876 yuan at the most. But BOC finally won her heart because of "a higher bottom line", as it could provide at least 154 yuan in reward for a new client, which is higher than the minimum level of the above two banks.

Although the four State-owned commercial banks were Yuan's top priority, Bank of Jiangsu Shanghai branch also attracted her attention with a "really appealing deposit interest rate" under the private pension account, which was 3.5 percent for a five-year deposit, she said.

Wei Min, 29, a jewelry sales professional in Beijing, was also drawn by the higher deposit interest rates provided by Bank of Jiangsu, which was 4 percent for a five-year

deposit and 3.5 percent for a three-year deposit under the private pension account, she discovered.

Public information shows that Bank of Jiangsu's listed interest rates were set at 1.65 percent and 1.7 percent, respectively, for fixed deposits with three years and five years of duration. Such a big difference helped Wei to open her private pension account at this bank.

According to Zhou Haiwang, deputy director of the institute of urban and demographic studies at Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the purpose for banks to offer more generous deposit rates under the private pension accounts is clear and simple — winning new clients.

But on the other hand, deposits are also in line with the risk appetite of the clients opening private pension accounts at banks, as they are looking for stable investment methods that include lower volatility and can provide long-term returns, he said.

The private pension program started its trial in November 2022 in 36 major Chinese cities, including Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. Under full implementation since mid-December, Chinese employees covered by the nation's basic pension insurance system can voluntarily open their private pension accounts at designated commercial banks and deposit up to 12,000 yuan annually into the accounts. The payments can be made monthly or yearly.

The deposited money can be used to purchase financial products such as wealth management products, commercial endow-

ment insurance, mutual fund products, treasury bonds, designated pension savings and index funds, the latter three of which have been newly included under the program's latest expansion.

According to the national social security public service system, 168 insurance products had been introduced for the private pension program as of the beginning of this year. At least 50 of them were released in the last quarter of 2024.

Insurance products, which can basically preserve the principal, have longer investment terms, include lower risks and can largely meet people's needs in terms of pension investments. The value-added services included in insurance policies, such as health services, can also meet people's needs to secure their retirement years, said experts from Guolian Securities.

If more supportive policies can be introduced, insurance companies can make bigger contributions to the optimization of the private pension system, they said.

Experts from Taiping Life Insurance Co Ltd suggested that health insurance products should also be included in the list of private pension products.

Health expenditure will become a rigid demand after retirement. Compensatory and reimbursement health insurance products can reduce the medical burden of retirees to some extent, providing more protection for people's later life, they said.

Zeng Gang, director of Shanghai Institution for Finance and Development, a think tank, suggested that a unified private pension account management platform should be set up to manage the accounts and products across different financial institutions.

## Humanoid robot innovation to focus on synergy for growth

CHENGDU — Zhang Ruirui felt a step closer to his dream of making the world's smartest robots, when seven humanoid robots developed by his team were unveiled on Dec 27 in Southwest China's Sichuan province, an area best known as home of the giant panda.

The robots will be used at the World Games 2025, which will be hosted by Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, and are expected to feature in various scenarios, such as the torch relay, sports exhibitions, reception and retail services.

"It's a significant recognition of our work, but that's only the beginning," said Zhang, president of Chengdu Humanoid Robot Innovation Center Co Ltd.

Zhang said CHRIC has focused on the "brain" technology of humanoid robots — aiming to create the "most powerful brain" for these machines.

"The brain is particularly important as it enables the robots to think, understand and have reasoning capabilities that traditional industrial or service robots lack, with the latter operating via pre-programmed instructions," said Zhang.

Since the beginning of 2024, CHRIC has managed over 30 world-leading technological achievements related to humanoid robot "brains", including its development of China's first humanoid robot high-speed inference model based on diffusion architecture and the country's first multi-modal task execution system for humanoid robots.

Recent milestones achieved by Zhang's team in humanoid robot development reflect the current explosive growth of China's humanoid robotics industry.

According to an industry report released in July at the 2024 World AI Conference in Shanghai, the value of China's humanoid robot market was about 2.76 billion yuan (\$378 million) last year. By 2029, it is expected to expand to 75 billion yuan, which would account for 32.7 percent of the global market.

"With predictions from figures like Elon Musk suggesting humanoid robots could outnumber humans two-fold, the market potential is immense, even surpassing that of the new energy vehicle industry," said Zhang.

As a next-generation mobile intelligent terminal, humanoid robots represent a

culmination of smart information technology while possessing diverse application scenarios — embodying the characteristics of new quality productive forces that China has been advocating.

In November 2023, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology released guidelines for the innovative development of humanoid robots, aiming to establish an initial innovation system for this industry by the end of 2025, with breakthroughs in key technologies such as "brain, cerebellum and limbs", and ensuring the safe and effective supply of core components.

Various regions in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, and the provinces of Zhejiang, Guangdong and Shandong have established innovation centers for humanoid robots, integrating production, academia and research to consolidate industry resources and seize early advantages.

Sichuan, an economic driving force for China's vast inland western regions, is also actively responding to the national strategy, having designated artificial intelligence as the "No 1 innovation project" for 2024, while providing substantial support for such initiatives.

A three-year action plan for the high-quality development of the AI industry in Chengdu (2024-26) outlines that by the end of 2026, Chengdu aims to have launched 100 new robot models, attracted 100 firms across the industrial supply chain, created 100 benchmark demonstration scenarios and achieved a total industrial scale of over 60 billion yuan — thereby establishing itself as a national growth center and demonstration hub for humanoid robot R&D and manufacturing.

According to Zhang, humanoid robots represent a complex system involving multiple fields such as algorithms, chips, new materials and mechanical engineering.

The manufacturing of a complete machine serves as a bridge between technology development and market application, with approximately 70 percent of costs attributed to hardware. Key components such as dexterous hands and joint actuators have high value and present significant research difficulty.

XINHUA



A bipedal humanoid robot is presented at a news conference in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Dec 27. XINHUA

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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## First energy law seen empowering network

EAGLE EYE

By Wang Peng

China's first energy law, which took effect on Jan 1, marks a milestone in the country's energy transition. It signifies the establishment of a foundational legal framework for the energy sector with the energy law as its cornerstone, supported by specific laws such as the electricity law, coal law, renewable energy law and energy conservation law, alongside administrative regulations.

Furthermore, the energy law elevates crucial measures for promoting the energy sector's "four revolutions and one cooperation" strategy from 2014 into law, acknowledging the strategy's decade-long efficacy.

The "four revolutions" cover curbing unreasonable energy consumption; establishing a diversified supply system; promoting the energy technology revolution to drive industrial upgrades; and promoting the energy system revolution to facilitate fast-track energy development.

The "one cooperation" refers to comprehensively enhancing international cooperation.

The energy law is an institutional guarantee to further drive energy transition, and is a crucial means of support for achieving the goals of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060.

The energy law delineates clear objectives and responsibilities for the energy sector's green development. It focuses on three critical mechanisms, with the first being establishing a dual control mechanism for total carbon emissions and emission intensity. Second, energy regulatory authorities should take the lead in formulating medium to long-term goals for non-fossil energy development and utilization, with annual monitoring and public disclosure of implementation progress. Third, energy regulatory authorities should be at the forefront in setting the minimum proportion of renewable energy in total energy consumption, and ensuring that power supply companies, electricity suppliers and electricity users fulfill their responsibilities for consuming power generated from renewable sources.

Additionally, it outlines policy directions for the development and utilization of various renewable energy types. Considering the broader context of energy resource availability, economic and social progress, as well as environmental preservation, the law precisely outlines the criteria for harnessing a range of renewable energy resources like hydro, wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal energy. Notably, it explicitly endorses the decentralized development and use of wind and solar power, setting a legal framework for novel initiatives such as decentralized power trade and micro-grid systems.

The energy law also reinforces institutional measures to support green energy consumption. It mandates the establish-



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

ment of a new type of power system, enhancing the coordinated development of power generation enterprises and grid companies while boosting the grid's ability to incorporate, distribute and manage power generated from renewable sources. In addition, it rolls out a few regulations for the development of energy storage, requiring that both conventional pumped storage hydropower plants and new types of power storage systems such as compressed air energy storage play a regulatory role in the power network. Additionally, it advocates for the establishment of a mechanism to promote green energy consumption through initiatives like green electricity certificates, encouraging energy consumers to prioritize the utilization of renewable and other environmentally friendly, low-carbon energy resources.

While green development lays the foundation for energy transition and energy security, a stable and sufficient resource supply is a prerequisite. Achieving a balance between green development and a secure transformation without creating

an either-or scenario necessitates legal protections. The energy law emphasizes the role of planning in guiding and regulating energy development. Given the substantial investments and long-term nature of energy projects, scientific planning is essential to ensure a stable supply-demand balance and prevent drastic fluctuations. The law details the content and procedures for energy planning at various levels.

The energy law also mandates specific requirements for the safe development of coal, oil and gas, highlighting the foundational role of coal in the energy supply system and the importance of enhancing exploration and development of petroleum and natural gas resources. It further underlines the importance of promoting the clean and efficient development of coal-fired power generation.

Moreover, the law elaborates on the management of energy reserves in case of emergencies, recognizing the inevitability of energy imbalances or operational incidents due to natural disasters or

other reasons. It sets stringent standards for establishing efficient and coordinated energy reserve systems, enhancing energy forecasting and warning systems, and establishing a unified structure for coordinated emergency management.

Aligned with the comprehensive reforms outlined in the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July 2024, the energy law emphasizes advancing market-oriented reforms in certain sectors and improving regulatory mechanisms. Additionally, the law involves progressing price reforms within the energy sector by enhancing tiered electricity and gas pricing for residential consumers, as well as improving the pricing structure for refined oil products.

Furthermore, it aims to deepen reforms in the energy management system by establishing a unified national electricity market and optimizing scheduling mechanisms for oil and gas as well as power distributions. These reform

efforts directly target the challenges and obstacles in advancing energy transition to achieve China's green targets.

The upcoming phase of energy reform is expected to progress smoothly, with the energy law facilitating the establishment of a unified national energy trading market encompassing coal, electricity, oil and natural gas. By integrating legal provisions with directives from the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the energy law ensures a coherent relationship between reform and the rule of law, providing a solid legal basis for major reforms.

With the energy law taking effect this year, the energy industry will see concerted efforts to push cleaner fossil fuel energy, the expansion of clean energy, the integration of diverse energy resources and the smart utilization of energy assets. This year, China is expected to achieve an installed capacity of approximately 1.6 billion kilowatts for wind and solar power. The proportion of non-fossil energy consumption is expected to surpass 21 percent by end-2025 and exceed 25 percent by 2030. China is on track to achieve its goals of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

In the near to medium term, there will be a noticeable shift toward electrification in end-use energy consumption. Over the long term, there will be a transition toward hydrogen plus electrification. Future energy use will witness accelerated electrification across industries, construction, transportation, agriculture and other sectors, with end-use electrification levels projected to reach nearly 30 percent by 2025 and 34 percent by 2030. Electricity is set to emerge as the predominant form of end-use energy. Looking ahead, hydrogen energy presents huge development potential and scalable application scenarios, with its share in end-use energy consumption expected to rise, transitioning from a primary reliance on electricity to a diverse array of clean alternatives like electricity, hydrogen and ammonia.

Energy investments and operations are set to become more market-driven, offering substantial commercial prospects. With the backing of legal frameworks, the country is encouraging and guiding various entities to invest in energy development and infrastructure construction in accordance with the law. Over the next decade, investments in pivotal energy projects are expected to remain in the trillions of yuan. The entire energy industrial chain, spanning resource exploration, design and construction, equipment manufacturing, project financing, distribution, trade and information services, will continue to be active in the coming years.

By 2030, China is expected to see the establishment of a unified national electricity market, with the proportion of market-based electricity transactions projected to increase from 63 percent in 2024 to 75 percent in 2030.

The writer is a professor at the North China Electric Power University.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## 'Debut economy' just what doctor ordered

MAIN STREET

By Cheng Shi and Xu Jie

The "debut economy", serving as a rising consumption model, is emerging as a vital engine for igniting new consumer dynamics and shaping future consumption trends with its distinct appeal and vast potential.

The annual Central Economic Work Conference in December emphasized the need to vigorously boost consumption, enhance investment efficiency and expand domestic demand across all dimensions, with the debut economy being further spurred by the ice and snow and silver economies.

In this context, the Ministry of Commerce recently introduced plans to accelerate the rollout of policies promoting the debut economy, guiding regions to adopt localized strategies tailored to their particular strengths.

The debut economy refers to a consumption model wherein brands strategically choose specific platforms, channels or venues to unveil new products, technologies or services for the first time, with a goal of generating excitement, attracting consumer attention and driving purchasing behavior by offering exclusivity, novelty and unique experiences.

Against the abovementioned policy backdrop, this model aligns seamlessly with contemporary consumer demand for personalization, quality and experiential engagement. It also provides businesses with opportunities for innovation and

brand-building while injecting fresh vitality into China's economic landscape.

The debut economy represents a dual narrative — fostering consumer-driven growth and pioneering economic innovation. It addresses diverse consumer needs, promotes industrial upgrading and contributes to high-quality development, all while reinforcing China's domestic demand.

## Boosting consumption

At the core of the debut economy lies "first launches", where brands — whether domestic or foreign — unveil new products to stimulate sales.

The rise of this model is deeply rooted in the evolving dynamics of China's consumption patterns. On the one hand, consumer behavior has shifted from outward display to inward satisfaction, seeking more personalized, practical and quality-driven consumption experiences. The novelty and exclusivity offered by the debut economy precisely meet these evolving consumer preferences, sparking enthusiasm and driving demand.

On the other hand, advancements in digital technology and the proliferation of mobile payment systems have laid a robust foundation for the debut economy. Online platforms have eliminated geographical barriers, enabling swift access to new products and services, while seamless payment systems have enhanced transactional efficiency. Moreover, evolving social media networks have also amplified the debut economy's reach, with user-generated content creating a ripple effect that drives widespread interest.

This shift in consumer behavior — from basic necessity-driven consumption to a focus on emotional fulfillment and experi-

ence — is the underlying force powering the debut economy's success. Coupled with today's transition from "consumption upgrading" to fundamental consumption-driven growth — which emphasizes the quality and growth of fundamental consumption and service sectors — the debut economy is expected to further unleash the vast potential of China's consumer market and drive sustained growth in the sector.

Moreover, the debut economy can also serve as a trendsetter in shaping consumer preferences, encouraging structural upgrades and fostering overall market prosperity. For example, whether via head-turning cutting-edge gadgets or fashion-forward apparel, debut events can easily captivate younger audiences and boost related sectors. This influence can also be extended to emerging services sectors such as innovative travel experiences or unique culinary offerings, further stimulating consumption growth.

## Helping businesses

Beyond its appeal to consumers, the debut economy also offers transformative opportunities for businesses. It is not only a marketing tool, but also a strategic avenue that fosters innovation, enhances brand value and strengthens market competitiveness.

For businesses, thriving in the debut economy calls for substantial investments in research and development to produce innovative and competitive goods and services. The need to stand out during product launch events will push companies to innovate in a continuous manner and establish a competitive edge in an evolving market landscape.

Furthermore, the debut economy serves as a platform for enhancing brand image

and value. Well planned launches, whether on specific platforms or in targeted venues, may attract extensive media coverage and consumer attention, thus amplifying brand visibility and fostering loyalty. Successful campaigns also help create brand advocates, a cornerstone for sustained growth.

In line with the Central Economic Work Conference's emphasis on quality-driven and innovation-led growth, the debut economy embodies these priorities by encouraging corporate innovation and industrial upgrading. And on the government side, more supportive policies such as tax incentives and structural fee reductions are expected to further support the new economic model and empower businesses to amplify their R&D efforts and bring more innovative products to the market.

## Driving high-quality growth

The debut economy serves as more than just a consumption trend. It's also an economic phenomenon with significant implications for growth and social progress.

First, the debut economy directly stimulates consumption growth. By introducing novel products and services, businesses can attract consumers, thereby increasing retail sales. This growth in consumer activity, in turn, generates a positive ripple effect across related industries such as logistics, advertising and event management. These sectors all benefit from increased demand, creating a virtuous cycle that drives broader economic expansion.

Second, it fosters a shift in consumption patterns, paving the way for structural optimization within the economy. As consumers gravitate toward higher-quality, innovative products and services, businesses are compelled to invest in technological advancements and upgrade their industrial capabilities. This process will facilitate China's overall transition from traditional to

emerging industries, and eventually provide support for the country's broader economic transformation.

In addition, the debut economy's strong performance offers significant upside to the labor market. Companies involved in the debut economy often provide targeted training and development programs, ensuring that employees are equipped with the skills needed to excel in an innovation-driven environment. Spanning product development, marketing, distribution and more, this need for specialized and skilled talent will help create new job opportunities and raise workforce quality.

By aligning with the Central Economic Work Conference's emphasis on boosting domestic demand and consumer confidence, the debut economy serves as a key lever for unlocking China's consumption potential. Its alignment with high-quality development goals — such as promoting industrial upgrading, encouraging technological innovation and enhancing resource efficiency — positions it as a key element of sustainable economic progress.

To maximize the debut economy's potential, continued policy support is essential. Policymakers are expected to introduce measures that encourage corporate innovation, facilitate the development and promotion of new products, and create a competitive market environment. Strengthening consumer rights protections will also be critical to ensuring the healthy and sustainable growth of this dynamic economic model.

Cheng Shi is chief economist at ICBC International Holdings Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China in Hong Kong, and Xu Jie is a macroeconomic analyst at the company.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## WORLDUS



A firefighter battles the Palisades Fire in Mandeville Canyon on Saturday in Los Angeles. JAE C. HONG / AP

## Headway made on LA firefight

But weather forecast is ominous as death toll rises to 24, with 12,000 structures destroyed

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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While some progress has been made on containing the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles, the outlook remained bleak on Sunday, with the death toll now at 24, and the weather forecast not expected to be advantageous for extinguishing the fires.

There also are 16 people reported missing, and the fires have destroyed an estimated 12,000 structures, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The National Weather Service issued red flag warnings for severe fire conditions through Wednesday, with sustained winds of 50 mph (80 kph) and gusts in the mountains reaching 70 mph. The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, said weather service meteorologist Rich Thompson.

"You're going to have really strong, gusty Santa Ana winds, a very dry atmosphere and still very dry brush, so we still have some very critical fire weather conditions out there," Thompson said at a community meeting Saturday night.

The largest blaze, the Palisades Fire, has burned 23,707 acres and numerous homes, businesses and landmarks in Pacific Palisades and westward along Pacific Coast Highway, toward Malibu, according to Cal Fire, the state's Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention. As of Sunday morning, the fire was 11 percent contained.

Many parts of Brentwood, Calabasas, Encino, Malibu, Pacific Palisades and Santa Monica are under evacuation orders or warnings. More than

12,000 structures remain threatened, the Times reported.

The Eaton Fire burned 14,117 acres along with many structures in Altadena and Pasadena. As of early Sunday, that fire was 27 percent contained.

The Kenneth Fire has burned 1,052 acres near the border of Los Angeles and Ventura counties. It is 100 percent contained, according to Cal Fire, and all evacuation warnings have been lifted.

The Hurst Fire burned 779 acres in the area around Sylmar, and evacuation orders also have been lifted. As of early Sunday, the fire was 76 percent contained, according to Cal Fire.

Eight of the deaths were attributed to the Palisades Fire, and 16 to the Eaton Fire, the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner said in a news release Sunday evening.

Crews from California and nine other states are part of the response that includes more than 1,300 fire engines, 84 aircraft and over 14,000 personnel, including firefighters from Mexico.

"This is your Hurricane Katrina," Craig Fugate, who led the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the Obama administration, said in an interview with the Times, referring to the 2005 storm that slammed the New Orleans area.

"It will forever change the community. It will be a touch point that everybody will remember, before and after," he said. "And for Los Angeles, this will become one of the defining moments of the community, the city and the county's history."

Trump, who has 14.7 million followers on TikTok, also has called for the deadline to be delayed to give him time to negotiate a "political resolution". Francisco served as Trump's solicitor general in his first presidential term.

However, only Justice Neil Gorsuch, whom Trump appointed, sounded like he would side with TikTok's argument that the ban violates the Constitution.

Gorsuch labeled arguments advanced by the Biden administration in defense of the law a "paternalistic point of view".

"Don't we normally assume that the best remedy for problematic

speech is counter speech?" he asked Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, who defended the law for the Biden administration.

A warning wouldn't be enough to counterbalance the spread of misinformation, Prelogar argued.

ByteDance has said it won't sell TikTok, despite several expressions of interest by potential buyers in the US.

Francisco stressed that the US has not presented evidence that China has attempted to manipulate content or gather Americans' data, which TikTok maintains is stored on US servers.

"This country has never taken a step of shutting down a speech platform, much less such an important speech platform," he said.

Jenin Younes, a civil liberties lawyer in Washington DC, wrote on X to her 136,000 followers: "The case raises an incredibly important question: can Congress ban a social media platform on the grounds that it constitutes a national security risk? The answer should be NO ... especially where, as here, the government has failed to show the law is narrowly tailored

to meet a compelling government interest.

"As some evidence, the legislative history demonstrates that the true purpose of the law is to silence certain types of speech: esp. pro Palestine speech," she wrote.

