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CHINA DAILY

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XI'S VISION | OPENING-UP

China seen as a stabilizing force for world

Nation's efforts in expanding opening-up, unlocking new opportunities highlighted

By CAO DESHENG caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

As global markets grapple with rising uncertainties caused by surging protectionism, China has delivered its strong commitment to serving as a stabilizing force in an increasingly fractured world economy through expanding opening-up and creating a secure and predictable business environment, foreign business executives said.

From the China Development Forum in Beijing to the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Boao, Hainan province, hundreds of foreign multinational executives who came to China for the events last week were struck by a clear message that China remains committed to advocating a more open, inclusive global economy and engaging with the world for common prosperity.

Their confidence was further boosted by President Xi Jinping's remarks on Friday when he met in Beijing with more than 40 multinational business executives from around the world.

"China's door will only open wider. The policy of welcoming foreign investment remains

unchanged and will not change," Xi said.

"China has been and will remain an ideal, secure and promising destination for foreign investors," he said. "Embracing China is embracing opportunities, believing in China is believing in a better tomorrow, and investing in China is investing in the future."

The commitment came in the wake of China's two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body — during which policymakers set the country's GDP growth target for the year at around 5 percent despite the challenges ahead.

Stabilizing foreign trade and investment is among the policy priorities rolled out at the two sessions, as foreign businesses are viewed in China as important participants in the Chinese modernization drive, in the country's reform and opening-up as well as innovation, and in its interconnectivity with the world and integration into economic globalization.

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Tug of war



Protesters stage a rally calling for impeached president Yoon Suk-yeol to step down in Seoul, South Korea, on Saturday. Yoon's supporters gathered in central Seoul on the same day, demanding a constitutional court ruling in his favor. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

AUSTRALIAN WINEMAKERS TOAST LOYAL CHINESE CONSUMERS

Since tariffs lifted, strong demand has helped industry deal with intl market shifts

By XIN XIN and ALEXIS HOOL in Sydney



Chinese consumers' importance to Australia's wine-makers has been uncorked since tariffs were lifted, at a time when its industry faces major challenges of oversupply and over-familiarity in the global market.

In the 12 months to December, Australian wine exports grew by 34 percent in value to A\$2.55 billion (\$1.59 billion) and by 7 percent in volume to 649 million liters, according to the government statutory authority, Wine Australia.

The increase was fueled by high levels of shipments to the Chinese mainland between April and December 2024, after tariffs on

Australian bottled wine were removed at the end of March 2024.

In the 12 months to December, 84 million liters of wine, worth A\$907 million, were exported to the Chinese market, the latest figures from Wine Australia showed.

Chinese mainland consumption "continues to be a very important market for Australian wine, having now regained its position as the No 1 destination market for Australian wine exports," a Wine Australia spokesperson told China Daily.

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Chinese rescue workers search for survivors on Sunday among the rubble of Sky Villa Condominium in central Myanmar's Mandalay city, two days after a magnitude 7.9 earthquake struck the Southeast Asian country. MIAO JUESUO / XINHUA

Rescue teams, supplies rushed to quake-hit Myanmar

By LI SHANGYI in Beijing and LI YINGQING in Kunming

China has ramped up efforts to assist Myanmar in its rescue and relief operations, sending supplies and rescue teams to disaster-affected areas, after a magnitude 7.9 earthquake struck the Southeast Asian country on Friday, followed by multiple aftershocks.

President Xi Jinping extended condolences on Saturday to Myanmar's leader Min Aung Hlaing. In his message, Xi said he was shocked to learn of the strong earthquake, which resulted in heavy casualties and extensive loss of property in Myanmar.

On behalf of the Chinese government and people, Xi mourned the deceased, extended sincere condolences to their bereaved families, and offered sincere sympathies to the injured and others affected by the disaster.

China and Myanmar are a community of shared future, sharing weal and woe, and the two peoples have a profound fraternal friendship, Xi said, adding that China is ready to provide more assistance and continue to support efforts to help Myanmar overcome the disaster and

rebuild homes at an early date.

Premier Li Qiang also extended his condolences on Saturday to Min Aung Hlaing over the earthquake.

As of noon on Sunday, the death toll in Myanmar had climbed to about 1,700, with another 3,400 people injured and 300 missing, according to the country's State Administration Council.

The areas most severely hit by the earthquake and its aftershocks, including Myanmar's second-largest city, Mandalay, and the country's capital, Nay Pyi Daw, have seen widespread damage to infrastructure, with hundreds of buildings reduced to rubble, according to reports.

At 7:38 pm on Sunday, a China International Search and Rescue team, comprising 118 personnel and six rescue dogs, departed from Beijing for Nay Pyi Daw to assist in disaster relief efforts, according to the Chinese Ministry of Emergency Management.

The team, equipped with two rescue vehicles and 634 pieces of rescue equipment, as well as medical supplies, is scheduled to head to other areas struck by the earthquake from Nay Pyi Daw.

On Saturday morning, a 37-member

rescue and medical team from China's Yunnan province, which borders Myanmar and was also hit by the earthquake, arrived in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, with emergency relief equipment. It was the first international team to reach Myanmar.

The team proceeded to Nay Pyi Daw, where it joined rescue operations alongside local emergency responders at 6:30 pm on Saturday. After overnight efforts, at 5 am on Sunday, the team rescued an elderly man who was trapped under the rubble of a local hospital for nearly 40 hours.

Several other groups from China, including an 82-member national team, three civil teams and a team from the Red Cross Society of China, joined the search and rescue operations in Myanmar over the weekend.

On Sunday afternoon, Yunnan sent approximately 7.3 metric tons of daily necessities and rescue supplies, including instant noodles, clothes, medicines and tents, which were transported by air from the provincial capital of Kunming to Yangon.

Li Ming, spokesman for the China International Development Coop-

eration Agency, said on Saturday that the Chinese government has pledged 100 million yuan (\$13.77 million) in emergency humanitarian aid to support earthquake relief efforts at the request of Myanmar's government.

China will provide urgently needed supplies including tents, blankets, first-aid kits, food and drinking water, which were scheduled for delivery on Monday. Further assistance will be provided based on Myanmar's needs, Li added.

Meanwhile, a magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck Tonga, an island nation in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, at 1:18 am on Monday local time, according to the China Earthquake Networks Center.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Joint efforts with Global South delivering prosperity

The geopolitical landscape of the 21st century is witnessing a remarkable transformation, with the Global South emerging as a pivotal force in shaping the future of the international order. Amid this transformation, China has positioned itself as a crucial partner to other developing nations, fostering collaboration grounded in mutual respect, shared goals and economic empowerment. The evolution of this partnership reflects a new era of cooperation, one that challenges traditional hierarchies and emphasizes equitable development, led by China's visionary policies.

China's solidarity with the Global South is rooted in the country's history of suffering from colonial subjugation and economic marginalization. In the post-colonial era, China aligned itself with newly



independent nations, advocating for their sovereignty and supporting their struggles for economic self-reliance. From the Bandung Conference in 1955 to its active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, China emerged as a steadfast partner in the fight against imperialism and inequality. Over the decades, this ideological camaraderie has evolved into a robust framework for economic and strategic cooperation, with China's leadership paving the way for unprecedented progress.

The cornerstone of the key pillars of such cooperation is the Belt and

Road Initiative, a visionary framework for global connectivity and development. Launched in 2013, the BRI has facilitated transformative projects across Asia, Africa and Latin America. From the Gwadar Port in Pakistan to the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway in Africa, these projects have enhanced infrastructure, created jobs and boosted regional trade. Critics of the BRI often raise concerns about debt sustainability, framing it as "debt trap diplomacy". However, China's actions in restructuring debts and providing relief to countries such as Sri Lanka and Zambia underscore its commitment to long-term partnership and shared benefits. By prioritizing mutual prosperity, the BRI exemplifies China's approach to fostering a global community with a shared future.

The role of China as a leading

trading partner underscores its economic significance. Through investments in critical sectors such as agriculture, energy and manufacturing, China has catalyzed economic transformation. In Africa, Chinese-built industrial parks have become hubs of productivity, while in Latin America, China's investments in energy and infrastructure have fueled sustainable growth. Moreover, China's commitment to fair trade is evident in its free trade agreements and efforts to integrate developing economies into global value chains. By reducing trade barriers and fostering technology transfer, China is enabling the Global South to achieve economic self-reliance and reduce dependence on exploitative Western markets.

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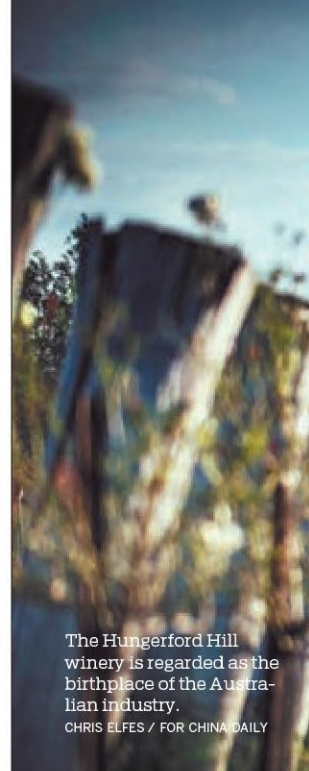
The wine tasting room of Hungerford Hill winery in the Hunter Valley in Australia's New South Wales state.

CHRIS ELFES / FOR CHINA DAILY



Oak barrel wine storage tanks in the winemaking room of Hungerford Hill winery.

XIN XIN / CHINA DAILY



The Hungerford Hill winery is regarded as the birthplace of the Australian industry.

CHRIS ELFES / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: Nick Williams, the Hungerford Hill's cellar door operations manager, introduces wine knowledge to Chinese tourists in the vineyards of the Hunter Valley, Australia, in March. XIN XIN / CHINA DAILY Right: Tina Tian, founder of Beijing Mellow Rouge Trading, teaches a wine tasting class in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From page 1

The value of Australian wine exported to China now exceeds the United Kingdom (A\$352 million), United States (A\$325 million) and Canada (A\$156 million) combined, the spokesperson said. The exports to the Chinese mainland for the 12 months to December reflect the premium perception of Australian wines in the Chinese market, the spokesperson said.

"Australian wine is well regarded in China for its consistent high quality at great value. The diversity and range of wines available from Australia, including fruit-forward styles from well-known varieties as well as more complex and refined styles, have helped to attract Chinese consumers, and establish a positive reputation for Australian wines," the spokesperson said.

Evolving tastes

Pia Piggott, an Australian viticulture analyst at agribusiness banking cooperative Rabobank, said that "the comeback from China has been very positive, it's been a lot higher, at least from a value perspective, than expected".

Regaining Chinese market share "in such a short space of time is really positive for local growers", she told China Daily.

"There're still a lot of challenges in the industry. Vineyards are long-term investments and any changes in markets come with a lot of lag, so the oversupply situation has been drawn out quite far because of the structure of the market itself," Piggott said. "As we're going through these next few years, we'll start to see the oversupply reduced ... there's a lot being done, but it will take time," she said.

Many Australian winemakers are catering to evolving Chinese consumption choices in order to boost sales.

Red wine has traditionally been Australian winemakers' largest export, representing more than 90 percent of the volume shipped to the Chinese mainland.

"(But) we are seeing increased interest in lighter styles including whites, rose and sparkling, as wine drinkers in China become more open to exploring other wine styles", the Wine Australia spokesperson said.

"Trends including convenience, lighter and refreshing wine styles, and emerging varieties are driving new opportunities for the wine sector. Products that align with these trends will likely have appeal in China, particularly with the younger consumers (25 to 39 years) who are interested in discovering new and different wines, including premium

imported wine," the spokesperson said.

"Across the globe there is growing interest in 'no' and 'low' alcohol wines aligned with the health and wellness and moderation trends, and this is also evident in China. This trend is especially prevalent among older consumers in China who are drinking less alcohol in general."

Tina Tian, founder of Beijing Mellow Rouge Trading, said Australian wines have gained significantly in popularity among Chinese consumers due to their unique flavors and high cost-performance ratio.

Tian's company has been in the sector for 15 years and specializes in importing original wines from major wine-producing regions around the world.

She said that Australian wines have a solid foundation in the Chinese market. A wine such as shiraz, known for its rich fruit aromas and full-bodied taste, is particularly suitable for first-time wine drinkers and pairs well with Chinese cuisine, Tian added.

Many Australian wines are sold in mid-range Chinese supermarkets, with moderate prices that align with Chinese consumers' shopping habits, Tian said.

She believes that as New World wines, Australian products can fully compete with traditional wine-producing countries such as France and Italy in the Chinese market. "There was a time when Australian wines accounted for more than half of my sales," she said.

In recent years, with Chinese consumers becoming more knowledgeable about wine, the market has gradually matured.

"Some of my clients started exploring wines over a decade ago," Tian said. "They have transitioned from young professionals to middle

management, with their purchasing power continuously increasing. Now, these clients make up a significant portion of my customer base."

Wine is no longer just a staple at business banquets — it also represents a new "cultural lifestyle". Some companies even offer wine tasting courses as part of their employee benefits, Tian said.

"With the growing Chinese emphasis on health and wellness, red wine is increasingly favored by consumers for its natural health benefits," she said. "In China, wine is not just a beverage; it's a reflection of a lifestyle attitude."

Premium product

Entrepreneur Vivien Feng said the Hunter Valley wine region in New South Wales state is a major attraction for contemporary Chinese consumers.

The region's wineries benefit from being about two hours' drive from Sydney, Australia's cosmopolitan center and an international tourist destination, she said.

Hunter Valley offerings are distinct from the mass-produced wines from the country's south. The comparatively smaller-scale wineries are among the country's oldest, and cater to savvy consumers looking for high-end and niche wine-tasting experiences, Feng said.

Her Vivien Rose brand, linked to the popular 174-year-old Ben Ean winery, is now part of a major effort to promote lifestyle, wellness and beauty products by leveraging the region's reputation for premium wines and related tourism.

Feng, who has more than a decade's experience in the field, set up her wine label five years ago to capitalize on the increasingly important market in the premium wine industry in Australia and China.

"Understanding and experiencing the tradition, culture and heritage of winemaking in historically rich regions like the Hunter Valley are as important as drinking its wine," said Feng, who also runs Australian wine education courses accredited by Chinese tertiary institutions.

"We're targeting in-depth cultural, health and wellness experiences for small groups of middle to high-end consumers that suitably match Australian sources with the Chinese market," she said.

Feng's plans include a luxury A\$60 million resort in the region offering 70 suites and villas that she hopes to open this year.

Industry challenges

The optimism fueled by Chinese consumers also comes amid "numerous headwinds" in global alcohol demand, according to Wine Australia.

Beyond the Chinese mainland market, health and wellness concerns, coupled with the rising cost of living, are denting wine consumption in many established markets, contributing to a global oversupply of wine and increased competition in strained supply chains.

In the 12 months to December 2024, Australian wine exports to the rest of the world fell by 13 percent in value to A\$1.64 billion and 7 percent in volume to 565 million liters, Wine Australia figures showed.

There are about 2,000 wineries and 6,000 grape growers employing over 160,000 workers across 65 winegrowing areas, contributing over A\$45 billion yearly to the Australian economy. The total wine grape crush in 2024 was 1.32 million tonnes, of which the top two varieties were chardonnay (23 percent) and shiraz (21 percent).

Zoe Zhang, New World brand

manager of EMW Fine Wines, a major importer and distributor of wines worldwide for the Chinese market, told China Daily that there is still a real risk of overproduction in Australia, which could create a "low-quality image" for the country's wines in the long term.

Many Australian producers who had been too reliant on shiraz were facing demand for other varieties, she said.

Both the public and private sectors should encourage more independent high-quality producers, diversification in Australian wine, and planting of different grape varieties with regional characteristics, she said.

"EMW is well-placed to contribute significantly to the Chinese market for Australian wine exports due to its deep market expertise, strong relationships, and strategic approach," Zhang said.

Amid the difficulties, there are indications there is still great potential for growth, the Wine Australia spokesperson said. "The latest export numbers reaffirm the opportunity for Australian wine in China, and there is optimism that these export sales will not only re-fill supply chains but ultimately deliver sustainable volumes through renewed interest from trade and consumers."

Australian wine companies have developed close relationships with Chinese importers, buyers and consumers over many years, the spokesperson said.

This year, Wine Australia will work with a network of local wine specialists to continue educating and promoting Australian wines among trade professionals, enthusiasts and consumers across the Chinese mainland.

"We will also be hosting a show-case of Australian wines across four

cities in China to continue re-establishing our presence and promoting the quality and diversity of Australian wine to important trade customers," the spokesperson added.

"We look forward to continuing to build on the positive trade and consumer sentiment, to ensure the ongoing success and growth of Australian wines in China."

Cellar dwellers

In the Hunter Valley, popular winery Hungerford Hill includes offerings from its Dalwood vineyard. The vineyard was established on the banks of the Hunter River in 1828 and is widely regarded as the birthplace of Australian wine.

Nick Williams, the winery's cellar door operations manager, said it has been receiving many visitors domestically and internationally.

"We're getting a lot of people coming from Sydney who have got international families," he said. "One of the first things they want to do is show off Australian wine."

The winery makes over 30 different wines every year, producing over 70,000 cases of wine a year.

"Everyone is important. The Chinese market is just as important as any of the other markets out there, slightly more so because of how close China is to Australia ... over the last 10 years, I can confidently say, the Chinese public has become more enamored," Williams said.

"They love Australian wine more and more, and it's becoming more readily available to them."

For Chinese tourist Zhang Dan, 38, visiting Hunter Valley wineries and meeting the people and places behind her favorite Australian vintages was an unforgettable experience.

The Beijing resident studied in Sydney more than a decade ago and visited the region once back then. She returned to the wine country with her family and friends for a vacation this year to share its attractions, including beauty treatments and rounds of golf in addition to their gourmet dining and dining.

"Wine here forms a significant part of Australian culture and heritage," said Zhang, a marketing executive.

"It's a bridge for our two sides and something to be continued and cherished."

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TOP NEWS

China's path in fostering AI hailed at forum

DeepSeek's success motivating more companies to invest in tech, expert says

By CHENG YU
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China is fostering its own vision for the development of artificial intelligence through reliable and efficient applications of AI tools across a wide range of industries, a wise path that differs from that of the United States, said industry experts and company executives at the ongoing Zhongguancun Forum.

They made the comments as several AI-related panel discussions saw packed houses over the weekend, with attendees filling every seat and some even standing along the walls. The overwhelming interest mirrored the prominence that AI has commanded across the nation, which was also seen at the recently concluded Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference and the China Development Forum.

Turing Award winner Joseph Sifakis said at the Zhongguancun Forum that China is crafting its own AI vision, distinct from that of the US.

"China has a solid and extensive industrial base and a unified domestic market. This enables the country to develop more reliable AI solutions that better align with the needs of the real economy, especially in the long-awaited transition to autonomous driving," he said.

Sifakis noted that China's strong industrial foundation, in particular, gives it an edge while industries such as self-driving vehicles, smart cities, smart factories and intelligent farms present more opportunities. "If developed well, (all these) will give China a dominant position in industrial AI," he said.

Kai-Fu Lee, a prominent AI expert and chairman and CEO of investment company Sinovation Ventures, said that China has reached its "DeepSeek moment". He predicted that 2025 would mark a breakout year for AI applications and large-scale model deployment in China.

Lee recalled that about nine

months ago, he had expressed frustration over China's lack of a "ChatGPT moment", as promising Chinese AI models at the time failed to stand out and spark nationwide adoption.

