

## Brave display

Folk performers dazzle with molten iron shower of sparks HOLIDAY VISUAL, PAGE 6



## Heartwarming link

Farmers with 'back baskets' ride Chongqing subway line to market HOLIDAY IMAGE, PAGE 7

# CHINA DAILY

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## Sino-EU ties seen as key to global growth

Experts call for stronger economic, trade partnership amid US tariff hikes

By LIU ZHIHUA, WANG YU and ZHONG NAN

Strengthening China-European Union economic cooperation has become crucial for worldwide economic growth, as the United States' tariff hikes against its key trading partners have cast a shadow over the global economy, said senior trade experts and EU business executives.

They emphasized that amid growing global trade protectionism, the Chinese and EU economies' structural complementarity and the two sides' upholding of free trade provide a solid basis for deeper bilateral economic and trade collaboration. They also said the US tariff increases are likely to backfire.

Zhang Yansheng, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said the EU economy has advantages in high-end manufacturing, green technology and services trade, while China excels in digital infrastructure, smart manufacturing, application scenarios and a vast market.

"China and the EU could consider establishing an industrial chain security dialogue mechanism to form a 'cooperation list' in key areas such as semiconductors and pharmaceuticals," Zhang said.

By creating platforms like industrial cooperation parks and joint innovation funds, the two sides' strategic consensus can be transformed into concrete projects, in order to shape a practical and feasible road map for them to build a new, future-oriented type of economic and trade partnership, he said.

"With the transformation and upgrading of China's manufacturing

industry, the competition between China and the EU in economic and trade development has intensified a bit," Zhang said.

"However, as they both face external challenges like rising protectionism and geopolitical uncertainties, the two economies are expected to forge closer economic ties based on complementary competition, thereby achieving a win-win situation," Zhang added.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the potential for collaboration between China and the EU is enhanced by their market complementarity and need for resource optimization.

He said he expects more cooperation mechanisms between the two sides to boost collaboration by enterprises, drive innovation and improve the allocation of market resources.

"By doing such things, China and the EU could generate significant economic and social benefits, boost employment and enhance supply chain security for both," said Zhou, whose academy is affiliated with China's Ministry of Commerce.

China remains the EU's largest import source and third-largest export destination, according to European statistics. Moreover, China's outbound direct investment inflows to the EU grew from 6.27 billion euros (\$6.43 billion) in 2020 to 8.06 billion euros in 2023, with greenfield investment reaching 5.3 billion euros in 2023 — an increase of 48 percent compared with 2022.

See *Ties*, page 2

## VISA-FREE OPTION GETS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Travelers given passport to convenience as they benefit from more streamlined entry procedures

By WANG MINGJIE in London wangmingjie@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Throughout 2024, China steadily expanded its visa-free travel program, easing entry procedures for international visitors.

The updated policy, which took effect on Nov 30, allows travelers from 38 countries, including 32 European nations, to stay in China for up to 30 days visa-free, doubling the previous limit.

The significant change represents a transformative step in enhancing international tourism, fostering economic collaboration and advancing cultural diplomacy. Experts widely regard the development as a strategic effort to position China as a more accessible and appealing global destination.

The nation's visa-free policy has simplified travel to China by removing obstacles that have traditionally deterred potential tourists as well as

business travelers.

Oliver Sedlinger, CEO of tourism consultancy firm Sedlinger & Associates, lauded the initiative as "wonderful news for the global travel industry". He noted that visas often act as barriers to international travel, adding, "Removing these obstacles will undoubtedly boost tourism and make China more appealing to travelers worldwide."

Statistics from the National Immigration Administration highlight the policy's early success. In the third quarter of 2024, foreigners made 8.186 million inbound trips to China, representing a 48.8 percent increase year-on-year. Of these, 4.885 million trips — an impressive 78.6 percent year-on-year rise — were facilitated by the visa-free policy, according to data released by the administration in mid-October.

See *Growth*, page 3

## Festivities in France



Performers stage a dragon dance on Champs-Elysees avenue in Paris on Sunday during a parade celebrating the Spring Festival holiday, which has ushered in the Year of the Snake. GAO JING / XINHUA

## Fireworks at box office greet Year of the Snake

By XU FAN xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

Riding a wave of blockbusters, the Spring Festival holiday — the country's most lucrative box office season — set a record on Monday as the highest-grossing in history for the holiday period.

As of 9:30 pm on Monday, the Year of the Snake — which began on Jan 29 — saw ticket receipts for all six new movies, including pre-sale revenues, reach 8.5 billion yuan (\$1.2 billion), surpassing the total of last year's Spring Festival, the previous record holder, according to Maoyan Pro and Beacon, two major industry trackers.

Topping the festival charts is *Ne Zha 2*, the highly anticipated sequel to the animated blockbuster *Ne Zha*. The special effects-laden movie, which reimagines the adventures of the titular hero, a renowned mythological figure, as he teams up with the son of a dragon king to thwart a cunning scheme, has grossed over 4.1 billion yuan.

Filmmaker Chen Sicheng's *Detective Chinatown 1900*, a loosely connected prequel to his popular *Detective Chinatown* franchise, has earned 2.1 billion yuan, securing the second spot. The crime comedy, which stars actors Liu Haoran and Wang Baoqiang as,



A moviegoer checks out a poster for *Ne Zha 2* at a cinema in Beijing on Thursday. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY

respectively, a detective's translator and a Chinese man adopted by an indigenous family in the United States, follows the unlikely duo as they investigate a series of murders that will have an impact on all Chinese in the US.

*Creation of the Gods II: Demon Force*, the sequel to director Wuershuan's mythological epic *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, took third place, grossing 959 million yuan. Revisiting the franchise's tale set around 3,000 years ago, the new installment highlights a Mulan-like female general

who sacrifices herself to save many civilians.

Maverick director Tsui Hark's martial arts movie *Legends of the Condor Heroes: The Gallants* came in fourth, grossing 578 million yuan, while *Boonie Bears: Future Reborn* — the 11th installment of the enduring animated franchise about two bear siblings — was fifth, bringing in 475 million yuan.

Hong Kong director Dante Lam's military film *Operation Hadal*, the first Chinese movie to feature deep-sea submarine conflicts, has

grossed 270 million yuan, placing it sixth on the festival charts.

With five out of the six festival movies being sequels, Rao Shuguang, president of the China Film Critics Association, said the box office bonanza demonstrates the progress of the Chinese film industry in various aspects, ranging from storytelling capabilities to special-effects techniques.

Among the blockbusters, *Ne Zha 2* and *Creation of the Gods II* draw inspiration from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) novel *Fengshen Yanyi* (The Investiture of the Gods), while *Legends of the Condor Heroes* is adapted from the late *wuxia* novelist Louis Cha's best-selling work *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*.

Rao said the trend showcases how traditional culture and literature have evolved into fertile ground for cinematic innovation, reflecting a growing cultural confidence.

Yin Hong, deputy chairman of the China Film Association, predicted that *Ne Zha 2* could become the highest-grossing film in the history of Chinese cinema. Yin attributed its success to a five-year production process that involved tailoring more than 1,900 special-effects scenes that prioritize artistic quality and resonate with audiences.

## Harbin heroes among torchbearers for Games

By TIAN XUEFEI and ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin

As the eldest torchbearer for the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, 83-year-old Luo Zhihuan was thrilled to take part in the torch relay on Monday.

"I was nervous but ecstatic to become a torchbearer for the Games in my hometown," said Luo, China's first winter sports world champion.

He was among the 120 torchbearers, who ranged in age from 16 to 83 and represented the various industries and individuals who have made significant contributions to the Games.

"It's a relay of the Olympic spirit from the older generation to

the next generation, and I hope our young athletes can vie for the best results at the Games," Luo said.

Luo himself is among the pioneers of China's winter sports development and has had a huge impact on generations of winter sports athletes.

In 1963, Luo won the men's 1,500-meter event at the World Speed Skating Championship in Nagano, Japan, marking China's first world championship gold medal in winter sports.

The relay on Monday, which featured an 11-kilometer journey across the city, set off from the famous Chinese-Baroque historical and cultural block in the city's Daowai district.

Xu Qin, Party secretary of



The torch relay for the 9th Asian Winter Games kicks off in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Monday, tracing an 11-kilometer route across the provincial capital, also known as the Ice City. HAN DONGXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Heilongjiang, lit the torch from a cauldron at a launch ceremony and announced the start of the relay.

The first torchbearer was 47-year-old Shen Xue, who won China's first pairs figure skating

gold medal with partner Zhao Hongbo at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics — a major breakthrough for Chinese figure skating.

See *Games*, page 2

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## NATION

# DeepSeek rocks US tech industry

Cheaper, more accessible AI program catapults Hangzhou startup to stardom

By **LIA ZHU** in San Francisco  
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Unlike the closed systems of major artificial intelligence companies in the United States, the Chinese startup sensation DeepSeek has embraced an open-source approach.

That path is seen by some as fostering collaboration and experimentation that could lead to faster breakthroughs. Its web-based chat interface and mobile app are free to use.

The strategy contrasts sharply with companies like OpenAI, which keep their models proprietary and charge monthly fees for access.

DeepSeek's approach has garnered strong support, with open-source advocates saying that the US could advance by embracing the cheaper, more accessible strategy.

The company has demonstrated that AI breakthroughs can be achieved through innovation rather than sheer computing power, challenging the established paradigms of AI development and sending shock waves through Silicon Valley, Wall Street and Washington.

DeepSeek, based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, has captured worldwide attention over the past two weeks with the release of two large language models that rival the performance of the dominant tools developed by US tech giants — but at a fraction of the cost and with far less computing power.

Jan 20 saw the release of DeepSeek-R1, an open-source "reasoning" model that employs a "chain of thought" approach similar to OpenAI's most advanced large language model o1, which was unveiled late last year.

Meta's chief AI scientist Yann LeCun emphasized in a recent Threads post that open-source models are now surpassing proprietary ones.

Bill Gurley, a veteran tech investor, challenged the adversarial narrative surrounding DeepSeek, saying: "Why are they 'enemies'? No one that works at DeepSeek is an enemy of mine. The fact that they love open-source makes me think I would gel with them quite well."

Rather than viewing DeepSeek as an adversary, US companies should see its breakthrough as an opportunity to pursue innovation in a different direction, experts say.

"If there's a lesson from Deep-

Seek's triumph, it's this: Be wary when the route to progress is simply spending more money. This path fosters no innovation, and your poorer competitors will be forced to get creative, work within their constraints, and eventually ... they'll win. Spending is not innovating," data scientist Drew Breunig told Defense One, a news site focused on national security issues.

Within days of its release, DeepSeek's AI assistant mobile app quickly rose to the top of Apple's App Store charts, out-ranking OpenAI's ChatGPT mobile app.

The prevailing notion in AI development has been that leading-edge large language models require significant technical and financial resources. Leading AI developers such as OpenAI have attracted billions of dollars in investment by arguing that more data, larger models and more computing power would lead to more advanced products.

However, DeepSeek has challenged this assumption. The company achieved remarkable results with an investment of less than \$6 million and approximately 2,000 less sophisticated chips.

For comparison, Meta's latest Llama 3.1 model required 16,000 of Nvidia's advanced H100 chips for training — chips that are currently prohibited for use by Chinese companies under US export controls.

Facing the constraint of high-performing chips, DeepSeek developed creative methods to train its models on less advanced chips through optimizations in model architecture, training procedures and hardware management.

Kat Duffy, senior fellow for digital and cyberspace policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, said that these innovative methods highlight a downside to the US' approach to AI.

"The focus in the American innovation environment on developing artificial general intelligence and building larger and larger models is not aligned with the needs of most countries around the world," she said in an article published by her organization. "The more the United States pushes Chinese developers to build within a highly constrained environment, the more it risks positioning China as the global leader in developing cost-effective, energy-saving approaches to AI," Duffy said.

## Heading home



Passengers check tickets at Nanjing South Railway Station in Jiangsu province on Monday. Hordes of travelers are heading home as the Spring Festival holiday concludes, with Monday marking the peak of post-holiday rail traffic. SU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Guizhou eyes outsourcing sector role

By **YANG JUN** in Guiyang  
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As Warner Bros' animated film *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim* debuts globally, a company from Guizhou province has left its mark, having contributed keyframe animation, coloring and cinematography to the movie.

At the helm is Xu Chenyi, manager of Junzi Qianxing Technology Media. Xu, who was a former animation professional in Japan, runs the company in Guiyang, the provincial capital. He also serves as a member of the Guizhou Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

During the provincial legislative session in January, Xu submitted a proposal on promoting the development of Guizhou's service outsourcing industry.

"Guizhou has the potential to attract high-value outsourcing projects such as digital services and creative design," he said. "With the increasing specialization of inter-

national labor, developed countries are outsourcing non-core services to regions with lower costs and higher efficiency."