TikTok users who already have the app on their phones will continue to have access to it. But new users won't be able to download it, and existing ones will no longer be able to receive updates. That will eventually render the app unworkable, the Justice Department has said.

"The letter of the law is about future downloads and updates," said Dean Ball, a research fellow with the Mercatus Center, a think tank out of George Mason University, to The New York Times. "It's not about taking the app off people's phones."

TikTok, however, has not said if it will allow access to the app if it is banned, the Times reported.

If TikTok isn't sold to an approved buyer, the federal law would prohibit app stores, such as those operated by Apple and Google, from offering it.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Latest smart-cockpit tech displayed at CES

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas  
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At CES 2025, automotive cabins are emerging as a key focus for technology innovation, particularly in display and audio-visual solutions, as companies respond to consumers spending more time in their vehicles.

BOE Technology Group, a leading Chinese display-panel manufacturer, is showcasing advanced smart cockpit technologies, including an intelligent steering wheel, glasses-free 3D displays, wooden displays that seamlessly blend with car interiors when inactive, and switchable privacy displays offering both anti-peeping and sharing modes.

At CES, the world's largest tech show, BOE introduced several innovative applications in car cockpits and cabins, for entertainment, health, office and other scenarios.

For instance, the intelligent steering wheel can monitor the driver's heart rate and the switchable privacy displays enable multiscreen collaboration between the meeting room and vehicle cabin.

"In recent years, BOE has benefited from the development of electric vehicles, with rapid growth in automotive display shipments," said Su Ning, CEO of BOE Varitronix, the sole sales platform of the BOE Group for automotive display and system businesses.

He noted that intelligent features have developed rapidly, particularly in China, where Level 3 autonomous driving has gained widespread acceptance.

"As autonomous driving becomes more widespread, we believe the overall demand for displays will continue to grow. When autonomous driving becomes common, drivers and passengers will have more free time in the car, creating a need for increased interaction," Su explained.

Patrick Rossi, Dolby's vice-president of strategic partnerships, shared similar views.

"What we've observed is that the streaming media for AV (audiovisual) experiences in China is significant, and the demand for those experiences is significant, so our team there has recognized this trend and this need, and help meet that appetite for these

experiences," he said. "We have to meet the consumers where they want to consume the content."

Dolby has partnered with Chinese EV maker Li Auto to showcase the latter's Li Mega model outside a hotel in Las Vegas. It is equipped with both Dolby Atmos audio and Dolby Vision visual technologies.

The model was launched last spring in China and is not available in overseas markets. The exhibit during CES is aimed at showcasing the in-car immersive experience to a broader international audience.

Though Dolby Atmos has been featured in some car models, the Li Mega is the first one that features both Dolby Atmos and Dolby Vision.

Chinese companies represent about half of BOE's automotive partnerships. "Li Auto was the fastest to adopt Dolby Vision alongside Dolby Atmos. I expect others will follow," Rossi said.

He said they were "certainly very proud" of the partnerships in China and that working with these partners was "part of how we bring Dolby experiences into the worldwide market".

For BOE's automotive business, the growth currently stems from China, driven largely by the rapid expansion of the new energy vehicle market. The company anticipates overseas markets will soon undergo similar smart technology transformations, spurring rapid growth in automotive displays.

The company achieved 42 percent of its revenue from overseas markets in the first half of last year and aims to increase this figure to 50 percent to balance domestic operations.

Su attributed the company's strengths to its "comprehensive technological coverage, diverse product range, and international presence", noting that BOE uniquely covers three major categories: traditional LCD, current OLED, and next-generation Mini/Micro LED, while most competitors specialize in only one or two categories.

"The demand for displays in smart vehicles remains clear and strong. As China is the world's largest country for display research and production, we believe integration with the global automotive industry will continue to strengthen," Su said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

LIA ZHU / CHINA DAILY

market my products?"

Prelogar, the US solicitor general, said an eventual sale of the platform, even after the ban starts, would allow TikTok to resume operations.

She said that the purchase of Twitter, now X.com, by Elon Musk, showed that the sale of a social media platform can happen quickly.

TikTok negotiated with the Biden administration between 2021 and 2022 to resolve concerns around US data privacy and the app's algorithm.

In court documents, it has accused the administration of essentially walking away from those talks after it presented a draft agreement in August 2022.

A three-judge federal panel unanimously upheld the law in December, prompting TikTok's appeal to the Supreme Court.

US senators Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, and Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, along with Representative Ro Khanna, a California Democrat, submitted an amicus (friend) of the court brief to the Supreme Court urging it to reverse the DC Circuit Court's decision.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## TikTok moves closer to ban date in US

By HENG WEILI in New York

The sentiment among media in the United States is that the Supreme Court is inclined to uphold the ban of TikTok, which would leave many of its 170 million American users frustrated.

A ban on the immensely popular social media app would go into effect on Jan 19 unless it is sold by its owner, Beijing-based ByteDance, but such a sale is considered highly unlikely.

The nine justices, who heard arguments on Friday in a case of free speech versus national security concerns, seemed persuaded that the alleged security threat posed by the company overrides concerns about restricting the speech of TikTok and its users in the US.

In arguments that lasted more than 2 1/2 hours, Chief Justice John Roberts identified his main concern: TikTok's ownership by ByteDance and what he said was its requirement to cooperate with the Chinese government's intelligence operations.

TikTok has repeatedly said it does not share information with the

government in Beijing.

If left in place, the law overwhelmingly passed by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden in April, will require TikTok to "go dark" on Jan 19, the lawyer representing TikTok and its users told the justices.

Noel Francisco urged the justices to enter a temporary pause that would allow TikTok to keep operating. "We might be in a different world again," he said, once President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20.

Trump, who has 14.7 million followers on TikTok, also has called for the deadline to be delayed to give him time to negotiate a "political resolution". Francisco served as Trump's solicitor general in his first presidential term.

However, only Justice Neil Gorsuch, whom Trump appointed, sounded like he would side with TikTok's argument that the ban violates the Constitution.

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to meet a compelling government interest.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Biden's alliance cliques just collapsible castles built on shaky foundation of fabricated risks

It is not China that is trying to have it both ways on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but the United States. The Joe Biden administration has been trying to drag China into its blame game in different ways over the Ukraine crisis while diverting the world's attention from the obvious fact that it is the US that is the sole beneficiary of the crisis that it has manufactured. As highlighted by the last-moment sanctions it has imposed on Russia, which only serve to expose how the US and some of its allies have been benefiting tremendously from transactions of Russia-sourced oil.

The Biden administration's systemic smearing of China as an "enabler of" Russian aggression is an integral part to its efforts to drive a wedge between China and the European Union. By seeking to bind China together with Russia it has given itself a new pretext to try and justify its sanctions on Chinese high-tech entities and form a united front with the EU under the excuse of "de-risking".

In the process, the Biden administration has fabricated an "axis of evil" that spans the Eurasian continent. This "axis of evil", which comprises China, Russia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Iran, is intended to zip together its transatlantic alliance targeting Russia with its "Indo-Pacific" partnerships targeting China.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a recent interview with the Financial Times, boasted that the Biden administration had succeeded in getting Europe and Asia to chorus in one voice the US-made mantra of democracy versus authoritarianism, highlighting US hopes that this combination punch will be able to deliver knockout blows without getting itself directly involved in the fray.

That the US has been looking to benefit tremendously from embedding its multipronged smear campaign against China in its overall China-containment strategy explains why the Biden administration has continued to persist with it even in the last few days of its tenure.

After the imposition of what may be the last round of sanctions targeting Russia's oil sector, the Biden administration's ambassador to China strummed the same tune in his job-well-done interviews with the media.

According to reports of the New York Times and Foreign Affairs, the US ambassador to China Nicholas Burns asserted that nearly 400 Chinese companies have supplied Russia with so-called dual use products that have both military and commercial applications, alleging that China has supplied 90 percent of the microelectronics used by the Russian military in its special operation in Ukraine.

But Burns was as mute as fish on the size and structure of the trade between China and Ukraine, including those carried out via third parties.

After working in China for nearly three years, during which he has traveled extensively around the country, Burns should know better than most of the armchair strategists in Washington that trying to shape China in the US' mold is a fool's errand.

The Biden administration has spent four years rebuilding the US' worldwide network of alliances, but it has done so on the tide line of an ideological beach.

Knowing the inherent weakness of the network's fragile foundation, it is no wonder, that during a roundtable with journalists in Washington on Friday, outgoing US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, a main maintenance man for the US' global alliance network, urged the incoming administration to continuously bolster ties with allies, warning that straying from this team-building work will "bring risk".

A message Blinken and Burns also sent to their successors in their respective de facto farewell interviews with the media. It's a message that in all likelihood will have fallen on deaf ears.

Most sandcastles, before being washed away by the tide, are demolished by the kicks of those who follow in the footsteps of the builders, once the latter have left the beach.

The castles built by the Biden administration will be of little value to its successor unless an exorbitant fee can be extracted for their upkeep.

## Positive pointer to how to shape a better year

The only thing certain about 2025 is uncertainty. And uncertainty poses the foremost threat to countries' economic health, which thrives on optimistic anticipations, and deteriorates otherwise.

The revival of the China-United Kingdom Economic and Financial Dialogue over the weekend, after its suspension since 2019, was a choice of strategic foresight by the two countries that promises profound mutual benefits.

Under consecutive years of Conservative leadership in the UK, economic and trade relations between the two countries had been hijacked by a "national security" narrative, echoing that of the Joe Biden administration in the United States, resulting in a frosty overall relationship. Even as Chancellor Rachel Reeves of the UK Treasury came to Beijing for the Dialogue, her visit was caricatured by the opposition as a return to "operation kowtow".

But, unlike her critics back home, Chancellor Reeves and her government colleagues know the need for a "stable, pragmatic" China-UK relationship. While those people accused her of having "fled to Beijing" instead of staying home to address the upheaval in domestic bond markets, her eyes were on the long-term, strategic dividends this critical relationship promises.

In contrast to the Conservatives, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government has demonstrated conspicuous pragmatism in its China policy. Chancellor Reeves' China visit, following that by Foreign Secretary David Lammy in October, and Starmer's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brazil in November, is considered a part of the Labour leadership's efforts to repair strained ties.

In that meeting, the leaders of the two countries agreed that China and the UK share extensive common interests and bear significant responsibilities in addressing global challenges and safeguarding world peace and development. They concurred on the need to strengthen dialogue, enhance mutual understanding and carry out exchanges and cooperation in a wide range of areas.

Despite the clamor about China being a national security threat, the Starmer Cabinet has seen room for cooperating on such subjects as global stability, climate change and the green transition. And these are only some of the most obvious areas of mutual benefit.

Unlike the Conservative marionettes of Washington, the Labour government has a more rational and objective perspective of China's development and the benefits of cooperation.