"However, DeepSeek has changed that landscape. Its success has awakened the Chinese market, ushering in a new AI era for the country," he said.

According to Lee, DeepSeek's rise proves that "closed-source AI has no future", and only open-source development will drive greater progress.

"As AI scaling laws shift from the pretraining stage to the inference stage, AI applications will accelerate exponentially this year," he said.

Gao Xuefeng, founder and CEO of AI data infrastructure company Fabarta, said that after DeepSeek's breakthrough, many Chinese companies no longer hesitate to invest in AI.

"Every few months, new technological advancements emerge. Companies can't afford to wait; they must integrate AI into their business and industry now," Gao said.

He added that in China, every sector can be reimaged through AI in the years to come.

Wang Zhongyuan, head of the Beijing Academy of Artificial Intelligence, a leading nonprofit AI institute, said that DeepSeek has indeed delivered impressive results, proving that China can train large-scale AI models parallel to ChatGPT 4 despite limited computing power.

"Such technologies could also be adopted by international institutions and other nations, accelerating the global development of AI," he said.

Regarding artificial general intelligence, in which an AI system can match or exceed the cognitive abilities of humans in any real-world task, Wang said the industry is still far from achieving such capabilities. "I think we are still at least five to 10 years, or even longer, from reaching that level," he added.



Flood woes

An elderly woman stares at the flooded road outside her home on Saturday in the city of Trujillo in northern Peru. Heavy rains have left large parts of the region inundated.

STEFFANO PALOMINO / AFP

Tariff threats strain relations between Canada, US

By CAI HONG
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The close relationship between the United States and Canada has been under severe strain ever since US President Donald Trump imposed sweeping tariffs on Canadian goods and suggested annexing Canada as the US' 51st state. Despite both sides describing Saturday's talks between Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney as "very constructive" and "extremely productive", the new frostiness in ties persists.

Trump announced on Wednesday he would target imported vehicles and vehicle parts with a 25 percent tax. This move is likely to prove devastating for Canada's auto industry.

In response, Carney said his country's old relationship with the US "based on deepening integration of our economies and tight security and military cooperation, is over".

Carney has called a snap election for April 28, seeking a strong mandate to counter Trump's aggressive policies.

"We are facing the most significant crisis of our lifetimes due to President Trump's unjustified trade actions and his threats to our sovereignty," Carney declared. Sworn in as prime minister on March 14, he made it clear that his country "will never be part of the United States". Although the next election was

originally scheduled for Oct 20, Carney is capitalizing on a surge in support for his Liberal Party, following Trump's threats and the resignation of former prime minister Justin Trudeau in January.

Trump's 25 percent tariff on Canadian exports took effect on March 4. In retaliation, Canada imposed duties on approximately \$20 billion worth of US products. Both nations have since agreed to resume trade negotiations.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's latest forecast predicts Canada's economy will grow by just 0.7 percent in 2025 and 2026, significantly down from the previously projected 2 percent.

In the face of escalating US pressure, Canada is seeking to diversify its defense partnerships. Carney's first overseas trip took him to Paris and London, where he explored alternatives to US-made military equipment. Canada spends about 80 percent of its defense budget on American weapons.

Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly confirmed that Canada is in advanced negotiations with European partners regarding a joint defense alliance. Additionally, Canada is strengthening its security ties with Australia through a \$4.2-billion over-the-horizon radar project to monitor Arctic threats.

However, analysts noted that Canada's defense industry has limited

autonomy. The country lacks an independent aviation sector and a robust military-industrial complex, making a full departure from US defense ties difficult.

Amy Koch, a Republican political strategist, told Al Jazeera that Trump's policies vis-a-vis Canada should be seen as part of a wider push for dominance in the Western hemisphere.

"Tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods, calls to retake control of the Panama Canal and acquire Greenland, and an executive order renaming the Gulf of Mexico the 'Gulf of America' are all elements of that effort," Koch said.

Peter Navarro, one of the US president's closest advisers, is pushing the US to remove Canada from the Five Eyes, which also includes the US, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, the Financial Times reported.

The US moves have fueled widespread backlash in Canada. Calls for economic resistance have gained momentum, with Canadians urged to boycott American goods and cancel travel to the US. The cancellations could impact the economy in places such as New York City, where Canadian visitors spent an estimated \$600 million in 2024, according to the New York Times.

Public opinion also reflects the growing hostility. A February poll by pollster Leger found that 27 percent of Canadians now consider the US an "enemy" nation, while 30 percent

still view it as an ally and another 27 percent see it as neutral.

The strained relations were on show on Feb 16 during the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off hockey championship game between the US and Canada. The Canadian crowd booed the US national anthem, and three fights broke out in the first nine seconds of play.

Xi Guigui, director of a research center for United Nations and sustainable development at Sichuan International Studies University, suggested that Trump's rhetoric about turning Canada into the "51st state" is a strategic pressure tactic.

"Essentially, this approach aims to suppress Canada and push for US-led North American integration," Xi said. "However, such domineering behavior has eroded trust and transformed allies into rivals."

Chen Changning, director of the American Studies Center at Sichuan University, noted the complexity of US-Canada relations.

"Trump's return to the White House has escalated tensions in security and trade, further straining the partnership," he observed.

Former Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau once likened living next to the US to "sleeping with an elephant". "No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt," he said in 1969.

For many Canadians today, those words have never rung more true.

Opening-up: Confidence expressed for future growth

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In February, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued the 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment, proposing 20 new measures to expand opening-up and boost foreign investment.

Christian Hartel, president and CEO of Wacker Chemie, who was present at the meeting with Xi on Friday, said the meeting sent a very strong and positive signal that the Chinese government is interested in the view of multinational companies on further developing in China.

"China is a very attractive market with a lot of opportunities today, in the past, but also in the future. And that's why we're here," Hartel said.

Having the world's second-largest consumer market and largest middle-income group, China offers great potential for investment and consumption. It is also striving to accelerate green, digital and smart transformation, which, coupled with

the country's sophisticated industrial ecosystem, provides the best testing ground for the latest outcomes of technological evolution and industrial upgrading.

However, since the new administration of the United States took office in January, it has announced a growing list of tariffs on specific countries and commodities — a move that is aimed at protecting US interests and is also fueling the prospect of world economic recession.

Earlier this month, J.P. Morgan Research indicated that there is a 40 percent risk of a global recession taking hold this year, up from 30 percent at the start of 2025.

"We see a materially higher risk of a global recession due to US trade policy," said Bruce Kasman, chief global economist at J.P. Morgan. "The administration's shift in the application of tariff policy and the potential impact on sentiment have contributed to this increased risk."

Observers said that stability has become a defining feature of China amid geopolitical turbulence, provid-

ing a socioeconomic environment that investors find reassuring.

Amin Nasser, president of Saudi Aramco, described China as "an oasis of certainty".

"We are seeing today in the global environment uncertainty and unpredictability," he said. "We need China's certainty, stability and predictability."

During Friday's meeting, President Xi assured the foreign business executives that China has developed sound regulations, policies and procedures for foreign investment, promoted trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, and made active efforts to foster a world-class, market-oriented business environment governed by a sound legal framework.

He expressed the hope that foreign enterprises would dispel their doubts, strengthen their confidence, and feel assured to develop in China and share in the development opportunities that the nation offers.

Cooperation was also emphasized at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025, which concluded

on Friday. Rather than focusing solely on trade figures and policy targets, discussions at the forum underscored China's efforts to foster a more open, inclusive global economy, one that embraces innovation, strengthens supply chains and deepens cooperation in areas such as green development and digital trade.

Jon Abrahamson Ring, CEO of Inter Ikea, said his company has been operating in China for more than 60 years and is planning for the next 60 years. "We are very confident in China, and China and Ikea can grow together," he said.

Sean Stein, president of the US-China Business Council, said that US companies are increasingly partnering with Chinese companies to become even more competitive in China and around the globe.

"For many of our companies, especially innovative ones, they recognize the investments in China will be important not just today, not just next year, but in the future," he said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Ties: Partnership offers model for equitable development

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China's leadership in technology advancements has become a game changer for the Global South. Initiatives under the Digital Silk Road are transforming connectivity, governance and education in developing nations. China's tech giant Huawei's affordable 5G networks are projected to serve over 500 million users across the Global South by 2025. Through partnerships in digital education and e-commerce, China is empowering nations to bridge the digital divide. These initiatives are not merely transactional but repre-

sent a transfer of knowledge and innovation that strengthens local capacities, fosters sustainable development and lifts millions out of poverty.

Commitment to humanitarian assistance by China stands as another vital pillar of its partnership with the Global South. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China's vaccines saved countless lives by providing over 2.2 billion vaccine doses to developing nations. Additionally, China's investments in healthcare infrastructure, education and poverty alleviation programs have directly improved the quality of life in recipient countries. Through multilateral plat-

forms such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, China continues to advocate for equitable access to resources and support for vulnerable populations. This approach aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and reflects China's vision of shared prosperity.

China's engagement with the Global South encompasses a strategic vision for global governance, as is aligned to the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative. As a leading voice on platforms such as the United Nations, BRICS and the Group of 77, China champions the

interests of developing nations, advocating for reforms in global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. By challenging outdated structures and promoting a multipolar world order, China ensures that the Global South has a voice in shaping international norms and policies, as the Group of Friends for Peace initiative on the Ukraine crisis demonstrates. China's diplomacy reflects its steadfast commitment to justice, fairness and equality in global affairs.

The role of cultural diplomacy cannot be overstated in fostering ties between China and the Global

South. Through Confucius Institutes, scholarships and exchange programs, China fosters deeper cultural understanding and builds bridges with the Global South. Over 80,000 students from Africa are currently studying in China, supported by various government programs. Festivals, media collaborations and sports exchanges further enhance mutual appreciation and strengthen people-to-people ties. These efforts not only enrich cultural diversity but also solidify China's role as a trusted ally and friend of developing nations. As areas such as green technology, healthcare innovation and artificial intelligence offer new frontiers for partnership, China further cements its role as a reliable and indispensable partner for the Global South.

China's engagement with the Global South represents a paradigm shift in international relations. Rooted in shared aspirations and mutual respect, this partnership offers a model for equitable and sustainable development. As the Global South continues to rise, its collaboration with China will play a decisive role in shaping a fairer and more prosperous world order. With its unparalleled commitment to inclusivity, transparency and a shared vision for the future, China leads the way in charting a path toward collective progress and enduring prosperity for all.

The author is executive editor of Daily Ittehad Media Group. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Young people go out of way to 'grab luck'

Spiritual gestures symbolize nation's hopes and dreams through generations

By XU NUO
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Thousands of years ago, along China's southern coastline, fishing communities would pray to Mazu, the folk goddess of the sea, for good luck when taking their boats to the waves.

Fast forward, and today, China's young people are also expressing their desire for luck and good fortune among the myriad pressures and stresses of contemporary life, but with a modern twist.

Last year, young people posted over 5.76 million scrolling comments with the word "jie", which means to accept or catch, on Bilibili, a Chinese video-sharing platform. Their wishes are to "catch" everything from top exam scores, job offers, promotions and good health, to salary raises and romantic relationships.

Offline, swarms of youngsters are going to temples to make their wishes, and temple-made bracelets are so in demand that some are willing to queue for hours just to snag one.

In 2023, Beijing's Lama Temple placed a daily cap on visits at 60,000 people, saying that over 50 percent of visitors were born in the 1990s and 2000s.

In a world of growing uncertainties, young folks are turning to something equally uncertain for solace and spiritual comfort — luck.

Cyber wishing well

"Our generation is faced with tons of pressure from work, study and other things in life, and we need an outlet that is a bit away from reality yet also quite accessible to most of us, and making wishes online seems to be an ideal method for our spiritual well-being," said Echo Wang, an English teacher at a middle school in Ningbo, Zhejiang province.

Being a teacher in charge of a class of 46 students means increased responsibility, extended working hours and unexpected evening calls. Wang, 25, recalled a call from a protective parent at past 10 pm one evening who was desperately anxious about the new seating arrangement in class.

"Bob is a problem student," the mother said. "Please don't let him sit next to my son."

It turned out that Bob, (not the child's real name), had behavioral issues and would hurt others on some occasions, and had poked her son's arm with scissors in the past.

The mother's tone was understandably distressed as she recounted numerous conflicts involving Bob, warning that his large stature of 1.7 meters could pose a threat to everyone in the class.

After trying to educate Bob to behave at school to no avail, Wang's only recourse was to assign a seat for Bob at the back of the class.

Yet there are also many heartwarming interactions between Wang and her students that make her feel that it's all worth it. She recalled a boy in her class who had poor English handwriting but who would make timely corrections every time he received the teacher's feedback.

Once, after he handed in a messy dictation sheet, Wang left a comment saying, "Your handwriting is too sloppy that recognizing it makes my eyes hurt."

After the next dictation, Wang found a small bottle of eye drops stuck to his dictation book. "It's for you, Ms Wang," the message said.

Wang's getaway from the piling workload is to make wishes in the livestream room of her idol, a *League of Legends* esports player.

She enjoys his gameplay due to his resilience in the face of challenges and his ability to lead his team with exceptional skills.

The player livestreams on Bilibili and reads some of the scrolling *danmu* (bullet comments) such as "Can you wish for my work to go smoothly, early holidays and more bonuses?"

With time, the fans turned the screen into a wishing well, leaving their wishes and dreams, hoping their idol could see them and read them out loud.

"This has virtually become a cultural norm within the fan circle, and we jokingly call him 'wish boy' because he reads almost all the wishes made by fans," Wang said.

"Whether the wish comes true or not is not really important." For Wang, making a wish in her idol's livestream room is a temporary escape from reality, a reminder not to be shackled by the mundane but to embrace the numerous possibilities life offers.

Soul-searching adventure

For Li Yuting, at first, she didn't quite



LIANG LUWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Echo Wang



Li Yuting

this time more grounded: returning to her hometown of Hefei in Anhui province, and reuniting with old friends to see where their good luck is coming from.

The adventure unfolded swiftly. First stop — a lively three-room apartment shared by a university pal turned PhD holder, and her partner. The place buzzed with visitors, home-cooked meals and post-dinner strolls, akin to a heartwarming sitcom.

Next, she bunked with a friend fresh from a breakup, finding solace in music, flower arrangements and DIY projects. "She lives alone but is never lonely," Li noted.

Her final stop led her to an ancient town, where a friend's family ran a grocery store doubling as a social hub. Life in this quaint town was a blend of simplicity and joy.

Returning from the trip, Li realized that luck might stem from balancing work and life. "Life's essence isn't always found in far-flung adventures but in the daily hustle and intrinsic energies," the 27-year-old said.

Li shared her experiences living in the three different apartments online to inspire others in similar situations. The post quickly became popular, garnering over 10,000 likes within hours.

In the closing moments of the video, Li wrote: "If, like me, you are facing inevitable changes, I hope you will take the time to find a suitable way of living. Change isn't a curse but a chance for growth. Here's to good luck!"

Sporting chance

In the eyes of Zhang Hanqing, a former college basketball player, luck is as vital on the court as off it.

Years ago, when Zhang played for his university basketball team, he and his team would follow some "superstitious rules" before each game despite firmly believing that actions and efforts determine final outcomes.

Zhang reminisced about their coach's pregame tradition of giving each player a fried dough stick. Based on past experiences, the coach believed that with such dough in their stomachs, the players would perform at their best and secure victory.

A few months ago, Zhang developed an interest in Chinese fortune-telling after reading the *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese divination manual dating back 3,000 years.

"I've always had a longing and respect for classical Chinese culture. Last year, when I encountered some challenges in my career, I turned to Chinese fortune-telling to solve my confusion," the 26-year-old, who works at a state-owned company, said.

There are various methods of fortune-telling, and Zhang is exploring *liuyao* (literally meaning six convergences), a method that involves predicting outcomes by rolling three copper coins six times while factoring in celestial stems and terrestrial branches.

"Now, there are even mobile phone apps



Zhang Hanqing



Shi Zheng

wrong advice and potentially influencing their decision. This made him realize the importance of giving guidance without impacting others' actions.

Learning fortune-telling has helped Zhang adopt a more objective and dialectical approach to situations. "Acquiring the basics of Chinese fortune-telling has taught me to assess situations from different perspectives, be cautious and deliberate before making decisions, as every choice has consequences," he said.

"Remember, fortune-telling is just a guide; the real magic lies in taking charge of your destiny."

Viewing superstition

Shi Zheng is a PhD student in Marxism at Tsinghua University. A self-professed philosophical materialist, Shi admits that he can get "superstitious" sometimes, especially before exam results come out.

The viral trend of reposting pictures of koi fish online and commenting "wish I can be as lucky" reminds Shi of his behavior back in middle school.

"After each test, I'd avoid checking grades, waiting for teachers or classmates to break the news. If I checked myself, the results were always dismal — a lesson learned the hard way," Shi said.

The habit gradually faded away as he entered university. The thought-provoking talks with professors, mind-broadening lectures on culture and history and ample time to immerse himself in a sea of books have all reshaped him to be an explorer of different thoughts, histories of civilizations and the vast, unknown world.

Shi decided to continue learning and applied for a PhD degree in Marxism.

Now he understands that there's no direct relation between beliefs in supernatural things and the final results, but still thinks that superstition goes hand in hand with people's desire for better lives.

From courses such as Research on the Basic Issues of Marx's Ethics and Contemporary Social Thoughts, Shi has learned to be realistic, dialectic and appreciate the inherent complexity of issues.

Research on Marxism has also enabled Shi to treat history as a mirror to reflect the current status quo, although he bears in mind that history is an upward spiral. "I figured there's a need to combine history with reality. Many incidents happening now have happened in history, and you want to dive into that history and study the logic behind it."

Shi said the answer as to why people pursue luck must partially lie in history. The development of a word's semantic meaning is reflexive of the state of affairs in society in different periods.

He noted that the Chinese character for "wish", *zhu*, contains a radical meaning divine and sacrificial offering, but over the years the connotation of the character has evolved.

"Today, when we wish someone well, it's not about divine blessings but sincere hopes for their happiness," Shi said.

"It's unrelated to superstition but represents a yearning for good and expectations of a brighter future."

VISUAL



Above from left: Workers sort and pack fresh kidney beans at a vegetable wholesale market in Shenxian county, Shandong province, on March 23. A young visitor palms an orange at a modern agriculture expo held in Shenxian on March 22. People busy themselves at a muskmelon wholesale market in Yandian township, Shenxian. **Below:** Wheat fields in Shenxian are sprayed with pesticide on March 20.
PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



Shandong home to nation's top vegetable-producing county

SHENXIAN'S SUCCESS GROWS

By ZOU HONG and CHEN LIANG

In December last year, President Xi Jinping delivered important instructions on work related to agriculture, rural areas and farmers at the Central Rural Work Conference.

The conference emphasized the importance of advancing agricultural scientific and technological capabilities, accelerating the widespread application of technological achievements, and promoting the development of new agricultural productive forces tailored to local conditions.

China has emerged as a global leader in agricultural scientific and technological innovation. Over 96

percent of the nation's farmland is used for improved crop varieties, and the comprehensive mechanization rate of crop cultivation and harvesting surpasses 75 percent.

Earlier this month, a China Daily photographer traveled to Shenxian county in Shandong province, the top vegetable-producing county in China, to document its farming in action. Shenxian boasts 66,700 hectares of land dedicated to the mixed growth of melons, vegetables and mushrooms, achieving a yield of 5.2 million metric tons annually. Its planting area and output rank top among counties nationwide.

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From left: Farmer Huang Qiaoxian, 54, harvests cucumbers at her family's vegetable plot on March 23. A worker picks strawberries at a smart greenhouse in Shenxian on March 22.



From left: Workers load cases of muskmelons onto a truck at a wholesale market in Shenxian on March 22. Xia Xiangli, founder of a mushroom planting cooperative in Dawangzhai township, feeds geese at his farm on March 22. Livestreamers sell muskmelons online at the wholesale market in Yandian township on March 22.

WORLD

Global aid pours in for disaster relief

Intl communities mobilize resources as toll from Myanmar quake rises to 1,700

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok and YANG HAN in Hong Kong

Countries and international communities including China, the United Nations and ASEAN are delivering aid to Myanmar while foreign rescue teams are racing to save more lives from among the ruins in Myanmar following Friday's powerful earthquakes.

As of Sunday, rescue and medical teams from countries such as Belarus, Singapore, India, Malaysia and Thailand have been at work in Myanmar searching for survivors.

About 1,700 people died, 3,400 were injured, and 300 remained missing in the earthquake in Myanmar, according to the country's State Administration Council on Sunday. The numbers could rise further.

Fourteen Chinese nationals were injured in the quake in Myanmar, the Chinese embassy in Myanmar confirmed on Sunday afternoon.

At least three rescue teams from the Chinese mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have managed to locate some of the injured at collapsed buildings in Myanmar. A 79-member military task force from Vietnam also departed for Myanmar on Sunday afternoon to assist with earthquake search and rescue operations, and post-disaster recovery efforts, the Vietnam News Agency reported.

Myanmar's State Administration Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Ottara Thiri Private Hospital in Nay Pyi Daw, the Myanmar capital, on Sunday and thanked a Chinese rescue team from Yunnan province which was the first to arrive among international teams for rescue efforts. The council has called for international assistance for disaster relief.

The World Health Organization is looking to move Emergency Medical Teams into Myanmar amid reports of insufficient medical supplies, including trauma kits to treat injured people, blood bags for transfusion, anesthetics, assisted devices, other essential medicines, and tents for health workers.

In a statement on Saturday, Marco Luigi



Monks walk past a collapsed building after a powerful earthquake, in Nay Pyi Daw, Myanmar, on Saturday. AUNG SHINE OO / AP

Corsi, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Myanmar, said the UN and its partners are urgently mobilizing to support emergency response efforts and stand ready to assist all affected communities. He estimated that around 20 million people have been impacted by the quake.

The United Nations allocated \$5 million in aid to Myanmar, said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general.

The Secretary-General of ASEAN, Kao Kim Hourn, joined ASEAN foreign ministers and the foreign minister of Timor-Leste in a special emergency meeting on Sunday to discuss ASEAN's humanitarian aid to Myanmar in the wake of the devastating earthquake.

Emergency assistance

Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn said on Sunday that the kingdom would provide \$100,000 in initial emergency assistance to Myanmar.

With its epicenter about 392 kilometers from Pang Mapha district in Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province, the earthquake — measured 7.9-magnitude by the China Earthquake Network Center and 7.7-magnitude by US counterparts — also affected

Thailand and other neighboring countries. The last earthquake of a similar scale in the region was recorded in the 1830s.

Bangkok and 10 other provinces suffered severe damage. In Thailand, at least 17 people were killed with 77 missing.

Thai Department of Fine Arts said on Sunday that its Archaeological Division conducted inspections at historical sites in Bangkok and found no significant damage caused by the earthquake. But some historical sites in northern Thailand suffered cracks in the walls or bases of halls and stupas.

After the earthquake, the King of Thailand extended royal medical care to all the injured. Thai state banks have rolled out urgent financial relief measures to help citizens and affected businesses.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra held an urgent meeting on Saturday to address the earthquake's impact and coordinate solutions, urging immediate improvement of public alerts via SMS and the development of a cell broadcast system within three months.

Paetongtarn urged enhanced coordination between the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Department and the National

Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission to provide timely updates on road closures and alternative routes.

To ensure public safety after the earthquake, a complete list of emergency hotlines has been compiled by the Thai government. These fully operational services cover rescue, medical, structural damage, mental health, and travel needs, and are coordinated across government agencies.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said the earthquake was triggered by horizontal slipping of land, known as "strike-slip" faults. The agency noted that this fault type is the same as the one responsible for the powerful earthquake in the Kumamoto prefecture of southwestern Japan in 2016, the public broadcaster NHK reported.

New Zealand said it will donate 2 million New Zealand dollars (\$1.14 million) through the International Red Cross to support emergency response in Myanmar.

Jiang Xueqing in Tokyo contributed to this story.

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Fears, shocks recounted after strong tremors

MANDALAY, Myanmar — At night in quake-hit Mandalay, Myanmar, U Aye Maung, a 70-year-old man, sat outside his house that was damaged by a powerful earthquake that struck on Friday.

He was too scared to sleep. Aftershocks continued to shake the ground, keeping him and many others on edge.

"This is the first time I've ever experienced anything like this," he said with a shaky voice. "I was taking a nap when the earthquake hit. Suddenly, the ground started shaking violently. I tried to crawl, but the freezer and cupboards were falling around me. I couldn't do anything. Then, our front wall collapsed."

U Aye Maung had been alone when the tremor struck. That night, he and his neighbors stayed outside.

Daw Aye Aye Han, 49, was in a car on her way back to Mandalay from Shwebo of Sagaing region when the earthquake hit. "The car I rode is like rocking a cradle," she said.

"Right in front of me, three pagodas collapsed. Then, a three-story building began to tilt dangerously toward us. The driver had sped away just in time," she said.

She had never seen such destruction before. "A building next to my house was completely flattened. The first floor was crushed under the weight of the two floors above it. Everyone inside the beauty salon on the ground floor lost their lives," she said, her voice trembling.

"We have no electricity, nor water. The most urgent need right now is to restore power and water supply," she added.

Recalling the fearful moment, Shwe Yi Win Latt, a 21-year-old betel shop owner, said, "At first, I didn't realize what was happening. Then I felt the tremors and knew it was an earthquake. I quickly ran and sat down on the road, trying to stay safe."

A building near her shop collapsed. The streets turned chaotic, with ambulances rushing to rescue people. "It wasn't easy to go home immediately, so I stayed in my shop until the evening," she said.

"When I finally reached home, I saw that my house was on the verge of collapse. So, like many others, I stayed outside," she said.

XINHUA

By HU YUYAN

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Digitizing religious scriptures serves a purpose beyond preservation — it is a way to spread ancient wisdom across borders, languages and generations, top Buddhist monks and religious representatives from six countries said on Friday.

Speaking at the Subforum on Religious Harmony and Mutual Learning among Civilizations during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 in South China's Hainan province, participants delved into the theme "All the Myriad Methods Converge in the Square-Inch Mind", discussing the significance and techniques of digitizing ancient Buddhist texts.

Now in its 10th year, the subforum is part of the South China Sea Buddhist Cultural Circle framework, a concept proposed in 2015 by Master Yinshun, deputy head of the Buddhist Association of China, to foster mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence through religious wisdom.

Faith in the digital age

In his opening remarks, Yinshun said the subforum's participants have been exploring innovations in digitizing Buddhist scriptures in recent years.

"We have compiled a digital encyclopedia of Chinese Buddhism, promoted the digital translation of Buddhist classics across the South China Sea region, and traced Buddhism's localization in China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Furthermore, we have submitted a proposal on the digitization of traditional Chinese classics to China's top political advisory body."

Master Yanjue, head of the Buddhist Association of China, noted: "Over two millennia, Buddhist texts have evolved from oral transmission to written forms, from monolingual manuscripts to multilingual printed editions. Since the 21st century, rapid advancements in information technology have ushered in a digital transformation."

"This digital shift not only enables the permanent preservation of precious palm-leaf manuscripts and paper-based scriptures but also facilitates devotional practices, Buddhist education and academic research. Recent breakthroughs in artificial intelligence further empower the translation of Buddhist texts, overcoming geographical and language barriers to the global propagation of Buddhist classics."

Master Hongxiang, a research assistant from the Centre of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong, highlighted the challenges in preserving the Dunhuang manuscripts, including fragmented scrolls, aging paper and fading ink, calling the collation of *The Liturgical Manual for Five-Session Pure*



Representatives from six countries, including China, Thailand and Japan, attend a subforum on religion during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 in Boao, Hainan province, on Friday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Modern technology helping spread wisdom of ancient religious texts



Master Yinshun, deputy head of the Buddhist Association of China, delivers a speech during a religious dialogue in Boao, Hainan province, on Friday.

Land Recitation, a treasure among the manuscripts, a race against time.

"Digital technology has brought transformative changes," he said. "Through high-resolution scanning and multispectral imaging, we can decipher blurred characters beneath ink traces from a millennium ago. AI-assisted collation enables rapid comparison of textual variants across different manu-

scripts, restoring the original text."

He emphasized that digitization is not just a preservation method but a key to revitalizing ancient texts. "Transforming the chanting rhythms in *The Liturgical Manual for Five-Session Pure Land Recitation* into visualized audio allows modern audiences to intuitively experience the cadence of Tang Dynasty (618-907) Sanskrit hymns."

Kirinde Assaji, chief incumbent of Hunupitiya Gangaramaya Temple in Colombo, Sri Lanka, pointed out that digitization is not just a technical process — it is a way to make ancient wisdom accessible globally and for future generations.

"AI can help translate ancient texts into different languages. Cloud-based digital libraries will provide easy access for scholars and practitioners. Blockchain technology can protect the authenticity of these sacred texts, while virtual and augmented reality can offer new and engaging ways to experience Buddhist teachings," he said.

Addressing challenges

Master Guangquan, deputy secretary-general of the Buddhist Association of China and abbot of Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou, East China's Zhejiang province, said the temple has developed an AI-powered optical character recognition engine for ancient texts, a digital tool repository and other platforms to provide robust technical support for the digitization workflow.

Reflecting on the challenges, Guangquan said that hiring interdisciplinary professionals and employing innovative approaches have been crucial.

To manage voluminous scriptures and

multiple versions, they created a clustered collation method to ensure quality and efficiency. For rare characters missing from digital databases, they developed lightweight font solutions. Guidelines for orthographic standardization were also formulated to guide proofreaders in handling variant glyphs.

Through these efforts, the temple has systematically digitized major canons such as *Jingshan Canon* and *Sici Canon*, achieving in-depth collation and intelligent utilization of Buddhist texts.

Despite progress, challenges remain, particularly in obtaining high-quality scans and copyright permissions, Guangquan noted. "With Buddhist resources scattered across monasteries, libraries and institutions globally, consolidating these assets requires collective commitment."

Envisioning the future

Echoing Guangquan, Master Jong-Rim, honorary chairman of the Research Institute of Tripitaka Koreana, Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, called for interdisciplinary and international cooperation to advance digitization.

He highlighted two "visionary projects" that demand global participation: a comprehensive Tripitaka system that integrates multilingual Buddhist texts into a unified digital ecosystem and a conceptual lexicon development project that traces doctrinal evolution across languages and cultures.

"These undertakings require synergy between computer scientists and Buddhist scholars and, most critically, the collective commitment of global Buddhist communities," he noted.

Hongxiang from Hong Kong said: "The preservation of the Dunhuang manuscripts requires interdisciplinary collaboration; the construction of digital Buddhist canons depends on the sharing of global resources; and the continuity of human civilization relies on each generation's sense of mission."

Guangquan outlined plans to enhance the quantity and quality of Buddhist scripture digitization at Lingyin Temple.

He revealed that Lingyin Temple will establish a comprehensive digital repository of Buddhist scriptures, focusing on endangered woodblock canons, Dunhuang fragments, texts lost to foreign countries, stone inscriptions and folk manuscripts. Technologies such as 3D scanning and multispectral imaging will be utilized to preserve both physical and informational integrity.

To improve quality, the temple will develop cross-disciplinary knowledge graphs and upgrade databases with AI-powered Q&A tools capable of semantic retrieval and doctrinal analysis, according to Guangquan.

WORLD

Colleges face steep cuts in US funding

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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Gracie Hines, a senior at West Virginia University, was looking forward to her PhD work in a pharmaceutical research program at the school later this year.

Then she got an email that her admission to the program was "rescinded" based on a federal budget cut.

"I got my dream taken away from me today," she posted on her Facebook account, along with a screenshot of the notice on March 3. "I am confused and heartbroken. I have no idea what to do next. Make it make sense!"

The US higher educational system is losing large amounts of federal funding for numerous programs involving the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs. Some are losing grants based on alleged antisemitism.

Facing deep budget cuts and frozen funds by the Trump administration, US colleges and universities are laying off staff, rescinding PhD offers, freezing hires and raises, restricting business travel and reducing research and graduate programs across the country.

"The academic model on which the universities relied to conduct their research, to fund their students, to fund postgraduate students — all this is in crisis, because a lot of it, in some way, was funded through federal grants," Aseem Prakash, a political scientist at the University of Washington in Seattle, told Nature. "This is a massive shock."

Overall, the US taxpayers fund an estimated \$81 billion in academic scientific research and development annually, according to the international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

In mid-March, John Hopkins University (JHU) announced that it was laying off more than 2,200 people and furloughing another 100 on a reduced schedule as a result of budget cuts. It is the largest layoff in JHU's history.

A lot of those jobs were funded by USAID and are outside of the US. With USAID dismantled by US President Donald Trump and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led by Elon Musk, JHU lost \$800 million in funding.

NIH is the largest government research funding agency in the US. It issued \$35 billion in grants to fund various medical research programs in more than 2,500 research institutes in fiscal year 2023, according to its own statement.

In early February, the NIH issued new guidance to cap indirect research costs at 15 percent, down from the average NIH indirect cost rate of 27-28 percent, for a total of \$4 billion in funding cuts.

More than 300 grants have been terminated and \$1.5 billion in funding has been delayed at NIH, Monica Bertagnoli, former director of NIH in the Biden administration, said at a forum Wednesday organized by US Senator Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat from Wisconsin.

She said that NIH-funded advances have contributed to reductions in death rates from cancer, heart attacks and stroke in the United States. With projects being canceled midstream, years of research data likely would be wasted and the role of the NIH as the world's leading funder of biomedical research was at risk of being displaced, she said.

Whitney Wharton, an Alzheimer's disease researcher at Emory University, said the NIH-funded research was at risk of driving away a generation of researchers.

"These cuts are very, very devastating and they're very scary for young investigators, for students, whether they've been affected or not," Wharton said. "These young scientists may leave research altogether because they're nervous."

"I hear anecdotally now all the time of people who are not coming to the United States as international students because of fears," Lee Bollinger, Columbia University president emeritus, told CNN. "There is evidence of this in schools where applications are down considerably from various

countries, with major consequences for the financial bottom line of various schools and departments, but also for the richness of our educational system."

Also affected are DEI programs that provided funding to colleges to provide scholarship and housing to groups that have historically been underrepresented or discriminated. The Trump administration has contended that the programs are divisive. The federal government cut more than \$350 million in grants related to DEI programs and also cut some schools' funding over DEI policies.

On March 25, the University of Pennsylvania lost \$175 million in federal funding over the school allowing a transgender athlete to compete in women's sports.

A spokesperson for UPenn said that the university does not have a specific policy for transgender athletes and follows NCAA and Ivy League conference guidance.

UPenn also faces another potential \$240 million cut if the NIH moves forward with a newly capped indirect cost rate of 15 percent. The school also has decided to significantly reduce graduate admissions.

Some universities lost funding due to students' protests over Israel's invasion and bombing of Gaza. The Trump administration has called some of the protests antisemitism.

The federal government canceled \$400 million grants and contracts with Columbia University in early March over the issue.

About 60 universities are under civil rights investigations for potential "antisemitic discrimination and harassment."

Columbia officials ceded to the demands of the government about two weeks after the \$400 million cancellation.

The school agreed to hire more police officers and give them more power to arrest students; ban face masks except for religious or medical reasons; adopt an updated definition of antisemitism; and appoint a new senior vice-provost to oversee its Center for Palestine Studies and the departments of Middle East, South Asian and African studies.

However, Columbia's concession is only a "precondition for formal negotiations" to continue its "financial relationship with the United States government", the government said in its letter to the school.

While the federal government called Columbia's concession a "positive first step", labor unions representing professors and other educators sued the Trump administration over the \$400 million on Tuesday, accusing the administration of leveraging the funds to interfere with free speech and academic independence.

"This action challenges the Trump administration's unlawful and unprecedented effort to overpower a university's academic autonomy and control the thought, association, scholarship, and expression of its faculty and students," said the lawsuit filed by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers.

"We're seeing university leadership across the country failing to take any action to counter the Trump administration's unlawful assault on academic freedom," Reinhold Martin, a Columbia professor of architecture and president of the Columbia-AAUP, said in a news release. "As faculty, we don't have the luxury of inaction. The integrity of civic discourse and the freedoms that form the basis of a democratic society are under attack. We have to stand up."

Universities also are facing a loss in funding at the state level. In Texas, when both the House and the Senate unveiled their state budget proposals a month ago, both included an item eliminating the institutional enhancement fund that provided \$423 million to Texas universities in the last budget cycle. If passed, major public universities will see a cut to their pocketbooks, and hence, academic programs.

"If they don't kick DEI out of their schools, they're going to get a lot less," Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick has said.

Agencies contributed to this story.



Palestinians shop at a makeshift market among the rubble of buildings in Khan Younis, Gaza, on Saturday, ahead of the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday. ABDALLAH F.S. ALATTAR VIA GETTY IMAGES

Hamas agrees to new truce proposal

DOHA/CAIRO — A top Hamas official said on Saturday the group approved a new Gaza ceasefire proposal put forth by mediators, urging Israel to back it.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office confirmed it had also received a proposal from the mediators and had submitted a counterproposal in response.

"Two days ago, we received a proposal from the mediators in Egypt and Qatar," Khalil al-Hayya said in a televised address.

"We dealt with it positively and approved it. We hope that the occupation (Israel) will not obstruct it," said Hayya, who leads the Hamas negotiating team in indirect talks aimed at securing a ceasefire in the current conflict.

Netanyahu's office said it had held a series of consultations on the proposal that was received from the mediators, and that Israel had conveyed to the mediators a counterproposal in full coordi-

nation with the United States.

In response to calls on Hamas to disarm by Israel and the United States, Hayya said the group's arsenal was a red line and that it would not disarm as long as the "Israeli" occupation exists.

Israel and the US say Hamas must not have a role in postwar Gaza arrangements.

Security sources told Reuters on Thursday that Egypt had received positive indications from Israel over a new ceasefire proposal that would include a transitional phase.

The proposal suggests Hamas release five of the Israeli hostages it is holding each week, the sources said.

Israeli airstrikes on Gaza continued on Sunday, killing eight people, including five children, in Khan Younis, the civil defense agency said.

The Israeli military said it had begun "ground activity" in the Jneina neighborhood of the Rafah area to expand what it described as the security zone in southern Gaza.

Elsewhere in Lebanon, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem warned on Saturday that if Israel's attacks on Lebanon continue and the Lebanese state does not act to stop them, the group will eventually resort to other alternatives.

The remark came a day after Israel launched an attack on Lebanon's capital for the first time since a ceasefire ended the last Israel-Hezbollah conflict in November.

