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# CHINA DAILY

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**XI'S VISION | HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT**

## Visits highlight Xi's concern for Northeast China

Full revitalization of region fundamentally relies on reform, opening-up, says president

By MO JINGXI  
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

In the past 20 days, China's northeastern region, including Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces, has frequently appeared on the itinerary of President Xi Jinping's domestic visits.

Xi has just wrapped up a trip to the region, after attending Friday's opening ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, the provincial capital of Heilongjiang, and visiting Jilin's Changchun on Saturday, where he urged the province to play a bigger role in advancing Chinese modernization.

Days ahead of the Chinese New Year, which began on Jan 29, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made an inspection tour to Liaoning, where he visited flood-hit residents and stressed that Northeast China's full revitalization relies fundamentally on reform and opening-up.

The traditional industrial base, the birthplace of the country's first automobile, first jet aircraft and first 10,000-ton ship, led the nation's industrial development in the 1950s and 1960s, and, at its peak, accounted for 22 percent of the country's industrial output.

It gradually fell behind the country's eastern coastal regions in the face of economic challenges such as declining heavy industries and a shrinking population. In 2003, the CPC Central Committee adopted the Northeast China revitalization program as a major strategy for the country's overall development.

Xi, who has visited the region more than 10 times since 2012, once

said that he visited Northeast China quite frequently because he "was very concerned about the region's revitalization and development."

As 2025 marks the final year of the country's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), Xi's footsteps in the region in recent days reflected his concern for the region's future development and its full revitalization in the next five years and beyond, observers said.

After listening to the work report from provincial leaders on Saturday in Changchun, Xi reiterated that the comprehensive deepening of reform and opening-up is crucial for the full revitalization of Northeast China.

Stressing that Jilin must focus on high-quality development, Xi urged the province to unwaveringly take the real economy as the cornerstone and achieve coordinated development through transforming traditional industries, strengthening competitive industries and cultivating new quality productive forces.

Efforts should also be made to translate technological breakthroughs into real productivity, he said.

Related policies and regulations must be fully implemented in the process of deepening the reform of State-owned assets and enterprises and promoting the development of the private economy, he added.

Xi stressed the importance of fostering a first-rate business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, and building a higher-standard open economy.

He said that Jilin should prioritize the development of modern and large-scale agriculture, and achieve coordinated advances in applying technologies, promoting green development, improving quality and nurturing well-known brands in the sector.

See *Revitalization*, page 3

## Faces of freedom



Palestinians greet a Red Cross bus carrying prisoners released as part of the fifth prisoner-for-hostage swap between Hamas and Israel on Saturday as it arrives at the Gaza European Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza. A total of 183 Palestinian prisoners were freed in exchange for three Israeli hostages previously held by Hamas, who were handed over on Saturday in central Gaza to the Israel Defense Forces and the Israel Security Agency. The three then crossed the border into Israel. MOIZ SALHI / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES See story, page 7

## US rule change threatens Chinese e-tailers

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
in New York  
belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

Fast fashion e-tailers Temu and Shein's rapid rise in popularity in the United States could face serious challenges if President Donald Trump fulfills his promise of ending an exemption that allows low-cost parcels from China to enter the US duty free.

The de minimis exemption allows e-tailers such as Temu and Shein to send parcels valued under \$800 from China to the US without paying duty and without customs inspections under US tax laws.

"If the de minimis exemption is ended permanently, both Temu and Shein would be well advised to change their business model," Z. John Zhang, a professor of marketing at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, told China Daily. "Anything short of that will not help the companies much and waste their resources."

Together, Shein and Temu account for 17 percent of the discount market in the US.

When Trump signed an executive order to impose additional tariffs of 10 percent on Chinese imports beginning Feb 4, part of that order included instructions to end the de minimis exemption.

But by Friday, he reversed that decision with another executive order which allowed the parcels to come in tariff free.

The de minimis exemption, as outlined in Section 321 of the Tariff Act of 1930, was first created in 1938. Its initial aim was to allow US citizens to bring back souvenirs from abroad.

Overall, it facilitated smooth global commerce and allowed small

packages valued at less than \$5 — \$160 in today's value — to get to customers quickly and efficiently.

The value of the packages allowed under the exemption has gone up steadily over the years from \$200 in 1994 to \$800 in 2016 per person, per day.

Trump said while the exemption has been paused for now, it is scheduled to be stopped altogether when his secretary of commerce notifies him that a procedure is in place to "fully and expediently process and collect tariff revenue."

Pausing it initially caused such widespread confusion that the US Postal Service said it would stop accepting parcels from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong temporarily on Tuesday. However, services resumed after 12 hours.

In fiscal year 2024, at least 1.36 billion shipments utilized de minimis, an increase from 637 million in 2020, data from US Customs and Border Protection showed.

At least 75 percent of all packages that came to the US under the rule were from China, according to Baird Equity Research.

In 2018, Chinese exports under de minimis amounted to \$5.3 billion but rose rapidly to \$66 billion in 2023, the Congressional Research Service found. Many of the parcels were shipped directly from China to customers.

Experts warned that in the future, changing the de minimis loophole would alter how firms operated, adding that it had upended the popularity of Western companies such as Zara, H&M and Primark.

George S. Yip, an emeritus professor at the Imperial College London and distinguished visiting professor at Northeastern Univer-

sity in Boston, Massachusetts, said that Chinese fast fashion brands have outperformed brands like Zara thanks to the former's quick management style, use of apps to communicate with staff and suppliers, ability to spot trends, and fast delivery.

In contrast, while Zara and H&M spearheaded fast fashion, they typically take longer to identify trends and buy fashion.

"Western companies have to learn to decide faster. Secondly, design faster. And, you know, these Chinese companies probably have designers based in China. Thirdly, of course, manufacture faster — this is something that Western companies can do, they can do more than manufacture," he said.

Other traditional US retailers who have to pay duties for bulk shipments to their warehouses say the rule is unfair to them.

Walmart and Amazon vowed to ship directly to consumers from China in a bid to fight off newcomers. Amazon launched its new Amazon Haul digital storefront last year with the aim of better competing with Temu and Shein.

Temu has gone to great lengths to advertise to US customers. Last year, it spent \$21 million on three 30-second Super Bowl commercials and offered \$15 million in promotions.

Additionally, Temu and Shein's use of social media has been an integral part of their success, said Yip.

"Young women in particular want to post new things all the time. So often, they're buying clothes that they wear only once for the photo. And so, it's social media that's driven (popularity)," he said.

## PSYCHOLOGY, DISCIPLINE HELP TRAIN 'HERO' POLICE DOGS

From search missions to rescue operations, skilled canines have crucial roles to play

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and Ezhou, Hubei, and ZHANG XIAOMIN

Police dog Doubao, meaning red bean bun, took part in 16 searches for missing people in Wuhan, Hubei province, last year. The 3-year-old German Shepherd serves as a tracker dog at the Jiangxia district sub-bureau of the city's public security department.

### in-depth

"Initially, we introduced the dog with the thought that it could assist us in tracking down criminals who ... would abandon their vehicles and flee into the nearby mountains," said Xia Mengmeng, deputy chief of the Zhengdian police inspection station. "Such individuals have not appeared, but Doubao has proved to be invaluable in serving the community."

Doubao's most recent successful mission was on Nov 29 when he helped a resident nicknamed Wei locate his 83-year-old father. Wei reported to police on the evening of Nov 27 that his father had gone missing at an agricultural market.

After several hours of unsuccessfully searching the site, police sent Doubao and his handler Zhang Zhou to join the operation.

See *Dogs*, page 2

## Looking for survivors



Firefighters and a rescue dog search through debris to find survivors on Sunday after a rain-triggered landslide in Jinping, a village in Yibin, Southwest China's Sichuan province, buried 10 homes and a production building, leaving one person dead, two injured and 28 missing as of 11 am on Sunday. ZHUANG GE'ER / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Pragmatism over ideology opens new chapter in Sino-UK ties

In a world rife with geopolitical uncertainties, especially due to the return of Donald Trump to the White House, the United Kingdom government led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer is sending a clear message: economic growth and stability must be prioritized over ideology.

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves' visit to China last month marks a critical turning point in a relationship that has oscillated between hope and frus-

tration over the past decade. Reeves' was the first visit of a British chancellor to China since 2019, signaling not just a return to diplomatic engagement but a shift toward strategic pragmatism.

The last decade of UK-China relations was marked by dashed hopes, with former British prime minister David Cameron's bold "Golden Era" investment plans faltering after political changes and international tensions escalated. Successive Con-

servative governments were often entangled in the ideological fog of China's human rights record and perceived geopolitical threats, leading to the UK's withdrawal from global economic engagement with China. That was not merely a political misstep, but a lost opportunity for boosting the UK's economic growth at a time when it was needed the most.

Fast forward to today: a more prudent approach under Starmer's

leadership is giving new life to UK-China relations.

During her visit to Beijing, Reeves reinforced the UK's economic aspirations, saying, "Growth is the number one mission of this government. The fiscal rules laid out in the budget are nonnegotiable. Economic stability is the bedrock for economic growth and prosperity." Reeves' message echoed the deepening awareness that economic success depends on building

## WORLD WATCH

By Adriel Kasonta

robust relationships with the world's key players.

Indeed, Reeves' visit is a recognition of a strategic economic reality. With the cost of government borrowing rising and the pound sterling falling, the stakes have never been higher for the UK's economic stability.

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## PAGE TWO



# Dogs: Canine heroes show intelligence, bravery

From page 1

Under Zhang's command, Doubao sniffed an item of clothing from the missing man and tracked a scent trail from the Haijixing agricultural product logistics park to a street several kilometers away. However, the trail was lost around 2 am and the search was stopped.

The following day, during a search of the area between the market exit and a gas station two kilometers away, Zhang observed Doubao's excited behavior. The search area was narrowed down, and after 35 hours the team located the missing man about 300 meters from the gas station.

"He was sent to hospital immediately. A medical examination showed that his vital signs were stable," Xia said.

A dog's sense of smell is approximately 1,200 times stronger than that of a human, allowing them to accomplish tasks that humans cannot, he said. Other estimates put a dog's sense of smell up to 10,000 times more precise than a human's due to their far greater number of olfactory receptors.

"Although tracker dogs are generally not as useful in urban areas, they can play a role in rural areas with a mix of urban and natural landscapes," Xia said.

Doubao has been involved in searches for the elderly, children, and disabled people.

While many missing people have been successfully located, there have been occasions where individuals were found dead.

"Factors like traffic and rain can cause scent trails to disappear. Starting a search within eight hours of a person going missing is crucial because the scent remains strong, increasing the likelihood of finding them," Xia added.

Doubao's first mission was on Feb 11, 2024, when he helped locate the body of a missing septuagenarian.

"Before setting out, I was quite nervous because real-life scenarios are quite different from training," recalled the 27-year-old trainer Zhang. "I didn't expect his performance to exceed expectations."

After getting a scent from the man's clothing, Doubao tracked through streets and forests, ultimately leading to a small grove.

"After making inquiries, we learned that the man had planted trees there. Doubao lingered there for quite some time. Later, he burst out of the grove and stopped in front of a major road," Zhang recalled.

Based on Doubao's prolonged lingering at three locations, police officers and villagers involved in the search continued to narrow down the search area. Unfortunately, the elderly man was later found dead.

## Great partners

Due to their outstanding performances, Zhang and Doubao came second in the police dog track-

ing category at the Wuhan public security bureau's police dog technical competition in June 2024, outshining over 40 teams.

"It was very rewarding. Upon returning (to the station), I gave him extra meals like boiled chicken legs and canned beef, and played games with him," Zhang said.

The pair started training in November 2023, when Doubao was a mischievous puppy. "He had a playful nature. After he finished eating he would chew on wooden boards or carry a stainless steel tray around, tossing it and making a loud clanging noise wherever he went," Zhang recalled. "At that time, he needed to be sternly reprimanded."

Whenever Doubao misbehaves now, Zhang only needs to give him a look or raise his voice with a questioning "hmm" sound. Doubao immediately calms down or obediently walks over to him.

"Through our rigorous training and progress, we have developed mutual trust and understanding," Zhang said, adding his own life has changed because of Doubao.

"The most noticeable change is in my physique. I used to weigh around 100 kilograms. Over the past year, I have lost 25 kg because of running with him, and I have also developed a habit of exercising regularly," he said.

Before Doubao, Zhang handled a riot dog for three years. The Rottweiler was retired in 2023 and due to the limited need for riot dogs, Zhengdian station introduced two German Shepherds, Doubao and his sister Tianlang (wolf in the sky) who serves as a drug detection dog, for police work.

Zhang attended a tracker dog skills training program at the Wuhan public security bureau's police dog base for four months.

The Wuhan base, which was established in 2017, now houses more than 100 police dogs ranging from German Shepherds to Labradors and Rottweilers. The dogs are trained to undertake patrols, search for explosives, drugs and blood stain as well as tracking and other tasks.

From the day he took charge of Doubao, Zhang's mentor emphasized the importance of establishing rapport with the canine. Spending every day together, the duo quickly developed a bond.

Sometimes, when Zhang stepped away briefly, other people would notice Doubao behaving like a child afraid of being separated from its parents.

After two weeks, the pair began training on specific skills. Each day at dawn, they would head to a nearby forest for training. It would start with a game of fetch followed by basic commands such as sit, stand, lie down, and jump, before moving on to tracking.

"Doubao is very intelligent. He gets very happy every time he

**Top:** A police dog undergoes search and rescue training with the help of a drone in Huangshi, Hubei province. **Above:** Police dog Xuanfeng, or whirlwind, from Ezhou, Hubei province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



**Above:** Zhang Zhou trains Doubao, or red bean bun, in Wuhan, Hubei province. **Below:** Yang Wentao from the Huangshi public security bureau of Hubei province trains a new police dog.



understands a command or learns a new action," Zhang said. The duo would move between training grounds and forested areas,

tracking items ranging from clothing and towels to cards, bottle caps, cigarette butts, and nails. They overcame numerous challenges, eventu-

ally leading to Doubao becoming qualified as a tracker dog.

In addition to search missions, the pair also conduct regular patrols.

Many passersby are fascinated to see a police dog on patrol and often greet the canine, take photos, and record videos. Doubao remains calm and composed throughout the interactions.

"Unlike the riot dog, which had an aggressive nature and was kept away from interaction with civilians, this tracking dog is quite different, serving as both a warning to and being friendly with people," Zhang explained.

The duo have continued daily training, which is adjusted based on Doubao's physical condition.

Other tasks include training to deliver a life buoy to a distressed person in the water. Doubao will reach his peak performance at around four to five years and retire when he is seven to eight, Zhang said. The dog can either return to the police dog base for retirement or be adopted.

"Most likely, I will accompany Doubao until retirement, and when the time comes, I will apply to adopt him. I hope it works out," Zhang said.

## Ahead of the pack

At the police dog training base of Ezhou public security bureau's criminal investigation detachment, nine police dogs are partnered with different handlers.

German Shepherd Xuanfeng, or whirlwind, and handler Yin Ziyang are considered one of the best teams.

"Xuanfeng is a responsible and strong police dog, skilled in blood-stain detection," said Yin.

In May 2021, over 1 million yuan (\$137,015) in funds was stolen in a burglary in the city. Xuanfeng played a crucial role in finding the suspect from a drop of blood.

In March 2023, Yin became Xuanfeng's handler after a colleague was transferred. He felt under immense pressure as Xuanfeng was a star police dog.

The canine was proficient in tasks such as explosives detection, search operations, and security checks, and had served in security roles at important international conferences.

In 2018, Xuanfeng secured fourth place in the 5th National Police Dog Skills Competition.

Yin said at the start of their partnership he was not sure whether the dog could accept a new handler.

However, he invested a lot of energy and time into learning how to cooperate with the canine. Yin arranges Xuanfeng's food intake and diet, organizes regular health checks, administers vaccinations, deworms the dog, and interacts with plays with it every day.

"Handlers should constantly monitor the physical and psycho-

logical well-being of their dogs," he said.

Huang Chuanhua is an experienced police dog trainer with a deep understanding of canine psychology. He works at the police dog training base of Dangyang public security bureau.

"To cultivate outstanding police dogs it is not enough to just have excellent physical training. What is more important is to develop the psychological qualities of the dogs," he said.

Huang started to train Luhu, or tiger on the road, when the dog was only six months old.

Initially, Luhu seemed a bit slow to respond to various commands and would make unexpected movements. So Huang changed his approach and used more playful training methods, which gradually increased the dog's interest in learning and its obedience.

Luhu is now nine years old, and the duo has participated in numerous missions.

In March 2024, they won first place in the tracking category at the inaugural police dog skills competition held by the public security bureau of Yichang, Hubei province.

## Expert handler

Yang Wentao is captain of the police dog training brigade in the criminal investigation detachment of the Huangshi public security bureau, which has 35 police dogs.

After graduating from the police dog technology department of the Criminal Investigation Police University of China, Yang has handled seven police dogs.

Every day, he feeds, trains, and washes the dogs, willingly devoting himself to his passion for the past 25 years.

"What's going on? Kunlun doesn't seem to be in a good mood today, the dog's lacking focus during training," Yang shouts to a young handler.

He later learns that Kunlun was upset after seeing the handler interacting with another dog.

"The intelligence of some police dogs is equivalent to that of a four or five-year-old child," said Yang, adding that understanding canine psychology is essential to effectively train police dogs.

"Sometimes, they pretend not to understand what you're saying when they want to slack off. They are actually very clever," he said.

Yang said it generally takes five to 10 months to train a police dog. The maximum service life of a police dog is around eight years.

After retirement, the police dog base allows the canines to live out their remaining years in comfort at the base.

"In my view, each police dog is a hero dog," said Yang.

Contact the writers at [liukun@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:liukun@chinadaily.com.cn)

## TOP NEWS

## Rules on dissemination of military info unveiled

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

China has released a set of regulations that note the do's and don'ts for disseminating military-related information on the internet.

The regulations, jointly issued by 10 departments, including the Cyberspace Administration of China and the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission, were published on Saturday and will take effect on March 1.

The regulations consist of 30 articles and focus on setting guidelines for the dissemination of military-related information on the internet, the establishment of military-themed websites and platforms, and the management of online programs and accounts focusing on military content.

They categorize military-related information into three types: one type is encouraged and supported for dissemination, while the other two types are prohibited to be disseminated online.

The rules encourage providers and users of military information to "produce, reproduce, publish and disseminate" information that publicizes the decisions and deployments of the

Communist Party of China Central Committee and the CMC, as well as information that promotes the "glorious history and fine traditions and conduct" of the military.

Information reflecting achievements in the modernization of national defense and the military, and the positive contributions of the Chinese military to world peace is also supported for widespread dissemination.

In addition, information that promotes the legitimacy and justice of military operations, and the heroic and self-sacrificing deeds of the armed forces, is encouraged for dissemination.

However, the regulations also specify which types of military-related information are prohibited from being disseminated.

These include information that endangers national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, or defames the absolute leadership of the CPC over the military and the CMC chairperson responsibility system.

Information that distorts, defames or denies the history of the People's Liberation Army, the deeds and spirit of heroes and martyrs, or that sows discord between the military and the

government or the military and the people, is also prohibited.

Furthermore, information that denies or attacks China's defense policies and strategies, and misinterprets international military exchanges and cooperation is also targeted, according to the regulations, which also ban spreading information that misinterprets non-war military actions, such as the evacuation of Chinese nationals overseas, international peacekeeping and rescue operations, military exercises and disaster relief.

The regulations also require military information providers and users to strictly safeguard classified matters related to national defense construction and the activities of the armed forces, and prohibit the dissemination of information containing military secrets, defense technology industry secrets, or unpublished information.

This includes information about military deployments, troop movements, operations and training.

It also includes information about the development, production, testing, transportation and deployment of weapons and equipment, their tactical and technical performance, and support capabilities.

In addition, regarding emergencies involving the military, relevant departments and internet military information service providers should "release and repost authoritative information" and manage "illegal and harmful information" in accordance with the regulations.

The Cyberspace Administration of China said in a news release on Saturday that the regulations are an important measure to promote the rule of law in cyberspace and have significant practical significance for addressing issues such as false military information and the leaking of military secrets on the internet.

Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian noted in a news release on Saturday that the military and relevant local government departments will strengthen coordination and cooperation to jointly implement the regulations.

He said that the regulations will standardize the online dissemination of military information from an institutional level, create a positive online environment related to the military, and provide "strong online public opinion support" for achieving the goals for the centenary of the PLA in 2027.

## HIGHER GROUND

## Spring Festival helps accelerate CPI growth

China's economy will likely make a robust start in the first quarter, predict analysts

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
and ZHOU LANXU

China's economy is showing fresh signs of recovery as consumer inflation accelerated in January due to the influence of the Spring Festival holiday, official data showed on Sunday, pointing to a gradual recovery in domestic demand.

Analysts said that China's economy will likely make a robust start in the first quarter, given the country's intensified efforts to expand the consumer trade-in program for 2025, the accelerated push for implementing key projects and the early signs of stabilization of the property market.

They, however, cautioned that the broader economy is still facing challenges from subdued demand and external uncertainties, urging policymakers to step up countercyclical adjustments in fiscal and monetary policies, including a comprehensive stimulus package to spur consumer spending and stabilize the housing sector.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Sunday that the country's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, rose 0.5 percent year-on-year in January after a 0.1 percent growth in December.

The growth in core CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and is deemed a better gauge of the supply-demand relationship in the economy, rose 0.6 percent year-on-year in January, after a 0.4 percent increase in December.

Feng Lin, executive director of research at Golden Credit Rating International, said that consumer inflation will likely remain within a low level in 2025, leaving ample space for stronger countercyclical policy adjustment, she said.

Feng noted that the subdued consumer demand remains a major challenge, primarily due to the ongoing correction in the real estate market that dampens consumer sentiment, along with a slowdown in per capita disposable income growth last year, which has affected household purchasing power.

"That provides plenty of room for policymakers to intensify efforts to further boost consump-

tion," she added.

NBS data showed China's producer price index, which gauges factory-gate prices, dropped 2.3 percent year-on-year in January, unchanged from the figure in the previous month.

Feng said the recovery in market demand has yet to provide strong support for industrial products price growth, noting that the "timing of the PPI inflation's return to positive territory will largely depend on the effectiveness of China's countercyclical policy measures in 2025, with real estate support policies playing a pivotal role."

During a news conference at the beginning of 2025, the National Development and Reform Commission said the annual quota for the consumer goods trade-in program for the year, which will be significantly larger than that of 2024, will be announced during the two sessions, the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said: "In the upcoming two sessions, we expect meaningful increases in bond quotas earmarked for stimulus spending, with roughly a third going toward consumption-oriented support measures, including the recently expanded consumer goods trade-in program. The coming months will likely feature more consumption-oriented stimulus."

Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities, said that despite facing pressures from structural issues at home and uncertainties from the international environment, China still enjoys favorable conditions to foster steady growth in the first quarter, considering supportive government measures to boost consumer spending and corporate investment and early signs of stabilization in the property market.

Li Chao, chief economist at Zhesang Securities, said China's economy will make a strong start in the first quarter. "China's annual growth target for 2025 could be set at around 5 percent, unchanged from the previous year. The GDP growth rate will likely hit 5.1 percent in the first quarter, with the full-year economy experiencing a U-shaped recovery," Li said.

Contact the writers at  
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

## Deadly crash

A person walks past the charred shell of a bus that collided with a trailer while heading from Cancun to Tabasco, near Escarcega in southern Mexico, on Saturday.

At least 41 people were killed in the accident, according to the government of Tabasco state.

LUIS MANUEL LOPEZ / REUTERS



## Relations: UK's independent stance sends positive signal

From page 1

Reeves' engagement with China — a relationship critical to both countries' economic health — has delivered tangible results. Amid mounting opposition criticism, Reeves secured agreements worth about £600 million (\$744.34 million) for the UK economy.

Despite their bumpy political history, economic relations between the UK and China are too significant to ignore, not least because China (including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) remains the UK's third-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching £103.1 billion in 2024. China is also the UK's sixth-largest export market, with the UK's exports reaching £38.6 billion last year.

Besides, Chinese investment in the UK has been a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship, as Chinese enterprises invested £64.5 billion in the UK, the most significant amount among European countries, between 2000 and 2023.

Also, the UK remains a top destination for Chinese students, who contributed £5.4 billion to the UK economy. In 2022-23 alone, more than 170,000 Chinese students enrolled in British universities. This symbiotic relationship has immense untapped potential and,

as Reeves emphasized, strengthening UK-China ties is a win-win for both sides.

Revising the UK-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission, which the previous Conservative government froze, would be a crucial step toward building on these existing economic ties. In this regard, the momentum generated by Starmer's interactions with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, should be leveraged to the fullest extent.

## Collaborative areas

The strategic imperatives of this new engagement go beyond trade deals and financial partnerships. One of the key areas where the UK and China can collaborate is the green economy. Climate change and sustainability are priorities for the Labour government, with commitments to realize net-zero emissions and stop the sale of new combustion engine cars by 2030. Here, China has a significant role to play as a global leader in the production of electric vehicles and battery storage technology. The UK, in turn, can create for China opportunities to expand into a stable, growth-oriented market economy.

Energy transition is another common global challenge, with both the UK and China having

much to gain from working together on clean energy technologies. With China offering affordable EVs and solutions for energy storage, the UK can meet its ambitious environmental targets, and accelerate its shift toward a green economy, further strengthening bilateral economic relations.

Moreover, the UK's decision to not follow the United States and the European Union in imposing tariffs on Chinese-made EVs and solar panels underlines the country's independent stance, sending a positive signal to Beijing. With the return of Trump to the White House, the US is expected to double down on its protectionist policies, particularly in sectors critical to the green economy, which makes China's role as a stable and reliable partner all the more critical for the UK.

With economic uncertainties weighing heavily on the UK, particularly in the wake of rising debt and inflation, the need for diversifying its economic partnerships is more pressing than ever. As Reeves aptly said, the UK's current fiscal position is the worst since World War II, and the need for growth is undeniable.

Given these facts, the UK should remove the ideological constraints that historically defined its relationship with China. As former British prime minister Lord Palm-

erston famously said, "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and it is our duty to follow those interests."

As the UK enters a new era of multipolarity, pursuing growth must take precedence over ideological purity. While the US under Trump may adopt an aggressive stance toward China, the UK must avoid following Washington's lead on matters that may not align with its best interests. Instead, it should adopt a sovereign, independent approach rooted in mutual benefit and pragmatism to build a prosperous future.

Reeves' visit to China is a bold first step in the new direction — one where the UK recognizes the importance of economic cooperation for long-term growth and stability. By prioritizing renewed engagement with the world's second-largest economy, the UK stands poised to reclaim its position as a key player in a rapidly changing world order.

The author is a political risk consultant and lawyer based in London who has served as the chairman of the international affairs committee at the Bow Group, which is the UK's oldest conservative think tank. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Revitalization: Reform and innovation at top of agenda

From page 1

He also encouraged the province to develop tourism by utilizing its distinctive resources such as ice and snow, and better coordinate with other provinces for regional development.

Over the past decade, Xi has presided over three key meetings on striving for the revitalization of Northeast China, and reform was at the top of

the agenda of all of these meetings.

In 2015, Xi said at a meeting in Changchun that efforts to revive the former major heavy industry hub had reached a crucial stage, which was akin to pushing a rock up a hill while overcoming obstacles, and he urged the region to speed up reform and innovation in order to accelerate its revitalization.

Three years later, in 2018, Xi made a

four-day fact-finding trip to Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces and, at a symposium in Shenyang, called for efforts to deepen reform in order to revitalize Northeast China. The region has a strategic bearing on national defense, as well as on food, the eco-environment, energy and industrial security, he said.

As 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of the implementation of the North-

east China revitalization strategy, Xi emphasized at a meeting in Harbin the importance for the region to push for industrial innovation through scientific and technological innovation and accelerate the modernization of its distinctive industrial system.

With China's booming winter economy bringing more and more tourists to the northeastern region in recent years, the region's rich ice and snow

resources have become valuable assets to help people become prosperous.

As Xi said on Friday at a banquet in Harbin, ice and snow are as valuable as gold and silver. "The ice and snow culture and economy are becoming a new driving force for the high-quality development of Harbin, and a new bond linking the city and the world," he said.

Li Zheng, dean of the School of Economics of Liaoning University, said that for Northeast China, the vigorous development of the ice and snow economy can be considered a

specific measure in building its distinctive industry system and cultivating new quality productive forces.

"The ice and snow economy, which also conforms with the current trends of consumption upgrading and industrial transformation, is expected to become a new driving force in the northeastern region's economic growth and serve as one of the key breakthroughs for the region's revitalization," Li said in an interview with Securities Daily.

Xinhua contributed to the story.



A Chinese performer takes a selfie with a local resident on Saturday after a show celebrating Spring Festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.  
LIN CHUNYIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Celebrations continue

## CHINA

## Ministry: Retirees target of latest espionage case

By CHINA DAILY

Retirees who previously held key positions have been targeted by foreign intelligence agencies under the pretense of providing consultancy services for an investigative firm based in China, the Ministry of State Security said on Sunday as it unveiled a recent espionage case.

To gather intelligence on the development of China's key industries, a foreign intelligence agency instructed the firm to recruit professionals with industry expertise, the ministry said in a post on its official WeChat account.

A retiree from a core department in a key sector, identified by the surname Feng, was singled out as a prime target. Exploiting Feng's diminished sense of confidentiality after retirement and ongoing connections with former colleagues, the firm repeatedly approached him with offers of high consulting fees.

Eventually, Feng signed a contract with the firm, ostensibly to provide business consulting services. In reality, the consultancy firm was gathering intelligence and stealing State secrets in an attempt to circumvent legal repercussions, the ministry said.

Feng later collaborated with a former colleague, identified by the surname Jiang, who had also left his position. The two used their industry contacts to obtain classified information on core projects. They wrote regular consultancy reports detailing key aspects such

as overall planning, strategic deployment and project progress. These reports, encrypted and transmitted to the firm, were then translated and forwarded to the foreign intelligence agency. Both men received substantial financial compensation.

The information leaked by Feng and Jiang contained classified information, posing a serious threat to national security and interests, the ministry said.

The Supreme People's Court sentenced Feng to six years in prison for illegally providing State secrets to foreign entities, deprived him of his political rights for two years and confiscated personal property worth 500,000 yuan (\$68,604).

Jiang received a prison sentence of five years and six months, with the same political rights deprivation and property confiscation.

The ministry underscored that China's anti-espionage law requires all citizens to safeguard national security and interests.

According to State regulations, individuals involved in classified work must adhere to confidentiality protocols even after leaving their positions.

During the designated confidentiality period, such individuals are prohibited from accepting employment or traveling abroad in violation of regulations. They are also barred from disclosing State secrets in any form.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

## Monitoring of pine wilt disease to be intensified

By YAN DONGJIE

yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

China will intensify its efforts to monitor and control pine wilt disease this year, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said on Friday.

The administration, at a special meeting on the disease, noted recent progress in monitoring, early warning, rapid detection and drug development to combat the pine wood nematode, which causes the disease. Earlier this month, leading Chinese experts reached the Xiangshan Consensus on future control strategies.

"Research has found that the natural enemy of the pine wood nematode is a fungus, and China's related pesticide and treatment measures are already relatively perfect," said Zhang Xingyao, an expert in pine wood nematode prevention from the Chinese Academy of Forestry.

"Scientists first use remote sensing, drones and other technologies to infer the epidemic area based on changes in tree color, and then local staff use a testing kit to accurately determine which trees are infected," he said.

The pine wood nematode, a parasite carried by Monochamus, a genus of longhorn beetles, can be spread as the beetles fly. Infected pine trees can wither and die within about a month if untreated.

The disease, first detected in China in 1982, has caused significant damage to the country's forest ecosystems. It is considered one of the most destructive threats to global forests, known for its rapid spread and high mortality rate. Asia has been the hardest-hit region, according to the administration.

"If a pine tree is infected, the symptoms are similar to those of a drought-stricken tree. If anyone notices this, they should promptly report it to the forestry department," Zhang said.

At Friday's meeting, experts discussed this year's disease trends and how to apply existing scientific and technological achievements to prevention and control. They also decided to establish a platform for monitoring prevention and control efforts.

Since 2020, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration has implemented a national five-year action plan (2021-25) for disease prevention and control, achieving its overall control target ahead of schedule. Over the past four years, China has reduced the affected area and the number of dead trees, the administration said.

Despite these gains, the area affected by the disease remains large. Experts believe continued efforts are needed in monitoring and management to mitigate the risk of local resurgences.

This year's efforts will emphasize the primary responsibility of local governments, using the "forest chief" system and adopting tailored solutions based on local conditions, experts said.

In high-risk areas, prevention and control measures will be strengthened, technologies such as satellite remote sensing will be used for monitoring and efforts will be made to prevent further spread.

The pine wood nematode can survive at any latitude in China, so preventing its spread is crucial, Zhang said. "The current focus of prevention is to prevent the circulation from epidemic areas," he said.



## Flying thunder

Performers dazzle the audience with a fireworks dragon dance amid the thunderous sounds of firecrackers, gongs, drums and cheers in Binyang county in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Saturday. Binyang is recognized as the "hometown of the fireworks dragon dance", and it was listed as a national-level intangible cultural heritage in 2008. The fearsome dragons are mainly made of bamboo strips, ropes and paper. SONG YANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Study says generic drugs are as effective as branded ones

Results eliminate doubts that bulk-buy procured treatments somehow inferior

By WANG XIAOYU

wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

A recent investigation by Chinese healthcare and drug regulators has found that generic drugs purchased through the country's bulk procurement programs are as effective as their original versions, and concerns about quality issues primarily stem from isolated cases or subjective experiences.

The National Healthcare Security Administration sent an investigation team to Shanghai in late January after media reports said several political advisers, most with medical backgrounds, had raised concerns over the efficacy of some medications procured through the national bulk-buy program, particularly drugs for high blood pressure, diabetes and anesthetics.

In a report published on its website, the administration said a real-

world clinical study by Ruijin Hospital, affiliated with Shanghai Jiaotong University's School of Medicine, found that a generic version of the high blood pressure drug Norvasc was just as safe and effective as the original. The administration said claims suggesting the generic drug is less effective are based on personal experiences.

Additionally, anesthesiologists and hospital officials from various hospitals in Shanghai said the generic versions of the anesthetics they use produce the desired clinical outcomes. Interviews with them, along with a retrospective study at Ruijin Hospital, showed no significant dosage changes before and after the bulk procurement program.

Addressing concerns about bulk-buy laxatives used for endoscopic examinations, the administration said the bowel-cleansing solution selected for bulk purchase in late

December has not yet been introduced in public hospitals.

Several hospitals in Shanghai reported no related complaints from clinical doctors, and a senior colorectal surgeon said domestically made laxatives have been used for two years without reports of reduced effectiveness.

The administration said concerns over the quality of bulk-buy generic drugs have largely stemmed from secondhand information or subjective impressions. Chinese drug regulators have established stringent evaluation criteria and methods to ensure the efficacy and safety of generic drugs before granting market approval, followed by continuous quality oversight after their release.

The agency said rigorous methodologies and processes are needed to produce scientific, fair and accurate assessments of drug efficacy. However, it noted that individual cases are easier to understand and tend to have a greater impact and spread more rapidly than scientific evidence.

In response to concerns that the centralized procurement program could squeeze original medications out of the Chinese market, the administration said bulk-buy drugs typically account for 60 to 80 percent of the total volume required by medical institutions, which are free to choose brands for the remaining portion.

To enhance oversight of bulk-buy medications, the administration said it is committed to conducting regular and random checks on drug-makers that win bids and will promptly address any issues.

It also said it will encourage frontline doctors to use a monitoring platform to report adverse reactions and potential drug problems and will support medical workers and institutions in conducting real-world studies comparing the effectiveness of original drugs and their generic counterparts.

Generic drugs contain the same active ingredients as their equivalent original branded drugs.

## Long-term care insurance becoming more popular

By CHENG SI

chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

China is making strides in popularizing long-term care insurance, improving the quality of life for people who have lost the ability to perform daily activities and easing the burden on their families.

The National Healthcare Security Administration recently announced that by the end of 2024, more than 180 million people were covered by long-term care insurance, with 2.6 million individuals receiving benefits. The program, which began its trial phase in 2016, now covers 49 cities, including Beijing and Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province.

Long-term care insurance is designed to assist people who are unable to perform basic daily activities such as eating, bathing or dressing due to aging, injury, illness or mental deterioration. Participation in the insurance program is voluntary.

Experts say the insurance is an important supplement to China's existing social insurance system, which includes pension, healthcare, work-related injury, unemployment and maternity coverage.

Local governments have pushed for broader implementation of long-term care insurance to address the aging population and improve the quality of life for impaired people.

In Ningbo, Zhejiang province, the program expanded from 2017 to 2023, eventually covering the entire city. Hangzhou and Huzhou, two other cities in Zhejiang, fully implemented the program last month, allowing local residents to join for an annual payment of 90 yuan (\$12.35).

Before receiving benefits, insured individuals must undergo a scientific evaluation by professional workers to assess their abilities in areas such as mobility, eating, bathing, cognition and communication.

Despite its progress, the expansion of long-term care insurance

faces several challenges, including a shortage of certified long-term care workers and reluctance from some people to pay for the insurance.

According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, China's elderly population — people age 60 and above — reached 297 million by the end of 2023, and the proportion of these individuals who have lost the ability to perform basic living tasks has risen in recent years. It's estimated that 46 million elderly people will lose such abilities by 2035, with the number rising to 58 million by 2050.

However, the number of certified nursing workers remains around 500,000, while the demand for such workers is estimated to be 10 million, according to state broadcaster China Central Television.

Li Yanqing, a 28-year-old nursing worker in Shanghai, said the demand for nursing talent will continue to increase due to the growing elderly population. She pointed out that issues such as low social recog-

inition, low pay, physically demanding work and unclear career advancement have caused many colleagues to quit in recent years.

"I plan to get the official certificate of long-term care worker," Li said.

Fan Weidong, an official with the National Healthcare Security Administration, said at a recent news conference that the administration is working to establish a long-term care insurance system that alleviates the financial burden on individuals and families.

"The implementation of long-term care insurance has created about 300,000 jobs and attracted approximately 60 billion yuan in social and industrial investment," Fan said. "We will continue exploring ways to involve commercial healthcare insurance and social organizations in expanding coverage, and encourage local authorities and companies to develop smarter, more digitalized services for people with impaired living abilities."

## Preparing books



Workers organize textbooks at a warehouse in Neijiang, Sichuan province, on Saturday, ensuring that students will have textbooks on time when the new semester begins. LAN ZITAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Abandoned mines transformed into ski resort

TAIYUAN — Though the eight-day Spring Festival holiday ended last week, the Wujinshan Li Ning International Ski Resort in Jinzhong, Shanxi province, is still bustling with skiing enthusiasts.

There are four ski resorts in the Wujin Mountain area, which was once a coal mining region.

"I heard from elders that this place was a mine when I was young. I never thought it could be transformed into a ski resort," said a tourist surnamed Jiang.

Wang Fei, deputy mayor of Wujinshan, said a decade ago, the town had seven coal mines and numerous enterprises involved in coal, build-

ing materials and metallurgy.

"With the excessive exploitation of resources, the vegetation on the mountains was severely damaged, and many areas became abandoned mines," Wang said.

With the remnants of the abandoned mine shafts still in sight, few could imagine how this once devastated and scarred old mining area has been transformed into a winter sports hub.

According to Wang, various revegetation techniques have been adopted to green approximately 236,000 square meters of barren mountains.

Besides skiing, the Wujinshan resort also offers a variety of snow-

based activities. Visitors ride snowmobiles across the plains, build snowmen and have snowball fights with family and friends.

Zhang Yingjie, head of Jinzhong's Yuci district, said the district is capitalizing on its geographical location and high-quality ski trails to develop the ice and snow economy as a new growth point, injecting new vitality into the economy with an entire industrial chain of winter sports, culture, equipment and tourism.

In the 2023-24 snow season, Jinzhong's ski resorts received nearly 250,000 visitors, with revenue of around 22 million yuan (\$3 million),

a 25 percent year-on-year increase.

Jinzhong has hosted more than 10 international ski, public alpine skiing and cross-country skiing competitions.

By providing youth training and organizing public ice and snow activities, the city has promoted winter sports to a wider range of consumers.

As night falls, the Wujinshan ski resort becomes even livelier. Visitors gather around the bonfire in the center of the resort to sing and dance, adding warmth and vitality to the cold winter night.

XINHUA

# CHINA



Trumpeters accompany a chorus at the Binhe Sports Center in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

## CHOIRS BRING MUSIC TO MASSES

Grassroots initiative in Taiyuan has become viral sensation online



Members of a choir perform at the Binhe Sports Center.



Senior residents join in a chorus at a park in Taiyuan.



The Longcheng Voice Choir performs at a gala show.



Two members of the Longcheng Voice Choir stage a dance during a concert.



Members of the Longcheng Voice Choir dance during a concert in Taiyuan.



A senior resident plays the trumpet during a "People's Concert" in Taiyuan.

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and CHEN LIANG

In the northern province of Shanxi, which is known for its rich tradition of folk songs, the capital Taiyuan has become a vibrant hub for community singing. Nearly every street and neighborhood in the city is home to a choir, where residents gather to share their love for music and foster a sense of community.

At the Binhe Sports Center, located along the banks of the Fenhe River, a unique cultural phenomenon has taken root. Known as the "People's Concert," this nearly year-round event features a rotating lineup of community choir performances. What began as a grassroots initiative has now become a beloved urban landmark and a viral sensation online.

Organized and led by locals, the performances have attracted music enthusiasts from across the country, all eager to experience the energy of Taiyuan's singing culture. The popularity of these concerts is

no accident. In Taiyuan, choirs are open to all, with no barriers to entry. Whether in the city's sprawling parks or community centers, anyone with a love for singing is welcome to join. Despite many participants being strangers, the atmosphere is consistently warm and inclusive.

There are over 300 registered choirs and more than 100 informal singing groups in the city, with tens of thousands of people regularly participating.

Cai Xiangshun, leader of the Longcheng Voice Choir, said: "People's desire to participate in cultural activities is increasing. We strive to provide the best services possible, with hosts, multiple conductors and a 40-member orchestra to accompany our performances."

In addition to competitions, the choirs are involved in a variety of events, including square dance contests, New Year's celebrations and gala shows in the countryside.

Contact the writers at [zhuxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhuxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn)



A senior resident livestreams a performance of a choir at the Binhe Sports Center.

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

### CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY

# China pushes for bamboo to replace plastics

Zhejiang county at forefront of drive to switch to greener, lower-carbon goods

By CHINA DAILY

The versatility of bamboo has long been known in China, where the giant woody grass has been utilized since the 11th century BC, taking the form of any number of useful items from food, transport and weapons to housing, paper and instruments.

China has 7.01 million hectares of bamboo forests and is the world's largest producer and exporter of bamboo products, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

The nation's bamboo forests account for an area similar in size to the entirety of Ireland.

It's estimated that the world produces around 400 million metric tons of plastic waste each year, and bamboo has arisen as a viable and environmentally friendly replacement due to its versatility and higher level of biodegradability.

At the forefront of the movement to replace plastics with bamboo are major bamboo production areas in China such as Zhejiang, Fujian, Sichuan, Guangdong and Anhui provinces.

In Anji, a county in northwestern Zhejiang province, bamboo is already replacing plastic in various products, from single-use takeaway cutlery to toothbrushes and combs used in hotels and homestays.

With 666 square kilometers of bamboo forests, an area about 80 percent of the size of New York City, and a long-standing history of bamboo use, Anji is serving as a model in advancing bamboo as an alternative to plastic.

In 2023, China launched a three-year plan to accelerate the industrial development of bamboo as a substitute for plastic with Anji designated as one of the first demonstration bases.

Bai Xia, who manages Anji's bamboo products exhibition center that showcases the innovative uses of the plant, said, "Since 2022, bamboo food trays have been replacing plastic ones in local government canteens and affiliated bodies."

Bamboo's potential as a plastic substitute takes on various forms in the exhibition center — from bamboo cutlery, straws and packaging boxes to bedding and clothing made from bamboo fiber.

Bai said that bamboo cutlery, toothbrushes, combs and toothpaste are widely used in Anji, and that bamboo-made tableware features in more than 300 restaurants and hotels in the county.

"In local markets, plastic bags have also been replaced by biodegradable bags made from 60 percent bamboo powder," she said. "These bamboo-based bags can break down within three months and yet they are tougher than plastic bags."

On the farm, bamboo-based film is replacing plastic film used for heat and water preservation. "As bamboo film is biodegradable,



A forestry worker fells bamboo trees in Anji, Zhejiang province, in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

farmers no longer need to collect film waste each year," Bai added.

Kindergartens in Anji have also adopted bamboo-made toys for children to play with, including toy bricks and models.

The estimated annual yield of bamboo is between 400,000 tons and 500,000 in Anji, according to Tang Hui from the local forestry department.

Bamboo undergoes several processes on its journey to becoming a versatile material.

Some products such as construction materials, cups and straws are made directly from bamboo through physical processing, while others, like pressed trays, bamboo-fiber clothing and packaging materials made of bamboo pulp, are created through chemical processing, Tang said.

As an Anji local, Bai is well-acquainted with the long-standing role of bamboo in daily life. "When I was young, bamboo-woven baskets and chairs were quite common," she recalled. "However, bamboo-based materials used to be prone to mildew in humid environments."

Thanks to improved processing techniques, bamboo products have become more durable and resistant to these limitations, said Bai.

For example, through high-temperature carbonization, bamboo is transformed into charcoal, which is then used to produce mold-resistant



Left: Cutlery made from bamboo are displayed at a demonstration center in Anji. LI SHANGYI / CHINA DAILY Right: A machine carves out patterns on a bamboo fan in Anji in March 2023. SHI ZINAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

bamboo charcoal chairs and chopsticks. Fallen bamboo shoot shells, once discarded in the forest, are now pressed into food trays or plates for use in food delivery and camping.

Tang said, "The initiative of using bamboo to substitute plastic was proposed in 2022, but the shift from wood, metal and plastics to bamboo has been a long journey in Anji."

Bamboo's advantages lie not only in its resilience and strength but also in its fast growth and renewable capacity. Compared to wood, which can take over a decade to grow, bamboo matures in just four to six years, enabling multiple harvests without the need for replanting.

"Adequate cutting is beneficial to the bamboo ecosystem," Tang said. "If bamboo isn't harvested, it



becomes vulnerable to diseases and pests. Moreover, if it blossoms it is unable to regrow. Overgrown bamboo can fall, and dry bamboo can pose a fire risk to the forests."

In Anji, the industrial development of bamboo benefits local communities as well. Villagers earn income from harvesting bamboo, and bamboo's strong carbon sequestration capacity provides additional revenue through carbon credit exchanges, according to Tang.

Bamboo has become a cornerstone of Anji's economy, with around 1,000 enterprises engaged in the industry.

The county has been implementing the philosophy of "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", which was proposed by President Xi Jinping in Anji 20 years ago when he was then secretary of the

Communist Party of China Zhejiang Provincial Committee.

In 2023, Anji's bamboo industry generated approximately 18 billion yuan (\$2.46 billion) in revenue.

Liang Fenghui, general manager of Zhejiang Fenghui Bamboo and Wood Co, based in Anji, said the company earned 130 million yuan in revenue in 2023 by selling bamboo-based products both domestically and internationally, including to Europe, Japan, the United States and Southeast Asia. Exports account for about 80 percent of the company's total revenue, he said.

Founded in the 1990s by Liang's father, the company focuses on manufacturing environmentally friendly bamboo products. "We specialize in consumables, packaging and lamps, with the majority of our materials sourced from bamboo," Liang said.

Bamboo consumables, including single-use knives, forks and toothbrushes, are designed for replacement within three months, aligning with efforts to reduce plastic usage. Some items, like bamboo sticks, are now produced automatically by machines.

At the company's factory, workers assemble bamboo lamps, which will be exported to European markets. "We have replaced plastic components in our lamps with bamboo as well," Liang added. The company is also enhancing value by incorporat-

ing cultural elements into the design of its packaging.

While the outlook for bamboo as a substitute alternative is promising, Liang acknowledged that domestic demand may take time to grow as consumer attitudes shift.

Bamboo products are already gaining traction in European and other international markets, but the domestic market still requires incentives to drive industry growth, according to Tang.

"Replacing wood materials with bamboo is already a common practice," he said. "However, using bamboo to fully substitute plastic is not an easy task. So far, there are only limited scenarios in which bamboo is used as a substitute for plastic in daily life."

One major challenge is the price difference between bamboo and plastic. Although plastic production based on fossil fuels generates more greenhouse gases, it remains cheaper due to lower labor and transportation costs compared to bamboo harvesting and processing, according to Tang.

"The price difference makes consumers favor plastic products," he said. "While we highlight bamboo's potential to reduce plastic pollution, the public often struggles to connect with it, as it seems distant from their everyday lives."

On the online shop for Anji's bamboo products, a bamboo toothbrush costs 3 yuan, and a bamboo Bluetooth keyboard is priced at 299 yuan. "The prices of these bamboo products are becoming more competitive compared to plastic alternatives," Bai said.

The government has introduced subsidies for certain bamboo products to reduce their prices and promote wider adoption. "These subsidies help bamboo products compete with plastic items, especially since many consumers are still unfamiliar with bamboo alternatives," she said.

"Consumer awareness is key," said Tang. "To further promote bamboo products in daily life, we need to shift traditional consumption habits."

In efforts to lower costs, Anji has developed low-altitude ropeways and drones to transport bamboo from the mountains.

"As automation boosts productivity and brings costs down, the increasing supply of bamboo should be met with rising demand so as to achieve market equilibrium," Tang said.

Anji is exploring bamboo's potential to replace not just wood and plastics but also steel, gas and even food. According to Tang, bamboo can serve as a renewable energy source based on its high caloric value, as a construction material because of its hardness, as a healthy food option and as a biomass material in cosmetics.

"To fully realize bamboo's ecological and social benefits, cross-sector collaboration is essential," he said.

Tang highlighted that using bamboo to replace plastic goes beyond just production. The entire life cycle of bamboo replacing plastics involves production, consumption and disposal.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

## Global South faces sustainable growth opportunities

Bamboo covers more than 50 million hectares worldwide, an area roughly the size of Spain, with the majority located in the Global South, offering significant potential for sustainable development.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the world generates 400 million metric tons of plastic waste annually. Unfortunately, only a small fraction of plastic waste is recycled, with the majority ending up in landfills or oceans, posing severe ecological threats.

In November 2022, the Chinese government and the International Bamboo and Rattan Organization (INBAR) jointly launched the "Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic" Initiative, aiming to realize bamboo's advantage in reducing plastic pollution and contribute to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

"Bamboo's unique physical and chemical properties, along with its

ecological advantages, make it a versatile material that can be transformed into fibers, pellets, pulp and blocks for a wide range of applications, including cutlery, packaging, furniture and construction," said Lu Wenming, deputy director general of INBAR.

"Bamboo resources, therefore, hold the potential to replace non-degradable, petroleum-based plastics and polymers, which are linked to high pollution and energy consumption."

Estimates suggest that using 100 million tons of bamboo to replace PVC (polyvinyl chloride) products annually could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 600 million tons. Additionally, the carbon emissions associated with bamboo processing are minimal — just 30 kilograms per ton — which is 1/216th that of steel, 1/220th that of aluminum, 1/41st that of cement and 1/19th that of plastic.

To date, over 10,000 different bam-

boo products have been developed globally. Its potential as an alternative green, low-carbon and biodegradable material has been recognized by the international community.

Recently, the International Organization for Standardization approved the global standard for bamboo drinking straws, marking the first ISO standard for bamboo as a plastic alternative.

Chinese bamboo products, including tableware and furniture, have been exported to markets across Europe, North and South America and Asia.

Bamboo products have made their mark in global construction projects as well. The inner ceiling of Terminal 4 at Adolfo Suarez Madrid-Barajas International Airport in Spain, is made of bamboo materials developed by a Chinese bamboo material company, Dasso.

The curved bamboo ceiling,

installed in 2004, is not only stable but also meets fireproofing requirements, and it has remained in good condition for over two decades, according to the company.

Under the Chinese government and INBAR initiative, significant advancements have been made in bamboo processing. "Fully automated drilling machines are now used to produce bamboo straws, and we've also made notable progress in developing bent bamboo straws," said Lu.

INBAR has carried out research on bamboo resources, production and markets in African countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana and Cameroon to support further studies on the potential of using bamboo as a replacement for plastic, according to Lu.

Cooperation in substituting plastic with bamboo is also highlighted in Sino-African cooperation as related programs are listed in the Forum



Visitors try bamboo products at a forum promoting bamboo-related innovation among Asian, European and African countries in Brussels, Belgium, in October. MENG DINGBO / XINHUA

on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2025-27).

According to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, training programs on bamboo forest management and bamboo product market development have been conducted between China

and African countries.

Through this collaboration, Chinese bamboo species and technologies have been introduced to Africa, promoting sustainable poverty alleviation by fostering the growth of the bamboo industry.

CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

## Ne Zha 2 premiere in US connects cultures

By RENA LI in Los Angeles  
renali@chinadailyusa.com

The Hollywood premiere of the blockbuster animated film *Ne Zha 2* turned the TCL Chinese Theatre into a vibrant celebration of Chinese culture over the weekend.

Featuring a dragon dance, martial arts performances and a showcase of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, the event on Saturday drew an international audience to the iconic location on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

The sequel to *Ne Zha* is titled *Ne Zha: Demon Child Conquers the Sea*, or *Ne Zha 2*.

Georges Chamchoum, executive director of the Asian World Film Festival, expressed deep appreciation for the cultural evolution of Chinese cinema, noting that the industry has shifted from old-fashioned productions to a more diverse and open expression of the country's culture.

"I think China has been doing forever good movies," Chamchoum told China Daily. "It's good to see that China is more open to show other kinds of movies, because a movie is the reflection of a country."

*Ne Zha 2*, based on Chinese mythology and the classic novel *Investiture of the Gods*, follows *Ne Zha* and his friend Ao Bing, born with supernatural powers from the Chaos Pearl. In the sequel, the duo face off against the Dragon King of the Four Seas and his army of sea creatures to protect their village.

The premiere was a significant moment for the film's international release, according to Gong Bohan, manager of the International Distribution Department at CMC Pictures, which manages the film's overseas distribution.

"It was also the first film to be released simultaneously at the TCL Chinese Theatre during the Chinese New Year celebrations," Gong told China Daily.

"We combined the film's red-carpet premiere with a showcase of China's intangible cultural heritage, allowing tourists from all over the world on the Walk of Fame to immerse themselves in Chinese culture," Gong said.

The film's success is already making waves globally. In China, *Ne Zha 2* has broken box office records by becoming the first film ever to surpass \$1 billion in a single market.

Released on Jan 29 for the Chinese New Year, *Ne Zha 2* has grossed an astounding RMB 8 billion (\$1.1 billion) in just 12 days, surpassing the \$935 million earned by *The Force Awakens* in the US for the single-market record.

The North American market's pre-sales are promising, according to Gong. He confirmed that *Ne Zha 2* will have a special IMAX 4D preview screening at TCL Chinese Theatres on Feb 12, with the official release scheduled for Feb 14.

"The film, which has already broken Chinese box office records and is approaching 10 billion yuan, is on track to rank among the top 20

highest-grossing films worldwide," Gong added.

Robert King, a Hollywood film producer, praised the film's success in China and its cultural significance. He suggested that *Ne Zha 2* could be a contender in multiple categories, including foreign film and animation.

"This little rascal *Ne Zha* would resonate with Hollywood," King told China Daily, adding that *Ne Zha 2* is "an extraordinary experience for China."

Meanwhile, King emphasized the cultural significance of the film, noting that it aligns with the TCL Chinese Theatre's efforts to foster cultural exchange.

"This film represents box office success in China, but I see it holding even greater cultural value in the message the premiere aims to deliver to Hollywood," King said.

Shawn Barrett, vice-president of XR Immersive Design at TCL Chinese Theatres, also lauded the film's animation, calling it "fantastic," and saying "it was a really top-quality film."

Barrett suggested that for broader American appeal, the film should be dubbed in English. "It has to be dubbed in English, then the American public would come," he added.

Barrett also recognized the significance of the TCL Chinese Theatre, formerly called Grauman's Chinese Theatre, a historic site known for starting the red-carpet tradition. He suggested that a Chinese cultural center could be established there to promote further cultural exchange.

Praising the movie as "unbelievable," Oscar-winning producer Andre Morgan, who produced *Million Dollar Baby*, also weighed in on the film's US marketing potential. "If this movie is marketed in the US much more quickly, its impact will be even greater," Morgan told China Daily.

He recommended creating short YouTube videos highlighting Chinese cultural elements in the film, which could help American audiences better understand and appreciate the movie.

In recent years, China's rapid economic growth and technological competition with the West have coincided with a resurgence in national pride and a revival of traditional culture. That has led to the retelling of ancient stories using modern digital technology, calling for high-tech collaboration in the film industry.

Li Zhiqiang, Chinese deputy consul general in Los Angeles, who attended the premiere, highlighted the increasing cooperation between the Chinese and American film industries.

"In recent years, China and US film cooperation has continued to deepen, producing many successful examples that not only allow both peoples to share rich cultural achievements but also inject new momentum into mutually beneficial collaboration," Li said, adding that more American audiences would understand China through films like *Ne Zha 2* and strengthen mutual friendship between the two nations.



People greet Palestinian prisoners released from Israeli custody in Ramallah, West Bank, on Saturday.  
AYMAN NOBANI / XINHUA

## Israel withdraws from key corridor in Gaza

Pullout follows 5th prisoner-hostage exchange as fragile truce takes hold

CAIRO/JERUSALEM — The Israeli military has withdrawn from a key Gaza corridor on Sunday as part of the cease-fire deal with Hamas, following Saturday's fifth prisoner-for-hostage swap under the first phase of the truce.

Israel agreed as part of the cease-fire to remove its forces from the Netzarim Corridor, a strip of land that bisects northern Gaza from the south.

"Israeli forces have dismantled their positions and military posts and completely withdrawn their tanks from the Netzarim Corridor on Salaheddin Road, allowing vehicles to pass freely in both directions," an official from the Hamas-run interior ministry told AFP.

An Israeli security source, requesting anonymity, confirmed the Israeli military was withdrawing from its positions in central Gaza, Reuters reported.

The full withdrawal of troops from the corridor took place a day after Hamas and Israel conducted their fifth hostage-prisoner swap.

On Saturday, three Israeli hostages previously held by Hamas were transferred from central Gaza to the Israel Defense Forces and the Israeli Security Agency and crossed the border into Israel, the IDF said.

The three hostages, kidnapped in a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, are Ohad Ben Ami, 56, a dual Israeli-German citizen; Eli Sharabi, 52; and Or Levy, 34.

Earlier in the day, a Xinhua News Agency correspondent saw three vehicles of the International Committee of the Red Cross arrive at the designated handover site in Deir al-Balah city.

The hostages moved onto a platform to speak first, and were then handed over by al-Qassam Brigades — the military wing of Hamas — to the International Committee of the Red Cross, according to the correspondent.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement that "in collaboration with security bodies, the government will support the released hostages and their families."

As part of the swap, Israel also freed 183 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails on Saturday.

## Greeted by crowd

Abdullah al-Zaghari, head of the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, said the released prisoners, transported by buses of the International Committee of the Red Cross, have arrived in Ramallah. TV footage showed the released Palestinians being greeted by a large crowd at a square in the city.

Of the freed prisoners, 42 were from the occupied West Bank, three from Jerusalem, and 27 from the Gaza Strip, all serving life sentences or lengthy terms. Additionally, 111 Palestinians were arrested in Gaza after Hamas' 2023 attack, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs said in a statement.

Palestinian security sources and eyewitnesses said that Israeli vehicles stormed Beitunia, a Palestinian city west of Ramallah, immediately after the bus carrying prisoners left Ofer Prison, to prevent any celebratory demonstrations by the families of the released prisoners.

Israeli forces also raided the

homes of some prisoners in the West Bank and warned their families against organizing celebrations to mark their release, according to sources.

Effective on Jan 19, the first 42-day phase of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas, brokered by Egypt and Qatar with support from the United States, stipulates that Hamas free 33 hostages and Israel release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

After the fifth hostage-prisoner swap, Netanyahu ordered negotiators on Saturday to return to Qatar to discuss the fragile cease-fire.

In a video statement released on Saturday, Netanyahu, who is currently in the US, reiterated his commitment to securing the release of all hostages.

"We will do everything to return all of our hostages. We will see to their safety. This is the directive that I gave to the delegation — say this to the mediators and demand it," he said.

In another development, Saudi Arabia affirmed its categorical rejection of remarks by Netanyahu about displacing Palestinians from their land, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

Israeli officials have suggested the establishment of a Palestinian state on Saudi territory. Netanyahu appeared to be joking on Thursday when he responded to an interviewer on Channel 14 who mistakenly said "Saudi state" instead of "Palestinian state", before correcting himself.

Egypt and Jordan also condemned the Israeli suggestions, with Cairo deeming the idea as a "direct infringement of Saudi sovereignty".

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## More Chinese tourists eyed as Sri Lanka deepens ties

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong  
xvweiw@chinadailyapac.com

Sri Lanka has high expectations from China's vast outbound tourism market, industry insiders say.

Following Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to China last month, bilateral ties have reached a new high, they added, highlighting Sri Lanka's manifold strengths as an outbound destination.

"President Dissanayake's visit underscores Sri Lanka's commitment to fostering robust ties with China, a partner that has consistently supported Sri Lanka's developmental aspirations," said Ananda Goonatileke, president of Sri Lanka-China Friendship Association.

Prasad Wijesuriya, the association's general secretary, said the visit has laid a robust foundation for boosting Sri Lanka's tourism sector through improved connectivity, infrastructure development and cultural exchanges. With these factors in place, Sri Lanka is well positioned to attract a growing number of Chinese travelers in 2025 and beyond, he said.

The signing of 15 cooperation documents during Dissanayake's visit reflects a deepened bilateral relationship, he added, which is expected to drive joint tourism promotion efforts, showcasing Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty to the Chinese market.

"Additionally, they focus on high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and projects like the Colombo Port City and Hambantota Port. Integrated development can enhance infrastructure and create new attraction for tours," Wijesuriya said.

## Cementing partnership

Priantha Fernando, former chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, said Dissanayake's visit to China could cement a long-lasting partnership, benefiting multiple sectors of Sri Lanka's economy.

"Tourism will be at the forefront, delivering rapid, sustainable benefits," Fernando said. "We are confident that the visit will usher economic affluence to the Sri Lankan economy."

The country is confident the president's visit will help it meet its target of 325,000 Chinese tourist arrivals this year, serving as a stepping stone for even greater inflows by 2030.

Last month, the country recorded 252,761 tourist arrivals — the highest ever for January — according to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority.

Alex Lee Chun-ting of Miramar Travel in Hong Kong said travelers from his city and the broader Asia-Pacific region are increasingly drawn to low-carbon tourism, making Sri Lanka a highly popular destination.

Wijesuriya echoed this view, highlighting Sri Lanka's appeal to Chinese visitors. "Sri Lanka is a year-round travel destination that provides warm and pleasant weather throughout the year."

XINHUA—AGENCIES



A Chinese dragon dance and martial arts were performed before the premiere of *Ne Zha 2* at the TCL Chinese Theatre as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations on Saturday in Hollywood. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY USA

## NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888  
Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com  
readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899  
Advertising: 212-537-8916

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WASHINGTON  
National Press Bldg, Suite 1108  
529 14th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20045  
Tel: 202-662-7349  
Fax: 202-662-7247

## SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
Tel: 415-348-8288  
Fax: 415-348-8388

## SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100  
Seattle, WA 98104  
Tel: 206-922-3966

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100  
Houston, TX 77077  
Tel: 713-956-7660

## CANADA / TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6B3  
Tel: 416-481-9706

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## African leaders call for cease-fire in eastern DR Congo

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania — African leaders called on Saturday for an immediate cease-fire in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, reaffirming their full support for seeking a lasting solution to the current conflict.

A "historic summit", jointly convened by the East African Community, or EAC, and the Southern African Development Community, or SADC, was held on Saturday in the Tanzanian port city of Dar es Salaam to address the escalating crisis in eastern DR Congo.

In a communique, the regional leaders called for an immediate cease-fire and the restoration of supply lines in DR Congo, as the March 23 Movement rebels has reportedly been advancing toward Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu Province, after establishing its so-called administration in Goma, the capital of North Kivu Province and a key regional hub.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the leaders directed the EAC-SADC chiefs of defense forces to meet within five days to devise technical



A woman cooks lunch on Saturday at the school where she is taking refuge with her family after their camp in Kanyaruchinya, North Kivu Province, was destroyed. ARLETTE BASHIZI / REUTERS

measures for enforcing an immediate and unconditional cease-fire.

Political and diplomatic engagement is the most sustainable solution to the conflict in eastern DR Congo, the communique stated, as regional leaders expressed support for resuming direct negotiations

with all state and nonstate parties.

The summit was co-chaired by EAC Chairman and Kenyan President William Ruto and SADC Chairman and Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Ruto reiterated calls for all parties to immediately cease hostilities and

take meaningful steps toward dialogue aimed at restoring stability.

Mnangagwa called on attendees to uphold the principles of transparency, truth and determination in the peace talks to ensure a lasting resolution to the crisis in DR Congo.

At least 2,900 people were killed during the M23 rebels' capture of Goma, according to the United Nations. The group claims to have controlled the city since Jan 26.

The conflict between the M23 and the Congolese government is deeply linked to the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and continuing ethnic tensions.

DR Congo has accused Rwanda of supporting the M23, while Rwanda claims that DR Congo's military has allied with the Rwandan rebel group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, which is accused of involvement in the 1994 genocide.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame attended Saturday's meeting, and his DR Congo counterpart, Felix Tshisekedi, joined via video link.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## BUSINESS

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## Foreign investment upgrades amid transformation

Multinational companies expand localization and innovation to seize new market opportunities

By ZHONG NAN

zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

For Anna An, president for China of German industrial and consumer goods group Henkel, 2025 is undoubtedly shaping up to be a busy year.

The company's new plant, with a total investment of 900 million yuan (\$124 million), is set to begin test production in Yantai, Shandong province, later this year. This facility is expected to raise the company's production capacity to supply high-end adhesives for industries such as electronics and automobiles.

"We are also planning to launch our new inspiration center for adhesive technologies in Shanghai this year, boosting our innovation capabilities for industrial businesses across China and the broader Asia-Pacific region," said An.

"The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held in December emphasized technological innovation and the promotion of consumption, creating significant opportunities for multinational companies like Henkel," she added.

Echoing that sentiment, Nathan Stoner, vice-president of Cummins Inc, a US engine manufacturer, said his company aims to increase its market share in key application sectors within China, including power generation equipment for data centers, high-tech manufacturing, and the engineering, procurement and construction sectors this year.

Highlighting that the company's hydrogen fuel cell products successfully powered 239 transit buses and trucks, and the accumulated mileage of over 16 million kilometers across China in 2024, Stoner, who is also chairman of Cummins China, said the company will continue to innovate on the internal combustion engine system, including high efficiency diesel, natural gas and hydrogen internal combustion engines in China this year.

"We are targeting our investments in zero-emission solutions into various Chinese regional markets where we see demand and adoption happening sooner, and iterating those products to be the best they can be, when customers want more of them," he added.

These examples highlight the growing optimism among multinational corporations regarding the long-term potential of the Chinese market, fueled by the country's economic resilience and its commitment to innovation and openness.

Initially, foreign companies were attracted by China's cost advantages and abundant labor force, using it as a base for producing competitive goods, said Xu Wei, head of the macroeconomic research department at the Development Research Center of the State Council.

As China advanced its infrastructure and industrial systems, it remained a low-cost production hub while evolving to offer sophisticated, high-value manufacturing, allowing foreign companies to integrate more advanced production processes, Xu said.

"With China entering a new era of green and innovation-driven growth in recent years, global investments have increasingly focused on supply chain optimization, high-end manufacturing, customized innovation, and digital and green solutions," he said, adding that sectors such as trade in services and healthcare have also become key areas of foreign investment.

For instance, in addition to announcing a record high of over 657,000 electric vehicle sales in the Chinese mainland in 2024, marking an 8.8 percent year-on-year



MAXUEJING / CHINA DAILY

increase, Tesla Inc, the US EV maker, is currently conducting trial production to manufacture energy-storage batteries at its Shanghai factory.

The US automaker said mass production at this facility is expected to commence fully within the first quarter.

China has been revising its sector list to attract more foreign investment. These efforts, along with the removal of all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector last year, reflect the country's proactive approach to openness.

Li Yongjie, deputy international trade representative of the Ministry of Commerce, said China will further open up its services sector, with a particular focus on accelerating pilot programs in key areas such as telecommunications, healthcare and education.

A total of 59,080 new foreign-invested firms were established across China in 2024, an increase of 9.9 percent year-on-year, according to information released by the Ministry of Commerce.

Wang Xiaohong, a researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing, said that China's ongoing commitment to further opening-up and fostering innovation is positioning the country as both a key player in global supply chains, and a prime destination for investment and strategic expansion.

This evolving environment is expected to create new opportunities for business growth, particularly as China adapts its policies to align with the shifting dynamics of the global economy, she said.

More than half of companies from the United States plan to increase their invest-

ments in China this year, according to the 2025 China Business Climate Survey Report released by the American Chamber of Commerce in China (AmCham China) in late January.

The survey, conducted from Oct 21 to Nov 15, involved a total of 368 member companies of AmCham China. It found that nearly half of the participants rank China as one of their top three global investment priorities.

About 68 percent of the US responding companies expect industry markets to see growth in 2025. Two-thirds of them plan to focus on growing their core business activities in China as their primary objective for 2025. Meanwhile, the consumer and services sectors are increasingly focused on driving growth by targeting new customer segments.

Jeff Losch, vice-president and business

manager for coating additives technologies at Milliken & Company, a US specialty chemical and performance materials firm, said China is a key market for Milliken, not only because of its vast scale, but also due to its forward-thinking approach to sustainability.

"We have observed a strong demand in the EV and industrial coating businesses. China's EV industry is extremely strong and has led the global market this year, with Chinese manufacturers making their presence felt in markets across many countries," said Losch.

He said that the quick growth of China's EV market has clearly created significant opportunities for the coatings industry. EV manufacturing requires coatings with high durability and environmental standards, which align closely with Milliken's innovation goals.

Eager to seize more market share, the US company plans to continue investing in its innovation unit, expand sales networks and enhance supply chain operations within China.

As China undergoes a profound transformation, making business navigation more challenging than before, Denis Depoux, global managing director at German consultancy Roland Berger, suggested multinational corporations make targeted investments to navigate the unique characteristics of the Chinese market and local competition.

"This strategy emphasizes enhancing localization efforts, particularly by tapping into China's innovation ecosystem, while also adapting to increasingly differentiated norms and standards," he said.

Affected by shrinking global investments in recent years, together with factors like slower economic growth, rising geopolitical risks, weak demand and stricter investment reviews in certain countries, foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland in actual use totaled 826.25 billion yuan in 2024, dropping 27.1 percent on a yearly basis, statistics from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

The adjustment of China's domestic industrial structure and rising labor costs have diminished the country's low-cost advantages, said Cui Fan, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

As a result, some labor-intensive industries have shifted gradually due to changes in comparative advantages. This reflects the evolution of China's economic development stage and factor endowments. This is a natural and expected process, said Cui.

Driven by China's stable political, economic and social environment, as well as its large-scale production capabilities and efforts to grow strategic emerging industries, FDI flow is expected to continue recovering within the country in 2025, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, which is affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

Strategic emerging industries in China include sectors such as energy-saving and environmental protection, next-generation information technology, biotechnology, high-end equipment manufacturing, new energy, advanced materials and EVs.

For efficiency-driven multinational companies, regions with dense and well-connected networks are emerging as primary targets for strategic expansion. This emphasis is closely tied to factors like strong industry integration, complementary capabilities and easy accessibility, and all these factors enable streamlined operations and growth, said Gao.

## Focus to attract global capital that aligns with long-term growth goals

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhong Nan

In years gone by, global companies, crucial to China's long-term economic success, established factories in China's coastal provinces, especially Guangdong, Zhejiang and Jiangsu. These companies employed young workers from the local job market and inland provinces to assemble products for export.

Following China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 as its 143rd member and its rise to the world's second-largest economy, these companies, in particular automakers, consumer goods, and food and beverage producers, broadened their operations by setting up new facilities in China's inland regions. There, they shifted

toward producing goods in large volumes for the domestic market.

Now, as China continues to optimize its industrial system, foreign companies are increasingly investing in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, modern services, high technology, environmental protection, and research and development.

These fields are at the forefront of China's push to elevate its economic structure, reflecting the country's commitment to sustainable and innovative growth. This strategic focus aims to attract global capital that aligns with China's long-term growth goals.

This strategic evolution in China's industrial landscape presents immense development opportunities for multinational companies. As the country champions sectors like advanced manufacturing, telecommunications, and green and renewable energy, global businesses have the chance to tap into a sophisticated economic environment ripe for innovation.

For example, Siemens Healthineers, a German health technology company, start-

ed construction of a new manufacturing and research facility in Shenzhen, Guangdong province in mid-January.

With a total investment exceeding 1 billion yuan (\$136.4 million), the new facility is expected to be operational by the end of 2027. It will focus on the research and production of angiography equipment and core components for magnetic resonance imaging systems.

This integration into China's burgeoning markets allows them to leverage cutting-edge technological advancements and robust industrial capabilities. Moreover, China's commitment to environmental sustainability opens new avenues for businesses specializing in green technologies and services, aligning with global trends toward eco-friendly industrial practices.

The modes of participation of foreign companies in the Chinese market are also evolving. Many of them, such as GE Healthcare, ABB Group and Honeywell International Inc, have been using platforms like the China International Import Expo and

China International Supply Chain Expo to launch their latest products globally and across Asia for the first time.

As the government pledged that it will roll out more measures to expand opening-up and attract more foreign investment in 2025, the country is likely to further advance the opening-up of its services sector, particularly pilot programs in the telecommunication, medical care and education fields this year, after it placed zero restrictions on foreign investment in its manufacturing sector in 2024.

In recent years, China's rapid advancements in digital infrastructure have also played a crucial role in attracting foreign investment. With one of the world's largest internet populations, the digital economy in the country offers a lucrative market for tech giants and startups alike.

Furthermore, China's push toward regional growth strategies, such as the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Chengdu-

Chongqing economic zone, offer new opportunities for investment beyond the traditional coastal economic hubs. These regions are becoming hot spots for high-tech industries, sustainable urban development and cross-border logistics services.

Despite the complex global economic and financial landscape, the resilience of China's economic growth continues to make it an appealing destination for foreign investment. The nation's vast consumer market, strong manufacturing base and increasing technological capabilities ensure that it continues to welcome foreign companies interested in exploring and expanding within its market.

China's strategic reforms and infrastructural investments over the years also underscore its commitment to a more open and reciprocal economic environment.

This commitment not only reinforces China's position as a global manufacturing and tech hub, but also as a leading player in the global economy, continually attracting foreign businesses looking for growth and innovation opportunities.

# BUSINESS



Two officers from Changchun Customs inspect export-bound vehicles to be transported via the China-Europe freight train service in Changchun, Jilin province, in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Green products crucial in driving increase in China's foreign trade

Exports totaled 25.45 trillion yuan last year, an increase of 7.1% y-o-y

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China's innovative and technology-intensive green products, ranging from electric vehicles to dual-fuel ships, will be crucial in driving the country's foreign trade growth in 2025, exporters and market watchers said.

They stated that these high value-added mechanical and electrical products are expected to contribute to the expansion of China's export sector, further positioning the country as a linchpin in global supply chains this year.

Despite growing external challenges and uncertainties, China's foreign trade rose 5 percent year-on-year to reach a record high of 43.85 trillion yuan (\$5.98 trillion) in 2024, while the country's exports amounted to 25.45 trillion yuan last year, an increase of 7.1 percent year-on-year, data from the General Administration of Customs show.

In the meantime, China's exports of mechanical and electrical products grew by 8.7 percent year-on-year, accounting for 59.4 percent of the country's total exports. Last year, exports of electric vehicles, 3D printers and industrial robots jumped 13.1 percent, 32.8 percent and 45.2 percent year-on-year, respectively.

This trend is fueled by rising global market demand and bolstered by supportive policies, with China's substantial supply capacity and robust industrial chain providing a solid foundation, said Chen Xuedong, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering and deputy general manager of State-owned China National Machinery Industry Corp.

Similar views were expressed by Sang Baichuan, dean of the University of International Business and Economics' Institute of International Economy.

Propelled by the ongoing green transformation, industrialization and industrial upgrades across numerous countries, China's exports of mechanical and electrical products, especially technology-intensive green products, will enhance the nation's foreign trade growth this year, said Sang.

Narwal, a Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based household robot manufacturer, has been heading in that direction. The number of its export markets expanded from fewer than 10 in 2023 to over 30 in 2024, covering multiple countries and regions including North America, Europe, Japan, South Korea and Australia, with fast-growing overseas sales.

"We will continue to invest in multiple fields such as 3D perception, artificial intelligence solutions, binocular vision technologies and big data application in the coming years. Our technological accumulations have helped us reach more overseas markets," said Zhang Junbin, the company's founder.

In 2024, Shenzhen's foreign trade reached 4.5 trillion yuan, surpassing 4 trillion yuan for the first time, with a year-on-year increase of 16.4 percent, statistics from Shenzhen Customs show.

Last year, Shenzhen's imports and exports of electronic products and their components, including household appliances, audio and video equipment and their parts, computers and their components, as well as flat panel display modules, soared 16.1 percent year-on-year, accounting for 51.9 percent of the city's total growth in foreign trade.

Facing rising protectionism, volatile global energy markets and geopolitical tensions, China has turned the challenges of deglobalization into a catalyst for industrial upgrading, leveraging its resilience and innovation in recent years, said Liang Ming, director of the Institute of International Trade, which is part of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

"In addition to supporting a large number of domestic companies to

accelerate their going global moves, China has also cultivated a diversified market and forged broader partnerships with emerging markets," said Liang.

China FAW Group, a Changchun, Jilin province-based State-owned automaker, shipped 125,000 vehicles to global markets in 2024, jumping 36.2 percent on a yearly basis and injecting strong momentum into the Chinese automakers' global expansion, data from Changchun Customs show.

Last year, Hongqi, a sub-brand of China FAW Group, made its debut in the European market with two new energy vehicles, said Zhang Hengkun, head of Customs affairs department of China FAW Group's exports and imports business unit.

Meanwhile, FAW Jiefang, the group's truck subsidiary, saw continued growth in its exports, successfully expanding to over 80 countries and regions including Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe, said Zhang.

To date, China FAW Group's overseas operations have expanded to 97 countries and regions across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. The automaker has established over 170 overseas sales and service branches and set up 24 overseas assembly production bases in locations such as South Africa, Tanzania and Mexico.

## Non-standard commerce becomes growth engine

CHONGQING — In Southwest China's Chongqing municipality, abandoned factories and warehouses have been transformed into vibrant cultural and creative hubs, while old neighborhoods have been revitalized with unique bistros and cultural exhibitions, turning them into popular tourist destinations.

In recent years, a new business model, distinct from traditional department stores, has emerged in China's consumer market, becoming a key driver of consumption. This model, known as non-standard commerce, blends shopping with art, culture, dining and design, creating comprehensive experience spaces.

Some old factory buildings have been repurposed as creative industry parks, such as TESTBED2 in Chongqing and Eastern Suburb Memory in Chengdu, Sichuan province, offering fresh perspectives on the history of urban development.

These transformations are part of a broader trend where commercial complex spaces, centered around interest-based culture and a slower-paced lifestyle, contrast with the fast pace of urban life. Another prime example is Shanghai's Hongshoufang neighborhood, established in 1933, which has become a new landmark, attracting both young and elder customers.

The newly opened Luzu Temple traditional street in Chongqing is a commercial complex that blends shopping, culture and social interaction, preserving the charm of the century-old streets while seamlessly incorporating modern design elements.

"From the artisan market in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) to the later book market and flower market, Luzu Temple has always embodied both cultural and commercial significance," said Shu Chang, manager of Uncle Tea Restaurant.

On the opening day, the restaurant was bustling with young customers from both the local area and other regions. The retro style of its outdoor dining area, which is seamlessly integrated into the local community, attracted many visitors who took photos and shared their experiences. Despite its small size, covering about 70 square meters, the establishment can generate up to 300,000 yuan

(\$41,370) in monthly revenue.

As young consumers enter the market, traditional retail models can no longer meet their demand for culture, art and social interaction, leading them to increasingly flock to non-traditional commercial spaces.

"Non-standard commercial ventures in places like abandoned factories and public areas attract more young people," said Tang Zhengyi, head of the commercial department at Cushman & Wakefield in Chongqing.

In a heritage building, classic Shaw Brothers films are screened on stage as patrons chat below, occasionally accompanied by the aroma of Chinese pancakes. This is the newly opened store of the craft beer brand Peiping Machine at Luzu Temple, marking their first expansion outside Beijing.

"For non-standard commerce, the space needs to be relaxing and uncrowded, the environment should be culturally rich and well-designed, and people at the same table should be able to have conversations and enjoy activities together," said store manager Dai Kan.

Non-standard commerce is not about confining people to a building for transactions, but rather about offering a space for living, emotional value and a certain consumer atmosphere, with experience being the most important element, according to Tang.

After a hectic working week, Chai Xinxin, a 24-year-old Shanghai resident, often takes her cat out for some relaxation on weekends. "In Shanghai, there are numerous pet-friendly non-standard commercial spaces where I can meet new friends who also adore cats," she said.

Shops are nestled within the community, where cafes, bakeries and clothing boutiques coexist in harmony with local markets, butcher shops and hardware stores, creating an atmosphere full of pleasant contrasts.

Non-standard commerce, with its unique allure and the ability to adapt to changing consumer perceptions, has emerged as a new growth engine for consumption, possessing significant potential and broad development prospects for the future, said Tang.

XINHUA



Visitors pose for a photo at the Beicang Cultural and Creative Block in Jiangbei district of Southwest China's Chongqing on Oct 4.  
WANG QUANHAO / XINHUA

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Public Interest AD: 012  
SONG CHEN AND MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

# BREAST DISEASE AWARENESS

EARLY DETECTION AND INTERVENTION CAN SAVE LIVES

# VITAL FOR WOMEN

Surveys show that a high percentage of Chinese women suffer from breast disease, and the life-threatening condition is now being found in younger women.

Many breast cancer patients did not recognize the early symptoms of the disease, and thus often receive diagnosis and treatment late. Medical experts suggest women aged above 30 should conduct breast self-examinations monthly and contact their doctor if they notice anything unusual.

## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## GDP goal for 2025 may stay at around 5%

## EAGLE EYE

By Guan Tao

The latest forecast from the International Monetary Fund suggests global economic growth will remain steady, with a projected growth rate of 3.2 percent in 2025.

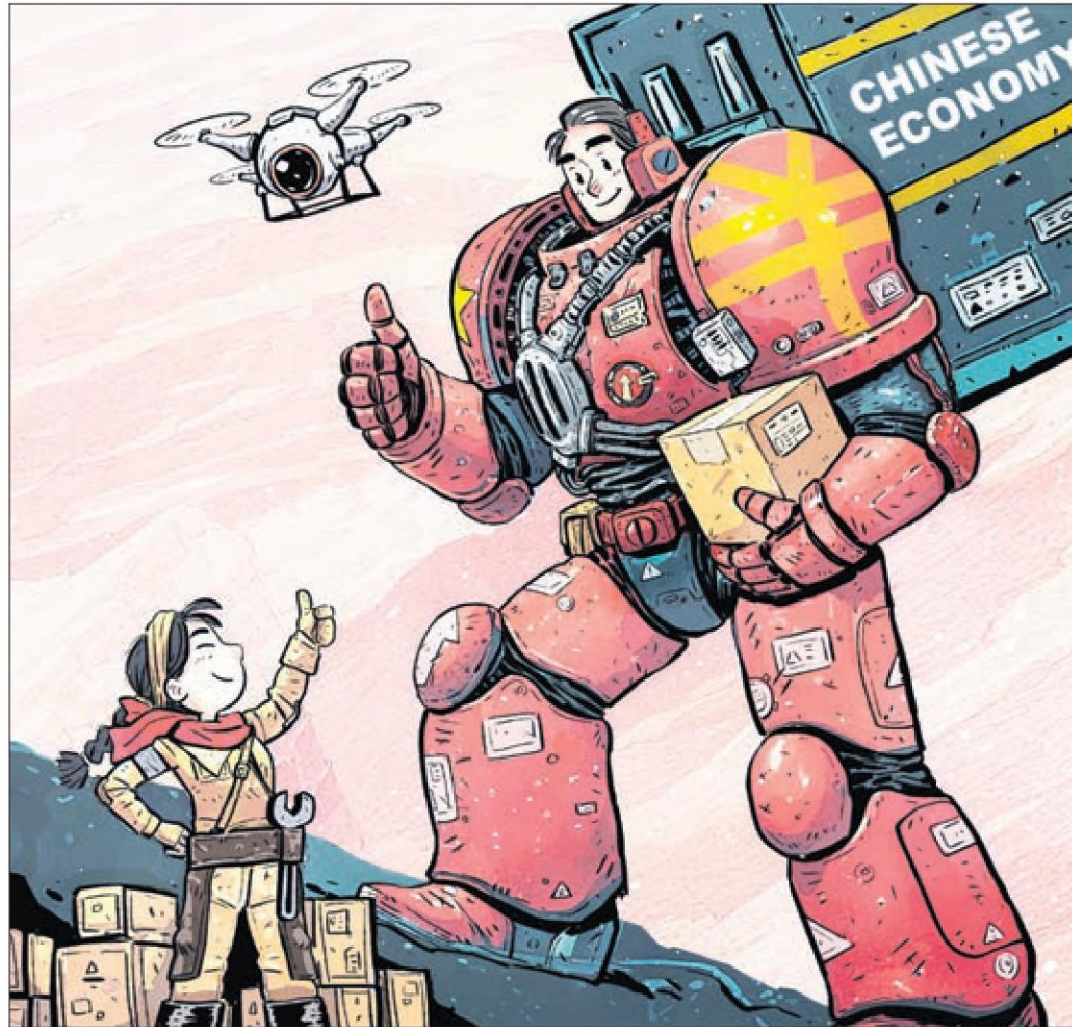
Growth rates for developed economies and emerging markets are expected to be 1.8 percent and 4.2 percent, respectively, unchanged from the previous year.

However, the IMF also highlighted significant downside risks to the economic outlook, including the escalation of geopolitical conflicts that could further disrupt energy markets, the adoption of harmful trade and industrial policies by various countries, prolonged tightening of monetary policy, and the possibility of a sudden tightening of global financial conditions. US President Donald Trump's administration will also be a key factor influencing the global economic outlook.

On the one hand, under a weak global economic backdrop, energy price growth is likely to slow down, and US rental prices may lead to a decline in housing inflation. As a result, US inflation is expected to continue to ease, and the US Federal Reserve is likely to continue interest rate cuts. However, the Trump administration's fiscal expansion, immigration policies and trade practices could pose a risk of inflation rebound, limiting the Fed's ability to reduce rates further. If the Fed maintains restrictive monetary policies for an extended period, it could increase the downside risks to the US economy and raise uncertainties around a "soft landing".

On the other hand, during his campaign, Trump threatened to impose high tariffs on all imports, with particularly aggressive trade policies toward China. Such tariff policies have already triggered retaliatory measures, and could trigger more from other countries, severely impacting global trade growth.

From a bilateral trade perspective, the trade imbalance between China and the US has significantly improved since 2018. According to US statistics, China's share of US imports dropped to 13.7 percent in 2023, a decrease of 7.7 percentage points from 2017. Additionally, the US trade deficit with China as a share of the total US deficit dropped by 20.7 percentage points to 26.2 percent, marking the lowest level since 2005. These figures suggest that the US has little political gain in continuing to pressure China on trade issues. However, "Trump 2.0's" push for higher tariffs on Chinese imports could escalate economic and trade tensions. While China's reliance on US exports has decreased, the imposition of high tariffs on goods produced in China and reexported to the US through



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third countries could still have a significant impact on China's export-driven economic growth.

In the second half of 2024, China's government repeatedly emphasized the need to strengthen macroeconomic policies, enhance countercyclical adjustments, and effectively implement existing policies while introducing new measures to boost growth. It is expected that China's fiscal and monetary policies will remain supportive in 2025, with a focus on improving people's livelihoods and stimulating consumption. In the final year of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), maintaining stable economic operations is crucial for coping with external risks and setting the stage for a strong start to the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30). The economic growth target for 2025 is likely to remain around 5 percent.

Amid policy support, consumption recovery will gradually strengthen. Since

2024, various policies aimed at boosting consumption have been rolled out, with notable measures like the policies to support trade-in deals for consumer goods. These policies are expected to further stimulate purchases of cars and home appliances. In September, the central bank announced a lowering of mortgage rates for existing home loans, which helps further support consumer spending. Moreover, the two additional statutory holidays in 2025 are expected to boost consumer expenditure. However, compared to investment, consumption is a slower-moving variable, with recovery mainly constrained by income growth. In 2024, wage incomes and net property incomes had slowed, with net property income growth hitting a historic low of 2.2 percent. Considering supportive policies for the real estate and capital markets, however, property-related income may increase, helping

drive gradual consumption recovery.

Real estate market is expected to stabilize and recover. In September 2024, a meeting held by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee said efforts should be made to reverse the downturn of and stabilize the real estate market, signaling a clear policy shift. According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the transaction volume of new homes in China went up 0.9 percent year-on-year in October last year, marking the first growth after 15 months of decline. The policy effects are expected to continue into 2025. Notably, the government's strategy of soaking up unsold inventories has played a key role in stabilizing the market. However, the effectiveness of this policy has been limited due to insufficient price adjustments, making it difficult to price properties reasonably.

Manufacturing and infrastructure

investments are expected to remain key supports for growth. Although the slowdown in export growth may suppress manufacturing investment, the Ministry of Finance indicated in early November that fiscal policies would be more supportive of large-scale equipment upgrades, helping to maintain high growth in manufacturing investment. This has been reflected in a 15.7 percent year-on-year increase in the investment on purchases of equipment and tools in 2024, 12.5 percentage points higher than the overall investment growth rate. Infrastructure investment is expected to be supported by multiple factors, including the country's local debt package, which will free up fiscal resources to support infrastructure projects. Additionally, major projects under the 14th Five-Year Plan are expected to accelerate this year.

In 2025, global uncertainties will significantly increase, with the Trump administration's policies emerging as a key variable affecting the global economic outlook. Earlier this month, the US imposed a 10 percent additional tariff on goods imported from China, as well as 25 percent tariff on goods from Mexico and Canada. In 2025, China's economy is expected to experience a gradual recovery in consumption, a stabilization in real estate market, and manufacturing and infrastructure investments will remain key for supporting China's economic growth.

To maintain steady economic growth amid external challenges, it is essential for China to intensify countercyclical adjustment of its fiscal and monetary policies and focus on boosting consumption and improving people's livelihoods. The space for fiscal easing has expanded, particularly with the recent decline in long-term government bond yields. Inflation concerns will be addressed when they arise, but for now, stabilizing the economy, mitigating risks and improving expectations are the priority. Only so can China build the resilience needed to respond to external shocks. Additionally, recent shifts in macroeconomic policy and the domestic economic recovery offer valuable time to advance structural reforms, including deepening fiscal and tax system reforms and fostering new quality productive forces according to local conditions.

Furthermore, China should actively manage external risks and mitigate the negative impact of "Trump 2.0". To avoid further trade conflicts, China should work to influence US policymakers, guiding both countries toward more cooperative trade policies. Moreover, China must remain vigilant, monitoring developments in US economic policies and preparing for potential challenges, strategically seizing opportunities even in the face of difficulties.

The writer is global chief economist at BOCI China.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Raising incomes should be focus in boosting consumption

## MAIN STREET

By Zhao Jian

For China, boosting consumption has become as important a task as enhancing innovation and competitiveness. Policymakers have taken the expansion of consumption to unprecedented heights on the development agenda, reflecting the urgency of figuring out solutions for Chinese consumers to maintain strong spending power in the long term, rather than just a short-term stimulus that can only trigger a temporary uptrend.

For the world's second-largest economy, boosting consumption is beneficial and a necessity. However, it is challenging. With industrialization and urbanization levels at historic highs, the main issue faced by the country's development has changed from insufficient supply and production capacity in the past, to systemic insufficient demand, such as the overcapacity in housing — which has been a major issue in recent years. The nation needs stronger consumption power to form its high-quality internal circulation development pattern with consumption-driven investments and free from major impacts created by restrictive moves of other nations.

To this end, China's five-year plan entering a new stage offers an opportunity for policymakers to bring changes in making development plans, with a focus shift away from industry and more toward consumption, which will involve a profound transformation in the framework, priorities and development concepts of the policy system.

## Root cause

It's known to many that consumption is deemed one of the "trioikas" that drive the economy, but from the perspective of the law

of economic development, consumption is always the ultimate goal of economic activities. Investment is also essential to serve future consumption.

After the industrial revolution, capitalization and socialized large-scale production have become the basic characteristics of developed economic systems, and the industrial chain has been lengthened, drastically expanding the proportion of upstream and intermediate capital goods. However, the ultimate value realization of upstream and midstream still depends on downstream consumption. As the modern industrial system gets increasingly complex, the signal transmission from the consumer goods market to the supply side is like "detouring" in the market and may not be completed in a timely manner, making it lead more easily to issues of overcapacity, insufficient demand, or even financial crises in some serious cases.

This is especially true for late-developing industrialized economies. For those, such as Germany and Japan after World War II, the time for research and development is less, and the original capital can be accumulated at a quicker pace, giving them the edge to take on the global market with lower factor costs. Such countries also experienced more or less of an overcapacity issue and financial crises in a certain period of their late stages of industrialization.

In order to solve the problem of overcapacity or insufficient domestic demand, such countries either vigorously develop the tertiary industry — mainly real estate and finance — to absorb production internally, or further globalize to occupy more external markets. But both paths have encountered challenges, with the former overdevelopment triggering a financial crisis due to the bursting of the housing bubble, and the latter triggering trade wars and even deeper conflicts between countries.

At present, China's economy is also facing

challenges alike. On the one hand, China — which boasts the largest industrialized capacity — is seeing its industrial output take up 40 percent of the global total. On the other hand, its consumption capacity ranks far lower compared to the size of its economy, with its share of consumption in GDP below the world average. This is a natural result of a nation achieving a higher development level, a necessary stage for post-industrialized countries, and a pure reflection of an objective law.

To conclude, long-lasting weak demand is a manifestation of the contradiction between the rapid increase in productivity and the relative lag in the evolution of production relations and a status where a country's consumption power cannot keep up with its productivity and innovation capability. Additionally, for China, speaking in terms of policy framework, the country has been adopting approaches of stimulating investment to boost demand for a long time, and has not accumulated much practical experience in expanding consumer demand, which is also a reason for its relatively weak consumption and less-than-expected policy effect on the sector.

## Key role

China has become the largest economy in terms of industrialization and electrification as well as the largest automaker. However, these are the sectors in which growth mainly depends on external demand. And once there is turmoil in the external market, exporters are expected to suffer issues such as backlogs of goods, performance losses, debt defaults, layoffs and salary cuts. In serious cases, there could be even a lot of bankruptcies, triggering a systemic economic crisis and undermining the country's economic security.

Looking back at the first three quarters of 2024, consumption's contribution to China's GDP growth was less than half — a sharp decline from the same period in previous

years. The contribution of exports stood high last year, which means that China's economic growth last year was still largely driven by external demand, which could be vulnerable in the context of the current global economic cyclical decline, a potential new round of trade wars and increasingly tense geopolitical conditions globally.

Therefore, more efforts are needed to spur the contribution of consumption in economic momentum and make consumption the "ballast stone" of China's economic growth. The nation should maintain a dynamic balance between supply and demand based on the internal circulation pattern, drive effective investment with consumption and inject impetus into consumption with the fresh supply brought by the effective investment, to ultimately ensure the sustainability of its internal circulation.

## Way out

Unlike investments, which can be more easily boosted by deficit stimulus, expanding consumption is a complex process of policy implementation and the transmission afterward. Consumption isn't something that can be easily controlled, especially the consumption of households. To expand consumption in the long term as the ultimate goal, the government can set intermediate goals such as raising income levels, because the final decision on consumption is still in the hands of micro entities.

Speaking further of this issue, how can China enhance its overall consumption power? One major solution is, of course, to increase people's disposable income. First, in terms of distribution structure, more income should be directed to households, because they are the main force of consumption. Measures could be, but not limited to, reducing the proportion of government accumulation in residential incomes, such as social insurance and the housing fund. In terms of income structure, it is also necessary to

attach importance to the increase of property income.

The other basis is to improve consumer confidence and eliminate consumer concerns over consumption as much as possible. In view of developed countries that have established a consumption-oriented economy, the premise of improving consumption power is that the government will "buy out" people's precautionary savings, that is, the social security programs will free people's precautionary savings, and people will no longer worry about the future, and most of the income obtained will be used for current consumption.

To this end, first, the government can transfer part of the budget for infrastructure investment to social security; second, the nation's deficit can be appropriately expanded to boost consumption, while ensuring that money is spent scientifically and appropriately for people's livelihood and social security.

With the increase in consumption, economic recovery may gather pace and tax revenues will also rise accordingly. Additionally, the government will have more financial resources to improve the level of social security and people will have more confidence to spend money and consume, so that the entire economy will form a benign and self-consistent internal circulation.

A more long-term approach is to shift the policy focus from industrial planning to consumption planning, which could be implemented in the upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30). It is necessary to focus on raising incomes, improve social security and increase investments in public goods such as healthcare, education and pensions to improve the foundation of consumption.

The writer is head of a research institute at Atlantis Investment, a Hong Kong-based asset management company. This op-ed is a translated version of an article by the writer published on the WeChat official account of China Chief Economist Forum, a think tank.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Full revitalization of enervated Northeast China imperative for country's holistic modernization

Northeast China, encompassing Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces, has historically served as a pivotal industrial and agricultural base, especially during the nascent years of the People's Republic of China. Once the country's economic powerhouse driven by heavy industry and rich natural resources, the region has become enervated as factors such as inefficiency, overcapacity, and global economic changes led to the decline of these industries in the region.

Today, the rejuvenation of Northeast China stands as a cornerstone strategy endorsed by the Communist Party of China Central Committee for the country's holistic modernization.

That Chinese President Xi Jinping has again emphasized that it is imperative for Jilin province to diligently execute the directives laid out by the CPC Central Committee for the comprehensive revitalization of the region on Saturday underscores the importance the country's leadership attaches to the revitalization of the region to enhance the country's food security, ecological security, energy security and industrial security.

Xi stressed the significance of grounding development in the real economy, calling for the transformation of traditional industries, bolstering competitive sectors, and fostering new quality productive forces, as well as leveraging technological advancements to drive tangible productivity gains.

Although this call in Changchun, capital of Jilin, was made to the province — after Xi listened to the work report from the Jilin provincial CPC committee and the provincial government in the provincial capital — his remarks should be seen as reflecting the top Chinese leader's thoughts after his extensive fact-finding tours in the region over the past three weeks. Before his inspection tour of Changchun, Xi visited Heilongjiang province to attend the opening of the ninth Asian Winter Games in the provincial capital of Harbin on Friday, and Liaoning province late last month.

That reflects the country still harbors the hope that Northeast China can cultivate its own comparative strengths in today's economic system.

As Xi stressed, the human factor is crucial to the revitalization of Northeast China, as the purpose of implementing the strategy is to improve the people's livelihoods. So local governments should not only create the necessary environment for the people to give full play to their talents to develop the region but also let the people enjoy the dividends of development.

To that end, local governments should target the bottlenecks that restrict the construction of a new development pattern and the promotion of high-quality development, including eliminating the institutional and mechanism barriers that hinder the development of the private economy and strive to establish a top-tier business environment that is market-oriented, governed by law, and internationally integrated, with an aim to construct a more sophisticated open economy.

They should promote the deep integration of scientific and technological innovation with industrial innovation, integrate scientific research resources and forces, strengthen the main position of corporate innovation, optimize the innovation ecology, and promote the transformation of scientific and technological achievements into real productivity.

Meanwhile, as Xi said, thanks to its special natural resources and geographical location, the region should coordinate its ecological environmental protection with green and low-carbon development, and use its unique advantages such as ice and snow, natural scenery, and ethnic customs to develop tourism. In the process, the localities in the region should strengthen their communication and coordination to avoid homogeneous and involuntary competition.

Xi's remarks also serve as guidance for other regions in the country that face similar challenges as Northeast China, including a brain drain, an aging society, shrinking population, resource depletion, underdeveloped private economy, difficult State-owned enterprise reforms and local government debt. These areas should have confidence that they can realize their revitalization and will not be left behind as the country pursues its modernization.

## US' tariff wars create a losing situation for all

US President Donald Trump, during a meeting with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Friday, announced plans to impose reciprocal tariffs on multiple countries next week, escalating the risk of a global trade war. In today's era of global interconnectedness and economic interdependence, the tariff wars initiated by the US threaten to disrupt international commerce and sow the seeds of discord among countries.

Driven by a combination of economic concerns, political strategy, and ideological beliefs, Trump has once again embraced tariffs as the means to address perceived trade imbalances, protect US industries, and extort concessions from trading partners.

On his inauguration for his second term in office, the White House issued Trump's "America First Trade Policy" memo, saying: "I am establishing a robust and reinvigorated trade policy that promotes investment and productivity, enhances our nation's industrial and technological advantages, defends our economic and national security, and above all benefits American workers, manufacturers, farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs and businesses."

But the reality is that any trade war is a double-edged sword. While such rhetoric resonates with his political base, particularly in areas of the US that have experienced the loss of manufacturing jobs as a result of globalization, the tariff wars his administration is waging will not achieve those aims.

The US tariff policies have triggered a surge in global trade protectionism. The potential consequences include reduced productivity, higher costs for businesses, and slower economic growth. As Mary Lovely, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said, they are a huge gamble, and "a recipe for slowing down the economy and increasing inflation".

The tariff battles will produce no winners and will not achieve the desired effects for the US. While tariffs might offer protection for specific industries and address trade imbalances in the short term, they fail to promote long-term investment and productivity. Retaliatory tariffs from trading partners can harm export-dependent manufacturing industries and agriculture, putting jobs at risk. Moreover, trade wars erode trust with trading partners, potentially leading to retaliatory measures that harm the US defense sector's industrial base and disruptions to global supply chains on which many US defense and technology industries rely.

Tariffs are a crude and simple weapon of the Trump administration's beggar-thy-neighbor economic nationalism that aims to reinforce US primacy. But the notion of a winner in a trade war is a fallacy, as the destructive ripple effects of protectionist measures spread far beyond the immediate participants, inflicting harm on economies, businesses, and consumers around the globe.

The uncertainty surrounding US diplomatic and economic policies is having an increasingly significant impact on the global economy and international relations. Trump's trade policies contribute to the complexity and instability of the global economic landscape. This uncertainty makes it difficult for businesses to plan and invest, further dampening economic growth. They are especially harmful to small and medium-sized businesses.

China is fully aware of the damaging consequences of trade wars. But the US administration has left it with no choice but to respond with countermeasures. It will not submit to external pressure.

Given the fact that many countries are struggling to recover their economic growth, what the Trump administration is doing will cast a pall on the prospect of the development of the world economy.

By standing up to the US and imposing carefully targeted countermeasures, China is not only showing that it will not be bullied but also demonstrating that it is a staunch defender of free trade and globalization. China is ready and willing to strengthen its relationships with other countries to oppose the US' harmful unilateralism.

Beijing urges the Trump administration to engage in dialogue. Rather than resorting to adversarial tactics, nations should engage in talks and seek mutual understanding to resolve trade disputes and foster inclusive growth. Cooperation and collaboration are essential to address the complex challenges facing the global economy and to ensure a more stable and prosperous future for all.

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at:

China Daily  
15 Huxin Dongjie Chaoyang District,  
Beijing 100029

News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366  
editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631  
ads@chinadaily.com.cn  
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App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK  
90 Cannon St. London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 8270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific  
China Daily Hong Kong  
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan  
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong  
+852 2518 5111  
editor@chinadailyhk.com  
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036  
+1 212 537 8888  
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa  
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya  
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)  
editor@chinadailyafrica.com  
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com  
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Shi Yu

SHIYU  
CHINADAILY

## Opinion Line

## Games spotlight snowballing popularity of winter sports

In his remarks at the welcoming banquet of the opening ceremony of the ninth Asian Winter Games on Friday, President Xi Jinping pointed out that, "From the Olympic Winter Games in Beijing to the Asian Winter Games in Harbin, the passion in China for ice and snow sports has swept across the nation".

China has effectively used such grand events as a catalyst to elevate the nation's ice and snow sports culture, and the country has realized its ambitious goal of engaging 300 million people in winter sports.

By April 2024, following the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, around 313 million people — over 22 percent of China's population — had actively participated in ice and snow activities. By

the end of 2023, the number of winter sports venues in China had reached 2,847, a 16.1 percent year-on-year increase, with new facilities emerging even in the southern regions.

The Asian Winter Games held in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, highlights China's growing global status in winter sports, which is supported by and further boosts the fast development of its ice and snow economy.

China's vision for its winter sports always includes a comprehensive winter sports economy encompassing equipment manufacturing, tourism and cultural industries. China's ice and snow economy is projected to exceed 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) in 2025.

China's winter sports equipment

industry is also expanding, bolstered by advancements in 5G, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality. The country now produces a full range of 15 ice and snow equipment categories, with innovations such as smart ski insoles, heated snow boots, and virtual reality skiing simulators.

The ultimate goal is to improve people's fitness. The development of the ice and snow economy has been and will continue to be an essential part of the efforts to realize a healthy China.

The theme of the Games — "Dream of Winter, Love among Asia" — embodies the shared aspiration and desire of the Asian people for peace, development and friendship, which sports help foster.

— AGENCIES

## Rise of DeepSeek sheds light on Chinese AI path

DeepSeek is an innovation "standing on the shoulders of giants", which stems from its integration and transformation of the international technology ecology, specifically manifested in the following aspects.

DeepSeek has adopted the research and development system of "distributed collaboration + agile development", integrating the innovative resources of universities, enterprises, and open source communities to shorten the technology iteration cycle. This "open innovation" path not only avoids the inefficiency of closed-door development, but also avoids homogeneous competition through differentiated technical routes.

Its open source model achieves expansion with marginal costs through user self-deployment and secondary development. In addition,

the application data generated by massive users continuously optimizes model performance, forming a positive cycle of "data-algorithm-scenario".

DeepSeek shows that China's AI development is neither a simple copy of the Western closed-source monopoly model nor completely dependent on international open source technology, but a new path of "independent innovation + open collaboration".

However, China still needs to continue to make breakthroughs related to AI research and development in technology popularization, innovation globalization, and participation in global governance.

The Chinese AI companies can help sustain the open source community by building multipolar data element collaboration networks that connect global developers, companies

and research institutions. Participants from different countries and regions, with their unique cultural backgrounds, technical advantages and market needs, can share knowledge, exchange experiences and innovate together on an open platform.

The country should also actively participate in multilateral cooperation on global data governance, promote some tested and proved Chinese practices to become international standards, and contribute to the establishment of a fair, transparent, and inclusive international data governance order. Through institutional exploration in areas such as cross-border data flows, digital taxes, and AI ethics, China can better provide relevant experience for the development of global AI technology.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## What They Say

## Slavish copying won't replicate Ne Zha's feats

The animated film *Ne Zha 2* was released in China on Jan 29, Chinese New Year. It had grossed 7.81 billion yuan (\$1.08 billion) in box office revenue as of Sunday morning on an \$80 million budget. That makes it the highest-grossing film of 2025 so far, the highest-grossing film in China, and the highest-grossing non-English language film of all time.

The movie, which is loosely based on the novel *Fengshen Yanyi* (Investiture of the Gods), a 16th-century Chinese novel that is one of the major vernacular Chinese works in the gods and demons genre, conflates the traditional Chinese cultural values of filial piety, friendship, loyalty and patriotism with the modern values of justice, freedom, responsibility and self-awakening.

The filmmakers have done a good job in using modern digital technology to enliven the fairy tale with martial arts, using thrilling visual effects to attract audiences and encourage them to empathize with Ne Zha.

Some Chinese movie critics have said the film is a visual feast of Oriental aesthetics, proving that Chinese

animated films have shaken off the label of "childish". Some claim that it has used the combination of "technology + culture" to tear open the cracks in Hollywood's monopoly.

According to the producer of the film, the film uses distributed cloud rendering technology to enable seamless collaboration among 27 animation studios across the country.

Because animated films can better tap into the potential of new technologies to attract audiences, investors are increasingly enthusiastic about animated films, and the money originally used to improve the look of a film with costly visual effects and on promotion

That explains why the proportion of animated films in film and television initial public offerings in China has jumped from 3 percent in 2015 to 19 percent in 2023. The capital market has begun to vote for Chinese "Pixar Animation Studios" with real money.

*Ne Zha 2*'s success is also supported by the film's precision promotion on social media that specifically targeted the parents born in the 1970s and

1980s, who used to watch *Ne Zha* cartoons during their childhood, prompting them to bring their children to the cinema to enjoy their childhood hero together.

Despite this, it should be pointed out the record box office revenue of *Ne Zha 2* also stems from the fact that the domestic audience had fewer choices during the Spring Festival holiday season this year than previous years, and the film ticket price has surged markedly than before.

With the influx of capital to the animated film sector, a worrying trend has emerged of the gold rushers excessively relying on the domestic market, special visual effects, commercial promotion, and ancient Chinese stories. That means some future Chinese animations might just stumble where *Ne Zha 2* succeeded if they go too far in copying the aspects that have made the movie so successful refusing to seek to tell better modern Chinese stories in animation forms that can appeal to the world audience in the competitive international market.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | The 9th Asian Winter Games

**Editor's note:** With Chinese people's passion for ice and snow sports ignited by major winter sports events, the 9th Asian Winter Games, which opened in Harbin on Friday, promises to be another spectacular winter sports in China after the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, promoting camaraderie, peace and prosperity. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Wang Zhaohong and Li Jing

## A boost to ice and snow economy

Late last year China issued guidelines to boost the ice and snow economy through high-quality development of winter sports. The aim is to leverage major ice and snow events to enhance ice and snow sports culture and strengthen the industry chain, marking a crucial step in promoting winter sports and tourism.

With Harbin hosting the 9th Asian Winter Games, Heilongjiang, known for its snow-covered landscapes and strong winter sports tradition, has taken center stage. Hosting Asia's largest and most prestigious ice and snow sports event, the province is poised for a transformative leap in terms of its ice and snow economy.

Heilongjiang has a rare blend of vast forests, pristine snowfields and ice surfaces, making it an ideal location for winter sports. For Heilongjiang, the event represents more than just competition; it is a chance to reshape the local economy by attracting new businesses, technologies and tourists.

The economic benefits of hosting the Asian Winter Games are already evident. In the run-up to the event, local government departments have been upgrading the city's infrastructure, while investments in transportation, accommodation, dining, retail and other services have been made to ensure the stay of athletes and visitors is convenient and comfortable.

In Harbin, the renovation of 10.44 million square meters of old residential areas, the modernization of infrastructure, and environmental improvements along the Songhua River reflect the significant impact of the event on the city's landscape, which not only enhances visitors' experience but also improves residents' quality of life.

Beyond infrastructure, the Asian Winter Games will highlight the huge potential of ice and snow tourism in Heilongjiang. The arrival of thousands of athletes and spectators will boost the province's economy, particularly its hospitality and service sectors.

The Asian Winter Games will enable visitors to experience Heilongjiang's rich cultural heritage. Events such as ice acrobatics, traditional opera performances, and Lantern Festival celebrations will showcase the



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



Wang Zhaohong is a professor at the College of Physical Education and Sports, Beijing Normal University.



The Li Jing is a PhD student at the same collage.

region's unique traditions, allowing visitors to engage with the local culture and strengthening Harbin's position as a global winter tourism hub.

The legacy of the Asian Winter Games will continue even after the event is over, as the competition venues will remain open to the public. This will boost the development of professional ice and snow sports venues, attracting more tourists who want to take part in or watch winter sports. In turn, Heilongjiang will contribute to China's "300 million people participating in ice and snow sports" initiative and consolidate its leading position as the winter sports capital of China.

The Asian Winter Games will also promote innovation in the ice and

snow sports industry beyond tourism. By boosting the ice and snow equipment manufacturing sector and improving winter sports services, the Games will help Heilongjiang enter a new phase of economic growth.

National and local policies have already been implemented to attract investments in the sector, with a focus on advanced technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence and big data. This will help transform the industry. The emphasis on technological advancement is necessary as Heilongjiang seeks to diversify its economy away from heavy industry. As the ice and snow economy grows, it will create new growth areas for the local economy, with focus on low-energy, low-pollution and high-efficiency industries in line with global sustainability trends. By fostering innovation in the emerging sectors, Heilongjiang can contribute to the broader economic transformation of northeastern China, setting an example for other regions to follow.

The Asian Winter Games will have a far-reaching impact on the country, as it will inspire more people to take part in winter sports and help build a pool of talented athletes. Local governments are already ramping up efforts to train athletes, coaches and referees to ensure that Chinese athletes are competent enough to compete at the highest level.

Furthermore, hosting the Asian Winter Games will give China a unique platform to showcase its winter sports achievements to the world. As Chinese athletes compete and succeed, they will enhance China's global image as a strong competitor in ice and snow sports. In the long run, this will strengthen China's position in the global ice and snow economy and ensure that its industry remains competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

In other words, the Asian Winter Games will serve as a touchstone for the future of China's ice and snow economy, guiding it toward a new era of high-quality, sustainable growth. As Heilongjiang leads the charge, it will help propel China — and the global ice and snow economy — toward an exciting new frontier.

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

Dong Yanghua

## Competitive spirit and rational fandom define true sports culture

The number of sports fans continues to increase in China thanks to the development of the sports industry and the increase in people's demand for sports-related services. However, the chaotic fandom culture has severely disrupted the development of the sports industry. To address the problem, some government departments have carried out many special campaigns and a number of athletes have issued statements or disbanded their fan groups on Weibo, China's leading microblogging platform, to express their opposition to aggressive fan culture. Yet the overzealous behavior of "sports fan circles" continues despite being banned by the authorities.

Modern sports have been commercialized, with athletes as the main body, events as the carrier and spectators or fans as the core source of profit.

With the development of China's economy and the improvement in people's living standards, participation in and consumption of sports have become more important for people. The growing number of sports fans has benefited sports, injecting new vitality into the sports economy and creating new opportunities for the sports industry.

The diversified demands of fans have given rise to new business formats including sports-related gifts and sports training, and promoted the diversified development of the sports industry. For example, the Thomas and Uber Cup in Chengdu, Sichuan province, last year attracted 128,000 visitors to the city and yielded direct economic benefits of 540 million yuan (\$74 million). The support of sports fan is transformed into consumption, which is the most direct commercial contribution of sports fans to the sports industry.

Sports fans have also helped improve athletes' commercial value, making their "star power" increasingly apparent. Star athletes having a large fan base are like entertainment celebrities. Their economic status and market influence have improved and their earnings have greatly increased because of their incomes from commercial endorsements, entertainment programs and magazine shoots. In addition, the active online platform economy creates new opportunities for athletes to have a constant source of income after retirement.

The wonderful performance of some outstanding athletes in high-level competitions has further stimulated people's enthusiasm for sports. But when sports fans organize a "fan circle", the abnormal and chaotic fandom culture invades the field of sports.

A "fan circle" is a group of fans that supports the same athlete or team and shares the same interests. Some fans behave irrationally or become aggressive because they misunderstand the value of sports. They tend to over-idolize athletes or teams and, by doing so, disrupt athletes' normal life and affect their competitive prowess with irrational online and offline behaviors.

The abnormal fan culture has damaged the relationship between the public and athletes, the economic benefits and social effects of sports, destroying the development environment of China's sports industry.

There is an essential difference between athletes and entertainment celebrities. For the latter, both positive and negative news helps them maintain their popularity and commercial value. As such, they normally take advantage of their fanatical fans to earn commercial benefits. But the situation is different for athletes, whose commercial value is directly related to their physical capability and competitive prowess and winning spirit. High-level sports competitions are the test of not only an athlete's professional skills but also his/her physical and psychological capability.

Some people trade athletes' itinerary information, disrupting public order at airports and hotels, while some so-called fans provoke confrontation among athletes. Under such circumstances, many athletes get frustrated and even face cyber violence. Of course, there are some athletes who cannot resist the temptation of commercial benefits, and eventually give up their sports careers to join the entertainment industry.

Also, certain economic entities offer professional guidance to athletes on how to turn their commercial value into cash, while the managers of some fan clubs take advantage of sports fans' tendency to organize activities and sell sports-related products to make profits, and some online platforms draw internet traffic or occasionally organize ranking activities for profit.

Worse, some fan clubs systematically solicit public opinions online to denigrate some athletes who are in competition with their idols. It is therefore crucial that all parties work together to eradicate the chaotic fandom culture. And to do so, government departments need to formulate regulations, publicize the legal punishment for creating chaos to defend or support an athlete or a team.

The media should adhere to the principle of objectivity in sports reporting, avoid hyping unconfirmed information and help form correct public opinion, while online platforms need to adopt advanced technologies to strictly monitor information sharing, filter out fake news, ban account users who upload inappropriate remarks and organize chaotic, unruly fan activities.

The authorities should also organize online and offline activities, highlighting that good sports culture is all about fans' awareness of the rules, rational thinking and understanding that the true essence of sports lies in sportsmanship and self-transcendence, not in blind following. In short, fan economy is necessary for the development of the sports industry, but it requires the joint efforts of all stakeholders to improve governance, maintain the market order, cultivate a healthy and orderly sports culture and curb chaotic fan culture.

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

Franco Ascani

## Asian Winter Games can drive Harbin's development

Major international sports events have always been an important economic lever for the host country, and hopefully the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin this year will play the same role. With the participation of more than 1,200 athletes from Asian countries, the event will not only showcase China's extraordinary organizational capability but also help boost the economy of the city and surrounding region.

The positive effect of an event of such a magnitude becomes evident when we analyze the economic impact of similar events. A recent report by the Centre de Droit et d'Economie du Sport estimated that the Paris 2024 Summer Games had an economic impact of more than €10 billion (\$10.41 billion), with the amount being distributed among organization, infrastructure and tourism. Such events not only stimulate the local economy in the short term, but also leave a legacy of improved infrastructure and tourism growth.

For example, after successfully and profitably hosting the 2006 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Turin, Italy applied again to host the

Winter Olympics and was awarded, for the third time in history, the Winter Olympics that will be held in Milan and Cortina in 2026.

The Asian Winter Games in Harbin is expected to have a similar impact, especially because ice and snow tourism is expected to grow at a high rate in keeping with the trend of more than 40 percent growth in foreign tourists in the 2024-25 winter season. The Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival, which comprises the world's largest ice and snow-themed park, attracted more than 1 million visitors in just 20 days since its opening, showing that the city is already benefiting from an increased influx of winter sports tourists.

A key aspect of sports events of this magnitude is their role in helping modernize infrastructure. As the provincial capital of Heilongjiang, Harbin has invested heavily to improve its transport, accommodation and sports facilities. The creation or renovation of such infrastructure facilities will not only make the city more attractive to tourists, but also leave a lasting legacy for residents, as was the case for the Barcelona where the number of international tourists quadrupled after the city hosted the 1992 Summer Olympics.

The number of ice and snow sports facilities in China increased from 700 in 2015 to almost 3,000 in 2024. This growth reflects the Chinese government's commitment to promote winter sports, with the aim of making the ice and snow economy a key driver of economic development. This trend is expected to yield about 1.2 trillion yuan (\$165.52 billion) by 2027 and 1.5 trillion yuan by 2030.

Organizing events of this scale also

has a multiplier effect on local employment. Increased demand for goods and services pushes companies to upgrade their production systems and increase their workforce, leading to an increase in people's incomes which in turn boosts people's spending capacity, generating widespread benefits for the local economy.

But hosting an event of this scale also has implications far beyond the duration of the event. One example is the increase in tourism in Harbin and the surrounding regions. For instance, Jilin province recorded a 120 percent increase in tourist visits last year compared with the previous year, with a 140 percent increase in tourism revenue to 241.9 billion yuan.

This shows the growth of winter tourism has a ripple effect across the region. The phenomenon is also evident at the national level: the number of ice and snow tourists in China increased by 38 percent last season, with revenues growing by 50 percent. According to projections, more than 500 million people are expected to take part in winter tourism this year, an increase of 20 percent over 2024.

The internationalization of the city is another key impact of major sports events. Harbin, known as the "Ice City of China" and having already hosted the Asian Winter Games in the past, will see its brand grow globally. This will attract not only tourists but also investors who will help further develop the tourism industry, winter sports and other sectors. With more than 900 companies operating in the ice and snow equipment sector — up from about 300 in 2015 — Harbin has the potential to become a strategic industrial hub for this sector.

In addition to the economic benefits, major sports events also have a huge socio-cultural impact. Residents of host cities develop a great sense of belonging and pride in their community, while taking initiatives and organizing activities related to the event, which strengthens the social fabric.

From a political point of view, these events foster international dialogue and cooperation between governments, sports organizations and private companies. The opportunity to establish new economic and commercial partnerships makes the Asian Winter Games an important platform for sports diplomacy and territorial marketing.

Apart from the immediate economic impacts related to tourism and investment, the effects, starting from the following two years, include the improvement of infrastructure (not only sports), the growth of the winter sports sector and the internationalization of the city.

However, in order to maximize these benefits, the authorities have to strategically plan their moves. Investments in sustainable infrastructure, tourism promotion and lifestyle improvement could be the key to ensuring lasting growth.

Harbin could consolidate its position as one of the world's leading winter tourism destinations. If used properly, this edition of the Asian Winter Games could be a turning point for the city and the rest of the northeast region, transforming it into a global center for winter sports and ice and snow-related tourism.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ALEXANDER LIBMAN

## Duo dynamics

China and Russia are driving closer and hardly any political interventions can change that

The past few years have been a period of unprecedented growth in economic ties between Russia and China. For Russia, China has become the main supplier of multiple consumer and industrial goods in the shadow of Western sanctions. In January to October of 2024, China accounted for about 34 percent of Russia's foreign trade, compared with 18 percent in 2021. China received privileged access to the Russian automotive market, and it helped China to turn into the leading global exporter of cars. In January to November of 2024, for example, China sold some 1,060,000 cars to Russia (the second-largest importer, Mexico, accounted only for about 420,000). In 2023, China accounted for about 45 percent of Russian oil exports, nearly half of the coal exports and 23 percent of pipeline gas exports.

Should one consider these growing interdependencies as the start of a long-term trend, or, rather, a short-term spike in economic activity, which is unlikely to last? Ultimately, the development will depend on five main factors.

The first and the most obvious factor is the economic sanctions imposed by the European Union, the United States, Canada and several other countries against Russia. Russia is currently the country with the largest number of individual sanction measures against its economy in the world. While it has not led to the complete decoupling of Russian and Western economies, it has massively decreased flows of goods and capital. For Germany, for example, Russia accounts for less

than 1 percent of total exports; its official exports to Russia involve a very small number of industries (pharmaceuticals and food).

It is unlikely that the sanctions against Russia will be completely revoked in the future. And even if Donald Trump's new administration succeeds in its ambition to negotiate a deal over the crisis in Ukraine, and this deal will include some sort of sanctions relief, it will not lead to the restoration of economic ties between the West and Russia. For businesses, it is enough to know that imposition of sanctions is possible — depending on the development of political relations, and that they need to be extremely cautious.

Russia moves into the same category of countries as Iran or Belarus — even if sanctions are reduced at some point of time, they can always be restored, and it deters the development of trade and investments. This will massively strengthen the development of economic ties between China and Russia in the long run.

Second, the US created a legal basis for the use of secondary sanctions against companies and financial institutions engaging in transactions with Russia in 2023-24. It means that those willing to do business with Russia may face major repercussions: They will be cut off from the US market (and, because of the crucial role of the US dollar in international payments, from other markets as well). Even the threat of secondary sanctions is often enough for large companies to reduce their activity or to introduce additional checks — again, Iran is a case in point. Secondary sanctions could negatively influence the dynamics of economic relations between China and Russia — in the last year it already experi-

enced setbacks because of this factor. At the same time, the threat of secondary sanctions works only as long as Chinese companies can operate under the assumption that there is a course of action allowing them to avoid US sanctions altogether.

The problem is that deteriorating political relations between China and the US make it increasingly likely that Chinese companies will face US sanctions regardless of whether they deal with Russia or not. The attitude toward China as an economic and political rival, which has to be contained, is among very few points of consensus between the Democrats and the Republicans in the US. If that is the case, disengaging with Russia makes no sense: one will simply delay the inevitable economic confrontation with the US. Under these conditions, US secondary sanctions will have a smaller effect.

The third factor is the transformation of the global economy. Since the first Trump administration, there has been increasing speculation about the world entering a new era of deglobalization; after an epoch of skyrocketing development of trade and free markets, governments will increasingly rely on protectionism, and the world will break up into competing economic blocs relatively isolated from each other.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis fueled this debate. As of now, the empirical evidence is mixed. Economic relations between China and the US are indeed going down, but many other countries are jumping in as intermediaries. There is a point of no return though: the divergence of technological standards. Once it happens, while there will still be enough space for trade in resources and raw materials, trade in manufac-



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

tured goods will be severely limited. Furthermore, mutual mistrust may result in the emergence of alternative payment systems, which will also contribute to fragmentation. The deglobalization scenario will also support the development of economic ties between China and Russia.

As for Russia, over the past couple of years, it fared much better than many expected, demonstrating high growth rates. Most growth forecasts for 2024 are in the range of 3.5 to 4.5 percent. However, the stability of this growth is questionable. Even in the short run, a labor shortage is likely to become a hard constraint for Russia's economic

development. By the end of November 2024, the unemployment rate in Russia reached 2.3 percent, which is an all-time record. Its economy remains dependent on the prices of commodities, especially oil. It is quite possible that in the coming years Russia will enter a special type of stagflation: high inflation, low growth rates and (contrary to other cases of stagflation) low unemployment and massive deficit of workforce. Even under these conditions Russia will remain a large market and an important trade partner.

Ultimately, a lot of factors are driving the Russian economy closer to the Chinese one. They are of

long-term structural nature, and there are hardly any political interventions which could change it. Essentially, economic dynamics between Russia and China will be influenced by the dynamics of US-China relations (which will also affect the entire world economy) and the evolution of the Russian economy itself.

*The author is a professor of Russian and East European Politics at the Free University of Berlin. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

ZHANG JIE

## Balance point

In general, Southeast Asian countries' relations with China are stable and progressive

Economic growth in Southeast Asia in 2024 is expected to be between 4.5 percent and 5 percent, signaling the continued recovery and expansion of the region's economy. Notably, countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines are achieving big growth rates. In

terms of industrial development, the overall manufacturing sector in Southeast Asian countries is trending positively, and the tourism industry is continuing to recover. The digital economy, in particular, is growing rapidly, with an expected year-on-year increase of 15 percent. The investments in clean energy and electric vehicles are also increasing at a fast pace, potentially bringing new growth points to the regional economy.

Last year, Laos served as the rotating chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, coordinating among member states to reach a broad consensus on the future development of the ASEAN with the theme "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience". Its efforts included enhancing connectivity through economic integration, jointly creating an inclusive and sustainable future, transitioning toward the digital age, and supporting the ASEAN Community Vision 2024 and ASEAN-advocated strategic plan to strengthen the association's resilience and central role in the region. It is evident that closer regional economic cooperation remains the core agenda for the organization. The success of the series of leaders' meetings on East Asian cooperation in October also marked the support of both regional and external countries for this core agenda, as well as their recognition of ASEAN's central position in regional cooperation.

However, as many international media outlets have noted, ASEAN still faces the challenge of properly addressing regional security hot-spot issues. The first is Myanmar. The country's economy has stagnated, and in 2024, it suffered from

severe natural disasters and a worsening refugee problem, and its civil war has intensified, drawing widespread attention from both regional and external countries. Although the ASEAN proposed a Five-Point Consensus on the Myanmar crisis in 2021, it has never been accepted by the Myanmar military government, and there are also disagreements among ASEAN members. This has led to doubts about the ASEAN's regional leadership.

Furthermore, the Philippines has not only frequently provoked China on the South China Sea issue at the bilateral level but also attempted to exert pressure on China through the ASEAN platform. In response, the joint statement of the ASEAN Summit noted that the ASEAN had discussed the South China Sea issue, calling for better mutual trust among all parties to show self-restraint, avoid the escalation of disputes and further complicating the situation, and settle disputes through peaceful means, among other things. In practice, ASEAN states and China have continued to advance consultations on a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, striving to maintain stability in the region.

In 2024, China's relations with Southeast Asian countries remained stable and progressive, with fruitful economic cooperation. Head-of-state diplomacy reached new heights, leading to deeper bilateral relations. According to available statistics, China held multiple head-of-state meetings with



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

most Southeast Asian countries throughout the year. This was partly due to the good bilateral relations, such as mutual visits between China and Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia. Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto visited China twice, once before taking office and once shortly after he started his presidency, reaching important consensus with China on building a community of shared future with regional and global influence.

In addition, long-established regional and subregional dialogue mechanisms created favorable conditions and provided convenience for bilateral meetings between leaders of China and Southeast Asian countries. During the series of leaders' meetings on East Asian cooperation in October, Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with the heads of several ASEAN countries and visited Laos and Vietnam. In November, during the Lancang-Me-

kong Cooperation meeting, leaders from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam gathered in China to attend the event.

Southeast Asia has always been a priority in China's diplomacy and rich fruits of regional cooperation have been harvested. In 2024, China and Southeast Asian countries achieved new progress in the field of connectivity. The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, which officially opened in 2023, has transported over 6 million passengers. The China-Laos Railway has shown strong growth in both passenger and cargo traffic, continuously unleashing its value as a golden corridor. The East Coast Rail Link project in Malaysia is proceeding smoothly, and the China-Laos-Thailand freight train services have officially started. The China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 upgrade negotiations have been substantially concluded. New quality productive forces such as the digital economy and the green economy are becoming new opportunities for China to explore cooperation with most Southeast Asian countries.

In general, regional economic cooperation remains the greatest consensus between China and ASEAN countries. China and major Southeast Asian countries are forging deep cooperation and a healthy competitive landscape in the new industrial and technological revolution. At the same time, China and ASEAN states can face their maritime disputes squarely, maintain strategic communication through advancing consultation on the Code

of Conduct for the South China Sea, and jointly safeguard the peace and stability of the region.

Most Southeast Asian countries are concerned that the Donald Trump administration of the United States might further intensify the comprehensive strategic competition between China and the US, which could make it difficult for them to maintain a balance between China and the US. They also worry that the new US administration might raise tariffs disrupting their economic growth. As a result, these countries are trying to establish contact with the president's team on the one hand, and on the other, they are attempting to diversify their diplomacy to mitigate the impact and risks of the administration's proposed policies.

The year 2024 marked the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, while 2025 commemorates the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference and the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Indonesia, as well as the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Thailand and the Philippines. In the face of common challenges, China and Southeast Asian states should jointly promote Asian values centered on peace, cooperation, inclusiveness and integration, and endow the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Bandung Spirit with new connotations. Not only should they continue to advance cooperation through the dual-track approach, but also, as more Southeast Asian countries join the G20, they should collaborate on a broader international stage to promote cooperation among the Global South nations, injecting positive energy into regional and global peace and stability.

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

## CULTURE



**Above:** *Pure and Infinite*, an exhibition at Hebei Museum, in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, pays tribute to the history and artistry of white porcelain in China. **Left:** A Tang Dynasty (618-907) lion of the Xing kiln. **Right:** Ding kiln flask from the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) on show. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

It's often said that one is easily betrayed by one's eyes. Sometimes, to be more precise, it is actually impeccable workmanship that "deceives" the eye.

Visitors to *Blanc de Chine*, an exhibition of Dehua white porcelain that opened at the National Museum of China last August, certainly felt that they had been tricked — albeit delightfully — upon seeing a pile of paper with rough edges.

As they approached, many gave voice to their surprise, took photos, and couldn't wait to share the images online as the "paper" actually turned out to be delicate sheets of ceramic created by artist Su Xianzhong.

This "paper" became one of the most talked-about exhibits at the show.

The title of the exhibition — *Blanc de Chine* — is the French name given to the glossy, milky white porcelain produced for centuries in Dehua county, Quanzhou, Fujian province.

The mass production of Dehua white ware can be traced to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and in the 17th and 18th centuries it arrived in Europe via the Maritime Silk Road, becoming popular and motivating European potters to replicate it.

The contrast between the stiff body and creamy, sleek surface resembling white jelly inspired the name, which means "white from China".

But Dehua was not the only historical hub producing quality white ceramics. From as far north as Lindong town in Baarin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, to as far west in Wuwei in Gansu province, the remains of once booming kilns dedicated to manufacturing white ceramics have been found.

A tribute to this glamorous chapter in Chinese ceramic history can now be seen at *Pure and Infinite*, an exhibition at the Hebei Museum in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, which runs until April 13.

It has been organized in collaboration with the National Museum of China and puts on display examples of white ware from the collections of both museums, as well as from other cultural institutions.

The exhibits include artifacts from the sites of historical kilns, some of which no longer exist, and work by contemporary artists that reflect the conservation of the white ceramic tradition, like Su's Paper series.

"The exhibition is a display of more than 300 pieces of the varying types of white porcelain from different kilns from across the country, from past to present," says Wang Yueqian, the exhibition's curator and a researcher at the National Museum of China.

"These sophisticated ceramics are radiant for their diversity and cultural

## The deceptive beauty of ceramic artistry

Exhibitions of the once highly sought-after white porcelain reveal the sophistication beneath its simple surface, **Lin Qi** reports.



**Above:** *Paper*, a porcelain work by Su Xianzhong. **Below:** A statue of Guanyin, goddess of mercy and compassion, also called Avalokiteshvara, autographed by He Chaozong, a celebrated Dehua potter of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

content, and have inspired modern potters to explore new possibilities in the field. The kiln fire never dies, but erupts with innovative spirit," he adds.

Most ceramics before the 6th century were celadon, which is known for its pale blue-green glaze, and according to Wang, the earliest examples of white porcelain emerged during the final years of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581).

The technique achieved maturity during the Sui Dynasty (581-618), as testified by the well-polished pieces found in an early 7th-century tomb near Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

"The Tang Dynasty (618-907) saw a situation of rivalry in which the production of



celadon in the south and white ceramics in the north went neck and neck. White ware kilns were largely found in the north and led to the rise of types named after their distinguished kilns," Wang says.

*Pure and Infinite* reflects the eminent status Hebei enjoyed in white ware production. It was home to the Xing kiln, which rose to become a key hub of white porcelain during the Tang Dynasty, the Ding kiln — one of the Five Great Kilns of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) — the Cizhou kiln, and the Jingxing kiln.

One vivid example of Ding ware on show at *Pure and Infinite* is a flask from the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

The pot, which stands 15 centimeters in height, is made in the shape of a small,

cheerful boy riding a goose. Water is poured in through a hole on the back of the boy's head, and exits through the goose's mouth, and the boy's left arm posed on his waist serves as the handle.

An elevated pillow from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) illustrates one of the distinctive features of Cizhou ware — black patterns against a white background — which lends it a simple beauty.

Wang says that in the final stages of the Tang Dynasty, white porcelain shifted southward, as kilns in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, began production. Later, during the Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, Dehua white raised the artistry of white ware to new heights, as evinced by its commercial success as part of the prosperous maritime trade between China and the world.

Among the family kilns still committed to the trade is the one belonging to Su's family, which was first fired up by his great-grandfather, Su Xuejin. His *Subduer of Tigers*, a figure of a *luohan* (the Chinese name for an arhat, or a Buddhist adept on the cusp of attaining nirvana), is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, alongside Su Xianzhong's *Paper No. 1*.

For the artist, keeping the family heritage alive is about renewing the presentation of traditional handicrafts.

In his Paper series, the stack of "pages" is placed on a brick Su Xianzhong found in the family kiln.

He says the bricks are what support this trade and make his work possible, and they help remind people of the close association between the fire at the kilns and the smooth texture of the porcelain.

*Pure and Infinite* is the first exhibition of pieces from the National Museum of China to be displayed outside of Beijing this year. It is the sixth collaboration with the Hebei Museum since the two museums began staging exhibitions of each other's collections in 2018.

In recent years, the national museum has lent items from its collection to museums outside Beijing to benefit a wider audience. Chang Li, director of the Merchandise and Development Department of the National Museum of China, says that they organized 14 exhibitions in China and abroad last year that welcomed more than 2.7 million visits.

The program this year includes a bronze ware exhibition at the Henan Museum in Zhengzhou, Henan province, and an exhibition about traditional Chinese medicine at the Dezhou Museum in Dezhou, Shandong province.

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

### What's on

#### Antique art

Bronze mirrors, painted terracotta bricks (*huaxiangzhuan*), pottery figures, and religious statues and



paintings form part of a vast collection of objects of antiquity at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

For quite a long time, these precious, beautiful artifacts were mostly for academic appreciation. Now, a selection of this treasure trove, spanning some 2 millennia, is on show for public viewing, with dozens of exhibits for the first time.

*Ancient Chinese Art*, ongoing at the Art Museum of Central Academy of Fine Arts, has gathered over 200 fine examples to celebrate the aesthetics and artistry of ancient China. They stand in testimony to the social etiquettes and systems of ranks, as well as cultural traditions and philosophical takes on the relation between man and the universe.

Exhibition labels show introductions of the works written by leading experts in the field. Digital means have been introduced to enrich the

viewing experience.

9:30 am-5:30 pm, closed on Mondays. 8 Huajiaodi Nanjie, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6477-1575.

#### Written history

*Waves of Valor*, an exhibition of calligraphy and manuscripts now underway at the Tsinghua University Art Museum, gathers dozens of pieces of handwriting to unveil historical narratives of the Jiawu War, or the First Sino-Japanese War,



which broke out in 1894 and ended in 1895.

The writings, letters, diaries and other manuscripts are by important political figures. They depict the political battles before the war, the efforts against the invaders and the social reforms spurred by defeat in the war. There are also paintings, drawings and photos of the time. Objects on show, until March 30, are from several institutions including the Xiang Gang Museum (Han Mo Xuan), in Hong Kong, the Museum of the Sino-Japanese War, in Weihai, Shandong province, and the Weihai Museum.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. Tsinghua University, Haidian district, Beijing. 010-6278-1012.

#### Auspicious signs

Animals which embody good luck and blessings are recurring motifs in



porcelain from ancient times. An exhibition now on at the Prince Kung's Palace Museum in Beijing shows 120 ceramics from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) which were made to resemble animals, or feature animal patterns of vivid colors and animation.

The vases, plates, incense burners, teapots and ornamental objects were excavated from the relic sites of the imperial kiln in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. The kiln began

producing ceramics for imperial use in 1369, and remained in operation until the end of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). While the best pieces were sent to the royal court in Beijing, the defective or low-quality ones were smashed to pieces and buried. Since the 1980s, continuous archaeological excavations have collected a great number of ceramic debris from the relic site, and restored dozens to their original shape, so that people can feel the graceful beauty of imperial porcelain.

Visitors to the exhibition, through to March 30, will be able to touch and feel the texture of a ceramic fragment from a *qinghua* cobalt blue dragon-motif bowl, believed to be from the 15th century.

8:30 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 17 Qianhai Xijie, Xicheng district, Beijing. 010-8328-6859.

## LIFE



Celebrating its 15th anniversary, the China NCPA Chorus, resident chorus of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, performs in Beijing on Dec 8, 2024, under the baton of resident conductor Jiao Miao. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Singing in a new year of musical exploration

NCPA chorus' 2025 season promises a blend of classical traditions with modern interpretations, **Chen Nan** reports.

As the new year unfolds, the China NCPA Chorus, the resident chorus of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, is set to embark on an exciting journey with a fresh, diverse season of offerings.

Based on the core theme of "Unbounded", the 2025 season will push the boundaries of choral art by blending classical traditions with modern interpretations and global influences, says Zhang Yao, vice-president of the NCPA.

This includes an array of choral music, operas, symphonic choral works and concerts in approximately 30 performances running throughout the year.

To celebrate the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Italy in 2025, the new season will explore Italian opera and folk music, blending multimedia and stage design to bring these genres to life in fresh and exciting ways under the leadership of the NCPA's music director, Lyu Jia.

More concerts are planned to bring the world's musical treasures to the stage, demonstrating how choral art can break boundaries and experiment with new forms. For example, *World Music Tour, China NCPA Chorus: World Famous Songs Concert*, conducted by Jiao Miao, will feature famous songs from around the world, including Mexican dance music, New Zealand folk music, and French love songs. The chorus will explore ways to merge vocals with musical instruments, including the free, vigorous rhythms



Left: (From left) Conductors Lyu Jia, Wu Lingfen, Wang Ning, president of the NCPA, conductor Jiao Miao, and Zhang Yao, vice-president of the NCPA, celebrate the 15th anniversary on Dec 8. Right: Members of the China NCPA Chorus perform during the Dec 8 concert.



“With this new Choral Theater series, we want to find a way to be innovative with contemporary Chinese choral art by telling stories with sound and cross-border collaborations.”

Jiao Miao, resident conductor, China NCPA Chorus

of Africa and South America.

Choral Theater, a special themed series combining theater with sound, will invite audiences into the stories to experience emotional rhythms.

*The Merriment Adventure*, a concert version of the operas *The Merry Widow*, a comic operetta in three acts by Hungarian composer Franz Lehár, and *Die Fledermaus*, an operetta by Austrian composer

Johann Strauss II, will present the comedic characteristics of operetta through bright, lively rhythms and lighthearted, humorous content, bringing delight to the audience through the twists and turns of the plot.

“Fifteen years ago, a group of passionate voices came together to found the China NCPA Chorus, and today, it has become a beloved pillar of the arts community in the



country,” says resident conductor Jiao, who has been with the chorus since its inception. “We’ve built a large fan base over the past 15 years, and with this new Choral Theater series, we want to find a way to be innovative with contemporary Chinese choral art by telling stories with sound and cross-border collaborations.”

Jiao adds that to appeal to younger audiences, the new series

will also include *Cinderella*, a concert based on the classic fairy tale, and *The Tale of Puxi and Nuywa*, a concert themed around the snake zodiac sign from classical Chinese mythology. These performances will help educate Chinese culture to children through music and audiovisual experiences.

The symphonic choral section will highlight some of the most beautiful pieces in the choral repertoire. Conducted by Li Xincao, the chorus will present a powerful rendition of the *Yellow River Cantata* in commemoration of the 120th anniversary of composer Xian Xinghai. It will also present *Carmina Burana*, a cantata for orchestra, chorus, and vocal soloists by the German composer Carl Orff, which is famous for its grandeur, in collaboration with

the China Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Yu Long.

As a versatile ensemble, the China NCPA Chorus will also take on four major opera productions in the first half of the season — the Chinese operas *The Long March* and *Minning Town*, and Verdi's *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*.

“The full version of the *Yellow River Cantata*, in particular, impressed me deeply. It felt like every note told the heroic story of the Chinese people. Over time, I followed the chorus' performances, and in 2023, when they toured Shenzhen, Guangdong province, where I live, I attended the concert. I traveled to Beijing last year for their 15th anniversary concert, which remains a great memory,” says Xing Jiachuan, a concertgoer who became a fan after watching the chorus' performances on the NCPA's online channel.

Famous dramatist and poet Zou Jingzhi has worked closely with the chorus. “I collaborated with the chorus on the opera *Xi Shi*, which I composed in 2010. Hearing them for the first time, I was deeply moved by their youthful, passionate and powerful voices. I could feel the singers' overflowing passion for choral art,” he says.

Zou has worked with the chorus on other operas, such as *The Chinese Orphan* (2011) and *The Long March* (2016). “Their enthusiasm is infectious, and the energy they bring to the stage is unparalleled,” he adds.

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

## German barista brews up a dream life in Zhejiang mountain village

HANGZHOU — The rich aroma of freshly roasted coffee filled the air inside a quaint stone cabin in the eastern Chinese village that houses Frank Sterzer's cafe, Bamboo Coffee Roasters.

After more than 20 years as an engineer and executive with leading automobile companies in Germany and China, the German barista has found a new calling and fulfillment in the village of Maoli near Ningbo in Zhejiang province. Inspired by his lifelong love of coffee, a passion for roasting beans prompted Sterzer to turn what had been a hobby into a thriving business.

“Zhejiang's countryside has excellent infrastructure and beautiful landscapes, and I find it the ideal place to live,” Sterzer says.

Maoli is located less than a 30-minute drive from the Ningbo city center, striking a pleasing balance between urban convenience and rural tranquillity.

For Sterzer, the experience of sipping a cup of coffee while enjoying a slice of handmade cake and gazing at the countryside, captures the type of serene lifestyle he hopes to share with visitors.

“Bamboo Coffee Roasters is a place to share the charm of this mountain village with visitors from all over,” he explains.

The cafe is named after the abundance of bamboo around Maoli, while its logo was inspired by a photograph Sterzer took of a nearby bamboo forest.

He has also created a small coffee factory behind the shopfront, where premium beans from around the world are neatly stacked next to gently humming roasting machines. He roasts 10 metric tons a year, and the operation has become a key component of the cafe's success.

Sterzer first came to China in late 2006 as an engineer for BMW in Shenyang, capital city of Liaoning province. Over the years, he also worked in Chengdu, Sichuan province, Shanghai and Beijing. However, during a 2021 visit to Maoli, he fell in love with the village's idyllic setting and decided to open a cafe there.

The cafe is next to a building near the village entrance that was once a warehouse. Sterzer spent a year renovating it, carefully maintaining the building's rustic charm while introducing modern coffee-roasting equipment.

“I also received a lot of support from both my family and the village council,” he says, adding that the council offered reduced rent and upgraded surrounding infrastructure, including reorganizing power lines.



Left: Frank Sterzer talks about the products at Bamboo Coffee Roasters, his cafe in Maoli village near Ningbo in Zhejiang province, on Jan 24. Right: Sterzer, a former automobile company executive, in the cafe in the village. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

Since opening in June 2024, Bamboo Coffee Roasters has quickly become a popular destination, attracting visitors from near and far — including international travelers taking advantage of China's expanded visa-free policies. Sterzer's own family took advantage of this policy, with his mother and siblings visit-

ing last year, while his nephew is expected to arrive soon.

Before the Spring Festival, the cafe was welcoming guests from all over, including nearby cities like Hangzhou and Shanghai.

“We came to Ningbo for local delicacies like *tangyuan* (a type of glutinous rice dumpling) and

*niangao* (a form of rice cake), but we also wanted to visit this coffee shop which has been recommended widely on social media,” said one tourist surnamed Wang, who drove from Shanghai.

Residents have observed a positive impact since the cafe's opening. Neighboring shops report increased

business, with visitors frequently purchasing snacks, beverages and local produce. Products such as honey oranges, bamboo shoots and tea have also found wider markets, thanks to the cafe's popularity.

As rural areas undergo rapid development driven by national rural revitalization efforts, more people are choosing to move to the countryside. Recently, an advertisement for jobs offering a stable income for village CEOs in Zhejiang proved a hit online. Meanwhile, the combination of faster development and modernization of rural areas has prompted a change in the composition of rural populations, with more young people, and even foreigners, choosing to settle in the countryside.

Having lived in China for just over 18 years, Sterzer was all set for his busiest Spring Festival yet.

On Chinese New Year's Eve, he and his family enjoyed a hotpot dinner and watched the Spring Festival Gala — just like other Chinese families, while his cafe remained open throughout the holiday season.

“I want more people to experience the charm of Chinese villages through my coffee business,” Sterzer says.

XINHUA

## CULTURE

# Sharing their love of culture

Artists, dancers, and artisans join New Year tour to share traditional culture with a global audience, **Zhang Zhouxiang** reports.

**G**olden threads dance between silver needles, threading vitality into the intricate snake-pattern embroidered fan in the warm sunlight in winter.

As the vibrant colors bring the snake to life, Liu Xiaoyan, an embroidery master, weaves her heartfelt wishes for a prosperous Year of the Snake with each stitch.

Liu was demonstrating her craft in a fun park in Greece on Jan 19, which is part of a cultural trip she and her team are on, called "Happy Spring Festival" organized by the Beijing Overseas Cultural Exchange Center to spread Chinese culture to the countries they travel to.

The cultural celebration is an annual activity held since 2016 to celebrate the Chinese New Year with Chinese community in other countries as well as other local people wanting to discover more about Chinese traditional culture. This year's activity included a series of events in Greece, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Turkiye, and Nigeria.

In her display table, Liu presented over 40 exquisite and captivating embroidery pieces, ranging from garments and scrolls to smaller items such as brooches and earrings to display the enchantment of Chinese aesthetics. Passersby couldn't help but stop and admire the works, with some excitedly trying their hands at creating their own embroidered fans.

"We are happy for this," said Nadia, a local woman who watched Liu's performance in Athens, "The Chinese community in Athens is really vibrant and strong, and I hope you're going to be healthy and happy throughout the Year of the Snake."

"My heartfelt thanks to you — both the artistic works and the food are amazing," said a local man named Vassili, who was happy watching Liu's performance and expressed his "Happy the Year of the Snake" congratulations to all.

What Liu displayed at the exhibition is the art of Beijing embroidery, recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of the nation, to which she is inheritor and master of arts and crafts in Beijing. Liu's family has had a long connection with the world of tailoring as four generations of her family worked as tailors, which brought her an early exposure to the craft of embroidery and naturally sparked her interest in Beijing embroidery, a form of classical Chinese royal embroidery that dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Characterized by exquisite details and auspicious patterns, the demanding techniques of Beijing embroidery are a time-consuming challenge. "It took me three months to embroider just one peony leaf at my first attempt," Liu recalled.

The skills needed to become an exceptional embroiderer, however, were not

"I believe that in this overseas performance, we represent our country and demonstrate the grandeur and broad-mindedness of China as a nation of etiquette."

**Zeng Ming**, a teacher at the Beijing Dance Academy's Department of Chinese Classical Dance

the only lessons Liu learned from several masters of Beijing embroidery over the course of 17 years.

"My teachers always advised me not to limit myself to the needle and thread," Liu recalled. "Instead, they encouraged me to think about how I could carry the essence of Chinese traditional culture into the modern era, ensuring this form of national intangible cultural heritage would continue to thrive."

In addition to mixing the popular snake motif for the New Year into embroidery works, such as fans, brooches, and earrings, Liu also experimented with traditional colors and techniques to convey grand messages of the times through these small pieces.

#### Hitting new heights

"Turquoise and lapis green are commonly used in traditional Chinese painting. With these two colors in this mountain-shaped brooch, I hope to convey our current pursuit of a better life and a cleaner environment," Liu said, pointing to the brooch she was wearing.

From Jan 18 to 28, during the "Happy Spring Festival" trip, Liu showcased her works in Greece and Italy. "For me, it's not only an opportunity to show Chinese traditional culture, but also a way to inspire me to keep this intangible cultural heritage alive by learning the tastes of global audiences and the methods of my global counterparts," Liu said.

Organized jointly by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism and local Chinese embassies, consulates and cultural centers, among other institutions, the "Happy Spring Festival" events feature a diverse array of activities such as display of Liu's embroidery products, interactive activities with local audiences, Chinese New Year photo exhibitions, exhibitions of award-winning entries from the Global Zodiac Design Competition, and VR exhibitions of Beijing's Central Axis that was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2024, all showcasing the rich connotations of Chinese New Year culture.

Another of the intangible cultural heritage practitioners taking part is Ha Xin, a fifth-generation inheritor of kite-making skills named after his family name, which, with a history of over 160 years,



Liu Xiaoyan, an expert in "Beijing embroidery" and inheritor of the art form that has been recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of the nation, works in her Beijing studio on Jan 16. LU TIANYUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

was included on the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2008. While all ordinary kite-making procedures are similar and involve making the different parts of the skeleton of the kite with bamboo, then gluing them together and covering the framework with paper, Ha's kites are uniquely artistic as he invests a lot of time and energy into the drawing and design.

For Ha, drawing is the gene of the kites he makes and he usually spends over 20 days drawing on a kite. His grandfather, the third-generation inheritor of the art, once said: "A kite might last only about 100 years but the drawing and design on it might exist much longer."

Ha's drawings on the kite include birds, butterflies, goldfish and dragons. This time he has creatively designed kites with drawings of Dala horses in Sweden and moose of Norway, to convey China's friendliness to the people of Scandinavian countries, which are his trip destinations.

To make it interactive, Ha has also half-made a large dragon kite and invited local audiences to participate in finishing the kite on-site. "By allowing locals to do it together, I hope they can enjoy the process and gain a love for the Chinese art of kites."

#### Expressive dance

The Beijing Dance Academy also participated in this year's activity. Zeng Ming, a teacher in its Department of Chinese Classical Dance, led a group of seven dancers to perform in Nigeria and Turkiye, showcasing the beauty of Chinese classical dance.

Among the performances was Zeng's solo dance titled *Calligraphy and Painting*. This piece is a fusion of two traditional Chinese art forms — calligraphy and classical dance. In the performance, Zeng held a calligraphy brush throughout, using the movements of writing as a form of expressive dance.

The dance reflects the passion and flowing strokes of Chinese calligraphy. As the music progresses, the rhythm of the dance grows more intense, akin to the moment when ancient Chinese literati moved their brushes vigorously to express their inner passion with strokes powerful enough to penetrate the paper.

*Calligraphy and Painting* is not only a celebration of Chinese calligraphy but also a vivid portrayal of the artistry and philosophy behind it, according to Zeng. By integrating the fluid motions of calligraphy with dynamic dance steps, Zeng's performance embodies the harmony of body, mind, and spirit.

The dance accentuates the elegance and intricate beauty of Chinese calligraphy, while also conveying its deep cultural significance, reflecting the Chinese literati spirit and profound historical roots of Chinese tradition.

Through the performance, Zeng and his fellow dancers brought Chinese culture to international audiences, demonstrating how Chinese classical dance and calligraphy can transcend cultural boundaries and resonate with people worldwide. There are also dances in which the dancers manipulate long silk ribbons to resemble snake, through which they hope to wish the audiences a happy Year of the Snake.

"I believe that in this overseas performance, we represent our country and demonstrate the grandeur and broad-mindedness of China as a nation of etiquette," Zeng said, "We want the audiences to see the spirit of the Chinese people and feel the depth of Chinese culture."

*Lu Tianyue and Wan Zhuoran contributed to this story.*

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



Several kites made by Ha Xin, a fifth-generation inheritor of kite-making skills that carry his family name, were on display during a cultural tour of Europe in celebration of the start of the Year of the Snake. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