Guiyang has already seen growth in the industry. According to local authorities, service outsourcing execution in the city grew 16.58 percent year-on-year in 2024, with offshore outsourcing surging 59.18 percent and domestic outsourcing increasing 12.67 percent.

Beyond direct benefits, Xu said he believes that service outsourcing can accelerate industrial upgrades.

However, he also pointed out a major challenge: a shortage of skilled talent.

"In today's decentralized production landscape, geographical barriers are no longer an issue in joining the global industry. The real challenge lies in addressing the talent gap."

This year, Xu recommended "partnering with universities, research institutes and enterprises to optimize academic programs based on market demands, introduce globally

recognized certification courses and strengthen practical training."

He also suggested launching targeted recruitment initiatives in fields such as big data, artificial intelligence and business negotiations while offering competitive incentives.

Xu highlighted the collaboration between Guizhou's big data and service outsourcing sectors.

"In animation, for example, big data offers a wealth of image, audio and video resources that serve as valuable references for production," Xu said.

One key example is rendering — the process of converting 3D scenes into 2D images. This resource-intensive animation step often demands costly hardware.

"Cloud computing resources, developed through its data industry, offer a cost-effective solution. Cloud rendering platforms reduce production cycles and costs," Xu explained.

Liu Boqian contributed to this story.

## Games: Relay passes Harbin landmarks

From page 1

The torchbearers passed through landmarks such as the century-old Binzhou Railway Bridge, Zhaolin Park, which is known for its ice and snow art, the renowned Central Avenue, the Flood Control Memorial Tower and Nine Stations Park, where Harbin residents enjoy snow and ice leisure activities.

Torchbearer Liang Xiaosheng, a renowned writer and a professor at Beijing Language and Culture University, said: "I've been looking forward to this day since the invitation came. Relying on its abundant winter resources, Har-

bin has already become a popular tourism destination, and it is buzzing with more excitement as the Games are coming.

"Moreover, I hope that following this opportunity, cultural and tourism activities in the three northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang can be linked together, which will be very encouraging for us in Harbin," he added.

Yao Lijun, a successful entrepreneur who was born in Harbin, said he hoped his hometown will attract more investments and develop further after the Games.

"I felt quite honored to become a torchbearer for the Games," said Yao, president of Ningbo Konfoong

Materials International Co in Zhejiang province.

"I hope that entrepreneurs from all over the world can come to Heilongjiang to invest and make my hometown better."

The closing ceremony was held at Daoli district's Snowman Square, a popular cultural and tourism landmark.

The Games, which will open on Friday and run through Feb 14, will see the largest representation of Asian countries and regions in history, with 34 confirming participation.

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## Ties: Bigger potential underlined for China, EU

From page 1

Zhang, from the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said that cooperation potential between China and the EU spans three key areas: green transformation, digital cooperation and third-party market development.

The two economies could build a joint carbon-neutral laboratory focusing on clean technology collaboration, recognize each other's cross-border e-commerce standards, and build dialogue mechanisms for cooperation in frontier areas like data flow and artificial intelligence ethics, he said.

According to Zhou, from the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, China and the EU should focus in the short term on reviewing and strengthening existing supply chain cooperation, whether market-driven or government-promoted, by reducing trade barriers and increasing investment opportunities and the mobility of personnel.

Long-term strategies should aim for more effective market integration through reduced tariffs, increased consultation mechanisms and enhanced collaboration on innovation, he added.

Zhou also said that Sino-EU cooperation could extend beyond bilateral relations to include third-party market opportunities in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere.

"This expanded cooperation could help address global challenges while strengthening both parties' economic independence and meeting consumer demand in emerging technological sectors," he added.

Experts also said the US tariff hikes will not be good for anyone and will fail to achieve the so-called purpose of making America great again.

Ju Jiandong, chair professor at Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, said that if the US truly wants to maximize its own interests, it should not damage ties with its manufacturing suppliers.

"Don't go against the customers and don't go against the suppliers — these are the ABCs of economics," Ju said.

Business leaders also said they have an optimistic outlook on China-EU economic and trade cooperation.

Thomas Roemer, global head of the coatings and adhesives business entity of Covestro AG, a German polymer manufacturer, expressed strong support for fair, open and rule-based global trade.

"We will continue to invest in China to provide our customers with innovative and sustainable solutions and products," Roemer said.

Denis Depoux, global management director at German management consultancy Roland Berger, said the interdependence between the Chinese and EU economies remains significant.

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# China assumes UN Security Council presidency in 'turbulent period'

By **MINLU ZHANG** at the United Nations  
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China on Monday assumed the rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council for February in a "turbulent period," as its top envoy to the UN said that "there is no winner in a trade war."

China is "firmly opposed to" additional tariffs imposed by the United States, and "we do believe that this is in violation of WTO (World Trade Organization) rules. That's why China is filing a complaint with the WTO, and we may be forced to take countermeasures," said Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN.

"Let me also emphasize that there is no winner in a trade war. We do hope that the US will look at its own problems and find a solution that is beneficial not only to itself but also to the whole world," Fu told reporters during a news briefing marking the start of China's Security Council presidency. "Frankly speaking, I don't think that raising tariffs is beneficial to the US itself."

The US has levied a 10 percent tariff on Chinese imports under claims about fentanyl.

"China is one of the countries with the most stringent regulations on fentanyl. In fact, we have regulations on all fentanyl-related substances. China is the only country that puts the entire category of fentanyl-related substances under regulation," said Fu.

On May 1, 2019, China officially added all fentanyl-related substances to its list of controlled chemicals, which far exceeds the scope of 27 fentanyl-related substances under control under the UN Drug Convention.

"The US should approach it more from its own perspective. For instance, it should look at the demand side of fentanyl rather than shifting the blame onto others," said Fu.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday told Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino that Panama needs to "immediately take steps" to end "China's influence and control" over the Panama Canal.

The accusation against China is "totally false" and "blunt," said Fu.

“Let me also emphasize that there is no winner in a trade war. We do hope that the US will look at its own problems and find a solution that is beneficial not only to itself but also to the whole world.”

**Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN**

"China has not participated in the management or operation of the Panama Canal and has never interfered in canal affairs. China respects the sovereignty of the canal and recognizes the canal as a permanently neutral international gateway," he emphasized.

Panama on Sunday announced that it will not renew its participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

"I think that is a regrettable decision because the Belt and Road Initiative, first and foremost, is an economic initiative. The purpose is to build a platform for countries, especially those in the Global South, to engage in economic cooperation with each other. It has nothing to do with any political agenda, and the economic cooperation is mutually beneficial. We do hope that countries will see this initiative in the proper light," said Fu.

"The smear campaign launched by the US and some other Western countries against the Belt and Road Initiative is totally groundless," said the ambassador. "We will continue our efforts in the hope that the Global South can achieve better development and that China can provide assistance to all these developing countries."

Regarding the topic of artificial intelligence, particularly the recent rise of Chinese AI startup DeepSeek, Fu said his key takeaway is that "technological containment and technological

restrictions do not work."

"Never, ever underestimate the ingenuity of Chinese scientists and engineers," he said. "What we need is not more bans, more restrictions, or more closures. Look at Huawei, look at TikTok, now the DeepSeek — how many more do you want to ban?"

He then called for opening-up and promoting cooperation both on the technological level and on the political level between US and China.

"China and the US, being the two most advanced countries in terms of AI, have so much to cooperate on. As we always say, AI has profound ramifications in all aspects of human life," Fu said. "In my view, we cannot afford not to cooperate. We need to cooperate to ensure that the benefits of AI are available to all countries, particularly in the Global South," he said.

He called for cooperation on artificial intelligence between China and US to establish proper guardrails as AI develops.

"If we have fragmentation, it will only enhance the risks and reduce the benefits. I don't think that is in

anyone's interest, including the United States, and certainly not in the interest of the whole world," he said.

Fu said he believes that "China and the US, as the two biggest countries in the world, have so much in common and many areas where we can cooperate."

Just within the framework of the United Nations, there are global issues that require the concerted efforts of the entire international community, particularly countries like China and the United States, said Fu. Those include anti-terrorism efforts, narcotics control, non-proliferation and climate change.

"I do hope that despite all the rhetoric we've heard from American politicians, we can take a constructive — and I will emphasize — a professional approach to our work here in the United Nations. There are so many issues we can address together, and so much is at stake," he said.

Fu also announced that a high-level open debate, scheduled for Feb 18, will be chaired by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

## COVER

## Growth: Inbound trips increasing

From page 1

During the first half of 2024, inbound trips totaled 14.635 million, marking a staggering 152.7 percent year-on-year growth. Among these, 8.542 million entries, reflecting a 190.1 percent increase, were made under the visa-free policy.

Altogether, foreign travelers made 22.821 million inbound trips to China during the first three quarters of 2024. Of this total, 58.8 percent — or 13.427 million trips — were facilitated by the visa-free policy, based on NIA data calculations.

"Introducing favorable visa policies is a smart move by China," Sedlinger said. "Many countries have implemented similar measures to great effect. These policies act as crucial levers for developing local tourism industries and maximizing their potential."

While awareness of the changes may take time to spread, Sedlinger remains optimistic: "With all the cultural and natural attractions that China has to offer, I am convinced there is a huge, sustainable potential for further development, and this potential is now being unlocked by removing the visa hurdle."

China's visa-free policy is enhanced by its 240-hour visa-free transit option, which allows travelers from 54 countries — including Russia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada — to explore major transit hubs like Beijing and Shanghai for up to ten days without a visa, as they transit to a third country. This combined approach makes China especially attractive to foreign travelers looking for shorter or more spontaneous trips.

Amrita Banta, managing director of Agility Research & Strategy, shares a similar sentiment. She noted: "The visa-free scheme removes one of the significant barriers that discourage potential tourists. It shows China is genuinely interested in welcoming more international visitors, which will strengthen both economic and cultural ties."

Banta also highlighted the policy's diplomatic implications, suggesting that it serves as a strategic effort to boost international partnerships. "This move fosters not only tourism but also goodwill between China and the participating countries," she added. "It encourages deeper connections, smoother interactions, and provides the world with an unparalleled opportunity to explore China's rich culture and heritage."

For business travelers, the streamlined entry process simplifies logistics, enabling more efficient networking and meetings. Sedlinger highlighted the broader appeal, saying "These policies, combined with more convenient payment solutions, make China a more accessible and attractive destination for both leisure and business travelers."

Tom Harper, a lecturer specializing in China's international relations at the University of East London, noted, "The move will help facilitate exchanges between China and the world, making travel easier and more attractive."

However, Sedlinger pointed out that immediate growth might be tempered by limited direct flight capacity between Europe and China. Despite this, the long-term



**Clockwise from top:** Foreign tourists pose for a picture at the Forbidden City in Beijing on Dec 25. WANG XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY; The South Putuo Temple in Xiamen, Fujian province, attracts foreign tourists on Jan 12. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY; The local delicacy of boiled meat keeps the chills away on an ice-covered lake in Xilin Gol League in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Jan 19. WANG ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

potential remains immense, as more suitable travel products are developed and awareness grows.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the average daily expenditure of foreign tourists in China amounted to 3,459 yuan (\$477.32) in 2023, directly driving up consumption by more than 100 billion yuan.

"The return of international guests will have a distinct positive economic impact," Sedlinger explained. "Sectors such as hospitality, retail, and food and beverage will directly benefit, while the ripple effect will extend to other industries."

He also emphasized the policy's role in maintaining existing infrastructure, such as international flight connections, which support both inbound and outbound travel.

Banta concurred, adding, "By attracting more tourists, China is promoting high-quality exchanges

“  
It (the policy) underlines China's commitment to globalization and its role in fostering international partnerships.”

Tom Harper, a lecturer specializing in China's international relations at the University of East London

that can foster better connections and mutual understanding between nations."

The visa-free policy is also a testament to China's commitment to deepening global integration. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning has stated that the initiative aims to "facilitate high-quality development of Chinese and foreign personnel exchanges and high-level opening-up to the world."

Harper said: "The policy is very much in line with China's efforts to promote opening up, which has become imperative in recent years. It underlines China's commitment to globalization and its role in fostering international partnerships," he explained.

Jochum Haakma, chairman of the EU-China Business Association, applauded the policy for enhancing bilateral relations. "The increase in foreign entries is factual proof that

this works. It fits perfectly within China's broader opening-up drive," Haakma said. He believes that high-level exchanges across sectors — from education and research to tourism and trade — will foster mutual trust and understanding.

Experts are optimistic about the policy's potential to inspire reciprocal arrangements. Haakma advocated for greater reciprocity between China and participating countries, arguing that mutual visa-free travel could further enhance bilateral relations.

This sentiment is echoed by Sedlinger, who believes that easing visa restrictions is a benchmark for developing tourism industries worldwide. The policy not only benefits China but also provides a model for other nations to follow, fostering a more interconnected and accessible global tourism landscape.

The policy's impact is also felt on a personal level. Malte Poppensieker, a German national living in London with his Chinese wife and children, praised the change for making travel to China more convenient. Germany was among the first countries granted visa-free entry to China in December, 2023. For him, the change represents a step forward in simplifying international travel and moving away from restrictive reciprocal agreements.

"Visa processes are cumbersome and often a major obstacle," he said. "This new policy makes travel much easier, even without being part of a bilateral arrangement. I hope it becomes a permanent measure."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Poppensieker traveled to China two or three times a year to visit his in-laws. In the past, he found the visa process frustrating — plagued with paperwork, long waits at application centers, and additional trips to collect passports.

With the visa-free policy in place, his recent experience was starkly different. Flying into Chengdu, he was initially concerned about procedural hiccups, given the policy's novelty and limited international flights to the city. However, the process was "super smooth," requiring only a simple arrival form before breezing through customs, he said.

For Poppensieker and his family, the visa-free policy has made visits to China more accessible and stress-free. It's a change he hopes will continue, allowing for more frequent and hassle-free trips in the future.

Simone Trazzi, chief operating officer and executive director of UFI Group Asia Pacific Region, echoed this sentiment. Recently awarded the 2024 Shanghai Magnolia Silver Award, Trazzi credited the visa-free policy for enabling his parents-in-law to travel from Italy to attend the ceremony.

"This policy is incredibly beneficial for individuals coming to China, particularly to cities like Shanghai," Trazzi said. "It's an important initiative to attract more international tourists, as well as businesspeople and professionals traveling from Europe to visit companies, factories, or explore new opportunities. I believe this policy plays a crucial role in re-attracting international companies and revitalizing international business here."

Reflecting on his own journey, Trazzi shared, "I came to Shanghai in 2008 as a young manager, relocating with my wife for a job opportunity. Over the years, I've grown professionally, taking on greater responsibilities, and eventually becoming CEO for Asia Pacific at UFI Group. During this time, I've witnessed Shanghai's remarkable transformation — advancing in sustainability, becoming a global hub for commerce, logistics, and finance, and establishing itself as a center for innovation."

Trazzi highlighted Shanghai's ability to attract talent and foster development. "We've set up both our R&D center and production site here because we believe this is the right place to be. Shanghai offers unparalleled opportunities, and our company continues to invest in this vibrant city."

Pi Wei contributed to this story.

## Visits help enhance cultural understanding

By WANG MINGJIE in London

China's decision to implement a visa-free policy for Italian nationals has significantly simplified travel to the country, providing a welcome boost for tourism and business exchanges. Maria Azzolina, president of the Italy-China Institute, believes the policy will encourage more Italians to explore the vast opportunities China has to offer.

Since December, 2023, when China introduced visa-free access for five countries, including Italy, the list has expanded to encompass 38 countries and territories. This initiative has streamlined travel logistics, reducing both time and financial costs for travelers. Azzolina, who is also the managing director of Private Incentive — a company that facilitates Italian delegations to China — has visited Chi-

na ten times in the last year. She highlighted the policy's significant impact on removing one of the major obstacles for Italian tourists and business professionals.

"Travelers no longer have to go through the cumbersome visa process, which saves time and money," Azzolina said. "This is especially beneficial for businesses that need to act at the last minute. The visa-free policy eliminates a potential hurdle."

The policy has already begun reshaping travel patterns. Azzolina noted that the elimination of visa requirements has encouraged airlines to expand direct flights between Italy and China.

"From Milan alone, there are now 35 flights weekly to various Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Xi'an, and even lesser-known destinations like Zhengzhou," she said. "This

makes it much easier for Italian travelers to explore different regions of China. Previously, flights were limited mainly to Beijing and Shanghai, but now the variety of routes reflects increased interest and accessibility."

This enhanced connectivity has proved advantageous for both tourists and businesses. Azzolina's company specializes in organizing business delegations and cultural exchanges, and she emphasized how the visa-free policy facilitates the quick organization of such trips.

"For businesses, this policy is a game-changer," she explained. "Previously, the need to apply for a visa at short notice could disrupt plans. Now, Italian companies can send delegations more flexibly. While the business travel segment is still recovering, this policy will undoubtedly accelerate the process. It aligns perfectly with the fast-

paced nature of modern business."

Beyond business, Azzolina is optimistic about the policy's role in fostering cultural exchanges. Over the past two years, she has participated in numerous events in China organized by institutions such as Tsinghua University.

"China's open-door policy makes cultural and academic exchanges much easier," she said. "These exchanges are vital for strengthening mutual understanding between our nations."

Looking to the future, Azzolina hopes Italy will reciprocate by simplifying visa procedures for Chinese nationals. "We need a bilateral agreement," she said. "Chinese tourists face lengthy visa processes to visit Italy, which limits their ability to travel here. A reciprocal arrangement would benefit both countries immensely."

The visa-free policy has not only



Maria Azzolina (second from left), president of the Italy-China Institute, leads a delegation at the 1000 Miglia Experience China event in Guangzhou in November. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

facilitated travel but also fostered stronger business ties and cultural understanding between Italy and China. As Azzolina put it, "Going to

China is now as easy as traveling to any other country. This newfound accessibility is bound to strengthen relations in every sphere."

## WORLD

# EU stands firm as tariff threats loom

Brussels warns of retaliation against US 'hurtful' trade measures, calling for unity

BRUSSELS — The European Union insisted on Sunday it would retaliate "firmly" if US President Donald Trump imposed tariffs, as Brussels decried his sweeping measures against Canada, Mexico and China.

Brussels has until now said it hopes to avoid a trade conflict with Trump through negotiation.

However, Trump doubled down on Friday by saying he "absolutely" planned to target the EU in the future, after first slapping levies on the US's three largest trading partners.

"The European Union regrets the US decision to impose tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China," said a spokesman for the European Commission. "Tariffs create unnecessary economic disruption and drive inflation. They are hurtful to all sides."

The EU "would respond firmly to any trading partner that unfairly or arbitrarily imposes tariffs on EU goods", the spokesman added. "At this time, we are not aware of any additional tariffs being imposed on EU products."

The 27-nation bloc remains committed to low tariffs to "drive growth and economic stability within a strong, rules-based trading system", he said.

Trump has not hidden his enmity for the EU, accusing it of treating the US "very, very unfairly" on trade.

Tensions have also risen over his repeated insistence that he wants to take Greenland from EU member Denmark.

Back in 2018, during his first term, Trump imposed tariffs on European steel and aluminum exports, leading the EU to respond with its own higher duties.

As a result, Europe has been gaming out scenarios for months to ensure it is ready this time around, should Trump decide to unleash a new trade conflict with the bloc.

EU diplomats and officials insist they stand united and have the tools to respond to any Trump measures, but experts also point to likely cracks if he ups the pressure.

Economic powerhouse Germany

— facing a fraught election this month and a sluggish economy — has been squeamish over tariffs.

Trump is also likely to try to play the interests of the individual EU states off against each other.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani wrote on Sunday that a "tariff war does not help anybody", saying Italy has ideas to protect its companies and that Rome will be a mediator with Washington.

Spanish Economy Minister Carlos Cordero, in an interview on Monday with Spanish radio station RNE, said the EU must remain united to respond to Trump's threats to levy tariffs on its products.

The EU's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas warned on Monday that there are "no winners in trade wars" as the bloc met for defense talks in Brussels.

## Talks announced

Trump said he would talk on Monday with the leaders of Canada and Mexico, which have announced retaliatory tariffs of their own, but he downplayed expectations that they would change his mind.

Speaking to reporters after he flew back to Washington on Sunday evening from a weekend in Florida, Trump said he was "speaking with (Canadian) Prime Minister (Justin) Trudeau tomorrow morning, and I'm also speaking with Mexico tomorrow morning."

"I don't expect anything very dramatic," he added.

A fervent supporter of tariffs, Trump had always maintained that their effect would be borne by foreign exporters, without being passed on to US consumers, contradicting the opinion of a broad range of experts.

Earlier on Sunday, he acknowledged on his Truth Social network that US citizens may feel economic "pain" from his tariffs.

"Will there be some pain? Yes, maybe (and maybe not!)" Trump wrote. "But we will Make America Great Again, and it will all be worth the price that must be paid."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Long road home



Palestinians displaced by Israeli attacks continue their journey back north from the south on Sunday in Gaza City, moving along Al-Rashid Street on the coast. ASHRAF AMRA VIA GETTY IMAGES

## From dream to dazzle: Chinese New Year festival organizer's effort pays off

By GAO YANG in Toronto  
gaoyang@chinadailyusa.com

For Blur Wu, seeing the first major Chinese New Year fireworks show in Canada marked the realization of a decade-long effort.

That work came to fruition on Jan 25 as vibrant bursts of color illuminated the night sky during the Toronto Spring Festival at Nathan Phillips Square.

"This is the first time in Canadian history that a Chinese New Year fireworks show will light up a major government landmark," said Wu, the festival's founder. "The whole city will see it, and that's a powerful cultural statement."

"The journey to this glory, however, was anything but easy."

"For 10 years, I kept asking the city if we could celebrate Chinese New Year with fireworks. Every time, the answer was no," Wu said. "Maybe the time just wasn't right back then, or maybe they had never even considered it as a possibility."

The turning point came when Toronto's city government decided to relocate its traditional New Year's Eve fireworks away from Nathan Phillips Square, opening the door for multicultural celebrations to take place in the landmark location.

"One day, the city suddenly asked me: 'Do you still want to do fireworks for Chinese New Year? We're opening all the permits for you! That was the moment I knew I had to make it happen,'" Wu said.

The Toronto Spring Festival is not just about fireworks; it also includes Chinese cultural performances, electronic dance music with traditional elements, ice skating, interactive lion dancing and dressing up in

hanfu — traditional Chinese clothing of the Han ethnic group.

The festival features an ice-skating performance inspired by Chinese culture, blending traditional elements with a uniquely Canadian winter setting.

"We adapted our performances to the season — our ice show gives a whole new meaning to celebrating Chinese New Year," Wu said.

"People from all backgrounds love taking photos with the lion dancers and the God of Fortune. This proves that Chinese culture resonates far beyond the Chinese community."

Chinese New Year is profound for Chinese, Wu said, "but I want to do an event that everyone can celebrate together, no matter their background."

## Resonating with public

His inspiration came from Toronto's Caribbean Carnival, a large festival attended by more than 1 million people annually.

"I was surprised, because I thought, if the whole city could embrace Caribbean culture in that way, why couldn't we do the same with Chinese New Year?"

Wu said he believes that Chinese culture should not be confined to community gatherings but should be shared in a way that resonates with the broader public.

"For years, our celebrations were largely limited to Chinese communities. When you step outside, the city feels the same — it lacks the festive atmosphere that we associate with this time of year," he said.

"I wanted Chinese New Year in Toronto to be something you can see, feel and experience in the heart of the city."

Pulling off a large-scale outdoor winter festival in Canada's frigid climate was not easy.

"You have no idea how cold it is to set up an event like this; workers could only stay outside for short periods," Wu recounted. "Every step — setting up the stage, installing lights, testing equipment — took twice as long as in warmer seasons."

The financial burden was another obstacle. Wu originally envisioned incorporating ice sculptures and large-scale lantern displays, but budget constraints forced organizers to scale back.

"We simply ran out of time and funding, but this is just the first year," he said. "We're learning, and we'll build upon this in the future."

Looking ahead, Wu envisions a future where fireworks displays become a nationwide Chinese New Year tradition in Canada.

"Why not? We've seen how quickly other cultural festivals have grown in this city," he said. "We're just getting started. I hope that in a few years, cities across Canada will join us in celebrating with fireworks."

Wu said he envisions expanding the festival into a multiday Chinese New Year fair with parades, lantern displays and large-scale performances.

"We're not stopping here. This is just the beginning of something bigger," he said.

"Fireworks represent renewal and happiness. My dream is one day to see Chinese New Year fireworks light up cities around the world and be able to celebrate together."

"That would definitely be a wish come true," he said.

## Thousands rally against Germany's far right

BERLIN — Tens of thousands of people protested in Berlin on Sunday against plans to limit immigration proposed by opposition conservatives and supported by the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD.

Friedrich Merz, the conservatives' leader who is tipped to become Germany's next chancellor after a national election set for Feb 23, sponsored a draft bill with AfD support, breaking a taboo against cooperating with the far-right party.

About 160,000 gathered at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, next to the Bundestag lower house, according to the Berlin police. The protesters held banners reading "We are the firewall, no cooperation with the AfD" and "Merz, go home, shame on you!"