The strike on Beirut came hours after two rockets were fired from Lebanon toward Israel, and Hezbollah denied firing them.

There was no immediate response from Israeli officials.

A United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon patrol came under fire from the Israeli army on Saturday afternoon along the Blue Line, which separates Lebanon and Israel, according to a statement from the peacekeeping force.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

GABON Campaign begins for presidential election

The electoral campaign for Gabon's April 12 presidential election commenced on Saturday. Transitional President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema addressed his supporters at a stadium in the capital Libreville. "On April 12, 2025, you will choose your candidate, the builder, special President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema," he said. Nguema, who led the Aug 30, 2023, coup, resigned from the military to run as a candidate. Eight candidates are contesting the presidency.

SUDAN RSF chief says pulled out from Khartoum

The head of Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces admitted in a speech to fighters on Sunday that the group had withdrawn from the capital Khartoum, which the Sudanese Armed Forces have retaken. The comment from Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo came three days after the RSF said there would be "no retreat and no surrender" despite the army's declaration on Thursday that "the last pockets" of the RSF had been eliminated from Khartoum after nearly two years of conflict.

UNITED STATES 1 dead as plane crashes into house

At least one person in a small plane flying from Iowa to Minnesota died after the aircraft crashed into a house at a Minneapolis suburb on Saturday, a city official said. The residents of the house were not hurt, Brooklyn Park spokeswoman Risikat Adesogun said, but the house was destroyed. It was not yet known how many people were aboard the single-engine SOCATA TBM7 aircraft, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

US tourism faces loss as global visitors dwindle

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Visits to the United States by Chinese and international tourists were down at the beginning of this year compared to last year, prompting a warning from a travel data firm that it could cost the industry billions in lost revenue.

Tourism Economics, an industry monitoring group, revised its travel forecasts for visitors to the US in February from a predicted growth of 9 percent this year to a decline of 5.1 percent. If that is followed by a drop in demand for hotels by 0.8 percent, it could cause an \$18 billion falloff in spending this year.

According to the National Travel and Tourism Office of the US Commerce Department, the number of overseas visitors to the US fell 2.4 percent in February compared with the corresponding time last year. Visits from China fell by 11 percent, African countries 9 percent, other parts of Asia 7 percent and Central America 6 percent.

Several issues, including potential tariffs on trade partners and changes at US borders and customs, appear to be of concern to international visitors. For some, the strong dollar has made it more expensive to visit the US. Other countries face long wait times for visas.

Last year, Canada was the biggest source of foreign visitors to the US, with more than 20.4 million visits, generating \$20.5 billion in spending and supporting 140,000 US jobs.

However, tourism and spending associated with Canadian visitors could take a hit this year, according to the US Travel Association, a non-profit representing the travel industry. It found that if there is just a 10 percent reduction in Canadian travel to the US, it could cost \$2.1 billion in lost spending and 14,000 job losses.

Last month, the number of Canadians who drove back from a trip to the US fell by 23 percent. Air travel from the US was down by 13 percent compared with last year,

The Washington Post reported.

The United Kingdom, a major source of visitors to the US (behind Canada and Mexico), issued a travel advisory to its citizens that a visa waiver will not guarantee entrance into the US. Germany and Canada have issued similar advice.

Last year, about 1.6 million visitors came to the US from China, an increase over 2023, but still significantly lower than the 2.83 million that visited in 2019.

High consumption

Tori Emerson Barnes, executive vice-president of US Travel Association, told China Daily that before the pandemic, China was one of the "fastest-growing markets to the US, with Chinese visitors spending more on average than visitors from any other market."

In 2019, about 80 million tourists came to the US and spent about \$235 billion. Nearly 3 million Chinese visitors spent \$35 billion.

In 2023, the Chinese regained their title of being the biggest spenders while traveling internationally. They spent \$106.5 billion on international travel, outpacing US citizens and Germans, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

On average, Chinese tourists traveling independently to the US and not as part of a group tour spent about \$10,445 per trip in 2023, the National Travel and Tourism Office found.

The US will likely see the number of visitors picking up later this year, but spending by all tourists will probably not recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2026, the US Travel Association predicts.

In May, the destination marketing organization Brand USA, the US Department of Commerce and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China hosted the 14th US-China Tourism Leadership Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

At the event, Chris Thompson, the then president and CEO of Brand USA, said, "The return of Chinese visitors is critical for the US tourism industry and essential for the full recovery of our economy."

Woolly stampede



People gather to watch "Running of the Sheep" at the Great New Zealand Muster in Te Kuiti, North Island, on Saturday. Hundreds of sheep dashed past spectators during this annual event, which celebrates the region's rich sheep-farming heritage. MENG TAO / XINHUA

Denmark slams 'tone' of Vance's Greenland remark

COPENHAGEN — Denmark said on Saturday it did not like the "tone" of US Vice-President JD Vance's comment that Copenhagen had not done enough for Greenland. Vance said this during his uninvited visit to the Danish territory, which is coveted by US President Donald Trump.

"We are open to criticisms, but let me be completely honest — we do not appreciate the tone in which it's being delivered," Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said on social media.

"This is not how you speak to your close allies, and I still consider Denmark and the United States to be close allies."

Vance made his comments during a trip on Friday to the Pituffik Space Base in northwestern Greenland, viewed by both Denmark and the island as a provocation.

"Our message to Denmark is very simple: You have not done a good job (for) the people of Greenland," Vance told a news conference.

"You have underinvested in the people of Greenland and you have underinvested in the security architecture of this incredible, beautiful landmass."

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen also hit back at Vance in a statement, saying his remarks about Denmark were "not accurate". She added she will be visiting the island this week.

Trump argues that the United States needs the vast Arctic region for national and international security reasons and has refused to rule out the use of force to secure it.

"I never take military force off the table" in regard to acquiring Greenland, Trump told NBC News on Saturday.

In Copenhagen, hundreds of protesters voiced strong opposition on Saturday to recent remarks and actions by the US administration regarding Greenland.

Mogens Lykketoft, former foreign minister of Denmark and former president of the United Nations General Assembly, addressed the crowd in the capital.

"We must fight our case at the UN, where it is certain that an overwhelming majority of countries will join in condemning American aggression against Greenland," he said.

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BUSINESS

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Energy self-sufficiency pointer to secure future

Advancements in exploration, production technology have also boosted output of oil and natural gas, ensuring stronger resource resilience in world's second-largest economy

By ZHENG XIN

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Even as it navigates global uncertainties and supply chain disruptions, China has made significant strides in enhancing its domestic energy security, with the energy self-sufficiency rate rising to above 80 percent.

This improvement in recent years is part of a larger trend of steady growth in domestic energy supply, driven by the increased production of oil and natural gas, according to a report released by China National Petroleum Corp Economics and Technology Research Institute in Beijing in January.

The country's total oil and gas output surpassed 400 million metric tons of oil equivalent last year, while total power generation exceeded 10 trillion kilowatt-hours, marking a 5.7 percent increase over the previous year, it said.

Industry experts believe domestic oil and gas output has been playing a central role in the country's energy self-sufficiency, while advancements in exploration and production technology have also boosted output, ensuring stronger energy resilience in the world's second-largest economy.

This growth reflects continued investments in exploration and development across both traditional and unconventional energy sources, as Chinese oil and gas companies are intensifying exploration and development efforts to boost reserves and enhance efficiency, said Lu Ruquan, head of the China National Petroleum Corp Economics and Technology Research Institute.

Exploration and development investments by the three major oil and gas companies — China National Petroleum Corp, China National Offshore Oil Corp and China Petroleum and Chemical Corp — are expected to reach 390 billion yuan (\$53.7 billion), which is leading to significant discoveries across a range of oil and gas fields, he said.

This, in turn, helped reduce China's dependence on crude oil imports to 71.9 percent in 2024, as the nation's oil and gas industry demonstrated remarkable resilience last year, leveraging advanced technologies to increase domestic production while reducing reliance on imports.

China's reliance on oil imports is projected to remain at around 70 percent between 2026 and 2030, while the world's second-largest refining industry is estimated to import 559 million tons of crude oil this year, a level equivalent to about 11.18 million barrels per day.

These numbers not only demonstrate China's strengthened energy security, but also underscore its growing role in global energy markets, where its demand is continuing to shape trends worldwide, said Lu.

According to the CNPC report, the country's energy consumption in 2024 grew by 4 percent compared to 2023, driving global demand for primary energy up by 1.9 percent.

New proven reserves included approximately 1.6 billion tons of oil and 1.6 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. Oil production reached 213 million tons, growing by 1.9 percent from 2023, marking the



An engineer works at the Dongfang 13-2 gas fields project, China's largest offshore high-temperature and high-pressure gas fields project, located offshore near Dongfang, Hainan province. YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: A crane lifts a large steel photovoltaic platform onto a ship in Laizhou, Shandong province, on Feb 27. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: A worker cleans a drill pipe at PetroChina's oilfield in Tarim Basin, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Feb 19. HU HUHUI / XINHUA

sixth consecutive year of increased production.

Natural gas production saw a 5.7 percent year-on-year increase to reach 248.8 billion cubic meters, continuing an eight-year streak of production growth exceeding 10 billion cubic meters annually, said the institute.

Hu Jianwu, deputy director-general of the National Energy Administration's oil and gas department, said China had been accelerating efforts to ramp up oil and gas exploration and development efforts throughout last year, driven by technological innovation and a focus on low-carbon transformation.

As China's oil and gas majors had also been increasing exploration and development efforts throughout last year, focusing on increasing reserves and improving extraction efficiency, 2024 also saw a series of breakthroughs in deep water and unconventional oil and gas exploration, with major new discoveries made in

Bohai Bay, Ordos Basin and Tarim Basin, said the administration.

Chinese oil and gas companies are intensifying exploration and development efforts to boost reserves and enhance efficiency, including a concerted effort to tap into unconventional gas resources like coal bed methane, and implement technologies that reduce emissions from fossil fuel operations.

CBM is a new type of unconventional natural resource and is widely distributed across coal-rich basins in China, such as those in Ordos in Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Junggar Basin in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Sichuan province, with estimated reserves exceeding 40 trillion cubic meters.

However, due to unclear reservoir formation mechanisms and high extraction difficulty — together with other challenges including low extraction efficiency, insufficient infrastructure and limited market access — further exploration and

development possibilities have been long hindered.

Zhang Qingsheng, executive director of Sinopec Zhongyuan Oilfield under China Petroleum and Chemical Corp, also known as Sinopec, emphasized the strategic importance of developing CBM resources in China.

Zhang highlighted CBM's potential to strengthen energy security and promote cleaner energy use, and underscored the wider industry's role in decarbonization.

"CBM is a valuable resource that can help optimize our energy structure while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We should take proactive measures to accelerate its development," he said, advocating for stronger policy support, increased investment and technological innovation to boost CBM extraction and utilization.

Breakthroughs in ultra-deep drilling and offshore exploration, for example, led by China Nation-

ally Petroleum Corp, have significantly enhanced the country's capacity to tap into its abundant but challenging reserves, securing a more robust foundation for energy independence, said Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the CNPC institute.

Wu said the country's oil and gas exploration continues to benefit from cutting-edge technologies, including digitalization and artificial intelligence, which have optimized operations and boosted productivity.

Wu believes China is expected to maintain its aggressive investment in oil and gas exploration, with new proven reserves projected to exceed 1 billion tons of oil and 1 trillion cubic meters of natural gas.

Ye Lin, vice-president of commodity markets research at global consultancy Rystad Energy, said China's demand for major transportation fuels showed minimal growth in 2024, as the rapid shift toward elec-

tric vehicles reduced gasoline consumption.

The fall in crude oil imports last year was mostly due to weaker domestic gasoline and diesel demand as China imports crude oil mainly to process into transport fuels and chemical feedstocks, she said.

As electric cars' improved performance and longer mileage are finally winning wide acceptance from customers, gasoline demand started to fall in 2024, she added.

At the same time, China's energy sector is undergoing a major transformation, as the country moves toward a greener, more sustainable energy model.

In 2024, renewable energy generation reached 3.2 trillion kWh, a 14.8 percent increase from the previous year. Renewables now dominate the power generation capacity, accounting for more than 43 percent of the global total, according to the NEA.

China has significantly advanced its energy sector decarbonization through major financial commitments to renewable technologies like wind, solar and hydrogen. These substantial investments in non-fossil energy now represent a third of such spending globally, establishing the country as a central figure in the worldwide shift toward green energy.

This energy transition has also been significantly fueled by the country's swift embrace of electric vehicles. Notably, in 2024, new energy passenger cars achieved a penetration rate exceeding 50 percent, surpassing gasoline-powered vehicles to become the leading category in the market.

China saw a substantial 31.4 million NEVs in use by the end of 2024, representing an ownership rate of 8.9 percent. This upward trend is forecast to persist into 2025, with projections indicating the number of NEVs on roads will surpass 40 million.

According to Lu, while China is advancing in its green transition, fossil fuels will continue to play a critical role in ensuring energy security in the near term.

The country's fossil energy output is expected to grow steadily in 2025, with oil consumption approaching its peak, he said.

In the future, as China shifts toward a more balanced energy structure, coal, oil and natural gas will continue to play an essential role alongside non-fossil fuels, said Lu.

According to the institute, by 2025, China's total energy production is expected to reach approximately 5.26 billion tons of standard coal equivalent, with a slight increase in energy self-sufficiency to 84.7 percent, a 0.1 percentage point improvement from 2024.

At the same time, China's oil and gas companies will continue to invest heavily in exploration and development. In 2025, the country's oil production is expected to remain steady at around 200 million tons, while natural gas output is expected to continue growing by more than 10 billion cubic meters annually.

Technological innovation will be crucial to driving efficiency gains, with digital tools and automation playing a key role in boosting production and managing resources, it said.

Computing sector to play crucial role in power demand

REPORTER'S LOG

By Zheng Xin

China's rapidly expanding computing infrastructure is emerging as a significant new source of power demand, challenging the nation's grid and accelerating the need for flexible energy regulation capabilities, industry experts said.

While China pushes forward with

its ambitious renewable energy build-out, the surge in demand from data centers, AI, and other computing-intensive sectors is creating a challenge for grid operators, requiring solutions beyond traditional power sources, said Zhao Yong, president of the Energy Research Institute under China Huaneng Group Co Ltd.

The escalating power consumption of the computing sector is becoming a major factor in China's overall energy picture. Among high energy-consuming industries, computing's share of national electricity demand is projected to rise sharply, he said during a summit held by

industry consultancy BloombergNEF in Beijing recently.

"Electricity demand from computing power is expected to continue soaring all through 2035. This figure represents a substantial portion of China's overall electricity consumption," he said.

"The need to reconcile the growth of energy-intensive computing with China's green energy transition is becoming increasingly pressing."

Zhao emphasized the importance of coordinated development between computing power and electricity supply, with energy storage playing a vital role in ensuring grid stability and enabling the

deeper integration of renewable energy to meet this burgeoning demand.

The rapid growth and widespread adoption of new infrastructure technologies like 5G, big data, cloud computing, AI, and the industrial internet have led to a substantial surge in electricity consumption within these industries, said the China Electricity Council.

Consultancy McKinsey & Company said the growth of data centers and the adoption of AI rely heavily on the availability of electric power. As a result, opportunities for investors in power infrastructure and adjacent sec-

tors are quickly emerging.

Zhao said one key technology gaining prominence is new-type energy storage, including compressed air energy storage. These advanced storage solutions are seen as crucial for providing the flexible grid regulation needed to balance the increasing variability of renewable energy sources and the surging demand from the digital economy.

Energy storage capacity has grown exponentially during China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, he said.

Chinese authorities unveiled several measures in February to promote the new-type energy storage manufacturing sector, as part of efforts to accelerate the development of emerging industries

and the country's modern industrial system.

According to an action plan jointly issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and seven other government departments, by 2027, the sector is expected to demonstrate international competitive advantages across the entire manufacturing chain, with a greater number of leading enterprises, marked improvements in industrial innovation capabilities, and overall competitiveness.

China will launch initiatives to boost technology innovation in the new-type energy storage sector, including measures to speed up the upgrading of mature technologies such as lithium batteries and support disruptive technological innovations, it said.

BUSINESS



Workers match up cells at the production line of Chongqing Haichen Energy Storage Technology Co Ltd in Chongqing on Sept 27. HUANG WEI / XINHUA

Nation to become a global energy storage powerhouse

Growth to be fueled by market demand and supportive government policies

By ZHENG XIN
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China's energy storage industry is set to experience significant growth through 2027, fueled by a combination of growing market demand and supportive government policies, according to industry experts and company executives.

The country's new energy storage sector, which is currently in its early stages, is expected to evolve from a nascent market player to a global leader in the coming years, they said.

"Key developments in energy storage technologies will play a pivotal role in integrating renewable energy sources and smart grids, thus enhancing the overall flexibility and efficiency of China's energy system," said Fei Zhi, vice-chairman of GCL Group.

"The new energy storage industry is poised to leap from a novice to a pioneer by 2027, driven by technological advances and the increased integration of renewable energy generation," he said.

"These developments will improve the system's flexibility, enabling more efficient energy use across the nation."

Fei's comments came in response to a government action plan announced recently, which outlines measures to foster high-quality development in the energy storage sector while promoting innovation, competitiveness, and environmentally sustainable growth.

As part of the government's push, China plans to cultivate three to five leading energy storage enterprises by 2027 and establish a regional clustering pattern to enhance the sector's innovation and market influence. The policy seeks to advance the full-chain development of energy storage technologies, which are vital for optimizing the use of new energy resources.

Amid the backdrop, the listed company under GCL Group, GCL Energy Technology Co Ltd, has been actively exploring innovations in business models, such as the virtual power plant model, which expands revenue channels through electricity market trading and ancillary services.

The company is also strengthening vehicle-to-grid applications and partnered with Chinese carmaker Nio last year to jointly develop a network of 100 energy stations as part of its national energy storage blueprint.

According to the plan, the government will further enhance support for the value chain of relevant manufacturing enterprises and foster a service-oriented manufacturing model. China will also seek to drive the extensive adoption of next-generation information technologies, including blockchain, big data, artificial intelligence and 5G, within the new-energy storage manufacturing sector, it said.

The government will also accel-

erate the construction of smart factories in relevant industries. It will promote the digital transformation of key processes in new energy storage production and system integration, utilizing technologies like machine vision, ultrasound and infrared thermography for enhanced quality control.

China's energy storage manufacturing industry is already at the forefront of global standards and will continue to lead the industry in advanced power trading and grid integration technologies in the future, said Tian Qingjun, senior vice-president of Envision Group.

"Developed countries overseas have mature electricity markets but relatively weaker grid environments, creating significant demand for trading and grid forming technologies. Domestic energy storage companies should increase their research and development efforts to cater to the needs of overseas markets," he said.

As a global leader in energy storage system integration, Envision has made significant breakthroughs in trading-based and grid-integrated energy storage technologies. The company has already validated these technologies through numerous projects in both domestic and international markets.

The government's long-term goal is to position China as a global manufacturing powerhouse in energy storage, contributing to the efficient development and utilization of renewable energy resources, experts said.

The Chinese energy storage mar-

ket is expected to benefit from the surge in renewable energy production, such as solar and wind power, which requires efficient storage solutions to balance supply and demand, said Wang Shouxiang, a professor with the School of Electrical and Information Engineering of Tianjin University.

Additionally, the expansion of electric vehicles and the growing trend of decentralizing power generation are further driving the need for advanced energy storage systems, he said.

