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KI'S VISION | CULTURAL HERITAGE

Revised law better protects cultural relics

Comprehensive approach adopted to meet needs of heritage development in new era

By DENG ZHANGYU and WANG RU

Following years of thorough and systematic amendments, the newly revised Law on Protection of Cultural Relics took effect on March 1, signifying a new era of legal governance in the protection of China's cultural heritage.

According to the National Cultural Heritage Administration, revising the law was an important step in turning proven practices into legal regulations. It also strongly supports the modernization of the governance system and capabilities in the field of cultural relics.

In November, the Standing Com-

mittee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislative body, approved the revision. This is the second time the law has been updated since it was introduced in 1982; the first time was in 2002.

Chen Xingcan, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and also president of the Archaeological Society of China, said the revision will meet the needs of the cultural relics sector's development in the new era.

The newly revised law consists of eight chapters and 101 articles, with very detailed and specific provisions, which Chen said reflects the central

government's great emphasis on the protection of China's cultural heritage.

"The law is very detailed and resembles a regulatory document. This revision is both comprehensive and systematic, and it may not require such large-scale amendments for the next 10 years or so," said Chen, who has participated in the law's two revisions.

The veteran archaeologist added that President Xi Jinping has given many instructions on the protection of cultural relics and emphasized the importance of protecting the relics on many occasions.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, Xi has toured more than 100 historical and cultural locations and issued many instructions related to cultural relics and archaeology. He said that historical and cultural heri-

tage is a valuable resource that is neither renewable nor replaceable, and its protection should always be given top priority.

Xi also said that we must properly handle the relationship between urban reconstruction and development and the protection and utilization of historical and cultural heritage, and ensure that urban development and heritage protection are well coordinated.

In 2022, reflecting the president's guidance, the nation's new principles of cultural relic work were released. These put protection first and urge enhanced management, value exploration and effective utilization, call for making cultural relics "alive", and aim to promote a deep integration of cultural heritage protection with modern society.

The new law added articles saying that before starting construction in old urban areas or large-scale land development projects, a survey of cultural relics must be done first. For land that might contain underground cultural relics, archaeological surveys and explorations must be completed by law before the local government sells or makes plans for the land.

"It's a milestone revision that will greatly aid future archaeological work. Many cultural heritage sites have disappeared during urban development in the past decades," said Chen.

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WORLD WATCH
By Stephen Ndegwa

How China helps Africa redefine its place on the world stage

In the context of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory — which claims that rich core capitalist societies succeed by exploiting poorer peripheral ones — Africa has long occupied the periphery of the global economic system. For centuries, the continent was consigned to a position of dependency, serving as a source of raw materials for industrialized nations while importing finished goods at inflated prices. This economic structure reinforced cycles of poverty, underdevelopment and reliance on foreign aid.

However, in recent decades, Africa's relationship with the global system has begun to shift, and China has been a key catalyst in this transformation. Through a unique approach to partnership, China is enabling Africa to break free from traditional economic hierarchies, moving the continent closer to the core of the global economy.

China's economic rise and its focus on global engagement have created a blueprint for Africa's development aspirations. Over the last two decades, China has emerged as Africa's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$282 billion in 2023. Investments from China span critical sectors, including infrastructure, manufacturing and technology. These investments are not merely transactional; they represent a deliberate strategy to address structural impediments to Africa's development.

One of the most transformative aspects of China's involvement in Africa is its focus on infrastructure development. According to the African Development Bank, the continent's infrastructure financing gap is estimated at \$68 billion to \$108 billion annually. By stepping into this space, China is addressing one of the most significant barriers to Africa's economic progress. The construction of industrial parks, special economic zones and energy plants demonstrates China's commitment to fostering long-term industrialization.

Ethiopia's Hawassa Industrial Park, developed with Chinese support, has become a hub for textile and apparel manufacturing, creating tens of thousands of jobs and boosting the country's export capacity. Similar projects across Africa signal a shift from dependency on raw material exports to the development of value-added industries.

Historically, Africa's reliance on Western aid and markets has stifled its ability to pursue self-determined growth. Structural adjustment programs imposed by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank often prioritized fiscal austerity over developmental needs, leaving African economies vulnerable to external shocks. In contrast, China's engagement is characterized by a policy of noninterference and mutual benefit. Loans and investments from China are often free of the political conditions that have traditionally accompanied Western assistance, allowing African governments to chart their own development agendas.

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CHINESE EVS MAKE MAJOR INROADS AS AUSTRALIAN MARKET CHARGES AHEAD

With policies to speed up green transition, wider range of electric vehicles available

By XIN XIN and ALEXIS HOOL in Sydney

Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers are gearing up for accelerated growth in the Australian market, as Canberra ramps up regulatory measures to smooth the country's transition to greener transportation.

At the recent Everything Electric show in Sydney, which ran for three days starting on March 7, Chinese EV makers took center stage among the diverse range of items on display.

In-depth

Ian Wilcox, a property valuer from Newcastle in New South Wales state, checked out one of the latest EV offerings on display from Chinese auto giant BYD, saying the vehicle was way ahead of its foreign competitors in many aspects.

"We already have a BYD. ... We're really impressed with it, and we've taken some long journeys in it," Wilcox said.

He said his current BYD electric vehicle has many features that are better than its non-Chinese competitors, including a long battery range that enables him and his family to use it on camping trips. "It's amazing, the BYD is probably our favorite vehicle these days," he said.

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Smart transit



A driverless minibus runs on the streets of Barcelona in Spain on Wednesday. The Renault Group and Chinese autonomous driving technology firm WeRide launched for the first time an open-road experiment in Europe from Monday through Friday, with two autonomous electric minibuses offering a free 2.2-kilometer open road loop in downtown Barcelona. DAVID ZORRAKINO / EUROPA PRESS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Egyptian-led Arab nations' plan for Gaza gaining ground

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Arab nations presented the Arab League-endorsed Gaza reconstruction plan on Wednesday to the United States' Middle East special envoy, spurring hopes that Washington may now treat it as the foundation for rebuilding the Palestinian enclave, as opposed to an earlier widely criticized proposal from the White House.

Speculation that the Egyptian-led plan could gain ground is being fanned by reports suggesting that US President Donald Trump could be backpedaling on his controversial proposal to depopulate Gaza and then rebuild through US auspices.

On Wednesday, the foreign ministers of Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and the secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee met with visiting US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff in Doha, the capital of Qatar.

According to a joint communique published by Qatar's foreign ministry, the Arab ministers agreed with the US envoy to "continue consultations and coordination on this plan as a basis for the reconstruction efforts".

The Gaza reconstruction plan, approved by the Arab League during a summit in Cairo on March 4, is estimated to cost \$53 billion. The plan counters Trump, who suggested redeveloping Gaza through a US



A Palestinian family in a neighborhood south of Gaza City break their fast on Wednesday sitting amid the rubble of their house demolished by Israeli forces. ALI JADALLAH / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

takeover and relocating the enclave's residents to Egypt and Jordan.

At Wednesday's meeting, the Arab ministers emphasized the need for a ceasefire in Gaza, calling for genuine efforts to achieve a "just and comprehensive peace" based on the two-state solution.

Meanwhile, in a meeting with Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin at the White House on Wednesday, Trump said "nobody was expelling any Palestinians" from Gaza.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem welcomed Trump's new stance.

"If US President Trump's statements represent a retreat from any idea of displacing the people of the Gaza Strip, they are welcomed," Qas-

sem said, adding that this position needs to be reinforced by obligating the Israeli side to implement the terms of the ceasefire agreements.

A statement posted on the X account of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Tammim Khallaf on Thursday said Egypt "expresses its appreciation for the statements" made by Trump.

"Egypt affirms that this position reflects an understanding of the importance of avoiding further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Strip and the necessity of working toward finding just and sustainable solutions to the Palestinian issue," the statement said. "Egypt views President Trump's

initiative to end international conflicts and achieve peace, including the Middle East, as a practical framework that can be built upon and jointly pursued to achieve these goals taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people," it added.

Earlier, Israeli media reported that the US was pushing for a 60-day ceasefire in exchange for the release of 10 hostages. If unsuccessful, Washington could only work to free US hostages, the Times of Israel reported.

Farhan Mujahid Chak, a visiting faculty at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, told China Daily that the Arab reconstruction plan has "the unique signature of all the Arab States" and the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

"There is complete unity behind this reconstruction plan so it becomes difficult for the US to dismiss it readily," said Chak.

The Arab plan is "presenting serious problems for the end game of the extremist Israeli government," he said, adding that it appears that the Trump administration may be rethinking its radical proposal in relation to Gaza, as it seeks "to appease some of the other partners in the region".

Chak also noted that the rift between the Israeli government and President Trump "seems to be widening".

PAGE TWO

A visitor inspects SAIC's MG Cyberster electric sports car at the Everything Electric show in Sydney on March 7. MA PING / XINHUA



EVs: Chinese brands help boost Australia's green shift

From page 1

In 2024, the Australian government passed legislation to introduce a new vehicle efficiency standard to regulate the carbon dioxide emissions of new passenger and light commercial vehicles, implemented on Jan 1 of this year.

The legislation has the stated dual aims of giving consumers more choices of low-emission vehicles and reducing Australia's carbon emissions and reliance on the volatile global oil market.

Sparking demand

The Electric Vehicle Council, the peak national body representing the EV industry, said in its 2024 report that to meet its climate targets, Australia will need over 50 percent of all new car sales to be EVs by 2030.

Dan Caesar, head of the team behind the Everything Electric show, said rapid developments in technology and expertise were fueling the strong trend toward EVs, with Australian consumers' interest in the vehicles high.

The range of EVs for sale in Australia is now "exceptional" and some models were being seen at the show for the first time. "Choice reduces costs, and China is obviously creating some of that competition ... which can only be good for the consumer," he said.

This year's show, billed as the main industry event in the Southern Hemisphere, hosted at least 36 major exhibitors including global EV brands from China.

"Chinese-made EVs are rapidly gaining popularity in Australia, with BYD leading the charge as one of the most popular brands," said Julie Delvecchio, CEO of the Electric Vehicle Council.

"Other Chinese EV manufacturers including Zeekr and Geely are also emerging in the Australian market. What draws Australians to Chinese-made EVs is their affordable price points, modern features, and diverse range of models. These factors are driving healthy competition in the Australian market, making Chinese EVs an increasingly appealing choice for a wide variety of consumers," she said.

More than 300,000 Australians are driving EVs and nearly one in 10 new cars sold in Australia are now EVs, said Delvecchio.

A total of 1.22 million new vehicle sales were recorded last year in Australia, with a rising number of motorists turning to greener choices like plug-in hybrid models, according to industry figures.

At the Sydney show, Chinese EV manufacturers expressed optimism about the Australian market. David Smitherman, CEO of Chinese auto giant BYD's Australian distributor EVDirect, said there is "massive potential for growth".

"Last year we sold 20,000 vehicles. This year our expectations are more than double that number," he said.

"There's a lot of work to be done, but with BYD's superior technology and performance, we're in a really good position to grow the brand here in Australia.

"Australians are very tech-savvy. We're opening up greater choice to Australians which they are really quickly adopting," he added.

Wider range

Among the Top 10 bestselling EVs in Australia in February were Chinese vehicles including SAIC MG's MG4, BYD's Sealion 7 and Atto 3 along with the luxury crossover Zeekr X, a new entrant to the Australian market, according to The Driven, a leading industry news site.

Delvecchio said consumers are seeing a wider range of EVs at more affordable prices entering the Australian market, making electric vehicles a great option for everyone — from families, to trade workers such as electricians and plumbers, and to car enthusiasts.

She said its estimated battery electric vehicles can save drivers up to A\$3,000 (\$1,890) every year on fuel and maintenance costs — important savings for Australians currently experiencing high cost-of-living pressure.

"Electric vehicles are already offering so many benefits to Australians, but there is still so much more potential. Key opportunities include the development of vehicle-to-grid, growing the used EV market, and advancing the battery recycling industry," she said.

Hans Hendrichke, a professor of Chinese business and management at the University of Sydney's Business School, said Australia has been more welcoming than many other countries in the EV sector.

"Australia hasn't considered imposing any tariffs on the Chinese vehicles ... because we don't have a vehicle industry here ourselves," he said.



Visitors enter the exhibition hall of the Everything Electric show in Sydney on March 7. MA PING / XINHUA



Left: Dan Caesar (left), CEO of the Everything Electric show, and Scott Maynard, Polestar's managing director in Australia, introduce Polestar's electric vehicle models during the opening of the event on March 7. ALEXIS HOUI / CHINA DAILY

Top right: People visit the booth of Zeekr at the show. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Above right: A staff member explains EV charging equipment to a visitor during the show. MA PING / XINHUA

He added there is no special financial support for Chinese EVs, which compete "increasingly well" against other brands.

Hendrichke is also a member of the Net Zero Institute, which supports decarbonization solutions to help the world meet its climate change goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The institute has more than 150 university researchers and industry collaborators across a range of disciplines.

"The Chinese EV market is certainly moving into markets like Australia," Hendrichke said. "I think it (the market) hasn't had the full impact yet; this is just starting. The Chinese have much better cars than they had in the beginning, with the EV market already very developed in China."

Jason Clarke is the CEO of TrueEV, a company specializing in EV distribution and services that has formed a strategic partnership with leading Chinese EV manufacturer, Xpeng.



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He cited Xpeng's "smart" EVs as a big plus for the Chinese startup's appeal to consumers.

Xpeng's vehicles have been available in Australia for a year, and already "people are really warming to the brand and feeling very connected with it," he said at the Sydney show.

'Pretty cool' tech

The startup promotes itself as a technology company focused on artificial intelligence and the possibilities of how good future travel and transport mobility can be, he said.

Many Australian car buyers had initial concerns about the quality of Chinese imports, but quickly changed their minds when they saw the models on offer, Clarke said.

"Literally thousands of people have now sat in these (EVs) and they're quite surprised by the quality, refinement and the comfort as well as how desirable they are," he said.

For Zeekr, another popular Chinese EV manufacturer, innovation is one of its key attractions for potential buyers.

William Zhou, Zeekr's general manager for Australia and New Zealand, said the company is very confident about the prospects for its vehicles, not just in Australia, but also other international markets.

"There are huge opportunities for us. On top of the mainstream market, people are also looking for premium EVs with innovation and technology. In terms of battery (range), an intelligent cockpit and charging technology, the network and services ... we

position ourselves as premium," Zhou said.

Scott Maynard, managing director in Australia of Polestar, a Sweden-based EV manufacturer, said the company markets itself as a premium brand, and taps considerable Chinese know-how in the sector.

"We're seeing a groundswell of interest in electric vehicles here. Chinese technology finds its way into so many vehicles operating in Australia, and you'll see it in these (Polestar) cars too," Maynard said, adding the brand does its research and development in Europe and draws heavily on European influence and Scandinavian design.

"But, definitely, the hallmarks of technology founded in China find their way through," he added.

Gino Casha, head of Segway-Ninebot Australia, said China's lead in EV tech is seen in the company's products, such as its e-scooters.

"We're also moving into e-bikes and related products. The e-motorcycles are far more technologically advanced compared to others," he said, pointing out their inbuilt global positioning and traction-control features.

Segway-Ninebot recently topped global electric kick-scooter sales with more than 13 million units sold.

"EV technology in China is probably second to none," Casha said. "In terms of the smart connectivity for all of our products, some of the stuff you see in the electric cars are in these scooters, that's pretty cool technology in such a small package."

The road ahead

Many of the automakers at the Sydney event said the infrastructure and network required for the EV sector to cover Australia's large distances still need to be improved.

"Australia is geographically a large place, similar in size to China, not quite as big but just about. But of course we have a very small population base," said Smitherman of BYD distributor EVDirect.

Many motorists needing to travel long distances are now overcoming "range anxiety" by first opting for a plug-in hybrid vehicle before transitioning to a fully electric one, he said.

During a panel discussion at the Sydney show, Australia's Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen said the transportation sector remains a major challenge in the country's move toward lower carbon emissions.

"People are driving around more, flying more, that's a big reason why — as we're getting emissions down so quickly in electricity and industry — transport is going up, and that's keeping up the national average," he said.

"So we have a lot more work to do on transport. We've got our new vehicle efficiency standards ... that will make a difference, but they're not yet seeing huge reductions in emissions," Bowen said.

However, he said a real impact is already being seen in the expansion of the EV sector, as evidenced by the Sydney show. "In the last three years, the range of EVs has tripled. The choice of models has tripled," he said.

Delvecchio from the EVC said while Australia has made progress in embracing electric vehicles, there is still a long road ahead.

"We are pleased that the new vehicle efficiency standard has been introduced to further improve choice and affordability — a policy we've been advocating for years.

"However, there are still a range of challenges Australia must overcome including building more charging infrastructure, harmonizing and reforming regulations, countering misinformation and introducing more purchase incentives to accelerate the transition."

Professor Hendrichke said Australia should look at the possible long-term benefits of China's EV industry as well as cooperation in other energy areas.

"What of course would be a potential consideration over the long term is when China starts to have more smaller-scale production units — high-tech, but smaller scale — there would be all kinds of good reasons to set up car manufacturers in smaller markets like Australia," he said.

While Chinese automakers are now introducing electric vehicles to the Australian market, there are other aspects of broader energy cooperation that both sides could benefit from.

"There is certainly big potential for future cooperation. But it goes beyond electric vehicles," he said.

"It goes to smart energy, to clean energy, where Australia could, with Chinese partners, build up energy cooperation or manufacturing. These are the next few steps the business community is looking at, and is interested in."

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TOP NEWS

Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul engage in close exchanges

Building mutual understanding, trust while expanding areas of cooperation highlighted

By ZHOU JIN
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As the resumption of the leaders' meeting among China, Japan and South Korea last year has created momentum for renewed exchanges, Secretary-General of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Lee Hee-sup said that more high-level interactions are underway, with a foreign ministers' meeting expected to take place in the near future.



Lee Hee-sup

The governments of the three Asian neighbors, with Japan as this year's chair, are maintaining close communication on affairs related to the foreign ministers' meeting as well as a leaders' meeting, and the secretariat is making every effort to ensure the success of the gatherings, Lee told China Daily.

After a gap of more than four years, the 9th Trilateral Summit was held in Seoul last year, during which the three leaders agreed to strive to institutionalize trilateral cooperation by holding the trilateral summit and ministerial meetings on a regular basis.

Since then, various ministerial-level meetings and government mechanisms have been actively operating, and diverse cooperation projects have regained momentum, Lee said.

There are 21 ministerial-level meetings, over 70 intergovernmental mechanisms and more than 100 cooperative projects under trilateral cooperation.

"Trilateral cooperation is now at a turning point where it must shift from quantitative growth to qualitative development," Lee said.

To achieve this qualitative leap forward with new vision and dynamism, it is crucial to build up momentum and potential for cooperation based on mutual trust, he added.

Lee emphasized that chronic differences such as historical issues and territorial disputes, which are difficult to resolve, should be managed prudently rather than rushed for immediate solutions.

The three countries have been operating bilateral mechanisms and carrying out strategic dialogues to address those differences, he said.

More important, he said that the peoples of the three countries must frequently meet face-to-face to build mutual understanding and trust while expanding areas of cooperation.

"This requires deepening people-to-people exchanges and advancing cooperation in practical areas closely related to daily life, such as the environment, disaster management, public health and aging populations," he said, adding that these areas are less affected by

Trilateral cooperation is now at a turning point where it must shift from quantitative growth to qualitative development."

Lee Hee-sup,
Secretary-General
of the Trilateral
Cooperation Secretariat

political factors and are those in which achievements can steadily be made.

In addition, by investing more positive energy in soft issues such as youth and cultural exchanges and interregional cooperation, the three countries are enhancing mutual understanding and trust among their peoples while steadily working for tangible outcomes, he said.

The three nations agreed last May to designate 2025-26 as the China-Japan-South Korea Cultural Exchange Year.

According to Lee, starting with the opening ceremony in April, various trilateral exchange events will be held, including the Culture Cities of East Asia project, the Trilateral Arts Festival and the Trilateral Cultural Content Industry Forum.

"Cultural and people-to-people exchanges among China, Japan and South Korea, based on their cultural commonalities, are essential for sustainable peace and common prosperity," he said.

As the three leaders agreed to maintain discussions on speeding up negotiations for a trilateral free-trade agreement, Lee said the negotiations will not only help identify areas of competition and areas of cooperation, allowing for more efficient collaboration, but also serve as a catalyst for upgrading the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which forms the foundation for the trilateral FTA.

China has been the largest trading partner of Japan and South Korea for years, while those two nations have been among the top four trading partners of China.

Statistics show that the three countries account for over 20 percent of the world's gross domestic product and over 18 percent of global trade.

Lyu Yaodong, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Japanese Studies, said that cooperation among the three countries must be future-oriented, and the common interests of the region should be prioritized.

This not only contributes to the well-being of the people of the three nations, but also to regional and global peace, stability and prosperity, he said.

China's role stressed in peaceful, green development

By SONG PING
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"We've come a long way," said Csaba Korosi, a Hungarian diplomat who served as president of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly from September 2022 to September 2023, reflecting on 75 years of diplomatic relations between China and Hungary. In an exclusive interview with China Daily during his visit to Beijing, Korosi emphasized the significant milestone of the all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership established in May 2024.

Hungary has become a key player in China's economic engagement in Europe. Under the Hungarian government's "Opening to the East" policy, adopted in 2012, and the Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, bilateral trade and investment have grown significantly, positioning Hungary as China's economic gateway to Europe.

Korosi explained that "the opening to the East does not mean it was previously closed to the East" but rather represents "a strategic shift".

To ensure healthy national development, it is essential to establish beneficial cooperation with global economic powerhouses, particularly



Csaba Korosi

ly China, which he described as a key driver of the world economy today.

The scale of Chinese investment in Hungary underscores this shift. According to the Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency, China leads in investment volume, with 5.2 billion euros (\$5.64 billion), accounting for 51 percent of the total. In 2024, China was Hungary's largest source of foreign direct investment.

China's investments, particularly in the automotive and electric vehicle industries, have transformed Hungary into a key hub for sustainable transportation in Europe. Chinese companies such as battery maker Contemporary Amperex Technology and EV maker BYD have established production facilities in Hungary, reinforcing the country's role in green transformation of the European automotive sector.

These investments align with Hungary's industrial strategy, which prioritizes green transportation and battery manufacturing.

Korosi, who was previously director of environmental sustain-

ability at the Office of the President of Hungary, acknowledged this shift, stating, "The transport industry is going to become less and less environment- and climate-harming. That is a trend that is harmonizing with our climate policies, with our climate agreements and our agreements on fulfilling the 17 Sustainable Development Goals."

However, as a former co-chair of the UN negotiations that produced the SDGs, Korosi expressed deep concern over the slow progress of global sustainability efforts. "We've already spent more than 60 percent of the implementation period, and the results indicate only about 17 percent progress. So we are falling far behind what we wanted to achieve."

China's growing economic influence in Hungary coincides with rising global trade tensions. Korosi warned that global cooperation on issues like climate change and water is crucial. If geopolitical rivalry dominates these areas, it will not only lead to a zero-sum game, but could devolve into a negative-sum game, where everyone loses.

He noted that the world is moving toward a deepening geopolitical divide, where economic cooperation is increasingly over-

shadowed by political rivalries, and markets are fragmenting into regional blocs. He believed that such divisions risk undermining global trade, technological collaboration, and broader transformation efforts agreed upon by the international community.

Looking ahead, Korosi emphasized the need for institutional reforms within the UN and other global governance structures, noting that the current system, created after World War II, no longer reflects today's realities. "Almost 80 years have passed and a lot has changed in the world. What was the balance of power at that time is not necessarily the balance of power today. So it would be much more frank and just to those countries that were not even there at the creation of the United Nations, of the Bretton Woods institutions, to make sure that they also have their say on equal footing," he added.

He pointed to the rising number of conflicts as clear evidence of the system's shortcomings. To address these challenges, he called for reforms aimed at not only strengthening peacekeeping efforts but also fostering more equitable and accelerated development worldwide.



Return to safety

Passengers board a bus on Thursday after being freed by armed militants who ambushed their train in a mountainous region of Balochistan Province in Pakistan. More than 340 train passengers taken hostage by a militant group were freed on Wednesday by security forces after a 30-hour siege, an army official said. BANARAS KHAN / AFP

Culture: Penalties in place as deterrent

From page 1

Now the entire society places high importance on cultural relics and heritage. This is significant progress and a reflection of our respect for our own history and culture, Chen said.

Another notable change is the significant escalation in administrative penalties for the destruction of cultural relics. The maximum fine for damaging cultural heritage has been increased from 500,000 yuan (\$68,790) to 10 million yuan, a revision that should effectively discourage illegal damage.

For Song Yan, deputy director of the Nanjing Museum Administration and also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, it is noteworthy that the revision frequently emphasizes the protection of ungraded "immovable" cultural relics and clearly outlines specific protective measures.

According to the third national census on cultural relics in China, conducted from 2007 to 2011, the country has more than 766,000 immovable cultural heritage sites, such as historical monuments, ancient architecture and rock carvings, among which 80 percent remained ungraded. The revision makes it clear that they should also be effectively protected.

Song also said the revision added numerous regulations and guidelines related to her work in the museum, especially regarding the effective utilization of cultural relics collected by museums. This responds to Xi's call for making cultural relics "alive", an instruction reflected in the revision.

Last year, the Nanjing Museum Administration held 40 exhibitions and conducted more than 1,200 educational activities. Centered around the theme "Growing Up in the Museum", it has introduced 108

exciting activities for teenagers, including exhibitions, educational programs, study tours and summer camps.

Song's team also collaborated with primary and middle schools to offer innovative experiences for students, aiming to attract more young people to visit the museum and learn about the culture behind the relics.

Wei Xiaolong, director of the Famen Temple Museum in Baoji, Shaanxi province, said he was impressed by the revision's emphasis on the use of high technology in research work, relics protection, digital collection and immersive shows.

The museum has many antique pieces made from delicate and fragile materials such as silk, wood and glass, particularly from the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Wei hopes to use high technology to better protect them, and the revision clearly supports such measures.

As the newly revised law facilitates international exchanges and cooperation in archaeological work, restoration, exhibitions, scientific research, law enforcement and judicial matters related to cultural relics protection, it also asserts the right to repatriate lost cultural relics and actively fulfills obligations under international conventions.

Wei said the law also explicitly prohibits the trade of cultural relics that are stolen or illegally obtained. It strengthens the regulation of companies involved in the sale and auction of cultural relics, requiring them to meet information disclosure obligations and banning false advertising.

"The new law also encourages individuals or organizations to donate or lend cultural relics to museums for the first time. We need to thoroughly review these new revisions to better carry out museum work," Wei said.

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Partnership: Tech transfer bridging Africa's digital divide

From page 1

Trade between Africa and China has also evolved significantly. While Africa's exports to the West have historically been dominated by raw materials such as oil, minerals and agricultural products, China has expanded its imports to include a broader range of goods. This diversification incentivizes local value addition and industrialization, enabling African countries to climb the global value chain.

For example, China's increasing demand for processed agricultural products from Africa has spurred the development of agro-processing industries in countries such as Ghana and Kenya. By fostering these industries, China is helping Africa reduce its dependency on volatile commodity markets and to build more resilient economies.

China's role in Africa is not limited to trade and infrastructure. It

has also become a key partner in technology transfer and capacity building. Through scholarships, training programs and technical assistance, China is equipping African professionals with the skills needed to manage and sustain development projects.

The establishment of technology hubs and digital infrastructure by Chinese companies, such as Huawei and ZTE, is bridging Africa's digital divide and positioning the continent as a player in the global technology ecosystem. According to the International Telecommunication Union, Africa's internet penetration is projected to reach 50 percent by 2030, up from 22 percent in 2020, with much of this growth attributed to Chinese investment in digital infrastructure.

Critics of China's involvement in Africa often raise concerns about debt sustainability and potential neocolonialism. However, the broad-

er picture reveals a more nuanced reality. Chinese loans are typically used to finance revenue-generating projects, such as toll roads and power plants, that can repay themselves over time.

Moreover, China has demonstrated flexibility in renegotiating loan terms with African countries facing repayment challenges, contrasting with the often rigid approach of Western creditors. For instance, in 2020, China suspended debt repayments for several African countries under the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative, providing much-needed fiscal relief during the devastating COVID-19 pandemic.

The strategic alignment between Africa and China extends to geopolitical cooperation. China's support for Africa's representation in global institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, reflects a commitment to amplifying Africa's

voice on the international stage. Initiatives like the BRICS, and China's backing of the African Continental Free Trade Area underscore a shared vision for a multipolar world where Africa plays a central role. The AfCFTA, the largest free trade area in the world by number of countries, has the potential to boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2025, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. China's investment in the infrastructure needed to support this trade is a testament to its long-term commitment to Africa's integration into the global economy.

Future projections suggest that the China-Africa partnership will continue to deepen. The World Bank estimates that Africa's population will double to 2.5 billion by 2050, making it a critical market for global economic growth. China's engagement with Africa is likely to evolve to meet the continent's

changing needs, with a growing focus on green energy, climate adaptation and sustainable development. Investments in renewable energy projects, such as solar and wind farms, are already underway, reflecting a shift toward environmentally conscious development. These initiatives align with Africa's own aspirations to transition to a low-carbon economy and to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The transformative potential of the China-Africa partnership is perhaps best illustrated by its impact on perceptions about Africa's future. For decades, the continent was seen as a land of perpetual crisis, characterized by poverty, conflict and dependency. Today, Africa is increasingly viewed as a continent of opportunity, with China playing a pivotal role in reshaping this narrative.

As Africa continues to engage with China, the prospect of moving from the periphery to the core of the global economic system becomes increasingly tangible. This transformation is not merely a the-

oretical possibility but a present reality, evidenced by the infrastructure, industries, and institutions that are emerging across the continent. China's approach, which emphasizes mutual respect and shared prosperity, offers a compelling alternative to the exploitative relationships that have historically defined Africa's interactions with the world.

The story of China and Africa is ultimately one of hope and transformation. It is a testament to what can be achieved when nations prioritize collaboration over exploitation, and when development is driven by a shared vision of mutual benefit. Africa's ascent, anchored by its collaboration with China, is no longer a distant dream but a dynamic reality that promises to reshape the world for generations to come.

The author is the executive director of South-South Dialogues, a Nairobi-based communications development think tank. The views do not necessarily represent those of China Daily.

CHINA

Childcare training



Trainees receive guidance from a childcare professional during a labor skills training program in Datong Hui and Tu autonomous county, Qinghai province, on Wednesday. The specialized training program was launched to improve the locals' labor skills and give them more employment opportunities. ZHANG ZHONGPING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Unions call for better protection of female jobseekers, employees

Employers warned against biased hiring and unfair treatment of women

By CHENG SI
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Several provincial trade unions in China have called for fairer treatment of female jobseekers and employees to better protect women's labor rights, promote gender equality and foster more harmonious workplace relationships.

The Hunan Federation of Trade Unions recently issued an online reminder warning employers against posting job openings exclusively for men or giving male candidates priority in hiring.

The notice also stated that employers should not ask female jobseekers about their marital or childbearing status, investigate their family plans or require pregnancy tests as part of pre-employment health screenings. A woman's gender, marital status or fertility status should not be grounds for denying her a job, it said.

The reminder urged employers to sign labor contracts with female employees and clarify their rights, including maternity leave, within the agreements. It also emphasized the importance of adhering to the principle of "equal pay for equal work".

For women in flexible jobs or new forms of employment, includ-

“We can work just as good as men and should not be denied employment or promotion opportunities because of our gender.”

Chang Wei, jewelry designer in Beijing

ing food delivery workers or ride-hailing drivers, the federation called for collective negotiations to clarify workload, pay and working hours.

The Hunan trade union group also reminded employers to provide necessary protective equipment for female workers, prioritize their physical and mental health, and take steps to prevent workplace sexual harassment.

Other provincial trade unions, including those in Qinghai and Fujian, have made similar calls, urging employers to respect female workers, ensure fair pay and career

advancement, and avoid imposing restrictions based on marriage or childbirth.

Public concern over workplace discrimination against women has grown in recent years as many women continue to face unfair treatment in the job market.

A recent report by recruitment portal Zhaopin found that 62.5 percent of surveyed female workers had been asked about their marital or fertility status during job interviews, up from 48.8 percent last year. In contrast, only 18.5 percent of surveyed male workers reported facing such questions. The findings were based on 3,788 responses collected through the platform.

“It's understandable that a company wants an employee who can work stably without interruptions from pregnancy or maternity leave, but it's unfair to us women,” said Chang Wei, a 31-year-old jewelry designer in Beijing. “We can work just as good as men and should not be denied employment or promotion opportunities because of our gender.”

Chang said she left her previous job in October 2023 after being reassigned to a less important position following the birth of her child.

“I then started my own jewelry workshop later that year, and now I have six staff members — two men and four women — who all do excellent work. A person's talent

and ability should not be defined by gender.”

Li Qiang, vice-president of Zhaopin, said more women are entering the job market with confidence but still face challenges related to childbirth and employment discrimination. He hopes more measures can be introduced to encourage men and women to share child-rearing responsibilities so that motherhood does not hinder women's career growth.

Many political advisers and national legislators also put forward proposals during the recently concluded annual two sessions to strengthen protections for working women.

Zhu Tonghui, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, told Henan Daily that she hopes the government will further refine laws and regulations to prevent gender discrimination in employment. She suggested clearer definitions and legal responsibilities related to gender discrimination, as well as improved complaint channels to help women protect their rights.

Zhu also proposed exploring mechanisms to alleviate employers' financial concerns about hiring female staff, such as providing financial subsidies, tax reductions or establishing a national birth-related fund to ease the financial burden on companies.

Fujian values shared ancestry with Taiwan

By WANG QINGYUN
and HU MEIDONG

Deputies to the 14th National People's Congress from Fujian province have shared their experiences and suggestions on enhancing cultural exchanges between Fujian and Taiwan to foster stronger ties across the Taiwan Strait.

Wang Jinzu, secretary of the Communist Party of China Zhangzhou city committee, said Fujian, which “shares the same root and the same blood” with Taiwan, has the closest ties to the island among all mainland provinces.

The dialect, culture and customs in Zhangzhou, a city in southern Fujian, are similar to those in Taiwan, and many residents in both places share common ancestry, Wang said.

The city, which is striving to become a center for global exchanges of Minnan culture, is leveraging these connections to enhance shared understanding and emotional bonds across the Strait, he said.

Minnan culture is a significant cultural influence that originated in southern Fujian province. Minnan culture has spread beyond Fujian due to migration, particularly to Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

In recent years, Zhangzhou has collected historical records reflecting the stories of residents who moved to Taiwan from the mainland and has built several venues showcasing the connection between both sides, including one displaying letters written to family members across the Strait, Wang said.

The city has 306 Taiwan-related cultural relics and plans to strengthen their protection while producing a series of micro-videos to tell the stories of the relics, he added.

Taiwan-related cultural relics are defined as items that document his-

torical political, economic and cultural exchanges between the mainland and Taiwan, demonstrate the shared ancestry of people on both sides of the Strait and hold historical, artistic and scientific value, according to the Fujian Provincial Bureau of Cultural Heritage. These include ancestral shrines, ancestral houses and tombs.

Huang Lei, president of the Federation of Taiwan Compatriots of Nanping, a city in northern Fujian, said 1,515 such relics have been registered in the province.

However, concerns remain over ineffective protection, Huang said, suggesting a tiered system to classify the relics by importance and apply different maintenance measures accordingly.

Huang also called for a comprehensive survey to compile a list of endangered relics and ensure prompt preservation efforts, encouraging public participation in protection initiatives.

Lu Luanmei, a member of the standing committee of the Fujian provincial committee of the China Democratic League, proposed that the financial support for repairing the relics should be expanded through different channels, and collaboration between people on both sides of the Strait should be encouraged to preserve them.

She urged the government to fund repairs for privately owned relic sites, suggesting that these sites could become free destinations to boost local tourism. A portion of the tourism revenue could then be allocated to site owners as an incentive, she said.

Huang encouraged local authorities to hold special exhibitions and commemorative events about the relics to attract more visitors from Taiwan and strengthen young Taiwan residents' awareness of their ancestral roots.

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Participants learn about local hand puppetry art during a cross-Strait intangible cultural heritage exchange event in Fuzhou, Fujian province, on Dec 13. ZHANG BIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Food chain shuts three outlets over violations

By LIANG SHUANG
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Yangmingyu Braised Chicken and Rice, a famous Chinese fast-food chain, shut down multiple stores in Henan province after a media report exposed serious food safety violations, including the reuse of leftovers and sale of spoiled beef offered as fresh meat.

Jinan Yangmingyu Catering Management Co, the franchise's parent company based in Jinan, Shandong province, issued a statement on Wednesday apologizing for not ensuring food safety and announcing the immediate and permanent closure of three affected outlets in Henan province — the Zhengzhou Erqi Wanda Store, the Zhengzhou Kangfu Qianjie Store and the Shangqiu Wanding Plaza Store.

Regulators in Shangqiu, Henan, said in a statement that officials had sealed the implicated restaurants and taken food samples for testing. They vowed strict legal action following the investigation's findings.

The probe was triggered by an undercover report from Beijing News, which found several Yangmingyu franchise locations using expired ingredients, recycling leftovers and adding coloring agents to blackened beef to make it appear

fresh. The report also said many stores employed workers without required health certifications.

Braised chicken and rice, or *huangmenji mijan*, is a popular and comforting Chinese dish that is generally believed to have originated in Shandong. The delicacy is particularly known for its quick and easy preparation, and the chicken, the rice and the sauce go well together. Many netizens dubbed it as one of the three “national snacks”, along with Lanzhou beef noodles and Shaxian snacks.

According to its website, the Yangmingyu company, which began operations in 2011, has branches in over 200 cities. As of September last year, the company has 2,703 stores nationwide, Southern Metropolis Daily reported.

Legal expert Tan Mintao told Beijing News that the violations contravened China's Food Safety Law, which allows authorities to confiscate illicit earnings and impose fines. Consumers who suffered harm from unsafe food could also seek compensation from the businesses involved.

In response to public outcry, the State Council's Food Safety Office ordered supervisory agencies in Shandong and Henan to oversee the investigation and ensure compliance.

Pig kidney transplanted into renal disease patient

By QIN FENG in Xi'an
and ZOU SHUO in Beijing

Doctors at Xijing Hospital, affiliated with Air Force Medical University in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, recently transplanted a multi-gene-edited pig kidney into a patient with end-stage renal disease, marking a significant milestone in xenotransplantation.

A multidisciplinary team led by Qin Weijun, director of the hospital's urology department, performed the surgery on March 6 under the guidance of Dou Kefeng, an academician from the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Upon restoring blood flow, the kidney turned a healthy reddish color and began producing urine. Six days after the operation, the transplanted kidney remained functional, with the patient's serum creatinine levels returning to normal.

The surgery marks the world's fifth such procedure and Asia's

first. It is also another clinical breakthrough for Xijing Hospital, which performed the world's first successful gene-edited pig-to-brain-dead recipient xenogeneic orthotopic whole liver transplant on Jan 7.

The kidney, sourced from Clonorgan Biotechnology Co in Chengdu, Sichuan province, was transplanted after precise surgical adjustments.

Qin said xenotransplantation could help overcome the shortage of human organ donors, providing timely solutions for patients in need. The team will closely monitor immune rejection, coagulation risks and potential infections.

In China, approximately 130 million people have chronic kidney disease, and the number of end-stage patients continues to rise. While kidney transplantation is the only cure, organ shortages force countless patients to endure prolonged dialysis, often deteriorating as they wait.

“This breakthrough offers new clinical options for patients and validates the feasibility of xenotransplantation. With further research, it could help address global organ shortages,” Dou said.

The patient is a 69-year-old woman who has battled severe high blood pressure, diabetes and other chronic conditions for more than 30 years. Diagnosed with end-stage renal failure eight years ago, her only options were dialysis or a kidney transplant.

Due to her high sensitivity to human donor antigens, no compatible human kidney was available, leaving her reliant on thrice-weekly dialysis. Her condition worsened after a stroke three years ago and a subsequent heart attack.

Despite these challenges, her son, Liu Shun (a pseudonym), persisted in caring for her. Balancing day and nighttime work, he carried his mother up and down the stairs of their four-story apartment building each day for eight years.

“My mother's illness is my greatest pain, but also my strongest motivation to save her,” he said.

After learning of Xijing Hospital's xenotransplantation research, Liu and his mother decided to pursue the experimental procedure.

“Someone had to take the first step to the moon. Our leap of faith is to test this possibility and bring hope to others,” Liu said. “The medical team's round-the-clock care has given us great confidence and courage. We hope this research paves a path for others.”

Before the surgery, the hospital's academic, medical ethics, organ transplant and animal committees reviewed the protocol, with input from international xenotransplant ethics experts. More than 20 departments collaborated on pre-operative planning, intraoperative coordination and postoperative care.

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CHINA

NE ZHA'S BRUSH WITH SUCCESS SPREADS

Fans paint murals of celebrated character on walls across the nation

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and CHEN LIANG

In the wake of the success of the animated movie *Ne Zha 2*, a wave of "Ne Zha fever" has swept across China.

Streets have become canvases for vibrant murals, with the rebellious yet heroic figure taking center stage. Some Ne Zha-themed graffiti walls have become hot spots for tourists to snap photos.

Wang Jianjie, 33, an artist from Gaoping city, Shanxi province, took the lead in creating one of the popular graffiti walls.

He told China Daily that he and his team worked from 8 am to 5 pm, overcoming many challenges, to present the 2.5-meter-high and 1-meter-wide image of Ne

Zha in graffiti on a wall in an urban village in Gaoping.

"Seeing our creation become a popular spot for visitors fills me with joy," Wang said. The mural vividly portrays Ne Zha's fierce determination and inner strength, traits that have resonated deeply with audiences at home and abroad.

For Wang, the inspiration behind the mural was deeply personal.

"Ne Zha's expression is resolute, his eyes gleaming with unyielding determination. Despite his small stature, he embodies immense power. That's the spirit I wanted to convey through my artwork," he said.

The creative process, however, was far from easy, with February temperatures dropping to -4 C.



Wang Jianjie works on a mural of Ne Zha in Gaoping, Shanxi province.

PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

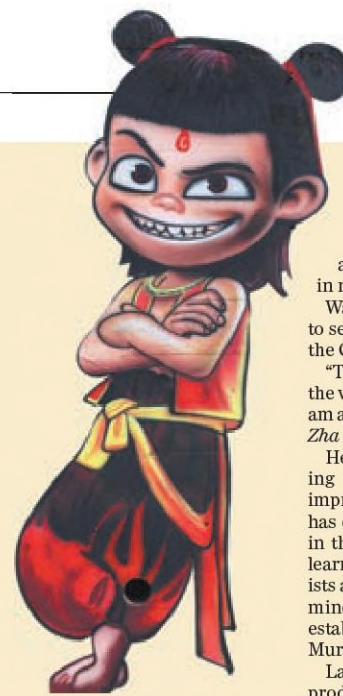
"The cold was our biggest challenge," Wang said. "When we were sketching the outline, my hands were so numb I could barely hold the chalk."

Undeterred, Wang and his team carefully selected a bridge underpass in an urban village as the location.

"The wall here has good quality, ample space, low traffic flow and a safe surrounding environment, making it an ideal place for painting," he said.

To complement the mural of young Ne Zha, they also painted a larger, 3-meter-tall depiction of an adult Ne Zha nearby, creating a striking contrast that invites viewers to reflect on themes of growth and transformation.

Bi Haibo,



A picture of Ne Zha by Wang and his team in Gaoping.

another member of the team, said, "We hope to celebrate the global success of *Ne Zha 2* in our own way, closely linking our city with the animation, while also inspiring us to continue exploring the field of art."

The completed murals quickly won the hearts of locals. Wang Shiya, a devoted Ne Zha fan from

Gaoping, couldn't contain her excitement.

"It's incredible to see such amazing artwork right here in my hometown!" she said.

Wang Jianjie said that he went to see *Ne Zha 2* on the first day of the Chinese New Year.

"The plot was outstanding, and the visual effects were stunning. I am already looking forward to *Ne Zha 3*," he said.

He said that he has loved drawing since he was young. To improve his painting skills, he has often traveled to other cities in the country over the years to learn from excellent graffiti artists and has made a group of like-minded friends. He has established the Dingjie Wall Mural Art Studio in Gaoping.

Last August, the domestically produced game *Black Myth: Wukong* brought attention to Shanxi's ancient architecture, with Gaoping's Tiefs Temple as one of the game's scenes attracting a large number of tourists.

Wang Jianjie and his team seized the opportunity to paint Sun Wukong, the protagonist of the game, and other related images around the Iron Buddha Temple, welcoming visitors with a series of Wukong-themed wall murals.

Recently, Ne Zha-themed murals have also appeared in the cities of Taiyuan and Datong in Shanxi. Leveraging this popular character, local authorities are promoting the deep integration of culture and tourism.

Near Zhijiabu Forest Park in Datong, a mural of Ne Zha characters, about 4.5 meters high and 10 meters wide, quickly became a new hot spot for visitors.

Zhang Yekong, the leader of the creative team, said, "To capture the dynamic flames on the mural, we combined spray painting with hand-painting techniques to bring the characters to life."

"Our goal with the Ne Zha murals is to inspire young people to stay true to themselves and keep striving for their dreams," Zhang added.

Looking ahead, Wang Jianjie is optimistic about the future of graffiti art.

"Our team has always loved animation. Through our work, we hope to introduce more people to the richness of Chinese culture," he said.

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A passerby admires a Ne Zha-themed mural painted on a wall of a bridge underpass in Taiyuan, Shanxi, on Feb 25.

Chongqing charity lifts poetry from the page for partially sighted

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

In mid-January, an exceptional and joyful gathering took place at a training center in Chongqing's Nan'an district. A Chinese literature class tailored for a group of partially sighted people was organized, offering them the chance to delve into the rich tapestry of Chinese studies.

Led by a volunteer teacher, the 21 participants were divided into three groups and dedicated two and a half hours to the study of a Chinese poem from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) themed around Spring Festival and traditional well-wishing Chinese couplets.

During the session, the teacher utilized an audio recording of a recitation to meticulously explain the literal meanings and deeper connotations of the poem to the participants, sentence by sentence.

To conclude the session, a fun group quiz was held, adding an exciting finale to the event.

The participants were members of the Chongqing branch of the national nonprofit charity Running in the Dark. It was their third in-person Chinese literature session.

Originating in Shanghai in 2016, Running in the Dark supports partially sighted runners and has expanded to include 27 branches nationwide, diversifying its activities to encompass sports such as hiking, cycling and swimming. "Ours is the first branch in the country to offer Chinese literature classes for the community," said Lu Wei, founder of the Chongqing branch.

Established in October 2022, the Chongqing branch has over 200 partially sighted members and a volunteer base of more than 400 individuals from diverse backgrounds.



From left: Participants of a Chinese literature class held by the Chongqing branch of the nonprofit charity Running in the Dark take a group photo in Chongqing's Nan'an district. Partially sighted members of the Chongqing branch attend the class taught by a volunteer.

PHOTOS BY DENG RUI / CHINA DAILY

"Like everyone else, they aspire to gain cultural knowledge and insight, and they are eager to learn," Lu said.

Five months ago, he initiated the class to combine cultural learning with physical activities.

"I hope to enhance their understanding of thousands of years of Chinese history by having them learn traditional Chinese cultural treasures such as Tang (618-907) poetry and Song ci poems taught in elementary school."

To accommodate their diverse levels of cultural proficiency, the curriculum is structured into three tiers. For instance, those with lower literacy skills engage with books from grades one and two.

"I'm a blind person, but I am not illiterate," said Deng Xuemei, a 51-year-old member who won the most prizes in the class competition. She said that within a span of three months, she managed to memorize over 40 ancient Chinese poems.

Immersed in her family's early exposure to ancient aesthetics, Deng cultivated a deep affection for these artistic elements. However, her life took a drastic turn when she lost her eyesight at the age of 15 due to a retinal detachment accident. Consequently, she discontinued her education and later transitioned into a career as a masseuse.

However, the majority of the branch members have much lower education levels, with some even being illiterate, as a consequence of their visual impairments, especially among those who lost their sight since childhood, according to Lu.

"I was born completely blind and have never attended school, and I struggle with a poor memory, making it challenging for me to understand poetry," said member Zhang Jun. "But with the teacher taking the time to explain each word patiently, I have put in a lot of effort to stay on track with others through self-study."

Zhang said one poem he deeply resonates with is *A Short Song* written by Cao Cao, a warlord and poet who lived between the second and third centuries.

He said that team leader Lu encourages them to recite this poem while running. With each line comprising four characters, the rhythmic recitation synchronizes with their breathing, offering a dual advantage of physical exercise and cultural enrichment.

"I study Chinese for around an hour daily, and our group study schedule is flexible. I believe in gradual progress," said Zhang. "Learning traditional Chinese culture boosts my wisdom in handling situations, making me more skilled at managing tasks."

According to the China Disabled Persons' Federation, by 2023, about 85.9 million people in China were living with disabilities, accounting for 6.3 percent of the population. The partially sighted population in

China exceeded 17 million, accounting for 17 percent of the national disabled population and nearly 18 percent of the global partially sighted population, with nearly 700,000 to 1.4 million partially sighted children.

According to the 2023 Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Disability Services released by the federation, China is vigorously promoting national standard sign language and national standard Braille.

There are 128 special education regular high schools in the country, with 12,429 students enrolled, including 1,816 partially sighted students.

At a national seminar on partially sighted education held in October last year in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, Ju Sihua, director of the Visual Impairment Education Research Center at Nanjing Normal University of Special Education, pointed out that the scale and demand for par-

tially sighted education in China are significant, yet the quality needs improvement, Xinhua Daily Telegraph reported.

Despite their limited educational background, their commitment to learning is truly remarkable. Apart from attending their regular classes, members of the Running in the Dark Chongqing branch spontaneously share interpretations of Chinese poems via voice messages within their WeChat group.

Their routine physical activities, particularly running, dominate their screens daily — starting as early as 5 am.

This vibrant and life-loving community greatly influences many volunteers.

"I am deeply motivated by their optimism and passion," said 44-year-old Bai Weihua, the volunteer teacher and an escort runner who became part of the group in August 2023.

Bai added that their remarkable learning abilities and proficiency in utilizing modern digital technologies to enrich their learning experiences have set a high benchmark for him, inspiring him to enhance his own efforts.

The branch members conduct training sessions on local sports fields once or twice a month. So far, over 30 members have participated in marathons with the assistance of volunteer escort runners.

After completing a full marathon on Dec 1, Yu Chun, Deng's husband, has become the fastest marathon runner among the group. His time for the 2024 Shanghai Marathon was 4 hours and 8 minutes.

In the same event, Chen Hong, 50, and Lei Na, 40, from the group made history as the first partially sighted couple in China to finish a full marathon.

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WORLD

Pro-Palestine protest at Trump Tower leads to almost 100 arrests

By HENG WEILI in New York
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New York City police arrested scores of demonstrators at Trump Tower on Thursday who were protesting against the detention of a Palestinian activist and military support for Israel.

The crowd of about 150 demonstrators — from the progressive anti-Zionist group Jewish Voice for Peace, who wore shirts with the message, “Jews Say Stop Arming Israel”, gathered at about noon in a downstairs atrium outside the Trump Grill restaurant in Manhattan, the New York Post reported.

A total of 98 people were arrested. “Those arrests are for trespassing, obstructing government administration, and resisting arrest by virtue of us having to carry some of the people out of the escalator, which you saw,” said NYPD Chief of Department John Chell.

Some protesters carried signs that said “Free Mahmoud, Free Palestine”. Mahmoud Khalil is a Palestinian graduate of Columbia University who was detained by US immigration authorities over the weekend. He has organized many of the pro-Palestine protests at the Ivy League campus in New York.

A permanent resident of the US, Khalil was taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents on Saturday night. A federal judge has temporarily blocked his deportation, and Khalil is awaiting proceedings in a federal jail in Louisiana.

“I’m just standing up for my rights, and I’m standing up for Mahmoud Khalil, who has been abducted illegally and taken to an undisclosed location,” said one of the protesters, the American actor Debra Winger, to The Associated Press. “Does that sound like America to you?”

Khalil, 30, who is married to an American citizen and hasn’t been charged with breaking any laws, was arrested outside his New York City apartment.

US President Donald Trump, in

a post Monday on his Truth Social platform, called Khalil a “Radical Foreign Pro-Hamas Student” and announced that his arrest was “the first arrest of many to come”.

“We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity, and the Trump Administration will not tolerate it,” Trump said.

The Trump administration made a campaign promise to deport foreign-born activists who participated in a wave of protests on American college campuses last year. The protests followed Israel military actions in Gaza, which came after the October 2023 attack on Israel by the militant group Hamas, which controlled the Palestinian enclave.

Media reports on Thursday said that Khalil has worked for the British government on its “flagship soft power policy”.

“It’s outright defamation what Trump has done. Mahmoud is an extremely kind and conscientious person and he was loved by his colleagues at the Syria Office,” Andrew Waller, a former British diplomat, told the Middle East Eye website.

The website reported that Khalil previously worked as a program manager at the Syria Office in the British embassy in Beirut from 2018 to 2022. Middle East Eye said that online records that it reviewed showed that Khalil worked as a local manager for the Syria Chevening Program, a prestigious UK government international scholarship, as well as for the Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund.

Trump Tower, on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, just south of Central Park, serves as headquarters for the Trump Organization and is where the president stays when he is in New York.

The multi-story atrium is accessible to the public and connects visitors to eateries, including the Trump Grill.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Tanker tragedy



Teams inspect on Wednesday a gasoline tanker that exploded, causing the death of two people and injuring 14 others near Otedola Bridge in Lagos state in Nigeria. Flames engulfed several vehicles in the area following Tuesday night’s explosion. EMMANUEL OSODI VIA GETTY IMAGES

SF consul general calls for respectful relations

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco
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China’s consul general in San Francisco has denounced the Trump administration’s tariffs on Chinese imports, reiterated that “fentanyl is America’s problem” and called for a peaceful, stable and sustainable China-US relationship.

At a Wednesday meeting with the media at his residence, Consul General Zhang Jianmin emphasized the important role mutual respect plays in bilateral relations. “Only by respecting each other’s core interests and major concerns can we ensure that the relationship moves forward on a sound and stable track,” he said.

“Take the fentanyl issue for example, Zhang continued. “What China did has reflected our respect for US concern and in particular, our goodwill towards the American people.”

Citing China’s white paper titled *Controlling Fentanyl-Related Substances—China’s Contribution*, which provides a comprehensive account of the situation, Zhang said China has in place the toughest policies and measures on counter-narcotics.

Fentanyl is America’s problem, said Zhang. “We don’t have a fentanyl problem in China like here in the US, yet when the US side asked China for help in 2019, China responded by scheduling all fentanyl-related substances as a class,” Zhang said, adding that China was the first country to do so.

China has conducted counter-narcotics cooperation with the US in a broad-based and in-depth fashion. “We educate our children; we crack down on drug kingpins; we send addicts to rehabilitation;

“The US has recently imposed a 20 percent tariff hike on Chinese goods under the pretext of fentanyl. This is, in the eyes of many, repaying kindness with enmity.”

Zhang Jianmin, consul general of China in San Francisco

we discipline stoned celebrities,” Zhang said. “The achievements are hard won, and we hope the US can continue the positive dynamics in the counternarcotics cooperation.”

However, respect has not been mutual, Zhang said. “The US has recently imposed a 20 percent tariff hike on Chinese goods under the pretext of fentanyl. This is, in the eyes of many, repaying kindness with enmity,” he said.

Such US action has seriously undermined the foundation of China-US counter-narcotics cooperation, disrupted economic and trade ties, and harmed the health and stability of the overall relationship, Zhang said. “The Chinese people are deeply offended and strongly opposed to it.”

Instead of solving the existing problem, a tariff war creates new problems, and hence makes things worse, said Zhang.

According to many economists, American consumers and companies will ultimately bear the cost of higher tariffs. It is estimated that

because of the tariff increase, the average price of a smartphone in the US is expected to rise by \$213, and that of a car by \$3,125.

At a news conference during China’s recently concluded two sessions, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi raised a series of questions regarding the US levying tariffs: What has the United States achieved from tariff and trade wars these years? Has its trade deficit increased or decreased? Has its manufacturing sector become more or less competitive? Has its inflation rate gone up or down? And has the life of its people got better or worse?

A tariff war and coercion offer no solutions, Zhang said, adding that such approaches will backfire and in the end do more harm to the US itself.

China has set its GDP growth target at around 5 percent for this year, and China has accounted for around 30 percent of global economic growth.

“Our respective success can be translated into each other’s opportunity rather than challenge, and our respective development can facilitate, rather than impede, each other’s progress,” Zhang said. “We are pleased to see that companies from California have participated in the China International Import Expo (CIIE) for seven years in a row. Each year, their exhibition booth has got bigger, and the number of participating companies has kept increasing.

“When I went shopping in Beijing, I was glad to see Napa wine and Californian almonds on the shelves. China’s sustained development will present even more opportunities of mutually beneficial cooperation for both sides,” he said.

Russia yet to decide on Ukraine truce deal

MOSCOW — The Kremlin said on Wednesday it would review details from Washington about a proposal for a 30-day cease-fire in Ukraine before responding, while US Secretary of State Marco Rubio hoped a deal would be struck within days.

As Moscow considered the plan, President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday made a visit to Russia’s Kursk region for the first time since Ukrainian troops captured part of it last year.

Valery Gerasimov, head of Russia’s General Staff, told Putin that his troops had repelled Ukrainian forces from 86 percent of the ground they once held in Kursk. Ukraine had hoped to use that territory as a bargaining chip in any peace talks with Moscow.

Meanwhile, US officials have landed in Moscow for talks over the Ukraine crisis, Russian media reported on Thursday.

The team was headed by US President Donald Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff, according to TASS news agency.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said earlier on Thursday that contacts had been planned with US negotiators.

Peskov said that Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov and US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz talked over the phone on Wednesday, adding that “certain information” was provided to Russia during the conversation.

The United States on Tuesday agreed to resume weapons supplies and intelligence sharing with Ukraine after Kyiv said, during talks in Saudi Arabia, that it was ready to support a cease-fire proposal.

The Kremlin on Wednesday said it was carefully studying the results of that meeting and awaiting details from the US.

Rubio said the United States was hoping for a positive response. Two people familiar with the matter said Russia has presented Washington with a list of demands for a deal to end the Ukraine conflict and reset relations with the US.

Rubio said Europe would have to be involved in any security guarantee for Ukraine.

In Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed this week’s meeting in Saudi Arabia as constructive, and said a potential 30-day cease-fire with Russia could be used to draft a broader peace deal.

Kyiv’s forces have been on the verge of losing their foothold in Kursk. Their main supply lines were cut and they ceded control of the town of Sudzha.

Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the international affairs committee of the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia’s parliament, said on Telegram that Russia’s advances in Ukraine must be taken into account in any deal. “Real agreements are still being written there, at the front. Which they should understand in Washington too,” he said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Briefly

MADAGASCAR Chinese embassy warns against trafficking

The Chinese embassy in Madagascar announced on Wednesday that local law enforcement authorities have recently cracked a case involving cross-border marriage-related human trafficking, leading to the arrest of several Chinese nationals. The embassy reiterated its reminder to Chinese citizens to strictly abide by relevant laws and regulations concerning international marriage. It highlighted that, according to Chinese law, no matchmaking agency is permitted to engage in international marriage matchmaking services, and that individuals are prohibited from using deceptive means or pursuing profit through international marriage brokerage activities.

THE NETHERLANDS Duterte anticipates long legal proceedings

Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, who is in the Netherlands, said on Thursday that he will take responsibility for everything during his presidency. In a video posted on his Facebook page,

Duterte said he expected a long legal proceeding, and that he will continue to serve his country. The video, taken inside the chartered plane carrying Duterte to the Netherlands, was posted before his plane landed at Rotterdam The Hague Airport. A spokesman confirmed Duterte was in court custody after he arrived in Rotterdam.

UNITED STATES Mission to bring back astronauts delayed

NASA and SpaceX on Wednesday delayed the launch of a replacement crew of four astronauts to the International Space Station that would have set in motion the long-awaited homecoming of US astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams — stuck in space for nine months after a trip on Boeing’s Starliner. The launch was called off due to a hydraulic system issue with a ground support clamp arm for the Falcon 9 rocket, NASA said in a statement. NASA said it is now targeting on Friday. If successful, the mission with astronauts Wilmore and Williams would depart the space station on March 19, it said.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES—XINHUA

China’s breakthroughs in tech, sustainability hailed

By ZHENG WANYIN in London
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Chinese experiences in advancing modernization, innovation, and sustainability have profound implications for global development, experts have said.

They made these remarks on Tuesday at an event during the annual London Book Fair marking the launch of the English editions of the China Development Report 2024 and the Global Development Report 2024, jointly published by Foreign Languages Press and China Development Press.

The China Development Report 2024, authored by the Development Research Center of the State Council, mainly presents China’s overall economic and social development achievements in 2023, along with key research findings on the country’s new energy industries, artificial intelligence, data

economy and carbon markets.

The Global Development Report 2024, written by the Center for International Knowledge on Development, explores pathways for international collaboration amid geopolitical turbulence to address shared global challenges, such as climate change, industrial and supply chain resilience, digitalization, poverty reduction, and food security.

“China has made enormous progress over the last 40 years with its reform and opening-up agenda, and now it will need to make the jump to become a fully developed economy with good living standards and strong innovation capabilities, represented by the new quality productive forces. We have seen some strides, such as DeepSeek, and we should recognize and show the respected exterior,” Vince Cable, former secretary of state for business, innovation and skills of the United Kingdom, told China Daily.



A man reads at a booth displaying China-themed books at the London Book Fair in Britain on Wednesday. LI YING / XINHUA

Jack Perry, chairman of the 48 Group, a London-based organization dedicated to promoting Sino-British economic cooperation, said China’s breakthrough in high-tech sectors, renewable energy and infrastructure connectivity “sets the pace for how nations will develop in decades ahead”, and he believes China and the UK share commitment to upholding collaboration and a long-term vision.

“At the heart of these reports is a recognition that development is not just about numbers. It is about people, about societies, about the choices we make for future generations,” he added.

The London Book Fair this year, running from Tuesday to Thursday, saw a strong presence from China, with over 4,000 titles brought by more than 50 Chinese publishers.

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GLOBAL LENS



People move their boat that is stuck in ice in Nuuk's harbor, Greenland, on March 9. MARKO DJURICA / REUTERS



Children play on an icy surface in Nuuk, Greenland, on Feb 16. EMILIO MORENATTI / AP



Houses covered by snow are seen on the coast of a sea inlet of Nuuk, Greenland, on March 7. EVGENIY MALOLETKA / AP

FREEZING POINT

Greenlanders' Inuit identity revives as US plans to take over the island

On a boat, surrounded by snow-covered mountains and icebergs in shades of blue, Qooqu Berthelsen points to the breaking sea ice as a worrisome sign.

Now, though, something is worrying him and many Greenlanders as much as the retreating ice that endangers their livelihood.

"Greenland," said the 23-year-old hunter, fisher and tour company owner, "is not for sale."

Like Berthelsen, Greenlanders are now debating the best way to ensure they control their future.

This big Arctic island held a closely-watched parliamentary election on Tuesday, as the United States President Donald Trump has made it clear he wants to take control of the region that occupies a strategic North Atlantic location and contains rare earth minerals key to driving the global economy.

Preliminary data show Greenland's pro-business opposition Demokraatit party won the elections, beating the incumbent left-wing coalition.

Demokraatit, which favors a slow approach to independence from Denmark, secured 29.9 percent of the votes with all ballots counted, up from 9.1 percent in 2021, ahead of the opposition Naleraq party, which favors rapid independence and wants a defense agreement with the US, at 24.5 percent.

Jens-Frederik Nielsen, the Demokraatit party's leader, said Greenland is not for sale and rebuffed Trump's interest in acquiring it, calling the aggressive overtures "a threat to our political independence."

Cultural revival

Greenland is a former Danish colony and has been a territory since 1953. It gained some autonomy in 1979 when its first parliament was formed.

Most of those 57,000 Greenlanders are Indigenous Inuit. They take pride in a culture and traditions that have helped them survive for centuries in exceptionally rugged conditions.

Indigenous identity is now seeing a revival in Greenland after Trump said he wanted to acquire the island.

In a workshop in Greenland's capital Nuuk, goldsmith Nadja Arnaaraq Kreutzmann polishes metals and stones mined and gathered on the vast mineral-rich island. The jewelry she crafts is adorned with Inuit symbols of life and survival.

"We were told to act more Danish, to speak Danish, if we wanted to be something," said 43-year-old Kreutzmann.

"Now, speaking Greenlandic, looking Greenlandic, and all of Greenland's cultural heritage, are being celebrated," she said.

Most wanted Greenland to decide its own affairs, but many warned against acting rashly in light of Trump's comments — fearing Greenland could become worse off and expose itself to the US, Reuters said.

In a debate on Greenland's state broadcaster KNR on Monday, leaders of the five parties in parliament unanimously said they did not trust Trump.

Julie Rademacher, a consultant and former adviser to Greenland's government, said the election campaign early on focused on the anger and frustration aimed at historical wrongdoings of colonization, but "the fear of the US imperialist approach has lately become bigger".

Erik Jensen, leader of government coalition partner Siumut, said, "He is trying to influence us. I can understand if citizens feel insecure."

Longest winter

On a frigid day, a group of kindergartners walked in line behind their teacher as they crossed a road covered in ice and snow. A few blocks away, teenagers played hockey on a frozen pond.

Bells tolled, and a recently married couple laughed as family members threw rice on them for good fortune outside Nuuk's wooden cathedral.

Life in Nuuk seemed to go on as usual these days, except for this "heat wave".

Some Greenlanders say they felt safe while being largely unknown to the world. Now, though, that feeling has dissipated.

Greenlander Tukumminnguaq Olsen Lyberth said the wave of attention and polarizing comments prompted some friends to delete social media accounts.

"We're not used to having this big attention about us ... Before, no one knew about us. Now, it's a blitz of attention," said Olsen Lyberth, 37, a cultural history student.

"I feel like this is the longest January," she said in February. "It's all of it. Everything feels too overwhelming."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



From top: Goldsmith Nadja Arnaaraq Kreutzmann works on a ring at her studio in Nuuk, Greenland, on Feb 9. Carver Kim Kleist Eriksen works on an art piece made from walrus skull in his workshop in Nuuk, on Feb 12. Indigenous identity is reviving after Trump said he wanted to control the island. PHOTOS BY SARAH MEYSSONNIER / REUTERS



From top: Relatives and family members throw rice on a couple as they leave the church after getting married in Nuuk, Greenland, on Feb 15. EMILIO MORENATTI / AP Children play next to a piece of floating ice in Nuuk's old harbor on March 9. MARKO DJURICA / REUTERS Women walk past an ice sculpture in Nuuk on March 8. MARKO DJURICA / REUTERS

Economic transformation initiative sees Shanxi flourish



Left: A coal-fired power plant of Shanxi International Energy Group in Yuxian county substantially reduces its emissions by using the latest low-nitrogen-oxide burning equipment and denitration technology. DU AQING / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: A drone flies over a village in Zuoquan county. Drone making is an emerging industry in Shanxi. WEI BO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Province leveraging its unique industry, culture to boost widespread development and opening-up across all sectors



Cyclists enjoy the waterscape of the Fenhe River. The Fenhe is an epitome of the improved environment in Shanxi. WANG RUIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY



The water-drop-shaped devices are the latest wind turbine developed by Taiyuan University of Technology, which feature effective resistance to low temperatures and strong winds. PROVIDED BY TAIYUAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

ing. Zhang spoke highly of the current coal mining industry transformation featuring intelligent upgrades. "Intelligent coal mining is a revolutionary transformation of the industry," he said. "The fundamental changes, especially in terms of safety, efficiency and environmental benefits, can be clearly sensed by our workers and the management as well."

Zhang suggested more innovative technologies be used in the coal mining industry in Shanxi as well as the entire country, pushing coal mining operations toward the direction of advanced, diversified and low-carbon development.

While Shanxi is devoting much energy to the intelligent upgrades of traditional coal-mining operations, it is also encouraging the cultivation and development of emerging industries as a crucial part of its economic diversification.

Intelligent coal mining is a revolutionary transformation of the industry."

Zhang Shili, an executive of the Changcun Coal Mine affiliated to Lu'an Chemical Group and a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress

vation bases for the integration of technologies and industries.

High-level opening-up

Through expanding the channels for international trade, such as international cargo flight services and the freight train services destined for Europe, Central Asia and Southeast Asia, Shanxi is pushing its opening-up initiative to a higher level.

On Dec 21, a China-Europe train loaded with domestic cars arrived at the Bely Rast Station in Moscow, Russia, after traveling more than 8,000 km.

"This China-Europe train, departing from Changzhi city, marked the beginning of the operations of China-Europe freight trains in the southeast of Shanxi," said an executive of Huayuan Land Port International Intermodal Transport (Shanxi) Co, one of the operators of the China-Europe

freight train service in the province.

The China-Europe freight train service allows Shanxi-made products to expand internationally at a lower cost directly from their doorstep, significantly enhancing local companies' confidence in pursuing overseas opportunities.

Shanxi has established a regular service network for freight trains to reach overseas destinations, with support from several railway companies in Shanxi and the rest of the country. There are 15 routes dedicated to China-Europe freight train services, reaching 48 major cities in 16 countries.

Taiyuan Wusu International Airport, the leading international airport in Shanxi, is also expanding its overseas business in recent years.

On Oct 21, a 737-800 cargo plane carrying 11.2 metric tons of locally made products departed from the Taiyuan airport and

arrived in Almaty in Kazakhstan about six hours later. This marked the inauguration of the China-Europe freight train service between Shanxi and Central Asian countries.

Shanxi now has three airports — one in Taiyuan and the others in Datong and Yuncheng — operating international cargo transportation services. In 2024, Shanxi's airborne cargo and mail throughput reached 2.581 tons.

The comprehensive, multimodal transportation system of Shanxi is helping local enterprises go global.

Taiyuan Heavy Machinery Group, for instance, has now exported its high-quality train wheel sets and other products to more than 60 countries and regions.

Shanxi Construction Investment Group, a major local company involved in overseas construction service, has also made its presence in 60-plus countries and regions.

Xinghuacun Fenjui Group, based in the

Shanxi city of Fenyang, is now among the top three exporters in China's white liquor industry. Its products have been sold to more than 60 countries and regions, through its dozens of overseas dealers and thousands of outlets in foreign countries.

Shanxi is offering a beneficial environment for opening-up, especially in the areas of international trade and investment.

To help Shanxi enterprises go global and attract foreign investors to Shanxi, the province has arranged for local companies to attend major trade fairs in China and overseas, including the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou and the China International Import Expo in Shanghai, helping them exhibit their products and network with international businesses.

The Shanxi Brands on the Silk Road, organized by the Shanxi Provincial Committee of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, is a major overseas marketing campaign for local products.

Last year, the events were held in Kazakhstan and Russia in August; Turkey and Morocco in September; and Britain and Spain in October, fully exhibiting Shanxi's investment and trade opportunities to overseas businesses.

During the third session of the 14th Shanxi Provincial People's Congress held in January, the government work report delivered by governor Jin Xiangjun endorsed Shanxi's achievements in developing a hub of opening-up in China's inland regions and required further efforts in deepening opening-up and stabilizing foreign trade and investment.

To this purpose, Shanxi is developing more platforms for opening-up, such as the construction of a cross-border e-commerce pilot zone, an innovation demonstration zone for imports and the comprehensive bonded zone in Wusu, Taiyuan.



The products produced at Shanxi High-Tech Huayue Electronic Group are destined for overseas markets. LIANG DONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Auto parts are produced at a company in Yuncheng city. YAN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Cutting-edge tech

The strategic emerging industries in the province now include such tech-intensive sectors as semiconductors, digital technologies, life sciences and high-speed magnetic levitation trains.

Enguang Technology based in the southwestern Shanxi city of Yuncheng, for instance, recently debuted its artificial intelligence-powered wearable device for emergency rescue.

"This watch-like AI wearable device features highly accurate sensors and 4G and Bluetooth technologies, offering disease monitoring and prevention, rescue and other services for patients in critical conditions," said Zhao Yongshi, board chairman of the company.

He also noted that this device has some functions reaching internationally advanced levels, especially in the aspects of the early warning and detection of cardio-cerebral infarction.

During the 15th International Invention Fair in the Middle East held from Feb 16-19 in Kuwait, the ultra-high-speed low-vacuum tube magnetic levitation transportation system from Shanxi won the highest prize after the assessment by a panel of experts, showing a worldwide endorsement of cutting-edge technologies from the province.

The system, also known as maglev train or "high-speed flying train" in China, was developed by a Datong-based laboratory jointly founded by Shanxi and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp.

The lab features the development of the high-speed flying train and a full-size test line as the crucial infrastructure for the train's trial operations.

The inauguration of the lab and ground-breaking of the test line took place in May 2021. The purpose of the lab is to provide a key test platform for maglev technology.

The maglev train, which developers said can have a travel speed of 1,000 kilometers per hour, is designed to run inside a virtually air-free tube to reduce resistance.

In August 2024, a successful test on the test line was completed in Datong's Yanggao county, marking the project entering the mid-term test phase.

In the years to follow, Shanxi's sci-tech authorities said the province will continue to strengthen fundamental research in sciences and technologies, aiming to improve its overall innovation capacity.



Clockwise from top left: A station of the Taiyuan Subway Line 1 features a modern design style. LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY Wind turbines stand by the crop farms in the county of Pinglu. HAO JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY A train transports Shanxi-produced coal to the rest of the country. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Since the beginning of this year, the North China province of Shanxi has demonstrated strong development momentum, in terms of advancements in economic transformation and industrial upgrades, infrastructure construction, market resilience and opening-up to the outside world.

In recent years, Shanxi has implemented an overall economic transformation initiative that features upgrading traditional industries and fostering emerging sectors as new growth drivers.

The coal mining industry, the traditional pillar sector of Shanxi's economy, is the major target of the province's industrial upgrading.

One example is Huo'erxihai Coal Industry based in the city of Changzhi.

The company, a subsidiary of Shanxi Coal International Energy Group, has been using the latest digital technologies to upgrade its operations for increasing efficiency and improving safety.

Jin Zaixin is a monitoring worker for safety devices at the company's coal mines. During a recent interview with the local media, Jin said the use of digital technologies has led to "an efficiency beyond his imagination."

Before the interview, he just detected a problem with a feeder switch.

"It took only three minutes to identify and

solve it," Jin said. He explained that this was because of the use of a wearable augmented reality device.

"It is connected with monitoring sensors in the mining shafts and features an automatic imaging function," Jin said. "This allows us to quickly detect problems and solve them even without entering the shafts."

Smart coal mines

Over the past two years, driven by innovative technologies and cutting-edge products, Shanxi has seen the emergence of a great number of intelligent coal mines, laying a solid foundation for its move toward energy revolution.

To date, the province has a total of 244 intelligent coal mines and 1,594 mining shafts with smart operations, according to local statistics.

The statistics also show that intelligent coal mines now produce 60.48 percent of Shanxi's total coal output. In a broader sense, coal mines with advanced operations, which include digitalization and automation, contribute to more than 83 percent of the province's coal output.

Zhang Shili, an executive of the Changcun Coal Mine affiliated to Lu'an Chemical Group based in the southeastern Shanxi city of Changzhi, is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress.

When attending the third session of the 14th NPC which concluded on Tuesday in Bei-



Market resilience

Shanxi saw a steady recovery of market demand in 2024. Statistics show that the province's total retail value of consumer goods reached 818.05 billion yuan (\$112.89 billion) last year, growing 2.5 percent year-on-year.

The growth momentum is expected to be sustained or to accelerate this year thanks to stimulating incentives offered by the government.

One such move is the trade-in subsidy policy announced by the Shanxi Provincial Department of Commerce in early January.

According to the policy, consumers buying certain new products through the trade-in practice can enjoy government subsidies of up to 20 percent of the retail prices.

The practice covers a range of products including mobile phones, laptops, automobiles, electric bikes and household appliances.

At an outlet of electronics retail giant Suning in Taiyuan city, huge posters reading "20 percent subsidy from the government, 10 percent subsidy from the retailer and 15 percent subsidy from the suppliers" attracted a flock of customers.

A local resident surnamed Wang was among the buyers. She couldn't help her excitement after buying a smartphone. "The multiple subsidies helped me save nearly 1,000 yuan buying the smartphone," she said. "That's a very good deal!"

Driven by the subsidy policy, Shanxi reported retail sales of 878 million yuan worth of

automobiles, 413 million yuan worth of household appliances and 871 million yuan worth of digital products through the trade-in practice by Feb 11, according to local statistics.

The tourism industry is another sector featuring strong market demand. Statistics show that the number of tourist visits in Shanxi during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday period in late January and early February increased 22.2 percent from the same period last year. And the total revenue generated from the visits grew 30.03 percent year-on-year.

Combining tourism with culture proved to be a big draw to tourists.

The city of Xinzhou, for instance, attracted a great number of tourists during the period because of a range of traditional cultural activities that were held.

When attending a cultural carnival featuring folk dances, beating on land, a mochen iron show and a parade highlighting the hit video game *Black Myth: Wukong*, a German tourist, who asked to remain anonymous, said the Spring Festival shows were more attractive than the game.

Shanxi is the place with the largest number of cultural and historical sites featured in the game of *Black Myth: Wukong*, which became immediately popular worldwide following its release in August.

Authorized by the game's developer, Shanxi has launched a tourism campaign called Travel in Shanxi with *Wukong* since last August, bringing a great number of tourists to Shanxi to see what the historical sites featured in the game really look like.

Shanxi is also promoting its rural tours by integrating tourism with agriculture.

Last year, the province promoted 19 rural tours, which cover 90 sites, among tourists throughout the country and from the rest of the world.

Local statistics show that the rural tourism sector garnered a total revenue of 11.29 billion yuan in 2024, increasing 4.1 percent year-on-year.

Shanxi also views ice and snow as a precious asset to attract tourists. The tourism administration of the province recently revealed a road map to Shanxi's 38 ice and snow sports venues for tourists to choose from.

Winter tourism again shows a deep integration between tourism and ice and snow-related sports.

For instance, many winter sports venues in Shanxi are adjacent to popular tourism destinations, offering visitors the choices of taking part in sports, sightseeing, enjoying local food and relaxing.

Zhang Qi and Li Yao contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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Reforms help facilitate more M&A activity

Encouraging mergers, acquisitions to boost support for high-quality growth

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's stepped-up reforms to encourage mergers and acquisitions will provide strong support for industrial upgrading despite external challenges, while further efforts can be made to enhance the campaign, said a political adviser and veteran investor.

"The country's recent policy signals regarding the capital market emphasize market stability, deepened reforms and risk prevention, reflecting a clear and positive direction for investors," said Zhang Yichen, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

"Against the backdrop of challenges in China-US investment relations, these policies will provide strong support for private tech enterprises, helping them play a greater role in independent innovation and industrial upgrading," said Zhang, who is also chairman and CEO of CITIC Capital Holdings Ltd, a leading alternative investment management and advisory firm.

Notably, Zhang highlighted the significance of the "M&A Six Measures", which promotes industrial upgrading and innovation by directing capital toward emerging industries and key technological fields, and allowing well-regulated listed companies to engage in cross-sector acquisitions and purchase high-quality but unprofitable assets.

The enhanced regulatory inclusiveness under the new policies will help resolve valuation challenges in M&As, particularly for companies listed on Shanghai's STAR Market, Zhang said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

In September, the China Securities Regulatory Commission issued opinions on deepening the reform of listed company M&As and restructuring, rolling out six measures to encourage M&As by listed companies, also known as the "M&A Six Measures".

This year's Government Work Report further vowed to reform and improve the procedures for enterprise mergers, acquisitions and reorganization, as part of efforts to deepen comprehensive reforms for investment and financing in the capital market.

Zhang stressed the need to break certain regulatory bottlenecks in the implementation of the policies to encourage M&As to maximize financial support for high-quality development.

He proposed adjusting solvency regulations for insurance companies to gradually expand their equity investment capacity, particularly in areas aligned with national strategic priorities and investments with stable cash flow and predictable returns, including M&A funds and secondary funds.

M&A funds are private equity investment funds specifically designed to finance mergers, acquisitions and corporate restructuring. Secondary funds — also called S funds — operate in the secondary private equity market, where they buy existing stakes in private equity funds or direct investments in companies.

At a news conference during this year's two sessions, CSRC Chairman Wu Qing also stressed the need to refine the support mechanisms for the "M&A Six Measures".

Wu highlighted plans to address bottlenecks in valuation, approval processes and payment tools, aiming to optimize resource allocation, promote corporate growth, and facilitate more M&As in the tech innovation sector, particularly those with exemplary significance.

Additionally, Wu pledged to support the development of S funds and M&A funds, further diversifying their exit channels and expanding funding sources for such funds.

In addition, Zhang emphasized the immense potential of artificial intelligence integration with traditional industries, particularly in smart manufacturing, healthcare and fintech.

"Currently, China is witnessing a surge of startups in sectors such as semiconductors, AI and robotics. From an industrial development perspective, achieving large-scale growth will require consolidation through organic expansion and M&As. CITIC Capital will actively participate in this process."

"Through capital empowerment, resource integration and strategic guidance, we aim to accelerate corporate growth, facilitate tech commercialization and support industrial upgrading, ultimately contributing to China's high-quality economic development," Zhang said.



A bird's-eye view of a Hualong One nuclear unit in Zhangzhou, Fujian province. XINHUA

Calls for steady nuke power progress

By ZHENG XIN
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Nuclear power should take on a bigger role in China's push for carbon neutrality by expanding its use in energy-intensive industries and supporting large-scale clean energy development.

Lu Tiezong, chairman of China National Nuclear Power Co, called for the steady development of nuclear power in China to meet the nation's carbon neutrality goals.

"China would need around 400 1-million-kilowatt nuclear power units to reach carbon neutrality by 2060. Maintaining the current pace of constructing eight to 10 new reactors annually is essential to meeting the country's dual-carbon goals and ensuring a green, low-carbon energy transition," he said.

Lu proposed incorporating nuclear power into the green electricity and green certification system to ensure sustainable development of nuclear power and help meet the dual demands of energy security and energy transition.

"As a stable and reliable source of high-quality, green, low-carbon electricity, nuclear power has the lowest life cycle carbon emissions among all types of power generation," he said.

"Several developed countries, such as France and Finland, have already recognized nuclear power as a form of green energy through various certification mechanisms. However, China has yet to integrate nuclear energy into its green electricity certification framework and the share of nuclear power in China's electricity generation is

still below the global average.

"Both installed capacity and generation proportions need further improvement. If we can clarify nuclear power's role in the green energy certificate market, it will ensure the industry's sustainable development while simultaneously addressing energy security and energy transition needs," he said.

Lu said China's domestically developed third-generation nuclear reactor, Hualong One, has made significant strides in global nuclear energy markets in recent years, entering the ranks of the world's leading nuclear technologies and becoming the most widely deployed third-generation nuclear reactor in the world.

As many as 33 Hualong One units are currently in operation or under construction both at home and abroad, according to China National Nuclear Corp.

CNNC has also built a fully localized supply chain for third-generation nuclear technology, ensuring China's independent control over its nuclear power industry while providing a strong foundation for the nation's nuclear power exports.

More than 90 percent of the equipment and components of Hualong One are domestically supplied.

Beyond electricity generation, CNNC is also actively developing a diversified clean energy system centered around nuclear power, supplemented by wind, solar, hydro and energy storage solutions. This strategy leverages nuclear energy for a variety of applications, including district heating, industrial steam supply,

hydrogen production and seawater desalination.

By the end of 2024, CNNC's non-nuclear clean energy installed capacity exceeded 51 million kw, with wind and solar accounting for over 46 million kw. The company is also building nearly 30 million kw of additional clean energy capacity.

As China accelerates its nuclear energy expansion, ensuring a stable supply of uranium resources has become a key priority. Duan Xuru, chief scientist for nuclear fusion at CNNC, said the company would continue to intensify domestic exploration and development efforts in the years to come.

The company will further strengthen overseas uranium mining and international cooperation, fostering closer partnerships with key suppliers while enhancing technological innovation, he said.

By 2030, CNNC aims to achieve global leadership in key uranium mining technologies, including big data-driven mineral exploration. Additionally, Duan emphasized that China is developing advanced automation for hard rock uranium mining, positioning itself at the forefront of the global nuclear fuel industry.

With China's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, nuclear power is expected to play an increasingly vital role in the country's energy transition. Lawmakers and industry leaders argue that sustained investment in nuclear energy infrastructure, policy support and technological innovation will be essential to realizing this vision.

AI advance prompting security safeguards

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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As China accelerates its artificial intelligence push amid the rise of homegrown large language models, cybersecurity risks tied to AI adoption are escalating, underscoring the need for enhanced safeguards to mitigate emerging threats, said Qi Xiangdong, chairman of cybersecurity company Qi-Anxin Technology Group.

Qi, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said AI is reshaping industries at an unprecedented pace, but is also making cyberattacks more sophisticated and harder to detect.

"AI, especially large language models, is not just transforming production and innovation — it's also bringing new challenges and risks," Qi said.

China's AI ecosystem has seen rapid breakthroughs, with Chinese startup DeepSeek's LLM drawing

wide spread attention since the Spring Festival this year for its disruptive potential.

Kevin Lu, general manager of Commvault China, said the deep

integration of AI technology is reshaping the industry landscape, creating both opportunities and challenges.

"The advancement and application of AI technologies have heightened the complexity of threats, while the data environments of enterprises have also evolved," Lu said. "Businesses must adapt to these new external and internal conditions, which increase the difficulty of data protection, rendering traditional measures no longer applicable."

AI-powered cyberattacks can be launched at an unprecedented scale, making traditional security defenses obsolete, Qi added.

For example, he said AI also enhances the ability to fabricate deceptive content, intensifying threats such as deepfake manipulation, cognitive warfare and phishing scams. Attackers can exploit AI-driven face-swapping and voice-cloning technologies to spread false information and carry out online fraud.

As AI models gradually integrate into critical infrastructure, they could become the new battleground for cyber warfare.

"When large language models are embedded in key areas such as smart cities, industrial control systems and digital governance, they could amplify existing security vulnerabilities. A successful attack on an AI model could trigger widespread disruptions, leading to service outages, production halts and data breaches, posing significant security risks," he said.

To counter the potential risks, Qi said it is necessary for policymakers to introduce documents regarding mandatory compliance requirements for LLMs and data security, in a bid to provide clear guidance for enterprises to strengthen cybersecurity in the AI era.

Businesses should also be encouraged to conduct regular "health checks" on network and data security, helping companies identify and address vulnerabilities to achieve continuous security enhancement. And a special fund should be established to accelerate the adoption of AI plus security innovations, fostering collaboration between leading enterprises across various sectors and cybersecurity firms to optimize security protections in emerging fields such as smart cities, smart energy and smart finance.

Qi said he believes security is the foundation of sustainable innovation, and the goal is to strike a balance — advancing AI innovation while ensuring it remains secure and resilient.



Qi Xiangdong

Self-driving airside



A self-driving towing vehicle is seen at Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Two such vehicles were put into operation at the airport on Thursday. JIANG HAN / XINHUA

Briefly

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 32 pips to 7.1728 against the US dollar on Thursday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market

makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

Chinese mainland shares close lower

Chinese mainland stocks closed lower on Thursday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index down 0.39 percent to 3358.73 points. The Shenzhen Component Index closed 0.99 percent lower at 10736.19 points.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

New policies attract FDI to Shenzhen

By WANG XU
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In a bid to further solidify its position as China's economic powerhouse, Shenzhen, the tech-hub in the southern province of Guangdong, unveiled a series of enticing incentives aimed at attracting foreign investment and encouraging local enterprises to expand their international footprint on Wednesday.

The new policy package, detailed in a recent municipal government document jointly released by the city's commerce bureau and investment promotion bureau, offers a range of financial rewards, tax breaks and support programs designed to lure multinational corporations and foster a more outward-oriented business environment.

At the heart of the initiative lies a concerted effort to incentivize foreign investment. Foreign-invested enterprises that inject significant capital into the city will be handsomely rewarded. Those with annual "newly added actual foreign investment" exceeding \$50 million in 2023 and 2024 can expect incentives ranging from 1 percent to 3 percent of the investment amount, depending on the industry sector with an upper limit of 50 million yuan (\$6.9 million). "Newly added actual foreign investment" refers to the net increase in foreign capital that has been put to practical use within a

particular area during a defined period.

Moreover, Shenzhen is extending a warm welcome to multinational corporations looking to establish regional headquarters. Qualified companies that meet the investment threshold of \$10 million annually over the two-year period will receive a one-time reward of 5 million yuan.

In 2024, Shenzhen saw the establishment of 9,738 new foreign-invested enterprises, a 21.7 percent increase, making it rank first among all cities in the Chinese mainland.

"To further optimize Shenzhen's market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, we have outlined four key areas," Ye Wenge, deputy director of Shenzhen's commerce bureau, told China Daily.

"The four key pillars are: first, we will make Shenzhen the 'top choice for global investment', actively encouraging more foreign companies to establish a presence here. Second, we will build a 'global capital integration hub', attracting international financial capital and streamlining the flow of funds into and out of our city. Third, we will create an open and innovative tech environment, drawing in leading research institutions and the top talent from around the globe. And fourth, we will significantly boost our appeal to international talent, making Shenzhen an even more attractive place for foreigners to live and work," Ye added.

Beyond attracting foreign capital, Shenzhen is also actively encouraging local enterprises to venture onto the global stage. The city is providing substantial support for companies undertaking overseas construction projects, offering rewards based on their completed business turnover.

Companies undertaking overseas construction projects can receive cash rewards based on their project earnings, up to 2 million yuan, to encourage the export of goods and services. Additionally, businesses investing or partnering abroad can receive subsidies covering 50 percent of various expenses, including legal, financial and insurance costs, up to a maximum of 20 million yuan, to reduce the financial burden of global expansion.

Yu Qiang, a professor at Beijing Technology and Business University said: "By attracting high-value investments in strategic sectors like technology, manufacturing and advanced services, Shenzhen is becoming a global hub for multinational companies, offering them a strategic foothold in the dynamic Chinese market."

"Foreign companies investing in the city create jobs and new technologies, while their entry into China helps them find new customers and get better at what they do. All these things boost the economy, make companies more competitive, stronger and ultimately more successful," Yu added.

COMMENT

Editorials

Toxic tariff policy heralds US recession and greater uncertainty for world trade

It is Washington's firm belief that the United States only stands to win in the tariff war it is waging against the rest of the world. That has made it addicted to weaponizing tariffs in a bid to "make America great again".

But that conviction is nothing but wishful thinking, as in the interconnected world no economy can sustain its growth by inflicting pain on others, as evidenced by the boomerang effects the tariff war has had on the US economy.

After the market saw the US leader would not change his mind at the last moment and the US would go ahead with a 25 percent additional tariff on all imported steel and aluminum on Wednesday, all three major US stock indices fell by a large margin. On Tuesday, the S&P 500 index fell 9.3 percent from its historical high in February, while the Nasdaq fell 13.6 percent from its historical high in December.

The negative effect on relevant industries will be felt soon, not to mention the impacts on other US sectors, including agriculture, as a result of the retaliatory tariffs to be imposed by other parties. Take the steel and aluminum tariff hikes as an example. They cannot boost steel and aluminum production in the US or create more jobs, instead they will harm downstream US companies and US consumers. Their effects will be felt in the automotive, electrical machinery, and construction equipment industries, among others, weakening the global competitiveness of US products in these markets.

If the US puts its president's "reciprocal" tariff threat into practice next month, it will further fuel the market panic and turn inflation in the US from a concern to a practical challenge.

Even some insiders of the economic and financial policymaking circle in the US have expressed their collective concerns about the possible impacts of the administration's tariff war on the US economy.

Conscious of that, the US president and his senior advisers met with leading US business figures at the White House on Monday to comfort the market, during which several CEOs of high-tech companies expressed concerns about the administration's tariff policies, warning that imposing tariffs would be detrimental to the US technology industry.

The US business community and lobbying groups have called senior officials such as the White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles suggesting that the US leader leave room for negotiations to lower tariffs and develop a "more predictable tariff agenda" to calm market tensions.

But US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said in an interview on Tuesday that even if the US economy eventually falls into recession, the US president's tariff policies will be "worth it", claiming that the tariff policies are "the most important thing America has ever had".

That was in stark contrast to Lutnick's remarks in an interview with the media on Sunday, when he said emphatically that the US would not experience an economic recession, adding that US people "should never" prepare for it. Regarding the criticism from the outside world that the US tariff policies are inconsistent, Lutnick said "anybody who bets against Donald Trump probably is a fool".

All of which has served to intensify the market's panic that the administration is suggesting a recession is inevitable, without explaining how it will end it and in what way that heralds a brighter future.

Although the World Trade Organization said in the latest issue of its "Goods Trade Barometer", released on Wednesday, that the global goods trade sentiment index remains almost unchanged from December last year, it pointed out that the increasing uncertainty of trade policies and the prospect of new tariffs may put pressure on midterm trade, warning that the increase in trade policy uncertainty may temporarily promote trade, as businesses and consumers will import ahead of possible measures, which may reduce demand later this year.

It will take time for the systemic impacts of the US' tariff policies to be manifest in the global economy. But history has and will continue to prove tariff wars have no winners. If the US administration relies on extortion, bullying and coercion as its art of a negotiated deal, it is not going to make America great again.

In all parties interest to talk their way to peace

With Ukraine agreeing to a 30-day ceasefire during talks with the United States in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday, it seems a path has been found toward resolving the crisis at the heart of the European continent. But diplomatic flexibility and sincerity from all parties involved are crucial to prevent that path meandering nowhere.

After talks with a US delegation, Ukraine has signaled its readiness to accept a US proposal for an "immediate, interim, 30-day ceasefire". The proposed ceasefire covers the entire front line.

If realized, it would be the first ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine crisis since it broke out more than three years ago, marking a breaking of the stalemate that had seemed to be insurmountable. Although it has not rejected the proposal, Russia is yet to accept it, pending the conclusion of its own talks with a US delegation visiting Moscow.

It is US President Donald Trump's policy shift and his administration's efforts to bully, cajole and solicit Ukraine and Russia to the negotiation table that have broken what had appeared to be an unassailable impasse between the two belligerents. As a corollary, this has served to show the unsavory role the previous US administration played in prolonging the conflict. Yet, the US should restrain itself from jeopardizing the potential of its efforts to produce meaningful movement toward peace talks by seeking to be the primary profiteer from any settlement.

The US policy shift has further strained its relations with its European allies, which are having to quick-step to adjust their position in light of the US' changed approach.

Their latest proposal, put forward by the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is that any lasting peace must guarantee Ukraine's sovereignty and security; military aid to Ukraine must continue, while the economic pressure on Russia is increased, Ukraine's defense must continue to be boosted; and European troops will be deployed in Ukraine to act as peacekeepers.

While this would meet Ukraine's demand for a security guarantee, backed up by the US having a manifest interest in safeguarding its newly acquired assets, it is hard to see what is in it for Russia except diplomatic engagement with the US, since it essentially maintains the economic and political pressure on Russia and effectively puts NATO troops on Ukrainian soil.

As such, even if a temporary ceasefire does materialize, it is going to require the three parties to take a leaf out of the US' book and radically change their approach if the prospect of peace is to be given any substance.

A lot of differences will have to be bridged to translate words into reality, and that means compromises will have to be made by relevant parties. The US too, which is looking to exploit the peace process for its own gains, should put that on the back burner and focus on cooking up a way to end the conflict since it is the one that seems to be dangling enticements and threats in front of all the parties concerned.

The Ukraine conflict is deeply entrenched, with high stakes for all parties involved. Ending it will require significant compromises, which neither side has been willing to make up till now. However, despite Russia's recent gains on the battlefield, there is a sense that both sides are now suffering from battle fatigue, and may be receptive to external pressure forcing them to negotiate.

At this stage, it is important that the Europeans do not guzzle the Kool-Aid of their long-gestating fear and loathing of Russia and obstruct the path to peace. Just doubling down on their current approach doesn't cut it. It is in their interests for a permanent peace to be negotiated that includes a viable security framework for the continent.

China has consistently emphasized that a peaceful resolution to the crisis, and a sustainable and lasting peace that addresses both sides' concerns, can only be realized through dialogue and negotiation. And all peace-loving members of the international community should give their support to efforts to get the parties concerned talking sincerely about what a peaceful future on the continent looks like and how to make it a reality.

Zhai Haijun



Opinion Line

American consumers victims of unfair price-reduction tactics

The Ministry of Commerce and other relevant departments summoned Walmart on Tuesday, following reports that the retail giant had asked some of its Chinese suppliers to significantly reduce prices. Walmart's move is seen as an attempt to help US consumers offset the otherwise unavoidable price hikes due to the United States imposing tariffs on Chinese goods. Walmart's approach raises important questions about fairness.

It has been the company's long-standing strategy to leverage its vast purchasing power to pressure suppliers into reducing costs. Walmart reportedly requested its Chinese suppliers to lower prices by up to 10 percent for each round of tariff. Reports show only a small number of suppliers agreed; the majority of Chinese

suppliers, already operating on extremely tight profit margins, found it impossible to comply.

While Walmart's actions may be driven by the need to protect its business interests, they risk undermining the principles of fair trade and mutual respect that are essential for healthy economic relationships.

The potential impacts of Walmart's approach are significant. It could lead to supply chain disruptions, affecting the production and distribution of goods.

Walmart's demands could end up creating an uneven playing field for businesses. If suppliers are forced to lower prices to unsustainable levels, it may lead to a decline in product quality, ultimately harming US consumers. It is crucial for Walmart and other

multinational corporations to recognize the importance of balancing their business interests with the principles of fair trade and mutual benefit.

Instead of pressing its suppliers to reduce their prices, Walmart and any US companies intent on following suit should work together to pressure the US administration to put an end to its lose-lose tariff policies.

Constructive dialogue and cooperation, rather than unilateral demands, are key to fostering a sustainable and mutually beneficial trade environment. A more collaborative and balanced strategy would not only help preserve the stability of global supply chains but also contribute to a healthier and more equitable trade relationship between China and the US.

—ZHANG XI, CHINA DAILY

Europe must show will for strategic autonomy

The Paris Defense and Strategy Forum 2025, held on Tuesday, discussed what contributions European countries will be willing to make for Ukraine's security if a ceasefire agreement is reached between Ukraine and Russia.

The timing of this meeting reflects Europe's intent to address the changing transatlantic landscape from a military perspective, seeking to intervene in the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict not only through diplomacy but also through military means. On the one hand, Europe aims to assert its role as a key player in resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict; on the other hand, it seeks to formulate a response mechanism led by Europe through collective discussions that can continue playing a role even if the United States withdraws all its support to Ukraine one day.

In contrast, according to a joint statement issued after the US and Ukrainian delegations concluded their talks in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday evening, Ukraine has agreed to implement a 30-day temporary ceasefire, and the US will resume intelligence sharing and military aid to Ukraine, while the US and Ukraine have agreed to expedite the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement to develop Ukraine's critical mineral resources.

Divergences between the US and Europe are becoming increasingly apparent. While the US is negotiating with Russia for a ceasefire for its own interest, Europe remains skeptical of Russia and believes that continued support for Ukraine is necessary to pressure Russia for peace.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has, in that sense, provided Europe with a

new opportunity to pursue strategic autonomy. In the past, due to limited military and security needs, Europe's strategic autonomy had been primarily focused on economic, investment, and technological domains, while its defense capabilities remained at a low point. However, shifts in US policy have made Europe realize that it can no longer rely on a security backer — or rather, that its backer has turned its focus elsewhere. As a result, Europe must refocus its strategic autonomy on security and defense.

Europeans have also come to understand that peace must be supported by strength. If Europe fails to demonstrate a certain level of strength in the negotiation process or places its hopes on the US' policy changes, it will not be able to realize true strategic autonomy.

—THEPAPER.CN

What They Say

Large model AI new driver for development

The Government Work Report this year indicates that the Chinese government will actively support the wide application of large model artificial intelligence, as one of the important measures it will take to stimulate the country's innovation vitality.

The move reflects China's forward-looking layout for the development of AI technology and the digital economy, with big model AI becoming a new tool to drive productivity growth in various industries.

As a cutting-edge technology in the field of AI, large models have powerful data processing and intelligent analysis capabilities. For example, in the manufacturing industry, big models can assist in the construction of smart factories, and help optimize the production processes and supply chain management. In the medical field, large models can be used for disease diagnosis, drug development, etc, to improve the efficiency and accuracy of medical services.

The future industries that China is focused on cultivating, such as quantum technology, embodied intelligence and 6G, all rely on the efficient data processing capabilities of large model AI.

China has unique advantages in developing large-scale AI models. It has the largest internet user group in the world, providing rich data resources for the training of large models. China's huge market enables enterprises to quickly iterate models through user feedback, forming a virtuous cycle of "application driven technology optimization".

The rise of DeepSeek has significantly lowered the application threshold of large model AI for small and medium-sized enterprises, revealing the potential of what AI can do. The penetration rate of large model AI in industries in China is gradually increasing, but it is still in the transitional stage. Its application in different industries and scenarios varies significantly, and risks such as data leaks and deep fakes

cannot be ignored.

During the just-concluded two sessions, many lawmakers and political advisors put forward some specific suggestions on the development, application and regulation of large models. They advocated empowering new industrialization with large model AI, building a whole-chain security system for it, and promoting the adaptation of the technology in different scenarios. These suggestions deserve the attention of decision-makers and related enterprises and industries.

Supporting the application of large model AI is not only an inevitable choice for industries, but also essential to the country's pursuit for high-quality development. In the future, large model AI will further penetrate into more socioeconomic fields and people's lives, and become an effective means for China to enhance its industrial competitiveness and governance efficiency, and improve people's livelihoods.

—ECONOMIC DAILY

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COMMENT

Wang Xudong

Palace Museum bridging civilizations

The Palace Museum in Beijing, which was called the Forbidden City, is an important repository of China's 5,000-year-old civilization and traditional Chinese culture. The establishment of the Palace Museum in 1925 marked the transformation of the former royal palace into a people's museum. Since then, the museum has been safeguarding the historical treasures of China and promoting dialogue among civilizations.

Promoting dialogue and exchanges among civilizations and fostering cultural prosperity have become the common goals of many countries. Following the proposal of the Global Civilization Initiative in 2023, the Palace Museum has been developing an innovative model for popularizing China's fine culture and promoting international dialogue, exchanges and cooperation. As a cultural center, it has also been facilitating mutual learning among countries.

A conservation haven for cultural relics

The Palace Museum prioritizes conserving China's cultural relics, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage through innovative approaches and international collaboration in the face of modern challenges like climate change and social transformations, including the establishment of a standard organization and the implementation of a zero-waste campaign.

In 2022, the museum initiated a quality management system to enhance heritage conservation standards and advance conservation technology and management. Two years later, in 2024, it was appointed as the secretariat and inaugural chair of the Technical Committee for Cultural Heritage Conservation within the International Organization for Standardization, pioneering efforts to standardize heritage monitoring, evaluation, restoration, and conservation practices in China.

The museum's zero-waste campaign since 2020 aligns heritage conservation with sustainable practices. Through seminars, UN conferences, and showcasing of green initiatives at Chinese heritage sites, it shares Chinese expertise on global energy conservation and emissions reduction.

Academic exchanges insightful

The Palace Museum prioritizes academic principles and fosters international exchanges with an open mindset, emphasizing mutual learning through research. It has established an inclusive international academic exchange mechanism to promote the development of civilizations. Notably, the museum houses diverse scientific research platforms, including the China-Greece Belt-and-Road Joint Laboratory on Cultural Heritage Conservation Technology, dedicated to creating a global platform for collaborative innovation and resource-sharing in cultural relics protection technology.

The Palace Museum engages in advanced cultural relic preservation techniques, such as high-definition relic acquisition and multidimensional display technology, while establishing work-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

The museum is striving to become an exhibition platform with a broader global perspective.

stations in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and Sanxingdui, an ancient archaeological site in Sichuan province, known for its mysterious and significant Bronze Age artifacts and relics. Collaborative archaeological projects with international museums in countries like India, Kenya, and the United Arab Emirates focus on trade relations across the Indian Ocean and ceramic archaeology, shedding light on cultural exchanges along the ancient Silk Road.

In terms of talent exchange, the museum partners with organizations like the International Council of Museums and the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, establishing training centers and fellowship programs to promote dialogue and knowledge sharing. Additionally, it inaugurated the Centre of Preservation and Transmission for Cultural Heritage of the Palace Museum in Macao and hosts international forums like the 'Taihe Civilizations Forum' and 'culture plus tech international forum' to facilitate collaboration among experts, scholars, and

industry representatives for heritage conservation and museum development.

An exhibition platform of global perspectives

The museum is striving to become an exhibition platform with a broader global perspective. Exhibitions are the most direct way museums promote cultural exchanges. Leveraging its rich collection of cultural relics, the museum has been organizing exhibitions to facilitate cultural exchanges between China and other countries, sharing its cultural achievements and fostering mutual understanding.

Since 2012, the museum has organized more than 50 exhibitions of cultural relics from other countries and regions, and participated in more than 20 overseas exhibitions. It has also collaborated with more than 20 countries and regions to organize 18 high-quality exhibitions. For example, a large-scale cultural relics exhibition, 'Empresses of China's Forbidden City', was held in Boston and Washington in the United States in 2018. And the Hong Kong Palace Museum, inaugurated in 2022, has become a cultural exhibition platform, bridging tradition and modernity, and China and the world.

On March 15, 2023, the day China proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, the Palace Museum co-organized the 'Gandhara Heritage along the Silk Road:

A Joint China-Pakistan Exhibition" with the Department of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan. It was the largest Gandhara art exhibition held in China.

And in 2024, the museum held joint exhibitions — "AlUla - Wonder of Arabia" with Saudi Arabia; and "The Glory of Ancient Persia" with Iran, as well as the "Historic Encounters: Interaction Between China and West Asia", highlighting the exchanges and mutual learning between the ancient civilizations of China and West Asia. These exhibitions were significant diplomatic achievements for China in the cultural field.

An innovative public service provider

The Palace Museum is dedicated to enhancing public cultural services through multi-field innovation, emphasizing education, communication, and the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture for creative transformation and development.

The museum has collaborated with multiple social institutions to produce a variety of cultural products, including the TV documentary *Masters in the Forbidden City*, the cultural relics exploration TV show *National Treasure*, the dance drama *A Tapestry of a Legendary Land* and the musical *Lu Duan*. Notably, *A Tapestry of a Legendary Land*, inspired by the iconic scroll, *A Thousand Miles of Streams and Mountains*, has been performed nearly 700 times worldwide, becoming a shining emblem of Chinese culture.

Since 2016, the Palace Museum's educational projects have traveled to 15 countries, including France, Japan and Australia. Currently, the museum is collaborating with the University of Stirling in the United Kingdom to promote Chinese cultural heritage overseas.

Cultural products also facilitate international dialogue. Beginning 2019, the museum has participated in 23 domestic and international exchange activities. During the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, the museum partnered with the China House, a dual architecture of online virtual space and offline entity sponsored by Chinese sports authorities, to showcase traditional Chinese sports culture through cultural and digital products, strengthening cultural and sports exchanges between China and other countries.

This year marks the second anniversary of the Global Civilization Initiative, which coincides with the Palace Museum's 100th anniversary celebrations. On this historic occasion, the museum pledges to continue upholding its mission, expanding international cooperation, and enhancing the breadth and depth of cultural communication, and make cultural relics protection as the foundation, academic research as the core, exhibitions as the window and education and communication as the link to help advance the Global Civilization Initiative.

The author is director of the Palace Museum.

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



Chen Weihua

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To achieve strategic autonomy, EU must do more than just boosting defense

For European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and some other European Union leaders, their top priority these days seems to be to get a monstrous €800 billion (\$871 billion) for the ReArm Europe plan to boost the EU's defense capability.

The argument is that the plan is necessary to overcome the EU's lack of defense manufacturing capability, which has been exposed by the three-year-long Russia-Ukraine conflict, especially with EU member states trying to continuously supply military equipment and ammunition to Kyiv.

The other argument justifying the plan is US President Donald Trump's dramatic policy change on US allies, especially his administration's distancing from and trashing of European countries.

Some alarmists have also been claiming for the past few years that Russia will attack the EU or NATO member states soon and, hence, the necessity of the ReArm Europe plan. While such fearmongering has duped many Europeans, it makes no sense to most foreign policy experts. Neither Russia nor NATO would want to trigger a direct war with each other given that it could escalate into a nuclear Armageddon.

The best way to prevent a conflict between the EU and Russia in the future would be to improve relations between the two sides. Unfortunately, EU politicians still talk in a way that indicates the bloc will always treat Russia as an adversary. That is unwise to say the least.

It is indeed important for the EU to increase its defense capability to reduce its dependence on the United States for security.

Russia will remain the largest country in Europe and in the world. So the best way forward for the EU and Russia is to find a way to coexist peacefully. That itself will be worth much more than €800 billion for the EU.

It is indeed important for the EU to increase its defense capability to reduce its dependence on the United States for security. Incoming German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is right to seek "independence" from the US, step by step.

But the EU's overdependence on the US goes way beyond security and defense. The EU's foreign policy has long been dictated by Washington. It's no secret that the US also wields outsized influence in EU think tanks, schools, the media, and even in the EU's bureaucracy.

The news conference held by von der Leyen on March 9 to mark her 100 days in office in her second term might be a good reflection. When she called the US an ally, several journalists asked her why she still thinks the US is an ally after what the US administration had done to its transatlantic allies in the past few weeks.

But von der Leyen's remark should not be surprising as she is known as "Europe's American president". If the EU is keen on seeking strategic autonomy, defense is only one of the many key areas it must work on.

There have been growing concerns that the €800 billion required for the ReArm Europe plan will redirect the money away from plans needed to attend to other, more critical issues.

When I asked Bas Eickhout, a Dutch member of European Parliament and co-chair of the Greens/European Free Alliance, about it on Tuesday, he voiced serious concern over the fact that the money that should have been spent on the EU's Green Deal might go to build the European military.

The Left Group in the European Parliament, including its co-chair Manon Aubry, was outraged by the ReArm Europe plan. The group asked why Europeans should pay for the arms race and why so many other issues such as fighting poverty and creating more jobs are not given priority.

Five years ago, the EU's Green Deal inspired the rest of the world to combat climate change and realize carbon neutrality. Today, many are wondering if the EU has put the deal on the back burner or downgraded it to suit what EU leaders claim to be the new political and economic reality.

The ReArm Europe plan does not have the appeal of the Green Deal. The EU has far greater priorities today — to boost its economy and the livelihoods of its 450 million people, and to build peace rather than killer weapons.

Tian Feilong

Sun Yat-sen great patriot, pioneer of national rejuvenation

The great patriot and revolutionary Sun Yat-sen passed away exactly a century ago. The great leader of the democratic revolution was the propagator of republican ideals and a key driver of China's transformation from self-imposed limits to a country with a global vision. His political thought, revolutionary practices, institutional innovations and morally upright character have left an indelible mark on China's modern political and intellectual history.

The fourth paragraph of the preamble to the 1982 Constitution objectively evaluates Sun Yat-sen's contribution to the republican revolution. It praises the historic significance of the 1911 Revolution, which abolished the imperial system. It marked a monumental shift from monarchy to a republic, bridging China's ancient and modern political systems.

The preamble also acknowledges that the historical mission of the Chinese people to fight imperialism and feudalism is far from complete, and the Constitution is a reflection of national history, spirit, and revolutionary achievements.

The Communist Party of China has inherited Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary legacy, completing the task of fighting imperialism and feudalism, and taking on the historical responsibility of national rejuvenation.

In the pursuit of peaceful national reunification, he remains the common political link and a vital spiritual pillar of patriotism and national unity.

During a meeting with former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou on April 10, 2024, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of strengthening the shared consciousness of the Chinese nation across the Taiwan Strait and achieving national reunification in order to continue and develop Sun Yat-sen's republican ideals.

Sun Yat-sen has left an invaluable political and institutional legacy. His republican ideals and great contributions to China's modern transformation and traditional Chinese culture, efforts to integrate China with the modern world system, and his thoughts on civil rights and public welfare all hold significant historical and progressive meanings.

Sun Yat-sen proposed the idea of "five races under one union". His focus on the construction of the Chinese nation reflected his efforts to transition China from a state of passivity to active awareness.

In terms of his thought on democracy, Sun Yat-sen synthesized Western democratic republican ideals with Chinese classical traditions, proposing the "three principles of the people", or nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood, in order to combine national, individual and social interests, and lay a solid foundation for China's modern democracy.

On constitutional thought, Sun Yat-sen integrated the Western three-branch system with traditional Chinese concepts, such as the examination and supervisory powers of the State, in a bid to strike a balance between ancient and modern forms of governance.

On national unity, Sun Yat-sen insisted on using the republican revolution to unite China, opposed regional fragmentation and federalism, and carried forward the tradition of political unity that has long defined China.

Sun Yat-sen's vision of national construction was influenced by his close observation of Western modernization, which had a profound impact on the development of contemporary China.

His political philosophy continues to influence the modernization of China's governance system and governance capacity, and the strengthening of rule of law and bureaucratic accountability. His ideas on national construction and social governance, and his practice-based phi-

losophy of "understanding is difficult, but action is easy", provide valuable guidance even today.

When it comes to cultural and philosophical thought, Sun's unique integration of ancient, modern, Chinese and Western ideas is evident in his theory that "understanding is difficult, but action is easy", in his belief in evolution and materialism, and in his confidence that Chinese culture has a brighter future.

Sun Yat-sen was a revolutionary educator, too, the pioneer of national rejuvenation and a key leader of China's revolution and the liberation of its people. His legacy as a revolutionary and thinker is respected across the Taiwan Strait as well as in the wider world. On the new journey to comprehensively realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by advancing Chinese modernization, Sun Yat-sen's ideas and practices remain significant. In the pursuit of peaceful national reunification, he remains the common political link and a vital spiritual pillar of patriotism and national unity.

The author is associate dean of the Law School at Minzu University of China, and a member of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS



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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

MLADEN IVANIC

Critical choice

Cooperation between China and the EU is needed to help the world choose the right path

The modern world is once again at a crossroads — will it choose the path of isolation or strengthening multilateral institutions? Similar dilemmas existed after the two world wars, but they had two opposite solutions. After World War I, there was a rise in separatism, isolation and weak international institutions embodied in the League of Nations, which played no significant role. The policy of economic isolation led to an economic crisis during the 1930s, and as a result, fascism emerged. All of this led to a conflict between powers that considered themselves strong enough to impose their will on others, the weakening of international trade and overall cooperation, and inevitably to World War II, with horrific casualties and destruction.

This year, we commemorate 80 years since the victory in the Anti-Fascist War. As a result of this victory, the United Nations was founded, which, despite the then-bloc conflicts, played a positive role as a place where all the world's major problems were discussed. Rules were established, which everyone adhered to, not always and not completely, but still much more than is the case today. As a result of this cooperation, numerous international institutions were created, which still have a positive role today, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund.

Over the past two decades, the role of the UN has seriously declined, and the world has moved from a phase of cooperation into a phase of conflict. Large countries, primarily the United States, are announcing the introduction of high tariffs, which could limit free trade. This undermines the foundations of the modern economy and will lead to responses from others, which could result in a serious slowdown of global growth and high inflation. Military interventions are taking place in some countries even though there are no UN resolutions for them. It started in the former Yugoslavia, continued in Iraq, and today it is the case in Ukraine, with other examples as well. It seems that the international legal system no longer exists, and everyone, especially

great and regional powers, does whatever they want. If such practices continue, it could lead to even more dangerous conflicts than those we see today. In Western countries, the so-called sovereigntists are gaining strength, advocating for a reduction in the role of multilateral and even regional integration. Their concept is "my country first and foremost", separatism, economic isolation, and a reduction in the role of international institutions are the inevitable results of such a policy.

Action is needed to stop this negative trend and strengthen multilateralism as the only way to turn processes in a positive direction. The key question is who can be the leading force in re-establishing the international legal system and renewing political and economic cooperation. Developing countries or small countries certainly have this interest, but they lack the strength to impose it. In fact, cooperation between two global players is needed — one is the European Union and the other is China. The EU is a multilateral institution based on compromise, which is exactly what the modern world needs. Moreover, the EU is a positive example that has survived despite the numerous challenges it has faced. It had to endure the banking crisis, Greece's inability to repay its debts, and especially the aftermath of Brexit. Yet, the EU showed remarkable strength and resilience in overcoming these significant challenges.

China has not had any military interventions and its economic strength and initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative give it significant influence, especially in developing countries. Political and economic stability is an important economic interest for China, creating the conditions for it to continue its impressive economic growth, thereby contributing to the growth of international trade and the global economy as a whole.

The cooperation between China and the EU is particularly significant in the field of promoting free trade. The introduction of the tariffs announced by the US will inevitably lead to a decline in international trade, which would have very negative consequences on the growth of the global economy. The greatest consequences would be felt by developing countries, as well as small countries that already have low growth rates, which are far below

their needs. Unlike the major powers, these countries do not have mechanisms to adequately respond to a trade war and would suffer the most severe economic and social consequences. The joint effort of China and the EU in promoting the WTO and the principles of free trade would be supported by a large number of developing countries and could not be ignored by the US. This approach is the only one that can stop the negative trends in the international economy, which will inevitably be the consequence of the announced tariffs. Moreover, insisting on these principles together can provide favorable conditions for the continuation of high growth rates in the global economy.

After the announcement of the US tariffs, the awareness of the need to pursue an independent policy and strengthen multilateral institutions will grow. This would be good for the entire world, especially today as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the UN, which should be given a stronger role.

In conclusion, the world stands at a critical juncture. The choice between isolation and multilateralism will have far-reaching consequences for the future of global peace, stability, and prosperity. While the forces of isolation and nationalism may seem strong, the need for cooperation and collaboration has never been greater. By strengthening multilateral institutions, particularly those dedicated to promoting free trade, global peace, and sustainable development, the international community can ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Only through cooperation can we build a world that is fairer, more prosperous, and safer for all.

In the end, it is up to the global community — including governments, the academic world, and the media — to recognize the importance of multilateralism and to work together to restore its strength. It may not be the perfect solution, but it is the only viable one. The future of humanity depends on our ability to cooperate and build a better, more interconnected world.

The author is former member of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ZHONG FEITENG

Way forward in Southeast Asia

In the face of containment efforts by the US, it makes sense for China to expand its presence in the ASEAN market

Donald Trump's return to the White House signifies that the world is entering a new phase, in which the United States is not only abandoning the neoliberalism it upheld over the past few decades, but also avoiding shouldering the responsibility of maintaining a liberal international order. The resulting rise of protectionism and isolationism is likely to leave

the global economy in a more unfavorable space.

In terms of foreign relations, China's policies form a sharp contrast with those of the US, still emphasizing that the globalization trend will not be changed. China continues to strengthen all-round cooperation with neighboring countries. Reducing the trade deficit remains a priority of Trump's second term. On Feb 1, Trump signed an executive order imposing a 10 percent tariff on all goods imported from China. Additionally, a 25 percent tariff was imposed on goods from Canada and Mexico.

On Feb 13, Trump announced plans to implement reciprocal tariffs on various countries. According to this plan, the US will regard subsidies, value-added taxes, and trade barrier provisions, among others, as non-tariff barriers.

Previously, the US had imposed the most-favored-nation tariffs, treating all countries that received this status equally. If it fully implements "reciprocal tariffs" in the future, the rules of the global trade system established after World War II will be on the brink of collapse.

Asia remains the primary target region for the US in its efforts to reduce its trade deficit. Data from the US International Trade Commission show that economies with a trade surplus of over \$10 billion include China, Vietnam, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia.

As the Trump administration considers reciprocal tariffs, Southeast Asia may face a trade war with the US. According to data from the US International Trade Commission, the combined trade surplus of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations members with the US has reached about \$227.7 billion, far exceeding those of Japan and the ROK.

Once the US imposes high tariffs on products imported from

In the future, China may further expand its presence in the Southeast Asian market. For ASEAN, deepening ties with a stable and open China is also a foregone conclusion to reduce uncertainty.

Southeast Asia, the economic order that it has established in the region over the past decades will collapse, and its reputation will further decline.

The development of Southeast Asia has stemmed from the trade and investment of major powers outside the region. After the Plaza Accord was signed between Japan and the US in the mid-1980s, Japanese enterprises leveraged their exchange rate advantages to accelerate their "going global" strategy and targeted low-income countries in Asia as destinations for industrial relocation. To a certain extent, the region's exports to the US saw a surge thanks to the Japanese businesses in Southeast Asia.

China's exports grew rapidly after it joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. It soon surpassed Japan to become the most important trading nation in East Asia. After the 2008 global financial crisis, the US became skeptical of an open regional economic order, while China embraced globalization and became the top trading partner for Southeast Asia.

The 2008 financial crisis was a turning point in regional economic and trade relations. Many countries in East Asia realized that relying on the US as the ultimate destination for exports was unsustainable. As a result, they placed greater emphasis on regional markets than they had in the 1990s. Among them, the fastest-growing economic and trade relationship within the region was between China and ASEAN.

As China-ASEAN relations flourished, some experts from the US recognized that neglecting Southeast Asia was detrimental to their strategic competition

with China. Consequently, the US quickly strengthened its ties with Southeast Asia. US-ASEAN relations reached a new height during the Joe Biden administration. In 2022, the two sides established a comprehensive strategic partnership. According to US official data, the US is the largest source of foreign direct investment for Southeast Asia, with the total trade between the US and ASEAN countries reaching \$520 billion in 2022. It was also during Biden's presidency that several Southeast Asian nations joined the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity.

However, Southeast Asian countries still seem to harbor concerns about the US. This worry is rooted in the fact that US' attention to Southeast Asia is often easily distracted by other factors. Moreover, many Southeast Asian countries are anxious that the Trump administration's excessive focus on the US trade deficits and emphasis on "America First" may make it difficult to fulfill the commitments made by the Biden administration. The Trump administration is likely to abandon the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity, reduce its aid to Southeast Asia, and more.

Southeast Asian countries do not wish to see an escalating strategic competition between the US and China. Maintaining stable relations with both major powers remains a key element of their foreign policy.

For China, in the face of the US' containment efforts, consolidating an external environment conducive to China's modernization remains an inherent obligation of its neighborhood diplomacy. In addition to the long-time friendship between ASEAN and China, ASEAN also boasts a huge potential market, since it is estimated its population will exceed 700 million by the end of the third decade of this century, with considerable consumer purchasing power. In the future, China may further expand its presence in the Southeast Asian market. For ASEAN, deepening ties with a stable and open China is also a foregone conclusion to reduce uncertainty.

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



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

CULTURE



Paintings, sculptures and installations at an exhibition in Beijing's Nanchizi Museum, including (from left): *At the Window* by Dang Feihua, a young shadow puppetry inheritor, that shows Mu Guiying, a legendary female warrior of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), adjusting her hair; *Leaping*, an installation by Cui Xiaoping; and part of *Havoc in Heaven*, by Wang Tianwen, a veteran shadow puppetry inheritor.

The personalities of puppets

Exhibition explores traditional shadow images as it reinterprets art form, **Li Yingxue** reports.

On a bright afternoon in Beijing, stepping into a traditional courtyard just east of the Forbidden City feels like entering another world. Beyond the weathered rock garden, a mesmerizing interplay of light and movement unfolds, blending centuries-old artistry with modern innovation.

In the courtyard's water feature, six mechanical red koi, inspired by intricate paper-cut designs, glide in fluid, circular motions from the depths to the surface. Titled *Leaping*, this dynamic art installation by Cui Xiaoping captures the delicate grace of both traditional craftsmanship and kinetic art.

Inside the main exhibition hall, a striking shadow puppet figure of the legendary female warrior, Mu Guiying, of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), towers several meters high. As sunlight filters through ornate lattice windows, its shifting reflections merge with the rippling water outside. Poised with spear in hand, the puppet almost appears alive. This piece, *Peach Blossom Horse*, now on show at Nanchizi Museum in Beijing, is the work of 56-year-old Wang Haiyan, a fourth-generation inheritor of Wang's Shadow Puppetry, a Huaxian shadow puppetry family versed in the national intangible cultural heritage from Huaxian county, Weinan, Shaanxi province. These inheritors, based in Xi'an, Shaanxi, are known for making shadow puppets, and especially for their carving skills.

Curated by Zhang Yuyang, *Dian Xi Yi Ben - Shadow Puppetry and Contemporary Art Exhibition* brings together contemporary artists and three generations of Wang's Shadow Puppetry in a display of paintings, sculptures and installations that reinterpret traditional shadow puppetry and paper-cutting.

"The goal is to translate traditional shadow puppetry and paper-cutting into a contemporary visual language," Zhang says. "By integrating modern aesthetics, the exhibition breathes new life into traditional art forms."

This exhibition, co-hosted by the Nanchizi Museum and Wang's Shadow Puppetry, runs until April 13. According to 25-year-old Dang Feihua, a fifth-generation inheritor of Wang's Shadow Puppetry, the phrase *Dian Xi Yi Ben* ("to order a special performance out of a catalog of choices")



From left: *Hello, Wall*, an installation by artist Chen Fenwan; and *Peach Blossom Horse*, also depicting Mu Guiying, a piece of puppet work by Wang Haiyan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

originates in a traditional Shaanxi shadow puppetry saying. "In the past, only those with an extensive collection and a skilled troupe could display a *Dian Xi Yi Ben* sign during performances at festivals, weddings or funerals. It was a mark of family strength," Dang explains.

The exhibition opens with a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) shadow puppet piece called *Dian Xi Yi Ben*, and a *huqin*, a traditional stringed instrument used in puppetry performances from the same era. Beneath them, two open puppet cases symbolize *kai xiang*, or "opening the case", a theatrical tradition by shadow puppet troupes marking their first performance after each Spring Festival.

Three generations of Wang's Shadow Puppetry inheritors are showcasing their distinctive work.

Besides fourth-generation artist Wang Haiyan, 74-year-old third-generation master Wang Tianwen exhibits *Havoc in Heaven*, an intricate blend of shadow puppetry and traditional Chinese *gongbi* painting (a refined, realistic style). It depicts the Monkey King, or Sun Wukong in the *Journey to the West*, a classic Chinese novel written in the 16th century, with light filtering

through fine details to create multilayered hues. "My grandfather Wang Tianwen merged shadow puppetry with *gongbi* painting, refining the craft through exceptional detail," Dang explains.

As the youngest inheritor, Dang brings a more dynamic and creative touch to his work. His piece *Shadow Puppetry MBTI* transforms MBTI personality traits (an analysis system based on Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung's theory of personality types) into shadow puppet representations, reflecting the way shadow plays shape characters based on personalities.

"My MBTI type is ENTP, and I carefully studied each personality profile, integrating cultural elements into the designs," he says. "For example, INTJs, known as 'architects', are represented by the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda (a historical landmark in Xi'an) in their headdress."

The exhibition also features displays detailing the shadow puppet-making process and the specialized carving tools. "We've set up a workshop area where visitors can try painting shadow puppets after learning about the materials and craftsmanship," Dang says, adding that a



small stage also hosts shadow-puppet performances, including for special nighttime tours.

Dang has also collaborated with other artists to create experimental work blending shadow puppetry with contemporary art. This includes *Shadow Collection: Ping Xu* (Bottles in Sequence) by artist Yao Zhihao, a doctoral student at Tsinghua University's Future Laboratory. Inspired by the traditional motif *siji ping'an* (the flowers of the four seasons: peony, lotus, chrysanthemum and plum blossoms each in a vase to represent peace and safety), Yao uses modern technology to transform flat shadow puppet imagery into a naked-eye 3D experience, offering a more immersive interaction for visitors.

Dang admits that the paper-cutting work of other artists has been inspiring. "As inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, we should break free from traditional constraints," he adds.

He says that with its blend of historical craftsmanship and modern innovation, the exhibition offers young audiences an engaging and dynamic cultural experience.

Many visitors have left heartfelt messages in the guest book, Zhang says. "I found that

many of them have a deep and personal understanding of traditional Chinese culture."

While the modern artistic interpretations of shadow puppetry and paper-cutting are central to the exhibition, much of the work also reflects on social issues.

Hello, Wall focuses on the Taipingxun area, a 400-year-old street in Xiqiao town, Foshan, Guangdong province. Created by 35-year-old Chen Fenwan, and combined with paper-cutting elements, the piece was inspired by her reimagining of the old town's former prosperity and observations of its current state.

Chen visited the street three times. The old architecture of Taipingxun bears the marks of time, with peeling walls that suggest the hollow imprint left by the passage of years. At some point, these traces were gently peeled away, leaving fragments of the past.

"I'm a curious observer, and I tend to magnify the granular details I encounter," Chen says, adding that she viewed these wall fragments as slices of time.

She collected the fragments and sought to give them a sense of belonging, by acquiring a list of past Taipingxun residents, and connecting each fragment to a name and enabling forgotten memories to resurface.

In its spatial presentation, *Hello, Wall* takes the form of a banyan tree, a symbol of vitality in Lingnan culture (the culture of Guangdong and nearby provinces in southeastern China). The banyan tree's aerial roots grow continuously, sometimes touching the ground and becoming new trunks, symbolizing regeneration. This contrast between the tree's life cycle and the peeling walls reflects the theme of the work.

"I don't aim to evoke simple nostalgia. The banyan tree's vitality softens any potential sadness," Chen explains. "Time has carved the peeling walls, and I have carved the people who once lived behind them into these fragments."

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What's on



Secular scenes

Tianjin Museum teams up with Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum to present an ongoing exhibition, *Shiqing Wanxiang*, at the former's venue, showing paintings from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

The show, running until May 5, reflects the prosperous cultural life, including artistic evolution, that was prompted by the development in social economics.

The dozens of artworks on display are from the collections of the two museums, depicting the diverse material life and spiritual

world of the people living back then. The paintings are divided into four categories which investigate the folk customs, economics and productions, citizens' everyday life, and entertainment spanning centuries.

Highlights include a Ming facsimile scroll of the 10th-century masterpiece *Night Revels of Han Xizai*. The copy was made by Tang Yin, or Tang Bohu, a gifted painter of repute who, together with Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming and Qiu Ying, was ranked among the Four Great Artists of the Wu School in the Ming Dynasty. The work shows the technical excellence of Tang, besides his mastery of landscape painting, in portraying figures.

Wanhu Chaotian Tujuan (Ten Thousand Tablets of an Imperial Audience), an important collection of Tianjin Museum, is also on show. Attributed to an anonymous painter, the scroll of some 17 meters reenacts the scenes of a southern inspection of Qing Emperor Qian-

long in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 62 Pingjiang Dao, Heai district, Tianjin. 022-8388-3000.

Xu's legacy

Xu Beihong (1895-1953) is recognized as a key figure in the modernization of Chinese art in the 20th century. Trained in China and France, he sought to bring reforms to the home art scene and art education through the integration of Eastern and Western cultural traditions.

He worked with both the mediums of ink and oil to create a body of paintings in which he explored motifs and an approach to realism that would attest to the changes of time and people's aesthetics. Especially during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), he painted a lot to raise funds for self-defense, and to motivate Chinese people to keep on resisting and not lose hope.

Legacy Through Time: Xu Bei-



hong, an ongoing exhibition at Guangdong Museum of Art, in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, through to June 15, centers around the formation of Xu's style in painting and his views on art and education. The works show his revisits of

the lion and galloping horse, two themes that have made him popular, in which Xu embodied the spirit of perseverance and heroism when confronting enemies.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 19 Baietan Nanhu, Lixian district, Guangzhou, Guangdong province. 020-8890-2999.

Profile of an era

Late realism artist Xin Dongwang once said, "I hope that my paintings would embrace a humanistic spirit. I hope that my paintings would show the temperament of my nation." The painter, with humble beginnings, endeavored to become a leading portrait artist. His early experiences drove him to portray people at the grassroots. His works profile the richness and subtlety of people's emotions in an ever-changing time.

The Ordinary World, an exhibition now underway at the Art Museum of China Academy of Art, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, pays



tribute to Xin whose artistic accomplishments provide the insights of a sociologist, a historian and sometimes a psychologist. It runs until March 31.

Xin was born in rural Hebei province. He learned painting from an early age, and continued to hone his skills while teaching in schools in Shanxi province. He passed away in 2014 at the age of 51. He was then a professor of the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 218 Nanshan Lu, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. 0571-8716-4633.

CHINA DAILY

LIFESHANGHAI



A celebration of culture in full bloom

As springtime arrives, festivals get into swing with many activities themed around a variety of blossoms, **He Qi** reports.

As spring approaches, Shanghai is poised to be adorned with an array of flowers, captivating visitors worldwide with its unique charm. A series of events will offer a front-row seat to the splendor of the season.

The 15th Shanghai Cherry Blossom Festival will be held at Gucun Park from Saturday to April 15. Gucun Park boasts 1,600 *mu* (106.7 hectares) of planting area with 16,000 cherry trees of 120 varieties, making it the city's largest park for cultivation and a landmark for enjoying cherry blossoms.

This season, the park in Baoshan district introduces a nighttime cherry blossom viewing activity, creating a dreamlike scene with light projections and storytelling.

"We are collaborating with urban lighting company Shanghai Luomian Technologies to transform the area near the park's No 2 gate into a cherry blossom island with day and nighttime events and light shows," says Liu Chuanbao, general manager of Shanghai Wusongku Culture Tourism Investment (Group) Co Ltd.

Liu also reveals partnerships with the video-sharing platform Bilibili and social media platform Xiaohongshu to attract visitors and create a new economic highlight with a blend of traditional Chinese and new animation themes. Leveraging the current trend of inbound tourism, Liu mentions plans for cherry blossom cruises as well.



From top: Gucun Park boasts the city's largest planting area with 16,000 cherry trees encompassing 120 varieties. The Shanghai Jing'an Flower Festival, or Huazhao Festival, in Daning, features traditional culture. PHOTOS BY HE QI, GAO ERQIANG AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

During the festival, four themes with 18 sub-activities will be launched. A cherry blossom-themed consumption season will be introduced, featuring four supporting activities — food, entertainment, nature exploration, and vacation accommodations, catering to tourists' diverse needs.

Chen Peng, deputy director of Baoshan district's Commission of Commerce, says: "Through this festival, we aim to enhance Baoshan's consumption vitality and elevate its image."

Li Yong, Gucun Park's greenery supervisor, highlighted that varieties like *Tairyō-zakura* (Dayu Ying) and *Kawazu-zakura* (Hejin Ying) are currently in full bloom. Late March to early April will witness the peak bloom of varieties such as *Somei Yoshino* (Ranjing Jiye Ying), creating a breathtaking spectacle. Late April will usher in the blooming period for

late-variety cherry blossoms. Cherry blossom enthusiasts like Min Na have already visited Gucun Park to admire the scenery. "The cherry blossoms are beautiful, perfect for *hanfu* photo-shoots, which turn out wonderfully!"

The Shanghai Jing'an Flower Festival, or Huazhao Festival, in the Daning Function Zone has also garnered attention. Running until March 30, this festival coincides with the blooming period of spring flowers in Daning Park, including cherry blossoms, crab apples, magnolias, and approximately 12,000 square meters of tulips. The festival combines traditional culture with modern aesthetics, featuring themed areas such as flower fields, cultural heritage markets, and traditional costume displays.

For the first time, the festival has introduced *hanfu* photo shoots. Visitors can wear traditional attire and join 12 "flower goddesses" to stroll flower-lined paths, immersing themselves in the elegance of ancient times.

An American employee in the Daning Function Zone nicknamed Liya says: "I'm thrilled to wear beautiful *hanfu* and take photos. I'd share them on TikTok to showcase

the charm of traditional Chinese culture."

From March 15 to 21, the flower festival's sports week will feature the 2025 Shanghai Jing'an Half Marathon, held on a traditional Chinese-style track that complements the Flower Festival's themed ancient route. From March 22 to 30, the marriage week will focus on young people's dating needs, hosting traditional wedding ceremonies and social events.

Moreover, major commercial complexes like Daning Music Plaza and Shanghai Jiuguang Center will launch themed activities, with discounts in catering, retail and cultural sports.

"We aim to deepen the integration of culture, tourism, sports, and exhibitions in Jing'an district through this festival," says Mao Lipeng, deputy director of the Jing'an Daning Function Zone Management Committee.

The Shanghai Landscaping and City Appearance Administrative Bureau announces that this spring, six types of flowers — white magnolias, plum blossoms, cherry blossoms, peonies, crab apples, and roses — have been selected as the main attractions. Parks with large planting areas and diverse varieties

will serve as primary display zones.

From March to April, street corners will also be adorned with flowers.

Xujiahui Park in downtown Xuhui district, one of Shanghai's top 10 park-plant zones last year, has 101 white magnolia trees planted across 700 square meters. The flowers typically bloom in early March.

Century Park in Pudong, with plum blossom culture at its core, features five plum garden scenic spots, creating a grand area blending Chinese and Western styles. Gulf (Haiwan) Forest Park's plum garden has over 40,000 plum trees of 126 varieties.

Gu Yi Garden, also one of Shanghai's top 10 park-plant zones last year, has a peony garden featuring hundreds of varieties that showcase white, red, pink, and yellow peonies, fully embodying the Chinese aesthetic of "peonies as the true national beauty."

Contact the writer at heqi@chinadaily.com.cn



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Contemporary artist's works explore ever-evolving Saudi Arabia

By ZHANG KUN
zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

The first large-scale solo exhibition by a contemporary Saudi artist in China, *Ahmed Mater: Antenna*, celebrated its opening on March 7 with the scent of cardamom-flavored coffee at UCCA Edge in Shanghai.

Mater, 46, is one of Saudi Arabia's most important contemporary artists. The physician-turned artist has documented and scrutinized the realities of contemporary Saudi Arabia for decades. Using a wide range of media from painting and photography to sculpture and installations, he creates conceptual works that explore collective memories of Saudi history — from the oil boom to the rapid transformation of society.

The exhibition, running until June 8, is a mid-career retrospective featuring more than 100 artworks, including Mater's major series and milestones, offering a comprehensive overview of his practices, formal and thematic explorations and documentary reflections at the forefront of Saudi Arabia's vibrant visual arts ecosystem in parallel to the rapidly evolving social and historical developments of his native land, according to Philip Tinari, director of the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art.

Presented by UCCA Edge in collaboration with the Saudi Ministry of Culture represented by the Saudi Visual Arts Commission, the exhibition is part of the official celebration surrounding the Saudi Chinese Cultural Year 2025, as this year marks



Left: Contemporary Saudi artist Ahmed Mater is giving a solo exhibition in Shanghai. **Middle:** A site-specific installation Mater developed for the Valley of the Arts. On exhibition are models and sketches for the project. **Right:** The artist sees the antenna as a bridge between a closed world and the vast beyond, embodying the desire to explore the unfamiliar. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

If you go

Ahmed Mater: Antenna
10 am to 7 pm (final entry 6:30 pm), March 8 to June 8
UCCA Edge, 2F, 88 Xizang Road North, Jing'an district, Shanghai
021-66286861

the 35th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia, according to Dina Amin, the CEO of the visual arts commission.

UCCA, one of the leading institutions for contemporary art in China, has been involved in the Saudi art scene for many years. Tinari recalls his first meeting with Mater at Art



Basel Hong Kong in 2014 and his first visit to Saudi Arabia in 2019. In 2021, Tinari curated the first Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale when he invited a dozen Chinese artists to participate in the exhibition.

As the world becomes more diverse, it is important that China and non-Western countries engage in cultural exchanges and dialogues on equal footing, Tinari says.

As visitors step into UCCA Edge, they will find a mihrab in the reception hall. The structure appears as a decorated gateway or pavilion found in a traditional Chinese garden, but walking through it, a string of red lights light up around the gate, accompanied by an audio alert.

The second-floor galleries display the artist's early works. The *X-Ray*

series of paintings were created from 2003 to 2004 when he was still practicing medicine. In these paintings, he blends Islamic cultural elements into abstract experimentation. The *Empty Land* series consists of photographs showing the volatility of the abundance and decline of the oil economy through the years. The *Magnetism* series are installations that symbolize the Meccan pilgrimage for Muslims.

The title piece *Antenna* is inspired by Mater's childhood memories of climbing onto the roof of his family's house to lift a battered TV antenna to the evening sky.

"The antenna carries unique symbolic significance throughout both my upbringing and artistic career,"

he says. Moving the antenna to find a signal beyond the mountainous horizon made him feel like a young explorer searching for contact with the outside world.

"Like many of my generation in Saudi Arabia, I was seeking ideas, music, poetry — a glimpse of a different kind of life. This spirit of creative exploration, curiosity, and reaching out to communicate across the borders surrounding me have defined my journey as an artist," Mater says.

Walking to the third floor, visitors will find more installations and large projects. *The Lightning Land* project was inspired by fulgurites, a glass tube formed by sand struck by lightning, which causes the sand to melt and then rapidly vitrify, form-

ing irregular elongated shapes resembling petrified lightning. Mater found in the immense and unpredictable force of nature a metaphor for the forces driving Saudi Arabia's changes. He used high-voltage power generation to simulate flashes of lightning to create a series of sculptures.

The UCCA also presents a miniature replica of a project he created in 2022 called *Ashab Al-Lal*, a large-scale site-specific land art installation located in the Valley of the Arts in the northwest of Saudi Arabia.

Studying the formation of a mirage, a natural phenomenon that appears in the desert, Mater simulated the bending of light rays. When visitors descend a tunnel into a subterranean chamber in the 65-square-kilometer valley, people walking in the faraway desert will see their apparition in mirage.

In some of the other cultures in the world, people consider the mirage as an unrealistic illusion that is deceiving and disappointing, but in his culture, the mirage is a traveler's guide and a picture of hope, Mater tells the media.

Mater's works have been featured in prestigious institutions around the world, such as The British Museum in London, the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, and the Guggenheim in New York. His art has also joined the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum in the United Kingdom, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in the United States, and the Centre Pompidou in France.

LIFE



Miao paintings by Liang Desong, his father and daughter, conveying peace and joy.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Breathing new life into brushwork

Miao painting tradition being given a makeover to enable its survival in the modern world, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

In a quiet corner of Qianzhou ancient town, nestled in the mountains of Hunan province, 61-year-old Liang Desong often sits at his wooden desk for up to 10 hours a day.

It's demanding for a man of his age, but he says he doesn't feel the time, as he immerses himself in Miao painting, an ethnic art form he has practiced for decades.

Surrounded by the tools of his craft, from fine-tipped brushes and a palette of vibrant paints, to bolts of dark black and indigo fabric, he outlines his design before applying base colors, layering on additional hues, and then adding the fine details.

The flow of tourism to the town in Jishou in the Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture has sent visitors to his workshop to appreciate the ancient art.

"I'm working on some big customized pieces that run more than 1 meter long and 80 centimeters wide for clients," Liang says.

Orders have flown in for his creations over the years.

An art form deeply rooted in Miao culture and tradition, Miao painting is known for its intricate natural motifs like peonies and lotuses, as well as auspicious symbols like phoenixes, dragons and fish. These are complemented by geometric designs, which are classified into five distinct forms: refined motifs, clustered patterns, horned designs, bordered embellishments and squared compositions.

These abstract yet evocative geometric patterns are a visual language, encoding the triumphs and tribulations of Miao history while preserving the essence of their cultural reverence, Liang explains.

"The most demanding part is the detail — mimicking the intricate stitches of Miao embroidery with a brush," he says, adding that he spent five years just mastering his brush strokes.

Holding his tool like a needle, he carefully traces lines that give the painting its textured, embroidered appearance.

"It's a painstaking process, but one that brings the artwork to life, blurring the line between painting and textile art," he says.

Miao painting is derived from Miao embroidery patterns dating back to the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), but has evolved into a distinct art form of its own, thanks to efforts by Liang's family.

Embroidery was an important form of adornment for Miao women, with designs that graced everything from clothing and quilts to curtains, door hangings and wall decorations.

It is an indispensable item at weddings, childbirth celebrations, and even the construction of new homes, and many artisans made a living just by sketching patterns for embroiderers.

But as the older generation of craftsmen passed away, the art teetered on the edge of extinction.

It was Liang's grandfather and father who stepped in to preserve this cultural treasure by collecting and refining Miao patterns, and designing motifs of their own.

Liang's grandfather was a schoolteacher who sketched patterns for embroiderers in the mid-20th century.

"He only outlined the designs, leaving the choice of colors to the women," Liang says.

The tradition passed to Liang's father, who began by drawing simple outlines but soon infused his work with his own creativity and personal flair. His designs, inspired by the world around him, became highly sought-after.

"Every five days, people from nearby villages would come to my father for patterns for their clothes and quilts," Liang says.

By the 1950s, as Miao women became too busy with farm work to embroider, Liang's father came up with a revolutionary solution: he painted Miao patterns directly onto the costumes, in place of embroidery.

This marked a pivotal shift from embroidery to stand-alone paintings, a bold innovation that redefined the art.

Since the Miao have no written language, painting has become an outlet for them to express their culture.

"My father would design patterns inspired by nature — flowers, birds, butterflies — and the myths we hold dear. Then, skilled women would embroider these designs, turning them into wearable art," says Liang, who has followed in his father's footsteps, learning Miao painting since he was 7.

As he honed his skills, Liang started to appreciate how the motifs reflect aspirations

for joy, prosperity, longevity and bountiful harvests.

"Symmetry is a hallmark of Miao painting, and there are some things you can paint, and some you cannot," he says.

For example, a pair of magpies symbolize double happiness, and the position of the dragon on the left and the phoenix on the right must not be mistaken. The combination of magpies and plum blossoms, or phoenixes and peonies, also follows specific rules.

Liang sees composition as key. Despite this, there are no rigid rules or fixed techniques, and painters have to rely on their intuition and experience of mixing and matching basic patterns, making every painting unique, he explains.

"Additionally, composition requires smooth, full lines and symmetrical forms. All the conceptualization happens in your mind. Every stroke must be precise, with no room for error or correction," he says.

As his understanding and skill grew, the rise of machine-made clothing in the 1980s threatened the craft once more. The demand for hand-painted Miao patterns dwindled.

At 22, Liang was forced to lay down his brush and take up miscellaneous jobs, from farming to construction, to make a living.

Even so, he never let go of the craft entirely.

"I kept painting from time to time, to keep my hand in," he says.

His break came in 2003, when folk art made a comeback. Local authorities tasked Liang with collecting Miao painting elements. This encouraged him to focus on his family heritage. He set a five-year goal of painting all the patterns he could find.

"Even if there was no market, I would be able to leave these paintings for future generations," he says.

In 2009, when the Xiangxi prefecture government held a folk arts and crafts competition, Liang's *Double Phoenixes Facing the Sun*, measuring 1 meter wide and 3 meters long and featuring two radiant phoenixes surrounded by pairs of colorful birds, lush greenery, and delicate butterflies, took the gold prize.

"I felt it put Miao painting on the map," Liang says.

Over the following five years, his work received recognition from scholars and experts around the country, among them Feng Jicai, a well-known Chinese author, artist and cultural scholar, who wrote that compared to Miao silverware and embroidery, Miao painting was radiant, exquisite and pure, captivating those fortunate to witness its beauty.

Tian Maojun, a professor at Hunan-based Jishou University, says that Liang's work carries the "freshness and sincerity of nature, unpolished, unaffected and free from artificiality".

These positive responses gave Liang the determination to continue to hone his skills.

He not only paints on cloth but has gradually started painting on Xuan paper as well.

His pieces are increasingly admired, attracting a growing number of collectors. He has also been invited to fine art exhibitions to demonstrate the art form's charm.

In 2011, Miao painting from Xiangxi was named a national intangible cultural heritage, and seven years later, Liang was named a national inheritor.

Under her father's influence, Liang's daughter, Liang Jincui, took up the family trade after graduating from college in 2015. Now in her 30s, she has dedicated herself to revitalizing the art of Miao painting through creative and modern interpretations.

"I focus on designing cultural products with Miao painting elements, such as pendants and other accessories," she says.

To make the art form relevant to today's market, she has embraced innovation, collaborating with tea brands to create specially designed packaging. Her goal is to use contemporary technology and methods that resonate with the young to present the art in a fresh and accessible way.

In addition, Liang Jincui has offered Miao painting training to those interested in learning the craft.

She says her decision to pursue this path stems from a deep sense of mission, shaped by the dedication and effort her father has poured into reviving the once faltering art.

"Miao painting originally served the lives and traditions of the Miao," she explains. "What we're doing now is bringing it back into our lives and reintroducing it to the public eye."



Clockwise from top: Liang paints in his workshop. His daughter Liang Jincui makes a Miao painting bookmark. Liang Jincui displays a fan painting at an art exhibition in the Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture. Liang Jincui teaches high school students Miao painting. Liang Desong paints a ceramic blank.

A set of mini-drums embellished with Miao designs by Liang Jincui.



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