

**Aging well**

ASEAN urged to adopt policies for well-being of the elderly  
ACROSS ASIA, PAGE 7



**False claims over Taiwan question firmly opposed**  
WORLD, PAGE 6



**Green leader**

Strong demand drives growth of clean energy investment  
BUSINESS, PAGE 8

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2025

## Fleeing violence



Displaced people board narrow boats on Tuesday to move to safety after leaving a refugee camp in Goma, the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Rwanda-backed M23 rebels resumed attacks on the Congolese army three days after a call by African leaders for a ceasefire. More than 110,000 people have in recent days left settlement camps in eastern DR Congo cities controlled by rebels, United Nations officials said on Tuesday. MICHEL LUNANGA / AFP See story, page 6

### FROM THE GRASSROOTS

## WOODEN TOYS FORM BUILDING BLOCKS OF A SUCCESS STORY

Yunhe county produces 40 percent of world's supply, exports products to 82 countries and regions

By YANG RAN in Yunhe county, Zhejiang  
yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn

In Yunhe, a mountainous county in Zhejiang province, wooden toys are more than just playthings — they are the lifeblood of the community. Among Yunhe's 126,300 residents, about one in four works in the wooden toy industry or related fields.

Wooden toys, which include blocks, puzzles, trains and educational tools, only account for 5.6 percent of China's toy market, according to Zhiyan Consulting, a Chinese market research company.



Yet, Yunhe's wooden toy industry had an impressive output value of 6.69 billion yuan (\$915 million) in 2023. The county produces 40 percent of the world's wooden toy supply, with over 70 percent of its products exported to 82 countries and regions. How did an industry with a primarily overseas market demand establish itself in a remote small town in southwestern Zhejiang?

See Toys, page 2

www.chinadailyglobal.com

A member of China Daily Global ©2025 All Rights Reserved

Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK £1, EU 1€, Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120, Philippines 120 PHP, Myanmar 2000 Kyat, Japan 210 Yen, Dubai 10 Dirham, Pakistan 300 Rupee

## Tariffs won't help fight drugs, say experts

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

United States President Donald Trump's move to impose additional tariffs on certain countries in a bid to check the supply of fentanyl into the US will not help solve the country's deadly drug crisis, experts said.

The US consumes more illicit drugs than any other country, according to the World Population Review, which estimated that 6 percent of the US' population uses drugs, which reduces the average lifespan of the users by 6.7 years.

In 2023, more than 107,000 people died from drug overdose, according to the US Drug Enforcement Administration, with illicit fentanyl taking the deadliest toll. The synthetic opioid accounted for about 75 percent of the overdose deaths. A White House fact sheet stated that "more Americans are dying from fentanyl overdoses each year than the number of American lives lost in the entirety of the Vietnam War".

Opioid abuse in the US started in the 1990s when doctors widely overprescribed opioid medicines for pain relief, the National Institutes of Health said on its website.

When the prescriptions were significantly curbed in the early 2000s, no safer alternative to pain management emerged, leading to illegal use of opioids. The number of overdose deaths began rising in the 2010s.

"The public health crisis of poorly managed pain, opioid misuse, addiction and overdose in America is now in its fourth wave," the website said.

To combat the drug problem, Trump implemented a strategy to tie the fentanyl supply to interna-

tional tariffs. However, experts said that tariffs will not help solve the country's fentanyl crisis.

Dewardric McNeal, managing director and senior policy analyst at Washington-based strategic advisory firm Longview Global, served on a bipartisan commission in 2020 to examine all aspects of the synthetic opioid threat to the US and find ways to combat the problem.

"Despite the wide range of recommendations and months of discussion, the linkage of trade policy to narcotics enforcement was never seriously discussed, and many would argue that the linkages not only set a dangerous precedent but could in fact reduce the willingness of countries like Mexico and specifically China to cooperate as we seek to address this serious challenge," McNeal wrote in an op-ed for CNBC.

"China is unlikely to respond positively to threats. If anything, it may reduce cooperation, with China seeing no real value in doing anything under duress," he wrote.

"No amount of tariffs will curb addiction," and the US government needs to come up with "a comprehensive strategy" to reduce people's demand for the drug, he added.

"Weaponizing trade policy for unrelated issues — whether immigration, drugs or security — erodes America's credibility as a reliable economic partner. Most importantly and unfortunately, they will not stem the flow of fentanyl," he said.

Rodney Coates, a professor at Miami University in Ohio, who studies social policy, shared similar views.

Examining US policy to curb drug use since the 1890s, Coates, in

an op-ed piece for The Conversation, said that past US government efforts to reduce illegal drug use have not been especially effective.

The US had imposed tariffs in the past, but it never helped the domestic economy, he said.

"This long history has shown that tariffs, industrial subsidies and protectionist policies don't do much to stimulate broad economic growth at home — but they raise prices for consumers and can even lead to global economic instability," Coates wrote.

"History also shows that tariffs don't work especially well as negotiating tools, failing to effect significant policy changes in target countries.

"Failure to restrict demand only places bandages on hemorrhaging wounds. What the US needs is a more systematic approach to deal with the demand that's fueling the drug crisis," he added.

Both McNeal and Coates agreed that the opioid crisis is a question of supply and demand.

"What's needed is a comprehensive strategy that includes addiction treatment, mental health services, public health campaigns and community-based interventions," McNeal said.

Coates pointed to European countries such as Switzerland and France, where drug addictions are being treated rather than being criminalized, to reduce demand.

"They realized that demand is what fuels the illicit market. And as any economist will tell you, supply will find a way if you don't limit the demand," Coates said.

### Inside

• Comment, page 12  
• See more, page 5

### XI'S VISION | A SHARED FUTURE

# China pursues AI development benefiting all

Nation committed to safeguarding security and sharing achievements of essential tech

By CAO DESHENG  
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

As the United States was absent from a collective pledge to drive inclusive AI development at the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris, the China-proposed Global AI Governance Initiative, put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2023, has greater relevance to promoting AI growth for good and for all, according to analysts.

Fifty-eight countries including China and two international organizations — the 27-member European Union and the 55-member African Union — signed the Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet at the summit, co-chaired by France and India from Monday to Tuesday.

The US refused to sign the international document, with Vice-President JD Vance making it clear at the summit that Washington maintains an "America first" approach in AI development.

Vance said that the US administration will ensure that "American AI technology continues to be the gold standard worldwide", while access to that technology will not be open to all, according to media reports.

Addressing the summit in the capacity of President Xi's special representative, Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing reiterated China's commitment to working with other countries to promote development, safeguard security, share achievements in the AI field, and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind.

In facing the opportunities and challenges brought about by the development of AI, Zhang called on the international community to jointly advocate the principle of

developing AI for good and to deepen innovative cooperation, strengthen inclusiveness and universal benefits, and improve global governance.

Zhang's attendance at the Paris summit is widely considered as China's active implementation of the Global AI Governance Initiative. Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said on Wednesday that China's signing of the outcome document at the summit demonstrates its commitment to promoting global AI development and governance in an active manner.

"China will continue to uphold the principle of extensive consultation and joint contribution with benefits shared by all, strengthen exchanges and cooperation with all parties, and promote artificial intelligence to better serve global development and enhance the well-being of humanity," Guo said at a regular news conference.

The Global AI Governance Initiative called on countries to work together to prevent risks and develop AI governance frameworks, norms and standards based on broad consensus, in order to make AI technologies more secure, reliable, controllable and equitable.

On July 1 last year, the 78th United Nations General Assembly adopted a China-led resolution on enhancing international AI cooperation, with over 140 countries supporting it.

This resolution was the UN's first on international cooperation for AI capacity building.

See AI, page 3

### Inside

• Editorial, page 11  
• See more, pages 3, 5, 13

## Artful strokes



Students try their hand at Chinese calligraphy on Tuesday during an event to mark Lantern Festival at the University Al-Azhar Indonesia in the capital city of Jakarta. The festival was observed on Wednesday. LI ZHIQUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Gaza struggles for justice amid fragile ceasefire deal

Negotiations for the second and third phases of the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, which finally started at a staggered pace on Jan 19 after months of international prodding and a scary last-minute delay, offer little cause to celebrate, especially amid objections to the United States president's Gaza Strip takeover proposal.

Having witnessed every gruesome Gaza incident, including the

### Inside

See more, page 6

Antonio Guterres probably understands that the entire Global South laments — that global institutions have become mere playthings for powerful Western nations and their allies.

Guterres has underlined that the ceasefire is just the beginning of a

long, arduous process to halt a regime that has unrepentantly killed at least 47,000 Palestinians and wounded over 110,450 others, apart from those killed in the West Bank after the Gaza truce, in flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions and international human rights law.

Israel has accused the UN and the entire UN General Assembly of being "anti-Semitic" and banned the United Nations Relief and

Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or the UNRWA.

Now, we must ask what kind of ethical, moral and legal world order — if any — could emerge from the ashes of Gaza? Where does the international community go from here?

As UN resolutions demand a two-state solution to resolve the crisis, the only viable way to enforce the Geneva Conventions is

### WORLD WATCH

By Farhan Mujahid Chak

for more and more countries to unilaterally recognize an independent State of Palestine.

This effort should be at the forefront of diplomatic initiatives worldwide. North America, the European Union and the entire Global South must enthusiastically pursue this path.

See Middle East, page 3

# PAGE TWO

From page 1

The roots of Yunhe's wooden toy industry trace back to the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties when carpenters crafted traditional wooden toys like the Luban lock and tangram puzzles. This artisanal legacy laid the foundation for a booming industry.

The modern era of Yunhe's wooden toy production began in the early 1970s. In 1972, Yunhe received its first wooden toy sample. By 1973, He Shouzhen, head of the Chishi Toy Factory, created a prototype wooden toy, securing the first export order for Yunhe.

"The local wooden toy industry burgeoned after the reform and opening-up, and in 2013, Yunhe was awarded the title of China's Wooden Toy City by the China National Light Industry Council," said Mao Changcai, vice-chairman of Yunhe's council for the promotion of international trade.

Today, Yunhe is home to over 1,100 wooden toy manufacturing companies, employing more than 30,000 people. "However, due to global economic slowdowns and geopolitical challenges, the output value of Yunhe's wooden toy industry declined from 7.81 billion yuan in 2022 to 6.69 billion yuan in 2023," Mao said.

"In response, we are promoting the transition from 'traditional manufacturing to smart manufacturing' in the wooden toy industry, encouraging companies to invest in R&D activities and brand building."

## Pioneering innovators

Ye Chen, a 37-year-old Yunhe native, exemplifies this transformation. Growing up surrounded by relatives who ran wooden toy factories, Ye initially viewed the industry as low-end manufacturing. However, his perspective changed after he entered the industry.

After studying finance in Australia and working there for a decade, he returned to Yunhe in 2018 to join his father-in-law's wooden toy factory as the deputy manager.

"Over the past seven years, I've seen significant changes in Yunhe's wooden toy industry," Ye said. "Our factory has shifted from traditional low-end manufacturing to modernized production, with a greater emphasis on design and innovation."

Ye's factory has embraced digitalization, transforming into a 5G-enabled smart factory that leverages cloud computing, big data and the internet of things.

"Our factory now features automated and standardized equip-



# Enchanting woodcraft dazzles

ment, making us a more modernized enterprise," said Ye.

In addition to upgrading manufacturing processes, the influx of young talent has brought new management concepts to Yunhe's wooden toy industry.

When Ye returned to Yunhe, he created Leo's Friends wooden toy brand. "Only running a factory limits what you can do, but having your own brand provides more avenues for various projects and ideas," he said.

Ye's overseas experience has helped him manage the brand's international expansion. "When our brand was first established, we sponsored a charity gala for hearing-impaired children in Australia. The event drew Australia's elites who afterward recognized our brand. This sponsorship not only increased our visibility but also highlighted our factory's capability, boosting our recognition and sales," Ye said.

Many business owners in Yunhe now have overseas study experience, which helps them understand foreign markets better and communicate more smoothly with overseas clients, according to Ye.

"We used to receive orders from Chinese foreign trade companies and were paid in renminbi. Now, we have more direct partnerships with overseas importers and brands," Ye explained.

"Currently, about 80 percent of Leo's Friends' sales are from over-

seas markets, including emerging markets like the Middle East and Southeast Asia."

## Tapping into silver economy

Ma Dafei, born in 1974, is another Yunhe business owner who returned from studying abroad to join the wooden toy industry.

"Wooden toys have a deep connection with me. My parents were among the first group of workers at Yunhe Chishi Toy Factory, the birthplace of the local wooden toy industry. Although I didn't attend kindergarten, I often visited the toy factory and played with the wooden toys there," he said.

Ma returned to Yunhe in 2002 after studying in the United Kingdom, and started his own business. In 2006, he created his own brand, launching a series of bamboo products under the concept of e-games, which were well-received in foreign markets.

Beyond innovating with materials, Ma also saw an opportunity to combine wooden toys with the silver economy.

"China, like Europe, the US, and Japan, is rapidly aging. So, there's a

huge market in the silver economy," said Ma. "In 2019, we saw potential in wooden toys for seniors. When we showcased some samples at the Guangzhou International Elderly Health Industry Expo that year, the positive feedback we received solidified our confidence in developing these toys."

"Senior users need larger sizes and bold fonts due to larger hands and poorer eyesight. Instead of cartoon designs, seniors prefer auspicious patterns from Chinese culture," Ma explained.

"Our toys target retirees, who often suffer from loneliness, which may lead to psychological issues or cognitive decline. So, many of our products are designed for two or four players to encourage social interaction."

Ma's company collaborates with the brain health research team at Xi'an Jiaotong University's Health Science Center to study toys' impact on brain health and Alzheimer's prevention. The research shows that these toys can have a positive influence on health, said Ma.

Jiang Zhen, deputy director of the local civil affairs bureau, said that Yunhe has been integrating elderly

health services with wooden toys.

"We have successfully held six consecutive provincial and municipal senior wooden toy competitions. In 2024, Yunhe established senior wooden toy experience centers in 12 elderly care institutions across the county. These toys have become quite popular among seniors," Jiang said.

"Overall, the senior wooden toy sector is still in its early stages, whether in research or market education. But the future potential, both domestically and internationally, is enormous," Ma added. "Last year, we visited elderly care institutions in Europe and found that their needs are similar to those in our domestic market. We brought some of our senior wooden toys there, and they were well-received. We have already seen exports of our senior wooden toys to Europe and Japan."

## Fresh perspective

Meng Jie, a 38-year-old entrepreneur, is another example of Yunhe's innovative spirit. Unlike Ma, she aims to expand the wooden toy market beyond the infant to 6-year-old age group by targeting the people age 18 to 39.

"The 18-39 market is hard to cater to, but lucrative. The products must align with the mainstream aesthetic tastes of first-tier cities," said Meng, general manager of Yunhe Chuangxiang Co.

Meng first connected with Yunhe during an internship while studying toy and game design at Guangdong

University of Finance and Economics. After graduating, she worked in various toy-related jobs in Guangdong province and Beijing. Her passion for wooden toys never waned, prompting her to return to Yunhe to start her own business in 2020.

"In late 2023, we started making wooden cultural and creative toys in Yunhe, after noticing a gap in the local wooden toy souvenir market. Distinctive cultural and creative design involves extracting unique local cultural elements and integrating them into the products, allowing them to tell a story," she said.

Guided by this vision, Meng designed Yunhe's rabbit mascot, Yun Maomao. "The name 'Mao' comes from the mortise and tenon structure (a joint connecting pieces of wood) of traditional Chinese wooden toys, called *summao*. 'Mao' in Chinese culture also represents the period from 5 to 7 am, the most vibrant time of day. In the Chinese zodiac, 'Mao' is associated with the tiger and the rabbit. We chose the rabbit because it better matches Yunhe's inclusive cultural character," Meng explained.

In 2023, Yunhe Agricultural and Tourism Investment Co contacted Meng to co-found a cultural and creative product company.

"Our design team has over 10 members, mostly born after 1995 in Yunhe. There aren't many wooden toy factories in Yunhe focused on creative development, making it hard for local youths to find jobs. So, forming this design team is very meaningful. In 2024, our company achieved revenue of 11 million yuan and developed over 300 cultural and creative products, each incorporating unique cultural elements."

In late November, Meng began using e-commerce livestreaming to sell her products. "Within two months, my Douyin livestreaming room gained nearly 20,000 followers," Meng said.

This showed her the potential of the wooden toy industry, which made her choose to bring her family to Yunhe during the Spring Festival holiday to continue livestreaming on schedule.

The influx of new-generation entrepreneurs is bringing fresh vitality and innovation to this traditional trade.

"By fostering new business models like e-commerce and health-related wooden toys, we are ensuring that Yunhe's wooden toy industry remains vibrant and competitive," said Mao, from the local council for the promotion of international trade.



Left: A woman plays a pitch-pot game in Yunhe, Zhejiang province, in November. The wooden toy made by a local company is designed for seniors.



Middle: College students from China and France try out a mortise and tenon structure at a wooden toy exhibition in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in October.



Right: Local residents play a board game in Yunhe in November. The table is designed and made by a local company.



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YANG RAN

## City's fairy-tale transformation delivers dusting of profits

For Xia Xiaoyi, a photographer in her 30s, her home county of Yunhe's title as the "Wooden Toy City" is a badge of honor. Watching the county transform into a production powerhouse, where wooden toys are also a vital part of its charm and character, fills her with immense pride.

"I am a native of Yunhe. Since my elementary school days, Yunhe has been known as the Wooden Toy City, a title it has held for over 20 years," Xia recalled. "Wooden toys have always been a point of pride for me about Yunhe, something that sets it apart from other cities. From the moment you exit the Yunhe highway toll station, you are greeted by buildings adorned with toy-themed designs, and the town center is filled with structures inspired by wooden toys."

From local hospitals to elementary schools and even the transportation bureau, many public buildings are designed to look like castles. Streetlights are decorated with cartoon

woodpeckers, and building-block decorations dotting the roads resemble toy castles.

At the heart of Yunhe stands a new building known locally as "Fairy-Tale Castle", which reflects the town's unique character. On Xiaohongshu, the Chinese social media platform, many tourists share photos of their visits to this fairy-tale structure. Xia wrote on her account, "This chocolate-colored castle is the perfect embodiment of a dreamy fairy tale."

The concept of a fairy-tale town is something Yunhe has been actively developing, leveraging its wooden toy industry to build a unique tourism brand.

"Our city slogan is 'One in a Million, Fairy Tale Yunhe.' Out of over 2,000 counties in China, we are the only one themed around fairy tales, which is our unique selling point," said Yan Tao, head of the county's publicity department.

Yunhe has constructed a fairy-tale theater, has hosted fairy-tale poetry competitions, and is developing fairy-tale-themed districts, said Yan. "In our fairy-tale district, there are castle-like buildings, and we have hung poems written by children in local fairy-tale poetry competitions on trees."

According to the Yunhe Culture

and Tourism Bureau, in 2024, the county received 2.914 million tourists, with approximately 40 percent drawn by the wooden toy-themed attractions.

"The development of Yunhe's tourism industry has paralleled the growth of the wooden toy industry," said Lan Xiawei, deputy director of the

county's culture and tourism bureau.

"In recent years, Yunhe has been exploring the integration of wooden toys and tourism, creating tourism attraction spots like the Fairy-Tale Castle and Rose Castle, establishing wooden toy industrial tourism demonstration bases, and building wooden toy educational tour bases. Since 2023, we have launched an elderly wooden toy study tour route, hosting 183 study tour groups with over 9,600 tourists," Lan added.

Lin Bifu came to Yunhe to work in the wooden toy industry and transitioned to running homestays in 2016. Lin now operates several homestays.

"When building our tent hotel, we envisioned it as a small castle or mushroom growing out of the forest. This concept gives our buildings a fairy tale-like feel without being too out of place, as if they naturally belong there," Lin said.

The use of wooden toy decorations



The "Fairy-Tale Castle" in Yunhe county. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Tutorials on DeepSeek use gain popularity

By offering free guidance, we can empower everyone to master the power of AI, expert says

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha  
zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

As DeepSeek, the latest AI phenomenon, thunders into public consciousness, social media platforms are being transformed into creative classrooms where just about everything imaginable is taught by using the software — from designing wedding invitations to using Photoshop, tutoring math and telling fortunes.

DeepSeek is even being used to teach people how to use DeepSeek.

One such tutorial is on social media platform Xiaohongshu, also known as RedNote. Titled *Learning to Use DeepSeek in One Minute*, it garnered more than 11,000 likes in just 10 days.

All this grassroots experimentation is helping to demystify artificial intelligence and turn it into a cultural phenomenon.

Among the tutorials, one released by Tsinghua University's Metaverse Culture Laboratory team — *DeepSeek from Beginner to Mastery 2025* — stands out. The 104-page document, which covers theory and practical skills, is a detailed manual for mastering DeepSeek and harnessing its full potential. It's designed both for beginners and advanced users.

The guide provides strategies for creating prompts that enhance AI performance, including task decomposition, iterative optimization and avoiding common pitfalls. It also includes case studies illustrating how to apply DeepSeek to meet various needs.

Team leader Shen Yang, a professor at Tsinghua University's School of Journalism and Communication and its College of AI, said human-computer dialogue is essential for progress.

Even though AI's ability to understand human intentions has improved significantly in the era of reasoning models, humans still need to clearly express their needs, he said.

Its ability to understand humans is getting stronger, and we should attach great importance to this kind of human-computer interaction, he added.

The combination of open-source software and inclusive applications is meaningful, he said. By providing free tutorials, for example, the team can deliver the power of AI to everyone, allowing each person to use and master it, rather than being

dominated by it.

"You can fight without mastering the Chinese martial arts," he said. "But you can fight better if you do. You can use AI more effectively after the tutorials."

It is hoped that everyone can achieve a level of mastery over AI in certain aspects, as well as develop the ability to make pleasing aesthetic judgments and responsible choices, Shen said.

The interaction between human intelligence and AI needs further exploration, he said, adding that he has interacted with different AI applications and models around 30,000 times.

What DeepSeek, an open-source software, means for people in different industries once it is thoroughly studied raises fascinating and exciting questions, he added.

A social media influencer using the name Zhinan Shanhe posted a four-episode video tutorial of DeepSeek on Douyin and Xiaohongshu. The videos have been popular, garnering hundreds of thousands of likes.

The 30-year-old from Shanghai works in the AI industry and has mastered many AI tools.

"Before DeepSeek, I mostly used foreign AI models, which are not so user-friendly for Chinese people," he said. "But the capabilities of DeepSeek are mesmerizing. It is powerful and also completely free, which is a blessing for its users."

As more people began to use the software, the lack of tutorials became apparent. Many people need guidance, so he began posting basic tutorials that bring much-needed traffic to his social media accounts, said the influencer.

"The emergence of DeepSeek has been a ray of hope for homegrown AI apps and has allowed more people to realize the value of AI," he said.

Ashui, another influencer on Xiaohongshu, has become a popular provider of DeepSeek tutorials. The 30-year-old from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region began using the software at the end of January and has been amazed by its high-quality output.

She posted an easy tutorial on Xiaohongshu that helped her gain thousands of new followers.

"Each question asked of DeepSeek gets a tailor-made response," she said. "It's almost like talking to humans."

Xu Ziya contributed to this story.



## Anger on the streets

People hold up placards during the "Rally to Save the Civil Service" organized by the American Federation of Government Employees at the Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. Unionized federal workers and members of Congress denounced President Donald Trump and Elon Musk for purging federal prosecutors and forcing out civil servants with dubious buyouts. KENT NISHIMURA / GETTY IMAGES

## Xiaohongshu users forge closer bonds through portal

By ZHAO XINYING and XU NUO

The recent influx of TikTok users based in the United States into Chinese lifestyle-sharing app Xiaohongshu, now also known as RedNote, has brought the young people of the two countries closer in more ways than one could imagine.

The US ban on TikTok over so-called national security concerns, which took effect on Jan 19, prompted the "TikTok refugees" to turn to another Chinese app in an egg-on-the-face moment for US authorities. Despite language barriers, US social media users entered the world of Chinese social media, creating cross-cultural frisson and opening up a magic portal for better mutual understanding.

Among the current popular trends on Xiaohongshu is one where US users are attempting authentic Chinese dishes posted by their Chinese peers. After a Chinese influencer's video on making the perfect jiggly Chinese steamed eggs went viral, the "TikTok refugees" put on their aprons to give the recipe a crack.

Leah Saifi, an influencer from New York, posted a video of her making the steamed eggs, garnering over 160,000 likes and 20,000 comments.

"I really love the community you all have built here. I'm constantly in awe of how wonderful and joyous you are to each other. Thank you everyone for your acceptance and excitement," she wrote in the

caption for her video.

Saifi received encouraging comments from Chinese users, with some of them suggesting ways to improve the dish with more ingredients such as ham and vegetables.

Not just users in the US, a couple living in Canada, where TikTok is not banned, also took up the challenge on Xiaohongshu. Nelson and Liz posted a video of their Chinese steamed eggs, quickly amassing over 70,000 likes and 13,000 comments.

Many Chinese users were thrilled by their attempt and cheered them on, posting comments like "Oh no! The foreigners made steamed eggs far better than I do!"

Such easy and effortless cross-cultural connections have caught many by surprise.

Speaking to China Daily, Shi Anbin, a professor at the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University, said, "Xiaohongshu provides US netizens with unique experiences that they cannot find on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which partly explains its surge in popularity, although Xiaohongshu is not originally tailored for an international user base."

Another popular trend is Xiaohongshu users replying to a fictional character, called Li Hua, who has regularly appeared in China's *gaokao*, or national college entrance exam, as part of questions in the English writing section.

In *gaokao*, Chinese students are tasked with writing letters in English to foreign pen pals, introducing traditional festivals, local specialties and daily life in China. The task often begins with the instruction, "Assuming you are Li Hua..."

With the influx of foreign users, many Chinese users started to post comments such as, "Li Hua finally got replies to his letters!"

An influencer, who goes by the name Meizijiang, said in a video: "After writing letters to an imaginary pen pal and never getting any reply for 10 years, we finally got real letters from you guys on RedNote. You're like Li Hua's pen pal finally coming to life. It feels magical!"

The foreign users played along. Douglas, whose screen name is "neonhotel", posted a video saying: "Dear Li Hua, I'm sorry I didn't get your letters. I understand you've been writing (to) me for a long time, but now I'm here to reply."

Sarah Dale, a blogger from Mississippi, posted a video saying: "The expanse between us has always felt so vast in so many different ways, from the deep ocean that separates us to the years of generational misunderstanding and assumptions. I'm sorry that I have not always truly known you for all your beauty. ... Thank you for your generosity, inclusion and open heart toward me. ... I hope that this friendship navigates our children toward a world where every little Li Hua's letter written

is returned with excitement and love."

Some foreign users mentioned digging "a hole to China", with one post from the US saying: "I remember digging countless holes on the beach or at the park, trying to achieve this feat. I think, in a way, we too have been trying to reach you as well, and now, we have found a hole that we can crawl through and visit."

Many Chinese users responded by saying that they have dug "a magical hole with the help of the internet."

Such heartwarming bonds have been forged with people from around the world despite language barriers and cultural differences, and despite attempts from various foreign authorities to hide the truth about China from their own people.

"The interactions between Chinese and global netizens have turned Xiaohongshu into a cosmopolitan community by connecting shared human interests and creating collective memories. It has provided a new lens for the world to better understand the real and techno-savvy lifestyle among Chinese Gen Z users," said Shi, from Tsinghua University.

Sarah Thrush, from the US, noted on her Xiaohongshu account, "Love and friendship can transcend the distance."

Contact the writers at  
xunuo@chinadaily.com.cn

## Middle East: Rebuilding Gaza needs joint efforts

From page 1

Only by ensuring that the State of Palestine is recognized, particularly by the US and Israel, can we revive the foundations of the global order that have been obliterated alongside Gaza. The painful part may dwell upon the US, an administration that helped broker the Gaza truce but now encounters protests over its leader's proposal to relocate the people of Gaza and allow the US to "own" that land.

Whatever difficulties may emerge, the UN must take a leading role in the reconstruction of Gaza and in the rehabilitation of its people, particularly through the UNRWA. Reconstruction should not be merely an act of charity but a collective global responsibility. China, too, could offer its ingenuity and support for the rebuilding efforts in Gaza. Rebuilding Gaza together could ensure that hostilities do not reignite.

International NGOs, such as World Central Kitchen and Save the Children, and other reputable

charities could create a robust base and hire locals to participate in rebuilding Gaza.

Relevant organizations must work to scour the internet and social media for videos and documentary evidence of the war crimes brazenly committed by Israel.

The stench of death and devastation, the deliberate sniping of children, the cold-blooded murder of aid workers, and the horror of obliterating hospitals — all these atrocities must be meticulously documented and legally pursued.

Those guilty of war crimes must not find sanctuary anywhere in the world. The impunity with which Israeli soldiers massacred women and children, who make up two-thirds of those killed, must be met with legal accountability. It is in the interest of the entire world that no single country or group of countries be allowed to flagrantly violate international law.

An international peacekeeping force under UN auspices is essential to ensure that hostilities do not

erupt again and peace is restored and sustained in Gaza and the West Bank. This force should be a diverse coalition, including European, Arab and other regional actors. Its composition is crucial in deterring radical elements within Israel and beyond from dragging the region into another catastrophic war. Again, it would send a clear message that international law must be upheld at all costs.

The international community, alongside multilateral organizations such as the UN, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League and the EU, should support the emergence of inclusive and indigenous leaders of Palestine. The new, nonpartisan political structure must resonate with local communities and remain free from foreign interference. Building a legitimate and independent Palestinian leadership will eliminate any pretext used to reignite tensions.

One day, the ceasefire may not be observed as a victory but as a disgrace that marks the uncon-

scionable delay that cost so many innocent lives. It is of critical global importance that the entire international community resist the brazen disregard for international rules and attempts to further inflame the Middle East.

History will remember the courage of the Palestinians who, against all odds, survived the equivalent of eight nuclear bombs and refused to submit to settler colonial crimes. The question that remains is whether the world will learn from this or allow history to repeat itself yet again.

The author is a visiting research faculty member at the Prince Agha Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding of the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, the United States. He is also a sessional instructor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta in Canada. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Energetic moves



Members of the Los Tinkus dance troupe perform in La Paz, Bolivia, on Tuesday. The Tinkus dance, featuring fast footwork and colorful costumes, is a vibrant and energetic traditional Bolivian folk dance form. JUAN KARITA / AP PHOTO

## AI: Key player offers opportunities for Global South

From page 1

It fully embodies the core principles of the Global AI Governance Initiative, and aligns with the high expectations of numerous UN member states, particularly developing countries.

Yasir Habib Khan, president of the Institute of International Relations and Media Research in Pakistan, said that in the fast-evolving AI econ-

omy, China has emerged as a key player, offering great opportunities for developing nations, especially the Global South, to help them keep pace with global technological progress.

Through international cooperation mechanisms, such as the UN and the digital Silk Road initiative, China advocates AI policies that reflect the interests of developing nations, Khan said, adding that its emphasis on

national sovereignty in AI governance ensures that emerging economies maintain control over their data and technological resources.

The Paris summit, gathering heads of state and government, leaders of international organizations, business executives and tech experts, took place as Chinese AI company DeepSeek sent shock waves through the global AI landscape.

DeepSeek, which built its open-

source AI model at a fraction of the cost of building similar large language models and with fewer chips, has reduced financial barriers for global AI participation and promoted a more level playing field through technological advancements.

Andy Mok, a senior research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, said that DeepSeek exemplifies China's broader vision to provide global public goods — a

model that reimagines technology as a universal resource for the benefit of all.

The Chinese company's success exposes the fragility of the narrative that only the US model, with its emphasis on individualism and laissez-faire economics, can foster progress, Mok said in an opinion piece published on the website of the China Global Television Network.

While hailing China's progress in AI development and its initiative for global AI governance, global leaders attending the Paris summit underlined the need for international

cooperation on AI development.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the growing concentration of AI capabilities risks deepening geopolitical divides, adding that "while some companies and countries are racing ahead with record investments, most developing nations find themselves left out in the cold."

"We must prevent a world of AI 'haves' and 'have-nots'. We must all work together so that AI can bridge the gap between developed and developing countries — not widen it," he said.

## CHINA

## Beauty pageant

Yi ethnic women examine their costumes before a local traditional dress show held as part of the Saizhuang Festival, or Dress Competition Festival, in Yongren county in Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, on Wednesday. Every year on the 15th day of the first lunar month, Yi people dressed in their own hand-embroidered costumes gather to sing, dance and participate in a costume beauty competition. The festival showcases the beauty and talents of local women and serves as a meeting place for young people. LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



## New tech could greatly extend life of lithium-ion batteries

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

Researchers at Fudan University in Shanghai have developed a technology that could dramatically extend the life span of lithium-ion batteries, allowing them to maintain near factory-fresh performance even after 12,000 charge-discharge cycles.

The breakthrough could have significant implications for electric vehicles, smartphones and China's large-scale energy storage infrastructure, the researchers said. For example, electric vehicle batteries typically last for 1,000 to 1,500 cycles, or about six to eight years, with cold temperatures accelerating their degradation.

Led by Peng Huisheng and Gao Yue, the research team devised a novel lithium-ion carrier molecule using artificial intelligence and organic electrochemistry. Researchers likened the molecule's function to medical treatment for batteries,

replenishing lost lithium ions and restoring capacity instead of declaring batteries defunct.

"This carrier molecule can be 'injected' into deteriorating batteries to precisely replenish lost lithium ions, providing a 'precision treatment,'" Gao said. "The structure of this molecule is quite simple, with lithium electrons at one end and the rest of it acting like a vehicle that transports lithium electrons into the aging battery. The vehicle component is eventually discharged as gas."

The researchers also broke new ground by developing battery materials that do not need to contain lithium ions, potentially enabling the use of greener, heavy metal-free materials.

They anticipate the technology could increase the life of typical lithium-ion batteries from the current 500 to 2,000 cycles to between 12,000 and 60,000 cycles, an unprecedented milestone in battery research.

A paper on the research was pub-

"We aimed to develop a transformative functional material that provides precise lithium-ion replenishment to significantly extend a battery's life span."

Gao Yue, co-corresponding author of a paper published on life span of lithium-ion batteries

lished on Thursday on the website of the journal Nature.

Experts explained that a lithium-ion battery consists of a cathode, anode and active lithium ions in between. A battery "retires" when it loses too many of these ions.

"Our approach is to retain the

cathode and anode, which are still functional, while addressing the problematic part," said Gao, a co-corresponding author of the paper. "We aimed to develop a transformative functional material that provides precise lithium-ion replenishment to significantly extend a battery's life span."

To design the lithium carrier molecule, the team used AI and chemical informatics to digitize molecular structures and properties. They built a database and employed unsupervised machine learning for molecular recommendation and prediction, ultimately synthesizing a molecule known as CF3SO2Li.

After verifying the molecule met stringent performance requirements and was cost-efficient to synthesize, the researchers said they completed principle validation and had collaborated with a leading domestic battery company to test the technology on real lithium-ion battery devices.

## US blasted for actions aiding Taiwan

Warship transit, new arms sales and political maneuvers criticized

By ZHANG YI  
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn

China on Wednesday urged the United States to stop sending "erroneous signals" to "Taiwan independence" forces, following a series of US actions, including warship transits through the Taiwan Strait and new arms sales to the island.

Taiwan has reportedly finalized a deal worth NT\$24.99 billion (\$761 million) with the US for three National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, aimed at strengthening air defenses in northern Taiwan against "mainland threats."

The agreement, approved in October by then-president Joe Biden, marks the first such contract signed under US President Donald Trump.

From Monday to Wednesday, the US destroyer USS *Johnston* and the ocean survey ship USNS *Bowditch* transited the Taiwan Strait. China's People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theater Command said it closely monitored the passage and strongly condemned the move.

"The theater command forces remain on high alert at all times, resolutely defending national sovereignty, security and regional peace and stability," PLA spokesman Senior Captain Li Xi said.

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of China's State Council, reiterated Beijing's position that Taiwan is a core national interest and firmly

opposed foreign interference.

She also condemned recent statements by US officials, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio's remarks supporting Guatemala's expansion of ties with Taiwan.

"The one-China principle is a fundamental norm in international relations and a widely accepted global consensus," Zhu said, adding that 183 countries have established diplomatic ties with China based on that.

Zhu also criticized a resolution recently reintroduced in the US House of Representatives that calls for resuming formal ties with Taiwan, warning that such moves undermine the political foundation of China-US relations.

She accused Washington of pursuing "America First" policies, citing Trump's Jan 27 statement that he planned to impose tariffs on Taiwan to encourage chip manufacturing in the US.

Trump argued that "about 98 percent" of the chip business had shifted to Taiwan, adding, "We want them to come back."

"The more the Democratic Progressive Party authorities rely on the US, the greater the harm to Taiwan," Zhu said, referring to Taiwan's ruling party. She argued that efforts to strengthen industrial cooperation with the US would damage Taiwan's economic foundation.

"The DPP cannot change the fact that Taiwan is part of China, nor alter the inevitable dead-end outcome of 'Taiwan independence,'" she added.

## Sweet recipes refined to meet nostalgic demands

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan  
and ZHANG XIAOMIN

As Lantern Festival fell on Wednesday, Han Fuyuan, a 72-year-old provincial-level intangible cultural heritage inheritor from Taiyuan, Shanxi province, got engaged with a bustling tradition. The days leading up to the festival are always the busiest for him.

"Since resuming work after Chinese New Year on Jan 31, we have been producing approximately 90,000 *yuanyao* (sweet glutinous rice balls) daily to meet festival demand," said Han, who has 50 years of experience crafting the delicacy.

At the Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao* workshop in Taiyuan's Jinyuan district, three towering stone milling machines, each standing 3 meters high, grind glutinous rice into fine flour.

"Southern China has *tangyuan*, while the north has *yuanyao*. Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao* is considered a representative of northern *yuanyao*, cherished for the unique quality of rice grown in Jinci town and our adherence to traditional craftsmanship," Han explained, deftly preparing the filling while sharing the story behind his family's signature treat.

It's a tradition for people to eat *tangyuan* or *yuanyao* during Lantern Festival. *Yuanyao* is chewier, while *tangyuan* is tender.

Making authentic Jinci osman-

thus *yuanyao* is no simple task. It requires more than a dozen meticulous steps. After preparing the filling, the *yuanyao* is rolled and coated with water four to five times, layer by layer, until it forms a firm, round ball.

"This technique is what makes Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao* unique," Han said.

For the traditional filling, walnuts, sesame seeds and peanuts are stir-fried and peeled, then mixed with melted malt sugar, white sugar, rock sugar, natural rose jam and osmanthus jam. The mixture is pressed into molds, dried and cut into cubes before being rolled into the final product.

In addition to the classic osmanthus and rose flavor, the workshop has introduced modern variations to appeal to younger consumers, including tangy sea buckthorn, low-calorie xylitol and black sesame *yuanyao*.

According to Han, these innovations have been well received, adding a contemporary twist to the centuries-old tradition.

"Customers come in person or call to place orders. We work from 5 am until late at night every day," Han said, highlighting the overwhelming demand.

With a history dating back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao* is deeply rooted in local culture.

In December 2023, its production



Workers make *yuanyao* at a Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao* workshop in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on Monday. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

technique was officially listed as a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage in Shanxi.

For local residents like Guo Zhong, Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao* is more than just a festive treat—it's a taste of nostalgia.

"*Yuanyao* symbolizes reunion, happiness and the sweetness of Chinese New Year," he said. "Every year before Lantern Festival, I come here to buy them. It brings back memories of my childhood, when ordinary families used to make *yuanyao* at home."

Han Fuyuan has passed down his craft to his son, Han Wei, the fifth-generation inheritor of Jinci osmanthus *yuanyao*.

"The filling recipe has been refined over generations to suit the public's tastes," said Han Wei, 36. "We also use traditional stone mills to grind the rice, preserving its

nutrients and achieving that soft, sticky and sweet texture."

To promote this cultural heritage, Han Wei opened an experiential store on Taiyuan's iconic Zhongliu street. The store not only sells *yuanyao*, but also allows visitors to experience the traditional production technique firsthand.

He has also expanded sales through online channels, projecting sales of more than 3 million *yuanyao* this year.

The business has created jobs and increased incomes for the community. Currently, more than 30 workshops and 500 people in Jinyuan district are engaged in *yuanyao* production, generating an annual output value of 50 million yuan (\$6.8 million).

Contact the writers at  
zhuwxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn

## DPP condemned for impeding exchanges

By ZHANG YI  
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn

A Chinese mainland spokeswoman criticized Taiwan authorities for obstructing cross-strait tourism and exchanges after the island denied entry permits for several Shanghai groups to attend the 2025 Taipei Lantern Festival, breaking a tradition unbroken since 2015.

"Such actions disrupt the peaceful atmosphere in which compatriots from both sides of the Strait celebrate Spring Festival, going against the shared desire of compatriots for interactions," said Zhu Fenglian, a spokeswoman from the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council.

She also condemned the Democratic Progressive Party administration for hindering mainland group tours to Taiwan under the pretext of coordination through cross-strait tourism associations.

Following the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's announcement on Jan 17 regarding the resumption of group tour services for residents of Fujian province and Shanghai, tour operators from these regions requested

inspection visits to Taiwan on Jan 24.

However, Taiwan insisted that such matters should be coordinated through the Taiwan Strait Tourism Association established by the island and the mainland's Association for Tourism Exchange Across the Taiwan Straits before proceeding.

Accusing the DPP of insincerity in welcoming mainland visitors and obstructing tourism exchanges, Zhu said they fabricated excuses to deceive the people and tourism industry on the island, attempting to shift blame and responsibilities to the mainland for political gain.

She said that the mainland has actively promoted cross-strait exchanges, but the DPP has impeded progress, including rejecting calls for the full resumption of direct cross-strait passenger ships and failing to lift the alert for Taiwan residents to travel to the mainland. The DPP's restrictions have led to a significant imbalance in visitor numbers between Taiwan and the mainland, Zhu said, urging the DPP to show more sincerity in facilitating mainland visits to Taiwan.

## Striga-resistant crop varieties become a reality

By YAN DONGJIE  
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese scientists have identified genes in sorghum that confer resistance to a major parasitic plant, providing a crucial foundation for developing Striga-resistant crop varieties, researchers said.

Using artificial intelligence predictions combined with molecular and cellular biology techniques, the research team pinpointed key ami-

no acid sites that enhance crop resistance to parasitic plants. The discovery could help combat parasitic threats to agriculture worldwide.

The study, published on Wednesday in the journal *Cell*, was conducted by a collaborative team from the Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, China Agricultural University, Syngenta Group China and the Yazhou Bay

National Laboratory, among others.

The researchers identified two specific genes in sorghum that, when knocked out, significantly increased the plant's resistance to Striga, commonly known as witchweed.

"Similar to how human parasites affect health, parasitic plants can be equally destructive to crops and food security," said Xie Qi, director of the national key laboratory of crop genetic improvement and

molecular breeding at the Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology.

Striga, a genus of parasitic plants, primarily targets monocot crops such as sorghum, maize and millet, severely reducing food production in Africa, Asia and tropical regions.

The Latin name Striga means "witch", and in some areas, the plant is colloquially called witchweed due to its parasitic nature. It

is also found in China's Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan and Hainan provinces.

According to the journal *Science*, Striga ranks among the world's top seven agricultural pests, alongside wheat stem rust, potato late blight and soybean rust.

Striga seeds can remain dormant in soil for more than 20 years, germinating rapidly and invading the roots of host plants once they detect their presence.

Traditional control methods, including chemical treatments, crop rotation and soil improvement, have proven costly and only

partially effective.

"Developing crop varieties resistant to Striga is crucial to solving this issue," Xie said, noting that parasitic plants cause an estimated \$10 billion to \$12 billion in global economic losses annually.

The research team plans to validate the function of these genes in other key crops and promote the industrialization of Striga-resistant varieties.

The discovery marks a significant step in combating parasitic plants, offering hope for improved food security and agricultural sustainability worldwide, Xie said.

## WORLD



Hu Wei, chairman of the China General Chamber of Commerce - USA and president and CEO of the Bank of China USA speaks at the CGCC annual gala on Tuesday in New York. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

## US-China trade: Connecting markets, strengthening ties

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Chinese families enjoy gifting almonds and pistachios from the United States, while American homes light up with festive, made-in-China decorations — exports and trade connect the two countries through laughter, especially during the Chinese New Year season.

This trade and business relationship was also celebrated at the annual gala of the China General Chamber of Commerce - USA (CGCC) on Tuesday in New York. The event brought together more than 300 business leaders, government officials and cultural influencers from both nations to commemorate two decades of fostering economic collaboration, cross-cultural understanding and transformative opportunities.

"The world economy is grappling with weak momentum, geopolitical conflicts and mounting debts. Economic globalization has come under headwinds. Tariff war and trade war are looming over the horizon," Xie Feng, Chinese ambassador to the US, said at the gala.

"The serious challenges facing China-US economic cooperation should not be dismissed. At the same time, as great entrepreneurs know — difficulties can be hurdles, but they can also be milestones — once we overcome them, a new world awaits us," he said.

This year's theme, "Celebrating Twenty Years of Building Connections & Creating Opportunities", underscored CGCC's ongoing commitment to strengthening US-China business relations.

Founded in 2005, the CGCC has grown to become the largest independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental chamber of commerce dedicated to bridging the gap between the two economic powerhouses.

As of July 2024, CGCC's Chinese member companies had cumulatively invested more than \$140 billion, employed more than 230,000 people and indirectly supported over 1 million jobs throughout the US, according to the CGCC.

This year's event also featured the "Twenty for Twenty" recognition, a

special segment honoring 20 companies and partners that have significantly contributed to CGCC's mission over the past two decades.

Among the honorees were industry giants and influential organizations that have played important roles in deepening US-China business ties, including financial leaders like Bank of China USA, JPMorgan Chase and Citi, which have facilitated cross-border investments and trade, while logistics and aviation pioneers such as FedEx, Delta Air Lines and Air China Ltd, New York branch have strengthened connectivity through transportation networks.

Manufacturing powerhouses like Fuyao Glass America and Wanxiang America Corp showcased the transformative potential of industrial collaboration, and professional services providers such as Ernst & Young LLP and DeHeng Chen LLC supported businesses in navigating complex cross-border regulations.

Those companies have not only built bridges between the US and China but also created lasting opportunities for economic growth, innovation and mutual understanding.

"We have navigated through changes with resilience, adapted for the changing environment and emerged even better and stronger," Hu Wei, chairman of CGCC and president and CEO of the Bank of China USA, said in a speech.

Michael Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg LP and Bloomberg Philanthropies and a former three-term mayor of New York City, delivered a special video message congratulating CGCC on its 20th anniversary.

Bloomberg emphasized CGCC's indispensable role in fostering healthy bilateral relations. He expressed gratitude to the attending companies for their contributions to trade, security and climate change and reaffirmed Bloomberg's commitment to connecting China with global financial markets.

Xie further said that CGCC has played a key role in strengthening business ties between the two countries, especially during Chinese New Year — such as the trade in almonds, pistachios and blood glucose monitors — demonstrating that market

forces naturally drive bilateral trade.

He emphasized China's strong consumer demand for American products and said both nations need to move beyond a zero-sum mindset and instead embrace mutual support and cooperation for shared prosperity.

"Over the past year, despite the complex and grave situation, we have managed to maintain the overall stability of the China-US relationship and achieved a smooth transition," Xie said. He said bilateral trade increased by 3.7 percent.

He added that the US trade deficit hit a record high, increasing by about 50 percent compared with 2017, before the tariff war started.

China's foreign trade also reached a new high, rising by more than 50 percent compared with eight years ago, once again proving that tariffs and trade wars cannot solve problems and cannot stop China's development, he said.

The ambassador also warned against imposing additional tariffs on China under the pretext of the fentanyl issue, saying that such measures would be counterproductive.

He noted that tariffs would undermine both economic and counter-narcotics cooperation while raising costs for American households and businesses. Instead, he advocated for resolving trade issues through dialogue and consultation.

Over the decades, China-US trade has grown from \$211.6 billion to \$688.3 billion. More than 77,000 Chinese companies are investing in the US, while American companies also had the largest exhibition area at the China International Import Expo. The number of US companies participating in the event was the highest among foreign exhibitors in 2024, Xie said.

"At this new starting point, we need more than ever to demonstrate entrepreneurship, place new paths forward, fight to win, stay confident and assured, unleash vitality and advance in a stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US economic relations," he said. "Our confidence comes from the strong resilience of the China-US relationship, which is just too big to fail!"

## European Union vows response to US tariffs

Levies on steel and aluminum imports will not go unanswered: Von der Leyen

By CHEN WEIHUA in The Hague  
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The European Union vowed a "firm and proportionate" response to US President Donald Trump's blanket 25-percent tariffs on steel and aluminum imports to the United States.

In a statement just hours before she met with US Vice-President JD Vance on Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she deeply regrets the US decision to impose tariffs on European steel and aluminum exports.

"Tariffs are taxes — bad for business, worse for consumers," she said. "Unjustified tariffs on the EU will not go unanswered — they will trigger firm and proportionate countermeasures."

"The EU stands united in defending the interests of its businesses, workers and citizens," European Council President Antonio Costa said on X, expressing solidarity with von der Leyen.

Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminum cover imports from all countries, effectively canceling earlier US deals to suspend steel and aluminum tariffs with the EU and several other economies.

In a readout following von der Leyen's meeting with Vance on the sidelines of the AI Action Summit in Paris, the European Commission said von der Leyen reaffirmed the EU's commitment to a fair trade relationship while both parties expressed their intention to prioritize economic areas of mutual interest, including energy.

EU officials have indicated that the EU could buy more energy from the US to help narrow the bilateral trade deficit, a source of complaint for Trump.

The EU had a goods trade surplus of 156 billion euros (\$162 billion) with the US in 2023, but the US ran a services trade surplus of 104 billion euros with the EU the same year, according to the European Commission.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the German parliament on Tuesday that "the EU will react, united", adding that "ultimately, trade wars always cost both sides prosperity".

European Commissioner for Trade Maros Sefcovic told the European Parliament on Tuesday that by imposing tariffs, the US will be taxing its own citizens, raising costs for its own businesses and fueling inflation.

### Disruptive effects

"Tariffs are not only harmful for the trading partners directly involved, but also risk having disruptive effects for many others, as well as the global trading system as a whole," he said, adding that "it is a lose-lose scenario".

"We are currently assessing the scope of the measures announced overnight and will be responding in a firm and proportionate way through countermeasures."

When Trump first imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports back in 2018, the EU responded by slapping its own tariffs on a list of US products, from Harley-Davidson motorcycles to bourbon whiskey to cranberry juice.

Jasna Plevnik, president of the Geoeconomic Forum Croatia, said the EU hopes it might get an exemption from the steel and aluminum tariffs because of its geopolitical significance within the transatlantic security partnership.

"However, it is unlikely that the EU will get a quick and effective

exemption from Washington's tariffs because President Trump likes more protectionism than alliances, does not respect the WTO, and deeply believes the EU is not competing fairly with the US, whether they are political allies or not," she told China Daily.

Plevnik said although Vance stated that the US "cares a lot about Europe", Brussels is aware that it must prepare the bloc for a big Trump trade war directed against all those countries that have a trade surplus with the US.

"To protect its interests, the EU must turn to cooperation with China to jointly respond to the ongoing challenge to world trade by the US because a united front of all 27 EU member states will not be enough," she said.

Henrik Adam, president of Brussels-based European Steel Association, or Eurofer, accused Trump's tariffs as "a radical escalation of the trade war launched under his first administration".

"It will further worsen the situation in the European steel industry, exacerbating an already dire market environment," he said in a statement on Tuesday.

According to Eurofer, EU steel exports to the US fell by over 1 million metric tons a year under the previous agreement with the US. With the new measure, the EU could lose up to 3.7 million tons in steel exports to the US, the second-biggest market for EU steel producers, representing 16 percent of total EU steel exports last year.

"Losing a significant part of these exports cannot be compensated by EU exports to other markets," Adam said.

The American Chamber of Commerce to the European Union said on Tuesday that the tariffs "will have a wide-reaching and overwhelmingly negative impact on jobs, prosperity and security on both sides of the Atlantic".

## Tassoulas elected as president of Greece

ATHENS — Constantine Tassoulas, former speaker of the Greek Parliament, was elected as the country's new president on Wednesday.

Tassoulas, the nominee of the ruling conservative New Democracy party, secured 160 votes in the fourth round of voting, the same as in the previous rounds. The other three candidates each received fewer than 50 votes.

A total of 276 members of parliament took part in Wednesday's vote. Under the Greek Constitution, a candidate needs at least 151 votes in the 300-member assembly to win the presidency in the fourth round, a threshold lowered from 180 votes in the first two rounds held over the past three weeks.

Tassoulas, 65, replaces outgoing President Katerina Sakellaropoulou, a former senior judge, for a five-year term.

Sakellaropoulou, elected in 2020,

was Greece's first woman president.

In Greece, the post of the head of state is largely ceremonial, with candidates nominated by the prime minister.

Tassoulas has been selected as Speaker of the Greek Parliament three times by a large majority since 2019. The lawyer and father of two is a political veteran. First elected as a lawmaker in 2000, he has served as culture minister, deputy defense minister and party general secretary in parliament.

On Wednesday, Tassoulas called his election as president a "paramount honor" and a "major responsibility".

In a statement, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Tassoulas would act as a "symbol of national unity" and "a guarantor" of Greece's democratic and constitutional stability.

When serving as culture minister a decade ago, Tassoulas helped rein-

vigorate Greece's campaign to reclaim the 2,500-year-old Parthenon Sculptures, also known as the Elgin Marbles.

The sculptures were removed from the Acropolis in Athens by British diplomat Lord Elgin in the early 1800s and have since been kept in the British Museum. The Greek government contends that their removal was illegal and has long sought their return, seeking to reunite them with other Parthenon artifacts displayed in a museum in the Greek capital.

Greek officials believe the return of the sculptures is more likely now due to the UK Labour government's perceived openness to loan agreements. Ongoing discussions on a potential arrangement would likely include an offer to facilitate rotating exhibitions of ancient Greek artifacts at the British Museum.

XINHUA — AGENCIES

## DeepSeek breakthrough gains widespread acclaim

SACRAMENTO, California — With its recent AI model breakthrough, Chinese artificial intelligence company DeepSeek has drawn a flurry of positive reactions from leading US tech firms.

The company's R1 reasoning model, released last month, has been widely compared with OpenAI's currently most advanced model o1. However, the R1 model was built at a fraction of what major US AI labs spent on computing power.

DeepSeek's breakthrough in efficiency has received widespread acclaim from leaders of tech majors in the United States.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella acknowledged DeepSeek's "genuine innovations" and the company has integrated the R1 model into Microsoft's developer platforms Azure and GitHub. Nadella stressed the importance of taking developments from China seriously, citing the remarkable efficiency

of DeepSeek's open-source model.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg also highlighted the benefits of DeepSeek's published innovations.

"DeepSeek had a few pretty novel infrastructure optimization advances, which, fortunately, they published. We cannot only observe what they did but read about it and implement it — so that'll benefit us," Zuckerberg said at a recent company meeting.

Nvidia, despite initial stock market concerns in response to DeepSeek's release, praised the R1 model as "an excellent AI advancement", describing the company's approach as a prime example of test-time scaling — one of three key scaling methods currently shaping AI development.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai acknowledged DeepSeek's "very, very good work" and suggested that lowering AI costs benefits both Google and the broader AI industry.

Like Microsoft, Amazon has embraced the new technology by allowing developers to leverage the R1 model through Amazon Web Services, describing it as "powerful and cost-effective".

DeepSeek's breakthrough has also impressed its US counterparts.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman described DeepSeek's R1 model as "impressive", particularly in its performance relative to cost. In response to this new competition, Altman announced that OpenAI would accelerate the release of improved models.

Perplexity CEO Aravind Srinivas also lauded DeepSeek's AI model, emphasizing that the company is not simply copying existing technology but innovating in significant ways.

DeepSeek's ability to create efficient solutions marks a significant milestone in AI development, said Srinivas. "Because DeepSeek had to

find a way to get around various limitations, it actually created something more efficient."

The release of the R1 model and the publication of DeepSeek's methods have sparked what many see as a potential paradigm shift in the AI industry. With the knowledge of how to create powerful reasoning models now in the public domain, experts anticipate a surge in free, highly capable AI models in the near future.

An analysis by consulting firm KPMG suggests that DeepSeek's emergence could reshape the industry through several key factors. The analysis noted that the company's performance rivals advanced closed-source models, while its cost-efficiency and open-source approach enable developers and researchers worldwide to learn from and build upon its work.

XINHUA

## Animal rights



Activists of the French animal rights association L214 stage a protest against the living conditions of farmed animals and their genetic selection in the intensive poultry farming industry, in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Tuesday. FREDERICK FLORIN / AFP

## WORLD

# Remarks over Taiwan question spark concerns

Statement by US, Japan slammed for interfering in China's internal affairs

By **JIANG XUEQING** in Tokyo  
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

Experts urged Japan to adhere to the one-China principle if it genuinely seeks to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, rather than interfering in China's internal affairs.

Their remarks came in the context of a joint statement issued by the United States and Japan after Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House on Friday, which touched on the Taiwan question.

The statement emphasized the two leaders' support for a "peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues" and their opposition to any attempts to "unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion." It also voiced backing for Taiwan's "meaningful participation in international organizations."

Takakage Fujita, secretary-general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, a Japanese civil group, said that in the Japan-China joint communiqué, the Japanese government explicitly recognized the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China. It also reaffirmed that the People's Republic of China considers Taiwan an inseparable part of its territory.

However, Fujita noted that in recent years, the US has repeatedly provoked China through actions such as record-breaking arms sales to the Taiwan region, visits by high-ranking US officials to the region, and frequent passages of US warships through the Taiwan Strait.

"These actions have raised Chinese concerns about the erosion of the long-standing US one-China policy. Without such provocations, the so-called Taiwan contingency would not have arisen," Fujita said.

He further argued that it is the US government, rather than China, that is attempting to change the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. Fujita also warned the Japanese government against preparing for war by portraying China as a threat.

"China is Japan's largest trading partner. Strengthening Japan-China friendship is one of Japan's most important security measures. Ultimately, the key to peace, stability, and development in Asia lies in the friendship and peaceful coexistence between Japan and China," he said.

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said at a regular news conference on Wednesday that the Taiwan question is purely China's internal affair and brooks no external interference.

"The so-called US-Japan joint leaders' statement makes unwarranted remarks on the Taiwan question and crudely interferes in China's internal affairs. We firmly oppose this," Zhu said, urging the US to adhere to the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués, and to stop sending any wrong signals to "Taiwan independence" separatist forces.

As a country with historical capability on the Taiwan question,

Japan should draw lessons from history, speak and act with caution, abide by the spirit of the four China-Japan political documents, and handle Taiwan-related matters prudently, Zhu said.

She also warned the Democratic Progressive Party administration that any attempt to rely on external forces to split the country is doomed to fail.

## Core interests

Highlighting that the Taiwan question is "at the core of China's core interests", Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a news conference on Monday that China has lodged serious protests with the US and Japan.

"The Taiwan region's participation in the activities of international organizations must and can only be handled in line with the one-China principle. Taiwan has no basis, reason or right to join international organizations that only sovereign countries join," said Guo.

On the so-called Taiwan contingency, Shigeaki Koga, a policy analyst and a former official at Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, argued that Japan has the power to either trigger or prevent such a scenario.

"Diplomacy would have to be structured on the premise of avoiding war. This means Japan holds considerable influence, and rather than simply following the US, it should consider restraining it," Koga said.

However, he noted that the Japanese government regards the Japan-US alliance as the cornerstone of its national security. In the event of a "Taiwan contingency", refusing to support the US could anger Washington and even risk destabilizing the alliance.

"To maintain the alliance, Japan may feel compelled to deploy its Self-Defense Forces and fight alongside the US, even at significant cost, in the name of protecting its own security," said Koga. "What was originally meant to safeguard Japanese citizens now seems to require Japanese sacrifices to sustain itself. This paradox must be fully recognized, and it is crucial for Japanese citizens to understand that we have the power to prevent such a crisis."

Gui Yongtao, associate dean at the School of International Studies at Peking University, said the joint communiqué signed by Japan and China in 1972 when they normalized diplomatic relations makes China's national interests absolutely clear: that Japan should adhere to the one-China principle. He emphasized that Japan has upheld the principles outlined in the communiqué for decades.

Additionally, he pointed out that while the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between China and Japan does not directly address the Taiwan question, it underscores a key principle twice: noninterference in each other's internal affairs.

"The Taiwan question is China's internal affair; it is primarily a political issue, not a security issue. Therefore, any irresponsible comment or move related to the Taiwan question by any country is an interference in China's internal affairs," said Gui.



Tents sheltering displaced Palestinians are erected in the yards of destroyed schools and buildings in the north of Gaza City on Tuesday. OMAR ASHTAWY / APA IMAGES

## Uncertainty abounds in Gaza cease-fire

By **JAN YUMUL** in Hong Kong and **CUI HAIPEI** in Dubai, UAE

Israeli warnings to resume "intense fighting" in the Gaza Strip after a Saturday deadline and insistence of United States President Donald Trump to take over Gaza and resettle Palestinians away are threatening a fragile cease-fire in the devastated enclave and injecting fear, according to officials and analysts.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Tuesday that his country would resume military operations in Palestinian territories if Israeli hostages were not returned by Saturday. He had echoed a similar ultimatum by Trump who said "all hell is going to break out" if Hamas fails to release the hostages.

Trump made the threat after Hamas' armed wing, Al-Qassam Brigades, announced on Monday that the planned release of Israeli captives set for Saturday would be postponed. Hamas accused Israel on Tuesday of failing to uphold its commitments under the cease-fire.

Hamas also labeled Trump and his plan to empty Gaza as "racist" and "a call for ethnic cleansing". In a statement on Telegram, Hamas accused Trump of seeking to "liquidate the Palestinian cause and deny the national rights of the Palestinian people".

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said on Wednesday in Dubai that it is "unacceptable" for the region to displace Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

"The focus today is on Gaza and

tomorrow it will shift to the West Bank with the objective of emptying Palestine of its historical inhabitants," he said at the World Governments Summit in the UAE. "It's unacceptable for the Arab world, which has fought this idea for 100 years."

In a statement, Egypt said on Tuesday that it plans to present a comprehensive Gaza reconstruction plan designed to ensure Palestinians remain on their land.

## Endangering peace

Egypt said "any vision for resolving the Palestinian cause must take into account the need to avoid endangering the gains of peace in the region" while simultaneously addressing the root cause of the conflict "by ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and implementing the two-state solution".

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Prime Minister of Denmark Mette Frederiksen, in a telephone talk on Tuesday, also emphasized the right of Palestinians in Gaza against displacement elsewhere. Sisi's scheduled visit to Washington on Feb 18 could be postponed, according to Middle East News Agency.

King Abdullah II of Jordan on Tuesday reiterated on social media Jordan's steadfast position against the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged on social media to "avoid at all costs resumption of hostilities in Gaza that would lead to immense tragedy".

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and visiting Turkish Pres-

ident Recep Tayyip Erdogan have stressed the legitimacy and need for establishing a sovereign Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Belal Alakhras, a political analyst and researcher at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, told China Daily that these developments are a pivotal moment for the Middle East region as they involve many regional countries and have international repercussions — as the world is following and examining Trump's foreign policy.

But the momentum "dissipated" following the US president's plans to push Palestinians out of Gaza and establish control over the territory, evolving into a situation where Trump has taken an "unequivocally pro-Israeli stance", opposing regional consensus and supporting Israel's extreme agenda of Palestinian displacement. "Trump's stance and threats have undermined the very cease-fire agreement his administration helped broker," he said.

"Indeed, these developments have significantly bolstered the credibility of Palestinian movements' long-standing position that the peace process and two-state solution proposals lacked genuine commitment from Israel and Western powers, with actions consistently contradicting diplomatic statements," Alakhras added.

They are likely to generate more support for Palestinians and elevate the Palestinian issue to a more prominent global issue, he said.

Contact the writers at  
jan@chinadailyjapac.com.

## Fresh fighting flares up in eastern DR Congo

GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo — Fighting erupted on Tuesday in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, three days after a call by African leaders for a cease-fire and a brief lull in the conflict.

Armed group militias of the March 23 Movement attacked Congolese army positions in South Kivu Province at dawn, local and security sources told AFP.

The resurgence comes after African leaders called on their general staff to propose a plan for implementing an "unconditional" cease-fire by Thursday — in a conflict that has killed thousands and driven vast numbers from their homes.

Clashes took place on Tuesday near the village of Ihusi, around 70 kilometers from the provincial capital Bukavu and 40 kilometers from the province's airport, according to security sources.

The M23 has in recent months swiftly seized tracts of territory in the eastern part of DR Congo after again taking up arms in late 2021.

The armed group began advancing in South Kivu after taking control of Goma, the capital of neighboring North Kivu Province, at the end of January.

Bukavu has been preparing for an M23 offensive for several days, with schools shuttering in the city on Friday as residents began to flee and shops closed over fears of an imminent attack.

Banks were still shut in the city on Tuesday.

Since Jan 26, more than 3,000



Displaced community members search for space in a truck as they return to their hometown, in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Tuesday. HUGH KINSELLA CUNNINGHAM / GETTY IMAGES

people have reportedly been killed, 2,880 injured and over 500,000 displaced, adding to the 6.4 million already internally displaced people in eastern DR Congo, according to the United Nations.

The suspension of US foreign aid has hampered UN humanitarian operations in the DR Congo, a senior UN official said on Tuesday.

The US suspension of foreign aid "is having a major impact" on humanitarian aid operations in the country, Bruno Lemarquis, deputy special representative of the UN secretary-general, resident coordinator and humanitarian

coordinator for DR Congo, told reporters via video from the capital Kinshasa.

The humanitarian situation in Goma is also worsening with no running water in large parts of the city and residents forced to take water from Lake Kivu.

An increase in cholera cases has been seen in the region, particularly among people displaced by the conflict, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said.

The crisis in DR Congo is set to be discussed at an African Union meeting in Addis Ababa on Friday.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Beijing decries manipulation of virus origins

By **ZHOU JIN**  
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

China reiterated its opposition over political manipulation on the origins-tracing of the coronavirus on Wednesday, urging the United States to reflect on itself rather than shifting blame to others.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun made the remarks in response to recent US media reports claiming that the US Agency for International Development used US taxpayers' money to fund gain-of-function studies of the virus at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology, which allegedly caused COVID-19 pandemic and led to the deaths of millions around the world.

China has made it clear many times that the Wuhan Institute of Virology has never engaged in gain-of-function studies of coronavirus and never designed, made, or leaked COVID-19, Guo stressed.

It is extremely unlikely that the pandemic was caused by a lab leak, and this is the authoritative conclusion reached by the experts of the World Health Organization-China joint mission, he said.

The conclusion is based on science following their field trips to the lab in Wuhan and in-depth communication with researchers, Guo said, adding that the conclusion has been widely acknowledged by the international community, including the scientific community.

Origins-tracing of COVID-19 is a matter of science, and any judgment on it should be made in a science-based spirit by scientists, he added.

## NASA plans early return of stranded astronauts

WASHINGTON — NASA, on Tuesday swapped out the astronaut capsule it plans to use for an upcoming routine flight to the International Space Station, a scheduling move that will allow a slightly earlier return for two Starliner astronauts who have been on the station far longer than expected.

The US space agency said mission management teams opted to use a previously flown SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule for its Crew-10 mission to the space station instead of a new SpaceX capsule whose production, it said, has been delayed.

The decision moves up the Crew-10 launch to March 12, from the previous target of March 25. NASA said it would still need to conduct a flight readiness assessment of the previously flown Crew Dragon capsule, which is named Endeavor and has been used on three previous missions.

The return of two astronauts, Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams, who flew to the International Space Station on Boeing's faulty Starliner capsule last summer, has hinged on the arrival of Crew-10s four-person crew to keep the station's American contingent staffed at normal levels.

The decision follows US President Donald Trump's abrupt demand to SpaceX CEO Elon Musk last month to bring Wilmore and Williams back to Earth "as soon as possible", pleading for an end to their mission that, in large part had already been decided on last year.

After Trump's demand, NASA affirmed its plan to bring home the astronauts, saying it would do so "as soon as practical". In its statement on Tuesday, the agency did not say its decision to change the Crew-10 capsule was made to bring the Starliner crew home early.

"Human spaceflight is full of unexpected challenges," NASA's Commercial Crew Program head Steve Stich said in a statement, praising SpaceX for its flexibility.

The spacecraft swap affects SpaceX's planned Fram2 private astronaut mission, which was expected to use the Endeavor capsule sometime this year for a polar-orbiting mission.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

### 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

Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

#### WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

520 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

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: 206-922-2860

#### HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

#### CANADA / TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No. 1516

# ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), of which China Daily is among its 20 leading titles.



Residents with dementia participate in a silent disco at Apex Harmony Lodge in Singapore in 2023. ROSLAN RAHMAN / AFP

## Aviophobia rises in South Korea amid safety scares

On the heels of two safety incidents involving South Korean budget airlines within a month, concerns over air travel safety are growing among passengers, prompting many to forgo cheaper fares in favor of legacy carriers.

Among them is 27-year-old Lee Ji-yun, who, while booking her upcoming trip to Osaka, Japan, with a friend, opted for round-trip tickets priced at 400,000 won (\$275) instead of a budget option half that price.

"Normally, I'd go for the cheapest option because going to Japan from (South) Korea is such a short flight," Lee told The Korea Herald. "But the recent incidents involving budget carriers made me feel uneasy about flying with them. I felt like my safety would be better guaranteed flying with legacy carriers instead."

Concerns over budget airline safety escalated following two major incidents.

On Dec 29, a Jeju Air passenger aircraft crashed during an emergency landing, resulting in 179 fatalities out of the 181 people on board. Though the exact reason behind the crash is yet to be confirmed, issues such as excessive flight frequency and inadequate safety maintenance were raised following the incident.

In less than a month, on Jan 28, an Air Busan plane caught fire at its tail before takeoff.

Fortunately, the incident resulted in no deaths, but speculations have still arisen as to whether the airline is liable for professional negligence regarding carry-on luggage, with the cause of the fire suspected to be a portable power bank stowed in an overhead compartment.

Lee is not alone in her reluctance to fly with low-cost carriers, or LCCs.

According to Air Portal, which is run by South Korea's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the number of passengers from South Korea's six major LCCs — Jeju Air, Jin Air, T'way Air, Eastar Jet, Air Busan and Air Seoul — has recently shown a steady decline.

Between Dec 23 and 29, the six LCCs recorded a combined 1.36 million passengers, which fell to 1.16 million in the first week of January.

Though there was a slight rebound for Jan 13 to 19, the numbers were around 9 percent lower compared to the number of passengers recorded at the end of December. However, observers forecast that these numbers could

decrease further following the recent Air Busan fire.

On social media platforms, several commenters spoke of an increased fear of flying.

"I've been planning this trip for months, but with the recent news of accidents involving planes, I don't feel confident about flying anymore," wrote one user.

To minimize travelers' fear of flying and regain consumers' trust in budget carriers, experts urged "comprehensive reform" of the aircraft maintenance system as well as an "expansion of maintenance personnel."

"Typically, the probability of an aircraft accident resulting in fatalities is as low as one in 10 million, but when such accidents occur, it can lead to a massive number of fatalities, resulting in significant social repercussions," said aviation safety management professor Kwon Bo-hun from Far East University of South Korea.

"A one-time inspection of an aircraft during an assigned inspection period is not enough. Instead, a comprehensive overhaul of the aircraft maintenance system, as well as an expansion in maintenance personnel is necessary."

Kwon added that "revisions of in-flight baggage policies and aviation safety regulations" are needed to prioritize passenger safety.

Kwon said measures to implement stricter guidelines on portable power banks or to restrict them completely should also be considered.

The government is looking into strengthening the regulations on carrying portable power banks on aircraft, which are to be announced by April this year, according to the land ministry of South Korea.

Discussions are underway regarding stricter limits on the quantity or capacity of portable power banks that can be brought on board, as well as designating specific storage locations by law and providing vinyl pouches at each airport to block the flow of electric currents from portable power banks.

Additionally, the possibility of mandating passengers to carry their portable power banks in hand is also being considered. While airlines instruct passengers before takeoff to keep their portable power banks in hand, these announcements lack enforceability, resulting in most passengers being unaware.

THE KOREA HERALD, SOUTH KOREA



A passenger stands in front of the window facing the parking apron of the Incheon International Airport on Jan 7. YONHAP

## GRAY WAVE

Experts urge ASEAN countries to find ways to meet needs of elderly population

When Malaysia last chaired ASEAN a decade ago, there were 39.3 million people aged 65 and above in Southeast Asia.

The number has since grown to 56.2 million according to the United Nations' population estimates, reflecting rapid growth in ASEAN's population of seniors.

Experts say the demographic trend, driven by falling fertility rates and rising life expectancy, is putting pressure on ASEAN member countries to quickly adapt infrastructure and services to meet the increasing needs of the elderly.

"It is in ASEAN's best interest that older persons embrace healthy, active and productive aging as delayed onset of diseases, disabilities or frailty means the elderly are able to keep contributing to their own well-being," said Chai Sen Tyng, a demographer from the University of Putra Malaysia.

To prepare for the rising number of older persons, ASEAN member countries need to invest in health, education and social protection systems within a much shorter window, he said.

"We need to put in place mechanisms that will help the older population sustain themselves," he said.

Among ASEAN's 10 member countries, Thailand has the highest share of older persons at 13.4 percent of its population as of 2023, according to figures from the ASEAN Statistical Highlights 2024.

Singapore is second at 12.1 percent with Vietnam third at 9.2 percent.

According to a 2023 ASEAN Secretariat study titled "Old Age Poverty and Active Ageing in ASEAN: Trends and Opportunities", the region is aging faster than many developed countries.

ASEAN figures also show that



Left: An elderly woman buys fruit at a market in Hanoi, Vietnam, on Jan 6. LUONG THAI LINH / EPA



Right: A Thai elderly woman smiles after receiving a cash deposit from the government's digital wallet scheme for the elderly in Bangkok, Thailand, on Jan 27. NARONG SANGNAK / EPA

### 56.2 million seniors

aged 65 and above are currently residing in ASEAN countries, up from 39.3 million in 2015, according to the United Nations' population estimates.

between 2016 and 2022, the elderly population in the region grew more than four times faster than the region's total population.

In 2015, ASEAN adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Ageing during the tenure of Malaysia's chairmanship of the regional body.

The declaration recognized the growing proportion of older persons in the population and called for health and social support systems to meet the challenge.

It also recommended actions to promote healthy, active and productive aging, seeking to strengthen older persons and the support from their families.

Associate Professor Tey Nai Peng from the University of Malaya said that in addition to the declaration, ASEAN member states have also formulated national policies to support older persons, including efforts to expand pension coverage.

"However, challenges remain, as coverage rates and benefit adequacy vary across countries," he said.

### Use of technology

Despite the challenges, Tey said ASEAN countries can learn from each other in adopting effective policies.

In Malaysia, cities like Penang Island and Sibul have been recognized by the World Health Organization's global network for age-friendly cities and communities.

The network aims to foster age-friendly community to promote and strengthen healthy aging.

"The integration of technology designed to address the specific needs of the elderly is being explored in these cities to support independent living and reduce the

strain on family caregivers," Tey said.

Singapore is another example. Tey said the island nation provides its elderly with many incentives for active aging.

"Programs like the active aging program or active aging centers encourage seniors to stay healthy and engaged through lifelong learning and community activities.

"Older adults in Singapore are notably more actively engaged in life compared to their peers in neighboring countries," he said, noting Singapore has the highest retirement age among ASEAN nations, at 64 by 2026.

He said the reemployment age will rise from 68 to 69, reflecting Singapore's proactive approach to fostering a longer and more fulfilling workforce participation for older individuals.

Singapore has also developed innovative retirement income schemes and care programs to support its aging population.

"Initiatives like the Central Provident Fund Life scheme provide financial security for retirees, while the Silver Support Scheme provides continuing support for their elderly who had low incomes during their working years."

Tey cited Thailand as another example, saying the country has implemented universal health coverage programs to benefit the elderly, improving their access to essential health services.

"Thailand also established a strong network of village health volunteers to provide basic health services and support for older adults in rural areas.

"The healthcare system integrates aging services into broader public health programs," Tey said.

THE STAR, MALAYSIA

## Volcano erupts dozens of times and triggers ashfall in Indonesia

Mount Semeru, located on the border between Lumajang and Malang in East Java, erupted dozens of times over the past few weeks, triggering ash columns and ashfall on villages around the volcano.

Data from the Semeru observation post in Lumajang showed that the volcano had erupted three times between midnight and 3 am on Feb 7. The mountain spewed thick grayish ash columns between 500 and 700 meters above the summit, which drifted to the north.

Semeru observation post official Mukdas Sofian said the volcano erupted 55 times on Feb 8.

"However, we could not observe all of the ash columns because the mountain's summit was obscured by fog," said Mukdas.

Mukdas cautioned the public to stay clear of areas within 500 meters of the Besuk Kobokan River, the pro-

jected path of any lava flow, because of the potential for pyroclastic clouds and *lahar* that could extend up to 13 kilometers from the summit.

Additionally, residents are prohibited from engaging in any activities within an 8 km radius of the summit because of the risk of falling rocks.

In addition to Besuk Kobokan, residents have been warned to be on alert for potential pyroclastic clouds, lava or *lahar*, a violent type of debris flow composed of a slurry of pyroclastic material, along the Besuk Kembar and Besuk Sat rivers and their tributaries.

Authorities have maintained Mount Semeru's status at Level II advisory on the four-tier volcano alert system.

The districts of Candipuro, Pronojowo, and Pasrujambe, located 13 to 18 km from Semeru's summit, have



Women carry belongings they collected from their houses that are affected by the eruption of Mount Semeru in Lumajang, East Java, Indonesia, in 2022. DICKY BISINGLASI / AP

experienced moderate to heavy ashfall in recent days, prompting authorities to advise residents to

wear masks and goggles when venturing outdoors.

Sugiyono, an official at Semeru's

Curah Kobokan observation post, said the ashfall was triggered by strong winds at the summit which carried volcanic material from the volcano's daily eruptions that had accumulated on the mountain slopes.

"These strong winds have also made it challenging for us to observe Semeru's ash columns," he said.

Head of the Lumajang Disaster Mitigation Agency, Patria Dwi Hastiadi, said the eruptions that occurred on Semeru in the past few days were still considered normal volcanic activities.

"However, we urge residents living at the foot of the mountain to stay away from rivers due to the significant risk of *lahar* flows, especially given the ongoing bad weather," he said.

Semeru has been showing height-

ened volcanic activity since November. The 3,676-meter volcano erupted 475 times in January alone, with an average of 15 eruptions per day.

The volcano experienced two massive eruptions in the past few years, including an eruption in December 2021 that killed 51 people and forced nearly 10,000 others to flee their homes.

In December of the following year, authorities were forced to evacuate 2,000 residents living around the mountain after it spewed a cloud of ash 15 km into the sky.

Authorities recently announced that the volcano would be off limits to the public until further notice, citing safety concerns due to increased volcanic activity and the ongoing adverse weather conditions in the area.

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA

## BUSINESS

MORE NEWS WHENEVER YOU WANT IT · CHINADAILY.COM.CN/BUSINESS

## Tech breakthroughs boosting bourse

DeepSeek in particular helps attract increased interest worldwide

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

The surge of DeepSeek, a two-year-old Hangzhou-based startup creating open-source large language models at much lower costs than foreign peers, has not only led to rising global investor interest in Chinese artificial intelligence companies, but also their bullish outlook on the Chinese tech sector in general.

As Galaxy Securities has calculated, foreign investors have shown particular interest in companies on the CSI A500 Index, which is comprised of industry leaders from emerging sectors such as information technology and communication services.

As of Friday, foreign investors held about 1.77 trillion yuan (\$240 billion) in CSI A500 company shares, accounting for 3.85 percent of these firms' combined publicly listed shares' market value. On average, foreign investors' holdings are equal to 1.86 percent of the A-share market's total value. Core assets of the CSI A500 Index are likely to attract more foreign capital inflow, which usually focuses on high liquidity and rapid growth markets, said Galaxy Securities analysts.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closed up 0.85 percent on Wednesday while the CSI A500 Index gained 1.08 percent.

Likewise, the Nasdaq Golden Dragon China Index, which tracks

US-listed Chinese companies, has jumped more than 6 percent since the beginning of February, while the Hang Seng TECH Index has spiked 9 percent.

While global investors tend to have significantly underweight takes on Chinese assets and their exposure to China is still "minimal" at present, they will "have to make a significant shift toward Chinese shares in the medium term, and it may be difficult to acquire these stocks without pushing up share prices", Peter Milliken, director of equity research for Deutsche Bank AG in Hong Kong, wrote in a report on Feb 5.

"We have been bullish on Chinese stocks but have been struggling to find the catalyst that would wake up the world and buy into Chinese stocks, and we think China's 'Sputnik moment' (or something like

dominance in electric vehicles) is that catalyst ... We believe the bull run in Hong Kong/Chinese mainland equities began in 2024 and will exceed previous highs in the medium term," wrote Milliken.

Holding a stronger preference for Chinese equities over US stocks this year, David Chao, global market strategist for Asia-Pacific (ex-Japan) at global investment management company Invesco, said prices of Chinese companies, especially tech companies, are heavily discounted if compared to their US counterparts. Similar to the narrowing gap in the development of AI, such valuation differences will become increasingly smaller.

DeepSeek's breakthroughs achieved at extremely low cost have pointed to the fact that Chinese companies are able to innovate, especially when it comes to soft-

ware, he added.

As UBS has noticed, AI-related Chinese shares have seen their prices surge by an average of 15 percent since the beginning of the year, outperforming the average 9 percent increase of the MSCI China Index over the same period.

Past experience shows that tech-driven rebounds will drive up share prices even before the companies see the breakthroughs make a big difference on their balance sheets, said James Wang, head of China Strategy for UBS Investment Bank Research.

Desmond Kuang, chief investment officer for China at HSBC Global Private Banking and Wealth, said the success of DeepSeek has invigorated investor appetite, showing the increasing competitiveness of China in terms of technological innovation.

## Briefly

## Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 6 pips to 7.1710 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

## SME development index edges up

An index tracking the development of China's small and medium-sized enterprises edged up in January, data from an industry association showed. The SME development index rose by 0.1 point to 89, compared to the previous month, the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises data showed. Six of the eight sub-indices rallied in January, including market, labor and investment, according to the association.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## China leads in energy transition investment

By ZHENG XIN  
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China led the world in energy transition investment last year, accounting for two-thirds of the \$2.1 trillion spent globally in 2024, according to BloombergNEF (BNEF), a research and advisory firm.

Driven by strong domestic demand, China remained the dominant force in clean energy investment last year, with spending focused on solar power, lithium batteries, electric vehicles, and power grids, BNEF said in its recently released Energy Transition Investment Trends 2025 report.

With a 20 percent year-on-year growth, the Chinese mainland alone contributed \$134 billion of the \$202 billion global investment increase in 2024. The country posted solid growth across multiple sectors, including renewables, energy storage, nuclear power, EVs, hydrogen, heat pumps and power grids, it said.

China's rapid investment surge widened its lead over other economies, with its energy transition spending more than double that of any other country. Even when adjusted for economic size, China's investment accounted for 4.5 percent of its GDP, far exceeding countries like the United States with 1.2 percent, said the research firm.

China's renewable energy sector experienced a stellar year in 2024, with total installed capacity of wind and solar power surpassing 1.4 billion kilowatts, further reinforcing the country's role as a global leader in renewable energy development.

Industry experts said China has always been a global leader in the green energy shift.



A technician checks solar panels at a production line of a tech company in Jinhua, Zhejiang province. SHI KUANGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY

The Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute, a think tank that is part of China Petroleum and Chemical Corp, has forecast that China's investment in its energy transition is expected to surpass \$1 trillion by 2030, with a focus on enhancing energy efficiency and accelerating electrification.

China has doubled the share of renewable energy in its energy investment mix, spending more than 40 percent of its energy transi-

tion funds on renewables, or roughly twice the amount allocated to fossil fuels, said Luo Daqing, vice-president of the institute.

According to Zhou Libo, deputy secretary-general of the China Electricity Council's electric transportation and energy storage branch, investment in China is set to continue growing in integrated energy stations, photovoltaic-storage-charging hubs and supercharging stations.

Data released by BNEF reveal

that China also maintained its dominance in the clean energy supply chain, accounting for 81 percent of global supply chain investment in 2024.

BNEF expects China to continue leading global clean energy spending in the years ahead.

Beyond renewables, investment in other low-carbon energy sources, including nuclear power, rose sharply in 2024, underscoring a global revival of nuclear energy, it said.

## Chongqing water shield entering Japanese market

By TAN YINGZI and  
DENG RUI in Chongqing

Soon, the shelves of around 100 upscale lifestyle supermarkets in Japan will be graced by a new addition — ready-to-eat canned water shield sourced from Southwest China's Chongqing.

Water shield, or *chuncai* in Chinese, is an aquatic, perennial herb with floating leaves that grows in ponds, lakes and slow-moving streams. It is an exquisite culinary delight that provides an organic option for discerning consumers and helps in tackling local production shortages.

Recently, at a water shield export shipment ceremony held in Chongqing's Shizhu Tujia autonomous county, a truck loaded with 100,000 ready-to-eat canned water shield valued at about \$100,400 departed from Chongqing Shuihuotu Food Industry Co Ltd.

The shipment is destined for Hakata Port in Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan, according to Li Ying, chairman of the company.

"This milestone export marks a significant achievement in directly exporting water shield products from Shizhu to Japan," said Li.

In the past, water shield products from Shizhu were not directly traded to Japan. Instead, they went through a trading company located in Zhejiang province, and were exported by a company in Shanghai. This marks the first instance of direct exports from the local area to Japan, Li added.

Toward the end of last year, Zhang Hua, Party secretary of Shizhu, led a delegation from Shizhu to Fukuoka. Through the delegation's economic and trade negotiations and friendly exchanges, a \$100 million export contract was signed, with \$80 million specifically designated for Shizhu's water shield products.

Situated high in the mountains of Chongqing, Shizhu boasts one of the largest production bases in the world for water shield, a vegetable favored by both Chinese and Japanese for its health properties.

Water shield normally has deep green oval leaves of approximately 6 to 10 centimeters, arranged alternately and is covered with a gelatinous material and characterized by

a unique texture. It is high in fiber and known to help in lowering fever and in strengthening weak stomachs. It is often cooked in soup or salads.

"This batch of ready-to-eat canned water shield will officially enter my company's supply chain system in Japan today, and will soon be available in 100 high-end lifestyle supermarkets in Japan, addressing the market gap," Yu Wenhang, general manager of AS Co Ltd in Japan, said during the ceremony.

A Chinese expatriate who has lived in Japan for over 20 years and who has been primarily involved in the supply chain of Japanese supermarkets, Yu said that around 80 percent of the Japanese population is acquainted with water shield. However, its production output in Japan is very low.

Additionally, water shield from Shizhu stands out for its excellent texture, quality and freshness, and aligns well with the dietary preferences of the Japanese. "I have confidence in the market, my business partner and Shizhu's water shield," he said.

Japan is known for its highest life expectancy in the world, a fact closely tied to the dietary habits of its population. In addition to consuming large amounts of deep-sea fish, the Japanese also eat various "longevity vegetables", such as water shield.

China has a long history of cultivating water shield in a few select regions, including Chongqing and Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Hubei provinces.

Chongqing's Shizhu began large-scale water shield cultivation in 11 townships in 1992. It has now emerged as a leading hub for water shield production in the world with a fully developed industry chain — enabling this delicacy to be widely available in households.

With a planting area of about 933 hectares and an annual production of about 14,000 metric tons, the local water shield industry's comprehensive output value reached 300 million yuan (\$41.78 million) in 2023, and is expected to reach 350 million yuan this year, according to the local bureau of commerce.

Contact the writers at  
dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

## Reforming hukou system key to stimulating economy

By LIU ZHIHUA  
and YIN MINGYUE

China is expected to promote trade-in programs in the short term and people-centered new-type urbanization in the long run to boost household spending, thereby injecting more vitality into economic growth, Liu Jing, chief China economist at HSBC Global Research, told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

Reforming the *hukou* system, also known as household registration, to better integrate rural migrants into urban economies, as well as diversifying market offerings are essential to stimulating the economy's internal vitality for long-term stable growth, Liu said.

"The ongoing large-scale equipment upgrades and trade-in programs for consumer goods have been highly effective to result in significant sales growth across all product categories," said Liu, adding that China will likely strengthen trade-in programs in the short term to promote household consumption.

"I think that this year's trade-in programs will focus on three key initiatives: including more products and services to the program, allocating more funds — last year 150 billion yuan (\$20.52 billion)

was offered as subsidies, streamlining the policy framework to simplify subsidy application procedures, such as consolidating information processing to save application time, while enabling both online and offline participation," Liu said.

From a long-term development perspective, Liu said that reforms to advance urbanization should deepen, with particular focus on improving the welfare of migrant workers in cities.

"Migrant workers in cities are enjoying less public services such as schooling and medical treatment than urban residents with household registration. These costs reduce the amount of money available for consumption, limiting their spending capacity," she said.

In the medium to long term, new urbanization reforms can prioritize providing public services based on permanent residence rather than *hukou* — as the resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July 2024 said. That will help unlock migrant workers' purchasing power and help tap into consumption potential, Liu added.

Besides, the respective contributions for funding public services by central and local governments are



Liu Jing

anticipated to undergo a revision and subsequent improvement, said Liu.

"For example, migrant workers should be entitled to more public services in their place of residence. Policies should shift from allocating resources based on household registration to distributing them according to the actual residency," she said.

Additionally, Liu said the debut economy, which introduces new products, ideas and business models, will allow companies to enjoy good profits for a period of time — rewarding innovation, while offering consumers innovative goods and services that can drive consumption.

Through tapping into diverse consumer needs and demands, the debut economy can also help mitigate unnecessary excessive peer competition among producers. It can even spur consumption upgrades in certain industries, she said.

"Some companies, in pursuit of short-term profits, engage in cut-throat competition to maintain or increase market share," Liu said. "This is not conducive to long-term development, because that may

reduce R&D spending. The focus should be on strengthening the debut economy to create demand and break the vicious cycle of excessive price competition.

"After the pandemic, some people said there is a so-called consumption downgrading, yet, for instance, high-end bicycles are still in high demand, with some costing more than 50,000 yuan each. This indicates that China's middle and high-income consumers will buy high-end products and services, if the market offers them what they want or need," she said.

The latest data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that sales of key retail and catering enterprises in China increased by 4.1 percent year-on-year during the Spring Festival, China's most important annual holiday. The movie box office reached a record high of 9.51 billion yuan.

In particular, sales of household appliances and communication equipment from retail enterprises that are monitored by the ministry jumped more than 10 percent year-on-year.

Dong Yilang contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at  
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn



An employee works at a water shield processing plant in Chongqing. TANG YI / XINHUA

## BUSINESS

# No time for domestic AI to rest on laurels

Continuous investment for new tech seen as key to more breakthroughs

By FAN FEIFEI  
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Continued investment in artificial intelligence infrastructure is still very much required despite Chinese AI startup DeepSeek's open-source model challenging the cost efficiency of peers' large language models, said Robin Li, co-founder and CEO of Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc.

Investment in areas like chips, data centers and cloud infrastructure remains crucial for coming up with the next best models that are smarter than everyone else's, said Li at the World Governments Summit 2025 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Tuesday.

"When technology still evolves at such a rapid rate, you cannot just stop investing. You have to invest to make sure that you are at the very front of this technological innovation or revolution," Li said.

"You have to use more computing to try all kinds of different areas. Maybe at some point you will find a shortcut that takes \$6 million to train a model, but you have already spent billions to figure out which way is the right way."

Li's comments came as DeepSeek has captured global attention with its high-performance and cost-efficient model RL. The performance of the model is on a par with leading models from US-based OpenAI, but at only a fraction of the cost and computing power of its foreign peers, raising questions about the necessity of massive AI infrastructure spending.

Li said DeepSeek's emergence demonstrates that innovation thrives in environments that nurture experimentation and curiosity. "Innovation can't be planned. You don't know when and where the innovation comes," he said. "What you can do is just to foster an environment that is conducive to innovation."

Baidu was among the first tech companies in China to launch its LLM Ernie Bot in March 2023 after OpenAI unveiled ChatGPT in November 2022.

Li said he remained "optimistic about the future of AI" as even at the current level, LLMs can create significant value across a range of scenarios, adding that "the inference cost of foundation models basically can be reduced by more than 90 percent over 12 months".

There's a correlation between cost decreases and productivity gains, Li said.

"If you can reduce costs by a certain percentage, then that means your productivity increases by that kind of percentage. I think that's pretty much the nature of innovation."

Moreover, in the enterprise sector, hundreds of thousands of customers have used LLMs to improve efficiency in various areas, achieving the same outcomes at just one-tenth of the previous cost, he added.

Chinese tech companies' continuous investment and technological advancements will further promote the popularization of AI models and bring fresh business opportunities for domestic AI servers, cloud computing and chip companies, said Lu Yanxia, research director at market research company IDC China, adding that the open-source models will substantially help enterprises and developers accelerate AI innovation.

CTIC Securities said in a research note that despite facing US export controls on advanced chips, home-grown AI models have made significant technological progress based on low costs, high performance and open-source features, which will bolster the application of AI technology in a more diverse range of fields.

When discussing the areas for AI deployment, Li said autonomous driving vehicles, particularly robotaxis, are poised to revolutionize transportation by significantly improving driving safety.

"We have proven that robotaxis are much safer than human drivers. As of today, they are at least 10 times safer," Li said. "If you look at our operational records, our insurance claims rate is only one-fourteenth that of regular taxis or a regular driver's car."

The Beijing-based company has invested heavily in developing self-driving technology. Apollo Go, Baidu's robotaxi service, is currently operational across 11 cities nationwide, while its fully driverless robotaxis are running in designated areas of Beijing, Chongqing, Wuhan, Hubei province; and Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

Regarding the future expansion plan of robotaxi fleets, Li said the company is ready to deploy the operation wherever the environment allows.



An employee explains the functions of a CATL battery during an auto expo in Beijing in October. CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## CATL aiming to raise over \$5 billion from HK listing

By LIU YUKUN  
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Contemporary Amperex Technology Co Ltd, the world's largest electric vehicle battery maker, has filed for a Hong Kong listing that is expected to be the city's biggest initial public offering in four years.

The long-awaited CATL listing aims to raise more than \$5 billion, which the company said will fund overseas production capacity and international business expansion, supporting its long-term global strategy.

Already an A-share listed company, CATL's Hong Kong listing will attract more international capital, further diversifying its financing channels, said analysts.

According to public disclosures, as of June 2024, CATL had foreign

currency balances of \$6.74 billion and 3.86 billion euros (\$4 billion), which were challenging to cover the hefty investments in Europe and other regions, as well as the ongoing need for overseas strategic expansion that often amount to billions of euros.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said CATL's Hong Kong listing is poised to assist the company in garnering funds on a global scale to support its endeavors in overseas research and development, production capacity expansion and market outreach. Additionally, the Hong Kong listing is expected to enhance CATL's brand influence in international markets, strengthening its global competitiveness.

"This listing opens avenues for

financing. Given CATL's expansive global reach, substantial financial support is imperative, a need that can be met through a successful IPO. In addition, CATL's global expansion necessitates collaboration from diverse stakeholders. By opting for a Hong Kong listing, CATL can also engage with a broad spectrum of international investors. This move is pivotal in enhancing CATL's global standing," Zhou said.

In recent years, CATL has accelerated its overseas expansion efforts, establishing battery factories in European countries including Germany and Hungary. In December, CATL signed a joint venture agreement with Dutch automotive group Stellantis that will build a large-scale lithium iron phosphate battery plant in Zaragoza, Spain.

According to SNE Research — a South Korean company providing global market research and consulting services for rechargeable battery industries — CATL maintained its top position globally in terms of battery usage for electric vehicles from January to November 2024, witnessing a 28.6 percent year-on-year growth. Following CATL are BYD and LG Energy Solution.

Many major Chinese original equipment manufacturers such as Zeekr, Aito and Li Auto, operating in the world's largest EV market of China, have integrated CATL's batteries into their products.

Furthermore, prominent global OEMs including Tesla, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen have also chosen CATL's batteries for their EV models.

## More steps to unlock potential of trade corridor

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

The planned restructuring of Chongqing Port Co and Beijing-headquartered China Logistics Group Co (China Logistics) is expected to boost the growth of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor and further unlock the economic potential of China's western region, said market watchers on Wednesday.

Chongqing Port said on Monday that it had received a notification letter from its parent company, State-owned Chongqing Logistics Group, regarding a planned strategic asset integration with China Logistics.

This integration could potentially lead to a change in the controlling shareholder and the actual controller of Chongqing Port. The company emphasized that the integration is currently in the planning stages and will require approvals from relevant authorities before it can proceed.

This follows State-owned automakers Dongfeng Motor Corp and

Changan Automobile — a subsidiary of China South Industries Group Corp — announcing plans to restructure their controlling shareholders on Sunday.

Zhao Yifei, an associate professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University who specializes in the logistics sector, said this move is seen as a key step in deepening reforms at State-owned enterprises and accelerating resource integration in China's logistics industry this year.

"The potential merger is likely to boost the efficiency and capacity of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, a key logistics network connecting China's western regions with global markets," said Zhao.

With an operational hub based in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality, this trade corridor connects global ports via railways, sea routes and highways through China's provincial-level regions such as the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and Yunnan province.

The Chongqing municipal government and China Logistics had

conducted multiple rounds of talks to push the development of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor.

They signed an agreement to jointly establish a new logistics service company last year, aiming to expand services categories for manufacturing businesses, boost port logistics operations, and develop specialty goods logistics services and bulk commodity supply chain integration.

According to data released by the Chongqing municipal government, more than 251,800 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of goods were transported through Chongqing via the trade corridor in 2024, with the total value reaching 46.7 billion yuan (\$6.39 billion), up 41 percent and 67 percent year-on-year, respectively.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing last month, Lin Qingmiao, head of the bureau of enterprise reform under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, said the government will prioritize the restructuring and

integration of SOEs this year to further advance the structural adjustment and optimization of the State-owned economy.

Lin said that China will speed up the allocation of State capital to critical industries related to national security and the lifeline of national economy, public services, emergency response capabilities, public welfare and strategic emerging industries.

The strategic asset integration between Chongqing Port and China Logistics could lead to greater synergies in terms of operations, resource allocation and strategic planning, said Jiang Xiaobing, secretary-general of Chongqing International Logistics and Port Service Association.

By building large logistics service groups, modern transportation infrastructure, fostering innovation and attracting investment, Jiang said, China aims to create new economic opportunities in its western regions and reduce the disparity between regions, ultimately contributing to the country's long-term prosperity.



Robin Li, co-founder and CEO of Baidu, speaks during a session at the World Governments Summit 2025 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Tuesday. AMR ALFIKY / REUTERS

## Exoskeleton players seek bigger global presence

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Combating labor shortages and an aging workforce — or simply supporting mountain climbers and improving elderly mobility — China's exoskeleton makers are pushing into the global market with advanced technology and cost-effective solutions.

ULS Robotics, a Shanghai-based developer founded in 2018, said that last year they saw an improvement in product maturity and growing market acceptance thanks to their in-house research, as the company expands beyond industrial use to individual applications.

Exoskeleton technology is already

deployed across industries such as mining, automotive, aerospace, energy and logistics.

Zhang Hua, market director of ULS Robotics, said with industry as their primary users, exoskeletons not only improve efficiency but also protect workers from excessive physical strain, helping them sustain long-term careers.

Beyond industrial applications, the company is piloting exoskeletons in elderly care, assisting individuals with mobility issues.

"Just like vision correction, exoskeletons compensate for strength limitations," Zhang said, emphasizing the technology's potential to enhance daily life.

Targeting personal use means

more effort in pricing and after-sales service.

Zhang said that independent research and development have played a key role in cost efficiency, particularly in core hardware components such as motors and drivers.

By manufacturing these components in-house, ULS Robotics has significantly lowered costs — nearly halving the costs of key components, compared with imported ones, and even reduced the weight.

The company has also partnered with renowned drone maker DJI's suppliers to leverage high-temperature materials for manufacturing to ensure scale production.

As a result, its FIT-U upper-limb

robot weighs only 3.9 kilograms, making it one of the lightest electric upper-limb exoskeleton robots in its category globally. It provides an assistance range of 5 kg to 15 kg.

Despite the industry's competitive landscape, ULS Robotics maintains a lean operational model, prioritizing financial sustainability over aggressive capital investment. "We cannot burn money like internet companies," Zhang said. "We need to generate our own revenue, reinvest in R&D and ensure we have enough resources for future challenges."

The company is also positioning exoskeletons as lifestyle products, integrating fashion and user-friendly design. The company has

plans to collaborate with a new movie to create themed exoskeletons, further enhancing their consumer appeal. "We want our consumers to look cool and trendy," Zhang said.

The company has accelerated its global presence by establishing a subsidiary in Japan and seeking partners in North America and Germany.

"We are not just looking for distributors, but partners with strong after-sales capabilities," Zhang said, stressing the importance of quality service in international markets.

ULS Robotics is not alone in tapping into the elderly care market. Kenqing Technology, a high-tech robotics firm established in 2015, has also introduced walking-assist exoskeletons designed for seniors.

During the recent Spring Festival, exoskeletons developed by Kenqing, were deployed at Mount Tai, helping elderly visitors climb. Its Ant-H1 Pro model, equipped with an advanced sensor network and power control system, provides synchronized support tailored to users' movements.

Kenqing is developing an even lighter version with a streamlined structure and enhanced intelligent algorithms this year.

"We are looking to make exoskeletons as easy to wear and light as clothing," Yu Yunbo, general manager of Kenqing Technology, told Xinhua News Agency.

Industry experts see exoskeletons as a high-growth sector, with policy support needed to drive affordability and large-scale adoption. According to ABI Research, the global exoskeleton market is projected to exceed \$3.9 billion by 2030.

## BUSINESSFOCUS

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

## Hefei boosting image as high-tech powerhouse

Nation's newly announced, more visitor-friendly visa policy allowing curious foreigners to explore East China city

By CHENG YU and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

On the morning of Jan 26, just days before the Spring Festival holiday, flight KE135 touched down at Hefei Xinqiao International Airport in Hefei, East China's Anhui province.

The flight carrying 166 passengers had departed from South Korea. Among them was Elyse, a traveler from the United States, who was making her first-ever journey to China.

As she stepped off the plane and approached the immigration counter, she quickly applied for the newly introduced 240-hour temporary entry permit.

She had finished the whole process in just a few minutes and was cleared by Customs, becoming another foreign visitor to enter Hefei under the new visa-free transit policy in 2025.

China announced in December a significant relaxation of its visa-free transit policy, extending the period of stay for foreign travelers from the previous 72 hours and 144 hours to 240 hours, or 10 days.

Eligible citizens from 54 countries and regions, including Russia, Brazil, the United States and Canada, can enter China visa-free. These travelers can now enter through any of the 60 ports, including Anhui's Hefei and Huangshan, across 24 provincial-level regions.

"This is my first time in China. The new policy is incredibly convenient," said Elyse.

Seizing the opportunity of a holiday break, Nazli Gul Gurlek, a student from Turkey, was eagerly preparing for her friends' visit to Hefei.

But she wasn't just taking them to the usual tourist hotspots — she had a surprise.

"I want them to see something different, something futuristic," she said.

At the top of her list was Luogang Central Park, widely known as Luogang Park, an urban marvel that blends nature with cutting-edge technology. Built on the former site of an international airport, Luogang Park has been transformed into more than just a scenic escape.

Visitors today can hop on autonomous-driven shuttle buses to reach different attractions, hail self-driving vending machines that stop at a mere wave of the hand, and soon, they might even be able to board airborne cabs.

A major highlight within the park is an aviation transport operation center. It is expected to be a pioneering hub for low-altitude urban air mobility, potentially making Hefei the first city in the Yangtze River Delta where people can book "air taxis".

The park also serves as a testing ground for technological breakthroughs, contributing to Hefei's vision of becoming a leader in the low-altitude economy, autonomous driving and smart urban planning.

Hefei's commitment to futuristic transportation is evident in its recent agreement with EHang Holdings Ltd, a leading Chinese autonomous aerial vehicle company.



An eVTOL flies through the skies over Luogang Central Park, widely known as Luogang Park, in Hefei, East China's Anhui province.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Visitors watch a molten iron fireworks show in Hefei, Anhui province, on Feb 3. RUAN XUEFENG / PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The local government has pledged support worth \$100 million, including the purchase of its pilotless aerial vehicles.

This move aligns with Hefei's action plan for the development of the low-altitude economy. The plan envisions commercial routes for aerial tourism and logistics.

With an urban landscape interwoven with self-driving vehicles, eVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing), and drone delivery services, Hefei is rapidly becoming a city where the once-imagined future is now reality.

After buying a bottle of water from an unmanned delivery service in Luogang Park, Nicolas Issac Jimenez Bravo, who now studies at Hefei University of Technology, said: "It's exciting to witness a city on the brink of something big."

For years, Hefei remained somewhat overshadowed by China's more prominent metropolises, but that perception is changing rapidly. The city is gaining traction as a hub for innovation, business and international travel.

With the extension of China's visa-free transit policy to 240 hours, Hefei is set to attract an increasing number of foreign visitors.

To support this policy, Hefei Immigration Inspection Station and the airport have implemented a series of measures to enhance passenger convenience.

Wang Chen, a police officer at the station, said a dedicated visa-free transit application area has been set up to help reduce waiting times.

Bilingual promotional videos explaining the policy and procedures were also published online. To further streamline the process, arrival cards are distributed onboard flights before landing, she said.

With the new policy, Wang said that international arrivals at Hefei's airport primarily come from Thailand, Japan, South Korea and Singapore, as well as Germany, Australia and Malaysia.

"With the 240-hour visa-free transit policy now in place, we anticipate even more foreign visitors in the near future," she added.

Hefei's airport is also expanding its reach. In the 2024 winter travel season, the airport launched direct passenger routes to Hong Kong, Macao, Osaka, Seoul, Singapore and Bangkok, broadening access to the city for global travelers.

Recognizing the needs of international travelers, the province has also focused on healthcare accessibility. The Second Hospital of Anhui Medical University inaugurated an international medical department in 2023, offering multilingual services, 24-hour emergency care, direct billing for international insurance and personalized medical assistance.

The facility had already served over 4,000 foreign patients in 2024, marking a 176 percent increase from the previous year, the hospital said.

As Hefei opens its doors wider, other cities in Anhui are also poised to benefit. Huangshan, home to China's iconic Huangshan Mountain, reported a total of 92.2 million visitors in 2024, a 10.8 percent year-on-year increase.

However, international tourist numbers remained below pre-COVID-19 levels, with only 180,000 inbound visitors in 2024 compared to 2.87 million in 2019.

The introduction of the visa-free transit policy is expected to drive a strong rebound in inbound tourism.

Such a transformation is among Anhui's broader push toward modernization and economic leadership. Traditionally overshadowed by China's coastal powerhouses, Anhui has rapidly emerged as a front runner in industries such as new energy vehicles, integrated circuits and advanced display technologies.

Today, the province produces one-fifth of China's photovoltaic modules, one-seventh of its lithium-ion batteries and one-eighth of its NEVs.

Lenovo, one of the world's leading tech giants, has also cemented its presence in Hefei.

"AI is not just enhancing efficiency — it's redefining what's possible in modern manufacturing," said Yang Yuanqing, chairman and CEO of Lenovo Group, in a separate interview.

Yang said Lenovo's Hefei factory now processes over 5,000 orders daily, with AI-powered scheduling slashing processing times from six hours to just 90 seconds, leading to a 23 percent increase in production efficiency.

With a seamless blend of cutting-edge technology, a welcoming environment and ambitious urban planning, Hefei is fast becoming a gateway for global travelers and a beacon of China's future-oriented development.

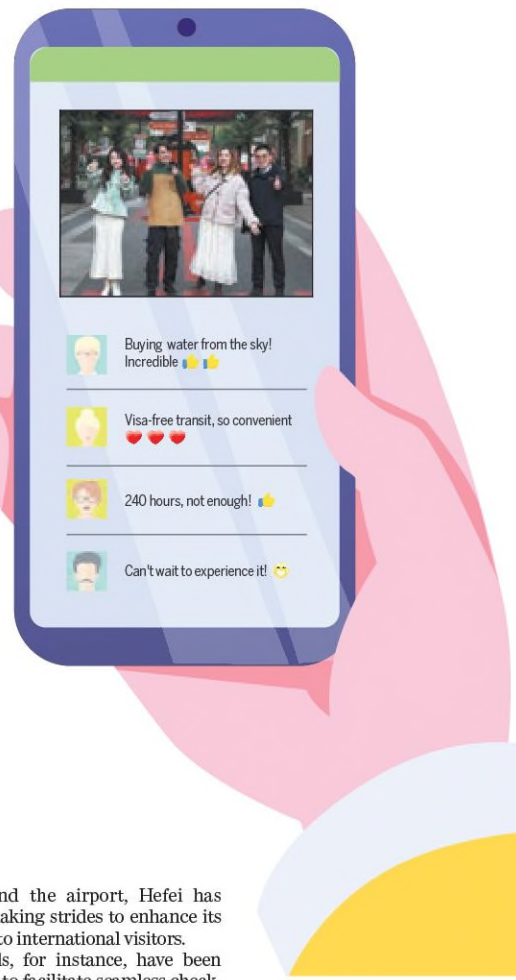
As Elyse wrapped up her visit, she reflected on her short stay.

"Hefei has truly amazed me. From futuristic transport to warm hospitality, I can't wait to come back and explore more."

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



Online  
See more by scanning the code.



Beyond the airport, Hefei has been making strides to enhance its appeal to international visitors.

Hotels, for instance, have been trained to facilitate seamless check-ins, bilingual signage in public spaces has been expanded, and a special immigration service counter has been established for travelers needing extended stays due to unforeseen circumstances.

In a significant digital upgrade,

## Anhui age-old village spreads fish lantern mania

By CHENG YU and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

During China's recently concluded Spring Festival holiday, Zhanqi, an ancient village in Shexian county, Huangshan, East China's Anhui province, found itself in the global spotlight. The village's breathtaking fish lantern performances, an 800-year-old tradition, exploded in popularity, captivating millions worldwide.

As of Friday, a hashtag featuring the lanterns had amassed over 270 million views across various social media platforms and short video submissions featuring the dazzling fish lantern dances, which skyrocketed by 168 percent during Spring Festival.

This propelled a 457 percent surge in visitors to the village during the period. Tourism-related

spending in Shexian — including dining, accommodation and entertainment — surged 458 percent year-on-year.

As night falls, the sound of drums fills the air as a fish-shaped lantern, followed by a procession of smaller ones, meanders through the streets of Zhanqi. The colorful festive lantern and other illuminating objects not only attract young people back to their hometown and tens of thousands of tourists nationwide to flood the small village, but also illuminate a path to the future for its residents.

Within the crowd, Zheng Dongjiao — a 45-year-old villager who serves as the "head fish" — leads the procession of lanterns, sometimes cheering on those behind him.

Traditionally, respected elders held the position of "head fish", but in recent years, younger partici-

pants who have ventured afar only to return to their hometown have taken on the role voluntarily.

With a deep passion for preserving this unique heritage, Zheng has recruited young people returning home, standardized performance movements, and used various means — livestreaming, commercial performances and even volunteering as a tour guide — to spread awareness.

"It has become an emotional connection. Such an energetic custom has attracted more young villagers like me back home, and also young tourists flooding in to experience an aspect of traditional Chinese culture," he said.

Every year, villagers in Zhanqi hold fish lantern parades. The mountain village, once predominantly consisting of wooden structures, faced the risk of frequent fires

in old times. Therefore, villagers used to gather to parade with fish lanterns signifying "water overcoming fire".

Over time, such a tradition has evolved into a means for locals to gather together to wish one another good health and prosperity. Fish lanterns were recognized as a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage in 2022.

The growing popularity of Zhanqi has sparked a movement to preserve and commercialize the tradition in a sustainable way.

Yu Xuewu, an official of Shexian bureau of culture, tourism and sports, said: "Moving forward, we will fully leverage the holiday economy by implementing a reservation system and issuing official announcements and guides on experiencing the Zhanqi fish lanterns."



Tourists watch a fish lantern performance in Huangshan, Anhui province, on Dec 31. SHI YALEI / PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Yu said Shexian will also integrate fish lantern performances into iconic attractions to ensure that tourists can fully immerse themselves.

Over the long term, the local government plans to build platforms, cultivate industries and expand creative models to develop fish lan-

terns into a sustainable cultural IP. By blending heritage, tourism and digital storytelling, Shexian aims to turn its ancient traditions into a thriving modern industry — one that continues to captivate audiences far beyond the village where it all began, he added.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## 'New beginning' timely opportunity for Washington to stop playing 'Taiwan card'

In their telephone talk on Jan 17, Chinese President Xi Jinping told then US president-elect Donald Trump that the Taiwan question concerns China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and he hoped that the US side would handle it with caution.

A message Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed again in his first talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, by telephone, one week later.

Taiwan has been an integral part of China's territory since ancient times, and Beijing will never allow Taiwan to be separated from the motherland, said Wang, stressing that the US has made solemn commitments to the one-China principle in the three China-US joint communiques and should not go back on its word.

Ever since Trump won the 2024 US presidential election in November, the Chinese side has taken advantage of various channels and opportunities, including through imposing sanctions on dozens of US weapon manufacturers that have sold arms to the island, to emphasize its firm stance on the Taiwan question, which is China's internal affair.

However, as the readout of the US Department of State on the Wang-Rubio call indicates — in which Rubio stresses the US "commitment to our allies in the region and serious concern over China's coercive actions against Taiwan and in the South China Sea" — the messages from Beijing seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

The new US administration is still sticking to strategic ambiguity regarding the Taiwan question. A stance based on the so-called Taiwan Relations Act, a public law enforced in 1979 upon the founding of diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing, that the US has adhered to ever since.

But while that ambiguity is becoming increasingly incapable of enabling Washington to butter the two sides of the bread at the same time, the US administration is still reluctant to discard the "Taiwan card".

So even while Trump openly demands the island pay more for its "defense" and complains about Taiwan exploiting the US in the advanced semiconductor industry, the US continues with its provocations related to Taiwan.

In its latest move, two US ships, the destroyer USS *Ralph Johnson* and the oceanographic survey ship USNS *Bowditch*, passed through the Taiwan Strait from Monday to Wednesday, the first such move since the Trump administration took office about 20 days ago.

As Chinese People's Liberation Army Eastern Theater Command spokesperson Li Xi said, the US side should realize that its actions "sent the wrong signals and increased security risks".

Washington should realize that there is only one correct stance on the Taiwan question for the US — and any other country having diplomatic ties with Beijing — and that is to uphold the one-China principle.

Guo Jiakun, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, reiterated that China firmly opposes any country's provocations and threats to its sovereignty and security in the name of freedom of navigation.

The PLA Eastern Theater Command tracked and monitored the two US ships, and it remains on high alert at all times to resolutely safeguard China's sovereignty and national security, as well as regional peace and stability. The US administration should heed Rubio's remark in a Congress hearing shortly before taking office that "the costs of intervening in Taiwan are too high". The PLA will not allow any external force to play with fire on the Taiwan question.

Notably, the Taiwan authorities have recently finalized a new missile agreement with the US worth \$761 million to acquire three surface-to-air missile systems. Although the deal was approved in October under the then president Joe Biden, it will be the first of its kind under the Trump administration if it goes ahead. That will deal a heavy blow to the nascent trust that has been delicately built between the two sides thanks to the guidance of the heads of state diplomacy.

As the Sino-US relations stand at a new beginning, it is high time the Trump administration discarded the US' strategic ambiguity over the Taiwan question and honored its commitments under the three communiques, which will give a strong boost to the healthy development of Sino-US relations.

## AI needs global consensus on its governance

Artificial intelligence breakthroughs in the form of chatbots such as ChatGPT and, more recently, DeepSeek continue pushing the boundaries of the technology, the hopes and anxieties surrounding AI have grown simultaneously.

How to harness the constructive potential of the nascent sector for the benefit of humanity while exerting effective control over the destructive ones has emerged as a new global challenge.

Since the abusive deployment of AI technologies is no longer a mere fearful trope of science fiction, there is a pressing need for a global, intergovernmental consensus on how to approach such technological breakthroughs, which, handled properly, may bring enormous social and economic benefits; or else wreak immeasurable havoc.

With the increasingly obvious damaging potential of AI technologies, a global consensus, rough as it may be at this stage, is of critical importance to ensure the responsible use of AI and the charting of a safe course for the thriving sector.

It is therefore regrettable that the two-day Paris AI Action Summit, which closed on Tuesday, failed to bring on board two of the world's key industry leaders to its demonstration of that imperative solidarity.

The AI Action Statement, which identifies the priority to ensure that "AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy, taking into account international frameworks for all", garnered 61 signatories, but not those of the United States and the United Kingdom.

The statement, which underscores the need for "the protection of human rights, gender equality, linguistic diversity, protection of consumers and of intellectual property rights", sets out the ambition to reduce digital divides by promoting AI accessibility, and ensuring the development of AI is transparent, safe, secure and trustworthy.

The US' absence, in particular, from such a needed consensus, reveals a deep divide among the world's key industry leaders that threatens the healthy progress of the AI sector. It is both the natural outgrowth of different outlooks on AI, and very possibly a dangerous driver of bifurcation in AI development in terms of both technological advancement and utilization.

It was no surprise that US Vice-President JD Vance should make clear that the US dislikes regulation, which he said may strangle the emerging new industry given the new administration's stance.

It is also well within expectation that Washington would take AI as a core dimension of its perceived strategic competition with China. The computer chips blockade that has run through both the Joe Biden and Donald Trump presidencies is all about that. Instead of inspiring fresh appreciation of the potential for bilateral cooperation, the disruptive emergence of DeepSeek from China seems to have triggered deeper fear of a Chinese AI threat.

Seemingly oblivious to the irony of his remark, Vance even warned US allies to not partner with "authoritarian regimes" that in his words are "weaponizing" AI.

Despite his remarks about "pro-growth AI policies" taking precedence over safety concerns, the US vice-president also made it sufficiently clear his government is turning AI into a decisive battlefield in what is broadly believed to be a new Cold War between the world's two largest economies.

China's stance on AI governance is clear and consistent. At the G20 Summit on Reform of the Institutions of Global Governance, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for stepping up international governance and cooperation on AI, to make sure that it is used for good and for all, not a game of the rich countries and the wealthy.

Prior to that, in September, China unveiled the first version of its AI Safety Governance Framework, which was formulated to implement the Global Initiative on AI Governance it has proposed.

The framework makes clear that effective governance of AI depends on exchanges and cooperation with multiple stakeholders shouldering their responsibility to identify, prevent and respond to risks.

As Chinese Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing, Xi's special representative in the AI meeting, said in the French capital on Monday, the international community should improve global governance of the technology while embracing the principle of developing AI for the good of humanity and deepening cooperation to that end.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Guidance shows attention paid to financing hardships of SMEs

The People's Bank of China, together with the National Financial Regulatory Administration and other departments, recently drafted a guideline document to standardize supply chain finance. It aims to standardize management to improve the quality and efficiency with which the financial sector serves the real economy, especially by better meeting the financing needs of small and medium-sized enterprises.

In recent years, with the popularization of digital technology, the supply chain finance model has been constantly innovated, providing SMEs with more efficient access to financing. However, the rapid development of the industry has also brought many problems, such as excessive credit expansion and opaque information due to the lack of clear regulatory standards. By taking advantage of their dominant position, the core enterprises may default on payment to SMEs and even extract bank funds

through fabricated trading.

The guideline document seeks to solve the problems faced by SMEs by regulating the supply chain finance business, clarifying the responsibilities and behavioral boundaries of participants, preventing risks, and guiding supply chain information service agencies to better serve the financing needs of SMEs. This is not only a comprehensive regulation of the supply chain finance sector, but also an important measure to implement the central authorities' instructions to serve the real economy.

The guideline document, if well implemented, will significantly improve the financing environment for SMEs by standardizing the behavior of finance providers and providing SMEs with new financing channels. This will help ease the financial pressure on SMEs. By strengthening the verification of the authenticity of the transaction background to ensure that the supply chain finance business is based on

real transaction scenarios, and guiding the supply chain information service agencies to provide reliable credit assessment and transaction information and reduce the risk of information asymmetry, the guideline will help prevent and resolve risks at the source.

At the same time, the measures rolled out by the guideline, such as standardizing the business operation process, improving the service efficiency and quality of supply chain finance, strengthening the supervision of supply chain information service agencies to ensure that the information provided by them is true and reliable, and guiding financial institutions to strengthen risk management and improve their ability to support supply chain finance business, will not only help solve prominent problems in the sector, but also lay a solid foundation for the sustainable development of supply chain finance.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## 'Silver service' rail boost for tourism sector

While it's good that the Ministry of Commerce together with eight other departments released an action plan to introduce "silver-hair" trains to meet the tourism needs of senior residents, there are many things that need to be done in the implementation of the action plan.

The action plan calls for the "silver-hair" tourism trains to be managed by professional teams that specialize in providing services to the elderly and systematically enhancing the service support capabilities. It will also be necessary to research and formulate national standards for the modification of the trains to make them

tailored to the needs of the elderly. Besides, coordination among different organizations will be essential. That is why the action plan has been forwarded to over 30 departments nationwide for better and more convenient coordination among them all.

It's on the basis of improving and updating the train services that the planned trains can effectively serve the elderly. It's also on the basis of providing ample care and service to senior citizens that the action plan will boost tourism as expected.

According to officials from the Ministry of Commerce, the aim is to provide "silver-hair" tourism rail ser-

vices nationwide by 2027. A basic "silver-hair" tourism train service system of standards will be established. The number of "silver-hair" tourism trains and the volume of passenger transport will achieve substantial growth compared to 2024. The "silver-hair" tourism trains are open to passengers of all ages, and the additional trains will not operate during peak periods such as the Spring Festival travel rush.

This lays a solid foundation for building consensus across society and marks a good start for the action plan.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Multipolarization unstoppable trend for its fairness

The Munich Security Conference released its Munich Security Report 2025 on Monday. The three-day forum this year is scheduled to start on Friday in the German city.

The report analyzes the far-reaching consequences of the multipolarization of the international order, and makes the case for "depolarization" highlighting the need for substantial reforms of the international order.

The report zooms in on eight actors which it thinks assert the claim to constitute a pole in the international order, among which China is ranked second, after the United States and before the European Union.

While the Chinese side believes "multipolarization is the underlying trend of today's world and an unstoppable trend of our times", as Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said while taking a question on the report in a regular news conference on Tuesday. The report holds a neutral, if not critical view on multipolarization.

China believes that multipolariza-

tion can help foster global peace and stability. But the report paints a negative picture of widening divides and growing competition among the major powers that stands in the way of joint approaches to address global crises and threats.

Mindful of the coexistence of different views on multipolarization, Guo stressed that what China stands for is an equal and orderly multipolar world and universally-beneficial and inclusive economic globalization.

"We are committed to practicing true multilateralism, working for greater democracy in international relations and call for countries around the world to jointly safeguard the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, uphold fairness and justice, and play a constructive role in resolving international and regional hotspot issues," Guo said.

As the report indicates, some in the West think the idealized multipolar world order China champions is just a banner it tries to uphold in a bid to give more morality and justice to its actions countering the US' Chi-

na-targeted divisive, unilateral and bullying moves, if not a cover for Beijing's "weaponizing its economic strength".

But that is a distortion of China's vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. It is more accurate to say the "multipolar" world order China seeks to realize is a fair and inclusive multilateral global governance design rather than the coexistence of different poles that tend to divide the world into different smaller unipolar sub-worlds.

As Guo said, the world today is confronted with multiple challenges. It is therefore all the more important for countries around the world to have closer cooperation, instead of building small yards with high fences or dragging the world into bloc confrontation.

China is ready to work with all parties to share opportunities, overcome challenges and promote development together, making the multipolar world order fair, just and inclusive.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## 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  
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203  
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn  
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/moblie/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

## COMMENT

Djoomart Otorbaev

## Bold steps needed to boost economy

China's economy has successfully achieved its growth target for 2024 despite facing a challenging domestic and global environment. It is encouraging news for domestic consumption and the global economy, as the world's second-largest economy remains a key driver, contributing about 30 percent to overall global economic growth.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's economy grew by 5 percent year-on-year in 2024, with its GDP reaching 134.91 trillion yuan (\$18.77 trillion). At a news conference, Kang Yi, the NBS chief, described these economic achievements as "hard-won" and emphasized that they would provide a solid foundation for realizing the goals outlined in China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

The domestic economy experienced a significant acceleration in the fourth quarter of 2024, growing by 5.4 percent year-on-year, an increase from the 4.6 percent in the previous quarter. This acceleration occurred despite the numerous challenges China faced. Although substantial efforts were made to stimulate domestic demand, consumption growth remained modest, many businesses encountered operational difficulties, and employment issues persisted. Additionally, geopolitical conflicts and rising protectionism further complicated domestic conditions.

On a positive note, industrial production reported an annual growth of 5.8 percent in 2024, up from the 4.6 percent growth in 2023. Over the past year, China has made noticeable progress in its pursuit of high-quality development, expanding electric vehicle production, increasing train travel, achieving record grain harvests, and boosting foreign trade.

Achievements in foreign trade have become particularly noteworthy. In 2024, China reported an unprecedented trade surplus of nearly \$1 trillion. According to the General Administration of Customs, exports reached \$3.58 trillion, while imports totaled \$2.59 trillion, resulting in a surplus of \$990 billion. China produces about one-third of the world's manufactured goods, more than the combined output of the United States, Japan, Germany, the Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom. December 2024 was particularly impressive, achieving a record monthly surplus of \$104.8 billion.

China's export success is founded on significant investments in education, manufacturing and infrastructure. Chinese universities produce

more engineers every year than all American colleges across all fields. Despite increasing opposition, many importers see China as the most competitive supplier.

A distinctive feature of the Chinese governance model is its remarkable speed in responding and adapting to the changing economic landscape. Following negative economic news around the middle of 2024, the government swiftly introduced a series of critical economic stimulus measures in September, including cuts to loan interest rates and bank reserve ratios, and a substantial fiscal package of 10 trillion yuan to address local government debt issues.

What stands out is the strong support from the Chinese public for the government's program to boost household consumption, a phenomenon that is hard to imagine in other parts of the world. This backing has played a significant role in the success of initiatives, including the exchange of consumer goods such as home appliances and cars.

The authorities also took significant steps to create a more favorable business environment for the private sector. They intensified efforts to combat "remote fishing", a practice where profit-driven enforcement targets private entrepreneurs outside local jurisdictions. Additionally, they relaxed restrictions on foreign investment. The real estate sector experienced necessary positive adjustments, including reduction in mortgage rates for home purchases and lowering transaction taxes and down payment ratios, all aimed at stabilizing the market and overcoming the downturn.

The authorities acknowledge that imbalances and discrepancies in development are still evident and that significant efforts will be required to achieve the long-term goals set for 2035.

At his news conference, Kang Yi emphasized that the authorities plan to implement a more proactive fiscal policy and moderately loose monetary policy for 2025. They are aimed to strengthen unconventional countercyclical adjustments and boost domestic demand across all sectors.

Furthermore, Vice-Finance Minister Liao Min earlier indicated that as part of this policy initiative, China intends to substantially increase its fiscal deficit in 2025 and issue a larger number of government

bonds, including ultra-long special treasury bonds and special local government bonds.

What challenges will the Chinese economy face in 2025, and how will it address them? With the new US administration threatening to impose additional tariffs on about \$500 billion worth of Chinese imports, the investment climate in China is deteriorating. Under these new, stricter conditions, it will be nearly impossible for China to maintain its record export volume. The US, Canada, and the European Union have accused Beijing of overproduction and imposed tariffs on Chinese imports. While Chinese exporters can shift their focus to emerging markets, those markets do not have or cannot generate the same level of demand as North America and Europe. A decline in exports will also hurt energy, raw materials and logistics services suppliers.

The biggest challenge facing the Chinese economy in 2025 will remain the real estate sector. Before the real estate crisis, the sector accounted for nearly one-third of China's economy and employed millions of people, including builders, developers, cement manufacturers and interior designers. Some experts expect the housing slump to bottom out this year. But banking giant Goldman Sachs has warned that the downturn

will continue to be a "multi-year drag" on China's economic growth.

The impact on consumer spending has been significant — household consumption now represents only 29 percent of China's economic output, down from 47 percent in the second quarter and 59 percent before the onset of the pandemic.

Nonetheless, if the private sector begins to invest and innovate, it could enhance income and employment opportunities, likely boosting consumer confidence. Also, rising national and provincial debt and high unemployment have also negatively affected savings and spending.

Given the challenges China faces this year and to maintain economic growth of about 5 percent, the country must take ambitious and bold steps to boost the economy, strengthen measures to support the private sector, and more actively engage with emerging markets in the Global South. Experience shows that China has consistently addressed economic challenges, promptly and effectively. I am optimistic that the trend will continue this year as well.

*The author, former prime minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, is a professor at the Belt and Road School of Beijing Normal University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Zhao Hong

## Wrong policies, not free trade, will fail Washington

Former US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer recently wrote an article, titled "Want Free Trade? May I Introduce You to the Tariff", in *The New York Times* (that it sounds like a dinner invitation is another matter). Lighthizer argues that the global trade system has failed the United States and many other countries, defending the new US administration's all-out tariff war.

But the truth is, global trade has been beneficial to most people worldwide, especially the US people. It's not the disaster Lighthizer is trying to make it out to be.

Since the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade gave way to the World Trade Organization in 1995, global trade has surged from about \$6.2 trillion to about \$30.4 trillion in 2023. Global trade has been growing at an annual rate of 5.8 percent, consistently outpacing global GDP growth by 20 percent to 30 percent. Trade's share of global GDP, too, has surged from 43.1 percent to 58.5 percent. It's like the global economy has been playing catch-up with global trade.

A 2024 WTO report makes it crystal clear that global trade has benefited most countries, even the low-income countries. Between 1995 and 2023, adjusted for inflation, global GDP per capita grew by 65 percent, with low-income countries seeing a whopping 191 percent increase. As WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has pointed out, the WTO and global trade have played a key role in improving the lives of people in middle- and low-income countries.

So, what's the takeaway here? The "Make America Great Again" crowd may think the global trading system has let the US down, but the vast majority of WTO member countries would disagree. For them, the multilateral trading system has been a win-win for all countries, businesses and consumers. Has the US lost out? Absolutely not. The US has been the biggest beneficiary of global trade, especially in the services, high-tech, agriculture, and oil and gas sectors.

**More and more countries are seeing the benefits of the WTO's trade rules, and that's something worth protecting, not tearing down.**

The US consumers, too, have benefited from global trade. The US Census Bureau recently said the median household income jumped to \$80,610 (a 4 percent increase) in 2023. The poverty rate also dropped to 11.1 percent, down 0.4 percentage points. Affordable goods made available through global trade have helped keep inflation low and made everyday life more comfortable for American families.

If anyone has been messing with the international trade system, it's the US government. Since 2018, the US government has been slapping tariffs, left, right and center, on imports, violating WTO rules. Not to mention the US' blocking of the appointment of new members to the WTO's appellate body since 2016, effectively shutting down the WTO's dispute settlement system. These US moves have dealt a massive blow to the rules-based multilateral trading system. The US is one of the architects of this system and a major force behind the establishment of the WTO. But now, it's the one shaking the foundation.

As WTO chief economist Ralph Ossa points out, reducing trade doesn't create a more inclusive world, and just opening up their economies won't help low-income countries reduce their reliance on primary products. Developing countries need good industrial policies to help them upgrade their industries — just like the US did when it was competing with European industries.

Whether certain industrial policies are "good" or "bad" for a country depends on people's perspective. From an international trade law perspective, it's about whether policies follow WTO rules. From a national perspective, it's about whether they support long-term development. Even if the WTO's industrial policies need to be reformed, we should ask: Will those changes improve the lives of more people? And the "Make America Great Again" crowd is certainly not interested in improving the lives of more people.

Lighthizer has also floated the idea of creating a new trade system where "democratic countries" and those with "free-market economies" would form a bloc, impose internal tariffs and raise external tariffs to balance trade.

This idea sounds like "decoupling" by another name, a strategy some in Washington are obsessed with. It's like going back to the days of the British Empire's preferential trade system or the post-World War I period when countries had separate currency zones (pound, franc, mark) and fragmented global trade. But did that create a fair trade balance? No, it led to economic downturns and the Great Depression, followed by World War II.

As former US secretary of state Cordell Hull, who helped establish the WTO's predecessor (GATT), wrote in his memoirs, "When war came in 1914, I was very soon impressed with two points ... I saw that you couldn't separate the idea of commerce from the idea of war and peace." Hull believed that free trade — fewer restrictions and barriers — would reduce deadly rivalries and improve people's living standards, leading to lasting peace.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. It's the perfect time to reflect on Hull's insights into World War I and how it prompted him to push for a multilateral trade system.

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the WTO. Since its establishment, the WTO has not only helped boost global trade by reducing tariffs and barriers, but also facilitated the growth of global trade at an average annual rate much higher than that of global GDP. More and more countries are seeing the benefits of the WTO's trade rules, and that's something worth protecting, not tearing down.

Global trade does face challenges such as rising protectionism and unilateralism, but throwing the baby out with the bathwater is not the answer. Balancing trade depends on natural resources, and the strategies of multinational corporations. Countries have to adjust their policies to realize more equitable growth.

Forming a new trade bloc will not fix the trade imbalances. The WTO does need reform, but the reform should be aimed at developing a more inclusive global trade system that benefits every country, not just a few. Countries around the world should work on that as we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the WTO.

*The author is a professor at the Law School, Peking University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Lu Changhe

## Ne Zha 2 writes a new chapter in animation industry

This year's Spring Festival film season has set several records. For one, the Chinese film industry shattered the revenue record with a staggering box office of about 9.51 billion yuan (\$1.33 billion) and 187 million pairs of footfalls in the cinema.

In particular, *Ne Zha: Demon Child Conquers the Sea*, or *Ne Zha 2*, has shattered multiple box office records, becoming the first film to earn \$1 billion in a single market and the first non-Hollywood production to join the coveted billion-dollar club. The movie also debuted in the US over the weekend.

The film's market performance not only confirms the commercial potential of Chinese animation films but also marks a historic breakthrough for the country's movie industry. In fact, *Ne Zha 2*'s success reminds us of the glorious beginnings of Chinese animation films. As early as the 1960s, the Shanghai Animation Film Studio made *Havoc in Heaven*, a landmark animation film that took the world by surprise with its unique oriental aesthetics, and won global acclaim.

Incidentally, *Ne Zha 2* has once again showed the world the potential of Chinese animation by adopting a mythological story for a modern production, creatively combining traditional values with modern spirit through the narrative. Its special

effects are comparable to those of Hollywood blockbusters. The film revives the creative spirit of the Chinese film industry.

The revival of Chinese animation is essentially a breakthrough both in the industrialization process and artistic exploration. Chinese animation films have a glorious history, but after hitting rock bottom, they had been passing through a period of confusion. For years, Chinese animation films, made only for children, were looked down upon.

It was not until *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* was released in 2015 that the animation genre got a shot in the arm. That *Monkey King*'s box office reached 956 million yuan is proof of the quality of the work. The film marked an inflection point in the industry, with film financiers and producers, as well as directors discovering the huge potential and artistic value of animation films.

Since then, China's animation industry has developed, both artistically and technologically, gifting a series of excellent works including the *White Snake* trilogy, *Big Fish & Begonia* and *Jiang Ziya: Legend of Deification*. These excellent productions reflect the uniqueness of Chinese animations and the artistic spirit of Chinese animators.

The success of *Ne Zha 2* is not accidental. Compared with its prequel, the film has a more fleshed out nar-

rative and refined theme. The movie continues from where the prequel left, but the theme changes with *Ne Zha*'s decision on whether to be a fairy or a demon.

With the help of superb special effects, the film subverts the traditional story of *Ne Zha*. Dialogues such as "If there is no road ahead, I will carve one myself", resonate with the audience because they are a metaphor for the rebellious spirit and free will of today's youths who refuse to accept fate and work determinedly to reach their respective goals.

The theme of the film, which is good defeating evil to deliver justice, reflects Chinese philosophy — that the individual, the family and the state are all intimately linked, and the ultimate goal is to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

To be sure, the excellent animation films being made of late are the result of the upgrading of the Chinese animation industry. The participation of more than 130 companies in the production of *Ne Zha 2* shows the industrial cluster effect and pragmatic division of labor.

It's the support of the entire Chinese animation industry that has made the movie so successful. The film is a product of collectivist values, and testifies to the role of the "technological community" in promoting the industrial upgrading of

the animation industry.

But the modern animation industry in China is still in its early stage. Although *Ne Zha 2*, which took five years to make and involved massive amounts of money, has achieved unprecedented success, it is still an exception to the rule. Most animation films still face budget constraints and lack technical finesse.

There is a need therefore to standardize the production system and talent training mechanism. *Ne Zha 2* has raised the audience's expectations. As a result, moviegoers will now demand good quality work, meaning animation films will now have little room for error, with quality and creativity being their core competitive advantage.

China's rich history and culture have been empowering Chinese animation artists for generations. Now they need to translate the abundant cultural resources into modern animation language. The animation industry is expected to make greater breakthroughs in projecting oriental aesthetics expression, creative storytelling and technological innovation now that *Ne Zha 2* has set very high standards.

*The author is a professor of School of Music and Film at Tianjin Normal University. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

# GLOBAL VIEWS

DAVID GOSSET

## High definition

The two sessions will demonstrate China's ability to respond to a changing global environment with strategic foresight

China's two sessions, the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, usually held at the beginning of March, set the course for national policymaking in the coming year.

The NPC, with more than 2,900 members, is the largest legislative body in the world. The CPPCC is an advisory body in which the main groups that make up China's vast society provide their insights into the country's development priorities for the coming year.



The world has increasingly recognized the importance of these meetings, paying close attention to the discussions and outcomes. First, the two sessions offer a valuable window for foreign observers to better understand how China's political institutions function and how policies are formulated. Biases against China's political system are all too common, often leading to a failure to appreciate the roles of its institutions as defined by the country's Constitution.

Second, the annual Government Work Report delivered by the Chinese premier to the NPC provides a comprehensive synthesis of the country's economic, social and political developments over the past year and outlines the policy priorities that will guide the country in the months to come.

This year, the third session of the 14th NPC and the third session of the 14th CPPCC will take place at a crucial moment for both domestic and international reasons.

Since the 19th National Congress of the CPC in 2017, China has accelerated its transition from quantitative growth to high-quality development. This significant shift is not only reshaping Chinese society but also affecting the world, as the actions of a nearly \$19 trillion economy have global repercussions. High-quality development prioritizes technological advancement, environmental sustainability and domestic consumption as key drivers of the economy.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

This year marks the end of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), a strategic blueprint aimed at fostering high-quality development.

One topic that will undoubtedly be fea-

tured in discussions at the two sessions is the DeepSeek story. This breakthrough serves as a clear demonstration of China's growing capabilities in artificial intelligence and stands as a symbol of the coun-

try's push toward high-quality development. DeepSeek's success highlights China's ability to innovate at a world-class level, reinforcing its position as a major player in cutting-edge technology.

If China can replicate such achievements across a wide range of fields — including semiconductors, biotechnology and quantum computing — it will not only enhance its own economic and technological strength but also shape the future of global innovation. The ability to lead in these sectors would position China at the forefront of modernity, influencing industries, setting new standards, and competing with the most advanced economies. In this context, DeepSeek is more than just a milestone; it is a glimpse into China's broader ambitions for technological leadership in the 21st century.

Beyond domestic concerns, this year's two sessions will also serve as a forum for discussing China's foreign policy strategy, particularly in light of the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency. The world is watching closely to see how US-China relations will evolve.

During Trump's first term, US-China relations were marked by trade tensions, technological restrictions and geopolitical frictions. His administration imposed tariffs on Chinese goods, sought to curb China's technological advancements, and deepened military cooperation with allies in the "Indo-Pacific" region. While his successor Joe Biden largely maintained a firm stance on China, his approach was more multilateral and predictable.

It is an understatement to say that Trump's return to the White House introduces new uncertainties. His rhetoric on trade, security, and industrial policy suggests a potential continuation, or even escalation, of economic and technological competition between the world's two largest economies. After 10 days back in the White House, he announced that the US would impose an additional 10 percent tariff hike on all Chinese goods. On his first trip abroad as US secretary of state, Marco Rubio visited Panama and called for immediate action to counter so-called Chinese

influence on the canal. The two sessions will provide an opportunity for Chinese policymakers to assess the early signals from the new US administration and to reach a consensus on how to respond.

The two sessions focus on stability and long-term planning, ensuring that external shocks, whether from economic disruptions or geopolitical shifts, do not derail the national goals.

This year, more than ever, China will seek to project confidence in its development trajectory while also preparing for potential headwinds from external factors. The Government Work Report will provide signals on how China plans to balance its economic reforms, technological ambitions and foreign policy adjustments in response to global uncertainties. Investors and business leaders worldwide will be eager to know China's growth target and the measures that will be taken to further stimulate the economy.

The 2025 two sessions will take place at a significant moment for China, both domestically and internationally. As the country advances its high-quality development agenda, discussions will center on technological innovation, economic resilience and sustainable growth. At the same time, Trump's return to the US presidency adds a layer of complexity to China's external relations, making this year's meetings particularly significant.

For foreign observers, the two sessions offer a glimpse into China's policymaking process, helping them to decode the country's priorities, challenges, and strategies for the year ahead. The outcomes of these discussions will not only shape China's future but will also have far-reaching implications for the world economy. The international system needs stability and predictability. The two sessions can signal that China remains a steadfast anchor.

The author is founder of the China-Europe-America Global Initiative. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

JORGE HEINE

## On the up

Indonesia's joining BRICS as a full member underlies its growing importance and influence

The announcement by Brazil, current chair of the BRICS, that Indonesia has joined the group as a full member underlines the upward trajectory of what is now the leading platform for the Global South. Although the group underwent a major expansion (its first since 2011 when South Africa joined) in 2024, with the addition of Egypt, Ethiopia,



Iran and the United Arab Emirates, and several nations were admitted as "partner countries" after the 16th summit of the group held in October 2024 in Kazan, Russia, Indonesia's membership has a special significance.

Indonesia is, of course, the fourth-largest nation in the world, with a population of 280 million; its GDP of \$1.4 trillion makes it the eighth-largest economy in purchasing power parity terms. It thus adds considerable heft to a group that already casts a large economic shadow, whose dynamism is undisputable, and whose intra-group trade has gained great momentum in the past years.

Over the past decade, Indonesia has undergone an economic boom, growing at an average of 5 percent a year (if we omit the COVID-19 pandemic period). China has played a key role, given the Belt and Road Initiative's emphasis both on physical and digital connectivity, a feature especially critical in a country with such a fragmented geography.

One flagship project is Southeast Asia's first high-speed railway, a Chinese-built, 142-kilometer railway line from Jakarta to Bandung, built at a cost of \$7.3 billion, which was inaugurated in October 2023. The railway has cut travel time between the two cities from three hours to forty minutes.

Some years ago, defying conventional wisdom, Indonesia banned all exports of raw nickel. Though many predicted this would lead to a slowdown in foreign investment in the sector, the opposite happened. Nickel production has skyrocketed, from 130,000 metric tons in 2015 to 1.8 million tons in 2023, about half of the world's production. Nickel, vital in the process of green

energy transition and electric vehicles production, has turned out to be decisive in propelling the country's industrialization, something in which Chinese car companies such as Chery and Wuling play a key role, and of which the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park in Central Sulawesi province, with its large number of Chinese factories, is exhibiting an impressive outcome.

Yet, it is a measure of the scale of Indonesian ambitions, that it wants to scale up economic growth even further, to 8 percent a year. The plan is to make Indonesia a developed nation by 2045, as per the Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision. For this, joining the BRICS and thus strengthening ties with some of the biggest and fastest growing nations in the world are an important step. Quite apart from growing its trade and investment links with member states, it will allow Indonesia to partake even more of the many instruments of collective financial statecraft available within the group, such as the Shanghai-based New Development Bank, and the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, or with other entities and frameworks in which China plays a key role, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRI.

That said, it would be a mistake to limit the significance of Indonesia's joining the BRICS strictly to economic factors, however important they may be. Indonesia was, of course, one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. The legendary conference of the Afro-Asian group that originated what was to become the Non-Aligned Movement was held in Bandung in 1955. The Non-Aligned Movement brought together the newly independent nations of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, gave them a sense of belonging, championed the need to stand up for their sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in their affairs, and otherwise articulated the need for a more equitable and fair economic order.

In the new century, Indonesia has embraced with renewed brio the principles of non-alignment. In a world once again struck by global tensions and great power competition, Indonesia has emerged as one of the key voices for the Global South. Revealingly, President Prabowo Subianto's

first overseas trip in April 2024, started with a state visit to Beijing, followed by additional ones later the same year to Washington and London, as well as to Lima, to participate in the APEC meeting, and to Rio de Janeiro, to participate in the G20 summit, a range emblematic of this ambitious and capacious foreign policy.

As the BRICS group continues to champi-

on the cause of the Global South and its demands for a more equitable and inclusive world order, one that pays more attention to the very real global challenges of our troubled planet, the voice of Indonesia along with that of China and other Global South countries will act as potent multipliers.

The author is a research professor at the

Pardee School of Global Studies, acting director of the Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future at Boston University and a former Chilean ambassador to China, India and South Africa. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



ZHANG TING / FOR CHINA DAILY

# CULTURE



## Auspicious prints to greet our future

New Year woodblock exhibition at the Capital Museum explores past and present, **Fang Aiqing** reports.

Visitors view New Year prints at *Splendid Beginnings on Woodblocks* at the Capital Museum in Beijing. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

## Exciting chapter for Chinese books at Cairo fair

CAIRO — The annual Cairo International Book Fair wrapped up on Feb 5 with a notable surge in interest in translated Chinese books, as readers from across the Arab world sought deeper insight into China's culture, history, and process of modernization.

One of the main attractions in this regard was the Bayt Al-Hekma Cultural Group, a publishing house dedicated to translating Chinese books into Arabic, and to providing Chinese language learning resources. Over the years, it has built a strong reputation among Arab readers, becoming a key destination for those eager to explore China's development and cultural heritage.

Saudi visitor Hussein Ismail was among those who purchased several books from the booth. He explains that his deep interest in China's modernization and economic success motivated him to explore the country's literature.

"Saudi Arabia is experiencing greater openness to China economically and politically, which has sparked increased cultural exchange and translation efforts," Ismail says.

He also emphasized a shift in reading preferences among Arab readers, who have traditionally been more exposed to translations of Western literature and history.

"Now, there is a greater need to explore other civilizations, with China being at the forefront," he says.

Egyptian translator Essam Ahmed, who began studying Chinese in 2016, shares a similar perspective.

"When I first started learning the language, there weren't many available resources," he says, adding that Bayt Al-Hekma was his primary source for books on Chinese history, culture and language.

Ahmed highlighted the increasing diversity of Chinese books at this year's fair, covering topics such as literature, economics, politics and history.

"Bayt Al-Hekma plays a crucial role in introducing Arab readers to China's civilization, as it remains the only specialized exhibitor of translated Chinese books at the fair," he says.

According to Amr Moghith, director of Bayt Al-Hekma, this year's booth had an extensive selection of translations about politics, economics and culture, as well as books written about China by Arab scholars and researchers.

The newly translated works cover topics such as China's energy resources, its role in the global economy, cultural identity, and China's engagement with Africa through travel literature, he says.

"Apart from translations, we also focus on books written in Arabic about China, offering deeper insight to researchers and academics," Moghith says.

The publisher has also expanded into children's literature, with some 120 books translated into Arabic for young readers aged 9 to 16. This year, several new titles were introduced, offering engaging stories that blend adventure and problem-solving, appealing to young audiences.

Beyond books, the publisher's booth had cultural products from China, including traditional Chinese New Year items.

"These cultural industries have become an essential part of Arab-Chinese cultural exchange, drawing significant interest from visitors," Moghith says.

This year's edition of the fair ran from Jan 23 to Feb 5. The event hosted 1,345 publishers and 6,150 exhibitors from 80 countries and regions, including 10 countries participating for the first time.

XINHUA

Ancient and modern woodblock New Year prints produced in Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province are on display at *Splendid Beginnings on Woodblocks*, an exhibition that opened at the Capital Museum in Beijing on Jan 24. It will run through to April 24.

Woodblock printing dates back more than a millennium in China. For Spring Festival, New Year pictures were traditionally pasted on doors to ward off evil spirits and pray for safety and good fortune.

In the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province became an important production area for these prints, and for centuries the auspicious images created in the region illustrated a diversity of themes and local features, according to Sun Ke, curator of the exhibition.

Co-organized by the Capital Museum, the Tianjin Museum, and the Hebei Museum, as well as the museum for New Year woodblock prints in Wuqiang county, Hebei's Hengshui, more than 120 sets of images produced since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) are on display.

Highlights include a pair of prints from the collection of the National Library of China that feature door gods Shenshu and Yuyu, imposing figures and clad in armor, both of whom hold a golden hammer on which their names are inscribed.

Shenshu has a kind face, whereas Yuyu is fierce, his eyes wide open. They are depicted in a simple and robust style of firm lines and heavy colors — mostly bright red, yellow and green — and according to Sun, exemplify the typical Beijing style of door-god paintings.

Another image is of a bustling Spring Festival temple fair in Qing Dynasty Beijing, which captures the architecture style and urban life of the capital at the time, with crowds lingering at stalls, strolling around, and riding in carriages or rickshaws.

Yangliuqing New Year prints from Tianjin's Yangliuqing town are quite different in temperament. In one, a well-dressed woman with a long pipe in hand sits beside a short-legged table, on which there is a red vase of plum blossoms.

To fully convey her elegance, the late Qing Dynasty painting makes use of soft colors and delicate lines, with gold powder used to pick out her jewelry, buttons and pipe, Sun says.

By way of contrast, New Year woodblock prints from Wuqiang county, which are an item of national intangible cultural heritage, are known for their rustic aesthetic.

In addition to this exhibition, the Capital Museum and its east branch, the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing, have plans for a further 11 exhibitions this year. These will highlight



**Clockwise from left:** Exhibits include images produced as early as the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), featuring banquets, traditional operas, family gatherings, fairs, Taoist figures, children and auspicious creatures such as carp. PHOTOS BY LIU JING / FOR CHINA DAILY AND JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

efforts to trace the origins of Chinese civilization, exchange and mutual learning between world civilizations, and Beijing culture, according to Tan Xiaoling, deputy director of the Capital Museum.

With this year marking the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Singapore, Tan says the Capital Museum plans to work with Singapore's Peranakan Museum and Asian Civilisations Museum on co-hosting an exhibition from May to August on the material and spiritual legacies overseas Chinese have left in Southeast Asia.

The Capital Museum will also exhibit gold artifacts from the collection of the Hong Kong Palace Museum from November to February 2026. Including gold pieces from the northern grasslands, the Central Plains, as well as the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the exhibition aims to present an overview of the development of gold craftsmanship over the course of 3,000 years and explore the historical role gold played in civilizational exchange.

From May to August, the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing will exhibit 300 artifacts unearthed from the 3,300-year-old Yinxu Ruins in Anyang, Henan province, where oracle bones inscribed with the earliest-known Chinese characters have been found.

According to Tan, the exhibition will be followed with another featuring artifacts discovered in two ancient shipwrecks in the South China Sea dating back to the Ming Dynasty.

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

## LIFE



From left: Murals Gao Chunlin replicates from Tang tombs depict two women dancing, a guard of honor and people from ethnic groups sending horse to the Tang rulers. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In the silence of an ancient tomb at night, a light remained aglow as people diligently worked within its chambers. Yet, these were not tomb raiders seeking treasures but three people immersed in copying the murals adorning the tomb walls, their brushes skillfully tracing the intricate designs onto paper laid out on painting desks. This tomb belonged to concubine Wei, a consort of Li Shimin, a Tang Dynasty (618-907) emperor, as a satellite tomb near Li's Zhaoqing Mausoleum in Liqian county, Xianyang, Shaanxi province.

It was in 1990 when the copying efforts began as archaeologists discovered numerous exquisite murals in the tomb that required mural professionals to immediately record their original state for future studies and display.

One of the mural experts, Gao Chunlin, who was just 21 and a new employee of the Zhaoqing Museum in Liqian, was especially hardworking. At midnight, his colleagues returned home to sleep but he insisted on drawing until 2 or 3 am each night, examining and imitating the ancient essence excitedly and resuming work at 6 am. Within two months, they managed to reproduce the intricate details of over 70 murals within the tomb before these precious artworks were relocated for enhanced preservation.

The following year, their replicas replaced the original murals when the tomb opened to the public.

This was one of the most unforgettable moments in Gao's career. As a mural expert devoted to replicating and studying murals for more than three decades, Gao has demonstrated that passion for one's career can transcend time.

Working in a grassroots museum with limited staff members, Gao must be flexible. For example, he restores pottery figurines, establishes files for cultural relics, and introduces artifacts on display for visitors. But what he cares about most are the murals.

During the Tang Dynasty, most people of higher social status had murals in tombs, often depicting their servants who would continue their services in the afterlife. As a result, the Tang tomb murals feature vivid human portraits.

Since scrolls from the Tang Dynasty are rarely inherited, only leaving copies made from later dynasties, the murals, as authentic Tang creations, hold immense value as genuine Tang images that directly convey information from that era, says Gao.

According to him, Zhaoqing Mausoleum has more than 200 satellite tombs, with 42 being excavated to date. Gao says although all of them would have murals, only 17 still have murals remaining.

Since murals are fragile, they cannot be exhibited in the natural environment. "Surfaces people touch can grow bacteria, which leads to the loss of the murals' colorful layers. As a result, the real murals are difficult to display to the public, often replaced by replicas," says Gao.

Zhaoqing Museum's mural exhibition hall houses many of Gao's replicas. He is now the only mural expert at the museum after his colleague Lu retired in 2002.

A mural often has three parts — a supporting wall structure, a ground layer made of lime powder and the surface layer the paintings are on. When Gao replicates a mural, he completes all the tasks himself, including making the wooden frame and the ground layer without help



The copied murals of maids from two satellite tombs of Zhaoqing Mausoleum, the resting place of Li Shimin, a Tang Dynasty (618-907) emperor. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Precious artworks are more than just imitations

Gao Chunlin achieves childhood dream as a mural expert replicating Tang Dynasty tomb paintings with passion and detail, **Wang Ru** reports.



Left: Gao introduces the murals he replicated from a satellite tomb of Zhaoqing Mausoleum at the Zhaoqing Museum in Liqian county, Shaanxi province, in October. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY Right: Gao paints a mural at his home in Liqian in 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



from carpenters or plasterers.

"Some people suggest that I invite other craftspeople to help me do the basic work but I'm worried they don't consider the final effect. By handling all aspects of the process, I have space to tailor the ground layer to achieve the desired final effect, whether opting for a smooth or coarse finish. This approach enables me to create more refined replicas," says Gao.

The painters of the Tang tomb murals didn't leave their names on them but Gao and other scholars have inferred they were probably distinguished Tang royal painters like Yan Liben, from their studies.

The murals were so well made that Gao finds when copying their patterns, mere imitations could hardly render the real temperament of the masterpieces.

For example, he tried copying a mural from the tomb of concubine Wei in 1991. At

first, he simply imitated the patterns but always found his work unsatisfactory. Since he had limited time for painting, he felt anxious and tried to calm himself.

Then he put aside his painting brush, stood in front of the original mural, and stared at it carefully, trying to understand the story it told.

"It seems to be a guard of honor with seven people holding flags. They seemed to behave naturally and everyone's emotions were precisely portrayed. I put myself in their shoes, thinking what I would do and feel if I were a member of the team," says Gao.

After close observation, he realized it described not a guard of honor in a working state but having a work break, possibly before or after receiving envoys. Amid this break, some engaged in conversation, others surveyed their environment, and a few

appeared lost in contemplation. The intricate details allowed for a glimpse into the inner thoughts of each individual, he says.

"A seemingly ordinary moment, immortalized by a painter's brush on the wall, evokes a sense of enchantment, transporting you into the vivid tapestry of life during the Tang Dynasty," says Gao.

That morning, he woke at 3 am and went to the tomb to continue reading the mural until 5 am. After having breakfast, he began painting again, this time confident that he had seized the mural's essence.

"When we replicate murals, it's not a simple imitation. It's very difficult to make your copy approach the temperament of the original work, requiring the ability to truly understand the murals and Tang Dynasty culture, which comes from practice and experience," says Gao.

Over the years, Gao has replicated more

than 10,000 murals, many of which have been collected by museums nationwide. In 2015, he won the top prize in a national Tang tomb mural replication competition.

According to Wang Jianqi, a researcher at the Shaanxi History Museum specializing in Tang murals, the work Gao submitted to enter the competition, called *Painting of Horse Tribute*, was not only painted well but also showed Gao's understanding of the connotations of the mural.

"Gao has a rich accumulation of and an incredible passion for mural replicating. His murals are so vivid that they show us the splendor of the Tang Dynasty," says Wang.

Gao says the mural depicts two people bearing distinct features and attire of northern ethnic groups leading a white horse. The horse also displays unique traits typical of horses from Xiyu, or the Western Regions, which refers to today's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and part of Central Asia.

"It's a scene of people from different ethnic groups sending the horse as a gift to the Tang rulers. The horse leans its head against a person and its raised hoof suggests a readiness to follow him, while its open mouth conveys an emotional communication with the man, as if being reluctant to leave him," says Gao.

"The man embraces the horse's neck and lightly holds the reins, seeming to have mixed feelings about parting with the horse. The other man, possibly the coachman, furrows his brows and glares, his eyes revealing toughness and a hint of resignation," he adds.

The Tang Dynasty is known as a prosperous era in Chinese history. During the reign of Li Shimin, he adopted inclusive policies toward ethnic groups from afar and was highly esteemed by them. Consequently, he often received gifts. The mural is a reflection of the grandeur of the Tang Dynasty and the good relationship between the central rulers and the ethnic groups, says Gao.

He mentions the images of figures in murals can exert influence on modern life. For example, people design costumes with elements from them, which are gaining increasing popularity. Moreover, TV series and films mirror the attire of these figures while using the Tang era as a background setting.

Born in an amateur artists' family in Liqian in 1969, Gao has held a strong interest in painting since childhood. He graduated from Shaanxi Normal University as a fine arts major and learned from painters Liu Wenxi and Chen Guangjian, who helped Gao lay a solid foundation in line drawing.

After graduating in 1990, he had to make a choice about where to work — Zhaoqing Museum or the traffic authorities in Liqian. Without hesitation, he selected the museum to work in mural painting.

Gao recalls when he was a primary student on a school trip to the museum, he was so attracted by a replicated mural that he started sketching it immediately. Seeing his enthusiasm, his fine arts teacher Liu Suyu encouraged him to hone his painting skills so that he could pursue a career at the museum doing what he loved for a lifetime.

"Luckily, her words proved prophetic. The greatest joy in life is pursuing something you are passionate about and can make a livelihood from," says Gao.

Contact the writer at wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

## Zimbabwean artist enchants modern audiences with ancient instrument

HARARE — A sense of cultural pride filled the club as Virimai Nhedega enchanted his fans with the rhythmic melodies of the Mbira, a traditional Zimbabwean musical instrument celebrated for its unique timbre.

The 38-year-old musician, also known as Vee Mhofu, is a renowned Mbira performer. The instrument, preserved for more than a thousand years by the Shona people, who make up the majority of Zimbabwe's population, holds deep cultural and spiritual significance.

Nhedega and his Dziva ReMbira traditional music ensemble recently captivated hundreds of fans at a club in Harare with a mesmerizing performance. The ensemble delivered a harmonious blend of vocals and instruments, including the Mbira, traditional drums and the hosho, a gourd rattle filled with seeds that often accompanies the Mbira. "To me, the Mbira is an important spiritu-

al instrument we inherited from our ancestors. It is something we must safeguard and promote," Nhedega says at his workshop in Harare.

The Mbira, sometimes referred to as a "thumb piano", is a handheld soundboard made of wood, with metal keys that are plucked to produce sound. To amplify its resonance, it is often placed inside a large calabash resonator.

In Zimbabwe, the Mbira is more than just an instrument used for entertainment. It is considered a vital link to the past, often described as a "telephone to the ancestors". Traditionally, it has been played during celebrations such as weddings and the installation of traditional leaders. In modern times, it features at concerts, corporate events and government functions.

Nhedega's journey with the Mbira began

at age 12 when he discovered the instrument underwater while swimming in a river. Fascinated, he took it home and taught himself how to play it, eventually becoming a skilled musician. The discovery inspired the name of his band, Dziva ReMbira, which means "pool of Mbira" in the Shona language.

Nhedega is modernizing the genre by blending traditional and contemporary elements.

In recognition of its cultural importance, Zimbabwe hosted the inaugural Mbira Festival at Gwanzura Stadium in Harare last September, with thousands in attendance. The month was officially designated as "Mbira Month".

Nhedega says that the Mbira is gaining global recognition and has become a cultural symbol for Zimbabwean tourism.

"We are hosting tourists who come to appreciate the Mbira, sometimes for over a

month. We are appealing to tourism officials to acknowledge the cultural significance of Mbira. I believe that is why UNESCO has inscribed the Mbira as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity," he says.

With growing cultural exchanges between Zimbabwe and China, Nhedega hopes to promote Mbira culture in Asia.

"I look forward to performing live in Asian countries like China," he says.

Having played a pivotal role in popularizing Mbira music, Nhedega's next ambition is to teach the instrument to younger generations, ensuring that its cultural legacy endures.

"We are like fish in water when it comes to culture. We should not abandon it," he says.

Raphael Chikukwa, executive director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, emphasizes the importance of celebrating the Mbi-

ra. "The Mbira is not just a musical instrument. It is deeply spiritual. As a key intangible cultural heritage of Zimbabwe and the region, it deserves recognition both locally and globally," Chikukwa says.

Recently, through government initiatives and the efforts of contemporary artists, the popularity of the Mbira has seen a resurgence. The genre now enjoys a growing trend among both older and younger audiences, including those who once disregarded traditional music.

Vee Mhofu has become synonymous with the revival of Mbira music.

"Vee Mhofu's Mbira has a unique and special presence. It draws you into its mood, making it impossible not to move and dance to its rhythm," says Lionel Nhachi, a 26-year-old fan from Harare.

XINHUA

## LIFE

Langzhong, a city nestled in the northeastern corner of Sichuan province, has long held a revered place in China's cultural and historical landscape. Known for its heritage, ancient architecture and natural beauty, Langzhong's most significant claim to fame is its pivotal role in the creation of the Spring Festival — one of the country's most important holidays.

Langzhong is also known as Langyuan, a name that suggests a place where gods reside.

The city's connection to the festival is the inspiration for a new stage production, *The Mythical Tales of Langyuan*, which weaves together history, myth, and modern-day celebrations.

It premiered on Jan 28 and highlights Langzhong's status as home to one of the more traditional Spring Festival celebrations in the country, and its contribution to global cultural heritage, following the festival's recent UNESCO recognition. The show runs until Thursday.

Langzhong's importance to Chinese New Year can be traced back some two millennia to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) and Lao Xiahong, a famous astronomer, who was born in the city. It is said that during his time at the imperial court, Lao was tasked with creating a calendar that would both standardize and predict the annual agricultural and astronomical cycles. Through meticulous observations, he created a new calendar called the Taichuli, which adopted the Xia Dynasty's (c. 21st century-16th century BC) definition of the start of the new year as being the first day of the first month of the Chinese calendar. This day eventually became the cornerstone of what is now known as the Spring Festival.

This moment is given special significance in the production, with scenes evoking ancient astronomy and depicting Lao's groundbreaking work.

The performance, which fuses contemporary theater with traditional storytelling techniques, brings to life the grandeur of the astronomer's calculations and their cultural implications for Chinese society.

"I can still recall the day I arrived in Langzhong. As I walked through its streets, I was impressed by how the city had maintained its ancient charm for centuries. Its historical buildings, temples and scenic landscapes provide the perfect backdrop for festivals," says the show's director, Fu Zhitao, who has been involved in grand galas like the CCTV Spring Festival Gala in 2019 and 2020, and the Silk Road International Arts Festival in 2014.

"I was both captivated and moved by its architecture, customs and culture. Wandering through this ancient city surrounded by mountains and rivers, I was drawn to the warmth and simplicity of its people," he adds. "The birds resting peacefully in the eaves, the lazy, contented cats and dogs lounging by the roadside ... Everything felt so touching

# Legend of Spring Festival

Stage production celebrates Langzhong's relaxed charm and historical importance, **Chen Nan** reports.



An actress plays a fairy featured in the stage production *The Mythical Tales of Langyuan*.  
PHOTOS BY LIU HAIDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

and warm, and I experienced a long-sense of ease and relaxation."

Fu also recalls sitting under a tree, sipping tea from a tea shop, listening to the owner passionately telling the stories of Langzhong.

"I felt as though I had formed a subtle connection with this ancient city. Words, such as 'legend' and 'carefree,' flashed through my mind. The legend of Langzhong has created this city's atmosphere, and each of us needs to live a carefree life. In an era where everyone is constantly competing, we all need to find some time to come to Langzhong and just relax, let go of anxiety and pressure, so this carefree ancient city can warm and heal you," he says.

From the sweeping curves of Langzhong's rooftops to its traditional Spring Festival celebration, with its preservation of customs and rituals, such as the traditional dragon and lion dance, the sound of firecrackers filling the air, and the breathtaking displays of paper lanterns illuminating the streets, Fu combines all these elements into the production.

"The new stage production pays homage to these age-old traditions. The audience is invited to immerse themselves in the vibrant atmosphere of the Spring Festival, a dazzling spectacle designed to evoke the energy and excitement of the holiday," he says.

Besides the Spring Festival, Fu has also featured references to the Three Kingdoms (220-280) period when Langzhong played an important role due to its strategic location and connection to prominent figures of the era. Dating back some 2,300 years, the city is also associated with Zhang Fei, a prominent general of the Three Kingdoms period, who defended it for seven years. Today, temples in the city acknowledge the general's contribution.

Qian Qi, who composed the music for the production in a month and a half, also made several visits to Langzhong.

*Xiaoyao Ge*, or the Song of Freedom, a catchy melody that incorporates memorable elements and is the production's theme song, was performed by Wu Tong.

Qian blended elements of rock, funk, jazz and traditional Chinese music.

"The full soundtrack is approximately 60 minutes. I blended symphonic music, world music, ethnic instruments and electronic music, allowing them to interweave and complement each other," says Qian, a professor from the Department of AI Music and Music Information Technology at the Central Conservatory of Music.

"*Xiaoyao Ge* is a dynamic piece that fills the audience with energy and strength. I particularly like the song's vibe, which matches the ancient city of Langzhong," says Wu, who is a renowned *sheng* (free-reed wind instrument) player. "I hope more people will travel to Langzhong and explore it."

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



The production incorporates historical and cultural aspects of ancient Langzhong, including Chinese astronomy, folk dancing, and the story of Zhang Fei, a prominent general from the Three Kingdoms (220-280) period.



## Getting to grip with tradition in my Year of the Snake

Before Chinese New Year, neatly folded pairs of red clothing occupied a prominent position in my closet, and in my drawer lay a pendant in the shape of a *pixiu*, a mythical beast that confers protection and prosperity on its wearer. But, I had asked myself, was I ready for the coming Year of the Snake, my Chinese zodiac year? Would these auspicious items help shepherd me through this period in safety?

I grew up in Cleveland in the United States, where the Chinese

zodiac was little more than a curiosity I encountered on place mats at Chinese restaurants while waiting for orders of spring rolls, fried rice and sweet-and-sour pork. But living in China has schooled me in the customs surrounding the Chinese zodiac, including warding off bad luck in one's *benmingnian*, or Chinese zodiac year, by wearing red clothing or a special talisman.

My previous Chinese zodiac year sent a wrecking ball through my life. The rational side of me called it coincidence, pointing to many non-zodiac years filled with hardships. The superstitious side of me wondered if I had bungled a custom. Last time,

I bought all the red clothing I wore for myself, instead of receiving it as a gift; did that cancel its protective power? Was my bright pink clothing not red enough to safeguard me?

This time, I was determined to rectify these errors. After I begged my husband to prepare a propitious gift for my Chinese zodiac year, he surprised me on Christmas morning with the *pixiu* pendant. His Taobao account paid for the clothing, each piece as scarlet as a Spring Festival lantern.

I had thought I was set, until I made the mistake of doing an internet search on the *pixiu*, inundating me with lists of "dos

and don'ts" for wearers, from how to "activate" it, even to where you should place it in your home. When I read that no one else should touch your *pixiu*, lest that disrupt the "bond" between you and the beast, I recalled my husband inadvertently handling the pendant while rethreading it with a new red string. In response to such disconcerting realizations, one website had a section titled "What to do if someone else touches your *pixiu*?" (Answer: Rinse it with water). How did wearing a simple pendant become so complicated?

Indeed, superstitious thinking, if given free rein, will push you to

obsess over the ways you or those you love have suffered adversity, as if the failure to follow a "rule" played a hand in it. Years ago, I realized in retrospect that my mother's terminal cancer diagnosis and death happened during her Chinese zodiac year, and that my father witnessed this heart-wrenching turn of events during his. A part of me wondered, had some Chinese zodiac curse touched my family? But this is reductive thinking; wearing red clothing or the right pendant during that year would not have magically saved her from a cancer that, according to doctors, had likely been hidden for years before that fateful tumor

appeared in her neck.

Given the meaning and importance of one's *benmingnian* in Chinese culture, and my past experiences, I couldn't help but grapple with how to prepare. But that doesn't mean I need to live in trepidation, now that the Year of the Snake has arrived. These Chinese New Year traditions are also expressions of hope and happiness meant to lift spirits for the nascent year. Now I'm learning to embrace the positive side of the customs. After all, I have an excuse to wear red, my favorite color, every single day.

The writer is a freelancer for China Daily.