Wang said China has achieved an early global leadership position in the key technological field of new energy storage, which is critical for the large-scale development of renewable energy.

China now possesses core technologies across the entire industry value chain, giving it a competitive edge in the field. This strengthens and complements China's leadership in the renewable energy and electric vehicle sectors, he said.

China released 770 energy storage-related policies in 2024, with 77 issued at the national level. The policies primarily focus on development plans, new energy storage integration, electricity market regulation and subsidy programs.

As of the end of 2024, the total installed capacity of new energy storage projects in China reached 73.76 million kilowatts, which represented an increase of more than 130 percent compared with the end of 2023, according to the National Energy Administration.

How China's policy kit fuels consumer wallets

BEIJING — China recently unveiled a comprehensive policy package to boost consumer spending, reinforcing its commitment to making consumption a key driver of economic growth.

The 30-point plan aims to strengthen consumer confidence through a set of measures that include promoting income growth and reducing financial burden.

Analysts described the pro-consumption push as an innovative move that underscores the government's commitment to a people-oriented approach and its focus on investing in human capital.

The holistic initiative, which combines fiscal, financial and regulatory tools, aligns with priorities outlined in this year's Government Work Report, which positioned "expanding domestic demand" as a top priority.

A key aspect of the plan is its focus on tackling prominent constraints on consumption through three main measures: boosting spending power by increasing incomes and easing financial burdens; delivering high-quality supply; and fostering a consumption environment.

and old-age insurance, Li Chunlin, deputy director of the National Development and Reform Commission, said at a news conference following the release of the initiative.

Accordingly, China plans to explore a childcare subsidy system, increase fiscal subsidies for basic old age benefits and basic medical insurance for rural and non-working urban residents in 2025, and appropriately raise basic pension benefits for retirees.

The plan's increased focus on tackling livelihood problems aligns with this year's Government Work Report, which pledged to "direct more funds and resources toward investing in people to meet their needs".

Increasing fiscal spending on human development and social safeguards not only helps create a sustainable consumption expansion mechanism, but also reflects an approach where economic growth and the improvement of people's well-being mutually reinforce each other, according to Jin Li, vice-president of Southern University of Science and Technology.

In a broader push to bolster domestic demand, China renewed its consumer goods trade-in program, increasing funding from last year's 150 billion yuan (\$20.67 billion) to 300 billion yuan through ultra-long special treasury bonds.

This year's initiative also extends subsidies to more electric gadgets and home appliances including smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

The push builds on the success of 2024, where 150 billion yuan in subsidies generated over 1.3 trillion yuan in sales across autos, home goods, and electronics, highlighting the program's role as a near-term economic stabilizer.

Amid strong policy support, e-commerce giant JD.com reported a 13.4 percent year-on-year revenue increase in the fourth quarter, marking its highest quarterly growth in nearly two years, while its operating profit skyrocketed to 8.5 billion yuan, compared to 2 billion yuan recorded in the same period of the previous year, the company's latest performance report showed.

Central to the plan is an unprecedented emphasis on demand-side support to bolster household consumption capacity through measures that foster reasonable wage increases, expand property income channels and boost farmers' earnings.

For the first time in a policy document on boosting consumption, the plan explicitly highlights the importance of stabilizing both the stock and property markets, outlining targeted measures in a bid to "enhance spending power, stabilize expectations and strengthen consumer confidence".

"There's considerable focus on increasing both the capacity and willingness of households to consume," Lynn Song, ING chief economist for Greater China, said in a note.

The plan integrates consumption growth with improving livelihoods, introducing measures to ease household burdens in areas such as childcare, education, healthcare



Customers pose for a selfie in front of a Spring Festival decoration at a shopping mall in Shanghai on Jan 28. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

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Photo by Wang Jing

AD

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Economy hints recovery, but challenges persist

EAGLE EYE

By Luo Zhiheng

China's economy continued its recovery in the first two months, but challenges remain, including tariffs and insufficient demand. To sustain growth and achieve high-quality economic development, well-coordinated and effective policies are needed to boost consumption.

Since the beginning of the year, China has seen steady growth in production, supply, consumption and investment. First-quarter GDP growth is projected to reach around 5.5 percent year-on-year, despite headwinds such as fewer working days in the first two months and the earlier-than-usual arrival of the Spring Festival holiday.

The industrial added value of major enterprises rose 5.9 percent year-on-year in the first two months, 0.1 percentage point higher than the full-year 2024 growth rate. The services sector output index grew 5.6 percent, accelerating by 0.4 percentage point from last year's annual figure.

Retail sales of consumer goods increased 4 percent year-on-year, while fixed-asset investment grew 4.1 percent. These figures are 0.5 and 0.9 percentage point higher, respectively, than the full-year growth rates last year.

Goods and services consumption gained momentum, driven by expanded trade-in policies for consumer goods and an optimized Spring Festival holiday schedule. Merchandise retail grew 3.9 percent, while catering revenue increased 4.3 percent year-on-year. Compared with December, catering revenue growth accelerated by 1.6 percentage points.

Manufacturing investment surged 9 percent year-on-year in the first two months, maintaining strong momentum after a 9.2 percent annual rise in 2024. Investment in equipment and tools skyrocketed 18 percent, up 2.3 percentage points from the previous year, contributing 62.3 percent to total investment growth. Technological upgrades in manufacturing increased by 10 percent year-on-year, 2 percentage points higher than the full-year 2024 growth rate.

Infrastructure investment expanded steadily, growing by around 10 percent year-on-year in the first two months, 0.8 percentage point faster than full-year 2024. New government bond issuances increased by nearly 1.5 trillion yuan (\$206 billion) compared with the same period last year, providing strong support for infrastructure projects.

China has adopted a more proactive fiscal policy this year, setting the deficit-to-GDP ratio at around 4 percent, the highest ever. The total fiscal deficit is budgeted at 5.66 trillion yuan, with 4.86 trillion yuan allocated to the central government. This represents 85.9 percent of the total, the highest share in recent years.

On the local government front,



the quota for special-purpose bonds has been further raised to stabilize economic growth, promote the recovery of the property sector and boost economic circulation.

Despite policy support, challenges remain. The negative impact of US tariff hikes on Chinese goods is expected to materialize in the second quarter, posing dual pressures on exports and overall economic performance. Rising global economic risks could further weaken China's exports to non-US markets.

The property sector still faces credit risks, preventing a sustained stabilization of housing prices and real estate investment in the short term.

Supply-demand imbalances, exacerbated by insufficient effective demand and intense domestic competition, have dampened corporate profitability and household income growth.

The consumer price index declined by 0.1 percent year-on-year in the first two months and has hovered near zero since 2023. The producer price index dropped 2.2 percent year-on-year in February, marking its 29th consecutive month of declines.

For the full-year, consumption and infrastructure investment will remain key drivers of economic growth.

More proactive fiscal policies, moderately loose monetary policies and enhanced fiscal-monetary coordination are expected to reinforce consumption's role in driving the economy. Some provinces are likely to explore new investment opportunities under the local debt resolution framework.

The decline in property investment is expected to narrow as the market gradually stabilizes. The economy may face downward pressure in the second quarter, stabilize in the third quarter with policy support and maintain recovery momentum in the fourth quarter.

The authorities have acted swiftly

to implement directives from the Central Economic Work Conference, driving early-year growth through front-loaded efforts and accelerated project launches. However, weak demand, subdued expectations and an unstable recovery foundation make growth vulnerable to setbacks. The negative effects of China-US trade frictions could intensify in the second quarter, adding further pressure.

Thus, policy support must remain strong until self-sustaining growth drivers strengthen and a virtuous economic cycle is established.

From a fiscal policy perspective, dynamic budget adjustments

should ensure that fiscal expenditure growth matches or slightly outpaces economic growth.

Tax and fee reduction policies should focus on efficiency and quality rather than size and quantity.

Fiscal spending should strike a balance between investment and consumption, prioritizing public consumption sectors such as healthcare, education, and eldercare to reduce household financial burdens and encourage spending.

Targeted support measures — including unemployment subsidies for graduates, rural elderly subsidies and childcare allowances for families with two or more children — could further stimulate consumption.

Debt resolution strategies should optimize the use of 6 trillion yuan in debt resolution quotas within three years and 4 trillion yuan over five years, ensuring flexibility based on regional needs.

From a monetary policy perspective, targeted tools should be employed to boost household consumption and corporate investment demand. Strengthened financial support will facilitate large-scale equipment renewals and consumer goods trade-in programs.

Policy measures should stabilize the property market while mitigating credit risks for real estate companies. Unnecessary restrictions on property transactions should be removed to restore market-driven allocation of commercial housing.

Establishing a central-level property stabilization fund could help alleviate liquidity pressure on firms, enhancing local governments' ability to maintain market stability.

Encouraging the development of high-quality residential projects will help meet housing demand.

Policies should promote reforms and improvements in mechanisms to boost consumption by increasing the ability and willingness of households to spend.

Tailored assistance and subsidies should be provided to enhance purchasing power and ensure sustained momentum for consumer goods trade-in programs.

Income distribution reforms should optimize national income allocation by refining tax structures and accelerating rural land marketization, thereby increasing the income share of low and middle-income households.

Household registration reforms should facilitate the integration of rural migrant workers into urban residency systems — known as the *hukou* system — stabilizing long-term expectations and increasing their spending appetites.

On the supply side, efforts should focus on optimizing the supply structure by increasing the share of high-end manufacturing to meet high-quality demand.

Liberalizing market access in the services sector could unlock demand for services consumption by easing entry barriers in tourism, culture, healthcare and eldercare, supported by stronger standardization and oversight.

The writer is chief economist at Yuekai Securities.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Healthier property sector key to boosting growth

MAIN STREET

By Lian Ping

This year's Government Work Report, for the first time, proposed stabilizing the real estate market, showcasing China's strong focus on the critical sector. Given its substantial influence and associated risks, a healthier property industry will play a vital role in boosting China's economy.

Driven by a series of supportive policies, the decline in housing sales and prices has gradually narrowed, and the real estate market in first-tier and some second-tier cities has shown signs of stabilization since the fourth quarter.

However, risks still exist. Some real estate enterprises are facing heavy liquidity risks, difficulties in

repaying their debts and continuous declines in returns on investment brought about by rising asset impairments. Local governments are bearing fiscal pressure from dwindling land transactions, while slumping property investment levels undermine both economic growth and investment confidence of private enterprises.

This year, the government vowed to conduct more forceful housing policies to further stabilize the real estate market. In terms of boosting demand, China will adjust the restrictive measures in light of local conditions, and expedite renovations of urban villages and dilapidated housing so as to fully release demand potential.

As for the supply side, China will revitalize stocks of land and commercial buildings, promote the acquisition of commercial housing stocks and give greater autonomy to city governments in terms of acquisition subjects, prices and uses, while expanding the scope of affordable housing re-lending.

To prevent debt risks among real estate enterprises and support the work of ensuring deliveries of pre-sold homes, China will leverage the real estate financing coordination mechanism, promote the implementation of a "white list" system and improve the liquidity of property firms.

Aiming to accelerate the turnover of existing real estate assets, China will give greater operational autonomy to local governments in terms of local purchases and storage, benefiting the revitalization of stock assets and the alleviation of liquidity risks of property enterprises.

China is also taking a more suitable coordination mechanism for urban real estate financing. With the expansion of the "white list", real estate enterprises are encouraged to fully use the special loans to ensure deliveries of pre-sold homes. It is expected that in 2025, the approval amount of "white list" special loans may be expanded to 8.54 trillion yuan (\$1.18 trillion), which will better support the construction of real

estate projects and mitigate debt risk among developers.

The Government Work Report also noted that, "to meet people's demand for high-quality housing, we will improve the standards and regulations on building quality homes that are safe, comfortable, eco-friendly and smart."

To improve people's living standards, China will carry out renovation plans for urban villages and aging residential assets, and promote the direct granting of monetary subsidies for resettlement. It is hoped that by this way, the number of actual urban village transformations this year will increase to 1.5-2 million units, driving housing demand by 75-100 million square meters.

Real estate enterprises are encouraged to provide more commercial houses of more than 140 square meters per unit on the supply side of new housing to better match demand for improved housing in major cities. As the construction concept of "green, modern and

intelligent" has gradually taken root among households, we're also likely to see an increase in the proportion of "green and smart" decorative materials, thus meeting people's new housing needs.

If all the measures are implemented effectively, it is hoped that this will stem the downturn and restore stability in the property sector this year. It is estimated that the decline in housing sales is expected to slow significantly throughout this year.

Housing prices in various cities are showing signs of stabilization. Prices of newly built commercial housing units and secondhand housing in the country will fall by about 1 percent and 2 percent year-on-year, respectively, which will be 4.7 percentage points and 6 percentage points narrower than that at the end of 2024.

And the maturity scale of real estate enterprise debt in 2025 will be further reduced compared with 2024. It is estimated that the scale of various debts among property firms during this year will be about 3.1 trillion yuan, and the overall expenditure scale will be about 800 billion yuan less than that in 2024.

The activity of land transactions

is increasing with the support of land reserve special bonds. It is expected that the shrinking overall land acquisition capacity of real estate enterprises will mitigate in 2025, as the annual land purchase funds will be about 3.44 trillion yuan, a year-on-year decrease of 3.5 percent, with the decline 5.2 percentage points narrower than that in 2024.

The current round of real estate market adjustment may gradually come to an end, and the inventory-to-sales ratio of commercial housing will gradually fall from relatively high levels, with the property market in major cities taking the lead in stabilizing the sector. Some of the main indicators of the industry may stop falling and some may narrow the decline. And market confidence will also be consistently restored with the risk of real estate sector exposure gradually narrowing this year.

The writer is a council member of the China Chief Economist Forum and head of the Guangkai Chief Industry Research Institute.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

US security alliances in Asia nothing but hollow promises in a losing game

When the current US president entered the White House, he spoke of a "new beginning" for US-China relations. Yet his administration is showing it is intent on inflaming tensions, pressuring Asian allies to weaponize their trade and security ties with the United States to contain China. The visits of US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to Japan and the Philippines have laid bare this cynical strategy — one that demands absolute loyalty from allies while offering them nothing but economic coercion and geopolitical instability in return.

Hegseth's rhetoric in Tokyo was typical of Washington's doublespeak. He praised Japan as an "indispensable partner" in countering what he called "communist Chinese military aggression", and invoked a shared "warrior ethos" between the US and Japan. Yet these hollow words ring false when contrasted with the US administration's treatment of Japan in trade and security. The US has slapped a 25 percent tariff on all imported Japanese automobiles, a direct blow to one of Japan's most critical industries. Meanwhile, the US leader himself publicly questioned the benefits of the US-Japan Security Treaty to the US, complaining that Washington is obligated to defend Japan while Tokyo offers no reciprocal guarantee.

This is the reality of the US' alliances in Asia: they are not partnerships of equals, but instruments of US dominance. Japan, like Europe, is expected to follow Washington's lead on security — hosting US bases, aligning with NATO's expansion into Asia, and escalating military spending — while simultaneously enduring punitive trade policies. The message is clear: submit to the US' geopolitical agenda, or face economic retaliation. Tokyo is certainly not blind to this trap. The sudden resignation of former prime minister Fumio Kishida was not driven by external threats, but by domestic economic strains worsened by his government's unquestioning alignment with US policy. His administration's decision to double defense spending in a short period — largely to fund US-backed military upgrades — placed an unsustainable burden on Japan's economy. Now, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba faces an impossible choice.

If Japan further opens its strategic southwestern islands to US forces — particularly near the contested East China Sea and Taiwan — it will sabotage Tokyo's efforts to stabilize relations with Beijing. Yet if it resists Washington's demands, it risks trade penalties and political pressure. The US has already demonstrated its willingness to strong-arm allies, as seen in Hegseth's meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Friday, where security assurances came with an unmistakable price tag attached. Japan knows the same applies to its own alliance.

Washington's lofty talk of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" is nothing but a euphemism for rallying regional nations into an anti-China bloc. The US does not seek stability or mutual prosperity — it seeks vassal states that will host its military assets, buy its weapons, and isolate Beijing at their own economic expense. But this strategy is backfiring. Asian nations, including Japan, are increasingly aware that blind obedience to Washington brings more risks than rewards. The US administration's erratic trade policies, its transactional view of alliances, and its willingness to stoke regional conflicts for its own gain have left even close allies wary. Japan, in particular, must recognize that it cannot eat from China's bowl in trade while smashing China's pots in security. A stable economic relationship with Beijing is incompatible with serving as a forward base for US containment efforts.

The US is not a reliable partner. Its alliances are not defensive pacts but tools of coercion, designed to maintain the US' hegemony at the expense of regional stability. To maintain the regional stability that is essential for their well-being, Japan, like other Asian nations, must pursue an independent foreign policy — one that prioritizes diplomacy over confrontation, and mutual benefit over subservience to Washington's demands.

The alternative is a future where Asia remains trapped in a cycle of US-manufactured crises, where trade wars and military brinkmanship replace cooperation and development. If Japan wishes to avoid this fate, it must resist becoming a pawn in the US' reckless game to constrain China's development. The times are changing. Asian nations must choose whether to change with them or be dragged down chained to Washington's folly.

Greenland should make 'rogue state' go away

United States politicians have habitually branded nations they dislike as "rogue states", accusing countries that oppose US ambitions of destabilizing behavior while ignoring their own country's egregious transgressions. This hypocrisy is once more in the spotlight with the covetous eye the US has cast on Greenland, where recent remarks by visiting US Vice-President JD Vance laid bare the US administration's imperial arrogance and its dangerous military expansionism across the Arctic region.

Vance's comments during his Greenland visit revealed the ugly truth behind the US' Arctic ambitions. His patronizing declaration that Denmark had "not done a good job by the people of Greenland" and that the territory would be better off under US "protection" demonstrated breathtaking disrespect for the people of Greenland. This condescension was particularly galling given that Greenland already falls under NATO's security umbrella.

The vice-president's fearmongering about Chinese ambitions in Greenland was especially cynical. "We can't just bury our head in the sand — or, in Greenland, bury our head in the snow — and pretend that the Chinese are not interested in this very large landmass," Vance said in his remarks at the US' Pituffik Space Base. This fabricated threat narrative collapses under the slightest scrutiny. China has never tried or threatened to seize Greenland. The same cannot be said of the US, whose president has openly discussed the US acquiring the territory "one way or another".

Despite Vance's scaremongering, the US' true motives were laid bare by National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, who dispensed with Vance's pretenses and admitted: "This is about shipping lanes. This is about energy. This is about fisheries." His candor revealed what Vance would not — that America's Arctic push is fundamentally about resource extraction and military dominance.

The numbers tell the story. Greenland holds an estimated 11 million tons of rare earth oxides essential for advanced weapons systems and green technology, along with some of the world's largest undeveloped uranium deposits. And as climate change opens new Arctic shipping routes, the US is determined to control these strategic waterways. This explains Washington's massive military buildup in the region, including a \$4 billion upgrade to the Thule Air Base to track hypersonic missiles and expanded drone surveillance operations across the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap — a critical choke point for submarines.

The US' Arctic militarization is part of its broader pattern of "rogue state" behavior. The US maintains approximately 800 military bases worldwide, including an expanding network in the Arctic region designed to encircle Russia and contain China. This expansion continues despite growing local opposition in places such as Greenland, where many Inuit communities view the bases as environmental threats and reminders of colonial occupation. The Pentagon's Arctic strategy explicitly frames the region as a "contested space" requiring US dominance, even as it destabilizes what had hitherto been relatively peaceful territory.

What makes the US' conduct particularly egregious is the stark contrast with China's approach. While Washington bullies, threatens and militarizes, Beijing has pursued economic partnerships and infrastructure investments in the Arctic without demanding military access or regime change. China's polar strategy focuses on scientific research and commercial opportunities, not the establishment of military bases or the overthrow of governments.

The "rogue state" label so beloved of the US has always been one of convenience. The US invades sovereign nations. It overthrows governments. It violates international law. And now, with the US leader reiterating on the weekend his earlier threat that the US may not need to use military force to "get Greenland" but the possibility of it cannot be ruled out, it is doing nothing but trying to strong-arm Greenland while pretending to be its savior.

The irony is that if any country fits the definition of a "rogue state", it is the US. It has become precisely what it claims to oppose — an unpredictable, expansionist power that disregards international norms when they conflict with its interests. From illegal invasions to drone assassinations to unilateral sanctions, Washington has compiled a record of lawlessness that dwarfs the list of alleged crimes it ascribes to the "rogue states" it designates.

Until Washington changes course, its claims to moral leadership will ring as hollow as Vance's patronizing lectures to the people of Greenland.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

iShowSpeed livestreams show world an unfiltered China

When Darren Watkins Jr, the 22-year-old US internet celebrity better known to his 37 million YouTube followers and those on other platforms as iShowSpeed, embarked on a marathon livestreaming tour across China, broadcasting for six uninterrupted hours on the first day alone, he vaporized the meticulously constructed "China threat theory" peddled by some in the West.

His lens revealed a nation so starkly divergent from typical Western caricatures that it made many viewers confront the uncomfortable truth that their perception of China had been systematically distorted.

What unfolded before his camera was a wonderland of 21st-century infrastructure. As his bullet train plunged into mountain tunnels, Western viewers gasped to see his livestream continue flawlessly, as China's ubiquitous 5G covers even the most remote transit routes. This technological seamlessness extended to daily commerce: at street vendors, subway turnstiles, and rural bus stops alike, a single QR code scan from his Alipay app completed transactions instantly, constructing a cashless ecosystem.

Even more telling were the moments when the technology faded into the background, allowing human connections to take center

stage. In Shanghai's People's Park, retirees taught him traditional fan dances, while strangers in the street pressed cups of milk tea into his hands. All these interactions coalesced into an unscripted tapestry of Chinese social warmth.

The YouTuber's unexpected role as a cultural ambassador stems from his February 2023 viral cover of Chinese singer Da Zhangwei's *Sunshine Rainbow White Pony* — a song whose absurdist lyrics have become a TikTok meme. When he later joined Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, like many in the US did when TikTok temporarily went offline in the US, his posts drew over 1 million followers in weeks. This hybrid appeal reached its zenith during his Shanghai subway freestyle session, as commuters rapped the song's chorus in regional dialects while grandmothers beat-boxed, a moment of cross-generational harmony that no soft power initiative could engineer.

Following iShowSpeed's livestream going viral, the backlash machinery lurched into action. Some resorted to the old trick of calling him China's "puppet". To rebut such allegations, iShowSpeed's production team released bank statements proving the trip's budget had nothing to do with China. Before that, they had already livestreamed in other devel-

oping countries and regions.

With the Chinese embassy in the US citing iShowSpeed's footage in an open invitation for Americans to visit China and see beyond the headlines, comparisons have been made to the ping-pong diplomacy of 1971, in which table tennis served as the medium for breaking the ice formed during the Cold War. As today's world is connected by mobile networks, it is easier for people around the world to get to know each other, and iShowSpeed's success has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the US people better understanding China. With unpolished vertical videos, self-deprecating humor, and algorithmic serendipity, he has bypassed geopolitical filters.

Significantly, his approach mirrors China's own digital rise, as TikTok conquered global culture by empowering individual creators rather than corporate studios. As the livestream's final frames showed him boarding a flight home, two revelations lingered: first, that the West's China narrative had been built on a foundation of curated ignorance; second, that the architects of this ignorance now face their greatest threat, not government spokespeople, but a generation that trusts smartphone cameras more than cable news.

— ZHANG ZHOULIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Tariff attacks on partners self-created pretty pickle

Despite calls from allies on Wall Street and Capitol Hill to adopt a more measured approach, US President Donald Trump has been pushing for sweeping trade actions aimed at reshaping the US economy.

Trump has reportedly continued to tell his advisers that he wants to keep intensifying trade measures, and in recent days, he has brought back the idea of a universal tariff that would apply to most imports, no matter which country they come from.

If the United States really imposes the "reciprocal" tariffs Trump threatens, it will not only propel the US economy into chaos but also send shock waves across the world.

Earlier on Friday, Trump said that he was open to carving out deals with countries seeking to avoid US tariffs but those agreements would have to be negotiated after his administration announces reciprocal levies on Wednesday.

And the US leader told the media on Saturday he did not warn car industry executives against raising prices as tariffs on foreign-made autos come into force, adding that he "couldn't care less" if they do, as he believes his permanent tariffs on foreign-made automobiles would be a boost to US-domiciled factories and was confident the move would lead to increased sales of US-made cars.

"I hope they raise their prices, because if they do, people are gonna buy American-made cars," Trump said, without explaining whether the US-made cars are also facing high pressure to raise their retail prices as currently a considerable proportion of vehicles made by US companies are actually assembled in Canada and

Mexico or with their parts imported from other countries.

That clearly indicates the tariff-happy president is well aware of the disastrous impacts of the US implementing his tariff policy on both the US' economy and its trading partners. By playing down the former and exaggerating the latter, he only intends to use the tariffs as a maximum pressure tactic to force other countries to sit at the negotiation table with the US.

A further evidence of that is Trump said on Wednesday that he may offer to reduce tariffs on China to get Beijing's approval for the sale of popular social media platform TikTok.

"Maybe I give them a little reduction in tariffs or something to get it done," he told reporters at the White House, adding "we're going to have a form of a deal", and if it wasn't done in time, he would extend the deadline.

A US law has ordered TikTok to divest from its Chinese owner ByteDance or be banned in the US. The law was enacted on baseless concerns about TikTok being a threat to US "national security". The law took effect on Jan 19, a day before Trump's inauguration, but he quickly announced a delay to the law which has allowed it to continue to operate. That delay is set to expire on Saturday, three days after the planned date for the US to materialize his "reciprocal" tariffs threats.

Beijing swiftly rebuffed Trump's suggestion, with the Chinese Foreign Ministry saying that China's stance against the imposing of additional tariffs is "consistent and clear".

As a matter of fact, despite their

openness for trade talks with the US, almost all targeted parties, ranging from Canada, Mexico, Japan and India to the European Union, share a similar view with Beijing when it comes to the US' tariff war that although it produces no winners, they will have to defend their legitimate rights and interests by taking all necessary countermeasures rather than succumb to the US' pressure.

Although there has not yet been a united front among the Trump tariff victims given their trade frictions, they are all supportive of free trade and inclusive economic globalization. The US administration should be reminded its tariff war has in effect prompted some of them to strengthen their economic and trade cooperation, such as the EU and China, and Japan and Republic of Korea and China, in a bid to hedge against the possible impacts from the US' irrational tariff policy.

For instance, the ROK, China and Japan held their first economic dialogue in five years in Seoul on Sunday. The three countries' trade and commerce ministers agreed to "closely cooperate for a comprehensive and high-level" negotiation on a China-Japan-ROK free trade agreement to promote "regional and global trade", according to a statement released after the meeting.

As such, the US policymakers should realize that waging a tariff war against the rest of the world will not "make America great again", as it will backfire on the US economy, shake the foundation of the world order and isolate the US from other countries.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Xiong'an New Area

Editor's note: Xiong'an New Area has been designed as a green city featuring innovation and providing a national model of high-quality development since its inception on April 1, 2017. Over the past eight years, Xiong'an has been transformed from a blueprint into a smart city, and intelligence, green and innovation are main features for the city's high-quality development. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Wang Wenju

A model of innovation for cities

Xiong'an New Area, established as a national-level district, following the example of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and Shanghai Pudong New Area, is a key initiative of national significance. Its development is a major strategic decision made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core, to advance the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei province.

Xiong'an is designed to play the role of an important engine for the region's development by absorbing Beijing's non-capital functions and promoting innovation. With a forward-thinking vision, Xiong'an adheres to international standards and the new development philosophy, laying the foundation for high-standard, modern urban construction in the new era.

Xiong'an New Area's innovation-driven development strategy is focused on institutional reforms, technological breakthroughs and systemic optimization. It strives to unleash its potential through institutional improvements, and focus on technological development which is at the heart of its future growth.

Xiong'an has implemented bold and pioneering reforms, established a streamlined, efficient management structure, introduced a unified administrative and political office system, and adopted a flat management mechanism. These measures are aimed at improving governance efficiency and ensuring smoother operations. The area is also exploring innovative personnel management practices, such as establishing institutions without administrative levels or staffing restrictions, which provide flexibility for key areas of work.

The new area is focusing on nurturing high-tech industries by attracting quality research and innovation resources from Beijing. With the establishment of research platforms such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Xiong'an Institute of Innovation and China Telecom's Xiong'an Smart City Industrial Park, the area has attracted top-tier talents and innovation projects, creating a dynamic ecosystem for technological advancement.

Throughout its development, Xiong'an has integrated cutting-edge digital technology and smart infrastructure to build a smart city. For instance, the Beijing-Xiong'an intercity railway employs BIM (building



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information modeling) for 3D digital management, and big data and cloud computing to ensure intelligent operations. The city has achieved full 5G network coverage and built smart systems like the "City Brain", greatly enhancing urban governance and integrating technological innovation into every aspect of its construction and management.

A key mission of Xiong'an is to absorb Beijing's non-capital functions, such as universities, research institutions, high-end medical facilities, corporate headquarters and financial institutions. By the end of 2024, nearly 300 central enterprises had established branches in Xiong'an. Major projects, such as the headquarters of China Satellite Network Group, Sinochem Holdings and China Huaneng Group, had been initiated, with universities and hospitals following suit. This relocation not only helps decongest Beijing but also provides a better living environment with high-quality services in Xiong'an.

The large-scale construction projects in the area have also revitalized the region's economy. By the end of 2024, Xiong'an's investments exceeded 770 billion yuan (\$106.22 billion), greatly benefiting industries such as infrastructure, construction materials and telecommunications. Economic data show the GDP of Xiong'an — comprising Xiongxian, Rongcheng and Anxin counties — grew from 18.92 billion yuan in 2017 to 40.73 billion yuan in 2023, reflecting rapid regional economic growth.

Xiong'an follows a comprehensive planning approach, working across transportation, ecology and industry sectors to promote high-quality development.

Xiong'an, strategically located in the heart of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

region, has rapidly integrated into the region's infrastructure. With the opening of the Beijing-Xiong'an intercity railway, the travel time between Beijing West Railway Station and Xiong'an will be reduced to just 50 minutes. As the Beijing-Xiong'an Expressway is completed, it will only take about an hour to drive from Beijing to Xiong'an.

The new city's layout emphasizes the integration of industry and urban life and strikes the right balance between work and living spaces. The city design combines the charm of the Baiyangdian wetlands with modern, minimalist aesthetics, creating a beautiful, livable environment.

Ecology remains a top priority for Xiong'an. Major projects like the restoration of the Baiyangdian wetlands and the "millennium beautiful forest" have significantly improved the area's ecological environment. Baiyangdian's water quality has improved from an inferior grade V to grade III, creating a picturesque landscape of clear water and green shores. Xiong'an has plant-

ed afforested more than 470,000 acres, increasing the forest cover from 11 to 34 percent.

The ecological layout follows a vision of "300 meters of greenery, 1 kilometer of parks, and 3 km of forest". The harmonious relationship between people and nature is evident in the region's rapidly developing environment, attracting people seeking a peaceful and balanced life.

Xiong'an is accelerating the development of emerging industries, including satellite internet and information and communications technology. As more high-end companies and innovative resources converge in the area, Xiong'an is poised to become a national leader in technological innovation. The new city has been attracting talents because it offers good employment opportunities and high-quality public services, which have contributed to its growing population.

The successful completion of public service projects, such as schools and hospitals, has improved local education and healthcare services. As the city's functions continue to improve, it is on track to becoming a model for modern urban development that blends industry and city living, offering an ideal environment for work and life.

In a short period, Xiong'an has made significant progress through institutional innovation, comprehensive development across multiple sectors, and regional collaboration. The achievements so far demonstrate the power of the new development philosophy. Xiong'an is steadily growing into a vibrant modern city and a new engine for the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei.

With ongoing construction and deepening reforms, the area will continue to stimulate innovation and provide strong momentum for high-quality development. Moving forward, Xiong'an is set to become a model for urban development in the new era, offering lessons that can be replicated and scaled for cities across China.

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

Sun Guangsha

Xiong'an devises blueprint for smart growth

A new city, Xiong'an New Area, is rising in the heart of China. While Xiong'an may seem like just another ambitious urban development project, it is something much more than that. It's a test-bed for futuristic city-building, a response to China's growing urban challenges, and a model for how smart planning can address the pressing issues facing cities worldwide.

Over the last eight years, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, Xiong'an has evolved into an innovative experiment aimed at easing the pressure on Beijing. It's a city for the 21st century, designed not only to relieve Beijing of its non-capital functions but also to address deeper issues of urbanization, economic inequality, and administrative inefficiency. The lessons learned here will likely serve as a template for other countries grappling with similar urban and regional challenges.

Xiong'an's construction is not just about solving Beijing's overcrowding problem. The city's founders have a larger goal in mind: to create a new type of city, one that will be environmentally sustainable, technologically advanced, and socially inclusive. Based on this vision, the city is tackling some of the most common yet complex issues facing expanding cities around the world, including pollution, inefficient infrastructure, and the growing gap between developed and underdeveloped areas.

While other regions continue to expand their cities following outdated models, Xiong'an is devising a new blueprint, a blueprint that focuses on creating a livable, sustainable environment.

A key feature of Xiong'an's development is its embracing of smart technology. Whether it's managing traffic or providing government services, the city is designed to integrate high-tech solutions into every aspect of daily life. Take transportation for example. The China Xiong'an Group has partnered with China TransInfo Technology to create a smart traffic system, which uses real-time data to optimize traffic flow and minimize congestion. The "Kunchao Shuangzhi Intersection 3.0" system, which has already been tried in Beijing, is now being implemented in Xiong'an. The idea is simple: use technology to make life easier, safer and more efficient.

The system combines city management functions, helping local authorities monitor everything, from traffic flow to urban cleanliness. The goal is to make the city function like a well-oiled machine, with technology seamlessly working behind the scenes to improve the lives of residents.

Apart from focusing on infrastructure and technology, Xiong'an is also simplifying government services. In many parts of the world, government processes can be slow, affected by bureaucracy, and frustrating. To eliminate these shortcomings, Xiong'an launched a cloud-based service platform earlier this month, which allows residents and businesses to access many types of services, including permit applications and investment approvals, without needing to visit government offices in person. The "cloud window" service is designed to reduce the time and hassle involved in accessing public services, making life more convenient for those living and working in the city.

By moving toward a more efficient and transparent service model, Xiong'an is demonstrating how governments can use digital tools to better respond to situations and be more accountable. It's a shift that many other countries could learn from as they modernize their own public sectors.

Xiong'an's development isn't just about smart buildings and efficient transportation; it's also about people. The city is taking measures to ensure that its residents have access to quality education and cultural events. Beijing's top schools, such as Beihai Kindergarten and Shijia Hutong Primary School, have already opened branches in Xiong'an, using a model that blends private and public resources to provide high-quality education to children living in the new city.

The city is also attracting universities, with institutions like the University of Science and Technology Beijing relocating some of their programs to the new city. By promoting educational and cultural growth — alongside physical infrastructure — Xiong'an is building a holistic city in which people can thrive economically, intellectually and socially.

One of the most pressing challenges facing Xiong'an, and many other cities in the world, is how to balance growth and reduce regional inequality. Xiong'an faces the challenge of bridging the gap between the more developed Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and the less-developed areas around it. The key to solving this problem lies in creating a system that ensures economic benefits are distributed evenly, avoiding the "scissor gap", that is, the widening disparity between regions.

Xiong'an is taking steps to ensure that it doesn't become another isolated growth hub. Through policies designed to attract investment, create jobs and improve infrastructure in surrounding areas, Xiong'an is trying to ensure its development benefits everyone. By focusing on building a connected, inclusive economy, Xiong'an hopes to prevent the type of economic fragmentation that often arises in rapidly growing urban areas.

How can cities balance technological development with environmental sustainability? How can smart governance improve efficiency and reduce costs? And how can rapid urbanization be managed in a way that benefits everyone?

Xiong'an's answers to these questions may provide other cities facing similar problems with the information they need to devise their development road map. Xiong'an is not only about building a city from scratch; it is also about creating a new way of thinking about urban growth. Xiong'an has shown that with the right combination of technology, smart governance and social inclusion, it's possible to build a city that works for everyone.

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



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Tim Stonor

The 'urban buzz' creating new urban areas

The first objective of developing a new urban area is to create the "urban buzz": that sense of thriving life in the streets, parks and other public spaces in a new development area. The urban buzz is important not only as a symbol of society but also as a generator of urban energy, and significant financial and cultural value. Streets support micro and small businesses, and create jobs. More than that, they create places for people to meet and hold conversations that lead to ideas, inventions and innovations which can potentially shape the future.

Many discoveries and transformations, from the birth of the financial services industry in London to the inspiration for great literature in Paris, even the breakthrough research in DNA at Cambridge, have taken place in the "street spaces" of thriving cities. For cities to continue attracting talents and encouraging people to settle down, urban planners need to build an environment in which people feel not only safe and secure but also stimulated and enriched.

So how do you create the urban buzz when planning and designing new urban areas? Xiong'an, a new area in Hebei province, northern China, has been designated to facilitate the relocation of non-capital functions from Beijing.

At the recent launch of Manchester United's new stadium in Manchester, England, a project that will not only build a monumental structure for



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about 100,000 spectators but will also establish a new urban area for the city. Olympian Sebastian Coe said the two most important factors needed for the job are community and connectivity.

He also said that development should be done in consultation with the local people and it should serve their needs. For example, urban development should create jobs for the local people and ensure the new facilities are affordable for residents of all income groups. The new facilities, he said, should also be easily accessible through existing streets and subways.

One of the greatest challenges for urban planners and developers is designing streets. Great streets make great cities. But over the past century or so, the urban buzz on the main streets of London, the boulevards of Paris and the avenues of New York City has been eroded by the overpowering presence of private cars.

The urban development industry has, too often, focused on the free movement of vehicles instead of paying greater attention to the essential role of streets in creating financial, social and cultural value. As a result, cities are encountering massive traffic

congestions, air pollution and higher risks to physical and mental health.

Paradoxically, the slower the movement of traffic in cities, the more free-flowing and less congested the streets are. Streets with slow-moving traffic are quieter, and safer for car drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. And the more people walk on pavements, the more business shops, restaurants and cafés will do, heightening the urban buzz. It is hardly surprising therefore that car speeds of 30 kilometers an hour in city centers is rapidly becoming the norm worldwide.

While it may be easy to tell a "good street" from a "bad one" (the first is full of life while the second is more or less devoid of it), three design characteristics are essential for ensuring the success of new urban areas.

The first is compactness. For too long, cities have been allowed to encroach on "lower-priced" agricultural land, again facilitated by the increasing number of private vehicles. This has not only lengthened the daily commute time but also irreparably damaged the natural environment of cities. Compactness, or keeping things close, is the solution.

This does not mean building super-high-rise buildings. The center of Paris is extremely densely populated yet you will hardly find a building that has more than eight stories. What matters is the architecture of the buildings. Modernist architects tend to surround their buildings with sterile landscapes, in order to set them

apart. In contrast, the architecture of a compact city is humbler, with buildings close to each other. This is the architecture and urban design of the great streets of the world.

The second characteristic is "mixity" — the blending of different land uses, such as housing, workplaces, shops and schools in neighborhoods, which reduces overall commute time and encourages walking. While 20th century urban planning promoted the separation of different land uses in zones connected by roads, the current urban practice is veering toward mixing things up, placing shops, offices and public buildings on main streets and creating quieter, residential environments on secondary and tertiary streets.

The third important characteristic of a successful urban design is simplicity. Perhaps the most powerful example of this principle is the street grid: a network of streets that defines the blocks in terms of where buildings are located (very close to each other wherever possible). Here, the works of cognitive scientists suggest that simple, rectilinear grids are easier for people to navigate because they are easier for the brain to remember.

If these guidelines sound familiar, it is because the principles of new urban planning are the very same that characterize historic Chinese cities. Is anything truly new?

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

DAVID MONYAE

Standing together for prosperity

Growing cooperation and solidarity between Africa and China will help build an all-weather community with a shared future for the new era

China's two sessions have become one of the most closely followed political events in the world as China's policies can deeply influence the trajectory of the global economy. Some of the main takeaways from this year's Government Work Report include the government's commitment to promoting consumption and stimulating domestic demand, developing new quality productive forces, pursuing higher-standard opening-up and encouraging foreign trade among other things.



More importantly, from an African perspective, China is committed to promoting cross-border e-commerce, growing digital trade, improving smart customs clearance and working on standards and certification issues to expedite international trade. China will host a series of events in this regard, including the China International Import Expo, the China International Fair for Trade in Services and the China Import and Export Fair. This is encouraging news for Africa as China is the continent's largest trading partner with two-way trade having reached \$295 billion in 2024. At the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing in September, China and Africa agreed to boost trade by, among other things, cultivating a smart customs partnership, creating a digital market for the free movement of goods and services, and establishing a green channel to facilitate the import of African agricultural products. As such, China's commitment to international trade will come as good news for African countries that can take advantage of the export market opportunities being offered by China. This will go a long way in not only growing the volume but also improving the structure and quality of China-Africa trade.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Furthermore, based on the work report, China has also promised to pursue high-quality Belt and Road cooperation through advancing both major signature projects and "small and beautiful" public well-being projects. In the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, China is committed to sup-

porting major connectivity projects launched by the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development to improve regional integration and help make the African Continental Free Trade Area a reality. Almost all African countries have signed

up to the Belt and Road Initiative. Since its launch in 2013, China and Africa have signed Belt and Road deals and contracts worth over \$700 billion with investments in various infrastructure projects such as rail, ports, roads, and energy plants among other things. As such, this is a highly strategic area of cooperation for African countries. Moreover, at the FOCAC summit in Beijing last year, it was announced that China would help deliver 1,000 "small and beautiful" projects to improve people's livelihood in Africa. To see this being reiterated in Premier Li Qiang's report is quite encouraging for Africa. These projects which seek to enhance the alleviation of poverty will be welcome news for Africa, which has struggled to eradicate extreme poverty. The projects will address issues such as access to health, food security and energy security to mention a few. If anything, this shows that the commitments made by China do not just end on paper but are incorporated into the government's policy program.

China's intention is to work with the international community to promote an equal and orderly multipolar world underpinned by an equitable globalization process in addition to advocating for the reform of global institutions. This is compatible with Africa's interests. The continent has long called for the reform of global institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, where African influence is minuscule despite being disproportionately affected by the decisions made in these platforms. As this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, Africa's representation in the most powerful organ of the UN is pursued with renewed vigor. Africa's collective vote at the IMF only amounts to 6.5 percent. The largest voting bloc of 54 states collectively representing about 18 percent of the world's

population only occupies a marginal position in the institution that is one of the most important players in the global economy.

In this sense, based on the continent's specific conditions, Africa can further integrate itself into the three China-proposed initiatives, namely the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative. In 2024, China and African countries published a joint statement on deepening cooperation within the framework of the Global Development Initiative, with about 30 African countries joining the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative. Under this framework, the parties agreed to work together on poverty alleviation, food security, healthcare, industrialization, climate change and green development among other areas.

Regarding the Global Security Initiative, China and Africa agreed to launch a partnership, build a demonstration zone and develop an implementation plan of the initiative. China has also pledged to provide 1 billion yuan (\$138 million) in military grants to beef up African military forces and train 6,000 military personnel from Africa. As the continent is currently struggling with multiple conflicts, the Global Security Initiative can go a long way in reducing the number of conflicts in Africa and promoting peace and stability. Through pragmatic cooperation, Africa and China will contribute to the Global Civilization Initiative by building an all-weather Africa-China community with a shared future for the new era.

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ZHOU QIAN AND HU LANYIN

Dynamic impetus of STI

China can help African countries bridge the digital divide and advance toward technological self-reliance

Since the release of the China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus in 2024, China has been building digital infrastructure and investing in digital technology in Africa, paving the way for both sides to jointly move toward a future of technological self-reliance.

The efforts, from building digital infrastructure to introducing smart agriculture, and from artificial intelligence to green transformation, have not only accelerated Africa's technological independence and self-reliance but also demonstrated boundless possibilities of South-South cooperation.



Zhou Qian



Hu Lanyin

Africa's large young population and growing internet penetration rate have endowed the continent with an invaluable data resource advantage. Its digital technology sector holds immense potential for investment. According to a Partech Africa Tech Report, tech startups across the continent received \$3.2 billion in funding in 2024, with emerging startups mainly focusing on fintech, e-commerce and educational technology. E-commerce in Africa is also booming. Data show that e-commerce transaction volumes in several African countries, including Kenya, Egypt and South Africa, are growing at an annual rate of over 20 percent. Statistics from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimate that Africa's digital economy will contribute \$180 billion to the region's GDP by 2025.

Sci-tech innovation is drawing the attention of more and more African nations and is regarded as a key factor for development in the new era. The African Union's Agenda 2063 proposes to undertake a revolution in education and skills development in science, technology and innovation (STI) as a priority, and achieve manufacturing/industrialization and value addition driven by STI. As Africa's demand for sci-tech innovation grows, China's investment in digital technology there has, to some extent,

bridged the gaps in infrastructure construction and funding shortages, thus expanding the growth space for the future development of homegrown African technology.

Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and South-South cooperation, China's investment in digital infrastructure in Africa is being gradually deepened and advanced. In July 2024, China and 26 African countries jointly released an action plan for digital cooperation and development. According to the document, the parties will take further cooperative actions in six major fields to accelerate the digital transformation of traditional sectors, help African countries build infrastructure, and promote the transformation and upgrading of Africa's industries. The China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 further emphasizes that sci-tech cooperation provides new impetus for development and digital cooperation and speeds up Africa's transformation.

China's investment in African digital infrastructure has laid a solid foundation for Africa's sci-tech innovation. The investments cover multiple fields, including undersea cables, data centers, and satellite communications. The 2Africa undersea cable project, in which China Mobile International participated as one of the investors, is the world's longest subsea cable infrastructure with an investment totaling \$3 billion and a total length of 45,000 kilometers. Chinese enterprises have signed information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure construction contracts with several African states, including Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Nigeria. Huawei Tanzania has provided most of the communication equipment for the network facilities on Mount Kilimanjaro, achieving wireless network coverage there.

The Action Plan for China-Africa Digital Cooperation and Development mentions that the two sides will jointly train 1,000 talents over the next three years. So far, China has established 17 Luban Workshops in 15 African countries, offering majors in digital technologies such as cloud computing and artificial intelligence. These workshops have trained about 12,000 engineers and intelligent equipment technicians. Accord-

ing to a 2024 report published by China-Africa Business Council, by the end of 2023, Huawei's Seeds for the Future program, launched in Tanzania in 2016, had provided over 240 local college students with the opportunity to learn cutting-edge ICT skills.

In the field of smart agriculture, the Chinese company XAG has introduced advanced drone digital technology to African farmlands, helping local farmers increase production and income through techniques such as atomized spraying and path planning. In terms of smart networks, in May 2024, Huawei's public cloud was launched in Egypt, becoming the first AI center for analyzing and processing big data in North Africa. Regarding smart cities, Chinese tech companies represented by Huawei, Hikvision and Uniview have actively cooperated with African governments. They have contributed technologies and experience in smart services, AI and information sharing to Africa's smart city initiatives, effectively improving its people's life quality.

To promote sci-tech innovation in Africa, the following measures should be taken. The first is to fully leverage the role of Luban Workshops; expand investments in digital technology education in Africa; set up a new mechanism for joint construction and sharing among enterprises, research institutions, and educational platforms; promote the integration of industry, academia and research; make tailored efforts to meet industry needs; enhance local scientific research and incubate more digital technology-related jobs. The second is to establish local production and supply chains; encourage Chinese companies to invest in more digital sectors; focus on technological improvement and regional influence; help Africa cultivate its own industries; break away from the "one-way output" mindset; establish an innovative mechanism for sharing intellectual property rights and reinvest profits into research and development. By doing so, the benefits of technology transfer can be turned into sustainable innovation capabilities, enabling African technology to achieve genuine qualitative improvement and upgrading.

China and Africa should strengthen



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

industrial alignment and cooperation, jointly promoting the development and upgrading of new-quality production. As for policy coordination, the scale and methods of Chinese enterprises' investment in Africa are closely related to the policy environment and cultural background of African countries. When investing in digital sectors, it is necessary to leverage local African knowledge resources, adapt to the investment and operational rules of the local market, ensure project implementation, and improve the alignment efficiency in digital technology investment in Africa. Regarding institutional safeguards, while China and Africa enhance cooperation in digital technology, they must also deepen collaboration in intellectual property protection, strengthen digital governance, and optimize relevant systems to safeguard both parties' innovative rights and legitimate interests in the field of industrial technology.

The Dar es Salaam Consensus serves as a road map for the modernization of the Global South, as well as a vision and interpretation of future China-Africa development and cooperation. The joint development of the two sides' digital technology under the framework of the con-

sensus is neither a simple transfer of technology nor one-way aid. Instead, it acknowledges differences and builds a common development model in the digital era that embraces the principle of "appreciating the beauty of each, and sharing beauty together". By fully utilizing multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum and the China-Africa Economic, Trade and Cultural Forum, the two sides will strengthen cooperation and exchanges among digital talents, drive African technological innovation and upgrading, help African countries eliminate barriers and bridge the divide in the digital field, and establish a multilevel and multi-field STI cooperation mechanism between China and Africa.

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LIFE

Portraying women of resilience

Popular Chinese actress gets to know her characters through performing, prompting her to seek more diverse roles, **Xing Wen** reports.



Actress Xin Zhilei starred in the recently concluded TV drama *Good Will Society*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Three years ago, British actress Jodie Comer debuted in London's West End with the one-woman play *Prima Facie*, a production that earned her the prestigious Olivier Awards for Best Actress the following year. During the award ceremony, the actress from *Killing Eve* emotionally explained how the play changed her life.

The play revolves around Tessa, a barrister who specializes in defending men accused of sexual assault. Her perspective on the legal system undergoes a profound transformation after she becomes a victim of sexual violence. The role demands intense physical and emotional commitment from the lead actress, requiring her to deliver a high-energy performance with no breaks.

In June 2023, on the other side of the Eurasian continent, Chinese actress Xin Zhilei made her theater debut in the Chinese adaptation of the play in Shanghai.

Xin, 39, also described the experience as life-changing.

It won her the best leading actress award at The 32nd Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards and completely altered her perception of acting.

The play required Xin to memorize approximately 60,000 Chinese characters of dialogue. In a 130-minute performance with no intermission, she portrayed and narrated 20 different stories.

To prepare for the physical and emotional demands, she woke up early every day for over three months to memorize her lines while running or climbing stairs. She also attended intensive training sessions at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, working alongside freshmen to hone her skills.

"She isn't shy in the sessions and doesn't put on any celebrity airs. I see her unlimited potential," comments Zhou Ke, director of the Chinese version of *Prima Facie*.

"The role of Tessa is the most challenging one of my career. After performing in this play, I feel like nothing can defeat me. I can achieve anything if I work hard and set my mind to it," she says.

"Before playing Tessa, acting was just a job to me. Now, I feel a sense of responsibility that comes with this profession. The play not only provided me with personal strength but also allowed me to transmit that strength to the audience through my performance," Xin says.



Xin has showcased her versatility in stage plays, films, television productions and reality shows, attracting a large following of keen fans.



Xin mentioned that female audience members often sent her letters after her performance.

She recalled one evening after a show, a woman in her 70s had her daughter guide her backstage to meet Xin.

"She hugged me and, with tears in her eyes, thanked me. I will cherish that moment for a long time. It didn't require many words and I didn't ask what she had been through. At that moment, we understood each other. It's moments like these that make me feel being an actress is truly worth it," she says.

Growing up in Hegang, a small city in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, Xin initially dreamed of becoming a fashion designer.

However, while studying fashion design at Harbin Huade University, she was scouted by a talent agent who encouraged her to become an actor.

At the time, her family was going through a difficult period. Her father was bedridden due to an accident.

Although Xin had no experience in the acting profession, she was then eager to earn mon-

ey to support her family.

For the next six years, she remained relatively unknown, working as a model to make ends meet while constantly auditioning for roles.

Her breakthrough came when she landed the lead role in the film *Crosscurrent* after one of her many auditions.

Despite not knowing how to swim, she performed a series of underwater scenes in a partly frozen river in Beijing.

The film was selected to compete for the awards at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival,

one of the most prestigious film festivals in the world. There, she met Meryl Streep, an actress she deeply admired, and received praise from her idol.

"*Crosscurrent* made me feel for the first time that I could act, that I was slowly finding a place where I belonged. Acting became enjoyable," Xin recalls.

Since then, she has gained wider recognition through her roles in notable productions, including the film *Brotherhood of Blades II: The Infernal Battlefield* (2017), the hit costume drama *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* (2018), Hong

Kong director Wong Kar-wai's acclaimed TV series *Blossoms Shanghai* (2023), and the suspense film *The Unseen Sister* (2024).

Xin has always been perceived by her fans as a daring, ambitious, and powerful woman. She actively seeks out acting opportunities and never hides her desire for fame because she believes that it grants actors more choices in their careers.

"With more choices, I hope to take on a wider range of roles," she says.

In *Blossoms Shanghai*, she plays a mysterious and beautiful restaurant owner. Although not a native, she builds the most successful restaurant on Shanghai's Huanghe Road, deftly managing relationships with the local elite.

In the film *Upstream* (2024), she portrays a full-time housewife who, after her husband loses his job, suppresses her panic and despair to support her family.

In the recently aired TV series *Good Will Society*, she plays a neurosurgeon who is calm and professional in the operating room and also humorous and straightforward in her personal life.

Through these diverse roles, Xin has deepened her understanding of women's strength and resilience.

"Through the process of shaping a character, I gradually bring the role to life with every small effort I make. It's only when I complete the role and present it to the audience that I understand who she is. This process is like building with Lego blocks: piece by piece, the character takes shape. Over the past two or three years, I've enjoyed it more," says Xin.

In the Chinese adaptation of *Prima Facie*, Xin has a favorite line that resonates deeply with her: "In my heart, there has always been a courageous girl. If I were to shrink back, I would lose her."

When asked what characteristics she values the most in herself, she answers without hesitation: "Courage, perseverance, and kindness."

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Online
See more by scanning the code.

Italian director looks forward to China's new generation of filmmakers

ROME — "I look forward to discovering the new generation of Chinese filmmakers and their ways of narrating stories at the Shanghai International Film Festival," says renowned Italian filmmaker Giuseppe Tornatore.

In an interview with Xinhua at his office in Rome, Italy, Tornatore showed reporters the Chinese version of the poster for *The Legend of 1900*, a film that depicts a piano prodigy who lives his entire life on a ship. The film, directed and written by Tornatore, has

been released twice in Chinese theaters and received positive feedback.

"I'm happy that Chinese audiences like my films," he says.

Tornatore was appointed jury president for the main competition section of the Golden Goblet Awards at the 27th Shanghai International Film Festival to be held from June 13 to 22.

"It is a big honor for me. I'm sure that I will see good movies," he says.

Tornatore notes that Chinese films have achieved notable success

in international markets in recent years. Films such as *Ne Zha 2*, *The Wandering Earth 2* and *Caught by the Tides* have earned international acclaim.

Known for his masterpieces including Oscar-winning *Cinema Paradiso*, which tells the story of a film-loving boy in his youth and adulthood, Tornatore emphasizes that the key to making films loved by global audiences is staying true to one's heart.

"*Cinema Paradiso* is a great example. When I decided to make



Italian filmmaker Giuseppe Tornatore during an interview in Rome in February. XINHUA

this film, I wasn't thinking about how to win the approval of audiences in Europe, the United States or China. Instead, I wanted to tell a personal story. I tried to make sure the characters and everything in the film were believable so audiences could connect with them," Tornatore says.

The film director says he enjoys watching Chinese films. "I love the different points of view that other cinematographers bring. I can also learn about the story of China and the culture of Chinese people."

Speaking of the influence of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies in the film industry, Tornatore says he is interested in AI and believes it offers new possibilities for film production and the restoration of classic films.

"My dream is to make a film entirely on my own without the help of anybody and to have my grandfather as the main character. AI can give me this opportunity," Tornatore says.

XINHUA

LIFE

When Fudan University associate professor Jiang Changjian recited a poem produced by DeepSeek as an impromptu response to history professor Meng Man's remarks about the challenge of teaching in the digital age, Meng couldn't help chuckling.

"The poem wasn't that well-written, but the tone was certainly lofty," she quips, eliciting laughter from the audience at the Wuyi Forum in Wuyishan, Nanping city, Fujian province.

Her lighthearted remark hinted at a deeper truth: while technology can mimic form and tone, it often falls short of capturing the depth of human creativity and emotion.

In the digital age, students have vast amounts of information at their fingertips, but this abundance of knowledge doesn't necessarily translate into true understanding or wisdom, Meng says.

Meng, who is a professor at the Minzu University of China, recalls a trip last year along National Highway 219 from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, across Yunnan province to the Xizang and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous regions, which made her realize just how much she didn't know.

"The world is vast, and the unknown far outweighs the known. The journey itself became a process of mobilizing memories and emotions. When we combine memories, emotions and insights, I believe we gain something more than knowledge — something closer to wisdom," she says, adding that this approach could help address the challenge of teaching in the digital age.

On the topic of artificial intelligence-related education, Meng spoke of experimenting with AI and training it to write classical poems, which demonstrated that certain limitations could only be overcome with human effort.

"The AI improved quickly, reaching about 75-80 percent of human quality, but then it plateaued. When I asked a friend why, I was told it had exhausted its data," Meng says.

The AI model couldn't go further because it lacked emotional depth, and without emotion, there's no room for error, and without error, there's no soul, she adds.

Meng is one of several experts who discussed the transmission of traditional Chinese culture in the digital intelligence era at the Wuyi Forum, which was hosted by the Renmin University of China and the Nanping government. The forum's goal was to present a broader perspective and more innovative thinking about Chinese civilization and decode its cultural genes.

While AI has its limitations, digital technology also offers unprecedented opportunities for cultural preservation, says Fan Di'an, chairman of the China Artists Association.

He says that the world today is marked by unprecedented global exchange, as well as both opportunities and challenges for the development of society.

"As we work to share Chinese cul-



Experts discuss transmission and communication of traditional Chinese culture in the digital intelligence era at the Wuyi Forum in Wuyishan, Nanping city, Fujian province, on March 22. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Relaying tradition in the digital era

Pitfalls and potential of using AI to open up and explore national heritage discussed at forum, **Yang Feiyue** reports in Wuyishan, Fujian.



Fan Di'an, chairman of the China Artists Association.



Ye Peigui, professor, Capital Normal University.



Xiao Xiangrong, professor, Beijing Normal University.



Huang Qingxian, professor, Nankai University.



Meng Man, professor, Minzu University of China.

ture with the world, it is essential to first consider the common topics that resonate globally. Only by addressing shared concerns can we capture interest, as cultural exchange is fundamentally rooted in curiosity — the desire to understand how others think, act, and express themselves. This mutual curiosity is the foundation of meaningful dialogue," Fan explains.

He emphasizes that the Chinese approach is deeply rooted in long-standing cultural traditions and offers insight that can benefit and inspire other cultures.

"For instance, Chinese painting embodies distinctive perspectives on

the cosmos, nature, and life itself. Our artistic traditions are supported by a comprehensive system of expressions, one that has captivated international audiences, particularly in the West," he says, adding that these elements not only reflect our heritage but are also a bridge for cross-cultural understanding and mutual enrichment.

Built on those premises, he believes the digital revolution can open up opportunities for cultural exchange.

Fan points to the transformative impact of digital technologies on the stage, screen, and visual arts, as well as on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and appreciates the way digital technology enables

the exploration of ancient art in manners that were not possible before.

"Today when we see the Dunhuang murals, the caves have been digitally re-created to reveal intricate details, vibrant colors, and even the dynamic movements of the flying apsaras. It's like stepping back into the Dunhuang era itself," Fan says.

He also says that digital tools have revolutionized the way people enjoy classical Chinese paintings.

"In the past, we could only admire these masterpieces from a distance. Now, we can zoom in to observe the finest details," he says, adding that these immersive digital experiences allow people to

connect with tradition.

Ye Peigui, professor at the Capital Normal University and a well-known calligrapher, acknowledges the potential of digital technology in preserving and disseminating calligraphy, but expresses reservations about its ability to fully replicate the art.

While machines can simulate the brushstrokes, they struggle to capture the essence and uniqueness of human expression, he says.

He suggests exploring ways of bringing calligraphy to the forefront, to make its presence felt in every cultural space.

"Calligraphy is deeply embedded in every facet of Chinese culture, yet

it often goes unnoticed. People may admire the physical artifacts (the scrolls, the ink, the paper), but they overlook the characters themselves," he says.

Ye also highlights the hands-on nature of calligraphy in education in the digital era.

"Calligraphy is a very practical art. To truly appreciate it, one must pick up the brush and write. The act of writing creates a powerful connection," he explains.

Xiao Xiangrong, dean of the School of Arts and Communication at Beijing Normal University, cautions against overreliance on AI, despite its transformative potential. "AI, like cameras and film before, is ultimately a tool. What matters most is the person using it," he says.

"However, the rise of AI is also a wake-up call for artists. We cannot afford to be ordinary; we must strive to be unique. This brings us back to the essence of art itself," he adds.

Xiao emphasizes that AI's true potential lies in helping us explore the future. He expresses excitement about the possibilities of storytelling in the digital age and calls upon other artists to not only embrace technology, but also to ensure that it serves their creative vision.

Huang Qingxian, professor at the Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, underlines the importance of leveraging digital intelligence to preserve and promote China's cultural heritage while fostering cross-cultural understanding.

He recommends data-based systematization of China's UNESCO intangible cultural heritage listings to create a foundation for deeper exploration and understanding.

"Once systematized, digital tools can be used to analyze and interpret the complexities of Chinese culture," he says. This opens up more approachable and engaging access to its depth and richness, even to those unfamiliar with its nuances.

In terms of the future of cultural transmission, Meng says that those involved must hold onto lofty and transcendent ideals, and trust in the shared imagination of humanity, such as the universal dreams of beauty and harmony that connect all people.

"It is the foundation of our exchanges, our dialogues, and our shared destiny as a community. If we ever lose this, we lose our path. But as long as we believe, the way forward will always reveal itself," she says.

Meng also proposes approaching cultural transmission with a sense of ease and accessibility.

She points out that even Song Dynasty (960-1279) philosopher Zhu Xi, with his deep knowledge and philosophical insights, believed that the simplest expressions — like a song — could convey profound truths.

Similarly, when the treasures of Chinese culture are presented with ease and openness, everyone can understand the "few notes of wisdom," she says.

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Kung fu master from Cameroon wants Chinese culture to 'light up' lives

YAOUNDE — Fabrice Mba's passion for Chinese culture and martial arts budded in the southern Cameroon town of Sangmelima, where he grew up watching kung fu movies.

His elder brother was a projectionist and as a youngster, Mba often helped him sweep the theater.

For the first time, he saw Shaolin monks on the screen. "I discovered kung fu and Chinese culture. It spoke a lot to me."

He and his friends would imitate characters from the movies, but there was no kung fu club to train them.

When he was 8, he left home with his elder sister to settle in the capital, Yaounde.

Life was difficult, his father was absent and his mother could not take care of all her children.

"I grew up on the street," he says. Mba's life changed with the arrival of a group of Chinese engineers in the 1980s. They built the Yaounde Conference Center, a China-aid project that remains one of the landmarks in Cameroon to this day.

He and his sister lived not far from the center. One of the Chinese engineers at the construction site was skilled in martial arts and trained regularly, to the amazement of Mba and his friends.

"I often went with my friends, and we stood and watched (him training) from afar," he says.

One day, the man called to them and asked them to take a posture, with knees slightly bent as if holding



Left: Fabrice Mba gives a lecture on traditional Chinese medicine to his students at the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaounde II in Soa, Cameroon, in February. Right: Mba (right, front) instructs a young man in martial arts movements in Yaounde, capital of Cameroon.

PHOTOS BY KEPSEU / XINHUA

a tree in their arms. "We stood facing the wall. It hurt," says Mba.

After that, he came every morning to learn kung fu. He trained hard, learning the fundamental elements.

Mba returned briefly to Sangmelima to help his brother, but life was difficult there, and he returned to the capital, where he did odd jobs to survive.

His life took another turn in 2011, when he encountered a codirector of the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaounde II, during one of his training sessions.

Mba enrolled in the institute.

"That marked a turning point in my kung fu journey."

Thanks to a scholarship, he got the opportunity to train in martial arts and traditional Chinese medicine at the Shaolin Temple in Henan province. Between 2015 and 2019, he visited the temple three times.

Today, Mba is a household name in Cameroon when it comes to kung fu and traditional Chinese medicine.

"I am president of the Cameroon Kung-Fu Federation. I am a specialist in Chinese traditional medicine. I have been the president of the



Association for the Promotion of Chinese Martial Arts since 2010, and I am also a Shaolin cultural ambassador of the time," says the 46-year-old disciple.

He runs a program that offers free short-term training in physiotherapy and other subjects to disadvantaged young people to help them find work. He also teaches kung fu in several schools.

"Be your own boss" is the slogan of his Lotus and Water Lily program.

"I train them to be morally upright and useful to society," Mba says. "I went through difficulties as a

child, and I do not want them to face the same hardships."

Martin Mangwandjo was one of Mba's students. About seven years ago, Mangwandjo started learning kung fu, which changed his life. Now 29, he also teaches martial arts and runs a kung fu club of his own.

"Kung fu has enabled me to fit into the social milieu more easily," says Mangwandjo, who has a congenital disability in his left leg and walks on crutches. "It has given me a winning mentality, because I've understood that a man's strength

lies not in his physique, but in his mind."

Now, he wants to emulate his mentor and help promote Chinese culture. "I'd like to encourage other people, who have full mobility but still hesitate to take the plunge, telling themselves that these things are not feasible or not attainable, to really encourage them to embrace Chinese culture as I have," he says.

Mba's knowledge and love of Chinese culture is also visible in the literary world. He has published several books of poetry and prose focused on kung fu, Chinese culture and nonviolence.

"Martial arts is about moral values, peace, respect and life," he says. "Cameroonians and Africans who read the books always come back to me, and say they now have a better understanding of Chinese people and their culture."

Mba says that as more people take up kung fu in Cameroon, he hopes to continue to offer valuable training.

"Promoting Chinese culture in Cameroon does not mean turning Cameroonians into Chinese," he says. "It's like putting Cameroonians in front of a mirror, enabling them to understand that through hard work, they can reshape their mentality, shed poverty, and achieve the results they want, just like the Chinese."

XINHUA

CULTURE



Left: Shadow puppetry artists hold a show at the Beijing center. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Middle:** A dough figurine artwork created by Lang Jiaziyu featuring protagonists of the recent box-office hit Ne Zha 2 on display at the Beijing center. **Right:** Cai Zhiwei explains the velvet bird and flower crafting at the Beijing Intangible Cultural Heritage Center in late February. PHOTOS BY YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY

Traditional crafts find modern place

In a side room of a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)-styled courtyard adorned with red corridors, green wooden pillars and a gray-tiled roof, Lang Jiaziyu elicited gasps of amazement from the audience with his lifelike dough models.

Inspired by the recent box-office hit *Ne Zha 2*, the man, 30, created dough figurines of several of the animation's protagonists with a timer marking its box-office milestones.

"It was an improvised solution to highlight the constantly changing records," says Lang, who has practiced dough figurine for almost two decades, an art form listed as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008.

A native of Beijing, Lang infuses his artistic vision into his work by incorporating characters from the popular game *Black Myth: Wukong* and historical figures like Xiang Yu, a warlord from the late Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC).

The audience, curious about the materials and techniques used in making dough figurines, listened intently as Lang revealed the tricks, which involve ordinary ingredients — wheat flour, glutinous rice flour, honey, salt, and water-soluble pigments — readily available items at local supermarkets.

However, the process is anything but simple.

The flour must be sifted to remove coarse particles, leaving only the finest. This refined mixture is then kneaded into colorful dough, which is meticulously

Artist of dough figurines incorporates popular characters in national intangible heritage as a way to preserve the past, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

shaped into intricate figures.

"These products showcase my efforts of blending a traditional craft with modern culture to appeal to younger audiences while ensuring that the past and present are represented in my work," Lang says.

The history of dough figurines dates back to the Qin Dynasty when they were used as sacrificial offerings in the form of miniature livestock, Lang says.

"By the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties, the art form peaked, coinciding with the rise of traditional Chinese opera. During this period, dough figurines became akin to today's collectible figurines, representing beloved characters from operas and folklore," he explains.

Under Lang's guidance, some attendees attempted their own creations.

Black, white and green doughs were carefully kneaded, rolled, and pinched to transform into a charming panda, complete with beady eyes, a bamboo stalk, and a tiny patch of grass.

A visitor surnamed Hu pulled off her very first dough panda under Lang's instructions.

"I've played with modeling clay before, but that was more like industrial products that are light and feel completely different from this (dough figurine). It has a unique

texture — it feels like food, very traditional, interesting, and fun," Hu says.

Dough figurines were among several intangible cultural heritage crafts showcased at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, alongside velvet flowers, painted opera masks, shadow puppetry, and woodblock printing. In late February, these art forms were celebrated at the Beijing Intangible Cultural Heritage Center, housed within the ancient courtyard complex.

The event highlighted the capital's cultural legacy tied to the Winter Olympics, says Su Jing, deputy director of the Beijing culture and art inheritance and development center affiliated with the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism.

"We wanted to revisit the intangible cultural heritage projects that served the Olympics and celebrate their contributions to this historic event," Su adds.

On the third anniversary of the Winter Olympics, the gathering brought together over 50 representatives from the travel industry, cultural heritage practitioners, and members of the Olympics operations team to explore collaboration opportunities.

"We'd like to have professionals from hotels and travel agencies experience these intangible cultural heritage projects and create opportuni-

ties to integrate them into modern tourism and hospitality, ensuring their survival and relevance," Su says.

At the event, business representatives and cultural heritage inheritors forged agreements to co-develop creative cultural products and host workshops for employees.

Beijing's famous chain restaurant Quanjude, whose roast duck technique was named an intangible cultural heritage in Beijing's Xicheng district in 2008, delivered Olympic-themed pastries, including two-tone hockey pucks made of purple sweet potato, yam and curling stone-shaped macarons.

The restaurant brand provided catering services to the Winter Olympics.

"The hockey pucks carry a sweet Osmanthus flavor, while the macarons have strawberry and blueberry notes," says Ma Zhenbin, the cold dish chef at Quanjude's Olympic Park branch.

At the last stop of the exhibition, velvet flower brooches handmade by Cai Zhiwei, an inheritor of the velvet bird and flower craft, a Beijing intangible cultural heritage, were quickly snatched up.

The art form's link to the Winter Olympics lies in its use as hat ornaments for the awarding ceremony.

Inspired by Dunhuang murals, the designs feature a lotus and peony

motif in blue and red.

"The red was vivid yet subtle, with four tonal variations," Cai recalls, adding that the perfect hue was achieved after his team experimented with various dyes.

Cai, who has practiced the art for over two decades, explains that velvet crafting is not limited to birds and flowers, as its name might suggest.

"We create animals, insects, and even landscapes," he says, pointing to his delicate works, including a nine-tailed fox and a panda made from raw silk wrapped around a thin copper wire, amenable to manual manipulation.

"The material is stiff like human hair and softened for floral designs, resulting in a velvety texture that is visually and tactilely stunning," he adds.

However, mastering the art demands patience and resilience.

"Every step, from shaping the silk to assembling the pieces, must be done by hand," he emphasizes.

"The hardest part is enduring the monotony, as twisting copper wires and shaping silk strands can be tedious, but the results are worth it," he says.

More events of this nature will be hosted at the Beijing Intangible Cultural Heritage Center to expand public engagement and explore new

avenues for cultural preservation, according to authorities.

"We aim to create more channels for people to experience and appreciate these heritage crafts," Su says.

Fan Yingjie, a senior manager with a Beijing-based travel agency, says he is blown away by the presentation of the cultural heritage displayed at the event.

"Those heritages are important part of Chinese culture," Fan says.

His agency has launched certain travel routes that enable travelers to get close to cultural heritage, and it has received positive reviews.

Lang vividly recalls when he presented two dough figurines of Bing Dwen Dwen, the Olympic mascot, to Albert II, Prince of Monaco, at the Great Hall of the People during the Winter Olympics.

"I gifted him a Bing Dwen Dwen and he humorously requested a second one, explaining that he needed two because he has twins," Lang recalls.

The experience fueled Lang's commitment to keeping this ancient craft alive by infusing it with contemporary relevance.

"Through my work, I hope to inspire a deeper appreciation for this unique art form, proving that even the oldest traditional crafts can find a place in modern culture. After all, intangible cultural heritage is not just about preserving the past — it's about shaping the future," he says.

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By ZHENG WANYIN in London
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Chinese gallery makes mark at UK art fair

For the third consecutive year, BR Gallery founder Li Rui has brought her collections from Beijing to the Collect international art fair held in London, capital of the United Kingdom.

Her gallery remains the sole Chinese representative at the 21st edition of this international platform for contemporary crafts and designs, which featured works by more than 400 artists from more than 30 countries from Feb 26 to March 2 this year.

Li spends half a year preparing for the fair: selecting works, submitting catalogs for committee review, transporting delicate handmade pieces, and curating exhibitions. With barely any profits to show for it, very few Chinese commercial galleries are willing or able to participate in an event held thousands of miles away, she says, admitting she sometimes questions her commitment.

"Every year, I pay out of pocket for the expenses and haven't made a single penny," Li says.

"All I wish is that, through BR Gallery, I can establish a platform that connects traditions with contemporary craft, and China with the world. Through our appearances at this fair, I have become even more convinced of the unique value and potential of contemporary Chinese crafts."

BR Gallery, initially described as a newcomer from Asia, has now become familiar to many regular visitors. During its three years of participation, more than 19 pieces have been acquired by prestigious institutions worldwide, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in the UK and the National Museum of Ireland, as well as by private collectors.

"Sally (Li Rui) started here as quite a small gallery, and we've watched her grow and grow," says Isobel Dennis, director of the Collect art fair. "We would love to see more artists and galleries representing China because it just has a phenomenal history of craft."



Clockwise from top: Chinese contemporary handicrafts exhibited through BR Gallery at the 2025 Collect art fair, including functional household items and wearable jewelry; BR Gallery founder Li Rui presents collections to visitors; People check out items at the display area of BR Gallery. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A major highlight of BR Gallery's exhibits has been works that subtly and skillfully integrate Chinese traditional elements, such as handed-down craftsmanship and philosophies, into contemporary artistic expression.

The centerpiece, the *Reproduction* series by Beijing-based metalwork artist Sun Qishuang, serves as a

vivid illustration of this fusion.

The crumpled silver teapot, covered in a rippling texture that only reveals itself upon closer observation, draws inspiration from Chinese traditional hammering techniques that thrive in Heqing county, Southwest China's Yunnan province, according to Sun. The skill employs different kinds of hammers to shape metal

sheets and creates exquisite marks, strike by strike.

The rippling lines also resemble the hemp-fiber texture strokes commonly used in Chinese landscape paintings to depict the gently bushy mountains of southern China, Sun says.

Interestingly, Li's passion for promoting Chinese contemporary

crafts also stems from a trip to Heqing county in 2018, where she was amazed by how silversmithing had evolved into a pillar industry, supported at both national and local levels to champion traditional craft skills.

"As tea drinking makes a comeback to the daily lives of Chinese people, it coincides with China's growing

economic strength. The utensils used for tea drinking have become more refined, and handcrafted silver teapots, as luxury items, have then come into sight. In Heqing, a small county, the output value of silver and copper products reached 3.2 billion yuan (\$4.4 billion) in 2024, with more than 1,500 households involved in the processing of silver handicrafts," she says.

Contemporary Chinese crafts are flourishing, yet they remain overlooked compared to traditional handicrafts, Li notes.

Pieces created by university faculty and students are frequently showcased at major exhibitions worldwide and achieve strong results in competitions, according to Li.

"However, domestic market for contemporary crafts remains underdeveloped. Most works by academic artists are largely confined to scholarly events and have yet to gain widespread recognition among collectors and consumers," she says.

"We hope art institutions can engage more actively with the market. We also hope that the government will provide stronger support to us. Contemporary craft is, in fact, a durable way to preserve China's rich heritage, as it builds upon traditions while embracing modernity."

Dennis adds: "The fair is just a stepping stone; it needs someone to be pushing it. Here in the UK, it's the Crafts Council that has done the job. Besides, the transition from traditional skills must ensure that both the skills and the artists are recognized; they are never separate."

Crafts Council is UK's national charity for craft that sets up the Collect art fair.

Despite the challenges, Li's dedication to showcase Chinese art remains unwavering.

"Every penny of my own spent to present China's most representative contemporary metalwork and jewelry art to the world counts," she says. "All my efforts have been worth it."

Zhu Xueer contributed to this story.