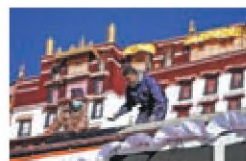


Power shift

Antarctic exploration goes green with large new energy system  
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Preserving Potala Palace  
Modern efforts sustain ancient Tibetan architectural marvel  
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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2025

## Deadly strikes



Local residents inspect a vehicle damaged by US airstrikes at Farwah market in Sanaa, Yemen, on Monday. The airstrikes targeting Yemen's capital killed 12 people and wounded 30 others, the Houthis said. AP See story, page 6

## A SECOND, HIGH-VALUE LIFE FOR CARBON DIOXIDE

Hong Kong's eco-bricks lay foundation for cleaner future

By SHADOW LI  
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**Editor's note:** In this series, *Greener Visions*, *China Daily* delves into the research, development and implementation of cutting-edge carbon technologies in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, aiming to cut emissions and achieve carbon neutrality.

Every action leaves a mark, and for decades, human activities have etched a growing carbon footprint into the planet. But what if that footprint could be transformed into something constructive?

Hong Kong startup CS Tech Solution is turning this vision into reality by converting carbon dioxide, a harmful greenhouse gas, into a revolutionary building material. Their innovative eco-bricks are not just reducing emissions, but also paving the way for a greener, more sustainable future.



In their factory nestled near picturesque Lung Kwu Tan in Hong Kong's New Territories, rows of neatly arranged bricks sit on steel shelves inside a tin cabinet. As the cabinet door is closed, a faint sizzling sound fills the air as gas is pumped through pipes into the sealed space.

These aren't the typical bricks. Over time, they quietly absorb the carbon dioxide being injected into the chamber, undergoing a remarkable transformation, emerging stronger and more durable than traditional sand-based ones.

See *Carbon*, page 2

## China opposes trade deal at its expense

By ZHONG NAN  
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China reaffirmed its strong opposition on Monday to any agreement that compromises its interests, and emphasized its unwavering commitment to safeguarding the nation's legitimate entitlements, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The ministry warned that no country can remain unaffected amid growing unilateralism and protectionism. The remarks came in response to foreign media reports that during tariff negotiations, the administration of United States President Donald Trump intends to pressure other countries to restrict trade with China in exchange for exemptions from the US' additional tariffs.

Beijing firmly opposes any party reaching a deal at China's expense. If such a situation arises, China will not accept it and will take countermeasures in a resolute and reciprocal manner, the Ministry of Commerce said in an online statement.

The ministry said the US recently imposed arbitrary tariffs on all its trading partners under the pretext of

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so-called "reciprocity", while pressuring others into engaging in so-called "reciprocal tariff" negotiations.

This is, in essence, an exercise in hegemonic politics and unilateral bullying in the realm of trade and economics, cloaked in the rhetoric of "reciprocity", said the statement.

"Appeasement doesn't lead to peace and compromise brings no respect," it said.

"If international trade reverts to the law of the jungle, where the strong prey on the weak, all economies will ultimately suffer," said the ministry, reiterating that China stands ready to strengthen solidarity and coordination with all parties, work together to confront these challenges, jointly resist unilateral bullying, and uphold international fairness and justice.

The US government's shift toward economic nationalism will have long-term consequences, said Su

Qingyi, a senior fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

"Its strategy of increasing unilateral tariffs to pressure other countries into accepting unreasonable demands amounts to a form of economic coercion, which violates the principle of sovereign equality in international economic relations," said Su.

According to a study released by Nankai University in Tianjin, the US leveraged Section 232 tariff measures on steel and aluminum to achieve certain objectives, such as replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. The US also pressured South Korea into accepting voluntary export restraints on steel, a measure explicitly prohibited under the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Safeguards, the study said.

Woo Wing Thy, distinguished professor emeritus of economics at the University of California, Davis, said the US tariff policies have sped up the integration of the European Union, driving EU members toward deeper ties and political unity.

## Firms emerging stronger from tariff war

As Chinese businesses get caught again in the crosshairs of an escalating trade dispute, much global attention is focusing on how they will handle the massive tariffs placed on their exports to the United States.

My company helps many Chinese businesses expand internationally, so I speak daily with a handful of these entities from a range of industries — from consumer goods to biotech to clean energy. If you have done business with Chinese firms, it will not come as any surprise that their outlook is cautiously positive, and many of these companies are in a position to emerge even stronger.

Some of the factors that have contributed to the success of Chinese businesses on the world stage are their resilience, pragmatism and adaptability. These traits are common in nearly every successful Chinese company that I have worked with.

The businesses that have made it abroad first had to beat cut-throat competition in China and then repackage their brand, products and operations for each inter-

### WORLD WATCH

By Chris Pereira

national market before competing there as well. These companies move fast, and are beyond tough.

So, when an escalatory barrage of tariffs and constantly changing trade barriers target such businesses, it is just one more obstacle for them to overcome with boldness and ingenuity.

While the tariff amounts keep adding up to levels far exceeding expectations, these targeted trade restrictions have been coming in some form or another for nearly a decade. The Chinese business community has had plenty of time to prepare and many have been taking measures to tackle this scenario head on. In some ways, the situation has helped these companies strengthen their localization efforts by establishing manufacturing, offices and local entities in markets such as the US and Europe.

In addition to the tough mindset at work, actions have been taken to

mitigate risks and avoid rushed decisions.

With US trade policy extremely unpredictable currently, most businesses involved in manufacturing are waiting to see how policies and enforcement play out until they calculate costs to determine the next course of action. Many of these companies still have months' worth of inventory in the US which will buy them time until the dust settles. Easily lost in the headlines is how difficult it will be to enforce such a barrage of tariffs on goods with such complex global supply chains, another issue that is prompting these businesses to wait and see.

Understanding that there is no sense in preparing for the unknown, others are more focused on continually improving their products and services, confident that if they have a product that global customers want, there will be a way to deliver.

Meanwhile, some companies are ahead of the curve and have already been localizing their manufacturing in the US and other countries for years.

See *Tariffs*, page 3

### XI'S VISION | HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

## External shocks pushing shift of growth model

Nation poised for sustained development as domestic demand, innovation prioritized

By OUYANG SHIJIA, MA SI and ZHOU LANXU

Despite facing mounting external uncertainties, China has the conditions and capabilities to offset the impact of the United States' tariff threat and is poised to see sustained growth this year, with consistent policies, an ultra-large domestic market, thriving technological innovations and a deepening of reform and opening-up, said economists and executives.

As China has prioritized expanding domestic demand and boosting technological innovations on its economic agenda for the year, economists said the move marks the country's shift to shaping a consumption- and innovation-driven economy.

Their comments came after data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's economy expanded 5.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of this year.

Economists said China performed better than expected at the beginning of the year, with existing policy stimulus measures taking effect gradually and new incremental policies put in place, making solid steps to tackle issues faced by the economy and navigate a grimmer external environment.

Facing rising external challenges such as heightened US tariffs, China is addressing key challenges by boosting consumer demand, deepening reforms and accelerating industrial transformation — core priorities emphasized by President Xi Jinping at the Central Economic Work Conference in December as essential to balancing supply and demand, and sustaining long-term growth.

The country should boost domestic demand, especially consumer demand, unwaveringly deepen reform and expand opening-up, and promote the steady replacement of old growth drivers with new ones, as it seeks to address the prominent problem of insufficient demand, the deep-seated obstacles and external challenges that hinder develop-

ment, and the bottlenecks in industrial transformation and upgrading, Xi said.

Niu Li, deputy director of the Department of Economic Forecasting at the State Information Center, said he believes that China's economy is on track for sustained growth despite facing external challenges, given the nation's ample policy space, its intensified efforts to deepen reform and opening-up, and the strengthening of new growth drivers.

"We will strive to achieve the annual growth target (of around 5 percent) this year," Niu said.

The central government said earlier this month that China has made full preparations to address various uncertainties in the face of the pressure that external shocks may exert on the country's economic stability.

"The shock that China is facing this time also presents an opportunity — a rare chance to transform its development model," said Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. "Now we need to shift toward a model powered by domestic demand and innovation from the previous export- and investment-driven growth model."

"If we can truly use this opportunity to drive that shift, then the trade war initiated by the US — despite the challenges — may actually offer us valuable impetus for change."

"The priority is to take strong measures to comprehensively expand domestic demand and stabilize the fundamentals of the domestic economy, smoothing and strengthening domestic circulation," he said. "More important, breakthroughs must be accelerated in deepening reforms and expanding high-standard opening-up, laying a solid foundation for achieving the annual growth target this year."

Wang's views were shared by Zhang Yansheng, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research.

See *Growth*, page 3

## Words build bridges



A man holds a folding fan at a cultural event to mark International Chinese Language Day on Sunday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The event was co-hosted by King Saud University and Chinese energy giant Sinopec. CUI HAIPEI / CHINA DAILY See story, page 6

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# PAGE TWO



**Left:** At a pilot project, a cylinder of liquefied CO<sub>2</sub> is injected into cement to make concrete, which could reduce the use of high carbon-footprint cement. It was co-initiated by CS Tech Solution, a local cement factory and the Hong Kong Productivity Council. **Right:** A bench printed by a 3D concrete printer is seen featured with recycled tiles and planks. PHOTOS BY ANDY CHONG / CHINA DAILY

## Carbon: Giving everyday materials new uses

From page 1

As the world grapples with the urgent need to combat climate change, CS Tech Solution's breakthrough offers a glimpse into a future where everyday materials can play a role in healing the planet.

Founded in 2022 by Dixon Chan and Terence Wong, CS Tech offers business-to-business carbon capture solutions for small and medium-sized enterprises. It is the only startup in Hong Kong — and possibly Asia — to provide a complete circular chain from carbon capture to utilization, ensuring captured carbon dioxide, or CO<sub>2</sub> is reused rather than released into the atmosphere.

The company recycles wood waste from construction sites, burning it into biochar — a green material used as a soil conditioner or pollutant filter. Emissions from the process are captured, liquefied, and used in eco-bricks or concrete, triggering chemical reactions that consume the gas.

Additionally, carbon credits from emission reductions can be traded, generating revenue. CS Tech is collaborating with the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC), a statutory body tasked with driving innovative technology, to draft a carbon credit methodology, with its first batch of credits expected in early 2026.

Concrete is their next target for carbon dioxide usage, as it reduces the need for cement, a highly carbon-intensive material. Chan said the company has secured a deal with one local cement factory and is in talks with another.

"CS Tech's system could capture one metric ton of carbon dioxide. In fact, the carbon dioxide captured by our system falls short of our demand now. We are on our way to recalibrate our system and boost the capacity to two to three tons a day," he said adding daily capacity could go as high as five tons.

In March, CS Tech launched its first batch of eco-bricks containing biochar, marking the fruition of Chan's brainchild after a decade. A total of 7,000 square meters of biochar pavers were used in a Tung Chung project — equivalent to reducing carbon emissions by about 7,000 kilograms, according to the company.

In 2015, Chan set his sights on carbon capture and utilization (CCU) technology, but shelved the idea due to high costs, space requirements for large facilities, and challenges in storing unused captured carbon dioxide. Additionally, carbon-credit trading was underdeveloped, with unclear calculation methods and standards.

Chan revived the plan during the pandemic, deciding to proceed as conditions improved.

At the time, no small-scale carbon capture systems existed in Asia. Chan built and designed the system by sourcing equipment from Scotland and assembling the rest locally with HKPC's support.

"Our system now takes up much less space, and the initial investment cost is relatively low," Chan noted. "We plan to bring the entire system to market in the future," he added.

At the end of 2024, it opened an office in Singapore, where a carbon tax is imposed on enterprises, to target clients in Southeast Asia as well as Hong Kong-based businesses with products shipped to Europe and America, where stricter environmental standards apply.

To showcase the process to potential clients, Chan set up a factory near his eco-bricks mill, which produces traditional eco-bricks made from recycled glass.

"Clients may have varying needs for reducing carbon emissions. For those aiming to cut their carbon footprint, we offer facilities to capture carbon dioxide. For construction material producers, we provide technology to make their products greener and lower in emissions," he explained.

Chan expects CS Tech, currently funded by investments, HKPC support, and profits from traditional eco-brick sales, to break even in 2026 when it begins trading carbon credits and launches its system in the market.

Starting in 2025, publicly listed companies from the Chinese mainland will be required, either mandatorily or voluntarily, to disclose ESG (environmental, social and governance) or carbon-related information. Companies must submit their 2025 ESG reports by April 30, 2026.

In April 2024, the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, which first introduced ESG disclosure guidelines in 2015, strengthened its climate-related reporting requirements, including direct emissions, emissions associated with purchased electricity and for some, emissions from the company's value chain.

### Application struggle

Despite the optimism, these technologies are still struggling to find their way to commercialization, according to Poon Chi-sun. Poon, director of the Research Centre for Resources Engineering Towards Carbon Neutrality at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, is the unsung hero behind the city's wide use of eco-bricks.

Traditional eco-bricks, made from recycled glass and construction debris, have been used in public footpaths since 2010, after the government mandated that recycled glass cullet contribute 20 to 25 percent of the weight to eco-pavers in road maintenance contracts.

In 2024, a total of 178,000 square meters of eco-pavers were used in public works, almost triple the 64,000 square meters in 2020, according to the government.

Since the 1990s, Poon has steadily improved his eco-bricks, which are now in their fifth generation. However, their application has stalled at the second generation.

Despite their potential to address roadside air pollution, third-generation eco-bricks have struggled to gain market traction. They include titanium dioxide photocatalysts, which react with sunlight to reduce air pollutants like nitrogen oxide, kill bacteria, and self-clean.

Poon said, with government support, it took a decade for the city to adopt the second-generation eco-bricks.

To spearhead the promotion and com-



A 3D printer used concrete injected with CO<sub>2</sub> to produce the Chinese characters for Hong Kong's PolyU seen above. The CO<sub>2</sub> reacts with calcium to quickly harden the concrete, allowing it to be printed in varying shapes.



Greater efforts are needed to achieve the 2050 carbon neutrality goal. A key technology for this is carbon capture, which involves capturing CO<sub>2</sub> from industrial activities. This process can achieve net-zero or even negative emissions in some cases."

**Keith Choy**, general manager of Hong Kong Productivity Council's Green Living and Innovation Division

mercialization of low-carbon construction materials and carbon capturing technology, Poon co-founded Carbon Capture & Storage Limited with colleagues.

One of the key patents the company holds is low-carbon concrete, which uses sea mud or recycled waste such as glass, incineration bottom ash and coal ash, to replace the use of cement. "Producing one ton of cement releases 0.8 tons of carbon dioxide," Poon said.

Many construction materials can absorb carbon dioxide. For example, cement contains calcium, which reacts with CO<sub>2</sub> to form calcium carbonate. This inspired Poon to use CO<sub>2</sub> for curing, a process that makes freshly laid concrete and other materials stronger and more durable.

Standard concrete curing takes 28 days, but CO<sub>2</sub> can speed the process up. Placing fresh concrete or bricks in a carbon dioxide-rich room absorbs the gas, accelerates curing, and enhances durability.

Given Hong Kong's focus on building safety and its cautious regulatory approach to innovative materials, Poon, who is nearing retirement, said it could take 15 to 20 years for the new material to gain widespread acceptance.

One stumbling block is Hong Kong's lack of construction material manufacturing, with only a few cement producers.

"Most materials are made on the mainland. With the widespread use of Modular Integrated Construction, many are prefabricated there and shipped to Hong Kong," Poon said.

Cost-effectiveness is also a challenge to finding investors. Despite its low-carbon benefits, the new technology offers uncertain immediate returns.

### Enhanced efforts

Keith Choy, general manager of HKPC's Green Living and Innovation Division, said Hong Kong is falling behind its emission reduction targets, despite a year-on-year 3 percent drop in per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2022.

"Greater efforts are needed to achieve the 2050 carbon neutrality goal. A key technology for this is carbon capture, which involves capturing CO<sub>2</sub> from industrial activities. This process can achieve net-zero or even negative emissions in some cases," Choy said.

However, Poon lamented the lack of policy support for such technologies in Hong Kong, noting the government's carbon neutrality road map excludes carbon removal technologies like CCU.

In contrast, the mainland, Europe, and the US enforce carbon footprint requirements, with non-compliant companies facing operational suspensions.

The construction industry is one of the few sectors in Hong Kong that could adopt carbon capture technology, Poon said.

Electricity generation accounts for about 65 percent of the city's emissions.

Poon suggested building factories near landfills or power plants, which are major carbon emitters. CO<sub>2</sub> released into the air could be directly channeled to the factory, where construction materials would chemi-

cally react with and deplete the gas, eliminating the need for costly capture, refinement, and storage. This makes the process financially sustainable and suitable for wide adoption, Poon said.

Hong Kong's Environment and Ecology Bureau said at present, many CCU technologies have yet to be developed into mature, energy-efficient, and cost-effective technologies for wider application. The bureau said it will continue to assess the feasibility of applying this technology as part of the decarbonization strategies.

In addition to raising public and corporate awareness of CCU, Choy suggested that the government establish a dedicated platform to share technology, providing SMEs with essential information, equipment rental options, and tailored solutions to lower the barriers to adopting CCU technology.

Choy said by offering tailor-made carbon management consulting services, the HKPC could assist enterprises in formulating emission reduction plans. It could also provide training and resources on CCU technology, enabling businesses to explore new low-emission opportunities and transition toward sustainable practices.

### Market demands

Hong Kong needs to develop a robust carbon credit trading market, which would provide economic incentives for businesses to reduce emissions, Choy said. Such a market could play a pivotal role in helping the city achieve its carbon neutrality goals, he added.

Two of the city's deputies to the National People's Congress — Frank Chan Fan and Nicholas Chan Hiu-fung — tabled a joint motion on this regard when they were in Beijing in March for the two sessions.

Hong Kong's existing carbon credit trading platform is relatively small, offers limited trading products and suffers from insufficient liquidity, making it difficult to meet the market's demand for a large-scale, highly transparent, and regionally influential carbon credit trading platform.

Hong Kong's carbon market still primarily relies on international standards, lacking more authoritative and adaptable local or regional standards, the deputies argued.

Formulating a regional standard for carbon calculating and auditing, and dovetailing it with international standards is essential in promoting Hong Kong's carbon trading market, the deputies said.

HKEX launched Core Climate in October 2022, the only carbon marketplace that offers Hong Kong dollar and renminbi settlement for the trading of international voluntary carbon credits.

According to HKEX, the platform has over 80 participants and provides quality carbon credits from more than 50 internationally certified projects in Asia, South America and West Africa, covering forestry, solar, wind and biomass initiatives.

Chan said achieving carbon neutrality cannot be accomplished by just one or two entities — it requires collective action across society, supported by policies such as carbon credit taxes.



**Left:** A staff member at the PolyU-NAMI 3D Concrete Robotic Printing Research Centre operates a 3D concrete printer during a demonstration at PolyU. **Middle:** A compact CS Tech Solution's carbon-capturing system is ready for operation. **Right:** Poon Chi-sun, director of the Research Centre for Resources Engineering Towards Carbon Neutrality at Hong Kong PolyU, introduces a concrete-3D-printed art installation for Valentine's Day. Visitors to the department's atrium were allowed to take selfies in front of the object.

## TOP NEWS

## China, Indonesia hold ministerial talks

Nations agree to boost cooperation, uphold multilateral trading system

By ZHOU JIN  
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China and Indonesia pledged shared efforts to ensure the peace and stability of the South China Sea, expand security cooperation and uphold the multilateral trading system during their first joint meeting of foreign and defense ministers, also known as the "2+2" dialogue, in Beijing on Monday.

The meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Defense Minister Dong Jun with Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono and Indonesian Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin.

The dialogue mechanism between Beijing and Jakarta is the first of its kind that China has established with a foreign country.

The two sides agreed to jointly safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea and set an example in maritime cooperation, Wang told a news conference after the meeting, adding that the coast guard agencies of both countries signed a maritime security cooperation agreement.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and to accelerating consultations on a Code of Conduct.

Wang stressed that as each other's major trading partners, the two countries should remain committed to opposing any kind of unilateralism or trade protectionism.

"We believe that abusing tariffs will seriously undermine the normal trade exchanges between countries, and we pledged to jointly promote regional economic integration, ensure stable and smooth supply and industrial chains and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the Global South," Wang said.

In terms of security cooperation, he said that Beijing and Jakarta agreed to establish a bilateral consultation mechanism on disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (second from right), Defense Minister Dong Jun (right), Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono (second from left) and Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin attend the First Ministerial Meeting of the China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue in Beijing on Monday. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

They also agreed to enhance law enforcement and security cooperation and jointly combat transnational crimes, such as transnational gambling and online and telecommunication fraud, and strengthen cybersecurity cooperation, Wang noted.

Speaking of defense cooperation, Dong called on the two sides to have more substantive cooperation in areas including strategic communication, exchanges between services, equipment and technology, and maritime security.

Calling the meeting a milestone in bilateral ties, Sugiono said that Indonesia is willing to work with

China to further consolidate political mutual trust, enhance exchanges at all levels, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and strengthen communication and coordination under multilateral frameworks such as ASEAN-China cooperation.

Indonesia firmly upholds the one-China policy and opposes any foreign intervention in China's domestic affairs, he added.

Sjamsoeddin said that Indonesia is committed to enhancing strategic trust with China through transparent and equitable defense cooperation.

Indonesia is the largest economy in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, while China has been

Indonesia's largest trading partner for 12 consecutive years.

In 2024, bilateral trade exceeded \$147.8 billion, marking a year-on-year increase of 6.1 percent, according to Wang Lutong, Chinese ambassador to Indonesia.

Xu Liping, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Center for Southeast Asian Studies, said that the establishment of the joint foreign and defense ministerial dialogue will help expand China's neighborhood diplomacy.

The mechanism places greater emphasis on deepening China-Indonesia comprehensive strategic partnership and translating it into

concrete actions, Xu said.

During President Xi Jinping's Southeast Asian tour last week, China and Malaysia, and China and Cambodia agreed respectively to establish joint foreign and defense dialogue mechanisms, while the strategic dialogue mechanism of diplomacy, national defense and public security was upgraded to the ministerial level with Vietnam.

Such arrangements show that strategic security dialogues and cooperation with neighboring countries have become increasingly institutionalized and mature, Xu said, adding that this brings greater stability and predictability to regional peace and prosperity.

## Tariffs: Businesses show confidence and rationale

From page 1

Yet others see new opportunities in more stable markets such as Europe and the Middle East and have already started shifting their focus there.

Businesses in the services, gaming or social media sectors are naturally not as concerned with the tariffs as those in products and manufacturing. But they are still tied to the fate of these manufacturing companies as many are clients or sellers on their platforms.

While the tariffs are bound to have an impact in the short term on Chinese firms doing business with the US, the tariffs can also be seen as one more challenge on the path to doing international business. It will most likely make the businesses even stronger.

China's tech giant Huawei is a great example of how a tough situation can be turned into a gift. In the face of sanctions and semiconductor export controls, Huawei turned around and developed chips for its smartphones. It has

since expanded into new sectors and is seeing increasing profits. Huawei is a model for many Chinese companies, and its success against adversity is well-known in the business community.

My company is very reliant on global trade and business between China and the US, and we are also taking steps to adapt, making sure we can serve clients in other global markets, while doing our best to still make business work in the US.

As the world reacts in shock and disbelief as the US takes a chain saw to the global trade system that worked in its favor for so long, the group that is arguably impacted the most by it all, Chinese businesses, remain confident and rational. They know better than anyone that what doesn't kill you only makes you stronger.

The author is the founder and CEO of iMPact, a communications and business consulting group headquartered in New York, the United States. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Growth: Economic prospects stay favorable

From page 1

Zhang said the key in responding to the US' economic bullying is to vitalize all market entities by bolstering people's expectations and deepening reforms to give the market a bigger say.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, emphasized China's tech-focused initiatives, saying the country has put in place multichannel funding support, including a relending program, a State venture capital guidance fund, and the upcoming "sci-tech board" in its bond market, for frontier sectors like artificial intelligence, quantum computing and self-driving cars.

These initiatives collectively would attract total investment of nearly 1.5 trillion yuan (\$206 billion), Xing said.

In an article published in early March in Qushi Journal, the flagship magazine of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, Xi said it is also necessary to coordinate the relationship between fostering new drivers and upgrading old ones, and promote the development of new quality productive forces in light of local conditions.

Global executives expressed strong confidence and optimism about China's long-term economic

prospects, seeing rising growth opportunities from the world's second-largest economy with its huge domestic market and the strengthening of emerging sectors.

Ma Jun, senior vice-president of Volvo Group and president of Volvo (China) Investment Co, said: "We see great potential in China's AI growth. With its vast market and diverse application scenarios, China provides a unique space for AI innovation."

"I look forward to seeing more creative AI solutions in the transportation and infrastructure sectors, to help reduce logistics costs further and support sustainable development in China and globally," Ma said.

Kelly Zhang, general manager of Bimbo China, said the Chinese government may continue to focus on building consumption confidence and creating more job opportunities by doubling down on efforts in new technology fields this year.

"This will give Bimbo confidence to deepen investment in the China market, helping speed up geographic and category expansion," Zhang said.

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## Back to earth



NASA astronaut Don Pettit is carried to a medical tent on Sunday shortly after landing in the Soyuz MS-26 space capsule in a remote area near Jezkazgan, Kazakhstan. Sunday was also Pettit's 70th birthday, making him the oldest NASA astronaut. BILL INGALLS / NASA

## Sanctions imposed on US individuals

By MO JINGXI  
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China has decided to impose sanctions on some United States lawmakers, government officials and heads of NGOs for their egregious actions on issues related to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Foreign Ministry said on Monday.

The move is in response to Washington's abuse of illegal and unilateral sanctions on officials representing the central government in Hong Kong and officials of the SAR government, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a regular news

conference in Beijing.

On March 31, the US Department of State announced its sanctions against six Chinese officials for allegedly "undermining Hong Kong's autonomy." The sanctions block any transactions on property, funds or deals within the US made by these individuals.

"The US' unilateral sanctions gravely interfere in China's internal affairs, including Hong Kong affairs, and violate the principles of international law and basic norms governing international relations. China strongly condemns this despicable move," Guo said.

According to the spokesman, Chi-

na's decision was made in accordance with the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, which was passed in 2021 to counter foreign sanctions. It gives China legal support and guarantee to counter discriminatory measures by a foreign country in accordance with the law.

Guo reminded the US that Hong Kong is China's Hong Kong, and Hong Kong affairs are purely China's internal affairs, which "brook no US interference."

"Any wrong action taken by the US on Hong Kong-related issues will be met with a resolute response and reciprocal countermeasures by China," he said.

## Cultural knowledge platform debuts on internet

By CHINA DAILY

China Daily officially launched Chinese Culturepedia (culturepedia.chinadaily.com.cn), an English-language knowledge platform dedicated to promoting Chinese culture and enhancing global understanding of China, on Monday.

Guided by the vision of "Decoding Cultural DNA, Connecting World Civilizations", Chinese Culturepedia is a comprehensive, multifunctional online platform dedicated to showcasing the richness of Chinese civilization, enhancing the global reach of Chinese culture, and fostering meaningful cross-cultural dialogue.

The platform enables readers to unlock centuries of culture, explore timeless traditions and join meaningful conversations with just one click.

Built upon China Daily's huge media ecosystem and empowered by big data and artificial intelligence technologies, it taps into more than 40 years of English-language journalism. It draws especially on a rich collection of cultural content — articles, images and videos — to showcase the essence and spirit of Chinese civilization in a dynamic, encyclopedic format.

Various themes are included in the platform, ranging from history, cultural heritage and tourism to literature, arts and lifestyle. Special thematic coverage explores the 24 solar terms, cuisines of China, traditional Chinese opera and other topics. Videos and an interactive chat robot further enrich the platform's horizons.

Chinese Culturepedia integrates knowledge, interactivity and immersive experiences, offering users a range of practical features such as progressive search, AI-powered Q&A, trending words, one-click saving and easy sharing.

It also supports multidevice access, with a responsive design that adapts to various screen sizes for an optimal user experience.

"I followed China's daily news even before coming to China. It played a huge role in shaping my early understanding of the general situation of China," said Mohammad Hashem Mohammad, an Afghan student at Shanghai University and a social media influencer.

"Now, with the launch of Chinese Culturepedia, I see it as another powerful way of bridging cultural gaps," he said. "As someone who is living in China and connecting with foreigners and local Chinese, having a powerful and trustworthy platform, which is bilingual, to explore Chinese traditions and values is invaluable."

Michael Oduro, who is from Ghana and is studying for a master's degree at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said, "This platform is a treasure trove of Chinese culture, making it easy for anyone to explore (China's) rich traditions."

"The fact that it is in English is a game-changer, allowing people from all over the world to access and appreciate China's cultural essence," he added. "The interactive features and easy access are perfect for us who want to learn more."

Axel Mackintosh, a New Zealand teacher working in Beijing, said, "I'm really impressed with how China Daily's Culturepedia AI search engine opens up a deeper understanding of Chinese culture."

"By helping me explore history, values and traditions more easily, it's not just improving how I find information — it's helping me better relate to people and connect on a more meaningful level," he added.



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## CHINA

# High altitudes give policemen higher spirits

Officers stationed in the Pamirs take pride in protecting borders, aiding herders

By WANG QINGYUN  
in Tashkurgan, Xinjiang  
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As one drives toward the Paiyike Border Police Station, they can enjoy the majestic view of snow-capped mountains.

At the foot of the mountains is a vast land filled with sand, stones or sallow grass, where yaks are occasionally seen grazing. Puddles glittering in the sun in late March served as a reminder that winter was coming to an end.

Summertime starts in May in this part of the Pamirs, when local herders travel with their livestock to pastures inside the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow valley that stretches from Afghanistan to the Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous county in China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

The Chinese side of the corridor is about 100 kilometers long and is within the precinct of the police station, whose officers patrol this section every day.

During summer patrols, police officers visit the herders' settlements in the corridor. The officers talk to them to learn about what's happening in the valley, and bring them supplies such as groceries, nang flatbread and tea leaves to help them get through the month-long stay there.

They also leave their contact information so the herders can call in times of need.

Murat Tursun, a 31-year-old officer who has worked in the police station for more than three years, said he is touched by the hospitality of the herders.

They often insist on inviting Murat and his colleagues inside their settlements to taste their best treats, including butter, yogurt and milk tea.

The officers' workload spikes in September and October, when herders begin to take their livestock out of the corridor as winter approaches.

"We receive a lot of calls for help from them during those two months," Murat said.

The reasons for their calls vary. Some request assistance when they get a flat tire but have no spare, when their vehicles get stuck in the snow or when they have lost their cattle. The police station responds promptly to the calls by dispatching officers to the scene, he said.

A typical job is to find missing yaks for those who leave dozens of the large animals to roam in the valley for the whole summer before collecting them ahead of winter.

The officers take videos of the yaks and the vehicles they are being transported in, Murat said, adding that by watching the videos, herders who lost their yaks can determine if their animals were taken by others accidentally.

If the herders are unable to identify the animals in the videos, the officers will take extra notice during the patrols and send messages to other herders for help.

## Better conditions

Paiyike is said to be a transliteration of a Kirgiz phrase, meaning "the highest mountain". The police station is located at an altitude of 3,780 meters in a village where most residents are

members of the Kirgiz ethnic group.

The station sits at the eastern end of the Wakhan Corridor. Its jurisdiction borders Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, so the police officers' daily patrols are especially important to help prevent illegal border crossings.

The patrols, which take place at an average altitude of 4,600 meters and often in howling winds and deep snow, only make the police officers' work more daunting.

"I found it particularly difficult to breathe," Murat said about the altitude sickness he endured when he first started participating in patrols. "Whenever I came back to the police station, I would feel dizzy, nauseous and extremely exhausted."

After finishing every patrol, Murat takes a two-hour break in the station's sunroom, which is filled with lush plants and equipped with an oxygen generator and a heating system. Here, officers can read books, have tea and snacks, and even sing karaoke.

The station also has a canteen, a gym and double rooms for its officers to live in. The rooms are equipped with a bathroom, a washing machine, a boiler, a TV, an oxygen generator and Wi-Fi, aiming to make the officers' lives on the plateau easier.

But things were rather different more than a decade ago.

Ablimit Awut, born and raised in Urumqi, a city more than 1,000 kilometers away, first came to work at the station for about 10 days in the winter of 2008, when he was 20.

At that time, the station was only a one-story building with a yard, and no heating or running water.

At night, Ablimit slept in a bunk bed, sharing the room with several others. "It was so windy at night, and I had to use the stove to keep warm," he said.

The water had to be fetched from a river nearby by a donkey cart. Due to the cold weather and limited water resources, he wasn't able to take a shower while working there.

"I felt the time go by so slowly. I had never experienced such hardship growing up," Ablimit said, recalling that he "almost began to cry" when he learned he would once again be appointed to work at the police station in 2012.

During his second stint at Paiyike, he lived in a double room in a new building near the one he had lived in years ago and found the conditions had "improved a bit".

A boiler was installed to provide heating, but the station still lacked stable power and water supplies.

Police officers had to save solar power while working by turning on only one of a dozen or so computers and avoiding to use electric boilers in the dorms. In addition, the water pump often failed to work in the freezing conditions.

But Ablimit said he had developed an emotional bond with the local people during his nearly two years of working there. He left after being dispatched to work in neighboring Yecheng county.

The bonds he forged were so strong that when he was up for redeployment in March 2023, he took the initiative and applied to return to Paiyike, where he was surprised by the "dramatic changes" at the station.

Sometimes, the 37-year-old still



Police officers from the Paiyike Border Police Station have a meal during their patrol of the Wakhan Corridor in Tashkurgan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, this month. WANG JIUFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



A police officer hands over contact information of the station to a family of herders who are raising livestock on the summer pasture of the Wakhan Corridor in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

struggles with altitude sickness and feels overwhelmed when he wakes up to the view of gargantuan mountains, but he said he is very proud to be participating in the border protection work in the area.

"I respect everyone who works at Paiyike. It's not easy being here," he said, adding that only those who have a strong will can bear staying in such a challenging environment for a long period.

## Educational experience

Paiyike's old residence has been turned into an educational base showcasing the history of the Wakhan Corridor and the station, which was established in 1950.

Tourists need permission to go beyond the police station's checkpoint into the Chinese side of the corridor, a border area of special control. But they can visit the base for free to learn about the corridor and how several generations of the police station's officers have fulfilled their duties in harsh conditions.

In the yard of the old residence building stand two yurts, one decorated in the Tajik ethnic group style and the other in the Kirgiz style. This gives tourists who are not able to visit residents' homes the opportunity to experience local culture by having a look at the yurts, said Peng Mingyou, head of the station.

More than 60,000 people visited the base last year, said the native of Hunan province.

Peng, who has a dark reddish complexion and bloodshot eyes after working in southern Xinjiang for two decades to help ensure border security, has been the head of Paiyike for more than six years.

On a wooden board on the base's wall, many visitors have left their notes to acknowledge and appreciate

the police station's efforts.

Peng, 41, said these notes make him value his days working at the police station more.

"It's a lifetime honor for us to have the opportunity to be stationed here to guard the country's border," he said.

## Rescue and reward

Ding Jixiang, a 25-year-old who has worked at the station for almost five years, agreed.

Hailing from Henan province, Ding vividly recalled the night he arrived.

"My police cap was blown away by the winds soon after I got out of the car, and I had to chase it in the yard. It was really awkward," he said, admitting he felt anxious and considered quitting.

But the years of hard work have proved rewarding. Ding said his parents are impressed by how he has grown up.

On an evening in June 2023, the police station received an emergency call to help a 13-year-old boy who was trapped on a river bank by a flood. Peng led four other officers, including Ding, to rescue the child.

They had to walk through "a pasture with marshes" to get to the river, which was flowing very fast, Ding said, adding that one of his colleagues, Atabay Niyazhuja, volunteered to wade to the opposite side to reach the boy.

So the people secured a thick nylon rope on Atabay and held on to the rope tightly as he went across the river.

Atabay said the water reached his chest, and he slipped several times while stepping on the pebbles in the riverbed.

It was snowing. Atabay found his fingers frozen stiff after he climbed on the bank.

"I had to put them under my arm-



CHINA DAILY

## FIRST PERSON

# Patrolman inspired by grandfather

Yuan Xiaohu, a 28-year-old police officer born and raised in Dingxi, Gansu province, talks to China Daily.



pits to warm them up," he said.

Then he took his lighter out of his pocket, shook it dry and started a fire with it to keep the boy who "was about to pass out" from hypothermia.

While Atabay was talking to the boy and collecting cattle manure on the bank to keep the fire alive, his colleagues on the other side were busy making calls and sloshing across the wet pasture to coordinate rescue efforts.

It was shortly after 7 am the next day when they finally managed to get a wheel loader to carry the boy and the police officer to safety, Ding said.

Ding and Atabay said they were deeply moved that many colleagues in the station had stayed up all night worried about them, and that warm tea and a warm meal awaited them.

Ding, who is articulate and happy to share his stories, said he used to be very shy and reluctant to talk when he first came to Paiyike, but he now serves as a guide at the police station's educational base.

Most of the tourists visit the base during the warmer season from the end of March to early November every year, according to Ding.

He said that in November last year, a middle-aged couple of visitors insisted on giving him a pair of gloves after seeing his chapped hands caused by the cold and dryness.

Their generosity made him cry. "They were about the same age as my parents," he said.

In the police station's sunroom, plants tended to by the officers are thriving.

Blooming camellia and bougainvillea are scattered among bushes. Lemons hang from branches, and plantain trees have grown so tall that their leaves bend against the roof.

They form a tropical scene full of life in stark contrast to the bare mountains encircling the station.

Peng takes special pride in the garden. "It is like the epitome of our spirit," he said. "The plants here are growing so fast. They are just like us, as we keep improving ourselves."

I came to work at the Paiyike Border Police Station on Dec 12, 2023. That day, after I put my luggage in my dorm, I went outside to the station's yard, where the head of the police station Peng Mingyou introduced me to the history of the police station.

I was standing at attention, but the wind was so strong that my body couldn't stop swinging. I had to focus on keeping my position upright and only heard part of what Peng was saying as the wind beat my face.

I joined my first border patrol two days later. I remember trekking and falling in knee-deep snow before climbing up a steep slope. The process was very exhausting. At that time I thought of my grandfather, and how he had persevered despite the tough work when he was young.

My grandfather is a veteran who was enlisted in 1970. He joined the construction of the "China-Pakistan Friendship Highway", also known as the Karakoram Highway, in 1974, and worked in Pakistan until 1979.

Those days of working at high altitudes were hard, but he is proud that he contributed to the highway's completion.

My grandfather has talked to me about his work on the highway many, many times. But I only began to relate to him after I came to work in the Pamirs five decades later.

His story has become an inspiration for me, encouraging me to try my best and excel in my work.



Officers from the Paiyike Border Police Station patrol in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## CHINA

# China's Antarctic station powered by new energy



Two droplet-shaped wind turbines spin in front of China's Qinling station in Antarctica. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Nation's polar journey moves from diesel into renewable era

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and ZHANG LI

A clean energy system tailored for polar conditions has been put into operation in China's Qinling station in Antarctica.

The breakthrough means China has become the first country to achieve the large-scale operation of a clean energy system under extreme Antarctic conditions.

Lead scientist Sun Hongbin, 56, told China Daily that the project marks an achievement in China's green scientific exploration in the field of polar energy, and signifies that the nation's polar exploration has developed from the diesel era into a new era of green energy.

The system will generate a wealth of data, as well as present challenges that will prompt continuous research, said Sun, who is also the chief scientist on polar clean energy at the Polar Research Institute of China and president of Taiyuan University of Technology in Shanxi province.

Since the launch of the system on March 1, it has replaced traditional diesel power sources, providing uninterrupted zero-carbon power for the research equipment and essential living facilities at Qinling station, which was established in February last year as China's fifth Antarctic research station.

Photovoltaic and wind power account for 60 percent of the energy capacity of the system. In situations without wind or sunlight, stored hydrogen can provide power to the station, ensuring short-term operation for research equipment and basic living facilities.



Sun Hongbin introduces the clean energy system for Qinling station in Antarctica at Taiyuan University of Technology in Shanxi province. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Sun stressed the primary challenges in ensuring the reliability and safety of the equipment. For instance, the development of the droplet-shaped wind turbine capable of operating on ice caps and hydrogen fuel cells demands cold-resistant power-up technology.

Construction of the system at the station commenced in 2023.

As much of the equipment and facilities required specialized research and modification to adapt to the extreme conditions, Taiyuan University of Technology established a digital twin laboratory simulating the environment of Antarctica.

This laboratory possesses the capabilities to simulate nearly 10 extreme conditions, including extreme cold, strong winds, blizzards, polar day and night, intense geomagnetic fields, strong ultraviolet radiation, low pressure and low oxygen levels.

The primary purpose of establishing this laboratory was to address the challenges of research, testing and operation, Sun said.

"Once the equipment arrives in Antarctica, we have no means to pro-

vide a replacement if a single screw malfunctions," he said. "Before deployment to Antarctica, various new energy devices underwent testing here. Now the laboratory receives and analyzes real-time data transmitted back from Antarctica."

In recent years, various countries have explored approaches to develop clean energy in Antarctica, with solar and wind energy being the primary focus.

However, the extreme conditions and shortage of technologies make it tough for solar and wind power generation equipment to maintain stable and efficient operation.

China is the first country to implement hydrogen energy in the extreme environment of Antarctica on a large scale, said Dou Yinke, dean of the Taiyuan university's College of Electrical and Power Engineering, and a leading expert who has participated in multiple Antarctic expeditions since 2004.

Against the backdrop of global warming and glacier melting, China proposed the concept of "green exploration" in 2017, Dou said. International organizations have repeat-

edly urged countries to transition from fuel-based power generation to clean energy in Antarctica.

As Antarctica possesses vast wind and solar energy potential, countries worldwide have been exploring clean energy in this area.

To date, approximately 30 Antarctic research stations have installed clean energy generation devices, with over half utilizing solar or wind, Dou said.

However, due to the lack of systematic application and development of clean energy technologies tailored to the Antarctic environment, these systems cannot yet fully replace traditional energy systems on the aspects of safety and stability, he said.

Currently, 80 to 90 percent of the world's Antarctic research stations still rely on fuel-powered electricity generation, leading to significant environmental pollution in the polar regions, said Dou.

Last year, the Taiyuan university led the formulation of the "Twelve-Year Development Outline for Clean Energy Utilization Technologies in the Antarctic", aiming to establish a comprehensive clean energy supply system for Antarctic research stations by 2035.

"I will dedicate my whole life to the cause. I believe we have just taken the first step on a long journey. It is a demonstration and an experiment," Sun said. Key technology breakthroughs can also drive the energy revolution in the province, a major energy base in China, said Sun.

