

XI'S VISIT

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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2025

Xi: Carry forward ironclad friendship

Beijing, Phnom Penh to jointly promote regional prosperity

By MO JINGXI in Phnom Penh
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President Xi Jinping called on China and Cambodia to carry forward their ironclad friendship and work together to build an all-weather China-Cambodia community with a shared future for the new era to deliver more benefits to the two countries and their peoples.

Xi said that China firmly supports the neighboring country's efforts in maintaining stability, accelerating development, improving people's livelihoods, and pursuing a development path suited to its national conditions.

He said that he believes Chinese modernization will bring more opportunities to neighboring countries including Cambodia.

Xi made the remarks when meeting with Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, after arriving in the country, the last stop of his three-nation tour to Southeast Asia, on Thursday.

He was warmly welcomed by King Sihamoni, Cambodian People's Party President and Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen and other senior officials during a grand welcome ceremony held by the king at the airport.

More than 20,000 local people, along with representatives of overseas Chinese, Chinese-funded enterprises and Chinese students, lined the streets to warmly welcome the Chinese president.

Since China and Cambodia established diplomatic relations in 1958, their traditional friendship fostered by successive generations of Chinese and Cambodian leaders has been continuously advanced.

Xi said that China and Cambodia have firmly supported each other on issues related to their respective core interests and major concerns, and have set an example of equal treatment, sincere mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation between countries of different sizes.

Two-way trade has expanded remarkably thanks to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade deal and the China-Cambodia Free Trade Agreement. Last year, bilateral trade reached \$17.83 billion, up 20.7 percent year-on-year.

China and Cambodia are also at the forefront of Belt and Road cooperation, with many landmark projects such as the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway and the Siem Reap Angkor International Airport becoming key drivers of Cambodia's economic and social development and creating tens of thousands of local jobs.

King Sihamoni said that Xi's his-



Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president, attends a welcoming ceremony hosted by Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni on his arrival in Phnom Penh on Thursday for a state visit. Cambodia is the last stop in Xi's three-nation tour to Southeast Asia. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

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toric visit to Cambodia will deepen the ironclad friendship, enrich the dimensions of the Diamond Hexagon cooperation framework and take their relationship to a new level.

Cambodia is also willing to strengthen coordination and cooperation with China within multilat-

eral mechanisms such as ASEAN-China cooperation and Lancang-Mekong cooperation, to jointly promote regional peace, stability and prosperity, he said.

After the meeting, King Sihamoni awarded Xi, "a great friend of Cambodia", the National Order of Independence — Grand Collar for his outstanding contributions to the development of Cambodia-China relations.

On Thursday, Xi also met separate-

ly with Hun Sen, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Cambodian Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk. He also attended a ceremony for the exchange of more than 30 cooperation agreements.

During the meeting with Hun Sen, Xi reiterated opposition to unilateralism and hegemonism, saying that no country is willing to regress to isolation.

Hun Sen said that Cambodia is willing to strengthen strategic secu-

rity cooperation with China, expand bilateral trade, welcome more Chinese companies to invest in Cambodia, and deepen people-to-people exchanges.

Xi's visit came on the occasion of the Khmer New Year. In a written statement upon his arrival at Phnom Penh International Airport, Xi, on behalf of the Chinese government and people, extended warm New Year greetings to the Cambodian government and people.

President sees visit as 'going to the home of a good friend'

By CAO DESHENG
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President Xi Jinping has called on China and Cambodia to "strive together" and "thrive together", in order to promote steady and sustained progress in building a China-Cambodia community with a shared future in the new era.

Xi made the remarks in a signed article published by Cambodian media, including the Khmer Times, a leading English-language newspaper in Cambodia, as he started a state visit to the country on Thursday.

Xi described the visit, his second in nine years, as "going to the home of a good friend", saying he wanted to use the visit to spearhead progress in building a China-Cambodia community with a shared future.

In the article, Xi recalled the friendly exchanges since ancient times between the two neighboring countries, as well as the friendship forged by Cambodia's King Father Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk and late Chairman Mao Zedong and premier Zhou Enlai, among the elder generations of Chinese leaders.

"In the face of complex regional and international developments, we support each other in safeguarding our respective core interests, and work together to uphold international fairness and justice. Our two nations have forged an ironclad friendship," he said.

Xi highlighted that the China-Cambodia community with a shared future is deeply rooted in the historical legacy of good-neighborly relations, founded upon inclusiveness and mutual learning, defined by the countries' mutual commitment to friendship and righteousness, and powered by equality and mutual benefit.

China has been Cambodia's largest trading partner and largest source of investment for many years, with the two nations' industrial and supply chain cooperation continuously deepening.

Among various projects of bilateral cooperation, the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone has drawn more than 200 international companies to establish operations, laying a solid groundwork for Cambodia's industrial modernization. In addition, the China-Cambodia Friendship Poverty Alleviation Demonstration Village project has been completed.

"We must strive together and thrive together. We must act as pioneers and pacesetters in translating the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative from vision into reality," Xi said.

"To jointly safeguard our political security, we should strengthen communication on matters of strategic importance such as foreign policy and national defense, and resolutely oppose any attempts by external forces to interfere in our internal affairs, sow discord or undermine China-Cambodia friendship," Xi said.

"We should also jointly safeguard the multilateral trading system, advance industrial and supply chain cooperation, enhance cooperation in advanced manufacturing, green development, the digital economy and other areas, and make the Diamond Hexagon cooperation shine better and stronger."

To advance modernization in both countries, the two nations should forge greater synergy between the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy, and advance the development of the Industrial and Technological Corridor and the Fish and Rice Corridor, Xi said.

In the article, he also called on both countries to work together toward a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful, amicable and harmonious Asian home.

China, Global South united by Bandung principles

During a news conference for the third session of the 14th National People's Congress on March 7, a journalist from Radio Republik Indonesia asked about China's perspective on the Global South. In response, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized that China is a natural member of the Global South, having fought against colonialism and hegemonism together, and remains committed to global development. His remarks echoed the sentiments of then Indonesian president Sukarno from the Asian-African Conference in Bandung 70 years ago, which were also referenced by late premier Zhou Enlai on that occasion among other leaders.

China played a crucial role in the Bandung Conference held in 1955, which established a foundation for international relations known as

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By Klaus Heinrich Radtito

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the Ten Principles of Bandung. The principles articulate a collective aspiration mainly for peaceful coexistence and respect for the sovereignty of all nations; the rejection of colonialism, imperialism, interference, aggression, and any form of foreign domination; equality among races and nations; the promotion of mutual development and cooperation; and the peaceful dispute resolution in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

During a meeting with Sukarno

on Sept 30, 1956, Chairman Mao Zedong stated that China's diplomatic priorities were focused on Asia, Africa and Latin America. Since then, China has kept its long-standing commitment to other developing countries, often referred to as the Third World. While addressing the United Nations General Assembly on April 10, 1974, late leader Deng Xiaoping stressed that the Chinese government and people firmly support all oppressed peoples and oppressed nations in their struggle to win or defend national independence, develop the national economy and oppose colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism.

As the world order evolved, developing countries acquired a new name — the Global South. In 2024, G. John Ikenberry of Princeton University defined the Global

South as a group of countries that exist on the periphery of the world's political and economic landscape, outside the core of leading great powers. These countries share collective aspirations for development and desire a greater voice in global governance. Essentially, the Global South is a contemporary term for developing countries, with the Bandung Principles serving as its essence.

Although referred to by different terms such as "developing world", "Third World" and "Global South", the same group of nations has become a key force for maintaining peace, driving world development and improving global governance. Just as Wang put it, "the hallmark of our era is the prominent, growing strength of the Global South."

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XI'S VISIT

Xi aims to bolster 'ironclad' ties with Cambodia

With China's help and friendship, Southeast Asian nation is on clear road to prosperity

By XINHUA

In February 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted then-Cambodian prime minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, an appointment between the two old friends.

Back in early 2020, Hun Sen visited Beijing as China was battling the COVID-19 epidemic. He visited to show Cambodia's staunch support for the Chinese people at a critical moment. Three years later, Hun Sen visited China again as promised.

At their 2023 meeting, Xi recalled the prime minister's trip to China during a heavy snowfall, saying he was happy to fulfill this "three-year appointment" with the visiting leader.

The warm and sturdy friendship between Xi and Hun Sen serves as a faithful reflection of the close bond between China and Cambodia, carefully nurtured by generations of leaders on both sides over the decades. And this relationship, described by Xi as "ironclad", will surely be renewed as the Chinese leader embarked on his second state visit to the Southeast Asian country.

A unique friendship

On the very day Xi arrived in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh in 2016 for a state visit, he made a special visit to the royal palace to see Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk. The queen mother invited Xi to sit in a chair that was frequently used by her late husband, King Father Norodom Sihanouk.

The chair had been meticulously preserved by the Cambodian royal family since the king father's passing — covered and untouched, until Xi's visit.

"This is a privilege reserved only for the most esteemed and dearest friends," explained Princess Norodom Arunrasmy, who was present.

With a warm smile, Xi spoke fondly of King Father Sihanouk, describing him as "a revered friend of the Chinese people and a symbol of China-Cambodia friendship". The deep, personal ties that the king established with Chinese leaders in the 1950s have played a pivotal role in fostering today's ever-refreshing friendship between the two countries.

More than once, Xi has quoted an old Chinese saying to underscore how the China-Cambodia friendship has withstood challenges and global transformations: "A long journey tests a horse's strength, and a long span of time reveals a person's heart."

In Xi's signed article published by Cambodian media prior to his 2016 visit to the country, he noted that China will never forget Cambodia's role as one of the first nations to recognize the People's Republic of China and a champion of China's rightful seat at the United Nations.



Top: The Phnom Penh toll station of the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway glows on Sept 25. XINHUA **Above left:** Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet (center) cuts the ribbon to launch the China-funded National Road 7/C in Tbong Khmum in Cambodia on April 12. NITOLA / XINHUA **Above right:** Workers watch traffic at the monitoring center for the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway on Nov 1. WU CHANGWEI / XINHUA

The friendship between the two close neighbors has always been mutual. China has been a steadfast partner of Cambodia, supporting its national independence and economic development, including the construction of Cambodia's first cement plant and thermal power station.

To honor the friendship, Xi awarded a Friendship Medal to the queen mother at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in November 2020.

Xi has also shown particular care for Cambodia's royal family.

"Beijing is your home. You're more than welcome to return whenever you like," he said while meeting King Sihamoni and Queen Mother Monineath at Beijing's Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in 2014. He has also made thoughtful arrangements for their medical checkups in China. For over a decade, King Sihamoni and Queen Mother Monineath have regularly come to China, almost twice every year.

Over the years, Xi has also maintained frequent exchanges with Hun Sen. With Hun Manet taking over as Cambodia's prime minister, the friendship has been passed on to the next generation.

In September 2023, Hun Manet

chose China as his first official overseas destination after assuming office, a gesture reflecting Cambodia's diplomatic priority. During his meeting with Xi, Hun Manet pledged to further carry forward the ironclad friendship between Cambodia and China.

Ek Sam Ol, president of the Cambodia-China Friendship Association, said the relationship between China and Cambodia has not only set an example for big and small countries to get along with mutual respect, equality and win-win cooperation, but also contributed to regional peace and stability, which has brought great benefits to the people of the two countries.

A road to hope

A Cambodian proverb says, "Where there is a road, there is hope."

In May 2024, a road in Phnom Penh was named Xi Jinping Boulevard by the Royal Government of Cambodia to honor the Chinese leader's historic contributions to the country's development. In 1965, the late King Father Sihanouk similarly named a road after Chairman Mao Zedong.

At the naming ceremony, Hun Manet highlighted that, under the leadership and joint efforts of Xi and

Cambodian leaders, bilateral ties have entered their best period in history.

Since 2013, the China-Cambodia comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership has continued to strengthen thanks to flourishing practical cooperation across various fields. The Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by Xi, has played a significant role in fostering common development and shared benefits for both sides.

Situated along the ancient Maritime Silk Road, Cambodia was among the first countries to join the Belt and Road cooperative effort.

Over the years, key BRI projects in Cambodia have reaped fruitful results: the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone has attracted over 200 international enterprises and institutions, generating 32,000 jobs; Cambodia's first expressway, the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, has reduced travel time between the two cities from over five hours to less than two; and the Siem Reap Angkor International Airport has helped Cambodia's tourism take off, operating 17 routes by the end of last year.

"The SSEZ, along with other flagship BRI projects, has played a crucial role in helping Cambodia achieve

its ambitious targets of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income nation by 2050," said Neak Chandarith, director of the Cambodia 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Research Center.

Bilateral trade and commerce have also thrived. China has been Cambodia's largest foreign investor and trading partner for several consecutive years. Over the past decade, bilateral trade has nearly quadrupled, official data shows. The Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership have facilitated exports of Cambodian products such as rice, bananas, longan and Basa fish to Chinese markets.

Xi advocates for a comprehensive approach to China-Cambodia cooperation. This is why he has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the bilateral "Diamond Hexagon" cooperation framework, which covers six major areas: politics, production capacity, agriculture, energy, security and people-to-people exchanges.

These efforts have provided new impetus for building a high-quality, high-level and high-standard Cambodia-China community with a shared future in the new era, a vision

pledged by both nations' leaders, noted Thong Mengdaiv, a lecturer at the Institute for International Studies and Public Policy at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Embracing Xi's ideas

In April 2017, the Khmer edition of the first volume of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* was released in Cambodia, with Hun Sen attending the launching ceremony.

First published in 2014, this 18-chapter book compiles 79 speeches, talks, addresses, interviews, instructions and congratulatory messages by Xi from November 2012 to June 2014. The book series, which now has four volumes, serves as key texts for readers worldwide to understand Xi's philosophies in running a major country like China.

Speaking before an audience of more than 700 attendees, Hun Sen expressed hope that Cambodian officials, scholars and students could gain valuable insights from the book and apply them to Cambodia's unique conditions, thereby contributing to more effective governance.

Chea Munyrit, president of the Cambodian Chinese Evolution Researcher Association, led the translation team. In his view, Cambodia's recent development is closely linked to learning from China's experiences and ideas, many of which are reflected in Xi's book.

One article focuses on poverty alleviation and wealth creation in impoverished areas. Under Xi's leadership, China eliminated absolute poverty in 2020. This achievement enabled China to meet the poverty eradication target in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years ahead of schedule.

"Cambodian officials particularly focus on poverty alleviation and closely follow China's governance experience in this area," Munyrit said.

In recent years, poverty reduction cooperation between the two countries has been taking concrete steps, with the establishment of poverty alleviation demonstration villages as a highlight. China has shared with its Cambodian counterparts its experiences in integrating modern agriculture, vocational training and rural development.

Thanks to those efforts, concrete roads, canals, solar-powered lamps and clean water facilities have been built. According to the UNDP Country Programme Document 2024-2028 released last year, Cambodia has lifted 2.8 million people, or 50 percent of its poor, out of poverty in the past seven and half years.

Xi has supported Cambodia in searching for a development path suited to its unique national conditions. This principle has been central to China's accomplishment of twin miracles: rapid economic growth and enduring social stability.

In Hun Sen's eyes, Xi is a great leader and a remarkable person capable of guiding China's development.

"Every initiative he has proposed, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which bridges past and present, and the Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative, reflects his far-reaching vision," Hun Sen said.

Special program helping young people gain skills

By YANG WANLI

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"Knowledge reshapes destiny" is a belief many people have, hoping to change their lives through learning. This universal motto is guiding the path of Mov Yis, a 21-year-old woman who dreams of earning a good living by studying new technology with support from China.

Mov, a sophomore at the National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor in northwestern Cambodia's Siem Reap province, is the most educated of her six siblings. Majoring in mechatronic manufacturing, she earned a full scholarship to study at the school and aims to carve out a bright future with information technology skills.

"Three of my siblings are now working at construction sites in Thailand. Many girls in Cambodia find jobs in service sectors, but I decided to learn IT as it's now the crucial driving force for the country's development," she said. "I will find my value in this industry in the future."

Mov is among the school's 2,400 students who have had or will gain professional training support from their "sister school" — Hainan Tech-

nician College in China.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training of Cambodia, the "ILO/China Partnership Program on Strengthening Skills Development in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar through South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)" launched a package of skills development training in Cambodia in 2020, with support from China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

The program has been instrumental in elevating Cambodia's workforce by linking vocational training to labor market needs, promoting green and digital skills, and fostering international partnerships with technician institutions in China.

"China's infrastructure, machinery and skills are very advanced. Moreover, the chance to visit Chinese companies with cutting-edge technologies was really an eye-opening experience to us that has helped broaden our horizons a lot," said Plek Proney, a trainer with the National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor who has visited China three times to receive professional training guidance.

"Many new machines that are used now in Cambodia have been donated

from China, so we need to update (our) skills. The encouraging thing is that skills training has increased our students' employment rate, helped them get promotions and raised their salaries," he said, adding that salary growth has tripled in some positions.

Plek said many of his students are eager for the chance to visit China. During his trips to the country, he was surprised to learn that many Chinese teachers have led student teams to participate in several international vocational skills competitions, with good results.

Although new technologies have revolutionized nearly all industries worldwide, Cambodia still faces challenges due to a lack of technological support and facilities, said Rath Ratanak, deputy director of the National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor.

Apart from traditional skills such as tourism services and culinary training, he said Cambodia is in urgent need of talent specializing in cloud technology, artificial intelligence, computer science and parametric robot control — aspects that are now widely adopted in the manufacturing industry.

"More importantly, ILO/China introduced a 'digital recognition of prior learning system' for the con-

struction sector at our school, which has certified 500 participants," Rath said. "It helped us standardize professional training and better match with the international standard."

According to Tian Feng, project manager and coordinator of the ILO/China Partnership Program on Strengthening Skills Development, the program focuses on helping Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar enhance skills development cooperation with fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and support the Skills Dream-Building Initiative. So far, it has benefited more than 48,000 individuals in the region, 35 percent of them women.

"In Cambodia, apart from the IT professionals that are in urgent need, we also conducted a targeted training program for 194 tourism professionals, including 113 women, that focused on food and beverage services and Chinese culinary skills," Tian added.

During the 13th ASEAN Plus Three Labor Ministers' Meeting last October, Cambodia's Minister of Labour and Vocational Training Heng Sour praised the program for its vital role in strengthening skills development, improving labor market systems, and fostering greater



A teacher guides a student at an information technology class last month at the National Polytechnic Institute of Angkor, which has been provided professional training support from Hainan Technician College in China under an ILO/China Partnership Program since 2020. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

collaboration between the public and private sectors in Cambodia.

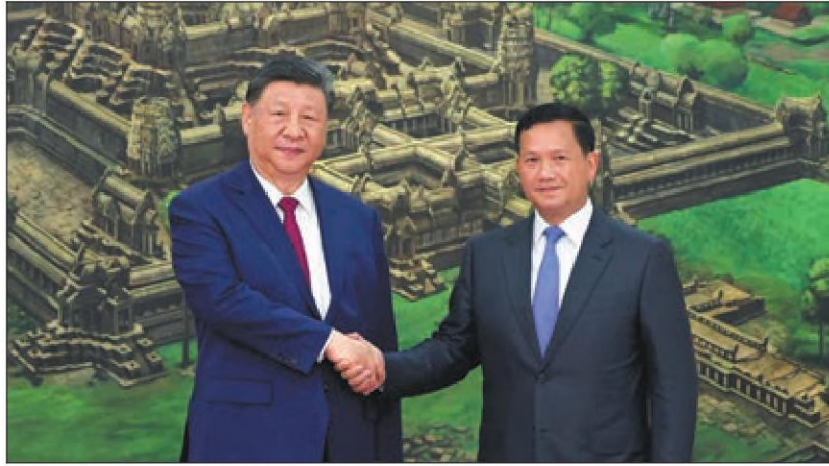
Under the framework of the ILO/China Partnership Program, some Chinese technician colleges have organized a study tour to China focused on skill training, according to Rath.

"During our visits to China, we were all deeply impressed by the diligence and enthusiasm of Chinese people either in school or at the factories. We hope such training programs can be continued through more diversified forms, and that

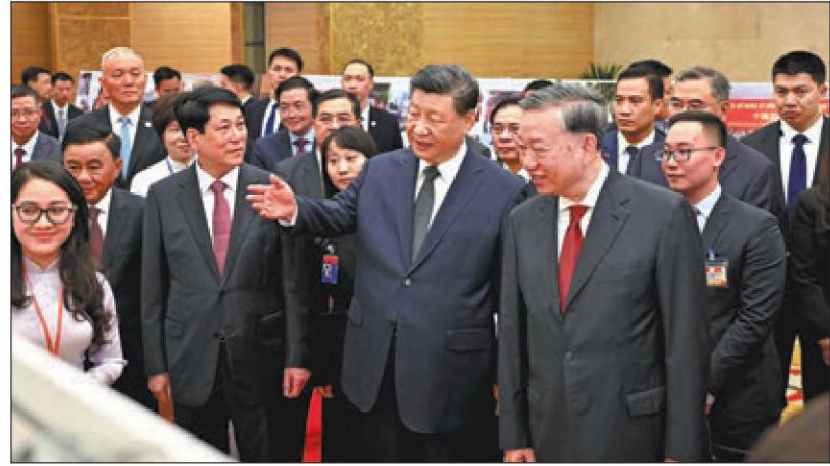
more memorandums of understanding can be signed between schools from both countries," he said.

"In the near future, we also hope that Cambodians' professional skill certificates can be recognized in China, boosting cross-border employment as well as providing Cambodian students with more access to Chinese enterprises in Cambodia," he added. "We also look forward to more professional training competitions in the future, encouraging Cambodian students to step on a bigger stage."

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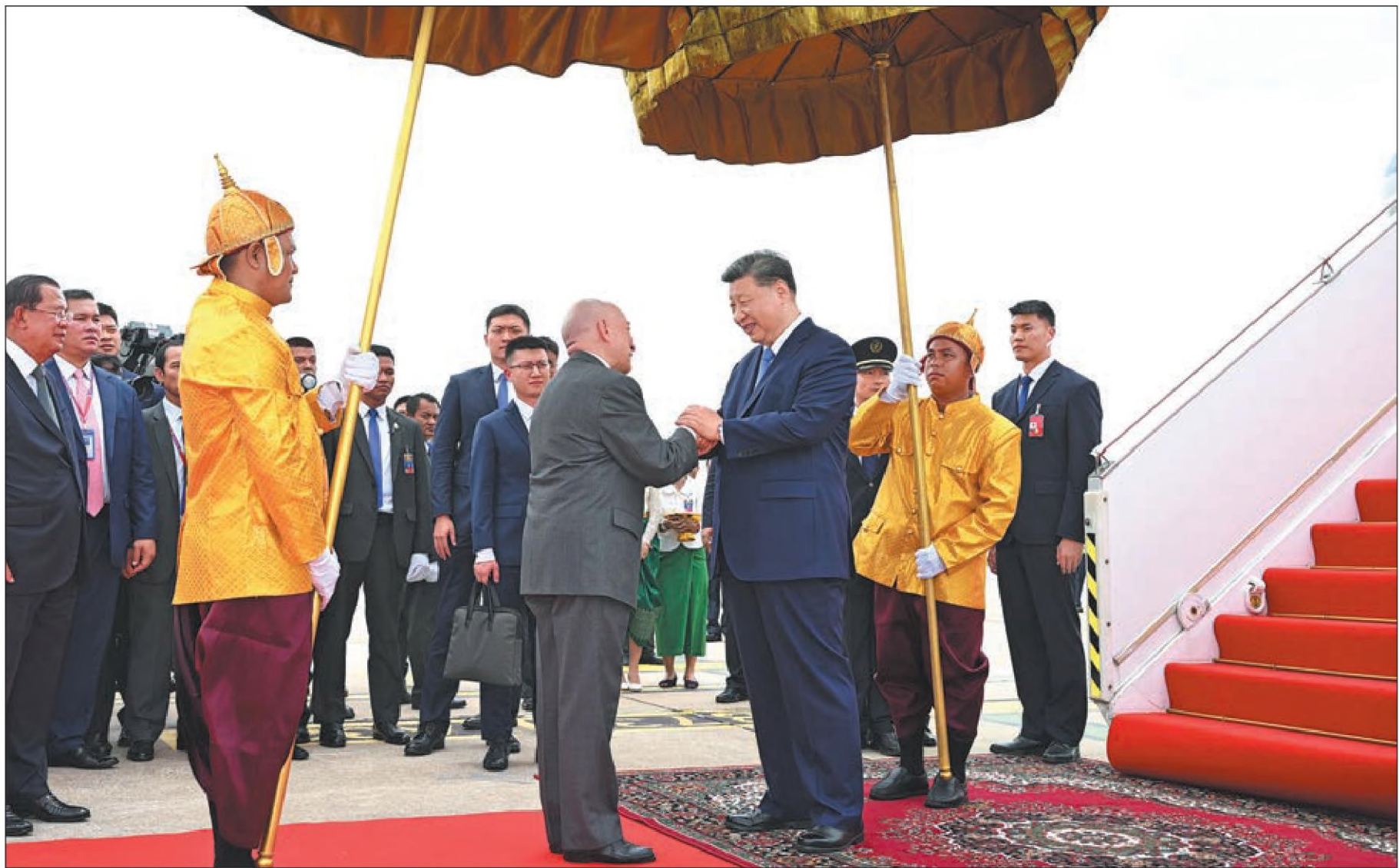


President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet during their meeting on Thursday in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. Xi arrived earlier on Thursday for a state visit to Cambodia, the last leg of the Chinese president's three-nation trip to Southeast Asia. LIU WEIBING / XINHUA



President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, To Lam (front, right), general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee, and Vietnamese President Luong Cuong (front, left), visit a photo exhibition marking the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China-Vietnam diplomatic ties in Hanoi on Tuesday. YIN BOGU / XINHUA

BOLSTERING PARTNERSHIPS



President Xi Jinping is greeted on Thursday by Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni during a grand welcoming ceremony upon Xi's arrival in Phnom Penh. XIE HUANCHI / XINHUA



Above: President Xi Jinping attends a grand welcoming ceremony held by Malaysian King Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar (front, right) at Istana Negara, or the National Palace, in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday morning during Xi's state visit to Malaysia. DING LIN / XINHUA

Above right: General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping, accompanied by General Secretary of the CPV Central Committee To Lam, visits Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi on Tuesday morning to pay tribute to the late Vietnamese leader. YAN YAN / XINHUA

Right: People in Phnom Penh hold flowers and wave the flags of China and Cambodia to welcome President Xi Jinping, who arrived on Thursday for a state visit to Cambodia. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY



XI'S VISIT

Boost in profits for regional farmers

Cooperation helps Cambodian farm produce 100 tons more fruit per year

By YANG WANLI
in Siem Reap, Cambodia
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In Pailin, a province on the northern edge of the Cardamom Mountains in southwestern Cambodia, thousands of longan trees are in full blossom.

According to 63-year-old local longan farm owner Sar Cham Roern, this year will see another bumper harvest.

Sar has been growing longan since 1997. His family business has thrived in the past three decades thanks to the cooperation of Chongqing Jinguoyuan Industrial Co, a Chinese company focusing on fresh fruit trade.

Established in Chongqing municipality in 1982, Jinguoyuan has been developing the fresh fruit trade with Cambodia for over 10 years.

In Pailin, the company built its own trading firm, which began operations in 2022 when longan was officially listed among the fresh fruits that can be exported directly from Cambodia to China.

Apart from Cambodia, it also partners with farms in Thailand and Vietnam covering a wide range of tropical fruits such as pineapple and mangosteen.

"Southeast Asia holds great resources of tropical fruits, but they also face challenges due to a lack of scientific management and the support of modern technology," said Pu Jianfei, executive director of Jinkwoyuan Jian Ai Agricultural Technology (Cambodia) Co.

Pu's company is Jinguoyuan's local branch, which has run its own orchard in Pailin since last year. Apart from its huge consumer market, he noted that China has supported the region with its advanced farming skills.



A farmer packs newly harvested longans at an orchard in Pailin, Cambodia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"As our fruits are also sold to Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Europe where a higher standard of agriculture chemicals is applied, we provide farmers with the latest recommended pesticides and fertilizers to standardize the planting," he said.

They also invite Chinese experts to provide local farmers with regular technical support to enhance production, he added.

Besides drip irrigation systems, Pu said the company has introduced drones to improve farming efficiency.

A drone can spray one hectare of farmland in an hour — at a cost of less than \$10. They also reduce the health risks to farmers.

"With the support of Jinguoyuan, the amount of fruit produced in my orchard surged from 200 tons to 300 tons per year and the quality of longan has also improved," said Sar, the farmer.

"What's more important is that we no longer worry about demand

fluctuating under the partnership with Chinese companies, which has a large business map covering many other regions," he added.

Strong diplomatic ties between Cambodia and China have led to a significant increase in the value of trade between the two countries.

According to the General Department of Customs and Excise of Cambodia, trade reached a record high of more than \$15 billion in 2024, nearly 30 percent of Cambodia's total trade for the year.

The Council for the Development of Cambodia revealed in January that a total of 414 investment projects worth approximately \$6.9 billion were approved last year, with Chinese investments remaining the largest source, accounting for nearly half of total foreign investment.

To strengthen its partnership with Cambodia, Jinguoyuan launched a self-operated orchard last year. Covering an area of 3,200

hectares with 8,000 trees, the orchard is expected to see a total output of 4,500 tons of longan.

"We aim to build it as a demonstration orchard for local farmers, and help them to better manage their orchards in a more scientific way," said Pu. "Working with Cambodians for years, we treasure their hardworking, honest and kind spirit. Our friendship and partnership will be further developed in the future."

To boost mutual understanding, Pu said the company organizes trips to China for their partners in Southeast Asia. Held once every three years, the trips give partners a vivid picture of China that impresses them a lot.

Among the sites they have toured, he said that Cambodians like the Dazu Rock Carvings most.

"They might find a spiritual connection between Angkor Wat and the Chinese cave temple dating from the 9th to 13th centuries, as I can see their serious faces," he added.

Educational bonds with ASEAN strengthened

By YANG JUN and LIU BOQIAN
in Guiyang

When Yu Dandan received the news that one of her Cambodian students had landed a high-paying job at a Chinese-funded company, she couldn't hide her joy.

Since 2018, Yu has taught international students at Guizhou Vocational and Technical College of Water Resources and Hydropower.

The State-run college, located in Qingzhen Vocational Education City in Guiyang, Guizhou province, has a growing number of students from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand who are learning skills there. As one of China's largest vocational education clusters, the region has become a beacon for foreign youths seeking quality training and promising careers.

In July 2023, the first group of 35 students graduated from Yalong Silk Road College, a joint initiative between the college in Guizhou and the Regional Polytechnic Institute Techo Sen Battambang in Cambodia. Chinese instructors provided both language training and hands-on technical instruction, with a focus on cultivating talent in electrical automation technology.

"Our first group of students was outstanding. They earned dual certificates from both our institution and our Cambodian partner. Most are now employed by Chinese-funded companies, and some have already been promoted to management roles," Yu said.

Since the program began enrolling international students, Yu has dedicated herself to teaching Chinese language courses. Walking around campus, she remembers the names of every international student she meets.

All technical instruction is delivered in Chinese, so students must quickly adapt to the language.

"Most of them could barely say 'hello' in Chinese when they arrived. Seeing their progress until they could follow lessons in Chinese is rewarding," she added.

"Our curriculum not only imparts practical skills, but also everyday and professional Chinese communication. Learning both the language and technical skills meets the needs of our students," Yu explained.

Keo Souching and Heng Kim Ea from Phnom Penh are among the students enrolled in the college's one-year Chinese language program. After passing the HSK — the official standardized Chinese language proficiency test — they will have the opportunity to further develop their professional skills or apply to other universities in China.

"I've been in China for nearly a year and I want to major in finance," Keo told China Daily in fluent Chinese. "I've applied to Nankai University as I'm hoping to continue my studies and build a career in China. Before arriving, I was worried about adapting to the climate, but Guizhou's weather suits me perfectly — I really like it."

Heng, 19, who was first drawn to China by the traditional costumes and culture she saw in TV dramas, said her favorite class is Chinese traditional culture. After graduation, she hopes to return to Cambodia to become a Chinese language teacher.

"Guizhou stands out for its strengths in vocational education, particularly in fields like water conservancy, hydropower and

Our curriculum not only imparts practical skills, but also everyday and professional Chinese communication."

Yu Dandan, teacher at the Guizhou Vocational and Technical College of Water Resources and Hydropower

transportation," said Song Haijing, the college's director of international education. "Its proximity to Southeast Asia, along with similar climates and dietary habits, makes it especially appealing to students from the region."

According to Song, the college currently hosts 43 international students, 23 of whom are Cambodian. The second round of enrollment for Yalong Silk Road College will begin in September. Chinese teachers will travel to Cambodia for instruction, and top-performing students will be given the opportunity to further their studies in China.

Song's college is not alone in its efforts. Across the province, other colleges such as Guizhou Communications Polytechnic University are also working with Southeast Asian partners to share expertise and expand training programs.

Cambodia and Malaysia both face development needs in transportation infrastructure, including construction and operational management. "Based on student employment feedback, Cambodia still requires a large number of transportation engineering professionals to support the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and other projects," said Lyu Xinlu, the head of international affairs at the university.

Founded in 1958 and known as the "cradle of Guizhou transportation talent," the college has produced graduates who've played key roles in China's transportation and bridge-building sectors. Now, it's taking its expertise in bridge engineering in karst areas to the global stage.

In partnership with Zhejiang Institute of Communications and Cambodia's Industrial Technical Institute, the college has set up a specialized training center in Cambodia.

Early in 2019, the university sent two groups of instructors to Cambodia to conduct surveying and engineering training.

Lyu explained that the university has sent over 10 teachers so far and has trained a total of 772 local students, with some already gaining practical experience in Cambodia's Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway project.

"Our cooperation and exchanges with ASEAN countries have spanned over a decade, and this year, we plan to send five teachers to Cambodia for further training efforts," Lyu added.

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China and Cambodia sign MoU to coproduce movie

By XU FAN
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Producers of *The Angkor Code*, a feature-length movie set to be coproduced by China and Cambodia, signed a memorandum of understanding in Phnom Penh on April 11, as part of a new project to boost cultural exchanges between the two countries.

The film, jointly produced by the Beijing-based ShineWork Pictures and Cambodian conglomerate Soma Group, will be set against the backdrop of the centuries-old history of Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious structure.

Iris Wang, the film's producer, told China Daily that the idea for the project emerged in July last year. It marks their third such internationally coproduced project, following megastar Jackie Chan's Sino-Indian blockbuster *Kung Fu Yoga* and *The Composer*, the first Sino-Kazakh film recounting a lesser-known story about late musician Xian Xinghai.

After traveling to Cambodia multiple times over the past half year in search of script inspiration, Wang revealed that the movie will interweave appealing elements of sus-

pense, adventure and action stunts to tell a human-interest story about the friendship between a Chinese martial artist and a Cambodian fighter.

"The story will be about how they team up to stop an international gang that steals precious treasures, with aid from both countries," said Wang, also vice-president of ShineWork Pictures.

With China being one of the world's largest movie markets, Wang said they hope the film will spark the interest of more Chinese tourists to travel to Cambodia, a country rich in history and cultural heritage.

Scheduled to feature a cast of A-list stars from China and Cambodia as well as actors from other countries, the film will showcase the stone carvings of Angkor Wat; stunts from Kun Khmer, a combat sport that originated in Cambodia; and the Apsara Dance, a traditional performance with roots dating back to the 7th century.

Jonathan Shen, president of ShineWork Pictures, recalled that *The Composer* beat over 300 competitors from 12 countries and regions to win the Golden Rumdul Award in the Best Film category —



A promotional poster for the movie *The Angkor Code* which will be coproduced by China and Cambodia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the top honor at the 2nd Cambodia-Asia Film Festival — in August last year. The triumph earned acclaim from industry insiders and attendees, including Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia Wang Wenbin.

"Through the new film, created under the Belt and Road Initiative frame, we hope to capture the vibrant spirit of modern Cambodia and celebrate the enduring friend-

ship between our two nations," Shen added.

Krasna Cham, chairwoman and CEO of Soma Group, described the coproduction as a landmark event for cultural exchange between Cambodia and China, commenting that it would vividly showcase Angkor Wat's historical heritage and modern vitality to audiences in China and around the world.

E-commerce firms accelerate push into Southeast Asia

By FAN FEIFEI
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Chinese e-commerce platforms are speeding up their push into Southeast Asia to cultivate new customers and rev up sales, as cross-border online marketplaces have become an important new driving force for bolstering the growth of China's foreign trade amid external uncertainties.

TikTok Shop, the e-commerce marketplace of popular short-video app TikTok, which is owned by Chinese tech giant ByteDance, has already entered Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said the company is planning to invest billions of dollars in Southeast Asia

over the next few years. While TikTok did not provide a detailed breakdown of its planned investments, Chew said the company would provide training and support to small vendors looking to join TikTok Shop.

He added that content on the platform was becoming more diversified as it adds more users and expands beyond advertising into e-commerce, allowing consumers to purchase goods through links on the app during livestreaming.

According to Momentum Works, a Singapore-based venture outfit, TikTok Shop has become the second largest e-commerce platform in Southeast Asia behind Shopee, with Vietnam and Thailand being the fastest growing e-commerce markets.

Online discounter PDD Holdings, the parent company of Chinese e-commerce platform Pinduoduo, has launched its cross-border e-commerce platform Temu in Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Temu offers a wide selection of merchandise, including apparel, consumer electronics, jewelry, shoes, cosmetics and baby products with deep discounts and coupons as part of its strategy to attract price-conscious consumers in the region. Most of the products are shipped directly from factories or warehouses in China.

Chen Lei, chairman and co-chief executive officer of PDD Holdings, said the company hopes to leverage the supply chain capacity it has

accumulated over the years to create a new channel that enables consumers in different countries and regions to directly purchase products from factories, providing more flexible and personalized supply chains, as well as more cost-effective shopping experiences.

Data from research firm eMarketer shows that revenue from the e-commerce market in Southeast Asia stood at \$113.9 billion in 2023, up 18.6 percent year-on-year, significantly surpassing the global average growth rate of 8.9 percent.

Google, Temasek and Bain & Company said in a report that Southeast Asia's digital economy reached \$263 billion in gross merchandise value or GMV in 2024, with sectors like e-commerce surging 15 percent year-on-year to \$159

billion, fueled significantly by video commerce.

It added that video commerce is reshaping the e-commerce landscape in the region, driving impressive growth and transforming local consumers' shopping experiences. From live shopping to creator-led content, video is now an integral part of how people shop online.

Southeast Asia presents vast opportunities for Chinese cross-border e-commerce platforms aspiring to expand their footprint globally, thanks to the increasing penetration rate of internet and smartphone use, as well as gradually improved logistics networks, payment systems and supply chains in the region, said Chen Tao, an analyst at the Beijing-based internet consultancy Analysys.

"Price, quality and service are the most important factors consumers consider when buying products, and cost-effective commodities have shown obvious advantages amid

global economic downward pressure," Chen said.

He added that one of the core strengths of Chinese cross-border online marketplaces in Southeast Asia lies in products with competitive prices and fast delivery, which are highly dependent on the establishment of supply chains.

China's cross-border e-commerce sector has seen robust growth in recent years. The sector's total imports and exports reached 2.63 trillion yuan (\$359.74 billion) in 2024, an increase of 10.8 percent year-on-year, said the General Administration of Customs.

Moreover, Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group has ramped up investment in Lazada, its online retail unit in Southeast Asia amid intensifying competition. Lazada received its first investment from Alibaba in 2016 when the Hangzhou-based company took a controlling stake.

XI'S VISIT



China and the World Roundtable | China-Southeast Asia Relations

Editor's note: As important members of the Asia-Pacific region, China and Southeast Asian countries have a long history of friendship. In face of global challenges, the two sides should uphold solidarity and harmony, ride the tide of history and heed people's aspirations. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Phan Thi Hong Xuan

Cultural diplomacy powerful bridge

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia has attracted global attention not only to the strategic dialogues but also to the subtle yet vital dimension of cultural diplomacy between China and Southeast Asia.

While geopolitical and economic factors remain the pillars of China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, it is becoming increasingly evident that the enduring strength of this relationship lies in people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and shared narratives.

And President Xi's visit to the three Southeast Asian countries provides an invaluable opportunity to boost China's soft power and deepen relations with ASEAN societies.

China and Southeast Asia share more than just geographical proximity. From the ancient Maritime Silk Road to the flourishing Chinese communities across Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia, cultural integration predates modern diplomacy.

Southeast Asia hosts nearly 30 million people of Chinese origin, the largest overseas Chinese population, serving as living bridges between China and Southeast Asia, embodying both shared heritage and unique local adaptation.

President Xi's visit to the three Southeast Asian countries comes at a transformative time. China and Malaysia have elevated their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership, while Vietnam and Cambodia have reaffirmed their enduring cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative framework.

Beyond state-level agreements, China's soft power has expanded across ASEAN, particularly in education, media, tourism and cultural exchanges. Southeast Asia hosts 41 Confucius Institutes, including 16 in Thailand. Also, China remains a top destination for ASEAN students, with over 100,000 youths from Southeast Asian countries accounting for 54 percent of China's international student population in 2019.

Tourism has been a key driver of people-to-people exchanges. Yet experts warn that Southeast Asian cultures remain underrepresented in Chinese media and education, creating an imbalance.

The future of China-ASEAN cooperation depends on not only state-led initiatives but also grassroots connections. As an anthropologist, I have observed that



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authentic trust is built not in negotiation rooms but in everyday interactions in classrooms, neighborhoods, festivals and digital spaces.

A youth exchange forum in late 2024 between Vietnam and China showed how students can build empathy and cross-cultural understanding through shared activities like traditional art, environmental projects, and media storytelling. Such efforts should be a key part of ASEAN-China cooperation.

But cultural diplomacy comes with challenges. In Southeast Asia, concerns sometimes arise over politicized media,

biased textbooks, and dominant Chinese symbols overshadowing local cultures. To address these concerns, China and ASEAN must uphold reciprocity and mutual respect.

Encouraging Chinese students to learn Southeast Asian languages, integrating Southeast Asian cultural content into Chinese media, and supporting ASEAN-led cultural centers in China would be welcome gestures of a balanced partnership.

Looking ahead, the cultural dimension of China-ASEAN cooperation must evolve from unilateral outreach to co-created narratives. In times of global uncertainties, identity politics and technological disruption, investing in human connectivity is not optional — it is essential.

This demographic reality is particularly significant in Southeast Asia, where 60 percent of the population is under 35. These digital natives are fluent in the language of social media, familiar with global trends and emerging technologies, yet grounded in local traditions and values. They are the emerging architects of regional identity and international engagement.

Recognizing this, China should strengthen youth-centered collaboration with ASEAN by expanding programs that empower young people, support joint research on shared cultural heritage, encourage digital economy innovation, and promote tourism to both iconic and lesser-known sites. By engaging this generation, China and ASEAN can build a more inclusive, forward-looking regional community.

President Xi's visit to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia is not only a diplomatic milestone; it is a powerful reminder of the enduring role of culture as a bridge between nations. As Confucius said, "Virtue never dwells alone; it always has neighbors."

China and ASEAN, bound by history and inspired by shared aspirations, can set a global example of the peaceful coexistence of rising powers and diverse societies — not despite their differences, but because of them.

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



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Ky Sereyvath

China-ASEAN ties set to get a timely shot in the arm

Chinese President Xi Jinping's high-stakes diplomatic visit to Cambodia from Thursday to Friday is expected to further consolidate the "ironclad" friendship between the two countries.

Cambodia-China trade has been growing at a steady pace in recent years, exceeding \$15 billion, up 23 percent year-on-year, in 2024, with Cambodia's exports to China surging from \$1.24 billion in 2022 to \$1.48 billion in 2023, and \$1.75 billion in 2024. Cambodia's trade with China has grown steadily from 2016. As a matter of fact, bilateral trade expanded even during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting the resilience of the two economies. Also, China has been the largest source of foreign investment in Cambodia for 12 consecutive years, accounting for almost 50 percent of the total investment till last year.

Given these facts, President Xi's high-level visit is likely to be fruitful for both countries.

Cambodia is among the countries worst hit by Washington's reciprocal tariffs, facing duties of 49 percent on its imports to the United States.

Although the White House has reversed its decision, delaying the tariffs on Cambodia and the rest of its trading partners, except China, for 90 days, Cambodia is expected to expand its trade with China in agricultural products, which is already included in the China-Cambodia Free Trade Agreement, and other materials in order to retain its position on the regional and global supply chains.

China can easily import 1 million tons of rice, as well as cashew nuts from Cambodia. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet is particularly keen on expanding the export of Cambodian cashew nuts, and strengthening the "rice and fish corridor", and the industrial chain.

However, the United States is the largest export market for Cambodia, accounting for 37.9 percent of Cambodia's total exports. But since China and the US belong to different market segments for Cambodia, China can be a major destination for Cambodian farm products while the US can be the largest market for Cambodia's industrial products.

Besides, Cambodia is seeking to further strengthen cooperation with China in services, including the tourism and tourism-related sectors, while Beijing's economic policy of high-level opening-up is benefitting both China and its trading partners, including Cambodia, and promoting people-to-people exchanges. For example, according to pre-pandemic data from 2019, the number of Chinese tourists accounted for 38.7 percent, by far the highest percentage, of all visitors to Cambodia.

More important, how can Cambodia attract Chinese investments to its cashew nut industry, as well as green energy and environmental cooperation sectors should be part of the discussions between the two sides during President Xi's visit.

As a rising manufacturing hub, Cambodia has seen a surge in Chinese investments in recent years as companies move production out of China to take advantage of the relatively low labor costs in Cambodia and hedge against US levies.

The relocation of Chinese factories to Cambodia and sharing of the value and supply chains by China and Cambodia should also be part of the high-level discussions. For instance, the relocation of BYD's factories to Cambodia should be accompanied by the shifting of the spare parts industries to the country, in order to reduce the cost of production and somewhat offset the impact of the US' tariffs on Cambodian and Chinese products. To achieve that, the two countries should sign agreements across multiple sectors — including railway connectivity between China and Cambodia via Laos, agricultural trade, the digital economy and the green economy.

The Sino-Cambodian discussions during President Xi's visit should also include how to improve air connectivity between the two countries.

While Cambodia can become the hub-and-spoke of Chinese products in ASEAN through improved infrastructure connectivity including railway, waterway and airway, the Bank of China branches in Cambodia should play the role of an intermediary bank in ASEAN for promoting ASEAN-China banking services, which in turn can help increase the use of the Chinese yuan and boost Chinese investment in Cambodia.

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



The author is director-general at the Institute of China Studies, Royal Academy of Cambodia.

Loh Wee Keng

Malaysia visit a defining moment in cooperation

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Malaysia from Tuesday to Thursday is an opportune occasion for the two countries to advance strategic cooperation amid mounting global trade tensions and shifting economic alliances.

President Xi's visit demonstrates Beijing's commitment to deepening ties with Kuala Lumpur at a time when the global economy faces turbulence, primarily due to the United States' widening tariff regime. For Malaysia, the visit is expected to reinvigorate projects under the frameworks of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, create new opportunities in the high-tech sector, and strengthen the regional economic architecture.

China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for years, with bilateral trade reaching record highs, while Malaysia has positioned itself as China's second-largest trading partner within ASEAN. The two sides therefore should focus on expediting infrastructure development, promoting digital innovation, and advancing green technology.

During Xi's visit, Chinese companies are expected to hold discussions on major infrastructure ventures including high-speed railways, power plants and digital connectivity, building on ongoing projects like the East Coast Rail Link and the twin industrial parks in Kuantan in Malaysia's Pahang province, and Qinzhou in China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region as part of "Two Countries, Twin Parks" project under the BRI.

These initiatives have boosted invest-



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ments and created jobs. For instance, Alliance Steel, one of the biggest steel-makers in Malaysia and among the first companies to set up a plant in the Kuantan park, employs more than 4,000 local people.

Given that China is a global leader in electric vehicles and artificial intelligence, and Malaysia's strong foundation in electrical and electronics products, the two sides are well positioned to move from traditional trade toward co-development. For example, the EV conference in Malaysia in December showed growing Chinese interest in establishing local operations in fields such as charging stations and battery technology. In fact, Malaysia — benefiting from Chinese know-how and local experts in chips — has all the potential to become a regional EV and AI hub.

Xi's visit to three Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, comes at a time when US tariffs on imports from China and other countries threaten to destabilize global trade.

That the US tariffs are part of the administration's bargaining strategy is clear. It's a US strategy to put pressure on other countries, forcing them to meet the US' conditions during negotia-

tions. In the short term, the impact of the US tariffs may be immense. But beyond that, Southeast Asia, along with China, can strike a new balance in the region, with ASEAN member states reducing their dependence on external powers, and stabilizing their relationship with China.

ASEAN member states, including Malaysia, have a young and growing population with strong purchasing power. If China's exports to the US are disrupted by tariffs, it can find in ASEAN a valuable alternative market. And since Malaysian imports from the US will become more costly, this is the right time for the country to deepen cooperation with China and work together to navigate global uncertainties.

Malaysia's role as ASEAN chair this year has boosted its diplomatic clout. By promoting regional consensus, Malaysia can help offset the protectionist shocks while advancing shared economic interests. The changing trade landscape, ironically, creates new space for ASEAN-China collaboration to grow.

The rise of cross-border digital payments and cooperation in financial technology presents yet another frontier. Malaysia has been modernizing its financial infrastructure and is in discussions with other ASEAN members on using currencies other than the US dollar to settle trade deals. By collaborating with China — already a global leader in digital currency and mobile payments — Malaysia could strengthen its position as a fintech hub that promotes yuan-based transactions.

Malaysia offers a range of strategic advantages that make it an attractive destination for Chinese investment. The cultural ties between the two countries and the friendly relations between their governments provide a solid foundation for both people-to-people and business-to-business collaboration. Since the introduction of mutual visa-free travel last year, the number of travelers between China and Malaysia has surged, further fostering deeper cultural and economic links.

In the realm of politics, Malaysia has demonstrated remarkable stability. Despite the changes in ruling parties in recent years, the country's efficient civil service has ensured continuity in governance, providing a stable environment for business operations. Political stability, combined with Malaysia's strategic location, makes it an ideal hub for international trade.

President Xi's visit is expected to deepen mutual trust and create new development opportunities. For Malaysia, the path forward lies in leveraging this moment to complete long-term projects, attract sustainable investment, and champion regional economic resilience.

For China, it is a chance to deepen engagement with a dependable partner that can facilitate broader integration in Asia and beyond.

In times of geopolitical uncertainties, it is this kind of pragmatic, forward-looking collaboration that offers the most promising path to shared prosperity.

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

COMMENT

Editorials

Strengthening China-Cambodia cooperation burnishes ironclad ties to a brighter sheen

China has friendly relations with many countries but only a few of them are described as "ironclad". Having withstood the harsh tests of international changes over the decades, relations between China and Cambodia have proved they are well-deserving of that designation.

The two countries have supported each other in maintaining their respective stability and continually promoted mutual development and prosperity since the founding of bilateral diplomatic ties 67 years ago. During the process, the two countries have set an example for building a new type of international relations and have taken the lead in working together to advance the Belt and Road Initiative and build a community with a shared future.

As President Xi Jinping, who is paying a state visit to the country from Thursday to Friday, wrote in a signed article published by Cambodian media, the China-Cambodia community with a shared future is deeply rooted in good-neighborly relations, defined by mutual commitment to friendship and righteousness, powered by equality and mutual benefit, and founded upon inclusiveness and mutual learning.

Under the guidance of heads-of-state diplomacy, the cooperation between the two countries is high-quality, high-level and of a high standard, and the construction of a community with a shared future between China and Cambodia has entered a new era. Being rooted in the actual development needs of the two countries, their friendship is not an interest calculation, stopgap measure or part of any bloc confrontation. It is in line with the common interests of the two countries and their peoples.

Building on that momentum, the two countries should continue to forge greater synergy between the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy, and expedite the development of the Industrial and Technological Corridor and the Fish and Rice Corridor.

Faced with the turbulent international situation and the acute global challenges, both countries are committed to supporting each other, and are deepening their mutual political trust. By maintaining close high-level exchanges and adhering to the blueprint of building a community with a shared future for China and Cambodia in the new era from a strategic height, the two countries can help each other emerge stronger from this crucible of pressures.

By strengthening their industry and supply chain cooperation, and expanding their high-quality mutually beneficial cooperation in fields such as advanced manufacturing, green development, digital economy and other fields, the two partners can help promote each other's modernization process.

To prevent this process from being derailed, the two sides should strengthen their strategic communication to resolutely oppose the efforts of those seeking to drive a wedge between them and sow discord in the region. To build a higher level security guarantee, the two countries should conduct more joint exercises and training, and jointly establish Belt and Road project security and emergency management mechanisms, crack down on criminal activities, such as telecommunications network fraud, and work together to create a safe environment for the development of the two countries.

By adhering to the principle of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, they can actively promote peace and stability for themselves, and the region at large. To that end they should draw wisdom from the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Bandung Spirit, accelerate the construction of a Lancang-Mekong community with a shared future for peace and prosperity, and work together to build a peaceful and prosperous Asian homeland.

It is in line with the common interest of the two countries and the region for the two sides to advocate an equal and orderly multipolar world, and to join hands to resist protectionism and maintain an open and cooperative international environment. Over the years, China and Cambodia have proved they are good neighbors, good brothers, good friends and good partners. In continuing to do so, they will further demonstrate how well-merited the epithet "ironclad" is for their relations.

White House peddling snake oil as medicine

In his first major speech since leaving the White House in January, former US president Joe Biden offered a succinct report card on his successor's performance so far.

"Look what's happened now. In fewer than 100 days, this new administration has done so much damage and so much destruction. It's kind of breathtaking," he said in Chicago on Tuesday.

His remarks, though taking aim primarily at the Donald Trump administration's social security policies that threaten to put the retirement benefits of US citizens at risk, can be taken as a totting up of all the damage and havoc that Washington has wreaked with its on-again-off-again tariff policies and conflicting edicts that often run counter to the basic laws of economics or even the US Constitution.

The White House, of course, is trying to put a good light on the grim reality. The US leader has brushed aside recent stock sell-offs due to his announcement of sweeping tariffs, saying "sometimes you have to take medicine to fix something".

But the medicine his administration has prescribed for the US seems to be doing more harm than good.

The scratched-bone therapy that has been inflicted on the US economy in a bid to restore its lost vitality has proved to be extremely painful, not just for the US but the world as a whole. And its side effects have been just as severe. It will require much post-operative care and rehabilitation for the US to regain the trust it has lost and to restore its leadership credibility.

That the US administration is now acting in a self-scripted hospital-themed TV soap rather than the real world was highlighted by the White House implying that its grandstanding tariffs targeting China could reach up to 245 percent, supposedly because of China's retaliatory actions in the ongoing trade dispute.

For the administration it is simply the face value of its treatment methods that matters, not their holistic health efficacy. This was highlighted by Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell on Wednesday, who, attributing it to the Trump administration's radical treatment methods, painted a gloomy picture of the US economy, one that is on a path toward weaker growth with higher unemployment and faster inflation — all at the same time.

"The level of the tariff increases announced so far is significantly larger than anticipated," he said, adding that the lingering uncertainty around tariffs could inflict lasting economic damage. Not surprisingly, US stocks tumbled again following his assessment of the administration's treatment plan, with the Dow diving 1.7 percent and the tech-heavy Nasdaq sliding 3.1 percent on Wednesday.

Amid uncertain US trade prospects, stock market turbulence, and global sell-offs of US assets, S&P Global Ratings has warned that massive debt levels and political dysfunction could trigger another downgrade of the US credit rating.

In its latest report this week, S&P Global Ratings said that it might lower the US credit rating from its current AA+ by one notch if anything worsens the US fiscal situation in the future. The rating agency pointed to the Trump administration's unilateral imposition of hefty tariffs on foreign imports, which economists worry will increase the cost and price of US goods, slow economic growth and push up US unemployment.

European credit ratings agency Scope has also warned that the US could be downgraded if a lengthy trade war erodes long-term trust in the dollar. Washington's sweeping tariffs, the bulk of which has been put on hold temporarily for most nations except for China, may have already inflicted lasting economic damage and could still lead to a financial crisis, according to the agency. "The tariffs would represent the biggest peacetime trade shock to the global economy in more than 100 years," wrote Scope analysts led by Alvis Lennkh-Yunus.

The self-inflicted damage to the US economy has prompted California, the world's fifth-largest economy, to sue the Trump administration in an attempt to end the president's stranglehold on trade. The state stands to lose billions of dollars to tariffs. "President Trump's unlawful tariffs are wreaking chaos on California families, businesses, and our economy — driving up prices and threatening jobs," Governor Gavin Newsom said in a statement. "We're standing up for American families who can't afford to let the chaos continue."

This should be a wake-up call, not only for commerce-savvy states in the US, but all countries that have business and trade links with the US, that the US administration should be quarantined given the extent of the damage already done in such a short period of time due to its willingness to minister shock therapy of its own devising.

A united front against, rather than submission to its enforced experiments, is the only way out for countries in pursuit of a fairer and more sustainable trade system and a brighter future for all.

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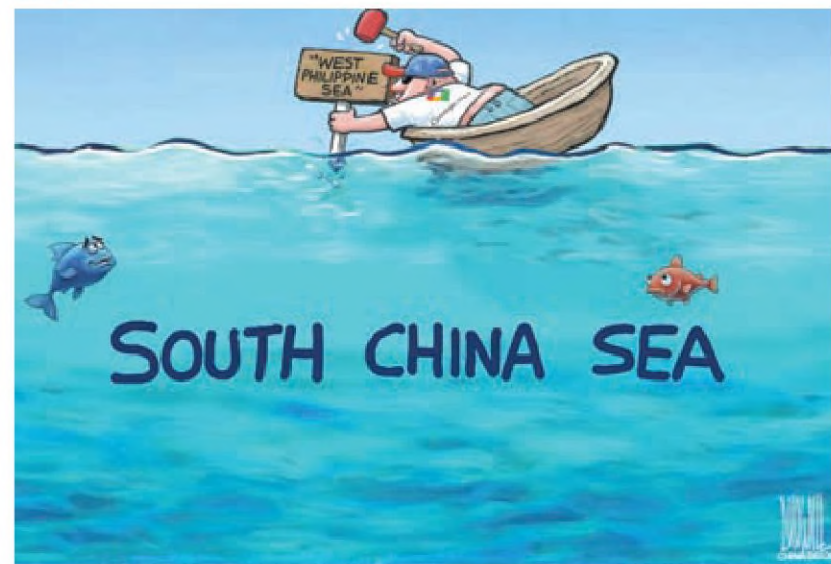
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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Latin America falls prey to new Monroe Doctrine

It is both startling and predictable that Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council nominated to be US ambassador to Chile, should pledge during his Senate hearing that he would try to "restrict" Beijing's access to Chile's resources, especially in space and technology.

It is startling because China's engagement with Chile and the broader Latin American and Caribbean region is rooted in mutual economic interests. China is now Latin America's second-largest trading partner and the largest trading partner for Chile, Brazil, and Peru. In 2024, Chile's total exports exceeded \$100 billion for the first time, with cherry exports alone growing by over 50 percent, most of them going to China. Meanwhile, Ecuadorian bananas, Nicaraguan honey, and Honduran shrimp are increasingly found on Chinese tables.

Bilateral cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative is also flourishing. The first environmentally friendly

light industrial park in Latin America with full 5G coverage opened in Trinidad and Tobago in 2024, while Peru's new Chancay Port is slashing the transportation time for exports to Asia and cutting logistics costs while creating new jobs. These are mutually beneficial ventures, based on shared development needs and the principle of win-win cooperation.

So why should Chile "restrict" access to resources? The answer lies in the distorted lens through which the US political elite view global development. Within today's political system in the US, increasingly shaped by Cold War-style suspicion, any engagement with China is portrayed as dangerous or predatory. It is predictable, then, that someone like Judd should bring the same mindset to international diplomacy.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent recently smeared Chinese cooperation with Latin America, calling it "rapacious" and a vehicle for "debt traps".

The Chinese Embassy in Chile rightly classified these remarks as the "new Monroe Doctrine", the 19th-century US policy that viewed Latin America as the US' exclusive sphere of influence.

Historically, US companies such as the United Fruit Company exploited Latin American agricultural labor to the point where "banana republic" entered the English lexicon to describe economies trapped by foreign domination. To US policymakers, Latin America remains a mere resource base to be exploited, not one that can be engaged with cooperatively and productively. China's growing role in infrastructure, trade, and innovation is largely welcomed in the region as a refreshing alternative to a century of asymmetric relationships with the US.

If the US administration wants to improve ties with Latin American countries, it must stop patronizing them by dictating to them what is appropriate for them.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Reform of betrothal gift custom proves arduous

The Intermediate People's Court of Datong, Shanxi province, announced its second-instance verdict on Wednesday in a case of suspected rape. The court dismissed the appeal of the man while upholding a lower court verdict giving him a three-year prison term for raping his fiancée shortly after their engagement.

Apart from the case itself, the other focal point is the two families' squabble over betrothal gifts. After giving his fiancée's family 100,000 yuan (\$13,697) and some gold jewelry as betrothal gift, the man's family, from a village in Datong, where the local farmers' average per capita income is 16,328 yuan, was required to add the woman's name as joint owner of a house with the man — something the man agreed to in writing but said lat-

er that his fiancée had forced him to sign it — and give another 88,000 yuan to the woman's family as the last part of the betrothal gift once his parents had enough money from selling the pigs they raise.

Were it not for the betrothal gifts, the case may not have been so complicated. The court dismissed online claims that the woman's family was using the rape case to extort money. Before the court registered the case, the woman had tried to return the 100,000 yuan and two rings, but the man refused to accept them feeling outraged that he was charged with rape.

Data from a national marriage customs survey show that the average bride price in rural areas reached 128,000 yuan in 2024, equivalent to

4.2 times the per capita disposable income of farmers. That explains why the central authorities included reform of the betrothal gift custom in the systemic rural reform they outlined in the No 1 document of 2025 unveiled in February.

The document stresses comprehensively managing the custom of high-value betrothal gifts in rural areas, and increasing the role of different social and public organizations to help promote the reform of relevant outdated custom. It also talked of intensifying the crackdown against marriage-related frauds.

The arduous task of doing away with this custom requires the concerted efforts of government departments, various sectors of society and families.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Bandung: Development remains key task

From page 1

Notably, one of the concerns addressed at the Bandung Conference was the uncertain future of Palestinian independence. China's humanitarian assistance and diplomatic efforts in support of the Palestinian cause are commendable.

In 2024, China successfully facilitated a reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah in Beijing, paving the way for peace and stability in the region. This represents China's significant contribution to the realization of the Bandung Spirit, earning respect among countries in the Global South. It requires unity and greater strength of the Global South to bring about lasting peace in the Middle East in line with the two-state solution.

China in the 21st century is significantly different from its 20th-century self. China has experienced a remarkable rise and has become one of the

world's major powers. China considers itself a natural member of the Global South, but its role is more complex. China's capabilities in many fields significantly surpass those of other Global South countries.

Nevertheless, to demonstrate its unwavering solidarity, China has been offering substantial assistance to countries in the Global South. For example, in Southeast Asia, China has created significant opportunities for regional growth. The Belt and Road Initiative has played a crucial role in funding 85 percent of large-scale infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia from 2015 to 2021. Undoubtedly, China has evolved into more than just a member of the Global South; it has become a partner, collaborator and facilitator of development.

At the news conference, the Chinese foreign minister's answer was clear: "No matter how the world changes, our heart will always be

with the Global South. ... China will work with all Global South countries to add a new chapter to the annals of the history of the world."

Indeed, 70 years after the Bandung Conference, peace and development remain key tasks of the Global South. China has been keen on keeping development as a central international agenda. Last November, Chinese President Xi Jinping outlined eight actions China would take in support of global development, generating new energy for faster Global South development.

Hopefully, greater development will bestow the Global South with more strength to contribute to better global governance, for the common good of all humanity on this planet.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



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



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

MUHAMMAD HABIB ABIYAN DZAKWAN AND WANG YUEHONG

Sustaining the Bandung Spirit

The Global South should work together to chart a path so its influence is felt over the next 70 Years

After decades of enjoying multilateral cooperation, an open global economy, and the rules-based order, the world has now entered another tumultuous period. Domestic social and economic landscapes and the fundamentals of the international

community are rapidly transforming. At home, many leaders care about retaining power more than conserving principles. Abroad, a de-globalization movement complains about the downsides, including the loss of jobs and the shuttering of domestic manufacturing industries. The most dangerous part of all is that populism heavily

clouds the judgement of a country with so much entrenched hard and soft power.

This ongoing reality calls for reflection on the 1955 Asian-African Conference, also known as the Bandung Conference. As this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, it is necessary to retrofit the principles.

Looking back at the Bandung Conference, the participating nations regarded the United Nations as the most meaningful ground to assert agency and defend independence. Furthermore, they imagined the UN as a collective force to ensure equitable rights and the fulfilling of the responsibilities of the international community. To make this point, they mentioned some principles of the Charter of the United Nations in the Bandung principles: respect for fundamental human rights, respect for the right to self-defense and the peaceful settlement of disputes. However, since the global order subsequently transformed into bipolar and then unipolar moments, the UN found itself incapacitated to tackle some delicate matters.

The Ukraine crisis and the Middle East crisis have proved this is still the case today. While the UN still serves as a pivotal platform, its contributions barely deliver the three related messages from the Bandung principles. The challenge is no easier following the dramatic withdrawal of the one superpower from several UN agencies and international treaties. Although this is not the first time such a

move has been exercised, the damage is slightly broader, as some countries are now following suit and reconsidering their participation in UN-related frameworks. At the same time, other like-minded developed countries are also showing their inclination to pursue so-called unilateral initiatives which sooner or later may cut the financial resources of multilateral institutions.

Beyond the political-security realm, the Bandung Conference also envisioned a non-zero-sum world in which mutual interests would be promoted while anchoring the rules of the game in international obligations to avoid blatant pressure on other countries. This idea may not necessarily echo the capitalist or free market proposals from the liberal camp, since the Bandung principles emphasize "justice" and "equality". It is more about a facilitated free flow of goods, capital and talent that positively benefits developing countries, as reflected in the UN General Assembly resolution on the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order. However, problems began to emerge after the Doha Development Agenda reached a stalemate in 2008 over agricultural subsidies and market access for developing countries.

A more complicated aspect of that saga is not the emergence of bilateral, regional or plurilateral free trade agreements. Instead, it is the changing United States' strategy. Just days ago, the White House has imposed "reciprocal tariffs" on all countries, rendering its multiple trade agreements and free trade regime virtually meaningless. This blanket approach does not even exempt US treaty allies such as Thailand and the Philippines, countries with which the US has maintained a trade surplus such as Singapore, or developing economies such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. This represents a complete reset of the global economy, and without a doubt, the Bandung principles require recalibration in the US' tariff-centric world. Especially considering that the World Trade Organization's dispute settlement body has also been paralyzed since the first Trump administration deliberately blocked new judge appointments to its Appellate Body in 2019.

Like other international norms, the Bandung principles cannot revitalize themselves. The future of the Bandung principles is what the Bandung Conference participants make for them. That is why China and Indonesia as the two emerging

economies from the Global South should shoulder the responsibility of retrofitting those principles into the context of the new strategic external challenges.

First, on the declining multilateralism, China and Indonesia should ensure that their cooperative initiatives complement the work of multilateral agencies rather than compete against them. The 2023 BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration and the BRICS Informal Consultative Framework on WTO issues are indeed great small steps to achieve this complementarity, but as BRICS incorporates new members, those normative ideals may be worth revisiting again. China and Indonesia could also leverage their shared diplomatic platforms such as the G77+China and the G20 to further discuss any proposal related to strengthening multilateral agencies.

Second, on the declining open global economy, China and Indonesia should seek to ensure that their immediate backyards remain committed to inclusive regionalism practices. Signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2020, resuscitating the trilateral framework among East Asian countries, and upgrading the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 to address emerging issues, such as the digital and green economy, are significant achievements, but they are not enough. To sustain the Bandung Spirit for another 70 years, these efforts must be coupled with meaningful coordination with the rest of the world to unleash the potential of collective actions.

The immediate test is indeed the new global tariff reality. While responses may vary due to differing modalities and applied rates, it is essential to resist the temptation to act selfishly or ignore the struggles of others. The next step should not be limited to resuscitating the open economy, but also focus on preparing new norms for the new situation. Only by remaining mindful and agile can the life expectancy of the Bandung principles be extended for another 70 years and beyond.

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POU SOTHIRAK

Key to open way to community with a shared future

It is the duty of China and ASEAN to ensure the historic principles live on as the foundation for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Asia

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference. On this occasion, it is significant to reflect on the continuous significance of the Bandung Spirit, particularly its legacy to drive the interests of developing nations in Asia and Africa away from the context of Cold War confrontation toward a new world order.



The Bandung Conference in 1955 was known as promoting the fundamental rights of the nations which resisted colonialization as they decisively demonstrated their strength to resist European domination. Its final resolution culminated in the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 by leaders of developing countries who joined hands to avoid being forced to take sides in the Cold War. The initial motivation for the Non-Aligned Movement was the promotion of peace and national development while safeguarding national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and internal security.

The core principles of the Bandung Conference centered around political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs and equality. These issues were of central importance to all leaders attending the conference. At the time most of these nations had newly gained independence from colonial rule.

Therefore, the legacy of the Bandung Spirit should be remembered as the quest of the developing countries in seeking an alternative way for global governance and justice, to achieve greater social and economic development for their people and their nations.

Although the Cold War has ended, the Bandung vitality continues to resonate well in the present day with its fundamental principles progressively inspiring the developing nations in Asia and Africa. These norms continue to shape and guide interaction among the developing countries within the realm of multilateral South-South collaboration.

For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations wholeheartedly shares the same spirit of the Bandung principles — peaceful conflict resolution, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs of other countries, and equality among nations — as the regional grouping strives to safeguard each member state's sovereignty and

independence, promote self-reliance and peaceful cooperation to address the current global challenges, and pursue sustainable development and regional integration.

Stimulated by the Bandung legacy, ASEAN has endeavored to promote regional stability to keep Southeast Asia free from conflicts under its trademark framework of ASEAN Regional Forum by pursuing confidence-building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution, with key principles including reliance on peaceful methods, non-coercion, settlement of disputes without the use of force and consensus-building. As visibly evident to this endeavor, some ASEAN countries' approach to resolving disputes in the South China Sea, for example, reflects the Bandung principles of peaceful means.

In addition, ASEAN follows keenly the Bandung Spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit as the grouping continues to foster economic and political integration among its member states by adhering to the codification of the norms, rules and values of the legally binding ASEAN Charter to boost community building as well as by abiding with its hallmark Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, which serves as a legally binding code for interstate relations and embodies universal principles of peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation among states in Southeast Asia and beyond.

There is another important aspect. The enduring political and normative influence of the Bandung Conference has had profound impact on China, which has demonstrated its strong desire for peace and friendship in Asia and Africa. This is also known as the emergence of Asia's regional order. China has attached considerable importance to the Bandung Spirit and has profoundly pursued connection with Asian and African countries.

After the Bandung Conference, China has engaged more with African countries. China's relationship with other Asian countries has formed an important foundation for Asian regionalism. In Asia, China assumed greater role in relations to the United Nations-based multilateral diplomacy, and it made more engagement with the East Asia and expanded to all directions, including Central, South and Southeast Asia.

After the end of the Cold War, China deepened its dynamic relationship with ASEAN, adhering to the Bandung Spirit, and from the mid-1990s, China started actively

participating in Asian regionalism led by the 10-member grouping.

China remains a champion in carrying the Bandung Spirit forward. During its 60th commemorative summit in Indonesia in 2015, President Xi Jinping acknowledged the significance of endorsing the Bandung Spirit. He called for a sustained commitment to greater openness and closer Asia-Africa, South-South and North-South cooperations toward building a community with a shared future and a new path of peace and development for mankind.

China has been inspired by the Bandung Spirit. China's reform and opening-up process has driven the country's economic prosperity and accelerated regional collaboration for a new type of international relations of win-win cooperation among all countries along the ancient Silk Road, particularly in Asia and Africa.

Next to China is ASEAN. The raison d'être of the regional grouping has been founded on the principles that deeply reflect those of the 1955 Bandung Conference, which advocated self-determination, non-interference and peaceful coexistence, aiming to promote economic and security cooperation among its member states and focusing on regional peace, stability and economic growth.

Although 70 years have passed, the Bandung Spirit remains relevant as ever for all Asian nations eyeing a rightful place in the international system of sovereign states. China and ASEAN members have the duty to keep the Bandung legacy alive for the sake of their future outlook for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Asia.

Both sides must work relentlessly together and with fortitude to overcome the challenges they face in upholding the Bandung Spirit, including reining in forces that can cause regional internal divisions, withstanding regional pressures that can alter the Asian regional order and values, and adapting to changing geopolitical uncertainties and global dynamics to actively influence common development toward a win-win future outlook of the whole of Asia region and beyond.

The author is former minister of industry, mines and energy of Cambodia and a retired academic and distinguished senior advisor to the Cambodian Center for Regional Studies. 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.



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CityDance 双城记

Editor's note: Amity between the people holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. China Daily will come out with a series of stories highlighting Chinese cities' special connections with sister cities, mutual understanding, trust and friendship between peoples of different countries and cultural backgrounds, and shining light on "city diplomacy".

CARVING FRIENDSHIP: SIEM REAP GAINS WITH DATONG



China, Cambodia foster economic cooperation, boost people-to-people exchanges through culture, tourism

By HOU CHENCHEN and ZHU XINGXIN in Datong, Shanxi, and YANG WANLI in Siem Reap, Cambodia

The Yungang Grottoes of North China and the Angkor Wat temple complex of Cambodia are 3,000 kilometers apart, but together these ancient treasures are forging new identities that are helping bring the countries together. The grottoes were carved into cliffs in the 5th century, and Angkor Wat sprang up in the 12th century. And they seemed to take on two distinct roles: Yungang in Datong, Shanxi province, guarded China's overland Silk Road, and Angkor Wat in Siem Reap thrived through the influence of the Maritime Silk Road.

Yungang's caverns have carvings of Central Asian merchants leading camel trains laden with silk, and Angkor Wat's stone walls depict Chinese traders with Khmer counterparts weighing fishery products — twin snapshots of cross-cultural exchange etched in stone for the ages. Now these once silent witnesses to trade, which have in more recent years become UNESCO World Heritage sites, are collaborators in a cultural exchange with truly modern dimensions. That exchange stretches far beyond the dusty confines of archaeology. Now it extends to economics, education, employment, and also where to go for the next overseas trip.

restoration and helping to develop tourism in both places. When their home cities, Datong and Siem Reap, officially became international sister cities in 2021, this relationship forged in stone took on a more modern, dynamic look. Li Xia, director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Datong Municipal People's Government, said advancing the sister-city relationship with Siem Reap and promoting international collaboration in studies will help globalize the Yungang Grottoes and related studies. Following the launch of the game *Black Myth: Wukong* in August, Datong's cultural riches have captivated global tourists, drawing them to explore the game's featured locations, Li said. In 2024, the city's primary scenic attractions welcomed more than 16.7 million visitors, marking a remarkable 108 percent surge from the previous year, according to the Datong government.

Links strengthened Cultural ties between the two cities have strengthened since 2021, she said, anchored by the exhibition *Re-find the Smile of Khmer*, a key part of the Yungang Grottoes' display series. The exhibition illuminates China's technical contributions to Angkor Wat's preservation and functions as a platform to increase Datong's understanding of its sister city's cultural treasures. Yan Hongbin, a scholar in heritage conservation and repair from the research institute of the Yungang Grottoes, who has conducted academic exchanges with Angkor Wat, said both sites have strong demands related to the preservation of their stone treasures. "Angkor Wat is working to combat tropical humidity and biological erosion, and Yungang is battling weathering and water seepage. Cultural relics, viewed through history's long lens, possess life cycles and will ultimately fade. Our mission is to decode their life stories through research and extend their life span through our conservation efforts." In 2011 China set up a project to help restore the Ta Keo temple 6 kilometers from Angkor Wat, and the work was completed in 2018 at a cost of 40 million yuan (\$5.7 million). China is now conducting conservation and restoration work on the royal palace ruins in nearby Angkor Thom, a 10-year project costing 90 million yuan.



A spectacular *Black Myth: Wukong*-themed lantern display dazzles viewers in Datong, which has gained fame for its ancient architecture. Its sister city, Siem Reap, Cambodia, attracts people from across the globe for its rich cultural heritage. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY; XINHUA; PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Our joint conservation work exemplifies the unbreakable Cambodia-China friendship," said Chea Muryith, president of the Cambodian Chinese Evolution Researcher Association. One of the latest examples of such close collaboration is Siem Reap-Angkor International Airport, which opened in October 2023, and bears Shanxi's strong imprint. Shanxi Mechanization Construction Group helped with the airport construction, including building a 3,600-meter runway, four taxiways, parallel taxiway sections on both flanks, drainage systems with slope protection, perimeter roads and fencing for the entire airfield. The Shanxi Daily quoted Hou Yucheng, the airport construction project manager, as saying that with eight-month rainy seasons limiting annual construction windows to 180 days, the company had to optimize schedules while implementing localized management. "Most areas contained soil that rapidly lost

strength when saturated, which is a critical geotechnical hurdle." The airport exemplifies Shanxi's engagement in Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure development, the Shanxi Daily reported. In the airport's first operational year it handled 14,700 flight movements with 1.32 million passengers, Xinhua News Agency reported. Its 15 routes connecting eight countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia have accelerated Cambodia's economic and cultural exchanges, it said. **Beyond borders** Cambodia's tourism industry generated a revenue of \$3.63 billion last year, the country's tourism ministry said, and Angkor Wat welcomed 82.675 Chinese visitors, 48 percent more than that in 2023. The collaboration between Datong and Siem Reap transcends mere paperwork. It is rooted in profound philosophical alignment, the heritage of both cities, in China and Cam-



The Yungang Smile (left) and Khmer Smile (right) showcase ancient artistry — the serene compassion from Yungang Grottoes, and resilient joy from Bayon temple, Siem Reap. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY; LI MENGQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

bodia, embodying Eastern values of peace, harmony and coexistence, scholars say. During fieldwork, Luo Yang, a researcher at the China Institute for Chinese Overseas Studies, said she traversed the kilometer-long Banteay Srei temple daily, each step taking in what she called "civilizational collision," in which cultures intermingle. "Ancient Angkor was the world's crossroads," Luo said. Artifacts unearthed at the Oc Eo port site — Roman coins, Iranian crafts and Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) bronze mirrors of China — prove its role as a Eurasian maritime hub. "Walking through these ruins I constantly sense the open spirit of the Silk Road," she said. Cultural fusion permeates daily life. Local units of measure, such as the silver *liang* and the rice *dou* — echo ancient Chinese terms, their linguistic parallels taking in centuries of exchange. During her research, Luo said, she found households preserving shrines inscribed with Chinese characters. "Even families unfamiliar with the lan-

guage uphold this tradition, a legacy of ancestral intermarriage that maps the contours of cultural convergence." Vuth Sophakna, general director of the International Chinese Education and Teachers Institute at the Royal Academy of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, attributes Angkor's splendor to its historical openness. "By engaging with Silk Road civilizations, Angkor absorbed diverse cultural nutrients through inclusive exchanges." Luo said: "Angkor's prosperity offers enduring lessons — for Cambodia, Southeast Asia and our globalized world — on navigating relations between nations, civilizations and ethnic groups." Like Siem Reap, Datong served as a crossroads of civilizations, at one point as the capital city of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534). The dynasty was established by the ancient ethnic group the Xianbei, which promoted sinicization by adopting the Chinese language, attire, surnames and interethnic marriages, and final-

ly merged with the general Chinese nation by the time of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). "Datong epitomizes China's unified yet diverse national identity," said Sun Yu, a professor in the College of Yungang Studies at Shanxi Datong University. "During the Tang Dynasty alone the region hosted 16 ethnic groups, with cultural integration spanning millenniums." Wu Jiao, a scholar from the research institute of the Yungang Grottoes, points to Cave 12 of the grottoes as evidence of this. Known as the "Music Cave," it contains carvings of 47 musicians and 44 instruments ranging from Persian harps and Indian lute variants to Kucha region's musical instruments such as five-stringed *pipa* and *zheng*.

