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Consumption, innovation offer momentum

Initiatives go beyond productivity boosts, target increase in people's income

By WANG KEJU, LIU ZHIHUA and MA SI

China's economic transition is gaining momentum as initiatives to boost consumption and drive innovation take center stage, which can inject greater certainty into the global economic landscape and provide broader space in which multinational companies can thrive, officials and business executives said on Sunday.

China will combine robust policy support and the unleashing of market forces as it strives to achieve its economic growth target of around 5 percent this year, and policymakers are well prepared to introduce new incremental policies if necessary, Premier Li Qiang said in Beijing at the opening ceremony of the China Development Forum 2025.

The recent dynamism observed in China's consumer market, particularly in the film, winter sports and cultural tourism sectors, points to the vast potential of the country's domestic economic circulation, Li said at the two-day event.

The theme of this year's forum is "Unleashing Development Momentum for Stable Growth of the Global Economy".

Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs, said that China is set to enhance people's consumption capacity, to ensure they have the financial means and the willingness to consume. These initiatives go beyond merely promoting economic growth and productivity, he said.

They also seek to increase the income of urban and rural residents, optimize the income distribution structure and elevate the share of household income in overall national income, Han said.

Liu Shijin, former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, noted that "China faces a critical transition from an investment- and export-driven growth model to one fueled by innovation and consumption".

"While structural imbalances in



Premier Li Qiang shakes hands with Mercedes-Benz CEO Ola Kallenius on Sunday in Beijing before the opening ceremony of the China Development Forum 2025. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

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consumption present major challenges, resolving them could unlock growth potential comparable to that once provided by the real estate sector. This transformation would establish a foundation for sustained medium-speed economic growth, ensuring stability for China's economy in the years ahead," Liu said.

Furthermore, Premier Li also stressed at the forum that the continuous emergence of technological advancements by Chinese tech startups such as DeepSeek and Unitree Robotics has showcased the country's immense capability for innovation and creativity.

This year, China will scale up its funding to the sci-tech sector to expedite breakthroughs in critical and core technologies, said Minister of Finance Lan Fo'an, stressing that a variety of policy tools will be

used, including tax incentives and investment funds, to drive the "AI Plus" initiative and foster the growth of emerging and future industries.

Policymakers are committed to implementing measures that promote the development of the private sector, providing tangible assistance to enterprises so that they can innovate and thrive, Lan said.

Executives attending the forum said that amid the growing uncertainties in the global economy, it is more important than ever for nations to open up their markets, and for businesses to pool their resources, in order to jointly tackle challenges and achieve shared growth.

"We expect China to remain an engine for global growth in 2025 and across this decade," said Georges Elhedery, group chief executive of HSBC Holdings, adding that he is confident that China will remain a thriving, sustainable economy at the

heart of global trade and investment and at the forefront of innovation.

Cristiano Amon, president and CEO of US semiconductor company Qualcomm, told China Daily that he was excited by the innovation from DeepSeek.

"Our Chinese partners are very excited at embracing AI, and Qualcomm will expand our cooperation with them in the future," Amon said.

Li Lecheng, Party secretary of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that China has become the world's second-largest contributor to the global open-source community and the fastest-growing country in this field.

An open-source community is a collective of users, developers and contributors centered around a project in which the source code is freely available for modification and redistribution.

"We will support foreign-funded

enterprises to establish research and development centers in China, and to further promote innovation and entrepreneurship in the country," Li Lecheng said.

More efforts will be made to facilitate the translation of scientific and technological progress into practical applications, he said, adding that the country also encourages foreign enterprises to participate in such initiatives.

Pascal Soriot, CEO of AstraZeneca, said the strong signals from this year's Government Work Report, which reaffirmed the country's commitment to science, innovation and opening-up, are highly encouraging.

"We have been investing in science and innovation for many years in China, and we plan to invest even more in the future," Soriot said.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

WORLD WATCH
By Anthony Moretti

True intent of Trump's tariff moves remains unclear

Let's start with what is known: the current US administration loves tariffs. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, it believes that tariffs will — to borrow the words the US President Donald Trump uttered to reporters after signing an executive order imposing a 25 percent tariff on steel and aluminum imports to the United States on Feb 10 — go a long way to "making America rich again".

That is highly unlikely. But one thing that is highly likely is more angry allies. The US administration's

recent tariff pledge — the 25 percent increase on metals, no matter the exporting country — went into effect on March 12, with no exceptions or exemptions. Canada, the European Union and South Korea are among the countries or regions that ship steel and aluminum to the US, and all these countries have had nothing good to say about Washington's tariff promise.

The US administration backed down from an extraordinary trade war escalation on March 11 that had threatened a significant surge in tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum and new tariffs on Canadian electricity. In return, Canada paused surcharges on electricity to US customers. But the EU officials issued a statement noting that they will "react to protect the interests of European businesses, workers and consumers from unjustified measures", which is a nice way of saying the EU is prepared to slap tariffs on US goods. South Korea is on edge because its economy is reliant on exports, and the US is one of its largest trade partners.

The data leaves no doubt that no matter the percentage of tariff, US businesses and consumers are the ones who will ultimately pay the bill. One estimate suggests that a typical US family will need to fork out at least \$1,200 to cover the higher costs derived from the barrage of tariffs by the US administration. Another estimate in 2024 placed that figure even higher, at \$1700.

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Premier calls for efforts to expand pie of Sino-US cooperation

By ZHAO JIA zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

Premier Li Qiang said on Sunday that there are no winners in trade wars and that no country can achieve development and prosperity through imposing tariffs.

Li made the remarks while meeting with United States Senator Steve Daines and a group of US executives in Beijing following an annual high-level development forum.

Li said that relations between the two countries "have come to an important juncture" and noted that

President Xi Jinping said during a phone call with US President Donald Trump in January that the two countries could become partners and friends that contribute to each other's success.

"History tells us that China and the US both stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation. Our two sides need to choose dialogue over confrontation, win-win cooperation over zero-sum competition," Li said.

The premier also said he hoped that the US will make more efforts to meet China halfway, so that the two

countries can work together to promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of bilateral ties.

Calling economic and trade cooperation a vital foundation for bilateral ties, Li called for expanding the pie of cooperation and using the growth of shared benefits to address issues such as trade imbalances.

He noted that over the past several decades, the two countries have witnessed fruitful results in the field of economic and trade cooperation, a testament to the joint efforts of both sides that should be cherished.

"The more challenges the China-

US relationship faces, the more crucial it is to safeguard and enhance the large pie of economic and trade cooperation between the two countries, so that it can continuously inject stability into bilateral ties," Li said.

China always welcomes enterprises from all countries to share its development opportunities, Li said, pledging that the country will address the reasonable concerns of enterprises, treat domestic and foreign companies equally, and continue to foster a favorable business environment.

The US guests said that American enterprises are actively participat-

ing in and supporting China's development. They said they are willing to continue investing in China and strengthen dialogue and cooperation in order to achieve mutual benefits and promote the ongoing progress of bilateral ties.

On Saturday, Vice-Premier He Lifeng also met with Daines in Beijing and expressed firm opposition to politicizing or weaponizing economic and trade issues.

Daines, a Republican from Montana, is the first member of the US Congress to visit Beijing since Trump took office.

Into the dark depths



People look at China's deep-sea manned submersible Fendouzhe aboard Tansuo-1 research vessel during an open day of a joint China-New Zealand dive expedition in Wellington, New Zealand, on Friday. The mission marked the first international scientific dive exploration of the Puysegur Trench. XINHUA

BEIJING'S ANCIENT CAMEL STOP REVIVED AS TOURISM HOT SPOT

Modernization maintains historic, cultural characteristics; temple murals a major attraction

By XIN WEN xinwen@chinadaily.com.cn

Moshikou resident An Licheng, 79, remembers well the sound of camel bells ringing as the pack animals traversed the mountain pass in Beijing's western region making their way to the city's downtown.

He said when he was a youngster he could hear the bells

In-depth

sounding from as early as 4 am. "There was only one road to cross from the western Mentougou district to downtown Beijing, with a large mountain pass on the west side of the road," said An. "The camel team, which includ-

ed at least five and up to seven camels, walked across the road to carry coal or groceries to the city's downtown, and returned in the afternoon at around 3 or 4 pm. "Those camels didn't stop to rest. Their endurance was strong, and they only stopped to drink water from a well in the middle of our village to replenish their strength."

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From left: Four characters on a wall that say "camel bells ring on ancient road" in Moshikou area. Middle: A dragon dance show celebrates Lichun (Start of Spring) at Moshikou Street in Beijing on Feb 3. Right: People visit the street in February. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Located in Shijingshan district, what today is officially known as Moshikou Historical and Cultural Block, has seen a large influx of visitors over the past two years due to its renovation. The block was recently chosen as part of the fourth group of national-level tourist spots by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Early last century, Moshikou was characterized by muddy roads and irregularly placed power poles. Over the decades, it has undergone a modernization process, but maintained its cultural traditions and characteristics.

A century of change

During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), Moshikou was a prosperous area. As wine shops and inns flourished to cater to camel caravans passing along what was called the "Camel Bell Ancient Road".

The block's historical connection to camels is depicted in the classic novel *Camel Xiangzi* by renowned novelist Lao She, which captured the everyday life of Beijing residents in the late 1920s.

The modern development of Moshikou began in 1922 when it became the first village in Beijing to have electricity.

A year later, to reflect the progress brought by electrification and other advances, the meaning of the name of the village was changed from "millstone" to "model", with both having the same Chinese pronunciation.

Moshikou, "the model of all villages", has been used ever since.

Despite the changes, An remembers the vital role camels played carrying loads weighing up to 350 kilograms of goods.

"At that time, when it rained, the dirt road turned muddy and the carriages could not pass through, so they could only rely on camels for transport," he said. "Later, as the road improved and more carriages appeared, the camels were gradually phased out."

An's family has been in Moshikou for three generations. He currently lives with four family members in a house covering about 300 square meters, half of which is leased for commercial use.

"I'm glad that the street has taken on a new look, and the change has been obvious," he said. The stores and shops, as well as the walls on both sides of the street, have undergone a major face-lift, with some of the houses retaining their original appearance, he said.

New food shops have popped up, attracting locals and visitors from the surrounding area to sample their dishes.

Before the changes, the street was a hive of activity, with stalls selling pork, Chinese chives and snacks, said An. "I especially liked the tofu made with water from the deep mountain spring," he said.

Since the renovation, the whole atmosphere of the street has improved and the food offerings have changed. An said he had tried two new food offerings and preferred the pancakes he sampled to a dish that was popular with visitors.

Preserving the past

Zheng Tengfei is manager of Gudao Sicun, a courtyard that has a folk culture exhibition, displays

and a cafe that highlights the attractions of the ancient trail. When visitors enter the venue they can refer to a copper cast map that takes them to exhibition halls and leads them to explore the displays on their own.

The property was a grain store during the planned economy era from 1949 to 1978, then a pharmacy, and a Taoist temple, before finally being renovated into the courtyard.

Zheng, 34, a native of Fengtai district, in Beijing, said that he hadn't intended to open a cafe in Shijingshan, particularly during the pandemic. However, when a friend told him about the Moshikou area's upgrade and the popularity of outdoor activities there, he changed his mind.

"We didn't plan for the coffee shop to be a standard, commercial urban cafe, and admittedly we couldn't produce that large quantity of coffee per day," said Zheng. "At most, we are able to sell about 300 cups of coffee per day, and on weekends, around 200 cups a day. On weekdays, we sell only about 80 to 100 cups."

"But after the major face-lift and the overall upgrade of Moshikou, and I was part of it, I believe the area is aesthetically different now," he added.

Zhang Hao is planning and design manager for the Moshikou renewal project. Starting in 2020, the Shijingshan district government began the transformation of the area, focusing on preserving its cultural heritage, enhancing residents' living environment and diversifying businesses.

"There are lots of residential courtyards on both sides of Moshikou Street, and our primary goal is to add more modern elements to

Moshikou: Where history comes alive



People visit an exhibition at Gudao Sicun, a courtyard that integrates folk culture exhibition, displays and cafe in Moshikou area. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the area while maintaining the original style of the neighborhood," he said.

"We didn't want to create a uniform old neighborhood, but an area that can reflect the changes of time and even leave contemporary memories," he added.

On the east side of Moshikou

Street, Jingxi Shuju bookstore offers an ideal place for visitors to read and socialize. The bookstore's sloping green tile roof, bridge-like wooden structure and a large glass curtain form an inviting interior.

Zuo Yan, manager of the state-owned bookstore, said that the store structure had integrated an

underground water pump house and the district's transformer substation. While these facilities are not immediately apparent to visitors, they provide a space that incorporates modern elements.

"It's become a must-see place for tourists visiting Moshikou," said Zuo. "Our bestselling books are historical and cultural ones, covering the history and folklore of western Beijing, especially on our street."

Lao She's books also sell well, she added.

Zuo said that the premises also host book-sharing sessions that feature cultural and creative products, as well as displaying artistic works related to Fahai Temple.

Temple attractions

Moshikou is home to Fahai Temple and its exquisite murals from the Ming Dynasty, which are a highlight of the cultural richness and history of the area.

The temple is located on the northern side of Moshikou block and was listed as a national key cultural heritage site in 1988. It has been preserved for centuries as a niche spot in western Beijing that was once part of the Ancient Camel Road.

Built in 1439 during the Ming Dynasty, the temple was founded by Li Tong, an imperial eunuch. Around 169 painters and craftsmen participated in the construction of the temple and the painting of the murals, a project that spanned over four years.

Fifteen court painters created 10 of the temple's murals, covering an area of 236.7 square meters and featuring 77 meticulously hand-drawn figures.

Compared with the Palace Museum or the Summer Palace, Fahai

Temple is a less popular destination for tourists visiting Beijing. However, the murals that it housed for over 500 years, are hidden gems that are now attracting more visitors from home and abroad.

Shen Yayun, 34, from Shenzhen, Guangdong province, has visited the temple twice in four years to appreciate its murals.

She said she is impressed by the fine details and extraordinary painting skills that brought almost everything on the walls to life, from flowers and grass to the eyes of mythical creatures and the attire of Buddha.

"To better protect the murals, they are kept in darkness in the main hall of Fahai Temple," she said. "Only when tourists visit are flashlights shone to allow them to appreciate the large murals, adding more mystery to their artistic charm."

Docents who guide the tour have a special flashlight that illuminates the murals in a yellowish glow that makes them look different, Shen said, adding it was a "mind-blowing" experience.

The names of the court painters are engraved on a Buddhist stone pillar in front of the temple, which is still well preserved at an exhibition hall in the temple courtyard. The tomb of Li Tong, the founder of Fahai Temple, is located to the right of the temple gate.

Sense of calm

Observing the murals of Fahai Temple is more than just a tourist experience, as they convey spiritual aspects of Buddhism. The giant Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, nearly 2 meters tall, stand with dignified and benevolent faces, their robes adorned with intricate patterns traced in gold.

"The brush strokes, smooth, free and soft, combined with the delicate and complete depiction, conveyed to me a peaceful Buddhist world, and a sense of calm," said Shen.

Angela Latham, a British journalist who explored Fahai Temple early last century, was amazed by the preserved Ming dynasty murals. "The vastness of the intricately-woven composition, its grace and dignity, seem the work of some divine artist," Latham wrote in an article published in the Illustrated London News in February 1937.

She described the Bodhisattvas she saw as "so beautiful that I have never seen any paintings as noble and as charming".

Latham wrote that the "distinguished people" so admirably attending the Buddha on the walls of Fahai Temple are "a gathering of immortals".

In 2023, Fahai Temple Mural Art Center was opened, showcasing the fine details and motifs of the frescoes with digital technology. The practice of copying the frescoes inside the temple has also gained popularity among visitors.

Fresco-copying events are also held at Jingxi Shuju bookstore. Zuo, the manager, said that in the past two years, most of the visitors from Beijing had got to know Fahai Temple and its murals.

"The development of the area and the preservation of the cultural relics site should complement each other, and I believe that is the goal," she said.

"In the future, as more tourists come, the reputation of Fahai Temple, Moshikou, as well as our bookstore will grow."



Left: The courtyard of Gudao Sicun. Right: Jingxi Shuju, a bookstore in the Moshikou area. Below: The costumes of the figures on the murals of Fahai Temple are displayed. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



TOP NEWS

Race day fever



Fans cheer on Sunday before the start of the 2025 Formula One Chinese Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit in Shanghai. McLaren's Oscar Piastri finished first — his first win of the season — while his teammate Lando Norris came in second. ANDY WONG / AP PHOTO

Trilateral meet stresses key role of cooperation

Mutual trust and dialogue in focus during talks between China, Japan and Republic of Korea

By ZHOU JIN in Beijing, JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo and YANG HAN in Hong Kong

The latest meeting of the foreign ministers of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea has provided a timely and vital platform for the three neighbors to enhance mutual understanding and maintain the good momentum of trilateral cooperation, observers said.

In a period of great upheaval and instability, the importance of their cooperation has been further highlighted, which the observers said will have significant ripple effects and influence worldwide.

The 11th Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting, attended by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya and ROK Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul on Saturday in Tokyo, was the highest-level communication since the resumption of the trilateral leaders' meeting in Seoul in May last year.

Wang said that facts have proved that the more solid the China-Japan-ROK cooperation is, the stronger the ability of the three countries to withstand risks, the stronger the foundation for empowering development, and the more effective the promotion of mutual understanding and friendship among the people of the three nations.

He called for promoting trilateral cooperation to achieve the effect of "1+1+1>3".

To achieve steady and lasting trilateral cooperation, it is essential

to create a virtuous cycle of mutual reinforcement with bilateral relations, Wang said.

In particular, the three countries need to respect one another's core interests, properly manage differences, and continuously build consensus, cultivate momentum and deepen cooperation on the basis of maintaining sound and steady relations, he added.

Wang advocated enhancing trade cooperation among the three countries, resuming negotiations to reach a China-Japan-ROK free trade agreement at an early date, and setting up a trilateral dialogue mechanism on export controls.

He also called for promoting scientific and technological innovation to stimulate new drivers for growth, and strengthening trilateral cooperation on healthy aging, healthcare, new energy, green development and ecological and environmental protection.

Amid what Iwaya described as a "turning point in history", the Japanese foreign minister called for the three countries to overcome division and confrontation through dialogue and cooperation and promote future-oriented exchanges.

ROK Foreign Minister Cho said he believes that through mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation, the three neighbors can jointly create a more peaceful and prosperous future and help heal the wounds of the past.

The three ministers also agreed to make preparations for a leaders' meeting this year.

Xiang Haoyu, a research fellow

at the China Institute of International Studies' Department for Asia-Pacific Studies, said that the foreign ministers' meeting aimed to undertake overall planning and coordination for trilateral cooperation this year, and to inject new political impetus and guidance into trilateral cooperation.

The cooperation among China, Japan and the ROK has long been characterized as "crisis-driven", Xiang said, adding that the hard-won restart and accelerated progress of trilateral cooperation reflects a heightened sense of crisis on the part of Tokyo and Seoul.

As the top three economies in East Asia and major players in global trade, China, Japan and the ROK, against the backdrop of current international political and economic turbulence, are sending a strong signal through their cooperation of jointly upholding multilateralism and the international trade system, and expressing their opposition to the unilateralism and protectionism pursued by the United States, Xiang said.

This cooperation will also play a positive role in maintaining unity, promoting collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region and advancing regional integration, he said.

Kumiko Haba, former vice-president of the International Studies Association and distinguished professor at Josai International University, said that to maintain and enhance regional peace and stability, it is essential to peacefully resolve disputes through noninterference in other countries' internal affairs and adopting an approach of setting aside differences. Based on this foundation, it is

necessary for Japan, China and the ROK to promote economic and cultural exchanges, as well as to strengthen public diplomacy and cooperation between local governments, Haba said.

Ukeru Magosaki, director of the East Asian Community Institute and a former senior official at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that collaboration on the development and advancement of electric vehicles, autonomous driving and artificial intelligence should leverage the respective technologies of China, the ROK and Japan to drive strong progress.

Many Japanese people still perceive today's China as the China of the 2000s, Magosaki said. If people-to-people exchanges become more active, it will become clear that cooperation "is the right path for these nations to pursue", he said.

As the opening ceremony of the China-Japan-ROK Year of Cultural Exchange from 2025 to 2026 will be held in Japan in April, Foreign Minister Wang said that the three countries should strive to achieve the goal of 40 million people-to-people exchanges by 2030.

Woo Su-keun, head of the Institute of East Asian Studies of Korea in Seoul, said that it is important for the three countries to jointly create more opportunities for people-to-people exchanges in the areas of culture, art, youth and economic cooperation, in order to promote mutual understanding.

The more frequently that the people of the ROK, China and Japan communicate, "the more they will discover the similarities and closeness inherent in one another, and the closer they will become", Woo said, adding that such interactions will also help solidify cooperation among the three countries.

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US plan to curb visas for Chinese students decried

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Recent moves by some US lawmakers are exacerbating an already hostile environment for Chinese students, and education experts have warned that this could undermine the United States' technological leadership and global research collaborations.

A group of House Republicans recently introduced a bill that seeks to bar Chinese nationals from receiving any kind of student visas to the US, citing "national security" concerns.

This controversial proposal comes amid increasing scrutiny of Chinese students. The House Select Committee on China has also demanded detailed information about Chinese students from Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and several other institutions.

These universities must provide data by April 1 on faculty collaborations with Chinese institutions, research projects involving Chinese students, and screening processes for Chinese applicants to "sensitive" research programs.

The proposal alone would dampen the sentiments of Chinese students and hurt US-China research collaboration, said Eddie West, assistant vice-president for international affairs at California State University Fresno.

Speaking to China Daily, West said that Washington's unpredictability would make families wonder if the bill could become law and disrupt the studies of their wards. "I doubt the bill will become law, and I feel I have a good enough understanding of the political landscape in the US to make that reasoned judgment call," he said.

Chinese students have long played an important role as a source of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics talent in the US. China is the largest country of origin for US foreign STEM students and provides the most STEM PhD candidates to US universities.

At the graduate level, Chinese students comprise 37 percent of international students and 16 percent of all US students in STEM fields, according to a 2020 study by the Center for Security and Emerging Technology.

The US tech industry heavily relies on this talent pool. Nearly 70 percent of Silicon Valley's tech talent — those with a bachelor's degree or higher in technical occupations — are foreign-born, with 18 percent coming from China, according to data released by the think tank Joint Venture Silicon Valley this month.

However, the number of Chi-

nese students in the US has been decreasing, from a peak of about 370,000 in 2019 to around 277,398 in the 2023-24 academic year. This decline follows policies implemented during US President Donald Trump's first term when student visas for Chinese applicants were tightened in certain programs, particularly those involving "sensitive" technologies.

Trump's Presidential Proclamation 10043 in May 2020 canceled more than 1,000 visas held by Chinese graduate students and researchers. The Center for Security and Emerging Technology estimates that 3,000 to 5,000 Chinese students are blocked annually by the proclamation, which remains in effect.

When faced with such hostile policies, students are likely to turn to other countries as alternative study destinations, West said.

He said some students have already informed his university that they are reconsidering or changing their plans to study in the US given the current situation.

Similar concerns are being voiced by other educators. Piali Sengupta, a biologist at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, said on social media platform Bluesky that she had advised an "excellent postdoc candidate from China" to look at labs in Europe or Asia instead.

"Leaving aside the death spiral of science funding and free speech here, hard to recommend coming here on a visa right now. Tragic to lose talent," she wrote in a post following the introduction of the bill.

Eloise Dray, an assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Structural Biology at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, expressed her frustration in the face of curbs while recruiting a "very talented young" doctor of medicine from China to her PhD program.

"He would have had a mini scholarship from his government, but mostly paid by the lab. Was told that it is forbidden in Texas. I don't think it's the best time to recruit overseas ...," she posted on Bluesky.

The restrictions and unwelcoming environment "does a huge disservice to the importance of collaboration" between the US and China, potentially undermining critical global research addressing shared challenges, West said. "The world needs Chinese and US scientists to cooperate, and one of the single best ways to foster that cooperation is through Chinese students and scholars studying and conducting research in the US — as well as US students and scholars studying and conducting research in China."

Raging inferno



A Korea Forest Service helicopter battles a wildfire on Sunday in Uiseong, North Gyeongsang Province in South Korea, as the blaze rages for the second day. The wildfire has caused at least four deaths. YONHAP PHOTO

Tariffs: Trump's latest moves won't bring back manufacturing

From page 1

But the vitriol from allies and the data about higher prices do not get at the heart of the issue, which is what exactly is Trump's plan? Is it to return thousands and thousands of manufacturing jobs to the US? Forbes magazine blew a huge hole in that idea, noting that US labor costs, a shortage of workers trained to take on such jobs, the high costs of retrofitting or building new facilities and the complex nature of global supply chains guarantee that a renaissance in US

manufacturing is little more than a pipe dream.

Perhaps the president thinks that increased tariffs will make more companies interested in moving operations to US? No seems like the answer to that question. A 2023 report from the Boston Consulting Group found that members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, India and Mexico are more lucrative locations and are likely to remain that way.

Does the US administration think that money generated from tariffs will offset another item pre-

vious to him — tax cuts? Stanford University claims that tax cuts will drain \$5 trillion from federal coffers over a 10-year period. If that figure is anywhere close to accurate, then the money coming from tariffs will need to be expanded.

Perhaps the administration considers tariffs an opportunity to address the fentanyl and illegal drug crisis in the US?

Trying to summarize that crisis in a few words seems risky, but there are some truths that cannot be refuted. One factor that explains the increased use of and high death

rate associated with fentanyl is that it costs much less than other illegal drugs. Doctors also face criticism because they have overprescribed legal pain medications, which has led to the unintended consequence of a spike in addictions. As the American University in Washington, DC, noted, the US government has failed to control the amount of fentanyl entering the country even though there have been consistent seizures at the US-Mexico border. What do these points have in common? Blaming Canada, Mexico, China or any other country, which

the US administration has done, for the problem makes zero sense. Think of it this way: If a homeowner refuses to do needed maintenance, then he or she should not blame the builder for the inevitable damage. Laziness, deliberate neglect and poor choices are instead the reality.

Regardless of what the US administration's purpose of tariff moves is — and there needs to be an assumption that it has one — anger and confusion remain front and center in capitals all over the world. One can hope that it will listen to

words of a Chinese official, who said the US needs to "promote a steady, sound and sustainable development of China-US relationship".

Canadian officials would happily insert their country into that statement. So, too, would representatives from Mexico, South Korea, Brazil, the EU and so on. Will the US administration listen? Come to think of it, does it care?

The author is department head and an associate professor of the Communication and Organizational Leadership Department at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania, the United States. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Phase II of space project completed

Network spans area between sun and Earth to warn of interstellar weather

By YAN DONGJIE

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China achieved a significant milestone in space science on Friday with the completion and national approval of the Chinese Meridian Project Phase II.

The project is the world's first comprehensive ground-based monitoring network spanning the entire sun-Earth space environment, extending from the solar atmosphere to near-Earth space, said Li Hui, deputy director of the National Space Science Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The breakthrough delivers 72-hour early warnings in space weather forecasting as solar activity approaches its 11-year peak this year, which poses interference risks to space missions and navigation systems, said Luo Bingxian, deputy director of the State Key Laboratory of Solar Activity and Space Weather at the NSSC.

With construction starting in 2019, the CMP Phase II established a "two vertical, two horizontal" double-cross monitoring network along the 100 degrees and 120 degrees east longitudes, and the 30 degrees and 40 degrees north latitudes.

By integrating 16 new observation stations with the original 15 CMP Phase I stations, the project enables unprecedented three-dimensional monitoring of space weather phenomena, from solar eruptions to the Earth's atmospheric responses.

The CMP Phase II features several key technological advancements, Li said, with the Daocheng Solar Radio Telescope ranking first. The ring-shaped array captures 3D coronal tomography with a 10-solar-radius field of view, enabling exceptional tracking of solar activity.

The project includes the world's first tristatic incoherent scatter radar system, which employs phased array technology to perform ionospheric computed tomography scanning and 3D imaging over distances of thousands of kilometers.

The Super Dual Auroral Radar Network, a mid-latitude high-frequency radar array, achieves large-

scale continuous detection of ionospheric dynamics in the middle and high latitudes of the Asian sector, covering over 4,000 km meridionally and 10,000 km zonally.

During its trial phase, the CMP Phase II demonstrated high reliability, Li said. It captured the May 2024 super geomagnetic storm, providing real-time, high-precision data crucial to understanding the sun-Earth space environment's responses to the solar activities.

Wang Chi, general commander of the CMP Phase II, said that the project exemplifies China's institutional strengths in "mega-science".

"By unifying global-scale monitoring, we are building a critical shield against space weather threats and offering innovative solutions to global scientific challenges," he said.

Building on this achievement, China is launching the International Meridian Circle Program, enabling all-latitude, all-weather and round-the-clock observation of space weather. This initiative will address transnational challenges such as solar storms and geomagnetic disruptions, reflecting a commitment to a collaborative future in space exploration.

"The Daocheng Solar Radio Telescope is the world's largest synthetic aperture radio telescope. The preliminary design and validation phases alone consumed half the project timeline, uncovering numerous technical bottlenecks. With perseverance and patience, we addressed these challenges step by step," said Yan Jingye, chief designer of the telescope.

All monitoring data from the CMP will be made accessible to domestic and international universities and research institutions for collaborative research, Li said.

"Space environment and weather are integral to the community with a shared future for mankind. However, disturbances in space weather pose a significant challenge worldwide, requiring coordinated efforts from the international community," he said.

Fang Biling contributed to this story.



Researchers monitor the operational status at the control center of the Chinese Meridian Project in Beijing on Thursday. JIN LIWANG / XINHUA



New tricks

Crowds watch a robot dog perform a back flip at the Appliance and Electronics World Expo in Shanghai on Saturday. The exhibition, which commenced on Thursday, has attracted participation from over 1,000 companies from home and abroad, showcasing cutting-edge achievements in the fields of home appliances and consumer electronics. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Climate change on plateau creating risks for residents, infrastructure

By YAN DONGJIE

Recent research by Chinese scientists has revealed that over the past 36 years, climate change has had a notable impact on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau's lakes, which in turn has created risks for the local infrastructure and residents.

The findings were published on Tuesday in the international journal *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* by the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The research team discovered that alongside changes in lake water volume, there was a gradual decrease in salinity, a significant reduction in chlorophyll-a levels and enhanced microbial diversity and nutrient status.

"These changes have, in turn, affected local climate and livelihoods, leading to increased regional precipitation and posing risks of lakes overflowing and breaching, which could harm infrastructure, living conditions and pastoral areas," said Ju Jianting, co-lead author of the study and an associate professor at the institute.

This study is the first to systemati-

cally quantify the long-term evolution of the physical, chemical and ecological characteristics of lakes on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, providing essential scientific evidence for evaluating regional water security and carbon cycling.

The study found that over the past 36 years, the area of the lakes expanded by 26 percent, the water volume increased by about 170 cubic kilometers and water transparency improved by 72 percent.

According to Zhu Liping, corresponding author of the study and a researcher at the institute, the lakes on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau store about 70 percent of the freshwater resources of the Asian Water Tower, directly influencing the water cycles of major rivers like the Yangtze and Yellow rivers.

From 1986 to 2022, the total area of lakes larger than 1 square kilometer on the plateau increased from 37,000 sq km to 47,000 sq km, with water storage increasing by 169.7 cubic km, equivalent to 3.8 times the maximum capacity of the Three Gorges Reservoir.

"While the expansion of lakes has temporarily improved water quality, it could trigger a series of ecological

chain reactions in the long run, potentially threatening infrastructure safety," Zhu said.

The research shows that although rising water temperatures have enhanced phytoplankton activity, the carbon dioxide flux of the lakes has undergone complex changes. During the 2000s the plateau's lakes released 16 gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; 68.7 gigatons in the 2010s; and have so far released 11.6 gigatons this decade, with emissions from high-salinity lakes being three times greater than those from freshwater lakes.

"This challenges the traditional understanding that cleaner lakes are not necessarily carbon sinks," Zhu said, explaining that the interchanging roles between temperature and salinity have made the plateau lakes dynamically shift between carbon sources and sinks.

Co-lead author Ju said: "The changes in the plateau lakes are a product of global warming. The exact impact of lake changes on global warming, whether it will result in carbon release or absorption, remains a topic of significant debate requiring further research, enhanced observation and the devel-

opment of physical balance models."

According to the simulations from an empirical model, if industrial gas emissions such as carbon dioxide remain high, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau's lake area could grow by an additional 8,000 to 9,000 sq km by 2050, equivalent to 11 times the volume of Qinghai Lake, China's largest lake.

"Although larger lake areas can help regulate local climates through increased precipitation, the ongoing expansion of closed lakes poses two significant risks: overflow and breaching threatening infrastructure such as the Qinghai-Xizang Railway. And chronic salinity reduction could potentially alter existing carbon exchange patterns and exacerbate regional carbon emission fluctuations," Ju noted.

The research team recommended developing clear-physical-mechanism models for lake water balance, improving future prediction accuracy and conducting in situ observations during all seasons. Establishing high-precision remote sensing systems and dynamic monitoring networks for lake-atmosphere carbon exchange is also essential.

As the second Tibetan scientific expedition progresses, researchers are integrating drone aerial surveys with satellite remote sensing, aiming to establish a real-time monitoring system, thereby equipping the Asian Water Tower with an ecological early warning system.

Brain-machine interface helps aphasia patients talk

By XU NUO

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A patient who sustained aphasia due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis has regained the ability to communicate after receiving a brain-machine interface implant, a hospital in Beijing announced on Thursday.

Doctors at the Xuanwu Hospital of Capital Medical University said they have completed the world's first human implantations of a device called the NeuCyber Matrix BMI System, which enables an aphasic patient who has lost the ability to speak to communicate, in much the same way that renowned physicist Stephen Hawking, who had ALS, was able to communicate with his speech-generating device.

The semi-invasive, wireless brain-machine interface implant was independently developed in China. It features a flexible, high-density electrode applied to the cortex that records, processes and transmits brain signals with a high sampling rate, high throughput and low power consumption.

"The device collects signals from 128 channels, or 128 different locations in the brain simultaneously, having the highest throughput

among its peers," said Luo Minmin, director of the Chinese Institute for Brain Research in Beijing.

Zhao Guoqiang, director of the National Center for Neurological Disorders and president of Xuanwu Hospital of Capital Medical University, said his team performed the first implantation surgery of a Chinese-language wireless brain-machine interface implant this month on a patient with ALS-induced speech loss.

The device was successfully implanted in the key area of the left hemisphere of the patient's brain that controls speech, he said at a press conference on Thursday.

The 67-year-old patient was diagnosed with ALS in 2023 and developed severe articulation disorders as the disease progressed, severely hindering verbal communication.

The surgery, assisted by a neurosurgical robot, placed a thin, flexible electrode with 128 channels on the dura mater, the outermost layer of the three membranes that protect the brain and spinal cord. The aim was to achieve high-quality neural signal acquisition with minimal trauma.

A coin-sized device responsible for control and signal transmission was

then embedded on the skull surface, allowing efficient neural signal transmission through near-field communication while also supplying power, Zhao said.

The brain-machine interface device is trained to recognize brain patterns produced when certain words are internally spoken or thought. This is typically achieved by flashing a word on a screen and asking the participant to "say" it internally. Brain-machine interface algorithms then predict the words tested, according to a 2024 study published in *Nature Human Behaviour*.

On March 10, five days after the surgery, the patient began language decoding training. Of the 128 signal channels, 126 functioned well. After three hours of training, the real-time decoding accuracy for 62 commonly used words reached 34 percent. It has now reached 52 percent, Zhao said.

"With more training, we hope ALS patients will not only be able to communicate daily needs, but also create poetry, expressing their sentiments and feelings," Zhao said.

In other clinical trials, two paralyzed patients who received the NeuCyber Matrix BMI System implantation were able to control

computers and robotic arms with their thoughts. They also controlled electrical muscle stimulation devices to recover limb motor functions.

In January, the Beijing Municipal Science and Technology Commission issued an action plan to accelerate brain-machine interface innovation in the nation's capital from 2025 to 2030. It aims for major breakthroughs in core technologies such as brain-machine interface electrodes, chips, and encoding and decoding algorithms by 2027. By 2030, the brain-machine interface industry in Beijing is expected to take shape.

The Chinese Institute for Brain Research in Beijing and NeuCyber NeuroTech (Beijing) Co have jointly developed the semi-invasive NeuCyber Matrix BMI System and the invasive NeuCyber Array BMI System, both of which have reached state-of-the-art global levels, according to the technology commission.

Last year, the NeuCyber Array BMI System, a wired version with 1,024 channels, was first demonstrated at the opening ceremony of the 2024 Zhongguancun Forum, where a monkey implanted with the device controlled a robotic arm using only its thoughts.

types of difficult cases, including neurological, bone and intestinal tuberculosis, said Hu Jinxing, vice-president of the hospital.

"Through a graded diagnosis and treatment system, patients can directly access specialized departments. Those with extrapulmonary tuberculosis receive 'barrier-free access' throughout the entire process, from diagnosis to treatment," Hu said.

Guangzhou has actively screened key groups, including university students, the elderly and diabetes patients, while promoting "tuberculosis-free areas" and other pilot projects, forming a closed-loop system for screening, treatment and management.

TB vaccine development aimed at breaking transmission chain

By ZHENG CAIXIONG

in Guangzhou

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Guangzhou Laboratory, a key State facility focused on studying respiratory diseases, is developing a vaccine that could completely break the transmission chain of tuberculosis in the coming years, Zhong Nanshan, a noted expert on respiratory illness, said in a video speech on Thursday.

Zhong made the remarks during a tuberculosis prevention and control awareness event in Guangzhou,

Guangdong province, which served as a prelude to the 30th World TB Day on Monday.

"Ending the transmission of tuberculosis requires actions from the whole society, including early diagnosis and treatment, elimination of discrimination and technological breakthroughs," Zhong said.

He called for greater public awareness of TB prevention and control and urged medical professionals to further improve diagnosis and treatment standards.

Zhong, head of Guangzhou Labo-

ratory, is also an academican of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a recipient of the Medal of the Republic, China's highest honor.

Guangdong's progress in short-term treatment and vaccine research and development has laid the technological foundation for eliminating TB transmission, he said.

According to a 2024 World Health Organization report, more than 10 million new cases of tuberculosis were reported worldwide last year, including about 741,000 in China, underscoring the country's heavy

burden in TB prevention and control.

In Guangdong, the reported TB incidence rate has declined by 51 percent since late 2012, according to official statistics, reflecting significant progress in prevention and control efforts.

The province, China's most populous with more than 127 million people, has detected and treated about 720,000 TB cases since 2012, maintaining a treatment success rate above 90 percent and a low mortality rate. Last year, the reported TB incidence rate in Guangdong fell by

8.9 percent from the previous year.

Guangzhou, the provincial capital, has been designated a national benchmark city for TB prevention and control. In 2024, the city reported an incidence rate of 33.82 per 100,000 people, with a 94.89 percent treatment success rate and a mortality rate of 0.31 per 100,000 cases, indicating effective TB containment.

To tackle ongoing challenges, Guangzhou Chest Hospital has established China's most comprehensive tuberculosis subspecialty treatment system, covering 18

CHINA



From Left: Students at Yongzhou Vocational Technical College in Hunan province register to donate blood for a 7-year-old girl. A student donates his blood for the girl. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Blood donors help restore girl's health

Students band together to assist child with severe disease

By ZOU SHUO in Beijing and ZHU YOUFANG in Changsha

At a square near Yongzhou Vocational Technical College in Hunan province, a mobile blood donation vehicle is surrounded by students ready to donate their blood to a 7-year-old girl who has thalassemia, a hereditary disease resulting in mild to severe anemia.

Li Qinghui, a sophomore majoring in nursing, rolled up his sleeve to give his blood. As the needle pierced his vein, crimson blood flowed through transparent tubing into the storage bag — each drop carrying hope for life. This specially designated blood donation would become vital nourishment for Xinxin, a 7-year-old girl

battling severe thalassemia.

Across campus, 24 student volunteers like Li have been mobilized for Xinxin, who should have been enjoying carefree childhood play, but has been shackled by this blood disorder since 2020.

Her parents embarked on an exhaustive medical journey across Guangzhou in Guangdong province and Changsha in Hunan province looking for a stem cell transplant match. To survive, the girl requires two 400-milliliter blood transfusions monthly, her tiny arms bearing constellations of needle marks that silently testify to her fight for life.

Post COVID-19 blood shortages at Yongzhou Central Blood Station exacerbated her crisis, with daily

collections meeting only 70 percent of clinical demand.

"Thalassemia patients account for 10 percent of long-term blood recipients," explained Tang Wei, director of blood collection at the center. Each delayed transfusion leaves Xinxin dizzy and weak, and is potentially life-threatening.

The turning point came on Dec 15 last year when Xinxin's family approached volunteers from the college's "Red Bond" blood donation service team in Lingling district. Launched in March 2023 by Tang Xinyu, a faculty member at the university, the team has 530 members and conducts weekly free blood donation promotion.

Following home visits and cross-

departmental coordination, the college issued an urgent campus-wide appeal.

Within 24 hours, 24 qualified volunteers averaging 19 years old were mobilized, with the goal of helping Xinxin conquer the disease.

Among them stood Tang Junjie, 19, an intelligent equipment major who received 1,600 milliliters of life-saving blood during emergency surgery.

"Blood donors gave me a second life at 17. Donating at 18 became my coming-of-age ritual," he said.

For Xinxin's mother, these students became "lifesavers who restored our hope".

The blood from the 24 donors can sustain Xinxin's needs for a whole year.

The "Red Bond" team plans ongoing recruitment to sustain this "never-ending relay of compassion".

Xinxin recently drew smiling faces on a thank-you note: "Big brothers and sisters, your blood sings in my body." Her childlike words amplify the warmth radiating from this campus, where youthful idealism pulses with life-giving force, Tang said.

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Yunnan turns focus to long-term tourist stays

KUNMING — For travel enthusiast Miao Pengzhuo, who has explored countless destinations, the idea of settling down in one place never crossed his mind, until he discovered a village in Southwest China's Yunnan province.

"Here, the sunsets never lose their magic, and life unfolds in its purest form, drawing me in with an irresistible charm," said Miao, a Sichuan native who has lived for five years in Haiyan, a centuries-old fishing village by Dianchi Lake.

The village's rich fishery culture, poetic landscapes and tranquil lifestyle have kept him rooted, replacing his once restless pursuit of new destinations with a deep sense of belonging.

Some 600 kilometers away, atop Jingmai Mountain in Pu'er city, engineer Jiang Cheng, from the southern economic powerhouse of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, has also found a sanctuary.

Each morning, he opens his laptop in a traditional Blang ethnic village, working against a backdrop of a rolling sea of clouds. The rhythmic tapping of his keyboard blends with the distant melody of tea pickers singing in the fields.

Two years ago, he rented an old house to be his base as he worked remotely.

Miao and Jiang are among a growing number of travelers choosing to stay longer in Yunnan, immersing themselves in local life rather than rushing from one attraction to another.

Industry insiders believe that this shift from whirlwind sightseeing to extended stays reflects a transformation in China's travel consumption.

Data shows that in 2024, nearly 4 million long-term travelers

Long-term stays are not just about travel or residence, they represent a deeper cultural engagement and a way of life."

Dai Bin, president of China Tourism Academy

settled in Yunnan, drawn by the opportunity to have a slower, more immersive experience in the province's ancient villages and terraced fields.

"Long-term stays are not just about travel or residence, they represent a deeper cultural engagement and a way of life," said Dai Bin, president of China Tourism Academy.

To meet this growing demand, Yunnan has launched an ambitious three-year initiative that includes establishing at least 3,000 designated villages tailored for travelers seeking wellness retreats, cultural immersion, educational programs and senior-living opportunities.

This shift is also revitalizing rural communities, creating new economic opportunities for lesser-known towns.

For instance, Yuanjiang county, which lacks any major tourist landmark, attracted 35,000 long-term visitors during this year's Spring Festival — nearly half the population of the county's urban area — thanks to its warm winter climate.

For 2025, Yunnan has set an ambitious goal of attracting 6 million long-stay visitors.

XINHUA



FIGHTING AGAINST DESERTIFICATION

Public Interest AD: 036
SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

India slaps 12% tariff to shield steel industry

Experts call for stronger economic ties with China as US protectionism rises

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi and XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong

India plans to impose a 12 percent "safeguard duty" on certain steel products for 200 days to protect its domestic industry from "serious injury" caused by a spike in imports.

While the move has been welcomed by local manufacturers, it has raised concerns among downstream industries over rising costs.

The decision comes as India navigates the fallout of sweeping United States tariffs on steel and aluminum. Experts have urged closer economic cooperation between India and China to counterbalance the effects of US protectionism.

In a notice published on Tuesday, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies, an investigative arm of India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, said a 12 percent provisional safeguard duty was deemed "appropriate to eliminate the serious injury and threat" to the domestic industry.

The agency has invited comments on its findings within 30 days, after which an oral hearing will be held. Thereafter, the final decision will be taken.

Abhishek Dayal, additional director-general of the commerce ministry, said: "This is a recommendation. Federal Finance Ministry will take the final decision in this regard. It will take a few days to come into effect."

TV. Narendran, CEO and managing director of Tata Steel, one of India's top steel manufacturers, backed the proposed new import levy, saying, "We welcome the decision and appreciate the government's support."

A.S. Firoz, former chief economist at the Economic Research Unit of India's Ministry of Steel, said the proposed safeguard duty will benefit domestic steel producers but will also drive up costs for user industries.

Sectors such as automobile, shipbuilding and construction will suffer if the new import duty comes into effect, Firoz said.

Guo Xuetang, director of the Research Centre for South Asia and Indian Ocean Studies at Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, said imposing the 12 percent tariff is India's natural response to US protectionism.

Through this action, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hopes to enhance the competitiveness of domestic companies while signaling to the world that the country can protect its industries, Guo said.

While some think the tariff may affect Chinese steel exports to India, Guo said he believes this is unlikely as India still needs high-quality, cost-effective Chinese steel for infrastructure projects, such as building bridges.

"I don't think the tariff imposed will slow down China's economic growth or hurt China-India collaboration in any way," Guo said.

"But from the industry and trade perspective, the two sides will need to communicate more with each other." Karori Singh, former director and an emeritus fellow of the South Asia Study Centre at the University of Rajasthan in India, said that amid US protectionism, India and China must collaborate on mutually helpful policies and take a joint stand on corrections to trade distortions resulting from the policies of developed countries such as the US.

Swaran Singh, a professor of international relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, said that as India and China have both become targets of unprecedented US tariff hikes, it creates an opportunity for the two nations to cooperate more on the economic front.

This view was echoed by Pushan Dutt, a professor of economics and political science at the INSEAD business school in Singapore.

Multiple avenues

"There are multiple avenues for fruitful cooperation — not just reducing mutual trade barriers, but promoting bilateral investments, collaborating in technologies and knowledge, and even jointly developing infrastructure projects," Dutt said. "They should strengthen cooperation through forums such as BRICS, the G20, and align on WTO reforms."

Sudheendra Kulkarni, who served as an aide to former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said Washington's tariff war has convinced India, China, Mexico, Canada and the European Union that they should reduce their dependence on the US and enhance cooperation with other trading partners.

In this context, India and China should explore the opportunity and seek further cooperative relationships, Kulkarni said.

Enhanced trade collaboration between India and China could yield considerable ramifications on a global scale, owing to their participation in multilateral entities such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the G20, said Biswajit Dhar, a former professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

"India and China should coordinate their efforts and get other BRICS countries together to counter this hegemonic tariff — because all of us are going to face the same music," Dhar said.

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A Palestinian man looks on at the spot where an Israeli strike killed Hamas political leader Salah al-Bardaweel and his wife in their tent shelter, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday. HATEM KHALED / REUTERS

Israeli strike kills Hamas political leader

CAIRO — An Israeli airstrike in southern Gaza killed Hamas political leader Salah al-Bardaweel on Sunday, officials of the Palestinian group said, as residents reported an escalation in Israel's six-day-old military campaign.

Hamas said the airstrike on Khan Younis killed Bardaweel, a member of the group's political office, and his wife. Israeli officials had no immediate comment.

The group described Bardaweel's death as an "assassination." "His blood, that of his wife and martyrs, will remain fueling the battle of liberation and independence," it said in a statement.

After two months of relative calm in the conflict that began more than 17 months ago, Gazans were again fleeing for their lives after Israel effectively abandoned a cease-fire, launching a new all-out air and ground campaign on Tuesday in the enclave.

Explosions echoed throughout the north, central and southern Gaza Strip early on Sunday as Israeli planes hit several targets in those areas in what witnesses said was an escalation of the attack that began on Tuesday.

At least 30 Palestinians had been killed in Israeli strikes on Rafah and Khan Younis on Sunday, health authorities said.

Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee issued an evacuation

warning on X for residents in the Tel Al-Sultan neighborhood in western Rafah in the south of the strip, saying the military was launching an onslaught there to eradicate "terrorist organizations".

Toll exceeds 50,000

Gaza's Health Ministry said on Sunday that the total number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the start of the conflict has crossed 50,000 after Israel ended the cease-fire last week with a wave of strikes that killed hundreds.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the aim of the new campaign is to force the group to give up the remaining hostages. Hamas on Saturday accused the United States of distorting the truth by saying the group had chosen war with Israel by refusing to release hostages.

"The claim that 'Hamas chose war instead of releasing the hostages' is a distortion of the facts," Hamas said in response to the accusation by US National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes on Tuesday.

Hughes had said, "Hamas could have released hostages to extend the cease-fire but instead chose refusal and war."

Meanwhile, the Fatah movement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called on Hamas on Saturday to relinquish power in

order to safeguard the "existence" of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

"Hamas must show compassion for Gaza, its children, women and men," Fatah spokesman Monther al-Hayek said in a message sent to AFP from Gaza.

He urged Hamas to "step aside from governing and fully recognize that the battle ahead will lead to the end of Palestinians' existence" if it remains in power in Gaza.

Hamas has repeatedly said it is willing to leave power in Gaza once the conflict is over but categorically excludes giving up its weapons.

"We are ready to accept any agreement regarding the administration of Gaza (postwar), and are not interested in participating in it," Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou said on Saturday.

Elsewhere, Israeli artillery and airstrikes hit southern Lebanon on Saturday after Israel said it had intercepted rockets fired from across the border, killing eight people and endangering a shaky truce that ended a yearlong conflict between Israel and Lebanese armed group Hezbollah.

Hezbollah denied responsibility for Saturday's strikes, saying it had "no link" to the rocket launches and that it remained committed to the cease-fire. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

US talks set on Russia-Ukraine war

By HENG WEILI in New York hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

US and Russian delegations will meet in Saudi Arabia on Monday to discuss a potential 30-day cease-fire in the Ukraine-Russia war.

The talks will take place a day after representatives of the United States and Ukraine met in Riyadh, the Saudi capital.

"We have concluded our meeting with the American team, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov posted on X on Sunday. "The discussion was productive and focused — we addressed key points including energy."

Protecting energy facilities, critical infrastructure and allowing navigation in the Black Sea are expected to be discussed Monday.

"I think that you're going to see in Saudi Arabia on Monday some real progress, particularly as it affects a Black Sea cease-fire on ships between both countries. And from that, you'll naturally gravitate into a full-on shooting cease-fire," US special envoy Steve Witkoff said in an interview with Fox News on Sunday.

A Ukrainian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Ukrainian delegation might hold additional discussions with US officials on Monday, The New York Times reported.

The US hopes to reach a broad cease-fire within weeks, targeting a truce agreement by April 20, Bloomberg News reported on Sunday.

Despite the continued talks, Russia and Ukraine have significant differences over what a peace deal should include.

"Both sides still believe that they can continue the war regardless of the American position," Dmitry Kuznets, a military analyst with the

Russian news outlet Meduza told the Times, adding that the two sides' "visions of what an agreement could look like are still infinitely far from each other."

US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed last week "that the movement to peace will begin" with the 30-day pause in attacks on energy facilities.

But that plan was cast into doubt, with Moscow saying Ukraine hit an oil depot in southern Russia, while Kiev said Russia had struck hospitals and homes and knocked out power to some social media.

In a post on social media, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said: "This week alone, more than 1,580 guided aerial bombs, almost 1,100 strike drones and 15 missiles of various types were used against our people. New solutions are needed, with new pressure on Moscow to stop both these strikes and this war."

Russia's Ministry of Defense said on Sunday it had shot down 59 Ukrainian drones overnight.

A moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes could favor Moscow more than Kiev, given it would prevent Ukraine from conducting strikes on Russian oil facilities.

Putin has said he wants Ukraine to drop its ambitions to join NATO. Ukraine defines joining NATO as a goal in its constitution and says that membership would be the best security guarantee that it can receive as part of a peace deal.

Last month, John Coale, Trump's deputy Ukraine envoy, said the US had not ruled out potential NATO membership for Ukraine — or a return to its pre-2014 borders.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth a day earlier had told Ukraine's military allies in Brussels a return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders was

unrealistic and that the US did not see NATO membership for Kiev.

Trump has said he does not believe Russia would "allow" Ukraine NATO membership.

The UK and France are looking to create a deterrent force of foreign troops, ships and planes in or around Ukraine after a peace deal is signed.

But some Russian officials have said they could not accept such a force.

Witkoff minimized concerns among NATO allies that Putin might be emboldened by any peace deal in Ukraine.

"I just don't see that he wants to take all of Europe. This is a much different situation than it was in World War II," Witkoff said. "And I think the Europeans are beginning to come to that belief, too. But it sort of doesn't matter."

"The agenda is stop the killing, stop the carnage. Let's end this thing," he said.

Russia wants to control all of the four eastern Ukrainian regions it has claimed as its own, plus the Crimean peninsula, which it annexed in 2014.

Russia's Kommersant daily cited unnamed sources who attended a private business event with Putin on Tuesday as saying he wants the US to formally recognize the four regions — Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson — as part of Russia along with Crimea.

Ukraine says it already recognizes that it cannot recapture some occupied Ukrainian territory by force and that it will have to be returned diplomatically over time. Kiev says, however, that it will never recognize Russian sovereignty over Ukrainian territory.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Trans-Pacific shipping to navigate a green course

By RENA LI in Los Angeles renali@chinadailyusa.com

The commitment to a sustainable and environment-friendly shipping corridor between Shanghai and California remains unwavering, industry insiders say.

During the Shanghai-California Maritime Decarbonization and Green Shipping Corridor Forum held at the Port of Long Beach on March 17, business leaders from both sides reaffirmed their dedication to the initiative, which aims to decarbonize trans-Pacific shipping and bolster economic ties.

"Transportation and goods movement continue to be a critical part of the backbone of our strong and thriving economy, and we are thrilled to join forces with Shanghai Municipal Transportation Commission in this important work," said Toks Omishakin, California's transportation secretary, adding the state looks forward to continued cooperation with international partners, including China.

Over the years, California and China have engaged in an open dialogue on climate cooperation. During his visit to China in 2023, California Governor Gavin Newsom committed to strong collaboration to advance shared interests related to climate action, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and the acceleration and deployment of clean energy.

The visit witnessed the signing of five cooperative agreements. One memorandum of understanding between California and Shanghai aims to advance clean, low-carbon transportation, including developing clean ports and green shipping.

Goals in the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Shanghai green shipping route include deploying reduced or zero life-cycle carbon-emission capable ships and facilitating investment in clean marine fueling infrastructure at the partner ports.

Ye Xing, deputy director of Shanghai Municipal Transportation Commission, said productive working relationships with the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have been established.

"Together, we are committed to advancing port decarbonization and the essential development of green shipping corridors," he said.

Collaborative efforts

At the forum, stakeholders highlighted the collaborative efforts between the Port of Long Beach, the Port of Los Angeles, C40 Cities, and Shanghai Municipal Transportation Commission in advancing maritime decarbonization.

"Decarbonizing goods movement between the largest ports in the United States and China requires international cooperation, and that's exactly what we're doing through our work on the Green Shipping Corridor Partnership," said Eugene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles.

The Port of Long Beach unveiled a white paper that explores the adoption of clean marine fuels in shipping. "The Green Shipping Corridor linking California and Shanghai represents a tremendous opportunity for sustainable progress," said Mario Cordero, CEO of the port.

However, escalating trade tensions between the US and several nations, including China, are increasingly posing a risk for global free trade.

"We need to kind of step back and see how this plays out," Cordero told China Daily at an event in Los Angeles. "When the dust settles, everybody realizes how important the partnership between the US and China is."

He emphasized the benefits of working together, particularly in reducing emissions and enhancing sustainability. "Our partnership with China's COSCO Shipping and ZPMC has been a very beneficial economic partnership — not just for the Port of Long Beach, but for the state of California and the United States," he said.

Cordero has visited Shanghai many times since his first trip in 2006 and has witnessed the rapid advancements in the city's port infrastructure and environmental policies.

"It is an amazing story of what we have seen, or what I've seen in Shanghai between 2006 and 2024," he recalled. "And I want to thank the Chinese government and our sister ports in China for committing to decarbonization."

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LIFE



Left: At the NCC Wave & Work Island Digital Nomad Community in Sanya, Hainan province, manager Li Xinya shares a photo taken by a community member during a gathering on Feb 2. **Right:** Xing Zengling (center), a villager from Zhenhai village, guides digital nomads in a traditional local dance practice. PHOTOS BY YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Digital nomads' shifting landscapes

Two Hainan cities, emerging havens for the increasing group of remote workers, are also reaping economic benefits, **Chen Bowen** reports in Haikou.

Picture this: Trading the monotonous hum of fluorescent office lights for the soothing rhythm of tropical ocean waves or the quiet buzz of a cozy cafe in a centuries-old village. This is reality for digital nomads, a growing community of remote workers who blend work, passion and travel into a seamless lifestyle. In South China's Hainan province, this trend is rapidly evolving from a niche movement into a thriving way of life.

Digital nomads are location-independent professionals who leverage technology to work from anywhere: be it home, a coffee shop or even a beach.

Shared spaces

In February, Haikou, the capital of Hainan province, took a significant step toward integrating this lifestyle into its local economy with the launch of its first digital nomad community. Located in the Longhua Animation Industrial Park, the Dopamine Digital Nomad Community is designed to provide an innovative and comfortable environment for remote workers, combining work with leisure in a vibrant setting.

The community, situated in the park's Baoming Digital Creative Block, features shared office spaces, livestreaming studios, cross-border digital business training centers and shared gyms.

It has already attracted over 30 companies spanning industries such as animation, gaming, artificial intelligence, short video, self-media and online education.

According to Wang Zixuan, the community's manager, the block's design draws inspiration from dopamine colors, creating a youthful and dynamic atmosphere.

One of the standout features is a shared lounge stocked with around 3,200 books from the Haikou Longhua District Library, which are regularly updated to cater to both digital nomads and residents of Baoming village. The lounge is open 24/7, offering a quiet space for reading at any time.

Additionally, the community includes a public art studio open to both nomads and villagers, fostering artistic creation and exchange.

A shared conference center is also available free of charge for business meetings and project discussions.

Wang notes that her company has transformed a row of houses rented from the villagers into a vibrant hub for digital nomads, blending modern innovation with the charm of a centuries-old village. The community, nestled next to a historical settlement, offers a unique juxtaposition of tradition and progress. The area's high green coverage and proximity to open fields create a tranquil environment, with minimal pollution and low foot traffic.

To enhance relaxation, an outdoor camping area with hammocks has been set up, allowing residents to unwind amid nature. Regular social events, such as board game nights and Switch gaming sessions, provide opportunities for digital nomads to connect and expand their social circles, according to the manager.



The opening ceremony of Baoming Digital Creative Block, the second phase of the Longhua Animation Industrial Park, is held in Haikou, Hainan, in October, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The community also offers networking opportunities, with plans to host training sessions on artificial intelligence-generated content (AIGC) and overseas content distribution. "These initiatives aim to equip digital nomads with cross-border business skills," says Wang.

Among the community's residents is Lin Xianquan from Haikou, 29, specialized in live-streaming and overseas e-commerce. Lin has been living in the community for over four months since its beta phase, drawn by its focus on animation and gaming. His company has established cross-border e-commerce channels and collaborates with intellectual properties created by other digital nomads in the park.

"I was introduced to this place by a friend in the same industry. After a quick visit, I found the office environment, relaxed lifestyle, good atmosphere, convenient internet tools and comprehensive industrial support perfect for future development. This place meets our needs perfectly," Lin says, praising the community's relaxed yet vibrant atmosphere.

Yan Yuxuan, a 31-year-old AI researcher from Beijing, shares Lin's enthusiasm. He values the collaborative environment, which facilitates idea exchange and provides access to industry resources. "The emotional value — nature, art, community — and the functional value, such as work, living and transport, make this place unique in Haikou," Yan notes.

The Dopamine Digital Nomad Community provides different types of rooms for 1,000 to 3,000 yuan (\$138-415), including utilities and



Digital nomads practice yoga together at the Sanya digital nomad community on Feb 3. YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

access to public facilities. This pricing structure caters to nomads with varying budgets and needs.

The community has utilized online platforms like RedNote, TikTok, and the popular Nomad Island mini-program to attract digital nomads from across China.

Wang says that digital nomads from cities such as Chengdu in Sichuan province, Wuhan in Hubei province and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, mostly aged from 20 to 40, have joined the community.

Looking ahead, Wang hopes to draw more foreign nomads, leveraging Hainan Free Trade Port policies and its focus on overseas markets. "This initiative will enhance global digital economic exchanges," she says.

Yi Hui, general manager of Hainan Manlyu Culture Development Co, which manages the project, empha-

making waves. The Sanya NCC Wave & Work Island Digital Nomad Community, the largest of its kind in China, has attracted over 200 nomads since its establishment in mid-December 2024. The community offers shared kitchens, libraries, gyms, swimming pools and offices, meeting the daily needs of its residents.

Li Xinya, 30, a community manager from Xi'an, Shaanxi province, frequently organizes activities to help newcomers connect with like-minded individuals.

"As long as you're not socially anxious and participate in community activities, it's easy to make new friends," Li says.

Li left his job in internet in Beijing a few years ago to explore a more flexible work-life balance and has since been involved in multiple digital nomad community projects.

Feng Ziqing, a designer from Foshan, Guangdong province, finds the oceanfront setting of the community inspiring.

"The quiet environment and proximity to the sea provide endless inspiration for my creations," she says.

Living in a six-person room, her monthly expenses, including food and accommodation, are around 2,000 yuan.

A 30-year-old finance professional from Wuhan called Laifu has visited the community twice within a month. He values the integration of work and leisure, as well as the intellectual exchanges among residents.

"Interesting souls, beautiful environment and well-equipped office spaces are crucial factors in digital nomad community life," he says.

Community events, such as cooking sessions, traditional local dance lessons, yoga practices and poetry workshops, foster deeper relationships among members. He hopes that future policies will support more flexible employment for digital nomads and more countries will offer visa-free entry to Chinese nationals, enabling him to "roam" more freely.

Yao Jianhua, a professor at Fudan University's School of Journalism, has been researching digital nomad communities for over two years. He sees these communities as transitional zones for young people facing employment challenges or career stagnation. "They offer a cost-effective alternative to metropolitan areas, allowing young people to experiment with online jobs while exploring their next career steps," Yao says.

However, managing shared spaces in digital nomad communities is not without its challenges. Li, the community manager, acknowledges that disputes over the use of public spaces, such as kitchens and quiet offices, can arise.

"Community governance must be self-regulated, not imposed," he says, emphasizing the importance of consensus-building and cross-authority among residents to maintain order and harmony.

Beyond being a physical space, Li describes the Sanya nomad community as an experimental model for reshaping social interactions. "It fosters high-frequency idea exchanges, breaking traditional work-life patterns and transcending the 'information cocoon' of established social circles," he says, adding that this environment encourages ideological collisions and value integration, creating a unique blend of creativity and collaboration.

For many residents, the community represents a physical escape from the pressures of urban life and a spiritual journey of personal growth. "This new form of living is both a physical migration to escape involution and a spiritual journey of cognitive upgrading," Li explains.

As community members bring creative capital and innovative cultural tourism formats to local rural development, they also undergo self-reconstruction through cross-experiential exchanges. This dynamic reinforces a value loop of "talents returning to villages; community empowering individuals", creating a sustainable model for rural revitalization and personal fulfillment, he adds.

The term "digital nomad" was coined in a 1997 book by Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners, who predicted a future workforce of globe-trotting professionals. Today, this vision has become a reality, with Hainan Free Trade Port emerging at the forefront of this global movement. As digital nomad communities continue to grow, they are redefining how people balance work, life and travel in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Chinese animation strikes a chord with young audiences

Once deemed overshadowed by foreign productions, Chinese animation is now experiencing a surge in popularity, especially among younger audiences.

With improved storytelling, advanced visual effects, and a seamless integration of traditional Chinese culture, the industry is rapidly gaining recognition at home and abroad.

A recent survey conducted by China Youth Daily among 7,232 university students revealed that 40.64

percent actively follow popular domestic animation films and series, while 30.35 percent check for new releases on a weekly basis.

This growing interest is reflected in the success of major box office hits, including *Ne Zha 2*, which grossed over 15.2 billion yuan (\$2.1 billion) in box-office revenue and stormed into the global box office top 5, cementing the Chinese original animation's place in the global industry.

Most respondents attribute this rise to the ability of Chinese animat-

ed works to blend traditional cultural elements with modern cinematic techniques, which 81.1 percent of surveyed students identified as a key factor in their interest. Nearly 45 percent believed that the technology used in Chinese animation is on par with international standards.

Recalling the release of *Chang'an* and *Deep Sea*, both widely acclaimed Chinese animated films, Huang Ziyi, a student at Wuhan University, feels as if the poems from her textbooks had come to life. "The

adaptations based on history were well-executed and felt authentic, bringing the audience closer to the stories."

In recent years, driven by both technological advancements and a focus on Chinese cultural storytelling, the quality of Chinese animation has improved significantly. According to the survey, 67.78 percent of university students shared this view.

"For instance, the movie *Chang'an* used artificial intelligence to recre-

ate the texture of Tang Dynasty (618-907) architecture, providing a visual representation of poetic imagination. Meanwhile, *Ne Zha 2* reinterpreted a classic myth through the lens of modern family dynamics, proving that technology should ultimately serve cultural expression," says Chen Yanyu, a student of Jiangxi University of Technology.

"I believe Chinese animation can carve out a space in the industry," Huang says. She notes that while Japanese animation often focuses on

youthful romance and American cartoons emphasize individual heroism, China has a vast pool of untapped storytelling potential.

"Whether it's history or modern times, mythology or reality, Chinese culture offers an abundance of material. These elements naturally resonate with Chinese audiences worldwide, providing both creative inspiration and a ready market," Huang adds.

XINHUA

LIFE



Chinese tourists redefine bucket list

In addition to routine sightseeing, travelers are looking for more diverse and immersive experiences, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



For decades, China's tourism industry was driven by a race for iconic landmarks, mass tour groups and the pursuit of "checklist travel". But the rising disposable income and increasingly rich offers from tour suppliers have reshaped the way people explore the country, according to the recently published Green Book of China's Tourism compiled by the Tourism Research Center of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"Tourism consumption is no longer limited to traditional activities like sightseeing or hotel stays. Consumers now engage in a wide range of experiences, including dining, entertainment, shopping and even fitness or gaming," says Liu Yanping, a researcher with the research institute under the country's major on-demand service platform Meituan and a contributor to the green book.

Meituan data shows that between 2019 and 2024, there was a significant shift from traditional tourism activities like sightseeing to more diverse and immersive experiences, Liu notes.

"The structure of tourism consumption is evolving. Traditional ticket sales for scenic spots are declining, as tourists now view these locations as starting points rather than destinations. Instead, they spend more on dining, accommodations and leisure activities around these areas. This shift reflects a broader trend where tourists seek holistic experiences rather than isolated attractions," he adds.

Additionally, there's a growing fusion between local life and tourism. Tourists are increasingly drawn to authentic, everyday experiences, such as visiting local markets or trying regional cuisines, Liu says.

This trend highlights a desire for both familiarity and novelty — tourists want to feel connected to the local culture while still experiencing something unique, he explains.

Liu also points out that online reviews, rankings and social media have played a significant role in shaping consumer decisions. Tourists now rely heavily on digital platforms to plan their trips.

"Looking ahead, digitalization will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping tourism consumption. By 2025, we expect further integration of digital tools, enabling more personalized and efficient travel experiences. The focus will be on creating seamless, end-to-end solutions that cater to the evolving needs of modern tourists," Liu says.

Song Rui, director of the Tourism Research Center, CASS, and a lead author of the green book, highlights that urban destinations remained a vital market for tourism experiences and consumption in 2024.

Key trends driving urban tourism include destination branding



Top left: Female hairstylist nicknamed Xiaohua from Huaihua, Hunan province, became an overnight sensation with a viral haircut video in October. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE **Top right:** Two tourists take a selfie in Gansu province's Tianshui city, famous for its *malatang*, or spicy hotpot. HOU CHONGHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY **Top:** Foreign visitors tour the Palace Museum in Beijing on Wednesday. WANG XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY **Above left:** Visitors shop for cultural products at the historical Pingjiang Road neighborhood in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. WANG JIANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY **Above right:** Diners at a *malatang* restaurant in Tianshui. LUO YATING / FOR CHINA DAILY

through short-video platforms, private customized tours emphasizing deep and unique explorations, reverse tourism (travelers choosing lesser-known or nontraditional destinations over popular, overcrowded tourist cities) and alternative tourism (the practice of seeking budget-friendly substitutes for expensive or overhyped destinations), Song reveals. "Short-video platforms have played a pivotal role in driving traffic and fostering engagement for destination branding."

For instance, Tianshui in Northwest China's Gansu province gained widespread attention after a viral video featuring its *malatang*, or spicy hotpot, in 2024. By leveraging the buzz, Tianshui emerged as one of the top 10 dark-horse tourist desti-

nations in China last year. Similarly, in October 2024, hairstylist nicknamed Xiaohua from Huaihua, Central China's Hunan province, became an overnight sensation with a viral haircut video, garnering millions of likes.

Huailua quickly capitalized on the trend by offering discounts at over 30 tourist attractions, homestays, restaurants and entertainment venues for visitors who showed proof of travel or a photo at Xiaohua's salon. Within just seven days, this initiative produced over 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million) in on-site consumption and 120 million yuan in overall city spending, Song observes.

Personalized travel experiences, such as self-driving tours and solo

travel, have become new trends in urban tourism. According to the green book, self-driving trips exceeded 4.6 billion in 2024. Solo travel, which emphasizes personal choice and freedom, saw a 25-percent increase in bookings on online platforms like Trip.com Group.

The rise of reverse tourism and alternative tourism reflects a shift in consumer preferences, the green book concludes.

Data from multiple online travel agencies shows that during the 2024 May Day holiday, third- and fourth-tier cities like Yangzhou of Jiangsu province and Luoyang of Henan province saw an average 11-percent increase year-on-year in tourism bookings, surpassing growth rates in first- and second-tier cities.

According to travel platform Mafengwo, searches and views for alternative tourism rose by 33.7 percent year-on-year, with Generation Z (born between the mid-1990s and 2009) and millennials accounting for nearly 60 percent of this trend.

The popularity of reverse tourism and alternative tourism underscores a broader change in travel consumption attitudes — moving away from blindly following trends to prioritizing value for money and fulfilling personal needs. This shift presents significant market opportunities for nontraditional destinations and emerging tourist cities, Song says.

Wu Jinmei, deputy director of the CASS research center and a contributor to the green book, emphasizes

the importance of creating immersive and engaging consumption scenarios, such as intangible cultural heritage elements, to boost cultural tourism demand.

She observes that the 2024 Spring Festival lantern fair in Beijing generated considerable public interest, providing a unique lens for understanding the creative transformation and sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage.

"The success of the lantern festival stemmed from combining traditional craftsmanship with modern design elements, creating immersive and interactive experiences that resonated with urban consumers," she says.

She notes that over 200 types of lantern installations were crafted, blending elements of historical and contemporary aesthetics.

During the festival, one-on-one exchanges and live demonstrations allowed artisans to engage with the public, fostering deeper appreciation and understanding, she adds.

As many five-star hotels, themed restaurants and high-end service providers participated in the festival, visitor experiences were enhanced, transforming the festival into a multidimensional cultural consumption platform that went beyond traditional tourism experiences, Wu says.

Apart from the positive domestic tourism development, the country's visa-free policies for an increasing number of countries since 2023 have fueled a surge in inbound tourism, according to the green book.

The National Bureau of Statistics reported foreign arrivals reached 26.94 million in 2024, with 20.12 million entering via visa-free policies, a 112.3-percent rise.

Experts at the launch ceremony of the green book on March 14 concurred that China's tourism sector is set to solidify its position as a global leader, driven by favorable policy, digital transformation and consumer-focused trends.

This will ensure long-term sustainable growth and deliver world-class travel experiences for both domestic and international visitors, the green book shows.

Wang Xuefeng, associate professor with Beijing Jiaotong University, says that the final year of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) is also a year of strategic planning.

The goal is to accelerate the construction of a world-class tourism power while emphasizing a comprehensive, high-quality approach beyond economic gains, he says.

Wang underscores the importance of aligning tourism development with China's modernization goals and the evolving consumer demand for better experiences in the "happiness industry".

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Inspirational 'key' carer serves community elders in Hubei

WUHAN — Yu Wenyong, a household name in her community in Central China's Hubei province, is easily recognizable by the jingling keys at her waist, with each one belonging to an elderly resident she cares for.

To the seniors in the Jianshelu community in Huangshi city, Yu is more than a neighbor. Instead, they view her as a family member. For nearly two decades, the 65-year-old has dedicated herself to helping the elderly, earning their trust and the affectionate nickname Gu Niang, which means "daughter" in the local dialect.

Yu's journey began when she started assisting her neighbor, Zhang Mei-yu, an elderly woman who suffered multiple strokes. As Zhang's health declined, her son struggled to care for her alone. In 2006, Yu then volunteered to assist with bathing, medication, laundry, cooking and house cleaning.

Zhang's family entrusted Yu with a spare key to their home, marking the start of her role as a dependable caregiver. Over time, the bond between Yu and Zhang deepened, while Yu's reputation for compassion spread throughout the community.

Soon, more elderly residents sought her help. Pan Suhui, a senior who had lost a child and suffered injuries from a fall, became the second person Yu cared for. With her own family unable to provide consistent support, Pan relied on Yu for three months until she recovered.

As Yu's responsibilities grew, so did the number of keys she carried — up to over 40, each symbolizing trust and responsibility.

"I used to worry about locking myself out. But once I gave my key to Yu, I felt much more at ease," says Li Fengyin, an 80-year-old woman who has lived alone for years. "She still visits me often,



Yu Wenyong takes care of her elderly neighbor Zhang Mei-yu, who suffered multiple strokes, in Huangshi city, Hubei province. XINHUA

and I feel very supported."

For Yu, these keys signify the trust placed in her. "Handing me the keys means placing absolute trust in me, and that drives me to work even harder."

In return, the elderly show their gratitude in small but meaningful ways, such as sharing homemade meals or reminding her to dress warmly when the weather turns cold.

Over the years, Yu has cared for nearly 100 elderly individuals. Today, her routine is always the same — wearing a red vest with a handful of keys and a bag full of necessities, she visits her elderly friends, providing help and support.

Inspired by Yu's selflessness, others in the community have opted to follow her example.

Li Xianglan, 72, started helping Yu after witnessing the care Yu provided to her own mother. "Yu showed me the importance of caring for the elder-

ly," Li Xianglan says. "I realized that I also wanted to contribute and help others."

Yu's husband, Xu Changliang, is another who joined in, using his skills as a retired electrician to help with minor electrical repairs for the elderly.

This collective effort led to the creation of the "red vest elder care team", a volunteer group dedicated to supporting seniors.

The initiative has since expanded beyond Yu's neighborhood, with surrounding communities adopting similar programs. Together, they have fostered a culture of mutual aid and respect for seniors, ensuring they feel valued and cherished.

On her dedication, Yu offers a simple yet profound explanation: "Everyone will grow old, and so treating the elderly with kindness is like being kind to our future selves."

XINHUA

LIFE



Zithers and Flutes of the Brocade City, an exhibition at Chengdu Museum, in Sichuan province, celebrates the city's music tradition, gathering artifacts such as a pair of whistleblowing pottery figurines dated to about the fourth century (left and right) and a stone relief (above) depicting musicians of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). PHOTOS BY HUANG LERAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Soulful tunes of an antique land

Renate, a senior citizen from Cunha in Brazil's southeastern state of Sao Paulo, visited the Chengdu Museum in Southwest China's Sichuan province with her husband Arpad on March 15.

It was the couple's first visit to China and they arrived to explore the city's storied past and culture in the museum in the heart of Chengdu, the provincial capital.

Yet they had a pleasant surprise of finding themselves transported further back in time through a special exhibition in the museum featuring ancient musical treasures from different parts of China, according to Renate, a former nature photographer.

The special exhibition, titled *Zithers and Flutes of the Brocade City*, which runs through to May 5, is a collaborative effort by more than 30 institutions, including the Henan Museum in Central China's Henan province, the Palace Museum in Beijing, Dunhuang Academy in Northwest China's Gansu province, Yungang Grottoes Academy in North China's Shanxi province, the Shaanxi History Museum and Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Northwest China's Shaanxi province, says Huang Xiaofeng, deputy curator of the Chengdu Museum.

The showstopper, positioned in the most prominent place in the exhibition hall, is an 8,000-year-old bone flute unearthed in 1987 at the Neolithic Jiahu Site in Wuyang county, Luohe, Henan province.

This 23.1-centimeter artifact, on loan from Henan Museum, is among 88 national first-class cultural relics on display in the special exhibition.

In the history of Chinese archaeology, the Jiahu Site dating back 7,800 to 9,000 years was one of the most developed ancient settlements in its time.

It was in the Neolithic Age.

Then, humans had just come out of caves and were clumsily trying to grow

plants and breed domesticated animals.

But Jiahu shows a picture that is not completely primitive and backward, and transcends people's understanding of the initial stage of civilization.

Han Jianye, an archaeology professor at Renmin University of China in Beijing, says the origins of Chinese civilization was formed around 8,000 years ago, and the most shocking and direct evidence is Jiahu.

The production of pottery, bone ware, turquoise, especially the excavations related to the astronomical calendar and divination, had a great impact, he says.

Between 1984 and 2001, Jiahu witnessed the excavation of more than 30 flutes made from the wing bones of red-crowned cranes.

The Jiahu bone flute, on display in the Chengdu Museum, is shaped like a long pipe with seven holes drilled in a straight line down one side.

