

Biggest show ever

Consumer expo expected to hit all-time high with 4,100 brands BUSINESS, PAGE 10



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Shining Brightman

Soprano enchants Beijing fans as Sunset Boulevard premieres LIFE, PAGE 14

CHINA DAILY

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Picture of unity



European leaders and officials pose for a group photo during a summit on the Ukraine crisis hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron (front row, center) at Elysee Palace in Paris, France, on Thursday. Leaders of nearly 30 countries plus NATO and European Union chiefs met for talks on security guarantees for a ceasefire between Russian and Ukraine. LUDOVIC MARIN / POOL VIA REUTERS

China, France to join hands in tackling global challenges

By ZHAO JIA zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

China and France issued a joint statement on Thursday on climate change to mark the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, reaffirming their steadfast commitment to advancing multilateralism and deepening cooperation to tackle pressing global challenges.

The statement, released after talks between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noel Barrot in Beijing, highlighted "providing appropriate solutions to major challenges of the era within a multilateral framework".

Analysts said the joint statement pointed to a stronger level of engagement between China and Europe to tackle major global challenges and oppose protectionist moves.

Barrot's two-day visit, which started on Thursday, marks his first trip to China since taking office as French foreign minister and the second meeting between the two ministers in less than two months. On Friday, he is due to travel to Shanghai for meetings with local officials and business leaders.



French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot (left) visits Beijing Language and Culture University on Thursday. He is on a two-day visit to China. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

In a separate meeting with Barrot on Thursday, Premier Li Qiang highlighted the need for both nations to strengthen communication and cooperation, in order to inject greater stability and certainty into bilateral and global development. Barrot said that France opposes trade wars and is willing to work with China to

uphold multilateralism and jointly address global challenges such as climate change.

During a joint news conference with Barrot, Wang affirmed China's support for France's hosting of the Paris Agreement's 10th anniversary commemoration, saying that China will send a high-level delegation to the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice in June.

Both sides expressed their dedication to upholding multilateralism against unilateralism, fostering dialogue and cooperation to counter bloc confrontation, and pursuing mutual benefit to prevent decoupling and supply chain disruptions.

As founding members of the United Nations and permanent members of its Security Council, China and France are seen by officials and analysts as bearing a responsibility to exemplify major-country leadership, strengthen strategic coordination and maintain world peace and stability.

Wang emphasized that the two nations should enhance strategic coordination, support each other's key multilateral initiatives and strive for a fairer, more equitable global governance system to prevent a return to the "law of the jungle".

Wang underscored the enduring relevance of the "China-France spirit" — characterized by independence, mutual understanding, foresight, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation — not only for the two countries but also for the world.

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Innovation to further drive nation's growth

Thriving of promising sectors poised to present opportunities for Asia and world

By CAO DESHENG in Boao, Hainan caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang said on Thursday that the Chinese economy is growing steadily with a stronger outlook despite many difficulties and multiple challenges, thanks to its increasing capacity to drive growth through innovation.

He made the remarks in a keynote speech delivered at the opening of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025, which was held in Boao, Hainan province, with the theme "Asia in the Changing World: Towards a Shared Future".

Ding said that China's firm commitment to the innovation-driven development strategy has notably boosted its innovation capacity.

"We will move faster toward greater self-reliance and strength in sophisticated science and technology, facilitate the integrated development of technological and industrial innovation, and foster and expand emerging and future industries, even as we transform and upgrade traditional industries," he said.

"In my view, apart from the rapidly developing new energy vehicles, other sectors such as artificial intelligence, biomanufacturing, quantum technology and the low-altitude economy will also thrive in China. They will offer opportunities not only for China, but also Asia and the world," he added.

Ding expressed his optimism about the Chinese economy, saying that China is among the world's fastest-growing major economies.

"In January and February, our economy got off to a steady start: The key indicators for industry, consumption and investment all grew faster than in 2024, continuing the upward momentum seen in the fourth quarter of last year," he said.

Speaking about China's GDP growth target of around 5 percent this year, he said the target is based on rigorous projections and methodical planning, underpinned by the country's growth potential and favorable conditions, and supported by its robust policy measures.

"China is confident of realizing its goals and tasks for social and economic development, and it will contribute to the development of Asia and the world," he added.

Ding reiterated China's commitment to deepening reform and opening-up across the board, in order to deliver a more business-friendly environment.

"We will accelerate the implementation of landmark reform measures, better leverage the leading role of economic structural reform, and refine institutions and mechanisms to better support high-quality development," he said.

Noting that opening-up is a distinct hallmark of Chinese modernization, Ding said that no matter how the external environment changes, China will open wider to the world.

While steadily expanding institutional opening-up and further improving market access for foreign investors, the country will expand voluntary and unilateral opening-

up in a well-ordered way, he said. "We warmly welcome businesses from all countries to invest and operate in China, join in the process of Chinese modernization and share in China's development opportunities," he added.

Lawrence Jin, leader of Deloitte Global Chinese Services Group, highlighted China's progress in boosting innovation and improvement in its business environment.

"Over the past half a year, China's innovation has gained significant global recognition. I believe this will not only support the next wave of globalization for Chinese companies, but also boost the confidence of multinational companies in further investing in China and participating in its innovation ecosystem," he said.

"Meanwhile, we are pleased to see continuous enhancements in the business environment for both private enterprises and foreign-invested companies. I firmly believe that this will be crucial in strengthening confidence," Jin added.

Abdulrahman Al-Fageeh, CEO of Saudi Basic Industries Corp, a petrochemicals manufacturer based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, said he is upbeat about China's economy and his company will continue to expand its presence in the country.

"Speaking of economic development, there are few countries that can match China. Over the past years, China has accounted for more than 30 percent of the global GDP. All of its economic dynamism explains our success in the Chinese market for more than 40 years," he said.

In his speech, Vice-Premier Ding called on Asian countries to work together to strengthen solidarity and cooperation through greater mutual trust, promote economic globalization through openness and integration, seek prosperity and development through mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, and safeguard tranquility and stability through peaceful coexistence.

"We should make full use of regional cooperation mechanisms in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, push for high-quality implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, work toward the signing of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol and promote regional economic integration and connectivity," he said.

Prime Minister of Laos Sonexay Siphandone highlighted the role of China in guiding regional and global cooperation, as mounting geopolitical tensions continue to have an extensive impact on global development.

He said the development of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative has proved that it is a bond for promoting mutual connectivity in Asia and Europe, as well as a boost for regional shared development and global progress.

Ouyang Shijia contributed to this story.

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Talks revive hopes of collective prosperity

WORLD WATCH By Wilson Lee Flores

reminder of the region's potential to lead the world toward stability and shared prosperity.

It also evokes the glorious epochs of East Asian history, such as the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Song Dynasty (960-1279) and Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when the region stood as a beacon of harmony, innovation, mutual respect and Confucian moral values.

Tang Dynasty, often regarded as a golden age of Chinese civilization, was marked by an open and inclusive approach to diplomacy, trade and cultural exchanges. During this period, China wielded its vast wealth and power to foster a thriving network of relationships across Asia.

Japanese and Korean scholars, merchants and artisans traveled to the Tang capital of Chang'an — modern-day Xi'an in Shaanxi province — bringing back not only goods but also ideas, art and technology that enriched their societies.

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HUMANITIES STUDIES TAKE BACK SEAT AS AI SURGES AHEAD

Cutting of university liberal arts enrollments sparks heated debate among academics

By ZOU SHUO zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn



Fudan University's decision to slash its humanities enrollments by up to half and expand its tech-focused programs has sparked a fierce academic debate about the value of humanities subjects in the era of booming artificial intelligence.

The strategic pivot by the Shanghai-based university mirrors moves by Peking and Tsinghua universities to boost undergraduate intakes in AI and related fields. This is despite Fudan being celebrated as a traditional stronghold of the humanities.

At this year's annual session of the National People's Congress in Beijing, Fudan University President Jin Li, who is also an NPC deputy, revealed plans to restructure the engineering departments into six

innovation colleges specializing in integrated circuits, intelligent robotics and advanced manufacturing. Although new humanities programs will emerge, their overall share of admissions will be reduced from 30 to 40 percent to 20 percent, he said.

Public reaction to the announcement has been divided.

Supporters have applauded the tech-oriented shift, arguing that AI dominance leaves mediocre humanities graduates uncompetitive in the jobs market. Others have mourned the potential erosion of Fudan's humanities legacy.

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PAGE TWO

Education: Humanities is still irreplaceable



ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

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The debate encapsulates China's developmental crossroads: balancing immediate tech demands with preserving the humanities "soul" of its elite education tradition.

Qiu Xin, Party Secretary of Fudan University, said at an earlier work conference that the university's humanities programs remain 'cornerstone' advantages, and their foundations won't be compromised. The reforms aim to elevate educational quality while meeting national priorities, he said.

Focusing on demand

The trend extends beyond Fudan, with elite higher education institutions like Tsinghua University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University recently announcing plans to expand student enrollments this year, heavily favoring strategic science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields including AI, robotics, and digital economy programs.

Zheng Shanjie, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, said at a recent news conference there are plans to increase the total enrollments at elite universities by 20,000 this year.

Tsinghua was the first university to announce its enrollment expansion, which will see it increase its undergraduate enrollments by 150 this year. The university is actively pushing to cultivate AI talent, and expansion is a major step toward realizing the goal, the university said.

Peking University announced that it will also enroll 150 more undergraduate students this year, with a focus on information technology, engineering, and medicine.

In the past five years, the two universities have enrolled around 3,500 undergraduate students annually, making the 150 jump a notable increase.

The moves follow the country's overall academic restructuring initiative. A plan issued by the Ministry of Education and four other departments in 2023 said the country will optimize 20 percent of its university majors by 2025, with one of the aims to meet industry needs.

The recent Government Work Report stressed the need to improve the structure of disciplines at elite universities. It also emphasized strengthening China's innovation ecosystem and efficiency through science and education.

Experts said compared with previous expansions of university enrollments, the latest round is more targeted and reflects China's intensifying tech rivalry with the US, particularly in semiconductors and AI, where domestic players like AI startup DeepSeek are driving innovation.

Wang Feng, director of the Institute of Education Mechanism and Institutional Reform at the China National Academy of Educational Sciences, said the latest enrollment expansion plan is more structured and focused on basic disciplines, cross-disciplines, and emerging sectors.

Ding Gang, a senior researcher at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China, said the 140-member research and development team at DeepSeek had an average age of 28 and almost all of them attended domestic universities. This reality upended a long-held belief in the tech sector that scientists should go to the United States for higher education.

More than 80 percent of the R&D team graduated from Tsinghua and Peking universities and less than five percent are from overseas universities, with core members still pursuing doctoral studies, he said, adding that the young team is indicative of the restructuring of the global innovation map.

The innovation and breakthroughs achieved by the team are testimony to the changes made by domestic universities to move away from rote learning to education that emphasizes critical thinking and cross-disciplinary experimentation, he said in a WeChat post.

The success of DeepSeek is not by accident, but it is inevitable thanks to China's strategic investment, he said. In the past 20 years, the development of research funding at Chinese universities has grown 15 percent annually, Ding said.

In quantum computing and AI, the paper citation rate of Chinese scholars is already in top spot globally, he added.

Global trend

Humanities subjects are facing similar academic decline around the world.

OECD data shows enrollment in the humanities has witnessed a significant decrease in 80 percent of its member nations over the past decade.

At the US Ivy League college Harvard, its arts/humanities cohort shrank from 15.5 percent to 12.5 percent over the past decade while Britain's University of Kent announced last March that it would phase out six programs, including philosophy and art history.

On the career front, China's humanities graduates are confronting stark realities.

STEM graduates command significantly higher starting salaries, according to a report by Beijing-based education consultancy MyCOS. For 2022 college graduates, software engineers could earn a 7,056 yuan (\$976) monthly salary compared with 5,374 yuan for visual design, the report said. Among China's 10 highest-earning degrees

in 2022 there were no humanities majors.

Experts predict as China upgrades its manufacturing sector toward smart production, demand will surge further for talent in the fields of semiconductors, new energy, and biomedicine.

Meanwhile, AI advances through ChatGPT and DeepSeek threaten to automate entry-level humanities work involving language processing and data synthesis, they said.

Zhou Yisu, an associate professor of the faculty of education at the University of Macau, said he supports less well-known universities cutting liberal arts enrollments.

In past university enrollment expansions, less reputable universities had admitted many humanities students, but one must seriously reflect on what value they had created for the students and society as a whole, he told the Paper.cn.

The issue is a global one and is not unique to China, he added.

Advocates for liberal arts

Other academics, however, warned against sidelining the role of the humanities needed to cultivate critical thinking and cultural literacy.

Song Baoliang, vice president of Wuhan

University, told China News Service that the development of AI has impacted almost all disciplines. However, he believes the humanities will live on, as they are significant in understanding language and personal spiritual pursuits.

"I often tell my students that interest is the most important thing. No matter which major they choose, AI cannot replace a human's role," he said. "What we can do is develop ourselves, learn more, embrace AI and new technologies, and integrate AI into different majors for upgrades."

Feng Yuanzheng, head of the Beijing People's Art Theater, said he used DeepSeek to write a film script, which he considered of reasonable quality.

"However, the script lacked warmth, human warmth, and it is not what I want," he said. "I think technology is limitless, yet it is limited in how people use it, not the other way around."

Zhou, from the University of Macau, said top universities still need to maintain a certain number of humanities majors.

Elite humanities talent is irreplaceable in the age of AI. Many technology companies hire humanities graduates for product design and user research, he said, adding that Deep-

Seek had also hired liberal arts majors.

With the emergence of AI, job requirements may become more demanding, yet the demand for talented humanities graduates remains. Top-notch humanities talents are characterized by their wide-ranging knowledge, erudition, self-motivation, strong communication and coordination skills, as well as a high sense of responsibility, Zhou said.

It is difficult to accurately predict what majors will be in demand and develop in the future. The emphasis has moved from big data to the current focus on AI, both hot majors, which is a reflection of the continuous evolution in higher education demand, he said.

"There are indeed concerns about overheating in the current construction of AI programs, a point with which I strongly agree. The key lies not in chasing trends but in consolidating the quality of education," Zhou said.

Funding and resources are not the core issues for the development of higher education in China, he said.

"The central question is: 'What should the curriculum framework be? How can we do better?' This goes beyond the simple dichotomy of liberal arts and sciences; the core issue is whether there can be high-quality higher education."

Losing your faculties? 'Hybrid' talents can create their own destiny

By ZOU SHUO

Liu Yao, 25, is a postgraduate student in journalism and communication at the Hunan Normal University.



As a 25-year-old journalism and communication major, I've been wrestling with mixed feelings since hearing about Fudan University's cuts to liberal arts enrollments.

I chose the humanities simply because I loved them since childhood — devouring

novels, obsessing over historical intrigues, and chasing answers to philosophical questions like "Who am I?" These weren't just academic interests. Reading *The Dream of the Red Chamber* taught me to decode human relationships, while studying communication theories helped me dissect viral social media phenomena. To me, the humanities aren't just school disciplines — they're tools for understanding humanity itself.

Yet Fudan's decision makes practical sense, and that's what stings. With China urgently needing tech talent in fields like AI and semiconductors, adjusting enrollment ratios seems logical. As their president noted, society doesn't need that many liberal

arts graduates, and trimming "less relevant" programs sounds reasonable.

But I worry that this sends a dangerous signal.

The "useless liberal arts" narrative keeps gaining traction online, but I find them one-sided, reducing our value to employment statistics while ignoring what we uniquely offer. Can AI address algorithmic bias's ethical dilemmas? Can it appreciate the anguish in Chu Ci's verses? These require humanistic thinking.

The job market reality hits harder. At campus recruitment fairs, I'd watch engineering students get snapped up while we humanities graduates queued for scarce positions. Competing for a copywriter role

once during undergraduate studies, I faced dozens of applicants — all with solid portfolios and internships, making it very hard to stand out. Our pink-tasseled graduation caps felt like a "badge of disadvantage". A bitter joke circulated: "Life can be an open field, but humanities graduates walk a single-plank bridge."

All the jokes and banter reflect a brutal truth that it is not easy to find jobs for humanities graduates, let alone high-paying jobs.

But maybe crisis breeds reinvention. Fudan's emphasis on interdisciplinary studies points the way. What if we combine our strengths with tech skills? Learning basic coding or data analysis could make us

"hybrid talents" — communicators who understand AI ethics.

Ultimately, I believe the humanities' true worth lies beyond spreadsheets. Our training in critical thinking, cultural insight and nuanced communication — these can't be automated.

As Fudan's president said, mature societies need the humanities more, not less. But we must evolve. Instead of clinging to traditional paths, let's become "hexagonal warriors" who discuss Socrates at morning meetings and debug Python code by afternoon.

The challenge isn't just to survive the STEM tide, but to prove why humanistic perspectives remain irreplaceable in shaping our technological future.

TOP NEWS

Forum focuses on cutting-edge technology

Conference offers opportunities for scientific innovation, collaboration in various fields

By DU JUAN
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Advanced technology and top scientific achievements are in the spotlight at the 2025 Zhongguancun Forum Annual Conference, which opened on Thursday in Beijing, attracting over 1,000 guests from more than 100 countries and regions.

The five-day event, also known as the ZGC Forum, features 128 activities in five major areas: forums, technology trade, achievements, innovation competitions and supporting events. This year's theme is "New Quality Productive Forces and Global Science and Technology Cooperation".

While addressing the forum's opening ceremony, Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing said that China is willing to work with other countries to explore new models of mutually beneficial and win-win sci-tech cooperation, in order to drive the development of new quality productive forces amid the deepening new round of sci-tech revolution and industrial transformation.

The vice-premier also called for joint efforts to leverage sci-tech innovation to lead the development of new quality productive forces and address global challenges such as climate change.

"The forum is highly international, which is a great platform for global science and technology researchers to communicate their views and young technology company leaders to seek opportunities," said Suliman Almazroua, CEO of Saudi Arabia's National Industrial Development and Logistics Program, who attended the opening ceremony.

"I would use 'innovation through collaboration' to summarize this forum," he said. "There are people from various sectors, and we can find potential partners here."

Almazroua, who is in Beijing for the first time, said he is eager to see more at the event.

This year's conference places a strong emphasis on cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, life sciences, green development and basic research.

Sixty parallel forums will be held, with 20 initiatives launched for the first time, including the Open Science International Forum and the Ocean Science and Development Forum. More than 30 international organizations and institutions are co-hosting 18 events, with numerous leaders participating in discussions.

Ma Juan, CEO of Steinbeis Sus-

"The forum is highly international, which is a great platform for global science and technology researchers to communicate their views."

Suliman Almazroua,
CEO of Saudi Arabia's
National Industrial Development
and Logistics Program

tainable Technology and Management Beijing Co, noted that this year's forum focuses on cutting-edge technologies.

"In the past year, we selected 12 cutting-edge technologies among the 60 globally to cooperate deeply with local Beijing companies, which has promoted a local industrial upgrade," Ma said.

AI and humanoid robots are major highlights at this year's forum and have generated significant interest among the participants, who can encounter robots at the forum venue engaged in such activities as serving drinks, answering questions, delivering items and even writing calligraphy.

Nearly 100 robots from 15 companies are deployed at the site, according to the organizer.