Interconnected development Sophakna said: "These carvings demonstrate Asia's interconnected civilizational development. Unlike Western colonial expansion, Silk Road exchanges were grounded in equality and mutual benefit. History shows that dialogue, not confrontation, is how civilizations deepen understanding." Jia Weihua, general manager of outbound tourism of Shanxi Baohua Shengshi International Travel Agency in Taiyuan, said the company started direct flights from Datong to Siem Reap in 2017, before the pandemic, and the agency is working on restoring more international chartered routes. Last year, Jia said his travel agency has seen the number of people from Shanxi traveling to Southeast Asia rise by 25 percent. "Driven by visa-free policies and streamlined measures, Southeast Asian tourism is rebounding strongly. Travelers are switching from rushed sightseeing to in-depth cultural immersion. Modern itineraries give priority to immersive local experiences — food, accommodation, transportation and leisure — over tightly packed sightseeing checklists." An increasing number of tour service providers are seeking opportunities using Chinese social media such as Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, to work for individual tourists from China. Song Bunly, 29, one of the best-known Cambodian taxi drivers on Xiaohongshu, said his first post on the platform was written with the help of a Chinese family that visited Siem Reap last July. "This order was sent from a travel agent. I

never knew how to connect with individual customers from China until the trip ended happily and the customers recommended that I use Xiaohongshu." Over the past nine months, Song said, he has served nearly 200 Chinese tourists. In that work, his knowledge of Mandarin has been invaluable. He began to learn it at a local language school after he graduated from college, he said. A year into his learning he started working for a duty-free shop in Siem Reap, where he had many Chinese customers, and his Mandarin skills continued to improve. He eventually set up his own tour company, providing services to Chinese tourists. "In the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh and in the city of Prah Sihanouk, locals who can speak Mandarin can earn as much as \$1,000 a month," he said, adding that his younger brother now works for a Chinese company in Prah Sihanouk. Sun Sreymuth, 21, a Cambodian studying Chinese language at Shanxi University in Taiyuan, said she chose to study in China to learn about cultural legacy and the journey of growth across historical eras. "Shanxi, one of China's most culturally profound provinces with its ancient architectural treasures and traditional arts, offers unparalleled resources to advance my learning." She said she has forged friendships with Chinese peers while fostering cultural exchange through mutual learning. "When I talk about Cambodia's historical heritage, traditional festivals and dance and musical traditions, my Shanxi friends always respond enthusiastically," she said. "Studying in Shanxi has profoundly influenced my cultural growth. It has pushed me to understand diverse cultural contexts, build new connections and become more resilient." After completing her undergraduate studies in China and returning to Cambodia she will use the skills to bring the two countries closer together, she said.

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Online See more by scanning the code.

Guided by blood ties and twists of the tongue

By YANG WANLI in Siem Reap, Cambodia yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

Tour guides are among the few experts who can decipher the hidden messages inscribed on the stone walls of the temples in Angkor Archaeological Park, the UNESCO World Heritage site in dense forest in northwestern Cambodia. Over the past 20 years, Lam Bun Pa, 42, has explored nearly every corner of the historical sites in the country's Siem Reap Province. Lam, a Cambodian tour guide who speaks Mandarin, said that one of the most popular sites among Chinese tourists is the Bayon temple, built at the end of the 12th century. He points to one of the carvings on its outer wall depicting a naval battle between the Cambodian ancestors of the Khmers and Chams, another ancient group from a once-powerful Hindu-Buddhist kingdom that at one stage thrived in what is now central and southern Vietnam. "The carvings also illustrated images of reinforcements from China in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) that were widely believed to have come to help the Khmers. Unlike the Khmers, who usually rode elephants and had long pierced ears, the Chinese rode on horses with a sort of goatee on the chin and a chignon on their head," he said. "The carving demonstrates a friendship between Cambodia and China that goes back to the 12th century, and many Chinese tourists are highly impressed with the vivid details on each figure."

Lam said that before the pandemic he served about 150 Chinese tourists a month. Recalling his career as a tour guide starting 22 years ago, he said that learning Mandarin was the crucial step in his journey. However, it was his parents who steered him in that direction, thinking that having language skills would be a key advantage for survival in times of turbulence. Lam's grandparents were from Guangdong province and fled to Siem Reap during the 1940s. Lam's father later married a Cambodian, and her French language skills helped support the family in the 1970s. "My mother made a living by translating instructions for medicines and other daily supplies imported from France into the Khmer language. She insisted that learning French may be a lifesaving skill that I should also acquire. However, because I'm half Chinese my father wanted me to study Mandarin.

Mandarin class "My parents finally decided to send me to my hometown gathered and shared information. He was always the last one to leave because the coffee shop subscribed to a Chinese newspaper, which he usually brought back for me to read." Thanks to Lam's Mandarin skills, he now earns a good living working as a tour guide, and sometimes as an interpreter for delegations from China. Over the years he has also served thousands of Chinese travelers. "Chinese tourists are very generous,



Lam Bun Pa has explored nearly every corner of the Angkor Archaeological Park, Siem Reap. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

"I remember my father would go to a coffee shop every day where people from his hometown gathered and shared information. He was always the last one to leave because the coffee shop subscribed to a Chinese newspaper, which he usually brought back for me to read." Thanks to Lam's Mandarin skills, he now earns a good living working as a tour guide, and sometimes as an interpreter for delegations from China. Over the years he has also served thousands of Chinese travelers. "Chinese tourists are very generous,

always buying souvenirs, something that helps locals. In big tour groups with Chinese, the atmosphere is always lively and full of laughter." Lam said he hopes that the number of Chinese visitors will return to pre-pandemic levels. Tourism is one of the pillar industries that supports Cambodia's economy. Last year 848,952 Chinese visited the country as tourists, 59 percent more than in 2023, Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism said. China was the third-largest source of foreign holidaymakers to the country after Thailand and Vietnam, it said. **Collaborative efforts** In a recent interview with local media, Tourism Sinan, chairman of the Pacific Asia Travel Association Cambodia chapter, forecast that the number of Chinese tourists visiting the country would continue to rise this year. "I believe that with collaborative efforts between the governments, the private sector and the Chinese embassy in Cambodia, we can expect a gradual increase in Chinese tourist arrivals." Lam, who has traveled to China several times, said he hopes that eventually there will be high-speed rail connectivity between China and Cambodia. "The China-Lao Railway has boosted economic growth and cross-border tourism. People in Cambodia look forward to such a connection that benefits us. China and Cambodia enjoy deep connections that go beyond the economy to culture and history. I really look forward to visiting more historical sites in China as transport links improve."

By HOU CHENCHEN and ZHU XINGXIN in Datong, Shanxi

In the 1980s Chang Weiming's hometown of Datong in North China's Shanxi province was commonly nicknamed the city of coal as it fueled China's industrialization with its resources. In fact since New China was founded in 1949, Shanxi has delivered more than 3 billion tons of premium thermal coal, keeping hundreds of millions of people warm and stoking industrial and economic growth. However, the warm glow that this delivered had a darker, more somber side. As a child, Chang lived next to a thermal power plant and recalls his school years under leaden skies shrouded in coal dust. "In those days no one dared wear white shirts outside because with a few gusts of wind your clothes could be ruined instantly," said Chang, 39, now a power project engineer. However, those days are long gone, Datong having given itself a far-reaching environmental makeover. Cutting-edge, intelligent technologies tied renewable energy infrastructure have converted this traditional coal base into a green energy hub, and it was one of China's national new energy demonstration cities. "Modern Datong embodies smart mining, solar farms, wind turbines and azure skies," Chang said. "While Cambodia lacks substantial coal reserves, its green energy imperatives align closely with Datong's transformation. Both regions share solar energy advantages." In 2020 Chang was project manager at a 30-megawatt solar power plant in the

northwestern Cambodian province of Banteay Meanchey. Shanxi Electric Power Engineering Co, a subsidiary of the China Energy Engineering Corporation, was in charge of the engineering, procurement and construction of the project. The solar plant was the first fully grid-connected project among Cambodia's initial five photovoltaic demonstration initiatives and the largest renewable energy installation in the province. Five years later, in February, the company secured another big engineering, procurement and construction contract in Cambodia for a 250 MW solar farm in the southern province of Prey Veng. The installation, covering 233 hectares, is due to be commissioned next March. **Transition needs** These renewable energy projects strongly align with Cambodia's energy transition needs, experts said. In 2022, the country's energy mix was well out of kilter, the Electricity Authority of Cambodia said, with hydropower accounting for 53.9 percent, coal and oil 38.9 percent and solar a mere 6.7 percent. This heavy reliance on hydropower makes the energy system highly vulnerable, particularly as climate change disrupts rainfall patterns, and both droughts and extreme rainfall events destabilize hydroelectric output. During the historic dry spell of 2022, plunging hydropower generation forced



Staff of Shanxi Electric Power Engineering Co work on a photovoltaic plant amid flooding in Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia, in October 2020. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cambodia to import fossil fuels, with more than a quarter of its electricity imported from Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Consequently, Cambodia has some of the highest electricity costs in Southeast Asia, according to the website Energy Tracker Asia. In its Power Development Master Plan 2022-40, Cambodia has said that by 2030 it aims to have hydropower account for 27.7 percent of domestic energy and solar power 17.7 percent of domestic energy. By 2040 it hopes that hydropower will account for 21.4 percent of that energy use and solar power 29.8 percent.

The newspaper the Khmer Times quoted Akshay Pattumuri Venugopal, a renewable energy expert and technical consultant based in Phnom Penh, as saying that Cambodia possesses the potential to emerge as a solar energy champion. "Cambodia enjoys ample sunshine throughout the year, making it an ideal location for solar energy." The environmental advocate Eric Koons said in an analysis that solar energy in Cambodia is cheaper to produce than most other alternatives, yet the solar energy market is largely untapped.

uninterrupted, and households are paying less for their electricity." Chang underlines the importance of sharing knowledge. "Training Chinese technicians with Cambodian workers created jobs, building local technical capacity for long-term maintenance." Work on the 250 MW project in Prey Veng is now in full swing, and two countries — one that gave light to China and one that seeks light through solar — are writing new energy stories together. Once the Prey Veng plant comes onstream it will significantly advance the country's goal of exceeding 1 gigawatt of photovoltaic capacity by 2030, according to the Cambodian Ministry of Mines and Energy. Wang Xinning, head of the Shanxi Electric Power Engineering Co, said: "The new project will strongly support Cambodia's green transition, accelerate renewable energy adoption and drive structural transformation of the energy sector." As technical achievements were being chalked up, human connections deepened. During floods, the team delivered emergency aid, including 8 tons of rice, 200 cartons of noodles and 400 water boxes, to 160 households, as well as educational materials to the Prah Nreah Preah Primary School. Chang frequently traveled 100 kilometers to Siem Reap with Cambodian colleagues for supplies. Visiting Angkor Wat, he reflected, "As I have worked there, the sister-city ties have given me a profound sense of connection." Chuoy Rath, 35, a Cambodian working on both projects in Banteay Meanchey, said the benefits were clear. "Since operations began, power outages have vanished. Local businesses operate

without interruption, and households are paying less for their electricity." Chang underlines the importance of sharing knowledge. "Training Chinese technicians with Cambodian workers created jobs, building local technical capacity for long-term maintenance." Work on the 250 MW project in Prey Veng is now in full swing, and two countries — one that gave light to China and one that seeks light through solar — are writing new energy stories together. Once the Prey Veng plant comes onstream it will significantly advance the country's goal of exceeding 1 gigawatt of photovoltaic capacity by 2030, according to the Cambodian Ministry of Mines and Energy. Wang Xinning, head of the Shanxi Electric Power Engineering Co, said: "The new project will strongly support Cambodia's green transition, accelerate renewable energy adoption and drive structural transformation of the energy sector." As technical achievements were being chalked up, human connections deepened. During floods, the team delivered emergency aid, including 8 tons of rice, 200 cartons of noodles and 400 water boxes, to 160 households, as well as educational materials to the Prah Nreah Preah Primary School. Chang frequently traveled 100 kilometers to Siem Reap with Cambodian colleagues for supplies. Visiting Angkor Wat, he reflected, "As I have worked there, the sister-city ties have given me a profound sense of connection." Chuoy Rath, 35, a Cambodian working on both projects in Banteay Meanchey, said the benefits were clear. "Since operations began, power outages have vanished. Local businesses operate

GLOBAL LENS

GLOOM ON DISPLAY

World Expo 2025 opens in Japan amid rising global tensions and economic uncertainty



A drone show is held to commemorate the World Expo 2025 at Yumeshima in Osaka, Japan, on Sunday. YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP

The World Expo 2025 opened in Osaka on Sunday to celebrate the start of the six-month event which will run from April 13 to Oct 13.

Participants from more than 160 countries, regions and organizations are showcasing their futuristic exhibits inside about 80 pavilions of unique architecture.

Organizers expect 28 million visitors through mid-October, though ticket sales have been slow, with about 9 million sold in advance — well short of an initial target of 14 million.

The 2025 version opens under a cloud dark enough to cast a shadow over the 390-hectare grounds on the reclaimed Yumeshima, a former dumping ground for industrial waste.

The World Expo's mission is to bring people together, albeit with an acknowledgment that humanity is more divided than at any time, The Guardian said. It opens in the wake of trade tensions and fears of a global economic downturn sparked by the United States' tariffs.

Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba compared the global tensions to a "national crisis" and said Trump's tariffs, especially the 25 percent duty on automobiles, would be a blow to all industries and to Japan's economy.

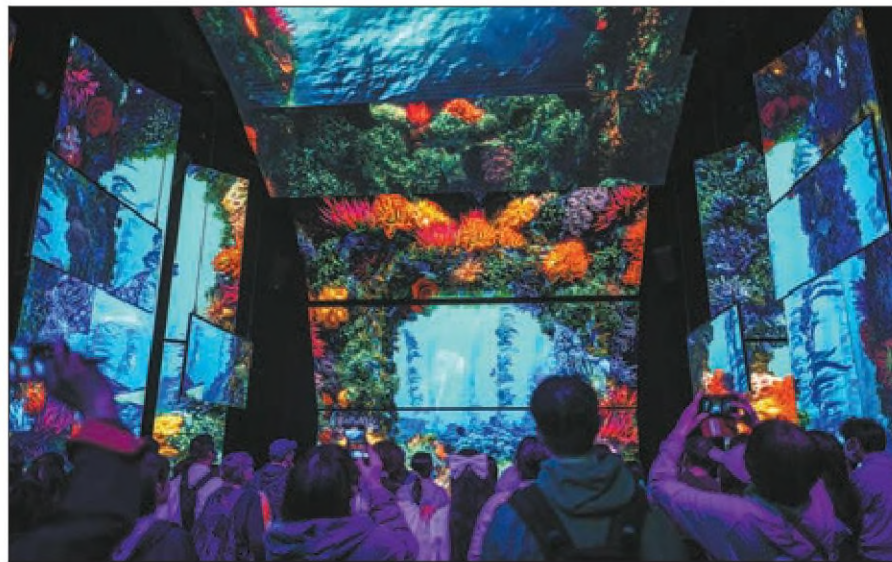
Sachiko Yoshimura, head of the expo's global communications, said: "I think the timing is actually quite fitting." She hoped the holding of the expo could eventually help to address the divisions in the world.

Sou Fujimoto, the expo's architectural mastermind, conceded the event was opening at a time when minds are focused on conflicts, real and commercial.

"The whole global situation is very unstable," he told CNN. But he added:



From left: People visit the Nordic Pavilion on the first day of the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan, on April 13. ISSEI KATO / REUTERS People in front of a World Expo 2025 mark designed from mascot Myaku-Myaku in Osaka on April 14. JIA HAOCHENG / XINHUA



People visit the Australia Pavilion of the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan, on April 13. PHILIP FONG / AFP

ed: "I believe this is a really precious opportunity to show so many countries can come together in one place and think about our future together."

However, the pavilions — and Fujimoto's sustainable architecture — will be dismantled later this year to make way for Japan's first casino.

Expo highlights

Many visitors carried Myaku-Myaku mascots or wore clothes matching its colors — red, blue and white — to get into the mood.

The imaginary creature Myaku-Myaku was born from the fusion of cells and water in a small spring in the Kansai region, organizers say.

The character can transform into various shapes and is good at "finding a rainbow after the rain", which carries the meaning of hope amid global tensions.

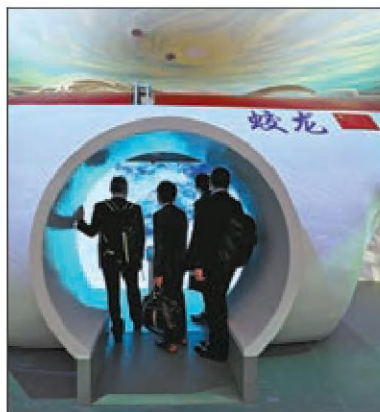
"Creating a future society for our lives" is the main theme of this expo. Exhibits of cutting-edge technology, such as robots and flying cars, as well as pop culture, are among the highlights.

"Pavilions all look amazing," said Laurel Sylvester from New Zealand, visiting with her husband and two children.

Her family is interested in ocean sustainability and planned to visit the Blue Ocean Dome. She said the boys are "super excited to have their photo with the (big Gundam) robot and some of the interesting tech things that are going on."

A small artificial heart made from induced pluripotent stem cells, or iPS, demonstrated a heartbeat at a Japanese healthcare pavilion.

China's highlights include side-by-side displays of lunar soil samples collected by China's Chang'e missions, the *Jiaolong* deep-sea submersible experience capsule and next-generation humanoid robots.



From left: Visitors look at the lab-grown heart made from induced pluripotent stem "iPS heart", at Pasona Natureverse Pavilion, at the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan on April 13. PHILIP FONG / AFP The Chinese humanoid robot called Walker made by UBTECH Robotics of China at the World Expo 2025 in Osaka on April 9. TORIN BOYD / POLARIS People visit the *Jiaolong* deep-sea submersible experience capsule at the China Pavilion of the World Expo 2025 in Osaka on April 13. JIA HAOCHENG / XINHUA

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLDUS

IMF chief: Tariffs raising uncertainty

By ZHAO HUANXIN

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The heightened uncertainty stemming from escalating trade tensions is costly, and the more it is removed, the better, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

Georgieva, speaking at a "curtain-raiser" event in Washington ahead of next week's IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings, noted that the world economy's resilience is being tested "by the reboot of the global trading system" that threatens to cause turbulence in financial markets.