Sun hopes to establish a 20,000-square-meter Antarctic extreme environment simulation laboratory in Shanxi to enhance future research.

"With clean energy, people can survive in polar regions. In the future, we may even install and test this technology on the moon and Mars," Sun said.

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## World Book Day offers wisdom and knowledge

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and CHEN LIANG

As the 30th World Book Day approached, Elhomosany Hesham Ramzy, a 29-year-old Egyptian student at Shanxi University, found himself wandering through the aisles of Xinhua Nangong Bookstore in Taiyuan, Shanxi province.

"Through books, I've discovered a more diverse China — one where people cherish reading, seek wisdom and embrace knowledge," he said.

He was reading *Shanxi on Earth*, a landmark work of cultural geography that took four years to compile. This monumental book, the first of its kind in Shanxi, has captured the attention of readers at home and abroad. "It has opened a new door for me to understand Chinese culture," Ramzy said.

Shanxi, one of the cradles of Chinese civilization, boasts the largest number of ancient buildings in the country, home to more than 50,000 immovable cultural relics, each a testament to the passage of time. From the majestic Yungang Grottoes to the sacred Mount Wutai and the ancient streets of Pingyao — three UNESCO World Heritage Sites — every corner of this land carries the weight of history.

*Shanxi on Earth* was spearheaded by Jiang Jianbo, director of the Shanxi Humanities and Geography Digital Industry Research Institute. Jiang and his team devoted over 30 years to in-depth research and field investigations to complete this 760-page, two-kilogram tome.

The book includes 63 exquisite hand-drawn maps and 361 stunning photographs taken by 150 photographers. By approaching from a geographical perspective and gradually delving into historical and cultural realms, it presents the unique charm of Shanxi's regional culture in a comprehensive manner. Since its release in October 2023, the book has generated nearly one million yuan (\$137,000) in sales, becoming a microcosm of Shanxi's cultural dissemination and reflecting the province's growing enthusiasm for reading.

"Shanxi lacked an effective window to showcase itself to the outside world," Jiang said. As a result, he proposed the concept of "Understanding China, starting from Shanxi", hoping that through the book more people would gain a deeper understanding of Shanxi and, by extension, Chinese culture, thereby enhancing cultural confidence among the Chinese people.

Reflecting on the evolution of

reading, Jiang said: "From the limited knowledge-bearing oracle bones to the advent of bamboo slips and paper, and eventually books, human reading has continuously deepened. The emergence of books facilitated the exchange and collision of Eastern and Western civilizations, driving the progress of human civilization."

In recent years, Shanxi's atmosphere of reading has grown increasingly vibrant. By last year, the province had established a five-level public reading service system spanning province, city, county, township and village levels, supported by over 120 libraries, 3,200 physical bookstores and 18,800 rural reading rooms.

Meanwhile, platforms such as workers' libraries, community reading rooms and broadcast television networks collaborated to conduct thousands of reading activities annually, reaching and benefiting millions of participants.

Physical bookstores, as vital carriers of urban culture, have played an irreplaceable role in promoting reading. Xinhua Nangong Bookstore, developed by the Shanxi Xinhua Bookstore Group as a new concept, broke away from traditional methods. It categorized its 80,000 books into 13 major themes based on reading preferences, creating a more targeted and personalized reading space for readers, said Lian Yi, manager of the bookstore.

Lian said that the bookstore also launched the "Youth Night School" project, integrating social resources and inviting industry experts and intangible cultural heritage inheritors to give lectures, providing rich learning resources for the youth.

"I hope our bookstore becomes a spiritual home for every book lover and another cultural landmark in the city," he said.

As digital reading grows, Jiang acknowledges the convenience of e-books and audiobooks. But he said while mobile reading has diversified reading forms, it remains fragmented and can't replace the deep reading experience provided by physical books. "Only through book reading can people achieve deep thinking and emotional exchange," he said.

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Jiang Jianbo introduces *Shanxi on Earth* to Elhomosany Hesham Ramzy at Xinhua Nangong Bookstore in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

## Data bank solves riddle in ceramic dating

NANCHANG — When Ton Letwory, a seasoned ancient ceramic collector from the Netherlands, acquired an intricately painted porcelain plate over a decade ago, he was told it was a piece from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

But something about its design — the swirling motifs, the brushwork — made him suspicious that it might be older. "The style reminded me of early to middle Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) porcelain," he said.

Determined to solve the mystery, he subjected the plate to multiple scientific tests in the Netherlands and Britain, including X-ray fluorescence and thermoluminescence analysis.

Yet the answers remained elusive — until his quest connected him remotely with researchers at the Jingdezhen Ancient Ceramic Gene Bank of the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Institute. The ceramic gene bank is a pioneering initiative launched in June 2022 in Jingdezhen, the world-renowned "porcelain capital" in Jiangxi province.

This is no ordinary research center. The imperial kilns in Jingdezhen wit-



A researcher works at the Jingdezhen Ancient Ceramic Gene Bank in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. ZHOU MI / XINHUA

nessed the pinnacle of global ceramic production from the 14th to 19th centuries — their wares now gracing the halls of the Palace Museum, British Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art.

By comparing Letwory's data against 17 meticulously selected imperial kiln specimens from the two dynasties representing a nearly 500-year continuum, researchers at the institute concluded that the plate was only a late Qing folk kiln piece

that borrowed techniques from multiple eras.

"It's a fascinating hybrid," said Weng Yanjun, director of the institute. "The flame pearl motif resembles early-to-mid Ming styles, while the seasonal flowers match mid-to-late Qing aesthetics. The double-ring foot, a technique unseen in imperial kilns but popular in Kangxi-era (1662-1722) folk kilns, is particularly intriguing."

To confirm their findings,

researchers in Jingdezhen conducted X-ray fluorescence tests on imperial kiln samples, extracting data on yellow, green and purple glazes and flux agents. "We're now awaiting matching quantitative data from the Netherlands on the plate to complete the analysis," Weng said.

Letwory's plate is just one small test case for what could become a groundbreaking resource in global ceramics research.

The ceramic gene bank, a collaboration between the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Institute and institutions such as Tsinghua University and the Palace Museum, is built on nearly 20 million ceramic fragments unearthed from the remains of Jingdezhen's former imperial kilns. These layers of discarded porcelain — some over 10 meters thick — stand as silent testimony to centuries of experimentation and relentless pursuit of perfection.

Unlike intact museum pieces, which are too precious to dissect, these fragments are a goldmine for researchers.

"A single ceramic fragment becomes a trove of data. Surface patterns can be studied, fragments pieced together to reconstruct original forms, cross-sections analyzed to

understand clay composition, materials ground for chemical testing, and even firing temperatures determined," Weng explained.

Armed with electron microscopes, Raman spectrometers and an array of precision instruments, researchers are collecting data from each ceramic fragment to methodically build what they call a "genetic map" of ancient China's porcelain heyday.

The project has already cataloged about 10,000 specimens from the Ming imperial kilns, with plans to complete genetic profiling of all excavated Jingdezhen ceramic specimens within years, according to Weng.

The gene bank's impact extends far beyond authentication. In late 2022, a research team led by Peking University professor Cui Jianfeng confirmed that artisans in Jingdezhen had begun blending Persian cobalt, known as "Smalt blue", with local ores to achieve deeper, more vibrant blues as early as the Xuande reign (1426-1435) of Ming. While Ming-era texts had hinted at this practice, it had never been scientifically verified until then.

Analyzing 275 ceramic shards from the three dynasties of Yuan (1271-1368), Ming and Qing, researchers documented — for the

first time — the two materials coexisting at a microscopic level.

The discovery underscores how Jingdezhen, even 600 years ago, was a hub of globalization, with its workshops solving complex technical challenges using materials sourced from thousands of miles away.

In 2023, Jingdezhen took another bold step by launching the Society of International Ceramic Studies in cooperation with 89 institutions across 22 countries and regions.

Simon Heijmans, a Dutch radio host, facilitated Letwory's inquiry through the society. He expressed his honor at the collaboration with the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Institute, noting the significance of international experts uniting behind this shared scholarly pursuit.

"For me, learning about Chinese ceramics means learning more about the history of China," Heijmans said.

The plate's attribution, though not what Letwory had hoped, reveals a deeper truth about the gene bank. While the flawless museum pieces represent porcelain's crowning achievements, these shards capture the messy yet magnificent creative process that brought them to life.

XINHUA

## WORLD

# Envoy hails China's ties with Lebanon

'Small, beautiful' projects under BRI credited with promoting shared values

By SHAO XINYING  
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Lebanon's ambassador to China has underscored the deepening ties between the two countries — a bond rooted in ancient history and bolstered by modern cooperation, especially the "small and beautiful" projects under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Ambassador Milia Jabbour said Lebanon's historical ties with China date back more than 2,000 years along the Silk Road and form the bedrock of the modern relationship.

"We share one continent," Jabbour said, describing Lebanon as a key stop where Chinese traders once carried goods to Europe.

Diplomatic ties, established in 1971, have deepened since 2017, when China and Lebanon signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly build the BRI, she said.

Apart from big infrastructure projects, she champions "small and beautiful" projects that uplift communities. Among them is the China-funded National Higher Conservatory of Music in Dbayeh, near Beirut, featuring teaching rooms, auditoriums and a theater with a capacity for 1,200 people.

"Art can bring us closer and closer," Jabbour said. "Those who love music, theater and art are looking at the watch as to when it will be finished."

The conservatory is going to be "the biggest musical conservatory" and "one of the most beautiful designs" in the Middle East, she added.

"We really appreciate those 'small and beautiful' projects. They highlight how the Chinese soft power can build bridges between Lebanese and Chinese people."

Cultural exchanges are drawing the two countries closer, Jabbour said. The Confucius Institute at the Saint Joseph University in Beirut, the first of its kind in the Middle East, was established in 2006.

Chinese language, calligraphy and culture captivate Lebanese students, businesspeople and academics alike, she added.

The ambassador is equally impressed with Chinese enthusiasm for Arabic. "Sometimes they speak it better than me. This is very encouraging," she said, stressing that true connection requires the understanding of history and culture.

Such mutual admiration is fueling travel between the two countries. "China is becoming a popular destination for Lebanon," she said.

Many visitors are amazed by the rapid development of Shenzhen, which transformed from a fishing village into a global technology hub within a few decades. "China can implement what it sees good for its people, and that's what we



Milia Jabbour

should learn from," she said. This awe extends to commerce. Chinese cars, known for their advanced technology, have become increasingly popular in Lebanon, forming a key part of bilateral trade, which reached \$2.2 billion last year.

Meanwhile, Jabbour said she has seen how much Chinese people want to visit Lebanon for its ancient ruins and cuisine. "This is very touching," she said, hoping for a brighter future where Lebanon can fully showcase its warmth and hospitality.

"Chinese people understand our country sometimes better than some of our neighbors, because they know how much we struggle to survive."

Lebanon's challenges, from domestic crises to the fallout of the Gaza conflict, make China's support even more vital, Jabbour said at a recent forum organized by Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies.

## Trusted global power

"China is a very respected and trusted global power," she told China Daily, praising its role in brokering the historic reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the unity declaration of 14 Palestinian factions.

She emphasized multilateralism as key to regional calm. "We believe a lot in what the international community can do," she said, voicing hope that broader peace in the Middle East can be established soon.

Jabbour, also dean of the Arab Diplomatic Corps to China, said: "China-Arab relations are built on trust, respect and frankness. We respect the core interests of both."

At the first China-Arab States Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in December 2022, China and Arab states agreed to build a China-Arab community with a shared future in the new era.

"Since then, matters have been building up in terms of economic and political relationship with China," Jabbour said.

She hopes the successful hosting of the second summit — scheduled to take place in China next year — will signal a stronger partnership between China and the Arab world, particularly with Lebanon.



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## The road home, unchosen



Afghan refugees ride a truck on Sunday as they arrive at a makeshift camp in Torkham, Nangarhar Province, near the border with Pakistan. The scene unfolds amid Pakistan's repatriation drive targeting more than 800,000 Afghans who have had their residence permits canceled. WAKIL KOHSAR / AFP

## NIH funding cuts disrupt research

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
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Hardeep Singh, a professor at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, moved to the United States from India to conduct medical research about three decades ago.

"Most of my research was inspired by my clinical practice, which started in rural East Texas, where I was a practicing primary care doctor," Singh said in a recent online discussion about NIH funding cuts, organized by the Center for American Progress (CAP). "I saw a lot of patients that had a missed and delayed diagnosis. That's when I found out how common a problem this diagnosis was."

Singh applied for a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and jump-started his research career in patient safety. He is the co-chief at Health Policy, Quality & Informatics Program (HPQI), a research center under the umbrella of multiple medical and governmental agencies.

His research focuses on reducing medical errors and improving healthcare quality. "We've been able to influence guidelines of several national agencies, CMS (the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services), CDC, international agencies, WHO, OECD (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)," he said.

He has won numerous awards and honors for his contributions to patient safety, including the 2012 Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, from former president Barack Obama.

Singh said his research is important because 1 out of every 20 US adults could be misdiagnosed every year in the outpatient setting alone. His research produces intervention solutions for health systems, clinicians and also patients to get involved in reducing misdiagnosis. "We're studying things like

artificial intelligence. How do you make sure that AI is delivered safely and effectively to everybody who needs it," he said.

However, HPQI will undergo a 90 percent budget cut under the Trump administration, "which pretty much eliminates the agency that has funded my entire life to work" and, "HPQI will cease to exist as it exists now," he said.

Singh is not alone. Michael Lin, a professor of neurobiology and bioengineering at Stanford University, is an investigator in one of the nine AVIDD (Antiviral Drug Discovery Centers for Pathogens of Pandemic Concern) set up by the NIH in 2022.

According to the NIH website, AVIDD Centers "will conduct innovative, multidisciplinary research to develop candidate COVID-19 antivirals, especially those that can be taken in an outpatient setting, as well as antivirals targeting specific viral families with high potential to cause a pandemic in the future."

Lin said he's not sure where the decisions were made, but all nine AVIDD Centers had their funding immediately canceled recently.

Lin said the AVIDD centers were allocated \$300 million over three years, and the work is nearing its end. Stopping the project now will save little money out of NIH's overall \$50 billion budget, he said.

With the grant being canceled, work already done will be lost.

"All of these centers had a very fast speed and developed a promising pipeline of drugs, and they were all in the last stages of testing those drugs," Lin said. "If the centers cannot do the final step of validating that these drugs work, then the money of the taxpayers that already (was) spent is going to go to waste. On top of that, you won't have the results that could be lifesaving in the future."

Lin said the public may not feel

the impact of the cuts at all right now, "but you can be pretty sure that at some point in your life, you or someone you know is going to benefit from a drug or would have benefited from a drug that might be being cut right now."

"It's going to be a problem that will have ramifications down the road five or 10 years later," Lin said.

The impact is extensive, according to Howard Forman, a professor at Yale University.

"Recently, 1,200 employees of the NIH have been fired or otherwise removed, including some of the most senior leaders of these centers, leaving them without any type of a deep bench which they previously had. And matching this, the FDA has also seen massive firings and an exodus of our best talent," Forman said, adding that the NIH was ordered to "reduce contract spending by 35 percent, or \$2.6 billion."

Forman said that NIH funding is extraordinarily important to innovation and the life sciences industry in the United States. He pointed toward a paper published on JAMA in 2023 showing "that 99.4 percent of all approved drugs from 2010 to 2019, that's basically all but two of 356 drugs approved during that time benefited from NIH-funded research."

Lin said that it costs about \$2 billion to develop a drug in the private sector, while NIH-funded research produces a drug at \$380 million due to different salary levels in the two sectors. NIH-funded research is a much more efficient way to get beneficial results.

With the current funding cut, the US will lose talent, he said.

"France has been trying to recruit away American scientists to their universities. So, these kinds of cuts do have an effect on how people judge their future careers. And they do put us in a less competitive position versus other countries," Lin said.

## US strikes kill 12 in Yemen's capital

DUBAI/SANAA — US airstrikes targeting Yemen's capital killed 12 people and wounded 30 others, the Houthis said early on Monday.

The deaths marked the latest in the United States' intensified campaign of strikes targeting the group. The US military's Central Command declined to answer questions about the strike or discuss civilian casualties from its campaign.

The Houthis said the strike hit the Farwa neighborhood market in Sanaa's Shuub district.

Footage aired by the Houthi-run al-Masirah news channel showed damage to vehicles and buildings in the area, with screaming onlookers holding what appeared to be a dead child. Others waited on stretchers heading into a hospital.

Strikes overnight into Monday also hit other areas of the country, including the Amran, Hodeidah, Marib and Saada governorates.

Tensions between the Houthi group and the US military have escalated since Washington resumed airstrikes on Houthi targets in Yemen on March 15 to deter the group from targeting Israel and US warships.

Later on Monday, the Houthis said they launched attacks at two Israeli targets and two US aircraft carriers, using drones and cruise missiles.

"We launched a drone attack at a vital target in the city of Ashkelon and another drone attack at a military target in the city of Eilat," Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea said in a statement aired by al-Masirah TV.

The group also targeted USS *Harry S. Truman* in the northern Red Sea and USS *Carl Vinson* in the Arabian Sea, using cruise missiles and drones, Sarea said.

The Israel Defense Forces have yet to comment on the Houthi claim, nor the US military.

## Attack plans 'leak'

In another development, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth shared details of a March attack on Houthis in a message group that included his wife, brother and personal lawyer, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Sunday.

The revelations of a second Signal chat raise more questions about Hegseth's use of an unclassified messaging system to share highly sensitive security details.

In the second chat, Hegseth shared details of the attack similar to those revealed last month by *The Atlantic* magazine after its editor-in-chief was included in a separate chat on the Signal app by mistake, in an embarrassing incident involving all of US President Donald Trump's most senior national security officials.

The person familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the second chat included about a dozen people and was created during his confirmation process to discuss administrative issues rather than detailed military planning.

The chat included details of the schedule of the airstrikes, the person said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## 'Taken' by storm



Twisted sheet metal from a collapsed roof drapes over a damaged vehicle at a car dealership in Ada, US state of Oklahoma, on Sunday, after violent storms tore through the region. The powerful system brought heavy rain, large hail and tornadoes to parts of Texas and Oklahoma, leaving three people dead and prompting severe weather warnings across the south-central and Midwest United States. RICHARD R. BARRON VIA AP

By CUI HAIPEI in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia  
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For Shahad Alsalahi, mastering Chinese has unveiled a gateway to global perspectives.

The final-year college student from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, was among four learners honored as "2025 Chinese Language Star" during Sunday's International Chinese Language Day event, co-hosted by King Saud University and Chinese energy giant Sinopec.

"My father once worked in China, so our family has numerous cultural keepsakes," Alsalahi said. "Those porcelain dishes he gifted remain household treasures today, serving as early inspirations for my China fascination."

"My studies in Chinese deepened my cultural comprehension, revealing shared values between Arab and Chinese traditions, particularly regarding etiquette and mutual respect."

She recalled visiting Beijing last

summer, where she explored landmarks such as the Great Wall. "Direct exposure heightened my appreciation for China's culture. I've also been to many other countries, but Beijing has always lingered in my mind."

Having passed level 4 of the HSK Chinese proficiency test, Alsalahi said she aspires to pursue China-focused career opportunities and strengthen China-Arab relations through professional contributions.

In 2009, King Saud University became the first in Saudi Arabia to offer a Chinese major. Its Chinese language department now enrolls about 300 students.

Abdullah bin Salman Al-Salman, president of the university, said the kingdom's proposal in 2019 to include Chinese into the national education system highly aligns with the core goal of its Vision 2030, which aims to promote cultural diversity and empower the employment skills of young people.

"Learning Chinese goes beyond acquiring linguistic skills. It is a

journey toward embracing diverse worldviews, understanding civilizations and forging bridges of friendship," he said.

China and Saudi Arabia are each other's key trading partners — China is Saudi Arabia's largest global partner, while Saudi Arabia is China's largest in the Middle East.

Lian Mingxiang, chief representative of Sinopec Middle East Office, highlighted the company's 20-year presence in Saudi Arabia and cultural exchange involvement.

In 2023, Sinopec donated more than 1,000 China-themed books to King Saud University to establish the Silk Road Library Chinese Bookshelf. Lian said Sunday's event further demonstrated the company's social responsibility.

The deepening integration between China's Belt and Road Initiative and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has accelerated cooperation across sectors, yielding significant educational and cultural achievements. This year, the two countries will

co-host the first China-Saudi Arabia Year of Culture.

In August, Saudi Arabia welcomed the first batch of 175 Chinese-language teachers to five cities, marking the beginning of Chinese-language education after it was included in the curriculum of Saudi primary and middle schools.

Al-Salman confirmed his country's plans to welcome 200 additional Chinese teachers this year, expanding its language program capacity.

Several event attendees noted a growing demand for Chinese proficiency in Saudi Arabia's job market, calling it a major advantage.

Malath Bushra Alaqib, a training agency employee who studied Chinese education in Guangdong province for over three years, said Chinese-speaking job seekers can increase their income by 20 to 30 percent.

Abdulaziz Alshaabani, a researcher at Al Riyadh Center for Political and Strategic Studies, attributed the surge in interest for Chinese language and culture to strong bilateral relations.

## WORLD

## Russia and Ukraine trade blame over breach of ceasefire

MOSCOW/KYIV — Russia and Ukraine on Sunday accused each other of violating an Easter truce as US President Donald Trump surprisingly announced that the rivals could make a “deal” this week.

The 30-hour truce from Saturday, announced by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, had been meant to mark the holiday, but Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had carried out hundreds of front-line attacks.

The Russian Ministry of Defense said during this period, all units involved in the special military operation strictly adhered to the ceasefire and maintained their previously held positions.

Multiple attacks by Ukrainian forces in the Donetsk region on Monday night were repelled by Russian troops, it added.

These attacks resulted in civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Zelensky said on social media: “The Russian army has violated Putin's ceasefire more than 2,000 times”.

He had made a similar proposal at the beginning of the weekend in response to Putin's announcement of the Easter truce.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 96 drones and three missiles in overnight attacks targeting Ukraine, causing damage in the Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Cherkasy regions.

Ukraine's air defense units shot down 42 Russian drones, and another 47 drones were redirected by electronic warfare.

Trump said on Friday that he would end US efforts to halt the fighting. Then on Sunday, he came out with a new startling announcement.

“Hopefully Russia and Ukraine will make a deal this week,” he said in a short message on his Truth Social platform.

“Both will then start to do big business with the United States of America, which is thriving, and make a fortune,” he added.

The Kremlin said on Monday that the position of Trump administration on ruling out NATO membership for Ukraine gave Moscow satisfaction, but declined to comment on Trump's hopes for a deal this week.

US envoy General Keith Kellogg said on Sunday that NATO membership was “off the table” for Ukraine.

Trump has repeatedly said previous US support for Ukraine's bid to join NATO was a cause of the fighting.

“We have heard from Washington at various levels that Ukraine's membership in NATO is excluded,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. “Of course, this is something that causes our satisfaction and coincides with our position.”

Also on Monday, Russian forces said it resumed fighting in Ukraine after the Easter ceasefire, Russian news agencies reported, citing the defense ministry.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Protesters gather in front of the fence at the White House on Saturday. THOMAS MUELLER VIA AP

## US tariff policy seen as ‘political theater’

Experts say levies designed for domestic posturing rather than economic reasons

By ZHAO HUANXIN

in Washington

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The United States' tariff policy on China, and even on its neighbors Canada and Mexico, has become a form of political theater that experts say is designed primarily for domestic posturing rather than real economic recalibration.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration has rolled out sweeping tariffs, starting with a 10 percent duty on all foreign goods. Dozens of countries received a 90-day pause, but tariffs on Chinese imports surged to 125 percent.

On April 11, smartphones and laptops were temporarily exempted. Still, tensions grew as a White House fact sheet noted China now faces tariffs of up to 245 percent.

The tariffs, emblematic of the MAGA agenda's populist protectionism, are inflicting high costs on US consumers and destabilizing global trade, according to analysts.

“Trump's tariffs are not a negotiating tool, and they are not about trade or economics. They are about politics, and they are purely performative; and they are for domestic, not foreign, consumption,” said David J. Firestein, a former US diplomat.

Firestein, inaugural president and CEO of the George H. W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, noted that the measures function as a political gesture, meant to project a populist image of toughness.

“Tariffs are not a means to an economic end; they are a means to a political end,” he added. “What they actually do is tax American importers and consumers, contribute mightily to inflation, throw people out of work, and blow out the US trade deficit.”

Trump's tariffs threaten to raise prices for imported goods from China, Canada and Mexico, which collectively shipped nearly \$1.4 trillion worth of goods to the US last year, accounting for roughly a third of all US imports, according

to official US data. The jobs that are ostensibly created by the tariffs aren't created here; they are created in countries like Vietnam and Mexico, Firestein added.

Echoing Firestein, political scientist Jon R. Taylor of the University of Texas at San Antonio described the tariff strategy as “a fool's errand that will result in tears and a bad ending”.

Taylor noted that the use of tariffs and other protectionist measures is not only outdated but dangerously misaligned with the realities of a deeply interconnected global economy.

## Notion dismissed

“This is 2025, not 1895,” he said, dismissing the notion that imposing blunt tariffs can magically trigger a massive reshoring of manufacturing or isolate China's high-tech sectors.

Taylor said MAGA seeks to pursue a zero-sum game of “we win, you lose”. Such an approach is not only counterproductive, but also likely to spur retaliatory measures that would further destabilize markets and ultimately harm US interests.

Both Firestein and Taylor said the administration's approach of “erratic” imposition and subsequent flip-flops of tariffs has unsettled investors and businesses alike.

In its latest round of countermeasures, released on April 11, China responded to the United States' “reciprocal tariffs” by raising its additional tariffs on US goods from 84 percent to 125 percent, effective from April 12.

The Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council, China's Cabinet, stated that current tariff levels have made US exports to China commercially unviable, so China won't respond to any further US tariff increases on Chinese goods.

Adding a historical perspective,

geopolitical analyst Lawrence Freeman noted that the Trump administration's tariff strategy reflects a deep misunderstanding of its traditional economic purpose.

“President Trump's tariffs are not really protectionist. They are not intended to protect the growth of industry in the US but instead are being used to weaponize trade with China for a political end,” Freeman said.

Under the guidance of early US leaders like Alexander Hamilton, tariffs were a critical tool. “Hamilton understood that for the former agrarian-based colonies to become a sovereign republic, the creation of a manufacturing sector was essential,” Freeman said, adding that when applied correctly, tariffs fostered industrial growth and generated revenue.

In stark contrast, the current policy has demonstrated a profound departure from the historically proven methods of nurturing domestic industry, according to Freeman.

In Freeman's view, the Trump administration's tariffs are a short-term political maneuver that does little to foster the country's long-term industrial growth or innovation, which are among the core objectives of the MAGA agenda.

Rather than advancing economic prosperity, the tariffs serve as a blunt instrument to “bludgeon China” with populist messaging that portrays the country as a threat to US dominance, he said.

Despite rhetoric and aggressive tariffs, China remains the US' top trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$680 billion last year and around 73,000 US companies investing in China, according to official statistics.

This enduring interdependence underscores the disconnect between the administration's confrontational stance and the economic realities that drive mutual prosperity, experts said.

“A stable US-China relationship is in the interests of both the United States and China, as well as the Asia-Pacific region and the world,” Firestein said. “No one gains from instability, unpredictability and volatility in the relationship.”

## Economists, Nobel laureates call Trump tariffs ‘misguided’

By RENA LI in Los Angeles  
renali@chinadailyusa.com

Dozens of leading economists, including two Nobel laureates, have signed a public declaration warning that US President Donald Trump's escalating use of tariffs risks triggering a “self-inflicted recession” and undermining the constitutional balance of power in the United States.

The declaration, titled “Trade and Tariffs Declaration: A Statement on the Principles of American Prosperity”, which had gathered more than 1,300 signatures as of Monday afternoon, warns that the administration's so-called “reciprocal” tariffs, announced on April 2 and now affecting goods from more than 180 countries and regions, are calculated using “an erroneous and improvised formula with no basis in economic reality”.

“The current administration's tariffs are motivated by a mistaken understanding of the economic conditions faced by ordinary Americans,” the letter reads. “We anticipate that American workers will incur the brunt of these misguided policies in the form of increased prices and the risk of economic contraction.”

Among the signatories are Nobel laureates James Heckman and Vernon Smith, former US senator and economist Phil Gramm, and Harvard professor N Gregory Mankiw, who served as Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under President George W. Bush.

The economists emphasize that trade deficits, often used by the Trump administration to justify tariffs, are widely misunderstood.

“Contrary to widespread fears, US trade deficits are not evidence of US economic decline or of unfair trade practices abroad,” the statement asserts. “Nor do these ‘deficits’ inflict damage on the US economy. Quite the opposite is true.”

“US trade deficits reflect global investors' high confidence in the US economy. And these investments, in turn, further strengthen the productive economy — and demand for the US dollar,” the letter said.

Constitutional concerns were raised over the way these tariffs were enacted.

“The ‘Power to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises’ was constitutionally reserved to Congress as the direct and explicit representatives of the people,” the statement reads. “The April 2 tariffs have been imposed without that body's consent, and without any intelligible guiding principle.”

According to the declaration, the administration's use of emergency authority amounts to “unilateral executive decrees” justified by

“improvised claims of emergency under a statute that does not even contemplate authorizing tariffs”.

“This seizure of power is unconstitutional,” the economists warned.

On April 2, Trump declared a symbolic “Liberation Day,” unveiling sweeping new tariffs on US trading partners in what he described as a decisive step toward reducing the trade deficit and reviving domestic manufacturing.

While the administration argues that such protectionist policies are necessary for American economic revival, economists counter that they will instead “invert the principles of liberty” that have long supported US prosperity.

Meanwhile, a bipartisan group of lawmakers is pushing back. Seven Republican members of Congress have co-sponsored legislation that would require the removal of any presidential tariffs within 60 days unless explicitly approved by the legislative branch.

Financial markets have responded with volatility, with major US indices hitting new lows in recent weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 970 points on Monday.

As of Monday, the White House had not issued an official response to the economists' open letter.

Beyond the academic and legislative response, the broader US public also has mobilized. Over the weekend, coordinated protests swept the country under the banner of the “50501” movement — symbolizing 50 protests in 50 states, united under one cause.

In Los Angeles, even in traditionally conservative Orange County, California, hundreds gathered with placards reading: “Trump: Your tariff war screwed the economy!” and “No Kings! Hands off our Constitution!”

“I'm here standing up for the rule of law,” said Aaron, a school teacher and protest participant. “We teach our students about checks and balances. Now we need to defend them.”

Earlier this month, the United States raised the base tariff on Chinese imports to 145 percent, prompting Beijing to introduce reciprocal tariffs on a wide array of US goods.

China's Ministry of Commerce has expressed support for resolving trade disputes with the United States through dialogue and consultation. However, it cautioned that China would take “necessary and proportional countermeasures” should any agreements be reached that compromise its legitimate interests.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Pope Francis dies at 88, Vatican says in statement

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis, the first Latin American leader of the Roman Catholic Church, has died, the Vatican said in a video statement on Monday.

Francis, 88, who suffered from chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, was admitted to Gemelli hospital in Rome on Feb 14, 2025, for a respiratory crisis that developed into double pneumonia. He spent 38 days there, the longest hospitalization of his 12-year papacy.

“Dear brothers and sisters, it is with profound sadness I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis,” Cardinal Kevin Farrell announced on the Vatican's TV channel.

Francis' death comes a day after the pope had made his first prolonged public appearance since being discharged from hospital on March 23.

On Easter Sunday, Francis had entered St. Peter's Square in an open-air popemobile shortly after midday, greeting cheering crowds. He had also offered a special blessing for the first time since Christmas.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope on March 13, 2013, surpris-

ing many church watchers who had seen the Argentine cleric, known for his concern for the poor, as an outsider.

He inherited a church under attack over a child sex abuse scandal and torn by infighting in the Vatican bureaucracy.

As his papacy progressed, he faced criticism from conservatives, who accused him of trashing cherished traditions. He also drew the ire of progressives, who felt he should have done much more to reshape the 2,000-year-old church.

Francis appointed nearly 80 percent of the cardinal electors who will choose the next pope, increasing the possibility that his successor will continue his progressive policies, despite the strong pushback from traditionalists.

The bells at Paris' Notre-Dame cathedral rang out 88 times on Monday in honor of Pope Francis. The Italian soccer league postponed its games which were scheduled for Monday.

Some leaders have offered condolences to the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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## Briefly

## SOUTH KOREA

## Ex-president back in court for criminal trial

South Korea's former president Yoon Suk-yeol appeared in court on Monday for the second hearing of his criminal trial — to defend himself against insurrection charges over his short-lived declaration of martial law. Yoon was formally stripped of office earlier this month, after being impeached and suspended by lawmakers over his Dec 3 attempt to subvert civilian rule, which saw armed soldiers deployed to parliament. He became South Korea's first sitting head of state to be arrested in connection with the criminal case against him in January. Yoon's court appearance on Monday was

the first time the media was allowed to film the former president's criminal trial.

## INDIA

## Vance in New Delhi for talks on trade

US Vice-President JD Vance began a four-day visit to India on Monday as New Delhi looks to seal an early trade deal with Washington and pave the way for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vance are expected to hold talks on tariffs. They are expected to “review the progress in relations” and “exchange views on regional and global developments of mutual interest”, according to India's foreign ministry.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## BUSINESS

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## Exchange rate stability 'best' available option for policymakers

By ZHOU LANXU  
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Despite facing a substantial external demand gap caused by US tariffs, keeping the renminbi exchange rate generally stable as much as possible should remain the best option for Chinese policymakers, said leading economists and policy advisers.

Instead of tolerating a sharp depreciation by the local currency against the US dollar to buffer the shock on exports, China should launch a pro-consumption policy package of over 1 trillion yuan (\$137.2 billion) while ramping up subsidies for heavily affected exporters and workers, they said.

“Measures to expand domestic demand at this point are not only about domestic economic management.”

Guo Kai, executive president of the CF40 Institute

“While local currency depreciation can possibly enhance export competitiveness, its impact may be limited in the face of significant trade barriers,” said Huang Yiping, dean of Peking University's National School of Development and a member of the China Finance 40 Forum, a top think tank.

Meanwhile, currency depreciation may unintentionally dampen investor sentiment in local financial markets, especially as domestic economic growth momentum still needs to be consolidated, Huang said on Monday.

At the People's Bank of China's monetary policy committee meeting last month, it was stressed that the central bank would strengthen the resilience of the foreign exchange market while resolutely guarding against the risk of exchange rate overshooting to keep the renminbi exchange rate generally stable at an appropriate, balanced level.

Huang is a member of the committee.

Citing the need to consider the impact of renminbi exchange rate adjustments on both trade and financial markets, Huang said he agrees that keeping the renminbi generally stable as much as possible remains a reasonable policy option.

Guo Kai, executive president of the CF40 Institute, which is affiliated with the forum, said with the US dollar weakening against the euro, any considerable depreciation of the renminbi against the greenback — which might support Chinese exports to the United States though — would lead to an even sharper weakening of the renminbi against the euro.

In that case, the pressure brought by US tariff hikes on exports would shift partly to Europe and perhaps Japan, as well as China's neighboring countries, raising the risk of trade frictions between China and its trading partners, said Guo, who has worked at the central bank in the past.

To avoid such an unfavorable outcome, he said China should instead offset the US tariff shock by launching an additional policy package of more than 1 trillion yuan to boost domestic consumption.

“Measures to expand domestic demand at this point are not only about domestic economic management,” Guo said. “It would also carry diplomatic signals, showing that China has no intention of shifting the costs of trade frictions (with the US) to any other economies.”

Zhang Bin, a CF40 senior researcher and a national political adviser, agreed that it is best to keep the renminbi generally stable against the dollar, warning that a gradual yet continuous renminbi weakening could form one-sided expectations and bring pressures of capital outflows.

The onshore renminbi rallied against the greenback after an initial weakening upon the US “reciprocal tariffs” announcement in early April, trading at 7.2873 as of Monday evening, strengthening by 0.16 percent since the beginning of the year, according to Wind Info.



A billboard on a building in Shanghai shows major stock indexes on Monday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## A-shares stabilizing amid trade tensions

Expert: Investors should be confident in dedication to safeguarding bourses

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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With rising strategic importance in terms of improving expectations and boosting confidence, China's capital market now provides opportunities for both Chinese and foreign investors as global economic growth stagnates due to Sino-US trade frictions, experts said.

Their comments followed messages delivered during a State Council executive meeting on Friday, which included making continuous efforts to stabilize the stock market and advance the sound and stable development of the property sector. Once related measures are introduced, they should affect targeted companies and individuals directly. The implementation efficiency of the measures should be improved and their effect ensured, according to the meeting.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index gained 0.45 percent on Monday while the Shenzhen Component Index closed up 1.27 percent. The tech-heavy ChiNext in Shenzhen jumped 1.59 percent.

The A-share market is crucial for lifting market confidence during trade tensions. Investors should be confident in China's dedication to safeguarding the stability of its capital markets, said Qiu Xiang, chief A-share market strategist at CITIC Securities.

Economic resilience is crucial during the ongoing stalemate. China has more choices and room for more policies, helping it to last longer during the tensions. But the huge amount of government debt that will mature or need refinancing before July will serve as the

turning point for US tariff policies, said Qiu.

Against such a backdrop, self-reliant technology companies, sectors benefiting from Europe's increasing capital expenditure, consumer staple providers and companies generating stable dividends are worth looking at in the A-share market, he added.

Market turmoil and volatility continued in overseas markets last week, indicating continued external pressure. But the Chinese market is stable, thanks to its recovering economic fundamentals and quick responses to recent uncertainties, said Zhang Qiyao, chief strategy analyst at Industrial Securities.

**0.45 percent**  
increase in the Shanghai Composite Index on Monday

Meanwhile, China's dual circulation development pattern and the country's strategic focus will help to anchor market stability, said Zhang.

Experts from Huaxi Securities wrote in a recent report that the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong stock markets may serve as havens for foreign investors, while other markets are undergoing more drastic fluctuations in the short term and global economic growth faces more uncertainties.

The Chinese government has been dedicated to advancing supply side reform and deeper restructuring. Combined with its continued efforts in expanding domestic demand, Chinese firms are provided with a better environment, which means new

investment opportunities, Huaxi said.

In addition, Chinese equity assets now enjoy more valuation advantages compared to their foreign peers. The former's investment value over the mid to long term is especially noticeable. The market should not underestimate policymakers' resolution to stabilize market performance and investor expectations, they added.

During a forum on Sunday, Liu Yuhui, a council member of the China Chief Economist Forum, said that now is a good time to invest in the A-share market, as it is projected to enjoy longer-term prosperity. Investors are especially advised to look for opportunities in core China assets, whose investment value has been manifested during the China-US trade frictions, he said.

Fu Si, China portfolio strategist at Goldman Sachs, said that global actively managed funds and overseas hedge funds have increased their exposure to A shares since the beginning of the year, mainly driven by the rapid development of Chinese artificial intelligence technology. But their current exposure is still lower than historical levels, while selling room is limited. Therefore, global capital will flow back to the A-share market in the mid to long term, Fu said.

As of the end of March, qualified foreign institutional investors have increased their holdings in A shares — both in terms of volume and market value — on a quarterly basis, according to market tracker Wind Info. QFII held at least 500 million yuan (\$68.6 million) worth of shares in Zijin Mining, Centre Testing International Group and China XD Group each, with the latter — a transmission and distribution equipment maker — seeing the most rapid increase of QFII holdings in the past three months.

## Service sector's opening-up to accelerate

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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China will accelerate the expansion of the service sector's opening-up, a practical action meant to inject more certainty and stability into the world in light of intensifying global unilateralism and protectionism, the Ministry of Commerce said on Monday.

The ministry has issued a guideline for accelerating the implementation of a comprehensive pilot program to expand the opening-up of the service sector that includes another nine cities such as Dalian, Liaoning province and Ningbo, Zhejiang province.

Previously, the pilot program had been carried out in three batches across 11 provinces and cities around the country. The latest round will be fully launched in all 11 provinces and cities at once, without distinguishing regions and task batches, the commerce ministry said.

The guideline proposed 155 pilot tasks in 14 areas, including supporting the open development of telecommunications services and related digital industries, improving the level of opening-up in the medical and healthcare sector, and promoting international cooperation in finance, cultural and tourism sectors.

The measures include supporting foreign doctors to open clinics in China and encouraging the short-term practice of overseas medical professionals and technicians. In addition, China will work to attract more overseas insurance companies, sovereign funds and pensions to provide investment, financing and technical services for green projects, and allow foreign-invested travel agencies to operate outbound tourism businesses in China.

Ling Ji, vice-minister of commerce, said the US “reciprocal tariff” policy has seriously impacted the international trade order and stability of global industrial and supply chains, and China has proposed measures to further strengthen its opening-up to better cope with the situation.

“China's new measures demonstrate its unwavering determination to expand the opening-up, and its firm support for economic globalization and maintenance of the multilateral trading system,” Ling said.

China's services sector boasts vast growth potential. In the first quarter, China's actual use of foreign investment amounted to 269.23 billion yuan (\$36.94 billion), and the services sector accounted for more than 70 percent of the total, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

“The nine cities newly included in the pilot program have a relatively high degree of opening-up in the services sector, and each city has its own unique industries. After the successful pilot, their innovative achievements are foreseen to have greater value for replication and promotion on a larger scale,” said Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

## Spring irrigation



As spring plowing and irrigation peaks in Zhengyang county, Henan province, employees from State Grid Zhengyang Power Supply Co visit farmers at Wangdatang village in Xiongzhai town over the weekend to check the electrical equipment of irrigation wells and ensure they have reliable power supply.

LI HONGYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

## Number of private firms tops 57m

Private enterprises in China continued to expand steadily, amid government efforts to spur growth in both the private sector and the broader economy, data from the top market regulator showed on Monday. The number of private enterprises in the country exceeded 57 million by the end of March, accounting for 92.3 percent of all businesses nationwide, according to data from the State Administration for Market Regulation. In the first quarter, 1.979 million private companies were established, marking an increase of 7.1 percent from a year ago and

outpacing the average growth recorded over the past three years, the SAMR said.

## Loan prime rates remain unchanged

China's one-year loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate, came in at 3.1 percent on Monday, unchanged from the previous month. The over-five-year LPR, on which many lenders base their mortgage rates, also remained unchanged from the previous reading of 3.6 percent, according to the National Interbank Funding Center.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

## Cleaner coal to complement green wave

By LIU YUKUN  
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China is gearing up for a new phase of coal power upgrades to hasten its transition toward cleaner and greener energy, said officials and experts on Monday.

This round of upgrades will focus on enhanced peak-shaving capability, strong support for volatile new energy power, high resilience and lower emissions.

It proposes key tasks in four aspects — clean and low-carbon; safe and reliable, efficient peak-shaving; valley-filling and the intelligent operation of coal power, said He Yang, deputy head of the National Energy Administration.

He emphasized that among the four key tasks, ensuring the security and reliability of the power supply are fundamental prerequisites, as coal-fired power accounts for 40 percent of installed capacity and generates nearly 60 percent of electricity in China.

This initiative comes against the backdrop of the rapid increase in power generated from intermittent and volatile new energies.

Officials and experts emphasized the pressing need for China's coal-fired power sector to address significant challenges amid energy transition.

Coal-fired power, a major carbon emitter, must reduce emissions while enhancing flexibility as a crucial peak-shaving and support

source in the evolving power system structure.

Moving forward, a focus on clean energy and intelligent operations is essential for coal-fired power to adapt to scheduling systems and complex operating environments, ensuring both security and sustainability, said He.

Hu Wenping, director of the power generation project consulting institute affiliated with the China Electric Power Planning and Engineering Institute, emphasized the need to enhance the efficiency and speed of coal-fired power generation units, as well as boost worker safety through technological innovation.

This includes intelligent optimization and decision-making

for efficient operation, dynamic matching of resources for peak load changes, and safety measures like intelligent safety monitoring to mitigate operational risks and ensure safe operations, Hu said.

Diao Baosheng, deputy director of the power department of CHN Energy, shared the group's practices in clean and decarbonization technologies for coal-fired power, including biomass co-firing and carbon capture, utilization and storage.

Diao said the company has successively carried out technological strategies such as chemical absorption capturing, which can absorb up to 500,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

# BUSINESS



Delivery employees pass through Beijing's central business district on Feb 20. ZHAO WENYU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Instant retail sizzling as turf war among big names heats up

JD takes on rivals with its optimized rules tailored for food delivery riders

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Competition in China's instant retail sector is intensifying as major online players are upping the ante on lucrative on-demand food delivery services to seek new sources of revenue and bolster the digital transformation of traditional brick-and-mortar stores, experts said.

They called for more efforts to step up investments in technology and supply chain innovation, and optimize delivery networks and inventory management by adopting intelligent warehousing and distribution systems to further improve delivery efficiency and user experience.

Chinese e-commerce giant JD announced that starting Monday, consumers whose orders arrive more than 20 minutes late will receive them free of charge. This move comes as some of its domestic rivals set rules for food delivery riders to take orders from only one platform.

JD said in an open letter that it will step up the recruitment of full-time delivery riders, raising the quota from 50,000 to 100,000 in the next three months. It will allocate sufficient orders to delivery riders who were fired by competitors for taking orders from JD, and ensure that their incomes will not decrease.

**650 billion yuan**

market scale of China's instant retail sector in 2023, according to Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation

The company emphasized that it will never force its riders to "choose one out of two" platforms, encouraging them to accept orders freely from different platforms. JD will also offer job opportunities to spouses of all food delivery riders.

The announcement follows JD's February entry into the highly competitive food delivery sector, which is currently dominated by Meituan and Alibaba Group's Ele.me.

Chen Liteng, senior analyst at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said JD has gained an upper hand in quality control and high-efficiency logistics and delivery networks, but it still faces some challenges in cultivating user habits and expanding the scale of riders, while striking a balance between lowering fulfillment costs and profit margin pressure.

By comparison, Meituan has accumulated abundant experience

in the food delivery segment, boasting a strong fulfillment capability with a network of 7 million delivery staff. However, its high commission fees have long been questioned by consumers, Chen said.

Chen added that the two platforms should step up efforts to leverage automated technologies to lift dispatching and delivery efficiency and lower operational costs, while enhancing user stickiness and improving repurchase rates.

Instant retail refers to a model where shoppers place orders on online trading platforms, followed by retailers from brick-and-mortar stores executing door-to-door deliveries themselves or through a third-party delivery platform. An on-demand delivery order usually requires 30 to 60 minutes to be completed.

According to a report from the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, the market scale of China's instant retail sector was 650 billion yuan (\$89.2 billion) in 2023, up 28.89 percent year-on-year. The figure is expected to surpass 2 trillion yuan in 2030.

JD said in February that it will provide full-time food delivery riders with comprehensive social insurance and housing funds, making it the first platform in China to offer such extensive insurance coverage for delivery personnel.

The company also revealed that catering merchants who register on

its platform before May 1 will enjoy commission-free services for the entire year, alongside comprehensive support.

Meituan has announced plans to offer both full-time and part-time riders social insurance starting in the second quarter. The on-demand services provider officially rolled out its instant retail service Meituan Shangou — or Meituan "flash purchases" — last week, providing 24-hour shopping services, with deliveries finished within approximately 30 minutes. Customers can select from a wide range of products, including fresh produce, snacks, electronics, beauty items and pet care supplies.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said JD, which relies on its advantages in terms of supply chains and brand reputation, is striving to explore new growth points in the food delivery market, while Meituan has been engaged in local life services and is expanding its presence in the instant retail domain by leveraging its abundant merchants resources.

Noting instant retail is regarded as an important development direction for the future retail sector, Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said competition in the sector will focus on optimizing user experience, expanding service scope and enhancing supply chain efficiency.

## China's innovation leap a boon for Milliken

By WANG KEJU  
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China, amid a global landscape marked by rising protectionism tendencies and economic volatility, has vowed to boost domestic demand and expand opening-up, which will contribute to global economic stability, and anchor foreign business confidence in China, said a senior executive with a US company.

"The fundamentals of China's economy are sound and the country's development prospects remain promising," said Cindy Boiter, executive vice-president of industrial manufacturer Milliken & Company and president of Milliken's chemical business, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

China set its GDP growth target for 2025 at around 5 percent, as laid out in the country's Government Work Report in March.

China's economic resilience is rooted in the government's proactive policies to promote innovation, stimulate domestic consumption, and expand the country's openness, Boiter said, adding that China will continue to be a key contributor to global economic growth.

According to the International Monetary Fund in March, the implementation of a comprehensive reform package aimed at catalyzing consumption and improving productivity could raise China's annual potential growth rate by around 1 percentage point in the medium term.

In particular, the country's stronger emphasis on consumption-boosting initiatives, according to Boiter, is a positive signal for global companies across various sectors seeking to expand their presence in China, the world's second-largest consumer market.

"With the continuous improvement of living standards among Chinese households, consumers' requirements for daily household products have moved beyond basic functions to encompass a broader range of needs, including overall performance, visual design, durability and environmental friendliness," Boiter said.

To better cater to the evolving

needs of Chinese consumers, the company has partnered with Chinese companies, and is utilizing advanced materials that enhance the performance of products in sectors such as packaging, consumer products and development of tailored products.

In collaboration with Shaanxi Yanchang Zhongmei Yulin Energy and Chemical Co Ltd, the company has developed a new application utilizing its high-rigidity transparent polypropylene material for refrigerator drawer components.

"Having a local innovation footprint allows our teams to be nimble, creating quicker solutions for our customers. We actively engage with the value chain of the polyolefin industry in China including associations, universities, and industry partners to co-develop materials and solutions," Boiter said. "Our approach to global innovation is local."

According to the 2024 Global Innovation Index released by the World Intellectual Property Organization last September, China demonstrated exceptional performance, rising to 11th place in the global ranking. China also maintains its leading position for the second consecutive year with 26 science and technology clusters among the global top 100.

China's strides in technology are poised to redefine global innovation. Its breakthroughs in some cutting-edge technologies indicate a shift from being a technology adopter to a global leader, Boiter said.

Moreover, China remains steadfast in its commitments toward opening its doors even wider to the outside world despite escalating global uncertainties, and the country has removed all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector.

"We are confident that China will remain a vital market for Milliken's innovation and a driving force behind our global technological breakthroughs," Boiter said, adding that "looking ahead, Milliken remains committed to deepening its R&D expertise, expanding our market presence and enhancing technical services in China."

"We are well-positioned to navigate opportunities and challenges, driving sustainable growth and value creation in the dynamic China marketplace," Boiter added.

## Better living



An aerial image shows an affordable housing project in Shanghai, where State-owned builders are ramping up efforts to help more tenants facing urgent housing needs in the metropolis. Specifically, China Railway Construction Corp's 23rd bureau said it is putting finishing touches on a project in Jiading district, which will soon be ready to accommodate about 1,300 households by the end of June.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## ABB unit looking at 'significant potential' for growth in nation

By ZHENG XIN  
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Global automation and electrification leader ABB is doubling down on its commitment to China, forging closer collaborations to accelerate the digital transformation of the nation's energy and industrial sectors, a top executive said.

"Among the sectors ABB Energy Industries, a division of ABB, is supporting in China, such as power, water, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, we see varying levels of momentum," said Anders Maltesen, president of ABB Energy Industries in Asia.

"ABB believes there is still significant potential for growth, especially in areas driven by policy and funding for energy efficiency," he said.

"We see significant opportunities across several energy sub-sectors in China — especially in power, water and pharmaceuticals. Some areas, such as energy efficiency and process

“We see significant opportunities across several energy sub-sectors in China — especially in power, water and pharmaceuticals.”

Anders Maltesen, president of ABB Energy Industries in Asia

optimization, show growth potential in the country.”

ABB Energy Industries has been actively involved in oil and gas, hydrogen, petrochemicals, as well as carbon capture and storage initiatives in China, focusing on automation and digitalization, particularly on advanced process control and real-time monitoring.

Maltesen said that among all the sectors served by ABB Energy Industries, the chemical sector is particularly promising.

Currently, the energy sector, especially the chemical industry, faces numerous data challenges and ABB Energy Industries' technologies and solutions are well-equipped to assist traditional industries in enhancing data availability, security and transparency, he said.

This support is essential for driving and facilitating the transformation of process industries toward smarter and more sustainable practices. The company has been expanding cooperation with local Chinese enterprises implementing full automation systems for their chemical operations, which Maltesen believes gives ABB a great opportunity to scale up its solutions across China.

ABB and the Instrumentation Technology and Economy Institute (ITEI) announced in April the building of a new laboratory aimed at

bolstering China's industrial transformation through advanced automation technologies.

The laboratory will focus on compatibility testing, technology demonstrations and training, and collaborate with partners across the industry chain to facilitate the intelligent and sustainable development of global industrial communication technology.

"This partnership with the ITEI aims to advance process automation — making manufacturing more intelligent, streamlined and autonomous," said Maltesen.

"Through this lab, we'll be able to test and verify how these devices transmit data in real time and contribute to autonomous decision-making in industrial environments. This collaboration also helps us explore how to make the industrial internet of things more effective and scalable."

According to Ouyang Jinsong, director of the ITEI, standardizing

industrial communication technology is pivotal for strategic industrial advancements.

This partnership will accelerate technological upgrades and product innovation for domestic enterprises, fast-tracking the implementation of Ethernet-APL technology, thus driving forward China's smart industrial transformation, he said.

China's dedication to expanding high-standard opening-up is a significant confidence booster for foreign businesses like ABB Energy Industries, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

As for the current economic climate in China, ABB Energy Industries remains optimistic about growth prospects, particularly in sectors like chemicals, water and pharmaceuticals.

Maltesen also pointed to China's ambitious energy policies and cross-border collaborations as key drivers

for growth. He highlighted China's push for regional interconnectivity across Asia, aligning with ABB's strategy of providing scalable and adaptable solutions.

Looking to the future, ABB anticipates autonomy, data utilization, artificial intelligence and machine learning to be transformative forces in China's energy sector.

The company is positioning itself to leverage these trends, enabling customers to optimize operations, predict maintenance needs and move toward fully autonomous systems.

Maltesen expressed strong optimism about China's trajectory in renewable energy and decarbonization, noting the country's massive investments in solar and wind power and the significant improvements in grid infrastructure.

"China is on an incredible journey toward building a cleaner, more sustainable energy future," Maltesen concluded. "And ABB is proud to support that transition through smart infrastructure, advanced technologies and long-term partnerships."

# BUSINESSFOCUS



## China's consumption engine gains momentum

Q1 retail sales up 4.6% year-on-year, 1.1 percentage points faster than in 2024

HAIKOU — At the China International Consumer Products Expo in Hainan province last week, crowds thronged exhibit halls packed with global brands showcasing a dazzling array of goods.

From cosmetics and massage chairs to flying cars and humanoid robots, the arrival of retail commodities from all over the world offered a window into the vitality of China's ever-evolving consumer market.

This year's expo, which concluded on Friday, attracted over 1,760 enterprises and 4,200 brands from more than 70 countries and regions. A record-breaking 65 Fortune Global 500 companies and industry leaders participated in the six-day event.

Official data released last week revealed that retail sales of consumer goods rose 5.9 percent year-on-year last month, a marked acceleration from the 4 percent growth reported for the first two months of this year.

In the first quarter, China's retail sales expanded 4.6 percent year-on-year, which was 1.1 percentage points faster than in 2024, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

"Overall, consumer spending in the first quarter of this year continued to improve on the back of policy support," Sheng Laiyun, deputy head of the bureau, said at a news conference, citing pro-spend policies such as the country's consumer goods trade-in program.

"The combination of policies in both supply and demand has successfully stimulated consumer sentiment, with notable impacts on capital markets and retail growth momentum," according to a Deloitte report released at the expo. "This will lay the groundwork for sustained optimism going forward."

As pressures of a sluggish global economy mount, market observers say that China's consumption upgrade and economic shift toward services-driven growth — sustained by a population of over 1.4 billion — carry immense potential.

At the Hainan expo, services consumption in sectors such as low-altitude aviation, the silver economy, health and wellness, and AI-powered innovation products from global firms, dominated many booths.

OSIM, which has participated in the expo for five consecutive years, debuted its latest massage chair and its flagship uDream wellness chair, integrating cutting-edge AI that monitors stress and customizes multi-sensory relaxation.

OSIM sees the expo as a key platform to engage in meaningful conversations with Chinese consumers, said Lin Xiaohui, deputy general manager of brand management and marketing of OSIM North Asia.

"As China's consumption structure upgrades, service-related spending is playing an increasingly important role, especially in sectors like healthcare, education and entertainment," said Zhang Tianbing, leader of the consumer products and retail sector of Deloitte Asia Pacific.

"Demographic shifts, including an aging population and smaller household sizes, are particularly meaningful against the backdrop of a complex international landscape.



**Top:** People interact with a humanoid robot at the China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou, Hainan province, on April 13.

**Above:** A booth featuring French beauty products at the CICPE attracts attendees in Haikou on April 13.

LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Demographic shifts, including an aging population and smaller household sizes, are reshaping consumer preferences in China."

Zhang Tianbing, leader of the consumer products and retail sector of Deloitte Asia Pacific

ness and digital consumption habits are spreading increasingly across all age groups.

Notably, China's services consumption is expanding at a faster pace than that of goods, with retail sales of services growing 5 percent year-on-year in the first quarter.

From January to March, the country's per capita spending on services increased 5.4 percent year-on-year and accounted for 43.4 percent of its total per capita consumer spending, official data showed.

Kuang Xianming, vice-president of the China Institute for Reform and Development, projects that services consumption will exceed 50 percent of China's total consumption by 2030, signaling the country's pivotal shift to a services-driven economy. "This expanding market is highly attractive to foreign companies."

Chinese policymakers have positioned the expansion of domestic demand as the paramount priority on the government's economic work agenda for this year, emphasizing increased spending power, improved expectations and strengthened consumer confidence.

The country's focus on domestic tasks is particularly meaningful against the backdrop of a complex international landscape.

By maintaining high-standard opening-up and promoting a more sustainable consumption recovery, China seeks to share its opportunities with the global community.

"Expanding domestic consumption is not only key to high-quality development, but also a strategic move amid global economic uncertainties," Kuang told Xinhua News Agency.

More importantly, as China continues to open up, this ever-expanding market will become a shared market, he said.

"We see a lot of encouraging signs by the Chinese government to help boost local consumption. So we're very excited about what's to come," said Mike Hofmann, managing director at Tricker's China, one of the United Kingdom's oldest established shoemakers. This year was the second time Tricker's had exhibited at the expo, helping them raise brand awareness in China.

In a key move in China's opening-up strategy, Hainan Free Trade Port is set to begin independent Customs operations by the end of the year, and global enterprises are eyeing the vast opportunities that come with open trade.

"Its success will not only benefit China, but also provide valuable insights for economies worldwide," said Zhang Xiangchen, deputy director-general of the World Trade Organization.

Douglas Alexander, minister of state of the British Department for Business and Trade, is also looking forward to the launch of the Hainan Free Trade Port's independent operations.

"The UK is keen to explore the opportunities for free and open trade, which benefits both Chinese and British firms," Alexander said. The UK was the guest country of honor at this year's expo and showcased 53 brands across the fashion, beauty, homeware, health and jewelry industries, doubling its 2024 presence.

Dong Debiao, partner at Deloitte China strategy and client center, told Xinhua that he expects the independent Customs operations of the Hainan Free Trade Port to drive consumption further.

Hainan is also likely to become a consumption hub linking China and Southeast Asia, with unique advantages in the high-end retail and services trade sectors, he said.

## AI reshaping hardware while creating growth opportunities, challenges

BELJING — China, once deemed "factory of the world" for churning out low-cost products and serving as a contract manufacturing hub for multinational brands, is now seeing its consumer electronics enterprises ride the AI wave to move up the value chain and cash in on the high-end market.

Among the rising stars is Dreame Technology, known as a leading manufacturer of smart vacuum cleaners. The company, based in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, is now expanding into the broader home appliances market. Founded in 2015, the company sold 3.96 million robotic vacuum cleaners last year, a year-on-year growth of nearly 60 percent, with its products reaching over 100 countries and regions.

At a product launch event in March, Dreame unveiled 11 new products, including its first AI-powered window-cleaning robot. Among the standout innovations was a robotic vacuum featuring a bionic, multi-joint arm capable of extending up to 33 centimeters and cleaning narrow spaces with the help of cleaning tools. Another notable feature is its ability to automatically change mop cloths, allowing for dedicated mopping in specific zones.

Dreame's latest robotic vacuum cleaners integrate DeepSeek to enable smart voice interaction. The company's AI model can recognize more than 200 types of obstacles, enabling its robotic vacuums with the latest generation of robotic arms to perform tasks such as tidying up obstacles and trash on the floor.

"AI technology can make the vacuum cleaners think more like humans," said Meng Jia, president of Dreame's robotic vacuum business. "Embodied AI will pave the way for the introduction of home service robots."

Meng said Dreame could make home service robots with robotic arms and wheels for feet to step over common door-sills as early as next year, with the potential for humanoid robots to be capable of climbing stairs in the future.

Algorithms and computing power are important, he explained. "For products that can tidy up rooms, offer emotional companionship, or assist in caring for children and the elderly, we need to harness AI and develop related software," Meng said.

Dreame's focus on research and development has been crucial to its rise, with research staff comprising 60 percent of its workforce. Moreover, R&D spending accounts for 7 percent of its total revenue, significantly higher than that of traditional home appliance makers.

To tap the premium segment, Dreame has introduced large smart home appliances and smart kitchen solutions. It plans to leverage its global resource advantages to increase sales of smart home appliances.

"Technological innovations and the development of product functions according to the usage habits of local consumers are key to penetrating the market," Meng said.

Indeed, Chinese enterprises are moving toward high-end development, boosted by the country's eye-catching achievements in the global technology and innovation-driven fields, said Gary Cai, head of the macroeconomic research institute of KPMG China research center.

MiMouse Technology, a startup established in 2015 in Hefei, Anhui province, serves as yet another outstanding example of how Chinese consumer electronics enterprises are leveraging AI to transform traditional hardware.

Within a year of its launch, MiMouse developed a smart voice mouse with a speech recognition speed of 400 words per minute and an accuracy rate of 98 percent.

"In the beginning, we wanted to help people with typing difficulties. Later, we added machine translation and then

smart writing features powered by large language models," said Feng Haihong, founder of MiMouse. Since 2015, the company has rolled out nearly 200 major updates to improve functionality and user experience.

In 2023, MiMouse launched its first smart mouse powered by a large language model. Leveraging major AI models like DeepSeek and ChatGPT, the smart mouse allows users to create PowerPoint presentations, articles, code, poems and more using simple voice commands.

Over 100,000 units were sold within one month of its launch and has consistently topped the sales charts on China's leading e-commerce platforms.

Technological innovations and the development of product functions according to the usage habits of local consumers are key to penetrating the market."

Meng Jia, president of Dreame Technology's robotic vacuum business

20 million yuan

MiMouse Technology's investment in R&D annually

"The AI era is reshaping hardware, bringing growth opportunities and challenges," said Feng, noting that the company has doubled its R&D investment to more than 20 million yuan (\$2.74 million) annually.

The company sold more than 400,000 AI mice in 2024, hitting a sales revenue of nearly 100 million yuan. A proportion of sales came from overseas markets, including the United States, Japan and India. In February this year, the company received two orders from US customers totaling 10,000 units.

"Going global is now our key strategy," said Feng, adding that "China's competitive edge in consumer electronics comes from its strong R&D workforce and comprehensive supply chain, which enables better products at lower costs."

He said that the company has upgraded its software to support multiple languages and set up overseas AI servers to improve user experience.