"We aim to make the Zhongguancun Forum's annual meeting a grand stage for the concentrated display of new technologies, products and scenarios," said Jin Wei, vice-mayor of Beijing.

At the forum's opening ceremony, the National Natural Science Foundation of China released a list of the country's top 10 scientific advances of 2024. The list includes the Chang'e 6 mission's lunar samples, which revealed volcanic activity on the far side of the moon dating back 2.8 billion years, as well as the realization of intelligent reasoning and training using large-scale photonic computing chips.

The annual selection of China's top 10 scientific advances began in 2005, said Dou Xiankang, director of the foundation.

With an enduring focus on innovation and development, the forum, founded in 2007, has evolved into a national-level open innovation platform as well as an international forum.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



A robot shakes hands with a guest on Thursday before the opening ceremony of the 2025 ZGC Forum Annual Conference in Beijing. Nearly a hundred robots from 15 companies are actively offering services at the annual meeting. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



Delegates attend a subforum on the South China Sea during the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan province on Thursday. The subforum featured topics such as the code of conduct in the area, regional cooperation and environmental protection. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Nations called on to cooperate on South China Sea

By CAO DESHENG in Boao, Hainan
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Officials and experts attending the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference have underlined the need for the countries involved in the South China Sea issue to resolve their disputes through dialogue to promote peace, friendship and cooperation in the South China Sea.

They made the remarks on Thursday at a subforum, themed "Illuminating the Blue: Building the South China Sea into a Sea of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation", held on the sidelines of the annual conference.

They warned external countries not to stir up trouble, create disruptions or provoke confrontations in the region that would affect the peace and stability of the South China Sea.

Vice-Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong said that China remains

committed to being a stabilizing force in promoting the peaceful development of the South China Sea, while firmly safeguarding its national sovereignty, security and development interests.

While calling for the resolution of maritime issues through bilateral negotiations, he emphasized the need to prevent external forces from interfering in and destabilizing the peace and stability of the South China Sea.

"For the South China Sea to be stable and for its issue to be resolved, external interference must be eliminated," Chen said.

China is willing to work with all parties to comprehensively and effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and strive to achieve a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea by 2026, he added.

China has established maritime dialogue mechanisms with all coun-

tries involved in the South China Sea issue. Last year, it signed an intergovernmental document on joint maritime development with Indonesia. Consultations on the Code of Conduct are accelerating, and the third reading of the text has been completed.

Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, director-general and senior official for Association of Southeast Asian Nations cooperation at Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that Indonesia and ASEAN emphasize the peaceful resolution of disputes and the achievement of maritime stability through diplomacy and international law.

This approach includes the full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties and strengthening negotiations with China to reach a substantive Code of Conduct by 2026, he said.

Zheng Yongnian, dean of Chinese

University of Hong Kong's School of Public Policy in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, said the South China Sea issue is intertwined with the broader geopolitical environment.

It is crucial to not underestimate the disruptions to the world order by the new presidential administration of the United States, he said, adding that countries involved should address the issue within the larger framework of maintaining stability and development in Asia.

Nguyen Vu Tung, a senior adviser and former president of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, said the foreign policies introduced by the US in recent weeks seemingly tend to alter the existing international order, which is likely to have an impact on the future development of the South China Sea issue.

The fact that Washington takes Beijing as a competitor makes things more complex, he added.

Talks: Meeting signals commitment to common goals

From page 1

Japan, for instance, adopted Tang-style governance, architecture and writing systems, while Korean kingdoms such as Silla maintained close ties through trade and diplomacy.

This era of cross-cultural exchanges laid the foundation for a shared East Asian identity, one that valued win-win cooperation over conflict and mutual benefit over zero-sum competition.

The Song Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty further solidified China's role as a regional leader. The Song era saw unprecedented advancements in science, technology and commerce, with revolutionary innovations such as gunpowder, compass and paper currency.

The Maritime Silk Road, which flourished during the Song and Ming periods, connected China with Southeast Asia, India and beyond, creating a vibrant economic ecosystem that benefited all participants. The Ming Dynasty's treasure voyages, led by Admiral Zheng He, exemplified China's willingness to engage with its neighbors on equal and friendly terms, fostering trade and cultural exchanges rather than conquest.

These historical precedents demonstrate that when East Asia is united by a vision of shared progress, it can scale extraordinary heights. The Tang, Song and Ming dynasties were not only periods of Chinese prosperity but also eras

when the region as a whole thrived through cooperation, robust trade and dynamic cultural exchanges.

Modern opportunities

Fast-forward to the present, and the challenges facing the region are starkly different but no less urgent. The specter of a US-China trade war, the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, the provocations of certain Taiwan-based politicians, attempts to excessively militarize East Asia through costly arms races and defense blocs, and the lingering scars of historical grievances have often strained relations between China, Japan and the ROK.

Yet, the recent trilateral meeting in Tokyo suggests a willingness to transcend these divisions and focus on common goals. Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya's emphasis on guiding the region "from division to cooperation" is a powerful statement of intent, one that echoes the spirit of East Asia's golden ages.

The areas of cooperation outlined — addressing low birth rates, aging populations and economic challenges — are not only pragmatic but also deeply symbolic. They reflect a recognition that the fates of the three nations are intertwined and that their collective strength lies in their ability to work together. Wang's call to "constantly unearth the potential for cooperation" is particularly poignant, as it underscores the untapped opportunities that lie ahead.

Of course, historical grievances cannot be ignored. Wang's reminder that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) is a sobering acknowledgment of the past. Yet his insistence that the future can only be built on sincere reflection offers a path forward. Similarly, Japan's and the ROK's recent efforts to move beyond their own historical disputes, such as the issue of wartime conscripted labor, demonstrate that reconciliation is possible when there is political will.

The trilateral cooperation also has broader implications for the region and the world. As the United States under President Donald Trump continues to pursue an unpredictable and often isolationist foreign policy, the need for Asian nations to take the lead in shaping their own destiny has never been greater. By working together, China, Japan and the ROK can not only address their own challenges but also serve as a stabilizing force in an increasingly fractured global order.

Shared future

The potential for this partnership is immense. Imagine a Northeast Asia where Chinese industrial capabilities, Japanese technological expertise and the ROK's innovation are combined to tackle issues such as climate change, energy security and public health.

Picture a region where cultural exchanges and educational programs revive the inclusive and cosmopolitan spirit of the Tang Dynasty, fostering a new generation of leaders who see themselves as part of a shared East Asian community. Envision a future where the lessons of history are not a source of division but a foundation for unity.

This is not a utopian dream but a realistic possibility, one that is within reach if China, Japan and the ROK can maintain their commitment to "future-oriented" cooperation.

As the world watches, the three nations have the opportunity to write a magnificent new chapter in the story of East Asia — one that honors the legacy of their past while embracing the boundless promise of a brighter, more harmonious future.

In a world that often feels adrift, the rekindling of this trilateral partnership is a reminder that even in the darkest times, the seeds of hope can take root. Let us hope that this time they will grow into a mighty tree whose branches shelter not just Asia, but the entire world.

The author is an economics and politics analyst, an award-winning columnist for the Philippine Star and Abante newspapers, a book author, college professor, and moderator of the Pandesal Forum. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Visit: Sino-EU cooperation far outweighs competition

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He defined independence as rising above ideological and geopolitical divides, resisting external pressures and hegemony, and fostering state-to-state relations based on equality and mutual respect in line with the UN Charter.

Wang further called for abandoning zero-sum thinking, rejecting the

notion of systemic rivals, and embracing open cooperation and free trade to foster peace through development.

Barrot said that France views China as a key partner, steadfastly upholds the one-China policy and supports free trade.

During the talks, both sides agreed to hold three high-level dialogues on strategy, the economy and

finance, and to promote people-to-people exchanges this year.

They committed to deepening cooperation in traditional sectors such as agriculture and nuclear energy, while exploring new opportunities in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence and the digital economy.

Wang welcomed the recent uptick in investment by French

companies in China, while expressing hope that France would ensure a fair, transparent and predictable business environment for Chinese companies.

As this year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the European Union, Wang said that cooperation between Beijing and Brussels far outweighs competition, with shared

interests exceeding differences, creating a strong foundation for further progress.

In response, Barrot said France supports dialogue between the EU and China to negotiate and resolve trade differences.

Cui Hongjian, director of the Center for European Union and Regional Development Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said that challenges facing multilateralism and rising uncertainties in the international landscape since the start of this year have elevated

the importance of China-France and China-EU relations.

China and the EU should work together to uphold multilateralism and build up mutual trust and consensus on key regional and international issues, he said.

"The EU should meet China halfway," Cui said. "In trade and economic matters, it should approach competition constructively rather than resorting to unilateral protectionism, which would only deepen mistrust and hinder cooperation in other domains."

CHINA

'Sky Net' drive snares more than 14,000

Sixty-two most-wanted fugitives subject to Interpol Red Notices were among them

By CAO YIN
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China has repatriated more than 14,000 fugitives from over 120 countries and regions in the past decade as part of a sweeping anti-corruption campaign, the country's top graft watchdogs said on Thursday.

Among them, 2,999 were members of the Communist Party of China and government officials, and authorities had recovered 66.62 billion yuan (\$9.3 billion) in illicit assets by the end of last year, according to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision.

Additionally, 62 of the 100 most-wanted fugitives subject to Interpol Red Notices have been returned to China, the commissions said.

"These figures are vivid examples of the remarkable achievements made in the international pursuit and recovery of corrupt fugitives and illicit proceeds," the commissions said in a statement, summarizing the results of the decadelong "Sky Net" campaign.

Originally launched in March 2015, the campaign aims to track down fugitives, recover illegal assets and combat cross-border corruption. It is led by the office for fugitive repatriation and asset recovery under the Central Anti-Corruption Coordination Group.

Guo Jiefang, a former police officer in Guangdong province who was one of China's 100 most-wanted fugitives, returned in June 2023 after 23 years on the run. She was the

first fugitive on the list to surrender since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022, and the 62nd to be repatriated since the campaign's launch.

In November, Xu Haipeng, a former general manager of the legal compliance department at Jiangxi Province Financing Guarantee Group Co, also turned himself in overseas and was repatriated. He had fled less than three months earlier.

This year's Sky Net campaign was launched on Monday, with authorities vowing to maintain pressure on corrupt officials who have fled abroad and deepen international cooperation.

The National Commission of Supervision will lead efforts to recover illicit assets tied to duty-related crimes, while the People's Bank of China and the Ministry of Public Security will focus on cracking down on illicit fund transfers via offshore companies or underground banking networks.

China has also expanded its legal framework for extradition and asset recovery. The office said the country has signed 178 treaties with 83 countries, covering extradition, judicial assistance and asset return and sharing. Additionally, China has signed financial intelligence-sharing agreements with 63 countries and regions.

"We will continue strengthening cross-border anti-corruption efforts and enhancing mechanisms for fugitive repatriation and asset recovery to provide robust support for the ongoing fight against corruption," the office said.

Former adviser and Party chief found guilty of graft

By CAO YIN

Liu Yuejin, a former national political adviser, pleaded guilty to taking bribes while standing trial in Fuzhou, Fujian province, on Thursday.

Liu was a vice-ministerial level member of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body, and had previously served as head of the narcotics control bureau of the Ministry of Public Security.

According to the Fuzhou prosecutors, from 1992 to 2020, Liu took advantage of his various positions, including as the deputy head of the Tianjin Municipal Public Security Bureau's Tanggu branch and head of the ministry's narcotics control bureau, to seek benefits for other individuals and departments in various matters such as business operations and financing, and accepted bribes worth more 121 million yuan (\$16.66 million) in return.

With evidence provided during the trial, the prosecutors said that Liu should be held criminally liable for accepting bribes. Liu and his lawyer also shared their opinions on the evidence, and Liu confessed to the crime in his final statement.

The Fuzhou Intermediate People's Court said that the verdict will be announced at a later date.

More than 20 people from various walks of life attended the hearing.

Liu, 66, began his career in 1974 and joined the Communist Party of China in 1977. He had a long tenure in the anti-drug sector and became head of the Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission in May 2015.

He also served as the ministry's commissioner for counter-terrorism from December 2015 to June 2020.

Liu led a special task force to investigate the Mekong River incident in October 2011, in which 13 Chinese crew members aboard two cargo ships were killed by the "New Kham Group" in the border area between Myanmar and Thailand.

In March last year, he was investigated on suspicion of seriously vio-

lating Party disciplines and national laws.

Separately, Mo Hua, former Party chief of Yulin, a city in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, was sentenced to life in prison for accepting bribes of over 117 million yuan, a regional court announced on Thursday.

Mo was also deprived of his political rights for life, with all his personal assets confiscated, according to the ruling made by the Hezhou Intermediate People's Court in Guangxi.

The court ordered that his illicit gains and any interest earned from them be turned over to the national treasury.

From 2011 to 2023, Mo was found to have taken advantage of his positions, including as deputy mayor of Laibin and deputy head of the Guangxi regional development and reform commission, to seek benefits for individuals and departments in matters such as project contracting and mining license application approvals, the court said.

In return, he accepted bribes worth more than 117 million yuan, it noted, adding that some of the bribes were not obtained.

"Mo's behavior has constituted the crime of bribe-taking and should be harshly punished, as the amount of the bribes he took was extremely huge," it said.

As he confessed and voluntarily disclosed some acts of bribery that the investigating authorities were not yet aware of, and because some of the bribes were not actually obtained, he avoided a death sentence, it added.

Mo, a 60-year-old native of Guangxi, began his career in 1984 and joined the Communist Party of China in 1989. He spent decades working at various regional departments in Guangxi. In August 2021, he became Party secretary of Yulin city.

Mo was placed under disciplinary and supervisory investigation in March 2023. In January last year, he was expelled from the CPC and removed from public office.

The court heard the public case in April.



Health campaign

A baby, accompanied by its mother, undergoes a free cardiac ultrasound examination in Moyu county in Hotan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Wednesday. A special campaign to screen for congenital heart diseases in children by the Chinese Red Cross Foundation was launched in Hotan on Tuesday. As of 11 pm on Wednesday, a total of 912 children have undergone screening, 122 of which will be sent in batches to Shanghai for surgical treatment.

TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Improved connectivity drives growth in Xizang

By Palden Nyima and Daqiong in Lhasa

The Xizang autonomous region's modern transportation network, spanning more than 120,000 kilometers of highways along with expanding rail and air links, is driving economic growth, social progress and deeper integration with the rest of China.

By the end of last year, Xizang's total road mileage had reached 124,900 km — nearly double the figure in 2012 — marking a significant milestone in the region's transportation infrastructure, according to the regional transportation authority.

Rural connectivity also saw major progress, with 309 rural road projects completed last year. The projects added 17 townships to the paved road network, raising the township connectivity rate to about 98 percent. The total rural road mileage reached 94,800 km, said Dawa Ngodrub, deputy head of the region's transportation department.

Dawa Ngodrub recalled the

region's past, saying that 70 years ago, Xizang, known as the "roof of the world", was a place where high mountains and large rivers posed formidable barriers.

"In the plateau's pastoral areas, people relied on primitive and ancient transportation methods like post roads, cableways and rafts. Material exchange was a labor-intensive affair, mainly relying on people and livestock carrying goods," he said, adding that it was a major bottleneck restricting regional development.

Xizang ended its long-standing isolation in 1954 with the simultaneous opening of the 4,360-km Sichuan-Xizang and Qinghai-Xizang highways, marking its first highway access. On July 1, 2006, the full operation of the Qinghai-Xizang Railway ended the region's railway-less past. Since then, an expanding network of roads, railways and air routes has driven Xizang's socioeconomic transformation.

Following the Qinghai-Xizang Railway's inauguration, the Lhasa-Shigatse Railway, an extension of

it, started operations in 2014 and was upgraded to high-speed service in 2021, reducing travel time between the two cities from eight to nine hours by car to two hours and 20 minutes by train.

The Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway, Xizang's first electrified railway, entered service in June 2021. Major cities such as Lhasa, Lhokha, Nagchu, Shigatse and Nyingchi are now connected by main railway lines, with the region's railway operation mileage expected to reach 1,187 km by the end of last year, data from the department showed.

The impact of these transportation advancements is deeply felt at the grassroots level. Lhatse, a 31-year-old forklift driver from Shigatse working at the Lhasa West Freight Station of the Qinghai-Xizang Railway, is a prime example.

He started working as a loader in 2012, and as freight volume grew following the 2014 opening of the Lhasa-Shigatse Railway, he learned new skills and earned a forklift operation qualification certificate. With a stable monthly income of more than 10,000 yuan (\$1,376), he encouraged his brother and uncle to join the industry. The railway has not only boosted his career, but also improved his family life.

"This year, I bought a car," he said proudly.

Lhatse also praised the improved transportation network. "Before, poor transportation meant my family couldn't visit me," he said. "Now, with the train from Shigatse to Lhasa taking just over two hours, they visit annually and even tour the Potala Palace before heading home."

The railway has also helped migrant workers like him balance farming and work, with more than 100 fellow villagers now working as

loaders at the Lhasa station.

In Changkar village, Dingri county, Kunga has also benefited from the improvements.

"The journey from our village to Shigatse, once 10 hours by car, is now less than four hours, and the trip from Dingri county to Lhasa, which took six days by truck two or three decades ago, now takes just eight hours," said Kunga.

Better roads have also revolutionized access to medical services. "In the past, serious illnesses often meant a long and risky trip to Shigatse or Lhasa, and some poor families had to rely on local remedies," he said. "Now, reaching a hospital is much easier, and living standards have improved."

With improved access to railways, the region has seen growth in the tourism and logistics industries.

According to China Railway Qinghai-Xizang Group, by February this year, the Qinghai-Xizang Railway had transported more than 38.75 million passenger trips in and out of Xizang and 925.63 million metric tons of goods.

The Lhasa-Shigatse Railway has seen 15.47 million passenger trips and has carried 58.284 million metric tons of goods, while the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway has facilitated 3.69 million passenger trips and hauled 11.37 million metric tons of goods.

This year, Xizang will expand investment in transportation, enhance logistics efficiency and reduce costs, aiming to further promote high-quality growth, said Dawa Ngodrub, deputy head of the region's transportation department.

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A view of the Lhasa-Nyingchi Highway in the Xizang autonomous region on Sept 3. JIGME DORJE / XINHUA

China's internet and video sector gaining intl fame

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu
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China's internet audio and video industry is growing in global influence, with Chinese applications accounting for more than a quarter of downloads in the top 100 audio and video apps worldwide and 30 percent of their total revenue last year, according to a new report.

The report, released on Wednesday in Chengdu, Sichuan province, showed China's short video user base reached 1.04 billion by December, covering 93.8 percent of all internet users in the country.

China's mini-drama user base surged to 662 million by the end of 2024, with a penetration rate of 59.7 percent among internet users. Users spent an average of 101 minutes daily on mini-dramas, rivaling instant messaging platforms, it said.

Zhou Jie, deputy secretary-general of the China Netcasting Services Association, said China's internet audio and video industry, driven by short videos and mini-dramas, is becoming a major global player.

Chinese mini-dramas have particularly excelled in overseas markets, serving as cultural vessels that carry Chinese stories to the world."

Zhou Jie, deputy secretary-general of the China Netcasting Services Association

"Chinese mini-dramas have particularly excelled in overseas markets, serving as cultural vessels that carry Chinese stories to the world," Zhou said.

Chinese apps secured 20 spots in the global top 100 audio and video apps in terms of revenue last year, with 11 new entrants — eight of them mini-drama platforms, the report said.

China's mini-drama industry

generated 50.5 billion yuan (\$6.95 billion) in revenue last year, surpassing domestic box office earnings for the first time, according to a separate report jointly released by the China Television Drama Production Industry Association and other institutions.

Wang Xiaopei, an associate professor at Beijing Jiaotong University's School of Languages and Communication Studies, said some Hollywood directors and screenwriters who previously worked on full-length dramas or films have shifted to mini-dramas.

"With further development, mini-dramas could become one of China's signature cultural exports to the world," Wang said.

She also noted mini-dramas' role in addressing loneliness among seniors. "While we previously focused more on younger users' needs, the demand among middle-aged and elderly users proves equally strong," she said.

A recent survey conducted by her team found that more than 80 percent of elderly respondents watch mini-dramas at least once a week, and 30 percent reported feeling less

lonely from watching them.

Zhang Lei, a professor at the Communication University of China, said mini-dramas and full-length dramas are not mutually exclusive but instead complement each other.

"The robust development of full-length dramas over the years has provided fertile ground for mini-drama's rapid growth," he said. "Meanwhile, mini-dramas can serve as derivative content that brings audience flow to its full-length counterparts."

Li Xuellin, founder and CEO of Enlighten and Two Bit (Beijing) Technology Co, said the success of mini-dramas offers insights for the production and business models of long-form content.

"Mini-dramas have set a model for efficient content production. Now it's time for traditional long-form video to catch up," she said.

China's internet audio and video user base reached a record 1.091 billion by the end of last year, covering 98.4 percent of all internet users, the report said. The industry's market size grew to 1.22 trillion yuan, up 6.1 percent year-on-year.



Shanxi on track to making economic and cultural connections around the world

Province aims to be 'new highland for opening-up of inland regions'

From top: A China-Europe freight train bound for Moscow prepares to leave the Shanxi city of Changzhi on Dec 6. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Taiyuan Wusu International Airport is the leading airborne logistics hub in Shanxi province. XIAN BO / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As one of the hubs of the ancient Silk Road, the North China province of Shanxi is playing an increasingly important role in the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative, is an international development program proposed by the Chinese authorities in 2013. It focuses on connectivity and cooperation among countries and regions throughout the world. To date, more than 150 countries and regions are involved.

Shanxi, known for its international trade developed by the famed Shanxi merchants, had been a key player in international economic and cultural exchanges via the ancient Silk Road during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

In this new era of globalization, the province has positioned itself as "a new highland for the opening-up of China's inland regions". To fulfill this ambition, it has highlighted economic and cultural exchanges with countries and regions involved in the BRI.

One of Shanxi's efforts is to improve connectivity with Belt and Road countries and regions by building convenient land and air transport networks.

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

Taiyuan Wusu International Airport, the leading international airport in Shanxi, for instance, has been expanding its overseas business in recent years.

On Oct 21, a 737-800 cargo plane carrying 11.2 metric tons of local products departed from the Taiyuan airport and arrived in Almaty in Kazakhstan about six hours later. This marked the inauguration of airborne cargo transport between Shanxi and Central Asian countries.

Shanxi now has three airports — in Taiyuan, Datong and Yuncheng — operating international cargo transport services.

Freight train services bound to destinations in Europe, Central Asia and Southeast Asia are an important channel for Shanxi's international trade and economic exchanges.

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

This train, departing from Changzhi city, marked the beginning of China-Europe freight trains in the southeast of Shanxi.

Shanxi has established a regular service network for freight trains to reach overseas destinations. There are 15 routes dedicated to China-Europe freight train services, reaching



Clockwise from top: Two portside loading machines made by Taiyuan Heavy Machinery Group are loaded onto a boat, held in place by two tugs. YAO YI / FOR CHINA DAILY Members of a Shanxi medical aid team pose for a photo during a ceremony to mark a donation of medicine in Togo. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Shanxi performing artists have fun with audience members after a performance in Iceland in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

48 major cities in 16 countries.

The China-Europe freight train service, as well as the train service to other destinations in the world, allows Shanxi-made products to go global at lower costs from their doorstep, enhancing local companies' confidence in pursuing overseas opportunities.

One company benefiting from the better connectivity as a result of the BRI is Taiyuan Heavy Machinery Group. It is a major manufacturer of advanced mining machines and rail transit equipment like smart hydraulic excavators and train wheel sets.

Over the past decade, the company has developed a presence in more than a dozen Belt and Road countries including Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, Turkmenistan, Belgium, Romania and Austria.

In 2024, the company saw a 25.6 percent year-on-year increase in its delivery of export orders and a 25 percent rise in overseas sales revenue. The 18 Belt and Road countries serving as Taiyuan Heavy Machinery Group's

major export destinations accounted for more than 68 percent of the company's exports.

Local financial institutions, including the Shanxi branch of the Export-Import Bank of China and the Shanxi branch of the China Export & Credit Insurance Corp, are also supporting Shanxi enterprises' expansion in Belt and Road markets.

Xin Gang Lian Metallurgy, based in the county of Pinglu, is a major iron alloy manufacturer in Shanxi. It mainly imports ore and other raw materials from Belt and Road countries, with an annual value of more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.38 billion). However, insufficient cash flow to meet the demand has been a pressing concern for the company in recent years.

Learning about this, the Shanxi branch of the Export-Import Bank of China, which is also known as China Exim Bank, immediately offered a credit line of 550 million yuan to the company in March 2023.

"The loan from China Exim Bank Shanxi has not only effectively solved our bottleneck

for development, but also helped us save costs worth millions of yuan a year, because of its preferential interest rate," said Wei Jun, an executive of Xin Gang Lian. "And more importantly, we are being offered access to the bank's lending in the years to come."

Sources from China Exim Bank Shanxi said that the bank has offered loans totaling 57 billion yuan to help local companies build or operate infrastructure, energy and manufacturing projects relating to the BRI.

The Shanxi branch of the China Export & Credit Insurance Corp has offered insurance for 11 new energy-related projects built by Shanxi companies in Belt and Road countries in 2024, including solar farms in Singapore and Eritrea. The insured amount of these projects totaled \$600 million.

One of the aims of the BRI is to build a global community with a shared future, so people-to-people exchanges are a priority in Shanxi's engagement in the initiative.

To help to realize common prosperity among people, Shanxi has strengthened

exchanges in the areas of culture, education and healthcare with countries and regions involved in the BRI.

Shanxi started its healthcare cooperation with Belt and Road countries, especially those in Africa, long before the BRI was launched.

In 1975, Shanxi began to dispatch medical aid teams to Africa. Since then, a total of 1,449 medics in 70 teams have offered their services in African countries including Cameroon, Togo and Djibouti. It is worth mentioning that Shanxi's doctors have used traditional Chinese medicine to successfully treat patients in those countries, contributing Chinese wisdom to the local healthcare industry.

Cooperation in education is another important pillar of Shanxi's exchange with Belt and Road countries and region.

Taiyuan University of Technology and Shanxi University, for instance, have established Confucius Schools in countries including Jamaica, Afghanistan and East Timor, getting local students familiar with the Chinese language and culture.

Shanxi Engineering Vocational College has joined hands with Xin Gang Lian Metallurgy to establish an online training program for the latter's local employees in Zimbabwe, helping them improve vocational skills and those in the Chinese language.

Shanxi Normal University has established a regular collaboration mechanism with some research institutions in the Middle East to promote academic exchanges.

As one of the cradles of Chinese civilization, Shanxi highlights the exchange among different cultures and civilizations. Shanxi Museum, based in the provincial capital of Taiyuan, is a major player in such exchanges.

The museum is planning an exhibition tour in Qatar in April to display the Buddhist cultural relics of the Tianlongshan Grottoes with the help of digital technologies.

The Tianlongshan Grottoes in Taiyuan include 25 caves filled with hundreds of Buddhist statues and relics. Construction on them began during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) and lasted for another five dynasties, representing the peak of grotto art in ancient China.

Replicas made with digital restoration technology will be highlighted at the Qatar exhibition, giving visitors the opportunity to learn more about ancient Chinese culture.

The digital tours of Tianlongshan Grottoes began in 2019, with digitally restored replicas displayed in countries including France, Egypt and Greece.

Shanxi has also launched a friendly cities program to promote international exchanges. To date, Shanxi's cities have forged friendly city relations with 67 counterparts in 32 countries.

Zhang Qi and Wang Ningna contributed to this story.

CHINA



Clockwise from right: A student at Huangpu Flight Academy operates a drone during a training course in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. A student checks a drone at the academy's training ground. A drone is put through its paces at the school. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Students take flight at drone training center

School fosters professional skills needed to grow low-altitude economy

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
in Guangzhou

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With the industry scale of China's low-altitude economy expected to reach over \$275 billion by 2030, schools and training centers are being established across the country to meet the professional skills needed.

In Guangzhou, Guangdong province, drones delivering packages to skyscrapers and urban villages, conducting aerial city tours and inspecting road conditions have become a common sight.

The Guangzhou city government last year released a plan aiming for its low-altitude economy to reach a value of 150 billion yuan (\$20.66 billion) by 2027.

Wen Chaoliang, director of Huangpu Flight Academy, a school that offers drone training in Guangzhou, believes that both the low-altitude economy and his school have great development prospects.

"The school is attracting more and more students with different professional backgrounds and life goals from around the country," he said. "The current drone craze is providing growing opportunities for people, particularly young people wanting to develop their careers."

Located on Changzhou Island at the mouth of the Pearl River, the school has become well-known in the industry and has attracted students from the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing to come to conduct research, Wen said.

In addition to the parcel and food delivery industries, drone operators can also provide services for maritime, fire protection, law enforcement, and government departments and agencies. They also conduct drone evaluation, work for agricultural enterprises such as orchards and gardens, and carry out emergency responses, said Wen.

"Many students can earn more than 10,000 yuan a month in Guang-

zhou by operating drones," he said.

As for some media reports that drone operators can earn as much as 30,000 yuan a month, Wen clarified that such high salaries are only for operators with special professional backgrounds such as surveying and remote sensing.

"With more companies entering the low-altitude industry, the demand for drone operators will continue to surge. Drone operating certification is undoubtedly the key to entering the industry," he said.

Learning how to operate drones takes a long time, Wen said, adding that it demands a lot of training in order for students to overcome numerous difficulties.

"Students first learn with small drones at the school, as large drones pose a certain level of danger when people operate them," he said.

A student needs to receive more than one month of training to pass the exams and be granted a certificate for operating drones, Wen said. With free accommodation provided for students from outside the city, the school charges tuition fees of around 10,000 yuan

for each monthlong course.

Ouyang Boyi, a student at Huangpu Flight Academy from Pingxiang, Jiangxi province, said he is optimistic about the low-altitude industry's prospects. "After graduation, I want to set up a company to provide cleaning services for high-rise buildings in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and I will use drones to solve transportation problems for mountaineering companies," he said.

Li Wei, another student from Hunan province, said drones can be used in many fields such as medical delivery and short distance transportation, and play a role in saving manpower.

Li said that the school provides a good learning atmosphere where students with similar interests can study together and share the fun of learning and operating drones.

Since the school began enrolling students in July, it has already registered more than 100 students. However, the school needs to expand to meet growing market demand, and Wen said he hopes to enroll more than 2,000 students this year.

One student at the school, who is also a mother of two children, said she looks forward to becoming a professional drone operator when her kids have grown up.

"Drones are a good starting point," she said, adding that she chose drones and the low-altitude economy because they are closely related to current trends.

Li Qiaoshun contributed to this story.

Climbing companions give helping hand on push to the summit

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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The sight of porters ferrying goods suspended across their shoulders up and down the steep steps of Taishan Mountain in Shandong province is nothing new, but another occupation on the mountainside has risen to the fore in recent years — climbing companions.

For many wishing to climb, doing so on their own can be a lonely experience, and so, paid-for climbing companions are on the rise and ready to accompany them up the 7,000 stone steps to the peak of Taishan Mountain.

These climbing companions, or *pei pa*, are often locals or university students, and offer physical assistance, emotional support and even local knowledge to weary hikers.

Chen, 26, has been accompanying tourists up the mountain for about a year. He leads a team of 50 to 60 mountain companions, including both part-time university students and full-time professionals.

Charging 600 yuan (\$83) for daytime climbs and 700 yuan for nighttime hikes, Chen and his climbing companions assist tourists — particularly in their struggles up the steep and daunting 1,000-step Eighteen Bends section near the summit.

Chen estimates that it takes him about 30 minutes to carry a client up the final 1,000 steps.

"I've always loved hiking. When I noticed that many girls couldn't make it past the Eighteen Bends, I started offering to carry them up," Chen said.

Last year, he earned 300,000 yuan from accompanying climb-

ers to the summit, he said. However, the job leaves him exhausted, often with little time to eat or rest.

"The physical strain is immense. After each scale, my knees hurt so much that I can barely walk. I'm basically pushing my body to its limits to earn money," he said.

The trend of accompanying tourists on climbs has gained popularity over the past two to three years, with more people offering their services online.

Many of these climbers are locals or students studying in Tai'an, the city at the foot of Taishan Mountain.

Yang Zihan is another of the climbing companions. Inspired by a viral video of a male student carrying a child up the mountain, since August she has transformed from being a livestreamer on Taishan Mountain to a full-time climbing companion.

She has accompanied over 100 clients to the summit, Yang told Chengdu Economic Daily.

Yang's clients primarily consist of male office workers aged 30 to 40. Her climbs typically take four to five hours, depending on the client's fitness level and the time she spends explaining the mountain's history and scenery along the way.

Despite its growing popularity, the work is not without risks.

"These personal guides operate without a platform or formal oversight, relying solely on agreements between the two parties involved. This makes it difficult to determine service quality and pricing, and disputes are hard to resolve through official channels," said Fu Jian, director of Henan Zejin Law Firm.

Liu Na contributed to this story.



Climbers scale Taishan Mountain in Tai'an, Shandong province, on Jan 1. CHEN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Cryopreservation keeps hopes of motherhood alive

Li Ying had always dreamed of becoming a mother, but a medical diagnosis almost shattered that simple wish.

Diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome, a condition requiring chemotherapy, Li was told that the treatment could damage her ovaries and potentially impair her fertility.

Fortunately, she had her ovaries preserved in a hospital cryobank prior to starting the treatment, allowing for reimplantation after her recovery. In 2021, she gave birth to a healthy baby, nicknamed Youyou — China's first "cryopreserved baby".

"It was a miracle!" Li recalled. In February, she turned to her doctor, Ruan Xiangyan, for a second ovarian tissue transplant, hoping to have another child.

So far, ovarian tissue from over 750 girls and women is preserved in the cryobank at the Beijing Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital, Capital Medical University, waiting to be "woken up" and once again serve as the source of new life.

However, these patients are among the lucky few.

"Each year, at least one million girls and women of childbearing age undergo chemotherapy or radiotherapy, yet fewer than one in 10,000 can have their ovaries preserved," said Ruan, founding director of the department of gynecological endocrinology at the hospital.

As a pioneer of ovarian tissue cryopreservation and transplantation in China, Ruan is not only dedicated to advancing the technology but also hopes to ensure that patients are fully informed about the medical risk of ovarian failure, helping them preserve their fertility.



Ruan Xiangyan (right), a deputy of the 14th National People's Congress, registers for the NPC session on March 3. XUE JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Frozen 'Noah's Ark'

Chemotherapy and radiotherapy cause ovarian failure with an incidence ranging from 70 to 100 percent, leading to infertility, premature menopause and other health issues due to insufficient ovarian hormones, Ruan said.

How can these patients preserve both their lives and their ovarian function? "This is a global challenge, and China had long been absent in this field," Ruan said.

After nearly a century of efforts by medical experts and scientists, the breakthrough technology of ovarian tissue cryopreservation and transplantation emerged and gradually matured. In 2004, the world's first healthy baby was born using this technology.

In 2010, while studying in Germany, Ruan was introduced to the technology. "I was overwhelmed with excitement. China needs this so much! My patients will be saved!" she recounted.

Without hesitation, Ruan made up her mind to bring it back to China.

With support from the government and foreign experts, China's first ovarian tissue cryobank was officially established at the hospital in 2012, a frozen Noah's Ark carrying the hopes of future life.

In order to make ovarian freezing services accessible to more people, Ruan has helped train doctors from over 300 hospitals across the country for the past six years. And with collective efforts, a nationwide fertility preservation network has been established, allowing ovarian tissue from across the country to be transported to the cryobank within 24 hours.

Certain preservation procedures have now been included in medical insurance coverage in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

So far, the hospital has successfully completed 41 tissue transplants, ranking at the forefront internation-

ally in terms of success rate.

"All in all, it is most important to make these ovaries function again," Ruan said.

Following the birth of Youyou, China's second "cryopreserved baby" was born in October.

"At that moment, I felt all my efforts have been worthwhile," she said. "Bringing happiness to my patients is my greatest happiness."

Medical disclosure needed

"Do you know how hard this has been for me? I wish I could give her my own ovary..." a mother sobbed uncontrollably.

Her daughter, now 19, was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia seven years ago. She endured grueling chemotherapy and radiation, which saved her life but came at a devastating cost. Her ovarian function was completely lost, and she experienced premature menopause. Her growth stalled at just over 140 centimeters, and her body was as frail as a 70- or 80-year-old woman.

Sadly, cases like this are still all too common in Ruan's consulting room. "The biggest reason is information asymmetry," she said. "As a new technology, ovarian tissue cryopreservation and transplantation is still unfamiliar to many doctors."

In addition, many doctors are unaware of the damage that chemotherapy and radiation can cause to patients, she said. "When faced with a serious illness, they always prioritize saving lives, often causing patients to miss the window for preserving fertility and ovarian function."

"Once patients are informed, many of them and their families will make every effort to preserve fertility and ovarian function," she said. "Howev-

er, over 90 percent of the patients who come to my clinic have already lost the opportunity, which deeply saddens me."

Heartbroken by these tragedies, Ruan is determined to push forward, striving to help save more families already burdened by misfortune.

Over the years, she has been calling for national and local health administrations to mandate that medical institutions fully inform patients and their guardians about the potential severe impact of these treatments on ovarian function and fertility.

Medical institutions should also encourage patients and their guardians to seek consultation on fertility and ovarian preservation methods before treatment and to sign informed consent forms, she said.

Ruan's team once conducted a survey involving 2,000 doctors and patients nationwide. The results showed that 90 percent of respondents believed that if standardized medical disclosure regulations were in place and doctors failed to fulfill their duty to inform, leading to severe consequences such as ovarian failure, they should be held accountable both medically and legally.

This is in the same vein as a medical dispute in Jiangxi province in 2023, where the hospital failed to fulfill its duty of disclosure, resulting in the patient's complete loss of ovarian function. The court ultimately ruled that the hospital must compensate the patient over 110,000 yuan (\$15,300). The legal victory strengthened her confidence. "There must be standardized medical disclosure," Ruan said.

Challenges ahead

Ruan's call resonates with China's broader efforts to boost its flagging population, and fertility preservation technologies are attracting increasing attention.

Beijing Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital is currently the only medical institution in China to have verified the effectiveness and safety of ovarian tissue cryopreservation and transplantation technology, and officially applied it to clinical practices. Meanwhile, an increasing number of medical institutions across the country are conducting experiments with this technology.

Ruan cautioned about the risks associated with ovarian tissue cryopreservation, saying medical institutions lacking experience may introduce risks in various stages, including ovarian tissue retrieval, transportation and freezing.

"Therefore, international guidelines recommend that ovarian tissue cryopreservation should be centralized, as this helps reduce risks, ensures quality control and maximizes the preservation of ovarian tissue viability," she explained.

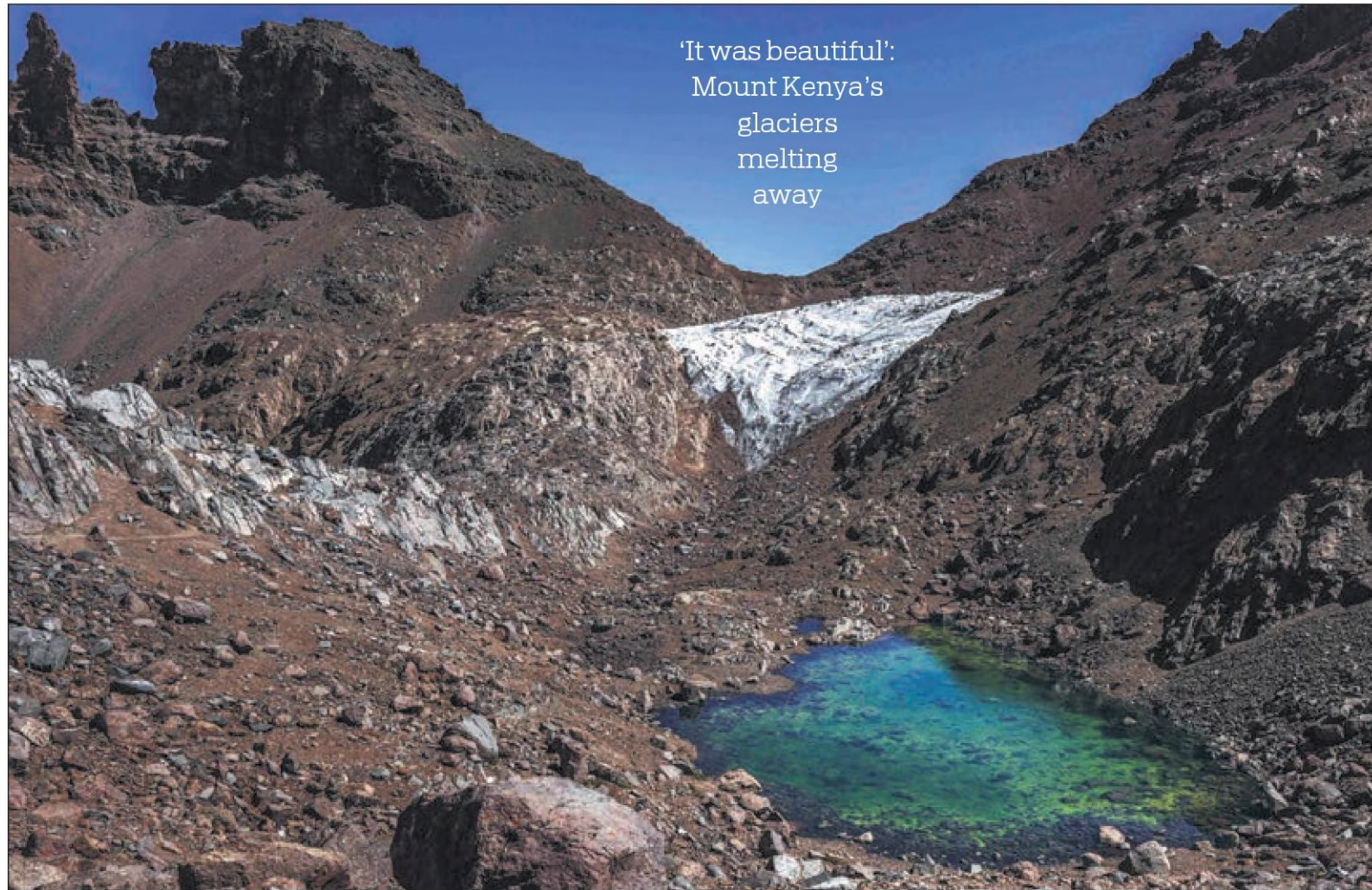
In terms of controlling the risks regarding ovarian tissue transplantation, Ruan pointed out that if clinical tests show clear evidence of malignant disease metastasis to the ovaries or ovarian malignancy, it is not recommended to transplant this ovarian tissue in the future.

So far, there have been no reports of disease recurrence attributed to ovarian tissue transplantation, Ruan said, adding that among the children born from this technology, there have been no noticeable differences compared to other children, but long-term follow-up is still necessary.

Youyou has already celebrated her third birthday and is as healthy as any other child. Every time Youyou affectionately calls her "Nanny Ruan," a warmth rises in Ruan's chest, her eyes misting over. "No matter what difficulties we face, we can't quit halfway," Ruan said.

XINHUA

GLOBAL LENS



'It was beautiful':
Mount Kenya's
glaciers
melting
away

A panoramic view of the melting Lewis Glacier, with a pool of meltwater at its base, in Mount Kenya National Park on March 7. PHOTOS BY LUIS TATO / AFP



A mountain ranger inspects equipment collecting meteorological data at the Met Station in the Mount Kenya National Park on March 5.

Charles Kibaki Muchiri traced the water trickling across the surface of the Lewis Glacier with his fingers, showing how quickly climate change is melting away the huge ice blocks off of Africa's second-highest mountain.

For nearly 25 years, the affable 50-year-old guide has been taking hikers to the peaks of Mount Kenya, nearly 5,000 meters above sea level, and observing their transformation from a landscape of snow and ice to brown rock.

"It was very beautiful," he said mournfully on a recent ascent.

He recalled the ice caves and thick layer of snow that lasted several months on the peaks of this ancient volcano.

The Lewis Glacier once covered one of Mount Kenya's slopes.

The imposing mass of ice visible in archive photos has now been reduced to just two blocks — the biggest only a few dozen meters wide.

Muchiri said he fears the glacier will be entirely gone in a few years, transforming the landscape and discouraging visitors.

His observations are backed up by numerous studies, while scientists have found that ice loss from the world's glaciers has accelerated over the past decade as the planet warms.

The United Nations has warned that glaciers worldwide are melting "faster than ever". It declared 2025 the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation and March 21 the first World Day for Glaciers, highlighting their crucial role in freshwater supply, and urging conservation efforts.

Mount Kenya is one of the only mountains on the African continent with glaciers, and scientists fear that as soon as 2030 it could become one of the first to turn entirely ice-free in modern times.

The Lewis Glacier lost 90 percent of its volume between 1934 and 2010, according to a 2011 study led by Rainer Prinz of Austria's University of Innsbruck.

A satellite study last year, published in the journal "Environmental Research: Climate", found that the surface area of the ice on Mount Kenya was just 4.2 percent of the size compared with the first reliable observations in 1900.

That is in keeping with other African mountains, including the highest, Mount Kilimanjaro, which has just 8.6 percent of its ice surface left, according to the study.



A waterbuck stands on a slope near the Met Station at the Mount Kenya National Park on March 5.

CRUMBLING CRESTS



Mountaineer guide Charles Kibaki Muchiri observes the landscape beside Lewis Glacier near the summit of Mount Kenya on March 7.



Kenyan professional mountaineers and porters cross a river as they approach the foothills of Mount Kenya for a summit attempt at the Mount Kenya National Park on March 6.



Professional mountaineer guide Charles Kibaki Muchiri inspects the flora while hiking through Mount Kenya National Park on his way to the summit on March 6.



Kenyan professional mountaineers approach the foothills of Mount Kenya for a summit attempt on March 6.

Although less well-known than Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site that attracts thousands of visitors each year.

Elephants can sometimes be seen in the dense forest at its base, while the trees give way to verdant hills on the ascent. After long hours of hiking, the brown rocks of the summit appear.

Prinz said the ice shrinkage is down to temperature changes at the surface of the Indian Ocean that transport moisture throughout east Africa, "and, hence, affected by our warming planet."

The mountains no longer receive sufficient snow and are deprived of the white blanket that protects the glaciers from the effects of solar radiation, he said.

"If they don't have that, they will just melt away," he said.

Porter and guide Godfrey Mwangi, 28, said he has already seen many glaciers disappear.

He pointed to a whitewashed cliff overlooking Shipton's Camp at an altitude of 4,200 meters, once covered in a sheet of ice.

The mountain is still home to atypical flora and unique landscapes, Muchiri added, but the loss of glacier ice has put a stop to certain types of technical climbing.

Rivers are also drying up, with consequences for the flora, fauna and residents of the villages at the foot of the revered mountain.

The glaciers were never large enough to constitute significant water reservoirs, according to scientists, but had considerable tourist and scientific importance.

There are other ice blocks left on the mountain, but Prinz said they are now "more or less a pile of ice cubes".

The Lewis Glacier did once have an effect on local water supplies, added Alexandros Makarigakis, a UNESCO hydrologist, but it has become so small that its contribution to the local environment has evaporated.

Makarigakis welcomes projects led by young Kenyans to plant trees around the base of the mountain in the hope of slowing the loss of snow.

But he said it will only delay the inevitable.

"Pretty soon we will have a generation that will never associate Africa with glaciers," he said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Zebras idle at the Mount Kenya National Park in central Kenya on Feb 19, 2023. LI YAHUI / XINHUA

WORLDUS



Denise Scotto (right), a lawyer and international policy adviser, receives the 2025 Global Women Leadership Award at the World Women Organization's Global Women's Leadership Summit at the United Nations. Presenting the award is Jing Zhao Cesarone (center), the summit chair, on March 21. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Leadership summit celebrates women

By MINGMEILI in New York
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Women leaders and entrepreneurs were recognized for their contributions and sharing their experiences and insights at the recent World Women Organization's Global Women's Leadership Summit.

The March 21 summit was held alongside the 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, as more than 100 participants gathered at the Church Center for the UN in New York.

The event highlighted women driving economic, social and political changes worldwide. Twelve women in select fields received awards.

The summit came at a crucial moment for the global women's movement, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the 1995 Fourth World Women Conference in Beijing and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The landmark document continues to be a foundational framework in the fight for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The declaration, adopted by 189 countries, remains one of the most influential global policy documents on gender equality. It outlines strategic goals in areas such as education,

health, economic participation, leadership, media representation and environmental impact.

"Women's leadership is the key to tackling today's most pressing challenges — from poverty to climate change. As global women leaders, we must stand in solidarity, share knowledge, and speak with one voice to advance the rights and dignity of all women and girls," Angela R.M., the director-general of the World Women Organization, said in her speech.

"I call on each of us to renew our commitment to action. Let us build a global sisterhood that uplifts, supports and holds one another accountable. Together, we can accelerate progress, champion policies that empower women and ensure no one is left behind," she said.

"Bringing female leaders together, where they can inspire, empower and mentor one another through mutual sharing, is a platform that enables women to achieve better development and sustainable growth. This has always been my focus and passion," said Jing Zhao Cesarone, the chair of the summit, in an interview with China Daily. "We focus on female entrepreneurship, career development for women and gender harmony for family. We create a platform and community where women can

engage in meaningful dialogues."

Cesarone shared that she personally benefited from the discussions and conferences with her female peers during her younger years, receiving advice from women leaders across various industries. Inspired by those experiences, she strives to continue that legacy and connect even more women globally.

She has been actively promoting discussions to facilitate conversations among women, recognizing the importance of guiding and communications. Cesarone emphasized that cultural exchange among women is also of great importance.

As global businesses and exchanges face uncertainty, Cesarone expressed her desire to help more companies from various backgrounds and regions including China — especially those led by female CEOs — expand internationally and engage in cross-border business opportunities.

"We focus more on the growth women experience in entrepreneurship and business, and as internationalization continues, women now have greater global perspectives," she said.

"In recent years, we have seen an increasing number of women consciously making choices that align

with their ideals, planning their careers independently, and becoming more confident — this is exactly what we hope to see more of.

"In the future, we will hold this summit around the world to strengthen global connections among women, foster mutual learning and inspiration, and provide more opportunities for networking and business collaboration," she said.

"The summit brought together women from various countries and from different walks of life. It was a great platform for women to express their views and come together in sisterhood to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Beijing Platform of Action," said Padmini Murthy, the vice-chair of the summit.

"It was a great experience to serve as vice-chair of the conference and on the committee to select these outstanding women for the prestigious awards presented at the event," she added.

The UNWFO, established in 1975, is dedicated to promoting gender equality, advancing women's development rights and enhancing family responsibility and social harmony globally. It strives to create a more sustainable and inclusive society where women, children and families can thrive.

US property laws' impact felt by Chinese

Bills prompt concern over resurgence of prejudice against Asian Americans

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Laws restricting foreign nationals, particularly Chinese, from owning property are becoming more prevalent in the United States. This has led to a revival in discrimination that has historically targeted Asian Americans, and matters have become worse since Donald Trump became president again in January, experts monitoring these developments say.

Committee of 100, a group based in New York that is one of the most vocal organizations opposing such laws, has warned about the "dangerous comeback" of "alien land laws", that date back a century.

"These discriminatory policies, along with other unfair housing practices, continue to fuel wealth disparities and economic barriers for the Asian American and other minority communities," it said.

According to the group's database, which monitors proposed legislation at both state and national levels, the number of such bills has surged over the past two years. In 2021 and 2022 a total of only 23 such bills were considered; in 2023, 130 bills were considered, and last year 124 were considered.

By March 17, 27 states were considering 84 bills that would restrict property ownership in some way, the group said, and the US Congress is considering seven similar bills. Since 2021, 42 states have introduced 323 bills restricting property ownership by foreign entities, and Congress has introduced 49 such bills.

The figures show a clear pattern targeting Chinese nationals. Of the 372 bills introduced since 2021, 236, or 63 percent, include provisions prohibiting Chinese citizens from owning some form of property, with 18 explicitly singling out China and Chinese citizens.

Among the 38 bills passed into law, Florida's SB 264, enacted in 2023, specifically targets Chinese citizens and prohibits nonpermanent residents from owning any property in the state.

Worsening situation

During a recent webinar examining the effects of alien land laws on fair housing rights, John Trasvina, assistant secretary for fair housing and equal opportunity under former president Barack Obama, said the situation has worsened since Trump regained power.

The current administration recently cut funding for the National Fair Housing Alliance in Washington and other organizations that both Democratic and Republican administrations had historically supported, he said.

It appears to be doubling down on these restrictions. The federal Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins said recently that the

Trump administration is exploring federal solutions to block "the Chinese purchase of our farmland".

Trasvina said that the Trump administration is doing is "a win only for discrimination".

"The state and now possibly federal laws are prohibiting or restricting the rights of non-citizens to buy property, taking us back to an era a century ago when Asian immigrants were denied the right to buy homes and farmland."

Explaining the historical prejudice against non-US citizens, Trasvina said: "Some were wrongly suspected to be security threats because of their ancestry or outright racism. Others were discriminated against for economic reasons."

'Poorly written'

The bills and laws of today are "poorly written and sweep up individuals and families way beyond their intended targets", he said. "Worse, they embolden those in our society who think that all Asian Americans are foreigners."

Hope Atuel, executive director of the Asian Real Estate Association of America, which is based in San Diego, California, talked of her own experience with SB 264 in Florida.

Realtors are placed in the difficult position of determining whether potential buyers are covered by the law, often erring on the side of caution by assuming someone is covered because they have an Asian surname or appearance, she said, opening the door to discrimination against Asian Americans.

Scott Chang, a senior counsel of the National Fair Housing Alliance, said "legalizing housing discrimination has a lot of ripple effects".

"We've seen in history that alien land laws then led to other restrictions. There's a huge potential for there to be discrimination both in housing and in other areas of life."

Discrimination has been deeply embedded in the US system throughout its history, Chang said.

"In fact, many of the US laws, including the Chinese Exclusion Act (of 1882), the Japanese internment act (of 1942), and racially restrictive covenants, were explicitly ... designed to provide opportunities to white people and to simultaneously deny opportunities to people of color."

The effect of these historical policies remains visible today. The homeownership rate for Asian Americans in 2023 was 63 percent, compared with 73.8 percent for whites.

"Given that homeownership is the cornerstone of building wealth in the United States, it's not surprising that the homeownership gap between whites and communities of colors remains large," Chang said.

US expands export controls targeting China's AI

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco

The Trump administration has escalated trade restrictions targeting China's artificial intelligence and advanced computing sectors, marking its first major move to curtail China's technological advancement in those critical areas.

The US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security on Tuesday added 80 organizations to its export blacklist, with more than 50 of them from China, effectively barring American companies from supplying those entities without government permits.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry urged Washington to "stop abusing various kinds of sanctions lists to unreasonably oppress Chinese companies". The diplomatic pushback highlights the growing tension between the world's two largest economies over technological primacy.

Among the notable additions to the "Entity List" are six subsidiaries

of Inspur Group, a leading Chinese cloud-computing and big data service provider. Inspur had previously been blacklisted by the administration of former president Joe Biden in 2023.

Inspur has been a major client for US chip companies, including Intel, Nvidia and AMD, while also maintaining joint ventures with IBM and Cisco within China to serve local businesses.

The blacklisting means those US tech giants face strict limitations on their ability to sell products to Inspur and other companies, potentially losing substantial revenue from the lucrative Chinese market.

For companies like Nvidia and AMD, it represents a further blow, as they had already been experiencing decreased demand for their AI chips in China due to previous export controls implemented under the Biden administration.

The US tech industry has consistently opposed such export controls,

arguing that they not only reduce revenue from one of their largest markets but also potentially harm domestic AI innovation.

In a policy proposal released on March 15, Google specifically called for "balanced export controls" to prevent negative impacts on US exports and global business operations.

AI export rules, including the recent Export Control Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion, may "undermine economic competitiveness goals the current Administration has set by imposing disproportionate burdens on US cloud service providers," said Google in the proposal, adding that "the impacts may be counterproductive".

The tech sector has been particularly critical of the "AI Diffusion" rule, a comprehensive trade measure implemented by the Biden administration in January that limits sales of US AI models and chips to all but 18 "trusted" economies.

Industry leaders have described

the restrictions as unworkable and counterproductive to the US' stated goals of protecting national security while maintaining AI leadership.

Nvidia's vice-president of government affairs, Ned Finkle, warned in January that by restricting Chinese companies' access to US technologies, such export controls could jeopardize global AI progress and "derail innovation and economic growth worldwide".

To understand whether the export controls can secure technological leadership, researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York examined the cost of the restrictions on firms and revealed substantial economic consequences.

The study, published last month, shows that domestic firms affected by the export controls have indeed halted sales to Chinese customers. However, they have struggled to establish new relationships with alternative customers, either domestically or in politically aligned regions.

US auto tariffs seen causing ripples across globe

By HENG WEILI in New York
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US President Donald Trump's plan to put 25 percent tariffs on automobile imports starting next week has raised alarm about costs for manufacturers and consumers in the global market.

American automakers source their components globally, which could complicate how the tariffs are collected. There also is the likelihood of higher costs for car buyers.

"It adds to the uncertainty facing all automakers as the industry's supply chain is inherently global and has optimized around moving components across national borders, where free trade agreements have existed in the past," said John Paul MacDuffie,

professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania.

Trump said at the White House on Thursday that "a lot of companies are going to be in great shape because they've already built their plant, but their plants are underutilized, so they'll be able to expand them inexpensively and quickly".

He said the levies will lead to more factories opening in the United States and the end of what he called a "ridiculous" supply chain in which auto parts and finished vehicles are manufactured across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The tariffs on auto parts covered under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) won't go into effect immediately, until the percentage of

non-US parts is determined in consultation with US Customs and Border Patrol, according to the US Commerce Department.

A truck built in Mexico with 45 percent US content would still face a 25 percent tariff on 55 percent of its value.

The American Automotive Policy Council said in a statement that "it is critical that tariffs are implemented in a way that avoids raising prices for consumers and that preserves the competitiveness of the integrated North American automotive sector".

The group's president, former Republican governor Matt Blunt of Missouri, told The Associated Press that "we have clearly expressed concerns related to prices and other impacts to the administration as

well as our belief that a modernized" USMCA remain in place.

"By mid-April, we expect disruptions. We expect sales to fall, new and used prices to increase, and some models to be eliminated if those tariffs persist," Cox Automotive chief economist Jonathan Smoke told USA Today.

The average cost of a new vehicle in the US was \$49,740 as of December, according to Kelley Blue Book. For a used car, it was \$25,565.

Trump posted Thursday on Truth Social that the tariffs, effective April 3 on automobiles and on parts a month later, are a "liberation day" for the US, posting that for years the US has been "RIPPED OFF BY VIRTUALLY EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD".

The move was welcomed by the

United Auto Workers union, which said it was a "long overdue shift away from a harmful economic framework that has devastated the working class and driven a race to the bottom across borders".

Trump has maintained that tariffs would cause more production to relocate to the United States. He also said that he would like to help car buyers deduct auto-loan interest from their federal income taxes if their vehicles were made in the US.

But US and foreign automakers have plants worldwide, and it could take years for companies to design, build and open the new factories.

The US imported nearly 8 million cars and light trucks worth \$244 billion last year. Mexico, Japan and South Korea were the top sources of foreign vehicles. Imports of auto parts came to more than \$197 billion, led by Mexico, Canada and China, according to the

Commerce Department.

"We will fight the US tariffs with retaliatory trade actions of our own that will have maximum impact in the United States and minimum impacts here in Canada," Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said.

Pierre Poilievre, Conservative candidate for Canadian prime minister said, "Canada First Conservatives will build a Canadian economic fortress to protect our affected jobs and take back control of our economy".

In Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, "Tariffs are taxes — bad for businesses, worse for consumers equally in the US and the European Union."

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said that under the USMCA "there shouldn't be any tariffs; that is the essence of the commercial treaty".

Agencies contributed to this story.

WORLD

Unilateralism benefits no one, experts in Boao stress

By MIKE GU in Boao, Hainan
mikegu@chinadailyhk.com

Far from helping the United States achieve its goal of greater prosperity, unilateralism and trade protectionism pursued by the US government have done harm to both the country itself and the rest of the world, said experts participating in the 2025 Boao Forum for Asia.

Kishore Mahbubani, former permanent representative of Singapore to the United Nations, started his speech with the word "multicivilizational", explaining that this should be a world where there can be many beautiful civilizations, not only one great power. However, US President Donald Trump is walking away from multilateralism, he said.

The US leader is surrounded by people who are very eager to see "America First", said Carlos Gutierrez, former secretary of commerce of the US. Because of this, the world is witnessing the US distancing itself from world institutions, such as the World Health Organization, he added.

"What comes next if the US foreign policy begins to dismantle all the institutions that the US actually helps create?" he asked.

Jeffrey Sachs, an economics professor and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, said Trump's trade policy is surely based on many falsehoods and many basic misunderstandings. As the US is running a large trade deficit, US people have very low savings, he explained.

Sachs stressed: "Tariffs will not solve our fiscal deficit. Tariffs mean tax cuts. That is the mentality of a plutocratic corrupt government."

The Trump administration calls tariffs "protection of the industry", but when the US auto duties were announced, auto share prices of the US fell 5 percent, Sachs said. This will harm the US auto industry, making it permanently uncompetitive, he added.

Countries around the world need to defend multilateralism, as there are 193 member countries in the United Nations, Sachs highlighted.

Speaking of Asia's solutions against unilateralism and trade protectionism, Patrick Foulis, foreign editor of *The Economist*, said in the longer term, Asia needs to build back more trade agreements and try to replace some of the services that the US has provided — such as a currency, a financial system or a set of technologies that everyone can share around the world.

Cui Tiankai, former Chinese ambassador to the United States, said that the global economy over the past half-century has expanded nearly eight-fold, yet the US' share has remained largely unchanged, continuing to hold the largest portion. However, this appears insufficient to satisfy the ambitions of the US.

The real challenge facing the world is how to ensure that a growing global economy and advancing technologies benefit more nations, Cui stressed. The Asia-Pacific region has many values to uphold, including mutual respect, emphasizing shared interests and resolving differences through peaceful means.

"No matter how others adjust their policies, especially amid today's major global shifts, we in the Asia-Pacific must hold firm to our confidence and leverage our strengths", Cui said.

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Neptune's auroras captured in detail by Webb telescope

WASHINGTON — Neptune's glowing auroras have been captured in the minutest detail yet by NASA's James Webb Space Telescope.

Hints of auroras were first detected in ultraviolet light during a flyby of the Voyager 2 spacecraft in 1989. Webb captured Neptune's shimmering lights in infrared light, providing direct evidence they exist.

NASA issued the images on Wednesday, and the results were published in the journal *Nature Astronomy*.

Auroras on any planet occur when electrically charged particles from space enter and collide with molecules in the atmosphere, creating a series of reactions that emit light.

On Earth, auroras tend to occur near the polar regions, producing

spectacular northern and southern lights.

Scientists have studied auroras on Saturn and Jupiter for decades, but Neptune, the farthest planet from the sun, has been harder to see up close.

"Neptune has always been elusive," said James O'Donoghue, a planetary scientist at the University of Reading and co-author of the new study. Its auroras "had only been seen by Voyager, and we've been trying to see it again ever since."

Neptune's auroras occur near the midlatitudes of the planet, not the polar regions, because of differences in its magnetic field — which determine the span of the auroras, said O'Donoghue.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Tech mission

Top leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Kim Jong-un visits the country's Unmanned Aeronautical Technology Complex on Tuesday and Wednesday, the Korean Central News Agency reported on Thursday. XINHUA

Auto industry rocked by tariffs

Hefty levies stand to hit US consumers hard in pocket and hamper production

DETROIT/WASHINGTON — US automakers and their global rivals were rocked on Wednesday by US President Donald Trump's announcement that the US would impose tariffs of 25 percent on all vehicles and foreign-made auto parts imported into the United States.

The new levies, if kept for an extended period, could add thousands of dollars to the cost of an average US vehicle purchase and impede car production across North America.

That will be because of the intertwined manufacturing operations developed by carmakers across Canada, Mexico and the US over the past 30 years. The US imported \$474 billion worth of automotive products last year. Five countries — Mexico, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Canada and Germany — supplied most US auto imports.

The European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described the move as "bad for businesses, worse for consumers", and Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney labeled the tariffs a "direct attack" on Canadian workers and said retaliatory

measures were being considered.

China's Foreign Ministry warned on Thursday that trade and tariff wars benefit no one and that no country can achieve lasting development and prosperity through protectionist measures.

The US practice violates the rules of the World Trade Organization, and undermines the rules-based multilateral trading system as well as the common interests of people from all countries, said Guo Jiakun, a spokesman for the ministry.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said in Tokyo that Trump risked damaging the US economy with additional tariffs.

Lula vowed to lodge a complaint with the World Trade Organization over a trade levy on steel.

In the wake of the news, shares of General Motors fell 8 percent in aftermarket trading. Shares in Tesla, which makes all the cars sold in the United States locally but with some imported parts, fell 1.3 percent.

Trump said the duties announced on Wednesday could be a net neutral or even good for Tesla, adding

that its chief executive, and his close ally, Elon Musk, did not advise him regarding auto tariffs.

In a post on X following the news, Musk said the tariffs would also affect Tesla. "The cost impact is not trivial," Musk wrote in X.

Many trade experts expect prices to initially rise and demand to fall, hurting a global auto industry that is already reeling from uncertainty.

On Wednesday Trump reiterated that he expected the auto tariffs to prompt automakers to boost investment in the US instead of Canada or Mexico.

Fewer options, jobs

Autos Drive America, a group in Washington representing major foreign automakers such as Honda, Hyundai, Toyota and Volkswagen, said the "tariffs imposed today will make it more expensive to produce and sell cars in the United States, ultimately leading to higher prices, fewer options for consumers and fewer manufacturing jobs in the US".

Automakers in North America have largely enjoyed free trade status since 1994. Trump's 2020 US-Mexico-Canada Agreement imposed new rules designed to spur regional content production.

After announcing tariffs of 25 percent on Mexico and Canada early this month, Trump allowed a one-month reprieve for vehicles produced in compliance with the terms of the 2020 trade agreement, which benefited US companies. The new rules do not extend that reprieve.

"Companies that have invested hundreds of millions and billions of dollars on plants in Canada and Mexico will likely see their profits cut dramatically over the next few quarters, if not into a couple of years," said Sam Fiorani, an analyst with AutoForecast Solutions, an industry forecaster in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania.

"We're going to look at adjusting our sales and production forecasts because this will throw everything into chaos."

The White House said that 25 percent tariffs on automotive parts imported into the US would take effect no later than May 3, taxing key items such as engines, transmissions, powertrain parts, and electrical components.

Zhou Jin in Beijing contributed to this story.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Japan weighs its options as carmakers dealt a blow

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo and HOU JUNJIE in Beijing

US President Donald Trump's plan to levy a 25 percent tariff on imported cars and car parts starting next week is forcing the Japanese government to balance its commitment to the US-Japan alliance with the need to protect its economy, analysts say.

The tariffs are expected to worsen the earnings of Japanese automakers and deal a blow to Japan's economy, as automobiles make up Japan's largest export to the US, they said.

Their comments came after Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said on Thursday that Tokyo will consider an appropriate response to Trump's announcement and that he believes all options are on the table.

Speaking at a meeting of the Committee on Budget of the House of Councillors on Thursday, Ishiba said that Japan is strongly urging the US to exempt it from the tariffs. The prime minister argued that Japan has made significant investments in the US and has created substantial employment opportunities. He questioned whether imposing the same tariff on all countries was the right approach.

Automobiles accounted for 28.3



New Toyota vehicles are stored at an imports processing facility at the Port of Long Beach, California, on Wednesday. DAMIAN DOVARGANES / AP

percent of Japan's total exports to the US last year, according to figures from Japan's Ministry of Finance.

Nomura Securities analyst Anindya Das estimated the financial impact of a 25 percent tariff on imported vehicles for 10 major automakers worldwide.

If a 25 percent tariff were applied to all imported finished vehicles, the annual tariff burden on these automakers would increase by \$51 billion. Some automakers could see their

annual operating profits turn negative. According to Das' analysis, companies like Mazda and General Motors — both of which rely heavily on imports from Mexico for their US sales — would face operating losses under the tariffs. Meanwhile, Toyota's operating profit would fall by 30 percent, *The Nikkei* reported.

A sharp increase in tariffs could lead to lower sales and profits in the US. If domestic automobile production — a key industry in Japan —

declines, the overall Japanese economy could be adversely affected, according to *The Asahi Shimbun*.

The automotive industry is undergoing a major transformation due to electrification and digitalization. *The Nikkei* reported that if US and Japanese automakers are burdened with higher costs due to tariffs and see their profitability decline, then their ability to invest in innovation will be further constrained.

While Japan considers its political relationship with the US to be of utmost importance, the forthcoming tariffs are forcing the government to balance its commitment to the US-Japan alliance with the need to protect its economy. To mitigate the economic impact, Japan is increasingly turning to East Asian cooperation as a means of stabilizing its economy, said Kumiko Haba, former vice-president of the International Studies Association and distinguished professor at Josai International University.

"US allies are gradually distancing themselves from Washington in economic matters, leading to a revival of trade and exchanges with neighboring countries," said Haba.

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Canadians turn their backs on the neighbor next door

By YANG GAO in Toronto
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More Canadians are rethinking about traveling to the United States as a mix of political tensions, economic policies and consumer attitudes reshape their views of their southern neighbor.

"One major factor is President Donald Trump's policy," said Frederic Dimanche, director of the Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management in Toronto.

"The fact that he started to impose tariffs on Canadian goods, the economic trade war."

Trump has also repeatedly said Canada should become the 51st US state.

Dimanche said such rhetoric has left many Canadians feeling uncomfortable and angry.

"Some people in the past few weeks have canceled vacations, have canceled trips or have not made reservations. We know from tour operators, travel agencies and airlines

that reservations for the United States have been down."

Michael Dorne, 47, of Toronto, said he had planned to travel to Los Angeles this month but had canceled his trip.

"When I saw the tariff on us on TV, I figured I'd go somewhere else instead. Why should I go to a country that's hurting us?"

Last month, Flight Centre Travel Group Canada reported a 40 percent decrease in leisure bookings for the US compared with the cor-

responding month last year.

Over the past three months the travel group has experienced a 20 percent cancellation rate on pre-existing trips to the US, with many travelers rebooking for other destinations, said Amra Durakovic, head of communications for Flight Centre Travel Group Canada.

Next month the US is due to begin enforcing a rule requiring Canadians visiting the country for more than 30 days to register and provide fingerprints.

"That's going to be another barrier in the mind of people," Dimanche said.

"People are going to say: 'Oh, now they want us to register. They want us to be fingerprinted.' And that's not going to help the reputation of our neighbor."

However, not all Canadians are staying away, and one of those is Nathan Cromwell, 26, of Toronto.

"I go to the US about twice a month, mostly on weekends — mainly just to eat and hang out with friends. I mean, it's super close. Niagara Falls is right there, and the US is just on the other side. So if it's that easy, why not go?"

Dimanche said a rebound in travel by Canadians may eventually happen, but this is unlikely to happen soon.

The effect extends beyond Canada, he said.

"It's not only Canadians who are reacting. The Mexicans and Europeans are starting to react as well. They are also starting to boycott travel to the United States."

A weaker Canadian dollar is another significant factor, Dimanche said.

"The cost of traveling to the US will grow dramatically, and that's another reason why Canadians will be hesitant to travel to the United States at the moment."

BUSINESS

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Consumer expo expected to be biggest ever

Mid-April event in Hainan to draw more than 1,700 firms, 4,100 brands

By ZHU WENQIAN
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The upcoming fifth China International Consumer Products Expo, to be held from April 13 to 18 in Haikou, Hainan province, is expected to attract the highest number of participants compared with past editions, which points to the confidence of global consumer enterprises in China, the Ministry of Commerce said.

The event, the largest consumer goods expo in the Asia-Pacific region, will become China's first significant international expo this year, and an important platform for the country to further boost consumption and expand high-quality development, said the ministry, the co-organizer of the expo.

In the recently delivered Government Work Report, boosting consumption was listed as a top priority among this year's tasks.

"This year, the expo is expected to attract the participation of more than 1,700 companies and over 4,100 brands from 71 countries and regions. This scale far exceeds the previous four editions," said Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce, at a news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

Hainan Free Trade Port is a pioneer in China's opening-up efforts. An FTP system focused on trade and investment liberalization as well as facilitation will be "basically established" in Hainan by 2025, according to the plan.

The holding of the consumer expo, coupled with the policies of the FTP, is expected to help drive the growth of duty-free shopping, catering, accommodation, and tourism consumption in Hainan, promoting its development into a globally influential tourism and consumption destination, the ministry said.

This year, the United Kingdom will serve as the guest of honor, and the UK, France, Switzerland and Slovakia will showcase their products in the form of national exhibition groups, according to the local government of Hainan.

In addition, different provinces and cities across the country will showcase popular domestic products and time-honored brands. In addition to the exhibition of products, services consumption — such as healthcare and wellness, sporting events and artificial intelligence — will also be highlights of the event this year.

"With the hosting of four editions of the consumer expo, international consumer enterprises have increasingly felt the charm of the Hainan FTP and felt that the door of China's reform and opening-up is opening increasingly wider," said Gu Gang, vice-governor of Hainan.

In the first two months, total retail sales of consumer goods in China reached 8.37 trillion yuan (\$1.15 trillion), up 4 percent year-on-year, and the growth rate was 0.5 percentage point higher than the whole year figure of last year, the ministry said.



Feeding the future

A self-propelled forage harvester on display at a three-day agricultural machinery expo in Hohhot, capital of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. The event concludes on Friday. WANG ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Sachs: China threat narrative 'dangerous' for ties

By WANG KEJU in Beijing and OUYANG SHIJIA in Boao, Hainan

The prevailing view in Washington that China poses a threat to the United States is a mistake with dangerous consequences, a senior US economist warned.

This flawed approach, if left unchecked, risks becoming "a self-fulfilling prophecy of conflict" between the world's two largest economies.

"The Trump administration's decision to impose tariffs on Chinese goods was a deliberate attempt to harm China's economy," said Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned professor of economics and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, in an interview during the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025.

It stems from a long-standing US foreign policy mindset that views China as "an adversary that must be contained" — a concept rooted in the Cold War mentality toward the erstwhile Soviet Union, Sachs said, highlighting the heavy-handed use of tariffs over the past months as a coercive tool to force other countries to bend to Washington's will.

US President Donald Trump said he would consider reducing tariffs on China to facilitate the sale of short-video platform TikTok to a non-Chinese buyer, according to a Reuters report on Wednesday.

However, the reality is that the US market is "no longer as strategically important for Chinese exports as it once was", diminishing the leverage that Washington believes it holds over Beijing, Sachs added.

At the request of the US side, He Lifeng, China's vice-premier and Chinese lead for Sino-US economic and trade affairs, held video talks with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on Wednesday.

He expressed grave concern over the additional US tariffs on Chinese goods over the issue of fentanyl, the Section 301 investigation and proposed "reciprocal" tariffs, stressing that China hopes the US side will soon return to resolving shared concerns through equal consultation.

"The Trump administration's attempt to restrict Chinese direct

exports has led many Chinese enterprises to establish manufacturing operations overseas," said Yao Yang, director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University.

Just like years ago, Washington's attempts to constrain China's technological advancement have not only failed to achieve its objectives, but have in fact catalyzed an even faster pace of progress in the nation's domestic innovation ecosystem, Yao added.

In particular, the recent rise of Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek, Sachs noted, has dealt a blow to the assumption that the US and other high-income countries maintain an unassailable technological advantage over China and the rest of the world.

"The US believed over the last 80 years that it held a monopoly of some technology that would give the country permanent dominance," Sachs said. "When it came to AI and large language models, the US thought it is many years in advance, and then DeepSeek came out of nowhere."

"The emerging and developing

economies will continue to grow faster than the already high-income countries. The gap will narrow. We will be in a multipolar world, and it will be a world in which the benefits of technology are shared much more equally than in the 19th and 20th centuries," he said.

However, Sachs said: "What the US is aiming for is dominance. It's aiming for primacy. It's aiming for hegemony, depending on whatever term you want to use. But this is not a sensible objective."

Indeed, the economic fallout from the "America First" doctrine has been far more severe on the US side. The Atlanta Federal Reserve's GDPNow model projects a 1.8 percent contraction in US economic growth for the first quarter of 2025, potentially marking the first quarterly decline since the first quarter of 2022.

"The United States should recognize that China's rise is not only good for China, but also good for the US and the world as a whole," Sachs said.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Hegseth will recognize US' limits in its bid to contain China via regional division

Having already visited Europe, where he openly declared the United States' attention was focused on the Asia-Pacific and underscored Washington's singular fixation on China as a strategic competitor, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has embarked on a visit to Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines and Japan.

This marks Hegseth's first official trip to the "Indo-Pacific" since assuming office, and the itinerary, conspicuously omitting the Republic of Korea, reflects Washington's deepening obsession with containing China. By prioritizing the Philippines — a nation embroiled in maritime disputes with China — over the ROK, the US has effectively signaled its intent to undermine regional stability by escalating confrontations in the South China and East China seas, in a bid to keep China on the back foot.

Hegseth's exclusion of the ROK, ostensibly due to its "uncertain domestic politics", cannot mask the true motive: refocusing Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy on the maritime containment of China. The inclusion of the Philippines, a nation the US has encouraged to militarize its stance in the South China Sea, exposes a deliberate effort to transform the Philippines into a frontline proxy.

The US' rhetoric about strengthening alliances for a "free and open Indo-Pacific" is a thinly veiled justification for rallying its partners to serve US geopolitical interests. By amplifying the Philippines' baseless claims and reinforcing its military presence in Guam and Japan, the US seeks to create a lattice of pressure points against China.

The US has long exploited historical complexities and territorial disputes to manipulate regional actors, most recently in Ukraine. Japan's role as a hub for US military operations and its recent alignment with NATO's expansion into Asia exemplify its subservience to Washington's agenda. Meanwhile, the Philippines, under the current administration, has abandoned its previous commitments to dialogue with China, opting instead for reckless provocations — such as encroachments into Chinese waters — emboldened by Washington's encouragement. The previous US administration's sudden focus on the Philippines and prominent positioning of Japan in its "Indo-Pacific" strategy was less about partnership and more about manufacturing crises to justify increasing the US military footprint in the region.

But while its potential to destabilize the region is the downside of his visit, Hegseth's visit does have a potential upside. His superficial grasp of the region — evidenced by his inability to articulate basic facts about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, such as the number of members, during his nomination hearing — reveals the transactional and insincere nature of US engagement. While the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy is in reality the US prioritizing its own interests over the well-being of the Asia-Pacific by means of a destabilizing campaign that perpetuates division and dominance, there is always the hope that Hegseth might take note of other realities in the region from which the US could benefit.

Rather than a divisive and disruptive approach, he might take heed of the distinctive "ASEAN way", which emphasizes consensus, noninterference and flexibility instead of confrontation and coercion.

Given the dynamism of the region, which is based on its stability and cooperative relations, the US would unquestionably reap greater benefits from more constructive engagement with it.

And as Tokyo will no doubt inform him, it is increasing its engagement with Beijing as there is only so far Japan can go in participating in the US' disruptive agenda, as regional peace and stability are a matter of survival for it, given its reliance on energy imports and maritime trade.

The peace and stability in Asia has been hard-won and it requires the sustained efforts of regional countries to maintain. The US would gain from a change of approach that forgoes its conflict-risking militarization of the region in favor of a more constructive approach that seeks to foster cooperation rather than escalating tensions. By prioritizing diplomatic engagement over military posturing, it could encourage the strengthening of regional partnerships focusing on the environment, trade and maritime safety, and support economic alternatives to resource competition, such as the joint oil/gas exploration agreements that have been proposed.

China remains committed to fostering mutual development and trust with its neighbors, and its growing ability to manage complex situations — coupled with its strategic composure — ensures that any external attempts to derail its development will be met with firm, proportionate responses.

By continuing to try and exploit the maritime disputes between China and some of its neighbors, the US can only expect to see both its image and clout in the region decline.

Asian solidarity stabilizer for a volatile world

As the world grapples with geopolitical turbulence and economic uncertainty, the Boao Forum for Asia stands as a beacon of cooperation, dialogue, and collective progress.

While it brings together leaders, policymakers, and business visionaries to forge solutions to shared challenges, the forum is far more than just an annual gathering of movers and shakers, it is a vital platform for advancing Asian solidarity, sustainable development, and a just multipolar world order.

In an era where some developing countries are retrenching into protectionism and bloc confrontation, the forum embodies Asia's commitment to open regionalism and win-win collaboration.

As an important member of the big Asian family and the host country of the Boao Forum for Asia, China is committed to promoting high-quality development and high-standard opening-up. This year marks the 10th anniversary of Chinese President Xi Jinping proposing the building of an Asian community with a shared future. Over the past decade, Asia has developed into the world's most vibrant economy with strong resilience. China has played a pivotal role in this, not only promoting regional trade and investment, but also stabilizing the international environment. The scale and growth effects the Chinese economy generates provide huge market opportunities for neighboring countries.

According to the Asian Economic Outlook and Integration Progress Annual Report 2025 released by the Boao Forum for Asia on Tuesday, the proportion of the GDP of Asian economies in the world is expected to rise from 48.1 percent in 2024 to 48.6 percent in 2025, calculated by purchasing power parity.

So as the global economy faces rising instability and uncertainty, the international community is paying high attention to what is happening in Asia. The Boao Forum for Asia Annual Meeting 2025, being held in Hainan from Tuesday to Friday, has attracted the participation of more than 1,500 entrepreneurs, researchers and officials from more than 60 countries and regions, who will seek to pool their wisdom on ways to stabilize regional growth, facilitate regional and global trade and promote sustainable development.

To that end, topics such as building trust, maintaining the stability of the global supply chains, strengthening monetary and financial policymaking coordination, developing global free trade ports, exploring the potential of regional free trade arrangements, and cross-border e-commerce cooperation, and steering the healthy development of clean energy industry and green economy are included in the agenda of this year's annual meeting.

These topics themselves and the discussions on them in respective sub-forums during the event reflect the broad consensus of the Asian business community, industrial circles, economic policymakers and researchers that they need to step up their collaboration, exchanges and coordination.

To create the necessary conditions for that to happen, as Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang stressed in his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the event on Thursday, the Asian family should continually strengthen its mutual trust, promote opening-up, carry out win-win cooperation and seek peaceful coexistence.

It is to be hoped this year's meeting will help Asian economies grasp the overriding trend of universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, so that they can make better use of Asia's strengths in manufacturing, resources and technology and the complementarity strengths of regional economies to consolidate the foundation for the sustainable growth of the regional economy and trade.

In doing so, the forum can demonstrate that the future of global development must be shaped by collective wisdom, not the dictates of a privileged few.

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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

More than a rearming policy, EU needs an independent foreign policy

The European Commission recently introduced a ReArm Europe Plan, which proposes to raise €150 billion (\$161.68 billion) in the capital markets for the European Union member states as a loan for increasing investment in defense.

However, France, Italy, and Spain rejected the proposal, insisting that the EU should provide grants instead of loans to avoid adding to their national debt burdens.

Given how the US is shifting its policies toward Europe, reducing dependence on the US and achieving defense autonomy has become a common goal among European nations.

However, there are various challenges to Europe's defense autonomy.

On March 19, on the eve of an EU summit, the European Commission unveiled the White Paper for European Defense — Readiness 2030. At the summit, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said this was a "watershed moment" for Europe and announced an €800 billion "Rearming Europe" plan, of which only the aforementioned €150 billion is real money available as a loan.

Although Von der Leyen's proposal received broad support in principle, the rejection by France, Italy, and Spain shows how EU member states

remain divided on the issue.

These divergences are not without justification. An additional €800 billion is a significant financial burden for the EU nations. As early as March 12, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde had warned in Frankfurt that "Trade fragmentation and higher defense spending in a capacity-constrained sector could in principle push up inflation".

Earlier this month at an emergency summit, 26 of the 27 EU member states signed a joint declaration in support of Ukraine, but they failed to reach an agreement on the specific amount and form of assistance.

Furthermore, Europe's defense industry remains deeply embedded in US supply chains. As the Huffington Post noted in a March 12 editorial, over the past five years, "NATO members in Europe have more than doubled their arms imports. Sixty-four percent of these come from the United States".

Within NATO, European countries have specialized in different military capabilities, resulting in a fragmented defense landscape. Military experts warn that this "patchwork arsenal" not only drives up maintenance costs but also weakens Europe's rapid-response capabilities. The EU is beginning to recognize

that Europe's biggest defense challenge is not geopolitical turbulence but the fragmented procurement strategies of its own member states.

An even greater challenge lies in its mindset. After World War II, with European economies and militaries significantly weakened, the US stepped in with the Marshall Plan to aid Europe's recovery. In 1949, the US spearheaded the creation of NATO, which became the foundation of European security for decades. The belief that "security comes from the US" has long been Europe's greatest vulnerability in defense.

Now, Europe lacks both the strategic decision-making framework and the defense industry capacity necessary to end its dependency. On top of that, overcoming internal conflicts of interest will be major hurdles. A single white paper alone cannot resolve these deep-rooted challenges.

Addressing the European Parliament on Feb 19, Jeffrey Sachs, an economist from Columbia University, emphasized that Europe lacks an independent foreign policy and must develop a "real" and autonomous diplomatic approach that reflects its unique geopolitical context and interests.

That is what Europe truly needs.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Collective misjudgments not collective insights

A main hindrance to repairing the Sino-US relations is that some in Washington stubbornly regard China as the United States' archrival.

The latest evidence is the release of this year's annual US intelligence report on Tuesday, which claims that "China presents the most comprehensive and robust military threat to US national security".

Beijing applying "coercive pressure" against the Taiwan separatists and "wide-ranging cyber operations against US targets" are indications of the country's growing threat to US national security, claims the Annual Threat Assessment by the intelligence community, which supposedly provides an overview of the collective insights of top US intelligence agencies about the security threats to the US.

It is ridiculous that the report uses the Taiwan question as an example to support its "China threat" claim, since Taiwan is part of China, and the Taiwan question is China's internal affair. It is the US playing the "Taiwan card" that poses a grave threat to China's national security, by seeking to undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Likewise, when it comes to cyberattacks and information espionage, it is, as the world sees clearly, the US intelligence agencies that are threats to the national security of other countries. It is well documented what the US intelligence agencies have been doing, overtly and covertly, to take advantage of the country's dominance in the internet and information technology to wage cyberattacks and snoop on other countries,

including US allies, and even the US people, under the excuse of protecting the US' "national security".

While the US is trying to make cyberspace another arena for major power struggle, China is doing the opposite in advocating the building of a cyber community with a shared future for mankind, in which cyberspace is a realm for cooperation, mutual learning and mutual assistance.

A major victim of US-sourced cyberattacks, China actively promotes fair and just global governance in cyberspace, and helps the less-developed countries to overcome the digital gap by helping them enhance internet accessibility and develop their internet economy.

What the US report provides is not "collective insights" of the US intelligence community but its collective misjudgments that are intended to mislead US society and decision-makers in their China perception.

Fundamentally, it is China's fast development these years, along a different path from that of the West, and the momentum it has demonstrated to become the world's largest economy in the foreseeable future that have triggered some US politicians to take a confrontational stance toward China. They take it for granted the US should have undisputed dominion over the world.

After World War II, apart from defeating the Soviet Union in the early 1990s through the Cold War, the US also took organized and systemic measures in the 1980s to prevent Japan from even nearing the US in

terms of economic size, financial prowess and high technology. Now it is China's turn to feel the heat.

But the world today is different from 40 years ago. Not to mention China being a major world trading hub, market, manufacturing base and investment destination means it plays a key role in effect in helping the US sustain its growth.

The reason why the US cannot use exactly the same playbook with China as it did with either the Soviet Union or Japan is it has much closer and broader connections with China. As well as the fact that the resolution of most common global challenges today entails China's support and cooperation.

Any attempt of the US to sever ties with China will backfire as the move is against the trend of the times, market law, the will of the two peoples and the common interests of the world. That explains why the world stock markets always fall at signs of strained relations between the two largest economies.

By hyping up a "China threat", the US intelligence agencies no doubt hope to swell their budgets, as is the case for the US military. But by spending federal funding copying playbooks of the last century and peddling them as up-to-date manuals for how to "make America great again" today, the US intelligence agencies may be setting themselves up as another target of the DOGE ombudsmen, after that body digs out all those who would be over 300-year-old receiving pensions.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Csaba Kandrács

China's financial innovations inspiring

We are living in an era of great transitions, with rapid changes catalyzing and multiplying each other on an unprecedented scale. Apart from the usual pattern of business cycle and geopolitical transitions, there are also new challenges and uncertain pathways. Most of them are related to the rise of artificial intelligence and the pressing issue of climate change.

The digital and green transformation are therefore not simply two processes shaping our daily lives, but two megatrends transforming economics, geopolitics and international relations. In a world like this, maintaining financial stability must remain a top priority as a well-functioning financial system is crucial for channeling funds toward future industries.

Our decade so far is characterized by "the re-rise of geopolitics", including heightened trade tensions, fierce competition in high-tech and a race for new types of resources. The emerging economies in Asia, especially China, are playing a vital role on the global stage and their quick growth has strengthened the voice of the Global South, ushering in a new multipolar world order.

The rise of Asia is underpinned by innovation, as several Asian countries are now at the forefront of developing new technologies. According to the Critical Technology Tracker compiled by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, China is the leader in many high-tech segments, including AI, quantum computing, critical raw materials extraction and processing, drone technologies, and engine manufacturing. In addition, China is building a vast renewable energy supply network, which enhances its competitive edge in the overall transformation needed in the 21st century.

These developments have created new geopolitical challenges. Amid looming trade barriers, it is worth recalling how the multilateral trade system has facilitated global economic growth over the past decades. Taking into account the rise of the digital economy and the nature of AI-based services, retaining the open and free international setting would be in the best interest of all parties. Such an outcome is possible if countries reach an agreement at least on the rules of new-old phenomena such as onshoring, nearshoring, the rush for critical resources and the reemerging concept of economic security.

Likewise, open minds are necessary for rethinking the general frameworks for international dialogue and cooperation. While emphasis should be placed on win-win cooperation, mutual trust and respect for the reasonable interests of the other party, connectivity should be improved, in order to ensure much-needed stability. In this respect, intellectual networks play a crucial role and require a new international consensus, too.

The free flow of knowledge has become critical as global economic powerhouses capitalize on international expertise to scale up their enterprises and raise the living standards of the people. Countries should strike a long-term balance between justified interests in development and the need to find ways to enhance sustainability. By prioritizing cooperative policies, countries can navi-

The circular economy, the large networks of alternative energy supply, the electric vehicles, as well as conservation of biodiversity pose several challenges, but at the same time, offer concrete subjects for discussion. These topics have several well-defined aspects where agreements are both realistic and enforceable.



gating geopolitical tensions while ensuring long-term growth. A renewed focus on preserving and enhancing economic connections will be key to mitigating risks and ensuring cooperation remains a driver of global progress.

Despite the current challenges, however, the global financial outlook has been stable so far. China has introduced a series of measures to safeguard financial stability, with a view to maintaining necessary levels of liquidity in the financial system.

Moreover, the Chinese government has pledged to make consumption the number one engine of growth. A significant rise in demand in China will inject new vitality into the global economy and benefit all players. On the other hand, financial innovation in China is gathering speed with digital payments, a widespread pilot of the central bank's digital currency (e-CNY), and green finance. This is a good example of how innovation in the financial sector, with the right supervision, can ensure the economy's long-term sustainability.

Although geopolitical tensions are rising, the efficient functioning of the global financial markets and the universal need to finance high-tech and green development can be regarded as a basis for constructive international engagement. The circular economy, the large networks of alternative energy supply, the electric vehicles, as well as conservation of biodiversity pose several challenges, but at the same time, offer concrete subjects for discussion. These topics have several well-defined aspects where agreements are both realistic and enforceable.

Besides governments, municipalities and corporations, central banks are also key players in facilitating cooperation. They can add immense value by helping every one identify hidden risks in the complex global financial network. In pursuing their mandates of price stability and financial stability, central banks can contribute to a viable model of international cooperation amid growing geopolitical tensions and rapid technological changes.

The author is deputy governor of Magyar Nemzeti Bank.

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



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Zhang Yongpan

End of serfdom in Xizang worth celebrating

Feudal serfdom was a social system established by lords in feudal society to exploit serfs living in their territories. According to French historian Marc Léopold Benjamin Bloch, the defining characteristic of serfdom was its hereditary status, with lords exercising legal authority over serfs, including the judicial power to punish them. This system was marked by personal attachment and land monopoly, a social structure that once prevailed in Xizang.

The democratic reform in Xizang, initiated in 1959, marks a historical milestone, because it dismantled feudal serfdom that had allowed lords to exploit ordinary people for more than 700 years. The reform granted the people in Xizang dignity and rights in line with the broader trend of social development.

Serfs got freedom following the reform in the Xizang autonomous region, enjoying life in a socialist society and participating in the building of a new social order, with their living conditions undergoing a profound transformation. While the mode of production has undergone a radical change, reli-

gious beliefs coexist harmoniously today with freedom in Xizang.

The year 1959 was a pivotal turning point in the history of Xizang, as it signaled the end of the oppressive feudal rule in the region and gave a new life to more than 1 million former serfs. The reform is comparable to the emancipation of slaves during the American Civil War, the abolitionist movement in Europe, and the dismantling of the apartheid in South Africa.

The liberation of serfs in Xizang was a historic step taken by the Communist Party of China. Given that many European and American countries began abolishing serfdom and embracing modern social norms and principles from the 14th century, the existence of feudal serfdom in Xizang in the 20th century was a stark affront to humankind.

The CPC was committed to abolishing feudal serfdom in Xizang because it represents the interests of the vast majority of the people. From the abolition of feudal serfdom in 1959 to the high-quality development of Xizang today, and the transformation from a grim feudal system to a prosperous new era on the snowy plateau, they are

part of the Party's glorious history.

The CPC's governance policy in Xizang has ensured human rights protection for the people in the region. Aiming for common prosperity, the CPC implemented land reforms by abolishing serfdom, granting millions of serfs freedom and land rights, thereby laying the groundwork for modernization.

However, supported by anti-China forces in the United States-led West, the 14th Dalai Lama clique and certain "Western scholars" have sought to romanticize serfdom in Xizang. The Dalai Lama clique harbors ulterior political motives, while those so-called scholars often ignore the extensive historical records and even the works of Western scholars who conducted social investigations in Xizang. They deliberately glorify the "Era of Shambhala".

The BBC once published a fabricated article distorting the reality of serfdom, absurdly claiming that serfs enjoyed life-long "care" from their masters, enjoyed peaceful sleep and held "iron rice bowl" jobs. Such statements are preposterous. Fortunately, many Western scholars remain clear-eyed. For instance, Canadian

scholar Tom Grunfeld, in his book, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, criticizes the dark realities of Xizang society before 1959.

Humanity shares a collective memory of suffering. In the early 20th century, the US, France and the United Kingdom established museums dedicated to the history of serfdom and slavery and designated days to commemorate their abolition. And the United Nations declared Dec 2 as International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

Sixteen years ago, on Jan 19, 2009, Xizang designated March 28 as Serf Liberation Day. This year the Chinese people will commemorate the 17th Serf Liberation Day. The monumental change on the snowy plateau symbolizes the historic achievement of the Party in leading the people of all ethnic groups in Xizang to overthrow the feudal serf system and stride toward a bright future. It is a moment worth remembering and honoring.

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

Wei Longbao and Xu Wangfang

Rural digitalization helps promote common prosperity

Over the past decade, a digital revolution has swept through China's rural areas, promoting common prosperity. Once isolated, village residents today are tapping into e-commerce and smart technologies to boost their incomes and improve their livelihoods.

From online marketplaces that connect farmers even in remote areas with consumers across the country to high-tech tools boosting agricultural productivity, digital innovation is narrowing the urban-rural divide and transforming rural economies.

The central government has put rural digitalization at the core of its agricultural modernization and rural development policies. In 2013, the government launched the "Broadband China" initiative to extend broadband internet across the country by 2020, laying the foundation for the digital transformation of rural areas. Building on this, the "Internet Plus" action plan of 2015 outlined policies for integrating digital technologies with agriculture and rural industries, and the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) emphasized rural e-commerce, big data and broadband expansion as key development pillars.

Policy momentum further accelerated with the rural vitalization policy in 2017, making technological innovation essential to rural rejuvenation.

The "Smart Agriculture Action Plan (2024-28)" was introduced to digitalize the entire agricultural value chain, from field cultivation to market sales, with the aim of reducing costs and boosting productivity. Thanks to such sustained efforts, rural digital infrastructure has improved dramatically.

Central to rural digital transformation are China's e-commerce giants such as Alibaba and Pinduoduo, and emerging platforms like Douyin. These digital marketplaces have vastly improved rural market access, allowing farmers and village entrepreneurs to directly engage with urban consumers nationwide, and earn higher profits.

Beyond traditional e-commerce sites, short-video and livestream platforms like Douyin (China's TikTok) have become powerful new engines of rural commerce. Through engaging videos and real-time broadcasts, farmers can showcase everything from freshly harvested produce to handcrafted goods, connecting directly with consumers and bypassing middlemen.

Overall, rural e-commerce has become a driver of efficiency. Annual online retail sales in rural areas skyrocketed from just 180 billion yuan (\$24.76 billion) in 2014 to 2.49 trillion yuan in 2023, increasing by another 8.3 percent year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2024, outpacing growth in many urban markets.

In one World Bank study of "Taobao villages" (e-commerce hubs that offer services from online marketing and mobile payments to logistics support), households operating online shops earned on average 80 percent more than their neighbors. By successfully connecting "small farmers to big markets", e-commerce is not only cutting costs but directly boosting farmers' prosperity.

The integration of digital technology on the farm is also transforming agricultural productivity. Smart farming tools, including drones, the internet of things (IoT) sensors and artificial intelligence, are reshaping traditional farm practices.

IoT-based irrigation systems track soil moisture in real time to optimize water use, and AI algorithms help predict pest outbreaks or price trends, enabling farmers to make data-driven decisions. Regions like Henan and Heilongjiang provinces have extensively adopted these smart agriculture techniques, using live data analytics to manage crops more effectively.

Through a mobile app, officials can see the location of each machine and the progress of harvesting in each county. If an area is forecast to get rain — a major threat to ripe grain — the system can immediately dispatch additional harvesters to that location to speed up collection and safeguard the crop.

By preventing losses and reducing inefficiency, such innovations helped China's grain output reach a record 1.4 trillion jin (700 million metric tons) in 2024, the 10th consecutive year of production above 1.3 trillion jin.

China's sustained investment in rural digital infrastructure, e-commerce ecosystems, and smart farming technology has delivered tangible economic gains, dramatically lifting rural incomes and overall prosperity.

The shift toward online business and tech-enabled agriculture has cultivated vibrant village economies, creating millions of new jobs and encouraging many young migrant workers to return home to start businesses.

Digital empowerment has also become a cornerstone of China's poverty alleviation and rural revitalization efforts. E-commerce, in particular, has become a powerful tool for further improving formerly impoverished regions.

Equally important, digital technology is improving public services and governance in rural China. Programs to boost farmers' digital literacy and technical skills are expanding, enabling more rural residents to harness e-commerce and smart farming tools. The government's sustained efforts to digitalize the countryside are indeed promoting common prosperity.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



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

JANUSZ PIECHOCIŃSKI

Double check

Reflecting on 50 years of China-EU relations shows the benefits it has had for both sides and the world at large

The year 2025 is to be marked by the intensity of global changes and diplomatic and economic confrontations. The dynamics of events, especially after the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency in the United States, surpass everything we have seen before.



Each day and almost every week explode with radical events, phenomena, or announcements.

Uncertainty and unpredictability are growing dramatically, while optimism and the willingness to invest are decreasing. In addition to existing challenges and unresolved problems on a scale not seen in a long time, new ones are emerging.

The European Union and China are preparing to organize a joint summit to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations, amid ongoing trade tensions and concerns about Trump's return to the White House. In this context, there is much to be drawn from the 50 years of EU-China relations. It is therefore worth looking at the past and drawing conclusions on what to do and how to do it better than before, not only to manage and ease EU-China relations, but also to bring new impulses for the normalization of relations and cooperation, and to reduce conflicts and anxieties, showing that there is an alternative to confrontation, tariffs or closed markets.

Relations between the EU and China were established in 1975. For many years, the EU was a very

Therefore, it is worth analyzing what 50 years of EU-China cooperation have brought to the world and how to continue developing it.

important trading partner for China, and China was a special trade partner for the EU. In 2020, China surpassed the US to become the EU's largest trading partner in terms of the exchange of goods. In 2023, China accounted for 9 percent of the EU's exports of goods and 20 percent of the EU's imports of goods. The products that the EU imports most from China include electrical machinery, electrical apparatus, electrical equipment, broadcasting equipment and parts for office machines. After the COVID-19 pandemic, China and the EU are each other's second-largest trading partners, with trade volume between the two sides increasing by 1.6 percent last year, reaching \$785.8 billion. In April 2023, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron paid an official joint visit to Beijing to emphasize the special economic ties between the two largest global markets.

Looking at important events in EU-China relations that took place

in the past six months, it is clear that despite the differences in interests or decisions related to protecting their own markets, EU-China relations remain a priority for both sides.

The EU has been signaling a change in its strategy toward China in the face of escalating tensions with the US. While the EU is preparing for intensified trade tensions with the US, von der Leyen signaled a shift in approach toward China. Reaffirming the EU's commitment to "reducing risks", she also emphasized the opportunities to deepen trade and investment ties with China.

The European Central Bank warns that Europe could be a big loser in the trade war between the US and China, which may significantly affect the eurozone. In the face of escalating trade tensions, Mercedes-Benz CEO Ola Källenius proposed strengthening cooperation as a solution to the ongoing dispute between the EU and China.

Additionally, Spain is urging the EU to shape an independent policy toward China in light of the growing trade tensions with the US. New initiatives in EU-China relations, including the summit meeting, provide new impulses for strengthening ties with China.

In Europe, it has been noticed that since President Xi Jinping's visit to France last May, Beijing has been interested in strengthening relations with the EU.

The US-EU conflict over ways to achieve lasting peace in Ukraine and the US' practice of using the "America First" electoral program as a dictate of US power toward Canada, Mexico, the EU and China



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

have created additional political and economic impulses for strengthening EU-China dialogue and cooperation.

This is evidenced by the phone call between President Xi and European Council President António Costa on Jan 14. The European side confirmed the importance of EU-China relations, while President Xi emphasized that "there is no clash of fundamental interests or geopolitical conflicts between China and the EU" and "both sides are partners that can contribute to each other's success". Moreover, President Xi stressed that "China and the EU should enhance strategic mutual trust" as the international situation becomes increasingly severe and complex.

The Chinese side has also highlighted the mutual benefits of eco-

nomic and trade cooperation between China and the EU and the need to foster new growth areas for expanding it.

It is clear that new solutions are being sought in EU-China relations. These initiatives could be a significant factor in reducing emotions and tensions in global diplomacy and economy. Therefore, it is worth analyzing what 50 years of EU-China cooperation have brought to the

world and how to continue developing it.

The author is a president of the Polish-Asian Chamber of Commerce and once served as vice-prime minister and minister of economy of Poland. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ZHU FENG AND LING BANGHAO

Compete without breaking ties

The US' strategic competition with China and push for a 'new Cold War' are not only unlikely to achieve the US' goals but also likely to have negative impacts on both

At the end of 2017, the government of the United States released the National Security Strategy report, declaring the end of the US "engagement policy" toward China and defining China as a "strategic competitor". From 2017 to



Zhu Feng



Ling Banghao

2024, because of a series of policies aimed at containing China, Sino-US relations reached a historic low.

Throughout Donald Trump's first presidency and during the Joe Biden administration, the US policy of strategic competition with China continuously evolved to become fully systematized. This trend won't change in the near term.

In recent years, the voices within the US advocating containing China have been growing louder. The technology war has been a constant thread, emerging as the core means for the US to contain China's development. The Trump administration was more inclined toward unilateralism, with "America First" being its guiding principle, sparing no effort in employing various means to advance its policies. In Trump's first term, the China-related technology strategy tended to exert maximum pressure, with "decoupling" as the main thread. The US coerced its allies into keeping pace with it and employed a range of stringent restrictions on technology, personnel and financial transactions to "strangle" China's high-tech industries.

In contrast, the Biden administration's governing philosophy inte-

grated neoliberal institutionalism with realism. It regarded technology professionals as a key force in strategic planning and actively involved them in making technology strategies. Moreover, many members of the administration were from the pro-establishment political camp of the Democratic Party. Leveraging their long-standing close cooperation with academia, they weighed various factors and developed a more rigorous, rational and feasible technology strategy. Regarding China, the Biden administration adopted a more cautious "selective decoupling" approach. It laid out strategies in key technology areas such as artificial intelligence, 5G, biotechnology and quantum information. It also promoted a high-tech ban or restriction policy known as "small yard with high fences", emphasizing the need to work with allies to build a "democratic technology alliance" and attempting to restrict China's development by shaping international rules. It further intensified restrictions on technological exports to and industrial investment in China through legislation and measures such as export controls, investment reviews, telecommunications licensing and equipment authorization. It also coordinated with allies in an attempt to isolate China in the field of semiconductors.

Judging from the current trend, the US' strategic competition policy toward China faces many restrictions. From an internal perspective, the differences between the US' two major political parties' willingness to cooperate with China are becoming increasingly apparent. In terms of strategic competition with China, the Democratic Party has relatively stable and clear goals, paying great attention to controlling the intensity and pace of competition and showing a strong desire to



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manage it. The Democrats advocate addressing various global challenges such as climate change, public health, debt and food security with China, believing that without cooperation between the two major powers, it's difficult to solve many global problems. In contrast, the Republican Party shows a clear lack of willingness to cooperate with China, arguing that there is a fundamental confrontation between China and the US, which makes it hard for the two sides to collaborate in global governance.

Moreover, the contradictions between the hard-liners on China and US tech giants have already been made public. For example, when the Biden administration imposed chip export controls on the Chinese market, US chip manufacturer Nvidia launched a special

version that does not require an export license.

From an external perspective, the US' efforts to rally its allies to form an encirclement containing China have achieved limited success. Its allies, based on their own interests, have not fully cooperated with it in the political, economic or military fields. In recent years, the US has shown strong uncertainty in its foreign policy and handling of international affairs. In the fields of technology and values, US allies regard China as a "competitor", while in the economic sphere, China is a partner they have to cooperate with. This complex relationship has led US allies to exhibit ambivalence or even multiplicity when formulating their China policies. On the one hand, they need to weigh the uncertainties of the US. On the

other hand, they have to make choices between competition with China and substantial economic benefits. These factors are all internal obstacles to the US' efforts to build encirclement against China with its allies.

It is noteworthy that the various limitations faced by the US in its attempts to once again dominate the high-tech industry chain, further suppress China's sci-tech innovation and high-end manufacturing reflect the reality that it is unable to completely "decouple" with China, the world's largest manufacturing powerhouse. At the same time, these limitations also provide new impetus for China to achieve independent innovation in science and technology. Against this backdrop, the Trump administration has voiced hard-line stances toward China on various occasions. Trump and his team share a clear consensus: They all subscribe to the "America First" doctrine, all aim to maximize US interests in interactions with China, and all advocate the continuation of a strategic competition framework that maintains the basic principle of suppressing and containing China. All these signs show an even more pronounced radicalization trend. Besides, the Trump administration is divided into three major factions: the technocratic elite, China hawks and the pragmatists. These factions have ongoing disputes over core issues, and this internal tension could potentially affect the continuity of policy.

Moreover, one of the focuses of Trump's second term is on reshaping its relationship with the world. From Trump's campaign rhetoric in 2024 to his policy implementation since taking office on Jan 20, China-related issues have so far not been put high on the agenda of the US government. China is seen as both the "greatest competitor" and an

important partner for reshaping the world order based on the principle of prioritizing US interests.

Overall, the Trump administration will remain committed to the "America First" policy and continue to advance the political agenda of "Make America Great Again". Trump's main economic policies toward China in his second term may center on direct suppression, covering four major areas: tariffs, export restrictions, investment restrictions and financial and technological sanctions. Both the scope and intensity of these policies are expected to exceed those of previous policies, with a high likelihood of dense rollout of policies in the short term.

Looking to the future, the trajectory of the US' China policy during Trump's second term is being closely watched. Against the backdrop of ongoing geopolitical upheavals such as the Ukraine crisis and the Israel-Palestine conflict, the US' continuous strategic competition with China and even its push for a "new Cold War" are not only unlikely to achieve the US' goals but also likely to bring negative impacts on itself and the global community. In the future, antagonistic contradictions between China and the US will persist, yet the relations may still remain in a state of "competing without breaking ties". The evolution of the US' policy on strategic competition with China is unlikely to transcend this trend.

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LIFE

Brightman set to dazzle in *Sunset Boulevard*

Soprano delights fans as she returns to China with starring role in musical, **Chen Nan** reports.



Above: Sarah Brightman, the world-renowned soprano, at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre on Sunday to discuss Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard* for its premiere in China. **JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY** **Right from top:** Brightman plays the role of silent film star Norma Desmond in the musical. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**

The room buzzed with excitement, every eye fixed on the door. As Sarah Brightman stepped into the spotlight, the air was filled with the whirl of flashing cameras capturing the arrival of the world-renowned soprano.

Brightman appeared at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre on Sunday to present the performances of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard* for its premiere in China.

The musical, which opened on Thursday at the Beijing Performing Arts Centre, will run until April 13. It then embarks on a national tour, with stops in Shanghai, Wuhan in Hubei province and Shenzhen in Guangdong province.

Brightman remains among the world's most prominent performers, with global sales of 35 million units, and has received more than 180 Gold and Platinum awards in over 40 countries, and garnering more than 1 billion streams worldwide.

At 65, with her soprano voice that blends classical and pop, Brightman has a broad international fan base, including in China. Her ability to seamlessly combine these two

genres has made her popular in markets that appreciate both Western classical music and contemporary sounds.

One of the key events that raised her profile in China was her collaboration with singer Liu Huan at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games opening ceremony, where they performed *You and Me*.

Through her roles in Webber's musicals, such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cats*, Brightman has a loyal following in China, particularly among theater enthusiasts.

"I truly feel honored to be back in China. This country has always been very special to me, and the people have always been so kind and respectful of me and my career," she says.

Sunset Boulevard is a musical that emerged from the golden age of Hollywood, and evokes cherished memories for countless film and theater lovers. The story follows the downfall of silent film star Norma Desmond, played by Brightman, who is sidelined by the rise of talkies. Desperate to make a comeback, she crosses paths with struggling screenwriter Joe Gillis, and their fateful relationship spi-

ral to a tragic conclusion.

Written by Webber and adapted from the 1950s film of the same name directed by Billy Wilder, the classic score is the very soul of *Sunset Boulevard*. Webber's compositional style, which emulates the feel of old Hollywood movie scores, adds emotional depth and musical texture to the narrative. Classic songs like *With One Look*, *The Perfect Year*, and *As If We Never Said Goodbye* will transport audiences into Desmond's world of glory and isolation.

The 2024 production builds on the original's opulent style, merging the cinematic texture, dark aesthetics, and cutting-edge stage technology.

"As an artist and a performer, this has been an incredible role to tackle," says Brightman. "It's beautiful because so much research went into understanding the Hollywood actresses of that time. How they transitioned from the silent era into the talkie era — it's surprisingly relevant to our times. Technology changes so quickly, and many people are left behind."

"Norma has spent years unable to perform, unable to do what she

is so gifted at. It's full of pathos, emotion and deeply upsetting experiences for her," Brightman continues. "I'm playing a woman who has had an international career and who has faced the challenges that a solo female artist must navigate in this world."

The male lead, Australian actor and singer Tim Draxl, as Gillis, is drawing significant attention. The character is a down-and-out screenwriter who has fallen on financial and professional hardship. Struggling to find meaningful work in Hollywood, he becomes entangled with Desmond, the fading silent film star desperate for a comeback in the world of talkies.

Gillis becomes Desmond's screenwriter, and she offers him financial support in exchange for his work on her screenplay. Over time, their relationship grows more complex and ultimately destructive. Despite recognizing Desmond's instability, Gillis finds himself unable to escape the allure of her wealth and the promise of a luxurious lifestyle. Their entanglement leads to tragedy as Gillis becomes trapped in a cycle of manipulation, betrayal and loss.

"I think what our show brings to

the stage is the essence of Hollywood in the 40s and 50s, at its peak during the golden era," says Draxl.

Speaking about his first visit to China, Draxl says: "I've been wanting to come to China for a very long time, so to start this tour in Beijing is a dream come true. The first day I arrived, I walked through the hutongs and around the Forbidden City. What really struck me was China's pride in its history and the preservation of its culture. It's beautiful."

Australian singer and actor Michael Cormick, who plays Max von Mayerling, Desmond's loyal butler, has sparked interest for his portrayal of the "time-traveling butler". Twenty years ago, he played the young Gillis in the same production, and now, with a calm and steady performance, he brings dramatic tension to the role reversal.

"That's one of the gifts of getting older," Cormick laughs. "Playing Joe and his relationship with Norma was wonderful, but playing Max is like being on the other side of the chessboard. It offers a completely different understanding of Norma and their relationship."

Lin Qinghong, associate professor at the acting department of

Shanghai Theatre Academy adds: "From imported classic productions to original musicals, Chinese musical theater is evolving into a vital part of the nation's cultural landscape."

Noting that while the famous production *Sunset Boulevard* is attracting a large Chinese audience, Lin says that what is even more important is: where is the future of musical theater in China headed.

"To achieve the sustained popularity of musicals, relying solely on importing classics is not enough," Lin says. With the rise of immersive and small-scale musicals in recent years, Chinese audiences have shown a strong interest in "small yet exquisite" productions.

"This format helps cultivate local musical theater talent while also offering audiences a more diverse range of choices," Lin says.

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Online
See more by scanning the code.

Documentary gives classic work a modern interpretation

By **FANG AIQING** and **SUN MENG**

Beauty and timelessness, these are what model-actress and director Chang Chunxiao wants to convey through her ongoing Kunqu Opera-themed short documentary project.

The People in the Time Tunnel documents fashion photographer Feng Hai's role as artistic styling consultant on *Romantic Dream in Garden*, a new interpretation of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Kunqu Opera masterpiece, *The Peony Pavilion*, produced by the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre in Beijing.

Chang's documentary captures the way Feng refers to image archives of the Ming Dynasty and reconstructs the appearance of the characters — designing makeup details and the way performers wear their ornaments, for example — how he shot the posters for the adaptation, and his understanding of the traditional Chinese opera form in general.

On Monday, Chang screened a trailer of her documentary shot on iPhones. She also discussed behind-the-scenes stories with Apple CEO Tim Cook. The event took place at Beijing's more than 300-year-old Zhengyici Kunqu Theatrical House, where *Romantic Dream in Garden* made its debut in December.

Written by playwright Tang Xianzu around 400 years ago, *The Peony Pavilion* is a love story that extends beyond life and death, as well as the heroine Du Liniang's search for love



Left: Apple CEO Tim Cook (second right) with model-actress and director Chang Chunxiao (second left) and performers from the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre at Beijing's Zhengyici Kunqu Theatrical House on Monday. **Right:** The Kunqu Opera actresses perform a classic excerpt from 400-year-old masterpiece *The Peony Pavilion*. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**



and freedom in feudal society. The Beijing theater's adaptation was also performed at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in February.

Upon learning about the traditional opera form and watching a classic excerpt from *The Peony Pavilion* performed by actresses from the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre, Cook said in an interview with China

Daily that technology helps expand the audience for traditional culture.

"Our history and culture is very important to understanding the present moment and where we're heading in the future," he says.

"Only a few of us can fit in the theater and enjoy it, but with the video we're able to capture that for the world. It enables us to connect with

our history in a much deeper way and with many more people."

Chang learned Kunqu Opera as a child. Growing up around historical Liulichang Cultural Street in Beijing, which has been home to bookstalls and shops selling ink and writing brushes, calligraphy and antiques since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), she says her early years

were filled with the fragrance of ink and the sound of Kunqu Opera taught to her by the elderly, and this heavily influenced her film.

"One thing I want to explore is how the younger generation of performers at the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre interpret Du from a contemporary perspective and how they understand the past," Chang says.

As the host of a private collection of centuries-old opera costumes, Feng is particularly drawn to the visual elements of opera and constantly seeks inspiration from them.

For example, he says the color combinations of opera costumes from the early 20th century have gradually formed an alternative aesthetic system in his mind. Speaking of the modern development of traditional opera, Feng calls for faithful preservation of the essence of the art form to maintain its authenticity.

"The principle of passing on should be to minimize loss as much as possible," Feng says.

Chang has been thinking about art and time for many years: "Art weaves in and out of the passage of time, yet it never fears time. A truly classic work will not be rendered obsolete by time."

"The Kunqu Opera performers and Feng, whom I have captured in the documentary, are those who endeavor to bring the beauty of the past into the contemporary era. I hope my short film will be passed on to future generations, allowing them to experience this beauty anew."

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Online
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LIFESHANGHAI



Sharing a grand collection



Focusing on their heritage rather than their value, couple presents artifacts spanning more than 3,000 years, **Zhang Kun** reports.

Fourteen years after the founding of their private Long Museum in Shanghai, Liu Yiqian and his wife Wang Wei decided to present some pieces from their most valued collection to the public.

The exhibition *Panorama: Timeless Imprints of Civilization* features a selection of more than 200 artifacts, including oracle bones and bronze vessels from the Shang Dynasty (c.16th-11th century BC), ceramic wares from landmark periods, imperial furniture, and more others that span more than 3,000 years of Chinese history. Some objects have made news headlines in past decades for their exceptionally high auction prices.

Such exhibits include a *doucai* (a porcelain enameling technique meaning "contrasting colors") chicken cup from the reign of Chenghua (1465-87) in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), which Liu bought at an auction in 2014 for \$36 million. Some have not been shown to the public for 10 years, while some are making their public debut, such as the Archaic Bronze Xijia Plate dating back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-771 BC) and a Celadon-glazed Ru Kiln (one of the famed Song Dynasty kilns located in Henan province) Brush Washer from the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

"I don't want to talk about the cost or value of my collection but rather the continued heritage of Chinese civilization through the past three millennia. Collecting is a personal journey but civilization belongs to everyone," Liu said at the opening on March 21. The exhibition will conclude on June 29.

"My husband and I began our collection over 30 years ago," says Wang, who also serves as the director of the Long Museum. "It has been 14 years since we founded Long Museum. Starting from traditional Chinese art, we have gradually built a systematic collection, from classical to modern and contemporary Chinese art, as well as modern and contemporary world art.

"Every piece in our collection



Top: Shanghai's private Long Museum presents its collection of ceramics and assorted treasures. **Center:** A lacquer throne from the Reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736-95), with a pair of lacquer table screens from the 18th to 19th century. **PHOTOS PROVIDED AND BY GAO ERJIANG / CHINA DAILY**

Four must-see exhibits



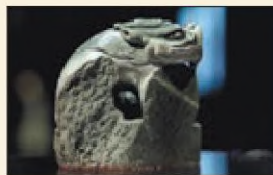
Celadon-glazed Ru Kiln Brush Washer
Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)

Made exclusively for the Northern Song court, Ru Kiln porcelain wares are by far the most celebrated of Chinese ceramics, known for their scarcity and refined beauty. These vessels are characterized by their simple forms and light color described as "blue of the sky after the rain". This brush washer is one of the few Ru wares that have survived today. The vessel has a diameter of 13 centimeters, with a glossy blue glaze and dense ice crackle. It is in near-pristine condition and recognized as a fine example of the *guanyao* or court ware of the imperial Ru Kiln, which existed in



Archaic Bronze Xijia Plate
Fifth year of King Xuan of the Western Zhou Dynasty (823 BC)

The plate, at a diameter of 47 cm, is engraved with an inscription of 133 Chinese characters in 13 rows telling about the life and achievements of a marshal named Xijia who followed King Xuan on punitive expeditions to a tribe in the north, and to collect articles of tribute from tribes in the south. The inscription provides important information for the studies of the period's social structures.



Jade Memorial Seal of the Empress Wen
Hongxi reign (1424-25), Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

This is a fragmented seal with one-half intact. The seal is 10.2 cm tall and 10 cm long. The mottled grayish-green jade seal is sculpted into a dragon squatting on a square pedestal. The fierce-looking dragon has a flattened snout, round eyes and elongated eyebrows flowing backward beside the horns. The base of the seal originally had 16 characters, with only seven characters still remaining: *Tian Qi Sheng Wen Huang Hou Bao*, the posthumous title of the empress. This



Doucai Chicken Cup
Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

The tiny cup stands no more than 4 cm tall with a diameter of 8.2 cm. It depicts a red rooster and a golden hen in the garden with their chicks, a scene that signifies harmonious country life. *Doucai*, which translates to "competing for color" or "contrasting colors", is a variety of decorative porcelain formed by the combination of a blue-and-white underglaze and overglaze decoration.

ZHANG KUN

has been carefully evaluated and selected based on its artistic and historical value," she continues. "Especially for ancient Chinese art, we place a particular emphasis on lineage and provenance, as these works are not merely cultural treasures but also witnesses to history. Over the past three decades, these collections have woven together a string of unique stories that continue to unfold."

Nicolas Chow, chairman of Sotheby's Asia and worldwide head of Asian art, writes in his preface for Liu's collection of Chinese ceramics, "Together with the classical and modern paintings and calligraphies that he has gathered, they form perhaps the most significant collection of Chinese art assembled by a single individual in modern times."

This is the first time for the Long Museum to display so many assorted antiques, such as bones, bronze, jade furniture and ceramics, in an exhibition. As curator of the exhibition, Liu says that he put more effort into this exhibition than any other.

"I wanted to find the best way to showcase these ancient objects in a modern structure made of armored concrete and create a dialogue between art and architecture that transcends time and space," he says.

The main exhibition hall of the Long Museum on the West Bund, one of its three locations, has an impressive 8-meter-high ceiling and a dark interior with lights focusing on each artifact.

Liu especially wants to highlight a half-preserved jade memorial seal fragment of Empress Wen during the reign of Emperor Hongxi (1424-25) in the Ming Dynasty.

"As far as I know, this is the only surviving jade seal from the court of Ming, and it has traces of being burned in a fire," Liu says.

While seals have long been an emblem of imperial power in China, they also tell of the cruelty and sadness behind the change in power and transition of dynasties, Liu adds.

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Flower festival teams tradition with technology

By WANG XIN

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With spring arriving in Shanghai and vibrant flowers blooming across the city, the annual Huazhao Festival held in the city's Yuyuan is attracting visitors in traditional Chinese culture in a modern, dynamic way.

The flower festival, held the second month of the lunar calendar to celebrate the flower goddess' birthday, boasts a history of over 2,000 years. According to ancient beliefs, the flower goddess controls human reproduction, and celebrating her birthday has become a custom to bring prosperity.

Running until the end of April, this year's festival integrates traditional culture with modern technology, offering visitors a feast for the eyes and ears. Colorful light shows, parades of performers dressed as the flower goddess, and dance and musical performances are taking place at landmarks within Yuyuan, including its Central Plaza, Gold Plaza and Jiuqu (Zigzag) Bridge areas.

Decorated with floral elements, the ancient architecture and sets are transformed into stages. With advanced projection technology, the dynamic lights jump to the beat of music on building roofs and laser beams flash across the fog on the lotus pond, creating a vibrant atmosphere.

The music for the light show was



The annual Huazhao Festival kicked off at Yuyuan in Shanghai on March 20, presenting traditional Chinese culture in a modern and vibrant way. **PHOTOS PROVIDED AND BY GAO ERJIANG / CHINA DAILY**

tailor-made for Yuyuan by a French musical team, presenting a unique blend of East and West influences, tradition and modernity.

Against the architectural backdrop, dance and music performances feature *guofeng*, a Chinese style that uses traditional cultural elements. The dance performance in the Central Plaza is a reproduction of a famed painting depicting ladies with floral headdresses in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and the folk music duet in the Gold Plaza blends ancient Chinese music with modern melodies, drawing large crowds.

In addition to the innovative tech-

nologies and eye-catching shows, a slew of interactive activities are offered during the festival, particularly targeting young audiences. Working with the makeup team of Xiaohongshu (RedNote), a popular Chinese lifestyle platform, the festival includes a market offering visitors immersive experiences such as traditional makeup, fragrance sachet-making, flower hair-pinning, hair braiding, an arrow toss and poetry writing.

"We are bringing some of our beauty bloggers and vloggers to the market to share their experiences. There are many visitors from home and abroad and we want to demon-

strate our Chinese traditions and culture," says Xu Tongru from the makeup team at Xiaohongshu.

Wang Qiru, a 33-year-old makeup artist and popular makeup vlogger on the platform, was invited to the market to meet her followers and offer visitors to experience a popular makeup style from the Tang Dynasty. Becoming a makeup artist specializing in restoring ancient makeup styles in 2022, she hopes to help more audiences learn about this art form.

"Most of my clients are 20 to 35 years old, and I have seen more people paying attention to our traditional culture recently. Although

it is easy to gain interest and basic knowledge of traditional culture, such as *hanfu* and makeup, it takes a lot of time and effort if you go deep into it," says Wang, noting that abundant knowledge of ancient Chinese history and culture is necessary for doing such classic makeup.

Zhang Ruiqi, a 19-year-old university student in Shanghai, is one of Wang's followers. Dressed up and doing makeup at Wang's booth, she says she has been fond of ancient Chinese makeup since she was younger.

"I find it interesting to dig into history by restoring ancient makeup

styles. At first, my interest in traditional clothing was triggered by costume dramas but when I learned about real *hanfu*, I felt more fascinated. It's worth studying," she says with a smile.

Foreign visitors at Yuyuan share Zhang's perspective despite knowing little about the festival before attending. Gerald Mohnl, a 57-year-old Austrian, gained a "nice" experience at Yuyuan on his last day of a business trip to China. Making his first visit to the country and Shanghai, he was impressed by the electric vehicles and described the city as "very clean and super modern."

"We went through Yuyuan, which was a really nice experience. There are a lot of traditional buildings here. Chinese culture is interesting and totally different from our culture. It is very comfortable with friendly people," he says.

Susan Willis, an Australian nurse on her first visit to Shanghai, was about to finish her 10-day trip and was impressed by the buildings at Yuyuan.

"The architecture is lovely, traditional and classic. Shanghai is an innovative and spectacular city," she says, adding that she knew little about Chinese culture and felt she learned a lot.



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LIFE

When Daniela Durdic Dedic, first counselor of the Embassy of Montenegro in China, joined over 80 diplomats from various countries to visit an exhibition on *mamianqun*, or horse-face skirts, at the Beijing Film Academy, she was captivated by the beauty of traditional Chinese attire.

The event was part of a cultural salon jointly organized by the academy and the Beijing Service Bureau for Diplomatic Missions, aimed at fostering international exchanges and deepening foreign diplomats' understanding of the Chinese film industry.

More than 100 ambassadors and senior diplomats from over 50 countries attended the event. While one group of guests visited the exhibition, some tried doing voiceovers in the sound studio while the rest watched a short film in a theater.

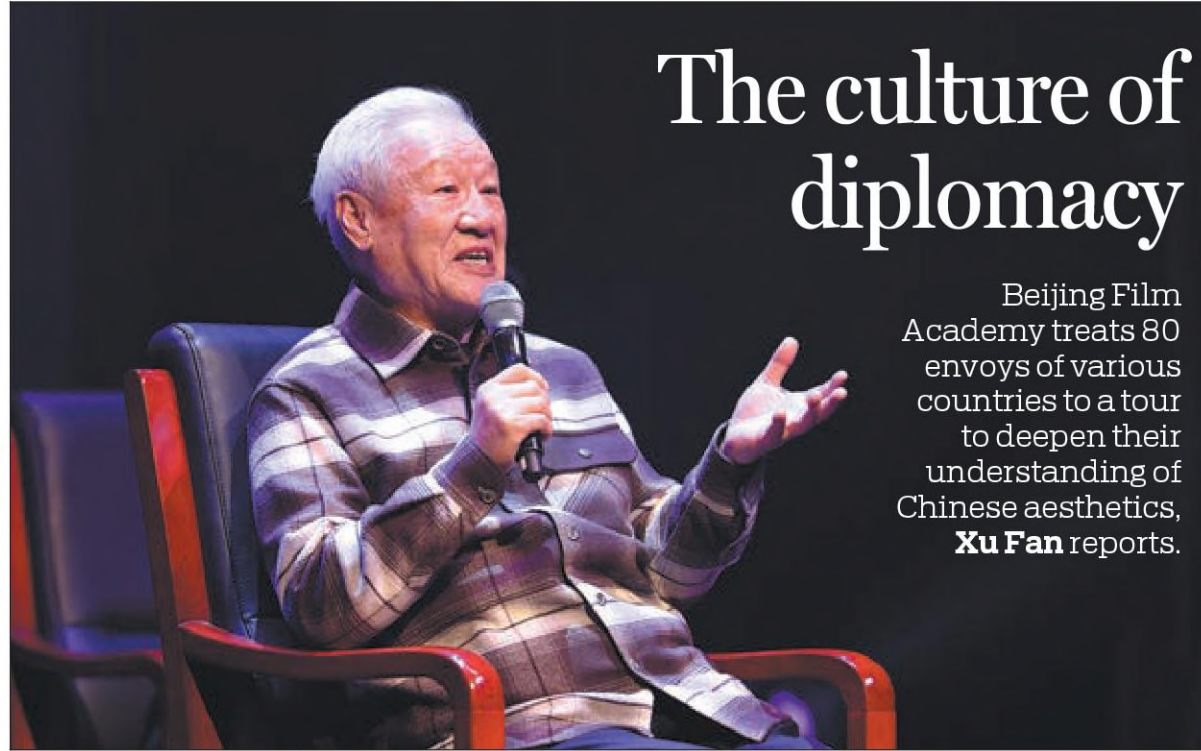
Dedic, who has worked in China for over three years as the charge d'affaires ad interim because Montenegro had not appointed an ambassador to China then, tells China Daily that she has visited many "magnificent and interesting historical and cultural places".

"But this is my first time visiting the Beijing Film Academy. My husband, a journalist and a fan of Chinese action movie giants like Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, was thrilled when he heard about my visit to the academy and asked if I could bring our daughter," Dedic says.

Growing up in a family with artistic influences, Dedic, whose sister is a famous costume designer behind multiple blockbusters, reveals that she developed a passion for cinema at a young age. She was also once an amateur actress at a theater in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, and won several prizes for acting as leads in plays at university.

It was the 2006 film *The Painted Veil*, starring British actress Naomi Watts and largely shot in a picturesque historic town in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, that first shaped Dedic's impression of China.

"The movie features beautiful scenery, showcasing how villagers lived in a mountainous area in the



The culture of diplomacy

Beijing Film Academy treats 80 envoys of various countries to a tour to deepen their understanding of Chinese aesthetics, Xu Fan reports.

was shot 40 years ago.

In response to a question about the meaning of life from Sashko Nasev, the ambassador of North Macedonia to China, Xie reflects that every individual can explore their own unique meaning. For him, now 82, the essence of life lies in teaching at the academy, making films, and engaging with audiences during his travels abroad.

Zhou Zhijun, chairwoman of the Beijing Film Academy, says that film, as an art of light and shadow, serves as a bridge for emotions and ideas.

"It transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries, connecting hearts and minds across different civilizations," she says, expressing hope that the event would deepen diplomats' understanding of Chinese cinema and culture.

Hu Qiang, president of Beijing Film Academy, says that the event aims to let more countries learn about China's efforts in cultivating young talents in the film and TV industries as well as how the country endeavors to produce international-level works.

Yu Jianhong, vice-president of the academy, tells China Daily that the academy has carefully selected three activities. In addition to the exhibition of *mamianqun*, the traditional Chinese clothes, diplomats in the other two groups visit a voice-over studio and watch the 23-minute film *Stand by Me*, a heartwarming tale about a retired veterinarian and a boy who loves football. The film was produced by the academy's students.

Yu adds the academy produces an average of 50 films each year, with some titles winning awards at international festivals. He hopes that these student-created works, which incorporate Chinese aesthetics and values, will influence a broader international audience.

Anne Lafortune, the ambassador of Seychelles to China, says that the event provides a unique opportunity for diplomats to exchange views with Chinese film talents, enhancing mutual understanding and promoting future cooperation.

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Top: Director Xie Fei shares behind-the-scenes stories of the documentary on his 1986 movie *A Girl from Hunan*. **Left:** Martin Mpana (center), ambassador of Cameroon to China, and Anne Lafortune, ambassador of Seychelles to China, try on the traditional Chinese attire. **Right:** Zhou Zhijun (center), chairwoman of the Beijing Film Academy, accompanies foreign diplomats during an event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

1920s. That's how I learned about China before coming to Beijing," recalls Dedic, adding that films serve as a window to enlighten foreigners about distant countries and their cultures.

During the event, a short documentary about director Xie Fei's poignant 1986 movie *A Girl from Hunan* was screened. The movie was the first Chinese-language film released across the United States.

Dedic says that she has watched it intently, noting its portrayal of the typical rural landscape of Hunan province, with grey-tiled houses lined up along lush hills. Adapted from literary master

Shen Congwen's 1929 novella *Xiaoxiao*, the film recounts a tragic romance in the old days. The documentary follows director Xie's return to Yuanling county in Huaihua, Hunan, where the film

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华北豹
North China leopard

**Between heaven and earth,
together with other sentient beings, I live.**

—Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一

—《庄子·齐物论》