"... growth is the number one mission of this government to make our country better off. And that is why I'm in China to unlock tangible benefits for British businesses exporting and trading around the world," said Reeves.

In an article in The Times, Reeves argued China offers the UK an opportunity to bolster growth. Her country cannot ignore the fact that China is its fourth-largest trading partner, with exports supporting close to half a million jobs in the UK, she wrote. "Choosing not to engage with China is therefore no choice at all," she said.

She brought to China a delegation of British business executives and finance officials, and is taking home a substantial package of "tangible benefits".

"Overall, this government's reengagement with China already sets us on course to deliver up to 1 billion pounds of value for the UK economy," she announced at a news briefing after meetings with Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng. Their talks touched upon exchanges in such areas as sustainable finance, capital markets connectivity, pensions and regulatory alignment, trade and investment, as well as market access for goods and services. During which they agreed to remove barriers to investment in areas such as clean technology, life sciences, digital technology and financial services.

In choosing to work with China for common growth rather than erecting further barricades in a bid to "de-risk", as the US-led exclusionary efforts are euphemistically described, the UK has set a positive example for other countries at the start of what promises to be another tumultuous year.

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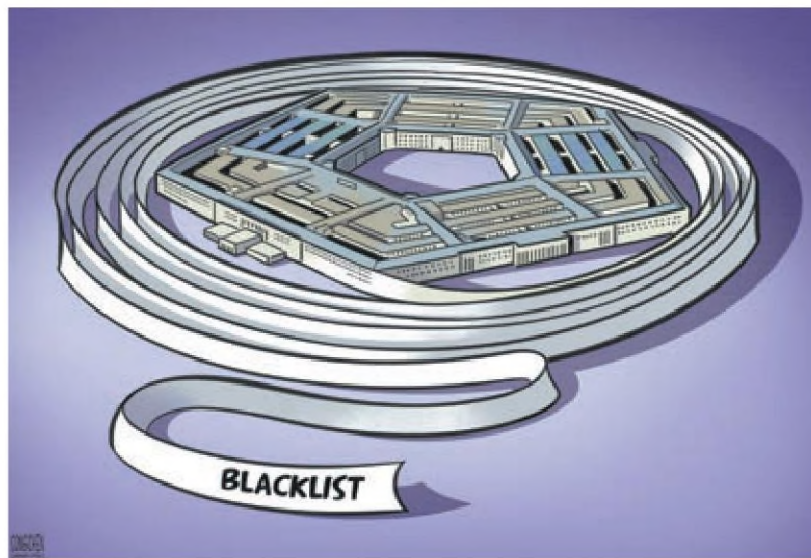
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## Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## US power transition test of resolve for Japan to repair ties with China

While meeting with Hiroshi Moriyama, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Makoto Nishida, secretary-general of the Komeito Party, at the Prime Minister's Office on Thursday, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba expressed his hope of "continuing exchanges between Japan and China at various levels" and reiterated his desire for an early visit to China, as reported by The Nikkei.

At the invitation of Beijing, Moriyama and Nishida are leading a delegation from Japan's ruling coalition to visit China from Monday to Wednesday, where the two sides plan to hold the ninth meeting of the China-Japan Ruling Party Exchange Mechanism, marking the first such gathering of the mechanism in seven years.

Ishiba's eagerness to visit China reflects the strong momentum of warming relations between China and Japan. On Dec 25, the two nations' foreign ministers reached a 10-point consensus at the second meeting of a high-level consultation mechanism on people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Japan in Beijing.

And the resumption of the China-Japan Ruling Party Exchange Mechanism after a seven-year hiatus itself indicates the positive development trend in Sino-Japanese relations.

Japan has always been a very important partner for the United States in Asia and has been highly dependent on the US for a long time. However, with the rise of US trade protectionism, especially since the election of Donald Trump who has said he will impose tariffs on global commodities, impacting Japan's economic interests, Japan urgently needs to expand its diplomatic space, making cooperation with China an important hedging strategy.

Last week, Japanese media reported that due to the upcoming review of the annual budget in the congress, Ishiba would be unable to visit the United States before President-elect Trump's inauguration.

While there are signs of improvement in Sino-Japanese relations, factors affecting the development of bilateral relations are not easy to grasp. This summer, Japan will hold elections for the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly and the House of Councillors.

Whether Ishiba can lead the Liber-

al Democratic Party to win these two elections will directly determine whether he can continue to govern stably. If Ishiba has to step down, it would not only mean an interruption in Japan's current relatively proactive policy toward China but also signify more uncertainty in Sino-Japanese relations.

Moreover, the US is an important ally of Japan, and adjustments in the US government's policy toward China often influence Japan's policy toward China. With the beginning of Trump's second term, the US is bound to intensify its pressure on China in the economic, trade, and technology fields, though probably in a different manner.

Whether the Ishiba administration can maintain its current stance on China and avoid choosing sides between China and the US will be a significant test for Sino-Japanese relations.

Cooperation between China and Japan benefits both, and it is hoped that both countries have enough wisdom and strategic resolve to continue moving forward on the path of friendship.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## Malignancy of telecom gangs needs exorcising

On Saturday, after concerted efforts, Wang Xing, a Chinese actor who was a victim of human trafficking in Myanmar and Thailand finally returned to China. The public has high expectations that relevant governmental departments will respond with firmer actions to crack down on the gangs and their illegal activities.

On the one hand, while continuing to strengthen anti-fraud education and risk reminders throughout society, relevant departments need to carry out systematic rescue operations for Chinese citizens who have fallen into the clutches of the telecom fraud gangs. Following Wang's rescue, there have been many pleas for help from families of individuals suspected of falling into overseas telecom fraud

traps online. In response, specialized information gathering and clue collection should be conducted to accurately assess the number of defrauded Chinese citizens and actively carry out concentrated rescue operations.

On the other hand, greater attention and investment are needed at higher levels for fundamental governance and crackdown on overseas telecom fraud crimes. Many overseas telecom fraud organizations specifically target Chinese citizens, not only defraud money but are also involved in other crimes such as personal injury and human trafficking.

Greater resources should be given to international law enforcement cooperation and related governance and crackdown measures. Allowing

such overseas telecom fraud forces to grow stronger poses a threat not only to the wealth of China but also endangers the sense of security of society.

The current situation remains complex, with telecom fraud still being a major crime type characterized by high incidence, significant losses, serious harm, and strong public reaction. There is still much to do to thoroughly eliminate the soil for telecom fraud crimes. Continuing to pursue victory without giving telecom fraud organizations any opportunity to breathe or relocate will demonstrate China's firm determination to combat telecom fraud crimes and help improve the efficiency of the crackdown actions.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Misery of wildfires compounded by mismanagement

Since Jan 7, amid dry and windy conditions, wildfires have raged in several locations across California. Due to multiple fires occurring simultaneously, some areas have reached the limit of their firefighting resources and water supply due to the high demand.

The Los Angeles Times stated, "... the United States has a history of fire mismanagement". But worse still, the budget for fire prevention and control in Los Angeles was cut in 2024.

For local residents, such scenes as water pumps running without water have become all too familiar in recent years. During the Ventura wildfires in November 2024, two pumping stations broke down, leading to a lack of water in fire hydrants, undermining firefighting efforts. Astonishingly, it was discovered that

Los Angeles' firefighting budget was significantly cut last year, being the second-largest budget reduction item. Where did the funds for firefighting go in a region prone to frequent wildfires?

Yet, US officials, whether the Republicans who have won the presidential election or the Democrats who still govern California, are busy blaming each other for this disaster, rather than uniting to extinguish it. The blame game has severely dragged everything to a lower efficiency, which is why the fires had still not been extinguished on Sunday.

Faced with major disasters, the US public has seen too much of government inefficiency and politicians passing the buck. Last October, hurricanes Helene and Milton struck the US consecutively, but with elections

on the horizon, both parties were busy attacking each other, turning the disasters into a tool to attack their opponents, seeing each other as enemies instead of partners. Everything is viewed from a partisan perspective severely hindering the US government's ability to respond to disasters, making the already difficult situation for disaster victims even worse.

The political polarization and bipartisan opposition that severely hinders the US government's efficiency, adds insult to injury for those already in distress. The public widely criticizes the government's inaction. Is this how the so-called world's most powerful nation responds to natural disasters? While the wildfires are a natural disaster, it seems that in the US they are also disasters made by humans.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China's Economic Prospects for 2025

**Editor's note:** China's economy has maintained overall stability and made steady progress in 2024. Faced with challenges and complex situations, the country has adopted strong policies to support high-quality growth and pledged to take more proactive fiscal policy to boost economic development. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Wen Yanbing

## New urbanization a fresh growth impetus

As China's economy shifts from rapid growth to high-quality development, the policy of new urbanization has become key to unlocking domestic demand and promoting balanced regional development. Given the fast-changing domestic and global situations, new urbanization offers a unique solution to challenges such as economic slowdown, lower-than-expected consumption, and industrial upgrading.

New urbanization is not only about expanding cities; it is also about advancing the country's broader economic and social goals, including common prosperity.

Urbanization has long been a key driver of China's economic growth. China's urbanization rate has increased from 17.9 percent in 1978 to 66.2 percent in 2023, but still remained below the 80 percent average of developed countries, leaving room for further growth.



The author is the dean of the School of Economics, Jiaxing University.

However, new urbanization represents a shift from a traditional, land- and investment-driven model to a more people-centered approach, focusing on the quality of life, better public services and industrial upgrading to create an urban environment that enhances both human and economic efficiency.

The core of new urbanization rests on three key principles: people-centered urbanization, urban-rural coordination, and balanced regional development, as well as green and sustainable development.

Domestic consumption has long been a key pillar of China's economic growth. With the rapid urbanization in recent decades, new urbanization offers a chance to unleash the untapped potential.

New urbanization shifts the focus from building infrastructure to improving urban living conditions, aiming to enhance citizens' quality of life and boost consumption. As people move into cities, their lifestyles and consumption patterns undergo a change. Urban residents tend to have more varied and higher-level needs in terms of education, healthcare, entertainment and public services than those in rural areas.

For instance, cultural and health-related consumption is emerging as a key driver of demand with the deepening of urbanization. This shift has prompted the growth of fitness, wellness, digital entertainment and other sectors, helping unlock new consumption potential.

In tandem with the movement of the population, digital technologies are enabling the emergence of new consumption patterns. From smart retail to virtual reality shopping, new models are creating a consumption landscape that is more personalized, innovative and experience-driven.

Jiashan county in Zhejiang province, which is part of the demonstration zone of green and integrated ecolog-



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ical development of the Yangtze River Delta, exemplifies new urbanization both in spirit and practice. In 2023, Jiashan was selected as one of Zhejiang's first pilot cities for new consumption initiatives.