"(We want to) make as much noise as possible to call for the self-described 'democratic' parties to protect this democracy," protester Anna Schwarz, 34, told Agence France-Presse.

She was joining a political rally for the first time as "we can no longer avert our gaze, it's too serious," she added.

Merz, the CDU/CSU's candidate for chancellor, on Friday tried to push the immigration bill in the lower house but failed to secure a majority as some of the deputies from his party refused to support it.

His failure to endorse his draft dealt a blow to the authority of Merz, who had pushed for the law despite warnings from party colleagues that he risked being tarnished with the charge of voting alongside the far right.

## Joining forces

Mainstream German parties had previously joined forces to prevent the AfD, which is under surveillance by Germany's security services, from achieving legislative power, something they call a firewall against the far right.

The draft law would have restricted family reunifications for some refugees and called for more people to be refused entry at the border. Two-thirds of the public support stronger immigration rules, according to a recent poll.

Merz had argued that the bill was a necessary response to a series of high-profile killings in public spaces by people with an immigrant background.

However, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats and Greens said the proposals would not have stopped the attacks and violated European law.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Underground peril



Rescuers work at the site of a road collapse on Sunday in Yashio city, Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo, where a growing sinkhole swallowed a 74-year-old truck driver. Authorities suspect corroded sewer pipes caused the collapse. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP

## NYC venue treated to Beijing museum's trappings

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Clad in red and adorned with festive charms, visitors reveled in the joyous beat of drums and a lively lion dance at a Chinese New Year celebration at the China Institute in America — which shimmered in gold and red to reflect the grandeur of Prince Kung's Palace.

The palace, one of the finest and "best-preserved" princely residences of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), is a nationally protected cultural relic and also a first-class museum that is a "must-see" for travelers to China.

A collaboration between the museum in Beijing and the institute in Lower Manhattan brought the vibrant Chinese New Year atmosphere to New Yorkers on Sunday, as family and friends gathered to celebrate the Year of the Snake.

"The Prince Kung's Palace is adorned with intricate paintings, brick carvings, lattice windows and door lintels, all featuring bat motifs. In Chinese culture, bats symbolize "blessings" and good fortune from the Chinese character *fu*, signifying the arrival of prosperity."

Liu Hualin, the deputy director of the Prince Kung's Palace Museum, told visitors that the cultural symbolism has earned the palace the title of "Garden of a Thousand Blessings."



Lion dances kick off a Chinese New Year special event on Sunday at the China Institute in America in New York, which collaborated with the Prince Kung's Palace Museum in Beijing, as visitors joined traditional heritage workshops with family and friends to celebrate the Year of the Snake. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

"Today, we're bringing together traditional Chinese folk activities and the mansion's rich blessing culture to create a hands-on experience like no other, through traditional crafts and cultural activities," Liu said.

The Chinese character *fu* also holds deep significance during Chinese New Year. Under the theme Fortune's Arrival, Prince Kung's Palace Museum brought the ideographic symbol to life through interactive cultural experiences inspired by its historic furniture collection.

Visitors explored workshops such as woodblock printing of *fu*, intricate paper-cutting, and mortise-and-tenon joinery — an ancient technique that creates strong, nail-free connections through precisely interlocked wood structures, a hallmark of traditional palace architecture.

"We went to the wood-joinery workshop, which was great, and we got to take apart and put together and learn how they work," Dan Harlan of Brooklyn told China Daily. "They are also very small-child-friendly."

He said his wife is from China, and he wants their daughter to learn more Chinese and about Chinese culture.

"It's very important for us that he knows all about his heritage," said Michelle Jordan, originally from China. "We're teaching our son Mandarin and showing him a lot about Chinese culture."

Visitors also participated in other workshops showcasing the rich heritage, from shadow puppet-making and Chinese opera facial-painting to lacquer fan-crafting and herbal sachet-making, each reflecting deep-rooted traditions.

"It encourages you to go out and support. I didn't even know this institute was here, so I'm happy they had the lion dances, crafts and activities for both children and adults," said Zullie Rodriguez, who wore a red cloak adorned with golden snake patterns. She said she also enjoyed calligraphy writing and collecting stamps of Prince Kung's Palace architecture.

Rodriguez said she was born in the Year of the Snake, also known as the "little dragon".

"It feels like a transformation because of the snake," she said. "A good ending and a new beginning." The experience made a strong impression on her, and with China's new 240-hour visa-free transit policy, she said she is excited to travel there to explore the country.

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## PEOPLE

By ZHAO YIMENG

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As the sun casts a golden hue across the plains of a township in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region weeks before Chinese New Year, the sound of villagers singing and dancing fills the air during a local cultural festival, as seen on a short video posted across social media platforms.

These are not songs passed down through generations but new anthems written by the villagers, capturing their life stories and rural customs.

The woman who posted the videos of this movement is Lyu Li, who is committed to ensuring that her fellow villagers in Mukainur township, Ordos, have a voice and can express their spiritual needs by creating village anthems.

Lyu, head of the cultural center in the township, grew up in a farming family with a deep love for singing. She dreamed of becoming a host since she was young.

Life took her down a path rooted in the soil of her hometown. Between 2021 and 2022, she led the residents of 14 villages in composing 14 unique anthems, weaving together a tapestry of the township's collective soul.

However, the journey to this moment has been far from easy.

"Whenever I think of village songs, I think of my mother," Lyu said.

Her mother, denied the chance to attend school, found her own stage among the hills, singing mountain songs with other girls as they tended sheep or at special occasions. Those melodies became a source of joy and expression, moments when her mother felt free.

These memories inspired Lyu, guiding her as she pursued her work. While attending a cultural event in 2018, she witnessed villagers singing and dancing with unbridled enthusiasm.

"I realized how deeply the villagers yearned for cultural activities," she recalled. "It was like seeing children longing for toys." Soon after, she joined the cultural station, determined to address this yearning.

But balancing her dreams with the realities of life proved a challenging task. In 2019, while pregnant, she frequently attended rehearsals with the local amateur art troupe, dancing alongside them despite her growing womb.

By July 2020, however, life became overwhelming. With a six-month-old child, a rented home, and a grueling 300-kilometer weekly commute between the city she lived in and the villages, she struggled to keep going. The pressures of her new role as a local Party official exacerbated her difficulties, culminating in a serious gastric illness.

"I felt completely helpless," Lyu said, facing the choice of staying in



Residents gather together with the assistance of workers from the cultural center of Mukainur township to create a village song in Wulan Jilin village in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in September 2021. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Anthems weave together a collective soul

Villagers in Inner Mongolia autonomous region compose their life stories, rural customs and spiritual needs through new songs



Left: Lyu Li holds a lamb while in Wulan Jilin village. Right: Lyu (first from right) and cultural center workers help villages rehearse a performance in Suokou village in Ordos in September 2022.



An elderly villager writes lyrics down on the back of his hand during a choir performance in Xiaohu village in 2022.



I realized how deeply the villagers yearned for cultural activities."

Lyu Li, head of the cultural center in Mukainur township in Ordos, Inner Mongolia

the rural area to continue her career or returning to the city for domestic life.

"I had professional knowledge but couldn't overcome my struggles, let alone help others." After leaving

her child in her parents' care, Lyu sought treatment in Beijing only to find herself still mired in distress.

It was the villagers, with their songs and dances, who helped her heal. Singing alongside them, Lyu

said she found solace and clarity. "I realized, this is my home. I am a child of farmers," she said, adding that helping the villagers fulfilled her.

With renewed purpose, she returned to the township deter-

mined to uplift her community. Even as cultural funding dwindled, she organized events, ensuring the elderly in particular had opportunities to participate.

The turning point came when Li Li, then mayor of Ordos, praised Lyu's initiatives. He emphasized that no matter rural or urban, residents need this type of cultural expression, Lyu said.

Tasked with creating a village anthem, Lyu embarked on a journey of discovery. Door to door, she listened to village songs sung by elderly people, many of which were involved in the red culture during revolutionary times.

She heard stories of hardship and resilience, learning about the township's history, family legacies and personal triumphs.

"The town is full of touching stories and historical landmarks in urgent need of preservation. Many of the elderly who knew these stories have passed away," Lyu said.

One of her most cherished memories is of an elderly man who, nervous about forgetting the lyrics during a choir performance, scribbled them on the back of his hand. "It showed how much this meant to him," Lyu said.

The township's population reflects a semi-agricultural, semi-pastoral lifestyle. Aging and migration have left many elderly villagers in need of support and joy. Through village songs, Lyu found a way to address their needs.

In her spare time, she runs the WeChat account Laomingzi to share videos of the villagers performing, the local scenery and community stories. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with elderly participants glowing at the sight of themselves on their phones, reading praise from netizens.

Her efforts have also bridged cultural divides. Villagers now sing songs from other regions, like *Red Dates* in Shaanxi province's Nihegou village, connecting with communities far beyond the grasslands through social media.

"I never expected our village song by a group of villagers in Inner Mongolia to resonate so deeply with others. It's truly moving," said Wu Jiangwei, Party secretary of the village.

Through village anthems, farmers and herders have found a way to share their stories with the world. "More importantly, villagers have gained a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity. They have developed a new collective identity and are reshaping modern rural communities," she said.

Fang Biling contributed to this story.

## E-commerce offers hope to vulnerable groups

By LI PEIXUAN

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Many disabled residents in Huichang county, Jiangxi province have seen significant improvements in their quality of life — some earn millions while others secure stable jobs and start families. This progress can all be traced back to the efforts of one official.

In 2005, Wen Dongming, a commerce bureau official who knew that his hometown relatives struggled to sell their high-quality, low-priced navel oranges, decided to open a Taobao store to supplement their income. His first attempt was a resounding success and the oranges sold out, according to Wen.

"I felt relieved and proud at the time," Wen said. He then began helping more people sell their oranges online.

Noticing similar issues across the county, Wen reported to his leader and advocated for promoting the e-commerce industry in Huichang. As a result, he was assigned to manage this sector and became an official in the e-commerce office, according to Wen.

Wen and his team put in a lot of effort to promote online agricultural product sales, such as establishing spots for courier collection in villages to improve logistics efficiency and starting e-commerce talent training, said Wen.

To date, they have trained over 20,000 people through county-run



Farmers load boxes of freshly picked navel oranges onto a truck at a planting base in Huichang county in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, on Nov 1, 2021. PHOTOS BY ZHU HAIPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

courses and collaborations, with over 12,000 engaged in e-commerce-related work, according to Wen.

One day, Wen learned about Lan Shiyong, a disabled resident of Huichang struggling to run his Taobao store. Lan, a young man with polio at only 1.2 meters tall, grew up in a fragmented family where his father had poor eyesight and speech difficulties and his mother also suffered from polio, said Wen.

"His circumstances were very difficult. He needed to prop up an antenna outside to get the internet signal because his home was in a rural area, far from town, so I brought him to our e-commerce incubator center," Wen recalled.

Providing a bed and board, Wen and the office also offered Lan

extensive e-commerce training, computers and internet supply, connected him with local suppliers to buy goods at cost and gave him financial support of 12,800 yuan (\$1,750), all free of charge, said Wen.

Lan's business continued to grow. "Seeing his daily income grow from 100 yuan or 200 yuan to sometimes over 1,000 yuan made me relieved," Wen said.

As his business flourished, Lan met his beloved, got married, and had children, becoming a role model among the disabled youth in Huichang, according to Wen.

In 2019, due to Lan's e-commerce success and employment aspirations, Wen recommended him for a position at a township civil affairs office. Impressed by his diligence



People experience the joy of harvesting and picking oranges at a navel orange-themed ecological park in Liantang village in Huichang on Nov 14, 2021.

and capabilities, the township hired him as an office clerk, marking a new chapter in his life, Wen recalled.

"Witnessing our efforts lead more vulnerable groups to better lives fills me with happiness and motivates me to drive more similar projects," Wen said.

Another disadvantaged person Wen helped is Wu Weiyue, who faced numerous adversities, including dropping out of school, losing close family members, and surviving a devastating fire that left his family destitute. But now, his annual sales have reached three to four million yuan, according to Wen.

"A childhood friend suggested I try e-commerce because it allows me to work from home and avoid facing others if I don't want them to

see my fire scars," Wu says, quoted by the China News Service.

After teaching himself the basics, Wu set up a Taobao store, but the income barely covered his basic needs, according to Wen.

With Wen's assistance, Wu participated in numerous e-commerce training sessions organized by the e-commerce office. "In 2019 alone, his sales exceeded 10 million yuan," Wen noted.

Through the e-commerce office's support, Wu transformed from a disabled person living in poverty to an e-commerce entrepreneur, hiring many impoverished individuals, according to Wen.

"Seeing people with disabilities realize their self-worth through e-commerce entrepreneurship and



Wen Dongming

place and exert their strength in society," Wen said.