Georgieva said that putting together all the recent tariff increases, pauses, escalations and exemptions, it seems clear that the United States' effective tariff rate has jumped to levels last seen generations ago. Other countries have responded.

"In a world of bilateral tariff rates, each of which may be moving up or down, planning becomes difficult. The result? Ships at sea not knowing which port to sail to; investment decisions postponed; financial markets volatile; precautionary savings up. The longer uncertainty persists, the larger the cost," she said.

Protracted high uncertainty raises the risk of financial market stress, Georgieva said, warning that recent US Treasury's yield curve movements should be taken seriously.

"Everyone suffers if financial conditions worsen," she said.

The IMF chief didn't directly call for a reduction in the tariff war intensified by the US with its trading partners, especially China, in her speech and subsequent interview. However, she emphasized how Washington and Beijing's interactions affect the global economic landscape.

"We would like to see a reduction in uncertainty, and it is hard to get there if the two largest economies are still finding their footing, and when, obviously, from the perspective of the world economy, it is important that the result of all this is a more fairer, rule-based system," Georgieva said.

She stressed that rising trade barriers hit growth upfront, as tariffs, like

all taxes, raise revenue at the expense of reducing and shifting activity — and evidence from past episodes suggests higher tariff rates are not paid by trading partners alone but by importers through lower profits and consumers through higher costs.

She also said that protectionism erodes productivity over the long run and reduces competition while leading to less efficient resource allocation and stifling innovation, particularly in smaller economies.

"I want to repeat (that) my main message is get uncertainty down, so businesses and consumers can plan, and when we do that, we would see very positive impact for the economy," Georgieva said.

Despite massive uncertainty over tariffs, the IMF sees global growth hurt by trade tensions but does not expect a global recession, because "the economic fundamentals are still quite strong," according to Georgieva.

"We, of course, know from experience that the longer uncertainty goes, the more likely it is to have negative impact on growth. So the more we can advance in clarity, remove this uncertainty, the better. But what we see is the real economy is functioning," she said.

She also cited a strong labor market and a solid financial system as parts of reasons why the World Economic Outlook, to be released early next week, will include "notable mark-downs, but not recession".

"One thing I learned through crisis periods is perceptions matter as much as reality," she said. "If perceptions change negatively, that can be quite detrimental to the performance of the economy."

In closing her speech, Georgieva called for unity and courage to navigate an uncertain future, saying that in challenge, there is opportunity, and that the most pressing priority by far is "ensuring that there can be cooperation in a multi-polar world".

"We need a more resilient world economy, not a drift to division," she said. "All countries, large and small alike, can — and should — play their part to strengthen the global economy in an era of more frequent and severe shocks."



Harvard responds

Students, faculty and members of the Harvard University community rally on Thursday in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Trump administration has threatened to block Harvard from enrolling international students unless the school hands over detailed records about its student body. AP

US-China e-commerce ties face tariff hurdles

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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As the United States ramps up tariff pressure on Chinese imports, industry leaders and trade experts are warning of rising inflation, supply chain disruptions and challenges for the thriving cross-border e-commerce sector that has connected consumers worldwide with China's manufacturing strength.

At a recent panel discussion on trade and digital commerce, Wang Mingming, CFO of Thunder International Group, an e-commerce logistics firm in California, emphasized the urgency of transparency and innovation in helping clients navigate changing trade policies.

"The tariffs have been dramatically changing the trading world, especially international trading," Wang told the forum hosted by US venture capital firm Plug and Play. "But I would say the supply chain in the East Asian market is there, and some of it is non-replaceable and can't go back."

Wang said many e-commerce sellers and factories had already shipped goods via ocean freight and are using every available customs clearance channel to store products in fulfillment centers in California.

Ranked the world's fifth-largest economy, California offers a favorable policy environment for businesses, including e-commerce. "So we should be very confident that



We have hugely loyal customers in the US because we are giving them choices and prices that keep them coming back."

Vivian Sun, head of business development at Shein Marketplace

e-commerce trading is still a way that can boost the economy here," Wang said.

At the heart of this sector's expansion are China's leading digital platforms — Shein, Temu, AliExpress and TikTok Shop — dubbed the "four little dragons" for their rapid global rise. Known for ultra competitive pricing and agile supply chains, these platforms have surged in popularity, attracting global consumers with low prices and free shipping on orders as small as \$10.

Vivian Sun, head of business development at Shein Marketplace, emphasized the mutual benefits of global e-commerce expansion.

"We have hugely loyal customers in the US because we are giving them choices and prices that keep them coming back," she said. "That's why we partner with local

merchants to offer products to millions of shoppers across the globe."

Founded in 2012, Shein has evolved into a retail giant serving more than 150 countries, with more than 20 offices and 16,000 third-party sellers. It has invested heavily in social commerce, supplier support and community programs to stay competitive.

However, the US government's imposition of high tariffs on Chinese goods, alongside additional duties targeting other trading partners, has cast a shadow over the continued growth of China's leading e-commerce platforms.

"I've been hearing about the story that the retailers canceled the orders for the factories through their FOB (Free on Board) orders," Wang said. "They will be affected dramatically due to the tariffs."

Officials have warned that punitive tariffs could strain both the economic and geopolitical fabrics connecting the US and China.

"More importantly, cross-border e-commerce is enabling small- and medium-sized enterprises, startups and entrepreneurs from both China and the US to break past traditional boundaries and directly reach each other's consumers," said Xie Xin, science counselor at Chinese Consulate General in Los Angeles.

Xie acknowledged the current tensions and urged collaboration. "If we let these issues lead us toward further decoupling

of commerce and trade, I don't believe that is the original intent of either side," he said. "If we reach a point where trade no longer exists, then even the highest tariffs will ultimately amount to zero."

Feng Ye, CEO of Thunder International Group, warned that continued tariff hikes could intensify inflation in the US.

"Inflation in the US is already a serious issue, and raising tariffs will only exacerbate it," Feng told China Daily. "Ultimately, if everyday consumers lose their purchasing power, they may simply stop spending altogether — 'lie flat,' so to speak."

Feng pointed to signs of weakened US consumer behavior and the rise of "consumption downgrading".

"US consumer spending is already showing signs of weakness. That's one reason why ultra low cost platforms like Temu have been able to quickly gain market share. People are choosing cheaper alternatives — they simply don't have the same level of disposable income anymore."

Kenneth Byrd, executive director of Byrd Immigration Law Group in Los Angeles, said worsening trade ties may also have a ripple effect on immigration patterns. "If we cannot have commerce between the two countries, then the next step will be the people will stop coming as well."



International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva delivers a speech, titled "Toward a Better Balanced and More Resilient World Economy" ahead of the IMF/World Bank Spring Meetings, at IMF headquarters in Washington on Thursday. ZHAO HUANXIN / CHINA DAILY

Canada looking to Europe amid strained US ties

By YANG GAO in Toronto
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Tensions between Canada and the United States under US President Donald Trump are pushing Canada to explore closer ties with Europe and diversify its trade relations, experts said.

"Canada is never top of the mind for American federal politicians," said Ron Stagg, professor of history at Toronto Metropolitan University. "But now the Trump government is very much ignoring Canadian leadership, except when threatened with tariffs, or when there is a threat to impose a surcharge on electricity to US northern states," Stagg told China Daily.

The delay in auto tariffs, he added, likely had more to do with pressure from auto executives and a declining stock market than diplomacy, Stagg said.

"Trump seems to respect Mark Carney more than his predecessor, Justin Trudeau," he said.

"All the Canadian parties are taking a stand against American bullying," Stagg said, noting that federal and provincial governments are preparing financial support for companies and workers in case tariffs take effect.

"The federal government is preparing economic assistance. Here in Ontario, the premier is doing the same, since a good deal of industry is located here."

Stagg also said "it will take years to reestablish the kind of relationship

that existed, and there will be an ongoing level of mistrust even then," he said.

He said the erosion in trust is pushing Canada toward Europe. "The interest in moving closer to the European Union is definitely a result of the hostile trade moves of the Trump government," he said.

"There has been talk for years about the need to diversify trade away from the United States, but the current situation has increased government interest, both in the European Union and in the trans-Pacific trade arrangement," Stagg said.

The European Union is a natural alternative, given Canada's cooperation with Europe on issues such as Ukraine and its ties through institutions such as NATO and the G7, he said.

He noted that Carney's experience at the Bank of England during Brexit gives him additional insight into the European economy.

"Some commentators have even suggested that Canada could join the European Union, but this is unlikely," he said. "It will be hard for the government to get Canadian business, so used to easy trade with the United States, to pivot en masse."

While agricultural exports and raw materials may find new markets, "the industrial sector of the economy will have a more difficult time," he noted, particularly given Canada's limited pipeline and energy infrastructure.

Another expert noted that the United States' reduction in aid to

Ukraine has prompted Canada to further align its security and foreign policies with its European allies.

"Canadian foreign policy is based on Canadian interests," said Lubomyr Luciuk, a professor of political science and economics at the Royal Military College of Canada.

"Canadian interests are to have a stable, peaceful, rules-based international order," he told China Daily. For Luciuk, Trump's shift on Ukraine represents not just a change in American policy but a symbolic weakening of Western unity.

Canada, he said, increasingly finds itself in closer alignment with European countries such as the United Kingdom and France, which have continued to provide military and diplomatic backing to Kiev.

"Europe, and I include the United Kingdom here, has contributed more to the defense of Ukraine than the United States," Luciuk said. "Canada, with Europe, could probably fill the gap."

Canada's involvement goes beyond rhetoric. Luciuk recalled Canada's past contributions under Operation Unifier, which helped train Ukrainian troops.

He highlighted that this role could expand further. "Canada will probably put boots on the ground as trainers," Luciuk said.

"France has more or less agreed to the same. They've all asked for some kind of backstop from the United States," he said.

If US support continues to erode,

he added, it may be up to Europe and allies like Canada to prevent a wider destabilization.

The shift in defense thinking is not limited to foreign deployments. "Canada has reacted to talk (by Trump) of making the country the 51st state, by promising to build up our northern defenses," Stagg said.

However, despite those signals, Stagg said Canada has not yet clearly articulated a new foreign policy doctrine.

"The current isolationist trend in the US, combined with its aggressive stance towards Greenland, Panama and Canada, has Canada looking for friends elsewhere," he said.

Stagg expects more friction, particularly when the Canada-Mexico-US trade agreement comes up for review in 2026.

A more amicable US government could help, but "a residual distrust will remain," he said. By then, "Canada will have made some moves to reorient trade and foreign policy."

The direction of that shift will depend in part on the outcome of the next Canadian election. "All of this is predicated on the Liberals winning," said Stagg.

"If the Conservatives win, I expect that the government emphasis will be primarily on restoring relations with the United States. How far these moves will go is unclear, as Canada recognizes that it is a relatively small player on the world stage," Stagg said.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is

published daily except weekends by

China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway,

Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York,

NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes

to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway,

Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No.1560

BUSINESS

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China pushing strongly for globalization drive

US using 'brute force' to compel others to fund its trade deficit

By WANG KEJU and LIU ZHIHUA

As the United States "walks away from its responsibility as a major power to advance open global trade" by engaging in a tariff war, China is doubling down on its efforts to boost globalization and free trade by reinforcing partnerships with key economies around the world, said a senior economist.

"The US believes that it has been shortchanged in the current trading system, and has therefore initiated a tariff war, with the possibility of escalating to currency wars, financial wars and tech wars," Zhang Yansheng, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

The US is attempting to disrupt the global trade order in a subversive manner, largely seeking to use "brute force and the law of the jungle to compel other countries to foot the bill for the US' trade deficits", Zhang said.

Therefore, on the "Liberation Day" that the Trump administration claimed earlier this month, Washington resorted to a blanket approach of levying tariffs against roughly 60 of US trading partners — friends and foes alike.

In a dramatic change of policy, just hours after "reciprocal tariffs" went into effect on April 9, the US announced a 90-day pause, aiming to give time for negotiators to work out new deals with the United States, with the exception of China where the US tariffs on Chinese imports ballooned to 145 percent.

Meanwhile, the baseline 10 percent tariff that went into effect on April 5 still remains in place for all affected US imports.

The key for China in responding to the US tariffs now is figuring out how to turn a bad situation into an opportunity."

Zhang Yansheng, researcher at Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research

The US is, however, selectively ignoring the fact that over the decades, the US dollar's dominance as the world's reserve currency required trade deficits, creating a cycle where dollar hegemony depends on trade imbalances, according to Zhang.

He noted that the US is turning toward a more protectionist, inward-looking approach, as it retreats from the multilateral economic and political order that it had previously championed.

"The key for China in responding to the US tariffs now is figuring out how to turn a bad situation into an opportunity," Zhang said.

China's consistent focus on expanding domestic demand and widening its opening-up policy will position itself as a shared market for the rest of the world seeking to capitalize on the world's second-largest consumer market for new growth momentum, he said.

"It is of paramount importance that we focus on increasing people's incomes, and then weave a more robust social security system to alleviate the burdens faced by the public in areas such as housing, elderly care, and medical

services," Zhang said.

This will ensure a coordinated and effective approach to bolstering China's domestic demand. Subsequently, other economies will look to China to provide new orders, new demand, and new growth momentum, he said.

"In this way, the closer the rest of the world engages with China through cooperation, the more prosperous everyone becomes. The more connected and efficient the infrastructure between China and the rest of the world becomes, the more it promotes shared development. This is a virtuous cycle," he said.

Zhang also emphasized the need for China to engage more with the European Union, Japan, South Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, among others, to uphold the multilateral trading system and global cooperation.

Since April 8, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao has held video calls with high-ranking officials from Brazil, South Africa and Saudi Arabia, as well as the European Union and ASEAN, during which they discussed various issues, including enhancing economic and trade cooperation and responses to the US imposition of so-called "reciprocal tariffs".

The global community should work together to promote inclusive international trade, Zhang said, emphasizing that prosperity should not be limited to the wealthy or the powerful, but rather shared equitably among all nations, large or small.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn



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Technicians adjust humanoid robots on display during a recent expo in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY

China to dominate humanoid robot mkt

By CHENG YU chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

China will dominate more than half of the global humanoid robot production this year, as the country is racing ahead in the sector as part of the next big frontier in artificial intelligence and automation, according to a recent industry report.

The report, jointly published by Leaderobot and nine other institutions, predicts that this year the country will produce more than 10,000 humanoid robots, reaching 8.24 billion yuan (\$1.14 billion) in sales revenue.

With costs falling and ecosystems maturing, the humanoid robot industry is poised to leap from pilot projects to large-scale commercialization. It is a path "reminiscent of China's rapid rise in electric vehicles" — and it could give the country a fresh economic

growth engine, said the report.

One early sign of commercial traction came in March, when Chinese robotics firm UBTECH Robotics — a provider of robotics to automaker Dongfeng Liuzhou Motor — said Dongfeng would roll out 20 industrial humanoid robots, with full deployment expected in the first half of 2025.

Wang Tianmiao, honorary director of robotics at Beihang University, said the surge in investment reflects both market forces and national strategy.

"Humanoid robots are being positioned to meet human needs and drive business efficiency," Wang said. "At the same time, countries are vying for dominance in next-gen tech — and AI and robotics are right at the heart of that race."

The report also highlighted the booming field of embodied intelligence — where robots combine AI

with physical interactions — and projects China's market to hit 5.3 billion yuan this year and soar to 103.8 billion yuan by 2030, capturing nearly 45 percent of the global share.

Since early 2024, the sector has gained momentum with rapid tech advances, growing demand, increased policy support and deepening international partnerships.

However, the report also urged local governments to focus on strategic positioning and avoid "over-hyped investments". It warned against a flood of short-term capital chasing buzzwords, calling instead for funds to support research and development and real-world testing.

To build a sustainable market, the report said, policymakers need to lead on setting standards and curb the risks of valuation bubbles and copycat competition.

Yacht economy lifts all boats

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn

The global yachting world turned its attention to Sanya, Hainan province this week as the fifth China International Consumer Products Expo, held from Sunday to Friday in the provincial capital of Haikou, hosted its first dedicated international yachting exhibition in the coastal city, featuring 62 companies from over 20 countries and more than 150 vessels.

The exhibition, held as the expo's first sub-venue in Sanya, aims to foster collaboration across the yachting industry's production, education, research, innovation and investment segments.

At Tuesday's opening ceremony, the Sanya Cruise and Yacht Association issued the "Sanya Initiative for the Yacht Industry", calling on businesses, industry groups, research institutions and governments worldwide to build an open, innovative and sustainable yachting ecosystem.

The proposal seeks to position Sanya as a hub for exploring new pathways for China's yachting sector.

Spanning about 166,800 square meters, the exhibition utilizes existing marina infrastructure, under-



The international yachting exhibition section during the China International Consumer Products Expo, held in Haikou, Hainan province. SHA XIAOFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

scoring the city's push to expand its yachting economy.

In recent years, Sanya has enhanced its maritime appeal by upgrading port facilities and diversifying services, including yacht rentals, sales and event hosting. The city has also cultivated niche markets such as yacht wedding photography and educational boating tours. Efforts to lower entry barriers have spurred growth in hybrid marine sectors.

By late 2024, registered yachts in Sanya reached 1,415, and it now hosts 7,300 yacht-related enterprises, accounting for 22.7 percent of China's total, according to Hainan Daily.

Wang Qiyang, Party secretary of Sanya, said the city will continue developing as a core zone for international tourism consumption while advancing reforms in yachting. Plans include integrating

yachting with tourism, exhibitions and cultural creativity, with a long-term goal of establishing a full industrial chain — from research and manufacturing to sales and maintenance — in order to solidify Sanya's reputation as the "Yachting Capital of the Asia-Pacific".

Li Gang, director-general of the department of market operation and consumption promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, said China's yachting market has grown steadily due to rising living standards and policy improvements. The ministry will support regions in developing yacht-friendly policies, infrastructure and public marinas while encouraging businesses to innovate with "yacht+" products to expand consumer access.

The yacht show highlights Sanya's ambition to become a global leader in the maritime leisure industry.

Changing habits of Chinese consumers may be pot of gold

By ZHU WENQIAN zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The transformation of Chinese consumption habits is accelerating, with consumers poised to boost spending on leisure, entertainment and healthcare goods and services as they shift from basic material satisfaction to aspirational and personalized consumption, a new report said.

The report, released by CITIC Securities during the fifth China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou, Hainan province, which concludes on Friday, said the digital economy and biotechnology are fueling new consumption trends in China and posing challenges to traditional consumption patterns.

China's super large market is unleashing enormous potential. Fueled by the country's ongoing consumption upgrade trend and the Healthy China 2030 initiative, a national guideline aimed at promoting overall health, the healthcare sector is undergoing unprecedented changes, and major foreign companies said they would continue to increase investments in China.

OSIM International Pte Ltd, a Singapore-based health products provider, accounts for the top market share in the massager market in Asia, and it has been participating in the consumer expo for five straight years. Sales have maintained growth in the past few years in Chi-

16 trillion yuan

expected market size of the health services sector in China by 2030

na, its largest market globally.

The company said the operation of brick-and-mortar stores serves as its cornerstone. After the first edition of the consumer expo, it launched a store in Haikou, and this year, it plans to upgrade the store to the highest level that sells various kinds of high-end products.

Besides top-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, OSIM has seen rosy sales in Chinese cities such as Hangzhou, Zhejiang province; Chengdu, Sichuan province; and Suzhou, Jiangsu province, and its main consumer group is aged between 35 and 45.

"We have always had confidence and optimism in China, a highly diverse market. In China, an increasingly growing elderly population is paying more attention to healthcare," said Lily Yang, associate brand director of OSIM China.

"Besides, cervical spine discomfort is becoming a concern for many young people who have been busy with work, and they have indicated higher demand for massagers. A growing demand for sports assistive devices among sports enthusiasts has also become a key driving factor

for the development of the massager market," Yang said.

Meanwhile, Charoen Pokphand Group or CP Group, a Thai international conglomerate with interests ranging from agriculture, food, finance to automobiles, pharmacies and manufacturing, has been a five-time participant of the expo. It has been a supporter and beneficiary of the event, and will continue to be deeply involved in the development of Hainan, it said.

The company has developed functional food for sleep aid and bone protection with its partner, and over the past three years, the average annual sales growth rate of such products has been 45 percent in China.

"Many Generation Z consumers (those born between 1995 and 2009) tend to stay up late while taking liver protection healthcare products. This phenomenon is a kind of pre-cise demand for healthcare products consumption," said Zhang Shuhui, senior president of CP Group.

By 2030, the total market size of the health services sector in China is expected to reach 16 trillion yuan (\$2.2 trillion), according to the projection by the National Health Commission.

"The application of synthetic biology in agriculture, food and beauty is worth paying attention to," said Jiang Ya, chief consumer industry analyst at CITIC Securities.

Briefly

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 48 pips to 7.2085 against the US dollar on Thursday, according to the China

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

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

Better services to aid exporters

The State Grid is applying inno-

vative ways to aid exporters. Liancheng Cultural Supplies Co, or LC-stationery, which is based in Xuzhou, East China's Jiangsu province, can produce 300 million pencils and 15 million sets of stationery each year, with an annual output value of 80 million

yuan (\$11.2 million). As 70 percent of its products are exported to more than 20 countries and regions including the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy, it has introduced advanced intelligent equipment, raising production efficiency by 15 per-

cent. The State Grid Xuzhou Power Supply Co has sent staff members to the work site to offer full-chain services, ensuring safe and reliable electricity for the company's equipment.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Zelostech ushers in L4 logistics solutions

By CHENG YU
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Zelostech, an innovative Chinese autonomous driving startup, is turbocharging its overseas push with homegrown advanced Level 4 self-driving technologies, said its top executive in an interview with China Daily.

"We are striving to build an algorithm that can run not just across China but around the world. An algorithm — by deeply understanding and generalizing diverse traffic environments — can learn from Beijing traffic and still handle a rainy day in Singapore, or even a complicated road of Berlin," said Zhuang Li, co-founder of Zelostech.

He made the comments as Zelostech announced completion of nearly \$300 million in Series B fundraising earlier this week. Following this round, Zelostech plans to focus on next-generation product development, establishing its own supply chain, expanding domestic and international markets, building urban operational networks, and fostering an industrial ecosystem alliance.

According to Zhuang, the Chinese company has already gained some momentum in overseas markets. In early 2024, it helped Singapore draft its first driverless logistics standards, filling a regulatory gap. It then passed the M1 test to secure Singapore's inaugural unmanned logistics vehicle license.

"The company has also rolled out its first autonomous delivery vehi-



A Zelostech unmanned logistics vehicle is seen at a facility in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cle in South Korea, followed by deployments in Japan in November last year and Europe in January this year," he noted.

This month Zelostech marks 100 days since it began delivering its 2025 L4 urban delivery series. The new models ditch the mechanical lidar "hat" in favor of a sleek flattop design that hides solid-state lidar and high-resolution cameras.

According to Zhuang, the streamlined profile not only sharpens aesthetics, but also enables adjustable cargo box heights to tackle diverse delivery tasks, from last-mile e-commerce drops to heavy industrial transports.

Under the hood, the 2025 series pairs dual-camera 3D perception with its in-house Jupiter inference engine, achieving decision latencies below 50 milliseconds.

Such performance leaps are made possible by the startup's full-stack research and development, covering sensor fusion, artificial intelligence

decision-making and edge computing. "This is the first large-scale roll-out of a solid-state lidar solution on an L4 production vehicle," Zhuang said.

Zelostech's rapid commercial roll-out has translated into eye-popping growth. Last year, its monthly deployment rate surged above 45 percent for five straight months. Its footprint now spans six countries and more than 200 regions, with operating cities up 387 percent year-on-year.

Beyond city streets, Zelostech's vehicles are carving out niche roles in specialized zones. In Inner Mongolia autonomous region's grasslands, a fleet embarks on daily 100-kilometer loops between county hubs and remote villages, slashing rural delivery times and costs by roughly 40 percent. "These use cases highlight the versatility of a one-algorithm platform," said Zhuang.

With solid-state lidar lowering sensor costs and weight, the 2025

models are poised to drive down total-ownership costs, enabling wider adoption in smaller cities and secondary markets.

"We're not just selling vehicles," Zhuang added. "We're delivering a plug-and-play logistics solution that can be replicated anywhere."

According to market consultancy, the global autonomous vehicle market was valued at \$207.38 billion last year and is forecast to skyrocket at a compound annual growth rate of 36.3 percent from 2025 to 2034.

As global logistics players seek high-efficiency, low-carbon delivery methods, Zelostech's homegrown technology and lightened vehicle architecture could serve as a template for scaling Level 4 autonomy.

"We believe the era of universal intelligent delivery is within reach," Zhuang said. "Our mission is to make advanced driving accessible, equitable and profitable for operators everywhere."

Competitiveness highlighted for manufacturers

Efforts in localization, supply chain seen as key for overseas expansion

By FAN FEIFEI
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As the global economic and trade landscape continues to evolve, Chinese manufacturing enterprises should step up efforts to adjust production capacities globally, expand presence in emerging markets and bolster technological advancements, to navigate challenges from the volatile tariff policy of the United States, said experts and company executives.

They added that in the face of rising trade protectionism and external uncertainties, more efforts should be made to strengthen local operations by setting up research and development centers and supply chain networks, while improving core competitiveness and better serving demand of local markets.

A report from market consultancy Sigmaintell Consulting said, as this year marks a crucial turning point in the global economic and trade landscape, the diversification of supply chain layout and enterprises' profitability will determine their capacities to buffer against the impact of US tariff increases.

Li Yaqin, general manager of Sigmaintell, said, "If the tariffs are raised across the Asia-Pacific region, global supply chains will speed up restructuring, and the position of Mexico, Brazil, Turkey and Egypt as new manufacturing hubs is expected to become prominent."

Therefore, it is of significance for Chinese manufacturers to diversify their production capacities in South America and European countries to reduce reliance on a single market and ramp up localization efforts to cope with mounting pressures such as rising trade barriers and supply chain disruptions, Li added.

The US government has exempted a broad range of consumer electronics, including smartphones, computers, laptops, semiconductor devices, memory chips and flat panel displays, from its recently imposed "reciprocal tariffs", according to guidelines released by US Customs and Border Protection last week.

However, the administration of US President Donald Trump is considering new tariffs on semiconductors and launching investigations into imports of computer chips.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said Washington's volatile tariff policy will bring about uncertainties to international trade, and pose severe challenges to the companies in the upstream and downstream of industrial chains.

Zhou said Chinese enterprises should strengthen analysis targeting overseas markets, and continuously adjust and optimize trade structure, such as increasing the technological level of products by leveraging artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge digital technologies to enhance trade efficiency and production flexibility amid increasing external uncertainties and an evolving international landscape.

He also highlighted the importance of improving diversified business layout globally, finding and creating new demand in local markets, and reinforcing cooperation with economies involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Industry insiders said bringing back manufacturing to the US is rather difficult given factors such as high labor costs, industrial and supply chain complexities and technological readiness, underscoring China's irreplaceable and pivotal role as the world's manufacturing hub.

Although the US government is attempting to contain the development of China's high-tech manufacturing industry, China is well-positioned to spearhead the global industrial revolution with its ultra-large market scale, complete industrial chain systems and increased innovation capabilities, said He Zhiyi, chief expert at the Institute for Global Industry at Tsinghua University.

He said against a backdrop of restructuring global supply chains, it is essential to build world-class enterprises through boosting self-reliance and strength in scientific and technological innovation to mitigate the negative effects of tariff barriers.

Hisense Group, a leading Chinese home appliance maker, is ramping up localized production and research capabilities in member economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Latin America, and increasing investment in technological innovation to target high-end markets abroad.

Jia Shaoqian, chairman of Hisense, said the company is speeding up its business footprint in Nigeria, Angola, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco by establishing new production bases and facilities.

Wu Chun, managing partner of Boston Consulting Group Greater China, said the rapid growth of emerging markets, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, India and Africa, brings new opportunities for Chinese enterprises in overseas expansion.

French energy giant lauds China's green efforts

By ZHENG XIN
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China's innovation capabilities in green technology are key to achieving an affordable, low-carbon economy and green energy transition, said Patrick Pouyanne, chairman and CEO of TotalEnergies, adding that the US retreat from globalization presents a "huge opportunity" for strengthened energy cooperation between China and Europe.

"As a European company, I want to emphasize that while the United States may be retreating from the wave of globalization, climate change and energy transition have actually brought enormous opportunities for cooperation between China and Europe," said Pouyanne.

"We will jointly contribute to the success of the energy transition process and continue to collaborate with China, and TotalEnergies is fully committed to supporting China's balanced and strategic energy transition," he said.

Pouyanne lauded China's com-

mitment to both providing energy and decarbonizing its economy, emphasizing the crucial role of affordable energy transition.

"TotalEnergies has a long-standing and stable relationship with China, with a history of over 40 years and extensive influence in numerous activities, while we also collaborate with Chinese energy companies and overseas subcontractors, utilizing Chinese products and solutions. China has excellent innovation capabilities in green technology, achieving a low-cost, low-carbon economy, which is crucial for customers. We need an affordable transition," Pouyanne said.

He added that the company's commitment to supplying LNG to meet China's growing gas demand has driven coal-to-gas switching and helps address peak power needs.

TotalEnergies announced in November the signing of a sales agreement with China Petroleum and Chemical Corp for the delivery of 2 million metric tons of LNG per year for 15 years, starting in 2028.

This came after the French energy provider announced a five-year extension of its sales and purchase agreement (SPA) with China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC) in September, on the delivery of 1.25 million tons of LNG per year to China until 2034, as the energy giant has been strengthening its long-term positions in the growing Chinese market, which is also the world's largest LNG importing country.

In China, natural gas serves as a crucial transition energy resource, mitigating the intermittency of renewable energy sources and reducing emissions when used as a substitute for coal in electricity generation.

In addition to fossil fuels, TotalEnergies also sees significant opportunities in China's renewable energy sector as well. Pouyanne outlined joint ventures with Chinese partners across the solar photovoltaic supply chain and agreements for offshore wind and onshore solar projects.

He reiterated the goal of providing renewable energy at competitive prices to ensure a successful

energy transition. The company aims for renewables and low-carbon electricity to constitute 50 percent of its energy production and sales mix by 2050.

Pouyanne also pointed to a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) agreement in China to produce 230,000 tons of SAF annually from local waste, showcasing collaboration in circular economy solutions.

Pang Guanglian, vice-secretary general of the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Federation, said global production of sustainable aviation fuel stands at 3 million tons, with China already contributing over 1.1 million tons to this total.

"Looking ahead to 2030, global SAF demand is projected to surge beyond 18 million tons, and China is poised to account for at least half of this burgeoning market," he said.

"With the European Union already mandating a 2 percent SAF blending ratio and China soon to unveil its own ambitious policy, the stage is set for exponential growth in the sector."



CULTURAL HERITAGE



Staff from the Great Wall protection station in the Tianzhu Tibetan autonomous county, Gansu province, discuss protection measures.



Grassroots guardians pick up waste near the ancient structure. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Modern technology, such as drones and remote sensing technology, is used to monitor the wall.

Great support for Wall in Gansu

National structure is more than ancient relic to dedicated team which looks after it every day, **Wang Qian** and **Ma Jingna** report.

In the rugged mountains of the Tianzhu Tibetan autonomous county in Gansu province, where the Great Wall snakes across the peaks, 68-year-old Wang Xilin has spent more than three decades on patrol, helping ensure the architectural wonder's preservation for future generations.

"During the past 30 years, I've heard only my footsteps and the howling wind while walking in the wild mountains. At first, I was lonely, but each mound of earth has become an old friend," Wang says, adding that he feels it is his family duty to guard the structure for generations to come.

After retiring last year, he handed over responsibilities to his daughter-in-law, ensuring that this family commitment to the wall endures. Now, he visits three times a week and does what he can, picking up waste and reporting hazards.

Although the job is lonely and doesn't pay well, a dedicated team of 39 grassroots protectors in the county work tirelessly, and receive about 2,000 yuan (\$275.61) a year for their efforts.

For Wen Zhanlian, director of the Great Wall protection station in Tianzhu, the environment that conservationists work in is challenging, with inconvenient transportation and many sites located at altitudes of over 3,000 meters.

"In such conditions, it is their love and passion for the Great Wall that helps them carry on," she says. Within the county, Great Wall sites consist of sections built in the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. The 79 existing segments are composed of walls, trenches, passes, fortresses,

and stand-alone structures, according to the county government.

They are more than just ancient structures; they are a testament to the resilience and spirit of the people and as Zhang Yongtang, director of Tianzhu's cultural and tourism bureau, says, the Wall's cultural value extends far beyond its physical form.

"It is a symbol of our history, our identity and our connection to the past," he says. "By protecting it, we honor the sacrifices of those who came before us, and inspire future generations to cherish their heritage."

Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, the Great Wall was built over the course of 2,000 years, with construction continuing from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) to the Ming Dynasty. Existing sections add up to a total length of more than 21,196 kilometers, and pass through 15 provinces, administrative regions and municipalities, according to the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

That symbolism has encouraged Wang to remain steadfast in his mission, which began in 1991, when he was appointed as protector after a devastating earthquake in October 1990 forced many to seek refuge near the ancient structure.

The disciplined veteran took on the mission without hesitation. Over the years, he walked the sections twice a day through wind, rain and snow, each patrol lasting around two hours. The vast, empty landscape was his companion, and the sound of his footsteps echoed against ancient stones.

Besides nature, the wall had been



Top: Great Wall sites in the county consist of sections built during the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties.

Above: Staff holding a banner that says "Protect the Great Wall as diligently as you would protect your home" take a group photo in front of a surviving section of the architectural wonder.

severely threatened by human activities, such as sand and stone mining. People nearby have even taken its bricks to use in buildings.

"In the past, people had a poor sense of protection, leading to human damage, such as illegal digging and the theft of sand and soil to build houses," Wang says.

One of his most vivid memories is the day he confronted a group of sand thieves. They had come to dig in a moat near the wall, a destructive act that threatened the wall's stability. Wang climbed onto their truck and refused to let them leave.

"I told them either they return the sand and fix the moat or they would have to drive over me," Wang says. In the end, they restored the moat as he demanded.

Things began to change after Great Wall Protection Regulations came into effect in 2006 as more people, both government and grassroots, began to participate in preservation.

"Natural environmental erosion is the biggest challenge. The earthen walls are very vulnerable to erosion by rain and snow, and with constant strong winds, the issue of weathering is severe. However, the good news is that with increased publicity, people's awareness has risen, and human damage has significantly decreased," Wang says.

In recent years, Tianzhu has invested 13.28 million yuan in protection, including the restoration of 4,700 meters of wall, and the installation of advanced monitoring systems, according to the county's cultural and tourism bureau.

Zhang says that along fragile sections, 11,540 meters of steel protective fencing have been erected to

prevent human damage. In 2023, a 2.68 million yuan digital security project was launched to equip 14 sections in the county (21,675 meters) with infrared surveillance and crack monitoring sensors.

Modern technology like drones and remote sensing technology have also been used to monitor the wall.

Even with all these efforts, protection is still not easy for the 39 villagers on Wen's team, who patrol the most remote and treacherous sections of the wall. To combat the altitude and difficult terrain, they rely on their motorcycles and worn-out boots to navigate rugged paths. Every week, they inspect the wall, documenting any changes or damage, ensuring that signs and barriers remain intact.

Despite these hardships, they are not only guardians but also educators, spreading awareness of the importance of cultural heritage among local communities.

"This place should receive better protection. There are many visitors from Beijing and other provinces, and everyone says that such a precious historical site should be an official scenic area. This would encourage more people to learn about the Great Wall, while also ensuring it is better protected," Wang says.

For the guardians in Tianzhu, the section they patrol is more than a relic of the past — it is a living, breathing part of their lives.

"As long as we are here, we will guard this wall. It is our duty, our pride and our legacy," Wang often tells his family.

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PERSPECTIVE

History, ethos and strategic vision define China's global appeal

By ZHAO XU

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Chinese civilization — described by President Xi Jinping as embodying consistency, originality, unity, inclusiveness, and peacefulness — has endured through the ages, serving as a testament to a deeply rooted cultural ethos. Drawing from this heritage, China offers a distinctive alternative to Western-centric models of international relations. Through initiatives in sustainable development, cultural diplomacy, and global governance improvement, China presents a perspective shaped by historical consciousness and a long-term strategic vision.

For these values to evolve from historical legacies into active forces in global discourse, further work is needed. A broader appreciation of Chinese culture must be cultivated, and enduring misunderstandings addressed. For traditional culture to take a meaningful role in China's international presence, those tasked with conveying it must be equipped to bridge the cultural divide between a historically rich China and the wider world.

Chinese civilization is embodied in a wealth of cultural symbols that reflect deep philosophical, aesthetic and moral traditions. These range from tangible elements — museum artifacts, the Great Wall, literati gardens — to intangible ones like Con-

fucian teachings, traditional medicine and Spring Festival. To make these symbols resonate globally, their historical context must be revealed, and emotional connections with contemporary audiences thoughtfully fostered.

One compelling example is the story of Daniel Bergmann, an autistic graduate of Harvard Extension School. As a nonverbal child, he often visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York with his artist mother. There, he formed a profound connection with a Chinese garden modeled on the style of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Sitting by the fishpond and waterfall, he experienced a moment of clarity — realizing that sound and sight were not separate phenomena but parts of a whole, making the world "only half as complicated" to understand. His story, shared by the museum, exemplifies how a Chinese cultural symbol can carry emotional warmth and human resonance — key to effective cultural communication.

As the Chinese idiom says, "see the whole leopard through one spot" — a single object can reveal a broader cultural truth. A 12th to 13th-century lacquered leather chest in the Brooklyn Museum in New York, for instance, features design motifs influenced by Silk Road exchanges between the 6th and 8th centuries. Crafted in east-



Visitors look at exhibits at *The Proof of Early China: The Civilizations of Songze and Liangzhu*, the second in *The Essence of China* exhibition series at the Shanghai Museum on June 20, 2023.

YI BAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

ern China, similar chests were later exported across the Maritime Silk Road to Egypt, Iran and Central Asia. This one artifact encapsulates China's long history of cross-cultural exchange — an endeavor China continues to champion today.

China's jade culture, spanning over 10,000 years, reflects the civilization's enduring cultural lineage. Fine jade, pure and smooth, symbolizes "the virtues of a gentleman" central to Confucian thought. During the Zhou Dynasty

(c. 11th century-256 BC), jade became increasingly important in funerary rituals, replacing human sacrifice in alignment with the rise of human-centered philosophy and Confucianism. Like Confucianism, jade, by embodying moral aspiration and aesthetic sensibility, stands as a testament to Chinese civilization's commitment to cultural consistency.

This consistency is not accidental but rooted in a profound respect for heritage. The originality of Chinese

civilization lies in its capacity for innovation within a framework of historical continuity — not discarding the past, but building upon it. Jade culture, particularly from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) onward, reflects this ethos. From the 10th century, antiquarianism became a guiding sentiment in jade aesthetics, driving both creative expression and cultural reinvention.

The emergence of *jinsixue* (the study of antiquities) during the Song Dynasty reflected a new cultural self-awareness among the literati. Under Emperor Huizong's patronage, hundreds of Shang (c. 16th century-11th century BC) and Zhou bronze vessels were illustrated and cataloged — later serving as templates for jade craftsmen. This transformation — from bronze to jade — epitomizes China's tradition of cultural renewal and its enduring spirit of innovation.

In the Liao Dynasty (916-1125), founded by the nomadic Khitan people and contemporaneous with the Song Dynasty, jade carving techniques from the Song were adapted to reflect hunting and herding traditions. Likewise, jade hat ornaments from the Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) were reimagined as incense burner lids in the succeeding Ming Dynasty. These continuous adaptations across dynasties and cultures highlight not only jade's enduring legacy but

also the inclusive and unifying nature of Chinese civilization. The shared reverence for jade among the Han and other ethnic groups' regimes reveals a deep cultural harmony and a peaceful ethos that transcends political change and temporary fragmentation.

Thus, all five features of Chinese civilization are reflected in China's jade culture. These features hold significant contemporary relevance. Drawing from its uninterrupted past and ability to continuously redefine progress in relation to history, the modern Chinese state brings a wealth of historical wisdom to global governance, emphasizing long-term vision and strategic patience in addressing global challenges. By leveraging its history of innovation and unity, China offers a compelling model for building international consensus, which is needed more today than ever.

The international communication of Chinese civilization symbols is a key cultural strategy, supporting China's efforts to shape its global image and enhance its soft power. As China deepens global engagement and offers unique solutions to international challenges, its civilizational values provide both the rationale and methodology for addressing these issues, forming the foundation and the starting point of its approach.

LIFESHANGHAI

A series of musicals and plays will make their China debut in Shanghai, solidifying the city's significance in the live entertainment sector, according to an announcement by Shanghai Culture Square.

A news conference on March 25, saw French musical actor Abi Bernadot perform a song from *Moliere, le Spectacle Musical*, which will debut in China in Shanghai on Sept 12. The production was created by Dove Attia, composer of the musical *Mozart L'opera Rock*, premiered in Paris in 2023 and has successfully toured China multiple times.

Winner of the French reality competition series *The Voice: La Plus Belle Voix* in 2020, Bernadot will give his first public performance in China, playing the antagonist, Prince de Conti. He tells the media that he is aware "there is a huge community waiting for new musicals and they are eager to discover you and new universes. I can't wait to exchange with people to see how they receive the show, how they share that bond with us, how they send love, and how we're going to send that love back."

"To prepare, I'm slowly but surely learning Chinese," says the French singer.

"China is one of the largest overseas markets for French musicals. Shanghai takes the largest share of that. That's why we are seeing a growing number of French musicals coming to Shanghai," says Fei Yuanhong, general manager of Shanghai Culture Square. "This is an effective tie between the Chinese and French cultures. They take into consideration the possibility of touring Shanghai, even during the creating phase."

One of the most anticipated productions on the 2025 program is *Spirited Away*, which premiered in Japan in 2022. The play, adapted and directed by John Caird, former associate director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, is based on the Japanese film of the same title by Hayao Miyazaki. Shanghai Culture Square sold out more than 37,000 tickets to the 25 shows "within one day after box office opening," according to Fei.

At the news conference, Shanghai Culture Square announced that they added 17 more performances.

The upcoming shows mark the play's second tour outside Japan, following a successful London tour last year.

All 42 shows taking place at Shanghai Culture Square from July 14 to Aug 17 "are probably still not enough for Shanghai," Fei says. "This play will be phenomenal. We look forward to receiving audiences from not only China but also nearby countries in the Asia-Pacific region."

This is not the first time Shanghai Culture Square has held dozens of performances for one production. "We presented 64 shows of *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *War Horse*, too," he says. The German musical *Elisabeth* also had 40 shows at the theater in 2014.

Musicals and theater productions from other countries are also making their China debut at the venue this year, such as British production of *Wuthering Heights* by Wise Children theater company, which was created and led by the multi-award-



Above: French actress Isabelle Huppert introduces *The Cherry Orchard* at Shanghai Culture Square on April 8. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY Left below: A scene from the production at the venue that ran from April 11 to 13.

Musicals tap into a surge in demand

Series of live entertainment solidifies city's reputation as a center for cultural performances, **Zhang Kun** reports.



Top right and above: Scenes from the British musical theater production of *Wuthering Heights* by Emma Rice and the Wise Children theater company at Shanghai Culture Square from April 4 to 6. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

winning director Emma Rice, and the West End production of *Life of Pi* directed by Max Webster, which was created in 2019 and is now on its first Asia tour, as well as the German production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Russian author Anton Chekhov's masterpiece *The Cherry Orchard*, with the internationally renowned French film star Isabelle Huppert, opened last Friday for a three night run.

According to Huppert, Chekhov's masterpiece explores universal human feelings, which transcend time and culture. "The play's cherry orchard represents philosophical and metaphoric existence, she says. "It can be real or fictional. That's what makes Chekhov a genius. It could be a person, property or an old place."

Huppert gave her first performance at Shanghai Culture Square doing a reading of *Marguerite Duras* in 2017. "Shanghai audiences welcomed me passionately. I felt their enthusiasm and am happy to return," says the actress.

Earlier this year, Huppert participated in a Chinese reality TV show as a guest mentor. She said she hopes to have more opportunities working in China with Chinese filmmakers. Huppert has seen many films by Chinese directors and named a few that she particularly liked, such as Jia Zhangke, Bi Gan and Lou Ye.

Shanghai Culture Square was founded 14 years ago as the first theater in the city to be designed to showcase musicals. Since then, Shanghai has gradually become an important center for performing arts in China and for the global live entertainment industry, Fei says. "It is a natural choice for big theater productions from abroad to premiere in Shanghai. The market proves that our audiences have strong consumption power for overseas repertoire, not just French but also German, Italian, Russian and Spanish shows. Our audiences have developed distinctive preferences — some favor French, some German, and some only go for Broadway shows."

Meanwhile, China's live entertainment market has evolved with high-quality productions emerging, Fei observes. "Musical talents are gathering in Shanghai. Such a virtuous circle has accelerated the continuous development of China's musical industry," he says.

From April 18 to 27, British singer Sarah Brightman will lead the revival of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Sunset Blvd* at AIA Grand Theatre in Shanghai. The production kicked off its Asian tour in Beijing on March 27.

In May, the English musical *Six* will start a residential performance at Shanghai's Majestic Theatre. Written by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, it gives the untold story of King Henry VIII's six wives.

Six is a project under Shanghai Media Group's new residential live show brand "See You in Shanghai", which highlights theater shows as an important attraction for domestic and international visitors. *Les Miserables the Arena Spectacular* will also be presented under the brand at the Shanghai Grand Theatre for eight weeks starting Nov 4.

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Brilliant productions to play big part in theater festival

By ZHANG KUN

At the upcoming 2025 Shanghai Jing'an Theater Festival, 20 plays will be staged from April 25 to June 2. Over 85 percent of the productions will make their Shanghai debut and half are from overseas.

Julie by the International Theater Amsterdam is one of the overseas shows premiering in Shanghai. The Dutch company is particularly good at interpreting classic masterpieces from a modern perspective, says Xu Zhongping, the festival's program director.

This production of *Julie* premiered in 2022 and is a subversive adaptation of *Miss Julie* by Swedish playwright August Strindberg from women's perspectives. "We hope to bring shows on the frontier of the global theater scene and new theater experiences that break boundaries," Xu says.

The theater scene has made a full recovery and "a large number of brilliant productions have mushroomed worldwide, many of which are interested in presenting their shows in China," according to Xu.

"Over the years, many brilliant plays from around the world pre-



Left: A scene from *Julie* by the International Theater Amsterdam. Right: An intense moment from the one-person show *The Far Side of the Moon*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

miered in Shanghai at this festival, including some exclusively performed in Shanghai," says Yu Rongjun, deputy director of SMG (Shanghai Media Group) Live. "We have seen many shows embarking on tours across China, following their success here."

Last year, Canadian theater director Robert Lepage presented

his first show on the Chinese mainland. The production *887* made five performances at the festival. "We had around 70 percent of the tickets sold for the first two shows," Xu, the program director, recalls. "And after opening night, tickets to the following shows rapidly sold out."

This year Lepage will present one of his best-known creations, the



25th anniversary edition of *The Far Side of the Moon*, a one-man show performed by Olivier Normand, who portrays more than 20 characters to tell a story about reconciliation between two brothers and two states set against the social background of the Cold War.

Although the show was adapted to cinemas as early as 2003, the upcom-

ing five shows in Shanghai at Daning Theatre from May 1 to 4 will be the first performed on the mainland.

Previously titled *Modern Drama Valley*, the festival is an annual event jointly hosted by the Jing'an district, Shanghai Media Group and the Shanghai Theatre Academy since 2009.

"We have witnessed the festival's growth from a regional initiative

into a cultural brand with international influence," said Xu Weihua, deputy director of the Jing'an Culture and Tourism Administration on April 11 at the news conference announcing the festival.

Aside from formal theater performances, the festival is dedicated to bringing theater experiences to communities and public spaces. Mini-theater shows will be performed at more than 20 landmark locations around the city.

This year, installations of mini theaters adapted from standard shipping containers will be introduced. These moving installations will be placed at Life Hub @ Daning, CITIC Square and other locations. People will be able to walk in and try theater-themed food and beverages and have an alternative theatrical experience that involves the audio, touch and visual senses.

This year, Jing'an district launched new measures to encourage consumption. Theater festival audiences showing their ticket stubs can enjoy special discounts at dozens of commercial centers in the district. Hotels, malls and other businesses will also give gifts for free to theater-goers during the festival.

LIFE



Red-crown cranes are a major ecotourism draw in Yancheng, Jiangsu province. The city is home to UNESCO world natural heritage listed migratory bird sanctuaries along the coast of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In praise of low profiles

As travel trends shift, once overlooked city is attracting new admirers, **Yang Feiyue** reports in Yancheng, Jiangsu.

With a mix of curiosity and excitement, Samar Keekeni let out a small squeal as she slipped a carrot into the wide, eager mouth of a giant milu deer.

The 28-year-old woman from Tunisia was visiting the Dafeng Milu National Nature Reserve in Yancheng, Jiangsu province, in mid-April, and this up-close encounter was unlike anything she had experienced before.

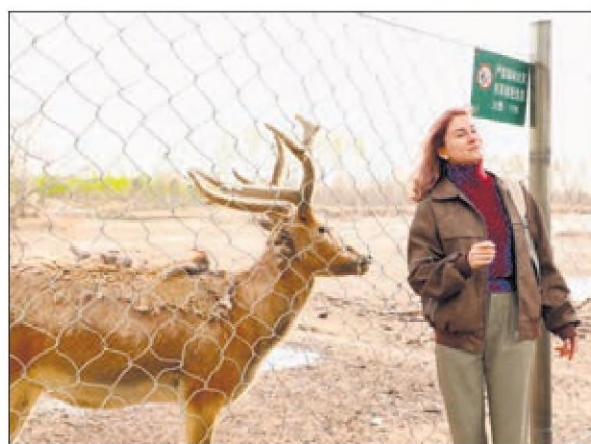
"At first, I was a little scared when one of the deer came right up to my face," she says with a laugh. "But the way it gently took the carrot from my hand — and the way it chewed, so calm and cute — it melted my heart. I just kept feeding more of them as I walked through the reserve."

Though she has seen deer before, this felt different.

"This wasn't like a zoo. I was seeing wild animals in their natural habitat and learning about their lives. It's really impressive," says Keekeni, who came to China in 2023 to work as an English teacher at Jiangnan University in Wuxi. Since then, she has visited 24 cities in eight provinces, driven by a deepening fascination with China's culture, people, and natural beauty.

The reserve is a symbol of conservation triumph. Once extinct in China, a small population of 39 milu deer, also known as Pere David's deer, was reintroduced from the UK in 1986. Over nearly four decades of dedicated breeding and protection efforts, the 39 have flourished, growing into a thriving population of 8,216 deer, accounting for nearly 70 percent of milu deer in the world, according to the reserve administration. Of these, 3,553 roam freely in the wild.

This remarkable transformation is just one reason the reserve has earned its place among the Top 100 Must-See Destinations in Asia in the



Left: A tourist poses with a milu deer at the nature reserve in Yancheng. Right: A visitor at the milu deer museum in the city.

2025 Word-of-Mouth Travel Rankings released by leading online travel agency Trip.com Group.

The rankings cover 291 destinations around the globe and were selected through a combination of user reviews, smart algorithms, and curated content, to offer inspiration and guidance from planning to booking.

The list includes some 1,500 hotels, 800 attractions, 800 restaurants, and nearly 400 night experiences, connecting visitors to rewarding travel routes through the Recommended Itineraries feature.

These range from nature escapes and cultural treasures, to ancient towns and must-see performances. Particularly noteworthy this year is the increase in nighttime tourism listings, with highly rated bars, markets, light shows, and music events making the cut.

"The Word-of-Mouth list has evolved over more than a decade," explains Wang Wei, a senior official at Trip.com Group.

"It underwent a major upgrade in 2020 during the pandemic and has since expanded with more diverse and nuanced categories to reflect the changing desires of modern travelers."

Wang says that travel today is no longer just about sightseeing.

"People travel to connect, to heal, to learn, and to discover themselves. Our list has grown to reflect these deeper intentions, highlighting destinations that speak to a traveler's values, interests and dreams."

It's in this context that Yancheng, the host city of the launch ceremony for this year's rankings, is stepping into the spotlight.

Once considered a relatively low-profile destination in East China, Yancheng is now attracting travelers' attention for its environmental and cultural offerings.

The city's natural beauty is one major draw, along with its UNESCO world natural heritage site — migratory bird sanctuaries along the coast of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf —



which plays a critical role in global biodiversity.

Add to that seasonal floral landscapes like the Dutch Flower Sea, and visitors are treated to a blend of spectacle and serenity. Bustling markets, food streets, and shopping districts, especially in the northern Jiangsu style, provide yet another dimension of exploration.

"The high-speed rail network has been a game-changer," Wang says. "Yancheng is now just a couple of hours away from major urban centers like Shanghai, Nanjing and Hangzhou. That accessibility has spurred a boom in weekend and short-stay tourism," he adds.

Over the past two years, the city has become a magnet for urban escapees — young professionals and families looking for quick getaways, rich in character and comfort. It's part of a larger national trend, driven by rising interest in niche travel experiences and themed tourism, Wang says.

Capitalizing on this momentum,

Yancheng authorities say they are planning to go deeper.

The goal is to tell the city's story to the world in more compelling ways, officials stated during the ceremony. That includes tapping into the city's cultural roots, from its heritage as a center for making sea salt, and revolutionary history, to its vast reservoir of intangible cultural heritage.

Plans are underway to develop more immersive experiences, such as study tours, bird-watching expeditions, wellness retreats, and golf tourism.

New attractions and dynamic events, like marathons, music festivals, and esports tournaments are being launched to engage younger travelers and create cultural moments that resonate both online and in life.

City leaders also hope to enhance Yancheng's visibility abroad by improving inbound tourism services, especially in light of China's relaxed visa policies.

Wang emphasizes that domestic

tourism itself is evolving.

"Besides families, we're seeing growing interest from two rapidly emerging groups: young travelers and retirees. These groups have distinct preferences, and offerings must meet their lifestyle needs, with better experiences and personalized service."

For travelers like Keekeni, these changes only increase the country's allure.

"China stands out as a travel destination because of its blend of tradition and modernity," she says. "In Shanghai, you can be surrounded by futuristic skyscrapers and, in the same day, walk through an ancient town where people still dress in traditional styles. It feels like time travel — seeing the past and future coexist. That's something truly special."

The food alone, she adds, is worth the journey. "As I travel more, I realize how incredibly varied Chinese cuisine is. Every region brings a new surprise, and I love learning the stories behind each dish and place."

The convenience of domestic travel doesn't hurt either. "It's affordable to travel around China. The public transportation system — subways, high-speed trains, even flights — makes it so easy to get anywhere," she says.

Keekeni has shared her travels through videos and photos on social media, and her content has found an eager audience. Some of her travel videos have garnered over 26,000 views, reflecting the growing international interest in China as a destination.

"I want to show people the real China," she says. "There's so much beauty, warmth, and surprise here. I'll definitely be exploring more of the places on that top destination list."

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Riding rising wave of arrivals, China's guides give tourists the local edge

Dan Niu, once confined to a cubicle crunching numbers at a Shanghai bank, now spends weekdays cycling through the city's alleyways, leading foreign tourists past steamed bun stalls and hidden galleries tucked away off the beaten path.

"On our rides, we can stop anytime to chat with people at breakfast spots, or dance with retirees in public squares," says Dan, whose cycling tours give international travelers a half-day glimpse into everyday Shanghai, far from the usual tourist trail.

Dan's career shift reflects the travel boom in China, partly fueled by visa-free policies. China has introduced unilateral visa-free policies for 38 countries, and offers 240-hour transit visa-free arrangements to another 54 countries.

The result has been striking. More than 20 million visa-free inbound trips were recorded in 2024, a 112.3 percent increase year-on-year, according to the National Immigration Administration.

This inbound tourism boom has opened up opportunities for people with foreign language skills like Dan.

GZL International Travel Service in Guangdong province has expanded its multilingual guide team to around 30 people, including 14 new members hired since late 2023, with English-speaking guides remaining the most sought-after.

In an era of instant AI-powered translation, tourists can travel to most foreign countries without the need for a translator. However, the human connection is still highly valued. After all, while technology can translate, it cannot guide. The warmth of a smile and the bond forged in a shared moment still require the human touch.

"What we're seeing goes far beyond language assistance," says Zhou Weihong, deputy general manager of Shanghai-based travel agency Spring Tour. Since the relaxation of visa policies, the agency has seen a growing influx of European and American tourists seeking cultural experiences that standard itineraries often overlook.

To meet demand, the agency has included the 2025 Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix in its tour packages, offer-



Tourists pose for photos at Yuyuan Garden in Shanghai. CHEN HAOMING / XINHUA

ing international visitors an exclusive combination of race event access and carefully curated Shanghai city experiences.

Xu Junjie, a Japanese-speaking guide, has also observed a growing trend in demand for culturally distinctive experiences.

"Alongside classic tours, visitors are increasingly drawn to quintessentially Chinese activities like tai chi and calligraphy," Xu says. "Some even request tours of filming locations inspired by Chinese TV dramas."

Zhao Da, a Spanish-speaking guide, says Spanish tourists tend to

have different priorities. "They are captivated by China's natural landscapes, with river cruises being their favorite," Zhao says. "Equally important is shopping for unique Chinese-style fashion items."

Even for the tourists from the same region, interests can vary with age. Chen Junjun, an English-speaking guide in Shanghai, observed that elderly European tourists seek historical experiences delivered with nostalgia, while Gen Z travelers crave urban exploration, including hidden food gems and street culture, so Chen tailors itineraries to suit generational preferences.

Xu Kai, another English-speaking tour guide, has seen a noticeable rise in visitors from South America. He also noticed that this year's inbound tourism season started earlier than last year.

Specializing in high-end travel, Xu Kai curates personalized itineraries that give visitors access to lesser-known, authentic experiences.

"What surprises most guests is how different China is from what they expected," Xu Kai says. "I often hear

things like, 'This isn't what we imagined at all,' or 'seeing is believing.'"

Though tourist consultants are one choice for many foreign visitors, popular Chinese social media platforms have become a thriving place to discover potential tour guides. This is how Yami, a Russian-language graduate student, finds clients.

Living in Sichuan province, home of pandas and spicy hotpot, Yami obtained a tour guide certification in early 2024 and began offering services through Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, a popular Chinese social media app.

Yami receives a flood of inquiries through RedNote. In the second half of 2024 alone, Yami led 16 Russian tour groups, and the schedule is already fully booked through June this year.

For Yami, guiding is more than just a paycheck. "Through daily interaction, I learn about my guests' lives back home. It feels like a study-abroad experience, with international visitors bringing the world to me," Yami says.

XINHUA