By focusing on smart communities, green consumption and cultural tourism, the city has triggered residents' enthusiasm for higher-quality consumption. Xitang town, with its "ancient town culture plus" approach and a focus on "drama, wine and community services" is creating cultural landmarks and promoting its identity as the "living millennium ancient town".

The town features a 250,000-square-meter complex of well-preserved Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasty architecture, where visitors can travel back in time. While more than 2,600 local households continue to uphold centuries-old traditions, unique cultural practices such as Xitang-style paper-cutting, *pankou* (literally "coiled buttons"), and *Xuan Juan* (a form of folk narrative art) are being preserved and passed down to the younger generations.

Traditional urbanization often exacerbates regional inequalities, with large cities becoming overcrowded while smaller cities and rural areas lagging behind in resources and infrastructure. New urbanization addresses this by focusing on not only population growth but also integrating urban and rural areas. It aims to create a balanced development model that ensures equal access to public services and sustainable economic opportunities across all regions.

Jiashan's experience further illustrates this point. The

county was the first place in the province to implement the "five-in-one coordination" mechanism, developing an integrated urban-rural smart eldercare app with four key service modules: "enjoy benefits", "book services", "ensure safety" and "select institutions".

As of November 2024, all elderly residents in the county have registered with the system, with more than 7 million service requests processed.

At the same time, digital rural development initiatives have helped farmers sell their products online, connecting rural economies with urban markets and boosting local people's incomes. In 2023, the per capita disposable income of rural residents in Jiashan reached 50,000 yuan (\$6,819.9), with the urban-rural income gap narrowing significantly to 1.53:1, well below the national average of 2.39:1.

Equally important is how new urbanization fosters technological innovation. Smart cities, for example, are applying emerging technologies such as the internet of things, cloud computing and artificial intelligence to improve urban system efficiency and create new consumer demand, especially in sectors such as e-commerce, digital entertainment and health-tech.

By promoting green building practices, investing in public transportation and optimizing energy systems, new urbanization is not just improving people's quality of life but also laying the foundation for a green economy. Green consumption is emerging as a new growth area, with consumers increasingly demanding sustainable products and services. This shift toward a green economy, fueled by new urbanization, will drive China's future growth.

Jiashan is a prime example of this transformation. As a pilot region for the Yangtze River Delta integration, Jiashan has prioritized the development of the digital economy and emerging industries through the establishment of "county-level scientific development demonstration zones" and "county-level high-quality development demonstration zones".

This has attracted skilled professionals and revitalized traditional sectors such as housing, education and healthcare. In 2023, Jiashan's retail sales of consumer goods grew by 8.7 percent, more than the national average. This growth, driven by new urbanization's focus on quality and innovation, points to a bright future for China's economy.

New urbanization is more than just a spatial reorganization of China's cities — it is a profound transformation in how the country approaches economic and social development. It provides a pathway to shift from "quantity-driven" growth to "quality-powered" development.

By embracing people-centered policies, fostering urban-rural integration, and prioritizing sustainability, new urbanization offers a road map for high-quality, inclusive growth. As long as the policy design is sound, the execution effective, and the focus on innovation and equity strong, new urbanization will become a key driver of China's economic success, helping realize its social and environmental goals.

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

Emmanuel Daniel

## Digital assets must be part of financial architecture

The proceedings of the third plenum of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee makes the future shape of China's financial infrastructure clearer. The policies that are now being put in place are probably the most concerted response by any country to ameliorate the negative effects of blatant capitalism that we see today in the West.

Even in the United States, unbridled capitalism has resulted in greater disparities that are tearing apart the fiber of its own society. China is determined to find a more constructive way, by not taking the easy path of pumping excess liquidity into the market.

The relationship between the different pillars of capital markets is being redefined today, not just in the US but in other major markets around the world as well. Blatant capitalism in the US has seen the country's stock market favor selected frontier technologies at the expense of almost everything else.

Ordinary companies, which are part of the real economy, are not able to raise capital in the US as they used to. Private capital is being taken to task by the Federal Trade Commission for creating monopolies and raising prices of everything from medicines to entertainment ticketing systems. China is

probably the only other economy that can attempt to find an alternative and sustainable course.

One factor that has to be included into China's efforts to build a sustainable financial system is that the US is totally capable of changing the rules to conveniently resolve an existing crisis. They have done it routinely in the past and will do it again in the future. In 1971,

when the US could no longer afford to peg its own currency to the price of gold, it abruptly de-pegged its own currency, ostensibly for a temporary period, but which has become an integral part of the global financial system and world economy today.

The US executed the plan despite keeping on insisting since the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 that a currency peg was crucial to managing economies. Today, almost every country in the world has been forced to accept a floating currency regime as the preferred norm, just because the US says so.

Countries such as China can insist on a managed mechanism, because they have a huge domestic market as well as inflow of foreign exchange to steer its economy without foreign influence.

Since 2013, the US Bureau of Economic Analysis has been redefining the composition of GDP to include non-tangible assets, such as intellectual property, entertainment, software development and increasingly digital assets. It is a matter of time before the definition of GDP will become so esoteric that the world's largest manufacturing country will look smaller than it really is because it does not have enough intangible assets in its economy.

For this reason, countries such as China will have to race to add assets from their digital assets that contribute to the overall definition of its GDP.

As finance becomes increasingly digitalized, we will find that anything that can be digitalized can be "financialized". The successful launch of *Black Myth: Wukong* video game is an example of a digital product that can grow at multiple levels, from licensing to movies, and from collectibles and events to become digital assets that do not exist in the real world, but still count toward the composition of GDP in the future.

Digital assets of all kinds can in the future be bought, sold and traded on new digital markets of all kinds.

This is both a good and a bad thing. The good thing is that people in the real economy can also put up assets to be traded digitally by tokenizing them. The entire supply chain in the climate-related bonds can be captured and traded in digitized form.

The "productivity gains" from digital activities are viewed as superior to real world activities, because they have much lower costs. Also, the valuation of digital assets can be much more volatile because they are easily created and destroyed. It becomes increasingly more difficult to manage an economy of that nature.

Finally, anything that can be financialized can also be personalized. This means that traditional financial institutions will have to reengineer the roles they play in financial intermediation. We already see this in the launch of the digital yuan, so that interest rate alone will not be enough for customers to leave their deposits with the bank. If the deposit business is tokenized in the future, banks will be competing with each other to provide greater functionality on their tokens.

These are very exciting times for China to build an all-inclusive financial architecture that is digital while creating one that is sustainable at the same time.

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

Lyu Yue and Chen Sida

## China's 'opening-up' in contrast to 'high walls'

Anti-globalization, unilateralism and protectionism have been hindering global trade in recent years, with some countries trying to retreat behind "high walls" and insulating their economies, and some adopting "de-risking" policies, especially against China.

On the contrary, China has been advancing institutional opening-up by aligning its rules and regulations with high-standard international trade and economic regulations and intensifying domestic reforms in various sectors to create a favorable environment for emerging industries. At the same time, China is also expanding its markets for goods, services, capital and labor, and further opening up its various sectors especially for least-developed countries to deepen its economic cooperation with them.

Foreign investment remains a critical pillar of economic growth, and China has been further reforming its foreign investment system to attract more foreign capital by expanding the list of encouraged industries for foreign investment, reducing market restrictions, and lifting barriers in the manufacturing sector. It is also strengthening intellectual property rights protection and supporting key foreign-invested projects to attract more investments, particularly in high-tech industries, fostering collaboration between domestic and global entities, and creating a favorable environment for new industries and business models.

Besides, by advancing regional development strategies and strengthening inter-regional cooperation, China aims to integrate local economies into the global industry and supply chains, with the supporting policy of establishing free trade zones to promote the liberalization of trade and investment.

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is deepening global economic and trade cooperation with the focus on high-quality development.

China has also applied to join major agreements including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, which it views as essential for creating a more equitable glob-



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al governance system.

China's commitment is also reflected in its offer of zero-tariff treatment to all products from the least-developed countries that are its trading partners to help them integrate into the global trading system. And to further promote global cooperation, China has introduced visa-free policies for citizens of 38 countries, including Thailand and Singapore, while hosting the China International Import Expo that saw nearly \$60 billion in transactions and strengthened the ties between global exhibitors and buyers.

By prioritizing green and digital trade, China is offering solutions to global challenges while transforming its own economic model. For example, China has collaborated with the European Union on energy platforms and clean energy technologies, promoting sustainable practices.

On the digital trade front, China's "Silk Road E-commerce" spans five continents, facilitating

cross-border cooperation in e-commerce. The participation of more than 80 countries and international organizations in the 2024 China International Fair for Trade in Services underscores China's growing role in the global service trade, contributing to a more inclusive global economy.

The "Invest in China" campaign, which facilitates exchanges with foreign enterprises and business associations, is part of the country's strategy to create a competitive, law-based environment for businesses. By granting foreign investment greater access in sectors such as healthcare and telecommunications, China aims to not only attract more investments but also foster innovation and collaboration between domestic and foreign companies.

Moreover, China has been enhancing its regional and international partnerships through free trade agreements. The 23 trade agreements China has signed with 30 countries and regions, including the upgraded China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, cover emerging fields such as the digital economy and strengthen economic ties with ASEAN. And the development of the Hainan Free Trade Port will offer new global development opportunities.

Through regional cooperation mechanisms such as APEC, China is also promoting new energy projects, including solar photovoltaic and wind energy cooperation with Latin American countries, to create mutual benefit for all parties.

Furthermore, through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is deepening global cooperation in advanced technologies, green development and digital infrastructure. By establishing agricultural technology demonstration centers, technology transfer hubs, and launching initiatives like the Belt and Road Green Development Partnership with more than 150 partners, China is laying the groundwork for sustainable development. China's efforts to bridge the digital divide in Belt and Road countries by improving the infrastructure are helping the beneficiary countries to boost their development.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

CSABA MOLDICZ

## Feeling the heat

Protectionism is not a long-term solution to the EU's competitive weaknesses

European competitiveness has been steadily deteriorating for decades. The last comprehensive reform program aimed at tackling the challenges of weak competitiveness was the so-called Lisbon Strategy in 2000. According to the European Council, the aim of the strategy was



“to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.” Not only has the strategy failed miserably and the European Union has not been able to catch up with the United States in terms of GDP growth, productivity growth and the knowledge economy, but the EU's international position has deteriorated further over these more than two decades. While the strategy assumed that the US was the EU's only competitor, today we can see that China and other emerging economic centers are also significantly affecting European competitiveness in several sectors.

On Sept 9, 2024, Mario Draghi, Italian economist, former governor of the European Central Bank and former Italian prime minister, presented a report entitled “The Future of European Competitiveness”, which has similar ambitions to the Lisbon Strategy mentioned above, with more awareness of the challenge that China poses to the EU.