"Such a sense of value motivates me to continue supporting vulnerable groups in the future," Wen noted.

To this end, Wen and the office formulated, then implemented three types of e-commerce support policies for people with disabilities.

For those with some education like Lan Shiyong, the office offers entrepreneurial support through incubators and e-commerce centers, including free venues, lodging and assistance with sales issues.

For those with lower education levels in rural areas, the office provides training in basic skills like video producing, teaching them how to leverage networks to sell agricultural products and providing promotion of their online shops to increase their incomes.

For others unable to perform a full-time job, the office introduces Taobao customer service positions, helping them work a home-based part-time job.

# READ



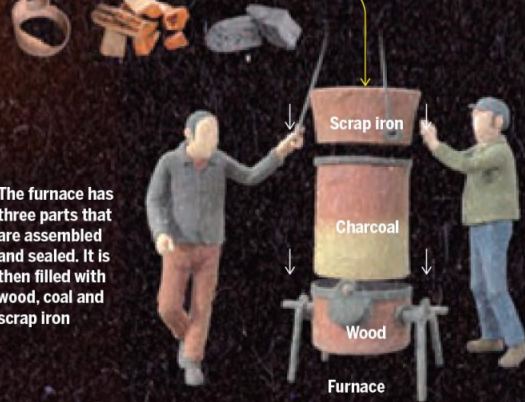
**Editor's Note:** Using a blend of words and visuals, this series explores unique communities and reveals the heart of China through food, architecture, craftsmanship, landscapes and traditions.

Five hundred years ago, blacksmiths in Nuanquan town, Yuxian county in Hebei province, found a way to celebrate Chinese New Year without firecrackers. As they threw cast iron against the walls, the sparks expanded like infinite luminous branches. This practice became part of China's cultural heritage.

## BACKSTAGE

### 01 SCRAP IRON AND FIRE

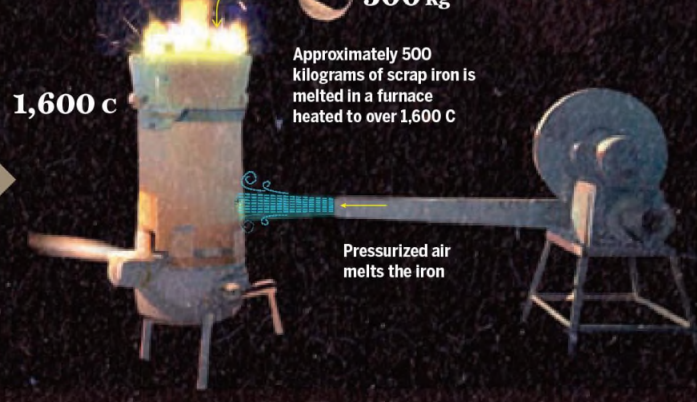
Scrap Iron + Wood + Charcoal



The furnace has three parts that are assembled and sealed. It is then filled with wood, coal and scrap iron

### 02 MELTING THE IRON

500 kg



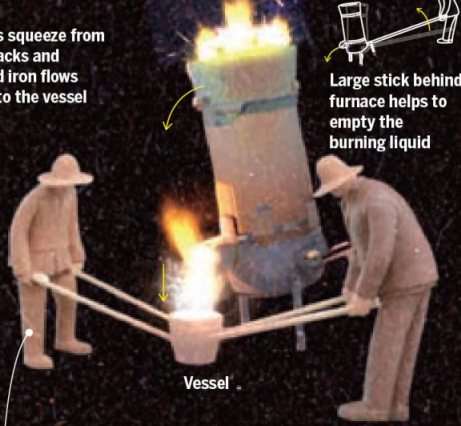
Approximately 500 kilograms of scrap iron is melted in a furnace heated to over 1,600 C

## BEHIND THE MOLTEN IRON FIREWORKS

# Game of the brave: *dashuhua*

### 03 MOLTEN IRON TO VESSEL

Sparks squeeze from the cracks and melted iron flows down to the vessel



Large stick behind furnace helps to empty the burning liquid

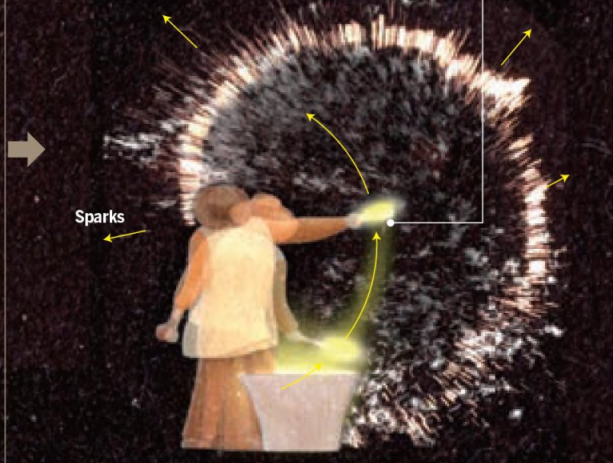
### 04 IRON ON STAGE

Two men carry the melted iron to the stage, where performers use specially crafted willow scoops



### 05 THROWING THE CAST IRON

Main performer throws the liquid iron onto the cold wall



Willow scoop

### 06 DASHUHUA

The sparks hit the wall creating a dazzling display of fireworks resembling a tree canopy

The molten iron is thrown against the wall at a height of approximately 8 meters. After hitting the cold wall, the sparks multiply generating a fire-flower effect.



A typical performance involves a team of 12, with four performers taking the stage



### 20 meters

The distance between the stage and the attendants to the show must be at least 20 meters

8 m

60° to 70°

## SAFETY GEAR

This outfit is an old folk custom. Wearing firefighter suits doesn't give the same experience



By ZHANG YU in Yuxian, Hebei  
zhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

**D**ashuhua, literally "striking iron flowers", is a traditional folk performance in Yuxian county, Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, that dazzles the spectators with a brilliant shower of sparks resembling a tree canopy. Yuxian, once an important military garrison during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), is dotted with fortresses for defense, endowing the folk art with creative features. *Dashuhua* dates back to an ancient industry that thrived here: weapon casting. In their daily practices, the blacksmiths found that molten iron splashed onto a cold wall burst into spectacular sparks. According to Yang Yingying, the commentator at the local Shuhua square for the performance, it evolved into a folk performance traditionally held during festivals to pray for peace and good harvests.

Recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage since May 2021, *dashuhua* traces its origin in Nuanquan town. Historically, it was performed on the 14th day of the Chinese New Year, heralding the Lantern Festival. Today, performances are also staged on weekends and during festivals to accommodate a growing number of tourists.

Wang De, a 61-year-old blacksmith and inheritor of the five-century-old folk art in Nuanquan, has been creating the spectacular display for over 40 years. Passing through generations, the art is a family tradition that Wang hopes will continue with his descendants. "It takes two hours to prepare for a performance. From setting up the iron furnace and igniting the fire to roasting the soaked willow scoop and gearing up with protective equipment, every step requires precision and care," Wang said.

A typical performance involves a team of 12, with four performers taking the stage. Approximately 500 kilograms of scrap iron is melted in a furnace heated to over 1,600 C, with sparks squeezing from the cracks and melted iron flowing down to the vessel. Two men carry the melted iron to the stage, where performers use specially crafted willow scoops to fling the liquid iron onto the cold wall, creating a dazzling display of sparks.

Wang and his fellow artists are outfitted in protective gear, including straw hats, inside-out sheepskin jackets, special gloves and leather shoes, to shield themselves from the intense heat.

Despite the precautions, injuries are common. Wang said that art demands more than technique — it calls for courage and strength to hurl the molten iron into the air and create stunning patterns.

The performance leaves the artists' clothes peppered with holes while the audience, standing safely 50 meters away, remains awestruck by the spectacle.

However, this breathtaking art form is not without its challenges. In Nuanquan, only four inheritors remain skilled in *dashuhua*. According to Wu Honglin, director of the local Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, the craft is at risk as younger generations move away. Local efforts are underway to promote the tradition through tourism, education and training programs.

"It takes two or three years to learn the game of the brave from scratch," Wu said. Yet inheritors such as Wang are committed to keeping this cultural treasure alive, sharing its beauty with audiences.

*Dashuhua* is not just a spectacle but a testament to the courage, skill and perseverance of its performers.

Guo Yanqi contributed to this story.

## LOCATION



*Dashuhua* has its origin in Nuanquan ancient town, in Yuxian county, Hebei province

The jacket is made of cotton and sheepskin so that it does not catch fire and burn

Source: Publicity Department of Yuxian county, Zhangjiakou city, Hebei province

GRAPHIC BY JORGE CORTES AND GUO YANQI / PHOTOS BY LI XINLEI / CHINA DAILY

# IMAGE



## 'Back baskets line' enlivens Chongqing

Subway connecting rural and urban areas a vibrant symbol of development

Chongqing Rail Transit Line 4 spans approximately 48.5 kilometers, connecting the central urban area with rural regions such as Shichuan town. Every morning, villagers carry bamboo baskets on their backs or pull small carts, taking the subway to the city to sell vegetables and fruits. Line 4 carries the hard work and hopes of countless farmers, conveying the inclusiveness and warm spirit of the city. This is the "line for back baskets", a distinctive and vibrant symbol of Southwest China's Chongqing in 2024.

The subway line accommodates briefcases as well as bamboo baskets and carrying poles. The "line for back baskets", full of vitality, is undoubtedly a heartwarming link between urban and rural areas, and a vivid example of urban-rural integrated development. Since May 2024, places such as air-raid shelters have been used as farmers' markets. Now, two and a half years after the line came into operation, the story has seen new changes — urban residents are taking this line to the rural areas to buy vegetables and fruits.

Especially on Shichuan town's market days, urban residents set out

early in the morning, taking the "line for back baskets" to the town to buy fresh vegetables. Gradually, a small vegetable market has spontaneously formed at the exit of Shichuan Station on Line 4. Not far away is the farmers' market of Shichuan town, bustling with urban consumers pushing carts and carrying shopping bags.

From farmers carrying baskets of vegetables into the city to consumers pushing carts to the countryside to buy produce, this is not only the best continuation of the basket story but also a vivid example of urban-rural integration, which benefits both farmers and urban residents. Sharing resources between urban and rural areas not only enriches the city's dining tables but also promotes the development of villages and towns along the rail transit line. This boosts agricultural performance, revitalizes rural areas and increases farmers' incomes, which injects new momentum into urban-rural integration, and achieves a true "two-way journey" between urban and rural areas.

LIU SONG AND ZHAO DANDAN/  
FOR CHINA DAILY



1. Farmers take Chongqing Rail Transit Line 4, referred to as the "line for back baskets", to the city to sell produce on Nov 2, 2024.  
2. Farmers begin entering the station with their back baskets full of vegetables and fruits at 6 am, the moment the gate of Shichuan Station on Line 4 opens on Nov 2, 2024.  
3. Urban residents travel to an air-raid shelter in Southwest China's Chongqing to buy fruits and vegetables on May 25, 2024.  
4. On her way to the market a farmer takes a brief rest on Chongqing Rail Transit Line 4 on Nov 17, 2024.  
5. Farmers carrying their produce take the first train at 6:30 am from Shichuan Station on Line 4 to sell their produce on Nov 2, 2024.  
6. Farmers enter the air-raid shelter with their tickets to sell their produce on July 6, 2024. The shelter has been open since May 2024 to help farmers.  
7. Urban residents buy the free-range chickens at the farmers' market in Shichuan town on Dec 18, 2024. LIU SONG/FOR CHINA DAILY



## TREND

By WANG XIN in Shanghai  
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With Chinese online literature becoming a "global cultural phenomenon", such creators and providers are also rapidly expanding overseas as carriers of culture and empowering writers from across the globe with "dream jobs".

Online literature is believed to have first gained a significant foothold in the Chinese mainland. Started domestically in the 1990s, Chinese online literature has been booming globally over the past two decades. Whether it be online releases or physical book publications, works in Mandarin only to be spontaneously translated by enthusiasts are a growing phenomenon.

The establishment of online reading platforms and the setup of overseas localization and development ecosystems have led to Chinese online literature continuously expanding its global influence. It is now described as one of the world's four major cultural phenomena, along with US Hollywood movies, Japanese animation and South Korean TV dramas.

Featuring magnificent imagination, fascinating plots and compelling stories, it is drawing a growing mass of readers from all over the world. According to a report released by the China Writers Association last April, Chinese online literature has captivated nearly 200 million active overseas users, 80 percent of whom are Generation Z readers — those born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s — from most countries and regions worldwide.

Another report released by the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association in December revealed that in 2023, China's online literature industry earned 4.35 billion yuan (\$597 million) from international markets, up 7 percent year-on-year.

"The charm of Chinese online literature is boundless. It transcends the limitations of traditional literature, breaking cultural barriers to resonate with readers around the world. As someone from faraway Italy, I've found deep emotional connection and inspiration in these works. Themes like the pursuit of dreams and the fight for justice are universal, uniting people across cultures," said Carlo Maria Rossi, a stage designer and multidisciplinary creative director from Rome and a big fan of the popular Chinese web novel *Lord of Mysteries*.

Currently, Chinese online literature is crossing more boundaries and exploring a new path of going global. With a focus on "global co-creation on intellectual property", online literature writers from different nations and regions are joining hands in fostering and developing their web novel IPs, creating a new wave of the globalization of literature while promoting cultural understanding and exchanges.

### Going global

The first step Chinese online literature took in its global quest dates back to 2001, when works produced by the Chinese Magic Fantasy Union, predecessor of China's online literature platform Qidian, started attracting overseas Chinese-speaking fans. Four years later, Chinese online literature began overseas exploration regarding publication authorizations for digital and print copyrights.

In 2017, WebNovel, a Chinese platform run by Yuewen Group, was launched, marking a milestone in the overseas expansion of Chinese online literature. As an overseas portal offering massive amounts of translated Chinese web novels, it provided international readers with easier and more comprehensive access to quality online novels from China.

Shortly after the launch of the platform, in 2018, WebNovel also began allowing overseas users to create their own works on the platform. Most of their works were observed to be heavily influenced and informed by the worldviews and structure of Chinese online literature.

Since 2020, the platform put these creators more at the forefront of the phenomenon. With increasing investment and

# Web novelist turns into 'dream job' for many

Chinese online literature captivates nearly 200 million active overseas users, 80 percent of whom are Gen Z readers



Above: Web novelists gather in Shanghai for the third Shanghai International Online Literature Week in December.

Left: Cover of magic fantasy *Shadow Slave* by Russian writer Barisbi Alborov.

Right: Cover of werewolf fantasy romance *Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted* by US web novelist Lenaleia.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"This is my dream job, definitely. As a novelist, I am in full control of my story. I am my own boss, and no one is telling me what I must write. My success or failure only depends on me, which is a great privilege in the creative professional field."

Barisbi Alborov, Russian writer whose online pen name is Guiltythree



By the end of November, the platform had published about 6,000 translated novels, including over 2,000 AI-translated works in 2024. Also, it has cultivated around 449,000 overseas web novelists and published some 680,000 overseas original titles, attracting some 300 million visitors from over 200 countries and regions, said Yuewen Group.

### Dream job

The rapid expansion of online literature has empowered writers from across the globe, and the web novelist position has emerged as a new profession. A large number of writers see this occupation as their "dream job", which allows them to gain considerable revenue, improve their living, make friends from different cultures, and even change their lives while fulfilling their

writing dreams at the same time.

JessicaKaye911, a 45-year-old Pakistani web novelist, excitedly finished her first solo trip to China in December, participating in the third Shanghai International Online Literature Week held in the city. After beginning to write web novels in May, her romance work *Mr President: You Are the Daddy of My Triplets*, claimed gold at the WSA in 2024, which attracted a record of about 140,000 entries competing for the prizes.

Being a math lecturer, JessicaKaye911 enjoys unleashing her wild imagination via writing web novels. In her stories, she puts a core emphasis on creating "empowered" and resilient female leads, instead of soft and weak "crybabies" as depicted in many movies or dramas.

"I like thinking about different plots, and it is amazing for me to be able to type them down. My husband has become my biggest fan, and might have changed himself a little as well — as he reads about the story and the female leads. There is no doubt this is the dream job and dream life for me," she said.

Barisbi Alborov, a 35-year-old Russian writer under the online pen name Guiltythree, received the award of High Potential Overseas IP for *Shadow Slave* during the week. Formerly a game writer and one of the most popular writers on WebNovel, he valued the "creative independence" as a web novelist, and the friendships he nurtured with readers from all over the world.

"This is my dream job, definitely. As a novelist, I am in full control of my story. I am my own boss, and no one is telling me what I must write. My success or failure only depends on me, which is a great privilege in the creative professional field. Another harvest I've reaped is the community that was built around my story with thousands of people basically from every country imaginable. Some of them have become my friends, and amazing things are being created by the collective and creative power of these people. That has enriched my life very much," he said.

US web novelist Lenaleia, a 39-year-old mom, has been a bookworm and writing since she was young. Her unfinished werewolf fantasy romance *Tangled in Moonlight: Unshifted* has drawn massive readers since it launched in April. She shared during the week that she always feels surprised to receive diverse messages from fans, and enjoys making friends in the unique "community of writers from across the world" that the platform germinates.

"(Writing web novels) has brought me freedom. I've been married for 13 years and I have six children to tend to. My husband for that entire time has been the person supporting our huge family and he has worked very, very hard. But now I am also able to support our family and let him be home with his children more. It's changed our entire lives," she said.

She added that being a web novelist can be an "option" for mothers in particular with children like her in many countries. "Many of us are home with children and we want to help bring in money in this day and age. I've been telling people I make money from home (by writing web novels) and you can do it too. And a lot of them are very, very interested. For many women, it is also life-changing even in smaller amounts of money, because it's an option when no other options exist," she said.

Currently, female writers account for 64 percent of the total in overseas web novel creation. The US, the Philippines, India, Indonesia and Nigeria stand as nations producing the most web novelists, and Gen Z writers make up nearly 70 percent of all the writers, said Yuewen Group.

"Everything is becoming better. It (writing web novels) doesn't feel like working. I was always told growing up that if you do what you love, it won't ever feel like work and that is absolutely true. Like now that I'm doing what I love, it doesn't feel like work at all," she added.

## Online lit helps spread China's culture through beauty of written word

By WANG XIN in Shanghai

As Chinese online literature gains increasing popularity worldwide, web novels have become a window for overseas audiences to know about China and learn about the nation's culture.

Among the 6,000 translated works on WebNovel by last November, nine titles have garnered over 100 million views, including *Library of Heaven's Path*, a Chinese fantasy web novel written by Yang Hanliang under the pen name of Heng Sao Tian Ya.

The 41-year-old writer is one of the best-selling creators on Yuewen Group's platforms, both domestically and internationally. Telling an incredible story about the ties between teachers and students with a focus on the Chinese tradition of respect for educators, *Library of Heaven's Path* has long been standing at the top of the charts on online literature platforms in many countries, and has been translated into more than 10 languages so far.

Moreover, it has inspired a large number of overseas readers to learn about traditional Chinese culture and even start creating their own web novels — like post-00 full-time writer Icutecat from Uganda.

Yang never expected his stories would be so popular when he started writing web novels on online platforms around 2008. Before typing out the first chapter of *Library of Heaven's Path*, Yang had finished several web novels and published dozens of physical books in Taiwan.

In November 2016, Yang was a physical education teacher at a remote senior high school in Delingha, Qinghai province. One day he saw a movie showing teachers doing so much for students, but the teachers were still not understood. It inspired Yang to construct a world wherein teachers could have a full grasp of students' abilities, teach them in accordance with their aptitude, and students must follow teachers' instructions.

"It is more like making a dream for myself at first, with no ambitious goals," Yang recalled.



Yang Hanliang (left) talks with a reader at an event in China in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The production of the 6.4 million-word web novel spanned three years until September 2019. Yang spent six to eight hours writing each day on average to ensure a daily update of a 6,000-character chapter of the story.

"It is challenging to satisfy all the readers though. I enjoy a lot thinking about the plot and telling the story. Writing web novels is a job without weekends or breaks. I was busy with the daily chapter update outside the delivery room even when my wife was giving birth to my son. But it is very rewarding, as it has greatly changed my life, not only offering me more income, but also a sense of accomplishment. I never thought my story could captivate overseas audiences," he said.

*Library of Heaven's Path* has become an instant hit on the establishment of the WebNovel platform in 2017, with its total views exceeding 180 million to date. WebNovel was founded by Chinese tech giant Tencent Holdings that year. Over the past two years, Yang has participated in several content-sharing events in Europe, includ-

ing Poland, France and the United Kingdom, drawing readers from across the continent to attend. Yang said he was particularly impressed by a French reader, who loves and shares the story with his son.

Yang said that the story's pure emotions as well as the relaxing, exciting and humorous plots are a universal language transcending national and cultural boundaries. Also, he saw an increasing number of audiences become interested and curious about China and its culture, which helped inspire them to learn more about Chinese web novels.

With Chinese online literature pursuing more high quality output, Yang is carrying on and deepening his own explorations too. Currently working on a sequel to *Library of Heaven's Path*, he aims to present a growing protagonist and a story about breaking the limits and living one's own life.

"Many people have dreamed of writing, and I do advise them to try it and stick with it. Also, I hope more readers can learn about China, like China and visit China," he said.

## BIZ LIFE

By LIU YUKUN

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When Lin Yating sought to enter renowned jewelry outlet Caibai recently, she was taken aback by the bustling crowd despite knowing fully well that the market for gold jewelry would be booming in the run-up to the Chinese New Year.

Lin, who was planning to purchase a gold snake bracelet for her mother to "ward off evil" during the Year of the Snake, found herself unable to reach the counter even after 10 minutes of pushing through the throng.

To be sure, Chinese consumers' fervor for purchasing gold jewelry for holidays has shown no sign of waning.

The tradition of buying gold jewelry for luck runs deep, despite 40 record-breaking price surges and a nearly 30 percent overall increase in gold prices last year.

This has prompted several consumers to reinforce their belief in the investment potential of the age-old safe haven asset. In a landscape marked by volatile real estate and stock markets, investing in gold has emerged as a steadfast asset allocation choice.

Online sales have also been buzzing.

Alibaba's e-commerce platform Taobao said jewelry transactions have soared since December, with sales of Chinese zodiac-themed gold jewelry, lucky charm-laden accessories, and red-themed jewelry all doubling. The younger generation has eagerly snapped up Chinese New Year-themed jewelry, aiming to lock in their dose of good fortune for the coming year.

The World Gold Council forecasts a rebound in China's gold jewelry demand in the fourth quarter, attributed in part to retailers restocking for the Spring Festival holiday that began at the end of January.

Other factors include an increase in gold use for weddings — with the peak season for weddings typically in the fourth quarter — and stimulus policies driving consumer spending.

Recent data from Taobao further support this trend.

Over a million pieces of Chinese zodiac-themed lucky charm-laden gold beads — which feature special designs of *San He Shu Xiang* believed by many consumers to double one's luck when paired with two other zodiac signs — have been sold this year.

Chow Tai Fook, a prominent jewelry brand, saw its new snake-themed zodiac pendant specially designed for the Year of the Snake garner over 12,000 searches in a single day, becoming one of the top-selling Chinese zodiac-themed items.

Yan Qi, in charge of operations of the jewelry sector at Taobao, said: "Since November, we have observed a continuous surge in enthusiasm among Taobao users for Chinese New Year's jewelry. Since 2025



Gold bracelets are displayed at a store in Huaian, Jiangsu province, on Jan 5. ZHOU CHANGGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Yellow gleams as asset of choice

Amid volatile real estate and stock markets, investing in gold emerges as safe bet in investment allocation

marks the Year of the Snake, searches and transactions for snake-themed gold jewelry have more than tripled in December compared to the previous month, while searches for red-themed New Year jewelry have grown nearly 100 percent and transactions have increased by over 60 percent year-on-year."

Liu Yan, vice-president of Yuyuan Jewelry and Fashion Group, the parent company of renowned gold brand Lao Miao, said since gold prices have risen this year, increased design and retail costs may lead some consumers to delay purchases or opt for lower-weight gold products.

However, the record-high gold prices have also attracted investment-conscious consumers seeking value appreciation, resulting in a high demand for heavier investment gold bars.

"Gold is not only a tool for storing value and investment, but also part of our pursuit of a fashionable lifestyle. As more consumers recognize the unique value of gold, demand for gold jewelry is gradually shifting toward fashion and personalized design," he said.

To better connect with consumers, activities such as flash sales and collaborations with intellectual properties are being held offline, while online platforms are utilizing live-streaming for product promotion.

## 10.26 metric tons

increase in the People's Bank of China's gold reserves in December, according to the World Gold Council

According to the WGC, as of the end of November, gold prices denominated in the Chinese renminbi represented by Shanghai Gold Exchange Au9999 have surged by 28 percent, making it the best-performing local asset this year.

Li Yuefeng, a researcher at the Beijing Gold Economy Development Research Center, said that escalating conflicts in the Middle East, the US election and expectations of loose monetary policies worldwide have propelled a surge in gold demand as a safe-haven asset.

Wang Lixin, regional CEO of WGC (China), said that the inflow of Western gold exchange-traded funds and the US Federal Reserve's interest rate cuts have contributed to declining interest rates, further propelling the performance of gold.

Global central banks' gold purchases have also been one of the drivers behind the rise in gold prices.

According to data from the WGC, global central bank net purchases of gold reached 60 metric tons in

## 2,279.6 metric tons

total reserves of the central bank as of December, according to the WGC

October, hitting a new high for the year. Their net purchase of gold was 53 tons in November. Poland increased its gold holdings by 21 tons in November, securing the top spot on the global gold purchase list for the month. Globally, nine central banks increased their gold holdings by 1 ton or more.

China's central bank, the People's Bank of China, increased its gold reserves by 10.26 tons in December, pushing its total reserves to 2,279.6 tons, WGC statistics show.

WGC predicts that the trend of central bank gold buying is expected to continue this year and may surpass the level of 500 tons, continuing to have a positive impact on overall gold performance.

Fluctuations in gold prices have led to diverse trends in the consumption of various gold products.

On the one hand, robust gold prices have dampened the purchasing power of gold jewelry consumers. Gold jewelry demand in the Chinese market during the first three

quarters amounted to 373 tons, marking the weakest performance for this period since 2010. Conversely, the decline in yields from bank savings and heightened stock market volatility have spurred investments in gold bars and coins, driving demand to an 11-year high of 253 tons. Concurrently, total holdings of gold ETFs in the Chinese market surged by 30 tons.

The WGC noted that gold demand dynamics in the Chinese market are influenced not only by prices but also by the impact of weddings and holidays. Anticipating the fourth quarter as the peak wedding season, the council has estimated a rise in demand for wedding jewelry.

Furthermore, with retailers replenishing stocks ahead of the Spring Festival holiday, there has been seasonal support for gold jewelry demand in the fourth quarter. The WGC also anticipates that recent government measures aimed at boosting the economy will further drive gold jewelry consumption in the future.

Deng Ronghua, general manager of Chow Tai King Jewelry, echoed the sentiment. "Driven by the Spring Festival, our franchisees stocked up more in the fourth quarter than in the preceding three quarters, albeit experiencing a slight decline compared to the same peri-

od last year due to high gold prices that also led to dampened consumption in the first three quarters.

"For the same period last year, sales were dominated by larger gold jewelry pieces, but now lighter products are selling better, with an average customer spend of around 2,000 to 3,000 yuan. Sales of gold bars have also notably increased this year, with some major clients purchasing hundreds of grams at a time. Additionally, businesses engaged in gold recycling have seen favorable outcomes," Deng said.

Despite the impact of gold prices leading to relatively subdued overall gold jewelry consumption this year, Deng said Chow Tai King, targeting customers in fourth- and fifth-tier cities, hasn't been significantly affected. While top-tier companies are closing stores, Deng said that it has opened 150 new stores, with 30 of these managed entirely by newcomers to the industry.

"We are also actively expanding our online sales. Online platforms have great potential, with our livestreams attracting around 2,000 viewers online simultaneously, after less than a year of development," he said.

"Even with changes in gold prices, consumer spending in various gift-giving and marriage scenarios remains stable," Wang of WGC added.

## Sales of luxury gold products show sustained upswing despite headwinds

By LIU YUKUN

Luxury gold products have shown remarkable resilience despite mainstream jewelry sales being hit following 40 record-breaking surges in gold prices, with spikes going up to 30 percent.

Laopu Gold Co Ltd's share price skyrocketed by over 70 percent on its inaugural trading day at the Hong Kong stock exchange in June.

It is estimated that the company's revenue will surge by 136 percent year-on-year to 7.5 billion yuan (\$1 billion) in 2024, with net profits increasing by 187 percent to 1.2 billion yuan, according to investment bank China International Capital Corp Ltd (CICC).

CICC said although the rapid rise in gold prices affected mainstream jewelry sales last year, sales of high-end gold products remained resilient.

It remains optimistic about the growth prospects of Laopu Gold this year and has raised its net profit forecasts for the current and next year by 15 percent and 18 percent, to 1.2 billion and 1.7 billion yuan, respectively.

In contrast, the broader scenario for gold consumption is less optimistic.

Data from the World Gold Council indicate that while there was a 19 percent quarterly rebound in gold jewelry demand in the Chinese market during the third quarter driven by seasonal trends, the quarterly figure



Left: Consumers gather at a jewelry store in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Jan 20. ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: A saleswoman (first from right) answers consumer queries at a store in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, in December. LI JIANLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

declined 34 percent compared to the same period in 2023, and dropped by 36 percent compared to the 10-year average.

From the year's onset until now, total gold jewelry demand in China has been 373 tons, marking a decrease of 23 percent year-on-year and representing the weakest performance for this period since 2010.

Gold retailers are finding themselves navigating turbulent waters.

Leading jewelry enterprise Chow Tai Fook reported a 44.4 percent year-on-year drop in net profits to HK\$2.53 billion (\$324.8 million) in

“The outlook for high-end gold luxury goods has surpassed expectations, as consumers exhibit a willingness to invest...”

Yi Dingyi, analyst with Topsperity Securities

its interim results. During the reporting period (April to September), the number of retail outlets decreased by 239 to 6,968.

Chow Tai Fook attributed the impact of gold consumption demand to the sustained macroeconomic influence on consumer behavior and persistently high gold prices.

These challenges are not confined to Chow Tai Fook alone.

Chow Sang Sang's interim report showed a 36 percent year-on-year profit decline to HK\$526 million for the reporting period (January to June). Lukfook Jewellery and Lao

Feng Xiang similarly experienced varying degrees of declines in profit.

In the prevailing environment of lower profits for mainstream products, Laopu Gold has taken a bold approach by implementing a series of high-cost strategies: it is only operating in upscale shopping centers, it has not established franchise stores, and has set its costs at over 1,000 yuan per gram.

Typically, traditional top-tier brands like Chow Tai Fook price their products at around 700 yuan per gram.

Laopu Gold underscores the

significance of selecting high-end store locations to attract a high net-worth clientele, while premium store environments serve to bolster brand allure.

Topsperity Securities analyst Yi Dingyi said, "The outlook for high-end gold luxury goods has surpassed expectations, as consumers exhibit a willingness to invest in innovative designs and traditional culture-embedded products."

Highlighting Laopu Gold's profits last year, Yi said the company's early promotion of the concept of "Heritage Gold" — embedding traditional Chinese gold-making techniques and styles — and innovative products like "gold inlaid with diamonds", has effectively blended traditional Chinese culture into its offerings and garnered attention from high net-worth individuals.

The spending power of China's high net-worth individuals is truly formidable.

Laopu Gold's prospectus reveals that products priced between 10,000 and 50,000 yuan contribute to 65 percent of revenue, while those priced over 50,000 yuan account for 24.7 percent of revenue, with 5.7 percent derived from products exceeding 250,000 yuan each.

A recent report by Kaiyuan Securities highlighted that China's high-end jewelry market has exceeded 60 billion yuan to date, and that there is vast growth potential for high-end gold products.

## TRAVEL

# A MILLION YEARS OF HUMAN HISTORY IN KENYAN MAJESTY

From ancient stone tools to volcanic landscapes, explore the beautiful natural and cultural heritage that defines the Olorgesailie site

By EDITH MUTETHYA in Nairobi, Kenya  
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Located 90 kilometers southwest of Kenya's capital Nairobi lies the Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site, dubbed the world's "factory of stone tools". This title stems from the large concentration of ancient tools, specifically hand axes, unearthed at the site, which date back millions of years.

Spanning an area of 50 hectares in the Great Rift Valley, between the extinct volcanoes of Mount Olorgesailie and Mount Oldonyo Esakut, the site is a memorable experience, rich in historical significance, and draws archaeologists, paleontologists, geologists, and visitors with a passion for human evolution.

Olorgesailie is a trove of in situ prehistoric materials, including hand axes, armor stones, flakes, and bones from extinct species of hippopotamus and elephant, deposited more than a million years ago.

Robert Opuka from the National Museums of Kenya based at Olorgesailie says the site has been revealing prehistoric materials since 1919, when British geologist John Walter Gregory discovered hand axes near Mount Olorgesailie while exploring for minerals in East Africa.

In the 1940s, British-Kenyan paleoanthropologists Louis and Mary Leakey conducted the first excavations at the main site following Gregory's notes, unearthing more hand axes. Later, in the 1960s, South African archaeologist Glynn Isaac expanded research through further excavations and geological studies as part of his dissertation.

Opuka says the artifacts found at Olorgesailie are associated with *Homo erectus*, an early human ancestor, based on sedimentary dating.

"Isaac carried out a lot of archaeological work around understanding the behavior of *Homo erectus* and the surrounding environment. He also produced a lot of documentation in regard to *Homo erectus* in Olorgesailie, Turkana, and the Omo River in Ethiopia," he said.

After Isaac's death in 1985, the site remained largely dormant until the late 1980s, when Richard Potts, director of the Human Origins Program at the Smithsonian Institution in California, took up the work, Opuka says.

Since then, the institution has partnered with the National Museums of Kenya to conduct excavations and geological studies.

Opuka says research into the ways early hominins used the land and responded to environmental changes takes place every year in July and August (Kenya's winter), when weather conditions are more favorable.

"Through collaboration with other private institutions and the United States government, the Smithsonian Institution mobilizes funds to support research work," he adds.

Although many artifacts and faunal remains have been unearthed at the Olorgesailie Basin since 1942, only one hominin remain — a frontal bone — was discovered in situ in 2003, raising questions about where exactly early humans lived.

According to an article published on the Smithsonian Institution's Human Origins Program website, Potts and his team believe they may have lived in the highlands around Mount Olorgesailie, because no hominin remains have been found in lowland sediments.

"The research is ongoing and we may not know what the next big surprise will be," Opuka says. "We have a lot of expectations."

The site is popular with schools and institutions, especially scientists and archaeologists, as well as with people interested in learning about human evolution.

"Our peak season is July and August, when many schools organize student visits for practical learning, as opposed to other months when temperatures are high," he says.

The site is believed to have been a lake about 180,000 years ago. However, because of volcanic activity, the lake has since disappeared. Over time, rain and wind eroded the sediment and buried traces of animal and human activity deep beneath the surface.

Several sites used for butchering animals, marked by a concentration of hand axes, other stone tools, and bone fragments of extinct animals deposited more than 100,000 years ago have been discovered.

Opuka says the lake once attracted wild animals, including extinct species of hippo, zebra, elephant, baboon, and giraffe.

Fossils indicate that large baboons and zebras were especially abundant in Olorgesailie between 1 million and 700,000 years ago. Many of these species probably became extinct around 300,000 years ago.

To protect the archaeological and paleontological materials from both human interference and natural degradation, a raised wooden platform has been constructed. This allows visitors to explore the site without disturbing the remains.

## 'Incredible visit'

Christina White, a distant cousin of Mary Leakey, visited the Olorgesailie site on Jan 10 and described it as "incredible", calling the sheer number of hand axes found there extraordinary.

"You don't see that anywhere else. What's lovely to see is that all the axes, whether they come from Europe, China, probably anywhere, are roughly the same shape and are made roughly the same way, with different stones, but mainly, flint," she says.

White adds that while at other archaeological sites, it is presumed that early humans traded stone tools and took them with them as they traveled, it appears that at Olorgesailie, they discarded the tools they made.

"I know they are heavy, so you wouldn't want to carry too many, but that's unusual in itself. It's like they may have killed one animal and then dropped them, and then quickly made another when they had to kill another animal. So, it's fascinating," she says.



From top: An excavation site at Olorgesailie reveals stone artifacts found in the sand and silt.

PHOTOS BY ZHANG MINGXIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

A National Museums of Kenya staff member explains the research at Olorgesailie.

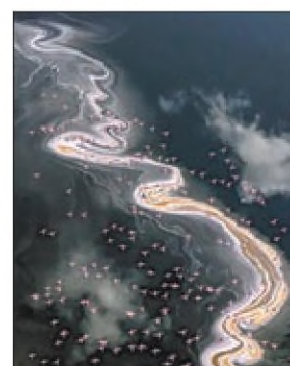
Fossilized hyena bones, including a skull, leg bones and ribs, found at Olorgesailie.

Left: A hand axe from Olorgesailie showcases stone toolmaking skills of early humans.



A Maasai herder leads his livestock in search of grazing land in Ilangeruani village, near Lake Magadi, Kenya, in 2022.

BRIAN INGANGA / AP



A flock of flamingos flies over Lake Magadi in Kenya.

JIN GONG / SOLENT NEWS

Apart from her interest in seeing the tools, White also speaks about imagining how *Homo erectus* behaved and lived while walking around the site, how the area would have looked when the lake existed and there were rivers flowing into it, as well as the thought that she may well have been walking on buried artifacts.

One of the excavation sites produced a humerus, or upper arm bone, of an extinct elephant species that was more closely related to the Indian elephant than to the modern African elephant. The bone is larger than that of the modern African elephant.

Specimens from Olorgesailie are among the last known bones of this species, which existed nearly 3 million years ago and became extinct about 600,000 years ago.

White says it was interesting to learn that the extinct elephant was more closely related to the Asian elephant, and that it was significantly taller and had smaller ears, much like modern Asian elephants.

She speculates that African elephants may have evolved from their Asian counterparts, developing larger ears to help regulate body temperature. Additionally, they may have become smaller in size because of the extreme heat of the region.

Regarding the hippo fossils, White says that while it remains unclear whether they were killed or died naturally, it is possible that early humans used their skins to make baskets or fishing implements.

White, who was visiting Kenya for two weeks to attend the 60th wedding anniversary of her Nairobi-resident uncle, said that he had encouraged her to visit Olorgesailie. She had previously visited Olduvai Gorge, a paleo-anthropological site in the eastern Serengeti Plain of northern Tanzania, which is famous for the discoveries of hominin fossils by Louis and Mary Leakey.

White speaks about visiting Mary Leakey when she was in her 20s. She said that Leakey, who was in her 70s at the time, had a deep influence on her life.

She also expressed her desire for a story about the Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site to be published in a widely read international magazine dedicated to archaeology, such as *Current Archaeology* or *World Archaeology*, to raise global awareness of the site's significance.

## Bringing the story to life

Danson Taris, an Olorgesailie native who has worked as a tour guide at the site for the past seven years, considers himself fortunate to be able to bring the story of human evolution — something he first learned about in school — to life.

"It has been an interesting experience, learning from scientists and professors who come to do research from the site. I have also expanded my network of friends," he said.

Although Taris was unable to pursue higher education after high school, he said that securing a job at the site has been life-changing.

In addition to ancient remains and interacting with the environment once inhabited by early hominins, visitors to Olorgesailie can participate in activities like mountain hiking, baboon watching, and visiting nearby Lake Magadi, 45 kilometers away.

The site partners with the Olorgesailie Conservancy to facilitate mountain hiking.

Climbing Mount Olorgesailie, which rises to a height of 1,760 meters, takes about three hours up and another three down. Best begun at 5 or 6 am to avoid the heat, the hike involves navigating rocky trails and thorny bushes.

According to the National Museums of Kenya, the mountain is named after a Maasai elder who used it as a place for meditation and meetings with village elders.

There is a campsite, but visitors need to bring their own camping equipment. Firewood can be purchased from Maasai women, who also sell beaded necklaces.

There are also eight round, thatched self-service huts — called *bandas* in East Africa — for those who prefer not to camp. Four have twin beds, while the other four have single beds.

Just a kilometer from the site, visitors can watch baboons gathering for the night at a "baboon camp" at around 5 or 6 pm. It is also an excellent spot for bird-watching.

## Pink-tinged Lake Magadi

Another key nearby attraction is the scenic, pink-tinged Lake Magadi, an amazing destination for landscape photography, filmmaking, adventure camping safaris, and bird-watching, especially flamingos.

The lake's reddish hue is the result of chemical reactions between algae and the salt in the water.

Lake Magadi is also popular for its soda ash and hot springs, where visitors can bathe in water believed to be therapeutic. As no perennial streams flow into the lake its water is mainly replenished by these saline hot springs.

According to Australia's Saltwork Consultants, Lake Magadi contains more than 30 billion metric tons of trona (a sodium bicarbonate compound that can be processed into soda ash or bicarbonate of soda) in a bed between 7 and 40 meters thick. The lake is believed to have formed over the course of the past 9,000 years as a result of volcanic activity and high levels of precipitation in the Great Rift Valley region.

Trona has been mined at the lake since 1914, and the facility currently owned and operated by Tata Chemicals Magadi produces 350,000 tons of soda ash per year, according to Saltwork.

The thermal springs driven by the area's volcanic activity are the primary source of salt in the lake, and the water arises from a deep, actively circulating groundwater reservoir.

In addition, visitors can experience the beauty of Maasai culture by staying in Maasai villages, visiting Maasai homes, and sampling traditional meals, which will give them an insight into a community that has retained its traditions, lore, and lifestyle.



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## SPORTS

YEARENDER



The Chinese men's national team retains a slim chance of making it to the 2026 World Cup Finals and has offered fans a glimmer of hope for a positive outcome. XINHUA

By SUN XIAOCHEN  
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With the men's team struggling in its World Cup qualifying effort, and the domestic league losing its appeal, Chinese soccer signed off an eventful year craving a healthier future, away from the ill repute of numerous corruption scandals.

As sports fans relish China's athletic achievements after a remarkable Olympic year, the country's mediocre soccer program would hardly place high up on any honor rolls, with a series of setbacks and incidents, such as the men's squad's worst-ever Asian Cup outing and jail sentences for several former coaches and officials for corruption, all of which took a heavy toll on the sport's profile.

The men's squad's remaining hope for making it to the 2026 World Cup Finals, though, has offered fans at least something to look forward to, despite the fact that it faces massive task to survive a tough group and qualify for the marquee FIFA tournament for only the second time since its solo appearance in 2002.

Led by Croatian head coach Branko Ivankovic, Team China finished its 2024 campaign at the bottom of its six-team group in the current third-stage qualifying tournament, following three wins, two draws and five losses over 10 previous qualifiers. Yet, Ivankovic's plucky side remains alive, tied with three other group contenders on points, but just shy on goal difference.

The six critical points earned by its two wins so far in the current stage, against Bahrain and Indonesia respectively, kept Team China in the running after it opened the third round with a humiliating 7-0 rout at the hands of group leader Japan in September, followed by two straight defeats to fourth-ranked Saudi Arabia and 2nd-placed Australia.

With two direct qualification berths reserved only for the top-two finishers, well beyond its reach, Team China has realistically set its sights on either third or fourth place. If it can manage that, it will head into the next qualifying phase to compete for the two last tickets to the FIFA showpiece, which will be staged in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The March 20 match away to Saudi now appears a do-or-die battle for Ivankovic's men, who completed a solid 10-day offseason camp last month.

"We've basically had an overhaul of the national team (over the past year), adding some new blood, becoming younger and slowly having adapted to a new system," Ivankovic said after the training camp in Haikou.

"Our boys worked really hard, knowing that they need to step it up a gear to prepare for the tough World Cup qualifiers ahead of us."

"I am glad that we proved to the fans that we are building a new national team, and we will try to pay back their support with better results."

Even with the team finishing the year languishing in 90th place in the FIFA world rankings, its worst position in a decade, Ivankovic has at least dug it out of the mire of 12 months ago, when the squad crashed out at the group stage of the 2024 Asian Cup in a frustrating goalless campaign — two draws and one loss — under former coach Aleksandar Jankovic.

Jankovic was fired immediately following China's exit from the continental soccer jamboree, prompting the Chinese Football Association to turn to the more experienced Ivankovic.

On the women's side, the "Steel Roses" finished 17th in the world and fourth in Asia. Australia's Ante Milcic took charge of the team in a year that lacked any official international matches, offering both Milcic and the squad a valuable opportunity to regroup.

**League appeal wanes**

At the league level, the continuous financial struggles of even some of the country's most celebrated clubs set the tone for a gloomy 2024

# AIMING FOR HIGHER GOALS

After a roller-coaster 2024, Chinese soccer hopes to return some luster to its beautiful game



**Clockwise from above:** As the last of the big-name signings during the spending spree of the 2010s, former Chelsea midfielder Oscar bids farewell to his Chinese club Shanghai Port in December; The disbanding of eight-time CSL champion Guangzhou FC after the 2024 season highlights the financial problems in China's domestic league; More effort is needed to tackle corruption among coaches and officials, as well as prioritizing grassroots soccer development.

XINHUA, PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY, WANG HAIBIN / ZHANG CHUNLEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



season, with the total number of spectators attending Chinese Super League matches dropping to its lowest since 2015 at 4.66 million.

The disbanding of eight-time CSL champion club Guangzhou FC after the 2024 season, due to heavy debts stemming from the impact of the pandemic and profligate spending on imported players, triggered mixed reactions from the sport's community, with fans lamenting the fall of the giant, while critics hailed the end of the "big-spending" era of the Chinese leagues.

The club, formerly known as Guangzhou Evergrande, together with another CSL team Cangzhou Mighty Lions and the third tier's Hunan Billows, all failed to pass CFA's financial review for entry into the 2025 season, winding up being disbanded by investors, which further exposed the fragile financial status of China's soccer pyramid.

Once relying on cash-rich owners, CSL clubs enjoyed short-lived success on the continental stage in the 2010s, highlighted by Guangzhou's AFC Champions League wins in 2013 and 2015, led by World Cup-winning managers Marcello Lippi of Italy and Brazil's Luiz Scolari, respectively, and bolstered by expensive squads, filled with high-profile imports.

The lure of Chinese clubs, funded by millionaires from the retail and real estate industries, proved too lucrative for even some of Europe's top stars to turn down, drawing the likes of former Argentina international Carlos Tevez and Brazilian internationals Oscar and Alexandre Pato to join CSL clubs for staggering transfer fees.

As the last of the big-name signings during the spending spree, former Chelsea midfielder Oscar bid farewell to his Chinese club Shanghai Port in December after helping the franchise defend its CSL title with an all-time, league-high ranking points total of 78, one point more than the previous record set by Guangzhou in 2013.

Meanwhile, Wuhan Jiangnan edged out Changchun Dazhong Women by just one point to retain the CFA Women's Super League title in September, completing a stranglehold of five league championships in a row.

**Fighting corruption**

Throughout 2024, China's anti-graft authorities, supported by law enforcement departments, intensified the crackdown on illegal activities in soccer that resulted in more than 10 notable figures, including former players, coaches and CFA officials, being sentenced to prison terms for their involvement in match-fixing and bribery.

Among those investigated and punished, the highest-profile offender was arguably former men's national team coach Li Tie, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Xianning Intermediate People's Court in Hubei province in December for bribery-related crimes.

The 47-year-old former midfielder, who was on China's only World Cup roster in 2002, was found by prosecutors to have offered bribes to officials who helped him win election to the position of national team coach in 2020, before accepting bribes from some certain league clubs to select their players into the national squad during his tenure.

Former deputy sports minister Du Zhaocai, former CFA president Chen Xuyuan and former CFA secretary-general Liu Yi were also convicted of bribery and sentenced to jail terms last year.

In September, a special investigation led by the General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Public Security uncovered 120 matches suspected to be tainted by match-fixing or gambling, spanning various leagues and competitions, including the CSL, the CFA Cup and the top-tier women's league, implicating 41 affiliated clubs.

A total of 43 former players, referees, coaches and club executives were banned for life from taking part in any soccer-related activities after the investigation, which has also dismantled 12 online gambling gangs.

# SPORTS



**From Left:** A Scotland fan reacts during a Nations League group stage match against Croatia in Glasgow, Scotland, on Nov 15; Leon Marchand of France competes during the Paris Olympics men's 200m individual medley final on Aug 2; The nail art of Manika Batra of India steals the limelight during her round-of-64 table tennis match against Anna Hurnsey of Britain at the Paris Olympics on July 28. REUTERS

Colombia's Victor Ortega Serna in action during round four of the men's 27m high diving event at the World Aquatics Championships in Doha on Feb 15. REUTERS

**YEARENDER**

## FOCUSED ON EXCELLENCE

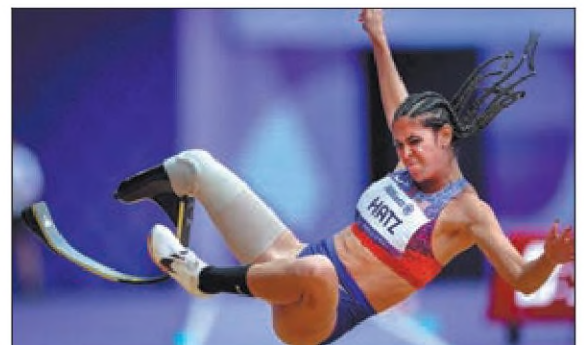
In a year of brilliant sporting moments, photographers were on hand to capture them in the most memorable ways.



China's Zheng Qinwen celebrates winning the Paris Olympics women's tennis singles title at Roland Garros on Aug 3. XINHUA



Priscila of Brazil in action during the women's soccer semifinal against Spain at the Paris Olympics on Aug 6. REUTERS



Beatriz Hatz of the United States competes in the women's long jump T64 final at the Paris 2024 Paralympics on Aug 31. REUTERS



**From left:** Taliyah Brooks of the United States prepares to launch a javelin during the women's heptathlon at the Paris Olympics on Aug 9; LeBron James and Stephen Curry celebrate Team USA's semifinal victory over Serbia at the Paris Olympics on Aug 8; Daisy Osakue of Italy winds up a throw in the women's discus qualification at the Paris Olympics on Aug 2. REUTERS