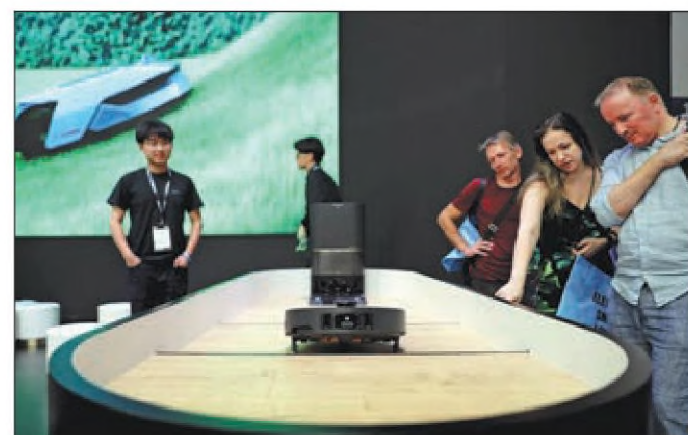
MiMouse also plans to expand its smart office lineup with new products, such as AI pens and transcription-enabled recording cards, aiming to integrate AI into everyday work and life.

To accelerate the adoption of smart, high-end home appliances in more households, Chinese policymakers have introduced a range of measures, including subsidies for trading in old appliances and green energy-saving consumption vouchers, to lower the barrier of accessing premium products.

A recent trade-in campaign organized by the China Household Electrical Appliances Association focused on smart products equipped with AI technology, covering cutting-edge categories such as smart refrigerators, self-adaptive air conditioners and kitchen appliances with AI voice interaction, said Zhao Jie, vice-president of the association.

"The campaign is expected to unleash consumption potential worth over 100 billion yuan, drive industrial upgrading through high-end supply, and facilitate China's manufacturing industry to transform from traditional manufacturing to smart manufacturing," Zhao said.

XINHUA



Visitors watch a floor cleaning robot at Dreame's booth at IFA Berlin 2024 in Germany in September. DU ZHEYU / XINHUA

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## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Bid to force decoupling from China is only serving to decouple the US

It is not a secret that the US administration is preparing to put pressure on other countries in tariff negotiations, asking them to limit trade with China in exchange for US tariff exemptions.

Something the previous Joe Biden administration tried to do, but failed to achieve, as it is a de facto getting something for nothing trick, since the United States cannot compensate its allies and partners for their losses should they decouple with China.

So it is ridiculous of the Donald Trump administration to bet on a magic wand of tariffs since countries are well aware that under the guise of "reciprocity", it is promoting hegemonic politics and implementing unilateral bullying in the economic and trade fields.

If the Biden administration was trying to hoodwink others to do the US' bidding at their own cost, the Trump administration is going further to try and coerce them to foot the bill for not only countering China on the part of the US, but also bear the cost of "making America great again".

That explains why neither the European Union nor Japan, along with other major trade partners of the US, has actually caved in to US pressure even if they are classified by the US administration as among the 70-plus economies "cooperative" to the US' extortionist tariff policy.

Instead of cracking them one on one as it planned, the Trump administration increasingly finds a united front is emerging among its tariff victims as almost all of them have markedly intensified their respective efforts to promote not only economic and trade cooperation with each other but also with China.

For instance, while the Biden administration regarded the EU's punitive tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles as a major achievement of its China-containment strategy on the economic and trade front over the past four years, the Trump administration has neared undoing it after just about three months in office. Its coercive and bullying practices have spurred the EU to resume long-stalled consultations with China in a bid to end those self-harming tariffs at an early date.

Without any concrete progress being made in its negotiations with other economies, the US economy, finance, market and society are under growing pressure. The US administration has sought to use the tariff policy to engage in political speculation, but it has only dragged the US to the brink of an abyss.

As a Chinese Commerce Ministry spokesperson said, appeasement will not bring peace, and compromise will not win respect in return. If a country sacrifices the interests of others in exchange for so-called immunity, it will end up harming others to no benefit to itself, as once given, the US, like any racketeer, will continue to take. China believes that all parties should stand on the side of fairness and justice, on the side of historical correctness, and should defend international economic and trade rules and the multilateral trading system. In the face of the impact of unilateralism and protectionism, no country is immune. Once international trade returns to the "law of the jungle" where the strong prey on the weak, all countries will become victims. China is willing to strengthen unity and coordination with all parties, work together to respond to the US' coercion, and jointly resist its unilateral bullying.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that China will not sit back and remain idle should any party reach a deal with the US at the expense of China's interests. If this happens, it will respond with appropriate countermeasures. Having said that, it is the Trump administration that has set the stage and created the opportunity for China to improve its economic ties with other economies.

The farther the US goes to practice unilateralism, protectionism and hegemony, the more efforts China is making with other like-minded partners to support multilateralism, promote free trade and safeguard a fair world trade order. The more the US tries to resort to bullying, coercion and extortion to secure selfish gains to make "America First", the more China endeavors with other partners to use cooperation, collaboration and mutual assistance to expand their common interests for the common development of the world.

The US' China-targeted tariff policy is intended to isolate China from the world system by rebuilding the global industry and supply chains centered on the US. But in effect, it is only serving to isolate the US.

## New Delhi should know Washington's tactics

The punitive bingo-number tariffs the White House has imposed on Chinese goods in response to China's unwavering stance on defending its interests and resisting unilateral bullying underscore the high stakes involved in the current global trade landscape.

Against the backdrop of the Donald Trump administration's escalating tariff extortion and the strain it has put on the US' economic partnerships, US Vice-President JD Vance's ongoing visit to India is a telling move.

It highlights how, amid the shifting sands of global geopolitics, the US is trying to leverage the tariff negotiations it is precipitating to pressure trading partners to limit their dealings with China.

Recent months have witnessed significant progress in China-India relations, triggering concerns in Washington about the evolving dynamics between the two Asian giants. As the US seeks to negotiate "new rules" of engagement with India to ensure continued cooperation in its broader China strategy, Vance's visit is part of its unfolding regional power play as the US administration strives to isolate China's economy through trade agreements.

But it would be naive for India to believe that it will be able to appease the US or expect significant benefits from submitting to its economic bullying. Despite Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi being one of the first world leaders to meet Trump after he took office for the second time, and India promising it is open to reducing tariffs on more than half of its imports from the US, the US president still refers to New Delhi as a "tariff king" and "big abuser" of trade.

At the same time, India's internal dynamics add another layer of complexity to the situation. While striving to strike a deal with the US, domestic concerns, such as protests from farmers' unions and challenges related to visa policies, highlight the intricate balancing act faced by Indian policymakers. Not to mention that in trying to get what they can from the US at the smallest cost, they have to take into account India's engagement with China.

China has censured the US' hegemonic tariff policy and unilateral bullying being conducted under the guise of "reciprocity", emphasizing the importance of fairness, justice and adherence to international trade rules.

Recent high-level meetings between Chinese and Indian leaders have laid the groundwork for enhanced cooperation and mutual understanding, emphasizing the shared responsibility of the two largest developing countries to support each other's development. China emerged as India's largest trading partner in the fiscal year 2023-24, with their two-way commerce totaling \$118.4 billion. Now that a consensus has been reached that China and India are a development opportunity for each other rather than a threat, there is huge economic potential for the two countries to tap.

That the two neighbors, each with a 1.4-billion-strong population, have the world's largest consumer markets, and their trade structure is highly complementary, makes them natural cooperation partners. And the prospects for a strengthened China-India partnership have never been better, especially after the two governments reached an agreement in October last year on military disengagement along their disputed border, ending a deadly stand-off between their troops that started in June 2020 and led to India unilaterally restricting Chinese imports and investments.

Given that international trade is a key driver of global development, and China and India are both embarking on a path of modernization with development being their common goal, it is their shared responsibility to stick to multilateralism and push ahead with a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization that benefits both countries, the Global South, and the rest of the world.

As China and India mark the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations this year, the path forward presents both opportunities and challenges. China's vigilance regarding the interactions between India and the US underscores the strategic importance of the region and the intricate networks of relationships that characterize the regional power dynamics and strategic alignments. The Quad, comprising the US, India, Japan, and Australia, has emerged as a counterweight to China's growing influence, and it is expected that Vance will try to persuade or coerce New Delhi to make a greater commitment to the grouping.

New Delhi should bear in mind the critical importance of maintaining a cooperative partnership and diplomatic engagement with its neighbor in the face of the US' pressure tactics and its own desire to profit from the US' attempt to force the decoupling of China from the global economy. It should remember that the evolving dynamics in the region will continue to shape the region's development environment. It is in the shared interests of both countries, and the region as a whole, for China and India to uphold international norms, oppose hegemonism and foster stable development in the region.

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Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Harvard, White House showdown portends ill for academics there

The world is looking at how the high-stakes showdown between Harvard University and the White House will end because this is not just a fight between a university and the US government. How the row concludes will determine whether universities in the United States will still have academic freedom and the autonomy they enjoy.

It is beyond the comprehension of many how far the US administration has gone in making sweeping demands — such as putting an end to all diversity, equity and inclusive programs and initiatives, and restricting acceptance of international students who are "hostile to the American values and institutions".

Were it just about the failure to adequately combat anti-Semitism on its campus, Harvard might choose to give in to the White House, which threatens to cut federal funding to the university. The White House is still withholding \$400 million in federal funds to Columbia University although the university has yielded to a series of sweeping demands made by the US administration in an effort to restore the halted funding.

After it was established in February, the US administration's new Federal Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism announced that it would be visiting 10 universities, including Harvard, in an effort to "eradicate anti-Semitic harassment" in

schools.

However, the demands the task force has set for Harvard suggest the White House intends to have an absolute say over how US universities are run.

Last week, the US administration accused Harvard — in yet another letter to the school — of failing to report to the federal government about large foreign donations, as is required by law. Harvard has been asked to provide the names of foreign donors, including records of communication with all of them from the beginning of 2020, and records pertaining to foreigners who spent time at Harvard; the latter must include names of students Harvard expelled or those who had their credentials canceled, going back to 2016.

Harvard released a statement last week publicly rejecting the demands. The statement goes: "The University will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights. No government — regardless of which party is in power — should dictate what private universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue."

Will other universities close ranks with Harvard to stand up to the demands of the US administration? It is really hard to say. Some universities may have to give in to

the White House because of the financial pressure. Harvard may eventually reach a deal with the White House when both sides make concessions somewhere.

Whatever the outcome, institutions of higher learning in the US will suffer considerably both academically and financially. The number of international students will undoubtedly shrink considerably in a couple of years. Data show that international students at colleges and universities in the United States contributed \$43.8 billion to the US economy in academic year 2023-24 and supported over 378,000 jobs.

In terms of academics, an increasing number of professors and researchers will choose to work in other countries if possible as the increasingly tightened control of universities in the US will limit academic freedom in US institutions of higher learning.

In addition, the chances of the US attracting talented students and researchers from around the world will dwindle considerably.

This may be a good chance for institutions of higher learning in other countries such as in Europe and in Asia to attract talented professors and researchers as well as admit as many international students as possible to not only increase their revenue, but also advance their academic research.

—ZHU YUAN, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Bulwark against seeds of division taking root

Attended by Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Defense Minister Dong Jun and their respective Indonesian counterparts Sugiono and Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoedin, the First Ministerial Meeting of China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue was held in Beijing on Monday.

The first 2+2 mechanism China has established at the ministerial level, the meeting conveys the strategic significance Beijing attaches to relations with Indonesia, a major member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Global South.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries, and their exchanges on bilateral ties, security and defense cooperation and international and regional affairs will have been conducive to further deepening mutual understanding and trust between the two sides, and strengthening their collaboration.

The dialogue has produced a series of important consensus that, if well implemented, can deliver concrete results that will contribute to not only the common development of the two countries but also the peace, stability and prosperity of the region.

For instance, apart from some economic and trade collaboration, the two sides agreed to further expand the connotation of security cooperation and practice a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept. They will establish a China-Indonesia consultation mechanism on disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control. The two sides will

also enhance law enforcement and security cooperation, jointly combat transnational crimes such as cross-border gambling and telecommunications fraud, and strengthen cybersecurity cooperation.

Monday's meeting was one of the fruits of the heads-of-state diplomacy of the two countries.

China is committed to working with Indonesia to build on their past achievements and achieve greater progress through transforming their consensus on cooperation from ideas, initiatives, plans and project to results that bring concrete benefits to the two peoples.

Adhering to the principles of strategic independence, mutual trust, mutual assistance, win-win cooperation, fairness and justice, which represent a summary of the development experience of China-Indonesia relations over the past decades, the two sides can build a China-Indonesia community with a shared future. But they should be alert to external forces trying to drive a wedge between them for their own narrow ends.

Unlike the 2+2 dialogue mechanisms some external forces try and build with regional countries, the dialogue between China and Indonesia does not target any third party, but serves to consolidate the "five pillars" of bilateral relations — politics, economy, culture, maritime affairs and security — so as to better achieve integrated development and advance the two countries' respective modernization.

With the regional tensions rising due to the divisive moves of the external forces, the dialogue between China and Indonesia sends a clear signal that they

oppose unilateralism and protectionism, and are committed to advancing an equal and orderly multipolar world and universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization.

The sound development momentum of China's relations with Indonesia, as well as Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia, the three members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that China's top leader visited last week, should remind the individual parties at risk of falling prey to the external forces in the latter's China-targeted geopolitical game in the Asia-Pacific that their collusion goes against the common will of regional countries and the trend of the times, and is doomed to failure.

China and the members of ASEAN have broad common interests, huge cooperation potential, shared Asian values and a long history of friendly exchanges. That Beijing attaches strategic significance to its neighborhood diplomacy means the world's second-largest economy is open to sharing its development dividends and opportunities with the ASEAN countries.

The more efforts regional countries make to strengthen communication and cooperation, the stronger the opposition they express against the bloc confrontation that will leave no party in the region unscathed.

The maritime disputes between China and some regional countries that the United States is trying to exploit for its divisive agenda, should not and must not be allowed to hold the region's well-being hostage.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

Donald Ramotar

## Zero-sum is wrong answer to testing times

On April 2, United States President Donald Trump announced wide-ranging tariffs on the rest of the world. It immediately created a storm in the international economy. Stock markets began to take a steep dive, and the bond markets also began to fall. So strong was the reaction that Trump had to step down from his high horse. He announced that he was dropping his so-called reciprocal tariffs on imports for most of the US' trading partners to 10 percent for 90 days to allow for negotiations.

However, he did not do the same for China. The White House claimed some imports from China faced up to 245 percent tariffs after China reacted by putting additional 125 percent tariffs on imports of US goods.

This move by the US administration was motivated by the internal socioeconomic situation in the US itself on the one hand and on the other it is being used as a tool for that country to achieve some of its geopolitical objectives.

Internally, the US administration is committed to reducing taxes for the forces most responsible for Trump's electoral success, the super-rich in the US. It is apposite to note that at Trump's inauguration on Jan 20 some of the richest persons in the world were special invitees, including Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg, among others.

The richest man in the US and probably the world, Elon Musk now has a direct role in the administration and seems to have the ear of the US president.

The tariffs are one of the means that Trump is using to transfer more wealth



**That approach has brought China tremendous respect throughout the world. It is for this reason that China is the number one trading partner of most countries.**

to the already rich from US workers and farmers. It is the working people that are the main victims of this rip-off.

The other reason for the tariffs is Trump's recognition that internationally the US is losing its status as the world's leading economy. His administration exemplifies the fear in Washington that the US is losing its influence and dominance over not just the poorer countries in the world but even its closest allies.

Acting on this fear it is ready to use all its power to force the transfer of wealth from the rest of the world to the United States.

It is already well documented that it has been involved in the regime change in countries where the governments have not subjugated themselves completely to US diktats. And when that is not enough it is always ready to use military force.

Nowadays it's not even trying to hide its intentions as we see how openly the US government is brazenly speaking of taking over Greenland and recolonizing Panama. It has even gone to the absurd level of disclosing its desire to make Canada the 51st state of the US.

That is why it is not decreasing its military spending, but instead continues to increase it. This is despite the fact that its military spending is more than the next 10 countries combined. The huge trillion-dollar military budget is not being reduced even though the US debt is almost 1.5 times its GDP.

In the US strategy, its military has a huge role to play in maintaining its status as the number one power in the world. It has at least 128 known overseas military bases in 49 countries.

These are a huge expense and it is now using all its power to redirect investments from the rest of the world to the US. This is being done at the expense of even its close allies such as the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada and Mexico.

However, its biggest fear is China. Not because China is threatening the US militarily but because China's influence and prestige is growing throughout the world.

What is striking is that China is on the rise not because it has a policy to out-do the United States, but because its philosophy is totally different from that of the US. It believes in having mutually beneficial relations with all the countries in the world. It rejected hegemonism a long time ago and genuinely works to ensure that its investments abroad and its relations are win-win.

China views development and peace

as two sides of the same coin. Socioeconomic progress in a country contributes greatly toward lessening tensions within and between countries. That is why most of its investments are designed to promote sustainable growth in countries which it engages with.

It has never used its considerable power to threaten and bully its partners. It has always respected countries' rights to decide what is best for them.

That approach has brought China tremendous respect throughout the world. It is for this reason that China is the number one trading partner of most countries.

Even though the US has recognized that Taiwan is an integral part of China, some US politicians continue to encourage some forces in Taiwan to break away from the mainland. In that project they have been arming Taiwan with very sophisticated weapons and been trying to trigger a conflict.

These are dangerous and very irresponsible acts by the US.

It is clear that the US will benefit much more if it changes its attitude toward China.

Its zero-sum game approach is damaging the socioeconomic progress of the whole world. It is a dead end.

The US could be great again if it practices more genuine cooperation with the world as a whole, but most importantly with China.

There is no other viable way because China cannot be bullied.

*The author is former president of Guyana. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



Kang Bing

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## Vocational education needs revamp to make it fit for modernization

The Ministry of Education announced before the end of last year that China has established the world's largest vocational education system. According to statistics, about 35 million students are studying in 11,133 vocational schools and universities. Their graduates have made up over 70 percent of those newly employed in the nation's modern manufacturing and modern service industries in recent years.

Given the fact that China has a population of over 1.4 billion and that more than 80 million students are studying in junior and senior high schools, the scale does not surprise me. It is only natural for the country to have the world's most extensive educational system as well as the largest network for vocational education.

China operates a nine-year compulsory education system. On graduating from junior-high schools after completing the compulsory period, about 40 percent of the graduates choose to stop studying or to go to middle-level vocational schools. The majority choose to go to normal senior-high schools for another three years to fight for a university place. Competition has always been tough in the annual national university entrance exams and those who score low may have to settle for a high-level vocational college.

As of now, about half of the young Chinese are studying in vocational schools or colleges with the rest in universities. As a country boasting the world's biggest and most comprehensive industrial network, China has good reasons to take vocational education seriously as it needs millions of skilled hands to support its manufacturing industries.

**The investing enterprises, in return, should be given priority in selecting from among the graduates. Such an arrangement should help to achieve a win-win result.**

But as China has turned more of its attention to developing vocational education, it has found that there are a lot of problems to be solved. Most of the vocational schools are poorly-equipped and can't meet the demands of enterprises that are using delicate instruments and robots for production. Poor resources have led vocational schools to train their students with outdated skills and teachings, making it difficult for their students to get a good job upon graduation.

On the other hand, potential employers are frustrated by the difficulties they face in getting young workers with the skills they need for their production even when they offer decent wages. The governments at different levels should greatly increase investments to buy more equipment and improve facilities to enable vocational schools to provide their students with proper education and training to sharpen their edge.

Vocational schools used to be mostly run by big enterprises who trained students according to their demands. Three decades ago when many enterprises ran into operational difficulties, investing in such schools became a burden. To ease their burden, the governments at different levels took over the schools, operating them as State-run. But that led to enlarging the disparity between demand and supply so far as vocational education is concerned.

Under the government arrangement, closer cooperation should be reached between vocational schools and potential employers. The enterprises can invest in the form of money, equipment, teaching and coaching and in arranging internships for the students — suitable internships being critical to the training of vocational students. The investing enterprises, in return, should be given priority in selecting from among the graduates. Such an arrangement should help to achieve a win-win result.

But the hardest nut to crack to promote vocational education is how to enhance its social status. Deeply soaked in the traditional culture of "He who excels in learning can be an official", most people today believe that going to university for higher learning is the natural choice for a smart youngster. As a result, the social status of vocational education is low and most students make do with vocational schools reluctantly after failing to do well in middle school.

We are born different and each of us has different talents with some being good in memory, some being excellent in logical thinking and some boasting nimble hands. To promote vocational education, the country for several years has been holding grand ceremonies to award a number of craftsmen as national heroes. With progress made in high-end industries, China now finds itself thirsty for such craftsmen as much as it needs cutting-edge scientists.

Raising the quality of vocational education will help it become better respected, something it deserves, and enable it to develop along the right track. It will also help vocational students to enjoy their study, career and life more confidently.

Zhou Mi

## China's diversified trade injects stability in global economy

China's foreign trade has once again demonstrated remarkable resilience in the first quarter of 2025. Total imports and exports reached 10.3 trillion yuan (\$1.4 trillion), a year-on-year increase of 1.3 percent. In a global economy still grappling with inflation, weak demand, and geopolitical headwinds, this growth is not merely a domestic achievement — it is a stabilizing force for the world.

The details tell a compelling story. Imports fell by 6 percent to 4.17 trillion yuan, largely due to a sharp drop in global commodity prices, including those of iron ore, coal, crude oil, and soybeans. Yet even in decline, China played a pivotal role: its steady demand for these goods offered crucial support to struggling exporters and global suppliers. Meanwhile, exports surged by 6.9 percent to 6.13 trillion yuan, underscoring China's continued capacity to serve as a vital engine of global growth.

This performance is not just the result of an increase in orders for Chinese exports in anticipation of the US administration's punitive tariffs. Since early 2023, China's quarterly exports have consistently topped the 10-trillion-yuan mark. From the post-pandemic rebound to today's trajectory, Chinese exports have offered the world not only goods but a sense of certainty. Thanks to its fully integrated manufacturing system, China is uniquely positioned to deliver high-quality, cost-effective consumer electronics, household appliances, and key components — products increasingly essential in the age of artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

This momentum is not limited to State-owned enterprises. Private companies are proving equally agile and indispensable. In the first quarter, they accounted for 56.8 percent of total trade, with imports and exports reaching 5.85 trillion yuan. Their success stems from sharp market instincts and the ability to quickly adapt to global shifts. These companies are not merely participants in global trade; they are innovators, broadening product lines and diversifying partnerships, making China's trade ecosystem more resilient and responsive.



LIMIN / CHINA DAILY

Foreign-invested enterprises, too, remain integral to the story. Since the 1970s, multinationals have looked to China as a hub of efficiency and coordination. Today, that appeal is undiminished. With a massive domestic market, improved business conditions, and strong intellectual property protections, China continues to attract global players. In the first quarter, FIEs contributed 2.99 trillion yuan to trade, nearly 29 percent of the national total. Their dominance in high-value sectors — such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment — speaks to the innovation and vitality they inject into the Chinese economy.

The benefits of China's trade extend far beyond its borders. For developing economies, stronger ties with China offer predictability in an unpredictable world. Trade with the Belt and Road

partner countries accounted for 51.1 percent of China's total trade, growing faster than the national average. With the Association of Southeast Asian Nations remaining China's top trading partner, bilateral trade reached 16.6 percent of the national total. Institutional frameworks such as the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership have nurtured deep integration across markets and supply chains. The result? A more interconnected, less fragile regional economy.

Europe, too, remains a crucial partner. Despite challenges ranging from Brexit to energy shocks and industrial policy competition, China-EU trade hit 1.3 trillion yuan in the first quarter. European exports to China — such as passenger cars, cosmetics, and luxury handbags — retain strong momentum,

while Chinese exports of industrial robots and advanced machinery to Europe rose by 81.9 percent and 11.7 percent, respectively. The growing sophistication of Chinese manufacturing is complementing, not replacing, Europe's high-end markets.

But while there is much to celebrate, China is not blind to the risks. Chief among them: the rise of unilateralism and protectionism. The aggressive tariff policies of the US administration and efforts to pressure partners into accepting unfair trade terms threaten to fragment the global trading system. Should these policies be fully enacted, the repercussions will be felt far beyond Washington. The world's supply chains will need reconfiguration — and for many countries, deeper engagement with China is becoming the logical, even necessary, choice.

China, for its part, is ready. Major international expos — from the China Import and Export Fair to the China International Consumer Products Expo — are creating fresh opportunities for global businesses to rediscover and re-evaluate the Chinese market. And projects under the Belt and Road Initiative — from the China-Europe Railway Express to the Digital and Green Silk Roads — are accelerating trade connectivity and market integration.

With a push toward digital trade, green growth, and cross-border e-commerce, China is not just playing catch-up; it is setting new rules of engagement. These innovations are not for China's benefit alone. They are designed to expand access to technology, drive down global costs, and enhance the resilience of global commerce.

China's trade today is more than just an economic metric. It is a signpost of where the world should go — toward deeper cooperation, smarter supply chains, and more inclusive prosperity.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

WARWICK POWELL

## Hastened transition

US dollar hegemony is losing ground as a new world of multicurrency settlements comes into being

April 2025 will stand as an inflection point. Rather than lay the foundations for a return of manufacturing to the United States, the so-called reciprocal tariffs launched by the US administration have accelerated the transition away from the dollar-dominated global economic system.



The transition isn't the replacement of the dollar with another hegemonic reserve currency. What's underway is a structural dislocation: the decentering of money from empire, and the relocalization of value circuits, anchored in real use value and national currencies and coordinated through a supra-national clearing layer. This is embodied by BRICS+ and a raft of already-in-play institutional and technical infrastructure.

The US' unilateral imposition of "reciprocal tariffs" on most nations followed by a rapid retreat a couple of days later, with the exception of escalations in relation to products from China, revealed some important truths.

First, it exposed a detachment of US fictitious capital value from the real value of economic production systems. Second, systemic fragility became apparent for all to see. Stock prices plummeted, as did the value of the US dollar. Bond yields spiked as holders exited in search of less risky assets. Third, it revealed the capricious nature of US political institutions, for which global institutions and agreements were wantonly jettisoned. Fourth, in the face of a collapse in market sentiment for the dollar and dollar-denominated securities, the administration folded. This suggests that the entire "reciprocal tariffs" move was ill-conceived, anchored more in the affective politics of nostalgia, than in any well-thought through systemic approach to the issues at hand.

The use of the dollar as a means of global trade settlement has been diminishing over the past decade. Almost all of Russia's trade is now settled in Russian rouble, the renminbi and other non-dollar currencies. Over 54 percent of China's



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

trade is now settled in the renminbi. Other countries — particularly BRICS members — are progressively increasing their use of national currencies for cross-border payments. Reduced utility as a means of payment ultimately undermines the dollar's potential to function as a store of value.

Settlements outside of the dollar system are growing, as nations bypass SWIFT and communicate via other data networks. The dollar's role as the final form of value is being hollowed out, not via political decree, but by system evolution and

reengineering of where real value is created and settled.

Fictitious capital denominated in the dollar remains in accounting form, but the engine of value has moved. The challenge for significant holders of dollar-denominated fictitious capital is to create and transition to a new system with as little disruption as possible.

For the past decade and a half, ever since the global financial crisis of 2008, we have been witnessing a controlled demolition of the dollar-denominated fictitious capital's supremacy, not through confronta-

tion, but by progressive decentering. The illusion of dominance persists only so long as real value flows through it. When that value is rerouted, systematically, quietly, structurally, the facade collapses without a bang.

A parallel system of value creation and circulation has emerged, and continues to be a work in progress. This system is grounded in real economies of use value.

To support this new circulation network, new multilateral and bilateral institutions have been created. Currency swap facilities have

been put into place between China's central bank and counterpart banks in more than 40 countries. Other countries' central banks have been working on similar arrangements. Alternative interbank messaging systems to SWIFT have been established; China's Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), Russia's SPFS and Iran's Shetab are cases in point. New settlement platforms, such as mBridge are now live, enabling national currency settlements. And now, we also have BRICS Clear in the pipelines, focused on enabling national currency-based settlements among BRICS member states.

The result is that settlements increasingly bypass the US dollar. The need for dollars at the transaction layer diminishes. The dollar is still formally the reserve asset, but less is used in trade and less is held unhedged. More is repackaged, swapped, or stripped of control. As such, the dollar's reserve status becomes symbolic; in form but not in substance. The erosion doesn't require default or inflation; it only requires decentering.

Currency relevance comes from circuits of real use value creation. The real economy starts to settle in other units. For example: oil is traded in the renminbi (priced and settled via Shanghai exchange+CIPS); copper in peso-yuan contracts for South-South trade; and grain in rupee-rouble swaps, with netting systems.

These mechanisms reconnect value to real use, not abstract credit claims. Proceeds from treasuries-collateralized loans are used to build the renminbi liquidity pools, fund commodity-for-yuan trade, or finance real assets (ports, tech, farmland, metals). US treasuries are captive shells, inert in the system, no longer activating real-world flows. Multilateral payment nodes (BRICS Clear, CIPS, SPFS, mBridge)

have emerged, clearing outside the dollar loop.

Sovereign and institutional actors redefine value in their own systems. Reserves become diversified baskets tied to trade exposure. Settlement systems align with production/consumption zones, not financial hegemonies. Money creation ties more directly to energy, resource flows, and productive output.

This is the future with BRICS. Here, the dollar isn't overthrown, it's simply decentered. The US government keeps issuing treasuries. There's no risk of formal default; the Fed can always "print". Coupon payments are made. The principal is rolled over. If dollars can be printed indefinitely, then "payment" becomes a tautology. There is no credit risk, but there is also no store-of-value confidence. If it cannot be used to exchange for real use values outside of dollar zones, and aren't universally accepted in payment networks, investors, central banks, and corporations will begin to wonder: what's the point?

And that's precisely what we saw in the market's reaction to the US' erratic and capricious "reciprocal tariffs". The policy is an attempt to assert control over a global system that the US no longer controls. The use of tariffs, sanctions or financial blockades to force alignment accelerates exit, as participants' fears of politicized finance are confirmed. Allies begin hedging their exposure, and the exodus becomes visible.

A new world is already in existence. It is now emerging more clearly from the womb of the dollar hegemony. The new world runs on multicurrency settlements, in which value is anchored in real trade, commodities, production and infrastructure. Financial markets as tools, not truths. April 2025 is an inflection moment, in which the reality of this transition became visible to all.

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DARYL GUPPY

## Misplaced trust

ChAFTA points the way to a remedy for the US administration's renegeing on its commitments

It is ironic that at a time when the 10-year anniversary of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement is being celebrated, the world is being rocked by the United States' attacks on the foundations of global free trade. These foundations made ChAFTA both possible and strong.



The attacks include unilaterally trashing previous trade agreements, the deliberate destruction of the global institutions of free trade, particularly the World Trade Organization, and the reckless manipulation of on and off again tariffs.

"The ChAFTA has made a major contribution to the prosperity, particularly in Australia, but I also like to think of China, over the past decade," Australian Trade Minister Don Farrell said. And China's Ministry of Commerce described it as "a comprehensive and high-standard agreement with balanced interests".

The one constant in the current global trade confusion is the relentless targeting of China, imposing tariffs that have ratcheted up to 245 percent. Broader global tariffs, often ridiculously high, and even imposed on uninhabited islands, provided both a smoke-screen for the attack on China, and a handy boost to income to offset the US' multitrillion dollar global debt.

The approach taken by the government undermines the credibility of the US, thrusting it into a situation where its word, its commitments, written or verbal, cannot be trusted. The US tariffs with differ-

entiated rates violate the WTO principle of nondiscrimination and severely disrupt the international trade order and the stability of international supply chains. These tariffs deny the Global South, and others, of their right to development.

The destruction of trust is not just an issue isolated to the US. Unless great care is taken, the destruction of trust spreads to many other agreements reached between countries other than the US.

If it is accepted that the US can discard international agreements in trade, in its commitments to the United Nations, and in the delivery of international aid programs, then, some may reason, why should they honor any trade or international agreement? Others may therefore follow the lead set by the US. Such is the broader corrosive impact of the US' unilateral and seemingly erratic decision-making.

Decades of careful, and at times, painful, progress in creating the rules and institutions of international stability are being obliterated. Certainly there is a need for change. The global rules and institutions were established before China became a major economic power and before the developing countries turned into the dynamic and growing Global South. If these global institutions are to survive, thrive and continue in their role of supporting expanded global prosperity, then they need to adapt to the new global realities.

Adaptation is not the same as destruction. The US has set about the destruction of these rules, crippling the WTO by refusing to appoint appellate judges to mediate trade disputes. They have also crip-

pled the operations of the UN by withdrawing from UN programs.

Today China is the second-largest global economy and is still growing. Asian economies are vigorous and sophisticated. The Global South is expanding economically, bringing with it increased consumer demand. Supply chains are now globally integrated in a way that is different from the structure of global trade in the 1930s.

The modern supply chain and structure of manufacturing assembly means there are viable alternatives to the US market and its punishing tariffs. They may not be immediately available, but the current situation will spur their development.

It is appropriate that ChAFTA provides a model for the way the mayhem of the US' tariffs may be blunted. The foundation of ChAFTA is respect for the institutions that underpin stability in global trade. ChAFTA rests on the WTO and its trade resolution mechanisms.

When Australia-China relations were uncomfortable, the dispute was managed and resolved within the framework of the WTO. Such was the respect for the rules of global trade that China and Australia developed an alternative dispute resolution process that respected the WTO principles, but did not rely on the appellate judges which the US government blocked.

It is this type of solution that respects the international order, led by China as the second-largest economy, and supported by other economies such as Singapore and those in the Global South, that provides an antidote to the tariff poison of the US. Trade cooperation, not trade coercion, is the path



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

to global prosperity.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson noted that "open cooperation that represents the trend of history and mutual benefit is what people want". Development is the universal right of all countries, not an exclusive right of a few. The international order has the UN at its core and the multilateral trading system with the WTO at its center.

The US administration plays the world for fools. Following instruc-

tions from the US after the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia, Europe, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Canada spent time deriding from China when they should have been deriding from the US' "reciprocal tariffs". The survival of the global rules-based order depends on a cooperative partnership among all countries, including China and the broader Global South.

China and Australia can work together to show full support and

respect for the international trade order. ChAFTA shows a solution is possible.

*The author is an international financial technical analysis expert and a former national board member of the Australia China Business Council. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

# CULTURAL HERITAGE



Tsering Wangdu, a restoration specialist, examines a palm-leaf scripture at the Protection Research Center of the Palm-Leaf-Scriptures of Potala Palace. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

## Palm-leaf scripture experts seek to master restoration

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQIONG in Lhasa

For centuries, palm-leaf scriptures, known as *beiyejing* in Mandarin, have passed down the wisdom and philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism from one generation to the next.

These sutras in the written word or engraved form on *pattra* leaves, compose a precious legacy that are housed in the Potala Palace in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region. According to the Protection Research Center of the Palm-Leaf-Scriptures of Potala Palace, the content of the palm-leaf works mainly consist of Buddhist scriptures.

The precious ancient literature is also among the top-class protected cultural relics in China that currently has the largest existing collection of palm-leaf manuscripts in the world.

According to Pema Dekyi, an ancient manuscript restoration specialist at the Potala Palace, since the 7th century AD, high-ranking Tibetan monks and translators traveled to places including India, Nepal and the Gandhara region to study Buddhist scriptures and brought back a considerable number of *beiyejing*. Meanwhile, eminent monks from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal came to present-day Xizang to spread Buddhism, bringing a certain number of *beiyejing*, thus making Xizang the most concentrated place in the world for the collection.

The Potala Palace houses 465 volumes of *beiyejing* (nearly 30,000 leaves), accounting for more than half of the total collection of type in Xizang. *Beiyejing* in the Potala Palace collection dates mostly from the 7th century to around the 13th century. The content of the scriptures mainly includes Buddhist scriptures from various historical periods, as well as documents on dramas, epics, stories, medicine, astronomy, astrology, and divination, among other subjects.

"They have high historical, scientific, and cultural value," Pema Dekyi says.

The Potala Palace Management Office created an experimental restoration team for palm-leaf manuscripts in 2019, and its main purpose is to overcome the difficulties of restoration.

Pema Dekyi says that the common problems of the ancient palm-leaf scripture include fiber delamination, warping and wrinkles.

"There are also some incomplete fractures in its blank areas, as well as some minor contamination, therefore, the leaf's disease is complex, and it is not a single problem, so during our repair work, the problems need to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis," Pema Dekyi says. "We have to assess the severity of each disease and select the appropriate repair method. While repairing, we are also exploring and learning."

The goal is to restore them in their original forms with minimal intervention, she adds.

Tsering Wangdu, another Tibetan ancient text restoration specialist at the center, says they use three common repair methods. First, imitating the production method of Tibetan paper, they grind the palm-leaves. Then they grind the paper into a powder to fill the missing parts. Finally, they grind the paper into a thin sheet, soak it in water and use it for patching.

"We've tried several traditional sutra styles on the new Tibetan paper and also attempted to replicate them in the form of photographs," says Tsering Wangdu.

"We can't read these characters on the palm-leaf scriptures because they are extremely ancient, even those who can read and write wouldn't be able to understand," he says.

At present, there is no technology or experience in the world to draw upon for palm-leaf restoration, according to the restoration team. That's why the Potala Palace set up this experimental group. The group has been carrying out experiments for years.



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Top left: In Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, a fire truck stationed at the Potala Palace, ready to be pressed into service. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY Top right: A worker prepares the ropes for maintenance work. JIGME DORJE / XINHUA Above left: A carpentry polishes wooden units used for restoration of the Potala Palace. JIGME DORJE / XINHUA Above right: Caretakers of the monastic property conduct a routine cleanup at the Potala Palace. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY



# Preserving the Potala Palace

Team of specialists and modern technology and equipment maintain the building's structural integrity and safety, **Palden Nyima** and **Daqiong** report in Lhasa.

Perched on crimson shoulders, Potala ascends a celestial stairway. Alabaster walls cradle golden roofs. Ancient stones murmur mantras, corridors breathe incense. Shadows dance with prayer flags, weaving time into silk. A sacred place in pilgrims' hearts, it guards the soul of this snowy plateau stretching vastly across western China.

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Potala Palace in the heart of Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, is one of the most iconic landmarks of the region, standing as a magnificent testament to Tibetan culture, ancient architecture and China's multicultural history.

Over the past decades, the Chinese government has invested heavily in the preservation of the Potala Palace, ensuring that this 1,300-year-old architectural marvel remains intact for future generations.

Through large-scale renovations, advanced technological monitoring and sustainable tourism management, the Potala Palace has been safeguarded against natural wear, structural risks and human impact.

First constructed in the 7th century by Tubo ruler Songtsen Gampo, the Potala Palace served as a royal palace and later a Buddhist administrative center. Much of its current structure dates back to the 17th century, following major expansion and reconstruction projects for the palace.

Kunga Tashi, deputy director of the Potala Palace Management Office, says that the entire construction history spans 13 centuries, and the architecture and cultural relics collected from various periods reflect the political, economic and cultural exchanges and integration among the various ethnic groups of China.

"Today, the palace complex covers 130,000 square meters, with its main building soaring 115.7 meters high, making it the largest and most complete palace-style complex in Xizang," says Kunga Tashi.

Palden Tsering, cultural and museum librarian at the Cultural Relics Research Office, of the Potala Palace Management Office, says the cultural relics of the Potala Palace include silk, various artifacts and silk clothing.

"The ancient documents that have been registered and compiled detail the Tripitaka (a collection of Buddhist teachings), and various classics related to the five major and five minor sciences of Tibetan culture."

"The *thangka* paintings show different art styles, including the schools of Chewo Gangba, Karma Gardri, Manthang, Chentse, and Nepal," says Palden Tsering.

The treasures of the palace also include various bowls and porcelain gifted by ancient emperors, Buddha statues preserved in the Lima Lhakhang Hall, the King Songtsen Gampo Cave, the Avalokitesvara Chapel and other areas throughout the temple.

"The Potala Palace has many varieties of rich, distinctive cultural relics, and it is a model of ancient Tibetan architectural features," Palden Tsering says, adding the palace has currently registered and documented over 100,000 cultural relics.



Workers paint the walls of the Red Palace of the Potala Palace, as part of an effort to protect the outer surface of the ancient cultural structure. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

### Devoting efforts

According to the palace's renovation department, the first large-scale repairs of the Potala Palace were made from 1989 to 1994, and they primarily addressed the structural risks of the palace.

The second phase of repairs took place between 2002 and 2009.

More than 200 million yuan (\$28 million) was invested by the central government. The money mainly covered repairs of the palace's body and sleeper walls, restoration of its murals, and environmental improvements in its Shol Courtyard.

"In recent years, the palace has received a great deal of attention from the State relics protection experts with renovation work mainly involving seven golden roofs," says Dawa Ngodrub, an official of the renovation department, adding that in 2018, the outbuilding of the Shol Courtyard was renovated, costing more than 30 million yuan.

"We do a routine inspection of the Potala Palace every day, the job is the same year after year," he says.

Local government made numerous efforts and achieved wonderful results in repairing this ancient building. With many tourists visiting the palace every day, there are monitors to gauge the pressure of the footfall to protect the ancient structure from damage.

Lhundrub, another official from the Potala Palace Management Office, says they use a management model for tourist receptions that includes a reservation system, visitor flow control and staggered peak hours.

"The carrying capacity of the ancient building is limited. To better protect the Potala Palace, we have implemented a crowd-control management model," says Lhundrub, adding that tourists or pilgrims tend to concentrate in certain areas, and security personnel are equipped to divert crowds at any time based on monitoring videos and structural detection data.

### Firefighting measures

Enriched with an abundant collection of historical relics, it is of utmost importance to prevent damage from disasters, as well as theft.

A fire rescue brigade has been stationed in the palace since 2005, and the buildings of the palace are equipped with alarms, smoke detectors, temperature sensors and imaging.

The Potala Palace has 889 electrical circuits in a smart electrical system. The brigade has 36 firefighters — commanders and combatants.

Sonam Tenzin, a firefighter, says they have fire extinguishers appropriate for the ancient buildings, include knapsack type,

trolley type and water-mist devices.

"They may use dry powder, water, carbon dioxide, chemicals or other suppressants," says Sonam Tenzin.

In addition to daily fire prevention work, they also lend helping hands to tourists.

"It's easy for tourists to get altitude sickness on the mountain. Their first thought is to seek the help of firefighters, which is another important task we perform," says Sonam Tenzin.

Apart from firefighters, monks and electricians also play important roles in palace protection.

Lobsang Chodrak, a caretaker of the monastic property, says the main responsibility of the monks is to protect and look after the external buildings and internal cultural relics of the Potala Palace.

"At the same time, we provide services to domestic and international tourists."

Once, there were places for boiling water and charging mobile phones, but not anymore, Lobsang Chodrak says.

"When monks leave home in the morning, they will cut off the power supply, and post a power outage symbol on the door when leaving after a power outage," he says.

Phuntsok Tsering, an electrician at the Potala Palace, says he needs to inspect each temple daily, and they check for abnormalities in each circuit section.

"Circuit risk is the biggest hidden fire danger. To prevent fires, we conduct daily inspections of each chapel one by one, and we walk 10,000 to 20,000 steps a day," he says.

### Digital solutions

The Potala Palace Heritage Monitoring Center uses artificial intelligence, internet and big data to track structural stability, including monitoring wooden beams, walls and seismic activity. It also monitors environmental conditions, including humidity, temperature and pollutants.

Tenzin Kelsang, a staff member at the center, says the structural monitoring system has shifted the Potala Palace from passive repair after incidents to proactive prevention, where risks are discovered in advance.

"The main function of the center is to provide necessary data for emergency reinforcement, repair projects, security technology and other major conservation projects, as well as to provide a decision-making basis for the protection of the palace's heritage," says Tenzin Kelsang.

Modern technology, the internet and big data have been utilized to establish a comprehensive management platform for the Potala Palace.

This platform plays a vital role in the daily management and scientific protection of the palace's ancient buildings and cultural relics.

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## LIFE



# Reading puts the world at your feet

Event aims to inspire young learners to grow into individuals with global outlook, **Yang Yang** reports.

The reading dialogue themed “The Power of Reading” was held at the center of Arabic studies in Beijing Foreign Studies University on Monday to mark the 30th World Book Day that falls on Wednesday.

Co-organized by China Daily, the country’s national English newspaper, and BFSU, the event invited eminent guests from different areas to share growth experiences and life wisdom.

Throughout its history, China has prioritized reading, valuing the pursuit of knowledge through investigating the world, and advocating among scholars the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation, harmonious governance and global peace.

Through this reading dialogue, “we hope to inspire young students’

passion for learning and encourage them to become talents with a global perspective”, says Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, in a speech at the event.

In his sharing, Qu recalls his youth when he read voraciously. As an adult, he draws spiritual nutrition from poetry and fiction: poems by Li Bai from the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Chinese classic *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the voluminous novels by Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and the magical world created by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

“Each great book is a world of itself, enabling us to transcend the boundaries of reality and understand the world’s diversity,” he says.

Qu encourages the university stu-



At an event ahead of World Book Day, students enjoy speeches from writers and experts at Beijing Foreign Studies University on Monday. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

dents to read foreign works in their original languages as a good way to cross cultural barriers, better understand different cultures and learn mutually from each other.

On the other hand, he also emphasizes the importance of social practice, for “knowledge alone is insufficient to address contemporary challenges”.

“Young people need to walk out of studies and travel 10,000 miles to learn about the world,” he says.

Today, China is facing unprecedented transformations. Science and technology epitomized by artificial intelligence is advancing at a startling speed, international crises in trade, energy, territorial disputes and so on continue incessantly, and the internet and digital products are generating excessive filter bubbles.

“At a time of profound changes unseen in a century, reading plays a crucial role in nurturing globally competent talents and serves as the cornerstone for enhancing international communication capabilities,” says Wang Dinghua, Party secretary of BFSU, in a speech at the event.

“If books are the ladder of human progress, then reading is the bridge for mutual enlightenment across civilizations,” he adds.

This event marks the beginning of the strategic cooperation between China Daily and Beijing Foreign Studies University, aiming to promote talent cultivation at university with media’s practical strengths, says Wang.

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## Tang Wensheng: Books are my compass

By YANG YANG

In 1975, Tang Wensheng faced a diplomatic challenge: interpreting for Guyana’s Prime Minister Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham with near-zero prior knowledge of the nation or its leader. Rushing to the archives, she borrowed two English books — one on Guyana’s history, another on Burnham’s life. Hours of focused reading later, she stepped into the meeting room with newfound clarity. Books turned panic into preparation, she says.

At another diplomatic occasion, when Chairman Mao Zedong cited an ancient proverb — A tree towering above the forest invites the storm — Tang, the interpreter, initially failed to understand until the chairman wrote down several words of the proverb. Tang later realized that “reading isn’t just preparation beforehand. You can read to accumulate knowledge afterwards”.

As a part-time interpreter then, gaps between assign-

ments threatened her fluency. Her remedy? English detective novels. Armed with knowledge gleaned off the gripping plots and polished prose, she “scraped the rust off her tongue”, maintaining the agility her role demanded.

The adviser to All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, Tang says reading became her compass. Novels lured her first, but memoirs, histories, and scientific texts soon broadened her horizons. During her China Daily years, she confronted her own limitations daily — waves of global news demanding swift comprehension.

Books also taught her humility, she adds. “Only through constant learning and an ever-expanding perspective could I effectively engage with the world,” she says.

Today, as AI reshapes industries, Tang’s faith in reading endures: “In an age of exploding knowledge, without continuous learning and reading, one will fall out of sync with the world and the times.”

## Wang Jiawu: Relentless study is the mantra

By YANG YANG

For Wang Jiawu, former chief engineer at China’s Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, reading is the key to China’s aerospace success.

Growing up in a small Anhui town, the son of factory workers with little formal education, Wang’s youth was marked by relentless study — rising before dawn, returning after dark — his only companions being the stars that ignited his fascination for the cosmos. In 1980, he entered Beijing Aeronautics Institute (now Beihang University), driven by an unshakable belief that books could free him from the grip of poverty.

For 40 years, Wang dedicated himself to China’s Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in the desert. Aerospace, he learned, was no single discipline but a symphony of specialties — automation, mechanics, communications — each demanding relentless study.

As a leader in launch operations, he spent three years sys-

tematically devouring 56 technical volumes on aerospace engineering. Professional reading wasn’t optional; it was survival, he reflects, adding, “those who can persevere in the aerospace industry all share one common trait: love for reading”.

At Jiuquan, every launch required meticulously crafted backup strategies, studied and rehearsed, even if never used. Wang recalls the escape tower atop the CZ-2F rocket, a solid-fueled safeguard never activated yet vital to mission confidence.

His commitment extended beyond engineering. Wang sees English mastery as another way to improve personal ability. “Aerospace is more about building resilience through learning.”

Today, Wang attributes China’s aerospace triumphs to this culture of perpetual study. Reading, he says, is the “North Star” of innovation, a powerful weapon to conquer challenges and explore the boundless cosmos.

## Soldat Tatjana: The magic of paper pages

By YANG YANG

As a child in Serbia, Soldat Tatjana, now director of the Serbian Cultural Center in Beijing, watched her father read each evening, his fingers tracing lines of text like a sacred ritual. “What magic lay in those pages?” she wondered.

Soon, her parents gifted her illustrated fairy tales. Among them, *The Hedgehog’s Home* — a simple story about a hedgehog defending its burrow — stood out, teaching her patriotism through allegory. “Every book leaves a mark,” she says, quoting a sentence Serbian people often say, “even a bad one teaches discernment”.

This lesson echoed through her life. At university, Tatjana chose to study Chinese, drawn by Serbia’s unexpected cultural similarities with China. Without a Serbian-Chinese dictionary, she decoded characters through a third language, marveling at how words and texts help a society interpret and respond to the world around it through the

nuances of its vocabulary. Books also anchored her during struggles.

Tatjana recalls Nikola Tesla, Serbia’s visionary inventor, whose childhood love for history and literature fueled his genius. Like him, she sees books as portals — to science, philosophy, and the quiet resilience of characters like the hedgehog.

Now, amid the frenzy of the digital age, Tatjana champions paper’s enduring power. Turning paper pages, inhaling ink-scented air, she finds focus — a tactile ritual no screen can replicate. Reading paper books is a mental training to enhance cognitive functions and strengthen memory retention, she says.

“Its weight in your hands, its scent — these are acts of mindfulness,” she says.

While cultivating empathy, reading also serves as a refuge, alleviating stress while nurturing the soul. “Thus, no matter the circumstances, we must never forget the power of reading,” she says.

## Kirill Kravtsov: Literature helps us connect

By CHENG YUEZHU

For Russian student Kirill Kravtsov, known by his Chinese name Lin Zirui, now pursuing a master’s at Peking University’s School of Journalism and Communication, reading is a vital means of connecting cultures and encouraging mutual understanding.

In his conversations with fellow students and teachers, he often introduces Russian literature, and listens to their interpretations of Chinese works, finding resonance in books from different cultural backgrounds and of varied genres.

“When we bring Chinese and Russian classics to the same table, different perspectives naturally arise. Through such exchanges, we learn to respect differences and continuously enrich ourselves through dialogue,” he says.

In his native Russian, he is drawn to the emotional depth of literary giants like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* revealed to him the preciousness of human connections in times of turmoil, and in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, he understood the complexity of human existence in the inner struggles of morality and redemption.

“It is these reading experiences in my mother tongue that allow me to keep inquiring into human nature, and to find a spiritual resonance with my home culture during my studies abroad,” he says.

After coming to China, Chinese literature opened new perspectives for him. He speaks of finding humor and resilience in Lao She’s *Rickshaw Boy*, which says “even the greatest hardship can be slept through,” or seeing the vicissitudes of cities and lives in Eileen Chang’s works.

“Reading in a foreign language not only strengthens my language skills, but also allows me to reexamine the meaning of fate and life through a Chinese perspective,” he adds.

## Agshin Aliyev: A journey shaped by stories

By CHENG YUEZHU

Back in 2003, Agshin Aliyev was an undergraduate student from Azerbaijan, studying at Shanghai University. At a campus book fair, he bought a copy of *The Analects* for just a few yuan.

“At the time, I could not understand the book at all, but I made a promise to myself: one day, I’ll be able to understand it, and even translate it into Azerbaijani,” Aliyev says in his speech.

Two decades later, he is actually given the task of translating *The Analects* into Azerbaijani, his translated version being included in Foreign Languages Press’s Library of Chinese Classics series.

Now serving as the head of the department of Azerbaijani language at Beijing Foreign Studies University, Aliyev says his entire life has been shaped by the books he read, from the Azerbaijani folk stories he read as a child, to Chinese and

English literature classics.

A particularly serendipitous encounter also began with a single book. During his master’s studies, he came across a pedagogical book on teaching Chinese grammar to non-Chinese learners.

When he was about to embark on his PhD, he plucked up the courage and reached out to the writer, professor Qi Huiyang, which led to Qi taking him on as a student.

He now has a collection of nearly 3,000 books, each one marked with the date and place of his purchase. To him, books are like milestones in his life, recording his growth at every stage.

“The most magical thing about reading is that it’s an evolving process. Some books are like seeds. At first, you may only grasp the words on the surface, but as your life experience deepens, they take root and begin to grow within you,” he says.

## A Yi: Stendhal’s novel showed the way

By CHENG YUEZHU

A common saying in Chinese goes, “reading changes fate.” For writer A Yi, this is not merely a catchphrase, but his true life experience.

In his speech, he shares how reading changed his life trajectory, leading him out of the mountain valley in his hometown to become a writer and see a broader world.

“From a pragmatic point of view, the most beneficial thing in this world is reading,” he says.

Born in 1976 in Ruichang, Jiangxi province, A Yi studied at Jiangxi Public Security College in Nanchang, the provincial capital, today’s Jiangxi Police Institute. After graduation, he went back to Ruichang and worked as an administrative officer stationed in a remote police station.

“I saw no need to change anything about that life, until I read Stendhal’s novel,” he says. He refers to *The Red and*

*the Black* written by the French writer. He still has the original copy he bought, on the title page of which he left the date when he first read it: July 27, 1998.

In his description, he “caught the fervor” of the protagonist Julien Sorel, whose ambition and recklessness influenced him to leave his hometown in pursuit of a greater life.

“I realized I should do something worthwhile for this vast land and even the entire planet,” he says. “A young person of humble origin is just as entitled to the world as anyone else.”

After nearly a decade in media, he became a full-time writer. He has since published 12 books, translated into over a dozen languages.

“Humans first exist, then define themselves through their own will. Life is nothing other than this process of self-design and self-realization,” he says.

## Meng Xiaoshu: Exploring our souls

By CHENG YUEZHU

In this age of rapid development of artificial intelligence, reading is more important than ever before, says writer Meng Xiaoshu in her speech.

With AI tools generating content and recommendation algorithms promoting information to users, Meng addresses questions shared among many — whether it is still necessary to read, and whether it is too late to develop one’s own understanding, judgement and worldview.

“Reading is not about acquiring information, because no one can access information faster than through algorithms. Reading is about fostering a deeper connection with the world and expanding the dimensions of our lives,” she says.

“When we read novels, philosophy, history, among other books, we are not merely consuming knowl-

edge. We are exploring our souls once and again.”

According to Meng, readers are able to reflect on the author’s arguments, or the emotional experiences of fictional characters, finding the similarities and differences between them and those of their own.

Rather than being constrained to personal experience, reading allows people to experience others’ fate, era and life. In doing so, they preserve individuality and retain objective judgements within a world of complexity.

“AI can simulate knowledge, but it cannot expand the boundaries of one’s inner experience,” she says.

“Only by reading a vast number of books can we travel back and forth across different times and spaces, carrying with us thoughts, empathy, skepticism and imagination, seeing the world anew and reinterpreting ourselves.”

## LIFE



## Subtle insights add to classic tale's appeal

*La Traviata* production gives audiences a more intense and intimate experience, Chen Nan reports.

Chinese soprano Yao Hong rehearses for the stage adaptation of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* in Beijing on April 10. LI NA / FOR CHINA DAILY

In 1992, a year after joining the China National Opera House, Chinese soprano Yao Hong took on her first leading role as Violetta in Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*. The heroine of this classic opera — a Parisian courtesan who is beautiful, passionate, and independent, living a luxurious yet emotionally detached life surrounded by wealthy admirers — has become one of Yao's most frequently performed roles.

Over the past three decades, Yao has played Violetta 79 times.

"Almost every year, I perform as Violetta, and she continues to inspire me," Yao says.

On Friday and Saturday, the 57-year-old soprano will once again take on the role for the 80th and 81st times in Beijing, in a new adaptation of *La Traviata*, which she is directing herself.

This version, in contrast to the large-scale productions Yao typically performs in, will feature a smaller cast — just six opera singers — and simpler sets.

Yao's vision is to make opera more accessible in terms of cost, logistics, and intimacy.

"This production will allow more people to enjoy opera and make it easier to tour nationally," she explains.

"One of the biggest challenges for opera is its elitist reputation — the perception that it's an expensive, inaccessible art form reserved for a specific class," Yao adds. "Smaller productions, using fewer resources, help break down this barrier. By bringing opera into more intimate

settings like small theaters, we can reach a broader audience, allowing them to experience opera without the intimidation of large, extravagant productions.

"When you strip away the grandiose aspects of a classic opera, such as massive orchestras and complex sets, the core of the piece — the music, emotions and characters — often comes into sharper focus," she says. "Without the distractions of a large stage or intricate visuals, the raw emotion conveyed by the singers and the music takes center stage. This leads to a more intense and personal experience for the audience."

Born in Shenyang, Liaoning province, Yao graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1991.

Yao's husband, renowned stage designer Gao Guangjian, has adopted a minimalist and abstract design concept for the production. Through simple stage sets and props, he aims to spark the audience's imagination.

According to Gao, two frames — one large and one small — are suspended at varying heights on the stage. These frames can serve as doors, windows or mirrors, dividing the stage into different spaces. This design not only enhances the flexibility of the stage but encourages the audience to engage actively with the imaginative aspects of the drama.

"We place great importance on layered lighting and highly saturated colors to facilitate scene transitions and subtly depict the



Set designer Gao Guangjian (left) and Yao at a news conference for the Chinese stage adaptation of *La Traviata* in Beijing on Wednesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Yao and cast members of *La Traviata*, including tenor Xu Seng (left), rehearse in Beijing on April 10. LI NA / FOR CHINA DAILY

emotional changes within Violetta, deepening the visual impact of the stage," says Gao, the former director of set design at the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

Gao is also known for working on the 1998 production of Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* at the Forbidden City in Beijing, directed by Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou.

"The connection between theaters and their audiences is a dynamic, symbiotic relationship that plays a crucial role in the success of a performance," Gao explains. "It goes beyond the simple act of watching a show; it's an exchange of energy, emotions and experiences between the performers and the audience. The sense of intimacy that small venues create is unique, and it can be particularly attractive to people who have never experienced opera before."

What inspired Yao to adapt Verdi's *La Traviata* for a smaller production was a concert she gave earlier this year in Beijing's Sanlitun, a vibrant commercial district. Unlike the vast theaters with capacities of over 1,000 seats, she enjoyed the immersive experience of performing in a venue with hundreds of seats.

"It was more like a salon-style concert. With a simple yet elegant stage design and lighting, a piano, no chorus, and just three singers performing intimately among the audience. The experience was completely different from anything I had done in my career," recalls Yao.

After the show, the enthusiastic

praise and encouragement from her friends inspired her to explore the idea of staging an opera in a smaller venue.

After researching smaller theaters in Beijing and Shanghai, she decided to present her version of *La Traviata* at the Shijingshan Cultural Center, which has fewer than 400 seats.

Yao also chose *La Traviata* for its broad popularity with Chinese audiences and her personal connection to the opera. In 1956, *La Traviata* was staged at Beijing's Tianqiao Theatre, becoming one of the first foreign classical operas introduced to China.

"At the heart of *La Traviata* is a deeply human story: love, sacrifice, societal pressure, and tragedy. It speaks to the struggle between personal happiness and societal expectations, a theme that resonates across cultures and time periods," Yao says.

For the upcoming performances, five Chinese opera singers will join Yao, including tenor Xue Haoyin, baritone Sun Li and baritone Zhang Peng.

"Even with a simplified setting, the core of the piece remains intact. It's still Verdi's *La Traviata* — the same plot, the same music," Yao says.

"While the number of cast members may be smaller, the vocal demands for the roles don't change. You still need exceptional voices," she adds.

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## Learning lessons from living without walking

I recently became a Meituan delivery.

A deliveryman hoisted me on his back like a backpack and deposited me at the bottom of a pedestrian overpass.



Erik Nilsson  
Second Thoughts

He'd seen me hopping up the bridge's stairs on one leg, clutching the rail, while my wife towed my wheelchair behind us.

About halfway down, the man wearing a Meituan helmet approached me and said: "I saw you struggling. Let me help you." He volunteered to let me ride piggyback down the remaining stairs.

I was leaving a hospital where I'd attempted, unsuccessfully, to enroll in physical rehabilitation, following ankle surgery. The operation was to repair four torn tendons, including

a severely ruptured peroneal brevis — a part of my body I'd never heard of — which suffered a rare kind of longitudinal split.

One wrong step now means three months of needing mobility aids, half a year of difficulty walking and at least a year before returning to sports.

It initially meant inhabiting a bed-sized world and losing control over most of my life. Weeks later, my world essentially ends at my door, unless I'm taken for a walk, like a pet.

Sometimes, the elevator rejects me because sensors mistake my manual wheelchair for an e-bike, which are prohibited in our building because of battery-fire risks.

I used to psych myself up to go for a run. Now, I give myself a pep talk to go outside at all.

I've been spending these days struggling to gracefully accept the shrinking of my world where I must and resisting it where I can,

pushing with all my might against the invisible walls closing in on my existence.

And I'm particularly vulnerable to lifestyle claustrophobia. I relish a kinetic regimen of travel, socializing, field work and combat sports. I find relaxing ... stressful.

Many people would consider breakfast in bed sumptuous. Not me.

I spend summer vacations frying breakfasts over campfires on a wilderness hilltop.

Previously, I did eight martial arts classes a week — jiu-jitsu, *eskrima* (Filipino stick-fighting), *sanda* (Chinese kickboxing) and MMA, plus weights and running. I filled evenings and weekends with punches, kicks, takedowns, headlocks and arm bars.

I was the happiest I'd ever been. Often, my work schedule didn't allow for so much training. I spent enough time on the road that I

always kept a suitcase packed.

I went into the pandemic a skinny-fat smoker who devoured junk, scorned sleep, and hadn't exercised on purpose in decades. Health, I thought, was something to sacrifice to work and family.

By the time I emerged from the lockdowns fitter than most 20-somethings, several good friends crinkled their foreheads at me and asked, disbelievingly: "Erik? Is that you?"

Once again, I find myself in a different kind of lockdown. A life in motion has lurched to a jolting standstill.

I've spent much of the past 20 years investigating disability in China as a volunteer and journalist.

I've covered Beijing's two Paralympics, profiled numerous initiatives and founded a volunteer group providing wheelchairs, surgeries and prosthetics for nomadic children with disabilities on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

About a third of my most recent book, *Closer to Heaven: A Global Nomad's Journey Through China's Poverty Alleviation*, is devoted to such stories as sexual rehabilitation for people paralyzed in the 2008 Wenchuan quake in Sichuan province.

I never imagined myself living on the other end of disability issues in China.

Lately, I've been reassessing every corner of the country I experience — even the high lip to our apartment building's hefty door, which my wheelchair can't clear unassisted — in new ways.

I'm thankful for the Paralympics' legacy. But I see areas for improvement and how a single snagged brick can make a thruway impassible.

I am grateful my injury is temporary — albeit protracted — and not worse.

It has also led me to think more deeply about the challenges China faces as its population grays and

more people will need barrier-free access and corresponding services.

We will all get old — unless we don't.

On March 31, I turned one year older in a hospital bed.

My original plan was to celebrate my birthday by training in ethnic wrestling in the Inner Mongolian autonomous region's capital, Hohhot.

Other birthdays in China have involved inviting 100 friends to eat a whole sheep with Sichuan Opera mask-changing performances and dancing pandas; sleeping in a cave in Yan'an, Shaanxi province; and visiting a mass grave in Wenchuan county during Tomb Sweeping Festival. Spending so many birthdays in the disaster zone taught me to appreciate every year so much more.

This year brings different experiences and lessons. I'm still learning them.

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