It is the earliest musical instrument unearthed in China, and it is also recognized as the earliest playable musical instrument in the world.

The delicate and small flute astonishes contemporary researchers as it is capable of playing the seven-tone scale.

In the opening ceremony of the special exhibition on Jan 21, a local musician used a homemade bone flute to play music.

Hearing the music was like catching whispers from a primordial dawn, said Lan Mei, a visitor who noted how the flute's haunting tones might have once echoed in ancient rituals.

The special exhibition's timeline leaps to the Tang Dynasty (618-907) with a 1,311-year-old *guqin* (a plucked seven-string Chinese musical instru-

ment) from East China's Zhejiang Provincial Museum.



From top: A Tang Dynasty (618-907) stringed *guqin* draws the audience; a smiling pottery dancer of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220); potteries of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581) period.

There are a bronze chime bell, made

in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and collected in Hebei Museum in North China's Hebei province, and a brick depicting musicians which is from the Gansu Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, in Gansu province.

"All of them are being shown in Sichuan for the first time," says Wang Li, an information officer in the Chengdu Museum.

The *pipa* is the only wood-carved musical instrument unearthed in the archaeological history of China, according to the Yangzhou Museum.

Yet to many ordinary visitors, few delights in the special exhibition can rival a smiling pottery woman dancer, made in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), which is in the collection of the Chengdu Museum.

Since Li Bing, then a governor of Sichuan, built the Dujiangyan Irrigation Project around 256 BC, the Chengdu Plain has had no major floods or drought. With fertile land and grain harvest, it is known as the land of abundance.

Visitors who have seen the smiling pottery dancer would joke that Chengdu people were satisfied with their life 2,000 years ago.

Contemporary Chengdu people are also noted for their fondness for drinking tea, playing mahjong and having a positive attitude of life.

Renate was most impressed with a smiling pottery rap musician in the Eastern Han Dynasty.

It is in a standing position, its posture is exaggerating, and its expression is very humorous, she said, showing a picture of the musician on her phone.

According to Wang, there are so many Eastern Han Dynasty smiling pottery figurines in the collection of her museum which are yet to be counted.

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Above: A painted terracotta brick (*huaxiangzhuan*) of the Eastern Han Dynasty shows a feast.



Above: A Tang Dynasty stone statue of a *pipa* player.
Left: A Song Dynasty pillow.

Probe reveals extent of fungal diversity in Qinghai

XINING — A three-year comprehensive investigation of macro fungal diversity in Northwest China's Qinghai province has yielded fruitful results, providing scientific basis for ecological conservation and sustainable utilization of resources on the plateau region.

This comprehensive and systematic investigation of macro fungal diversity, recently completed in Qinghai, found a total of 807 species of macro fungi, among which, the top three species in terms of family groups were Tricholomataceae with 75 spe-

cies, 42 species of Agaricaceae, and Polyporaceae contributing 35 species.

Qinghai is a global biodiversity hot spot. It has complex terrain spanning large altitude fluctuations and featuring diverse habitats — as well as unique weather conditions combining low temperatures with strong ultraviolet rays, which together result in specialized fungal communities. However, there was a prolonged lack of systematic fungal diversity investigation and research in this region.

The investigation is the first comprehensive and systematic investigation of macro fungal resources in Qinghai, filling knowledge gaps in many parts of the province, according to Zhang Yu, director of the wildlife conservation department of Qinghai's provincial forestry and grassland bureau.

Starting in 2022, the bureau and more than 20 scientists from multiple research institutions of the country carried out this joint investigation across the province.

Over the past three years, this joint scien-

tific team conducted around 300 days of field investigations. In the process, scientists obtained 5,653 macro fungal specimens, 25,632 photos of their habitats, and 3,852 sheets of gene-segment sequences.

Currently, details of 10 new species of macro fungi found in this investigation have been published. Moreover, there are a batch of new species in need of further description, as well as species newly recorded in China.

Through the evaluation of macro fungi resources in Qinghai, the investigation has identified 109 edible fungi, 77 medicinal fungi and 76 virulent bacteria, while also selecting macro fungi that have economic value or potential. This has laid a solid foundation

for further development and utilization of macro fungi resources, according to Zhang.

The outcomes achieved by the investigation will support further research concerning macro fungal species diversity in Qinghai province and on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, according to Qinghai's provincial forestry and grassland bureau.

The bureau says it will extend investigation and research endeavors regarding macro fungal resources by collaborating with scientific institutions — targeting the development of a diversified food supply system for the country.

XINHUA

CULTURE

San Francisco Opera unveils *The Monkey King*

Legend finds a new stage, **Lia Zhu** reports in San Francisco.

The monkey king, one of the most beloved characters in Chinese literature, is set to make his Western operatic debut. The legendary figure from the 16th-century Chinese novel *Journey to the West* will leap onto the stage of the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco in November, marking not only an artistic achievement but also a moment of cultural exchange between East and West.

Commissioned by the San Francisco Opera in partnership with the Chinese Heritage Foundation of Minnesota, the production represents the first opera to be sung in both English and Chinese. The opera's premiere follows the company's successful adaptation of another Chinese classic, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which debuted in 2016 and toured China in 2017 to widespread acclaim.

The Monkey King draws from the opening chapters of *Journey to the West*, focusing on the ambitious Sun Wukong — a monkey born from stone who acquires supernatural powers through Taoist practices.

The story follows his rise to become ruler of the monkeys and his audacious challenges to the gods of sea and heaven in his relentless quest for immortality.

"Many scoff at his aspirations, but he is set on proving them wrong with his signature cunning and charm," explains the opera's synopsis. "He wins every battle against legendary warriors, but the respect he longs for is always out of reach."

The narrative culminates with his rebellion against heaven, resulting in his imprisonment under a mountain by Buddha for 500 years — where he remains trapped until freed by the monk Tang Sanzang, setting the stage for the epic "journey to the west."

San Francisco Opera's General Director Matthew Shilvock believes this character will resonate deeply with American audiences.

"I think in America there will be a lot of resonance, because it's an action hero story, and one with great depth behind it," Shilvock told China Daily. "There is something so inherently appealing about this character and his great strength and courage, his mischievousness and irreverence, and ultimately, he's there helping guide this incredibly sacred journey. So he's got all of these layers for audiences to go into."

A fusion of artistic traditions

What makes this production particularly innovative is its blend of traditional Chinese and contemporary Western artistic elements. The opera combines classical operatic performances with puppetry, dance and elements of Peking Opera to create what Shilvock describes as "a complete feast for the senses" with "accessible and beautiful" music and "spectacular, playful and energetic" visuals.

The opera's composer Huang Ruo, who has long been interested in bringing the monkey king to the stage, found personal motivation in creating a Chinese superhero figure for Western audiences. Having observed his own children surrounded by Western superheroes like Spider-Man and Batman, Huang saw an opportunity to introduce the monkey king as an alternative role model — not just for his children but for a broader audience as well.

The creative team faced significant challenges in adapting this classic tale for the operatic stage. "It's been very important to us that we do this as authentically as possible. One of the important questions which we had to answer was that those first few chapters of *Journey to the West* that we are covering in the opera are all action. It's just go, go, go, go," Shilvock said.

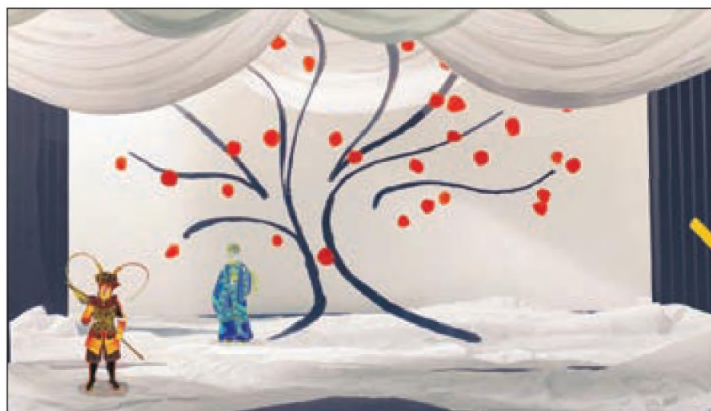
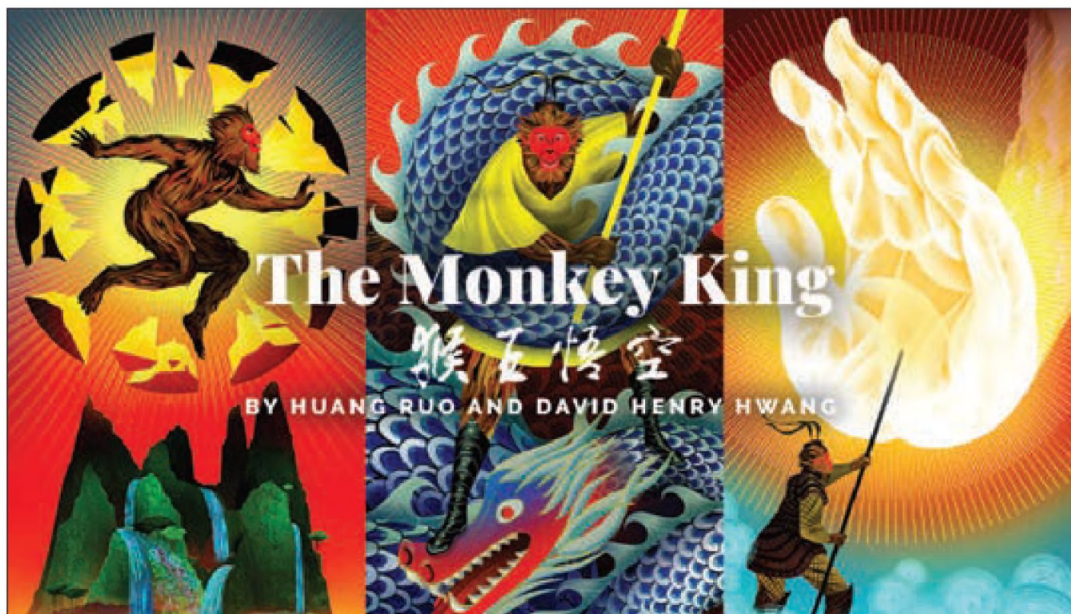
This presented a fundamental challenge for the operatic form. "In the opera, you want moments where you stand back and you take a pause and reflect, a chance to internalize and to have an emotional response. So we knew we needed to find a way to achieve that in the opera," Shilvock noted.

The solution came from composer Huang Ruo and librettist David Henry Hwang, who incorporated six Buddhist sutras into the action. This innovative approach means that the monkey king's adventures — from the depths of the sea to his epic battle with the gods in heaven — are balanced by moments of repose with the Goddess Guanyin and a chorus of Bodhisattvas reflecting on the monkey king's progress in Buddhist sutras.

Chinese soprano Zhang Meigui, who previously starred as Dai Yu in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, returns to play Guanyin, the goddess of compassion. Her aria *All Dharmas Are Equal* is already available on the San Francisco Opera's website, offering a preview of the production's musical richness.

"It'll be the first time that we've had Chinese sung on the opera house stage. These Buddhist sutras are all sung in Chinese, which I think will be really beautiful," said Shilvock.

Bringing the fantastical world of the monkey king to life on stage presented extraordinary technical and creative challenges. The



From top: Illustrations used to promote *The Monkey King*. A view from the premiere of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in San Francisco in 2016; A set mock-up from *The Monkey King* — The Tour of Heaven; And the set mock-up for the scene depicting the undersea palace.

production team had to develop innovative solutions to depict magical elements central to the story, such as the monkey king's ability to expand and shrink his magical staff and his ultimate imprisonment by Buddha's hand.

To meet those challenges, the opera company assembled an accomplished team of designers and choreographers, many from Chinese traditions. They enlisted Peking Opera movement specialist Jamie Guan to advise the team and local puppeteer Basil Twist as the set and puppetry director.

The team's creative solutions include the use of bioluminescent fabric to create glowing sea creatures for the scene where the monkey king visits the dragon king Ao Guang in his underwater palace.

For the iconic moment when the monkey shrinks a big pole holding up the palace,

which becomes his magic staff, the team employs "an old-fashioned theatrical magic" of gradually letting the curtains close in on the light source, which makes the pole look smaller and smaller.

Perhaps most ingeniously, the production utilizes different representations of the monkey king. "We have a number of different monkeys — a singing monkey, a martial arts monkey and a puppet monkey, and the three of them will interchange depending on what we need the monkey to do," Shilvock explained.

The puppetry extends beyond the character representations to help transform the set itself. One of the most significant challenges the team faced was depicting Buddha's hand imprisoning the monkey king — a pivotal moment in the story.

"We're in a time period where it's so easy to focus on differences, and a lot of political discourses about differences. I think if we can find things in the world that bring us together and that remind us that we are all human beings, then we all have the same emotions."

Matthew Shilvock,
San Francisco Opera's
general director



The monkey king's costume design. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"How do you do that on stage and make it feel like this great moment?" Shilvock asked. The solution emerged through experimenting with puppetry techniques "to create the idea of this hand closing in on somebody?"

"From the music to the visuals and then the set, I think we're creating something very special coming to life," said Shilvock.

Cultural bridge

The new production builds on the success of the San Francisco Opera's previous adaptation of a Chinese classic, *Dream of the Red Chamber*. After its 2016 world premiere in San Francisco, that production toured China in 2017, performing in Hong Kong, Beijing, Wuhan and Changsha to enthusiastic audiences.

"There were really strong reviews, and a

real pride that this work of Chinese literature had gone to America and was coming back," Shilvock recalled. "It was wonderful to see that great energy, and we really worked hard to make sure that it was done with great respect and great honoring of the story."

Interestingly, when composer Bright Sheng anticipated translating the opera into Chinese for its China tour, he received unexpected feedback. "The strong message was: No, we want it in English, because it more clearly shows that this has been a piece of cultural diplomacy. It has been a cultural export from China to America and made into an opera in America. And there was a huge amount of shared pride between the two countries," said Shilvock.

The Chinese audiences responded enthusiastically, purchasing tickets as soon as they became available. According to the Chinese Heritage Foundation, "The two performances at the Hong Kong Arts Festival sold out in two days. The same held true for each of the two performances in Beijing, Changsha and Wuhan."

The late San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, the first Chinese American mayor of the city, played a critical role in facilitating the tour through numerous trips to Beijing — efforts that both Shilvock and the Chinese Heritage Foundation acknowledge as vital to this "cultural diplomacy."

"It was both an artistic success and a diplomatic success, a wonderful example of a work of art being able to speak with such universality between two different countries," Shilvock reflected.

With *The Monkey King* set to premiere on Nov 14, the San Francisco Opera is already in preliminary discussions with Chinese partners about bringing the new production to China, hoping to build on the momentum established in 2017 and to tap into China's growing enthusiasm for opera.

"Look at what's happening in China and the real growing energy around opera. The opera houses that are being built in China at the moment are extraordinary," said Shilvock ahead of a trip to Shanghai, where he would explore the opportunities of bringing the new opera to China.

He specifically highlights the Shanghai Grand Opera House, a new landmark of the metropolis expected to be completed this year. "This new opera house in Shanghai looks like it could become one of the great opera houses of the world. And I think there is a real hunger, a real energy, a real commitment to opera in Shanghai and across China," he said.

The development of opera infrastructure in China represents a unique cultural phenomenon, according to Shilvock. "There are so many great opera houses and performing arts centers being built in China in a way that's not happening anywhere else in the world," he said.

"You just look at this incredible pride the Chinese cities are taking in the opera house and what it means to have a place where people can gather and come and experience culture and shared stories."

The San Francisco Opera, as the closest major opera company to China, sees itself in a unique position to engage with China's growing interest in the art form. The company has historical ties to Shanghai and was one of the first Western opera companies to visit China after the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), developing a relationship with the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Even before *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the San Francisco Opera had successfully adapted Chinese American writer Amy Tan's novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* in 2008, demonstrating a commitment to works that resonate with Asian and Asian American audiences.

For Shilvock, the productions represent more than artistic achievements — they are cultural bridges in an era often defined by division. "We're in a time period where it's so easy to focus on differences, and a lot of political discourses about differences. I think if we can find things in the world that bring us together and that remind us that we are all human beings, then we all have the same emotions," he said.

As *The Monkey King* prepares for its world premiere, Shilvock sees it as part of a broader cultural exchange that strengthens bonds between nations.

"I think it's particularly exciting when you can have a piece that travels between countries and honors the cultural heritage of, in this case, China, and brings that to life in America. I'm excited to see how pieces, like *The Monkey King* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, not just to have a presence there, but to have that bond artistically as well," Shilvock said.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Path to common development requires commitment to openness and collaboration

In a world increasingly marked by geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainties, China has once again reaffirmed its commitment to openness, global collaboration, and sustainable development.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the China Development Forum 2025 in Beijing on Sunday, Premier Li Qiang emphasized China's resolve to achieve its annual growth target of around 5 percent while further expanding market access for foreign investors across various sectors. His remarks underscored China's role as a stabilizing force in the global economy and its determination to foster mutual benefit and win-win cooperation in an era of rising protectionism and unilateralism.

This commitment to openness stands in stark contrast to the "America First" policies pursued by the United States, which have seen it weaponize tariffs and retreat from multilateralism. The US' bullying, unilateral policies have disrupted global trade, finance, and economic stability, creating challenges for nations and businesses worldwide. In this context, China's consistent advocacy for and practice of openness and shared development offer a vital alternative.

The China Development Forum, attended by hundreds of executives from leading multinational corporations, researchers, officials, and representatives of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, served as a platform to showcase China's vast opportunities and its commitment to shared development. In his speech, Premier Li urged global business leaders to seize the potential presented by China's massive consumer market, its dynamic innovation ecosystem, and its rapidly growing green economy. He called for international businesses to collaborate with the country in good faith to resist unilateralism and protectionism, emphasizing that mutual benefit and win-win cooperation are the keys to achieving greater development dividends.

Premier Li's speech also highlighted the indispensable role that foreign-funded enterprises play in upholding China's development trajectory. He described them as key participants and contributors to the country's economic progress, emphasizing that China's doors will remain open to international businesses.

China's commitment to openness is not merely rhetorical; it is deeply rooted in its institutional design and long-term planning. This year marks the conclusion of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), a period during which the country has made significant strides in achieving its economic and social development goals. The success of China's five-year plans over the past seven decades demonstrates the unique advantages of its system, which combines strategic planning with flexibility and adaptability.

Premier Li's speech highlighted the resilience, potential, and vitality of the Chinese economy. The scale of China's economy, coupled with the efficiency and responsiveness of its policy implementation, generates a powerful endogenous growth impetus. As the Chinese economy continues to strengthen, new growth drivers are emerging across various sectors, from advanced manufacturing and digital technologies to renewable energy and green infrastructure. By integrating into China's market, international businesses can tap into these opportunities. The face-to-face exchanges between international entrepreneurs and China's economic policymakers at the forum provided them with firsthand insights into the government's resolve and capability to maintain long-term stable growth.

China's commitment to openness is further reinforced by its efforts to address the concerns of foreign companies. Premier Li reiterated that the government will continue to deepen economic system reform, promote the construction of a unified national market, and remove bottlenecks and obstacles to economic circulation, enterprise innovation, and creation. These measures are designed to create a more level playing field for all businesses.

In a world grappling with uncertainty, China's steady growth and commitment to openness provide a beacon of stability and opportunity. As Premier Li noted, enterprises are not only beneficiaries of globalization they also need to be the defenders and promoters of it. By working together to resist protectionism and unilateralism, China and its international partners can build a fairer and more inclusive global economic system.

Cooperation the guarantee for prosperity

Embracing the ancient wisdom that "close neighbors are better than distant relatives" China has long championed a philosophy of fostering strong ties with its neighboring countries. Despite trilateral relations encountering some disruptions due to the changing dynamics in the international terrain in recent years, China has constantly kept the door open to warmer relations with Japan and the Republic of Korea, along with its other neighbors.

