

Bittersweet return

Displaced family treks through desolate terrain to reach home
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Extra hearing scheduled for Yoon's trial
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Hero lives on

From literature to blockbuster, Nezha spirit evolves with time
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CHINA DAILY

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Scholar says US can learn from Asian diplomacy

Imposition of sanctions and tariffs on trade partners 'not the way' to build friendships

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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An esteemed scholar has suggested that the administration of United States President Donald Trump should include "win-win solutions" in its policies to avert a loss of goodwill in the rest of the world.

"I hope that somebody will try to inject the words 'win-win solutions' into the dialogue and discourse of the Trump administration people," said Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former ambassador to the United Nations, at a webinar on Wednesday.

In the first three weeks of Trump's second term as president, the White House has issued numerous executive orders, actions and pronouncements, including imposing tariffs on trade partners and considering territorial expansion.

"I think it's certainly in the first six months they'll go around doing this bashing, which, unfortunately, is going to lead to lots of loss of goodwill in many parts of the world," said Mahbubani, who served as the president of the UN Security Council in 2001 and 2002.

Mahbubani made the remarks during an online book conversation with the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a Washington-based think tank.

He suggested that the Trump administration should find one or two areas of the world in which it could develop a positive agenda and achieve positive results, and then demonstrate to the world the potential for collaboration and win-win solutions.

Imposing sanctions and tariffs is "not the way you win friends," Mahbubani said.

Mahbubani, a distinguished fellow at National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute, suggested

"I hope that somebody will try to inject the words 'win-win solutions' into the dialogue of the Trump administration."

Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former ambassador to the United Nations

Inside using Southeast Asia as the place to establish a win-win model.

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The author of nine books, including the latest, *Living the Asian Century*, Mahbubani said the West should learn from Asian countries in finding compromise solutions and ways for peaceful coexistence.

Although Western civilization dominated for the past 200 years, the 21st century will be characterized by multicivilizational, multipolar and multilateral dynamics, he said.

"One reason why American diplomacy has run into a ditch, and European diplomacy has run into a ditch, is because when they come across a society which is not like them, which is different from them, they immediately say, 'No, no, no, something is wrong with you. I've got to impose sanctions on you,'" he said.

In Asia, people understand differences and the need to coexist, so they find solutions to live together, Mahbubani said. However, he added that Western diplomats have stopped using this basic practice because they impose sanctions whenever they have a problem.

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WORLD WATCH

By Xie Jianhua

By leveraging their supply chains in China, the platforms have carved out a significant share of the discount market, particularly in fast fashion, toys and other consumer goods.

A recent report by the Congressional Research Service revealed that Shein and Temu now account for approximately 17 percent of this rapidly growing sector.

Mixed effect

If implemented, the revocation of the tariff-exemption policy would introduce a complex mix of challenges and opportunities for both US consumers and Chinese e-commerce platforms.

In the short term, it would lead to higher prices and fewer choices for consumers, but over the long term, it could reshape the global trade landscape.

First and foremost, the policy would directly lead to higher prices of goods that were once affordable and widely accessible. Products ranging from electronics to apparel — many sourced from China — will become more expensive, straining household budgets and potentially adding to inflationary pressures at a time the US economy is already grappling with rising costs.

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Tariffs will lead to hike in prices, fall in choices

US President Donald Trump temporarily suspended the imposition of tariffs on small packages from China shortly after announcing an end to the duty-free policy for shipments worth less than \$800 — but not before the executive order created chaos for the United States Postal Service.

The decision to revoke the de minimis tariff exemption rattled US-China trade relations, particularly in the cross-border e-commerce sector — not to mention creating a backlog of millions of packages from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong after the order went into effect on Feb 4.

The de minimis exemption will now remain until "adequate systems are in place" for the Commerce Department "to fully and expeditiously process and collect tariff revenue".

Chinese e-commerce powerhouses such as Shein and Temu have taken the US market by storm in recent years, captivating consumers with their unbeatable prices and direct-to-consumer shipping model.

Raging torrent



Volunteers help residents navigate their way through fast-moving floodwaters in Makassar, the capital of the Indonesian province of South Sulawesi, on Wednesday. Thousands of people have been forced to evacuate to safer areas after days of torrential rain caused three rivers to overflow. Flooding also shut down more than 450 electricity substations in the province, leaving around 23,600 homes without power. DAENG MANSUR / AFP

Washington crushes Kyiv's NATO ambitions

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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With just one speech by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, the United States, the most powerful member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has thrown the world's biggest military alliance into disarray, raising troubling questions about US commitment to European security.

Hegseth told the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday that European troops should be the primary force securing a post-conflict Ukraine and there will be no US troops deployed to Ukraine.

Any peacekeeping troops from NATO countries in Ukraine would not be covered by the alliance's Article 5, which stipulates that an attack on any NATO member is one on the entire alliance, he added.

Hegseth told Ukraine's Western backers that he had joined the meeting "to directly and unambiguously express that stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe".

Reflecting a shift in Washington's stance toward European defense, Hegseth said the US "does not believe that NATO membership for Ukraine is a realistic outcome of a negotiated settlement", during his first trip abroad after taking office.

He said "returning to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders is an unrealistic objective", and "chasing this illusory goal will only prolong the war and cause more suffering".

"Honesty will be our policy



A woman stands next to a crater and a destroyed vehicle following a missile attack in Kyiv on Wednesday. The attack killed one person and injured four others. TETIANA DZHAFAROVA / AFP

going forward," Hegseth said.

His remarks contrast sharply with the public rhetoric of European Union leaders and that of the previous Joe Biden administration.

"We hear you," was the reaction of British Defense Secretary John Healey, who chaired the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting of more than 50 countries.

"On stepping up for Ukraine, we are and we will. On stepping up for European security, we are and we will," he said in response to Hegseth's speech.

Kaja Kallas, the European Commission's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, said in a message late on Wednesday that "Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity are unconditional".

"Our priority must now be strengthening Ukraine and provid-

ment from the US, he said.

"Under (European Commission) President Ursula von der Leyen and foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, the EU's central bureaucracy virtually transformed itself into the political and economic wing of NATO. The wing is still flapping, but where's the bird?" he wrote on the institute's website.

Phillips O'Brien, a professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, wrote on X, "Any European leader who wakes up tomorrow and says confidently that Europe can rely on the US to be a dependable defense partner, should be removed from office on grounds of willful insanity."

Hegseth's speech "is probably the best the US can offer to Europeans: It will force us to reclaim our autonomy on security," said Alberto Alemanno, a professor of EU law at HEC Paris, clearly referring to the growing calls for more EU strategic autonomy from the US, including boosting the EU's own defense industry.

Ian Bremmer, president of New York-based Eurasia Group, a political risk consulting firm, said most NATO members understand that Ukraine does not have a path to membership and all recognize Ukraine will not get back all its territory; but these are concessions to be negotiated by NATO and the Ukrainians together, not to be unilaterally conceded by US President Donald Trump in advance of negotiations with Russia.

"The NATO alliance stands weaker today as a consequence," he said.

Xinhua contributed to the story.

BEIJING'S 'VILLAGE FAIR' REKINDLES PASSION FOR LEISURELY SHOPPING

Weekend market in northern suburbs enticing visitors with handmade goods, relaxed atmosphere

By XIN WEN
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A market fair mushrooming in Beijing's northern suburbs is providing a village-style atmosphere for visitors, and re-introducing them to the simple joys of shopping for handmade and craft items.

The weekend market in Xin-

zhuang village, Changping district, opened in the autumn of 2023 as a venue for trading secondhand merchandise, but its impact was limited.

The fair started to take off in September last year when it was moved back to the renovated main street of the village.

Dong Yanhua, 47, originally from Tieling city, Liaoning province, runs Cindy Coffee shop at the market, and is one of the main driving forces behind its successful rise.

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PAGE TWO



Left: Visitors take photos at Xinzhuang Market in Changping district, Beijing, on Jan 18. Right: Children visit Xinzhuang Market with their pets on Jan 18. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Market: Vibrant hub of creativity, connection

From page 1

When Xinzhuang Market was first opened, Dong created a WeChat group for vendors to sign up for a spot. "People were attracted to the idea. They came straight to me and said they wanted a spot in the fair. For some periods, demand for places exceeded the supply," she said.

Nowadays, vendors travel from across Beijing to set up their stalls in Changping. At its peak there are more than 120 sellers operating the weekend stalls, but few of them are locals.

Wang Huan, 37, from Daxing district is one of them. After packaging his bakery goods on Friday night, he gets up at 6 am every Saturday to drive to Xinzhuang, where he offers his baked goods, including pretzels. Most market days he sells around 600 items.

His market stall has given him the opportunity to display his professional skills while earning a profit. Wang is a student of master pastry chef Cao Jitong, and has held several senior positions in the industry, including working as a manager for his master's baking arts gallery.

"After all these years, I feel lucky that I am still in the industry and can bake what I am interested in," he said, adding that he constantly works to improve his products.

By featuring bespoke decorations and handicrafts, Xinzhuang has also distinguished itself from other marketplaces in the capital. It's earned a reputation as Dali in the suburbs of Beijing, a reference to the market in the Yunnan province city, renowned for its leisurely, laid-back atmosphere.

Xinzhuang Market's rapid growth is also an example of how the concept of village market fair can be broadened and converge with traditional ideas of how city street vendors operate.

Humble beginnings

Dong opened Cindy Coffee in 2022, when she relocated to Changping for her daughter's education.

She came up with the idea of organizing a market fair in September 2023, when a friend returned from a trip to the Netherlands and enthusiastically told her about the popularity of weekend fairs there.

"Food and drink, as well as daily necessities, were on offer in the Dutch market. And unwanted products could be exchanged at the fairs as secondhand goods," Dong said of what she learned. "I was inspired by my friend and talked with the Party secretary of the village about consideration of opening a market," she said.

With the village's approval, Dong organized a secondhand goods market in the street, and then shifted it to a vacant spot inside a grove near the communi-

ty. Even then, she hoped the market stalls could highlight artistic flair and individuality. "If stall keepers use a tablecloth and decorate their booths with flowers, they make trade (not only a transaction, but) a conscious lifestyle choice," she said.

Improvements to the streetscape also helped propel the market forward. Three years ago, hanging electric wires were clearly visible on the main road of Xinzhuang, along with unsightly utility poles. Nowadays, the wires are hidden below ground and the road is covered in flagstones. The makeover has been accompanied by the sprouting of restaurants, bread shops, cafes, gift stores and supermarkets.

Dong's coffee shop is a place where people like to sit and chat, which typifies the strong sense of community in Xinzhuang, she said.

"Unlike the usual experience of just visiting a place to shop, people are warm and welcoming in the village. You feel a genuine connection and become part of the community," she said.

About 80 to 100 spots are usually made available at the market fair every weekend, with each one costing 50 yuan (\$6.80).

Dong hopes the homemade wares and goods offered for sale have some "emotional value" for buyers. "If the designs of the goods are cute, they can give people a calm and peaceful feeling. They feel different from mass-produced industrial products," she said.

Dong is hopeful more craftspeople will be attracted to the weekend fair to communicate with and influence other stallholders, who are eager to improve their wares.

Young shoppers

On a chilly weekend after Chinese New Year, the market was bustling with many young shoppers from all over Beijing.

Gu Mingfei, 26, a native of Changping who works in the financial industry in Beijing, said she liked the atmosphere steeped in a "New Year vibe". What's different about the fair are the cultural and creative products that always catch her eye, she said.

She first visited the market in the middle of January, when she drove 20 minutes from her home to experience the hustle and bustle as Spring Festival approached.

Gu said she is in the habit of going to a market or temple fair during the winter break, and usually goes to Shahe Market with her family. "After this fair opened, I was pleasantly surprised to find that a fair worth visiting is so much fun," she said.

During her first visit, she purchased a refrigerator magnet in the shape of a loaf of bread for less than 20 yuan. On her second visit in February she bought a fluffy



Clockwise from top left: A customer visits a stall selling indigo dyeing products at Xinzhuang Market; a stall selling gourds attracts visitors at the market; a customer selects bread at Wang Huan's stall; a mother and son select small items. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

“The market fair... features smaller stalls and more flexible locations, which frequent visitors might find a novel experience.”

Sun Xiaoqun, market visitor



Handmade rabbit toys are available at the market.

snake-shaped toy. "Most of the handicrafts here, I think, are worth buying," she said, adding that the market environment made her feel calm and joyful.

Gu's friend Xu Xiaoman, 29, who also works in the finance industry, purchased *jianbing guozi* — pancakes rolled into a crispy fritter.

Xu said the prices of food and goods at the market are reasonable. She said the market resembles Nanluogu Xiang shopping alley, a popular *hutong* that combines traditional charm with modernity in Beijing's downtown area.

"The market here is not as formal as Nanluogu Xiang, and it relaxes me because I can pick up stuff I like and bargain with the stall owner," she said.

Liza Senigagina, 32, has been to the market twice. While she sees that the items are fairly priced, she has also enjoyed experiencing Chinese New Year through the eyes of the locals.

Dong, the fair organizer, said that the village has a resident population and a daily flow of people. She hopes the market attracts new vendors who view it as a place to make their own goods to support themselves.

Wang, the baker, who has been a market stallholder for six months,

said that after each fair day, he rethinks how he makes and markets his baked goods.

"Every time you have an experience, every time you have a problem you try to find a solution," he said. "You consider how to make adjustments for tomorrow's fair, and the answer might come at the end of that day."

Baking bread is not easy, as it takes time and involves many steps, Wang said. "It takes at least four hours to make this bread, from start to finish. That's not a short time, and it's actually the minimum time required for any bread," he said.

He added: "Baking is a lifelong career, and the market fair here is an opportunity for me and my master's baking arts gallery to let more people know about pretzels and the delicate craft behind them," he said.

Offline experience

Sun Xiaoqun is a frequent visitor to such markets. She said that due to the pandemic some fairs and morning markets were closed.

After the market in Xinzhuang opened, her friends invited her to join them for a stroll around the fair. There was no pressure to buy anything.

"I found many accessories were

displayed at the market, and it was a lot of fun for me to take a good look at them. I usually browse for accessories and buy them online, which is a bit less fun," she said, adding that the market stalls have exquisite items that are completely different from those in wholesale markets.

Sun is also a tea expert. A friend suggested that she open a tea-house in the village after her shop in Beijing's Haidian district closed a few years ago.

"While the rent and overall costs for a shop here are relatively high, the village has a good atmosphere with lots of interesting shops and activities," she said. "Sometimes, opening a shop just takes a bit of luck, and I need to consider it carefully."

She enjoyed a fulfilling day in the village, staying until evening before heading home.

"I've visited the Guanyuan morning market in Xicheng district and Shilibe wholesale market in Chaoyang district," she said.

"The market fair here in Changping, however, is different. It features smaller stalls and more flexible locations, which frequent visitors might find a novel experience," she said.

TOP NEWS

Jurassic bird fossils rewrite avian evolution history

By YAN DONGJIE
and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

A set of fossils discovered in East China's Fujian province has been identified as the only known unambiguous record of Jurassic birds, pushing back the origin of birds to the late Middle Jurassic period and rewriting the history of avian evolution.

After a year of restoration and research, a joint team from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Fujian Institute of Geological Survey confirmed that the set of fossils discovered in November 2023 in Daxi village of Fujian's Zhenghe county belong to a bird from the late Middle Jurassic period, dating back approximately 150 million years.

In their study, which was published in *Nature* journal on Thursday, the researchers named the bird species *Baminornis zhenghensis*. Its fossils display a unique combination of features including bird-like shoulder and pelvic girdles as well as a hand structure resembling that of nonavian dinosaurs, according to the CAS.

"Birds evolved from dinosaurs, which is one of the most astonishing chapters in the history of evolution. This process involved significant changes in bones, muscles and other biological structures, representing a leap from land to sky," said Xu Xing, an academician of the CAS and director of its paleontology institute.

"The Zhenghe Fauna, where the set of fossils was found, offers a rare glimpse into the ecosystems of the late Mesozoic era. It's a treasure trove for understanding the origins of the variety of life we see today," he added.

Since 2021, researcher Wang Min and academician Zhou Zhonghe from the CAS institute have collaborated with the Fujian Institute of Geological Survey to form a field team and conduct systematic fossil studies and geological research in the province.

In September 2023, the team reported in *Nature* the first discovery of skeletal fossils of a dinosaur in Fujian, naming the species *Fujianvenator prodigiosus* and the fossil assemblage the "Zhenghe Fauna".

Zhou said the discovery provided a new window into the evolution of life on land in East Asia during the late Mesozoic era.

The area of the fossil assemblage, characterized by swamps and wet-



A Chinese scientist introduces one of the world's oldest bird fossils, that of the *Baminornis zhenghensis*, at the Fujian Institute of Geological Survey in Fujian province on Tuesday. JIANG KEHONG / XINHUA

lands, was home to a diverse array of species of fish, amphibians and reptiles, among others. In November 2023, the field team discovered two incomplete reptilian fossils in the Zhenghe Fauna. At first glance, Zhou and Wang speculated that the fossils belonged to a bird.

"After systematic research and comparison, the hypothesis was confirmed. The restored bird weighed over 150 grams, similar to a domesticated pet parrot," said Wang.

Macroevolutionary studies previously speculated that the diversification of birds began in the Jurassic period, but this hypothesis lacked fossil evidence.

One of the most significant differences between birds and reptiles is in their tails. Avian species have shorter tails with fewer tail vertebrae, and the last few vertebrae are fused into a structure called the pygostyle. This adaptation is crucial for shifting the body's center of gravity forward, enabling independent movement of the hind limbs and tail and refining flight capabilities.

"The shortening of the tailbone was one of the most profound changes in body structure during the evolution of dinosaurs into birds. What makes

the *Baminornis* unique is that it has a short tail that consists of the pygostyle, which is a key feature of the modern bird body plan," Wang said.

The Archaeopteryx, the fossils of which were first discovered around 1860, belonged to the Late Jurassic period and was once considered the earliest bird. However, its long tail and primitive features led some scientists to question its classification as a bird. Instead, they suggested that it belonged to a group of bird-like dinosaurs.

"The Archaeopteryx was identified as a bird over 160 years ago because of its feather fossils. At that time, feathers were considered exclusive to birds," said Zhou. "But with advances in fossil research, this single-trait classification is outdated. Modern classification relies on studying evolutionary relationships, and we now know that some dinosaurs also had feathers."

The Archaeopteryx and other "suspected Jurassic birds" retained long tailbones similar to dinosaurs, making them significantly different from birds in terms of skeletal structure.

Whether birds truly existed during the Jurassic period remained a mystery until now. The discovery of the *Baminornis* confirms for the first

time that the skeletal structure of modern birds had already appeared during the Jurassic period, 20 million years earlier than previously thought.

In addition to the *Baminornis* fossils, the research team also discovered a separately preserved furcula, a forked bone found in most birds.

Analysis showed that the furcula closely resembles those found in derived birds called the ornithomorphs from the Cretaceous period — the earliest of which appeared 130 million years ago — and is distinctly different from the *Baminornis* and other Jurassic birds and dinosaurs.

The discovery of this furcula confirms that at least two species of birds lived in the Zhenghe Fauna. If the furcula indeed belongs to the ornithomorphs, the origin of birds would be pushed back even further.

Stephen L. Brusatte, from the School of GeoSciences at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom, said, "The *Baminornis* is a landmark discovery and ranks among the most important bird fossils unearthed since the discovery of the Archaeopteryx in the early 1860s."

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AI surge fuels optimism on A-share market

Trading value in Shanghai, Shenzhen tops 1 trillion yuan for 17th consecutive trading day

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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While the surge of Chinese artificial intelligence companies has led to upbeat sentiment in the A-share market, the inflow of more long-term capital and improving fundamentals will be the major drivers of the market's bullish performance in a more sustained manner, said experts.

Although the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index and Shenzhen Component Index declined 0.42 percent and 0.77 percent, respectively,

on Thursday, trading remained vibrant, as the combined trading value at the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses topped over 1.8 trillion yuan (\$250 billion), up 5.9 percent from a day earlier. This marked the 17th consecutive trading day that the trading value had stood above the 1-trillion-yuan level. Zhang Jiqiang, head of Huatai Securities, said that trading capital in the A-share market has increased significantly since Spring Festival. The activity level of financing transactions has reached a new high since mid-November. The net inflow of retail funds exceeded 40 billion yuan from Feb 5 to 7, the highest level since mid-November.

The performance of property developers, the market heavyweights, was worth noticing on Thursday. The sector rallied for the second consecutive day by 0.79 percent. These companies have seen prices rise 6.3 percent since trading resumed on Feb 5.

This can be largely attributed to the progress that leading property developers have made in addressing their debt pressures.

Shenzhen-based China Vanke announced on Monday that Shenzhen Metro, its largest shareholder, plans to provide a 2.8-billion-yuan loan, with which Vanke will repay debt in the open market.

Country Garden said on Jan 9 it has proposed a deal to restructure offshore debt worth \$10.3 billion, providing its creditors with multiple options including converting debt into cash and extending the maturity. At the end of November, Sunac China Holdings proposed restructuring plans for 10 debts in the onshore market, of which eight have been supported up to now.

Gloomy expectations about US tariff policies and A-share companies' business results suppressed market sentiment before the holiday, but since these have been released after the holiday, and catalyzed by the DeepSeek surge, mar-

ket sentiment has been buoyed, said Zhang from Huatai Securities.

Similarly, China's hedge fund managers' confidence index for A shares rose by 2.2 percent on a monthly basis in February, with technology companies as their focus, according to private market tracker Simuwang.

Qiu Xiang, chief strategist at CITIC Securities, said the revaluation of A-share AI companies has served as a major catalyst of sentiment in the first half of February. During this time, risk appetite picked up, with the bullish sentiment priced in and trading activities being extreme.

As such a mood gradually cools down, investors' defensive demand will increase and less-volatile stocks will be more preferred, he said.

Indeed, companies that previously benefited from the DeepSeek surge underwent significant price adjustments on Thursday. Zhejiang Daily Digital Culture Group and MeIG Smart Technology, which both touched the daily price increase limit of 10 percent for six consecutive days since Spring Festival, saw their prices plunge by 7.18 percent and 9.54 percent, respectively, on Thursday.

The current success of DeepSeek is mainly represented by spiking user traffic. The success of AI companies in the medium term is defined by the proliferation of AI-related devices and the wider application of AI, said Chen Guo, chief strategist at China Securities.

Companies' improving profitability is also key to the sustained bullish performance of these listed AI companies, he said.

The medium- and long-term bull market in A-shares is inseparable from the recovered trading enthusiasm of foreign investors and the inflow of more long-term capital, said Zhang from Huatai Securities.

The guideline to promote the inflow of more medium to long-term capital released by top regulators earlier this year is likely to usher in the inflow of more annuity, which has a higher risk appetite, as well as more insurance capital by lowering the latter's investment risks, he said.

The People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, said on Thursday that it will continue to complete the design of various tools to facilitate the high-quality development of the Chinese capital market.

As of the end of January, it has conducted two operations under the Securities, Funds and Insurance Companies Swap Facility, totaling 105 billion yuan. This has led to a significant increase in the scale of proprietary stock investment by securities companies.

Trade: Joint efforts key to inclusive e-commerce ecosystem

From page 1

Additionally, major e-commerce platforms would have to reassess their US market strategies, resulting in reduced supply and fewer choices for consumers.

So far, the reaction among consumers in the US has been mixed. While some lamented the increased cost of living, others supported the revocation of the policy as a means to bolster domestic industries. However, the unintended consequences such as reduced tariff revenue and continued challenges in intercepting illegal goods suggest that the policy revocation will miss its mark. Instead of protecting US interests, it will create a lose-lose situation for both consumers and businesses.

Innovation catalyst

One positive aspect of the cancellation of the de minimis tariff exemption would be that it would act as a catalyst for innovation and strategic realignment in the cross-border e-commerce sector. Chinese e-commerce giants are rethinking their business models, moving from low-cost, high-volume sales to a stronger focus on quality, user experience and value-added services.

This shift could create a more competitive and consumer-friendly market. One immediate response has been the optimization of supply

chains and logistics networks. Companies are investing in local warehousing and distribution centers in the US, enhancing their ability to respond quickly to market demands while reducing operational costs.

This not only improves efficiency but also deepens collaboration between US and Chinese firms in logistics and technology, paving the way for more integrated trade ecosystems.

The policy revocation would underscore the critical role of compliance and sustainability in cross-border trade. Chinese e-commerce platforms are increasingly focusing on meeting international trade standards, improving transparency and adopting ethical business practices. Such efforts not only strengthen the companies' corporate image but also foster consumer trust, laying the groundwork for long-term success in global markets.

Sustainability is becoming a key competitive advantage. With growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products, companies that prioritize sustainable practices — from sourcing to packaging — will gain a competitive edge. This shift aligns with broader global trends and strengthens the reputation of Chinese e-commerce platforms in the international market.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the policy revocation would amplify the urgency for Chinese

e-commerce platforms to expand their global reach to emerging markets in Southeast Asia, Europe and South America, which present untapped opportunities. Those markets are fueled by growing middle-class populations eager for affordable yet high-quality products.

By tailoring products to local preferences and forging partnerships with regional players, Chinese companies can lessen their dependence on any single market. This diversification not only mitigates risks but also strengthens their global presence, ensuring long-term resilience in an increasingly unpredictable business world.

A call for collaboration

The challenges posed by the cancellation of the de minimis tariff exemption policy are undeniable, but they also present an opportunity for US-China trade relations to evolve. By fostering collaboration in areas such as technology, logistics and regulatory frameworks, both nations can mitigate friction and create a more stable trade environment.

For instance, joint efforts can be made in digital innovation and artificial intelligence, and data analytics could revolutionize cross-border e-commerce, making it more efficient and consumer-friendly.

At the same time, cultural exchanges and brand storytelling

will play a pivotal role in bridging gaps between Chinese e-commerce platforms and international consumers. Collaborations with local influencers and a focus on cultural resonance can help Chinese brands build emotional connections with global audiences, enhancing their appeal and market share.

To summarize, the revocation of the de minimis exemption is a reminder of the complexities of global trade. Yet it also serves as a call to action for innovation, collaboration and strategic adaptation.

By embracing these challenges, Chinese e-commerce platforms can transform obstacles into opportunities, driving growth and fostering stronger ties with global markets. As we look to the future, the key lies in mutual understanding and cooperation.

By working together, the US and China can create a more dynamic, inclusive and sustainable cross-border e-commerce ecosystem — one that benefits consumers, businesses and economies on both sides of the Pacific.

In a world increasingly defined by interconnectedness, the success of one nation is inextricably linked to the success of the other.

The author is the founder of the US-China E-commerce & Trading Chamber. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Deadly blast



The damaged facade of a department store in the city of Taichung in central Taiwan is seen on Thursday after a gas explosion on the premises killed four people and injured 26. YUFU LIAO / AFP

"The most damaging part of *The End of History* essay was that it actually made those in the United States and the West feel, 'Hey, we won, so from now on, the rest of the world has got to converge toward us and become like us,'" Mahubani said.

Fukuyama, in an online discussion about "America's Democracy in the Age of Trump" on Wednesday, said Trump's economic policies are "mutually contradictory".

"He can't do all the things that he's claiming that he wants to do. You know, you cannot impose 25 percent

tariffs on Canada and Mexico and not see inflation come roaring back in a big way," he said.

Fukuyama also said that ongoing deportation efforts will contribute to labor shortages, which will drive up wages and also contribute to inflation.

US consumer inflation increased again last month as the cost of groceries, gasoline and rent rose. The consumer price index edged up to 3 percent in January — higher than expected — from a year ago, according to data released by the Labor Department on Wednesday.

Diplomacy: Attempts to contain China won't succeed

From page 1

"What would sanctions achieve? Nothing. Have sanctions ever changed any country? Never. So why don't you just continue talking to people?" he said.

Asian people always try to find compromise solutions, a practice that Mahubani said the West should learn from.

Furthermore, Asia is doing the right things as a result of being very careful, pragmatic and doing the best to treat one another with the utmost respect and never give condescending lectures or insult leaders, according to Mahubani.

One of the worst practices of Western media is "to constantly insult leaders", he said. "So this is a result of 200 years of cultural condescension

from the 19th and 20th centuries flowing into the 21st century, where it's going to hit a big, hard wall."

In the book conversation, Mahubani also said there are "some fundamental mistakes in the assumptions" by the US regarding China.

"All the effort, I mean, look at the entire four years of the Biden administration — (it) is containment policy. You know, whatever it

is, all the AUKUS (security partnership) and all these things were designed, were going to fail anyway. You cannot succeed in containing China," he said.

Mahubani also mentioned *The End of History*, a 1989 essay by American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, who later published the book *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992.

CHINA

Video makers should avoid infringement

Warning comes as creators challenge boundaries with artificial intelligence

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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As artificial intelligence technology advances, video creators should respect the copyrights of original works while making large-scale adaptations of films and television shows, according to an article published on Thursday by the Copyright Society of China.

The CSC, which is overseen by the National Copyright Administration, published the article with Yu Bo, deputy dean of the Intellectual Property School at the East China University of Political Science and Law, as the lead author.

In recent years, AI-generated video technology has sparked a wave of public creativity, leading to large-scale and "fantasy-style" adaptations of classic film and television works. The article said AI-modified videos are proliferating online, frequently challenging copyright boundaries.

In December, the National Radio and Television Administration's network audiovisual program management department issued a reminder, saying that such AI-modified videos — often created to attract views — desecrate classic intellectual properties, undermine traditional cultural perceptions, contradict the original spirit of the works and may constitute copyright infringement.

The article noted that AI-modified videos often rely on copyrighted materials from movies and TV shows, some of which are adapted from novels and plays. As a result, these videos risk infringing on adaptation rights and the right to preserve the integrity of original works.

China's Copyright Law defines the right of adaptation as "the right to change a work to create a new work with originality". The article said that if AI-modified short videos significantly differ in style from the original and present unexpected content or plot directions, they may be considered original.

However, it emphasized that if the modified videos retain original characters' appearances, voices, costumes and sets — making them easily associated with the original

work — they likely infringe on adaptation rights without the copyright owner's permission.

Furthermore, the article said AI modifications often distort the original work's themes. Serious or profound narratives may be overshadowed by spoof-like elements, violating the creator's original intent and infringing on the right to preserve the integrity of the work.

On China's video-sharing platform Bilibili, a widely circulated humorous short video features the ancient Chinese warlord Cao Cao from the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220-280) engaging in a fierce battle with Captain America. The 1.5-minute video, which has amassed 1.54 million views, combines footage from a popular Chinese TV series and a film from the United States.

According to the China Internet Network Information Center, by June 2024, China had 1.05 billion short-video viewers, accounting for 95.5 percent of the country's internet users.

The article urged video creators, online platforms and government regulators to work together to reduce copyright infringement risks. It called on short-video creators to adhere to ethical standards, avoid catering to vulgar tastes for the sake of traffic and refrain from distorting or vilifying original works.

It also suggested that video-sharing platforms strengthen content review mechanisms and remove infringing short videos that alter classic works.

Regulatory authorities, the article said, must conduct regular enforcement actions and investigate platforms with widespread infringement or weak copyright oversight. It also recommended that the short-video industry establish self-regulation norms and standards to promote healthy and orderly development.

"In today's era of flourishing AI-generated content, we must fully leverage AI technology to promote the prosperity of short-video creation while effectively protecting the legitimate rights and interests of copyright holders," the article said.

Together again



Guo Song (middle), who was abducted in May 1998, reunites with his biological parents at Nanchang Railway Station in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on Thursday. His parents have been searching for him ever since he went missing from a vegetable market in Guiyang, Guizhou province. In December, with the help of AI models, police compared a photo of Guo — now 29 and living in Putian, Fujian province — as a child with a more current photo and found they may be a match. On Jan 26, DNA testing confirmed that Guo was indeed the missing child. XU GUOLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

AI making presence felt in China like never before

A pack of 10 robot dogs leaped, spun and waded in perfect harmony to a traditional dance song during China Media Group's 2025 Intangible Cultural Heritage Gala on Jan 31, wowing audiences with their synchronized moves.

The electrifying performance quickly ignited social media, where impressed users dubbed them "the most dedicated dance crew" and praised the fusion of cultural heritage and futuristic technology.

The dancing Lite3 models belong to the agile intelligent robot dog series developed by DEEP Robotics, based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Capable of carrying payloads up to 7.5 kilograms with a 5-kilometer operational range and continuous motion of up to two hours, these robots can perform complex maneuvers such as high jumps and front flips.

"Our proprietary joint modules, control systems and advanced algorithms enable unprecedented motion capabilities," said Lin Yi, the company's research and development manager. Users can develop additional training programs based on intelligent algorithms, including deep learning and reinforcement learning.

Artificial intelligence is entering Chinese households like never before, seamlessly integrating into

both daily life and entertainment.

Dressed in colorful jackets, a group of humanoid robots were a highlight of this year's Spring Festival gala, broadcast on Chinese New Year's Eve. Sixteen robots danced the yangko, a traditional folk dance, alongside human performers. After the show, a "robot grandmother" was gently escorted offstage by dancers — a moment that quickly went viral on social media.

Meanwhile, with its vast knowledge, eloquent expression and playful wit, DeepSeek, an AI-powered chatbot, has captivated users of all ages.

"I felt powerful after having a good command of DeepSeek," said a retiree surnamed Ma, who downloaded the open-source tool following his son's recommendation.

Beyond virtual interactions, AI is increasingly present in daily life, enhancing real-world experiences. Whether at temple fairs or tourist attractions, AI is replacing servers and trainers, making candy figurines, playing games, carrying heavy loads, delivering goods and even assisting climbers.

This year's Spring Festival was a celebration of AI-driven surprises, with each innovation sparking excitement. Social media is buzzing with users sharing their favorite high-tech experiences, making this a

“The success of AI is measured not by lab-based computing power, but by its impact on everyday users.”

Robin Li, Baidu chairman and CEO

uniquely futuristic Chinese New Year.

"Wow! No more video calls for New Year greetings!" said a tech worker surnamed Li, who uploaded a photo to the Baidu App, entered prompts like "firecrackers on Mars" and "dragon dance on the Forbidden City rooftop," and added a festive message. In just over a minute, AI created a digital greeting card, making the process effortless.

AI's mainstream success is driven by two key factors — practical application and strong technology. The key to widespread adoption is aligning technological advancements with real-world needs, according to Baidu chairman and CEO Robin Li.

"The success of AI is measured not by lab-based computing power, but by its impact on everyday users,"

Li said. "Advanced technologies must be integrated into daily life, making them accessible to all."

China's AI industry ecosystem spans chips, algorithms, data, platforms and applications. More than 4,500 companies are involved, with the core industry reaching a scale of nearly 600 billion yuan (\$82.1 billion). In the past year alone, 238 new generative AI products have been registered.

Demand for large AI models continues to grow. On Feb 2, DeepSeek topped app markets in 140 regions, with daily active users exceeding 30 million. By last November, Baidu's ERNIE had reached over 1.5 billion daily calls, a 30-fold increase from the previous year, while ByteDance's Doubao saw daily token usage rise 33-fold by December 2024 after its launch in May 2024.

Omdia, a consultancy focused on the tech industry, forecasts that China's generative AI market will grow 5.5 times over the next five years.

Looking ahead, DeepSeek continues to expand its ecosystem, driving growth across the AI industry. Major cloud service providers, including Huawei Cloud, Tencent Cloud, Alibaba Cloud and Baidu AI Cloud, have integrated DeepSeek's large models into their platforms.

XINHUA

Panoramic mountain train opened in Yunnan

By LI YINGQING in Kunming and XU NUO in Beijing

The world's first panoramic sightseeing mountain tourist train began operating on Wednesday in Lijiang, a popular tourist destination in Yunnan province.

The train, independently developed by Chinese railway companies, runs at a maximum speed of 70 kilometers per hour and can transport passengers to the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in about 35 minutes, according to local media.

The 20.7-km sightseeing route connects Lijiang Ancient Town, a UNESCO-listed world cultural heritage site, with Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, a top-rated tourist attraction. Along the way, passengers can enjoy views of snow-capped peaks, crystal-clear waters and dramatic canyons. Intermediate stops include Baisha Ancient Town, Yushui Village, Dongba Valley and Ganhaizi Meadow.

"To enhance passengers' experience, the train's side windows are made of 1.9-meter-long, color-changing glass that is electrically adjustable. They not only provide a better panoramic view, but also pro-



Left: A panoramic sightseeing mountain tourist train in Lijiang, Yunnan, on Wednesday. Right: A passenger on the train takes pictures of the scenery outside. YANG ZHENGONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

tect against high-altitude ultraviolet rays," said Yang Jian, chairman of Lijiang Snow Mountain Rail Transit Co, which oversaw the train's construction.

Zhong Ya, a university student majoring in rail transit who was among the passengers on the train's first ride, said she enjoyed its slow pace.

"This train ride is different," Zhong said. "Other trains usually rush to the destination, but the snow mountain sightseeing train travels slowly, allowing passengers to appreciate the scenery along the way. The train has very large windows, and the views outside are spectacular."

During the initial operation period, a one-way ticket costs 50 yuan (\$7), while a round-trip ticket is priced at 80 yuan. Discounts or free rides are available for children, active-duty military personnel, firefighters, rescue workers, the disabled and tour guides.

Led by China Railway Eryuan Engineering Group, the rail project faced various challenges. Workers had to handle the plateau's fragile ecological environment and endure its complex mountainous climate and steep slopes while meeting high standards for route alignment through scenic landscapes.

Designed with energy efficiency in mind, the project is expected to save nearly 2.7 million kilowatt-hours of electricity annually and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 1,500 metric tons, according to the company.

The company estimates the train will carry about 45,500 passengers per day, helping boost local tourism and economic growth.

Liu Boqian contributed to this story.

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Highly nutritious rice variety developed

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Chinese scientists have developed a new rice variety capable of synthesizing CoQ10, paving the way for enriched dietary sources of the widely used antioxidant supplement.

The creation of CoQ10-producing crops offers a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to enhance nutrition, researchers said.

CoQ10, or coenzyme Q10, is important for human health, particularly for heart protection. It plays a key role in the mitochondrial electron transport chain and functions as a fat-soluble antioxidant. While the human body synthesizes CoQ10 naturally, production declines after age 20. Some experts say statin medications may also affect its synthesis.

Unlike humans, who produce CoQ10 with a side chain of 10 isoprene units (C50), cereal crops such as rice and wheat, as well as certain vegetables and fruits, primarily produce CoQ9, which contains nine isoprene units (C45). The key difference lies in the lengths of their side chains.

In a joint study, researchers from the Shanghai Chenshan Research Center at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences and the CAS Institute of

“Similar gene editing work on wheat is underway and has made significant progress.”

Chen Xiaoya, leading researcher on the study and academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences

Genetics and Developmental Biology analyzed 134 plant samples from 67 families. The samples — collected from the diverse plant collections at Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden — included mosses, clubmosses, ferns, gymnosperms and angiosperms.

Scientists mapped the distribution patterns of CoQ types across these species and found that CoQ10 is an ancestral trait of flowering plants. While most plants continue to synthesize CoQ10, grasses, including all cereal crops such as rice, wheat and corn, as well as daisies and cucurbit plants mainly produce CoQ9.

By analyzing the evolutionary pathways and natural variations of an enzyme involved in CoQ side-chain synthesis in more than 1,000 terrestrial plant species, researchers identified five amino

acid sites that determine side-chain length. Machine learning aided the discovery.

Through targeted gene editing, they successfully modified rice plants to primarily synthesize CoQ10, with levels reaching 5 micrograms per gram of rice grain, without affecting yield.

"This compares to the fact that today, the amount of CoQ10 obtained from food for a person is around 3 to 5 milligrams per day, while that from grains is nearly zero," said Chen Xiaoya, a lead researcher on the team.

A paper on the findings was published on Friday in the journal Cell.

"The CoQ10 in rice remains stable during cooking," said Xu Jing-jing, co-first author of the study.

Chen, a co-corresponding author, said researchers are now working to introduce the CoQ10 trait into elite rice varieties suitable for large-scale cultivation.

The breakthrough also highlights the role of big data and artificial intelligence in understanding plant trait evolution for crop breeding, researchers said.

"Similar gene editing work on wheat is underway and has made significant progress," Chen said.

Gene editing is an efficient and safe method of crop improvement that has developed rapidly in recent years. The edited plants do not contain foreign genes and are genetically stable, Chen said.

WORLDUS

Upbeat on Chinese students in US

Co-founder of college admissions business sees benefits of 'cross-pollination' in academic exchanges

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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Jamie Beaton walked into the interview room in Times Square, took off his coat, and glanced at the ball. He remembered New Year's Eve in 2014, when he had watched the ball drop here. That night, he was online coaching an international student from China, Fangzhou Jiang, who would later join him as a co-founder of what is now an almost \$600 million business.

Born in New Zealand, Beaton started the college admissions counseling company Crimson Education when he was 17. He applied to US universities like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Wharton, Columbia and Duke — and he got into all of them.

"I had seven months free before starting at Harvard, so I began mentoring students in Auckland," he said. "I'd visit their homes, coach them, and do seminars. It grew organically, almost like a passion project before Harvard."

Soon the passion project grew into a company that has the highest revenue globally in the college admissions counseling space, especially in North America.

The company soon expanded globally across 23 countries and attracted many clients, especially in China.

"China is a little bit different from the rest of the world because they already had so many people applying that the numbers have been flat or moving around based on these geopolitical factors," Beaton told China Daily.

Working as an educator between China and the United States, he has firsthand experiences in what cultural exchange between the two countries could bring to the world.

"When it comes to cultural exchange in general, it's very important, because if the world breaks into, for example, a Cold War between China and its territories, America and its territories, and no one goes to each other's countries for trade, and you have this kind of segmented world where you don't have cultural exchange — you just create unnecessary conflict," he said.

But when people from China study in the US, or people from the US study in China, and there is a cross-pollination of ideas and understanding — very quickly, things that seem like they are insurmountable become negotiable, he said.

To further his business expansion in China, Beaton studied at Tsinghua



Above: Jamie Beaton with his co-founder Fangzhou Jiang at Harvard University, sitting outside the dorm in March 2024 where Crimson Education was born and developed. **Left:** Jamie Beaton (center) with Crimson's Shanghai team at a company seminar in China in September 2024. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

University in Beijing, one of the country's top institutions, and spent six months living in Shanghai.

"It's been very rewarding in my life to have those kinds of cultural exchanges where I lived in Shanghai and I went to school in Beijing. And I think it's quite a limitation for a young person if you only live in your city or your country because you really don't have perspective on how your country can improve for the better," he said.

For decades, Chinese students have been the largest group of international students in the United States. But recent data reveals a significant shift: the number of Chinese students

studying in the US has been declining since the 2019-20 academic year.

In the 2023-24 academic year, for the first time, Indian students outnumbered their Chinese counterparts, with 331,602 Indian students enrolled in US higher education institutions — a 23.3 percent increase from the previous year — compared with 277,398 Chinese students, a 4.2 percent decline, according to the nonprofit Institute of International Education.

Beaton offered a different perspective on the numbers, suggesting that Chinese student enrollment is either increasing or holding steady at top US universities.

"What we're seeing in the data is

that the number of students attending top-tier schools remains quite consistent — it's not declining," he said.

In fact, at some institutions, those numbers are even growing, Beaton said. However, he said the significant drop is occurring among the long tail of other universities, and that's where the real decline is happening.

The reason for this trend is twofold. First, the return on investment for certain degrees is much lower — it's harder to secure top jobs, and the cost of education is high.

For some families, especially those from higher-income backgrounds, that type of degree is almost a luxury, akin to "tourism education," rather

than a necessity, said Beaton.

On the other hand, the interest in the top 40 US schools remains robust, with intense demand, because they offer a strong return on investment for families, he said.

One of the key factors contributing to the decline in Chinese international students in the US was the government's "China Initiative," which had targeted Chinese students and scholars. Beaton believes the impact is still very limited for Chinese students applying to undergraduate programs in the US.

"There is certainly sensitivity if you're a Chinese citizen and you enroll in a US PhD program focused on advanced robotics. Some employers work with sensitive technologies related to space weapons and space exploration, where this sensitivity applies," he said.

"But for undergraduate degrees, there's really no issue. You can attend colleges and study anything you like — applied math, physics, computer science, AI — and, in fact, these are the most popular majors among my Chinese students."

Chinese heritage brands making global strides

By RENALI in Los Angeles
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It's time for China's cultural and creative products to go overseas.

Ye Chun, president of the China General Chamber of Commerce Los Angeles

intangible cultural heritage and artisans," Sun said. "We aim to connect Chinese brands with the world, allowing global audiences to experience the richness of Eastern culture."

China's rapid economic growth and technological innovation have sparked a renewed appreciation for its rich cultural heritage.

This blend of progress and tradition has driven a movement to promote the new Chinese lifestyle, inspired by *guo chao* (national trend) and traditional craftsmanship, while displaying the beauty of the East to the world.

"It's time for China's cultural and creative products to go overseas," said Ye Chun, president of the China General Chamber of Commerce (CGCC) Los Angeles, adding that CGCC will actively support the expansion of Chinese heritage brands.

Vinh Ngo, mayor of Monterey Park — a city where 65 percent of the population is Asian, mainly Chinese American — views the expansion as a positive development for international business and cultural exchange.

"I think it's an amazing adventure for them to come out here," Ngo told China Daily. "Business is international, and we like to see the collaboration, so bringing in the culture of China into the US, and vice versa, is beneficial."

"Trade is a good thing for all economies, and this will be welcomed in many cities in the San Gabriel Valley, given the strong Chinese and Asian communities here," he said.

John Chou, a member of the City Council in San Marino, California, highlighted the unique artistic and historical value of Chinese heritage products.

"I think it's always good to introduce overseas products, because the local market may not be aware of them," he said. "With the long history of these companies and the artistic nature of their products, they bring something truly unique that is not commonly found here," Chou said. "This event helps us better understand Chinese culture and history."

Highlighting the significance of bringing Chinese brands into the North American market, former California state assemblyman Mike Eng emphasized the demand for diverse product offerings.

"It's very important to have as many products as possible available. North American consumers like variety — different sizes, colors and shapes," he told China Daily. "This is great for people who often spend extra money on gifts for special occasions like Christmas or birthdays."

However, there are numerous challenges in bringing Chinese heritage brands to the global market,

according to Peter Wu, CEO and founder of Xavvi, a TikTok Shop partner.

As many foreign consumers lack an understanding of the brands' cultural and historical value, many heritage products cannot be mass produced for wider distribution.

"Heritage brands like Yu Tai Xiang have something truly unique to offer, but they need to modernize their approach to storytelling and engagement," Wu explained. "Our goal is to blend their rich cultural background with Western consumer trends to create something that resonates globally."

As an influencer-driven marketing platform, Wu said the company will collaborate with top American influencers to co-brand and market Chinese heritage brands, providing brand localization and marketing solutions for Chinese manufacturers.

"It's about bridging the gap between tradition and innovation," Wu added. "A brand must captivate and engage a global audience while staying true to its roots."

The initiative marks a significant milestone for Chinese brands entering global markets.

A formal signing ceremony was held on Monday in LA to solidify the partnerships between Yu Tai Xiang and key enterprises, including Beijing Lizhihuating Cosmetics Co, Shanxi Lu'anfu Lu Silk Weaving Group, Beijing Enamel Factory, Beijing Theatrical Costume Factory, Beijing Yidege Ink, Beijing Gaojian Group Mixiu Haute Couture, and the Beijing Tree Art Museum, among others.

Playful petition: Denmark should buy California

BERLIN — Is California for sale? A lighthearted petition to buy the state of California for Denmark prompted more than 200,000 signatures by Wednesday — in response to US President Donald Trump's wish to take control of Greenland, a vast and mineral-rich Arctic island.



You know what Denmark needs? More sunshine, palm trees, and roller skates."

Whimsical petition calling for Denmark to purchase California

"Have you ever looked at a map and thought, 'You know what Denmark needs? More sunshine, palm trees, and roller skates,'" the petition asks. "Well, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make that dream a reality."

"It is in the national interest to promote the extraordinary heritage of our nation, so California will become New Denmark," it says.

Xavier Dutoit, the petition's author, got the idea last month while vacationing in the Philippines. He overheard a US tourist loudly discussing Trump's Greenland pitch.

"That Americans didn't seem to grasp how unhinged and absurd it was for any country's president — especially in a stable democracy that the USA claims to be — to offer or threaten to take over another sovereign country's territory," Dutoit wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

While Dutoit is not Danish — he is Swiss-French — he consulted a multinational group of friends who are helping him, including Kenneth Haar, who is Danish and lives in Copenhagen.

"The Trump-Greenland issue is, by far, the biggest political issue in this country at the moment," Haar told AP. "It is considered a very depressing and a very dangerous situation."

There is one city in Southern California with a very real connection to the land of Vikings, Lego and Hans Christian Andersen. Known as "the Danish capital of America," Solvang was founded by three immigrants from Denmark in 1911.

The city is popular with tourists, who come in droves for its aebleskiver pastries, Scandinavian windmills, a main street called "Copenhagen Drive" and, of course, a Hans Christian Andersen Museum to honor the famous Danish fairy tale author. Danish royals have visited the city several times over the decades.

In 2019, Trump scrapped a trip to Denmark, blaming Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen for making a "nasty" statement when she rejected his idea of buying Greenland as an absurdity. Greenland is a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark.

Before taking office again last month, Trump said he would not rule out the use of military force to seize control of Greenland, calling it vital to US national security, and last month his son visited the island.

Haar said California's appeal to Danes is obvious, from its towering mountains to its sunny beaches.

The petition organizers even have their own plans for Disneyland in Southern California: "We'll rename it Hans Christian Andersenland. Mickey Mouse in a Viking helmet? Yes, please."

But of course, every petition needs some fine print, way down at the bottom: "Disclaimer: This campaign is 100% real ... in our dreams."

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WORLD

ASEAN
expecting
neutrality in
'Trump 2.0'

By PRIME SARMIENTO
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Southeast Asian countries need to hedge and expand trade and security alliances to navigate the increasing protectionism and changing geopolitics under the second term of US President Donald Trump, an online forum heard on Wednesday.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations may not be a key priority in Trump's foreign policy, but what is significant is how individual ASEAN countries deal with the United States and other major powers, according to experts who participated in the webinar "Asia and Trump 2.0: Geopolitical Outlooks". The webinar was organized by the Asian Center, University of the Philippines.

Experts have noted how Trump's policy of raising tariffs against its major trading partners like China is also affecting ASEAN as the region is also part of the China supply chain. They also said Trump's directives such as the US withdrawal from the Paris climate pact and the World Health Organization will have repercussions worldwide.

While ASEAN countries are not major powers, these countries "still have agency" when it comes to international relations, according to Melissa Hubahib Loja, a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for European, Comparative, and Constitutional Legal Studies, University of Copenhagen.

Rational options

"The best way for (non-major powers) to exercise their agency is to adopt a rational approach to real politics," Loja said, noting that balancing, bandwagoning and hedging are the "rational strategic options" for small states.

Collin Koh Swee Lean, senior fellow at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, cited Singapore as a case study in strategic hedging. Koh said the city-state, a small and trade-dependent economy, maintains a consistent and principled foreign policy when dealing with major powers.

Koh said that regional governments like ASEAN are not likely to choose sides and would instead choose to band together to assert their interests on the global stage.

"We are likely going to see greater intra-ASEAN cooperation," he said, adding he expects ASEAN member states to agree on more vital issues, especially on trade as US tariff hikes threaten their respective economies. Koh also sees "growing participation in regional security" by other non-US regional powers such as those in either the Pacific or Europe.

Maria Thamar Tana, Japan Foundation-Global Japan Studies fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo, said that while hedging remains ASEAN's best strategy, its effectiveness is limited by internal divisions, weak enforcement mechanisms and growing external pressures.

Aaron Jed Rabena, assistant professor at the Asian Center at the University of the Philippines, said ASEAN countries should reduce dependence on the US in light of Trump's "unpredictable and volatile" trade and foreign policy. But Rabena said the strategy of each ASEAN nation also varies from time to time based on their perceived and actual threats and opportunities.

For Noel Christian Moratilla, dean of the Asian Center, "neutrality is what is imperative and applicable at this point." He said this has already happened in the past, with the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 at the height of the Cold War.

Moratilla said there's no point for the Philippines to antagonize either the US or China and learn from other ASEAN countries "as to how they do it, and also as not to appear very adversarial and very hostile to either one of them."

Irine Hiraswari Gayatri, senior researcher at the Research Center for Politics, National Research and Innovation Agency in Jakarta, said Indonesia is diversifying economic partnerships to reduce reliance on the US market. For example, Gayatri said Indonesia has joined BRICS, demonstrating how it's widening alliances.



New York Philharmonic Board Co-Chairman and Lunar New Year Gala Co-Chair Oscar L. Tang (fifth from right), gala honoree Angela Chen (fourth from right) and others pose for a group photo during the gala on Tuesday in New York. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Musical tribute to Chinese
New Year, philanthropist

By BELINDA ROBINSON
in New York
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An audience gathered at the Lincoln Center in New York City to hear the delightful sounds of the New York Philharmonic orchestra in celebration of the Chinese New Year and to honor Chinese American philanthropist Angela Chen.

At the event Tuesday evening, Oscar Tang, co-chairman of the Philharmonic board, praised Chen's tireless work in establishing the first Lunar New Year Gala with the New York Phil in 2012 along with Chinese conductor Yu Long.

Chen, also a board member and co-chair of the NY Phil International Advisory Board, has not only spent 14 years championing the Chinese New Year concert but also acted as a conduit to bring Chinese music and culture to Western audiences.

"I think that cultural exchanges are very important, and 14 years ago, I wanted to do a cultural exchange and thought that the New York Philharmonic is the perfect platform to do that," Chen told China Daily.

The aim of the annual gala in the Year of the Snake was to illustrate how music transcends borders and barriers.

The audience and musicians at the Wu Tsai Theater, David Geffen Hall, a beautiful wood-paneled space, were a reflection of this, as they were from both Eastern and Western cultures.

Chen added: "The US-China relationship is very important, one of the most important in the world. Now, because the world is very complex, I think that music bridges the two cultures. Those bridges are more important than ever. It is a very soft bridge."

Star violinist Immo Yang, who was made his debut as a soloist with the New York Phil, was clear on the power of music to bring cultures closer together.

"We can reach places with our music that other things cannot," Yang told China Daily. "We can touch emotions and thoughts of people that are protected. I believe in the power of music and the communicative power of music, and we can tell them what we live for."



Tianyi Lu makes her New York Philharmonic debut conducting the Lunar New Year concert in New York on Tuesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Yang effortlessly displayed his versatility by playing his violin in a powerful, striking, rhythmic way in conjunction with the string section of the orchestra. He was also able to evoke the sweetest sounds.

"I think there is a purity to [Chinese music], a different kind of narrative to it that I feel close to," Yang added. "I'm from Korea. But I grew up listening to it. We use the same kind of scale. It is in my blood. I would love to introduce more music from Asia because it is really pure and beautiful in nature."

Conductor Tianyi Lu, dressed in black and red made, her NY Philharmonic debut leading the orchestra in Li Huanzhi's *Spring Festival Overture*; the prologue to *A Mad Tea Party* from Unsuk Chin's opera *Alice in Wonderland*; Casella's *La donna serpente*. She also conducted *Suite No. 1*; Chen Yi's *Chinese Folk Dance Suite*, featuring violinist Yang and Bizet's *Carmen Suite No. 1*.

After the concert, Lu described her experience as "unforgettable". She looked at home in charge of the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States founded in 1842.

"It was a joy to work with the musicians," she told reporters after the show. "It was a difficult program; there was a lot of new music that they had never played before, but they took it very well, and we accomplished a

lot in only two rehearsals."

Elements of Chinese culture were woven into the night by Chen and her team, including lion and dragon dances.

Composer Chen Yi was thrilled by the command of the conductor, the talent of Yang, and the musicians' rendition of her work.

"I think that it was a great performance, first rate," she told China Daily. "You already know how great NY Phil is, and seeing the culture being brought together was excellent."

The Chinese-American composer began studying classical music at age 3, as her parents liked the genre. Her storied career has included many accolades including awards from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and American Academy of Arts and Letters Lieberston Award.

"I think that it's great having the Chinese Lunar New Year festival being celebrated by different cultures who were in the audience. They came from everywhere; they enjoyed the Asian music combined with Western music and the composition techniques," she said.

"It was a first-rate performance to share with people around the world. That is very meaningful to bring cultures together to bring understanding between people from different backgrounds. It was a very celebratory event."

Extra hearing
announced
in Yoon's trial

President's team slams procedure as prosecution says court undermined

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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Seoul's Constitutional Court announced an additional hearing in the impeachment trial of South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol on Tuesday, after the last designated hearing concluded on Thursday.

"We will conduct an evidence review for the records that were admitted as evidence but have not yet been examined," said Moon Hyung-bae, acting chief justice of the Constitutional Court, according to Yonhap News Agency.

Moon said the National Assembly and Yoon will both be given two hours to summarize arguments and present key points of their documentary evidence.

According to the original schedule, Thursday was the eighth and final designated hearing date for Yoon's impeachment trial.

During Thursday's hearing, Yoon's legal team accused the Constitutional Court of unlawful proceedings, warning of serious action if the impeachment trial continued in the current manner. They did not elaborate on what that action might be.

Yoon's lawyer Yun Gap-geun said the court violated the law and is conducting an unlawful and unfair trial.

"What is more important than a quick decision is a prompt, fair, accurate and politically neutral trial that the public can trust, as this is what gives meaning to the existence of the Constitutional Court," said Yun.

The team requested once again to call impeached Prime Minister Han Duck-soo as a witness.

Yoon was impeached by the National Assembly on Dec 14 over his short-lived martial law decree earlier in the month. He has since been suspended from office, and was arrested on Jan 15.

Witnesses questioned in the eighth hearing were the Chief of the National Intelligence Service Cho Tae-yong, the former chief of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency Kim Bong-sik, and the Head of the First Security Command of the Capital Defense Command Cho Sung-hyun.

The National Assembly's legal team — which is serving as a prosecutor in the impeachment trial — said the acts by Yoon's side undermined the court's credibility.

Song Doo-hwan, an attorney from the National Assembly's impeachment committee, said the facts regarding the trial have been clarified to a considerable degree, and he believes it is the right time for a constitutional assessment of whether the martial law declaration and the actions that followed were unconstitutional and illegal.

The timing of the verdict depends on whether the court accepts additional witnesses requested by Yoon's side and

schedules more hearings, said Cho Hee-kyoung, a law professor at Hongik University in Seoul.

If no further hearings are held, a verdict could come as early as the end of this month or early March, she told China Daily.

The Constitutional Court said it would decide on Friday whether to admit additional witnesses.

"If there are more hearing dates, then the verdict will be pushed back accordingly," Cho said.

In the previous presidential impeachment trials in South Korea, the ruling was delivered in 91 days for former president Park Geun-hye and 63 days for former president Roh Moo-hyun. Those decisions were announced about two weeks after oral arguments ended.

Insurrection charges

Local media also reported that the first preliminary hearing for Yoon's criminal case on charges of leading an insurrection is scheduled for Thursday.

A simultaneous court hearing will take place to review Yoon's request to cancel his detention.

Currently, Yoon is only indicted on charges of insurrection as he is a sitting president, but he will lose presidential immunity and will likely be charged with additional crimes once the impeachment motion is upheld by the court, said Cho.

"Yoon will be in his element in the criminal trial and will use every tactic he can to challenge the indictment and the court and the judges and to draw out the proceedings," said Cho, who expects a prolonged criminal trial.

A survey released on Thursday showed that 58 percent of South Korean residents polled agreed the Constitutional Court should uphold Yoon's impeachment, while 38 percent said it should be dismissed.

The number of respondents who said Yoon should be removed from office through impeachment increased by 3 percentage points from the previous week, while 54 percent of respondents said they trusted the process of the impeachment trial, up 2 percentage points from last week.

The latest National Barometer Survey was jointly conducted by four research institutes from Monday to Wednesday, polling 1,001 South Korean residents aged over 18.

The suspended president's supporters have gathered outside the court throughout his weeklong trial.

Yoon's legal team announced it would officially launch a "citizen defense team" of supporters seeking to "save" him and have him reinstated. According to the lawyers, 15,000 people have applied to join the team.

Agencies contributed to this story.

AI presents untapped potential in Africa

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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As the global economy is looking forward to generating trillions of dollars in growth through artificial intelligence, Africa lags behind, accounting for only a small portion of that market.

Experts at the Africa Tech Summit being held in Nairobi between Wednesday and Thursday have urged breaking down barriers that limit the development of AI in Africa to leapfrogging economic development.

Speaking during a panel discussion on growth, opportunities and policy in AI, Moya Novella, global privacy and AI policy counsel at the international technology firm IBM, said that the African continent contributes a significantly small percentage of the global data used for artificial intelligence.

"Research data estimate that Africa produces less than 2.5 percent of the total AI market, highlighting a significant gap in data production compared to other regions like North America and Asia. This is mostly due to limited infrastructure, lack of digital access, and poor data collection capabilities. For instance, we do not have tools to collect data in local languages," Novella said.

Nick Gicheru, head of partnerships at the Kenyan technology startup business KX Partners, added that AI startups in Africa face significant challenges, including a shortage of skilled talent in AI, inadequate data access, a lack of structured data ecosystems, regulatory barriers, and a lack of supportive policies.

According to him, African governments should prioritize the formulation of supportive policies and funding mechanisms

specifically for AI startups in Africa. This can be achieved by investing in education and training programs to cultivate a skilled AI workforce.

"Since AI is a global tool, African countries need to work together to establish data repositories with open access to relevant African data sets. We should also seek collaboration with international partners by obtaining resources and expertise from global tech companies and advanced countries to accelerate AI development in Africa," Gicheru said.

Despite the challenges, most experts attending the summit said that if well adopted, AI has a substantial potential to greatly improve various sectors in Africa, such as agriculture, education, governance and healthcare by offering opportunities to address socioeconomic challenges and accelerate economic growth.



South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol attends a hearing of his trial over his short-lived imposition of martial law, at the Constitutional Court in Seoul, on Thursday. JEON HEON-KYUN / POOL VIA REUTERS

GLOBAL LENS



Homeward Bound

A displaced Palestinian family's journey home to the ruins

The Mohammed family sat up talking late into the night before their journey north to the ruins of their Gaza home, a trudge across a desolate landscape that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians embarked on last week after a cease-fire.

Crowding around the fire and the cooking pot on the sand by their tent in a sprawling camp for displaced people in Deir al-Balah in the southern half of the Gaza Strip, they talked of their excitement about going home, plans for the tough days ahead and the fear and hardship they had lived through over 15 months of conflict.

"I haven't slept for the past three nights from joy. I long for my land, my town Jabalia, and the people of the north, to see our kin," said Ismael Mohammed, 47.

His wife Badreya, 42, their children Waseem, 25, Naseem, 22, Maysoun, 15, Yasser 10, Abdulrahman, 8, and Mohammed, 5, as well as Waseem's wife and their two toddlers, fled Jabalia early in the conflict.

Israel began its military campaign in Gaza in October 2023. The assault, with the declared goal of destroying Hamas, leveled swathes of the enclave driving nearly all its inhabitants from their homes and killing more than 48,000 Palestinians, over half of them women and children, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Early in the campaign, Israel ordered civilians to leave the north. Most did so. Those who left were barred from returning until last month's deal for a cease-fire and hostage release.

After the cease-fire took effect, hundreds of thousands of people left the temporary shelters they had crowded into across the south and trekked back north.

The Mohammed family had learned from relatives that their home had been destroyed in an airstrike but they had been ready to return as soon as the cease-fire was agreed upon.



Top and above: Ismael Mohammed, 47, and his family, who were displaced to the southern part of Gaza during the war, rest as they return to their destroyed house in northern Gaza amid a cease-fire in Gaza City, on Jan 28. PHOTOS BY DAWOUD ABU ALKAS / REUTERS



Children and grandchildren of Ismael rest inside their tent in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on Jan 25, before returning to their home in northern Gaza. RAMADAN ABED / REUTERS



Ismael's wife Badreya, 42, and their family, eat dinner inside their tent in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on Jan 25, before returning to their home in northern Gaza. RAMADAN ABED / REUTERS

"Shrapnel passed by the children while they were sleeping here. It went through the cover while I was here in the tent. The children were sick from fear," Badreya said.

Daunting trip

Deir al-Balah is only 18 kilometers from their Jabalia home. But cars, which must wait in line for hours at an Israeli checkpoint, are rare and expensive to hire.

Like most families, the Mohammeds had to walk. For Ismael, the journey was daunting. He is diabetic and lost an arm to his illness before the conflict. Last year his leg was injured in an Israeli airstrike and he can only hobble, leaning heavily on a rough stick while toting a bag on his back.

Having dismantled their tent, giving it to a neighbor for safe keeping, the family walked for hours, everyone except the youngest children carrying large packs laden with bedding, clothes, kitchen things, food and water.

Through long stretches, the road traversed districts of near total ruin, with mounds of rubble lining each side where buildings had stood. As they went farther north, the turquoise Mediterranean Sea on one side contrasted with the dust and debris on the other. When they reached Gaza City, past the Israeli checkpoint in the north of the enclave, they found a taxi for the final stretch, squeezing inside it.

In Jabalia, they found much of their neighborhood had been flattened and the roof and upper story of their home pancaked onto the ground floor.

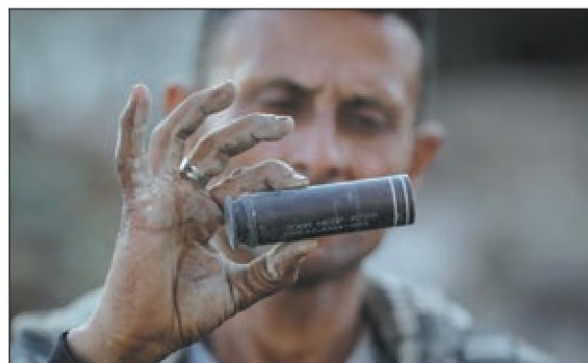
Palestinians accuse Israel of indiscriminate bombardment. Israel accuses Hamas of hiding among civilian populations.

"There is joy, but it is not complete. There is no home, no water, no food. I do not know how I am going to sleep tonight," Ismael said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Ismael and his wife Badreya dismantle their tent before returning to their destroyed house on Jan 28. RAMADAN ABED / REUTERS



Ismael holds a spent projectile casing after returning to their destroyed house on Jan 30. DAWOUD ABU ALKAS / REUTERS



Ismael plays with his 5-year-old son before returning to their house in northern Gaza on Jan 26. RAMADAN ABED / REUTERS

BUSINESS

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US called on to steer clear of protectionism

Tariffs on steel imports considered threat to global supply chains

By ZHONG NAN
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China has urged the United States to rectify its mistakes and rejoin the multilateral trading system, calling for cooperation with other countries to address mutual concerns through fair and equal consultation, said the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

The ministry's comments follow US President Donald Trump's recent announcement of a plan to impose a 25 percent import tax on all steel and aluminum shipments entering the country.

Speaking at a weekly news conference in Beijing, He Yongqian, the ministry spokesperson, said this is a typical example of unilateral and protectionist behavior, and many countries have explicitly voiced their opposition. There is also significant domestic opposition within the US.

"In fact, as early as 2022, a World Trade Organization expert panel concluded that US Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 violated WTO rules," said He.

The Section 232 tariff measure is a US trade law that allows the US president to impose tariffs or other trade restrictions on imports if they are deemed to threaten national security, according to the US Department of Commerce.

However, rather than lifting the existing Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminum, the US further raised tariffs on aluminum products, significantly harming the interests of other countries, undermining the rules-based multilateral trade system, and disrupting global supply chains, she added.

The China Iron and Steel Association, a national industry organization representing China's steelmaking sector, said on Thursday that Washington's tariffs on steel and aluminum imports are essentially an act of trade protectionism.

Even though China's steel exports to the US accounted for only 0.8 percent of China's total steel exports and the short-term impact is limited, this move by the US may encourage other countries to follow suit over the long run, thereby reducing the competitive-

ness of China's steel exports, said the Beijing-based association.

From a medium to long-term perspective, tariff hikes will negatively impact the industrial and supply chains of the global steel sector, including China's steel sector, said Zhang Longqiang, CISA's deputy secretary-general.

Liu Ying, a researcher at Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, said that taking protectionist measures will disrupt the international trade order, lead to an increase in both tariff and non-tariff barriers, and cause a sharp decline in international trade, further slowing down the global economic recovery.

Saying that imposing tariffs will directly squeeze businesses' profit margins, Liu said that the rising costs will force companies to readjust their supply and industrial chain layouts, resulting in supply chain fragmentation.

Similar views were shared by Peng Bo, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

"In turn, this fragmentation not only increases corporate costs, but also reduces efficiency, thus impacting global economic stability," Peng said.

The multilateral trading system relies on open cooperation among countries, and retaliatory actions taken by affected countries will inevitably trigger trade disputes, Peng added.

Facing challenges such as the new US tariff policies and supply chain disruptions, Ningbo Dafa Chemical Fiber Co Ltd, a textile and chemical raw material manufacturer in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, has been actively exploring new possibilities in emerging markets, according to information from Ningbo Customs.

"In the past, our exports were mainly to the US and Europe," said Wang Ling, the company's sales director.

"We have continuously sought greater cooperation opportunities with Southeast Asian and Latin American countries in recent years, starting with neighboring countries like Vietnam and Pakistan and gradually expanding to markets such as Peru and Colombia," Wang said.



A parade with local cultural elements attracts shoppers at a department store in Jinhua, Zhejiang province. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shopping centers have stellar year

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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China's shopping centers saw broad growth in sales, foot traffic and rental income in 2024, according to a shopping center industry report, recently released by the China Chain Store & Franchise Association.

The report found that 73 percent of surveyed venues recorded year-on-year sales growth, with the majority seeing moderate increases.

Nearly half achieved growth of up to 10 percent, while 20 percent posted gains exceeding that threshold.

More than half of venues surveyed also reported an increase in online sales, underscoring the effectiveness of an omni-channel strategy that integrates digital and offline operations with innovative marketing.

Shopping centers have actively expanded their online business to drive sales. For instance, Wushang Group, a leading shopping mall operator in Wuhan, Hubei province, saw its online transaction volume rise 20 percent year-on-year in 2024, with online orders surging 77

percent and the number of online users 25 percent higher, according to the company.

The report's findings were based on a survey of CCAFA member companies, including the top 100 shopping centers and major comprehensive retailers. A total of 113 venues spanning 41 enterprises participated in the survey.

Foot traffic also saw an overall uptrend, with 15 shopping centers reporting increases of up to 20 percent, while others experienced more moderate gains. The data highlight a steady rise in consumer visits throughout the year, contributing to stronger overall sales performance, said the report.

Member-driven consumption remained a key contributor to total annual sales, with 76 venues reporting an increase in the proportion of revenue generated by their membership programs, while 31 saw no change.

Rental income also improved, with 70 percent of surveyed locations reporting year-on-year growth. Among them, several recorded increases of more than 10 percent, while a smaller proportion achieved gains

exceeding 20 percent.

Despite China's vast retail market and diverse business entities, the sector still faces challenges such as uneven development and intensifying competition.

Industry experts said that diversified supply will shape the next phase of retail growth, as new national policies create fresh opportunities in previously overlooked segments.

Meng Yi, head of the northern commercial department at Cushman & Wakefield, said the commercial sector is shifting back to a demand-driven, people-oriented model.

Meng told the Beijing News that both population density and increasing demand for high-quality services will drive future retail transformations.

Sectors catering to the silver economy, healthcare, multigenerational education, and cultural, commercial and sports-related experiences are all poised for expansion, he said.

With strong government policy support, these segments are expected to become key drivers of China's next wave of retail growth, Meng added.

Holiday spending echoes vigor of economy

Zhang Xin, a white-collar worker from Shanghai, made advance reservations to spend the Spring Festival holiday enjoying snow in Northeast China's Jilin province.

Zhang, together with his 7-year-old son, practiced snowboarding techniques under the guidance of an instructor at Changbaishan International Resort. They progressed from falling repeatedly at first to gaining some proficiency. Zhang humorously remarked that this year's Spring Festival was a "sliding" celebration.

Zhang is not alone in spending the holiday exploring new places, experiencing new things, enjoying good food and buying new clothes and digital gadgets. During the holiday, bustling temple fairs, crowded restaurants and cinemas, and packed high-speed train stations were common scenes, leading to a spending boom in services, which is an emerging consumption engine for the world's second-largest economy.

Services consumption was up by 12.3 percent year-on-year during the holiday, higher than the 9.9 percent increase in goods consumption, data from the country's taxation authority showed.

According to data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 501 million domestic tourist trips were made across the country during the holiday, marking a year-on-year increase of 5.9 percent.

The total expenditure on domestic travel reached 677 billion yuan (\$92.87 billion), reflecting a year-on-year growth of 7 percent.

This year's holiday celebrations featured a mix of cultural heritage and advanced technologies. While major museums, including the Palace Museum and Sanxingdui Ruins site, reported record visitor numbers as historical exhibitions became holiday hotspots, multiple scenic areas provided interactive robot displays, AI-guided tours and VR experiences for visitors.

The consumer market was vibrant and lively, with a strong momentum in services consumption, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Notably, restaurant bookings soared to record levels, underscoring rebounding consumer spending in the catering sector.

Major eateries across Shanghai were fully booked through the holiday period. Xinya Cantonese Restaurant on Nanjing Road Walkway, for instance, operated at full capacity during the Spring Festival holiday between Jan 28 and Feb 4.

At a restaurant in the hotspot chain Haidilao in Nantong, East China's Jiangsu province, the table turnover rate exceeded 10 times during peak hours on the second day of the festival, according to the company.

Data showed that the combined revenue of major catering businesses during the holiday period rose 6.2 percent compared to the same period of 2024.

Moreover, watching movies gained in popularity during this year's Spring Festival holiday. From Chinese mythology to suspense detective stories, the Spring Festival movie lineup offered a diverse range of genres and posted record-breaking sales.

Services consumption has been gaining steam in China in recent years. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's total service retail sales in 2024 grew by 6.2 percent year-on-year, outperforming the 3 percent increase in goods retail sales.

Per capita services consumption expenditure in 2024 among residents also rose by 7.4 percent compared to the previous year, accounting for 46.1 percent of total per capita consumption expenditures, an increase of 0.9 percentage point from the previous year.

To further promote the high-quality development of services consumption, the State Council last year issued a document urging efforts to better open up the services sector, enhance service quality, enrich consumer experiences and optimize the consumption environment.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Flowers for Valentine's



Shoppers select flowers from a florist in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Thursday. Local flower shops are busy reaping Valentine's Day sales gains. HUANG JINKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Social logistics value hits 360.6 trillion yuan

China's total social logistics value rose 5.8 percent year-on-year to 360.6 trillion yuan (\$50.28 trillion) in 2024, said the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing. Industrial logistics, the main driver of overall growth, rose by 5.8 percent to reach 318.4 trillion yuan. High-tech products, including integrated circuits, reported a logistics volume

growth exceeding 15 percent.

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 9 pips to 7.1719 against the US dollar on Thursday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

By FAN FEIFEI
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Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group Holding Ltd will partner with US consumer electronics company Apple Inc to roll out artificial intelligence features for iPhone users in China.

The move, industry experts said, demonstrates the growing recognition of Alibaba's capacities and strengths in the AI-powered large language model sector.

Joe Tsai, co-founder and chairman of Alibaba, confirmed the company's partnership with Apple at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Thursday.

"They (Apple) talked to a number of companies in China. In the end they chose to do business with us. They want to use our AI to power their phones," Tsai said.

Some media outlets reported that Apple had considered models developed by ByteDance, Alibaba, Tencent and Chinese AI startup DeepSeek, but it gave up DeepSeek as the company's team lacked the manpower and experience needed to support a large customer.

Both companies have submitted AI features they codeveloped for iPhones in China to the country's regulator for approval.

The deal comes as Apple is seeking to secure a local AI partner to boost sales of its iPhones in China, where the US tech company is facing a challenge as Apple Intelligence features are unavailable to iPhone users in the world's largest smartphone market.

Pan Helin, a member of the expert committee for information and communication economy under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said Alibaba has gained an upper hand in the field of LLMs, the application of AI models across industries, as well as computing power and AI infrastructure construction, which will provide a better AI experience for Apple users and help reinvigorate iPhone sales in China.

Alibaba Cloud, the company's cloud computing arm, recently unveiled its latest AI model, Qwen2.5-Max, which boasts enhanced math and coding capabilities and has outperformed other leading AI models such as US-based OpenAI's GPT-4o and DeepSeek's V3.

The company's Qwen model offers a low-cost DeepSeek alternative as US computer scientists have successfully developed a new reasoning model that has been trained for less than \$50 with the help of Alibaba's open-source technology.

Lu Yanxia, research director at market research company IDC China, said Alibaba enjoys a huge consumer base in China and large amounts of user data based on its vibrant e-commerce ecosystem, and these advantages will help Apple better understand the personalized needs of users.

Industry experts also said the e-commerce giant has a deep understanding of users' shopping and payment habits, which could help it train models and deliver

more customized AI services.

Apple is facing mounting challenges from local rivals. Data from market consultancy Counterpoint Research showed that Huawei reclaimed the top spot in China's smartphone market in the fourth quarter of 2024, capturing 18.1 percent of the market share.

Xiaomi secured the second spot in the quarter with a 17.2 percent market share, while Apple held 17.1 percent, experiencing a sharp 18.2 percent decline in sales.

Analysts at Morgan Stanley said Alibaba's partnership with Apple would be a critical catalyst for the latter's competitive edge in China, and suggested it could solve Apple's iPhone sales slump in the country.

Industry insiders said AI capabilities on smartphones will drive upgrades and represent a significant opportunity for both vendors and application developers alike. Shipments of AI-powered smartphones across the globe are expected to rise by 73.1 percent year-on-year in 2025, according to a report from IDC.

The triple-digit growth in 2024 will be followed by four consecutive years of double-digit growth as handset manufacturers look to incorporate generative AI features across their device offerings, the consultancy said.

By 2028, IDC forecasts that global shipments of generative AI smartphones will reach 912 million units, with the compound annual growth rate hitting 78.4 percent between 2024 and 2028.

BUSINESS



Employees of Guangdong Xiangguan Optoelectronics work at a research facility in Dongguan, Guangdong province. The company is a major producer of mid- to high-end light-emitting diodes and LED application products. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Manufacturing mecca back to work after long holiday

Dongguan enterprises, employees go full steam ahead to tap 'substantial' orders

By QIU QUANLIN
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In the production workshop of Emma CNC Technology Co in Dongguan, Guangdong province, workers are busy debugging intelligent cutting devices and directing them to cut out desired patterns based on preset programs, with efforts gearing up for production after the Spring Festival holiday.

"We resumed operations on the eighth day of the Chinese New Year, with all production lines operating at full capacity to fulfill orders," said Wang Guoquan, chairman of Emma CNC.

The workshop scene at Emma CNC was a vivid snapshot of the resumption of production in Dongguan, an advanced manufacturing mecca in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, with operators — from intelligent workshops to industrial parks — swiftly switching to a mode of rushing to meet orders.

As of Tuesday, the 14th day of the Year of the Snake, the city's overall resumption rate of enterprises reached 98.72 percent, with approximately 3.36 million workers having resumed their duties, according to the local government.

"Although it's just the beginning of the Chinese New Year, our order volume from business partners is quite substantial," said Wang.

The company's order volume in the first half has increased by around 30 percent compared to the same period last year, with orders from the furniture and automotive sectors growing particularly fast.

The company's overall order growth for 2025 is expected to exceed 50 percent year-on-year, Wang added.

Inside the Dongguan Binhaiwan Bay Area, numerous vehicles are seen entering and exiting the high-tech industrial park, with workers either busy unloading and moving goods, or closely monitoring production lines in the workshops.

Guangdong Xiangguan Optoelectronics Co Ltd, which is engaged in the production of mid- to high-end light-emitting diodes and LED application products, has fully resumed operations after the long holiday.

As of the eighth day of Chinese New Year, the company's return-to-work rate had reached 85 percent, with employees already busy debugging production line equipment.

After moving to Binhaiwan, the company — with an area of over 6,000 square meters and more than 200 employees — invested nearly 30 million yuan (\$4.11 million) in equipment upgrades and promoted production intelligence, helping expand production lines by 30 percent.

With reduced labor costs and increased production efficiency, the company's output value reached 130 million yuan in 2024, said Zhang Guoxiang, chairman of Xiangguan.

"We aim to increase output value to 150 million yuan while intensifying research and development efforts for new product models to continuously meet customer needs," Zhang said.

To ensure smooth starts for firms' resumption of operations in 2025, departments such as the local human resources and social security, as well as industry and information technology, have joined forces to tackle labor shortages and drive stable production by implementing measures such as interprovincial recruitment and policy support for labor forces.

Starting from the fifth day of the Chinese New Year holiday, human resources and social security authorities have been helping local enterprises to conduct labor exchanges in Tongren, Guizhou province, and other cities in Hunan

province, offering over 3,800 job positions and securing employment intentions from 1,050 job seekers.

Through chartered high-speed trains and buses, about 1,500 migrant workers from Tongren and Bijie, Guizhou have returned to their workplaces in Dongguan, with an estimated 3,000 more expected to return during the first month of the Chinese New Year.

In a recent move, the Human Resources and Social Security Bureau of Dongguan once again helped local enterprises to conduct interprovincial recruitment activities in Jian, Jiangxi province, to support companies in attracting workers.

Moreover, six offline job fairs in Ji'an and Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, have attracted participation from 34 Dongguan-based enterprises, offering over 5,200 jobs and helping further expand the labor force.

The city has also made efforts to promote the innovative development of key industries such as smart mobile terminals, industrial machines and robots through activities like industry chain matchmaking events.

Dongguan plans to conduct more than 20 such events in the current quarter to help local enterprises expand their markets and stabilize their operations.

Xinjiang marks robust growth in foreign trade

URUMQI — Despite mounting pressure from Western countries over issues like so-called "forced labor" and import restrictions and sanctions, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region achieved a historic high in foreign trade in 2024.

Last year, the region's import and export value surged to 435.11 billion yuan (\$60.68 billion), marking a 21.8 percent year-on-year increase and underscoring its remarkable resilience and vitality.

To date, more than 3,000 State-owned and private enterprises are actively engaged in foreign trade in the region.

Yu Chengzhong has witnessed the rapid growth of Xinjiang's foreign trade over the past three decades.

In 1997, Yu pioneered fruit exports in Xinjiang by transporting tangerines from Urumqi, the region's capital city, to Horgos, a key port city.

He later established Jinyi Group, which has grown into one of the leading foreign trade enterprises in the region. In 2024, the company's import and export value exceeded \$2.2 billion, with plans to target \$2.6 billion this year.

"We now transport over 2,000 metric tons of agricultural products and daily necessities every day," Yu said. "Thanks to the favorable policies of the free trade zone, Customs clearance has become faster, enabling us to handle larger international orders with confidence."

China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone was established in November 2023. It encompasses three iconic areas — Urumqi, Kashgar and Horgos — and is the first FTZ in China's northwestern border regions and the 22nd nationwide.

The robust growth in Xinjiang's foreign trade has been underpinned by strong policy support, as well as an array of measures to streamline Customs clearance and

improve related services.

"The Customs authorities have implemented a series of specific measures to enhance supervision efficiency and service quality, ensuring the high-quality development of Xinjiang's foreign trade," said Li Qinghua, a Customs official of Urumqi.

As the Belt and Road Initiative continues to forge ahead, Xinjiang is committed to building itself into an important corridor linking Asia and Europe and to serving as a gateway for China's opening-up efforts in the west.

Russian entrepreneur Barsalkinov believes he is a beneficiary of the BRI. Barsalkinov established a trading company in Xinjiang that produces noodles and rapeseed oil using Russian ingredients, which have been well-received by Chinese consumers. His products are sold not only in Xinjiang but also in other provincial-level regions such as Gansu, Sichuan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan and Hubei.

"The preferential policies in the FTZ have helped us reduce operating costs, expand our business scope and access broader markets," said Yu Xiangyang, the company's factory manager.

The company has seen continuous orders from major supermarkets in Xinjiang, with daily production capacity reaching up to around 15 tons. In 2024, sales of rapeseed oil surged by 50 percent compared to the previous year, according to Yu Xiangyang.

In 2024, Xinjiang established trade relations with 213 countries and regions, with imports and exports to BRI participating countries increasing by 18.7 percent. Meanwhile, trade with member countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also saw growth, increasing 167.8 percent and 191.9 percent, respectively.

XINHUA

Back on line



A worker assembles new energy vehicle axles on a production line of Qingdao Aerospace Hongguang Axle Manufacturing Co Ltd in Shandong province on Thursday amid a post-holiday order surge. DING ZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY



BUSINESSFOCUS



A child participates in activities to celebrate Chinese New Year in London in February. LI YING / XINHUA

Festival buying spree fuels global biz growth

Surge in domestic consumption creates vast opportunities for enterprises

BEIJING — On a balmy afternoon on the first day of Spring Festival, a line of nearly 40 people, over half of them Chinese tourists, snaked around the plain ice cream stall of “Uncle Chieng” on Orchard Road, Singapore.

“Recently, more than half of the customers have been Chinese tourists. Around Spring Festival, I sell about 20 percent more ice cream each day compared to usual,” said Chieng Puay Chui, owner of the stall, which has become one of the must-visit spots for Chinese tourists.

This scene is just a microcosm of the vibrant Spring Festival celebrations that have swept China and beyond, the first Chinese New Year festivities after Spring Festival was added to UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage list.

The festival, which fell on Jan 29 this year, with weeklong nationwide celebrations around the date, has not only ignited a surge in domestic consumption, but also created vast opportunities for international businesses, as Chinese consumers embrace global goods and cultures.

Spring Festival, a time for family reunions and feasting, has seen a

growing appetite for “foreign New Year goods” among Chinese consumers. From French wine to Chilean cherries, global delicacies have become essential elements of the Chinese New Year shopping list.

France’s Occitanie region, renowned for its wine, has been actively promoting its produce in China through platforms like the China International Import Expo and the “From French Farms to Chinese Tables” initiative. For French wine producers, Spring Festival is one of the best opportunities to promote their products.

“Ahead of Chinese New Year, we organized various events to support wine producers from the Occitanie region and importers in distributing their products so that they would be available during Spring Festival,” said Catherine Machabert, food and wines international director of the economic development agency of the Occitanie region.

“For the Year of the Snake, distributors have prepared a variety of gift boxes featuring snake-themed designs to promote the wines,” said Machabert.

Meanwhile, French confectionery giant Andros has capitalized on the

festive season by launching special gift packs and organizing in-store tastings. “Our sales during this Spring Festival are expected to double compared to previous years, setting a record,” said Maxence Zeng, general manager of Andros China.

Chilean cherries, with their vibrant red hue and symbolic association with prosperity in Chinese culture, have also become a favorite among Chinese consumers.

China is a very important market for fresh Chilean cherries, not only because it receives more than 90 percent of total exports, “but also because of the friendly relationship that has been built between our cherries and the people of China,” said Claudia Soler, executive director of the Chilean Cherry Committee.

Spring Festival is not just about shopping and feasting; it’s also a time for travel and cultural exploration. With extended holidays and visa-free policies, Chinese tourists have been flocking to international destinations, while foreign visitors have been arriving in China to experience the festivities firsthand.

On the pristine beaches of Zanzibar, Tanzania, Chinese tourists Li Chenguang and his wife, Zhao Xue,

marveled at the natural beauty surrounding them. “We can witness the Great Migration in the Serengeti, the azure waters of the Indian Ocean and even the snow-capped peaks of Mount Kilimanjaro,” Zhao exclaimed.

Meanwhile, Kuala Lumpur International Airport was bustling as Chinese tourists headed to Malaysia for tropical experiences and Malaysian travelers embark on winter adventures in China. “We’re planning to visit Harbin, hike up Changbai Mountain and savor traditional northeastern dishes like *guo bao rou* (crispy sweet and sour pork),” said Zhou Jinglang, a tour guide of a Malaysian travel agency.

According to the National Immigration Administration, China recorded 14.37 million cross-border trips during the Spring Festival holiday season, a 6.3 percent increase from a year earlier. About 1 million of these trips were made by foreign nationals, marking a 22.9 percent year-on-year rise.

Meanwhile, the 2025 Spring Festival holiday marked a new milestone for China’s thriving film industry, with box office revenue soaring to an unprecedented 9.51 billion yuan (\$1.33 billion) between Jan 28 and

Feb 4, according to the China Film Administration.

A staggering 187 million moviegoers flocked to cinemas throughout the holiday week, setting new all-time highs in both box office earnings and audience turnout.

Released on Jan 29, the first day of Chinese New Year, Chinese animated blockbuster *Ne Zha 2* has shattered multiple box office records, becoming the first film to cross \$1 billion in a single market and the first non-Hollywood title to join the coveted billion-dollar club.

The Spring Festival consumption boom has not only showcased the resilience and vitality of China’s economy, but also highlighted the potential for international collaboration. From French dairy products to Chilean cherries, foreign businesses are eager to tap into the vast Chinese market and capitalize on emerging consumer trends.

“Occitanie has always maintained strong ties with China and recognizes the importance of the Chinese market. With its Shanghai office, the regional agency will continue to support wine, agri-food, and cosmetics companies in entering or expanding in the Chinese market,”

said Machabert.

Meanwhile, Herve Lanoe, chief executive officer of French dairy company Fit Group, noted that Chinese consumers are increasingly prioritizing quality and health. “Butter with a protected designation of origin is highly appreciated by our Chinese clients,” he said, adding that the company will try to take advantage of this opportunity.

Over the years, Garces Fruit, Chile’s largest cherry exporter, has been actively expanding its presence in China. “The Chinese market is fundamental for the trade of Chilean cherries,” said Hernan Garces Gazmuri, the export manager of Garces Fruit.

“It is a clear example of win-win,” said Gazmuri, who settled in China in 2017 and opened an office in 2018. “It produces a lot of employment, from the harvests, the packaging, all this positive dynamic is generated thanks to the Chinese market. This industry does not exist without China.”

“We want to continue to explore the market, developing e-commerce and boosting our Garces Fruit brand. I think there is a lot to do,” he said.

XINHUA

Passion for ice-and-snow sports fires up industrial fervor in northeast region

HARBIN — In the Baroque Museum in downtown Harbin, host city of the ongoing 9th Asian Winter Games, rows of ice skates lined up against a wall captivate the attention of winter tourists.

Liu Chang, collector of the skates, said the “relics”, known as “Heilong Blades”, were designed for speedskating and were manufactured by the Heilongjiang Ice Skate Factory back in the 1950s, making these some of the earliest domestically produced speedskating blades in China.

Harbin, capital of Northeast China’s Heilongjiang province, is currently at the pinnacle of its ice and snow tourism season. The combined effects of the Games and China’s broadened visa-free policies have led to a spike in tourists at this premium winter destination.

The city’s landmark Harbin Ice-Snow World — the world’s largest ice-and-snow theme park — had welcomed over 3 million person-visits so far this season as of Tuesday, setting a new attendance record just 52 days into its 26th edition.

Notably, the northeast was previously referred to as the country’s “rust belt” after experiencing difficulties in terms of industrial transformation and development

following its early fame as a major industrial base.

Liu said the skates displayed in the museum were collected to record the early stages of the city’s transition from a heavy industry base to an ice-and-snow paradise.

Despite evident wear visible on the leather, the skates’ blades still glisten brightly under the museum lights.

Liu said the nation’s former heavy industry heartland saw the emergence of numerous steel-makers back in the day, among which was the predecessor of the Heilongjiang Ice Skate Factory, namely — Heilongjiang Hardware Factory.

“Responding to the national call of developing winter sports, engineers at the factory began trial production of the skates in 1954,” Liu said.

In 1959, Harbin hosted the first National Winter Games of China, which triggered a surge in local ice-and-snow sports. As a result, “Heilong Blades” became highly sought-after commodities, and when the city hosted the 3rd Asian Winter Games in 1996, the popularity of the locally made skates soared.

However, the market environ-



Tourists visit an ice and snow park in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, in February. HOU JUN / XINHUA

ment underwent significant changes in the late 1990s, resulting in many local firms, including the Heilongjiang Ice Skate Factory, enduring the pain of transition. The factory ended up closing its doors in 2003.

Yet, the story of “Heilong Blades” didn’t end there. Heilongjiang later managed to accelerate its industrial transformation, and its ice-and-snow economy — nurtured by the lasting winter sports culture — gained momentum, thus injecting

vitality into ice sports equipment manufacturing.

In June 2015, Qiqihar Heilong International Ice and Snow Equipment Co Ltd was established, breathing new life into the production of “Heilong Blades”.

Li Mingyang, head of the company’s technology quality department, said by capitalizing on the booming ice sports and tourism markets, the company has grown into one of China’s largest manufacturers of ice-and-snow equipment.

The company currently holds eight patents for ice sports products, while its robotic production line is capable of churning out up to 3 million pairs of skates annually, which are sold worldwide.

Li said the company has focused its latest research efforts on developing ultralight, high-strength alloys for ice skates. They have successfully broken through material technology barriers, allowing the company to enhance the performance of its ice sports equipment.

“We are upgrading a speed skating blade model featuring five-layer full-carbon materials. This upgrade will reduce weight and better support performance,” he added.

The ice-and-snow sector has been identified as both a key economic driver and a vital means of promoting public fitness in China. The primary goal of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics was to “engage 300 million people in ice-and-snow sports” in China and promote leapfrog development of winter sports in the country.

China aims to boost its ice-and-snow economy, targeting an economic scale of 1.2 trillion yuan (\$167 billion) by 2027 and 1.5 trillion yuan by 2030, according to guidelines

released by the State Council last year.

With the hosting of the 9th Asian Winter Games and the flourishing of winter tourism, Heilongjiang is effectively transforming its ice-and-snow resources into economic opportunities — boosting the growth prospects of the cultural tourism, sports and equipment manufacturing sectors in the province.

More than 500 ice-and-snow events are planned to be held this winter in Heilongjiang, which is expecting to see an influx of visitors during the cold season.

Heilongjiang’s industry and information technology department estimates that the province’s ice-and-snow sector generated revenue of 5.47 billion yuan in 2024, a 7.9 percent year-on-year increase.

Ma Tao, dean of the Business School at Harbin Institute of Technology, said China’s ice-and-snow economy is expected to break new ground and unleash more vitality with the integration of high-end industries such as equipment manufacturing, new materials and new energy, thereby creating new forms of consumption.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Both sides must honor terms of ceasefire and uphold all relevant UN resolutions

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Hamas on Tuesday that Israel would end the ceasefire and resume "intense fighting" if the Palestinian armed group "does not return our hostages by Saturday".

And President Donald Trump of the United States threatened the same day that "all hell is going to break out" if the Palestinian militant group does not release "all" the remaining hostages this week.

Will the military conflict resume in the Gaza Strip? The situation in Gaza is on a knife-edge.

It remains unclear whether Netanyahu is demanding the release of all 76 remaining hostages, or just the three due to be freed this Saturday.

Hamas said that it was postponing freeing more hostages as a "warning message" to Israel, which it said has repeatedly violated the terms of the three-week-old ceasefire deal.

Hamas accused Israel of preventing the return of displaced Gazans to the north of the strip, blocking the planned influx of humanitarian aid and continuing to kill "many" Palestinians despite the pause in fighting.

Trump's demand that all the remaining hostages be set free gives the impression that the Israeli Cabinet and the White House have reached a consensus that further military action should be taken against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It is quite probable that the support Netanyahu was offered on his visit to Washington early this month has emboldened him to take further military actions in the Gaza Strip with the aim of displacing the Palestinian population. After their talks, Trump spoke of resettling the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Israel handing over control of the Palestinian enclave to the US, which would develop it into the "Riviera of the Middle East".

The negotiation for the second phase of the ceasefire, which should have begun 16 days after the ceasefire took effect, hasn't started yet. Which bodes ill for the ceasefire's prospects.

Given the fact that Israeli military actions in Gaza have led to the death of some 40,000 Palestinians and displaced the majority of Palestinian residents there, causing a dire humanitarian crisis, it has become a top priority for the ceasefire to last until a workable solution is worked out for the end of the war and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

It is irresponsible for US President Donald Trump to talk about his plan for the resettlement of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and for him to make threatening remarks to Hamas about "all hell is going to break out".

It is imperative for all countries and parties involved in the mediation between Israel and Hamas to do whatever they can to persuade both parties to treasure the ceasefire and give peace a chance by strictly abiding by what the deal requires.

Washington should realize that resumption of the military conflicts in the Gaza Strip may trigger a much larger conflict involving other parties such as Iran and the Houthis in Yemen, which will make the situation in the Middle East even more complicated. The consequences of that may be unimaginably disastrous not just for the region but also for the entire world.

It is unrealistic for Israel to displace all the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. And it is wishful thinking for Hamas to believe that their resistance will finally destroy Israel. Both parties must realize that permanent peace in the region lies in the peaceful coexistence between both.

Continued military conflicts between both parties will only increase the animosity between both peoples, which will make it harder for the two sides to reach a peace deal.

China firmly supports the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, and believes that "Palestinians governing Palestine" is an important principle that must be upheld in the post-conflict governance of Gaza. It opposes the forced displacement of the people of Gaza.

As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said: "Under the current circumstances, the international community, major countries in particular, need to play a constructive role in implementing the ceasefire deal, and promoting the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza and reconstruction there."

It should be the top priority of all concerned to make the ceasefire last as long as possible for both parties to have further talks on peacemaking in the region.

No winners in tariff war initiated by US

United States President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Monday, announcing a 25 percent tariff on all US steel and aluminum imports from March 12. The order also canceled the duty-free quota and exemption policy for the imports from some trading partners, effectively canceling the deals that had been reached with the European Union and other economies.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a statement in response, pledging that the EU will take "firm and proportionate" countermeasures.

US tariffs on steel and aluminum, two major EU exports to the US, "will not go unanswered", Von der Leyen vowed on Tuesday, adding that "the EU will act to safeguard its economic interests".

The countermeasures from the 27-nation bloc are expected to target Republican states and traditionally strong US exports, including bourbon, jeans and motorcycles.

Reminding the Trump administration of the harms of a tariff war, Von der Leyen said, "Tariffs are taxes — bad for business, worse for consumers".

That is something the European Commission chief should also reflect on given the steep tariffs the bloc has imposed on Chinese-made electric vehicles since October last year, following Washington's call to form a "united front" against China on the economy, trade and technology.

Having stating that the US "unjustified tariffs" on the EU will trigger "firm and proportionate countermeasures", the European Commission president, given the active role she has played in supporting the aforementioned China-targeted tariffs, should consider whether the restrained countermeasures China has taken in answering the EU's unjustified tariffs on Chinese-made EVs are justified, though the EU side claims they are baseless or irrational.

China will not be "laughing on the side" at the US tariffs Trump is imposing on the EU, as the EU's top foreign affairs and security official, Kaja Kallas, said. China will by no means benefit from a tariff war between the two, which will leave no party unscathed.

China's EU policy and US policy are both consistent, so is its openness to work with both of them to promote the healthy development of relations. Playing one party against another has never been and will never be part of China's diplomacy, neither is playing a zero-sum game in its repertoire for handling international relations.

China's top leader has stressed on many occasions the need to avoid politicizing economic issues and taking protectionist moves to prevent the fracturing of the global economy, which he warned would create "severe challenges" for all. He has called for building a stable world economy characterized by openness, urging that efforts be made to keep the World Trade Organization rules relevant, both by addressing long-pending issues and exploring the formulation of new, future-oriented rules, to enhance the authority, efficacy and relevance of the multilateral trading system.

Since the "America first" Trump won the 2024 US presidential election in November, the EU has long predicted that the US was becoming an opponent in a tariff war. An indication of that is that Von der Leyen took advantage of her special address in Davos on Jan 21, shortly after Trump's inauguration, to take aim at China so as to signal to the new US president that if he treated the EU the way of his first term, the bloc would have no choice but turn to China, shattering the anti-China clique the US had painstakingly built over the past four years.

But Brussels should be reminded about what China looks for in the EU is a win-win partnership with mutual respect and based on shared belief in fair multilateral global governance and inclusive economic globalization, rather than being treated as a spare tire or a counterweight in its policy portfolio.

China has been and will continue to be committed to promoting healthy relations with the EU and the US — and all other trade partners. It's China's hope that the EU and the US will work with it to strengthen their trade and economic ties with it, maintaining the stability of the world industry and supply chains for the common good of the world.

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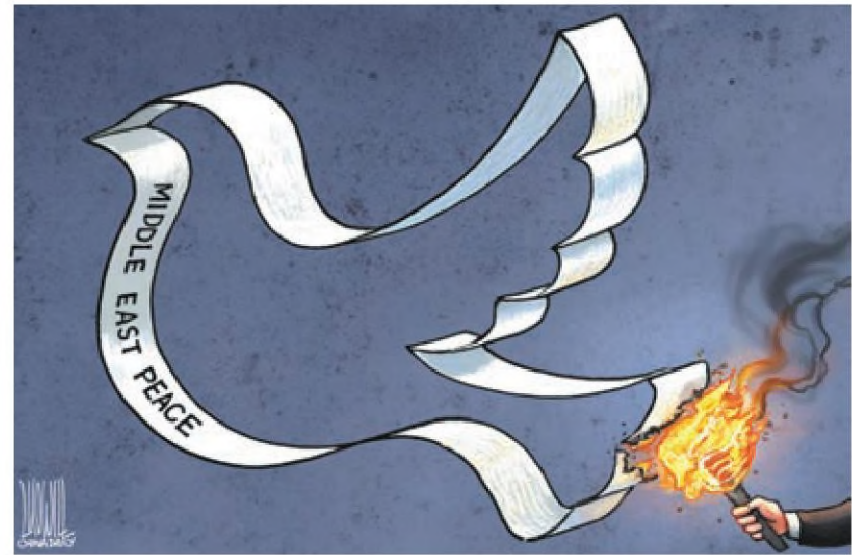
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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Open, inclusive and cooperative approach boosts innovation

In October 2023, China's top leader introduced the Global Initiative for AI Governance, proposing China's solution and contributing China's wisdom for AI development and governance. During his attendance at the recent AI Action Summit in Paris, Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing reiterated China's willingness to work with other countries to promote development, safeguard security, share achievements in the field of AI, and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind.

The statement signed by dozens of countries at the summit spoke positively of China's efforts to promote the adoption of a UN General Assembly resolution on strengthening international cooperation in AI capacity building and pointed out that the 2025 World AI Conference due to be hosted by China will be a milestone event. Although the United

States refused to sign, with Vice-President JD Vance making it clear that Washington maintains an "America first" approach in AI development, China's cosigning of the document demonstrates its positive attitude toward promoting global AI development and governance and its continued wishes to promote AI to better serve global development and improve human well-being.

China's open, inclusive and cooperative approach is boosting its innovation capacity. According to the Global Innovation Index 2024 released by the World Intellectual Property Organization last September, China is the only middle-income economy among the top 30 in the Global Innovation Index, ranking 11th in the world, up one place from 2023. After DeepSeek shocked the world with its open-source model R1, Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google, warned that

Western countries need to focus on building open source AI models or risk losing out to China in the global race for the cutting-edge technology.

While vigorously promoting the innovation and development of AI and attaching importance to AI security, China has also been actively promoting the inclusive development of AI, advocating open source AI technology, and promoting the accessibility of AI services. It opposes drawing lines by ideology, generalizing the concept of national security and politicizing economic, trade and scientific and technological issues.

The Chinese innovation model constitutes a key part of China's innovative development, and the global governance of new technologies advocated by China is in line with the common interests and expectations of the world.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

Innovation flourishes in good business environment

Six leading technology companies, including DeepSeek, Game Science and Unitree Robotics, are all located in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

They are referred to as the "six tigers of Hangzhou". The city is a regional innovative center characterized by a high degree of marketization. It has produced many well-known private enterprises and a large number of innovative small and medium-sized enterprises, together they form an innovation ecosystem.

The continuous emergence of star private enterprises has attracted more investors and entrepreneurs

to Hangzhou, creating an innovation culture with great vitality, leading to the constant emergence of new enterprises and industries.

After large enterprises and venture capital-supported entrepreneurs entered the AI field, most of them would regard research as an application development process with high commercial purposes and have to consider the balance between input and commercial interests, which inevitably imposed various constraints on the scope and objectives of research, limiting adventurous open innovation to a certain extent. Yet DeepSeek, which

did not undergo market financing, allows a team with curiosity and creativity to explore openly rather than being result-oriented, thus generating new ideas.

The story of Hangzhou shows that local governments can create a nurturing business environment for private enterprises to form a virtuous cycle driven by innovation. The success of DeepSeek also reminds us that only by adhering to a long-term perspective and being willing to take risks can original and disruptive technological innovations be produced.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

Call for greater support for Syrian stability

The United Nations Security Council held a briefing on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria on Wednesday. UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya briefed on the country's political and humanitarian developments respectively.

At this critical juncture, it is important for the international community to provide constructive assistance to Syria. The Syrian people, who have long been mired in sufferings and hardships caused by war and chaos, are longing for a return of peace and stability in their country, so that they can start a life of tranquility and dignity as soon as possible.

That explains why the top UN security body held the briefing about one month after a briefing on the Middle East country that has remained at a crossroad nearly three months after the former Bashar al-Assad government was toppled by different forces. As the briefings of Pedersen and Msuya indicate, the current humanitarian situation in Syria is extremely dire. It is worrying to see that the survival and development of tens of millions of people are at stake.

The following consultations

among representatives of the UN Security Council members show some common understandings of the international community on the future of Syria, which are largely reflected by the remarks of the Chinese Ambassador to the UN Fu Cong at the briefing.

Fu emphasized that the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria should be respected under all circumstances and called on the international community to increase its humanitarian assistance to the country.

Although US Ambassador to the UN Dorothy Shea, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, in her remarks at the briefing also highlighted the need for "an inclusive transition in Syria", the United States should, as Fu said, realize that its illegal unilateral sanctions against Syria have caused great harm to the Syrian people.

China's position on this is consistent. Such measures should not have existed in the first place. In order to meet the needs of humanitarian assistance and promote the development of Syria, it is necessary to take actions to eliminate the negative impact of these measures.

Also the US should stop indulging

its ally, Israel, to take advantage of the domestic turmoil of Syria to try and grab land from its neighbor.

As Fu stressed, the resolution of the Security Council on the Golan Heights must be implemented. So must the 1974 disengagement of forces agreement. China urges Israel to withdraw from Syrian territory without delay.

China supports the promotion of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, and the achievement of a solution that meets the aspirations of all Syrian people through inclusive dialogue and consultations.

Resolution 2254 of the UN Security Council represents the basic consensus within the international community, and provides important guidance for addressing the Syrian issue. It remains valid in terms of the current situation. The holding of a national dialogue is a key step in the political transition, for which a clear timetable should be set as soon as possible and implemented steadily.

China supports the United Nations and the special envoy to play an active role in this process, as well as the efforts of the Arab League to help Syria in its political transition and reconstruction.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Shen Xie

Winter games ignite passion for sports

The 9th Asian Winter Games from Feb 7 to 14 in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, is a milestone in the development of winter sports in China and a defining moment in its journey to become a global sports powerhouse. The Harbin Asian Winter Games, from venue construction to event management, and technological innovation to cultural integration, not only showcases China's multifaceted achievements in sports, on and off the field, but also lays a strong foundation for popularizing winter sports.

For example, the Asian Winter Games curling venue is equipped with two independent sound systems: a centralized amplification system and a distributed amplification system, which together have eliminated echoes in the arena.

At the Yabuli Sports Training Base, a 3D digital twin system, using virtual reality, has recreated the competition venues, equipment rooms and device information, enhancing management efficiency. And the "5G+BeiDou" wide-area seamless integrated positioning technology, which combines BeiDou satellite capabilities with 5G communication networks, offers an innovative solution to the problems affecting the flight of drones in zones with weak indoor satellite signals.

Also, China's independently developed lap counting and video replay equipment for short track speed skating meticulously records every detail of the competition, substantially improving the efficiency of the judges. These innovations not only enhance the quality of the competition but also set new benchmarks for sustainable operations in winter sports facilities.

During the opening ceremony, the powerful, sonorous ice-harvesting chant (song performed during ice harvesting in Northeast China, particularly in Harbin) showcased Harbin's rich culture, symbolized by the concept of "first ice" — the first block of ice cut from the Songhua River, signaling the beginning of the New Year and conveying good wishes for the future.

The region's intangible cultural heritages, including paper-cutting, handkerchief dancing, and ice lanterns — cultural symbols rooted in the region's black soil — offer Chinese wisdom and warmth to Asia through vibrant, living traditions. The harmonious fusion of tradition and modernity reflects China's confidence in its approach to winter sports.

A record number (more than 1,200) of athletes from 34 Asian countries and regions have participated in the Harbin winter games, with athletes from Cambodia and Saudi Arabia making their debut, and Thailand and Lebanon sending their largest-ever delegations. In fact, countries with limited or no snow, such as the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand, have also sent their teams to the Asian Winter Games.

Saudi Arabia, scheduled to host the 10th Asian Winter Games in 2029, is using this opportunity to gain valuable knowledge about hosting winter sports tournaments. In this context, the China-Saudi Arabia partnership to develop the NEOM special economic zone has expedited the construction of the Trojena Sports City for the 2029 Asian Winter Games, which will mark the event's entry

To achieve this transformation, however, the government should optimize resource allocation and cultivate talents.

into the Middle East. This open approach marks China's transition from a participant to a leader in the winter sports in Asia.

As Chinese athletes win medals at the Asian Winter Games, their successes catalyze broader public interest in winter sports, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between elite competition and mass participation. The challenge is in sustaining this momentum.

How do we transform competitive enthusiasm into long-term public engagement? How do we democratize advanced technologies used at the winter sports venues for wider community benefit? Addressing these questions is crucial not only for the sustainable growth of winter sports but also for advancing China's aspirations as a sports powerhouse.

The advancement of competitive winter sports and the increasing public participation form a virtuous cycle. Rather than being mutually exclusive, professional and amateur athletes create a

complementary ecosystem through resource sharing, technological exchanges and coordinated policy initiatives.

The extraordinary performances of professional athletes on the competitive stage can spark widespread interest in winter sports. When spectators witness high-level skills at regional and international competitions and gain insight into athletes' training regime via social media, this tangible inspiration translates into motivation for ordinary individuals to try winter sports. Professional competitions promote not only excellent performances but also create "promotional windows" for mass participation in winter sports.

Cutting-edge technologies, when appropriately used, can significantly enhance the public's experience of watching or participating in winter sports. For instance, the environmentally friendly materials and technologies used at the Asian Winter Games are expected to play a crucial role in promoting sustainable urban development in the region.

Strategic policy design creates vital links between professional systems and public needs, and facilitates the periodical opening of professional venues to the public while inspiring retired athletes to serve as coaches and trainers.

The key to bringing winter sports from competitive arenas to communities lies in developing a sustainable participation ecosystem.

As winter sports develop, the grand narrative of "winning glory for the nation" widens the scope for mass participation in winter sports to "improve individual health and fitness", advancing China's quest to become a sports powerhouse. To achieve this transformation, however, the government should optimize resource allocation and cultivate talents.

The significance of the Asian Winter Games in Harbin extends far beyond medal tallies; it showcases China's unique approach to the coordinated development of competitive sports and public health. From state-of-the-art venues to community ice rinks, from professional athletes to amateur athletes, all are promoting winter sports and contributing to China's efforts to build a healthy and active society.

The ultimate aim of this comprehensive strategy is to transform the ambitious vision of "300 million people participating in winter sports" into a lived reality.

The author is an associate professor at the College of Marine Culture and Law, Jimei University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Zhou Xueren

Targeted policies can help revitalize Northeast China

In less than 20 days since the beginning of 2025, President Xi Jinping has been to Northeast China twice. He extended warm regards to ordinary people during his tour in Liaoning province on the eve of the Spring Festival, attended the opening ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, Heilongjiang on Feb 7, and listened to the work report of Jilin provincial authorities the next day.

The tours, along with his reaffirmation of the importance of revitalizing Northeast China, have underscored the strategic significance of the region in the new era.

While the business environment has seen improvements in recent years, local authorities in the region have to push forward with reforms to enhance the business environment further and reshape the inherent perception of enterprises so as to advance the revitalization of Northeast China in the new era.

First of all, local authorities in the region should adopt new technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence, to boost reform and promote innovation. For example, they should integrate the administrative service centers at county and district levels. And different departments should collaborate to break down barriers to improve business efficiency.

A mechanism needs to be improved for information collection, sorting and evaluating, and a credit database established that covers all types of enterprises in the region.

They also need to boost investment in digital infrastructure and enhance government networks to enable high-speed data transmission and secure data storage including population, legal entities, and spatial geography. This endeavor necessitates intra-departmental cooperation to be more smoothly and efficient.

Besides, the local authorities can also adopt advanced technologies such as big data and AI to analyze the type, size and health of enterprises, with the aim of providing them with customized services, and implement policies in different fields to ensure enterprises enjoy the policy dividends and reduce their operating costs.

There is also a need to optimize the communication platforms between local governments and enterprises to enable the authorities to understand the needs

and demands of enterprises in a timely manner, and help the enterprises to address the problems they encounter.

What's more, business activities should be carried out under the purview of law, so that all business entities and individuals can enjoy a fair and just market environment and enjoy efficient services.

While clear boundaries and standards of law enforcement should be set, specific and, if need be, flexible methods should be adopted for law enforcement. For instance, it is crucial to enhance awareness among enterprises that have committed minor offenses about the importance of adhering to laws and regulations, rather than solely imposing administrative penalties. This approach aims to assist them in pursuing their business objectives through legal means. The authorities should refrain from collecting excessive fees and, instead, take specific measures to reduce the overall logistics costs for businesses to ease their burden.

Also, the authorities should eliminate hidden barriers, especially those hindering business, strengthen supervision on the bidding process, and improve the fair competition review system to build a fair and just competition environment. In fact, the authorities should standardize the electronic bidding system

by digitalizing it.

A mechanism needs to be improved for information collection, sorting and evaluating, and a credit database established that covers all types of enterprises in the region. The local governments can set unified credit evaluation standards and grade enterprises based on their credit status. Moreover, law-violating enterprises should be punished in accordance with the law, and their market access, financing, and bidding rights need to be restricted to promote fair competition.

Authorities at all levels in Northeast China should take the lead in building an economy based on rule of law, solve existing problems and establish mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of the problems or creation of new problems, and ensure that enterprises fulfill their contracts, so as to improve the governments' credibility. They should also introduce an accountability system, and hold government departments and their employees accountable for their actions if they have caused major losses to enterprises.

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Chen Weihua

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Instead of cheering demise of USAID, world should help developing nations

US President Donald Trump's decision to shut down programs funded by the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, has infuriated his opponents. Some Democratic lawmakers and commentators have said Trump's move is a gift to China, as China will happily fill the void left by the withdrawal of USAID to expand its global influence.

Such fearmongering has been frequently used by Democrats and Republicans as the most effective way to knock down each other. The two parties have also accused each other of "going soft" on China.

By making such absurd arguments, US politicians, who claim to be supporters of USAID, have insulted many frontline staff working hard to help people in need in Africa, Latin America and other regions. They seem to be telling these staff that "you are nothing but US geopolitical tools" to counter China.

USAID was established in 1961 by then US president John F. Kennedy during the height of the Cold War. Over the past decades it has indeed done a lot of positive work, providing humanitarian and development assistance for the developing world.

Many other countries, including China, Russia, India and a number of European Union member states, have been doing such good work, too, in various forms. They should now join hands to help the poor and the needy across the world instead of turning development aid into a zero-sum geopolitical game.

Development aid, like the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is to help lift people out of poverty. It is not about US versus China, or us versus them as some like to portray it to be.

One thing is clear: China's foreign policy of no interference in other countries' domestic affairs will remain consistent.

All countries, indeed all entities, are welcome to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of USAID by contributing more funds and expertise to help low- and lower-income countries to fight diseases, build infrastructure and schools, and invest in manufacturing facilities. Development aid is a common cause for the humankind as a whole.

As a responsible major country, China will certainly support the increase of global development aid. However, as a large developing nation of 1.4 billion people, China alone cannot fill the void left by USAID.

One thing is clear: China's foreign policy of no interference in other countries' domestic affairs will remain consistent.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame said exactly this at the Doha Forum in December. Stressing the positive nature of China's activities in Africa, Kagame said China, unlike some other countries, has no strings attached to aid or loans. He praised China's activities to bring tangible benefits to African countries while some Western powers just lecture the African people.

Other participants in the Doha Forum from the Global South, such as Namibian President Nangolo Mbumba, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley and Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina Garcia, too, praised China's support for and cooperation with African and Latin American countries. The same, however, cannot be said of all USAID programs. For example, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum questioned the transparency of USAID. In fact, some Latin American leaders cheered the agency's shutdown because of USAID's agenda to fund oppositions in their countries.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that USAID has worked closely with the US State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency on various covert operations, aimed at destabilizing foreign governments.

The largest drawback of USAID has been its opaque funding to many news outlets, including BBC, and so-called independent journalists and NGOs around the world. Some of these entities have hysterically spread disinformation and launched smear campaigns against China over the past years.

Yet I hope the US will continue to help fight poverty and AIDS in low- and lower-income countries. I also hope the US will rectify its mistakes of pulling out of the World Health Organization, the Paris Agreement, the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

GLOBAL VIEWS



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



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ANDREA CALIGIURI

Building a strong partnership

China and the EU are the only credible actors to lead the green transition

The United States' withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change under the second Donald Trump administration, and the promotion of pro-fossil fuel policies, marks the return of climate change skepticism that could create a vacuum in global climate governance. In this context, a strong partnership between China and the European Union is crucial to promote the multilateral climate actions necessary to achieve the global climate goals. However, this partnership takes place within a complex framework influenced by geopolitical tensions, mistrust in economic and trade relations, and the political dynamics within the EU members.



Despite the differences in their political systems and economic models, both sides recognize that tackling climate change is a global imperative that requires joint action. In the fight against climate change, China and the EU have shown that they have clear long-term goals and well-defined approaches to achieving them. The EU has established a general framework, the European Green Deal, for the green transformation of the EU economy and society by 2050, while China adopted the "1+N" policy framework in 2021 which aims to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. Both parties focus on decarbonization, increasing carbon sinks and promoting technological innovation and investment in key sectors such as energy, industry, transport and buildings. Common priorities also include accelerating the shift to alternative and cleaner energy sources, promoting the use of clean energy, reducing emissions in end-use sectors, reducing support for carbon-intensive energy production, improving energy efficiency and promoting low-carbon technologies.

Over the past two decades, China and the EU have developed several joint initiatives to tackle climate change, promote sustainability and protect the environment, implementing the EU-China Partnership on Climate Change launched in 2005.

Key initiatives include the Innovation Platform on Sustainable Urbanization, which aims to promote the long-term viability of cities by reducing consumption and waste and improving the overall well-being of people and places; the EU-China Energy Cooperation Plat-

form, which supports the development of smart grids and the integration of renewable energy sources into energy systems. However, all these cooperation programs are only a prelude to more structured economic cooperation between the two parties, as they generally encompass only a number of limited actions, including a strategic research and innovation agenda, scoping and assessment, networking events, peer-to-peer exchanges, benchmarking and monitoring, and joint demonstration projects.

Biodiversity is also an important area of cooperation. Beijing is progressively incorporating higher environmental standards into its Belt and Road Initiative and seeking to reduce the environmental impact of its infrastructure activities, while the EU is supporting its own programs for monitoring and sustainable management of ecosystems. Cooperation has also taken place at the diplomatic level, through the negotiation of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

All these achievements provide a solid basis for deepening and consolidating cooperation in other areas.

Despite these positive examples, cooperation between China and the EU is not without obstacles. China still relies heavily on fossil fuels to meet its energy needs, although it should be noted that coal's share of electricity generation fell to 59.6 percent in the first half of 2024, the first time it has fallen below 60 percent. Moreover, the first decade of the BRI saw the financing of several carbon-intensive infrastructure projects, such as coal-fired power plants, only to see a reversal of this policy from 2021 onwards, when China announced at the UN General Assembly that it would stop building new coal-fired power plants overseas and instead increase investment in renewable energy, a commitment reiterated at the BRI summit in October 2023. At the same time, the EU, despite adopting ambitious climate targets, faces internal opposition from some member states. The rise of right-wing governments and political parties in Europe further complicates the situation, as they oppose environmental regulations perceived as too burdensome for national economies. One example is the call to postpone the EU's 2025 CO2 reduction targets for cars in order to protect the European automotive sector, which is struggling to keep up in the transition to elec-

tric vehicles, where China is leading the way.

A growing theme in the climate debate is the link between climate change and international security, an aspect that the Trump administration and the European right seem to be neglecting. Climate change is not just an environmental issue, but a destabilizing factor in geopolitics: rising temperatures, desertification, biodiversity loss and resource scarcity are exacerbating existing conflicts and creating new migration crises. Water scarcity, for example, is already a source of tension in regions such as the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, and its worsening could lead to new regional wars.

Both China and the EU recognize this link between climate and security. In the case of China, the government is investing in food security and water resource management to prevent instability internally and in areas involved in the BRI. Similarly, the EU is integrating climate change into its security and defence policies, recognizing that climate-induced migration could become a major source of instability in the Mediterranean and neighboring regions.

Climate finance is a fundamental tool to support mitigation and adaptation efforts to address climate change, but it is a point of contention. The EU favors multilateral instruments such as the Green Climate Fund, a key element of the Paris Agreement, while China prefers bilateral approaches, often linked to the BRI.

Despite this complex context, the China-EU climate partnership represents one of the few opportunities to keep the world on track to realize the goals of the Paris Agreement. The Trump administration's recent threat to impose tariffs on EU goods imported into the US could trigger a rapid rapprochement between the EU and China in the economic and trade fields, which would inevitably benefit the partnership in the fight against climate change. The success of the China-EU climate partnership will depend on the ability of both parties to overcome their differences and build a relationship based on mutual trust and shared interests.

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ZHAO HUAIPU

Wiggle room

The EU should beware being trapped by the US as the Trump administration squeezes its strategic space

China, the United States and the European Union are the world's three major strategic powers, and their trilateral relationships are largely determining the development direction for the global landscape in the 21st century.

The three parties' relations are complicated, with their interests closely entwined. The UK political scientist Barry Buzan has noted that the relations between China, the US and the EU are a mix of friend and adversary, where competition and cooperation coexist.

In addition to the coexistence of cooperation and rivalry, there are two other prominent features of the China-US-EU triangle relations.

First, the US and the EU share common values, economic and political models, and similar goals in their long-term China strategies, thus leading to an unbalanced dynamic in the trilateral interactions. Second, the relationships among them are not static, and can be reshaped, which is particularly true of China-EU relations.

China-US-EU relations are in a period of intense collision, with China-US rivalry being the primary contradiction in the triangle of relationships. The future of China-US ties mainly depends on how the two view each other and the stability of bilateral relations. In this process, the EU is a key variable.

The EU plays multiple roles in the relationships among the three parties. It is a stakeholder and a mediator, a de facto ally of the US and a partner-cum-competitor of China.

On the one hand, both China and the US regard the EU as a crucial stakeholder and seek its support. On the other hand, the EU hopes to mediate the China-US rivalry to maximize its own interests.

As the EU shares similar values and political and economic systems with the US and relies on the US for security, the two parties are de facto allies. However, this does not mean that their respective interests concerning China are totally aligned.

As for the China-EU relations, the two parties see each other as both partners and competitors. In recent years, the bilateral relations have become more complicated, and entered a new period of

adjustment, with the EU emphasizing the aspect of competition in the relationship.

The EU's multiple roles in the triangle have shaped its unique position in the triangle. The EU insists on not picking a side between China and the US, and seeks to balance and mediate their rivalry.

The EU bets on both sides to influence the China-US relations and avoid being marginalized or forced to take sides. But choosing "strategic autonomy" does not mean the EU takes a neutral position between China and the US. In fact, the EU remains closer to the US, and the challenges it has encountered within the bloc in recent years have pushed it even closer to the US.

As the US and the EU have no fundamental differences in their approach to China, the basic dynamic of the triangle is possibly evolving into the "EU and US against China".

To preserve the current global order and pursue their common interests, the US and the EU have strengthened the transatlantic coordination on China, seeking to curb China's tech and economic development through investment and export controls, interfering in China's internal affairs on the grounds of "human rights abuses", and increasing alignment in "Indo-Pacific"-related issues to counter the influence of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

During the Joe Biden administration, the EU and the US relaunched their bilateral dialogue on China, and established the Trade and Technology Council, which was designed to compete with China on trade and technology. In addition, interactions related to China among the US, the EU and NATO have also been strengthened simultaneously.

The return of Donald Trump to the White House has brought new uncertainties to China-US-EU relations. Under the "Make America Great Again" doctrine, Washington will continue to regard containing China as a foreign policy priority and make technological and economic rivalry the core of its China strategy.

Meanwhile, the upgraded "America First" and "transactionalism 2.0" will significantly disrupt the transatlantic relationship. Trump's political instinct to reshape US-EU ties coupled with the divisions his return has sown in European countries will further tilt the power balance within the transatlantic alliance toward the US, and increase the risk of

Europe becoming a vassal of the US.

Other challenges to the transatlantic relations include an underlying divergence over how to deal with the Ukraine crisis, conflicting interests in several areas, and the growing mistrust in bilateral ties. In a word, the return of Trump poses a serious challenge to Europe's strategic autonomy, piling more pressure on the EU to pick a side in the China-US rivalry. Against this backdrop, the influence of the EU "variable" on the trilateral relationships has become more prominent. The EU's increased dependence on Washington for security due to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, and the Trump administration's pressure on the EU to cooperate with the US on containing China will squeeze the EU's strategic space.

Some political observers have said that European countries may buy weapons from the US in exchange for the latter's security guarantee, or support the US' China policy in exchange for the US taking a pro-Europe stance in its Russia policy.

To summarize, the EU finds itself in a delicate situation in the China-US-EU trilateral relationships and under immense pressure to balance between the two powers. Europe's perception of China may fall under greater sway of the Trump administration, prompting the two parties to trade interests in coordinating their approaches to China.

But the EU should be aware that any expedient deal with the US on China offers no guarantee that the US will not harm European interests. The US and the EU are not equal partners, and Europe's concessions to the US will only deepen its reliance on the latter.

As for China and the EU, it is in their common interest to maintain their partnership, which can help mitigate the risks in their respective relations with the US and expand the space for cooperation.

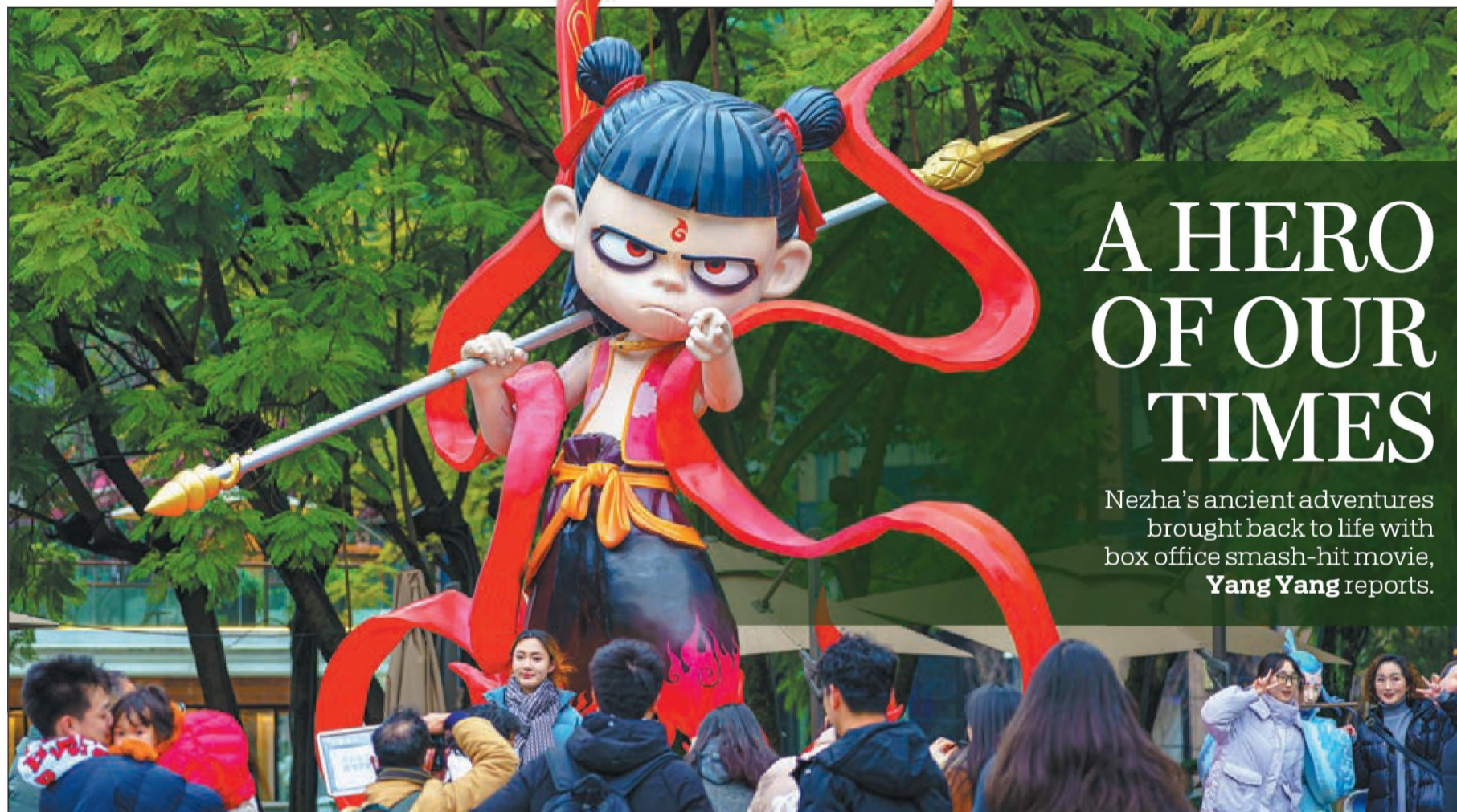
China, for its part, should continue to try and build a stronger bond with Europe, while exploring the establishment of a China-US-EU trilateral interaction mechanism to push for a more stable and balanced development of their relationships.

The author is a professor at China Foreign Affairs University. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

CULTURE



A HERO OF OUR TIMES

Nezha's ancient adventures brought back to life with box office smash-hit movie, **Yang Yang** reports.

Visitors pose for photos with a statue of Nezha, the character of the animation blockbuster *Ne Zha 2*, in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Saturday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In Chinese literature, there might be no other characters more rebellious than the Monkey King Sun Wukong from *Journey to the West* and Nezha from *Investiture of Gods*. Both novels were written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

With magical power, they defied the hierarchy, fighting against unjust destinies. That's why the two are so popular with Chinese people, writers, artists and, in particular, filmmakers.

Last year, China's first triple A-rated video game *Black Myth: Wukong* shone on the world stage. This year, it is Nezha's turn. Since Thursday, *Ne Zha 2*, an animated movie by director Yang Yu, better known as Jiaozi (Dumpling), the sequel to *Ne Zha* (2019), has been shown overseas in countries, including Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and will show in others such as Japan, Singapore and South Korea. Opening on Jan 29, the start of the Spring Festival holiday, it made Chinese box office history, with earnings surpassing 10 billion yuan (\$1.37 billion) by Thursday, topping China's all-time best-selling movies list. It also makes *Ne Zha 2* among the top 20 highest-grossing films in global cinematic history.

Despite their similar determination to resist, compared to the Monkey King, the story of Nezha in Chinese mythology is more tragic in tone. His identity as the child of mortals has given people more space to adapt his story to different eras especially after the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), though its rebellious core has never changed.

It is said that the mythology surrounding Nezha spread across China in the wake of the arrival of Buddhism. Studies of Buddhist literature from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) have found that Nezha was depicted as the third son of one of the four Heavenly Kings of Buddhism, the Guardian of the North, according to *A Study on the Evolution of Nezha's Divine Image*, a paper by professor Liu Wengang of Sichuan University, published in 2009 in the periodical *Religious Studies*. Nezha is a giant Yaksha god (a nature spirit and guardian of wealth) and Dharma protector (a spiritual entity safeguarding the teachings of the Dharma, or religious and moral law).

In Buddhist works, Nezha often appears together with his father, carrying a magical miniature pagoda. His duty is to help him guard the Dharma, ward off evil spirits, and protect people.

As Dharma protectors and Yaksha deities typically have fierce visages, symbolizing their resolution against malevolence, Nezha was often portrayed with a formidable and wrathful countenance.

Buddhist texts about Nezha's unusual relationship with his parents are missing. Researchers found in the retellings and discussions of existing



Clockwise from left: A drawing of Nezha in a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) book introducing the characters in *Investiture of the Gods*, an ancient classic tale. The character in the 1961 animation, *Uproar in Heaven*, by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A poster for *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* (1979), also by the studio, when it screened in the 1980 Cannes Film Festival. ZHANG HENGWEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

early materials from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) that Nezha once dissected his own body and returned his flesh to his mother and his bones to his father.

Before the end of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), he was basically depicted as a Yaksha god with three heads, six arms and a formidable, wrathful countenance, according to Liu.

As Buddhism continued to spread, ancient China absorbed and adapted the religion, and folk beliefs evolved. Nezha's portrayal gradually departed from its Buddhist origins and took on a more distinctly Chinese character.

For Liu, the first remarkable evolution of Nezha's image occurred in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), during which Li Jing, a strategist in the Tang Dynasty, was worshipped as the heavenly king, Nezha's father. Consequently, Nezha became the third son of Li Jing.

From a fierce Yaksha god to a Chinese deity, this change opened up space for development of Nezha's image with colorful interpretations of stories in the following centuries. Nezha has gradually become a classic literary character in China, blending elements of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.

Varied versions

With the emergence of important god-and-demon novels such as *Journey to the West* and *Investiture of the Gods*, the literary image and story of Nezha was standardized and became popular. In the *Investiture of the Gods*, he is depicted as the son of Li Jing, a general guarding

the Chentang Pass, and his wife Yin Shiniang. Nezha is an adorable, slender and elegant child with magical powers, incarnated from a magical lotus roots to re-create his body and resurrects him. After being reborn, Nezha wants to kill his father, who escapes narrowly several times and is given a magical pagoda by another Taoist immortal to subdue Nezha.

For hundreds of years, Nezha's stories have been adapted into countless works of art. In the above-mentioned paper, Liu writes, "gods are products of society, evolving with the times". In this case, Nezha is intertwined with the spirit of the times.

One of the most successful adaptations is the animated movie *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* released in 1979 when China was at a turning point at the start of the reform and opening-up.

The animated film, produced by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, was China's first large-scale, color, wide-screen feature film. It won numerous awards both domestically and internationally and has become a cherished memory for a generation. Many film critics, such as the late Zhong Dianfei, acknowledged the film as a feat, which "restructured mythical stories in the modern context, and implied the spirit of reform and innovation". The film's artistic style, including its ink-wash backgrounds and opera-inspired action design, represented a great achievement in the localization of Chinese animation.

The movie paints Nezha as a trag-

ic and rebellious character. In the story, the four dragon kings cause chaos, putting the people at risk, while the Yaksha abducts young boys and girls. When the four dragon kings lead a massive army to flood Chentang Pass, Nezha wants to retaliate, but his father intervenes and confiscates Nezha's magical weapons. He finally sacrifices his life to save the people of Chentang Pass, also displaying his rebellion against destiny and patriarchy.

For Lu Shihan, a micro-blogger with more than 3.5 million followers on Sina Weibo, in this 1979 film, the dragon kings symbolize decaying feudal rule, while Li Jing represents a feudal family. Nezha, the revolutionary young hero, breaks away from his conservative family and disrupts the old ways of the East Sea, Lu writes in a recent post, adding that this narrative is a clear depiction of revolution, akin to the experiences of many revolutionaries of past generations.

Coming-of-age

The latest adaptation, *Ne Zha 2*, directed by Yang, and now a popular blockbuster, incorporates his understanding of the relationship between personal growth and the external world, and the dream to fight for fairness in a bigger context.

"Every era has its own Nezha, serving the current audience," Yang said in a previous interview, adding that "we continue Nezha's spirit of resistance, particularly seen in the struggle against fate". In his version, Nezha is reimagined as the story of a boy with dark

circles around his eyes, who breaks stereotypes, and the Dragon Prince Ao Bing as a kindhearted youngster, while the Dragon Kings and Shen Gongbao, a key villain, who is a leopard demon turned celestial being, each have their own struggles.

Good and evil no longer stand in binary opposition. The Dragon Prince Ao Bing and the Dragon Clan embody spiritual burdens stemming from ancestral responsibilities.

The old oppressive hierarchy with biases and hidden agenda seems indestructible. In *Ne Zha*, the audience witnesses how one person, upon learning of their cruel, predetermined fate, strives to overturn it. In its sequel, *Ne Zha 2*, the audience sees how millions of the oppressed fight against destiny for justice.

The portrayal of family relationships is strengthened, with improved parental personalities: The father is gentle, implicit and introverted and the mother is a brave military officer.

It also reflects the director's personal emotional projection. From a medical background, he switched to animation midway through his studies, although no one believed he could succeed.

"Without the support of my parents, I wouldn't have come this far or persevered for so long in animation," Yang said in an interview with *The Beijing News*. "Nezha was also able to change his fate because of his parents' acceptance, support, and love."

Compared with that old image of a Buddhist or Taoist deity, this latest Nezha resembles a real human child. Beyond the story, the director hopes to offer more encouragement, hope, warmth and strength to those pursuing their dreams, those running forward, he said in an interview with *Southern Weekend*.

Yang Chenxi, a 17-year-old senior middle school student from Huzhou, Zhejiang province, resonated with the spirit of the movie. She watched *Nezha* five times and *Nezha 2* once during the Spring Festival holiday.

"There might be a similarity between Nezha and me. We both care how other people see us," she says. "This version of Nezha is different from the typical storyline of a divine being reincarnated to save others and himself. Instead, it begins with Nezha as an underestimated demon who gradually proves himself, defying fate to start anew. Along the way, he and the Dragon Prince Ao Bing become friends. Despite his status, Ao Bing faces similar doubts."

"Their intertwined journey features fresh plot twists, thought-provoking dialogue, and inspiring moments, making it both uplifting and touching," she adds.

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LIFESHANGHAI

At a reptile cafe in Shanghai, 19-year-old Qiu Shiyuan gently pets a corn snake coiled around her hand. "They're just as affectionate as traditional pets," she says, eyes gleaming with affection. "Many people are interested in them but are held back by the stereotypes of reptiles being cold and frightening creatures."

He Yonghua, a young visitor at the Zenki exotic pet experience store, says the sensation of touching snakes is unique. "You realize it is a living creature, not as scary as it first appears. Touching it gives a feeling of a vibrant life moving in your hands. You learn to respect and admire it," she adds.

As China ushers in the Year of the Snake in 2025, the country is witnessing a boom in its exotic pet market. Reptiles, particularly snakes, emerge as favorites among young pet enthusiasts. The transformation is striking, given the traditional associations of suspicion and fear to snakes and other reptiles.

At Baobaolong Reptile Bar in Yangpu district, one of Shanghai's first reptile cafes, store clerk Qiao Xinran has observed this transformation. "When the store opened four years ago, people were not nearly as interested in exotic pets as they are now," she recalls. "Our customers range in age from 15 to 28 and include kids accompanied by parents. Surprisingly, women make up the majority — challenging long-held assumptions about who is interested in reptilian pets."

The two-story store houses approximately 50 snakes and 70 geckos that give visitors an opportunity to interact with the creatures in a safe, controlled environment. "All our snakes are nonvenomous and carefully temperament-tested," Qiao explains. "We provide detailed handling instructions and maintain constant supervision to ensure the safety of both animals and visitors."

During the Chinese New Year holiday, the store saw dozens of visitors each day, reaching full capacity several times. This surge in interest reflects a broader shift in China's pet culture traditionally dominated by cats and dogs.

According to Petdata.cn's 2025 China Pet Industry White Paper, approximately 17.07 million Chinese people keep exotic pets — defined as uncommon or unusual domesticated animals, including aquatic creatures, rodents, birds, and reptiles. The market has swelled to nearly 10 billion yuan (\$1.37 billion), with reptile ownership surging by 2.9 percentage points to 11.3 percent of all exotic pet owners.

Chen Guanwen, an 18-year-old snake owner, exemplifies the new generation of exotic pet enthusiasts. "I've been fascinated by snakes since watching nature channels as a child," she says. After years of research and persuading her parents, she has three snakes, including two boa constrictors.

"They're very low-maintenance pets," she explains. "As a student with a packed schedule, I only need to feed them weekly and maintain their enclosure."

The financial accessibility of snake ownership has also contributed to its growing appeal. Basic snake species can cost from a



Exotic pets warm young hearts

Despite being seen as frightening, the Year of the Snake brings more reptiles into the loving arms of the upcoming generation, Zheng Zheng reports.

A leopard-pattern lizard is among the most popular pets. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

few hundred to a few thousand yuan, with feeding expenses averaging just over 10 yuan per month. The affordability combined with low care requirements makes them particularly attractive to young urban dwellers managing demanding work schedules.

Cui Dejun, owner of the Zenki exotic pet experience store in downtown Shanghai, has been in the business since 2016. His store normally accommodates around 40 snakes for petting. During breeding season from late April to October, his inventory can reach up to 1,000 snakes.

At pet exhibitions, he can sell over 100 snakes in just a few days. "The market grows larger every year," he notes. "Young people especially are looking for something different from traditional pets."

Cui says many people are curious about snakes. "Since it is the Year of the Snake, we saw more visitors during the Spring Festival period." As few people have regular encounters with reptiles, these experience shops provide a safe environment for people to interact with snakes, dispelling misconceptions and fears, Cui adds.

The rise in raising exotic pets also reflects a generational shift. "Today's youth receive different education and have more access to information about these animals," Qiao observes. "Unlike previous generations taught to fear snakes, they're learning about these creatures through social media and other channels."

This transformation is evident in He's experience, who touched snakes for the first time without any nervousness. "I feel more intrigued than fearful of snakes and reptiles after watching many videos online," she says. "I hope people will try touching a snake and realize that it is a living creature and there is no need to be scared."

Though relatively niche, the industry operates within specific legal frameworks. "We deal exclusively with non-protected species that are legal for domestic ownership," Cui emphasizes, noting that the snakes they handle are captive-bred for multiple generations, resulting in stable temperaments, unlike their wild counterparts.

"The market has enormous potential," Cui affirms. "We are seeing more pet exhibitions and reptile experience stores opening across China. With younger generations becoming more open to these animals and the increasing availability of care information, the future looks promising."

For young enthusiasts like Qiu, Chen, He and countless others, these exotic pets represent more than just a trend — they are also changing the way Chinese society views and interacts with nature.

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Left: Owner of an exotic pet shop in Shanghai, Cui Dejun examines one of the reptiles on Monday. Cui has been in the business since 2016. Middle: Godzilla models are also on display in Cui's shop. Right: A boy comfortably holds a corn snake.

Exhibition coils around cultural heritage and AI works

By ZHANG KUN zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

An exhibition at Shanghai Library East celebrates the Year of the Snake with 270 artworks, from pieces using handicrafts recognized as intangible cultural heritage to cartoons, posters and sculptures created with digital technology.

The exhibition runs until March 2 and explores snake-themed myths, legends, history and modern interpretations. Co-hosted by the Shanghai Library, the Shanghai Artists' Association and the Shanghai Animation and Cartoon Association, this marks the third consecutive year of Chinese zodiac-themed exhibitions at the library.

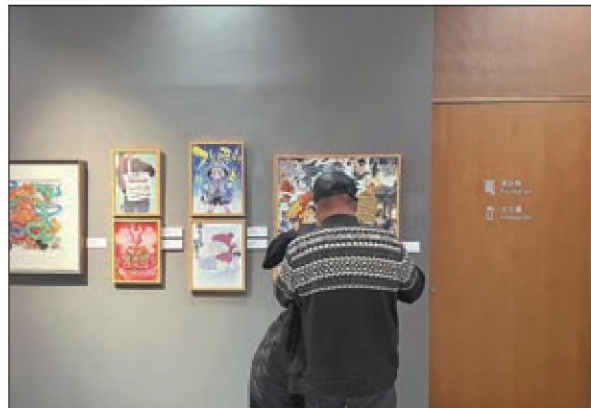
As one of 12 animals in the traditional Chinese zodiac, the snake is widely represented in Chinese culture, symbolizing intelligence, rejuvenation and agility. The exhibition features various works, including paintings, cartoons, illustrations, engravings and digital art created by art students and established artists like Dai Dunbang and Zheng Xinyao, as well as artists who have many social media followers.

"People have stereotypes about



the snake being a horrible, cold-blooded animal. It can be difficult to portray it as a creature loved by many," says Zhang Wei, secretary general of the Shanghai Animation and Cartoon Association.

In ancient Chinese mythology, Fuxi and Nyuwa, believed to be the creators of Chinese people, are often portrayed as snakes with human heads. "In Chinese culture, as some believe, the snake does not usually



represent evil but is a sacred creature with mystical powers. In other cultures, we can see more diverse representations of the snake as emblems of renewal, healing and protection."

The snake, with its rich connotations and simple, flexible form, is also a versatile image for artistic creations, as the organizers received around 6,000 submissions from home and abroad within a month.

"We found that many of them are

intangible cultural heritage handicrafts," says Li Ying, in charge of publicity for the Shanghai Library. Among the 270 selected exhibits are artworks made from paper-cutting, cloth, batik, lacquer and more.

"For example, Shanghai paper-cutting is listed as an intangible cultural heritage of China," she says. While paper-cutting has a long history and can be found across the country, the distinctive Shanghai



The exhibition at Shanghai Library East celebrates the Year of the Snake with 270 artworks. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO AND BY LI JUNFENG FOR CHINA DAILY

style began appearing in the early 20th century. It is recognized for its various subjects and for introducing new expressions found in paintings and drawings.

Meanwhile, organizers found the number of artworks involving digital technology has increased each year. The exhibition adopted the design for the fifth-floor space from students of the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, where 176 digitally pro-

cessed paintings and posters are arranged in the shape of a slithering snake.

Organizers also found traces of artificial intelligence in some of the submitted artworks. "We found AI-generated images and some that were optimized with the help of AI," Zhang tells China Daily. "There were also paintings that were hand-painted with ideas borrowed from AI. You can see the involvement of AI because human brains work differently with the aesthetics, composition and how the details are processed."

Li says: "AI has become an indispensable tool in art and popular culture today, so we must consider a special section for artworks involving AI next year." Artists will have to submit their source materials for their works to avoid any foul play or copyright infringement, she explains.

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LIFE



Little singers touch a million hearts

All-girl choir from deepest Sichuan takes center stage at CCTV's Spring Festival Gala, **Chen Nan** reports.

Music teacher Jibu Xiaolong (left), who founded the Niuniu Choir, and members of the choir in their village in Puge county, Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

On a stage more than 2,200 kilometers away from their home in the small village in Puge county, Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province — far removed from the bright lights of China's urban centers — the Niuniu Choir captured hearts at home and abroad.

During China's most-watched TV event of the year — the CCTV Spring Festival Gala, which was broadcast on Jan 28 — the sweet, innocent voices of the children's choir from one of the most remote regions in the country stole the spotlight.

The sight of the 38 smiling girls, aged from 7 to 14, dressed in traditional Yi attire and their pure, clear voices as they sang *Jade Plate*, elegantly showcased the beauty of Yi culture.

"That was at the end of January. We spent over a month in Beijing preparing and returned home the day after the gala aired. We will never forget the experience of performing on the country's biggest stage," says Jibu Xiaolong, a music teacher from Puge county, who is the founder of the Niuniu Choir.

"The melody is graceful, and the lyrics are poetic," wrote a viewer on social media. "I can feel the children expressing their love for their home, and the beauty of Yi culture, through their singing."

Another viewer wrote, "It's one of my favorite performances in the gala. The children's angelic voices filled the air, a beautiful contrast to the bustling, fast-paced city world."

The children were impressed by the sight of a rocket launch in Xichang, capital of the Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture, which is known as "moon city". It is home to the Xichang Satellite Launch Center, the starting point for China's lunar exploration missions. In 2007, the country's first lunar probe, Chang'e 1, was launched

from there. Since then, Chang'e 2, 3 and 4 have followed, exploring, orbiting, and landing on the moon. According to Jibu Xiaolong, the inspiration for *Jade Plate* came from this ongoing exploration and was adapted from a song written by his friend Tan Qiyin called *Asking the Moon*.

Born in Puge county in 1987, Jibu Xiaolong was the first in his family to attend university. After graduating from the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in 2009 with a major in popular singing, he moved to Beijing with dreams of making it in the music industry, like many young people with musical aspirations. But after struggling with odd jobs and failing to get into a troupe, he returned to his hometown in 2011. Eventually, he became a teacher, and he found his true calling: not just teaching, but inspiring children to dream.

In 2017, he transferred to the school where he now works, the Dacao township central primary school in Puge, and began teaching subjects ranging from mathematics to sports. One day, while playing his guitar and singing a pop song on the playground, a group of curious children gathered around, singing along with him. The moment sparked an idea — why not form a choir? With the support of the school leadership, he began organizing a performance.

The choir started small, with only four students initially expressing interest. Over time, more joined, particularly girls, who found joy in singing and thus, the Niuniu Choir was born. The name, which refers to young girls in Yi, is a reflection of warmth and affection.

Starting a choir was not easy. Though naturally talented, the children were often shy and reserved, especially when it came to performing in front of others. Many of them had never sung pub-



Top: Jibu Xiaolong (front) and his students, also members of the choir, pose in a classroom in the school in Puge county. **Above left and right:** Under Jibu Xiaolong's guidance, the choir made its debut on China's most-watched TV event of the year — the CCTV Spring Festival Gala — on Jan 28.

lily before. To overcome this, Jibu Xiaolong focused on building confidence, starting with simple solo performances before gradually bringing them together as a group.

He also started to write songs for the choir that were not only tailored to their vocal ranges, but also reflected their lives and the beauty of the natural surroundings. These

songs, in both Yi and Mandarin, were about celebrating life, nature, and hope.

One of them, *The Song of the Children*, was inspired by a visit to a family home, where he saw children gathering firewood and herding animals. Another, *Brave Niuniu*, was written to encourage the girls to face their fears.

Jibu Xiaolong says that many girls in the region face significant educational challenges. His eldest sister had to leave school when she was 10 because her parents couldn't afford it.

"I simply want these girls to enjoy music and develop hope and courage as a result. Through music, they see a wider world, and

have the courage to pursue their dreams," he says.

The choir gained recognition after performing in competitions, and its success led to more opportunities: performances on the county, prefectural, and even national stages. In 2020, the choir went viral after its videos were shared on social media, with one gaining over 600,000 views. This exposure gave the choir much-needed support — donations of instruments, teaching materials, and even financial aid for the girls' families.

Jibu Xiaolong says that beyond material support, the attention they received from people across China gave the girls something far more valuable: confidence.

"Some now hope to become professional singers, while others want to follow in their teacher's footsteps and become educators. For many, the choir has opened doors to a brighter future — one where they can rise above the limitations of their rural upbringing and reach their fullest potential," he says.

Seeing his students perform on one of China's most prestigious stages was a moment of deep fulfillment for Jibu Xiaolong. Far from the mountains that shaped them, they had sung their way into the hearts of millions. He now has new plans for the choir and hopes to attract more members, not only from Liangshan, but from around the country, by launching online choir training programs. He also looks forward to having boys sing together.

Another mission is to collect Yi ethnic folk songs and arrange them for children. "That is our goal as a choir — to reach out to the hearts of more and more people," he says.

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Legendary pop star Liu Huan to go global with new deal

By CHEN NAN

Legendary pop artist and music educator Liu Huan, and the Universal Music Greater China, a division of the Universal Music Group, announced an exclusive global agreement on Tuesday.

This will be the first time that most of Liu's work — both recording and publishing rights — will be united under one umbrella. The deal aims to promote and preserve his musical legacy, while amplifying the global cultural impact of Chinese music.

A prolific singer-songwriter and dedicated music educator, Liu, 61, has contributed significantly to the evolution of Chinese pop music. His enduring hits have helped define each era since the 1980s, among them *Wan Wan De Yue Liang* (The Crescent Moon) and *Shao Nian Zhuang Zhi Bu Yan Chou* (Young Aspiration Knows No Sorrow), making him

a beloved household name.

In the 1990s, he cemented his status as a national icon through compositions for the hit television series *Beijingers in New York*, including the beloved hit *Qian Wan Ci De Wen* (Time and Time Again). Later in the decade, his performance of *Hao Han Ge* (The Song of Heroes), the theme song of the TV adaptation of *Water Margin*, which was based on one of China's four great classical novels, became a cultural phenomenon. In the 2010s, he composed the entire soundtrack for award-winning TV series *Empresses in the Palace*, which shattered viewership records and sparked nationwide acclaim.

Liu's status as a cultural icon is reflected in performances that have defined pivotal moments in the country's modern history. In 1990, he collaborated with female singer Wei Wei on the song *Ya Zhou Xiong Feng* (Mighty Winds of Asia), which

was dedicated to the 11th Beijing Asian Games, capturing the spirit of optimism and ambition of the era. In 2008, he took center stage at the Beijing Olympic Games opening ceremony, performing *You and Me* alongside British soprano Sarah Brightman in a duet watched by billions around the world.

Beyond his career as an artist, Liu has dedicated himself to nurturing new talent and promoting original music. In 2012, he took part in the inaugural season of *The Voice of China*, helping launch the careers of many of his students. In 2014, he spearheaded the critically acclaimed reality show *Sing My Song*, which spotlighted original music and introduced a new generation of singer-songwriters, who have since produced a wealth of widely celebrated songs. Furthering his commitment to originality, he established the Liu Huan Original Music

Fund in 2019, a philanthropic initiative to support singer-songwriters and promote the development of China's music industry.

"I am honored to entrust my life's work to Universal Music Greater China, a partner that values the integrity of music and recognizes its deep significance. I believe this partnership will not only expand the reach of my creations, but also amplify their impact on a broader scale," says Liu, adding that the deal will advance the global influence of Chinese culture, which he says aligns perfectly with his long-held goals.

"I look forward to seeing how our collaboration will bring the richness and beauty of Chinese culture to audiences around the world through music," he says.

"We are deeply honored to stand alongside Liu Huan as his chosen partner, supporting him in this excit-

ing new chapter of his illustrious career. His ability to create music that speaks to the soul of a nation is unparalleled, and his enduring artistic vitality makes him truly one of a kind. With his trust, we are committed to celebrating his musical legacy, and together, we aim to promote the development of the Chinese music industry, and continue to elevate the global impact of Chinese culture," says Timothy Xu, chairman and chief executive officer of Universal Music Greater China.

"We are committed to championing local artistry as part of our vision for a diversified global music culture. Liu Huan is a towering figure in contemporary Chinese music history, and we are proud to support his journey in sharing his extraordinary music with the world," says Adam Granite, executive vice-president of market development at the Universal Music Group.



Liu Huan, legendary pop singer-songwriter and music educator. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY