

**Love under fire**

South Kivu on edge as fresh violence surges in DR Congo  
WORLD, PAGE 7



**Inbound tourism booming amid relaxed policies**  
BUSINESS, PAGE 8



**Clean growth**

Safe recycling of disused items to facilitate industrial upgrade  
GOING GREEN, PAGE 5

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2025

## China reaffirms commitment to multipolarity

Foreign minister also tells Munich meeting that nation maintains consistent US policy

By ZHANG YUNBI  
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

As Foreign Minister Wang Yi addressed the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany and engaged in a slew of meetings on the sidelines, observers said Beijing has underlined the consistency of its policies and its commitment to offering certainty in areas such as China-US ties and building a multipolar world.

While delivering a speech on Friday at the "China in the World" session of the 61st Munich Security Conference, Wang said that China maintains a stable and consistent policy toward the United States and does not readily flip-flop or reverse the policy. This demonstrates China's "strategic resolve as well as international credibility as a major country", he emphasized.

"If the US insists on suppressing and containing China, we will play along to the end, firmly counter any unilateral bullying actions by the US, and resolutely defend China's state sovereignty, national dignity and its legitimate right to develop," he said.

Noting that it is unrealistic to attempt to change or upend each other's political system, Wang said global challenges need to be jointly addressed by China and the US, and this is an international responsibility that both sides should shoulder.

Wang referred to Beijing's long-standing position on ties with Washington, which is to build "a stable, healthy and sustainable bilateral relationship" based on the three principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

Urging Washington to find the right way for the two major countries to get along, Wang expressed his hope that the US "will move in the same direction as China".

During a meeting on Friday with Graham Allison, a professor of international politics at Harvard University, Wang said that China will work with like-minded countries to promote a stable and orderly multipolar world as well as inclusive economic globalization that benefits all.

He also reiterated that "China maintains a consistent and stable US policy".

Allison expressed his hope that the US and China can engage in effective cooperation and play a key role in addressing international and regional hot-spot issues.

During a panel discussion at the conference in Munich, Fu Ying, a former vice-foreign minister of China, stressed that over the years, Beijing has maintained consistency in its principle of developing ties with Washington.

"The US has launched this 'strate-

gic competition' with China, but you don't hear China talking about accepting or defining our relationship with the US as competition," she said.

Wang Yiwei, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of International Studies and director of the university's Institute of International Affairs, said, "The foreign minister's comments have made clear how Beijing will respond if Washington persists in suppressing and containing China."

"A major country should resolutely reject seeking a zero-sum game, and should not fail to match its words with actions," he added.

While the organizer of this year's Munich Security Conference has focused on the world's multipolarization, the Chinese foreign minister also elaborated on China's four key views regarding multipolarization in his speech — advocating equality among nations, respecting the rule of international law, practicing multilateralism, and upholding openness and win-win cooperation.

"The multipolar paradigm must not be in a state of disarray, said Wang Yi, adding that "without norms and standards, one may be at the table yesterday but end up on the menu tomorrow".

"Major countries should take the lead in upholding integrity and the rule of law," he said, adding that China actively fulfills its international responsibilities and obligations, and "never practices exceptionalism, still less cherry-picking".

Noting that protectionism is not the way out and that the abuse of tariffs will benefit no one, Wang Yi said it is essential to adhere to openness and cooperation, and to support equal and orderly multipolarization of the world through universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization.

China is willing to promote the synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and the European Union's Global Gateway initiative, empowering each other and the world, he added.

Wang Huiyao, president of the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization, attended the events in Munich, and said that during his trips to several European countries, he noticed that "there is growing interest in advancing cooperation with China and expanding investment".

"China surely will move steadily on its path and work on building its circle of friends, working together to meet challenges posed by uncertainties," he said.

**Inside**

- See more, **page 3**
- Editorial, **page 11**
- Comment, **page 12**

## Young celebrities



A pair of six-month-old panda cubs meet their adoring fans on Sunday during their first public appearance at the Ocean Park in Hong Kong. The twins are Hong Kong's first locally-born giant panda cubs. CHAN LONG-HEI / AP

## Xi extends congratulations to African Union Summit

President Xi Jinping sent a message on Saturday to the 38th African Union Summit, extending warm congratulations to African countries and people.

In the face of the current complex and intertwined international situation, the Global South, including China and Africa, has grown significantly, Xi noted.

Over the past year, the AU has

united and led African countries in vigorously advancing integration, actively responding to regional and global challenges, and speaking in unison as the "voice of Africa", he said.

Noting that these efforts have led to a continuous boost in Africa's international status and influence, Xi sincerely wished African countries and people even greater success on the path of independence,

self-reliance and development.

Xi said the year 2024 saw vigorous development of China-Africa ties.

With the successful Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China and Africa have embarked on a new stage of jointly building an all-weather community with a shared future for the new era, and stayed at the forefront of building a community

with a shared future for mankind, he noted.

Xi expressed readiness to work with African leaders to implement the six proposals for jointly advancing modernization and 10 partnership actions put forth by Xi at the FOCAC summit, in order to bring more tangible results to benefit over 2.8 billion Chinese and African people.

XINHUA



Angolan President Joao Lourenco (center) holds the gavel after taking over the rotating chairmanship of the African Union on Saturday during the 38th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of the Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

MINASSE WONDIMU HAILU / EPA-EFE

## Trump's tariff moves designed to serve economic, political objectives

United States President Donald Trump, who entered the White House for a second term, described tariff as "the most beautiful word in the dictionary" several times during his campaign.

In his opinion, tariffs are a multipurpose weapon for achieving three objectives: compelling foreign leaders to negotiate, rebuilding the US manufacturing sector, and reducing the US trade deficit.

The first objective was clear in his Feb 1 announcement of 25 percent tariff on all imports from Canada and Mexico, and an additional 10 percent tariff on all imports from China, which took effect on Feb 4.

Trump waited until the last minute to cut a deal on Feb 3 with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, pausing the imposition of tariffs for 30 days. Canada and Mexico, which had prepared precise lists of retaliatory tariffs in the event the US duties took effect, did the same.

Canada and Mexico also committed thousands of soldiers and police personnel on their respective borders to curb the flow of immigrants and fentanyl — Trump's immediate objectives, which are far removed from traditional trade concerns.

Before the tariff pause was announced, the US and world stock markets tumbled. That was important because Trump gauges his success with three metrics: the stock market, the headlines and the opinion polls. The initial stock market reac-

tions and semiconductors, among others.

His tariff assaults on allies and adversaries alike are unlikely to spark a US manufacturing renaissance, nor will they make a serious dent in the US global trade deficit, which is around \$900 billion annually. But the assaults do have several adverse consequences.

If all the threats evolve into actual tariffs, inflation in the US will surge. New tariffs averaging 20 percent on imports from the world could raise the consumer price index and personal consumption expenditures index by almost 2 percentage points, in other words, escalating inflation to above 4 percent, when direct and indirect effects are fully counted.

The Federal Reserve would need to raise its policy rate above 4.5 percent, sparking a rise in mortgage interest rates above 8 percent. That will be painful for any young couple buying their first home and for everyone rebuilding after damage from hurricanes and wildfires.

High interest rates also will take a toll on the stock market, while retaliation from countries hit by new US tariffs will destroy jobs in the targeted US industries.

Such economic consequences cannot be favorable for Trump when US midterm elections are due in November 2026. Surveying the outlook, Trump could declare victory on his tariff threats and pull back on actual implementation.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration's additional 10 percent tariff on all imports from China took effect on Feb 4, taking the total US tariff on such imports to above 30 percent. China predictably took countermeasures, but not one-for-one.

Trump declared that the new 10 percent tariff on China was just "an opening salvo", adding that "If we can't make a deal with China, then the tariffs would be very, very substantial".

He has also threatened to impose tariffs on Europe, and named several global products destined for tariffs, including steel, aluminum, pharmaceuti-

**WORLD WATCH**  
By Gary Clyde Hufbauer

**Inside**

• See more, **pages 3, 7, 10**

tion was unwelcome. However, once the pause was announced, the markets recovered, and headlines proclaimed a Trump victory.

Nationalistic sentiment has reached peak levels among people in the US, fanned by Trump's grievances against foreign countries. It will take time for opinion polls to report on public approval or disapproval of Trump's tariff policies, but until those policies translate into higher prices and lost employment, attitudes are likely to stay positive.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration's additional 10 percent tariff on all imports from China took effect on Feb 4, taking the total US tariff on such imports to above 30 percent. China predictably took countermeasures, but not one-for-one.

Trump declared that the new 10 percent tariff on China was just "an opening salvo", adding that "If we can't make a deal with China, then the tariffs would be very, very substantial".

He has also threatened to impose tariffs on Europe, and named several global products destined for tariffs, including steel, aluminum, pharmaceuti-

tion was unwelcome. However, once the pause was announced, the markets recovered, and headlines proclaimed a Trump victory.

Nationalistic sentiment has reached peak levels among people in the US, fanned by Trump's grievances against foreign countries. It will take time for opinion polls to report on public approval or disapproval of Trump's tariff policies, but until those policies translate into higher prices and lost employment, attitudes are likely to stay positive.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration's additional 10 percent tariff on all imports from China took effect on Feb 4, taking the total US tariff on such imports to above 30 percent. China predictably took countermeasures, but not one-for-one.

Trump declared that the new 10 percent tariff on China was just "an opening salvo", adding that "If we can't make a deal with China, then the tariffs would be very, very substantial".

He has also threatened to impose tariffs on Europe, and named several global products destined for tariffs, including steel, aluminum, pharmaceuti-

## COLORFUL TREE 'SWEATERS' BRANCH OUT ACROSS COUNTRY

Decoration trend brings pride, sense of community to cities

By ZHANG XIAOMIN  
in Dalian, Liaoning  
zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn

From online to offline, a trend of dressing trees in colorful sweaters has swept across the country this winter, with the vibrant spectacle adorning roadsides in many places.

Initially, people used AI software to "dress" iconic buildings such as the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and the Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai with the sweaters. Tourism departments then joined in, dressing historic buildings and landmarks.

**In-depth**

In Dalian, Liaoning province, several popular attractions in Zhongshan district saw roadside trees adorned with colorful sweaters, each with its own theme reflecting the creativity of the weavers.

One that gained widespread attention in the northeastern port city was a ginkgo tree in front of the post office in Zhongshan Square, decked in a sweater of bright colors intended to trigger the release of dopamine, and with a heart-shaped pattern.

See Dalian, page 2



© 2025 China Daily Global All Rights Reserved

www.chinadailyglobal.com

Newsstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1.16 EU 1.6 Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 Thai Baht Philippines 120 p/p; Myanmar 2000 Kyat; Japan 210 Yen; Dubai 10 Dirham; Pakistan 300 Rupee



# PAGE TWO

From page 1

"To respond to the tourism department's 'Winter Fairy Tale, Romantic Dalian' theme event, we thought of dressing the tree with a sweater, aiming to make it a picturesque spot for photos," said Meng Zhuo, the head of the Zhongshan branch of China Post.

In late November, resident Miao Chunyan, 63, was invited to knit a sweater for the ginkgo tree. She enjoys knitting dolls, hats and other small items, but had never thought of knitting a large sweater for a tree.

"There are many elements to consider, such as knitting size, density and more," Miao said. She made multiple trips between her home and the post office, measuring, modifying and fitting the sweater for size repeatedly.

When the garment decoration was finished, the tree attracted many visitors who eagerly shared their beautiful photos on social media.

The postal company added sweaters to a mailbox and lamp post near the tree.

While knitting the mailbox sweater, Miao carefully measured its irregular top section, pondering how to knit the pullover to be both aesthetically pleasing and durable.

"One night, I couldn't sleep and thought about how the front part of the sweater I knitted during the day was too loose. It could easily get stretched if someone pulled it for a photo," she recalled.

It was midnight, but she immediately got up, unraveled the arm part, and reknitted it tighter. "That way, it wouldn't easily stretch, and it would also be easier to maintain," said Miao.

### Enthusiastic participation

After that, the Dalian Women's Federation launched a program to dress trees, which attracted families and individuals.

People took matters into their own hands by dressing the trees along Nanshan Road and Qiqi Street in so-called dopamine sweaters. Many schools and businesses spontaneously knitted sweaters for trees on campuses, and outside their premises.

The sweater styles kept evolving. Some trees were fitted with miniskirts, some with cute dolls attached to the sweaters, and others had paper tags filled with New Year blessings.

"We planned this activity to leverage the federation's expertise in family work and also to contribute to Dalian's winter tourism, creating new hot spots for social media check-ins," said Chen Jing, vice-chairperson of the Dalian Women's Federation.

The two streets selected are located in a well-known cultural community that attracts many young entrepreneurs. The trees dressed in dopamine sweaters blended harmoniously with the streets' atmosphere.

"We initially planned to decorate 100 trees, but the enthusiasm of applicants far exceeded expectations, so we added 20 more. Once applications were opened on Dec 29, they were quickly fully subscribed," she said.

"Although the volunteers' skills varied, with some knitting, some wrapping, and others meticulously and professionally designing, each tree's sweater displayed unique creativity, reflecting residents' love for the city," Chen added.

Many people contacted the federation, expressing their desire to decorate trees, leading to the launch of a second group of 50 trees.

Chen said that before launching the activity, they conducted relevant research, coordinated with the gardening and municipal departments, and consulted experts.

"Dressing the trees in sweaters for a short period would not have any negative



Volunteers pose for a photo in front of a tree, one of those they had knitted "sweaters" for in Zhongshan district of Dalian, Liaoning province, on Jan 10. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Dalian: Knitting warmth, ingenuity into city space

impact," she said they concluded.

The sweaters started to be removed after Lantern Festival, which fell on Wednesday.

The federation also set up a dedicated working group to repair mishaps, with two staff members patrolling the streets daily, carrying scissors, needles and yarn. If any sweaters were found to be unraveling or coming loose, they were promptly repaired, Chen said.

### Family involvement

Volunteers Zhao Shuang and her 10-year-old daughter Shi Yunxin participated twice

in the program and "adopted" two trees.

For their first tree, they used deep blue color for the sweater to symbolize the power of the sea, and added a pair of orange hands to evoke a feeling of warmth and an embrace.

For the second tree, in addition to the festive sweater, they made a large bouquet of roses using twist rods. They placed them in a heart-shaped bag, and included inspirational cards offering encouragement to those who see it.

"When the first batch of (tree) adoptions

was almost full, I was lucky to secure a spot. During the second batch, I involved my group of friends to take responsibility for 50 trees," Zhao said.

Since 2017, the mother and daughter have been participating in various federation activities. They have made like-minded friends and formed a volunteer service team.

"The enthusiasm of everyone was particularly high. Initially, we planned for one family to adopt one tree, but there were too many people interested. In the end, some trees had two or three, or five or six families adopting them together," she said.

The Picture Book Dalian volunteer team also participated in the tree dressing.

Wang Xuehong, head of the team, said that as soon as they noticed the activity posted on the federation's WeChat account, they immediately claimed 20 trees.

"Mostly parents brought their children to participate. We collected many old sweaters and even found some discarded sweater pieces from a sweater factory. Everyone worked together to sew, creating various styles of tree coats," said Wang.

The children were actively involved. Some of them would occasionally check on the trees they helped decorate, and feel a sense of responsibility and pride, which was particularly meaningful to them, she said.

### Controversy, reflection

While dressing trees in sweaters has garnered a lot of praise around the coun-

try, it has also sparked controversy.

Professor Liu Yong, from Beijing Forestry University, told Beijing News that trees like the locust and the camphor, which have been planted for many years, have already adapted to the local climate and do not require additional warmth. Dressing them in sweaters is more like a form of "performance art".

"During the holiday season, dressing them for a couple of days to create an atmosphere is feasible, but doing so for an extended period could lead to insects laying eggs inside, causing diseases in the trees," he said, adding that there have been instances of ancient trees wrapped in banners for many years, and upon removal, insect eggs were found.

Some netizens wondered if such activities were a waste of resources and suggested prioritizing people's needs. Others felt the practice was a form of formalism.

"This may be a manifestation of the lack of innovative thinking in urban greening management. Blindly dressing trees in 'clothes' may affect the health of the trees, such as causing poor ventilation and breeding mold," one netizen commented on social media platform Xiaohongshu.

But many other netizens said that seeing the trees dressed in sweaters had lifted their spirits and made them feel that their city is more vibrant and lovable.

From plush toys to city buildings, many young people are keen on anthropomorphizing objects and imbuing them with personality and emotion.

Some enthusiasts believe this is a way of presenting existing objects in a fresh manner and adding novelty to them. However, critics worry that treating society as a fairy tale reflects a reluctance to grow up and is indicative of a "Peter Pan syndrome".

Feng Lei, a specialist from the Dalian Psychological Society with a doctorate in applied psychology, is positive about the effects of the trend.

"People are happy when they are helping others," she said. "When dressing trees in sweaters and making them warm and cute, it's actually about bringing warmth to oneself. Many people hugging the trees in sweaters are also warming themselves," Feng said.

She believes that dressing trees in sweaters is a novel and creative idea, and a way for people to enthusiastically express their love for their city.

Behind the popularity of this activity is a collective unconscious need for warmth from others, especially during challenging times, and a psychological need to be cared for and comforted, experts said.

Researcher Cao Yixia from the Institute of Applied Economics of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences told Shanghai Observer news portal that young people's fondness for personifying everything is a projection of a desire for companionship. This is done in the context of a relative lack of social interactions and contact with neighbors, Cao said.

An attending physician in the field of mental health told Shanghai Observer that such phenomena are all rooted in psychology.

"What people find fun is that it uses a contrast, turning buildings into people, turning things without warmth into warm things," he said.

In his view, this is just "a little game" that may not be popular after a while when new trends have soon emerged. In fact, turning city buildings into ice sculptures was popular on social media when the "sweater dressing" trend was still gaining popularity, he said.



Trees wear "sweaters" or "coats" in Dalian, Liaoning province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Revelry season

Performers dance as a parade moves through the Place Massena on Saturday during the opening ceremony of the 152nd Nice Carnival in Nice, southern France. The Nice Carnival is one of the world's best known events, alongside the carnivals in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Venice in Italy.

LEWIS JOLY / AP PHOTO



## Experts warn Trump's moves escalating frictions

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
yifan.xu@chinadailyusa.com

As United States President Donald Trump eyes tougher tariff measures against China starting in April, businesses and global markets are bracing for escalated trade friction, according to experts.

Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, DC, said that Trump has commissioned "a lot of probes and reports" targeting China on various issues, including whether China lived up to its market purchase target, whether the US should initiate more Section 301 investigations against China, and how he can expand the range of already banned Chinese-made hardware and software for connected vehicles.

All these reports are due around early April, Gupta said, adding that Trump will then start using them to impose a tariff here and get leverage there.

Trump's pending trade reviews, due by April 1, are likely to accuse China of breaching agreements or employing "nonmarket practices", setting the stage for escalated measures. "The reports will inevitably criticize China, giving Trump leverage," Gupta said.

However, negotiations during Trump's first term saw limited suc-

cess, with US demands for total compliance often derailing talks. "The Americans wanted 10 out of 10, not nine," Gupta said.

On Thursday, Trump signed an executive order announcing reciprocal tariffs on imports from other countries, imposing duties equivalent to the rates that trade partners levy on US exports. In another executive order signed on Tuesday, Trump reinstated 25 percent duties on steel and aluminum imports, applicable globally but notably affecting top suppliers Canada, Mexico, Brazil, the Republic of Korea and Japan, which collectively account for 25 percent of US steel imports.

In an earlier round of announcements, Trump came close to imposing sweeping tariffs on the US' largest trade partners, Canada and Mexico, accusing the two nations of channeling drugs and migrants into the country. Following some concessions from the two countries, he opted to pause the measures for 30 days. In contrast, he has already imposed an additional 10 percent tariff on all imports from China.

Peter Harrell, a nonresident fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former National Security Council official, said in a discussion hosted by the Center for Strategic and Interna-

tional Studies, a think tank based in Washington, DC, that tariffs could disrupt US alliances.

"The key is whether Trump's team prioritizes deals over maximalist demands," he said, warning that Trump's policies risk global ripple effects.

Dean Baker, senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, said in an interview with CBS MoneyWatch, "If you put a tax on imported steel and aluminum, you will raise the price of everything that uses that — cars first and foremost."

Baker estimated that adding a 25 percent tariff on imported steel and aluminum could increase the cost of a car by \$1,000 to \$1,500.

In a statement regarding the Trump administration's plan to impose reciprocal tariffs on all trade partners, David French, executive vice-president of government relations at the National Retail Federation, said that Trump's scale of the undertaking is massive and would be extremely disruptive to US supply chains.

"It will likely result in higher prices for hardworking American families and will erode household spending power," French added.

Gupta, from the Institute for China-America Studies, said that Trump's tariffs target China as part of a "broader supply chain"

approach, despite Beijing's cooperation with both the Trump and Biden administrations on theentanyl issue.

The tariffs on China are already high in some sectors — like semiconductors and electric vehicles, on which Biden imposed 100 percent tariffs — but generally between 10 and 25 percent. An additional 10 percent tariff is just the beginning, Gupta said.

China has responded with targeted tariffs on \$18 billion worth of US goods, focusing on sectors such as automobiles, agriculture and energy, which are critical to Trump's political base.

Gupta described China's countermeasures as smart and restrained. "The measures are very restrained, affecting about 10 percent of US trade. China has been preparing for this moment and is keeping ammunition for future rounds."

Gupta said he foresees "more bad news", because with climate cooperation "completely off the radar", potential collaboration may instead focus on geopolitical issues such as brokering Russia-Ukraine peace talks or engaging with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"Trump prefers stability in strategic competition. That's where common ground might exist," he added.

"If the intention of the speech was to alienate Europe, I think it could be described as successful. Otherwise — certainly not," Bildt said.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said Vance was trying to pick a fight with the EU.

"Listening to that speech, they try to pick a fight with us and we don't want to pick a fight with our friends," she said at the Munich conference.

Wang Yiwei, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of International Studies, who attended the Munich conference, told China Daily that Vance's speech has confused Europeans.

"Some Europeans are disappointed with the US. Some still harbor delusions about the US, even hoping to incite tensions between China and the US to benefit the EU," Wang said, clearly referring to Kallas, who took several swipes at China when people expected her to comment on US government actions.

Rob Roos, a former EU lawmaker and former vice-president of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, applauded Vance's speech.

"EU bureaucrats should be required to listen to this twice a day — once before work, once before bed," he wrote on X. "A master class in democracy. A lesson in common sense."

## China backs all efforts to achieve peace

Nation to continue playing constructive role in ensuring political solution to Ukraine crisis

By ZHAO JIA  
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

China has reiterated its commitment to supporting all peace efforts aimed at achieving a political solution to the ongoing Ukraine crisis and expressed its hope for a fair, lasting and binding peace agreement acceptable to all parties concerned.

On Saturday, Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, at Sybiha's request, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany and vowed that China will continue to play a constructive role in the political settlement of the crisis and in the realization of peace.

Ukraine values China's significant influence as a major country and appreciates its "objective and balanced" position, Sybiha said, adding that the country expects China to play an important role in achieving comprehensive, fair and sustainable peace.

When addressing the Munich Security Conference on Friday, Wang also emphasized the need to resolve the Ukraine crisis through dialogue and consultation. He said he hoped that all parties directly involved in the matter, as well as other stakeholders, would be able to participate in peace talks in due course.

"Any conflict ultimately finds its resolution at the negotiating table," Wang said, adding that China welcomes all efforts dedicated to peace, including the recent consensus between the United States and Russia on peace talks.

As the conflict unfolded on European soil, he highlighted the importance of Europe's role in fostering peace and addressing the root causes of the crisis, in order to establish a balanced, effective and sustainable security framework to ensure long-term stability in the region.

"China is not the instigator of this crisis, nor is it a direct party to it. However, it is not standing idle, nor is it seeking to exploit the situation," Wang said, adding that the country has instead relentlessly striven for peace.

One day after the conflict started, China proposed a political settlement through dialogue and later sent special envoys for shuttle diplomacy.

China has consistently upheld the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected, the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter observed, the legitimate security concerns of all sides taken seriously, and all efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement of the crisis supported.

## CHINA DAILY USA

## NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

## Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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

## WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg., Suite 1108

539 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

## SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San Francisco,  
CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

## SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave., Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2866

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-995-7650

## CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No. 1517

## Vance's speech irks European leaders

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

European leaders reacted angrily to US Vice-President JD Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference on Friday, in which he accused European governments of overturning elections, ignoring the will of their people and doing nothing to halt illegal migration.

"The threat that I worry the most about vis-a-vis Europe is not Russia. It's not China, it's not any other external actor. And what I worry about is the threat from within," Vance said.

"The retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values, values shared with the United States of America."

"If you're running in fear of your own voters, there is nothing America can do for you."

Citing specific cases, Vance criticized the actions taken by European authorities, from the European Commission and Sweden to Germany and Romania. He pointed to Romania's top court overturning the first round of the country's presidential election in November.

"When we see European courts canceling elections and senior officials threatening to cancel others, we ought to ask whether we're holding ourselves to an appropriately high standard," he said.

Vance also warned Germany, saying "there is no room for firewalls", referring to Germany's mainstream political parties refusing to cooperate with the Alternative for Germany, or AfD, a party labeled as far-right in the European Union.

Germany's federal election, set for Feb 23, is expected to see the AfD finish in second place, ahead of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party, according to a recent YouGov poll.

Scholz immediately rejected Vance's call to remove the "firewalls" against the AfD, saying the Donald Trump administration's backing of the party "is not proper, especially not among friends and allies, and we firmly reject that."

"We will decide for ourselves what happens to our democracy," Scholz said on Saturday.

Friedrich Merz, leader of Germany's Christian Democratic Union

and the most likely next chancellor, also rebuffed Vance.

"We respect the presidential elections and the congressional elections in the US. And we expect the US to do the same here," he told the Munich meeting.

Merz mocked Trump's White House for banning Associated Press reporters from attending events after the agency refused to use "Gulf of America" to replace Gulf of Mexico. Merz said the German government "would never kick out a news agency out of the press room of our chancellery".

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said Vance's speech was "not acceptable".

Vance infuriated German leaders by meeting with the AfD's chancellor candidate Alice Weidel on Friday, while he did not meet Scholz.

Asked about Vance's speech, Trump said on Friday it was a "very good speech, actually very brilliant".

Carl Bildt, former Swedish prime minister, said Vance's speech was "significantly worse than expected" and Scholz delivered "a fairly robust rebuttal".

no longer provide a solid foundation for long-term investment.

Other global economic powers, such as China, the European Union and Japan, will very likely respect their own commitments, but multinational corporations will carefully assess the extent of disruption

before making new investments.

If chaotic policies patterned after Trump spread, not only trade but also finance and digital connections will be interrupted. The world economic order created during World War II will no longer exist. It may be replaced by something akin

to the commercial and financial disorder between World War I and World War II.

On an optimistic note, other countries may design their international policies around the US. They may strengthen their own bilateral and multilateral relations, through trade

arrangements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the EU-Mercosur agreement and other pacts.

They may create alternatives to the dollar-centered financial system. Multilateral financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, may gain

fresh support from new members. All said, the world could be pleasantly surprised by constructive reactions to Trump's destructive policies.

The author is a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, an independent non-profit, nonpartisan research organization in Washington, DC, the United States. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## Areas vie to be Ne Zha's 'birthplace'

Tourism bodies claim fictional character born in their localities

By CHENG SI  
chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

Tourism authorities in several provincial-level regions have vied to promote their areas as the "real birthplace" of the Ne Zha character, hoping to ride the wave of popularity of the hit blockbuster, attract more tourists and boost economic growth. However, experts have called for some restraint as the fervor over the mythical character has gone beyond expectations.

The animated film *Ne Zha 2*, or *Ne Zha: Demon Child Conquers the Sea*, has become China's highest-grossing movie of all time, with over 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) in ticket sales since its opening on Jan 29 during the Spring Festival holiday. It's a sequel to China's top-grossing movie of 2019.

The box-office sensation is adapted from Chinese mythology and loosely based on the novel *Fengshen Yanyi*, or *The Investiture of the Gods*, which was written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). In the film, a boy named Ne Zha, who was born with a demonic destiny and mighty power, fights against his fate and takes down villains with his best friend Ao Bing.

According to the novel, Ne Zha was born in Chentang Pass during the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC). However, the location of Chentang Pass in real life remains controversial, causing a "bidding war" for Ne Zha's birthplace online.

Yibin, a city in the southwestern province of Sichuan, said that it has over 20 places, relics and natural sites closely related to the folklore around Ne Zha. In August 2019, its Cuijing district was named "home to Ne Zha culture" by the China Folk Literature and Art Association, according to the Yibin government official website.

Other cities and provincial-level regions such as Tianjin, Henan and Anhui are also claiming to be Ne Zha's birthplace based on their folk



Street artists paint a mural themed after the movie *Ne Zha 2*, attracting people to gather and take photos in Mianyang, Sichuan province, on Saturday. The mural is approximately 2.5 meters high and 15 meters wide. CHEN DONGDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

tales or historical relics.

Experts said that it is still difficult to determine the real locations depicted in Ne Zha's story, as the character is a fictitious one, though it is loosely modeled on a real person in history. The fact that Chinese regions are vying to be known as the character's birthplace shows that local authorities are trying to benefit from the in-vogue film to boost their tourism and economies, they said.

Figures from travel portals appear to support this claim. According to online travel agency LY.com, the number of Yibin hotel room bookings and the average price of the rooms both grew 30 percent year-on-year from Feb 1 to Feb 9. Tianjin's Hexi district saw hotel

bookings surge over 60 percent year-on-year during the period.

Travel portal Qunar also reported that during the Spring Festival holiday from Jan 28 to Feb 4, hotel bookings in Yibin rose 50 percent year-on-year on its platform.

It is not the first time that a Chinese folklore or film or entertainment product based on mythology has intrigued people's interest in Chinese traditional culture and prompted hordes of enthusiasts to visit certain regions.

The Chinese video game *Black Myth: Wukong*, based on the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, was all the rage worldwide after being released last year. A large number of gamers and fans have flocked to Shanxi province, which is

home to 27 of 36 scenes in the game, with most of the scenes closely related to Buddhist culture and Taoism.

Tang Yezhe, a 32-year-old engineer in Beijing, said he's a fan of the *Ne Zha* films and *Black Myth: Wukong*.

"*Ne Zha 2* is really stunning. The story, the characters and the special effects of the film are all exciting and vivid. I watched the film twice with my wife," he said.

He added that he traveled to Datong, Shanxi, in October with his family to see sites associated with the *Black Myth: Wukong* game.

"I've heard about the online birthplace contention of Ne Zha. I think it's hard to define where exactly Ne Zha comes from as he is a mythical figure," Tang said. "Sichuan and

Tianjin are so far the two strongest candidates, and I may pay a visit to Sichuan's Yibin city to see the relics about Ne Zha."

Wang Peng, an associate researcher from the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said in a recent interview with news outlet CQCB.com that Ne Zha is one of China's most popular mythical figures and has boosted short-term public attention to destinations concerning Ne Zha's story.

He suggested local authorities combine their own cultural and tourism advantages with the influence of Ne Zha to ensure more sustainable tourism development, rather than blindly jumping on the bandwagon or ignoring their local tourism resources.

## AI model treating children at Beijing hospital

After its launch on Jan 18 and nearly a month of internal testing, Beijing Children's Hospital's artificial intelligence model specializing in pediatrics faced the task of diagnosing and treating its first patient on Feb 13.

The first case involved an 8-year-old boy who for three weeks had been experiencing persistent ticks, which are habitual spasmodic muscle contractions.

A mass discovered at the base of the boy's skull two weeks earlier presented a complex medical condition for which diagnostic results across multiple hospitals had proved inconsistent.

Ni Xin, head of the hospital, along with 13 renowned experts from different departments, conducted in-depth discussions regarding the boy's condition. They concluded that further MRI evaluation was necessary and recommended expediting the completion of the required examinations.

"This advancement will significantly increase the popularization and accessibility of high-quality medical services."

Wang Xiaochuan, founder and CEO of Baichuan AI

Meanwhile, the pediatric AI model was also hard at work. After engineers input the patient's chief complaints and medical records into the model, it provided recommendations that closely aligned with those of the expert panel.

The specialist AI, believed to be the first of its kind in China, has been used in multidisciplinary consultations for complex cases, pioneering a dual-doctor parallel model that combines the AI with multidisciplinary human experts — potentially improving the diagnosis and treatment of challenging pediatric conditions.

According to Ni, the pediatric AI was developed by the hospital in collaboration with multiple technology companies, leveraging the hospital's pediatric medical big data model, its health medical innovation applications key laboratory and its validation platform.

The AI system integrates the clinical expertise of over 300 renowned pediatric specialists in the hospital, along with decades of high-quality medical record data from these experts. Through structured clinical reasoning paradigm training, it has established a comprehensive knowledge system covering both common and complex pediatric diseases.

Wang Xiaochuan, founder and CEO of Baichuan AI, a technical collaboration partner, said the application of the AI model at Beijing Children's Hospital marks a significant milestone in the field of AI healthcare.

"This advancement will significantly increase the popularization and accessibility of high-quality medical services," he said.

Ni said the hospital will continue to deepen research, development and promotion of its big data pediatric health model, aiming to comprehensively cover diverse scenarios for primary medical institutions and family health management.

Through technological empowerment, all 300 million children across the country can hopefully access high-quality medical services, Ni added.

XINHUA

## Tips to prevent back-to-school blues

By WANG XIAOYU  
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Temperatures are rising, trees are budding and the days are getting brighter, but some children across the country are struggling with the start of a new school semester.

While many experience post-vacation blues, experts say there are ways to ease these transitions back to normal daily life.

"After a pleasant winter holiday, children's brains have adapted to a state of freedom, relaxation, irregular lifestyles and low stress levels. Therefore, their prefrontal cortex, responsible for regulating emotions, needs to readjust to the upcoming school routine," said Cui Yonghua, chief physician at Beijing Children's Hospital affiliated with Capital Medical University.

Concerns about unfinished homework, new coursework and fears of lagging behind, separating from the family or being isolated in class can exacerbate feelings of anxiety, Cui said during a Thursday news conference held by the National Health Commission. Primary and middle school students in China begin their new semesters this week.

To help children adjust, Cui suggested they reset their sleep schedules to match school hours three to five days in advance and create study plans to prepare for new courses.

"Another feasible approach is to interact with classmates proactively when returning to campus, sharing anecdotes or discussing study plans together, and engaging in group activities," he said.

A growing number of outpatient clinics for students struggling with school have opened in recent years, according to Wu Renrong of the Second Xiangya Hospital of Central South University. She urged parents to take a rational approach to school-related difficulties.



Students and their teacher carry textbooks in a primary school in Haikou, Hainan province, on Sunday, as they prepare for the new semester that begins on Monday. SU BIKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Such clinics typically integrate professional resources from child psychiatry, psychology and education. They help parents and children identify the root causes of their issues and provide targeted treatment and interventions," she said.

However, Wu said that learning difficulties and school avoidance can sometimes stem from developmental factors such as adolescent mood swings or a temporary lack of motivation. Creating a more relaxed family atmosphere and improving learning environments can help in such cases.

Some students may have underlying conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Children who consistently struggle with school, frequently skip classes or consider dropping out should get professional medical help, Wu said.

"It is important to be vigilant about potential mental health issues while also avoiding the over-medicalization of developmental problems," she said.

As concerns over gaming addiction among young people grow, Wu stressed the importance of early

diagnosis and intervention.

Gaming disorder can significantly impair a person's personal, family, social, educational or occupational functions, with symptoms typically lasting at least 12 months, she said.

"It could take several years from the start of gaming to develop a gaming disorder, providing opportunities for early detection and intervention," Wu said.

She called on families, schools and society to work together to prevent gaming addiction by fostering a healthy growth environment, promoting awareness about responsible internet use and tightening oversight of the gaming industry.

Cui said students experiencing psychological distress can seek counseling services on or off campus.

China recently launched the 12356 mental health support hotline with 18 provincial-level regions operating the service.

Cui also urged parents to prioritize their children's mental well-being, offer emotional support and seek professional help if needed.

## Artificial intelligence use by kids sparks concerns

By CHINA DAILY

With schools set to reopen after the winter vacation, students will return to their classrooms with rapidly evolving artificial intelligence tools that have become efficient assistants for those rushing to complete their assignments. But the trend has also sparked concerns about AI's growing role in education.

With just a few simple prompts, students can use AI tools such as DeepSeek or Kimi to tackle their schoolwork. Typical assignments in primary and secondary schools — ranging from solving math problems and writing essays to designing posters — can now be easily handled with generative AI.

"AI tools have saved me a lot of time tutoring my child," said Su Min, a 40-year-old mother of a sixth grader in Beijing. "I learn how to solve problems with AI and then teach my daughter."

However, Su emphasized that her daughter does not use AI tools for schoolwork on her own.

"Simply copying the results generated by AI is not beneficial," she said. Chen Zhuo, a 16-year-old 11th grader from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said she started using AI out of curiosity.

"I used AI to generate a framework for my essay and then refined it myself," she said. "But I found it lacked emotional depth and was disconnected from current events."

"While it may lead to reliance, I don't use it for my math homework because copying answers from AI is meaningless. Ultimately, I need to learn how to solve problems on my own."

Parents on social media are now sharing their experiences with using AI to help their children with their assignments, particularly those they see as unimportant.

"Given the tight schedule of a

ninth grader during winter vacation, AI tools help with time-consuming tasks that don't significantly impact grades, like simple writing or making posters," one user commented on Chinese lifestyle app RedNote.

While AI tools make schoolwork easier, some teachers are concerned about unauthorized use, as students' homework increasingly contains AI-generated content.

Although some universities have implemented strict guidelines for AI use in research and thesis writing, primary and secondary schools have largely lacked clear regulations.

In December, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines aimed at strengthening AI education in primary and secondary schools. The initiative includes developing a systematic AI curriculum and expanding AI education nationwide by 2030.

To promote the responsible use of AI, some schools are exploring ways to integrate it into assignments. The affiliated primary school of Beijing No 12 Middle School, for example, assigned an AI-related homework project over the winter break. Younger students were tasked with generating AI-assisted paintings of Spring Festival, while older students wrote an English research report on the festival's cultural influence and consumption trends using AI tools.

"While AI is often touted as a tool to enhance education, its impact on children's self-development could be more detrimental," said Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute. "Relying on AI for knowledge acquisition hinders the development of their capabilities."

Xiong said uniquely human skills such as imagination and creativity are becoming increasingly valuable in the face of rapid AI development.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

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

## CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY

### Tianjin eco-city invests in green tech research

By YANG CHENG

A 135-square-meter "zero energy emissions and zero carbon" building in the China-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City made headlines in domestic media outlets recently.

The innovative space, a collaborative research project by State Grid Tianjin Electric Power Co, is fitted with 60 solar panels capable of generating over 20,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity annually.

This translates to saving approximately 8 metric tons of standard coal per year or reducing annual carbon dioxide emissions by around 20 tons.

The building features a 40-kWh energy storage battery that, in energy-saving mode, can sustain the building's energy requirements for nearly two days.

Intelligent energy control facilitated by the energy router in the building allows for efficient energy transmission between the grid, solar panels, energy storage and household appliances.

This pioneering space is just one example of the eco-friendly initiatives in the eco-city.

The modern grid infrastructure has expanded the reach of green electricity, showcasing an array of solar-powered amenities like street lights, benches, roads and trash cans.

Within this eco-conscious community, residents can relax on energy-efficient benches that can wirelessly charge their phones simply by placing them down.

Liu Shuyu, director of the power supply center in the eco-city of State Grid Tianjin's Binhai branch, said, "Projects and technologies in the eco-city are benefiting everyone, especially with

regard to solar power utilization."

The eco-city is a major cooperation project between China and Singapore. The two countries are collaborating to advance green technologies, equipment, services, infrastructure and green financing initiatives.

One company operating in the eco-city, Innova Green, exemplifies this bilateral effort by incorporating various green and low-carbon technologies such as renewable energy sources, smart energy management systems, visual displays and vertical greening, according to its developer Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city Investment and Development Co.

The sustainable structures and developments illustrate a forward-looking urban renewal model not only in Tianjin but throughout China.

They also shed light on the reasons why the newly established China Resources Recycling Group Co has chosen the eco-city as its headquarters.

Wang Guoliang, director of the administrative committee of the eco-city, said: "The eco-city has had environmentally conscious roots since its establishment in 2008. Plans to elevate the eco-city to a national model zone for green development, approved by the State Council last August, outline standards and steps toward achieving an internationally pioneering status in green development.

"With the integration of a new State-owned enterprise within the eco-city, it's our commitment to supporting technological research, application and knowledge transfer. Leveraging this partnership, the eco-city aims to lead the nation in green, low-carbon development initiatives," he said.



Top: The Fourth Community of the China-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City on Sept 27, 16 years after the project's beginning in 2008. LI RAN / XINHUA Above: The "zero energy emissions and zero carbon" building in the eco-city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



An exhibitor organizes high-quality protective gloves at the booth of China Resources Recycling Group during the second China International Supply Chain Expo in Beijing on Nov 27. YIN DONGXUN / XINHUA

### Recycling platform utilizes disused items

Demonstration project improves efficiencies by recovering valuable materials from old mobile phones, solar cells

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin  
yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China launched a new demonstration project for the safe recycling and disposal of mobile phones in northern China's Tianjin and South China's Shantou of Guangdong province on Jan 18.

China Resources Recycling Group, a newly established centrally administered State-owned enterprise headquartered in Tianjin, became the first in the country to integrate online and offline operations for recycling, dismantling and smelting mobile phones.

Mobile phones hold significant recycling value due to the presence of precious metals like gold, silver and copper, however, privacy concerns have hindered their reuse.

It is estimated that during the 14th Five-year Plan (2021-25) period, 6 billion mobile phones were discarded in China, with 54.2 percent not being recycled, highlighting a need for solutions, according to the China National Resources Recycling Association.

In response, the group partnered with State-owned enterprises, including China Post and China Energy Conservation and Environmental Protection Group, to establish an online platform offering door-to-door and confidential mail recycling services.

Discarded phones undergo mechanical destruction and smelting under strict surveillance to recover valuable metals.



Workers process recycled copper wire at a recycling factory in Tianjin. ZHAO ZISHUO / XINHUA

Liu Yu, Party secretary and chairman of the board of the group, noted that it aims to spearhead efforts in scientific innovation in recycling and open wider to collaboration.

"We will safeguard national resource security and accelerate the establishment of a technology-innovation enterprise that serves national strategies and leads in high-quality development," he said.

#### Industrial upgrade

Within three months, the SOE has launched an AI-powered sorting and inspection technology for regenerated steel with a leading level of accuracy domestically; conducted research on new energy photovoltaic functional materials and the high-value recycling of

retired photovoltaic modules; and built strategic partnerships with Nankai University, Tianjin University and research institutes of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Liu Yubin, a professor at the Business School of Tianjin University of Finance and Economics, said the group is poised to catalyze industrial upgrades and transformations.

"The introduction of new technologies in this sector is anticipated to usher in novel business models in Tianjin and throughout China," he said.

While the recycling economy in China has experienced rapid growth, it still faces challenges in terms of technology and skilled personnel.

Liu expects the country to implement more policies aimed at cultivating top-tier talent to further bolster the economy.

He said that China lags behind countries such as Germany, France and Japan in the realm of ecological environmental protection. "However, China has emerged as a frontrunner in internet applications, boasting a wealth of diverse application scenarios."

Liu suggested that the experience gained from internet applications could be leveraged in the recycling economy, particularly in sectors such as new energy vehicles and energy dismantlement.

"This transition presents a mix of challenges and opportunities for the country as it seeks to innovate and advance in these areas," he said.

Fu Weifang, an associate professor at the Civil Aviation University of China, said the country's aviation sector could benefit from the establishment of the new SOE.

"Everyone knows that for an aircraft, once it is dismantled, the whole body is full of treasures, with the vast majority of components and materials being recyclable.

"It is understood that in Europe, the dismantling recycling rate can reach around 90 percent. For instance, if 90 percent of an aircraft can be recycled and reused, then these dismantled components, after maintenance and recertification by relevant authorities, can be reinstalled on other aircraft for continued use," he said.

He pointed out that the newly established SOE could explore numerous collaboration opportunities with the Civil Aviation University of China in the realm of resource recycling solutions.

He highlighted that expanding the scope to encompass the storage of decommissioned aircraft, dismantlement and used serviceable material exchange platforms represents additional avenues for growth in China's aircraft waste solutions.

"From the supply chain to recycling, significant advancements in industrial infrastructure are anticipated to materialize," Fu said.

### Development zone a hotbed for circular economy

By YANG CHENG

At the headquarters of Sinone Co in the Ziya Economic Development Zone in Tianjin, a giant screen shows details of the company's real-time nationwide recycling operations, along with the subsequent processes they undergo.

Over 18,000 companies have joined this online cloud service platform, and have contributed to 4 million metric tons of recycled goods annually in the past three years.

The online trading volume reached 88 billion yuan (\$12 billion) during this period, according to Sinone Co.

Within the company, a whole vehicle can be disassembled into tiny parts in just 15 minutes, utilizing state-of-the-art technologies for reuse in various sectors.

Activity such as this has been exemplified in the Ziya zone in Tian-

jin's Jinghai district, a pioneer in China's circular economy for the past 30 years.

The zone has evolved from a focus solely on dismantling renewable resources to a diverse industrial landscape encompassing new energy, new materials, new energy vehicles and equipment manufacturing.

Zhang Yanjiang, the general manager of Ziya Economic Development Group, the leading market player in the zone, said, "The transformation has established the 'Ziya model' of circular economy in China."

Zhang said the action plan announced by the State Council in March 2024 for promoting large-scale equipment upgrades and the trade-in of consumer goods is paving the way for the zone's growth.

According to the plan, by 2027, the volume of scrapped cars to be recycled in China is expected to nearly

double the figure in 2023, while the amount of discarded household appliances slated for recycling is projected to surge by 30 percent from 2023.

Last year, China recycled 8.46 million scrapped cars, marking a 64 percent year-on-year increase.

The proportion of recycled materials in overall resource supply continues to rise, aligning with the country's strategy.

Jinghai district has outlined its blueprint for the sector, aiming to upgrade its industry, enhance product quality, nurture key enterprises, expand industrial chains and establish more industry standards.

The Ziya zone is home to 938 companies and generated over 17 billion yuan in revenue in 2024.

Since 2007, the zone has processed tens of millions of tons of recycled resources annually, supply-

ing the market with approximately 1.5 million tons of recycled copper, aluminum and other resources each year.

The zone has managed nearly 10 million tons of scrap metal, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by almost 20 million tons — equivalent to saving 40 million tons of ore extraction — significantly impacting energy conservation and emission reduction.

Zhang highlighted the ambitious goal for the zone to attract at least 35 extended industrial chains within the next five years.

He said: "We anticipate that within the zone, two or three companies will emerge as market leaders during this period. Over the next five years, we plan to upgrade 110 units of equipment, install 34 production lines and retire 55 high-energy-consuming units."

Ziya's growth trajectory aligns



An engineer at Sinone Co operates a recycling machine in the Ziya Economic Development Zone in Tianjin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

with the strategy of the newly established State-owned enterprise China Resources Recycling Group.

Han Hui, deputy Party chief of the group, said: "The group aims to enhance industrial chains and

establish a nationwide platform for the sector. We will collaborate with more market, technology and personnel leaders, as well as engage with global upstream and downstream companies, research institutes and local governments."



From left: The Hami-Chongqing 800-kilovolt ultrahigh voltage direct current transmission and transformation project. An engineer inspects the Bazhou-Tieganlik-Ruoqiang 750 kV transmission and transformation project. Power transmission lines and wind turbines near Sayram Lake. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Xinjiang flexing transmission muscles

By YUAN SHENGGAO

State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power recently completed an annual interprovincial market transaction volume of 116.1 billion kilowatt-hours for 2025, with the market transaction scale once again exceeding 100 billion kWh, according to data released by the Beijing Power Exchange Center.

The transaction volume ranked the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region third among State Grid's operating regions in terms of annual market transaction volume. Among them, the traded volume of new energy stood at 34.96 billion kWh, accounting for more than 30 percent of the total. This significantly contributes to realizing of the "dual carbon" goal and the national energy security supply by Xinjiang's power industry, the center said.

State Grid Xinjiang's effort to boost Xinjiang's power transmission was expedited by the early signing and implementation of intergovernmental agreements for the initiative of power industrial aid to Xinjiang, ensuring continuous improvements to power transmission from the region in 2025.

To promote consumption of new energy, State Grid Xinjiang has capitalized on interprovincial annual transactions, engaging with higher-level trading institutions and relevant purchasing provinces and cities that have optimized supply

demand for efficient external transactions, with 60 percent of transmitted power concentrated during daytime off-peak hours. This strategy resulted in an 80.8 percent year-on-year increase in local new energy transactions with a total of 7.74 billion kWh generated and consumed by the end of 2024.

Additionally, green energy trading has been diversified by initiating multiyear transactions with cities and provinces such as Shanghai, the Jiangsu and Hubei provinces, as well as the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, achieving 3.87 billion kWh in interprovincial green electricity trading volume, and accounting for 50 percent of Xinjiang's new energy transmissions.

State Grid Xinjiang has prioritized green energy transmission. In 2024, the company enhanced the internal grid structure and expedited external transmission channel construction, establishing a main grid layout of "internal supply with five ring networks and external transmission with four channels", and further boosting efficient use and distribution of energy resources in the region.

For example, the key 750-kilovolt Tacheng-Wusu transmission and transformation project in Xinjiang was put into operation at the end of September 2024 to meet the significant external transmission needs of new energy in Altay, Tacheng and Karamay.

Located in Northwest China,

Autonomous region's electricity trade volume one of China's highest



An employee at a green certificate service station in Aksu introduces green energy and green certificate services to a customer. LIU YUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xinjiang boasts abundant energy resources but has a limited local consumption capacity. Historically, its energy resources have struggled to translate into tangible benefits. Based on the region's development positioning and energy resource advantages, the electric power company has concentrated on optimizing the grid layout and coordinating construction of various levels of grids.

In 2010, the autonomous region connected the Hami-Dunhuang 750 kV power transmission and transformation project with the national power grid. In 2020, the Altay-Zhunbei 750 kV power transmission and transformation project was put into operation. Through years of

effort, Xinjiang has built China's largest 750 kV ultrahigh voltage provincial-level power grid in terms of coverage area and geographical expanse, achieving full coverage across all prefectures and cities.

Power grids are driving economic and social development. On Dec 14, 2024, the Bazhou-Tieganlik-Ruoqiang 750 kV transmission and transformation project became operational, marking the largest individual investment scale 750 kV transmission and transformation project in the country during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25). It is also China's longest 750 kV transmission and transformation project in

terms of desert route. Xinjiang now has the most 750 kV substations, the longest 750 kV lines and the largest coverage area in the country.

**Green distribution**

In 2024, State Grid Xinjiang accelerated implementation of key projects, with power grid infrastructure investment surpassing 20 billion yuan (\$2.74 billion), reaching the largest scale since the start of the 14th Five-Year Plan.

Since 2010, four Xinjiang outbound power transmission channels known as the "two alternating current and two direct current" have been constructed. With ultrahigh voltage crisscrossing the country east to Shanghai, north to Beijing and south to Guangdong province, the power supply coverage has expanded significantly. By the end of 2024, power transmission from Xinjiang reached 126.43 billion kWh, with new energy accounting for more than 30 percent.

As energy supply becomes more diversified, the momentum of energy transformation continues to be unleashed. In 2024, Xinjiang's scale of new energy grid connection equaled the total of new energy installed capacity added between 2010 and 2021, ranking first in the country in terms of the scale of additions. Xinjiang's historic breakthrough in new energy installed capacity exceeding 100 million kilowatts offers proof

that the region's new power system has entered a new stage in the construction of a national energy resource strategic security base.

To promote the adjustment of energy consumption structure and the green and low-carbon transformation of key industries and enterprises in the autonomous region, last June, the Xinjiang power exchange center pioneered a method for compiling Xinjiang's renewable energy power consumption statistics. Additionally, State Grid Xinjiang is continuously improving the green electricity market system, including green electricity trading and green certificate trading, while expanding the scale of green power and green certificate trading through measures such as advancing institutional mechanisms, increasing green power transmission, tapping into green electricity consumption potential, and innovating trading service mechanisms.

In 2024, Xinjiang achieved a record high in green electricity trading at 2.08 billion kWh and green certificate trading at 24.73 million certificates, marking a new peak in the scale of green electricity and green certificate transactions. Moreover, a milestone was reached when Xinjiang sent electricity to Jilin province for the first time on Dec 17, 2024, expanding its reach. Over the past year, Xinjiang's green power was first transmitted to Beijing, Fujian province and Jilin, while covering 20 provinces and cities.

## New energy installation capacity on the rise

By YUAN SHENGGAO

New energy power generation in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region reached 116.16 billion kilowatt-hours in 2024, amounting to a year-on-year increase of 30.7 percent, while the incremental increase in new energy power generation exceeded 80 percent of the region's total.

According to State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power, new energy power generation volume and proportion continue to grow, making it the region's largest contributor to power generation increment. Of the 116.16 billion kWh of new energy power generation, photovoltaic power generation reached 40.77 billion kWh, a year-on-year increase of 65.7 percent, while wind power generation reached 75.39 billion kWh, a year-on-year increase of 17.3 percent.

In recent years, Xinjiang has targeted the goals of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality while developing the new energy industry and continuing to advance energy structure adjustment. It has accelerated construction of large-scale wind and photovoltaic power projects in desert and arid areas and completed the construction of three new energy bases with a capacity of over 10 million kilowatts in Hami, Zhundong and South Xinjiang, as well as more than 10 new energy bases with a

capacity of over 1 million kW. The region's new energy installation capacity has exploded, with 2024 seeing nearly a 40-fold increase compared to 2021. By the end of last year, Xinjiang's new energy installation capacity surpassed 100 million kW, making it the first provincial-level region in Northwest China to achieve that milestone.

On Dec 30, with the grid connection of the Hami Yushan wind farm — the second batch of the project focusing on deserts, Gobi and barren areas — Xinjiang's new energy installed capacity reached 100.3 million kW, which is 2.8 times the initial installed capacity scale at the beginning of the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25).

According to official data, Xinjiang has taken the lead in new energy installation capacity in China, adding 35.57 million kW in the past year. Its record-breaking development of clean energy demonstrates a significant achievement in the promotion of green, low-carbon energy transformation, highlighting the important role of the region's power grid in advancing a new electric power system.

To support development of the new energy industry, State Grid Xinjiang has focused on "dual carbon" goals, accelerating the construction of new power and energy systems to promote a green and low-carbon

energy transformation. By the end of 2024, the company had built 31 750 kV substations and 94 power transmission lines spanning 12,200 kilometers in Xinjiang, making it the provincial-level power grid with the longest 750 kV power transmission lines and the highest number of substations in the nation. This establishment of new channels for power transmission and increase in new energy transmission helps promote the development of new energy bases.

As well, State Grid Xinjiang has opened a "green channel" for new energy grid connection projects, promoting simultaneous planning, construction and production of supporting grid projects and new energy initiatives. In 2024, it invested 3.09 billion yuan (\$412.48 million) to construct 67 new energy output projects, breaking records for the number of new energy supporting projects and investment amounts.

The company has completed the revision of the 14th Five-Year Plan for the power grid and is promoting inclusion of 12 750 kV grid engineering projects in the national plan. It is also developing a new power system in southern Xinjiang, exploring smart microgrids and multiple pilot projects. In addition, it is implementing agreements signed with State Grid Corporation of China and CHN Energy Investment Group for promoting four major projects including green hydrogen production and transmission, as well as the Ruoqiang large-scale wind and photovoltaic base, along with 16 demonstration projects.

State Grid Xinjiang said it is focusing on the construction of a demonstration area for the new power system in southern Xinjiang in the coming years, as well as leveraging the advantages of large power grid resource allocation, conducting research on new power system technologies, promoting coordinated efforts in generation, grid, load and storage, establishing market mechanisms that adapt to a high proportion of new energy, and creating a "Xinjiang model" and contributing a "Xinjiang solution" to the construction of new power systems nationwide.

## Power grid construction fosters long-term sustainability practices

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region continues to increase its capacity for outbound power transmission through dedicated power grid construction projects.

With a focus on optimizing electricity resource allocation and enhancing grid connectivity, State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power is strengthening the region's internal loop transmission networks, thereby accelerating development of the power grid to meet the goals of the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25) by improving backbone networks and ensuring smooth energy transmission.

As one of the new power system demonstration areas, southern Xinjiang is creating a new power transmission network. On Dec 14, 2024, with completion of the fifth full-voltage impulse test of the two main transformers at the Ruoqiang 750-kilovolt substation, the Bazhou-Tieganlik-Ruoqiang 750 kV transmission and transformation project officially became operational. It represents the longest 750 kV transmission and transformation project in China's desert route, better meeting electricity demand in southern Xinjiang while supporting construction of the third alternating current outbound channel of the Xinjiang power grid and promoting its interconnection with the Qinghai grid.

To strengthen the main grid in southern Xinjiang, promote coordinated development, support the economic development of Xinjiang and ensure the national power supply, State Grid Xinjiang is constructing the transmission network at the Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang in three phases. It is expected that the 750 kV transmission projects will be connected to form the network surrounding the southern Xinjiang Tarim Basin later this year, providing stronger



Staff members of State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power inspect the Changji converter station. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

support for local new energy development and enhancing power supply reliability.

Last year, the two main arteries of Xinjiang outbound power transmission — the southern Hami-Zhengzhou 800 kV ultrahigh voltage direct current transmission project and the Changji-Guquan 1,100 kV ultrahigh voltage DC transmission project — transmitted more than 110 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. That is equivalent to converting 33 million metric tons of standard coal locally, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 86.45 million tons and sulfur dioxide emissions by 280,000 tons for the receiving provinces.

In November 2024, the final wire installation of the Hami-Chongqing 800 kV ultrahigh voltage DC transmission and transformation project in Xinjiang marked a significant milestone. Known as "transmitting Xinjiang power to Chongqing", it connects five provinces and integrates more than 10 million kilowatts of new energy sources, with renewables making up about half the total. Stretching 2,290 kilometers, the transmission line can transfer electricity from Xinjiang to

Chongqing in just 0.01 seconds.

In addition, State Grid Corporation of China kicked off construction of the fourth channel for the Xinjiang outbound power transmission DC project in February 2024. Since then, State Grid Xinjiang completed a project review feasibility study in about six months — a record for the preliminary phase of an ultrahigh voltage DC project.

"Upon completion, this channel is expected to provide 5 million kW of power support during peak hours to the Sichuan-Chongqing region, aiding in the development of the new energy base focusing on desert, Gobi and barren areas in Xinjiang and optimizing the power structure in the Sichuan-Chongqing region," said Xin Chaoshan, director of the new power system planning research center at State Grid Xinjiang's economic and technological research institute.

Currently, State Grid Xinjiang is working on plans for the fifth and sixth ultrahigh voltage DC loops, which are expected to increase the outbound transmission capacity from 25 million kW to around 60 million kW.



Two State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power workers inspect lines at a 750-kilovolt wind farm in the Santanghu area of Hami, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. WANG JINKUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

# Thailand airs concern over tariff policy

Experts seek steps to lessen harm as nation's trade surplus with US grows

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

Experts have urged Thailand to take proactive measures to minimize the potential harm from US President Donald Trump's tariff policies as the kingdom is particularly vulnerable to risks of higher reciprocal tariffs among emerging economies in Southeast Asia.

With a fast-growing trade surplus with the US, Thailand is highly likely to be a prime target in the coming round of tariffs, they said.

Their comments came after Trump signed an executive order on Feb 10, announcing a 25 percent tariff on all US steel and aluminum imports from March 12.

He later signed a memorandum directing his administration to determine "the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner", which could lead to higher tariffs for major trading partners by April.

Thai Commerce Minister Pichai Nariphaphan said last week that the government will do everything to make sure the kingdom doesn't become a target.

He said the country is ready to accommodate US requests to ensure a good outcome, Bangkok Post newspaper reported. Pichai also said he would visit the US for more discussions with US officials.

"It is highly likely that Vietnam and Thailand will be prime targets for the coming round of tariffs," said Arm Tungnirun, director of the Chinese Studies Center at the Institute of Asian Studies and Lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University.

He said that Trump might impose a general tariff on all imports, which means goods from all countries, in the future. The possible effects of such an approach on global trade and market stability depend on the scope and rate of the tariffs.

"My worry is that there is not much we can do about it. We can try to negotiate and provide Trump with a list of concessions. But no one can guarantee that in the end we can be exempted from tariffs," Arm said. "Sooner or later, with or without negotiation, Thailand will be hit with tariffs — the only question is to what scope and extent."

Statistics from the Thai Ministry of Commerce showed that the US is Thailand's largest export market, with an export value of \$54.95 billion last year, accounting for 18 percent of total Thai exports.

According to the US Census Bureau, Thailand took 11th place last year among the countries with the highest trade surplus with the US, while China remains in the top position with a surplus of \$295.4 billion.

As a country with an export-oriented economy, Thailand will see a drop in its products' competitive-

ness in the global trade market if the US expands its tariff policy to more countries, said Narongsak Putthapornmongkol, president of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

He said that industrial products, such as electronic devices, cars, rubber and food will be the most vulnerable. He estimated that the increase of tariffs would result in the slowdown of export growth and the economic decline of related industries, thus affecting employment and investments.

## Overall economy

"If the trade environment becomes unstable, it will undermine the confidence of foreign investors and lead to changes in trade policy that may affect exchange rate and financial market volatility, which, in turn, affects the overall economy," said Narongsak.

After Trump's return to office, trade policies and international relations have gained greater attention, particularly under the "America First" policy, which places US interests at the forefront, said Burin Adulwattana, managing director and chief economist of Kasikorn Research Center in Thailand.

"The international economy will see a significant change where the US utilizes its economic greatness as a tool of leverage in the advancement of its political and security interests," he said.

To ease trade tensions, Burin suggested that the Thai government may need to consider increasing imports from the US, such as energy, soybeans and corn. Additionally, he said the US Federal Reserve may not be able to lower interest rates beyond the two interest rate cuts projected for this year if the impact of the trade war expands.

"As such, banking stocks will benefit from increased interest income in line with bond yields, but global stocks will be pressured, especially those traded at high values," he added.

To minimize the impact of the US tariff measures, Narongsak urged the Thai government and enterprises to strengthen regional and multilateral trade cooperation, explore new markets and reduce reliance on the US market.

"It is also important to increase the added value of Thailand's manufacturing industry, promoting smart manufacturing and technological innovation while enhancing product competitiveness to mitigate the impact of tariffs," he said, emphasizing the need to strengthen the domestic market and establish a flexible supply chain.

"Overall, Thailand needs to seek opportunities in the changing situation and reduce the potential impact of US tariff policies through multilateral cooperation, industrial transformation, and policy flexibility," Narongsak said.



Ian Monroy, 17, from Shaolin Temple Kung Fu Center, waits for his turn to compete at the 2025 USA International Kungfu Championships in Union City, California, on Sunday. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

## Kung fu devotees flock to California tourney

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco  
junchang@chinadailyusa.com

Ian Monroy was one of hundreds of kung fu practitioners with a passion for the Chinese martial art competing in a two-day tournament in Northern California.

Monroy, 17, described himself as among the "most ardent and self-disciplined" kung fu students. "I said so because I have been practicing martial arts for more than 13 years."

Martial artists, coaches and enthusiasts packed the auditorium of the James Logan High School in Union City on Sunday as more than 500 American practitioners signed up to compete in the 2025 USA International Kungfu Championships. The tournament will conclude on Monday.

The youngest practitioner was age 4, and the oldest was over 80 years old, said Betty Yuan, CEO of the Northern California Chinese Cultural Athletic Federation (NCCCSA) and the tournament organizer. "We do see a mixture of ages, expertise, backgrounds and, of course, enthusiasm."

Monroy, a native of a small, tranquil agricultural town in Southern California, developed a passion for kung fu after seeing a blockbuster movie starring Jackie Chan, one of the most recognized advocates of Chinese martial arts in the West.

"As long as I start it, I can't stop. I just feel it's part of me, a very intriguing experience," said Monroy. "It has become a daily ritual for me to practice the doctrines I have learned from my coach, for example, the unity of 'mind and breath' as well as 'heart and mind.'"

Ben Zhang, a main organizer of the event, said they invited several Chinese universities to send their best students of kung fu to attend the event and collaborate with American counterparts. "We have university representatives from China to support us," he said. "Through martial arts, the East communicates with the West; that's our shared goal as kung fu practitioners and industry enablers."

China's professional wushu master Sun Peiyuan accepted an invitation to attend the event and did a brief demo.

"For many kung fu practitioners around the world, Sun is the first athlete to achieve his version of a grand slam — gold medals at the national championships, National Games of China, Asian Games, World Cup and the World Wushu Championships," Zhang added. "He is legendary."

Clint Liddick, who runs his own martial arts after-school program in the Bay Area, said that he believes the public in California has invested more effort and energy in martial arts than any other parts of the United States.

"Given the large quantity of student learners, coaches, referees and professional facilities, I can say with confidence that the base for martial arts is solid here," Liddick said.

However, "we have teams from the East, the Middle West, and the South as well," he said.

Audrey Maillet, 7, of Illinois said: "My parents put me into martial arts after school when I was 3. My mom said I can keep this as long as I like it. 'I believe I can at least win one medal,'" she said.

Wang Wenhui, the cultural consul for the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco, told the audience that he was impressed by seeing so many children and young people involved in martial arts exchanges.

"It's our hope to enhance people-to-people connections between China and the United States," he said.

## Stampede at Indian train station kills 18

NEW DELHI — At least 18 people, including 14 women, were killed in a stampede at a railway station in India's capital of New Delhi, the Press Trust of India news agency reported on Sunday.

Many of the victims were Hindu pilgrims who were traveling to the Maha Kumbh festival in Prayagraj in northern India, according to Delhi's caretaker chief minister, Atishi, who uses only her first name.

The stampede happened late on Saturday while thousands of people had gathered at the railway station waiting to board a train. The incident occurred after some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a footbridge that connects train platforms, authorities said.

Sheela Devi, who was at Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital in New Delhi to collect her daughter-in-law's body, said an announcement about a change of train platforms created confusion among passengers that led to the stampede.

"The crowd went out of control and no one could control it," said Nikhil Kumar, a shopkeeper who witnessed the crowd surge.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra



Passengers jostle with each other to board a train at a railway station in New Delhi, India, on Sunday. IMTIYAZ KHAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Modi and other federal ministers confirmed the stampede incident without disclosing the death toll.

"Distressed by the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones," Modi said on X.

India's Home Minister Amit Shah said in a post on X that he had spoken to the railway minister and taken stock of the situation.

An inquiry was ordered into the

incident, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on X.

India has witnessed several rail accidents in the last two years, including a collision in 2023 that killed at least 288 people. Indian railways is the fourth largest train network in the world and is undergoing a \$30 billion upgrade, as part of Modi's push to boost connectivity.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Japan to tap into rice reserves as prices rise

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

Japan's agriculture ministry announced that it will release 210,000 metric tons of rice from government reserves to address the soaring prices. This marks the first time the stockpiled rice will be released specifically to stabilize supply.

Japanese Agriculture Minister Taku Eto said at a news conference following a Cabinet meeting on Friday that the distribution will begin as early as mid-March, with the possibility of further increases if needed. The stockpiled rice is expected to reach store shelves between late March and early April.

This decision follows a sharp rise in retail rice prices, which reached record highs in the week ending Jan 26.

Due to supply shortages, spot market prices for wholesale transactions have surged, with the price of Niigata Koshihikari rice, a renowned rice variety known throughout Japan, rising by 80 percent since autumn 2024, Nikkei reported.

Eto said he hopes the release of the reserved rice will bring the market back to normal.

The release will be conducted through bidding, with an initial allocation of 150,000 tons. Subsequent releases will be determined based on the state of rice distribution. The bidding process will be open to major rice distributors, Nikkei reported.

## Emergency reserve

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries maintains a reserve of 1 million tons of rice for emergencies like crop failures, according to the public broadcaster NHK.

In the past, rice reserves were only released in response to poor harvests or disasters. However, the ministry relaxed its policy last month, allowing the release of stockpiled rice to curb surging prices.

Despite a rise in rice harvest to 6.79 million tons in 2024 — an increase of 180,000 tons from the previous year — supplies have fallen short of meeting the demand from households and the restaurant industry.

As of the end of December, major distributors secured 210,000 tons less rice compared to the previous year. While the exact reason remains uncertain, the agriculture ministry points to hoarding by wholesalers and farmers, expecting further price hikes, as the primary factor.

Experts believe the government's decision to release stockpiled rice is intended to curb speculative activity.

Officials warned that if the situation continues unchecked, rice — a staple food — could become a target for financial speculation.

The agriculture ministry plans to closely monitor the impact of this measure on prices. While experts expect the increased supply to drive prices down in the short term, they warn that market adjustments over time could lessen the policy's effectiveness in the medium to long term.

## UN chief warns of conflict crisis in DR Congo as rebels seize key city



A woman reacts as she receives a bouquet of flowers for the Valentine's Day in Goma, DR Congo, on Thursday. MICHEL LUNANGA / AFP

ADDIS ABABA — United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned of escalation of conflict in South Kivu Province of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, as the M23 armed group advanced into the provincial capital.

Speaking about the current peace and security situations in Africa during the African Union summit on Saturday in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, Guterres said the people of DR Congo are suffering from a brutal cycle of violence.

"The fighting that is raging in South Kivu — as a result of the continuation of the M23 offensive — threatens to push the entire region

over the precipice," said the secretary-general, emphasizing the need for avoiding regional escalation at all costs.

The ongoing conflict between the M23 and the DR Congo government is deeply rooted in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and long-standing ethnic tensions between the Tutsi and Hutu communities. The DR Congo accuses Rwanda of supporting the M23, while Rwanda alleges that the DR Congo army has allied with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, a rebel group accused of participating in the genocide against the Tutsi.

"There is no military solution.

The deadlock must end, and the dialogue must begin," Guterres said, adding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of DR Congo must be respected.

The conclusions of the recent joint summit co-hosted by the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community offered a way forward, with a renewed call for an immediate cease-fire, and new momentum for regional efforts based on the Luanda and Nairobi processes.

In a statement released on Saturday, the M23 called on residents of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu Province, to form "vigilance committees to ensure security and to

appoint honest and responsible people to lead them". The group's spokesperson confirmed earlier that the M23 had entered the city.

On Friday, the M23 announced it had seized Kavumu Airport, a vital humanitarian and military supply hub in South Kivu. The airport serves as a key defensive line for Bukavu, located about 30 kilometers away.

Local sources told Xinhua News Agency that despite the group's earlier claim that it had no intention of capturing the city, its fighters continued advancing toward Bukavu. Meanwhile, some DR Congo soldiers and their allies were seen retreating toward Uvira, a strategic commercial and transport hub near the Burundian border.

XINHUA

## BUSINESS

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

## Inbound tourism surges amid relaxed policies

Travel into China to generate revenue of around \$1.7 - 4.5 trillion for nation over next decade

By LIU YUKUN

liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Zhang Miao, who is currently preparing to host her husband's family from France, is being inundated with Travel in China advertisements on social media platforms.

The array of services and activities offered by major online travel platforms like Trip.com and Fliggy as well as individual operators and part-time students, with prices ranging from around 300 yuan (\$41) to several thousand yuan per day, has left the 40-year-old feeling overwhelmed.

Last year, favorable policies like the 240-hour visa-free transit option has significantly boosted inbound tourism, injecting new vitality into the tourism industry.

According to the latest data from the National Immigration Administration, the number of foreign visits entering China via the visa-free policy through various ports nationwide reached 20.115 million in 2024, marking a 112.3 percent year-on-year increase.

Among these, the number of individuals eligible for the transit visa-free policy rose 113.5 percent year-on-year.

Estimates by financial services provider Morgan Stanley show that inbound tourism is expected to generate cumulative revenues of between \$1.7 trillion and \$4.5 trillion for China over the next decade, with its contribution to the nation's GDP expected to rise to about 2-4 percent in 10 years.

Against this backdrop, online travel platforms have been rolling out initiatives to cater to the greater influx of inbound tourists.

Trip.com has established an inbound tourism services platform offering bookings for hotels and tourist attractions, mobile payments and communication-related services.

Fliggy, in collaboration with Alipay, has launched activities like the "China Travel Flight Plan" to provide conveniences and discounts for visitors to China.

Simultaneously, bilingual guides specialized in serving foreign visitors have become highly sought after. In Fujian province, for instance, the number of applicants for foreign language tour guides increased by over 180 percent year-on-year to 531 last year, data from the local government showed.

Yet, the country faces a shortage of foreign language guides, particularly those skilled in less common languages, said Sun Guizhen, head of the tour guide committee at the China Association of Travel Services.

Among about 660,000 licensed tour guides in China, only 8.4 percent are fluent in foreign languages, Sun said.

The family of Zhang's husband, comprising over 10 members, decided to make a short trip to China, attracted by the favorable visa policy.

Zhang soon identified a startup team on social media.

Despite the high rates — over 1,000 yuan per day just for a guide — plus additional expenses for car rentals and overtime costs for staff, the small team seemed to have guides juggling multiple roles, constantly fielding calls and messages from foreign tourists inquiring about inbound travel.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Zhang said she chose this team because of their full-service approach, which eliminated concerns about language barriers and payment inconveniences and offered customized itineraries and other tailored services. This was particularly of interest to her foreign in-laws.

The team leader of Zhang's travel group, Zhang Yang, is a graduate in arts management with an educational background in the United Kingdom.

Compared to Chinese tourists, he said foreign visitors are more easily drawn to plans featuring "authentic experiences" and "cultural tours". Consequently, their specialized services often include activities such as *hutong* (alley) tours

and intangible cultural heritage experiences.

Zhang Yang said his order volume surged by over half in December, with projected earnings reaching new highs.

About a year ago, he worked for an advertising company, but stumbled upon the trending "Travel in China" topic on Douyin by chance, where he discovered that the monthly influx of people from certain foreign countries to China had far exceeded expectations and was steadily increasing.

Recognizing the opportunity, he quit the advertising agency and joined the current travel startup, in which he sees great development potential.

In the first week at his new job,

Zhang posted a video showcasing the beauty of Zhangjiajie in Central China's Hunan province on Douyin's overseas sibling TikTok. The video quickly garnered over a million views and resulted in hundreds of inquiries and private messages.

The just concluded Chinese New Year, which ran from Jan 28 to Feb 4, also ushered in a small peak for inbound travel of foreign tourists.

Zhou Huijie, a researcher at Trip.com Group, said: "Cities near the 25th parallel north have become golden destinations for Spring Festival travel due to their favorable temperatures and intangible cultural heritage projects. While Chinese nationals traveled overseas during the festival, foreigners came to China to celebrate Chinese New Year."

In addition to online travel platforms offering inbound tourism services and the expansion of new businesses by traditional travel agencies, the trend of inbound tourism has attracted many young entrepreneurs to join the market.

Data from Qichacha show that there are currently around 78,700 inbound tourism-related enterprises in China, mainly concentrated in Beijing, and provinces including Guangdong and Hebei, with 5,760, 8,858, and 5,435 companies, respectively.

In terms of cities, Beijing leads with 5,760 related enterprises. Shenzhen and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, follow with 3,141 and 2,895 companies, ranking among the top three nationwide.

Government policies are active-

ly supporting industries related to inbound tourism, with many provinces and cities introducing measures to promote such tourism. For instance, Changsha in Hunan plans to establish an overseas comprehensive service center for guests focusing on cultural tourism in 2025, while Beijing Customs recently announced 10 measures to promote inbound tourism and consumption.

Zhangjiajie has launched an innovative "money pouch" service for inbound tourists, facilitating the exchange of foreign cash in small denominations through a model involving banks, exchange agencies, travel agencies, and guides to meet the temporary and small-denomination exchange needs of inbound tourists.

On Chinese social media app Xiaohongshu, the topic of entrepreneurial opportunities in inbound tourism has attracted nearly 1,000 published notes.

Some teams, like Gopagoda Travel, are seeking entrepreneurial partners, while others, like ChiNICE Travel, are sharing their entrepreneurial experiences. Many are also sharing challenges and obstacles, engaging in exchanges with their peers.

The founder of a startup who is surnamed Li said that travel budgets of foreign clients he had accompanied on tours had been lower than expected. They tend to prefer semi-free private tours over large group tours, Li said.

"Unlike Chinese tourists, foreigners have a strong preference for independent travel, even if they don't understand Chinese. This poses challenges for us, even in private tours, as there are many uncontrollable factors. Clients who choose group tours are generally older, less likely to use social media or online travel platforms, and have more trust in overseas local travel agencies than us. As a result, the profits from working with them are relatively low," he said.

Ge Tian, a former entrepreneur in the educational camping industry, shut down her company about a year ago and is now exploring opportunities in inbound tourism. With a professional background in English translation, experience studying in the UK, and running a camp, she initially thought transitioning would be easy, but reality proved otherwise.

"Nowadays, information is transparent, and young people who use social media and translation software prefer independent travel. They are more inclined to opt for affordable and flexible charter services. Older travelers tend to choose more familiar local travel agencies. Their preferences for travel experiences vary greatly, making it challenging to design personalized itineraries for each group of tourists," she said.

As she prepared to post her personal service information on social media, new concerns arose.

"What if foreign visitors have accidents during their trips? Can I handle any trouble that may arise?"

Payment for insurance, mature legal and accounting support seemed far beyond her current budget.

"There's so much more to think about before rushing into the market."

## Spring Festival showcases Chinese culture to the world

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Liu Yukun

Celebrating Chinese New Year at my in-laws' for the past five years, this year marked the first time I encountered foreigners on a plane.

My mother-in-law's home is situated in a small county in East China's Anhui province. In recent years, efforts have been made to boost the local economy through the development of the Mount Tianzhu tourist area. The scenery at Mount Tianzhu is truly breathtaking, reminiscent of

classical Chinese landscape paintings, but the visitors mostly consist of locals from nearby cities.

However, nothing could compare to the astonishment I felt on the first day of the Chinese New Year when I witnessed foreigners worshipping at a local temple. They appeared to be backpackers, mimicking the gestures of Chinese worshippers as they solemnly held three sticks of incense, eyes closed in what seemed like a moment of prayer.

After a brief conversation, one of the tourists described her Chinese New Year journey as "an unforgettable cultural journey". Traveling from cities like Shanghai, Hangzhou and Suzhou to Anhui province, she was enchanted by the diverse traditions unique to each region. Her future

plans included visiting Fujian and Guangdong provinces.

Lesser-known destinations are gaining popularity among foreign tourists beyond major cities and famous landmarks, and this trend was also proven by data from large travel portals.

According to data from Qunar, tourists to expanded visa-free policies, among the Chinese cities foreigners are booking flights to, apart from historically and culturally rich cities like Beijing, Chengdu, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an and Hangzhou, there has been a growing trend of foreigners exploring second and third-tier cities, with 10 new destinations added compared to the previous year. These new destinations include Baotou, Dali,

Nantong and Taizhou, etc.

Trip.com's data reveal that orders for inbound tourism to intangible cultural heritage destinations such as Shijiazhuang, Fuzhou and Xi'an increased by 50 percent, 52 percent and 97 percent, respectively, compared to last year's Spring Festival. On Trip.com's overseas platform, tickets for intangible heritage-related activities such as lantern festivals, temple fairs and traditional dramas increased nearly 7.5 times compared to the previous year.

Clearly, the momentum of "China Travel" continues, and the influx of international traffic on social media platforms at the beginning of this year has sparked a wave of enthusiasm among netizens. The combination of UNESCO intangible cultural

heritage — Spring Festival — and the high cost-effectiveness of Chinese tourism has left foreign tourists in awe.

As the first Spring Festival following the successful application for UNESCO intangible cultural heritage this year, experiencing local customs and participating in intangible heritage activities have become major highlights. Trip.com said there was a doubling in search interest for intangible heritage hotspots such as Kaifeng in Henan province, Fuzhou and Putian in Fujian province, Shantou in Guangdong province, and Huangshan in Anhui province, among others.

My family and I have also deeply experienced this. The Chinese New Year atmosphere in my in-laws' hometown started brewing from the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. Under the old trees at the village entrance, the elderly chatted while

taking stock of the cured meat, smoked sausages for the festival, as well as sunflower seeds and peanuts for guests and candies for children. Walking through the village, the air was filled with the aroma of traditional pastries being made in households. Back home, my husband and children put up Spring Festival couplets and auspicious words. Outside, the sound of firecrackers filled the air, accompanied by endless blessings.

The inheritance of culture can truly soothe the exhaustion and troubles of travelers after a year of wandering. Encountering foreigners participating in traditional Chinese intangible cultural heritage activities during the Spring Festival was truly moving and filled me with pride. Seeing foreign friends being drawn to our intangible cultural heritage, I came to realize that Spring Festival is not only our festival, but also a window to showcase Chinese culture to the world.

# BUSINESS



Employees (right) from Tourism Malaysia give gifts to Chinese tourists at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Malaysia, on Jan 29. ZHANG WENZONG / XINHUA

## Surge in cross-border travel for Chinese New Year holiday

Trip.com says overall orders up 30%, inbound ticket orders up 180% y-o-y

By LIU YUKUN  
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Cross-border tourism has emerged as a driving force for the Spring Festival travel market in the Year of the Snake, thanks to expanded visa-free policies, said travel agencies and experts.

A Trip.com report revealed that overall cross-border travel orders increased by 30 percent compared to last year, with a staggering 180 percent growth in inbound ticket orders and over 60 percent growth in inbound hotel bookings.

Data from another travel portal Qunar show that during the Spring Festival period, the number of non-Chinese passport holders booking domestic flights increased by 70 percent compared to last year, with more foreigners exploring second and third-tier cities.

This trend is further confirmed in a set of data released by Hainan Airlines. During the Spring Festival holiday period (Jan 28 - Feb 4), Hainan Airlines transported over 20,000 visits of foreign passengers.

While many foreigners trav-

eled to China, a significant number of Chinese people chose to celebrate the Chinese New Year overseas.

Data from Trip.com reveal that short-haul outbound trips to Japan doubled compared to last year's Spring Festival. Long-haul destinations like the United States, Spain, Italy and France also saw a surge in popularity, with increases of 53 percent, 82 percent, 56 percent and 50 percent, respectively.

Looking at bookings on Qunar, Chinese tourists' footprints spanned over 2,100 overseas cities this Spring Festival, marking a 50 percent increase from last year.

Shanghai residents were truly global holidaymakers, with the highest total number of outbound flight tickets purchased during the Spring Festival period among all Chinese cities, showing a 57 percent year-on-year increase.

Notably, as more countries offer visa exemptions and decrease in airfare and hotel prices for outbound travel, coupled with the increasing number of new flight routes, it means that more residents of smaller cities are able to more easily experience the joy of

celebrating the Chinese New Year abroad.

"Residents of third-tier and below cities accounted for over 30 percent of the total outbound flight ticket purchases during Spring Festival, more than doubling compared to last year. Cities with the highest growth rates include Zhangjiakou in Hebei province, Binzhou in Shandong province, Ordos in Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and Yangjiang in Guangdong province, with their residents booking increasing more than twice on a year-on-year basis during Spring Festival," said Xiao Peng, a researcher at Qunar.

"Overall, Thailand remains a top choice for many Chinese travelers during Spring Festival," said Cai Muzi, a researcher at Qunar's big data research institute, citing its proximity, visa-free access, affordability and pleasant weather. However, Japan's popularity surged, overtaking Thailand as the most popular outbound destination during Spring Festival this year.

As Chinese travelers become more experienced with outbound travel, their overseas travel methods have diversified. Trip.com's overseas platform shows a 42 percent increase in overseas car rental orders compared to last year, and a

significant 20 percent growth in overseas chartered tours during Spring Festival.

The platform also saw a record high in overseas transfers to airport hauling service orders during the Spring Festival holiday, with a 58 percent year-on-year increase in transaction value. Notably, Japan, South Korea and Thailand experienced even more significant growth during Spring Festival, with Japan's gross merchandise volume increasing by 120 percent compared to 2024.

Zhou Huijie, a researcher with Trip.com, said that the influx of international travelers visiting China for the Chinese New Year and the trendy topics of "UNESCO intangible cultural heritage Spring Festival" on global social media platforms have elevated the Chinese New Year experience, with Chinese people traveling abroad and foreigners coming to China to celebrate the festival.

In addition to popular inbound tourism cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, destinations rich in intangible cultural heritage such as Shijiazhuang, Fuzhou and Xi'an saw respective increases of 50 percent, 52 percent and 97 percent in inbound travel orders compared to last year's Spring Festival.

## Trade-in program boosts Spring Festival shopping

BEIJING — China's consumer goods trade-in program remained highly popular at the start of the year, especially during the Spring Festival shopping season.

The Ministry of Commerce reported receiving subsidy applications for 10.79 million electronic devices over a four-day period starting Jan 20, following the inclusion of mobile phones, tablets and smartwatches in the trade-in subsidy program, marking a significant expansion of the initiative launched in March last year.

Moreover, automobile and home appliance trade-ins had reached 34,000 and 1.04 million units, respectively, as of Jan 23, according to the ministry.

Spring Festival is the most important holiday in China and an occasion for family reunions. It fell on Jan 29 this year.

The strong participation in the trade-in program boosted consumer sentiment in the holiday market. According to Sheng Qiuping, vice-commerce minister, the program, along with a series of shopping promotion events, helped meet the growing demand for Spring Festival shopping.

Since last year, "trade-in" has become a buzzword in China's consumer market, driving steady retail sales growth and boosting consumer sentiment.

In 2024, more than 6.8 million vehicles, including gasoline-powered and electric cars, were traded in, while over 56 million home appliances, such as refrigerators, washing machines and computers, were sold under the program. Additionally, the sales of electric bicycles surpassed 1.38 million units.

The total sales value of eligible products under the program topped 1.3 trillion yuan (\$178.8 billion) last year, highlighting strong market vitality and immense potential. Notably, purchases of smart and eco-friendly products surged, particularly new energy vehicles and energy-efficient appliances.

The trade-in program has revitalized consumption momentum, promoted a more sustainable economy and enhanced the quality of life for consumers, according to MOC official Li Gang.

In recent years, consumer spend-

ing has become an increasingly important economic driver. In 2024, final consumption expenditure accounted for 44.5 percent of economic growth, boosting GDP by 2.2 percentage points. Consumption now plays a more pivotal role than investment or exports in shaping the economic landscape.

New consumer trends in China have gained significant momentum, including a resurgence in tourism and rapid growth in digital entertainment, online education, and livestreaming e-commerce. Green products, such as energy-efficient appliances and NEVs, have also emerged as new growth areas.

In 2025, supporting consumption will remain a top priority for the government.

At the Central Economic Work Conference in December 2024, China's policymakers, while mapping out economic work for 2025, highlighted the need to vigorously boost consumption and expand domestic demand on all fronts.

As part of its ongoing efforts to boost consumption, China has expanded the trade-in program. In addition to including smartphones, tablets and smartwatches, the government has increased the number of eligible home appliance categories from eight to 12 and added a wider range of passenger vehicles to the program. Approximately 81 billion yuan has been allocated for the first round of funding for the program this year.

Sheng noted that the government will ensure subsidies are delivered to consumers quickly and conveniently.

Local authorities are actively rolling out measures for the trade-in program. For instance, Shandong province has launched 10 special initiatives for vehicle and appliance trade-ins, while Jiangsu province is offering subsidies for smartphones, tablets and bluetooth headsets.

Experts predict that with such supportive measures in place, consumer spending will continue to grow steadily this year, while the Chinese economy demonstrates strong resilience, underpinned by solid fundamentals and enormous potential.

XINHUA



A salesperson (left) introduces the mobile phone trade-in program to customers at a Suning outlet in Hua'an, Jiangsu province, during the Spring Festival holiday period on Jan 31. ZHAO QIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

LEAVE ME A HOME

CHINADAILY Public Interest Ad: 005  
LIANG LUWEN AND MA XUEJING / FOR CHINA DAILY



## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Macroeconomic policy changes key to growth

## EAGLE EYE

By Yu Yongding

The Chinese government made a series of adjustments to its macroeconomic policies recently (in the absolutely right direction as far as I'm concerned), the results of which are expected to support the recovery of confidence in China's economy in 2025.

This is the final year of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, and if the nation is aiming at a much higher quality of economic growth, there are three things internally it must do well — a GDP growth target of 5 percent; a stable real estate market with systemic risks caused by debt problems being well contained; and sound management of government debt risks.

At the external level, it is necessary to pay attention to issues related to Sino-US trade tensions and the exchange rate.

## Initial steps

First, China should maintain a GDP growth target of 5 percent and achieve it. How? Consumption could be a good start. Sluggish consumption was the biggest drag on China's economic growth in 2024. In 2023, the contribution of consumption in its GDP growth of 5.2 percent stood at a high 82.5 percent, or at 4.3 percentage points.

However, from January to November 2024, the growth rate of social retail goods sales slowed to 3.5 percent, from 7.2 percent in the previous year.

There should indeed be a significant increase in consumption growth — at least for it to equal that of GDP growth.

But how? In this case, three main approaches can be taken — issuance of money or consumption vouchers, reducing personal income tax and reforming the social security system.

Among these, the issuance of money or consumption vouchers can indeed increase income, albeit temporarily. But there is no guarantee in this case on whether it can stimulate consumption as expected.

Taking Hong Kong as an example, a total of HK\$15,000 (\$1,926) per person subsidy was distributed in 2021 and 2022, which did help low-income earners to a certain extent, but the stimulus effect on consumption overall does not seem to be obvious.

On spurring demand, government-led infrastructure investment has been the main tool for countercyclical adjustments traditionally. Infrastructure investment has played a key role in the recovery

of economic growth in successive instances where effective demand has been insufficient.

But there are some voices of concern over increasing infrastructure investment, with the three main reasons being — a saturation of infrastructure projects nationwide; inefficiency in terms of generating economic momentum and large concentration of public resources; and a likely boost that may lead to overcapacity.

To this end, in the future, the government should further promote the efficiency of investment, with more attention being paid to the socioeconomic benefits of infrastructure investment rather than commercial returns.

Additionally, the range of infrastructure projects could be expanded to cover all basic, public welfare and long-term projects, such as education, healthcare and elder care. The government should be clear about what to expect from such lighthouse projects, which may not bring much direct commercial returns, but result in immeasurable socioeconomic benefits to the nation and its people.

In terms of monetary policy, the People's Bank of China, the central bank, has said that it will implement a "moderately loose" monetary policy this year, increase money supply and reduce interest rate, which will certainly be good for economic growth, as it can cut the financial costs of enterprises and the debt burden of residents.

The central bank also made some moves in this regard last year. However, under a scenario where household consumption and enterprises' willingness to invest are not strong, it is difficult to effectively stimulate loan demand from consumers and investors.

In addition, a further easing of monetary policy in China is also constrained due to some specific reasons.

For example, if the loan-deposit spread is too low, small and medium-sized banks may lose money, and to avoid such losses, the lenders may need to lower their deposit rates. The social consequences resulting from lowering the interest rate on ordinary deposits are a serious matter that need to be taken into account.

Meanwhile, the effect of a widening interest rate gap between China and the United States on the RMB exchange rate and capital flows should also be closely watched.

In this case, it requires better synergy between fiscal and monetary policies. For example, the country could start with launching more proactive fiscal policies, such as raising the deficit ratio, and expanding the issuance of government bonds, which is very likely to lead to an increase in the interest rate on 10-year government bonds and the overall economic yield curve.

An increase in the fiscal deficit means an increase in aggregate

demand, and the demand for loans from households and enterprises will rise accordingly. Therefore, the central bank can further loosen monetary policy so that the two policies can combine to maximize their respective effects and achieve an impact of 1+1 being greater than 2.

Another key issue of the Chinese economy is sound management of local government debt.

In the past, in the process of promoting infrastructure investment, local governments were more aggressive in setting up their own platforms for investment and financing, which became a source of hidden debts.

Beginning in 2010, China began to tighten the management of platforms to curb the sharp growth in local government debt. In 2018, the central government asked local governments to clear their hidden debts by 2028. Among them, Guangzhou and Beijing achieved this goal on their own strengths a few years ago.

In addition to hidden debts, China's local government statutory debts, or "explicit debts", amounted to 40.7 trillion yuan (\$5.6 trillion) by the end of 2023, while that of the central government was only 30 trillion yuan. In 2025, local governments will need to repay nearly 4 trillion yuan in such debts.

To this end, the new policy issued in November by the Ministry of Finance — with 12 trillion yuan to be used to resolve local debts — is an important adjustment.

Through debt swaps, local governments will have less debt repayment pressure, giving them more financial resources to improve residents' well-being, subsidize consumption and increase infrastructure investment. Also, in view of the high proportion of local government debt in total government debt, the proportion of national debt should be increased to some extent this year.

In terms of real estate, since 2021, real estate prices and investment have both shown a downturn for three consecutive years. Stabilizing the realty market remains vital for 2025. However, the correction in the sector is likely to continue for quite some time. Too many houses have been built in China in the past few years — just as some scholars have pointed out: "China will no longer bank on real estate for significant economic growth in the future, as the per capita housing area is close to two-thirds of the US level, while its per capita GDP is only one-sixth."

Despite the above fact, China's real estate problems are not that serious to trigger a financial crisis. The authorities have in fact introduced a series of policy measures to stabilize the real estate market, and signs of stabilization are visible.

In this case, China's stable mortgage policy has been key. As of the end of the third quarter of 2024, the balance of real estate loans was 52.9 trillion yuan, accounting for only



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

20.9 percent of the credit balance. So far, mortgage defaults have been low. As for the "triangular debt" between real estate companies and upstream and downstream enterprises and the realization of guaranteed delivery of buildings, the government can consider establishing a specific institution and injecting a sum of money to help maintain the stability of the real estate industry.

## External forces

With the US intending to further hike tariffs on several countries, there is a greater chance that Sino-US trade tensions will escalate. China's export growth was relatively high in 2024, and the base effect will also have a certain adverse impact on its export growth this year. The imposition by the US of tariffs is a practice of "cutting off the nose to spite the face", as it will worsen inflation there.

Against such a backdrop, measures to maintain export momentum, such as increasing subsidies and export tax rebates, are not expected, as they would embolden the US to impose more tariffs.

In fact, the impact of tariffs on China's economy is limited, both in terms of tariff pass-through and the elasticity of the US demand for Chinese products. Some studies esti-

mate that if a 60 percent tariff is imposed on Chinese exports, there may be a 1 percent dip in China's GDP, and less-than-1 percent drag on the GDP growth rate.

In addition, over the past decade or so, China has been adjusting its economic structure and gradually reducing its dependence on external demand.

The share of exports to the US has also declined significantly in recent years. Therefore, the impact of US President Donald Trump's tariff policy on China's exports and economic growth is still manageable, though it cannot be ignored.

Some media outlets estimate that China's trade surplus reached a record \$1 trillion in 2024 — which is solid enough to prove that the US policy of decoupling and breaking the chain has failed.

But it should also be noted that a trade surplus is not, and should not be, the goal of China's trade policy. On the contrary, China should reduce its trade surplus by expanding domestic demand.

Last but not least, China should pay close attention to fluctuations in the exchange rate. There has been pressure due to the yuan depreciation in the second quarter of 2024, which is mainly due to a wave of enterprises

going overseas, leading to a surge in outbound direct investment.

In the third quarter, the Chinese government said that it would implement an expansionary fiscal and monetary policy, while the US Federal Reserve slowed down its interest rate cuts, weighing on the RMB exchange rate due to the expected widening of interest rate differentials between the two countries.

In this case, at the policy level, the central bank emphasized at its meeting at the beginning of the year that China will guard against the risk of exchange rate overshoot. Therefore, the current exchange rate fluctuations are likely to be short-term, and there will not be a sharp depreciation of the RMB exchange rate against the greenback. In addition, considering the economic fundamentals of China, the pressure on the exchange rate will gradually decrease if a sound economy can be maintained throughout 2025.

*The writer is a researcher of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.*

*This op-ed is a translated version of the writer's article to the China Finance 40 Forum, or CF40, a Beijing-based think tank.*

*The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## Can higher tariffs bring greater prosperity to US?

## MAIN STREET

By Wu Songbo

Trump's reelection marks a strong resurgence of protectionism in the United States, with his administration implementing a range of trade protectionist policies early in his second term.

These include a 25 percent tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico (which was then promptly temporarily delayed), a 10 percent tariff increase on Chinese imports and, more recently, an increase in tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. Trump also plans to introduce a reciprocal tariff that would take effect almost immediately, applying to all countries and matching the tariff rates imposed by each trading partner.

Trump's tariff policies are rooted in his belief that globalization has caused the US to lose out to major trading partners like China, Mexico and Canada. He has argued that while these countries benefit from US trade, his country is left with a

large trade deficit and diminishing economic power. For Trump, this situation justifies a shift away from international agreements and global trade systems, with a focus on rewriting trade rules to prioritize US interests.

As he declared during his campaign, Trump believes tariffs will bring multiple benefits to the US. Trump asserted that high tariffs will revitalize domestic manufacturing by encouraging companies to produce goods in the US, creating jobs and boosting wages. He claims that the increased fiscal revenue brought about by tariffs would allow the US to carry out domestic tax reduction reforms, bringing lower tax burdens to domestic businesses and households. He also sees tariffs as a means to enhance national security by cutting reliance on foreign supply chains, ensuring more economic independence. Additionally, he views tariffs as a tool to counter unfair trade practices like currency manipulation and industry subsidies, leveling the playing field for US firms.

These benefits all seem enticing. However, Trump's tariffs may not achieve their stated goals for the following reasons.

First, economic research shows that high tariffs do not lead to job creation, wage increases or economic growth over the long run. On the contrary, tariff increases have an adverse impact on output, productivity and consumption. Tariff increases also lead to more unemployment and higher inequality, further adding to the deadweight losses of tariffs. Mainstream economists are generally skeptical of tariffs, considering them a mostly inefficient means for governments to promote prosperity. A National Bureau of Economic Research working paper examining the effects of Trump's first-term trade war found that it has not to date provided economic support for the US heartland: import tariffs on foreign goods neither raised nor lowered US employment in newly protected sectors; and retaliatory tariffs had clear negative employment impacts, primarily in agriculture. These detriments were only partly mitigated by compensatory US agricultural subsidies. Protectionist tariff policies have increased political support for Trump in these regions, but the tariffs have not brought corresponding economic returns to these regions.

Second, high tariffs alone cannot

achieve the policy goals of balanced trade and domestic tax reductions. In the era of global production, the US, like other major global economies, has a large amount of imported intermediate inputs in its exports. Many US exports use imports as intermediate inputs to final goods produced domestically. Raising the cost of these inputs through tariffs will raise the prices of such US exports and make them less competitive abroad. Moreover, trading partners are likely to retaliate against US tariffs with corresponding duties of their own, making exports more expensive overseas. High and widespread tariffs that reduce both exports and imports will leave the trade balance roughly unchanged. Even in the most extreme case, the goal of using tariff revenue to offset domestic tax cuts will be difficult to achieve without effective domestic reforms. International research think tank Tax Foundation estimates Trump's most extreme tariff proposals — a 20 percent universal tariff plus a 60 percent tariff on China's exports to the US — would raise about \$3.8 trillion over the 10-year budget window, falling short of the \$4.3 trillion needed to fully offset the cost of

making the expiring tax cuts permanent.

Third, high tariffs may do little to advance US national security or supply chain resilience because they fail to address the structural challenges of domestic production and global supply chain complexity. Simply making foreign goods more expensive does not guarantee that critical industries will relocate to the US, as businesses may instead shift sourcing to other low-cost countries or absorb higher costs without reshoring production. Tariffs also raise input costs for domestic manufacturers, making it harder for them to compete globally and potentially weakening key industries rather than strengthening them. Building a country's manufacturing competitiveness requires long-term policy efforts, including improving innovation, infrastructure, education and workforce development. Tariffs cannot provide effective assistance in these areas.

Moreover, the protectionist trade policy of "America First" will bring additional risks not only to the US, but also to the world.

Beyond the US, Trump's trade policies carry significant risks for the global trade system. The increasing use of tariffs as a strategic tool, particularly in areas like drug and immigration policy, is creating more uncertainty in interna-

tional markets. This approach undermines existing global trade norms, leading to potential trade wars, fragmented supply chains and reduced international cooperation. By weakening Washington's role in shaping global trade rules, the country risks losing influence to its allies and trading partners. Historically, the US has played a key role in promoting open markets and shaping the rules of international trade. If the US steps back from this role, other countries may fill the void. Washington may face a rewritten set of global trade rules that may not be in its interests.

In conclusion, while Trump's tariff policies aim to secure economic benefits for the US, they may not lead to the prosperity he envisions. High tariffs could increase production costs, raise consumer prices and stifle innovation, ultimately harming US competitiveness and global standing. As the global trading system becomes more fragmented, the US may face a more volatile and uncertain economic future, rather than a hoped-for greater prosperity.

*The writer is an assistant research fellow at the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.*

*The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## China a source of certainty in world of turbulence and transformation

The world is rapidly changing, and it is once again experiencing the turbulence of transformation. As in days gone by, people are trying to read the signs to divine what shape the future will take.

For the authors of the Munich Security Conference report the auguries are clear, the world is becoming multipolar. But unlike those who see hope and promise in such a transmutation, the report offers a bleaker assessment, focusing on the birth pains that have become increasingly prominent, such as rising divisions between major powers and conflicts over differing order models that are hindering unified responses to global challenges.

In response, the report advocates for "depolarization", emphasizing the necessity for significant reforms within the international order to address these issues.

In his speech at the international security forum on Friday in Munich, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, offered a more sober view from Beijing's perspective, pointing out that it is the resistance to change that is the cause of the strife of upheaval.

Wang made it clear that it is "the we-first approach" adopted by some countries, which he politely didn't name, that is the cause of the current "incessant chaos and confusion" in the world, as "they believe might makes right and have opened a Pandora's box marked the law of the jungle".

For the benefits of multipolarity to be manifest, it is important, as the Chinese foreign minister said, that all countries practice true multilateralism. In the face of emerging global challenges, no country can stay unaffected.

China agrees that reform of the global system is needed. But the reforms should be to make it inclusive and fair, and to enable it to address the development, governance, security and trust deficits that plague the world.

Beijing has repeatedly called for the United Nations to be at the core of practicing multilateralism, and Wang said that it is essential to "cement its foundations rather than destroy its pillars".

As he pointed out, all countries, regardless of size or strength, are "stakeholders in the international rule of law". The multipolar paradigm will only be in a state of disarray if some countries adhere to double standard in observing international law, saying one thing and doing another.

Unlike the self-serving and exclusive security concept pursued by some Western countries, China points to the right direction for building a more secure world for all.

It upholds true multilateralism and advocates for the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

China's goal is to build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world of lasting peace, universal security and shared prosperity. The pathway to this is promoting global governance that features extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit; with the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative providing the strategic guidance, and high-quality cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative the platform for action.

A multipolar world has become an unstoppable trend. For too long, the existing international order has been shaped disproportionately by a handful of Western powers, which have sidelined the voices and needs of developing nations.

From Iraq to Afghanistan, from Gaza to Ukraine — to name only some — the unipolar world upheld by the US-led West is one of bloodshed and suffering.

Yet, it seems — as shown by the meeting between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo on the sidelines of the Munich forum, indicating the US will continue with its friction-causing meddling in the South China Sea — that the US and its club of allies and partners in the "Indo-Pacific" have no intention of reflecting upon their security perception which only sows the seeds of confrontation and division.

Amid the profound global changes and challenges, no country can look on with folded arms. As China's top leader has urged, countries should plan together, build together and benefit together.

By practicing true multilateralism, featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit, China is the source of the greatest certainty amid all the turbulence and uncertainty, as it is a "steadfast constructive force" upholding the trajectory toward an equal and orderly multipolar world.

## Vance drives home that EU is on its own

Although United States Vice-President JD Vance's 20-minute speech at the Munich Security Conference on Friday was the only address in the international security forum this year that was met with silence from the beginning to the end, it was arguably the one that produced the most animated response afterward.

Instead of taking advantage of the forum to introduce the Donald Trump administration's latest plan to end the Ukraine crisis, as anticipated, shortly after a 90-minute "cordial" call between the US leader and his Russian counterpart, or to explain to what extent the new US administration expects the European countries to boost their security spending, Vance shocked his European audience by launching a blistering attack on the US' European allies, accusing them of betraying their values, and ignoring people's concerns on immigration and free speech.

"It was a very weird 20 minutes ... Vance's speech went down very badly — unequivocally badly. It was extraordinarily poorly judged." That was how the BBC commented on the US vice-president's speech, which a US commentator told the United Kingdom media outlet "was all for US domestic consumption".

Vance might have gone too far in seeking to woo his domestic audience by "trying to pick a fight" with Europe, as the European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said, since it comes at a time when the EU countries already feel betrayed by the Trump administration on the Ukraine crisis, with the US administration hinting that a settlement can be realized through its direct talks with Moscow, omitting both Ukraine and the bloc.

In particular, Vance inappropriately singled out Germany, the host country of the conference, as the target for his lecturing of his European audience about the "values" the Trump administration upholds, just a week before Germany heads to its federal elections. The Alternative for Germany, a far-right and right-wing populist political party in Germany that is polling in second place is endorsed by Trump adviser and billionaire Elon Musk.

Understandably, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz sharply rebuked Vance one day later saying Germany will not accept outsiders intervening in the country's elections — "That is not done, certainly not among friends and allies". Which makes one wonder whether the US will have any left after another four years of "America first".

No wonder when Vance tried to enliven the atmosphere during his Friday address with presumably an impromptu joke, "if American democracy can survive 10 years of (climate campaigner) Greta Thunberg scolding, you guys can survive a few months of Elon Musk", he failed to raise a single laugh in the hall.

On the same day as Vance bombed his Munich debut, French President Emmanuel Macron urged Europe to respond to "the electroshock" triggered by the return of the Trump administration to the White House with a new approach to defense and the economy.

But the French leader speaking to the Financial Times didn't expect that apart from the economy and security, the Trump administration would also try to dictate how the US' European allies should address their culture-war issues at home — key themes of Trump's campaign for the US presidency — in a bid to try and intervene in the domestic politics of the European countries.

That should serve to further highlight what Macron told the UK newspaper in his interview: "This is Europe's moment to accelerate and execute ... It has no choice. It is running out of road."

Although the EU conceived different solutions to cope with the possible impact of the comeback of Trump since he won the 2024 US president election in November, it still seems to have been caught unprepared by the administration's indifference. It is high time the bloc reflected on its hitherto passivity in not only dealing with the US but also some other burning issues concerning its immediate interest, and sought to uphold its strategic autonomy in foreign policy.

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at

**China Daily**  
15 Huxin Dongjie Chaoyang District,  
Beijing 100029  
News: +86 (0)10 6491-8366  
editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
Advertisement: +86 (0)10 6491-8631  
ads@chinadaily.com.cn  
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203  
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn  
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

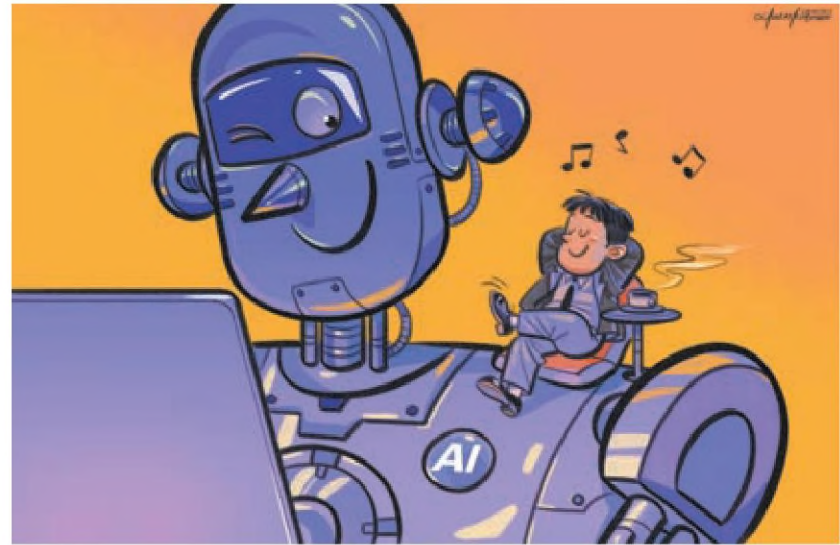
**China Daily UK**  
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 8270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

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

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

## Li Min



## Opinion Line

## Cook Islands beneficiary of Belt and Road cooperation

During his meeting with Prime Minister of the Cook Islands Mark Brown on Friday, Premier Li Qiang expressed China's willingness to strengthen high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with the Polynesian island country, and advance mutually beneficial cooperation in areas such as the maritime economy, infrastructure construction, agriculture and fisheries.

When China and the Cook Islands established diplomatic relations in 1997, their bilateral trade volume was \$145,000. As a comparison, in the first ten months of 2023, the bilateral trade volume reached \$12.27 million, a year-on-year increase of 9 percent.

That cooperation has been especially strengthened since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, which advocates infrastructure construction for the participant

countries. For example in February 2014, a groundbreaking ceremony for a water supply project on the Oceanian country's Rarotonga Island was held, which was a tripartite cooperation project among China, the Cook Islands, and New Zealand. Only three years later, in February 2017, the construction work aided by China was successfully completed, and a handover ceremony was held.

Through cooperation with China, the Cook Islands have gained better infrastructure, which has promoted the diversified development of the local economy, thereby attracting more trade and investment opportunities.

Moreover, fishery is an important industry in the Cook Islands. The fishery industry of the Cook Islands can benefit from the huge consumer demand in the Chinese market and enter the global market more

smoothly for their agricultural and fishery products and other specialties through China's ports and logistics.

The cooperation between the two sides in the tourism sector is also worth noting. Through cooperation with China, the Cook Islands will not only be able to attract a large number of Chinese tourists but also take this opportunity to enhance its competitiveness in the international tourism market.

China is genuinely imparting its own development experience to Pacific island countries like the Cook Islands. For example, in March 2024, trainees from 11 Pacific countries, including the Cook Islands, participated in a military cadet training course and brought back the technology of planting mushrooms and grasses, which can help conserve water and soil, and increase local residents' income.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## Forward-looking sights set for monetary policy

On Friday, the People's Bank of China, the central bank, released the financial statistics for January, showing that both the scale of social financing and the increase in loans reached new highs. This not only reflects the effectiveness of the country's latest monetary policy but also indicates a recovery in market demand.

In January, the increase in the scale of social financing was 7.06 trillion yuan (\$972.9 billion), up by 583.3 billion yuan year-on-year. On the one hand, this was due to the rapid growth of balance sheet loans; on the other hand, it benefited from the accelerated issuance of government bonds.

In January, loans increased by 5.13 trillion yuan. The balance of inclusive small- and micro-loans at the end of January was 33.31 trillion yuan, up 12.7 percent year-on-year. The balance of medium- and long-term loans for manufacturing was 14.41 trillion yuan, up 11.4 percent year-on-year,

both higher than the growth rate of all types of loans during the same period, indicating continuous optimization of the credit structure. In January, new personal housing loans amounted to 244.7 billion yuan, up by 151.9 billion yuan year-on-year, suggesting that the real estate market is stabilizing after the downturn.

The PBOC has fully utilized structural monetary policy tools to encourage financial institutions to increase credit supply to relevant fields, making financial support for the real economy more effective.

At the end of January, broad money (M2) grew by 7 percent year-on-year, with the growth rate falling by 0.3 percentage points from the previous month. It is worth noting that starting from January this year, M1 data has been published according to new statistical standards, which include individual current deposits and customer reserves of nonbank payment institutions. This change mainly

reflects the significant changes in the usage scenarios and convenience of individual current deposits and payment institution reserves as mobile payments become widely adopted.

Meanwhile, the balance of customer reserves of payment institutions can be used for payment or transactions in most scenarios, meeting daily needs. Therefore, including individual current deposits and customer reserves of payment institutions in the M1 statistical scope is necessary and timely. Overall, this adjustment to the M1 statistical standard aligns with financial innovation and mobile payment trends, reflecting changes in liquidity under the current monetary and financial environment.

Of course, the adjustment of statistical standards will not change the direction of monetary policy. The moderately loose monetary policy in 2025 will be more forward-looking, effective, and precise.

—21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## What They Say

## Canada playing 'China card' to beg for mercy

Recently, a group of premiers from all 13 provinces and territories in Canada visited the United States. They lobbied US lawmakers, business groups, and labor leaders, trying to persuade the US to be lenient on the issue of tariffs. In an attempt to convince the US, some Canadian politicians even played the "China card", depicting China as a common economic enemy.

The US leader has repeatedly belittled Canada, saying it should be the 51st state of the US, and mocked Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as a "governor". Earlier this month, citing fentanyl and illegal immigration as reasons, the US threatened to impose an additional 25 percent tariff on Canadian imports. Most recently, the US announced a 25 percent tariff on all imported steel and aluminum, with Canada bearing the brunt of that.

Unable to stand up to the US, some

Canadian politicians have resorted to the trick of opposing China and smearing it, in the hope the US will show leniency to Canada as a comrade in arms. Over the years, Canada has continuously introduced measures against China in the political, security and economic fields, from the illegal detention of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou to the ban on Chinese 5G equipment.

As long as one views the relationship between China and Canada rationally, there is no fundamental conflict of interest between the two. China is Canada's second-largest trading partner, source of imports and export market. The relationship between China and Canada was originally developing well, but as the US regards China as its primary strategic rival and comprehensively seeks to contain and suppress it, cooperation between China and Canada has continually cooled, as Canada

has toed the US line.

Over the past year, while some Western countries have chosen to improve relations with China, Canadian politicians still refuse to fundamentally correct their erroneous understanding of China, losing valuable opportunities for cooperation with China, and not gaining any goodwill from the US either.

This year marks the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Canada, as well as the 20th anniversary of the establishment of a strategic partnership. Currently, Canada is at a turning point of political change. For the country's leaders, whether they can maintain strategic independence, refuse to mindlessly follow the US' China policy, and return to a rational understanding of China is undoubtedly a crucial test.

—CHINA MEDIA GROUP

## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Munich Security Conference 2025

**Editor's note:** The Ukraine crisis has once again become a hot topic at the Munich Security Conference. Three experts share their views with China Daily on how the relevant parties should truly act to end the crisis.

Liu Qiang

## Munich Security Conference needs reforms

The Munich Security Conference has become an important annual conference on global security. Launched in 1963, the conference organizes high-level discussions, and fosters agreements and transnational cooperation on global security.



The author is the director of the Academic Council and a senior research fellow at the Shanghai Center for RimPac Strategic and International Studies.

Despite these traits, the MSC needs reforms to regain its status in global security management.

The MSC operates in a center-periphery power structure: the G7 member states set the core agenda, while the countries of the Global South often remain passive recipients. Long-term Western dominance has led the MSC to neglect the views and interests of some non-Western countries, and turn into a platform for the West to promote its values and policies. As such, some developing countries are reluctant to take part in the conference.

The selective approach of the MSC, especially on key issues, exposes the structural flaws of the conference. The MSC claims to reach strategic consensus through closed-door meetings among developed countries. But in today's multipolar world, the platform lacks institutional power-sharing dialogue mechanisms and the capacity to check major power competition.

Hence, it cannot meet the security demands of small and medium-sized countries.

No wonder disagreements on multiple topics and doubts about the conference being fair and effective have increased. The conference's efficacy in promoting agreements and suggesting viable solutions to burning issues has declined.

The international community still expects the MSC to promote fair and equitable security dialogues. For instance, in 2024, about 700 representatives from more than 120 countries and regions attended the conference, including about 50 heads of state and government, because they expected to find answers to their questions at the MSC.

The MSC faces many challenges including geopolitical differences, increasingly complex security issues, and outdated security mechanisms because of the declining trust between countries. While the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Palestine conflict are new major geopolitical hotspots, emerging cybersecurity threats, artificial intelligence, national security issues and climate change have further complicated the security agenda.

The rising differences in the stances and interests of, and the lack of trust between Western and non-Western nations have made it even more difficult to reach a consensus, leading to a deadlock in dialogues at times.

The MSC's problems are a result of the rapid changes in the world order. Globalization is accelerating. Non-state actors have emerged. BRICS member states account for a bigger percentage of the global economy. Global South

countries have refused to take sides between Western and non-Western nations. And the world is incapable of addressing the complex security challenges with traditional security mechanisms and geopolitical confrontation narratives.

The MSC must evolve beyond traditional thinking and frameworks to promote cooperation in security. Otherwise, it will become a club for the West to amuse itself.

The MSC needs to expand the scope of security discussions. Traditional security thinking focuses on state-centric military confrontations and territorial security while underestimating economic, social and environmental security. Today, the impact of non-traditional security threats including cyberattacks, financial insecurity, resource shortage and climate change is as much as that of traditional security threats. The two threats sometimes intertwine to pose a bigger threat to society.

That's why measures should be taken to make the MSC's decision-making mechanism more flexible. Despite not having the binding power of the United Nations Security Council, the MSC remains an important platform addressing both traditional and non-traditional security issues. The MSC should also devise flexible, efficient policies to address transnational security issues, for which a quick and unified response is crucial.

Reforming the global governance system, too, is important. Although full of twists and turns, the development of a multipolar world order is an unstoppable trend. Acknowledgment of the trend can help countries and organizations to innovate and develop

multilateral mechanisms.

Listening to the voices of developing countries and strengthening cooperation with emerging economies instead of seeking dominance is the only way the developed economies can establish a multi-layered, multi-dimensional global governance network and ensure fairness in rule-making.

The MSC reflects the deep-seated problems of traditional security governance systems in adapting to changing situations. In a complex and changing world, every country has the responsibility to help maintain global peace and promote global development. But irrational thinking is crippling the global security governance system. The MSC should become a facilitator of good governance and a dialogue platform that can answer questions on different security issues, balance different interests, and promote communication, mutual understanding and trust among countries.

While drafting rules for global governance, world leaders should take into consideration cultural, religious and social differences, with the aim of building a community with a shared future for mankind. And the international community should use advanced technologies to improve governance capacity and efficiency, and leverage big data, AI and blockchain to improve information management, sharing and analysis. By reforming and adapting to the changes in global security, the MSC can better address new challenges and contribute to world peace and stability. Otherwise, it risks becoming irrelevant.

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

Xu Wenhong

## Ending Ukraine crisis most beneficial to EU

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives and caused destruction worth billions of dollars. That's why many people hope the two sides declare a ceasefire soon.

But the fact that the United States and some European Union member states have been providing military equipment and ammunition for Ukraine has made it difficult to end the conflict. The nature of the EU's aid to Ukraine is different from that of the US. The EU has been providing "pure aid" for Ukraine, earning almost no profit. On the other hand, the US with its well-developed "military industrial complex" earns handsome profits by supplying arms and ammunition to Ukraine most of which goes into the pockets of US defense industries. As such, the blood transfusion to Ukraine means long-term blood loss to Europe.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has severed the link between some EU economies and Russia's energy sector, resulting in high energy prices. Amid the global economic slowdown, the fiscal revenue of EU countries has decreased and their economic recovery is foundering — European financial markets have become volatile and the euro has weakened.

Given the new US administration's demands, the EU countries have to not only increase their defense budgets but also contribute more to NATO's budget, while continuing to provide increased military assistance for Ukraine. This means increasing fiscal deficits and debt burdens for EU countries.

Before the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia was the main natural gas supplier of the EU, with its share in the EU natural gas market being as high as 40 percent. After the outbreak of the conflict, however, the EU countries began seeking diversified energy supplies to reduce their

dependence on Russian energy. While the EU countries have deepened energy cooperation with natural gas exporting countries such as Norway, Algeria and Qatar, and are exploring new sources for importing liquefied natural gas (LNG), the US has seized the opportunity to increase its LNG exports to Europe. Still, natural gas prices in EU have increased, which in turn has raised the cost of goods.

Although the EU and its member states have adopted effective policies and are using multiple financial channels to reduce their dependence on Russian energy, temporarily addressing the energy crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, their energy imports and foreign trade still face geopolitical risks. If the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues, the EU economy will face greater economic pressure and lag behind other developed economies.

Also, in the face of soaring energy costs, the EU has been forced to lower its requirements for clean energy in the short term, with its member states resorting to fossil fuels to maintain their industrial production and supply electricity and heating to industries and households. Germany, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and other EU countries have already announced the reopening of coal-fired power plants.

The energy crisis has also forced manufacturing enterprises in the EU, especially those in traditionally advantageous industries such as machinery and chemical industry, to adjust their supply chains. And a large number of European companies, particularly those that have invested in the US, are unhappy with the EU in the light of Washington's "America first" strategy, exacerbating concerns within Europe about "deindustrialization".

Although the EU's green transformation has accelerated, it faces many challenges and uncertainties. The EU and its member states have introduced a series of policies to support the green transformation, which will create new economic growth points and industrial opportunities, prompting countries to increase investment in and boost the development of related industries.

But thanks to the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the EU economy, the growth of investment in green transformation has declined. There is a significant gap among EU countries when it comes to investment in green transformation.

Besides, the EU still faces technological bottlenecks and insufficient infrastructure, which can slow down the green transformation. The existing technology infrastructure in European countries cannot fully meet the needs of green transformation.

Moreover, there are differences among EU countries on the speed and policy intensity of promoting the green transformation. Some member states have different views on the cost-benefit ratio of green transformation, making it more difficult to coordinate different member states' policies.

In addition, policies such as the US' Inflation Reduction Act have attracted investments from EU companies, leading to the relocation of some European green industry chains and affecting the EU's green transformation.

In short, the EU stands to gain the most by urging Russia and Ukraine to declare a ceasefire, which will have a profound impact on international relations and the global economy. Ending the war as soon as possible, therefore, will be most beneficial for the EU.

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

Martin Sieff

## US bid to end Ukraine crisis may hit bumps

Less than a month into office, a seemingly confident US President Donald Trump sent his "A team" — Vice-President J.D. Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and special envoy to Russia and Ukraine, retired Lieutenant General Keith Kellogg — to the annual Munich Security Conference, held from Friday to Sunday, to inform European allies of the new US administration's policies and pressure Russia into accepting Washington's new terms to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict.



The author is a senior fellow at the American University in Moscow.

In fact, Trump called Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, and said later that he had a "lengthy and highly productive phone call" with Putin, characterizing it as the beginning of a negotiation to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Trump has apparently told his advisers that finding US-backed process

to end the conflict is a priority for his administration.

Although there has been no official response from Moscow, Russia is unlikely to give concessions to the US president to end the conflict nor will it settle the conflict on the US' terms.

Besides, his "America first" policy is causing chaos and consternation among the very same US allies that he takes for granted will blindly follow the US' lead on Ukraine as they have been doing for the past three years.

Indeed, Vance, Rubio and Kellogg are in for a set of nasty surprises as they collide with the new unyielding realities their own policies have created. Because the Russia-Ukraine conflict has already reshaped Europe's security mechanism and undermined, even wrecked, it in multiple ways.

The US-NATO policy — encouraged by the United Kingdom and Poland, and somewhat reluctantly supported by France, Germany, Spain and Italy — was to arm Ukraine to the teeth against Russia in the expectation that Ukraine would bleed the Russian army white and force Moscow to settle the conflict on the terms of the US and NATO, even leading to the overthrow of the Putin government.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

But the opposite has happened. Ukraine's losses in the three years of the conflict have been horrendous. Instead of bleeding Russia white, Ukraine itself has been bled white. And while Russian arms production has expanded exponentially, the US and NATO have drained their arsenals dry in their vain attempts to prop up Ukraine.

NATO has been exposed as a "paper tiger", and it will take at least five years, if not more, for its major member states to restore their armaments and ammunition piles to the level they were in February 2022.

With the conflict going badly for Ukraine, the smaller NATO member states from Central and Eastern Europe have become far more dependent on the presence of NATO and US militaries. At the same time, the current leaderships in France and Germany have become increasingly fearful of Europe's descent into political disarray and an economic crisis.

Economic sanctions against Russia, too, have disastrously backfired on the European Union. They have cut off

cheap and reliable gas supplies from Russia, dealing a big blow to the German economy.

Now, the new US administration has added to the uncertainties and fears in Europe in ways that had not been anticipated in London, Paris or Berlin.

On Wednesday, The Guardian said the US leader's suggestion that Denmark cede Greenland to the United States and the US absorb even Canada have changed the US' image among Europeans — from a protector of order and stability in Europe to an unpredictable and potentially aggressive force.

The Munich Security Conference report says that "the US may be abandoning its historic role as Europe's security guarantor — with significant consequences for Ukraine". The report goes on to say that "US foreign policy in the coming years will likely be shaped by Washington's bipolar contest with Beijing. This, however, may well accelerate the multipolarization of the international system".

The US leader's threat to bring

Greenland, Canada and even Panama under US control has already prompted many European allies to see the US not as "an anchor of stability, but rather (as) a risk to be hedged against", the report warned. The report also said the US administration's new policies would, unwittingly, accelerate the development of a multipolar world order to replace the US-dominated one that was established in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War.

Twenty-two years ago, when I covered the Munich Security Conference for United Press International, I was told by a senior European arms-control negotiator that there was widespread worry that the US was going to act like a "rogue cowboy" on the international stage.

To cite the famous French proverb, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." The more things change, the more they stay the same. However, the consequences will be far greater and more unpredictable this time.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ISHIDA RYUJI

## Live up to its name

Friendship with China would be the highest form of security assurance for Japan, which calls itself a 'peaceful nation'

There is a deep-rooted sense of pride across Japanese society in being a "peaceful nation" that has renounced war. On the other hand, neighboring countries' vigilance toward Japanese militarization plans has not disappeared but increased in recent years.



One of the reasons for this is Japan's continuous political measures that deny the history of its aggressive wars and revise a series of laws and regulations that reflect on those wars. At the same time, Japan has constantly strengthened its security cooperation with the United States, the world's leading military power, which is another significant factor that cannot be ignored. Although the Japanese Self-Defense Forces possess one of the most formidable military strengths in the world, the Japanese government has been pushing forward with policies that would invalidate the nation's pacifist Constitution.

The Japanese public is opposed to tax increases and a significant increase in the defense budget. However, due to the widespread belief in society that Japan is a "peaceful nation" and that neighboring countries are implementing expansionist policies, there is a lack of large-scale and active opposition to Japan's military build-up.

The US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security was signed in 1960, and 2025 marks its 65th anniversary. When the old security treaty between Japan and the US was signed in September 1951, Japan was still under occupation following its defeat in its war of aggression, and it was concluded under the leadership of former prime minister Shigeru Yoshida without substantial public support.

With the scars of war still fresh and the Cold War intensifying conflicts in East Asia, the revision of the security treaty in 1960 triggered massive protests across Japan, driven by a common desire to "avoid being dragged into war again". To sign the new security treaty, then



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Japanese prime minister Nobusuke Kishi had to resign in exchange for the revision. During that period, Japan's postwar identity as a "peaceful nation" was incompatible with the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.

So, what is the situation like 65 years later? The term "Japan-US alliance", once cautiously avoided, is now ubiquitous in both political and public discourse. Even though the term evokes the image of a military alliance, people no longer seriously consider its contradiction with Japan's pacifist Constitution and its identity as a "peaceful nation".

Given that during its aggressive wars, Japan's military actions were also carried out under the guise of "defense" and "liberation", neighboring countries' concerns about

the resurgence of an imperial Japan are not unfounded.

Such a dangerous situation is caused by the fact that, apart from the "Japan-US alliance", Japan lacks any other conceptual framework for its national security.

Sixty-five years ago, even among conservatives, there was a notion that the Japan-US security arrangement was a temporary measure, and that Japan would eventually break free from its subordinate position to the US and pursue an independent foreign policy.

Today, however, both Japan's left- and right-wing forces unabashedly declare that "Japan-US alliance is the cornerstone" of the country's security, based on the traditional deterrence theory, which posits that a country's national security can be achieved by maintaining military

superiority over other nations. This reveals that postwar Japan, while keeping the identity of a "peaceful nation", has continued to be a militaristic country, just like in the pre-war period.

In recent years, using the "China threat" as a pretext, the Japanese government has continuously revised laws, not only lifting restrictions on military spending but also enabling the exercise of collective self-defense and even preemptive strikes against enemy bases.

In contrast, China's military expenditure growth has always remained in a range commensurate with the country's economic growth. It is worth noting that postwar Japan has long been increasing its military strength. Now, despite three decades of economic stagna-

tion, Japan's military spending has doubled. In the context of its declining birthrate, rapidly aging population and decreasing average income, the Japanese public is burdened with heavy taxes and social security costs. The Japanese government unilaterally strengthening the Japan-US alliance under the pretext of a so-called security threat that doesn't even exist will only undermine Japanese people's well-being and escalate tensions in Japan's surrounding regions.

So, are there ways for Japan to guarantee its national security other than via a military build-up? In the postwar period, Japan refused to recognize the newly established People's Republic of China during the Cold War, leading to the birth of unofficial diplomacy that sought to promote reconciliation and friendly relations with the People's Republic of China through grassroots efforts, which makes the country a true "peaceful nation".

In recent years, the advocates of the friendship movement have aged, and with the overall rightward shift in Japanese society, the peace and friendship movement has been shrinking.

Nevertheless, there still exist groups and citizens who steadfastly reflect on the country's history of aggression and strive to build trust. Among them is Hirokazu Yamahashi in Osaka, who has always been at the forefront of the labor movement. Yamahashi actively advocates that "Sino-Japanese friendship is the highest form of security assurance". He believes that if the government does not pursue military expansion that contradicts the essence of a "peaceful nation", the majority of the population, who are workers, will have the conditions to live a humane life. He

believes that the Japan-US security system primarily targets a fictional "threat" — China. Therefore, Yamahashi calls on the public and workers to transcend national borders and develop friendship with the Chinese people, initiating and practicing Sino-Japanese friendship from the grassroots level, thereby gradually eliminating the conditions that necessitate the Japan-US security system.

Such awareness and activities, in today's Japanese society where the "China threat theory" is a uniform clamor regardless of the political stances, might even be criticized as utopian or impractical.

However, ensuring security through Sino-Japanese friendship is precisely the spirit of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, an attempt to elevate the postwar settlement between the two countries to a principle of peaceful coexistence between nations.

In the 1970s, both Japan and China shared and contributed to the world the wisdom of transforming the history of aggression into a future of peace and friendship. If we adhere to the treaty, there would be no need for costly military expansion, and such bilateral relations would not only benefit the two peoples but also be welcomed and trusted by neighboring countries; the "peaceful nation" would live up to its name, and Japanese Self-Defense Forces, which is aimed at defense, would also be better understood.

Furthermore, joining the Belt and Road Initiative and pursuing development with a broader range of countries could create more development opportunities for the struggling Japanese economy. Therefore, the path of peace and friendship is a realistic, reliable and long-term guarantee for Japan's security.

The author is an associate researcher at the School of Humanities at Shanghai Jiaotong 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.

ZHANG YUN

## Horns of a dilemma

Japan is seeking strategic and mutually beneficial relations with China while still retaining the perception that its neighbor is the greatest strategic challenge

On Feb 7, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba made his first visit to the United States after taking office. The joint statement issued after his meeting with US President Donald Trump criticized China on issues related to the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and stated that the deterrent and response capabilities of the US-Japan alliance would be strengthened.



Before this, Ishiba had repeated his desire for improved Sino-Japanese ties and expressed his hope of visiting China as soon as possible. Last November, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Ishiba during the APEC summit in Lima, Peru, reaffirming the political consensus on building a strategic, mutually beneficial relationship. Also that month, Takeo Akiba, the Japanese national security adviser, visited China and had high-level political talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya visited China in the subsequent month. This was the first official visit to China by a Japanese foreign minister since the start of April 2023.

From China's perspective, Japan appears to be making active efforts to improve bilateral relations on the one hand, while on the other, it is vigorously sensationalizing negative perceptions of China, creating a contradictory and duplicitous stance. This duality and contradiction are most evident in Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook 2024. The report mentioned that Japan will promote a "mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests" with China for the first time in five years. However,

the Bluebook retains the previous edition's perception of China, positioning China as the greatest strategic challenge Japan has ever faced. During his state visit to the US, former Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida linked a major shift in Japan's defense policy to China being regarded as Japan's greatest strategic challenge in his speech to the US Congress. This raises questions about the direction of Japan's China policy and whether the improvement in Sino-Japanese relations will merely be a brief Indian summer or lead to sustainable progress. It is believed that the essence of the duality and contradiction in Japan's China policy lies in the context of great changes in international relations, where Japan is at a critical juncture of seeking direction, reflecting a drift in its strategic cognition.

The strategic agenda of a nation largely depends on its "strategic cognition", and the core of this cognition lies in observing and analyzing the fundamental perception framework of international relations. After Japan was defeated in World War II, its perception framework of international relations was fundamentally shaped by the US-Japan alliance. Aligning with the US, the world's most powerful nation, and integrating itself into the US-led international order became the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy. In the early post-Cold War era, Japan briefly entertained discussions about moving toward a multilateral strategic direction, but these discussions quickly faded. At the beginning of this century, the strong tendency of the US unilateralism displayed in its war on terror further reinforced Japan's perception of the world moving toward a unipolar order. Some scholars even argued that the world was under the rule of the

American empire.

This perception began to shift after the 2008 financial crisis. Statements by then-US president Barack Obama, who took office in 2009, such as "the US would no longer act as a world policeman", were often cited by Japan as evidence of the end of the unipolar world and the decline of US global leadership. During Donald Trump's first term, his "America First" policy and the uncertainties he showed in dealing with alliances and free trade further solidified Japan's perception of these changes. In 2021, with the Joe Biden administration in power, the hasty US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the lack of global support for the severe economic sanctions against Russia following the Ukraine crisis, and the Israel-Hamas conflict, indicated a decline in US influence in the Middle East, and Japan has come to view international relations as undergoing a fundamental transformation. Recent Japanese diplomatic documents frequently mention that international relations are at a historic turning point and emphasize the importance of the Global South, indicating that it is at a critical juncture in shifting away from the long-dominant perception of a US-centered unipolar world. Facing such a historic transformation, Japan is primarily engaged in a debate between two theories on strategic opportunity. A highlight of this major shift in strategic cognition is its relationship with China.

One theory holds that Japan fills the leadership vacuum left by the US in Asia. Proponents of this view believe that, although the US has identified China as its greatest competitor, domestic political divisions have weakened its willingness to intervene abroad; additionally, the US faces the immense strategic pressure of

potentially having to engage simultaneously in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Under these circumstances, Japan, based on its alliance with the US, is strengthening and consolidating multilateral security mechanisms such as the US-Japan-Republic of Korea, US-Japan-Philippines, and US-Japan-India-Australia partnerships. This approach aims to establish a maritime security architecture centered on a framework with Japan and the US as the dual axis in Asia. Such a structure would not only reduce Japan's sense of inequality vis-à-vis the US but also enhance its presence and leadership in regional affairs. This strategic logic requires the so-called China challenge or even "China threat" as a pretext to legitimize its actions. This is why we have seen Japan amplifying negative perceptions of China in recent years both domestically and internationally, which serves as an important contextual factor. The shortcoming of this mindset lies in Japan's need to allocate substantial resources to the military domain, raising questions about its sustainability for a country that has already been grappling with fiscal constraints. Nevertheless, taking a hard-line stance toward China can only backfire in Japan's efforts to expand its strategic space.

The other holds that Japan is integrating into a multipolar world. In this view, the US is no longer a democratic model, a leader in the free economy, or a reliable ally. The collective rise of the Global South means that the era of the US-led G7 dominating the international order is likely to come to an end, and the world is increasingly moving toward multipolarity. The biggest challenge facing Japan and developed European countries is the decline in their economic and technological competitiveness. Tak-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

ing artificial intelligence as an example, DeepSeek signifies a weakening of the high-tech hegemony of the US. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that other countries will develop new AI technologies in different ways. The multipolarity of technological innovation also represents a significant opportunity for Japanese companies to reorganize and reconstruct the high-tech industry chain. Taking former prime minister Kakuei Tanaka who proposed the plan for remodeling the Japanese archipelago as his mentor, Ishiba put forward the initiative of rebuilding the Japanese archipelago in the Reiwa Era that aims at regional revitalization and economic growth. Looking back, prime minister Tanaka's visit to China to normalize Sino-Japanese relations was crucial for Japan to maintain a stable international environment, especially in its neighborhood, and stabilizing its relations with China was a top priority at that time. Meanwhile, Japan cannot expand its space for external relations and economic cooperation or develop diplomacy

with the Global South without having a good relationship with China, because China is deeply involved and plays an important role in many Global South frameworks. Japan has reached a critical juncture of its strategic cognitive transformation. The competition between the two perceptions mentioned above will continue to fluctuate with changes in the domestic and international landscapes. China-Japan relations are facing both opportunities and challenges. It is like rowing upstream; failing to advance means falling back. The two sides should continue to strengthen communication at all levels, including strategic dialogue, and constantly seek to establish common ground in perceptions that fit the new era of China-Japan relations.

The author is a professor of the School of International Studies at Nanjing 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.

# CULTURE

A traffic accident put Zhou Donglin's rising real estate career on hold, changed her outlook, and sent her on a soul-searching journey into the heart of nature.

The woman in her 30s from East China's Zhejiang province exudes a laid-back vibe that belies her thrilling experiences up hill and down dale, chasing the mind-boggling power of love and the lives of wild creatures.

Zhou is traveling during Spring Festival in Uganda, attempting to capture precious images of mountain gorillas through her lens.

"I plan to spend 20 days exploring western and central Africa, zooming in on the creature that has a very small population but shares 98 percent similar genes with human beings," Zhou says.

Her interest in the subject was inspired by a meeting with internationally renowned British primatologist Jane Goodall, 90, at the China Wildlife Image and Video Competition in Beijing in December.

"Her lifelong devotion to chimpanzees is admirable and piqued my curiosity about other great apes," she says.

So far, Zhou has hiked through the tropical rainforest with help from a hired guide and keeps close tabs on mountain gorillas with distinctive silver backs.

"I enjoy delving into animal communities and have tried to tell their tales of kinship, friendship, life and death, and competition. If these stories can move the audience and touch their hearts, they will come to love animals. This love will, in turn, inspire them to protect nature," Zhou says.

In December, Zhou's photography work highlighting an upland buzzard sacrificing itself to protect its chicks from a snow leopard on a precarious cliff stood out from the more than 37,600 nature-themed image and video submissions from across the world. It also won the hearts of the judging committee at the China Wildlife Image and Video Competition awards ceremony hosted by the Chinese National Geography in Beijing.

The photo was shot in the Garze Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Sichuan province.

"I was in awe of the bird's maternal instincts. It could have put up a good fight, which might have chased the leopard off," Zhou recalls.

It wasn't until she saw the chicks were hidden under the bird that she understood how the fight would expose the babies. "It was purely tragic and soul-stirring the way she sacrificed herself without protest," Zhou says.

Bao Yongqing, a senior official from the Qilian Mountains Nature Conservation Association based in Northwest China's Qinghai province, says Zhou's work captures an eternal moment, recording a timeless natural story that allows viewers to witness a world where the "law of the jungle" and "tenderaffection" coexist.

"It is a collision of life's instincts — the snow leopard's hunt clashing with the motherly love of the upland buzzard who sacrifices itself to protect its young," Bao says. "Every detail in the image is worth examining, drawing each observer to speculate on the unfolding story."

"The work reveals the stunning and perilous tensions of nature, making it an extraordinary creation that expands the boundaries of our understanding," he adds.

Zhou started contemplating the meaning of life when she was confined to bed for six months following a car crash in 2013.



## Putting life in focus

Serious accident transforms photographer's outlook into a journey that takes her to the heart of nature and wildlife, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



**Above:** Photographer Zhou Donglin ready to zoom in on polar bears at the Wapusk National Park in Canada. **PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**  
**Clockwise from top left:** Zhou has captured many amazing moments of wildlife, including a polar bear cub sharing a tender moment with its mother in Canada; a golden monkey nestling in its mother's arms in Sichuan province, Southwest China; Iberian lynx hunting in Spain; and a dwarf lemur leaping across the cliff in search of food in Madagascar.  
**PHOTOS BY ZHOU DONGLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY**

"We are small in the grand scheme of the universe. On the path of caring for the environment and protecting animals, taking a step forward, even if it's just one, is far more meaningful than remaining stagnant."

Zhou Donglin, photographer

"The doctor told me I was likely to lose mobility," she recalls. She realized she had been striving to be a straight-A student to please her parents and was trying to earn money, as was expected of her after

graduation. "I was too busy to try to figure out what I want," she says. As she reflected on her past and looked to the future, her childhood dream of exploring every corner of the planet sprang to mind. "I love watching documentaries

about wildlife, man and nature, which inspired me to pursue a path in that direction," she says. When she fully recovered, she picked up the camera and backpacked to Africa, Europe and the polar lands.

She was immediately overwhelmed by the power of the wild. A female lion sniffing a sea of blossoms in Zimbabwe, a little hummingbird suckling honey against an ongoing storm near a volcano in Costa Rica, and a brown

mother bear feeding fish to her baby in Alaska were among the wonders that blew her mind.

"I enjoy capturing these animals in their natural, unrestrained state, observing their struggle against nature and the friendships, love, conflict, and family bonds in their world," she says.

With her MBA background, Zhou says it's key to pick up a wealth of knowledge about animals before getting into the field. "Before photographing a jaguar, I would first research its characteristics — its habitat, behavioral traits, and how old it gets before reaching maturity," she says.

For a female photographer, it's important to physically and mentally prepare for carrying heavy equipment and traversing rough conditions.

"Nature photographers often use extremely long lenses, which are very heavy, and hiking in the wilderness with such gear requires a lot of physical strength. Especially when a tripod isn't an option and you have to support the lens with your shoulder," Zhou says.

Endurance is also key — being able to handle hunger, dirt and sometimes thirst, as certain places don't allow for easy access to clean water.

"Every trip to answer the call of nature can be dangerous, as it puts you at risk of encountering wildlife," she explains.

As her skills developed, Zhou honed her style and principles. For instance, the scene being captured must be authentic and must be photographed in the animal's natural state.

"It is essential not to use bait, set up scenes, or disturb their natural life rhythms — such as forcing a bird to fly or deliberately pruning a bird's nest to make it photogenic," she says. "If there is a conflict between capturing a shot and jeopardizing the animal's existence and safety, one must decisively abandon the shot."

The years Zhou has spent capturing nature and wildlife have not just given rise to tens of thousands of valuable images but endeared her to the animals, prompting her to call attention to their protection.

In 2019, she worked with ornithologist Lin Qingxian from Xiamen University based in East China's Fujian province to set up Seeking Wild, a nonprofit organization committed to raising public awareness of wildlife conservation through field research, rescue efforts, and ecological photography. Additionally, Zhou held a personal photography exhibition, with all proceeds going to natural conservation endeavors.

To date, her NGO has about 160,000 followers on the social media platform Sina Weibo.

"The images captured by a photographer are more a source of materials for wildlife conservation, as what the eye sees is the most direct and visually impactful," Zhou explains of the establishment of Seeking Wild. "However, when it comes to follow-up actions, I believe it requires the involvement of organizations that can implement practical measures."

She knows it's unrealistic to expect immediate major changes through this small cause.

"We are small in the grand scheme of the universe. On the path of caring for the environment and protecting animals, taking a step forward, even if it's just one, is far more meaningful than remaining stagnant," Zhou says.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

### What's on



#### Poetry and romance

*Facing the Sea*, an exhibition at the Kulangsu Center for Contemporary Art, on Gulangyu Island, Xiamen, Fujian province, displays paintings, prints, sculptures, watercolors and lacquer paintings by dozens of Chinese artists. It is a diverse expression of people's affection for maritime views, eliciting rich feelings.

Not only do the artworks depict

the landscapes in reality, but also, there are half-imagined scenes, in which artists have imbued poetic and romantic feelings.

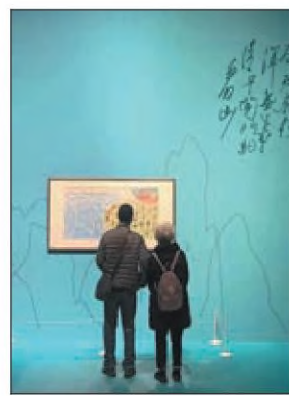
The exhibition also shows flower-themed works to embrace an anticipation of spring. It is through to April 20.

9:30 am-5:30 pm, closed on Mondays. L1-02, No 151-8, Kangtai Lu, Gulangyu Island, Xiamen, Fujian province.

#### Colorful legacy

*For So Long, and Colorful*, an exhibition of paintings created by late artist Huang Yongyu in the last decade of his life, is on at the Chengdu Art Museum in Sichuan province. It runs until April 6.

Huang, a versatile artist, writer and designer, died on June 13, 2023, at the age of 99. He once envisaged his centennial exhibition, saying, "it



will show 100 paintings, to celebrate the 100 years I have lived". The current exhibition shows his "latest works". He said before his passing, "I will be doing my best, but maybe

they are not perfect for the audience. But hopefully, people will feel they are not bad, and that's enough for me".

Born in Changde, Hunan province, Huang left his hometown in his early teens, and earned a living by taking on various jobs. He taught himself to draw, paint and write. His works reveal the realities of the world, in a straightforward manner.

10 am-8 pm, closed on Mondays. 181 Huayan Lu, Jinniu district, Chengdu, Sichuan province. 028-6306-8368.

#### Extraordinary ink

In the later stage of his life, artist Huang Binhong (1865-1955) still embraced a hardworking lifestyle and his daily routine included collecting and studying art materials, researching objects of antiquity, and sharing knowledge with friends by

exchanging letters.

His lifelong investment in extensive reading, researching and painting allowed Huang to establish a unique style of Chinese painting, sealing him a position in the first rank of ink artists in the 20th century.

*A Man in the Brace of Huangshan Mountain*, an exhibition at the Anhui Museum, Hefei, Anhui province, celebrates Huang's creativity and innovations to modernize ink art, which, at first, was not well recognized. The exhibition, until March 2, is in memory of the 160th anniversary of Huang's birth.

On show are several landscape paintings hailing the magnificence of Huangshan Mountain, close to the Shexian county where Huang grew up. The extravagant natural views motivated him to explore ink as a medium to depict the world.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 268, Anqing Lu, Hefei, Anhui province. 0551-6282-0945.

CHINA DAILY



## LIFE



**Above:** An artwork at the exhibition *Echoing Through the Ages: An Archaeological Scroll of Prehistoric Civilization in Hunan* that depicts Sunjiagang culture. **Bottom:** Another scroll at the exhibition depicts the Gaomiao culture. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Once upon a time in Liyang

Exhibition of scrolls depicting ancient life celebrates Hunan's archaeological wealth, **Lin Qi** reports.

Long, long ago, there was a city state called Jijiaocheng, "crowing rooster city", so named because it was said to have been built at dawn.

The square city was situated on the fertile Liyang Plain. Its deep moats were connected to an expansive network of waterways, which irrigated vast paddy fields, and provided for the dozens of settlements inside and outside of it.

The rulers of Jijiaocheng encouraged their people to log in the mountains. Massive timbers were transported to the city on the waterways for the construction of a tall complex. Standing in it, the city's rulers would be able to overlook the settlements and paddy fields between the waterways.

During the harvest, rice was brought to the city for processing and storage. Piles of rice husks accumulated in the northwestern area.

This is not the beginning of some bedtime story, but the story of something that actually took place in a Neolithic

lithic rice-growing culture around 4,500 years ago.

Millennia later, the once prosperous Jijiaocheng, which is located in modern-day Lixian county, Changde, Hunan province, came to the notice of the modern world, following many years of excavations.

With the help of archaeologists and historians, ink artists painted re-creations of life in Jijiaocheng in the traditional scroll format.

It was part of an ambitious project that took two years for a group of Hunan-based artists to complete, which includes eight scroll paintings, totaling 140 meters in length, that visualize early human activities on the Liyang Plain and the prehistoric culture in Hunan.

The collection of scrolls, *Echoing Through the Ages: An Archaeological Scroll of Prehistoric Civilization in Hunan*, made its debut in December 2023 at the Hunan Art Museum in Changsha.

It is now on display at the National Museum of China in Beijing, in an ongoing exhibition with the same title that runs through February.

"The painters have used far-reaching lines and expanses of colors to take the audience on a painterly journey to the past, and to engage them in the search for answers to the questions: Who are we, where did we come from, and where will we go?" says Zhu Xunde, artist and former chairman of Hunan Provincial Artists Association.

Each of the scrolls is shown alongside artifacts — stone tools, bone objects, pottery and jade — found at archaeological sites from the different prehistoric periods depicted in the paintings.

The juxtaposition of paintings and artifacts is designed to give visitors a vivid picture of life at the time.

"Hunan is one of the early locations of civilization of China. The Liyang Plain on the northwestern bank of the Dongting Lake nurtured many prehistoric cultures," says Zhang Xingguo,

“

The painters have used far-reaching lines and expanses of colors to take the audience on a painterly journey to the past ...”

Zhu Xunde, artist and former chairman of Hunan Provincial Artists Association



A jade arched pendant found from the Sunjiagang site.



A flat jade disc from the Sunjiagang site.



A clay pot from Gaomiao culture.

director of the public archaeology center of the Hunan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

Zhang says the plain is like a chessboard of prehistoric sites, and hundreds of them, dated from the Paleolithic to Neolithic ages, have been found so far.

"The exhibition includes firsthand material from these findings, which span a period from about 500,000 to 4,000 years ago," he adds.

Zhang says that among the examples of the earliest objects found at the Jigongdang site, which dates to the Middle Paleolithic, there are two stone tools. One is a ball believed to have been used for hunting and the other, which has a sharpened end, was used to dig up plants and seeds.

Human development in Hunan took a leap forward, as excavation of the Neolithic Pengtoushan site suggests the beginnings of rice domestication.

The exhibition includes objects found at the site — finely trimmed tools and well-shaped pottery — meaning that people were settled.

"The utensils were better polished. The objects became smaller and smaller. This means that humans grew smarter, and their hands became more dexterous," Zhang says.

Fast-forward to 7,000 to 8,000 years ago, another flourishing Neolithic culture known as the Gaomiao created the most attention-stealing artifacts at the exhibition — pottery patterned with intricate, imaginative motifs that embody religious beliefs.

On the upper and exterior surfaces of these pots, cups and plates are patterns which scholars have identified as combining birds, the faces of beasts and the sun.

"People became more sensitive to what was happening in nature. They translated what they had observed in the environment into the objects they used, enriched by their imagination," Zhang says.

"The worship of sun was derived from perceptions of the

changes of nature and how these changes, for example, sunrise and sunset, influenced their lives and agriculture. It laid a foundation for developing a calendar."

This trip through time ends with jade pieces from the Sunjiagang site from late Neolithic period, more than 4,000 years ago. More animal motifs appear on them, including eagles, tigers, frogs and cicadas. Meanwhile, pottery from the site have similar shapes and decorative motifs to those found at other sites from the same period along the Yellow River, evidence of exchanges between Hunan and other cultures to the north.

Chen Xingcan, deputy director of the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, says the exhibition will improve understanding of the course of prehistoric civilization in Hunan, of Chinese civilization, and will strengthen cultural confidence.

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

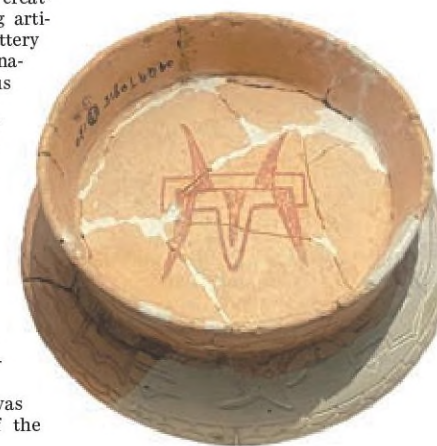
A clay cup from the Neolithic Gaomiao culture with sun, bird and beast patterns.

LIN QI / CHINA DAILY



A clay plate from the Neolithic Gaomiao culture with bird and beast patterns.

LIN QI / CHINA DAILY



## Shipwreck highlights Hong Kong's key role in maritime trade

HONG KONG — In a ship-themed exhibition hall in Hong Kong, artifacts from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) laid out in glass cases tell the story of the ancient merchant ship *Nanhai I*.

The exhibition *Launch From Greater Bay Area: Nanhai I Shipwreck & the Maritime Silk Road*, co-organized by the Development Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, the National Cultural Heritage Administration, and the Office of the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture of the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region, opened at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Center in the Tsim Sha Tsui district on Aug 16 last year.

By the end of December, it had attracted over 50,000 visitors from China and abroad.

The *Nanhai I* is the most complete ancient Chinese merchant ship discovered to date. Since it was salvaged in 2007, over 180,000 artifacts have been retrieved.

Among the 255 exhibits were Kwangtung jars, mainly used for holding wine. They became the highlight of the exhibition, as they reveal Hong Kong's role in the historical development of the Maritime Silk Road since the Song era.

After extensive research, Lee Hiu Wai, the assistant curator at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Center, found that wine-related inscriptions on shards unearthed at the Sacred Hill site in Sung Wong Toi in the Kowloon district were similar to the ones on the jars aboard the *Nanhai I*.

"It's really exciting to see the similarities. They are related," Lee says, adding that it indicated Hong Kong was once a transit point on the Maritime Silk Road and participated in trade along its length.

Mainly produced in southern China, Kwangtung jars have been used in maritime trade since the Tang (618-907) and Song dynasties, and have been found in Southeast Asia, East Asia and Africa.

According to the exhibition guide,



Lee Hiu Wai, the assistant curator at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Center, introduces a greenish yellow glazed porcelain jar with six handles and a dragon design from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) at the exhibition. CHEN DUO / XINHUA

a trade system centered on Guangzhou Port (the city being the capital of Guangdong province), which used Hong Kong and Macao as transfer stations, gradually took shape during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC)

and Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

The exhibition provides new perspectives on the history of Chinese maritime trade, and allows visitors to learn about the shared heritage and cultural connections between

Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, Bernadette Linn, secretary for Development of the HKSAR government, said at the opening ceremony.

The exhibition was free to the public. Visitors showed particular interest in the intricate process and challenges involved in salvaging the *Nanhai I* a decade ago.

Artifacts found include porcelain, copper and ironware, gold and silverware, and lacquerware.

"The assistance of our mainland partner was very helpful," Lee says. The Nanyue King Museum in Guangzhou, which had previously held an exhibition on the *Nanhai I*, provided valuable suggestions to the Hong Kong curatorial team.

"Big jars are too heavy, but I can hold the small pottery shards in my hand," Lee smiles and spreads her palm when talking about the transportation process. "It's like holding a part of history."

Lee has been engaged in the preservation of artifacts since graduating with a degree in archaeology. She

says on-site visits help cultivate an interest in archaeology and history, especially among the young.

In addition to detailed textual descriptions, the curators also mocked up several sailor logbooks that would have been used to tally supplies, in a bid to bring the past to life.

An interactive multimedia device revealed the timeline of the shipwreck. According to archaeologists, the *Nanhai I* probably sank in the waterway from Guangdong to the South China Sea around the 10th year of the Chunxi period (1183) of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279).

Lee says that in exploring the past, one can understand the present. Through the exhibition, which ended on Wednesday, she hoped to re-create the history of the Greater Bay Area and shine a light on the courage of those who explored the ocean almost 1,000 years ago.

XINHUA

## CULTURE

# London's Chinese eateries keeping pace

London's Chinese restaurants have gone from strength to strength in recent years, **Wang Mingjie** reports in London.

London's Chinese food scene has expanded far beyond the Cantonese-centric offerings that once defined it, transforming into a vibrant tapestry of regional cuisines.

For decades, London's Chinatown was synonymous with dim sum parlors, roasted meats, and takeaways, catering to local British tastes with dishes rooted in Guangdong province.

While these classics laid the foundation of familiarity, the city's culinary identity has evolved, driven by the growing presence of people from the Chinese mainland, and Londoners' burgeoning appetite for authentic regional flavors.

Chen Xin, chairman of Gen C Lifestyle and the organizer of the 2024 London Chinese Cuisine International Development Convention, highlighted the shift, saying: "London's food scene has seen an influx not only of traditional Cantonese restaurants but also a diverse range of regional Chinese cuisines."

"Successful hotpot chain restaurants like Haidilao, Da Long Yi, and Xiao Long Kan have made their mark, while regional specialties from places like Chongqing, Hunan, and Northeast China are gaining popularity."

Chen attributed this shift to Londoners' growing curiosity about the rich culinary landscape of China.

## Broader culinary landscape

Gordon Cheung, an expert in Chinese food studies at Durham University, described the transformation as unmistakable.

"The previous Chinatown has been upgraded and extended," he said, noting how food offerings have become both "specialized" and "diversified" and include regional cuisines as well as trendy additions like bubble tea and Chinese dessert cafes. Cheung noted the inclusion of Taiwanese restaurants, such as Leong's Legend, was further evidence of this expanding culinary landscape.

London now offers Chinese dining experiences for every occasion and budget. Michelin-starred venues like A Wong and Kai Mayfair redefine Chinese fine dining, while fusion-inspired restaurants like Hakkasan and Hutong blend traditional flavors with modern presentation. Casual options, such as noodle houses like JWD Lamian Noodle Bar, provide hearty northern Chinese staples like beef noodles in chili oil.

"The growing demand for diverse and authentic culinary experiences is reshaping London's Chinese food scene," Chen added.

Hotpot culture has captivated Londoners, with chains recreating the communal dining experiences beloved in Chengdu and Chongqing.

Noodle shops are also gaining traction, reflecting the city's growing appreciation for authentic, everyday Chinese food.

Karen Kwok, a London-based foodie originally from Hong Kong, has witnessed this evolution first-hand.

"When I came to London in 2015, most Chinese restaurants served Cantonese food, dim sum, and roast duck. While I love those, the options lacked variety," she said. "Over time, Sichuan restaurants gained popularity as people became obsessed with spicy food. Then, all of a sudden, there were hotpot restaurants everywhere, along with dumpling and noodle shops."

Having tried around 20 to 30 Chinese restaurants in the city, Kwok recommends A Wong for fine dining, Ma La Sichuan for casual meals, and Xiao Long Kan Hotpot in Holborn for hotpot enthusiasts.

The increasing variety of Chinese food in London is a development Kwok sees as overwhelmingly positive.

"Westerners' views of Chinese food are often one-dimensional," she said. "But



**Above:** People enjoy bubblewrap waffles in London's iconic Chinatown.

**Left:** A passerby checks out the window of a popular Chinatown restaurant.

**Below:** A spicy meal from Jincheng Alley restaurant. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**“This variety reflects broader acceptance of Chinese culinary culture and attracts more international customers.”**

**Kevin Tang,** chairman of the Chinese Catering Association of UK

the diversity of regional dishes — each with unique flavors — encourages cultural exchange and drives restaurants to improve."

She is particularly fond of dining at hotpot and noodle establishments, which have become increasingly popular in the city and describes hotpot as an "adventure" for many Londoners, likening it to Swiss fondue.

"It comes with so many ingredients unfamiliar to Westerners — like frog legs — which makes it an experience. Noodles and dumplings, on the other hand, are budget-friendly and beloved staples in a pricey city like London," she added.

## Burning hot

London's dining scene now showcases specialties from across China. Restaurants like Barshu and Jincheng Alley bring the numbing heat of Sichuan peppercorns and complex chili sauces to eager diners.

Luan Zhixin, owner of Jincheng Alley, explained her motivation.

"During the pandemic, many of us abroad longed for authentic flavors from home. We wanted to create a space where Chinese expats could enjoy genuine Sichuan cuisine and introduce locals to authentic Chinese flavors." At Jincheng Alley, authenticity is key, she said.

"Our chilies, Sichuan peppercorns, and

other seasonings are sourced directly from Sichuan," Luan emphasized. "This ensures a flavor profile that differs from locally available ingredients. Customers also appreciate the consistency in quality and the decor, which reflects the warmth and simplicity of small eateries in China."

Luan has witnessed first-hand how London's Chinese dining scene has evolved.

"The market has seen the entry of major Chinese dining brands offering hotpot, bubble tea, and spicy soup, creating more



competition. When we opened in 2021, we relied on word-of-mouth recommendations, but now we focus on increasing visibility to stand out in this crowded space."

While some restaurants adapt to local tastes, Luan believes in maintaining authentic Sichuan flavors.

"Our chefs carefully select ingredients and seasonings to preserve the true essence of Sichuan cuisine. Competition from fusion restaurants motivates us to stay true to our mission: providing Chinese expats with a taste of home and showcasing the depth of Chinese culinary culture to locals."

Meanwhile, the flavors of Shaanxi and Xinjiang are also making waves. Restaurants like Master Wei serve hearty hand-pulled noodles, while Xinjiang cuisine delights with cumin-spiced lamb skewers. These dishes offer diners both new flavors and deeper cultural experiences.

## Diversified market

Kevin Tang, chairman of the Chinese Catering Association of UK, praised the growing diversity of Chinese cuisine in London.

"This variety reflects broader acceptance of Chinese culinary culture and attracts more international customers," he said, noting the presence of 11 Michelin-starred Chinese restaurants in the city that mostly lean toward fusion flavors that meet local expectations.

Tang explained the challenges Chinese dining culture faces when evaluated by Michelin standards, which focus on individual dining experiences rather than the lively communal style that is traditional to Chinese meals.

"To succeed, restaurants must adapt to the system," he said.

As the market diversifies, Tang sees a growing trend toward smaller, more refined dining formats that allow Chinese cuisine to adapt to global markets. His own restaurant, Bright Courtyard Club, combines Cantonese and Shanghai flavors while focusing on quality and innovation.

"We continuously refine our menu by introducing new dishes and enhancing existing ones," Tang explained. "Additionally, we leverage social media to sustain visibility and actively participate in public events to boost our exposure and reputation."

Cheung from Durham University also emphasized the importance of advancing the industry through education, suggesting that London's Chinese culinary landscape could benefit from the establishment of serious, larger culinary schools dedicated to teaching authentic Chinese cooking, which would inspire greater appreciation and mastery of the cuisine.

Cheung also underscored the need for improved shopping experiences at Chinese supermarkets.

"While these supermarkets are popular, modernization and a more welcoming atmosphere are needed," he said. He proposed the introduction of premium Chinese supermarket chains, such as Pangdonglai, to elevate the shopping experience for Londoners and residents of other major UK cities.

The evolving Chinese food scene in London represents more than just culinary innovation — it reflects a broader cultural shift, offering diners deeper insights into China's rich culinary traditions and fostering opportunities for cultural exchange. With its diverse and dynamic offerings, London is becoming a true global hub for Chinese cuisine.

Contact the writer at wangmingjie@mail.chinadailyuk.com.

## Innovative no-menu restaurant has been writing its history for decades

By **WANG MINGJIE** in London

Hunan, a restaurant in the heart of central London's Belgravia district, stands out as one of the United Kingdom capital's most distinctive Chinese restaurants, with its unusual no-menu approach to dining.

For more than four decades, Hunan has defied convention, offering a culinary experience that blends innovation with authenticity.

Michael Peng, who took over the restaurant from his father in 1999, continues to honor its trailblazing ethos while introducing his own modern touches.

Hunan's story began in 1982, when Peng's father, a passionate chef who started cooking at 14, decided to offer something beyond the predominantly Cantonese fare that characterized Chinese restaurants in the UK at the time.

"He wanted to introduce a different type of cuisine," Peng explained. "He felt Chinese food wasn't just limited to Cantonese cooking."

Initially focusing on Hunan cuisine, which is known for its spicy flavors and fresh aroma, Peng's father later incorporated elements of Taiwanese and Cantonese culinary traditions. At the heart of this innovation was a bold and unconventional approach — a no-menu dining experience, which became



**From left:** Michael Peng, who has owned and run Hunan restaurant since 1999; A selection of dishes on offer at Hunan restaurant. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



the restaurant's signature style.

"My father initially had a very small à la carte menu, but most people would order from it and get something entirely different," Peng said with a laugh. "There used to be a lot of arguments when the bill came. People would say, 'I didn't order this,' and my father would reply, 'I gave you a better dish.'"

When Peng took over, he fully embraced this philosophy, eliminating the à la carte menu entirely.

Today, Hunan serves a curated

selection of 12 to 18 dishes, meticulously tailored to each diner's preferences, dietary needs, and even cultural backgrounds.

The "Leave it to us" approach, where diners trust the chefs to craft their meals, was ahead of its time in the 1980s but is now celebrated worldwide.

"Back then, it was unheard of," Peng said. "But now, it's quite common, especially with Japanese omakase-style dining."

While preserving the essence of his

father's legacy, Peng brought his own modern touch to Hunan.

"One of the changes I made was sourcing the best British ingredients," he explained. "Our meat comes from the Lake District, and we work directly with fishermen to get the freshest seafood."

Peng emphasized that the simplicity of Hunan's dishes demands the finest quality ingredients.

"Sometimes, there are only three or four ingredients on a plate. You can't hide with that kind of cooking — it's

similar to Italian cuisine in its respect for simplicity and quality."

Wine also became a focus under Peng's stewardship.

"When I took over, wine in many Chinese restaurants wasn't great. So, we invested in building strong relationships with wine importers and winemakers," he said.

Hunan now offers a curated selection of wines, including low-alcohol varieties that pair well with Chinese cuisine.

"German wines, for example, are some of the best matches for Chinese food," he added.

Despite its success, running Hunan hasn't been without challenges. The unique no-menu concept required building trust with customers.

"There's a big element of trust when you let someone choose your meal. It's quite an intimate experience to feed someone," Peng reflected.

Operating in London's competitive restaurant scene also demands adaptability.

"We're in a city that's so diverse and multicultural. People's tastes are broadening, and there's more demand for authentic and high-quality experiences," he said.

As more Chinese restaurants from the Chinese mainland establish themselves in London, Peng views the evolution positively.

"London is a melting pot. Chinese cuisine is so vast and relatively unexplored, so it's great to see more diversity. But I think authenticity is crucial. You have to pass on that knowledge, and it's something I feel is getting lost today."

One of the barriers to preserving this authenticity, Peng explained, is the lack of formal training opportunities for Chinese cooking in the UK.

"If you want to learn French cuisine, there are institutions and schools. But where do you go to learn authentic Chinese cooking here? That's something we need to address to keep our culinary traditions alive."

Hunan's intimate atmosphere, attentive service, and emphasis on quality have garnered loyal customers over the years. While some have speculated about whether the restaurant will aim for a Michelin star, Peng remains pragmatic.

"It's not something I've pursued," he said. "We're just a small neighborhood restaurant. But if my staff wanted to aim for it, I'd support them."

For Peng, the essence of Hunan's success lies in creating a happy, cohesive team.

"If your staff are happy, your customers will be happy too," he said. "I focus on building a team that works well together, and I think that's really important."