It is beyond doubt that a strong trilateral partnership is in the interest of all three parties. Greater trilateral cooperation among China, Japan, and the ROK has, as all three have acknowledged, the potential to bring about significant economic, political, and social benefits for not only them, but the region at large. By leveraging their complementary strengths and addressing common challenges, the three neighbors can not only produce direct tangible benefits for themselves but also consolidate a more stable, prosperous and interconnected region as a whole.

The high-level engagements between China, Japan, and the ROK over the past few days represent a significant step toward renewed and enhanced trilateral cooperation that promises to give a shot in the arm to their trilateral cooperation and thus a boost to regional development.

Commencing on Friday, a series of diplomatic dialogues were held in Tokyo, bringing together the top diplomats of China, Japan, and the ROK for substantive talks on the current state of trilateral relations and ways to inject vitality into their trilateral partnership to maintain the positive momentum that has been generated. The discussions included the 11th China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Sixth China-Japan High-Level Economic Dialogue, alongside a meeting hosted by Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba.

The productive conversations among Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Japanese counterpart Takeshi Iwaya and ROK counterpart Cho Tae-yul resulted in a consensus on bolstering communication, fostering mutual trust, and deepening collaboration among the three nations.

Good preparations for the upcoming 10th China-Japan-ROK Trilateral Summit were underscored so that the present positive momentum in trilateral relations can be maintained and attention directed at future-oriented cooperation on the basis of maintaining continuity. The future focus for their relations is on advancing cooperation in the key sectors outlined in the Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade, while exploring new avenues for collaboration.

Amid the complex global landscape and sluggish economic recovery, deepening trilateral cooperation is undoubtedly the logical and responsible choice for the three neighbors. Despite disruptions in recent years and the subsequent deterioration of relations among them, the overall trajectory of China-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation over the past few decades has been one of growth and accompanying increased influence on certainly the Asian, and arguably the global, economy. External challenges may introduce hurdles, but the overarching trend points toward strengthened cooperation. That aligns with the interests of all three parties and the broader region as a whole.

As major economies collectively accounting for a significant portion of the global population and GDP, China, Japan, and the ROK are pivotal economic engines in East Asia and beyond. Amid the global volatility, their strengthened trilateral cooperation stands to instill confidence and certainty and thus has a positive and fundamental impact on regional and global development.

To fortify the East Asia cooperation framework, the three neighbors must nurture a cycle of mutual reinforcement, starting with bolstering bilateral relations. Respect for core interests, adept management of differences, and cultivating a cooperative spirit are essential. The suggestions put forward by Wang emphasize deepening economic ties, reviving negotiations on the China-Japan-ROK Free Trade Agreement, fostering innovation, expanding cultural exchanges, addressing common challenges, and collaborating on nontraditional security issues.

The tripartite cooperation mechanism of East Asia is poised to make significant advancements. By building on the existing positive momentum, fostering mutual trust, and solidifying their consensus with practical efforts and initiatives, the three nations can ensure that not only is it a platform for regional peace and stability but it also serves as a driving force for global prosperity and development.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

High gold price reflects credit crisis of US dollar

International gold prices have hit record highs recently, with London's spot gold price surpassing \$3,050 per ounce on Thursday. The traditional analysis framework has realigned, with gold's value inversely linked to US dollar and US bond yields.

Changes in market dynamics impact gold pricing. Gold serves as a currency, commodity, and financial asset, offering risk mitigation and inflation protection. Factors influencing gold's monetary attributes include exchange rate trends, credit risks, and foreign reserve changes. Commodity attributes are affected by retail consumption, industrial demand, mining activities, and recovery rates. Financial attributes are influenced by the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy.

The Federal Reserve opted to maintain the federal funds interest rate target range at 4.25 percent to 4.5 percent during its March meeting and signaled a gradual slowdown

starting in April. This decision, coupled with the Fed's cautious approach led to a modest increase in gold prices, and a weakening US dollar. These movements align with the expectation of ongoing interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve throughout the year.

The current gold market faces a key driver due to the tariff strategies of the Donald Trump administration that potentially undermine US economic growth and the US dollar's global status. Continued tariff implementations may weaken the US economy, erode trust in US dollar reserves and the US administration's credibility.

The short-term focus of the US administration and the fiscal challenges have prompted central banks worldwide to reduce US dollar reserves and increase gold holdings. In January, global central banks collectively purchased 18 tons of gold, primarily led by emerging economies.

Developed countries such as the US, Germany, France, and Italy have long held substantial gold reserves, and today it is emerging market central banks that are leading net gold purchases. This trend has spurred investor interest and bolstered gold prices.

Central banks' gold acquisitions have elevated prices, with gold's role as a safe haven asset becoming increasingly prominent. In 2024, total gold demand reached 4,974.5 tons, driven by central bank purchases, global investments, jewelry demand, and technological uses. Notably, demand stems largely from retail purchases such as jewelry and gold bars, with central bank acquisitions influencing market prices and driving over-the-counter demand.

That being said, the "America First" policies of the US will continue to fuel the rising price of gold, as they will increase the uncertainties in the global financial sector and the world economy.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

No lying flat on personal data protection

The Ministry of Public Security recently announced 10 typical cases of crimes that infringe on citizens' personal information, including the stealing of personal information related to express deliveries, false recruitment, invading parking software, and criminals pretending to be medical insurance department staff to collect people's personal information.

The public security organs cracked more than 7,000 criminal cases that infringed on citizens' personal information last year. That reflects the severity of the problem.

In the digital age, personal information has become a "digital mineral" for some people. Criminal gangs can sell the personal information they illegally acquire for huge profits, and the amount involved in a single case can reach millions of yuan.

Some new trends in crimes that infringe on citizens' personal information are also due to regulatory

loopholes. For example, the means of committing such crimes are becoming more and more technical. Criminal gangs can produce and release Trojan programs to control computers of the victims. The chains involved are also harder to trace, as the criminal gangs collude with express industry staff to steal the personal information provided with an order. These gray industry chains have become more developed with increasingly clear labor distribution within the criminal gangs in the upstream and downstream undertakings.

In response, the authorities should take advantage of technological means to counter the increasingly intelligent and organized illegal data mining activities related to personal information, especially those in the education, medical care, logistics and other key industries.

Meanwhile, as the parties that are responsible for the data security of the

personal information they control, related companies, platforms and data operators must be made to establish and improve their data security management systems, technically defend against hacker attacks, and strictly prevent internal staff from leaking the personal information of customers.

Targeted publicity activities should also be carried out to enhance the public's awareness of information protection and raise their ability to identify and prevent fraud. Relevant authorities should improve the reward mechanism for reporting clues and encourage the public to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests through legal channels.

The country needs to build a three-in-one protection network involving watchdog departments, companies and society to deal with personal information-related crimes in the digital age.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Soaring growth of drones calls for watchful eye

The Government Work Report this year proposed to promote the safe and healthy development of the low-altitude economy. The action plan to boost consumption recently issued by the central government also requires accelerating the improvement of the low-altitude economic supervision system and orderly developing low-altitude consumption.

The potential of the low-altitude economy has begun to be demonstrated in the logistics industry and agriculture. In the first two months of this year, the output of civil drone products saw a year-on-year increase of 91.5 percent, showing a robust momentum.

The potential of low-altitude consumption also lies in its multiplier effect on the industry chain. Taking consumer-grade drones as an example, their popularization can also

drive hardware manufacturing, software development, data processing and other links.

It is predicted that the market size of the country's low-altitude economy will reach 1.5 trillion yuan (\$207 billion) this year, and it is expected to reach 3.5 trillion yuan by 2035.

The supervision of low-altitude consumption not only involves data security, but also includes flight safety, consumer rights protection, low-altitude aircraft control and many other contents.

The Low-Altitude Economic Development Department of the National Development and Reform Commission was founded in December. The department is responsible for the formulation and implementation of low-altitude economic development strategies and medium- and

long-term development plans, proposing relevant policy recommendations.

The authorities need to take into account flight safety supervision and industrial innovation needs. And more institutional breakthroughs are expected to accelerate the implementation of consumption scenarios.

However, if it is not managed well, low-altitude aircraft will seriously disrupt production and living order, and even threaten public safety. Therefore, the Low-Altitude Economic Development Department of NDRC needs to coordinate with relevant departments so as to strengthen supervision to ensure that recreational and industry users abide by the regulations and use drones legally and responsibly.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Economic Growth and Free Trade in Asia-Pacific Region

Editor's note: Efforts to advance Asia-Pacific cooperation face challenges like rising geopolitical tensions, unilateralism and protectionism. In such circumstances, countries in the region should uphold multilateralism, free trade, and enhance cooperation through platforms such as Boao Forum for Asia for the betterment of the region. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Chung Jae-hung

Japan, ROK should embrace multilateralism

Despite the emergence of a multilateral world order influenced by Eurasia and BRICS amid the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, the Donald Trump administration is not only pushing ahead with its "America First" strategy but also following a new foreign policy. This shift will lead to a major transformation of the existing world order.

But even before the inauguration of the Trump 2.0 administration, the then Yoon Suk-yeol government in the Republic of Korea had been pursuing a foreign policy focused on the ROK-US alliance and the ROK-US-Japan security cooperation, pushing the country toward a serious crisis.

Since taking office, the Yoon government has engaged in confrontationalist diplomacy with China and Russia, not to mention the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The ROK's diplomacy is based on the US' neoconservative worldview, which runs counter to the emerging multilateral world order, and looks to strengthen the ROK-US alliance and ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation, and promotes Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

After the outbreak of the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, emerging powers in the Global South and BRICS, seeking a change in the existing world order, have rapidly gained prominence. The G7 economies, including the United States which has been a global leader since World War II, have been gradually losing their heft. In contrast, the overall trade and economic strengths of BRICS have surpassed that of the G7, with the gap between the two continuing to widen. This shift is contributing to the transformation of the existing world order led by the Western powers.

Notably, at the BRICS Summit held in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates officially joined the grouping. And Indonesia became a full-time BRICS member in January this year. The Kazan summit, in a significant development, announced a mid- to long-term plan to gradually reduce the use of the US dollar to settle trade among BRICS member states and, instead, promote the use of an independent BRICS settlement currency.



The author is director of the Center for Chinese Studies of Sejong Institute, the Republic of Korea.

The continuing Ukraine crisis has sounded an alarm to the US-led world order, and the emergence of a multilateral world order with the Global South, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS at its core.

On the other hand, the ROK and Japan face a major historical turning point, where they must seek a new direction for strategic cooperation with China in line with the new world order. At a China-Japan-ROK meeting in the ROK last year, the three countries discussed six major issues: people-to-people exchanges, promoting sustainable development through

cooperation to mitigate the effects of climate change, economic and trade cooperation, cooperation in healthcare and eldercare, cooperation in science and technology including digital technology, and cooperation in disaster management. But they could not reach any consensus on political, diplomatic and security issues.

Hence, it is imperative that the three countries explore strategic common grounds in line with the principles of the emerging multilateral world order. Especially, they should reach a strategic consensus on the changes in the world order, because without such a consensus, they cannot deepen economic and trade cooperation.

In this regard, the ROK should abandon its confrontationalist diplomacy, because it is contributing to the intensification of China-US strategic competition and escalating tensions with the DPRK. The ROK should also promote peace and prosperity, and advocate for

peaceful coexistence in the region. If the US-Japan-ROK security alliance continues to focus on strengthening the US military's presence in the Asia-Pacific, and if the trio persists on interfering in the Taiwan question and escalating the Korean Peninsula denuclearization issue, the ROK's and Japan's relations with China will deteriorate further.

Hence, China, Japan and the ROK need to make efforts to strengthen advanced technology exchanges based on mutual benefit, enabling their companies to engage in multilateral cooperation, because it will help them achieve sustainable economic growth. The three sides should also address regional supply chain issues, advance the development of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, promote technology cooperation, as well as strengthen economic cooperation with the Global South, including Russia and Eurasian countries.

They also need to establish a mutual complementary industrial division of labor based on their respective strength, and build a profit-sharing mutual cooperation structure and a rules-based competition framework.

Moreover, China-US competition in industry and advanced technology has intensified. So China, Japan and the ROK should reorganize the regional advanced industry value chains and supply chains, leveraging their respective strength to deepen economic and technological cooperation, especially in the field of advanced technology, including AI, semiconductors and robots, and expand their consumer markets.

In the emerging multilateral world order, China, Japan and the ROK should make efforts to reform the global governance system and resolve various non-economic, including political and diplomatic, issues that hinder economic and technological cooperation. The three sides should also make joint efforts to promote peace and stability in the region by establishing a multilateral political-economic cooperation platform based on the principles of the emerging multilateral world order.

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



MA XUJIE / CHINA DAILY

Kong Qingjiang

Beijing an upholder of trade system centered on WTO

Unilateral measures, be they tariffs or economic sanctions against a particular country or particular countries, are often not compatible with World Trade Organization rules. Among all the countries, the United States has taken by far most of the unilateral measures against other countries, be they its perceived adversaries or longstanding allies like Canada and the European Union.

On Feb 1, for example, the US imposed sweeping tariffs on imports from Canada, Mexico and China. These include 25 percent tariffs on most goods from Canada and Mexico, 10 percent on energy imports from Canada, and 10 percent on all Chinese goods. In March the US administration announced to double tariffs on all Chinese imports to 20 percent in excuse of so-called fentanyl abuse.

The moves are in violation of the US' obligations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 of the WTO. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 as specified in Annex IA of the WTO is legally distinct from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade established in 1947, which was replaced by the WTO in 1994.

The unilateral imposition of punitive tariffs by a WTO member is against its binding tariff obligations under the Schedules of Concessions of GATT 1994. According to their binding commitments, WTO members can only reduce their tariff rates. The exorbitant tariffs imposed by the US on Canada, Mexico and China therefore contravene its tariff commitments to the WTO.

What's more, the US' unilateral tariffs violate the principle of most-favored-nation under GATT 1994. The principle of most-favored-nation requires WTO members to treat products from all other members equally. By imposing tariffs on specific countries, the US has denied their products from enjoying the same tariff rate as products from other WTO members, which is discriminatory and a contravention of this principle.

GATT 1994 allows a WTO member to deviate from its obligations on the ground of national security, provided the member proves that certain products are a threat to its national security, the imposition of tariffs is necessary to safeguard national security, and there is no moderate but equally effective means to deal with the issue.

But without making the slightest of efforts in this regard, the US has imposed unilateral tariffs, thereby violating the WTO agreement. Any other WTO member would have meticulously elaborated the applicability of the GATT 1994 exception clause before citing the exception. For example, such a member would have carefully examined what the real cause of the so-called fentanyl abuse crisis is and whether the fentanyl crisis is relevant to national security according to WTO rules before claiming the selected countries are responsible for fentanyl trafficking, and the national security exception clause is applicable.

The US did not bother doing so. In fact, the US imposed tariffs on Canada and Mexico as they have long been "abusive" of US, referring to the US' trade imbalance with the two countries. But a trade imbalance is the result of trade among countries based a trading system promoting free trade, the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement in this case.

It is clear that national security is merely a pretext for the US administration to ignore its obligations toward Canada and Mexico according to the USMCA, and launch a tariff war against them. As a matter of fact, the US administration is using tariffs as a means to address domestic issues, including illegal immigration and fentanyl trafficking.

The US is hell-bent on ruling the world, by ruthlessly resorting to unfair measures to target other countries, especially those that it perceives as "rivals" or "competitors". This US logic, which has shaped the country's approach to international trade, is facing a legitimacy crisis now.

In contrast, Beijing, despite Washington imposing punitive tariffs on Chinese goods, has approached the WTO dispute settlement mechanism to resolve the issue. China has taken countermeasures against the US, though, just in accordance with general international law.

When a WTO member facing an unjustified trade war launched by another member turns to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, instead of taking unilateral measures, to resolve the issue, it actually lends the biggest support to the WTO system. As a major player in the WTO, China has always emphasized that trade disputes be resolved through the WTO dispute settlement mechanism and opposed taking unilateral measures.

At a time when the US is out to wreck the multilateral trading system, China's upholding of the WTO rules will inspire other WTO members to adhere to the established trade rules. One has reason to believe that other WTO members will stand up to the US' unilateral trade measures and work together to reform the WTO and reenergize the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, and ensure the US' unilateral tariffs do not undermine the foundation of the multilateral trading system.

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



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Amitendu Palit

AI crucial for China-ASEAN cooperation

Artificial intelligence has become a priority for a number of countries as they try to ensure their citizens derive greater benefits through digital applications. This has made two issues very important. The first is the ability of countries to use AI for digital functions and solutions. And the second is the ability of countries to develop AI that will enable users of AI to get optimum results.

Addressing these two issues is crucial for deepening economic cooperation between China and Southeast Asia, as well as among countries within the Southeast Asian region.

Most countries, including Southeast Asian countries, are focused on developing capacities for using various AI applications. Without these applications, it is no longer possible to boost economic growth and strengthen regional cooperation in the long run. The application of basic AI tools includes the use of chatbots and digital recognition technology, such as facial recognition systems.

There are many other applications that have found their way into delivery services, making them essential for individuals and enterprises alike. These include robotics used to operate industrial robots for carrying out specific tasks, speech recognition systems produced by deep learning, and machine-learning tools enabling predictive analytics.



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Regional economic cooperation can no longer be strengthened without adequate emphasis on AI and its role in all sectors of society. AI is also crucial for understanding future economic cooperation between China and Southeast Asia.

The ability to adopt various AI applications for widespread use in households and businesses requires the development of robust national information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, which should be accessible to institutions, organizations and the wider public. The availability of quality broadband and internet services at affordable rates, too, is an important requirement.

In this regard, the scope of cooperation between China and Southeast Asia is huge, with Chinese investment poised to play a significant role in enhancing regional ICT capacities.

China has taken a decisive step in using AI for digitalizing the day-to-day functions of the people, which extends from online retail and mobile banking to a variety of citizen-specific applica-

tions, such as the increasing use of digital payment platforms, online communication, and facial recognition features.

Similar apps, including digital platforms for necessary services like hailing cabs, ordering food, and availing household services are becoming increasingly popular in practically the whole of Southeast Asia. The Chinese example of using AI for simplifying complex tasks for a large number of people offers regional economies, especially the smaller ones, valuable lessons.

However, regional economic cooperation cannot be strengthened without addressing the risks arising from the use of digital technologies and AI. Such risks include cyber frauds and various other digital malpractices. "Scam factories" being run by cyber criminals in some parts of Southeast Asia have become rampant, posing a grave risk to unsuspecting individuals. They also pose a serious risk to countries' national security.

These risks cannot be eliminated by any one country alone. Therefore, it is imperative that countries collaborate to effectively handle these cyber threats.

With businesses in Southeast Asia carrying out transactions across borders using digital technology, countries, especially China and Southeast Asian nations, must collaborate to ensure the risk-free, seamless flow of financial information and other sensitive busi-

ness data, and maintaining the secrecy of information.

As the region's largest economy, and the one with which Southeast Asian businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, are integrated with, China — in collaboration with ASEAN — should work on rules and frameworks that would strengthen cybersecurity. This collaboration should not be limited to adopting mutually acceptable rules for digital transactions and data transfers; it should extend to the development of mutually acceptable learning processes, such as digital literacy courses and managing data training.

One of the most important aspects of economic cooperation between China and the Asia-Pacific region, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is to understand the need to connect and align with existing and upcoming regulation frameworks. Since AI applications are poised to play a greater role in regional cooperation, it is necessary for China and ASEAN to review the existing rules, including those for digital payment and data transfer, and collaborate on future rules-based frameworks, such as the "Digital Economy Framework Agreement", to ensure smooth progress to the next phase of regional economic cooperation.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

CHARLES ONUNAJU

Confidence boost

China has provided a viable alternative to the West's path of modernization and development for African countries

Multipolarity as the emerging structure of contemporary international relation is shaped by the objective historical course from which emerging economies and countries in the Global South are translating their sovereignty to independent course of action and seeking inclusion and participation in devising and shaping global agenda. The rise of the countries in the Global South is giving impetus to the emerging trend of multilateralism as the central theme in global governance and consequently, institutionalizing the structural framework of multipolarity as the compelling praxis for global affairs.