While the report was a long-awaited document and well received in Brussels, particularly by the European Commission, the report's conclusions were not welcomed by everyone, everywhere. The report acknowledges that the EU faces serious challenges in terms of economic growth and that

this cannot simply be blamed on the EU's status as an advanced economy.

The report said: “The EU-US gap in the level of GDP at 2015 prices has gradually widened from slightly more than 15 percent to 30 percent in 2023, while on purchasing power parity basis a gap of 12 percent emerged.” The difference is to be explained by productivity differences. Due to the crisis of the multilateral trade order, the EU's opportunities in the world have become more limited. At the same time, the era of cheap energy from Russia ended with the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2022. The report argues that the global order appears to be in flux under the hegemony of the US, meaning that the EU no longer enjoys the “peace dividend” it has received in recent decades.

The main conclusion of Draghi's report is that the EU needs more investment each year to catch up with its competitors, particularly the US and China. Draghi concludes that the additional investment we are talking about amounts to around 800 billion euros (\$822 billion) per year. This corresponds to around 4.7 percent of the EU's GDP and is equivalent to the size of the Marshall Plan after World War II. In contrast to previous reports, he calls for an EU industrial policy, which is a new element in the political discourse, but not without contradictions.

While most responses agree with the report's main conclusions, many question the report's proposals. Draghi believes that the Euro-



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pean competitiveness weakness can be solved by more power for Brussels and EU institutions. The Hungarian government seems to want a solution tailored to the country to improve competitiveness. Hungary would like to avoid the rise of new economic, trade or technological blocs in the global economy, while the EU seems to be resorting to techniques and instruments of protectionism. Protectionism may provide economic actors with breathing space for a short period of time, but it cannot guar-

antee a revival of European industry and a rapid improvement in European competitiveness. The paper fails to recognize the specific characteristics of Central Europe, which, unlike Western Europe, has relatively rapid GDP growth and low unemployment rates. These characteristics of Central Europe are not taken into account in the Draghi report.

A similar attitude is reflected in the comments of Minister of Economics in Latvia Viktors Valainis, who said that the report does not

take into account the views of the region and fears that the EU's overregulation will stifle the region's growth. Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Technology of Poland Ignacy Niemczyk added that the report does not reflect the interests of the Central European countries, and that Poland will continue to push for the liberalization of services in order to reduce differences between countries, which he believes is in the interest of the EU. Officials from the Czech Republic also complained about the lack of consultation with the regional experts.

The Hungarian prime minister agrees with Draghi when it comes to the problem, but not when it comes to the solutions. In a speech at the Ludovika University of Public Service, he put the whole problem of weak European competitiveness in a broader perspective, saying: “If I want to summarize it in one word, I would say that the West's response is bloc-formation. We are trying to respond to the changes in the global economy in a way that leads to the creation of power blocs. Put more simply, efforts are being made to separate the Eastern and Western economies — or if you prefer, the Eastern and Western global economies — sometimes with the same vehemence and rhetoric reminiscent of the Iron Curtain. As a politician, I can say that if we don't speak so elegantly about ‘bloc-formation’ but use our own language, then the West's response to the transformation of

the global economy is nothing other than a return to Cold War logic.”

So the Draghi report has polarized politicians and experts. While the majority agree with the gloomy outlook the report offers, the proposals in the analysis are more controversial as they would require a more federal functioning of the EU, which would curtail the sovereignty of its member states, and the extension of powers could only come at the expense of member states. While federal ideas have more public support and are endorsed by the so-called mainstream in Western Europe, the same ideas tend to be rejected by political parties in Eastern Europe. Moreover, there are some specificities of the Central European countries that are not taken into account in the report presented by Draghi. For this reason, and especially because of the issue of financing the report's proposals, we believe that the Draghi report faces significant challenges in terms of implementing its proposals.

Another layer to the story is that the protectionism implied in the report is not a long-term solution to the EU's competitive weaknesses. It may provide a temporary respite for the European companies that need protection, but it does not provide the necessary capital and knowledge to participate in the global race for cutting-edge technologies. The positive thing about the report is that it sees US companies as competition for Europe, not just Chinese companies.

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JI XIANBAI AND CHEN XI

## Clear-headed appraisal

With ‘America First’ to continue, Europe needs to comprehensively adjust its trade and energy policies to reduce its dependence on the US

With Donald Trump re-elected as president of the United States, the “America First” policy will continue, leading to a shake-up in the global trade patterns and a significant increase in international trade uncertainty. His



Ji Xianbai



Chen Xi

threat of higher tariffs has intensified the economic and trade tensions between China and Europe. China-Europe cooperation going forward will be impacted by both US interference and internal divisions within Europe itself. Already, China-Europe trade relations have endured increasingly severe challenges. In 2024, Brussels introduced 31 restrictive trade and investment measures against China, such as slapping anti-subsidy duties on Chinese electric vehicles. In retaliation, China launched anti-dumping investigations into European brandy. Moreover, the European Union is using numerous non-tariff barriers such as technical standards and intellectual property protection to create obstacles, increasing the cost for Chinese companies to reach European consumers. Meanwhile, China's market access rules for the service and agricultural sectors also limit the growth of European businesses in China. Such frictions not only impact the industries of both sides caught in the crosshairs but also significantly add to the uncer-

tainty in the overall bilateral trade relations.

The trade policies of Trump's new administration will profoundly influence the global trade landscape, particularly affecting China-US-EU triangular trade relations. The proposed universal tariff rate of 10 percent and an additional 60 percent tariff on imports from China will certainly exacerbate the decoupling and disruptions in supply chains between China and the US. In the globalized production network, where China, the US and the EU are deeply intertwined, this situation will also be a severe blow to China-Europe economic and trade relations through the global value chain. According to forecasts from the Chasing International Economic Institute, the imposition of a 60 percent tariff could lead to an 8 percent decrease in China's exports and a slowdown in GDP growth of 1.2 percent. Many European companies in China are involved in production for export to the US, such as European suppliers in the Apple smartphone production chain. The US tariff increases will lead to rising costs and decreased competitiveness for these companies, triggering reduced orders and heightened overcapacity.

The EU's economic and trade cooperation foundation with China is profound and extensive. With its strong manufacturing capabilities, complete industrial supporting facilities, and continuous technological development, China has become a core node in the global supply chain and cooperates closely with the EU. Data of 2024 shows that Chinese products account for 27.1 percent of the EU's daily consumer goods, and over the past five years, the EU's manufacturing

imports have become more concentrated in China. In the field of industrial production, European companies are heavily dependent on Chinese components.

In the emerging industry sector, China has particularly stood out in the fields of renewable energy and information and communication technologies. Its photovoltaic module production, for example, has been leading the world for 16 consecutive years, accounting for 70 percent of the global market share and becoming an important source of photovoltaic products for EU countries. In the field of 5G technology, more than half of the 5G wireless access network equipment of eight out of 31 European countries comes from Chinese manufacturers. This reflects the EU's demand for Chinese technology and products in their efforts of green transformation and digital construction.

At the same time, the EU is reducing its dependence on the US supply chain. The US' policy promoting de-globalization has disrupted the original stable cooperation patterns. For instance, in the field of aerospace, the European aerospace company Airbus is actively adopting a “near-shoring” initiative to ensure supply chain security due to concerns about the uncertainty of US trade policies and the risk of supply disruptions.

At present, China-Europe cooperation is influenced by a mix of internal and external factors, with both opportunities and challenges. In terms of external barriers, the protectionist policy of the US has intensified trade frictions, impacted China-Europe supply chains, and compressed the space for cooperation, while its economic and technological restrictions threaten the stability of cooperation. In terms of

internal pressure, the political and economic landscape in the EU is unstable, with the rise of far-right, populist forces after the 2024 parliamentary elections, deadlock in French internal decision-making, Germany's energy transition constraints, and the diversification of EU member states' policies toward China, which exacerbates the complexity and flexibility of the EU's policy toward China. Meanwhile, existing disagreements between China and the EU on trade rules have increased the difficulty of deepening their cooperation.

Against this backdrop, China should adopt a multi-dimensional approach to advance its cooperation with the EU. First, in terms of expanding high-level opening up, it is necessary for China to continue improving its business environment, enhance regulatory efficiency, and further expand the opening up of its service sector, such as finance, education and healthcare, to attract high-quality European resources and promote the exchange of technology and management experience and win-win outcomes.

Second, with respect to developing and emerging markets, there is vast room for China-EU cooperation in green development. In terms of renewable energy technology research and development and application, both sides can jointly build large-scale solar and wind energy projects, combining China's manufacturing prowess with the European side's technological innovations to create new trade and investment opportunities. In terms of digital economy cooperation, they should strengthen collaboration in areas such as big data, artificial intelligence and cross-border e-commerce, jointly establishing



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rules for cross-border data flows and digital trade standards, and building a new platform for bilateral cooperation in the digital era.

Concurrently, China should play an active role in global economic governance and deepening communication and collaboration with the EU in platforms such as the World Trade Organization, the G20 and the Belt and Road Initiative, to jointly resist trade protectionism and create a favorable international institutional and policy environment for China-Europe cooperation. Furthermore, mutual trust and understanding among the people can be enhanced through academic, cultural, and artistic exchanges and other activities, solidifying the public opinion foundation for China-Europe cooperation and fundamentally resolving potential conflicts and misunderstandings.

In summary, China-EU cooperation needs to seek balance and breakthroughs in the complex international environment, by deepening openness, expanding cooperation in emerging fields, and participating in global governance, to achieve mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, and inject new vitality into the global economic recovery and sustainable growth.

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# SPORTS

## TENNIS

# Zheng, Andreeva win as rain lashes Open on day one

Chinese star awarded the honor of playing the first point on center court



China's Zheng Qinwen celebrates after victory against Romania's Anca Todoni during their women's singles match on day one of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Sunday. AFP

MELBOURNE — Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen overcame a sluggish start to blast into the Australian Open second round on Sunday as storms caused havoc ahead of Aryna Sabalenka beginning her quest for a historic third consecutive crown.

Fifth seed Zheng, last year's losing finalist, had the honor of playing the first point on center court at the opening Grand Slam of the season against Romania's 110th-ranked Anca Todoni.

She came through unscathed 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena but was clearly rusty after opting not to play a warm-up event.

Zheng had three set points on-serve at 5-3 in the first set, but allowed Todoni to come roaring back before closing her down in the tiebreak and then racing through the second set.

"The first match is always not easy," she said. "Just happy to get through the match, the tiebreak and find my rhythm."

The 22-year-old enjoyed a breakthrough 2024 with her Australian Open exploits helping spur her to Olympic gold — beating Iga Swiatek on the way — and two WTA titles.

While Zheng was able to play, the action on the outside courts at Melbourne Park was halted barely an hour after it started when storms rolled in that turned the sky black.

Thunder and lightning saw players and fans rushing for cover, with heavy rain lashing Melbourne Park in a headache for organizers with a match backlog looming.

Only the three main stadiums — Rod Laver Arena, Margaret Court Arena and John Cain Arena — have roofs.

Mirra Andreeva was the first player through to the second round, with the 14th-seeded Russian easing past the Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova 6-3, 6-3 on John Cain Arena.

The 17-year-old made a run in Melbourne last year to the fourth round with her next opponent being either Poland's Magda Linette or Japan's Moyika Uchijima.

"Honestly it was a bit hard for me when they started closing the roof (mid-match)," said Andreeva, who is

coached by former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez.

"I'm very happy today that I played in a stadium with a roof."

Later on Sunday, a battling Sabalenka survived an early wobble to beat Sloane Stephens 6-3, 6-2 as the world No 1 began her bid for a historic hat-trick at the Australian Open.

### Sinner's title defense

The first round of the Australian Open continues on Monday at Melbourne Park where top seed and defending champion Jannik Sinner seeks a third Grand Slam title while

Novak Djokovic begins his quest for a record-extending 25th major.

World No 1 Sinner is playing under the cloud of a potential two-year ban due to his doping case while 37-year-old Djokovic, a 10-time champion in Melbourne, returns to his favorite hunting ground as the seventh seed.

Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek are also in action while four Australians, including Nick Kyrgios, will get their chance to shine on the showcourts.

Kyrgios returns to Grand Slam action for the first time in two years

when the Australian takes on Briton Jacob Fearnley.

Kyrgios has been sidelined due to knee, foot and wrist problems and he returns to his home Slam as an unranked player, still struggling with an abdominal strain and "niggles" that forced him to pull out of an exhibition event.

The 29-year-old spent some time in the broadcast booth during his break from the game but he is confident tennis has not left him behind.

"People are always going to say, 'Be realistic, you're not going to be the same.' I unfortunately don't have that

mindset. I always have the utmost confidence in my ability," said Kyrgios, whose best result in Melbourne was a quarterfinal run in 2015.

"If I'm playing my style of tennis, my unpredictability, I have a chance against anyone."

The Australian Open marks Fearnley's second main draw appearance at a Grand Slam but he made his mark at his first at Wimbledon last year, winning his opening round match and then taking a set off Djokovic on center court.

### Russian ace hails coach Martinez for making her 'fearless'

Teenage talent Mirra Andreeva hailed her former Wimbledon champion coach Conchita Martinez for making her "fearless" Sunday after blasting into the Australian Open second round.

The 17-year-old Russian eased past the Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova 6-3, 6-3, negotiating tricky conditions with rain in the middle of the match forcing the roof to be closed on John Cain Arena.

Martinez, who beat Martina Navratilova to win the 1994 final at the All England Club, hooked up with Andreeva last year and they hit it off immediately.

"With her, I kind of became closer to fearless," said 14th seed Andreeva, who reached the semifinals of the French Open in 2024.

"For example, before I would never go to play a volley on match point. Here, I decided, 'Why not?'" She also praised Martinez — who previously coached Garbine Muguruza and Karolina Pliskova — for her sense of humor, saying they had similar personalities.

"I really like our relationship, because, well, I like to joke around," she said. "Sometimes I just, you know, I don't like to be very serious. I always try to smile and laugh. It's just easier like this."

"Actually I was surprised in the beginning that she's also pretty much like me."

"And since we first started working together, I have noticed that she's always also trying to tell a joke or just laugh sometimes."

Andreeva served notice of her precocious talent when she reached the last 16 of Wimbledon in 2023 and then again at the Australian Open in 2024. She eclipsed that under Martinez by reaching the semifinals at Roland Garros.

AGENCIES

AFP

## SOCCER

# Man City hits Salford for eight, Liverpool cruises into 4th round

MANCHESTER, England — Manchester City dashed the dreams of Salford's former Manchester United star owners with an 8-0 FA Cup rout on Saturday, while Liverpool cruised into the fourth round with a 4-0 victory over Accrington Stanley.

Chelsea was among the other big winners with a 5-0 demolition of Morecambe.

Brentford was the only Premier League side to fall to lower-league opposition as Plymouth, who sits bottom of the Championship, stunned the Bees 1-0 thanks to Morgan Whittaker's late winner.

League Two Salford has risen through the non-league ranks since investment from David Beckham, Gary and Phil Neville, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs and Nicky Butt began in 2014.

Scholes, Butt and director of soccer Giggs were in attendance at the Etihad but were denied a night to rival their best during glorious playing careers at Old Trafford.

Pep Guardiola made wholesale changes as Erling Haaland was afforded a rest.

Jeremy Doku opened the scoring after just eight minutes before youngsters Divin Mubama and Nico O'Reilly made it 3-0 before half-time. Jack Grealish scored his first City goal for over a year from the penalty spot, while Doku also netted from the spot.

But James McAtee, who had only scored once for City previously, earned man-of-the-match honors with a 20-minute second-half hat-trick.

"I've been here since I was 10 and it's a special moment for me. Something I'll remember forever," said McAtee.

### Trent leads by example

There was never any hint of an upset at Anfield either despite Arne Slot making eight changes for Liverpool.

Trent Alexander-Arnold was named captain in the absence of Virgil van Dijk and led by example after



Manchester City's James McAtee (bottom) celebrates scoring the team's eighth goal against Salford City on Saturday. REUTERS

being criticized for his display in a 2-2 draw against Manchester United a week ago.

Slot had warned the Premier League leader that a trip to Anfield would be Accrington's "Champions League final".

A mammoth 86 league positions behind Liverpool in the 92-team English league system, Stanley held out for nearly half an hour before Diogo Jota was left with a simple task to tap in from Darwin Nunez's low cross.

Alexander-Arnold then stepped forward to double the lead with a sumptuous hit into the top corner from outside the box.

"I could talk for hours about that (goal), unbelievable," said Slot.

"The biggest compliment Trent could get was the reaction of everyone after the Manchester United game."

"Every player around the world, maybe except for a few, has a bad game and that is completely normal, but the moment Trent has one, everyone has an opinion about it."

Jayden Danns made it 3-0 before Federico Chiesa netted his first Liverpool goal after an injury-hit start to his time in England.

Joao Felix was the star of the show for Chelsea as he got a rare chance to

deputize for Cole Palmer.

The Portuguese international and Tosin Adarabioyo both scored twice, while Christopher Nkunku made up for missing an early penalty by netting his 13th goal of the season.

### Brentford stung

Only Liverpool has taken more points at home than Brentford in the Premier League this season, while Plymouth had not won away from home all campaign.

Yet against the odds, Argyle, who sacked former England captain Wayne Rooney just two weeks ago, held out and hit Thomas Frank's men with a sucker punch when Whittaker blasted in from outside the area nine minutes from time.

"I have pride in everybody, and I'm pleased for the supporters. It's a big day for us," said caretaker Plymouth boss Kevin Nancekivell.

"The FA Cup brings that romance and we've put a little bit of history in it today by getting the win."

High-flying Nottingham Forest continued its excellent season with a comfortable 2-0 win over Luton.

Brighton was 4-0 winner at Norwich as Georginio Rutter struck twice.

AFP

New year, new vision  
Feeling nice on ice

CHINADAILY  
中国日报

Times' Portrait Studio  
Illustrator: Li Min

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## LIFE

## Teaching the stage in a different way

Institute draws on neighboring theater village to provide practical as well as theoretical grounding in contemporary techniques, **Li Yingxue** reports in Huichang, Jiangxi.

Nestled in Huichang county, Ganzhou city, Jiangxi province, the Huichang Theatre Village is a hub of activity, where the sounds of performances regularly fill the air. Actors, technicians, and eager audiences breathe constant life into the village.

At the entrance to the village is a "dream-making space" that could be described as a talent factory for the theater: the Hesheng Institute of Theatre Technology, which is dedicated to training the next generation of theater professionals.

Founded two years ago by Huichang entrepreneur Wang Mingfu and theater director Stan Lai, the institute was conceived to serve the needs of the village — a cultural project that Lai, who is passionate about modernizing Chinese theater, devised to introduce stage productions to his father's hometown.

The Hesheng Institute is one of the few schools in China focused on career-oriented training in theater technology that offers an educational experience unlike any other. It provides students with academic teaching, as well as hands-on opportunities to engage with productions.

In 2023, the institute welcomed its first cohort of nearly 100 students, and a further 80 last year. It offers a major in stage art design and production, with specializations in stage, lighting, sound and costume design.

The school's president Liao Weihuan, who has years of experience in both Chinese and international stage production, has a clear vision: to train top-tier theater talent and contribute to the flourishing of the national theatrical landscape.

"We want to raise awareness within the domestic theater industry about the importance of stage technology," Liao says. "It's a specialized field that requires expertise. We need trained professionals to bring theater to life. I hope these students will one day take over the work I do on stage production."

The teaching building was originally a department store. After six months of renovations, Liao turned the space into the aforementioned "dream-making space" for students.

At 60, the "chief dream maker" is affectionately called Liao Ye (Grandpa Liao) by the students. He has a chivalrous spirit and a touch of childlike enthusiasm.

He oversaw the design of every detail, personally selecting each piece of furniture, from the desks and chairs to the trash cans. The chairs in the meeting room are colorful, and the lighting in each room is tailored to the specific function of the space. Even the indicator lights at the entrance of the recording studio, the fonts above them, and the color temperature of the lighting were all carefully decided by Liao.

Apart from a conventional lecture hall, the other classes are held in dedicated studios, including international-standard set design, costume practice, and woodworking studios. Liao has thoughtfully arranged everything in these spaces, including the storage of teaching materials.

A romantic at heart, his design for the dream-making space is filled with small, poetic touches — from the gaps between the shelves in the library and the angles at which sunlight filters through the windows to the gradient painted wall and the piano key-like seats on the balcony.

The large glass windows on the first floor of the teaching building were left unchanged. Liao wanted



residents to see what he and his students are doing in the hopes of connecting the institute with the community.

"I hope the students will share what they've learned with residents," he says. "We also want to invite our neighbors to come in and see what we're doing. Theater is a way of life."

The new teaching building officially opened on April 8 last year. On the afternoon of the 7th, students were divided into groups of 10, with each group receiving a 100-minute tour. Liao worked nonstop, repeating the tour for 10 different groups.

"This is how I do things. Everything I can give you, I do," he says.

#### Exploring passion

His educational philosophy centers on the principle of safety first. He aims to instill this mindset not only in his students but also throughout the industry. This ethos permeates every aspect, right down to the smallest details of operations.

For instance, students are not allowed to bring food into the building, as eating is prohibited in a theater. On rainy days, umbrellas must be stored neatly on designated racks at the entrance to prevent water from dripping into the corridors.

"If there is food, it might attract rats, and rats can chew through wires, creating safety hazards," Liao explains. "I want students to develop good safety habits in their daily lives, which are built over time."

On the first day of each academic year, the principal addresses incoming students with a message that reflects his commitment to their future: "From today on, I am the director of our great theater company, and our annual production is your employment."

"This production only succeeds if the students put in the effort," Liao says. "I'm here to help them realize their dreams."

He has structured the curriculum to provide a hands-on, progressive learning experience. In the first year, students focus on general education, while specialized courses are introduced in the second year. They explore a range of professional courses in their first year to determine their specialization.

Specializations are designed to meet industry demands. Courses are taught in a modular format, with expert instructors delivering intensive lessons over short periods.

Liao invites top-tier professionals,



**From top:** Students of the Hesheng Institute of Theatre Technology in class. Liao Weihuan (right), president of the institute, and Stan Lai (second from right) attend an exhibition of student masks. Liao (left) and Lai at the opening ceremony for the mask exhibition. Liao (right) giving a tour of the teaching building.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



We want to raise awareness within the domestic theater industry about the importance of stage technology. It's a specialized field that requires expertise. We need trained professionals to bring theater to life."

**Liao Weihuan**, president, Hesheng Institute of Theatre Technology

says. "I feel a responsibility to them to improve."

The practical curriculum stands out. "We don't just study theory; we actually handle the equipment and experience it firsthand," Wang explains.

She describes Liao as both a mentor and a friend. "He's energetic, enjoys telling jokes, but is also strict when necessary," she says. "From him, we've learned that passion is essential for success in the theater industry."

She also values the design of the building. "We care for it like it's our own. We immediately dispose of trash and handle expensive equipment with great care."

#### Hands-on experience

The Huichang drama seasons offer students valuable hands-on experience and opportunities to observe theater productions. In addition to volunteering at the festival, Liao encourages students to intern on current productions in the theater village.

Freshman Chen Jiayi, a 19-year-old volunteer at last December's drama season, assisted with tours for guests and also attended several performances.

Chen, who comes from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, entered the program with little prior knowledge of theater but, after one semester, discovered a passion for stage production. "It opened a whole new world of theater to me," she says.

Liao always takes tools — including a small whiteboard, tapeline, portable chargers, and pens — wherever he goes, a reflection of his professionalism that subtly influences his students.

He has also set alarms for wake-up and lights-out times in the dorms to play classical music, to cultivate a deeper appreciation for beauty among the students.

Play is an essential teaching method. Knowing that his students enjoy gaming, Liao has organized an *Honor of Kings* tournament modeled after the professional esports competition.

A team of eight students handles everything from the event format to promotional materials. "They even made their own trophies. For the finals, I had them arrange an opening dance, cosplay, a host, commentators, and livestreaming," he says.

The students also designed the tournament's logo and created merchandise. "Through play, I gradually teach them about lighting, stage design, and subtly introduce them to the industry," Liao explains.

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**From left:** The Hesheng Institute of Theatre Technology's professional recording studio. Liao Weihuan observes students during a drawing course. A specialized classroom at the school.



# CULTURE



## Flourish of ethnic flair

Ideas from China's many traditional communities appeal to modern designers, **Hou Chenchen** reports.

**T**hin strips of fabric meticulously sewn in overlapping layers of dazzling colors adorned the intricate collars and sleeves, with shimmering tassels hanging from broad belts.

When the group of young people wearing the eye-catching attire styled in the traditional designs of local communities appeared on the cosmopolitan streets of Shanghai last year, many bystanders said it was as though a rainbow was passing through them.

The group posed for photos against the urban backdrop of shared bicycles, subway stations and roadside billboards, creating a striking contrast between the traditional elements of their clothes and the modern cityscape.

The unique runway event, organized by Chinese artist Zhao Bing, showcased the traditional clothing of the Lisu people, an ethnic group from Southwest China's Yunnan province, through a "citywalk" that blended culture and contemporary living.

The show itself reflected a rising trend celebrating the traditional allure of ethnic culture in the art world amid increasing digitalization.

Su Xiaoling, a young content creator from Yunnan, has similarly taken ethnic attire onto the international stage.

During the 2024 Paris Olympics, Su wore the clothes of Yi ethnic group members from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region of South China and Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou provinces of Southwest China while she visited iconic landmarks including the Louvre Museum and the Eiffel Tower, captivating French spectators who eagerly posed for photos with her.

"They were so enthusiastic and warm, far beyond what I expected," Su said. "Sometimes, they'd mistake us for Japanese or Korean people, and I'd always tell them I am Chinese."

Through the efforts of fashion fans like Su, Chinese ethnic costumes are gaining growing recognition across the globe, with more foreigners shedding their stereotypes of a singular "Asian culture" and appreciating the rich diversity of China's ethnic groups.

Su's videos modeling exquisite costumes from various ethnic communities have already earned her over a million followers online.

"Ethnic costumes and haute couture might seem unrelated but to me, these delicate handicrafts are Chinese haute couture," Su said.

"They require immense labor and resources, and they carry deep cultural significance. Wearing them is the best way to preserve them."

### Blending in

Beyond the popular *hanfu*, or traditional Chinese clothing of the Han ethnic group, other ethnic clothes in China are merging with modern fashion, fueled by innovative interpretations from the younger generation.

Members of the Lisu ethnic group are known for their brightly colored and elaborately patterned attire, utilizing the local fireweed plant as one of its raw materials.

Zhao Bing, who grew up in southwestern China, possesses an innate emotional connection to the area's folklore and nature. When Zhao studied art in France, an exhibition about ethnic costumes from various countries inspired her to delve into her hometown's ethnic culture and the rich folk craft of the Lisu quickly captured her interest.

"Although the clothing of the Lisu is also diverse, it is somewhat simpler compared to other ethnic groups. So it's easier to blend with modern art," Zhao said.

After years in the fashion marketing industry, Zhao shifted her focus to establishing her own ethnic art innovation platform, GiftMarket. She launched a comprehensive art project of Lisu culture, encompassing exhibitions, fashion shows, experimental photography and music videos.

One of her primary concerns is to integrate traditional ethnic clothing into contemporary life.

"The elaboration of ethnic costumes may take one

**"**I'm basically translating ethnic culture into something that millennials and subculture enthusiasts find interesting."  
**Zhao Bing, artist and curator**



**Top:** Su Xiaoling in a paper-cutting style custom dress in Milan, Italy in October.  
**Above:** Su Xiaoling in Blang ethnic clothing in Pu'er, Yunnan province, in May.

to two years, and they are always very expensive due to their purely handmade nature," she said.

"If we can make them more usable and fashionable, they will be better suited for our everyday wear." Zhao turned to design for the answer. During a fashion show in October 2023, apart from traditional Lisu attire, there were also innovative garments that combined Lisu patterns and designs with punk or denim styles, creating a cross-temporal artistic charm.

"I'm basically translating ethnic culture into something that millennials and subculture enthusiasts find interesting," Zhao said.

"The involvement of design brings a better communication of language that urban young people can relate to."

Mixing and matching can also be a more cost-effective approach, echoing a "light ethnic lifestyle", she said.

On Shanghai's Changle Road last year, Zhao had gathered a group of young people who are passionate about ethnic culture. They put on Lisu shawls, hats, dresses and other related items that matched with modern clothing, presenting various styles.

A young man from Indonesia was part of the group.

"This was my first time as a model. Inspired by the photographer, I even did a little traditional dance from my hometown, Java island," he said in an interview with Fashion Zoo, a local fashion media outlet.

"Indonesia, like China, has many different ethnic groups, and this love for ethnic culture attracted me."

### Tapping tradition

The younger generation's embrace and promotion of ethnic costumes goes beyond the appreciation of beauty, with members like Su and Zhao exploring the deeper values of traditional culture.

In the latest fashion show and exhibition organized by Zhao, 16 complete sets of Lisu ethnic costumes were displayed, all handmade by Lisu members from across China. Two young members living in Shanghai also took part as models for the citywalk.

"They have a strong sense of ethnic pride and they were eager to participate," Zhao said. "Even if they had other commitments, they would take a day off just to be part of this."

Similarly, Su's work would not have been possible without the support of local ethnic residents.

"Many custodians of ethnic costumes lent me their cherished garments," she said. "They're eager to showcase these precious pieces and the craftsmanship behind them to a wider audience, especially on short-video platforms."

Su also acts as an ambassador for local cultural tourism. Her stunning photographs featuring beautiful ethnic costumes have become a major draw for tourists, capitalizing on the trend of travel-focused photography.

Zhao continues to explore the intersection of art and development. She recounted a detail of Lisu culture that touched her: the delicate seashell ornaments on the ethnic clothing.

"My hometown also has a lot of such shells," she said. "They symbolize wealth and peace."

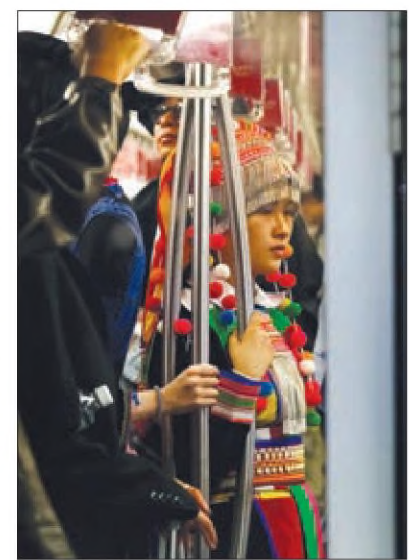
The seashells adorned the models on her runway, conveying the aspirations of ethnic communities.

Through her extensive field research, Zhao has also observed the phenomenon of villages in ethnic areas where adults head out for work in the cities, leaving behind the elderly and children.

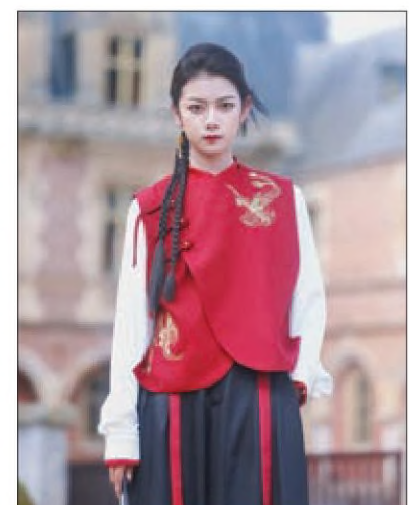
"If we can make ethnic crafts more practical and marketable, it might encourage young people to return home and continue honing these skills," she said.

"That way, they can keep their traditions alive, spend more time with their families and, even if they don't earn as much as they would in the city, find happiness."

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**Main photo and above:** Young people dressed in Lisu ethnic clothing participate in a citywalk in Shanghai curated by artist Zhao Bing, in October 2023. DIWEI AND CASSIE / FOR CHINA DAILY



Su Xiaoling in a neo-Chinese style waistcoat in Paris in August. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY