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RedNote: Uniting global musicians, fans in cultural symphony

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Intrigued by the idea of reaching a completely new audience, he signed up to RedNote. What he didn't expect was the warm welcome his music received and the vast, connected community he was about to discover.

At first, the process was like diving into the unknown. The platform was entirely in Chinese, and Udhu wasn't sure what to expect. But as he began uploading his music, including his beloved rock covers, everything clicked.

"It was a bit challenging at first, but the interface is actually pretty intuitive," he said.

"And once I started posting, I realized this wasn't just about sharing music, it was about building something — a community."

Udhu believes RedNote is a great opportunity to meet new people, build bridges, have fun, connect with people from different cultures and mindsets, and learn from that experience. He added it has helped him start to realize his dream of becoming a content creator.

"My friend and I are working together on a project, which involves planning, creating a schedule, sticking to it, and being consistent. The transition has been smooth so far, as the platform is very convenient and easy to grasp."

Udhu spends hours recording his music and uploading it for his fans on RedNote.

Whether he's playing a classic song or trying new material, the reactions are usually a mix of surprise and excitement. But what truly stands out are the comments. So far, he has gained more than 20,000 followers on RedNote and received over 100,000 likes.

"The kindness of the people here is incredible," he said.

"They're so polite and supportive, which is a huge contrast to some other platforms I've used. It's like they really want to share their culture, and I'm eager to learn from that."

He has also signed up for Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili, and is considering joining other platforms in the future.

The connections he's making are far from superficial. A post asking for a new Chinese nickname received a strong response with more than 10,000 comments.

"Music is a bridge to create a community, and then build other things together. I've always been attracted to what connects us as human beings, despite our different social, cultural or financial backgrounds. We all have hobbies, passions and things we love or hate, even if we live miles apart. It's fascinating to try to build a community through social media," he said.

Udhu continues to grow his presence on RedNote. Covers of Chinese rock bands like Black Panther and Beyond have catered to fans' nostalgia and sparked conversations that transcend borders. He discovered these bands through comments made by Chinese music lovers.

He also follows what's trending in China. For example, when *Ne Zha 2*, China's box-office sensation, smashed through the 10 billion-yuan mark in ticket sales on Feb 13, he posted videos covering the theme song from the movie.

Crossing cultures

Chinese fans have expressed their admiration for foreign musicians who are willing to share their art and connect across cultures.

One comment on Udhu's page reads: "Your cover of Beyond's songs really touched me. It brings back so many memories of my youth. Thank you for understanding our music!" Another fan asked: "Have you watched *Ne Zha 2*?" Udhu replied that he cannot wait to see it.

"As a French guy, I was mostly exposed to European and American music. I could have been more curious and explored rock bands from around the world earlier," he said.

"It's awesome to spark those emotions in RedNote users by covering songs they cherish. It just shows how music enhances our life journey."

In the long term, Udhu sees RedNote as more than just a platform, envisioning it as a bridge to something bigger.



Talented musicians have become one of the most acclaimed groups among "TikTok refugees" who flooded onto Chinese lifestyle app RedNote after January. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY

"It's incredible to think I'm connecting with people in China through a single app," he said. "I'm not sure where it'll take me, but I'm excited to see where this journey goes."

"I need to learn more about Chinese culture to understand what's happening in the comments, stay up to date with new trends. ... The cultural aspect is incredibly important to grasp," he added. "We've already connected with a Chinese musician and have plans to collaborate very soon."

New generation

With the surge of American "TikTok refugees" flooding onto RedNote, a new phenomenon has emerged. More musicians are launching their accounts on the platform and finding fresh audiences in China. A new generation of global artists is exploring RedNote as a way to share their music and ideas with a vast, international audience.

Christina Munsey, 23, from Raleigh, North Carolina, said RedNote has provided her with both wide exposure and connections to diverse cultures.

When Munsey first joined RedNote in January, she didn't fully know what to expect. Like many foreign musicians exploring new platforms, the idea of engaging with an audience across the globe was both thrilling and uncertain.

"I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. My intention was to reach a broader audience and explore how well my music would play out in different cultures and countries," she said.

She had already built a modest following through other social media apps like TikTok, but was eager to test her music's appeal in China.

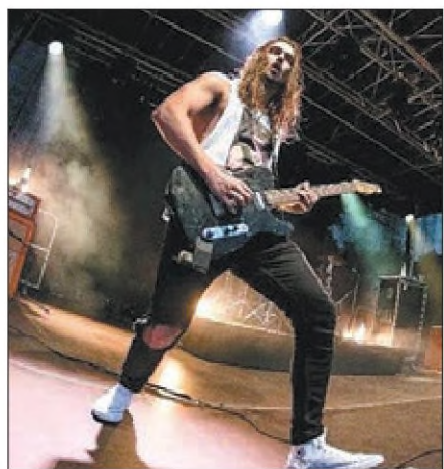
The early days on RedNote were exploratory. Munsey wasn't sure how her brand of indie, emotional and often deeply personal music would resonate with new listeners.

"I was curious to see if my sound connects with people beyond my usual reach," she said.

"To my surprise, this journey quickly revealed the global power of music and taught me about 'cat tax,'" she said, referring to a quirky trend on RedNote where users post pictures of their pets, often accompanied by music.

After posting just 20 videos, her audience rose sharply.

"In the first 72 hours of posting, I saw my followers grow from a small number to over 100,000. It was an incredible and surreal adjustment,"



Above left: French musician Arthur Udhu has gained more than 20,000 followers on RedNote.



Above right: US musician Christina Munsey says she is impressed by the quality of the engagement on RedNote. Below: A harpist's video uploaded by a US musician has gained 158,000 likes on RedNote. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



she said. "The response has been overwhelmingly positive."

Munsey's fans have also expressed deep appreciation for her authenticity. "Your music touches my heart. I don't understand all of it, but the feelings come through clearly," one wrote on RedNote.

For Munsey, it wasn't just the large number of followers that impressed her, but the quality of the engagement. As her music reached a wider audience, she found that users weren't just passive listeners — they were active participants in the cultural exchange. They commented on her music, shared their stories, and connected with her in ways that transcended language barriers.

"The most meaningful part has been reading heartfelt comments and seeing how my music resonates with people across the world," she said. "Even when many can't understand the lyrics, they still connect with the emotions my songs convey. That connection is a gift."

Munsey's journey has inspired her to learn Mandarin. "The desire to connect more deeply with my Chinese audience has only grown," she said. "I'm now taking Mandarin classes to understand and communicate better."

Conor Doyle, who lives in Mooncoin, Ireland, has also seen an immediate response to his RedNote post.

"I have only posted one video and two photos, but I have gotten some lovely messages. China has such a healthy love for music of all types, so I am excited to see the reactions

the more I post," said the 24-year-old musician.

"From a musician's point of view, any time a content-based app blows up, musicians tend to want to get there early and be ahead of everyone else, and establish a following," Doyle said.

Doyle began playing music at the age of 15. He said he has never been to China, a country he described as "rich in history, culture and celebration of life."

"Visiting is definitely a goal of mine and I will learn some Mandarin while on this app," he said.

RedNote rising

There has been a significant surge in the popularity of RedNote, especially in markets outside China. The social media app gained nearly 3 million US users in one day in early January as a flood of "TikTok refugees" joined, according to a Reuters report. The Chinese-language app had about 3.4 million daily active users across both iOS and Android devices in the US as of Jan 13.

Acknowledging the surge, RedNote, which was launched in 2013 by a group of Chinese entrepreneurs, has added a translation function catering to English-speaking users. Appealing to the increasing music-savvy base, the platform also held the Global Village Concert on Jan 26, featuring 20 groups of musicians from China and abroad. The concert ran for about seven hours and attracted over 1 million viewers.

There has been a noticeable trend of Western musicians and artists trying to expand their presence in China over the past decade. This is largely due to China's rapidly growing entertainment market and its vast, young population that is increasingly interested in international music.

Music critic Er Di said that platforms like RedNote offer fertile ground for musicians from abroad to connect with a highly engaged and diverse audience.

"I think the users of RedNote are more diversified compared with other social media platforms," he said. "This diversity shows in the comment sections, where positive feedback fuels the creativity of artists. These musicians are not just reaching audiences — they're building global communities."

He also pointed out that the platform is a rich environment for various music genres, from R&B and jazz to classical and country, he said. "It's truly a dazzling array, with something for everyone."

TOP NEWS

Bridge collapse

An aerial photo shows an elevated part of an under-construction highway that collapsed on Tuesday, killing four people and injuring six others in Cheonan, South Korea. The fire agency said in a statement that five people remained in serious condition. The cause of the collapse wasn't immediately known.

HONG KI-WON / YONHAP



Policy turn damages US market

E-commerce platforms should make more efforts amid uncertainty over tariff imposition

By FAN FEIFEI
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The United States government's recent adjustment of the "de minimis" tariff exemption policy for small packages and low-value items imported from China will only prompt Chinese cross-border e-commerce platforms to realign supply chains and logistics networks, accelerate the establishment of overseas warehouses and diversify layouts in emerging markets to navigate tariff challenges, experts said on Tuesday.

They said the revocation of the small-package tax exemption will lead to higher prices of goods that were once affordable and widely accessible to customers in the US, increase consumption costs and affect their shopping experiences, while ultimately hurting their interests.

The comments came as US President Donald Trump temporarily suspended the imposition of tariffs on low-value products from China shortly after announcing an end to the duty-free policy for shipments worth less than \$800.

However, the "de minimis" tariff exemption will again be eliminated

after the US Department of Commerce establishes a system to "fully and expeditiously process and collect tariff revenue", according to the executive order signed by Trump.

Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the adjustment of the "de minimis" policy will bring about challenges to Chinese cross-border online marketplaces, as it adds to transportation and logistics costs and operational pressures for these platforms in the US, pushing them to adjust pricing strategies and optimize supply chain management to reduce dependence on any single market.

In order to mitigate the impact, Hong said that Chinese e-commerce platforms should invest more in establishing overseas warehouses and distribution centers, accelerate steps to expand their footprint in more diverse markets, and strengthen cooperation with international logistics enterprises to improve delivery efficiency and lower logistics costs.

As an important way to support the development of cross-border e-commerce, overseas warehouses allow domestic retailers to transport com-

modities in bulk to overseas locations in advance, which is conducive to lowering shipping costs and facilitating the efficient delivery of goods to consumers abroad, market observers said.

"If the elimination of the small-package tax exemption is finally implemented, the costs for US consumers purchasing Chinese-made products will increase. The move will make shoppers become prudent when choosing commodities, and some of them may reduce the frequency of purchases," said Liu Ying, a professor from Capital University of Economics and Business.

Chinese cross-border e-commerce platforms including Shein and PDD Holdings' Temu have gained popularity among US consumers as they offer a wide selection of merchandise at competitive prices. Most of the products are shipped directly from factories or warehouses in China.

The two online discount retailers have taken steps to expand their operations in the US. Last year, Temu began adding Chinese sellers to its site that have inventory at US warehouses, allowing it to ship packages faster to shoppers in the US. Shein has opened distribution centers and a supply chain hub in the US, and started to diversify its supply chain, adding more suppliers from Brazil. Zhang Zhouping, a senior analyst

of business-to-business and cross-border activities at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said the US government aims to weaken the competitive advantages of Chinese goods in terms of cost-effectiveness and contain China's cross-border e-commerce enterprises by adjusting the tariff exemption policy on low-cost packages from China.

The "de minimis" provision has existed since the 1930s in the US, but the threshold has increased and its use has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. The number of shipments entering the US under the exemption has surged more than 600 percent in the past 10 years, according to US Customs and Border Protection.

The recent policy shift will not only result in reduced supply and fewer choices for US consumers, but will also have a negative impact on the overall development of the global e-commerce industry, Zhang said.

He added that it is important for Chinese online retailers to strengthen localized operations in overseas markets in order to reduce international transportation costs and expand their global reach to emerging markets in Southeast Asia, Europe and South America, while also improving the quality and added value of products, and enhancing brand competitiveness on the global stage.

Ecology: Resolute fight against pollution stressed

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During panel discussions with his fellow deputies from Inner Mongolia in March 2019, Xi underlined that environmental protection and economic development are closely integrated and complement each other.

In the Chinese economy's transition from a phase of rapid growth to a phase of high-quality development, pollution control and environmental governance are two major tasks that must be accomplished, Xi said. The country should explore a new path of high-quality development that prioritizes ecology.

Huang, the CASS researcher, said that Xi's strong emphasis on ecological civilization also showcased his people-centered development philosophy. This focus aligns with the evolving principal contradiction in Chinese society, which now centers on unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing expectations for a better life.

While attending a panel discussion with deputies in 2019, Xi underlined the resolute and effective fight to prevent and control pollution, saying prominent environmental issues that the people are strongly concerned about must be addressed properly.

Huang said meeting the people's aspirations for a better life fundamentally involves ensuring that they live in a pristine ecological setting characterized by blue skies, lush landscapes and lucid waters.

After Xi was elected as a deputy to the 14th NPC at the first session of the 14th Jiangsu Provincial People's Congress in January 2023, his commitment to green development and harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature has remained unwavering.

"At no time should we take hasty and reckless actions, drain the pond to catch the fish, or focus only on GDP growth," he said, while attending a discussion with deputies from Jiangsu in March 2023.

Xi emphasized the importance of protecting ecology, citing as an example Taihu Lake, China's third-largest freshwater lake in the lower Yangtze River region. Algae once persisted in Taihu and caused the water quality to severely deteriorate.

Discharge of industrial and domestic waste caused serious pollution in Taihu, and it took great efforts to rectify the situation, Xi noted.

"We say that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, but if we fail to protect the ecology, we will end up with losses rather than benefits," Xi said.

Substantial advancements have been achieved in treating Taihu, and the Taihu region has served as a prime example demonstrating that economic development and environmental conservation can go hand in hand without contradiction.

Monitoring showed that the quality of water in Taihu reached Grade III last year, unprecedented in the past 30 years, according to Jiangsu's department of ecology and environment. Water with a quality of Grade III is fairly good and is suitable for most aquatic life to live in.

With comprehensive and systematic governance since 2007, the lake's water quality has improved each year, authorities in Jiangsu said. This has not only been accomplished without hindering economic development, but has also driven industrial upgrading, they said.

Suzhou, Wuxi and Changzhou, three major cities near Taihu Lake, have seen the services sector surpass the manufacturing sector as the largest part of their industrial structures since 2014. In 2023, the contributions of high-tech industries to the total added value of industrial enterprises reached 53 percent in Suzhou, 51.8 percent in Wuxi and 56 percent in Changzhou.

"The treatment practices in Taihu fully demonstrate that ... economic progress and the development of ecological civilization can mutually benefit and support each other effectively," said Jiang Wei, head of Jiangsu's department of ecology and environment.

Wu Shourong, a professor at the School of Marxism at Beijing Forestry University, highlighted the unique importance of Xi's emphasis on ecological civilization during the annual two sessions, saying this will strongly propel Chinese modernization that features harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

Highlighting that NPC deputies are a crucial link between the Party, the government and the people, Wu said that by engaging in discussions with NPC deputies, Xi can attentively listen to problems encountered by people in their living environments and other spheres, understand their needs, collect diverse opinions and suggestions, and unify the people's aspirations into a cohesive consensus on national environmental governance.

Such discussions can promote the dissemination of decisions made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, thereby guiding the development of ecological civilization, she said.

Xi's deep concern regarding ecological civilization during the annual two sessions is "conducive to rallying and mobilizing the immense power and practical actions of the masses, and promoting a strong advancement of Chinese modernization featuring harmonious coexistence between humans and nature", Wu added.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Port: In LA, factoring in impact of new fees, tariffs

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Seroka also said that companies are having to adjust.

"The impact of tariffs on negotiations between procurement executives and manufacturers in Asia is ongoing. Many companies are facing pressure to offer discounts or relocate production," he noted.

"If I'm getting pushback to lower prices, whether I'm a parts supplier or selling directly to the American public, do I have to take a little hit myself? This is a key discussion happening across the industry today," Seroka said.

The increased demand for imports has led to lower warehouse vacancies and full trains to the Midwest. Some analysts suggest that this anticipation of tariffs is contributing to inflationary pressures, reflected in rising consumer prices.

While the new tariffs create short-term disruptions, Ye Chun, president of the China General Chamber of Commerce Los Angeles, said that the underlying economic principles of global trade will ultimately drive

Developed countries like the US are not suited for large-scale reindustrialization. The economic principles of international division of labor will eventually restore trade relations."

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

tariffs back to a reasonable level. "The current tariff dispute between China and the US should be seen as a temporary issue," Ye told China Daily, noting the determining factor in the trend of globalization and deglobalization is the economic laws governing

industrial supply chains. He emphasized that post-industrial economies like the US face high manufacturing costs and inefficiencies, making large-scale domestic production difficult to sustain.

"Developed countries like the US are not suited for large-scale reindustrialization. The economic principles of international division of labor will eventually restore trade relations," Ye said.

Ye also noted that the Trump administration's tariffs initially disrupted US-China trade, causing supply chain shifts and raising import costs. However, he predicted that over time, economic pressures will push trade relations back to normal.

"As product prices rise and domestic reindustrialization efforts face challenges, trade will eventually return to a more balanced trajectory, aligning with the economic logic of international cooperation," he said.

Chinese businesses have been adapting since the initial wave of tariffs under the Trump administration, implementing strategies such as tax management, exchange rate

adjustments, cost transfers and productivity improvements.

"I believe that after a brief period of difficulty, tariffs may actually become an external factor that stimulates further growth in China's manufacturing sector," Ye added.

Xie Jianhua, president of the US-China E-commerce Trade Association, emphasized the structural complementarity between China, home to seven of the world's top 10 ports, and the US, the largest consumer market.

"Decoupling and breaking links do not align with market rules," Xie told China Daily, citing the projected \$690 billion bilateral trade volume in 2024.

Xie also stressed the need for US-China collaboration in emerging industries like green shipping and smart logistics.

China holds 62 percent of global electric ship-battery patents, and the US excels in marine electronic systems.

"Only cooperation can accelerate the industry's low-carbon transition," he said.

Climate: Green energy shift prioritized by global trends

From page 1

Trump's second-term withdrawal is not just symbolic — it comes with an explicit commitment to prioritizing the expansion of big oil companies, entrenching US dependence on fossil fuels and dismantling climate-related policies.

Trump signed the executive order Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on Jan 20, and a week later, the US officially notified the United Nations of its departure. The withdrawal will take effect on Jan 27, 2026.

The executive order mandates the immediate cessation of financial contributions to climate-related international funds, the reversal of domestic policies aligned with the Paris Agreement, and the suspension of reporting obligations to the UN on progress in reducing emissions.

To have it both ways, the White House has nevertheless kept the US in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 1992 treaty addressing global climate change.

This means the US can still participate in UN climate negotiations, influencing discussions while opposing policies that clash with

the current administration's priorities. To maintain this privilege, the US only has to make a modest financial contribution to the UNFCCC's core budget.

By withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, the US will no longer set or meet emissions reduction targets or contribute to international climate finance mechanisms negotiated over many years to assist poor nations in dealing with climate change.

Moreover, the Trump administration sees climate regulation as a roadblock to economic growth and is aggressively dismantling environmental oversight.

By banking on big oil companies, the White House may end up slowing the US' technological advancement. While the US now sees fossil fuels as the best way to secure cheap energy, the rest of the world, especially China, is prioritizing green energy as the foundation for economic growth, technological advancement and industrial innovation.

China has been heavily investing in clean energy, electric vehicles, batteries, and renewable infrastructure combined with digital technologies, not only to cut emissions and improve efficiency but also to drive economic expansion

and develop a highly skilled workforce.

As other nations increasingly commit to green technology and sustainability, China may well become the undisputed leader in the global green and smart economy.

Trump's supporters argue that the Paris Agreement imposes costly regulatory burdens on US industries, hampers economic growth, and compromises US domestic policy autonomy. They claim that withdrawing from the accord frees it from obligations that hold US back.

However, critics argue that US' exit undermines global climate action at a critical moment. They warn that rolling back federal support for renewables will stall the transition to clean energy, hinder

innovation, and worsen climate risks.

The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, combined with a decisive push for fossil fuel expansion, marks a profound reversal in US climate policy. Unlike the previous departure that was swiftly overturned, this move is part of a broader strategic agenda that could reshape the global energy landscape for years.

Betting on fossil fuels to secure US economic dominance, the White House is making it clear: US' energy future is still fossil fuels. The question remains — but at what cost to the planet's future?

The author is Chief Development Strategist at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's Institute for the Environment.

Citrus flavor



The likeness of an astronaut created with lemons and oranges stands at a square on Monday for the 91st Lemon Festival, which runs from Feb 15 to Mar 2, in Menton, France. IMAGO / MANDOGA MEDIA

CHINA

By CHENG SI
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Winning gold in the computer numerical control (CNC) milling event at the 47th WorldSkills competition, held in Lyon, France, in September, is etched into the memory of 23-year-old Long Weijie, whose victory gave China its fifth consecutive gold in the event over the past decade.

Widely applied in daily life, CNC milling is used to shape metal and other solid materials to create products such as watches or even ship propellers.

"The competition imposes extremely strict requirements on precision and accuracy, with a permissible error range of just 0.02 of a millimeter — about a quarter of the diameter of a human hair," Long said. Working as a teacher at Guangdong Machinery Technician College Guangzhou, Long passes on his skills to domestic companies, helping them to improve and update their milling techniques.

Young Chinese handy men and women — usually aged under 25 — have shown the world their impressive skills and talent at WorldSkills, an initiative that rose out of the ruins of World War II in Europe when a huge skills shortage threatened economic depression.

At the 47th WorldSkills competition in Lyon last year, China won 36 golds, nine silvers and four bronzes, topping the medal table.

The WorldSkills competition is held every two years. The Chinese mainland joined the organization in 2010 and has since sent seven delegations to compete.

Long and his peers are examples of young people in China who have dedicated themselves to honing their skills not just to take victory in competitions, but to pursue better career development and to pass down their craftsmanship to future generations.

Youthful enthusiasm

Zeng Xiaocan, 21, bronze winner of the health and social care event at the recent WorldSkills competition, said that taking nursing at university was thought of as a "worrying choice" by her parents because of the laborious work and perceived lower social status of being a nurse. She hopes her peers and her contributions can help change the public's stereotypical view of nursing.

Graduating from the School of Nursing and Health Management of Shanghai University of Medicine and Health Sciences in 2024, Zeng said she had heard some preconceptions about nursing work when she was at school.

"People have always said that nurses are assistants to doctors who just do the simplest things like giving injections or pills to the patients. But we are actually 'partners' of the doctor. The doctor diagnoses and we help perform treatment and care for the patient," she said, adding that the WorldSkills competition has turned her into a more considerate person with clearer career targets.

"The event for health and social care is much like nursing, while requiring other professional knowledge on recuperation, rehabilitation and promoting physical and psychosocial well-being. Language ability and communication skills are also of importance in the event," she said. "After the event, the people around me said that I'm totally different now, I'm much more soft, caring and thoughtful. I was a bit introverted before taking part."

Zeng said that there is a great shortage of healthcare professionals in China and she intends to further her studies in social care and elderly nursing to gain more career possibilities.

For 23-year-old Wu Yanting, from Chongqing in Southwest China, becoming China's first female gold medalist in the 3D digital game art



Left: Wang Wentao (left) and Zheng Piaoxue (center) learn how to measure the voltage of a new energy vehicle battery at a training center in Hefei, Anhui province, in December. The pair won a national competition on NEV maintenance in November. DU YU / XINHUA Right: Students learn about food processing technologies at a vocational school in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in April. DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY



China's skilled workers impress on world stage

Attitude shift still needed to get more young people into vocational education



Students learn how to operate a drone at Tianjin Modern Technological Vocational College in Tianjin in November. ZHAO ZISHUO / XINHUA



A highly skilled operator uses an excavator to stack individual champagne glasses during a skills competition in Qingdao, Shandong province, in September. ZHANG JINGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

competition in Lyon was a dream come true. The event requires competitors to use their creativity, aesthetic ability and geometry skills to design and construct a 3D model of a video game in 21 hours over four days.

"I was learning animation at Chongqing Technology and Business Institute in my first year of college, and then switched to game art design as my major. I'm very interested in

video games and programming technology," she said. "I integrated elements of cute giant pandas into my game design to impress the judges."

"When I stepped on the podium with the national flag covering my shoulders, I let the world see not only myself but proactive young Chinese in high spirits," Wu said. She is now a teacher at the institute and plans to open a workshop designing



Long Weijie Zeng Xiaocan Jiang Jiajun

Growing need

China has sent 283 contestants to compete at WorldSkills since 2010, winning the nation 93 golds, 41 silvers and 28 bronzes in total. Learning

and producing video games.

Jiang Jiajun, 22, from Guangdong province in South China, wishes to use his experience to show young Chinese people ways of leading a decent and fulfilling life. He and his partner Fang Canhao won the autonomous mobile robotics competition in Lyon.

"The competition was a way to learn more knowledge and skills and to prove myself. My hard work paid off," he said, adding that the public and many parents have negative impressions of vocational college, thinking that the students are just muddling along.

"I learned skills and can now make myself a good living using those skills. I hope to inspire more young people, who may feel confused about their future careers," he said. Jiang is now a teacher at a vocational school in Yiwu, in East China's Zhejiang province.

skills has not only shaped individuals' lives and careers, but has grown to become a strong support for the nation's development in manufacturing, technology and innovation.

In 2021, China had over 200 million skilled workers, taking up 26 percent of the total workforce. Among them, 60 million were highly skilled, according to the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

The nation has channeled more effort into training skilled workers in recent years. Figures from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security show that from 2019, over 100 million people have attended job training or work skills improvement campaigns organized by the ministry. From 2021, nearly 2 million skilled apprentices have been trained by companies with the aid of financial support from the government.

However, skilled workers, especially the highly skilled, remain in short supply.

"The technological and industrial advancement of AI, big data and cloud computing, creates higher requirements for skilled workers. The WorldSkills competition has updated its events in line with market needs," said Ye Junfeng, Party secretary of Guangdong Machinery Technician College. The college has produced 16 world champions and won China 12 gold medals at WorldSkills competitions.

According to Ye, the students who graduate from his college have good career prospects and many receive job offers from companies two or three months before they graduate.

"We have about 3,000 graduates each year and those majoring in electromechanical and smart manufacturing, numerical control machines can get three to five job offers at campus job fairs. Their salary can be as much as 7,000 yuan (\$960) a month during their internship, rising to 28,000 yuan."

He said that some companies often complain that they can't find suitable skilled people to operate cutting-edge machines or to maintain them. "The structural imbalance of the job market is a problem. From my observation, skilled workers in electromechanical, smart manufacturing and domestic services are in great demand. Companies are willing to hire and pay more for these skilled workers."

The college is cooperating with other vocational schools to help maximize students' career prospects. "What we wish to do is to change people's stereotypes around skilled workers, whose abilities are usually undervalued. Many of our students have served in the nation's key companies and been involved in technique improvements and tackling technological problems with researchers."

Ye Zhihao, executive director of Guangzhou High Genius Dynamics Co, said China's participation in WorldSkills has brought benefits to the nation's cultivation and evaluation of skilled people.

"The updating of WorldSkills competition events has pushed forward the emergence and development of new professionals. For us employers, WorldSkills champions or contestants are welcomed at our companies," he said, adding that his company has recruited more than 10 Chinese WorldSkills competitors since 2017.

However, experts are still calling for better and fairer treatment for skilled workers in terms of payment, career promotion and social status.

Zhang Rui, deputy director of the WorldSkills Competition China Research Center in Tianjin, said that though vocational schools have open attitudes to cooperating with companies to help their students better adapt to market needs, the cooperation should be further deepened in curriculum design and with more investment.

"The public still prefers academic achievement rather than vocational education, thus it still requires efforts from governments, schools and companies to raise the social status of skilled students and skilled workers," she said, adding that the widening regional gap in vocational education needs to be tackled.

"The gap lies in economic development imbalance. The provinces or areas with stronger economies and manufacturing power, such as Guangdong province, are usually more open-minded and channel more effort into cultivating skilled workers," Zhang said.

Ye Zhihao, the executive director, added: "The manufacturing industry is the foundation for the nation's development, and requires diversified talent ranging from knowledge-based researchers to the skilled people who can deftly operate and maintain precision and high-tech machines."

before China's National Day, and I thought the medal I gained would be the best gift I could give to my mother country.

"The gold medal is not the end but a new start for my life. The competition has shaped me into a better teacher, enabling me to master not only theoretical knowledge but hands-on ability and the spirit of craftsmanship," he said.

"I've seen many talented students who will embrace more diversified career possibilities in the future. The nation has also channeled greater efforts to producing skilled workers, and optimizing vocational education. I will face challenges, but I will not give in and I hope I can inspire more young people by guiding them to use skills to win themselves a better future," Chen said.

Competition winner hopes to inspire others to follow in his footsteps

By CHENG SI

Draping the national flag over his shoulders, 26-year-old Chen Jun'an celebrated winning gold in the optoelectronic technology event at the WorldSkills competition in Lyon, France, in September.

Graduating from the Harbin Institute of Technology, Shenzhen in Guangdong province in 2020, majoring in communications engineering, Chen gave up several lucrative job offers from industry titans like Huawei and Xiaomi to become a teacher at the Shenzhen Institute of Information Technology in South China's Guangdong province.



Chen Jun'an

ing up I received a lot of help from my teachers. I enjoy sharing knowledge with other people, so I made the choice of becoming a teacher when I graduated," he said.

Chen said his first thought when preparing for the WorldSkills com-

petition was to gain more confidence, facing students not much younger than him at the time.

"I was not that confident in myself as I had theoretical knowledge but not much practical experience of the knowledge or skills. I never thought that my attempt at self-improvement would see me standing on the WorldSkills award podium," he said.

However, it was not all plain sailing. He missed out on the opportunity to compete in the special edition of the WorldSkills competition in 2022 because of some mistakes at domestic selection trials. The special edition of the WorldSkills competition was organized in

several countries and regions such as Switzerland and Japan from mid-September to late November that year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I was lucky that I got the chance to compete in the competition in Lyon before reaching 25 years old — the maximum age for the optoelectronic technology event," Chen said.

"I took no holidays and weekends during my training period. I remember I only spent a few days celebrating Spring Festival and returned to the school for training. I was the oldest of all the Chinese competitors for the competition in Lyon and I cherished the opportunity a lot."

Recalling the competition, Chen

remembered the intensity and stress. "The competition sets four modules such as designing and producing an optoelectronic application terminal and installing and debugging a smart lighting control system. Each of the modules was highly competitive and there were very strong rivals from South Korea and Brazil. Nobody could predict the winner until the last second of the competition."

His efforts eventually paid off. "Standing on the podium, holding the gold medal with the national flag draped over my shoulders was a very touching moment. I remember the time was about two weeks

CHINA

CROSSING THE STRAIT

Editor's Note: The Taiwan question is a key focus for China and the international community. China Daily is publishing a series of reports to track hot Taiwan-related topics and address disinformation from the Democratic Progressive Party administration.



Left: Believers pray for safety and good fortune during a grand ceremony paying tribute to Mazu on Meizhou Island in Fujian province on Nov 19. WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Right: People touch a tortoise made with some 29.4 metric tons of rice for good wishes at a Mazu temple in Quanzhou, Fujian province, on Feb 10, Lantern Festival. Coorganized by Mazu temples in Quanzhou and Taiwan's Penghu, the Qigui ritual — touching a rice tortoise from head to tail — is held on Lantern Festival to pray for peace and happiness. LYU MING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Devotion to Mazu stretches from Fujian to Taiwan

Shared culture sees followers of Song Dynasty sea goddess remain faithful across the waves

By ZHANG YI and SHI XUEFAN

The fervor for folk beliefs is unparalleled in Southeast China's Fujian province, and during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, faith in a rich tapestry of deities crossed over the sea to Taiwan as people moved to the island, forming a cultural bridge between the two shores. Among these, the most revered deity is Mazu, the goddess of the sea.

Vibrant celebrations take place in Taiwan to mark Mazu's birthday on the 23rd of the third month in the Chinese calendar. These festivities epitomize the widespread devotion to the goddess. The grandest of these festivities is the annual Dajia pilgrimage, set to start late in the night of April 4 at Dajia Jenn Lann Temple in Taichung, where devotees embark on a sacred journey spanning 300 kilometers over nine days and nights, drawing tens of thousands of worshippers each year.

Mazu, originally named Lin Mo, was born on Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian province, during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Revered for her miraculous abilities to calm storms and rescue troubled ships, she became a symbol of protection and salvation for seafarers, leading to the construction of temples in her honor.

Since the late Ming Dynasty, Fujian people have journeyed to Taiwan, often carrying Mazu idols for protection during the perilous voyage across the Taiwan Strait. Upon safely reaching Taiwan, they established temples to worship Mazu, spreading her following across the island as the most prevalent folk belief.

There are over 500 Mazu temples across Taiwan, and the Meizhou Mazu Temple in Fujian is recognized as their ancestral temple. To celebrate Mazu's birthday each year, devotees from all corners of Taiwan form pilgrimage groups to pay homage to the deity at the temple on Meizhou Island.

Wu Kun-tsai, a history professor at Chiayi University in Taiwan, said

that Mazu believers come from all walks of life, transcending political affiliations and gender.

"It's a common practice in Taiwan for families to worship together. When I was young, I walked seven kilometers to visit the Chao-Tian Temple in Beigang to pray," he said.

All Mazu temples in Taiwan have their roots on the mainland, particularly originating from Meizhou Island. The Mazu statues worshipped in various temples across Taiwan were brought over by people from Fujian, Wu said.

Reflecting on his experiences taking Taiwan students to visit Mazu temples on the mainland, Wu said, "I was deeply moved because Mazu is a shared sea goddess among us Chinese, connecting people on both sides of the Strait."

He said that for political reasons, the Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan are reluctant to promote exchanges involving Mazu worship between both sides of the Strait. Instead, they attempt to create the misconception that popular deities like Mazu and Guan Gong are indigenous to Taiwan so as to sever the historical ties between the two sides.

"However, this won't work because when people hear about Guan Gong, they think of the Three Kingdoms (220-280). With Mazu, such a widespread belief, it's impossible to make it just local to Taiwan," he said.

Similarly, the recent domestically produced animated blockbuster *Ne Zha 2*, which draws from ancient Chinese mythology, has sparked discussions and attracted numerous Taiwan residents to the mainland to watch the movie, fostering cultural exchanges between people on both sides of the Strait.

Hsiao Hsu-tsen, executive director of the Ma Ying-jeou Culture and Education Foundation, led a delegation of nearly 40 Taiwan students to watch the film at a Beijing cinema during a five-day visit to the mainland in February.

"Family love is what attracts me the most to this movie because I



Some 120 young people from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan arrive at the Meizhou Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island, Fujian province, on Nov 24, to worship and pay tribute to the sea goddess. Clad in *hanfu*, they had walked more than 200 kilometers in five days and four nights on their pilgrimage. LYU MING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

have a very good relationship with my own family, so watching it made me very sad," said Ko Yi-ting, a student who was moved to tears when Nezha's mother dies in the movie, hugging him in her final moments.

Chuang Po-chung, a professor from the Chinese Culture University in Taiwan, said that on the island, Nezha is a symbolic figure in tradi-

tional religious activities, so it's a mythical character that people in Taiwan are very familiar with.

In Fujian and Taiwan, the mythical figure Nezha is a beloved and adorable child deity, revered as a guardian, especially known for protecting children. Nezha also often appears in Mazu parades.

Historical records indicate that

during the Qing Dynasty, ancestors from Quanzhou in Fujian brought the Nezha deity to Taiwan's Chiayi, establishing the first Nezha temple in Taiwan, the Xinying Taizi Temple. Over the years, this tradition has flourished, and today there are over 370 Nezha temples across the entire island of Taiwan.

Hsiao said that, like Nezha, Mazu could be a subject for the silver screen.

"Taiwan has over 10 million Mazu worshippers, surpassing half of the total population. Also, there have been numerous exchanges related to Mazu between Taiwan and the mainland," said Hsiao, who expressed his hope that professionals in Taiwan's film and television industry could strengthen collaborations and exchanges with the mainland.

"With the mainland's growing influence, Chinese culture has not only spread across the Taiwan Strait but also globally," Hsiao noted. He said he is pleased to see Chinese cultural products like films and games, such as *Empresses in the Palace* and *Black Myth: Wukong* reaching international audiences.

With a rich and enduring history, Chinese civilization, spanning five millennia, remains uniquely comprehensible to contemporary audiences. The global appeal of Chinese culture naturally captivates people from diverse backgrounds. Hsiao advocates for Taiwan's entertainment industry to actively engage in this cultural exchange by creating internationally acclaimed works inspired by Chinese traditions and folklore.

"It is a very positive phenomenon because I believe that Chinese culture has a long and rich history, so it's natural our foreign friends would be moved and come to appreciate it," he said.

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Shared folk beliefs

City God

Numerous City God temples emerged in Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), often with statues of gods brought from Fujian's Anxi, Tongan and Jinjiang regions. Architectural styles, sculpture techniques and deity worship in these temples bear similarities to those in Fujian. Notably, while the mainland's City God temples are typically built by local authorities, Taiwan showcases a unique trend of temples being funded by civilians honoring deities from their ancestral lands, exemplified by the Xiahai City God Temple in Taipei, with its ancestral temple in Fujian's Xiamen.

Earth God

A deity representing the land vital for agriculture has evolved into a personified figure typically depicted in regal attire with a flowing white beard, with dedicated temples dotting villages in Fujian and Taiwan. People from Fujian who moved to Taiwan constructed various Earth God temples across the island to ensure prosperity and safety.

Guan Gong

A renowned general from the Three Kingdoms (220-280) period in ancient China symbolizes bravery and loyalty in the hearts of Chinese people. The worship of Guan Gong in Taiwan was introduced from Fujian. Guan Gong represented a symbol of martial strength against threats, especially as many were far from their hometowns at that time.

God of Medicine

A celebrated healer from Fujian worshipped by local people. Their belief has also found reverence among Taiwan communities, with temples originating from Fujian.

Source: China Museum for Fujian-Taiwan Kinship

ZHANG YI

Book encapsulates legacy of cross-Strait family bonds

By ZHANG YI
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Chang Yu

Chang Yu, a young writer from Taiwan, has spent a decade traveling between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, visiting relatives, collecting old photographs and writing a book about his family's journey, seeking their roots on the Chinese mainland over the past three generations.

The writing process for Chang was more than mere storytelling, but a spiritual practice of rekindling connections with his ancestors.

"I hope to inspire more people to turn their gaze toward their homeland and ancestors, and be more willing to listen to the stories of the older generation," he said.

His book, titled *Huanggu Family*, was published in December, and literally means "a family from the yel-

low earth". This symbolic name reflects the ancestral origins of his Taiwan family, tracing back to the lands of Henan province in the Yellow River Basin.

Chang's inspiration sprang from poignant childhood memories of his grandfather's behavior. He vividly recalls his grandfather's joy upon receiving letters from Henan, a province that held deep significance for their family.

His grandfather, a soldier born in Qixian county, Henan, was among the Kuomintang troops forced to retreat to Taiwan in 1949 amid the tumult of cross-Strait conflicts lasting for decades. He married and had children in Taiwan, unable to

return to the mainland.

The pivotal year of 1988 marked a significant turning point. With the reopening of cross-Strait family visits, Chang's grandfather seized the opportunity to return to his roots in Henan. His symbolic gesture of bringing back a vial of water from the Yellow River encapsulated the essence of his homeland, a cherished memento that remained by his bedside until his final days.

"For him, preserving items carrying the essence of home held deep significance," Chang said.

Chang's perception of the Yellow River evolved over time. A chance encounter in the summer of 2014 with a Henan-born taxi driver during a visit to Peking University shattered preconceived barriers.

"When I mentioned that my ancestral roots were in Henan, the

taxi driver warmly responded with a fellow villager greeting and engaged in a friendly conversation with me. In that seemingly casual moment, I was deeply moved," Chang said.

"Even though I had never been to that land, just because of the geographical connection of ancestral roots, I felt the warmth of human connection. This sparked my interest in Henan, how our family came from there to Taiwan, and how my grandfather returned to seek his roots."

With just a ticket and a backpack, Chang boarded a train to his ancestral home in Henan. When he arrived in a small village in Sanmenxia and inquired, "Is Zhang Xiulan here?" A weathered elderly woman stood before him, initially stunned, then warm tears streamed down her face as she embraced the young man she had never met before.

"My grandfather had passed away, and I had never been here before. Our families had been disconnected for so many years. Why did this elderly lady recognize me at first sight?" This scene left a lasting impression on him. The old lady was his grandfather's sister.

Through the narratives of the elders, in scattered old letters and photographs, blurry memories slowly became clear.

"In Taiwan, my grandfather was a relatively lonely old man burdened with his past, but in Henan, he was a person who returned to invest and bring glory to the family."

Chang gradually understood the hidden sorrows, loneliness and yearning of his grandfather. He decided to piece together the long-buried fragments of stories and write a book to share more positive energy across the Strait.

After its publication, one of the author's friends found a long-lost fellow soldier of his grandfather, sur-

named Wu, from Zhejiang province, who at the age of 93, still remembered the training experiences he shared with Chang's grandfather. In a heartwarming exchange, Chang connected with his grandfather's old friend, now residing in Taipei.

Yuan Xiaobo, the book's editor, highlighted the scarcity of opportunities for veterans like Chang's grandfather to return to their mainland hometowns, with only about 3,900 of the 600,000 Taiwan veterans who originated from the mainland still alive today.

He said Chang had fulfilled his grandfather's longing to return home and immortalized his legacy in the book, serving as a valuable reference for families with similar experiences across the Strait.



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CHINA



From left: Dondrub Gyaltsan (left), captain of the Dingri county branch of the Xizang fire and rescue corps, and his colleague move things out of a damaged house at a village in Dingri county, Xizang autonomous region, after a magnitude-6.8 earthquake hit the area on Jan 7. Dondrub Gyaltsan comforts a villager at a camp site in the quake-hit area in Dingri, Xizang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Village official recalls earthquake aftermath

Kelsang Drolma, among others, ensures safety of residents after natural disaster

By **PALDEN NYIMA**
and **DAQJONG** in Lhasa

More than a month after a devastating earthquake struck her home county on Jan 7, Kelsang Drolma, a village official in the Xizang autonomous region, still recalls the intense, sleepless nights spent racing against time to relocate villagers and minimize losses.

The magnitude-6.8 earthquake claimed 126 lives and affected multiple areas, including Chukhu village in Mangphu township, Lhaze county, where Kelsang Drolma has worked tirelessly to help residents recover.

She was attending a meeting when the earthquake hit. As soon as the tremors began, she ran out of the hall and tried to call her villagers but found that the communication network was down.

"I couldn't reach anyone. I became very worried and decided to return to the village immediately," she said.

On her way back, many villagers working in distant locations called her, desperate for news of their families. She reassured them that their loved ones would be fine and promised to update them upon reaching the village.

The road back was strewn with

rocks from the quake, forcing her and a township leader traveling with her to clear debris along the way. It took them about 40 minutes to reach the village, where they learned that, fortunately, all villagers were safe.

Two township officials had already arrived ahead of her to assess the situation.

"As soon as I heard the villagers were safe, I felt so relieved," said the 28-year-old.

However, many houses had collapsed or sustained major cracks. Affecting the devastation, some villagers burst into tears, asking her what to do next. "I told them that as long as lives were safe, everything else could be rebuilt," she said, adding that the government and the Communist Party of China would help them recover.

Kelsang Drolma quickly organized relief efforts. She visited households to assess damage to homes and livestock and worked to restore normalcy.

Continuous aftershocks on Jan 7 and 8, along with falling rocks in the mountainous terrain, posed ongoing risks to residents' safety and property.

"After careful planning, we evacuated 42 residents, mostly elderly people and children, to a resettlement



Kelsang Drolma moves some daily utensils from a damaged house at Chukhu village in Lhaze county, Xizang.

site near the primary school," she said.

She arranged for 24 villagers to care for the livestock and set up 10 additional tents with quilts, winter jackets, beds, heaters and other

necessities. "Currently, food, shelter and heating at the settlement site are ensured, and residents can sleep safely in the temporary shelters," she said.

Eighteen households were relo-

cated to the township primary school, where 13 tents were set up. There were no casualties or missing persons in the village.

"I was on duty for seven consecutive days with little sleep, which was exhausting," she said.

"But when we visited residents' tents, they would express their gratitude by offering us hot butter tea. That made me feel proud of what we were doing."

Firefighters also played a critical role in rescue efforts.

They arrived in affected areas immediately after the quake, conducting search and rescue missions, clearing debris and helping residents set up tents.

Among them was Dondrub Gyaltsan, captain of the Dingri county branch of the Xizang fire and rescue corps, who led a rapid response team to the disaster zone.

"When the earthquake struck, our brigade barracks shook violently, with tiles falling as we ran downstairs," he said.

He immediately gathered his colleagues and led three vehicles and 19 personnel to the epicenter in Dramso township, Dingri county.

"When we arrived, we saw collapsed houses, immense destruction and people suffering. It was

heartbreaking," he said.

Despite the devastation, he quickly organized his team into four search and rescue squads to operate in different villages.

"In Thongley village, I was searching a house when I touched a small foot under a blanket. I realized it was a child," he said.

"When I carried her out, she was so light, but my heart felt so heavy. I have two daughters of my own."

After handing the child's body to her mother, he could offer only a few comforting words before moving to the next site.

In another house, his team found an elderly man who had been killed by a falling metal beam. Using hydraulic cutters, they freed his body and returned it to his family.

Over the following days, Dondrub Gyaltsan's team helped residents retrieve valuable belongings from damaged homes.

"Once they had salvaged their items, the villagers, covered in sweat, expressed deep gratitude for our help," he said.

"We always do our best to conduct search and rescue operations and support affected residents."

Contact the writers at palden_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

Mountainous town sees future in drone industry

CHENGDU — The morning of Jan 20 brought two pieces of good news for Yuan Tao, Party chief of Chewang, Sichuan province — a drone company established in the town just two months ago had already secured orders through to the end of the year.

The orders were expected to bring in tax revenue nearing 600,000 yuan (\$84,000). In addition, a local bamboo processing company was planning to expand its capacity in 2025.

According to Yuan's calculations, excluding the income boost for locals, the town is projected to generate record tax revenue of over 1.2 million yuan this year, marking a substantial increase of more than 20 percent compared to 2024.

The reason behind this surge is the low-altitude economy.

Before 2024, the town, with a population of over 23,000 in Luzhou city, was primarily known for its bamboo industry. Most local farmers had never ventured outside the city, let alone seen a drone in person.

It all began in early September, when Wang Fei, head of Sichuan Honghuang Technology, a company specializing in drone operations, was informed about Chewang's bamboo resources during a business matchmaking workshop in Luzhou.

Wang then visited Chewang, intending to establish a cableway to help villagers transport bamboo from the mountains.

Surrounding Chewang are bamboo forests that span over 20,000 hectares, making it one of the core bamboo production areas in Luzhou. However, due to the mountainous terrain, transporting bamboo harvested from the hilltops is a major challenge, often leading villagers to watch their bamboo "naturally perish" as they struggle to move it.

Rather than building a cableway, Wang thought to himself, why not transport the bamboo directly with drones?

After conducting a field survey, Wang presented the idea to Yuan, pointing out that many of the bamboo groves were within 300 meters of rural roads.

In early November, Wang brought a team to demonstrate the transportation process.

Following instructions, a villager swiftly bound a 50-kilogram bundle of bamboo to a rope attached to a drone, which then flew about 300 meters before unloading it beside the village road — all within five minutes.

It was an eye-opening experience for Yuan and his fellow villagers.

"I thought this could only happen in a movie," Yuan told Xinhua News Agency. "How can such a 'big toy plane' do something like this?"

"Using drones can solve over 70 percent of the transportation challenges for bamboo in our town," he added.

Following the demonstration, Sichuan Qingmu Tianque Technology was founded in the town, with a registered capital of 3 million yuan. The company's operations cover public air transport, general aviation services and air cargo packaging.

Zhou Jiangtao, a bamboo buyer and frequent visitor to Chewang, was stunned by the changes.

He explained that, just the day before, the drones had transported four metric tons of bamboo from the mountains, and by the following morning they had a total of around 10 tons, just enough for one truck.

Previously, it took three villagers about three days to move one ton of bamboo just 200 meters.

"With a daily wage of 150 yuan per

person for workers transporting bamboo and a market price of 500 yuan per ton, our bamboo farmers were barely making any money," Yuan said.

However, with drone transport, covering the same distance means that moving one ton of bamboo requires 20 drone trips, which can be completed in just two hours at a cost of 200 yuan.

Following the delivery of an additional 30 drones, Yuan said, they plan to expand their business to surrounding areas, and will initiate training for drone operators.

Skilled workforce

At the drone pilot training base of Luzhou Vocational and Technical College, 40 retired military personnel are undergoing a three-month training program.

Meanwhile, students enrolled in the 2024 drone application technology program are learning simulated flight training at a virtual drone simulation center.

The training base boasts a standardized runway measuring 140 meters by 40 meters, and is equipped with virtual simulation training devices, along with facilities such as a drone hangar and fully equipped classrooms.

"Our college serves as a cradle for cultivating drone technology talent in Luzhou," said Bao Xuedong, vice-president of the college, adding that Luzhou is the first city in the province to launch cooperative school programs linked to low-altitude economy disciplines.

Wen Yonggang, a student enrolled in the drone application technology program since September, said, "The training is helping me become a more employable 'near-professional!'"

He chose this major not only to fulfill his dream of "serving the nation through aviation" but also because of the rapidly developing drone industry, which offers vast potential and promising career prospects.

In his spare time, Wen participates in activities through the college's drone association. "By the time I graduate, I hope to earn both a certificate in drone maintenance and a drone pilot license," he said.

The first batch of 148 students began their full-day training in September.

"Acquiring an additional professional skill opens up more employment opportunities for me in the future," said Zhou Yidong, a university student and veteran who has long been interested in drones.

China's central government has identified the low-altitude economy as a key sector for developing new quality productive forces, with the Sichuan provincial government taking significant steps to promote its growth.

This year, the college has initiated partnerships with the Ordnance Science and Research Academy of China of the China North Industries Group Corporation, and China's major commercial unmanned aerial vehicle company JOUAV, based in Sichuan's capital Chengdu, to establish an industrial academy.

The college plans to expand partnerships with leading enterprises to establish a low-altitude flight school and develop productive drone training bases on campus to cultivate high-quality professionals to support the growth of smart manufacturing and the low-altitude economy in Luzhou.

XINHUA



Douan Flower Market is a popular tourist attraction in Kunming, Yunnan province. CHEN XINBO / XINHUA

Spring Festival sales soar at Douan Flower Market

KUNMING — Freshly cut flowers added a festive air to Spring Festival celebrations this year, as well as fueling a booming trade.

Douan Flower Market, Asia's largest fresh-cut flower trading market, has seen flourishing trade and surging prices since the beginning of the year, with a series of festivals from New Year, Spring Festival and Lantern Festival.

During the period, the average price of major categories of flowers in the market in Kunming, Yunnan province, reached about 2.5 yuan (34 cents) per stem, an increase of 40 percent compared with the same period last year.

After the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, from Feb 5 to 13, the center's average daily trading volume amounted to around 4.5 million stems, with the highest daily trading volume exceeding 6 million stems.

Zhu Qi, planning manager of the Kunming International Flower Auction Trading Center in Douan, said the price of single-headed

roses rose sharply from 5 yuan to 7 yuan per stem. The highest under-the-hammer price of high-end roses exceeded 13 yuan per stem during the Spring Festival.

Meanwhile, the price of other festival flowers, including lisianthus, carnations, lilies and tulips, also surged.

In addition to the auction trade, during Spring Festival the transaction volume of fresh-cut flowers in Douan's retail market reached about 190 million stems, with a sales volume registering 288 million yuan. The market is also a popular tourist destination in Kunming, attracting over 40,000 visitors on average daily.

As a barometer of China's overall flower market, the market has seen booming sales via various e-commerce platforms. Yunshe Flowers, a vendor's account on the Chinese short-video sharing platform Douyin, saw its average daily revenue topping 5 million yuan during Spring Festival.

XINHUA

WORLD

Vietnam rail project seen to boost trade

Planned link will enhance connectivity between SE Asia, China, say analysts

By PRIME SARMIENTO
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Vietnam's planned new railway that will link its largest northern port city to the border with China could boost bilateral trade and also serve as a "critical linchpin" in the realization of a pan-Asia railway, analysts say.

Vietnam's National Assembly approved on Feb 19 an investment plan for the Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong railway project. The project, which is estimated to be worth over \$8.3 billion, involves a rail link stretching from Vietnam's northern port city Hai Phong to Lao Cai, which borders China's southwest province of Yunnan.

The construction of the railway aims to meet the transport demand between Vietnam and China, according to a report filed by Vietnam News Agency, citing a resolution passed by the Vietnamese parliament.

The Vietnam rail venture is the latest project that boosts connectivity between Southeast Asia and China. Early this month, the Thai Cabinet approved the second phase of the high-speed network that will connect Thailand with China through Laos.

Rail infrastructure will help bolster trade between China and Southeast Asia as it reduces the transit time as well as the delivery cost, noted Wilson Lee Flores, a political-economic analyst and honorary chairman of the Anvil Business Club in the Philippines.

He said time and cost efficiency are especially important for coun-

tries in the landlocked Greater Mekong Subregion, expanding their access to the global market.

Flores said the Vietnam railway project is "a critical linchpin" in building a pan-Asia rail network. This is because Vietnam's geographical position makes it a gateway between China and Southeast Asia.

"By integrating Vietnam into the broader pan-Asia rail network, the project would enable a more fluid movement of goods, services, and people, thereby amplifying economic opportunities across the region," he said.

Flores said China's expertise in high-speed rail technology, coupled with its unparalleled capacity for large-scale infrastructure projects, has enabled the nation to bridge historically inaccessible regions across Asia.

Rise of e-commerce

Linda Tjia Yin Nor, an associate professor in the Department of Public and International Affairs at the City University of Hong Kong, said the rise of e-commerce has pushed the demand for increased connectivity between China and Southeast Asia.

"They need to be part of the entire globalization of e-commerce development," she said.

Tjia, who has researched Chinese and Japanese railway technology, said China can contribute to the development of a regional rail network in Southeast Asia either through financing or technological transfer.

Nguyen Tuan Duong, chairman of Vietnam Trading Investment Promotion Group, said the Hai

Phong Port is the biggest container port in northern Vietnam, and Lao Cai borders Yunnan. As such, the railway will facilitate freight transportation by connecting sea and rail transport.

Duong's company exports agricultural products to China. It uses sea transport to ship products from southern Vietnam to China, and container trucks to ship from central and northern Vietnam.

"The cost would be very high if we use container trucks so the railway would be the best and most convenient way for shipping agricultural products from central and northern Vietnam to China," he said.

The Vietnam railway project will span approximately 390.9 kilometers. A new electrified single-track railway line with a 1,435-millimeter gauge will be constructed to accommodate both passenger and freight services.

The Vietnam News Agency reported that Vietnam's prime minister is authorized to issue government bonds to cover any shortfalls in the annual investment plan.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said in a briefing on Feb 19 that China and Vietnam have been exchanging views on enhancing railway connectivity.

Guo said the two sides agreed to accelerate the feasibility study on the Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong standard gauge railway, speed up the plan compilation of the Dong Dang-Hanoi standard gauge railway and the Mong Cai-Ha Long-Hai Phong standard gauge railway, and advance the work of building a standard gauge railway connection point between Hekou in China and Lao Cai in Vietnam.

Yang Han in Hong Kong contributed to this story.

School 'bus'



Slum children attend free school inside a bus that was converted into a classroom by a nongovernmental organization in Kolkata, India, on Monday. RUPAK DE CHOWDHURI VIA GETTY IMAGES

Briefly

AUSTRALIA

New search launched for missing MH370 flight

A new search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 started on Tuesday, covering an Indian Ocean area of around 15,000 square kilometers off the coast of Perth in western Australia. United Kingdom-based exploration firm Ocean Infinity has signed a "no find, no fee" contract with the Malaysian government for the search, according to Australian news outlet 9News. Compared to a previous search that covered about 200,000 square kilometers, the latest effort aims to be more precise and targeted. Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 aircraft, went missing during its journey from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014. The plane was carrying 12 crew members and 227 passengers.

UNITED STATES

Canada, Mexico tariffs on schedule: Trump

US President Donald Trump said on Monday that the 25 percent tariffs on Canadian and Mexican imports are "on time and on schedule", despite efforts by the countries to beef up border security and halt the flow of fentanyl into the US ahead of a March 4 deadline. He later referred to his desire for "reciprocal" tariffs to match the duty rates and offset the trade barriers of all countries. Many had hoped the top two US trading partners could persuade the Trump administration to further delay the tariffs that would apply to over \$918 billion worth of US imports from the two countries, from autos to energy. Canada and Mexico have taken steps to beef up border security, which bought them

about a month's reprieve from Trump's earlier Feb 1 deadline to impose the tariffs.

Musk renews threat to fire federal workers

Tech billionaire Elon Musk said US federal workers had "another chance" to justify their work or lose their jobs, as the original deadline passed on Tuesday. "Failure to respond a second time will result in termination," Musk said on Monday evening on X, without offering a new deadline. The original deadline came and went, creating much confusion among an already anxious workforce after several US federal agencies, including the FBI and the State Department, told their staff to ignore the email, at least temporarily.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES

US reportedly plans additional curbs on China's chip industry

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The Trump administration is working on more ways to restrict China's semiconductor industry, according to a published report.

The plan includes putting pressure on US allies to restrict China's chip businesses, according to the report Monday by Bloomberg News.

Administration officials recently met with Japanese and Dutch officials on the sidelines of a summit in Japan about restricting Tokyo Electron Ltd and ASML Holding NV engineers from maintaining semiconductor equipment in China, Bloomberg reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The objective, which also was a priority for the Biden administration, is to see key allies follow limits that the United States has placed on American chip-gear companies, including Applied Materials Inc, KLA Corp and Lam Research Corp.

"China has repeatedly expressed its firm stance against the US malicious blockade and suppression of China's semiconductor sector," Lin Jian, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, said on Tuesday.

"The US has been politicizing and weaponizing trade and technology issues, overstretching the concept of national security while continuing to strengthen its chip export controls to China and coercing other countries

to suppress China's semiconductor industry.

"This has impeded the development of the global semiconductor industry and will ultimately backfire," Lin said.

It could be months before any new US regulations are announced, as President Donald Trump makes staffing decisions at federal agencies; and there also is the question whether allies will be more receptive to the change in leadership in Washington, Bloomberg reported.

Some in the administration also are looking to further restrict what kind of Nvidia Corp chips can be exported to China without a license, Bloomberg News has reported.

They're also discussing tightening existing curbs on the quantity of AI chips that can be exported globally without a license, the report said.

Phil Blacato, chief executive officer of Ladenburg Thalmann Asset Management, said the news report was "adding to this matrix of new worries that haven't been in the market before this, and if Nvidia can't put up another gigantic number just to sustain its current price, the market is ripe for a selloff."

The quarterly earnings results due Wednesday for tech giant Nvidia, based in Santa Clara, California, will be crucial for technology companies as investors question the industry's massive spending on artificial-intelligence after competition — at far

lower costs — from China's DeepSeek rattled markets in January.

At the same time, Chinese companies are ramping up orders for Nvidia's H20 artificial intelligence chip due to booming demand for DeepSeek's low-cost AI models, Reuters reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

Alibaba, ByteDance — the owner of TikTok — and Tencent have "significantly increased" their orders of the H20 — a chip specific to China due to US export controls.

The new administration is also considering curbs on sales of those particular chips, Bloomberg has reported. Some of former president Joe Biden's National Security Council officials wanted to impose those stricter measures before he left office, but then-Commerce Department secretary Gina Raimondo declined.

"With Nvidia now having less access to her main market, she will get less money for the necessary R&D. In other words, Nvidia's ability to come up with new products may come under pressure," posted "MXHeritage" on X.com.

In December, Zhang Meifang posted to her 170,000 followers on X: "China's annual chip exports exceed RMB1 trillion. When the US stops selling chips, the Chinese start making their own a lot more. Could be bad news for American semiconductor companies."

"Trump's chip play is a high-stakes geopolitical chess match," wrote "kautions" on X. "China is fast-tracking its own semiconductor surge — and Taiwan's tech crown is at risk. This isn't America's golden age; it's a wild tariff gamble that could hand key bargaining chips to Beijing, sending ripples through global markets. Buckle up, Wall Street — the tech tug-of-war has just entered overdrive."

Agencies contributed to this story.

As inflation sidelines many in US, the well-off still splurging

By HENG WEILI in New York

While most American consumers are fretting over inflation, 10 percent of them aren't even flinching.

To be in the top 10 percent in income in the United States, a household has to bring in \$250,000 a year or more. And those households account for almost 50 percent of all spending in the country, according to a recent report.

Such households "are splurging on everything from vacations to designer handbags, buoyed by big gains in stocks, real estate and other assets", The Wall Street Journal reported Monday, in a story about a new report by Moody's Analytics, an economics research firm.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, wrote on X.com on Sunday about the report, which he based on Federal Reserve data.

"With the stock market on its back heels the past couple of trading days, it is worth noting how important the well-to-do (those who own the bulk of stocks) have been to driving consumer spending and, by extension, the broader economy," he wrote.

"Indeed, in the five years since the pandemic hit, the well-to-do, those in the top quintile of the income distribution who make well over \$250,000 a year, are entirely behind the increase in real (after-inflation) consumer spending. Spending by low- and middle-income households has simply kept pace with inflation during this time.

"Much of the well-to-do's outsize spending is driven by their increasing wealth, much of it in stocks. This is the so-called wealth effect — the wealthier households are, the greater their willingness and ability to spend," Zandi wrote.

The buying power of the richest Americans, who Zandi said tend to be older and more educated, is driven by the outsize rise in values of houses and the stock market in recent years, the Journal reported.

“Much of the well-to-do's outsize spending is driven by their increasing wealth, much of it in stocks. This is the so-called wealth effect.”

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics

Households in the top 10 percent are now behind almost 50 percent of the spending, the Journal reported, whereas 30 years ago, they made up about 36 percent of all spending.

But it doesn't mean the good times will continue indefinitely for the well-heeled.

"The wealth effect can also turn negative if, say, the stock market stumbles," Zandi wrote on X. "And there are good reasons to be concerned it might, given frothy valuations and the current problematic economic policy. If the stock market were to hit the skids, so would spending and the economy."

In response to Zandi's post on X, Robert Dandi, a real estate broker in Pennsylvania wrote: "The top tier economic strata are eating the rest of us alive. They're also responsible for our aggressive inflation problem. A stock market decline would check economic momentum and possibly inflation itself. They have more than enough. They don't need Nvidia to go up another 50 points."

Zandi estimated that spending by the top 10 percent alone accounted for almost one-third of US gross domestic product, the Journal reported. The article drew thousands of comments, with viewpoints as divided as the gap between the wealthy and everyone else.

"The Federal Reserve deserves the bulk of the blame for this. This is what happens when you keep interest rates at virtually zero for over a decade," commented Richard Barber. "The Fed's Quantitative Easing program was designed to elevate asset prices, with the thinking that the rewards would benefit everyone; unsurprisingly, the overwhelming beneficiaries have been the wealthy."

"This is hardly sustainable as a country — and it's only going to get worse," Matt Baker wrote of the economic divide.

Bill Rose disagreed with the premise that it was all about the top 10 percent.

"Strange. Not the 10 percent we know. We are all just stashing cash," he wrote. "Driving our very nice but older cars, we entertain at our homes or dine with friends at cheap happy hours. We do travel well and we buy what we want, but at this stage of life ... we have all the things we need."

"If the economy is depending on me and those in my circle to 'consume' our way out of the Biden debacle ... the economy needs to rethink its strategy," he posted.

"Today, most 'rich' households consist of two earners combining for \$250k. But if that couple separates, they're each back to living on \$125k ... which is NOT rich," wrote Dan Dority, who said the concept of "households" is "an outdated carryover of the years when most households had one earner and their partner was a homemaker."

JPMorgan Chase analyst Matthew Boss told the Journal that there is "an extreme bifurcation" between, for example, cruise lines and companies that make luxury goods, and others that focus on less affluent consumers.

He noted that discount chain Big Lots filed for bankruptcy last fall, and retailers Kohl's and Family Dollar are closing stores.

"They're all battling for fewer dollars," Boss said.

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SOEs actively deploying DeepSeek AI models

By LI JIAYING
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In a move toward large-scale implementation of artificial intelligence technologies, several State-owned enterprises have recently announced an accelerated integration with DeepSeek, China's home-grown AI reasoning model that has taken the world by storm recently.

To date, major energy giants, such as Sinopec, PetroChina, China National Offshore Oil Corp, Sinochem Group, CHN Energy and China Southern Power Grid, have all completed private deployments of DeepSeek's AI models into their proprietary large language models.

Sinopec plans to leverage DeepSeek's high-quality programming capabilities to optimize seismic data processing, reservoir development, chemical product research, and customer service, further propelling the petrochemical industry toward intelligent and digital transformation.

Similarly, Sinochem highlighted DeepSeek's advanced capabilities in complex information processing, logical reasoning and open-domain knowledge comprehension, which are expected to boost its core business operations in a wider range of application scenarios, the group said.

This round of AI deployment by energy SOEs follows a recent such move by the telecommunications sector, wherein the country's three major operators — China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom — first used the country's hottest tech startup's AI models in their cloud services.

Beyond telecommunications and energy players, more SOEs are expected to collaborate with tech companies like DeepSeek to advance AI applications in communication technologies, cybersecurity, and smart office solutions, with more cooperation opportunities anticipated in sectors such as transportation, logistics and finance, said Zhou Lisha, a researcher at the Institute for State-owned Enterprises of Tsinghua University.

"DeepSeek's emergence has realized equal AI access," said Zhou. "In the future, competition in the AI area will be driven by the scale and quality of data. With the vast data resources at the disposal of SOEs, their integration with DeepSeek will help accelerate data circulation and commercialization."

The automotive, financial, technology and construction sectors are also actively advancing their own LLMs through further integration.

China Energy Engineering

Group, a central SOE engaged in power and infrastructure, has completed the full-platform integration of DeepSeek models, embedding them into its self-developed AI assistant for comprehensive AI empowerment. Dongfeng Motor Corp, a key State-owned automaker, has also integrated DeepSeek models into its autonomous brands such as Voyah, Mengshi and Yipai.

Such upgraded LLMs in the automotive industry can facilitate enterprise data analysis and intelligent decisionmaking, as well as boost intelligent driving and in-car interaction capabilities, while in transportation and logistics, they could optimize infrastructure construction, delivery route planning and smart warehouse management, Zhou said.

The recent AI integration deployments are part of a broader "AI+ initiative" spearheaded by State-owned assets regulators to accelerate the deep integration of AI into SOEs' diverse production scenarios.

At a meeting held by the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council last week, central enterprises were urged to prioritize AI development in their 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) and increase funding to bolster AI research and development.

The meeting also underscored the strategic window for AI development, calling on SOEs to focus on mastering core technologies and fostering original innovations.

Three high-value application scenarios were highlighted — strategic significance (such as energy and communication infrastructure), economic benefits (such as financial risk control and intelligent operations), and close ties to people's livelihoods (such as smart governance and environmental management).

Li Jin, chief researcher at the China Enterprise Research Institute in Beijing, said the emphasis on high-value scenarios sets clear boundaries for SOEs' AI development, preventing chaotic allocation of R&D resources at the source. Looking forward, cross-industry and cross-ownership collaborations among SOEs will become one of the key drivers for AI breakthroughs and LLM technologies, Li said.

"For central SOEs, the focus (of AI development) should not be on competing for talent, but on strengthening internal capabilities. It is through reforming institutional mechanisms that they can fully unleash the potential of existing talent, tolerate innovation failures and ignite bold experimentation," Li said.



Xpeng's robot on display during an expo in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

High-tech robot sector revving up carmakers

Entry into emerging industry stems from many overlapping applications

By LI FUSHENG
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Chinese automakers are accelerating their forays into the burgeoning humanoid robot sector as a means of strategic diversification, leveraging existing technological expertise and manufacturing capabilities in smart vehicles amid intense competition.

Xiaomi, a high-profile relative newcomer in the smart electric vehicle sector, said on Sunday that it is working on preparing its robot, CyberOne, to work on its vehicle production lines. The consumer electronics giant unveiled the humanoid robot back in 2022.

GAC, a Chinese partner of Toyota and Honda, unveiled its humanoid robot GoMate in December, which stands and moves on wheels.

The State-owned automaker said it will start mass production of the robot's components — developed in house — in 2025, and the robots are expected to work in its vehicle assembly plants from 2026.

Li Xiang, founder and CEO of Li Auto, the first Chinese NEV startup to be profitable, said in a December interview that the company "will definitely do humanoid robots".

Analysts said automakers' entry into robotics stems from overlapping technologies between smart

EVs and humanoid machines.

Also, their bulk purchases of components, many of which are from auto parts suppliers, give them cost advantages over smaller rivals.

Autonomous driving systems, a battleground for automakers, have become a treasure trove for robotics, said Chen Meng, a Beijing-based independent auto analyst.

"Sensors like lidar and cameras, AI algorithms for object recognition, and high-precision motors — all originally designed for vehicles — are now being repurposed to teach robots to 'see', 'think', and 'move'," said Chen.

NEV startup Xpeng's robot — Iron — unveiled in November, will feature in-house developed chips. The robot has hands and arms that have 15 degrees of freedom, compared to Tesla chief Elon Musk's Optimus, which has 22 degrees of freedom.

Also, entering the humanoid robot sector positions participating automakers at the forefront of a rapidly evolving industry, with potential applications across various areas, including healthcare, manufacturing and consumer services.

That offers a new growth engine, which might prove to be more powerful over time than many can imagine, for automakers that are seeing profit declines

amid white-hot competition.

Musk has called Optimus a potential "\$10 trillion business", dwarfing Tesla's auto revenue.

Chinese firms are equally bullish.

Xiaomi's CyberOne, which can work as a home assistant, aims to anchor its ecosystem of smart devices.

In a Sina Weibo post, He Xiaopeng, CEO of Xpeng, wrote, "Robotics is a natural extension of our smart EV ecosystem."

The total addressable market for humanoid robots worldwide is projected to reach \$38 billion by 2035, up more than sixfold from a previous projection of \$6 billion, Goldman Sachs Research analyst Jacqueline Du, head of China Industrial Technology research, wrote in a report.

There are short-term, instant benefits for automakers as well, said Zhang Xiang, a fellow at the Research Center of Automobile Industry Innovation of the North China University of Technology.

"It gives automakers such labels as 'innovation' and 'technology', which will help their appeal in the minds of potential car buyers and may help boost their performance in the stock market as well," said Zhang.

Following a team of humanoid robots performing at the Spring Festival Gala in early February, a number of companies in the sector have been seeing their prices surge in China's stock market.

Shanghai gets major low-altitude biz liftoff

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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A helicopter fully loaded with passengers recently completed a test flight from Shanghai Pudong Software Park to Qidong Linyang Park in neighboring Jiangsu province, marking another step forward in low-altitude passenger transport development and connectivity advancement in the Yangtze River Delta region.

Flying across the Yangtze River and Chongming Island, the flight greatly reduces the transportation time between Shanghai's Pudong New Area and Qidong. While the trip usually takes one hour and a half by road, the helicopter flight only took 20 minutes, significantly improving logistics efficiency in the region.

The test flight also marks the start of the construction of a low-altitude transportation network in the YRD region. Linyang Aviation, a subsidiary of Jiangsu Linyang Energy Co Ltd, which specializes in low-altitude infrastructure construction and operation services, launched the route as a first step in building a comprehensive low-altitude transportation network across the region.

In collaboration with Shanghai Pudong Software Park and other partners, further plans are underway for additional low-altitude passenger transport routes connecting Shanghai's Lin-gang Special Area, Jiading and Songjiang districts, Jiaying in Zhejiang province, and Kunshan in Jiangsu.

Moreover, in excess of 100 helipads for helicopters and eVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing) aircraft are set to be built across 45 cities, counties and districts in the region, which will complement regional connectivity with airports and high-speed railway stations and contribute to the construction of an integrated three-dimensional transportation network in the Shanghai metropolitan area, said the Pudong new area government.

With solid policy support and continuous technological advancement, the low-altitude economy in China has seen rapid growth and strong momentum in recent years. According to the Civil Aviation Administration of China, the nation's low-altitude economy is expected to reach 1.5 trillion yuan (\$207 billion) in 2025 and expand to 3.5 trillion yuan by 2035.

"Low-altitude transport is a core application scenario in the low-altitude economy, and many general aviation companies and local governments are making efforts in this sector. The traditional helicopter is currently still the main transportation equipment. Though with continuous technological advances and improvements in infrastructure and rules, low-altitude transportation using the new eVTOL aircraft will become a common option for the masses," said Dong Zhiyi, an expert on low-altitude economy.

Shanghai has been making efforts to boost the high-quality growth of its low-altitude economy. In August, the Shanghai government released an action plan for the sector, highlighting the construction of a comprehensive industrial system with a core industrial scale exceeding 50 billion yuan by 2027.

In November, the Shanghai Municipal Transportation Commission unveiled another implementation plan, aiming to establish at least 400 low-altitude flight routes by the end of 2027 to help achieve the city's ambitions of building a "city of sky".

Toy manufacturing shifting inland due to rising labor costs

By YANG JUN in Guiyang
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Now that work has resumed after the Spring Festival holiday, a toy factory in Southwest China's Guizhou province is racing to complete international orders booked through the year's end, about 70 percent of which are from the United States.

In light of US President Donald Trump's new tariff policies, company head Ma Mingjiang expressed concern for export-driven businesses like his.

"Last year, our output reached 57 million yuan (\$7.85 million) and our target for 2025 is 60 million. However, shifts in the international landscape could affect us," he said.

Songtao Qiaoji Toys Co Ltd, which mainly produces plush toys, serves as an OEM (original equipment manufacturer) for Disney brands such as Mickey and Minnie. "Our export orders remain robust," Ma noted, adding that about 70 percent of the company's orders come from the US, with most of the remainder from European Union countries.

As a labor-intensive industry, toy manufacturing, once concentrated in southern regions like Guangdong province, is shifting inland due to rising labor costs.

"We moved because of favorable policies and abundant labor resources. Labor costs are roughly 80 percent of those in Guangdong, and most of our workers are in their twenties and thirties," Ma told local media, referring to Songtao Miao autonomous county in Guizhou.

To cut labor costs and boost local employment, the company has adopted a "headquarters plus rural micro-factory" model. "Under our current setup, the headquarters handles orders while the micro-factories manage production. This model efficiently channels orders and creates rural jobs," he said.

The firm now operates seven sites across townships, generating more than 1,000 jobs, with the headquarters coordinating orders, sales and technical support.

"Last year, Songtao's toy industry generated an output value of around 400 million yuan and

employed roughly 5,000 workers. More related industries are expected to move in," said Wu Chengkai, deputy director of the enterprise service center of the Songtao Miao autonomous county economic development zone.

To attract industries relocating from coastal areas, the local government has provided substantial support in recruitment and factory land allocation.

"This year, our goal for the toy industry is an output value of 500 million yuan and export volumes exceeding 80 million yuan," Wu added.

International pressures, however, are now making their way to inland export enterprises. "Although our orders this year are stable, the US tariffs have a direct impact," Ma said.

"The outlook for toy exports remains uncertain. We need to strengthen our capabilities and gradually develop our own products to expand our market, but this shift is challenging for a company long dependent on contract manufacturing."

Liu Boqian contributed to this story.

Delicious delights



Food on display at an international restaurant, hot pot ingredients and supplies exhibition, which opened on Monday in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. YANG BO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Briefly

Marine economy hits milestone in 2024

China's marine economy achieved a significant milestone in 2024, with its gross ocean product exceeding 10 trillion yuan (\$1.4 trillion) for the first time, according to data released by the Ministry of Natural Resources. An annual report by the ministry shows that GOP reached 10.54 trillion yuan in 2024, marking an increase of 5.9 percent from the previous year, while

demonstrating robust growth across multiple sectors.

Loans to small firms see robust growth

Official data showed that China saw robust growth in the outstanding sum of loans to small and micro companies by the end of 2024 amid government efforts to encourage inclusive financing. By the end of the fourth quarter of last year, the bal-

ance of loans issued by banking financial institutions to small and micro firms totaled 81.4 trillion yuan (\$11.4 trillion), according to the National Financial Regulatory Administration. Outstanding loans to small and micro companies with a credit limit of 10 million yuan or less reached 33.3 trillion yuan, surging 14.7 percent year-on-year, data from the administration showed.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



An image shows an offshore wind farm in Guangdong province. As of the third quarter of 2024, a total of 39.1 million kilowatts of offshore wind power capacity in China had been connected to the grid. ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ACWA Power charges ahead in China's green energy sector

Nation 'represents a key opportunity' for Saudi company in clean power biz

By ZHENG XIN
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ACWA Power, a Riyadh, Saudi Arabia-based energy and water desalination giant, is set to deepen its foothold in China's rapidly growing renewable energy sector.

Following years of collaboration with Chinese firms in third-party markets, ACWA Power has formally entered China's renewable energy landscape, securing agreements for over 1 gigawatt of renewable energy projects across several provinces in the country, eyeing a multidecade investment strategy focused on solar, wind, desalination and green hydrogen, said a top company executive.

"China, now the world's largest renewable energy market, represents a key opportunity for ACWA Power to scale its expertise in green energy solutions," said ACWA Power's founder and chairman, Mohammad A. Abunayyan.

"China is leading the way in clean energy, and its commitment to energy transition aligns perfectly with ACWA Power's ambitions. We are confident that by combining our world-class technology with China's strong manufacturing base and policy support, we can make renewable energy more affordable and accessible," he said.

“China is leading the way in clean energy, and its commitment to energy transition aligns perfectly with ACWA Power's ambitions.”

Mohammad A. Abunayyan, founder and chairman of ACWA Power

As a formal entry into China's renewable energy market, the Middle East energy conglomerate partnered with two of China's major renewable power producers — Sungrow Renewables and Mingyang Smart Energy — in January, to jointly develop and invest in solar and wind projects that will contribute to China's ambitious decarbonization targets.

Abunayyan said the company's

expansion in China is a natural evolution of its global strategy.

"Our goal has always been to deliver affordable, sustainable and reliable power and desalinated water to the world. Our long-term partnership with Chinese companies — especially in technologies like solar, desalination and hydrogen — has been a cornerstone of that mission."

ACWA Power plans to invest heavily in research and development in China in the years to come, particularly in desalination technology, green hydrogen and electrification.

"Our innovation center in China will be a hub for developing cutting-edge solutions in water desalination, hydrogen and electrification. The Chinese market offers immense potential, not just in terms of scale, but also in the country's technical expertise and talent," he said.

Industry experts believe this move reflects the company's ambition to secure a larger stake in China's green energy transition.

Wang Lining, director of the oil market department under the economics and technology research institute of China National Petroleum Corp, said global energy companies are increasingly targeting China due to its rapid advancements in new energy technologies and its strong commitment to green energy transformation.

"China's ambitious carbon neutrality goals, coupled with substantial investments in renewable energy infrastructure — such as

solar, wind and electric vehicles — make it an enticing market for international firms. By entering China's expanding green energy sector, global energy companies can not only diversify their portfolios, but also tap into the world's largest energy market, positioning themselves at the forefront of the global energy shift," Wang said.

Looking ahead, Abunayyan envisions ACWA Power playing a critical role in both the renewable energy and desalination sectors in China, with an eye toward expanding its asset base.

"By 2030, we aim to have \$250 billion in assets under management, with \$30 billion of that coming from our operations in China. This is just the beginning," he noted.

Despite challenges, including the complexities of securing long-term power purchase agreements and integrating renewable energy into China's vast grid system, Abunayyan expressed confidence in the country's ability to overcome obstacles.

"China has always been a leader in turning ambition into action. We believe in its vision, and we're here to stay for the long term," he said.

"For ACWA Power, 2025 is critical as the company works to solidify its position in China's energy market and expand its renewable energy footprint globally. Success in China will be the foundation for our future ambitions worldwide, and we're just getting started."

Innovative forces seen as key to driving rural vitalization

BEIJING — China aims to cultivate new quality productive forces through technological innovation to empower modern agriculture, a policy priority that has been underscored in this year's "No 1 central document", which was released on Sunday.

The blueprint document is the first policy statement released by China's central authorities each year. And this year, the nation plans to leverage scientific innovation to inject impetus into the modernization of agriculture, amid China's rapid advancements in biotech and smart farming equipment.

Policy support

China's "No 1 central document" for 2025 outlines its priorities in deepening rural reforms, and takes solid steps to advance all-around rural vitalization.

The document emphasizes the importance of developing new quality productive forces in agriculture according to local conditions, and calls for the cultivation of leading high-tech agricultural enterprises and the acceleration of breakthroughs in seed varieties.

The country will support the development of smart agriculture and expand the application scenarios of artificial intelligence, big data and low-altitude technologies, according to the document.

Sunday's release is a top-level development framework for the cultivation of new quality productive forces in the field of agriculture, said Jin Wencheng, director of the Research Center for the Rural Economy, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

The document stresses the importance of improving the agricultural sci-tech innovation system, and of nurturing agri-tech talent and emerging enterprises, while accelerating the large-scale application of agricultural sci-tech achievements, Jin said.

To address barriers hindering the application of new technologies and product commercialization, the country will establish a modern institutional framework that aligns with the development needs of new quality productive forces in agriculture.

He noted that a regional approach to the transformation and modernization of traditional agriculture is needed, as it balances the adoption of new technologies with employment stability.

Seed revolution

Seed innovation is crucial to China's agricultural modernization, and the document emphasizes the importance of accelerating breakthroughs in seed varieties through the country's key agricultural research platforms, and of advancing the industrialization of biological breeding.

Technology has been boosting the seed industry, said Ru Zheng-gang, a professor at the Henan

389.7
kilograms per
mu

national average grain yield in 2023

Institute of Science and Technology, citing the country's improvements in grain yields over the decades.

Official data show that the national average grain yield stood at 389.7 kilograms per mu (0.067 hectares) in 2023, an increase of 321.1 kilograms per mu compared to 1949.

"The quality and breeding speeds of crop varieties are important factors affecting grain yields," Ru said, stressing the importance of leveraging new varieties and technologies to boost total grain yield and ensure the country's food security.

Ru also noted that interactive collaboration among farmers, agricultural researchers and enterprises has facilitated synergistic development between supply and demand, enhancing agricultural productivity and efficacy.

Industrial upgrade

Beyond seeds, rural industries are reinventing themselves through storytelling and tech integration.

Zhejiang's Lizu village, for example, has transformed its local pears into a "sweet industry" by branding itself with intellectual-property terms like the name of its cultural mascot — Zu'er — and blending farm products with tourism and entertainment, according to Jin Jing, who is in charge of the village's business operations and often dubbed the CEO of Lizu.

To stimulate innovative rural industries, the village has established innovation spaces that combine entrepreneurial mentorship, incubation and e-commerce training to provide tailored policy support and funding resources for entrepreneurs who are willing to lay down roots in rural regions.

Locals have also jumped on the startup bandwagon, forming a multitude of wealth-creation industries. In 2024, the local per capita disposable income reached 66,000 yuan (\$9,206).

And the changes in Lizu can be seen as a microcosm of rural vitalization in Zhejiang province. Rural industries across the province have attracted 80,000 young entrepreneurs, over half of whom were born after 1990.

To attract talent, Jin stressed the importance of building incubation platforms, and of introducing policy incentives and resources to boost entrepreneurship.

"The countryside needs young people, and young people need the countryside even more," Jin said, calling on more young people to contribute to rural vitalization.

XINHUA

Zeiss Vision sees 'golden' decade of growth in country

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

Zeiss Vision will remain dedicated to its investment in China, one of the top priority markets for the German manufacturer of eyeglass lenses and ophthalmic instruments, a senior executive of the company said during an exclusive interview in Shanghai.

The company will integrate its global expertise with local strategies to align with the demands of the Chinese market, explore and expand new business areas, and shape the future market, said Sven Hermann, a member of the executive board of the 179-year-old Zeiss Group.

"This year marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the China Optometric and Optical Association, and Zeiss Vision Care has been rooted in China for 30 years," said Hermann, who is also president and CEO of Zeiss Consumer Markets.

"We are honored to have witnessed

“... we have full confidence in our sustainable prosperity in China and our contribution to the high-quality development of the vision care industry.”

Sven Hermann, member of the executive board of Zeiss Group

the prosperous development of the industry in China, and we have full confidence in our sustainable prosperity in China and our contribution to the high-quality development of the vision care industry," he said during this year's China (Shanghai) International Optics Fair (SIOF), which concluded on Saturday.

Hermann noted that the company

expects China, a fast-growth market, to become its largest market and the biggest contributor for Zeiss Vision Care.

"By closely understanding the needs of Chinese consumers, we will innovatively introduce diversified products, especially those that meet digital trends. Also, based on a deep understanding of consumers, we will adapt marketing strategies that meet the market need, thereby deepening our brand influence," he said.

"We will be growing with our customers in China. We believe that we will see a golden decade of growth of eyecare in China and us focusing on delivering superior eyecare to deliver astonishing growth," he said.

Data by market consultancy Frost & Sullivan showed the number of people with refractive errors and cataracts in China will reach 769 million in 2025, and the demand for ophthalmic diagnosis and treatments will continue to increase.

According to China Insights Consultancy, the size of the ophthalmic

market in China reached 223.1 billion yuan (\$30.7 billion) last year, and is expected to exceed 250 billion yuan in 2025.

Zeiss has invested in six legal entities in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, covering a diverse range of businesses in the optical field with a total cumulative investment of nearly 4.1 billion yuan. It has established a comprehensive and sustainable eye health industry ecosystem encompassing such key functions as product design, research and development, manufacturing, personalized customization and sales.

Hermann said this is having a positive impact on the industry, driving technological innovation and progress.

During the past two fiscal years, 15 percent of the company's revenues were spent on R&D, which laid the foundation for the success and continued expansion of the company's technology and market leadership, said Hermann.

At this year's SIOF, the company



Visitors gather at the Zeiss booth during an expo in Shanghai on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

launched the Zeiss DuraVision Gold UV coating that features innovative breakthroughs in aesthetics, performance and cleanability.

In recent years, to address societal concerns in China regarding myopia management among teenagers and presbyopia management, the company launched key products to

meet consumer needs. For example, Zeiss MyoCare lenses with C.A.R.E. technology significantly slow axial elongation. Also, Zeiss Progressive Light 2 Lenses are an ideal choice for first-time progressive wearers, allowing users to focus easily and comfortably on both near and far objects.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

By ZHU WENQIAN

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Young Chinese consumers have shown a growing interest in outdoor activities such as cycling, fishing and hiking, enabling them to get closer to nature as the weather warms up and driving a rapid growth in sales of outdoor sporting equipment and accessories.

Besides traditional outdoor sports brands that focus on pure outdoor activities and emphasize the professional attributes of their products, a growing number of new outdoor sports brands have emerged in China over the past few years and they have integrated with more outdoor lifestyles and related mentality, said LeadLeo Research Institute, a market research provider.

With the rise of outdoor sports as a lifestyle, Sanlitun Taikoo Li, a shopping complex in downtown Beijing, is gradually transforming its underground level of the south area into a gathering place for outdoor sports brands.

Domestic outdoor gear and apparel maker Uppervoid has launched its first brick-and-mortar store in North China at Sanlitun Taikoo Li. Before that, outdoor sports brands such as New Balance and tennis sporting goods maker Wilson opened their stores in the same area in a bid to attract more young customers.

"Chinese consumers have been paying more attention to the design and styles of outdoor sports products and participants have shifted from professionals to the general public," said Zheng Zijiong, an analyst of LeadLeo. "Both professional and leisure settings of outdoor sports have their own participants, and the niche and mass markets have coexisted. Many young female consumers living in top-tier cities have become the main group of consumers."

This year, the market size of the outdoor sports sector in China is expected to top 3 trillion yuan (\$413 billion), according to a report on the development of the country's outdoor sports sector released by the General Administration of Sport of China late last year.

Taking a short trip to suburban areas and going for outdoor activities have become a popular weekend lifestyle for young people, driving growing demand for outdoor sports gear.

In the first week after the Spring Festival holiday this year, the online search volume of cycling equipment such as bicycles and helmets surged 284 percent over the previous week, and the search volume of fishing equipment jumped 93 percent week-on-week, according to Xianyu, Alibaba Group's online trading platform for secondhand goods.

Compared with purchasing new products at their original prices, young people have been interested in buying secondhand outdoor equipment or renting goods to save money and achieve circular consumption. Besides outdoor sports gear, drones, Polaroid, Fuji cameras, and other types of camera equipment for spring outings have also seen growth in sales, Xianyu said.

Besides growing demand from the public, the outdoor sports sector has also gained support from favorable government policies.

Earlier this month, a new guideline said that China aims to develop its outdoor sports sector and culti-



Young Chinese show growing interest in outdoor activities

This year, market size of outdoor sports sector in China expected to top 3 trillion yuan



ivate new economic growth points by building about 100 high-quality outdoor sporting venues and destinations by 2030, according to the National Development and Reform Commission and the General Administration of Sport of China.

The guideline noted that China plans to build internationally renowned outdoor sports destinations with well-equipped facilities and high-quality services, and China aims to organize different kinds of sporting events and competitions at such venues.

China also plans to organize more national and mass-market sporting

competitions and strengthen international cooperation in organizing such events, the guideline said.

"With favorable national policies and the continuous building of outdoor sports facilities, the number of outdoor sports participants is expected to continuously grow and the sector is foreseen to embrace a golden period of growth," Zheng of LeadLeo said.

He added that in the next few years, more domestic outdoor sports brands are expected to gradually enter the mid- to high-end market, and consumers' recognition of domestic brands is foreseen to

increase. Besides, the mergers and acquisitions of overseas brands by top Chinese companies will drive further changes in the competitive landscape.

China's outdoor sports sector has been growing rapidly. From 2018 to 2022, the compound annual growth rate of the sector reached 27.1 percent, according to LeadLeo.

In the past few years, the outdoor sports sector has gradually transformed from a niche sector to a sector that covers all kinds of consumers. Participants have shifted from pursuing professionalism and excitement to pursuing socializing and relaxation, and from challenging and conquering nature to enjoying nature, said LeadLeo.

For instance, fishing, traditionally an outdoor sport favored by middle-aged and the elderly, has increasingly attracted the attention of young people, as they regard it as a way of getting close to nature and relaxing.

Shangdao Fishing Line Co Ltd, a Jinhua, Zhejiang province-based fishing line maker, said it has seen growing sales revenue in the past year, fueled by a growing interest in fishing from more people at home and abroad.

During the one-year period until February, sales of Shangdao Fishing Line jumped over 120 percent year-on-year, and it has seen demand from every region of the country, including those in inland areas. In particular, the order volume of fishing lines from coastal areas such as Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Fujian and Guangdong provinces has been higher, it said.

"The market of fishing gear is con-

stantly expanding and becoming more competitive, as more people are venturing outdoors for leisure and entertainment, and the sport has become more popular among young people, driven by the promotion of some online celebrities," said He Yudi, general manager of Shangdao Fishing Line.

"For consumers who purchased fishing line products online, those who were aged between 30 and 45 accounted for 40 percent of the total, and most of them are male. There are also a considerable number of female buyers, while many bought the products as gifts for their fathers and partners," He said.

He added that the company has been upgrading the materials it used, and added sensors to the development of fishing lines to help better discover fishing mines. The company also cooperates with Wenzhou University to apply more new technologies into the development of the products.

In addition, Shangdao Fishing Line has been constantly expanding its overseas markets by exporting products to Southeast Asia, North America and Europe. Sales have been rosy in countries such as Malaysia, South Korea, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and Canada, it said.

The company said it has participated in a number of professional fishing and outdoor sports exhibitions in China and abroad, and netted a large volume of orders at those expos. To further expand its overseas business, it recently established a team that focuses on cross-border e-commerce business, hoping to sell products through e-commerce platforms such as eBay.

Top: Sea fishing enthusiasts try their luck in Yantai, Shandong province, in October.

Above: People ride bicycles in Wuhu, Anhui province, in February.

XIAO BENXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

27.1 percent

compound annual growth rate of the outdoor sports sector from 2018 to 2022

By ZHU WENQIAN

The domestic tourism market has entered an off-peak period with declining prices of hotel rooms and flight tickets, providing travelers with the opportunity to take trips that cost less and feature smaller crowds.

After the Spring Festival holiday, the passenger flow of popular domestic tourist cities in various regions has gradually declined, and the prices of flights have dropped accordingly.

For instance, a one-way flight from Beijing to Chengdu, Sichuan province; Lanzhou, Gansu province; or Harbin, Heilongjiang province, all carry a price tag of around 200 yuan (\$27.54), excluding airport construction fees and fuel costs. A one-way flight from Beijing to Hainan or Sanya, in the tropical island of Hainan province, is around 300 yuan, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

The elderly who have flexible schedules often embark on trips during this period, and they prefer independent travel and choose destinations largely based on prices.

In-depth tours of Yunnan province, Fujian province, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area have been favored by senior travelers, Qunar said.

"The tourism market has entered a long slack season and it will last until the next holiday, which is Qingming Festival, also known as Tomb-Sweeping Day in early April," said Xiao Peng, a Qunar researcher. "March will be a period that is inexpensive and not crowded, suitable for college students, senior travelers and office employees who take annual holidays off work to travel."

He added that during this period, small towns in China often become popular with tourists. For instance, Zibo in Shandong province and Tianshui in Gansu province became viral online in 2023 and 2024, respectively, with their unique features. Domestic scenic spots should provide good services during the off-peak season so that they can attract more travelers in the peak season.

Meanwhile, prices of international flights have also dropped significantly after the Spring Festival holiday. In late February, some

Travel costs decline as market enters off-peak period



Tourists take photos at a park in Chongqing in February.

HE PENGLEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

international flights such as those connecting Tianjin with Osaka, Tokyo and Seoul dropped to 180 yuan for a one-way flight, according to Tianjin Airlines.

For long-haul flights that connect Tianjin with London or Sydney, the price could be as low as 530 yuan for a one-way flight, and the price reduction of those routes has been higher, the carrier said.

In addition, as ice and snow tourism is nearing its end, the price declines of flights to some ice and snow tourism destinations have been more significant. Flights from multiple domestic cities to the ice city of Harbin had 90 percent off from their original prices, industry players found.

From Feb 14 to Feb 28, the prices of hotels near some popular skiing resorts in Heilongjiang province, Jilin province and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, dropped 10 percent on average over the peak period of this skiing season. The price decline can be as high as 50 percent, according to Tongcheng Travel, a Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

Despite the skiing season in Chi-

na coming to an end, the search volume of products to some popular skiing resorts have been growing, Tongcheng Travel said.

"The consumer groups for skiing are relatively fixed, and their repurchasing rates have been high. Their preference of a certain skiing resort depends on multiple elements such as transportation, accommodation and catering services," said Cheng Xin, a Tongcheng researcher.

Feng, a senior skier from Beijing, who has been skiing for nearly 10 years, said he would take skiing trips several times a year.

"At the beginning of a skiing season, I usually go skiing in suburban Beijing for my regular training as it is easier and saves money. Then, I often go to some more advanced skiing resorts in Heilongjiang or Xinjiang to play and try different techniques," Feng said.

In the 2024-25 winter season, the number of passenger trips related to ice and snow tours in China is expected to reach 520 million, with revenue in the ice and snow leisure tourism market likely to exceed 630 billion yuan, the China Tourism Academy said.

COMMENT

Editorials

UNSC vote welcome weather vane showing winds of change blowing through crisis

The Ukraine crisis is a complex interplay of historical, political, economic and social factors, exacerbated by external influences and geopolitical considerations.

Ukraine's strategic location, its historical ties with Russia, and the West's efforts to expand its influence in Eastern Europe have all played a role in triggering the conflict that has now entered its fourth year. Resolving the crisis and establishing a durable European security framework requires not only promoting dialogue between the two sides and upholding international law, but also working diligently and in good faith to address the root causes.

As China's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Fu Cong said ahead of the voting on two General Assembly resolutions on Monday, a binding peace deal should be acceptable to all parties, and Europe should come together to address the root causes of the crisis. "At this critical juncture, we are counting on the international community to create an enabling atmosphere for a political solution to the crisis and for the General Assembly to help forge consensus for peace among Member States," he said.

The UN Security Council also voted on a resolution on the Ukraine crisis later that day. Drafted by the United States, it was the first resolution on Ukraine to be passed by the Security Council since the outbreak of hostilities in 2022, receiving 10 votes in favor and none against, with five abstentions, all from European countries. The resolution was concise, calling for a swift end to the conflict and lasting peace between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

But it reflects there is a new dynamic at work, as the vote marks the first time that Beijing, Moscow and Washington have been on the same page. This is indicative of a wider consensus between different camps that with both Kyiv and Moscow signaling their willingness to negotiate a peace deal, and the new United States administration intent on acting as a broker in order to secure access to Ukraine's coveted mineral reserves and reset economic and political relations with Russia, a window of opportunity has opened to end the conflict.

Without the change of the US administration and its shift in position on the Ukraine crisis, such a resolution would not have been passed. But it should also be pointed out that the call of the UNSC resolution is exactly what peace-loving countries in the world have been pushing for since the outbreak of the conflict, which is not just a regional conflict but a reflection of broader global tensions, making it one of the most significant geopolitical challenges of the time.

On the same day the UNSC resolution was adopted, President Xi Jinping held a phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which he welcomed the positive efforts made by Russia and relevant parties to resolve the crisis. President Xi also pointed out that soon after the full escalation of the Ukraine crisis, he outlined China's basic position, including four points on what should be done to resolve the crisis, and that China and Brazil, together with other Global South countries, launched the group of Friends for Peace in September with the aim of fostering the right atmosphere and conditions for the political settlement of the crisis.

In fact, Beijing's persistent stance on the Ukraine issue and its commitment to enhancing China-Russia ties have not only made it stand out as an impartial and just voice in the world arena but also lent Moscow support that it badly needed in international organizations, including the UNSC, in the face of the West's previous efforts to portray Russia as an enemy of the entire civilized world.

By insisting on its legitimate right to maintain normal ties with Moscow, Beijing had to endure pressure and criticism from the previous US administration and the Western world at large, which wrongly accused it of enabling Russia's military operations in Ukraine. Hence, it is good to see the US under the newly installed Donald Trump administration make a 180-degree turn in its stance on the Ukraine crisis.

But despite the latest developments, the crisis remains a Gordian knot. China's position on the Ukraine crisis remains consistent and clear; it is committed to building a consensus for ending the conflict and paving the way for peace talks and the establishment of a sustainable security framework in Europe. To that end, it will continue to uphold an objective and fair position and play a constructive role in advancing the political settlement of the crisis.

Make-believe beautiful to some but painful for all

With a firm belief in tariffs being "the greatest thing ever invented", the levy-happy US President Donald Trump has undoubtedly made almost all his foreign leader guests over the past month or so have their respective bite of the saying "One man's meat is another man's poison".

Despite what Trump once called "unbreakable" relations between the United States and France, as well as those between himself and Emmanuel Macron, the visiting French president has not been exempted his share of that Trump treat in the face of what he called the "game-changer's" staunch stance on weaponizing tariffs to ensure "America first".

The Trump administration has pledged sweeping tariffs targeting the European Union, raising wide concerns among its EU allies. Were it for the more pressing Ukraine crisis, the tariff disputes would have been top of the agenda for the meeting between the French and US leaders in Washington.

It was against this backdrop that the French president said in his interview with US media on Monday that the US' priority is its tariffs on China and warned, "Come on. You cannot have a trade war with China and Europe at the same time" insinuating the EU was being wrongly treated.

Yet in a move to show his tariff threats are real, Trump said during their joint news conference at the White House on Monday that sweeping US tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico "will go forward" when a monthlong hold on their implementation expires next week.

Since Trump reiterated his plan to impose so-called reciprocal tariffs in the presence of his French guest, be it Macron or any other leader from the countries and regions targeted by the US' tariff war, they should be awakened to the fact that the US won't bite their China-baited hooks until the Trump administration extorts what it wants from them.

So it is ridiculous that some US pundits have tried to comfort the US allies and partners by claiming that China is the real target, not them. For instance, Kate Kalutkiewicz, who was senior director for international trade policy at the National Economic Council during Trump's first term, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp on Monday, the tariffs Trump has threatened to levy on Canada and Mexico "almost entirely relate to China, and China's nonmarket policies and practices which have enabled this global glut".

The former trade adviser for Trump even admitted that Trump's goal of imposing "maximum pain" on Canada and Mexico is to ensure that the US gets the best deal, indicating he is not happy with the trade pact between the US, Mexico and Canada, which was renegotiated during the first Trump administration and made law in 2020. The short shelf life of such trade deals with the US means weaponizing tariffs to reduce the trade deficit or secure a new deal more favorable to the US is a normalized practice of the incumbent US administration.

But it should be reminded, the US has no longer maintained trade balance since the 1970s as an important economic principle, and that its trade deficit is deliberately created by itself, so the tariff war is a false move from day one.

It is no exaggeration to say that the trade deficit is an indispensable part of the US economy, ensuring its capital closed-loop can continuously reap increasing development dividends from the rest of the world. It is through the dollar-dominated trade settlement and trade deficit that the US dollar circulates around the world. The US then absorbs surplus dollars from various countries by issuing Treasury bonds, thereby filling the trade deficit under the current account. The US thus obtains low-cost financing, and then uses this foreign capital to invest abroad to make capital gains.

The only reason why the US administration still obstinately weaponizes tariffs is that it cannot figure out any better approach that can pull the nerve of the world with the lowest input while effectively distracting domestic attention from the US' real challenges at home, which include belated institutional reforms, widening political and social divides, and rising debts.

No matter how "beautiful" the US leader tries to convince his domestic audience his tariffs are, they are still a tax that must be paid by the US public. There are no winners in any tariff war, there won't be this time either.

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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Global human rights governance calls for cooperation and mutual learning

Since its founding, the People's Republic of China has led its people in making unremitting efforts to fight for dignity, and protect and develop human rights. That has helped China find a path of human rights development suited to its national conditions.

This is why China has the confidence to uphold its view of human rights and promote the improvement of global human rights governance in international forums, the latest one being Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivering a speech by video to a high-level meeting of the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council on Monday.

At a time when global peace, development, security and governance deficits are growing, the promotion and protection of human rights require the joint efforts of all. That is why the building of a community with a shared future for mankind and the initiatives on global develop-

ment, security and civilization put forward by China's top leader have won extensive praise and endorsement.

China is aware that doing its own things well is the basis for its participation in global human rights governance, and that people having a happy life is the greatest human right.

From building a moderately prosperous society in all respects to building the world's largest education, social security and healthcare networks; from developing the whole-process people's democracy to improving the protection for the rights and interests of ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly, and the disabled; from strengthened environmental protection to doubled efforts to give the people a greater sense of gain, happiness and security, China has set an example for the development of human rights in the world.

China believes that no country can impose its cultural traditions and values on others, and that all countries have the right to prioritize the development of human rights in accordance with their actual conditions.

Over the years, China has made Chinese contributions to the realization of the world vision of "human rights for all". Since its inception, the Belt and Road Initiative has fostered thousands of cooperation projects, created numerous jobs for people across countries and lifted tens of millions of people out of poverty. These achievements are China's path to promote the progress of human rights in the world.

China's efforts to promote world peace and development, mutually beneficial cooperation, and common prosperity, are its major contributions to the development of world human rights.

- WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Merz shows the way forward for Europe

Christian Democratic Union leader Friedrich Merz, who, in all likelihood, will be the next chancellor of Germany, is just as clear-eyed about the United States and NATO as French President Emmanuel Macron was in 2019.

"It is clear that this (the US) government does not care much about the fate of Europe," Merz said in a televised address on Sunday night.

In 2019, Macron had in an interview with The Economist mentioned "the brain death of NATO".

In the backdrop of a US focus on "America first" and at a time when US Vice-President JD Vance ques-

tions whether European values are worth defending while mentioning a "threat from within" at the Munich Security Conference, it is very likely that Europe's reliance on the US for security cannot continue for long.

That the US administration has given up its firm support of Ukraine and turned to Russia for bilateral negotiations while excluding Ukraine and the European Union from the talks reveals that the US cares little about Europe's security. The US is acting as if it had never encouraged Ukraine to lean on NATO and the West before the crisis broke out in 2022. For the US, only its

own interests that matter; everything else is disposable.

Which is why Merz's idea of reshaping policies vis-à-vis security is worth cherishing for not only his own country but also the whole of Europe. It's clear that Europe needs to end its long dependence on the US, step up building its own defense capabilities, and even find an alternative to NATO if necessary.

That the White House has said nothing to counter Merz's remarks further necessitates it — after all, Europe is the home of Europeans, independent of the United States.

- ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

DPP fears being neglected piece on US game board

Nobody should doubt that the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party authorities of Taiwan have closely followed the Ukraine crisis since its outbreak three years ago.

When the West's support for Kyiv, along with its harsh sanctions on Russia, seemed to tilt the balance in favor of Ukraine, the previous Tsai Ing-wen authorities of Taiwan hastily compared the island to the Eastern European country, trying to cast a "politically correct" light on their separatist cause and smear Beijing's endeavors to realize national reunification as a threat to "democracy".

However, the United States' about-face in its foreign policy under the Donald Trump administration has in effect divided the West on the Ukraine crisis, which has resulted in the situation developing in a direction that Tsai's successor, Lai Ching-te, increasingly finds unfavorable to

his secessionist cause.

In the past two weeks, Trump has claimed Ukraine "should have never started the war"; and Ukraine "may be Russian someday". He has questioned the legitimacy of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government, and upended the long-standing US position of isolating Russia over the Ukraine crisis by engaging in direct talks with Moscow and voicing positions sounding remarkably like the Kremlin's own.

Although the Lai authorities have tried their best to woo the new US administration, their disappointment with, if not worries about, Trump's abrupt change of US policy on Ukraine, is evident.

Most of the US allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific, including Japan, Australia and the Republic of Korea, now take a balanced stance when it comes to dealing with relations with

the US and China, which has further isolated the Lai authorities.

Lai's anxiety was made clear when he said recently that the island is not a piece on the chessboard of major countries but a chess player at the table along with other parties. But that only served the opposite purpose of exposing his authorities as struggling with the reality that they are losing control of their own fate as the US proves an unreliable backer.

The US and their regional allies and partners are well aware the Ukraine crisis and the Taiwan question are of different nature, with the latter being China's internal affair that brooks no external interference. They are also well aware the DPP authorities' secessionist cause is doomed to failure, as they are nothing but a deserted piece on the board.

- LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Wang Shangkun and Zhu Ying

Europe struggles in US-Russia standoff

The Russia-Ukraine conflict, which witnessed its third anniversary on Feb 24, has become what many say is a geopolitical puzzle, with a "dual-track dilemma" at its core. While the US leads negotiations, the European Union and many of its member states, as well as the United Kingdom, seem sidelined.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, while senior US officials held direct talks with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia recently in an effort to end the three-year-long Russia-Ukraine conflict. The move, following a phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, has raised eyebrows because it bypassed Ukraine and the US' European allies.

By turning the conflict into a proxy war, the US, before Trump entered the White House a second time, intended to weaken Russia and keep European countries bound to NATO. Russia responded by issuing all types of threats, with the EU caught in the middle, unable to lead negotiations and burdened with the conflict's economic costs. This imbalance reveals a stark truth: Europe is losing its strategic voice and its interests are becoming irrelevant in global diplomacy. A conflict which could have been resolved through diplomatic means now threatens to reshape the entire European security framework, as the US wants to use the conflict to reshape transatlantic relations.

This strategy aims not to end the conflict, but freeze it — allowing the US to maintain its strategic dominance over Europe while pushing its economic agenda, for instance, of increasing its energy exports. Europe, caught in this tussle, has become little more than a pawn on the US' chessboard.

Russia, on the other hand, perceives NATO's eastward expansion as an existential threat. It demands a reworking of Europe's security architecture, seeking guarantees that NATO will not expand eastward further and that Ukraine will remain neutral. But the US is unwilling to relinquish its control over Europe, and Russia lacks sufficient leverage to force a change. This has led to a deadlock, with the two sides engaging in a zero-sum game where security and geopolitical compromises clash. The failure to resolve these differences means Europe is left negotiating its future security with no real power to shape the outcome.

The US wants to keep the negotiations within a narrow "Russia-Ukraine ceasefire" framework, avoiding the



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Only by creating a comprehensive security framework can the cycle of war, sanctions and confrontation be broken. If the world is to avoid a new Cold War, countries must work together to build a fairer, more effective and representative global order.

broader issue of Europe's security. Russia, however, insists that Ukraine's fate be tied to a global strategic balance. This mismatch has led to a tactical delay in talks rather than a meaningful resolution, with Europe finding itself excluded from the discussions and further marginalized.

In the early days of the conflict, European countries set up a united front against Russia, imposing sanctions on the country. But this unity masked deeper fractures. The leaderships of Germany and France have weakened, and Eastern Europe's security concerns are growing. Germany's attempt to establish a "European Army" has faltered, unable to counterbalance NATO's dominance and the

US' grip on European energy markets — meaning Europe's quest for strategic autonomy is being thwarted at every turn.

Besides, European countries' sanctions against Russian energy have caused industrial costs to surge, with US liquefied natural gas prices costing four times more than Russian pipeline gas. This has created an economically distorted "bleeding Europe, blood transfusion from the US" situation: Europe suffers while the US makes more profits. To make matters worse, the EU states are divided on how to handle the sanctions, with countries like Hungary calling for a softer approach to Russia. These divisions undermine European countries' global influence, making it harder for the EU to act independently.

The US has demanded that European NATO members spend at least 2 percent of their GDP on defense, but many European countries are unhappy to shoulder this added burden. Protests in France and the rise of far-right groups in Germany show the public is rejecting the idea of paying the price for a US-led war. This growing resentment is making it difficult for Europe to maintain its political and military cohesion, further eroding its influence in global affairs.

The Ukraine crisis has exposed the flaws in the UN Security Council's mechanisms, too. To prevent future conflicts, the global security governance system must be reformed, by, among other things, revitalizing organizations like the Arctic Council and establishing cooperative frameworks to resolve regional conflicts. A new, inclusive global security system can help build a platform for peace and stability, addressing the root causes of conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

At its heart, the Ukraine crisis reflects the clash between US hegemony and Russia's survival instincts, with Europe stuck in the middle. If the "dual-track dilemma" continues, the conflict will persist with grave global consequences that include fractured supply chains and increasing instability. Only by creating a comprehensive security framework can the cycle of war, sanctions and confrontation be broken. If the world is to avoid a new Cold War, countries must work together to build a fairer, more effective and representative global order.

Wang Shangkun is a researcher at the Baize Institute for Strategic Studies, Southwest University of Political Science and Law; and Zhu Ying is a professor at the same institute. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Time to end discrimination against mental illness

A nationwide mental health support hotline — 12356 — will become operational later this year to address the increasing needs of people living with mental illness, according to the National Health Commission.

The move shows the growing demand for mental health services, and the health authorities' determination to more efficiently provide those services. Some better-developed regions already have their local hotlines for mental health services. Under the new arrangement, all city-level areas are required to establish such hotlines staffed by at least two people for at least 18 hours a day to provide mental health education, counseling and other support to people.

Rapid economic growth, urbanization, industrialization, the aging population and pressure of studies have led to an increasing number of mental health cases. Data from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention show that in 2021, the rate of moderate to severe depression in the country was 8.3 percent, meaning about 100 million Chinese have some sort of mental health problem. To make things worse, the center said more teenagers face such problems.

Given the government's governance measures, such a plan can materialize within a few years.

Mental health problems are more challenging to deal with than many diseases not because they are incurable or difficult to control but because most people living with such a condition, or their families, are unwilling to face it squarely. Traditionally, the Chinese people call those living with such a condition *shenjing bing* (neuropath), which is seen as a curse. Worse, people with mental illness are discriminated against. As a result, many living with such a condition refuse to consult a psychologist or psychiatrist even if they realize their condition is treatable and curable.

When my wife was recently hospitalized for a possible heart condition, her roommate was a woman in her late 20s who was admitted to the hospital because she often suffered from heartache. After a thorough check-up for a few days, the doctors concluded that she was physically very healthy. The young woman's mother told us that she knew that her daughter had some mental health issues and that she had been deceiving her to take sedatives. But she flatly refused our suggestion to consult a psychologist or psychiatrist for her daughter.

"If her case is diagnosed, the sky will fall on my family," the mother said as she broke down.

I therefore suspect the figures for people living with mental health problems provided by the CDC disease control center are much smaller than the actual figures, because many, like the mother and daughter, don't consult a doctor or visit a hospital for treatment.

Liu Wei, a former world table tennis champion and now a Peking University professor, has been using her influence to invite present and former world champions to campuses to give lectures on the struggle they went through to build their careers. "I have heard many cases of students committing suicide after having failed in an exam or scared they would fail, or due to the pressure of studies," Liu said. "Through the champions' stories, I want to encourage students to bravely face all the challenges..."

Considering Chinese people's attitude toward mental health, the establishment of the nationwide hotline is a better way to help people in need, because it would enable potential patients to consult counselors without letting other people know.

According to the health commission, more mental health hospitals, special counseling departments and centers, and specialized clinics will be set up in communities for early intervention. Counselors will receive further training to better deal with cases. Given the government's governance measures, such a plan can materialize within a few years.

But we should be aware that the most important and most challenging thing is to raise public awareness of mental health. More awareness campaigns should be launched in communities and workplaces, and special attention should be paid to school and college campuses to better protect our children.

Only when people accept that mental illness is not only controllable but also curable can people living with mental health problems willingly consult counselors or visit a hospital or make use of the hotline and other services. And only when the public realizes that no one is immune from depression or other mental health conditions can discrimination against people with mental illness end.

Mohamad Zreik

BRICS provides new options for global financial order

With Donald Trump returning to the White House, the geopolitical and economic landscape is set to undergo a significant shift, particularly in terms of the US dollar's dominance in global trade. The expansion of BRICS — now known as BRICS plus with the inclusion of countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — has raised concerns in Washington, because the grouping seeks to reduce its member states' reliance on the dollar by using local currency in intra-BRICS trade and possibly creating an alternative global currency.

The new US administration's threat to impose 100 percent tariffs on imports from BRICS member states if they pursue de-dollarization is indicative of the looming ideological battle in global finance.

China, the economic powerhouse within BRICS, has long pushed for free and convenient global trade.

As evidenced by the recent shift toward using BRICS member states' currencies in bilateral trade, the groundwork for an alternative financial system is slowly taking shape. The BRICS New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are already working to provide financing to more countries.

The US administration's threat to impose 100 percent tariffs on goods from BRICS members is part of its strategy to further US interests and



The US administration's aggressiveness might push more countries toward seeking alternatives to the dollar, but it will also deepen global economic fragmentation.

reinforce the dollar's position as the world's reserve currency. His "America first" strategy continues to advocate economic isolationism and maintaining the US' hegemony in the global financing mechanism. By issuing such threats, Trump aims to deter BRICS members from undermining the dollar's supremacy. But this approach might prove counterproductive for the US in the long run.

The global financial system is already showing signs of a gradual shift away from the dollar, and the US administration's confrontational stance could accelerate this shift, because some countries such as Russia and Iran have been

already excluded from the US-led financial system due to sanctions.

Moreover, Trump's proposed tariffs could harm both the US and other economies, because they will increase inflation and raise US households' budget. Products from BRICS members, such as electronics from China, coffee from Brazil and minerals from South Africa, would become more expensive, exacerbating the already fragile global supply chains. This would disproportionately affect lower-income families in the US, contradicting Trump's promise to "Make America Great Again".

While BRICS has established alternative financial institutions, the push for a single, unified currency faces significant obstacles. The economic disparity within BRICS — from China's booming export to India's growing service sector and Brazil's commodity-based industries — makes the creation of a single trading currency a big challenge.

Despite this, the grouping's members share a common desire to reduce their vulnerability to US sanctions and its financial control mechanisms. However, the dollar's dominance is deeply entrenched in the global economy, and despite efforts by BRICS plus, alternatives are unlikely to rival the dollar's status in the near future — although the IMF's Special Drawing Rights or block-chain-based payment systems could emerge as regional solutions, the global shift away from the dollar will be slow and uneven.

China's approach to BRICS plus has been pragmatic, seeking to build a cooperative framework rather than antagonizing the West. As seen in its diplomatic stance, China emphasizes mutual development and prosperity through cooperation rather than confrontation. This contrasts with Russia's more combative stance, challenging Western financial hegemony.

As the world braces for Trump's next aggressive move, the future of global finance will be shaped by the complex interplay between geopolitics and economics. The global financial system's inertia, coupled with the dollar's entrenched role in global trade, means that any significant challenge to the dollar's dominance is still years away.

The US administration's aggressiveness might push more countries toward seeking alternatives to the dollar, but it will also deepen global economic fragmentation. In the end, the US policies may end up accelerating the diversification of global trade currencies — not necessarily to the benefit of the US, but perhaps in a more fragmented and less predictable global financial order.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

NIU XINCHUN

Endogenous motivation

China's Middle East policy is driven by its economic interests in the region and not motivated by an intention to undermine the US' influence

In recent years, divisions among countries over major global hotspot issues have deepened. Notably, the Ukraine crisis — renewing its escalation since 2021 — and the longstanding Israel-Palestine conflict have contributed to these widening rifts. Against this backdrop, developing nations are actively seeking to position themselves in a shifting world order.

The expansion of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization mark the growing prominence of the Global South. And the Middle East has also emerged as a region of significant economic transformation and opportunity.

With President Xi Jinping's attendance at the first China-Arab States Summit and the China-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit, as well as his State visit to Saudi Arabia in December 2022, China-Arab relations have entered a new era of robust growth.

At the same time, to circumvent the unpredictable high tariffs imposed by the United States on Chinese products, Chinese photovoltaic and electric vehicle companies have turned to Arab nations to build factories and achieve localization before entering US and European markets.

More importantly, economic cooperation between China and Middle East countries has a strong endogenous driving force.

Middle East countries are pursuing re-industrialization while Chinese enterprises are exploring overseas markets outside the US and Europe. Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region have ambitious plans to transform their economies by developing their tourism, trade, industry and technology sectors, which require huge industrial capacity and infrastructure building. The Gulf nations' vision for energy transition and China's new energy prowess are a perfect match.

Gulf nations are keen to lead in new

energy, with EV, energy storage, hydrogen and carbon capture their focus areas. For its part, China is expanding its investment overseas, especially in Global South countries. Although still dwarfed by developed countries, China's overseas economic presence is growing fast. According to Foreign Direct Investment Markets, a greenfield FDI tracking database, China's overseas greenfield investments reached a record \$162 billion in 2023, up from only \$50 billion in 2022.

It is noteworthy that most of these investments flowed to the Global South, with the Middle East the top destination, marking a strategic pivot in China's outward investment. In the past, the country's investment and financing in the Middle East was insignificant, far lower than its trade with the region. But in 2023, three of the top five destinations for China's overseas greenfield investment were in the Middle East — Saudi Arabia (\$16.8 billion), Egypt (\$8.3 billion) and Morocco (\$9.8 billion).

Arab countries' investment in China has been surging as well. Before 2020, the Arab world's investment in China was negligible. In 2021, the investment of Arab sovereign wealth funds in China was \$110 million, rising to \$1.05 billion in 2022 and \$2.3 billion in 2023. In the first 10 months of 2024 alone, Arab sovereign wealth funds invested \$9 billion in China, accounting for 16 percent of their global total investments. It took less than three years for the share to grow from 1 percent to 16 percent. These figures underscore that economic interests are a key driving force behind China's increased engagement in the Middle East.

While some attribute China's policy in the region to strategic rivalry with the US, the economic data present a contrasting narrative. Against the backdrop of China-US competition, scholars in both countries tend to overestimate the threat posed by the other country. But a rational and objective evaluation best serves the national interests of both countries, while overestimating or underestimating the

threats is detrimental.

If decision-makers fail to accurately assess the intensity of China-US competition in the Middle East, they will not grasp the true nature of China's Middle East policy, thereby missing opportunities and wasting resources.

China-US confrontation mainly unfolds in the form of China's moral criticism of the US, and the US' attempted suppression of China's military and technological development. Although it represents only a small part of the two countries' involvement in Middle East affairs, competition occupies the majority of media headlines, leading scholars, politicians and the public to believe that confrontation is the mainstay of the two countries' Middle East policies.

In fact, China-US competition is not prominent in trade and investment. The US does not seek to challenge China's leadership in trade and investment, while China does not threaten the US' dominance in security and technology. But these areas are the "silent majority" in public opinion, and do not draw enough public attention.

It can be seen that China-US competition is not the major determining factor in China's Middle East policy. Instead, it is China's political, economic and security interests in the region that form the endogenous motivation for its engagement with the Middle East.

China and Arab countries are walking toward each other. Economic ties remain the locomotive of China-Middle East relations, and China is also trying to substantially participate in the political process of the region.

In summary, the evidence points to a policy primarily propelled by endogenous economic imperatives rather than a deliberate attempt to counter US influence.

Contrary to the Western narrative that China leverages the Middle East to influence major power relations, it is major country interactions that shape China's interests in the Middle East.

Western scholars reverse the cause and



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

effect, thinking that China's Middle East policy is not in line with US interests or is detrimental to US interests, and conclude that China's Middle East policy is intended to undermine the US' influence in the region, which is a typical US-centric world-view.

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JIANG QINGQUAN AND GUO XIAOZHEN

Smart oversight

BRICS is a vital driving force in advancing the development of AI governance frameworks

The international political and economic landscape is undergoing rapid transformation, marking a new era of great development, change and adjustment. Notably, the BRICS countries, as representatives of emerging markets and large developing nations, have become a significant force on the global stage.

Currently, the BRICS countries account for 45 percent of the world's population, cover approximately 35 percent of the global territory, and contribute around 35 percent to global GDP based on purchasing power parity.

The new generation of information technology, centered on artificial intelligence, is driving a new industrial revolution. According to International Data Corporation, by 2030, AI is projected to contribute around \$19.9 trillion to global GDP, boosting global GDP growth by about 3.5 percent. The rapid development of AI is also causing structural changes in employment, with 23 percent of jobs expected to be transformed by 2027, and around 69 million new job opportunities created. AI is profoundly influencing the development trajectory of all human societies and reshaping the global economic landscape.

While the development of AI is having profound impacts, it also poses a series of unprecedented challenges, necessitating global cooperation to address them together.

For the BRICS countries, there are notable differences in their stages of development and industrial bases. As the largest developing country globally, China has made significant progress in AI technology and industry, boasting a group of internationally competitive AI companies and research institutions. While other BRICS countries are actively promoting AI development, their overall strength and technological level still need improvement. The developmental disparities among the BRICS member states are evident not only in technology development but also in the governance of AI.

The BRICS countries face the challenge of unifying the technical standards in global AI governance. Given AI's cross-border nature and widespread impact, establishing unified technical standards is crucial for ensuring interoperability and security. However, differences in technological levels

and industrial development among the BRICS countries, coupled with limited influence in international standard-setting, make this task particularly difficult. This could lead to technical barriers but also hinder global AI technology exchange and cooperation.

The BRICS countries face challenges in their regulatory lag and enforcement capacity in AI governance. With the rapid development and widespread application of AI technology, regulatory measures often lag behind its practical use, making it difficult to effectively address potential security risks. Additionally, the BRICS countries face deficiencies in enforcement capacity and resources, which may result in ineffective regulation and even trigger a series of security and ethical issues.

Further, there are differences in values and cultural backgrounds among the BRICS countries. These differences can lead to inconsistent perceptions and stances on AI ethics, privacy protection, and data security, affecting the formation of a global consensus on AI governance. For instance, some countries may prioritize personal privacy and data protection, while others may focus more on technological development and application innovation. Such value-based disagreements can make it difficult for the BRICS countries to adopt a unified position on AI governance issues, increasing the complexity of cooperation.

There are also challenges in terms of international cooperation for the BRICS countries. Because of national interests and security concerns, there is weak AI cooperation among them. For example, since 2020, Chinese companies have faced increasing scrutiny from the Indian authorities. Relatedly, in 2020, the Indian government banned 59 mobile apps developed by Chinese companies, including TikTok, WeChat and UC Browser. In 2023, Indian authorities seized a total of 55.51 billion

Indian rupees (\$640 million) from Xiaomi. The momentum of AI development is strong. The BRICS countries should strengthen their coordination and cooperation on AI to steadfastly advance global AI governance together.

In 2023, the Brazilian Academy of Sciences released ABC Lança Recomendações Sobre Inteligência Artificial No Brasil. In the same year, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global AI Governance Initiative. The above policies imply the BRICS members have generally reached a consensus and taken action on AI legislation, contributing BRICS wisdom and strength to the healthy growth of AI. The BRICS members should jointly discuss and formulate unified AI policies, establish a specialized legislative coordination body and hold regular meetings to discuss the objectives, priorities and progress of AI legislation. This will promote the development of global AI governance in a more unified direction.

To foster complementarity in technological strengths and resource sharing, the BRICS countries can jointly organize AI technology forums to promote technical exchanges and academic cooperation. The first meeting of the China-BRICS Artificial Intelligence Development and Cooperation Center marks a new starting point for collaboration in AI among the BRICS countries. The BRICS countries can also establish an AI technology sharing platform, promoting the sharing and application of technological achievements among themselves. For instance, the BRICS-led New Development Bank is also investing in AI applications in the BRICS countries, such as "smart metro development" in China. With the current expansion of the BRICS group, the potential for BRICS-led investments and cooperation will increase. Bilateral investment in AI among the BRICS countries, such as the \$1 billion Russia-China Technology Investment Fund established in 2021, may increase as well.

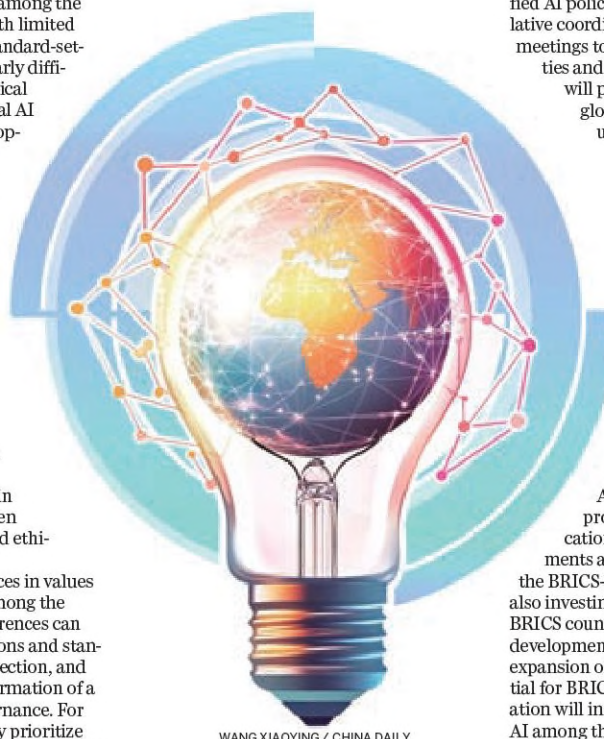
The BRICS countries can jointly advocate for and promote the establishment of a global AI governance mechanism, develop international standards and norms for AI governance, and clarify the requirements and specifications for the R&D, application and management of AI technology. For instance, in 2023, the BRICS countries established an AI study group, recognizing AI as a distinct area of concern and committing resources to jointly mitigate risks and develop AI governance frameworks and standards. What's more, the BRICS countries can also drive the construction of a global AI regulatory system, strengthening the oversight and enforcement of AI

technology to ensure its application aligns with laws, regulations and ethical standards, thereby promoting the healthy and orderly development of AI technology worldwide. For example, in 2024, Chinese researchers released the AI Governance International Evaluation Index, assessing the level of AI development, governance tools and effectiveness among the BRICS countries.

Talent cultivation and international cooperation in the field of AI are also being emphasized. First, China will implement the capacity-building program for BRICS digital education, establishing 10 overseas learning centers in the BRICS countries over the next five years, providing training opportunities for 1,000 educational administrators and faculty members. Second, Xiamen has launched China's first cross-border e-commerce air cargo line to BRICS cities, established the "China-BRICS Science and Innovation Incubation Park for the New Era", and formed a blockchain industry alliance among other BRICS cooperation demonstration projects. Furthermore, the BRICS countries should jointly initiate the "digital BRICS builders" program to support students in conducting research in AI, data science and cybersecurity. What's more, relying on BRICS partnership on the new industrial revolution, the BRICS PartNIR Innovation Center based in Xiamen keeps developing multilingual online and offline AI training programs to cultivate digital talents in the BRICS countries, which can be a good example for other BRICS countries. All in all, by strengthening talent cultivation and international cooperation, the BRICS countries will be able to continuously enhance their competitiveness and influence in the field of AI, contributing more wisdom and strength to global AI governance.

The BRICS countries are actively collaborating in emerging fields such as AI, accumulating successful experiences in AI application, interactive cooperation and governance under diverse national conditions. Through enhanced policy coordination, technical exchanges, resource sharing and talent cultivation, they aim to ensure the safe, efficient, reliable and controllable development of AI.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Social Media Digest

Meals for mates

In a world where swiping left and right on your phone is the norm for making connections, two students from Glasgow, UK, chose to ditch the algorithms and take a more traditional approach: they created a society focused on bringing people together over shared meals.

The result? "Dinner with a Stranger", an initiative that quickly gained popularity, attracting over 200 eager participants within its first month.

The idea was born out of a simple coffee outing between two young women, 21-year-old Juliette Sartori and 22-year-old Mary Yiorakadi, who, despite being surrounded by people, found themselves struggling with loneliness.

Inspired by their own conversation, they decided to organize similar meetups, uniting young people facing the same issue of loneliness and fostering friendships in the cozy ambiance of restaurants.

Unlike mainstream platforms that rely on algorithm-based matching, this initiative adds a personal touch: participants complete a personality quiz that covers topics like favorite movies, dream vacation destinations, and go-to karaoke songs.

And it works. For example, Vanya, 19, and Hannah, 20, both second-year students at Glasgow, crossed paths through "Dinner with a Stranger". Since being paired up in December 2024, they've formed a strong bond, becoming best friends and later roommates.

"It's more of a modern way of making friends," Sartori said in an interview with the BBC. "It's taking the idea of meeting someone online from a dating website and turning it into friendships by seeing how well you mesh with that person."



A "friendship blind date" over a meal could be a new way to make friends. vcg

Springtime palette

With the arrival of spring, flowers bloom in soft pink hues, brightening cities with a vibrant burst of color. Fashion brands are drawing inspiration from nature's palette, incorporating the season's colors into their collections.

The rise of the "light spring" aesthetic has captured the imagination of young people, amassing over 100 million views on China's lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu (RedNote) under the hashtag "light spring outfit". This trend, spanning everything from hair colors to clothing, represents a fresh and rejuvenating approach to style.

In stark contrast to autumn's cozy "Maillard style", which features warm, earthy tones like caramel and coffee, the light spring trend embraces soft pastels such as powder pink, sage green, and pistachio white. This harmonious mix of colors creates a visual symphony of elegance and tranquility that mirrors the awakening of spring.

The origins of the light spring fashion can be traced back to the seasonal color theory popularized by Carole Jackson in her bestselling book *Color Me Beautiful*, published in the 1980s.

Jackson's exploration of the color palettes associated with the four seasons has become a guiding principle for selecting colors in makeup, clothing, and accessories.

GUO JIATONG



Soft colors like sage green are commonly featured in spring outfits. vcg

Global youth embrace Yan'an's spirit

Students from around the world connect with Yan'an's revolutionary history and vibrant folk tradition, sharing stories from diverse cultural perspectives.



Top: Lee Che-young participates in a paper-cutting workshop during a cultural exchange trip to Yan'an, Shaanxi province, held from Feb 9 to 12. **Above:** Li Yiwei tries calligraphy while visiting a museum in Ansai, Yan'an. **Right:** Rio Ohori poses for a photo at Ganquan Canyon in Yan'an. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By MENG WENJIE
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Although it wasn't his first visit to Yan'an, a city in Northwest China's Shaanxi province, Jiang Debin gained a deeper understanding of it when he returned in February with a group of international youth.

"My fellow travelers came from diverse backgrounds, and our different perspectives allowed us to explore Yan'an in unique ways, creating richer and more vivid stories," said Jiang, 20, a student at the Communication University of China (CUC).

This cultural exchange, organized by CUC and the Yan'an municipal government, took place from Feb 9 to 12. More than 20 young participants from countries including China, South Korea, Albania, Japan, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka came together to experience Yan'an's enduring spirit and vibrant folk culture.

What made the trip particularly special was that these young people walked the same ground once visited by US journalist Edgar Snow (1905-1972), the first Western journalist to report from China's revolutionary base areas. His book *Red Star Over China* (1937) documented the country's struggles and achievements, leaving a lasting impact on how the world viewed China's revolution.

Deng Liya, director of Yan'an's bureau of culture and tourism, noted that 2025 marks the 120th anniversary of Snow's birth.

"We hope more young people from around the world will visit Yan'an, just as Snow did, and experience the true heartbeat of this land through their own eyes," Deng said.

One of the most memorable stops for the students was the Yan'an News Memorial. Jiang recalled seeing a rusted mimeograph machine in the museum, which made him feel as if he had stepped back in time. He could almost picture the dedicated journalists of the past working tire-



“As a broadcasting major, I hope to use objective reporting to build bridges and reduce misunderstandings and biases.”

Lee Che-young, 27,
a South Korean student at CUC

lessly, determined to share the truth despite the hardships of war.

"Even in such harsh conditions, these pioneers never gave up on their mission. It was truly inspiring," Jiang said.

Beyond its revolutionary history, Yan'an is also known for its rich folk traditions. During the visit, students took part in activities such as waist drum dancing, yangko dancing, and paper-cutting.

Li Yiwei, 20, a student at CUC, had little prior knowledge of waist drum dancing before the trip. But when he and his international peers joined the locals in the dance, he was amazed to see people of all ages — men, women, and even children — enthusiastically participating in this traditional art form.

"The most exciting moment was when two African students faced off with a local drummer in a dance battle, with everyone gathering in a circle to cheer them on," he said. "Seeing young people from different countries embrace this cultural tradition made me feel like we're all part of the same family — the global village."



“Yan'an is no longer the war-torn small town of decades past. It has come alive with vibrant energy in the new era.”

Jiang Debin, 20,
a Chinese student at CUC

Joyful connections

Rinva Gjeka, an 18-year-old Albanian student, was captivated by the lively atmosphere of the waist drum and yangko dances.

"What impressed me most were the bright smiles of the local people — you could feel their joy and pride in their culture," she said. "It wasn't about the dance techniques; it was about the vibe. We were all dancing and smiling at each other, and in that moment, it didn't feel like we were from different cities or countries — we were just like the locals."

Chen Leyi, 20, a fellow CUC student, had a similar experience with paper-cutting. During a workshop, she was surprised to see many of her international friends excel at the craft, even outperforming the Chinese students, who were also trying it for the first time.

"Traditional arts have no boundaries. They're a wonderful way to share beauty," she said.

Rio Ohori, a 20-year-old Japanese student, was amazed to learn that many skilled paper-cutting artists are local farmers.

"People may not typically associate farmers with art," she said. "But when you see the intricate and delicate designs, you can't help but admire their unique artistic sensitivity."

The trip not only gave students the chance to experience Yan'an's rich culture firsthand but also helped foster meaningful friendships within the group.

Lee Che-young, a 27-year-old South Korean student at CUC, recalled a heartwarming moment on the bus when a Chinese student performed an English song, followed by a US student singing a popular Chinese song. Even the bus driver joined in by playing a Shaanxi folk song over the speakers.

Lee also pointed out that the students on the trip came from a wide range of academic backgrounds, including journalism, directing, language, and broadcasting. "I learned so much from everyone," she said. "It made me appreciate the value of cultural exchange. As a broadcasting major, I hope to use objective reporting to build bridges and reduce misunderstandings and biases."

"This trip not only deepened students' understanding of Chinese culture but also provided them with hands-on opportunities to develop their professional skills," said Cong Fangjun, a CUC teacher and the trip's group leader.

Cong explained that during the trip, students filmed vlogs in multiple languages, sharing a total of 225 original short videos on international platforms like TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube, along with 110 videos on Chinese platforms.

For Jiang, returning to Yan'an was an eye-opening experience, as this time, he was walking in the footsteps of Snow, accompanied by young people from around the world.

"Yan'an is no longer the war-torn small town of decades past. It has come alive with vibrant energy in the new era," he said. "With our diverse perspectives and modern media, my international friends and I are telling our own stories of this city."

Z WEEKLY

Bringing TCM to the modern screen

A young physician challenges perceptions of TCM, blending ancient wisdom with modern life on screen, **Wang Xingwei** reports.



Zhang Linghe, 27, plays a TCM physician in the medical-romance drama *The Best Thing*, which premiered yesterday on Jiangsu TV and iQiyi. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

When thinking of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) doctors, one might picture a gray-haired man with a long beard sitting in front of a medicine chest filled with neatly labeled drawers.

However, *He Suye* — a young and talented Chinese physician in the latest medical-romance drama, *The Best Thing* — may reshape that image.

"He Suye is a traditional medicine practitioner with a gentle demeanor for the modern era," said Zhang Linghe, the 27-year-old actor who plays the male protagonist.

According to Zhang, He is a diligent, focused, and professional physician, but outside of work, he is also a vibrant young man with many hobbies, such as skateboarding and enjoying *malatang* (spicy hotpot).

"These traits might challenge some stereotypes associated with TCM practitioners," Zhang added.

Premiering last night on Jiangsu TV and iQiyi, China's leading online entertainment platform, *The Best Thing* is an adaptation of the novel of the same name.

The story follows Shen Xifan, a workaholic hotel manager who suffers from migraines and insomnia.

In her search for a cure, she encounters the gentle physician, He. Amid their medical consultations, fate draws them closer, and their relationship soon blossoms into something more.

To prepare for this role, Zhang studied Chinese medicine with practicing physicians, learning techniques such as acupuncture, pulse diagnosis, and moxibustion — a TCM therapy that involves burning mugwort on or near the skin at specific acupuncture points to stimulate circulation.

"This is my first time portraying a physician," Zhang said. "Beyond the therapies, I have also developed a deeper appreciation for the holistic philosophy and humanistic spirit of TCM, which has helped me take better care of my own health and improve my mental well-being."

The drama incorporates a series of TCM elements and knowledge, with each episode named after a type of Chinese herbal medicine. For instance, the first episode, titled "Suye" (perilla leaf), echoes the name of the protagonist.

The drama also showcases the clinical applications of TCM, particularly in treating severe and critical conditions. In one episode, He performs a technique called "wet cupping" to rescue a patient experiencing breathing difficulties.

"This is a typical example of TCM's role in emergency treatment," explained Zhang Ying, chief physician at Guang'anmen Hospital, China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, and an expert adviser for the drama. "However, if this method doesn't work, we must quickly turn to modern medical interventions."

Recognizing the growing interest in TCM among young people, Zhang Ying hopes the show will encourage its audience to develop a balanced and objective perspective on the practice.

"The rising popularity of TCM milk tea and other herbal beverages indicates that younger generations are gaining confidence in TCM," Zhang Ying said. "However, we must be careful not to overstate its effectiveness, as that could lead to delayed treatments and worsening conditions for some patients."

A modern perspective

Since its debut, hashtags related to the drama have amassed over 1 billion views and generated more than 12.98 million discussions on the microblogging platform Sina Weibo.

This widespread engagement reflects the show's strong resonance with viewers, particularly among Gen Z audiences.

As the story unfolds, several plot points have struck a chord with younger viewers. For example, He's dedication to TCM offers insight into the growth and career development of TCM students, highlighting the modern relevance of this ancient practice.

Zhang Linghe believes that passion is the driving force behind a successful career — just like his character, He, who remains committed to his path in TCM despite numerous challenges, including initial opposi-

tion from his father.

In recent decades, more and more young people like He have embraced TCM as a fashionable approach to maintaining health.

With the growing integration of TCM and Western medicine, as well as expanding international exchanges, TCM practitioners and students now have more diverse career opportunities.

"Take acupuncture as an example. Many countries have included this therapy in their health insurance plans," Zhang Ying explained. "The 2024 World Conference on Traditional Medicine has also earned international recognition, enhancing collaboration and communication between educational institutions and research centers at home and abroad to apply the latest research findings."

As TCM continues to gain momentum globally, the drama is set to be released on international platforms, reaching audiences in countries such as Malaysia and South Korea.

Zhang Linghe looks forward to receiving feedback from overseas viewers.

"TCM is a unique treasure of Chinese culture," he said. "I hope this drama can introduce TCM practices and philosophies to the world in a relatable and engaging way, making them more accessible to younger generations."

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Several herbs used in TCM

Perilla leaf



Perilla leaf, or "zi su ye", is an aromatic and flavorful herb frequently found in Korean and Japanese cooking. In TCM, its warming nature and acrid flavor promote sweating to expel external pathogens. It also supports the circulation of *qi* — vital energy throughout the body — while harmonizing the digestive system.

Apple



As the Western proverb goes, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." In TCM, this sweet and cooling fruit not only quenches thirst and aids digestion but also helps relieve restlessness and counteracts the effects of alcohol.

Liquorice root



In TCM, liquorice, known as "gan cao", is considered neutral in nature, meaning it typically does not disrupt the body's balance. It is often used to harmonize the properties of other herbs. With its sweet flavor, liquorice can help slow down acute reactions and detoxify the body. It also has a tonic effect, replenishing *qi* and regulating the spleen.

Mint



Mint, or "bo he", has long been enjoyed as a tea and food flavoring. In TCM, it is valued for its pungent, aromatic, and cooling properties. With its refreshing taste and strong scent, mint is often used to relieve headaches and dizziness, improve eyesight, soothe sore throats, clear up rashes, and alleviate anxiety and stress.

WANG XINGWEI



LIANG GUOXIU / CHINA DAILY

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Parkour: leaps of faith and dreams

Tan Xiaofan, a parkour enthusiast, combines extreme sports with traditional Chinese culture, promoting modern movement and heritage preservation.

By GUI QIAN
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Lion dancing, martial arts, a small town in Guangdong, and physical labor — these are the threads that weave together the story of A Juan in the hit animated film *I Am What I Am* (2021). But they also run deep in the life of Tan Xiaofan, a young man whose journey mirrors that of the protagonist.

Tan, 27, from Dongguan, Guangdong, was naturally drawn to heights as a child, often climbing trees and scaling walls. This instinct led him to martial arts and parkour training in middle school.

After failing to gain college admission, Tan worked a series of jobs, including summer stints at a martial arts school, as a trampoline assistant, and as a taekwondo coach.

Yet, his love for parkour never wavered. He continued to train, compete, and win awards, integrating martial arts and parkour techniques into lion dance performances. Today, he has reinvented himself as an extreme sports vlogger with over 2.4 million followers on Douyin, China's version of TikTok.

Tan admits that he "had no talent" for academics, and his family never expected him to excel in that area. Coming from a humble background, his parents had hoped he would follow a more traditional path — learning a trade, securing a stable job, perhaps running a breakfast stall, becoming a barber, or working in auto repair. His pursuit of parkour, even while juggling various jobs, received little support from his family.

"I can't say for sure if it was rebellion or passion that drove me," he said. "But as long as I could make ends meet, I felt I could keep going."

When Tan watched *I Am What I Am*, the film struck a chord deep within him, bringing tears to his eyes and sending shivers down his spine. "How could it be so much like my own life?" he wondered. "Every young person pursuing a niche sport faces the same struggles — being unable to support themselves and dealing with family disapproval. These experiences are so relatable."

A sport of freedom

Despite the challenges, the strong allure of parkour drove this real-life A Juan to push past obstacles and keep moving forward.

Tan describes the experience as exhilarating — a feeling of transcending ordinary life and soaring through the air.

"Every kid has a martial arts dream, picturing themselves as an ancient hero leaping across rooftops. Many of the martial arts TV shows I watched as a child were full of parkour elements," he explained.

Tan sees many connections between martial arts and parkour: numerous techniques used by martial arts stunt performers — such as front flips, backflips, wall runs, and high jumps — are also fundamental parkour moves. The physical conditioning and basic training in martial arts lay a solid foundation, making it easier to master new parkour skills.



Tan Xiaofan is an extreme sports vlogger and cultural influencer who combines parkour with traditional Chinese cultural elements.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Every time I conquer a challenge or learn a new move, I feel a rush of excitement. The better I got, the more I fell in love with the sport," he said.

Parkour is also a sport fueled by imagination. Tan explained that it is mainly divided into two categories: speed running and free running. The former focuses on quickly traversing obstacles, emphasizing speed, while the latter allows for various moves to be incorporated, with fluidity, style, execution, and difficulty as the key evaluation criteria.

"Free running is your moment to showcase your creativity. If your imagination is big enough and you come up with a routine no one has seen before, you might become famous or score high in competitions with just one move," he said.

Free running is Tan's favorite and strongest discipline. Since 2021, he has won several championships in various free running competitions.

Tan describes his style as "vigorous yet casual."

"Others might need a lot of effort to pull off a move, but I can do it effortlessly. It's quite visually appealing," he said.

Tradition integrated

After Tan's parkour career took off, he was invited in 2023 to film a video combining parkour with the traditional Chinese art of *dashuhua*, or "striking iron flowers" — a technique that creates dazzling sparks by hitting molten iron.

For the video, he attached small fireworks to his feet and performed parkour moves, producing a spectacular display of sparks. The video went viral, amassing over 12 million likes to date.

This experience inspired Tan to merge modern sports with more traditional cultural elements.

Having grown up watching lion dance performances in Guangdong, he noticed that the movements required to navigate the high poles were strikingly similar to parkour techniques. This realization led him to choreograph a lion dance routine incorporating leaps from high poles and dynamic parkour moves.

Building on this idea, Tan explored over a dozen forms of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, including Wing Chun, tai chi, Wudang sword, Cantonese Opera, and Yingge dance. He refreshed these traditional arts with parkour style, creating new combinations.

"Just like a company needs new talent to grow, traditional culture must break free from certain entrenched impressions to thrive," he said.

"When you combine it with parkour, people get curious about this unexpected fusion, and their interest is aroused. I believe that igniting curiosity is key to spreading culture," he added.

Initially, Tan saw parkour as just a profession, but over time, he found himself becoming a cultural ambassador.

"This is something I never imagined or even dared to dream of," he said. "Being able to promote intangible cultural heritage through parkour fills me with both emotion and excitement. It's not just a passion — it's a mission and an honor."



Lyu Yanting is the voice of Nezha, the protagonist of the Chinese animated film *Ne Zha 2*, which was released on Jan 29. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Story behind the voice of a warrior

By LUO SITIAN and GUO JIATONG

The Chinese animated film *Ne Zha 2* has taken theaters by storm since its release on Jan 29. By Feb 25, it had amassed over 13.8 billion yuan (\$1.90 billion), making it the highest-grossing animated film both in China and worldwide.

Yet for Lyu Yanting, 37, the voice behind the protagonist Nezha, the film's massive success was unimaginable when she first took on the role. "I saw it as just another dubbing project," Lyu recalled.

As she delved into Nezha's lines and story, she realized that this adaptation offered a fresh take on the legendary character.

Nezha's origins trace back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), where he was first depicted as a celestial guardian protecting a monk. Over the centuries, his image evolved through cultural reinterpretations — transforming into a rebellious figure who defies fate and authority, fights for his beliefs and loved ones, and grows into a powerful warrior by overcoming adversity.

Lyu found herself deeply resonating with this modern version of Nezha, particularly his determination, sincerity, and resilience. This connection made her performance feel authentic, as if she were drawing on real emotions rather than simply acting.

However, finding a role that naturally aligns with oneself is rare. This is why Lyu believes that professional voice actors must constantly refine their skills, always preparing for any character that may come their way.

"To be a good voice actor, you need to empathize, imagine, and truly understand the character — their emotions, their situation — which requires both life experience and the ability to see things from different perspectives," Lyu said. "Only by combining personal experience with professional training can you seamlessly bring different characters to life."

Lyu explained that being a voice actor is much like being an actor — only even more challenging.

"The audience can't see our faces, gestures, or actions — our voice is our only tool for expression, which demands even greater precision in conveying emotions," she said.

To achieve that, immersion is key. Before voicing Nezha, Lyu spent years in solitude, dedicating herself to honing her skills. "I was fascinated by anything related to vocal expression — I explored and analyzed it to see how it could enhance my future work. That was simply my passion," she said.

Thanks to those solitary years, Lyu was well-prepared when she landed the role of Nezha. Although she describes her newfound recognition as "a pure stroke of luck," it was much more than that.

"This character gave me the opportunity to express everything I've learned and practiced over the years," she said. "For that, I'm very grateful."

Connection in voice

Lyu noted that, unlike Western superhero narratives that focus on individualism, *Ne Zha 2* places a strong emphasis on communal bonds, familial love, and traditional Chinese chivalrous spirit.

"It's not about one person achieving something alone but rather the strong connections and sense of righteousness shared between people," she explained.

Lyu believes this is one of the reasons for the film's success and its resonance with global audiences.

"It sets a benchmark for Chinese animation techniques, signaling a promising future for the industry," she said. "I'm thrilled to see the box office numbers rising by the day, and I'm proud to be part of this project."

Beyond bringing Nezha to life, Lyu also underwent a personal transformation by fully immersing herself in the role.

"I used to enjoy quiet moments at home. I'm not very talkative and tend to have a steady emotional state," Lyu said. However, she was inspired by Nezha's fiery spirit, shedding her reserved nature to adopt a more outgoing persona. "My emotions became more active during the dubbing process," she added.

For aspiring voice actors, Lyu stressed the importance of dedication. "No one can predict the future or know for sure if a passion for dubbing will lead to a sustainable career," she said. "Just give it your all, keep training, and one day, your dedication might unexpectedly light the way forward."

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