In contemporary times and even with the emerging trend of multipolarity, it is still imperative for emerging economies and countries of the Global South to deliberately construct and promote the requisite guardrails to enhance and support the tendency of multipolarity and multilateralism. China's development has had a decisive impact on the global stage and created a wave of unprecedented confidence among the countries of the Global South that development and modernization are possible within the framework of their respective national initiatives and endeavors.

Prior to the emergence of China, modernization and development were mostly seen as the prerogatives of advanced Western capitalist economies, along with Japan, and therefore, any modernization and development endeavor must proceed along the paths already taken by the West or at least be guided by them.

Consequently, most of the national initiatives of countries in Africa were largely limited to explorations of Western models, with the support of Western institutions and personnel.

But the compelling failure of the economic package of the "Washington Consensus" created doubts among many countries of the Global South. The meteoric development of a non-Western power and the peaceful and stable trajectory of the rise of China created and supported the groundswell of the opinion that development and modernization should be within the context of indigenous and local initiatives and efforts. This has solidified into a confident path for development and modernization. China, having blazed the trail for a non-Western development and modernization paradigm that is shaped by its own realities, has placed its experiences in the public space.

Not only has China demonstrated the responsibility of a major power by sharing its experience through diverse international platforms, but it has also made tangible contributions to the

modernization and development of the countries of the Global South by creating public goods. Over the past more than 10 years, the Belt and Road Initiative, a framework for international cooperation spanning infrastructure construction, financial integration, policy alignment and people-to-people communication, is widely recognized as one of the greatest international public goods. The connectivity of infrastructure, within and across countries and spanning several regions across the world has been a practical spur for modernization and development.

In Africa, the BRI has supported the closing of the connectivity gaps within the region and provided impetus for the construction of the economies of scale through the current framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area, one of the world's largest free trade areas.

It is a year since the historic document of the China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus was published. It was the culmination of the scholarly endeavors of China-Africa think tanks to offer clarifications, promote innovative paradigms and generate fresh momentum for the trajectory of China-Africa cooperation.

Think tanks in China and Africa have now been integrated in the follow-up mechanism of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, a multilateral framework that drive relations between China and Africa.

China's other important initiatives, such as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, have also resonated strongly across the Global South, aligning seamlessly with their aspirations for an inclusive, multipolar global order, where experience sharing, extensive consultations, joint contributions and broadly shared benefits are the norms.

The inclusive security framework, in contrast to the inward-looking alliances and blocs and "small yards with high fences" created by the United States, has brought home the reality that all humanity shares a common responsibility to establish a community with a shared future.

With a solid cooperation framework that has withstood the test of time, China, Africa and the G20 can play more decisive roles in safeguarding the multilateral system and preserving the multipolar world order, especially with the rise of extreme right-wing nationalism in major countries of the Global North, especially the US and countries in Western Europe.

With the recognition of experience that trade and investments are credible engines for development and even the oxygen to sustain it, China and Africa must play constructive roles to preserve the international trade system and contribute significantly to the pushback against the politically motivated use and abuse of tariffs especially

by the new US administration.

Expanding trade through the use of local currencies and other innovative methods would take the steam out of the US-initiated tariff wars and expose the US administration for its historical absurdity and the futility of its attempts to obstruct the wheel of history.

Strengthening emerging international institutions such as the New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that seek to complement the older institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund should be vigorously pursued as crucial guardrails to safeguard multipolarity and guarantee the multilateral system, featuring open and constructive dialogue.

The considerable international profile of China-Africa cooperation as an all-weather community with a shared future for the new era means they are uniquely positioned to carry forward their cooperation model as an example of international cooperation characterized by the outcomes of tangible and real results.

The effective follow-up mechanism for China-Africa cooperation, which leaves no room for complacency, serves as a guarantee for pragmatic progress.

The framework of sustainable dialogue and mutual respect in China-Africa cooperation are essential prerequisites for its sustainability.

The basic understanding of the Global South for the centrality of the United Nations system and for international law as the foundation for civilized international relations should be boldly strengthened, especially as countries in the Global North make revisionist retreats from these core pillars of the international system.

The whole range of issues that mankind has to grapple with, ranging from climate issues to disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, need a lot of exertions to minimize their risk and broadly share their benefits. An insular global order riddled with inward-looking nationalism has dangerous prospects, as it has the potential to instigate clashes among civilizations and derailing from the benefits from the advances in science and technology.

China and Africa can play pivotal roles in ensuring that the pillars of multipolarity are firm and strong enough to withstand the shock of emerging revisionism and atavistic nostalgia, now on display in most of the Global North.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

EHIZUELEN MICHAEL MITCHELL OMORUYI

Highly compatible

The deepening economic cooperation between China and Africa is beneficial to both

It is a fact that China's economic interests in Africa have been summed up in two words for much of the past two decades: investment and trade. In 2024, trade between China and African countries was \$295 billion and China had 643 overseas direct investment projects in Africa, with a total value of about \$150 billion, making China one of Africa's largest sources of foreign investment. The scale of Sino-African economic cooperation has reached new highs and there has been a steady growth momentum.



Aside from the increasing volume of trade, there has also been an improvement in the trade structure between China and Africa, as evidenced by China's steadily increasing imports of agricultural products from Africa. China's imports of African nuts, fruits, vegetables and flowers increased by 130 percent, 32 percent, 14 percent and 7 percent, respectively, in 2023, as compared to 2022.

It was announced at the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in November 2021 that China would establish a "green channel" through which agricultural products from African countries could enter China. In fact, this "green channel" has already started yielding results by shortening the time for inspection and quarantine as well as expanding the scope of the exemption from customs duty, creating more market opportunities for African farm products such as pineapples, avocados and citrus fruits.

China-Africa cooperation in the digital economy is also growing and becoming more diverse, helping African countries realize their digital transformation. Chinese companies have also been actively involved in building digital infrastructure in Africa in order to assist African nations narrow the digital divide. A livestreaming event was held during the online shopping festival for African goods in June 2023, at which Chinese and African livestreamers combined forces to promote African specialty products to Chinese consumers, allowing them to easily purchase these products. A number of quality

African products are also being brought to the Chinese market via cross-border e-commerce platforms as part of the Silk Road e-commerce collaboration between the two sides.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the high growth of economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa is largely due to the fact that the economies of both Africa and China are highly complementary in nature. China possesses mature and applicable technologies, equipment and sufficient capital, whereas African countries have significant advantages in terms of manpower and natural resources. Manifestations of this complementarity can be seen in a wide range of fields, including industrial cooperation, technical assistance, market potential and human resource collaborations in a variety of sectors, whether it is in agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing, or service sectors. There is a great deal of benefit in strengthening trade ties between China and Africa, in order to harness their respective advantages and vast markets, achieve mutual gains, and build a win-win development partnership.

In order for trade development to succeed, it is imperative that the transport infrastructure in Africa should be well developed. As a result, the Africa-China cooperation places a high priority on improving the connectivity of infrastructure across Africa so that trade and economic integration can take place. There are also plans to enhance trade facilitation, financial integration, as well as policy coordination between China and African countries as part of the project. Through the latter, it will be possible to ensure that the development strategies of the two sides are harmonized and mutually reinforcing.

There have also been a number of landmark projects that have been undertaken in recent years in emerging sectors such as aviation, aerospace, e-commerce, energy, housing and livelihoods. Since the founding of the FOCAC, Chinese companies have built and upgraded more than 10,000 kilometers of highways, nearly 1,000 bridges, around 100 ports and a large number of hospitals and schools in Africa. It is because of these infrastructure projects that China has emerged as the largest bilateral creditor to

Africa, providing African countries with a new source of financing in the areas of infrastructure, mining and energy.

There is no doubt that, in the decade ahead, China's private sector will likely lead trade and investment in Africa in a more significant manner. In fact, more than 70 percent of the 3,000 Chinese enterprises that have expressed an interest in Africa are private sector companies. It is likely that the African Continental Free Trade Area will accelerate this trend by promoting the growth of regional value chains, giving Chinese businesses a chance to access a larger and more unified African market. It is imperative for both parties to prioritize the enhancement of coordination among the AfCFTA, the FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative, in order to fully realize this immense potential. Investments should be targeted at catalyzing the industrialization and manufacturing projects, as well as enhancing trade connectivity across the AfCFTA region. Better coordination and synergy will ensure mutual benefits and sustainable growth for Africa and China. It seems that Africa is set to expand its supply chain to feed factories across the continent.

In the future, many of these factories will feature collaborations between Chinese and African entrepreneurs, as well as government agencies, producing consumer goods for the growing middle-income group in Africa. This is an important development. As a matter of fact, the bottom line is that Africa needs China, and China needs Africa as well. There is no doubt that China's investments, trade and technology, as well as its foreign aid, loans and grants, play a major role in promoting Africa-China economic cooperation. However, in the long-term, Africa must engage with China in a more integrated manner, pushing for a more balanced trade structure, and above all for a greater contribution of local added-value.

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Low-altitude economy on cusp of takeoff

By ZHU WENQIAN

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China's low-altitude economy, a strategic emerging sector that is key to developing new quality productive forces, is poised to fly high following its inclusion in the Government Work Report for two consecutive years now.

This year's Government Work Report, which was delivered on March 5 at the annual session of the 14th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, once again reiterated that China will encourage low-altitude industry players to carry out large-scale applications of new technologies, products and scenarios.

According to the report, the government will promote the safe and healthy development of emerging industries such as commercial aerospace and the low-altitude economy.

Meanwhile, the State Council — China's Cabinet — issued a special action plan to boost consumption earlier this month. According to the guideline, the government will support the accelerated development of new types of consumption.

Specifically, the guideline said that the government would speed up the supervision system for the low-altitude economy, and encourage the orderly development of low-altitude consumption, such as low-altitude tourism, air sports and consumer drones.

The low-altitude economy's uptrend has been closely intertwined with support from favorable policies.

The low-altitude economy was first included in the Government Work Report last year, and the sector was regarded as a new growth engine for the economy.

"The industry has experienced leapfrog development. Since early this year, a number of domestic cities have started building infrastructures to help develop the low-altitude economy," said Fu Changyin, marketing director of Shanghai-based Volant Aerotech, which focuses on the research and development of electric vertical takeoff and landing, or eVTOL, aircraft.

"For instance, these cities are planning and designing the takeoff and landing points for eVTOLs, and preparing for the large-scale commercial use of the products," Fu said.

Late last year, the National Development and Reform Commission established a low-altitude department. The department's responsibilities include formulating and organizing the implementation of low-altitude economic growth strategies, making medium and long-term development plans, proposing relevant policy recommendations and coordinating on major issues.

In the past year, various local governments have launched favorable policies to support the growth of the sector. About 30 provincial-level regions have included the low-altitude economy's development in their local government work reports or introduced relevant policies.

The market size of China's low-altitude economy is expected to reach 1.5 trillion yuan (\$207.2 billion) this year, and estimated to touch 3.5 trillion yuan by 2035, according to a projection by the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

In particular, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province have introduced a series of measures to support the sector. Over 30

Government Work Report says China will encourage industry players to carry out large-scale applications of new technologies, products and scenarios



percent of the country's low-altitude industry chain enterprises are located in the province, according to the local government.

In November, Airbus Helicopters, a division of European aircraft manufacturer Airbus and the largest helicopter manufacturer worldwide, launched its new China headquarters in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Guangdong, indicating the company's strong commitment to the country's general aviation market.

This is the first regional headquarters of a large-scale Fortune 500 company in Hengqin.

Colin James, managing director of Airbus Helicopters in China, said the continuous introduction of favorable new policies related to the development of the low-altitude economy in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area indi-



“Since early this year, a number of domestic cities have started building infrastructures to help develop the low-altitude economy.”

Fu Changyin, marketing director of Shanghai-based Volant Aerotech

1.5 trillion yuan

China's expected low-altitude economy market size this year, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China

Top: Technicians install and debug a newly developed vertical takeoff and landing drone at a workshop in Hohhot economic and technological development zone in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Feb 28.

Middle: An aerial drone carries tea pickers' lunches on the fly up to a tea hill area in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on March 20.

Bottom: A drone carrying designated goods leaves China Post Dongyang branch in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on March 6.

HU YANGHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

icates the area's huge market size and rising opportunities.

"Now more than ever, it is of critical importance for the low-altitude economy to develop, and all stakeholders to work together on pro-Chinese solutions to promote the low-altitude economy," James said.

In terms of the number of enterprises, Guangdong has been the only province in China that has more than 10,000 enterprises that operate businesses related to low-altitude economy. The number of related enterprises in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, ranks second in the country, according to the local government.

Guangzhou has also demonstrated its strong capabilities in developing eVTOLs. A group of specialized and innovative enterprises with global competitiveness in the low-altitude sector are present in the city.

As a key player in the low-altitude economy, Chinese electric vehicle maker Xpeng Motors' flying car unit Xpeng Aeroht has taken a giant leap into the future of transportation.

The company unveiled its "Land Aircraft Carrier", a car capable of storing an "aircraft" in its "trunk" during the Zhuhai Airshow in November. The air module is an eVTOL structure, built with carbon fiber for lightweight durability.

Currently, the company's flying car manufacturing base is under construction in Guangzhou, and it is expected to be a major mass-production facility for flying cars using a modern assembly line.

With a planned annual capacity of 10,000 units, the factory will focus on producing the air module for the "Land Aircraft Carrier" and is scheduled for mass production in 2026. With each flying car carrying a price tag of about 2 million yuan, the company has received some 4,000 orders.

By 2028, flying cars could enter the stage of small-scale commercial promotion, and by 2035, the products are forecast to gradually see widespread popularity, according to industry research and consulting institute iResearch.

Meanwhile, global competition in the low-altitude sector is intensifying. US billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX-backed flying car company Aleron Aeronautics completed flight tests of its products in urban environments in February.

Priced at \$300,000 each, the flying car has received some 3,300 orders. Aleron Aeronautics plans to start production in the fourth quarter of this year and subsequently make its first group of deliveries, according to the company.

Separately, Guangzhou-based eVTOL maker Ehang Holdings Ltd is the world's first eVTOL enterprise to go public, achieve commercialization as well as profits.

Last year, Ehang delivered 216 drones and achieved a record high sales revenue of 456 million yuan, or a 288.5 percent surge year-on-year, according to its annual report.

"With increasing policy support, the low-altitude sector is entering a phase of high-speed growth. With our own advantages, Ehang will actively seize the strategic opportunities emerging in this golden period of growth for the low-altitude economy," said He Tianxing, vice-president of Ehang Holdings.

"We will efficiently promote the applications of drones in different scenarios, and the building of an industrial ecology and innovation of business models," He said.

drones operated by Meituan fly to the designated store to pick up the goods. Then, they get their products delivered to an airdrop cabinet in a little over 10 minutes.

Meituan said residents in Hong Kong can pay for orders done via drone delivery services using Hong Kong dollars through WeChat.

In various application scenarios of the low-altitude economy, instant delivery services by drones in cities have been more complex, and they are currently being piloted in some particular areas.

The service is expected to gradually gain traction across the nation with favorable policy support, address the issue of urban traffic congestion and improve delivery efficiency.

Getting a drone to deliver your coffee at the Great Wall!

REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhu Wenqian

Not long ago, a friend of mine took a day trip to the Badaling section of the Great Wall on the outskirts of Beijing. While there, she ordered a cup of iced coffee using an app on her mobile phone. To her surprise, it was delivered by a drone within five minutes.

This is a convenience that is increasingly available in China because of the rapid development of instant delivery services through drones.

In August, Badaling Great Wall launched the first drone delivery route in Beijing, as the scenic spot aims to enhance tourist experience, strengthen emergency support capabilities and improve the digital capabilities of its daily operations and maintenance.

A drone can carry up to 2.3 kilograms of goods and deliver them to buyers within three kilometers at a speed of 10 meters per second,

according to Meituan, a major on-demand service platform.

The application scenarios of instant delivery services by drones are constantly expanding.

By the end of last year, Meituan had launched 53 delivery routes using drones in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and Nanjing, Jiangsu province. In total, the drones had delivered over 450,000 orders, the company said.

Earlier this month, Meituan launched a drone delivery route at Fudan University in Shanghai, making it the first such offering at a

university in the city. This route connects a business complex in the Wujiaochang area of Shanghai with the student apartments in the east district of Fudan University.

Drones complete a round-trip flight every 15 minutes on average, and students can collect their orders at a cabinet set up near their dormitories. When the drone operates at a distance of 50 meters, its noise level is only about 51 decibels, which is lower than the volume of a regular conversation, Meituan said.

South China's Guangdong has been a hub for drone development.

The consumer drones sector in the province accounts for over 70 percent of the global market share, while the industrial drones sector holds 50 percent of the international market, according to the local government.

In particular, Shenzhen in Guangdong has been leading the development of consumer drones and the application of delivery services by drones. Futian Port in Shenzhen was the first major port to launch a drone delivery service late last year.

After buyers order products through their mobile phone apps,

BUSINESS



Flight attendants from Cathay Pacific Airways demonstrate emergency safety training procedures in Hong Kong on Jan 11, 2024. CHEN YONGNUO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Cathay Pacific to recruit more people from Chinese mainland

Hong Kong-based carrier aims to fill a variety of positions this year

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Hong Kong-based carrier Cathay Pacific Airways has said that it plans to hire more flight attendants and pilots from the Chinese mainland as the airline continues to increase the number of flights connecting the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong with overseas destinations.

The airline is working to attract more Chinese mainland talent to support its future development plans. Currently, the group has more than 30,000 employees from some 70 countries and regions, including about 3,000 employees from the Chinese mainland. By the end of this year, it aims to raise the number of Chinese mainland employees to 4,000.

With operating bases in Beijing and Shanghai, Cathay Pacific plans to mainly hire flight attendants in the Chinese mainland, as well as more pilots, aircraft maintenance engineers, ground crew members and information technology personnel.

In Shenzhen and Guangzhou of

Guangdong province, the company has two offices that focus on the technology side of the business and it hopes to soon expand these teams to about 200 people in total.

"In the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, there are many excellent digital talent and research companies, providing a great platform for Cathay Pacific to attract more outstanding Chinese mainland talent," said Patricia Hwang, director of people at Cathay Group.

"The total number of flights operated by Cathay Pacific has rebounded to the pre-pandemic level. This year, we aim to increase the number of destinations that we fly to 100 worldwide and continue to increase investments. We are confident in our growth potential," Hwang said.

Cathay Pacific announced last year that it would invest more than HK\$100 billion (\$12.87 billion) in the next seven years for its development strategy. This includes increasing investment in its fleet, cabin products, lounges, digital upgrades and sustainable development, the company said.

Meanwhile, the group reported

an attributable profit of HK\$9.9 billion last year, higher than a profit of HK\$9.8 billion in 2023, driven by stronger cargo demand, higher passenger volumes, lower fuel price and higher cost efficiencies, according to its annual report released in mid-March.

For new flights to the Chinese mainland, Cathay Pacific recently announced that it plans to launch direct flights connecting Hong Kong and Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, starting from April 28. The new four-flights-per-week return service will bring the airline's passenger network in the Chinese mainland to 20 destinations.

"Urumqi is an exciting new addition to our network, directly connecting our home city with an important Belt and Road hub in Northwest China," said Lavinia Lau, chief customer and commercial officer at Cathay Group.

This summer, Cathay Pacific and the group's low-cost carrier HK Express will together operate over 290 return flights per week between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland.

Besides, the International Air Transport Association recently released data showing global passenger demand in January. Total

demand, measured in revenue passenger kilometers, climbed 10 percent year-on-year, while total capacity, measured in available seat kilometers, grew by 7.1 percent year-on-year. The January load factor was 82.1 percent, an all-time high for the month.

In particular, Asia-Pacific airlines achieved a 21.8 percent year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity increased 16.5 percent year-on-year and the load factor was 86.7 percent. Traffic from Northeast Asia was particularly strong, said IATA, which represents some 340 airlines comprising over 80 percent of global air traffic.

"We have seen a notable acceleration in demand this January, with a particularly strong performance by carriers based in the Asia-Pacific region. The record high load factors that accompany this strong demand are yet another reminder of the persistent supply chain issues in the aerospace sector," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director-general.

"The strong growth in demand aligns with the results of our latest passenger survey done in November 2024, in which 94 percent of travelers indicated that they planned to travel as much or more in the coming 12 months than they did in the past year," Walsh added.

Smart greenhouses lift winter jujube industry

By HAN JINGYAN
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With China's "No 1 central document" for 2025 calling for technical advancement and all-around rural vitalization, Chinese farmers are showing more enthusiasm in using the latest technology to boost their incomes.

In East China's Shandong province, winter date grower Guo Ning expressed a myriad of emotions while looking at the thriving winter jujube trees growing at the Guo Ning Winter Jujube Demonstration Park in Xiahe Town.

In order to usher in an early harvest of his winter dates and sell them for a good price, Guo has introduced "smart temperature control" technology to the greenhouses in the park, set up by the local township government with an investment of 1.6 million yuan (\$221,270).

At Guo's demonstration park, a key industrial project in the town, controlling greenhouse temperatures is conducive to maintaining the activity of the root system and boosting the revival of seedlings in early spring, said Xu Lin, government head of Xiahe town in Zhanhua district.

In recent years, Zhanhua, which is part of the prefecture-level city of Binzhou, has vigorously developed its winter jujube industry and bolstered modern agricultural technology, helping jujube growers raise their income and become prosperous.

Zhanhua, sitting on the lower reaches of the Yellow River in northern Shandong, governs two sub-districts, seven towns and two townships with a total population surpassing 331,800.

Guo said the air-powered heating equipment in his greenhouses — consisting of a main unit, a water storage tank, water connections, air outlets and other parts — can drive water circulation through a heat pump and uses 12 air outlets to deliver warm air into the entire greenhouse, achieving intelligent control of inside temperatures.

"This device can help winter jujubes to mature earlier and usher in a harvest in late June, three months earlier than traditional cultivation," said Li Bing, Party secretary of Xiahe. "The No 1 central document has been giving us much strength each

year, offering a new guide in technical advancement and new direction in rural vitalization," he said.

"In the next step, we will fully leverage the advantages of our characteristic agricultural industries such as greenhouse winter jujube, organic fruits and vegetables, and introduce advanced management technologies, improving the quality and efficiency of these industries, and bolstering farmers' income," Li added.

As the winter jujube industry is starting to become more developed through the use of smart technologies, efficient use of air-powered heating equipment is the future development path for the industry, said Meng Xiangui, a local expert in greenhouse winter jujube cultivation.

To reduce the growth cycle of winter jujubes and seek early harvests, Xiahe has helped upgrade 8,000 mu (533 hectares) of winter jujubes in the town and turned them into greenhouse cultivation.

"This year, with our newly installed air heating equipment in the greenhouse, the interior temperature can reach 25 C during daytime and remain around 10 C at night," Guo said, noting that he was pleased to see his winter jujube trees sprout during the Spring Festival holiday.

However, the smooth running of the new equipment cannot happen without ample power, as the increased equipment makes the power load rise sharply and aging power lines can be a risk, he said.

As the unstable voltage can lead to frequent failures in temperature control, Guo reached out to the State Grid Binzhou Power Supply Co for timely help.

Du Zuyin, director of Xiahe Town Power Supply Station, led his team to replace a 200 kVA (kilovolt-ampere) transformer for Guo's park, and renewed the previous bare aluminum wires with insulated cables to ensure stable power transmission.

He also introduced an inspection mechanism to check the park's power facilities on a monthly basis to prevent potential hazards.

"Now with stable electricity and precise operation of the temperature control equipment, my winter jujubes can be harvested about 15 days earlier than usual, hiking my sales significantly," Guo said.



Workers of State Grid Binzhou Power Supply Co measure temperatures inside a greenhouse at Guo Ning Winter Jujube Demonstration Park in Zhanhua district, Binzhou, Shandong province. JIA SHUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY



The Belt and Road Initiative will help tap market potential in these regions, promote investment and consumption, generate demand and job opportunities, enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges among the peoples of involved countries and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity.

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The Belt and Road Initiative

Making the world a better place



BUSINESSINSIGHT

Balance sought between govt intervention, mkt

EAGLE EYE

By Huang Yiping

What is China's new economic momentum? Recently, my colleagues and I conducted a study on the evolution of industries amid economic fluctuations. Over the past 30 years, China's economy has grown through cycles, transitioning from being primarily driven by labor-intensive sectors to capital-intensive ones.

Our research employed production network analysis to quantify the contribution of infrastructure and real estate to economic fluctuations. This method examines the input-output relationships across industries. For instance, when the property market rises, cement supply increases accordingly, and furniture supply follows suit, not to mention interior decor purchases and durable big-ticket items like white goods. While we won't delve into the technical methodologies here, our findings were quite unexpected.

Since 1992, reform and opening-up moves kicked off an economic boom, and various industries contributed to overall economic growth. But infrastructure and real estate were particularly significant. After China joined the WTO in 2001, the economy flourished again but later slowed due to the global financial crisis in 1997-98. After the 2008-09 sub-prime loan crisis recovery, infrastructure and real estate emerged as the primary growth engines.

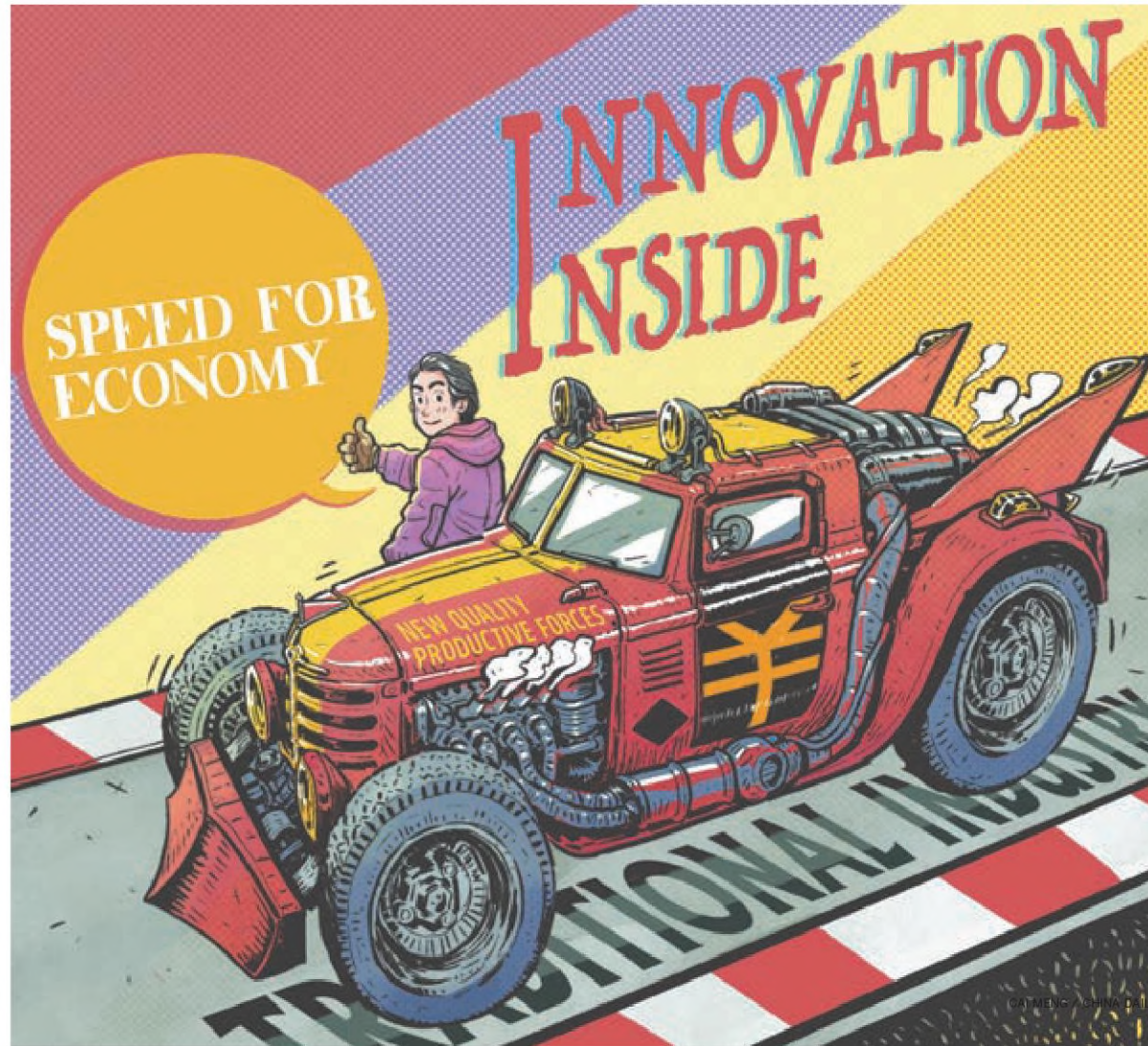
The conclusion is somewhat stark — China's economic prosperity over the past decade has been heavily reliant on infrastructure and real estate. Other industries played a role, but their contribution to economic fluctuations was relatively mild.

This finding carries an important implication for today. Economic uncertainty looms at present, whether due to US policies under President Donald Trump or other administrations. However, if our research holds true, then stabilizing the real estate market may be crucial for macroeconomic stability.

What will drive the next growth phase? A more pressing question is what industries will support and sustain China's economic growth. A former US official once expressed uncertainty about which industries would become China's next growth engines. It is worth deep reflection.

How could economic momentum shift? One key strategy is to develop new quality productive forces.

There are various interpretations



of this concept, often linked to artificial intelligence, new energy vehicles and quantum computing. While these sectors are undoubtedly important, I believe that the fundamental question is whether total factor productivity can continue to rise. Only with sustained improvements in productivity can economic progress persist. Even in traditional industries, continuous technological innovation, management optimization and efficiency improvements can drive long-term growth.

Take the example of cigarette lighters produced in Shaodong, Hunan province. For 20 years, unit prices remained at 1 yuan (\$0.14). Originally manufactured in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, production eventually shifted to Shaodong, which now produces 15 billion lighters annually.

This industry is highly cost-sensitive, as any slight cost increase could break the 1-yuan price point. Given the difficulty of raising prices, the industry constantly seeks lower-cost locations. Moving to Shaodong helped, but further relocation posed challenges. Cigarette lighter production involves at least 16 components, requiring a concentrated supply chain. If production moves to a lower-wage country like Laos, but suppliers remain dispersed, cost control is nearly impossible.

Currently, manufacturers have reduced labor costs to just 3 percent of production expenses — a temporary solution that may not be sustainable next year. This case illustrates that even traditional industries, thanks to technological and managerial improvements, can

significantly contribute to overall economic development.

Some Western countries have questioned China's subsidy policies and State-driven approach, which are indeed worthy of discussion. However, purely from a cost perspective, competition in global markets will be a major challenge. In some cases, market shifts driven by economies of scale may make it difficult for latecomers to enter. This requires careful consideration.

On a positive note, China has demonstrated strong innovation capabilities. Looking back, early growth engine sectors like apparel and home appliances gained global significance, followed by robust developments in machinery and equipment. Now, China leads in digital economy and green energy.

During my recent visit to the US, I discussed AI and frontier technologies with US experts. Some claimed that the US and China are technologically equal, but I disagreed. While a significant gap remains, China has built considerable strength in manufacturing.

Recently, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman visited China. In our conversation, he remarked that the US needs more Elon Musks to advance high-end manufacturing, while China needs more Taylor Swifts to drive cultural consumption. Musk relocating Tesla's factory to China underscores the country's appeal in high-end manufacturing. China's advantages include an open market, diligent and creative entrepreneurs and workers, and a comprehensive sup-

ply chain — all critical factors.

Current conditions alone may not be enough to meet future challenges. In the past, China focused on catching up. Now, innovation demands higher standards.

What exactly makes the new growth momentum "new"? China's per capita GDP has risen from \$156 at the start of reform and opening-up to \$12,700 today, nearing the high-income threshold. This means China is approaching the global technological frontier and must increasingly rely on its own creativity.

Harvard Professor Michael Porter has extensively studied national innovation capabilities. He identifies two key factors.

Level of investment: This includes the number of scientists, researchers and R&D funding involved in the undertaking. In AI, for instance, a report showed that the US has 60 percent of the world's AI talent, while China holds 11 percent. Given China's developing status, 11 percent is quite significant, especially since many AI experts in the US are Chinese. China's investment in innovation is growing.

Transformation of investment into high-quality innovation: Beyond investment, Porter emphasized the need for strong intellectual property protection, an open economy and support for private sector firms. Without a thriving private sector, innovation stagnates.

A major challenge lies in maintaining openness. Today's global economy makes complete self-sufficiency difficult.

Recently, I met with Mustafa Suleyman, CEO of Microsoft AI, in Beijing. He mentioned something striking about US elections. Many top executives at Microsoft — especially in AI — aren't even US citizens and thus can't vote. This highlights US openness in talent recruitment, welcoming global expertise regardless of nationality.

As China faces increasing challenges, self-reliance and innovation remain crucial. However, maintaining appropriate openness — if not maximizing it — is equally vital.

Industrial policy remains a topic of heated debate at our institute. In 2016, we hosted a high-profile debate.

However, views on industrial policy have since evolved within academia, government and the public. How should China balance government intervention and market forces? How can it reconcile economic activity with national security? A new equilibrium must be found.

The writer is dean at the National School of Development, Peking University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Guizhou's big data leap valuable reference for regional innovation nationwide

MAIN STREET

By Yang Jun

As China accelerates its push for technological self-reliance and high-quality development, Guizhou province has emerged as a trailblazer in the big data sector, transforming from an underdeveloped mountainous region into a national hub for digital innovation. Its success story offers valuable lessons for other provinces seeking to carve out their niches in the wave of scientific and technological innovation.

More than data basement

Guizhou's big data journey began with leveraging its natural advantages — a moderate climate, stable seismic conditions and relatively low electricity costs — to build massive data centers. According to government data, as of January, it hosted 48 key data hubs, including Huawei's largest global cloud data center in Guiyan New Area in Guizhou. The Chinese high-tech heavyweight aims to deploy 1 million servers in the new area, reflecting its commitment to Guizhou, which serves as a cornerstone of China's "East Data, West Computing" project.

But Guizhou's ambition extends

beyond infrastructure. By integrating data resources with industrial applications, the province has shifted from passively storing information to generating dynamic, industry-driven insights. For instance, Hongwork Technology Co Ltd, a Guiyang-based technology firm specializing in online recruitment, uses AI-powered job-matching systems and a nationwide flexible employment platform to serve nearly 1 million blue-collar workers, demonstrating how data can revolutionize traditional sectors. Similarly, the province's digital government initiatives, such as integrating facial recognition for power top-up services, have streamlined public administration and set benchmarks for efficiency.

During his two-day inspection tour in Guizhou last week, President Xi Jinping underscored the need to strengthen innovation-driven development with the real economy as the foundation. He called for actively developing strategic emerging industries and enhancing industries such as the digital economy and new energy.

In 2024, Guizhou's sci-tech innovation research and development spending exceeded 20 billion yuan (\$2.76 billion) and over 400 new high-tech enterprises registered. These milestones reflect a strategic focus on transforming data into actionable productivity.

Promising blueprint

Guizhou's success is rooted in pro-

active policymaking and ecosystem building. The establishment of Guiyang Big Data Sci-Tech Innovation City exemplifies this approach. With a designated coverage area of 54.8 square kilometers, Innovation City had attracted some 1,500 companies as of end-February, including Huawei Cloud and Aero Engine Corp of China, with policies favorable for innovation and talent. The facility also launched a 15 billion yuan industrial fund to support artificial intelligence, data applications and low-carbon technologies.

Moreover, Guizhou has pioneered data governance frameworks. In 2025, the Big Data Development Administration of Guizhou Province began soliciting nationwide proposals for public data utilization — spanning sectors like healthcare, transportation and green energy — to foster innovation through open collaboration. This initiative aligns with the operation of the Global Big Data Exchange in Guiyang, China's first data trading platform, which has facilitated transactions worth 7.5 billion yuan since its establishment. Such policies underscore the importance of institutional innovation in unlocking data's value.

Expecting more

Guizhou's sector-specific breakthroughs provide actionable blueprints. For example, in terms of the smart low-altitude economy, Guizhou Tuzhi Information Technology Co Ltd, a geospatial data firm which develops AI-powered

systems for drone route planning and weather simulation, aids industries like logistics and agriculture. Its partnership with universities and provincial labs illustrates how niche technologies can address regional needs.

Also, by processing ethnic cultural elements into digital assets, Guizhou is exporting its heritage via platforms like digital film rendering, creating a "culture + tech" global narrative.

Peng Benqian, a manager at Guian New Area Science and Technology Innovation Industry Development Co Ltd — a high-tech business in Guizhou that runs the Guian Supercomputing Center — said the company has provided post-production services for over 100 films and TV shows, including Chinese animated blockbuster *Ne Zha 2*.

The firm's services enhance visual realism, impact and dynamism using techniques such as color correction, compositing, animation, blending and segmentation. These processes transform ordinary scenes into vibrant and engaging content, boosting a work's visual appeal.

"The data volume for a 3D animated film can exceed 250 terabytes. It would take 600 years to complete if rendered on a single server. But with thousands of servers working simultaneously, it can be done in just a few months," Peng was quoted by Xinhua News Agency as saying.

In addition, amid the national efforts seeking carbon neutrality

before 2060, green transition is growing into another major sector. The integration of big data with green initiatives shows how tech can align with green development goals.

For example, Guizhou has started using robots to conduct routine inspections at its power substations in remote mountainous areas, according to the Guizhou branch of China Southern Power Grid.

In Tongren, robots have been deployed to power substations, where they conduct automatic inspection patrols. Once per week, they patrol and check 3,800 points at the station without human intervention, with an accuracy rate of 100 percent.

Road ahead

Despite its progress, Guizhou faces hurdles like talent retention and balancing scale with specialization. However, its commitment to addressing these issues — through initiatives targeting talent service and R&D investments — offers a playbook for others.

Looking forward, Guizhou aims to evolve from a computing power supplier to a standard-setter in emerging fields like AI and blockchain. This vision requires continuous policy agility and global engagement, such as attracting overseas rendering projects and participating in international tech alliances.

And for other regions, Guizhou's experience highlights the need in many sectors. First, local govern-

ments should tailor policies to local strengths. Whether in energy, agriculture or manufacturing, different regions should identify sectors where data can drive leapfrog growth.

Second, there should be cross-sector alliances. Partnerships between local governments, enterprises and research institutes — as seen in Guizhou's collaborations with universities and national labs — are critical for translating R&D into market-ready solutions.

Third, for any region nationwide, be it a hinterland or coastal area, the path of openness is a must. Data sharing and other interregional projects can balance resource disparities and foster win-win growth.

Guizhou's journey from a data hinterland to a national innovator could be deemed as a valuable example that shows the path forward. But it should also be made clear that Guizhou's transformation underscores that technological advancement is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Instead, it demands a blend of strategic foresight, policy experimentation and grassroots innovation.

As China pushes for new quality productive forces, regions nationwide should identify their unique value propositions — be it in data, green tech or advanced manufacturing — and cultivate ecosystems that turn potential into prosperity, and proposals into profits.

The writer is a senior reporter with China Daily.