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CHINA DAILY

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MODERNIZATION FOR ALL

Projects help build livelihoods in Kenya

By XU WEI in Beijing and OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi

As a quantity surveyor, Daniel Kigen Ruto has spent the past four years helping upgrade the Sagana-Marua highway, one of Kenya's most ambitious road projects and a critical artery designed to speed up commerce and connect rural communities to the economic heart of the nation.

For the 30-year-old, the project's meaning stretches far beyond the spreadsheets and cost tallies he keeps each day. "Every time I see a farmer's truck rushing to the market without getting stuck for hours, I feel proud," he said. "We are not just building a road; we are building livelihoods."

Since the upgrading of the highway started, the travel time has decreased from more than two hours to less than two hours. For Kenya's farmers, who grow the fruits and vegetables that line the markets of Nairobi, the capital city, this reduced time can mean the difference between the survival of their businesses and the loss of an entire harvest.

The Sagana-Marua highway expansion, undertaken by China Wu Yi, a construction and engineering company, is among the dozens of infrastructure projects funded or built with Chinese support across Kenya. Together, they are physical markers of Beijing's growing cooperation on the African continent.

The relationship was back under the spotlight as Kenyan President William Ruto wrapped up a five-day state visit to China on Saturday. During the visit, President Xi Jinping and Ruto witnessed the signing of 20 bilateral cooperation agreements covering the Belt and Road Initiative, advanced technology and public welfare projects.

Watching the news at his home in Nairobi, Ruto, the surveyor, said he could hardly hide his enthusiasm. "I don't remember the last time I smiled at the TV," he said.

Chinese investment has created jobs and chipped away at Kenya's stubbornly high unemployment rate, he said, adding that when the new memorandums of understanding are implemented, the rate would decline further.

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President Xi Jinping and other Party and State leaders on Monday hand over awards to model workers and exemplary individuals during a gathering to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. LI XUEREN / XINHUA

Xi calls for rallying working class

Role of Chinese trade unions as bridge and link between Party and workers highlighted

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has called for pooling the strength of the country's working class and working people into a powerful force to make greater contributions in the new era, as China embarks on a new journey to build a great country and advance national rejuvenation.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks on Monday at a gathering to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and honor national model workers and exemplary individuals.

The federation, which was founded in 1925 with 540,000 members, is currently the world's largest labor union, with a membership of nearly 300 million.

Xi said that over the past century, under the leadership of the CPC, the federation has united and mobilized the working class to focus on the Party's key tasks in each historical period.

"The practice over the past 100 years has fully proved that the working class in our country is indeed the most solid and reliable class foundation of the CPC," he said.

Xi also spoke highly of Chinese trade unions' role as a bridge and link between the Party and the working people, saying that these unions are both representatives and defenders of the workers' interests.

"Regardless of how the conditions of the times and social groups develop and change, the position and role of the working class in our country must be unwaveringly upheld; the fundamental policy of relying wholeheartedly on the working class must be unwaveringly upheld; and the nature and functions of our trade unions must be unwaveringly upheld," he said.

Xi urged trade unions to guide workers to tackle challenges in the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, forge ahead in developing emerging industries, and explore the cultivation of future industries, thus providing new momentum for the country's high-quality development.

In the wake of the latest round of

technological revolution and industrial transformation, Xi emphasized the need to increase the ranks of high-caliber workers to build an educated, skilled and innovative workforce.

He also called for efforts to create better employment and working conditions, as well as better reflect workers' labor, skills, knowledge and innovation in income distribution, in order to give the people a growing sense of fulfillment, happiness and security.

Addressing a gathering of 1,670 national model workers and 756 exemplary individuals, Xi said they are role models for the people and pillars of the nation. He encouraged them to cherish their laurels and continue to make new accomplishments.

When Xi said it is necessary to ensure that taking pride in labor becomes a social norm and that public support for labor is encouraged, the audience erupted into enthusiastic applause.

Chen Keying, an engineer with China National Offshore Oil Corp, said that Xi's words greatly motivated him as a worker engaged in oil and gas extraction in the South China Sea.

"Offshore extraction is full of challenges. Generation after generation of offshore oil workers have strug-

gled and fought bravely, passing down a model work ethic and the spirit of quality workmanship," Chen said, vowing to fulfill the mission and glory of workers in the new era with concrete actions.

Monday's event was the 17th State-level award ceremony for national model workers and exemplary individuals. The first such award ceremony was held in 1950, and the event has been held every five years since 1995.

Apart from those working in traditional sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, those honored included representatives of new professions such as delivery service.

Gao Feng, a Meituan deliveryman, who was recognized as a national model worker this year, said the State-level honor fully demonstrates the care and concern of the Party and the country for the new workforce.

"I feel that the power of an individual may be little, but the power of a group is immense. This award does not belong to me alone, but also belongs to our entire group," he said.

As May 1 marks International Workers' Day, President Xi also extended festive greetings and best wishes to the country's working people.

WORLD WATCH
By David Gibson-Moore

Trilateral engagement key in global trade system

In an era of shifting alliances, politicized trade policies and fragmented supply chains, a realignment is underway that could well define one of the most important chapters in global commerce. China, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are currently forging deeper economic, strategic and financial ties in a way that reflects not only mutual interest but also a shared response to uncertainties currently confronting the global trade order.

While the world's attention has been focused on tariff wars and decoupling debates, these regions have been concentrating on connectivity, infrastructure and pragmatic interdependence. Together, they represent over 2.1 billion people and a combined GDP of around \$25 trillion. This trilateral engagement represents a highly important component in today's global trade architecture.

Among the most consequential of these evolving relationships is the rapidly expanding partnership between China and the GCC. Two-way trade reached over \$300 billion in 2023 and China is now the largest trading partner for most Gulf states. What began primarily as a relationship focused on hydrocarbons, is now rapidly maturing into a multidimensional partnership encompassing infrastructure, industrial investment, finance and digital technologies.

Gulf sovereign wealth funds, with assets surpassing \$4 trillion, are increasingly directing capital into Chinese infrastructure and technology while China is scaling up long-term energy deals and co-investing in special economic zones across the Gulf. Investment in green energy, digital infrastructure and logistics networks continues to accelerate, aligning with the goals of national diversification programs such as Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE Centennial Plan 2071.

Parallel to its growing relationship with China, the GCC has also been steadily building a multilayered partnership with ASEAN, home to around 680 million people and with a combined GDP exceeding \$3.9 trillion.

In 2023, intra-ASEAN trade totaled \$759 billion while foreign direct investment reached a record high of \$230 billion.

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STRICTER CONTROLS IMPOSED ON MARKETING OF SMART DRIVING CARS

Ministry cracks down on exaggerated claims about vehicles' capabilities

By LI FUSHENG
lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

"They are nothing but lies," said Wang Yun, a 35-year-old teacher at a middle school in Tianjin, about many carmakers' marketing campaigns to promote smart driving vehicles.

Once an avid fan of the electric Xiaomi SU7, Wang's enthusiasm for such vehicles waned after a



fatal crash in East China's Anhui province in March involving the model.

Three young people were in the vehicle, cruising on a highway late at night at 116 kilometers per hour with its smart driving sys-

tem Xiaomi Pilot on, when the car suddenly prompted the driver to "take over" after it detected an obstacle.

Data from Xiaomi shows the driver immediately took control of the vehicle. However, it ended up crashing into a concrete barrier at 97 km/h and bursting into flames, killing all three occupants of the car.

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Offering comfort



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sunday talks to one of those injured in the massive explosion that ripped through a port in Bandar Abbas. The death toll from Saturday's blast now stands at 46, with over 1,000 wounded. HANDOUT VIA REUTERS See story, page 7

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An intelligent connected vehicle tester monitors the status of the car during a road test in Wuhan, Hubei province, in July. WU ZHIZUN / XINHUA

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The popularity among young people of Xiaomi and its founder Lei Jun sparked widespread discussion about the safety of the vehicle's smart driving system and its technology.

The tragedy also prompted Wang to question whether the technology was perfect, as many automakers claimed. "How can any human driver solve such a problem in three seconds?" he asked.

Wang later discovered that carmakers make it clear in user manuals that a smart driving system cannot cope with every situation. They are legally required to make such disclosures, however, they don't mention these clarifications at product launches.

On social media, there are multiple video clips in which executives confidently and enthusiastically boast that their cars are smart enough to outperform experienced drivers. They usually show footage of a smart driving system avoiding all accidents.

One of the executives who often takes to social media is Yu Chengdong, head of Huawei's smart car solutions. He wrote on the Weibo platform that his Luxeed "drove itself all the way" when he returned from his home city of Huoqiu, Anhui, to Shenzhen, Guangdong province, during the Spring Festival holiday earlier this year.

Luxeed is one of the marques developed by carmakers and Huawei that uses the technology giant's smart driving system. The vehicles are marketed under the banner of the Huawei Intelligent Mobility Alliance.

Lu Fang, CEO of automaker Dongfeng's premium marque Voyah, has warned about exaggerating the capabilities of smart driving. "The problem isn't with the technology itself — it's with how it's being marketed," he said.

Lu said carmakers should accurately inform potential buyers about the capabilities of a specific model.

"Safety is the baseline. They must know what their vehicles can do," he said, adding buyers shouldn't be confused by "vague ideas".

Clarity of operations

Phrases such as "smart driving" or "high-level smart driving" are more marketing language than technical terms.

Vehicle automation is divided into six levels, Level 0 to 5, based on how much control the vehicle takes versus the human driver, according to the Society of Automotive Engineers.

Functions now available in passenger vehicles in China are Level 2, which means the car can control both steering and speed simultaneously under certain conditions, but the driver must stay alert and keep their hands on the wheel.

Many carmakers, however, refer to such functions, which are nothing but driving-assist ones, as "high-level smart driving" in their marketing campaigns, which makes a vehicle sound more advanced than it is.

Another common marketing ploy is to say the vehicle's functions are Level 2.9 or 2.999, a meaningless number used to convey the idea a particular car is better than its rivals, and close to achieving Level 3.

According to the Society of Automotive Engineers, a Level 3 vehicle can drive itself in specific scenarios, such as a traffic jam, and the driver

can take their hands off the wheel and eyes off the road — but must be ready to take over when requested.

No Chinese carmaker has commercially launched a Level 3 vehicle, although some claim that they will soon.

A large number of car buyers are attracted by the hype of smart driving, believing that their vehicles are capable of autonomous driving, which is classified as Level 4 or 5.

"This is how internet companies-turned carmakers promote things. That's incredibly irresponsible," Lu said. "Just because someone is loud doesn't mean they're right."

Overstating features is one of the strategies frequently used by NEV startups to impress potential buyers.

In February, Wei Jianjun, chairman of China's largest SUV maker, Great Wall Motors, warned that "smart driving is not a show".

Toning down claims

In a move that appeared an attempt to tone down the hype, the Huawei alliance issued a notice on April 15 calling for the use of smart driving in a "standardized way".

Nevertheless, the alliance claimed that its system had helped 700,000 vehicles prevent 1.7 million possible accidents.

"Safety is the best luxury," said Yu, head of Huawei's smart car solutions, when he unveiled the alliance's new models in Shanghai the day after the notice was issued.

On April 18, Horizon Robotics, a Chinese smart driving solution provider, also unveiled its latest products in Shanghai.

However, it abandoned descriptions such as "smart driving" and "high-level smarting", and said simply the vehicle had "Level 2 driving-assist solutions".

The change in terminology followed a meeting convened by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology earlier that week. The ministry said in a news release on April 16 that it had instructed automakers to avoid exaggerated or misleading marketing. Carmakers were also told to thoroughly test the driving-assist systems and clearly define their true capabilities.

Companies must also fulfill their duty to fully inform users, ensure production consistency, and take full responsibility for product quality and safety, said the ministry.

A picture of the meeting's minutes, which has been widely circulated on social media, shows much

Smart driving: From hype to regulation



A technician installs a steering robot for an upcoming test of an intelligent connected vehicle in July in Tianjin. SUN FANYUE / XINHUA



A car undergoes an automated driving test in simulated rainy conditions in Haikou, Hainan province, on May 8. GUO CHENG / XINHUA

stricter ministry controls.

Among other things, it said carmakers should not use terms such as "autonomous", "smart driving" or "high-level smart driving", "eyes-free", and "hands-free" when they describe their driving-assist functions.

Even "take over" is not allowed, because the term is technically applicable to Level 3, and not Level 2 functions. Instead, the simple term "driving-assist" is recommended.

Also, carmakers were told not to organize large-scale public tests for publicity purposes.

Yu Kai, founder and CEO of Horizon Robotics, said the ministry had done a "great" job. "It is a great, virtuous curb, without which the sector cannot have a healthy and orderly development," he said.

Realistic expectations

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, called for a combined approach to ensure safety as smart driving features become available to more car buyers.

"It is critical to address the gap between consumer perception, and the actual capabilities of the driving-assist systems," said Cui.

He also suggested that vehicles that claim features such as "hands-free" and "eyes-free" driving should be strictly monitored.

Normally, such vehicles will give a warning if the drivers' hands are off the steering wheel for a certain amount of time.

But drivers can easily circumvent this safety measure by buying a gadget to put on the steering wheel. Others just wedge a bottle of water into the steering wheel.

Cui called for tighter regulation of these cheat gadgets, which are easy to find on platforms like Taobao.

He also advised the media to adopt a more cautious tone in their stories about the technology.

Content creators tend to upload eye-catching or sensational videos and images to attract viewers, which brings income from the platform and advertising opportunities.

Lu, the Voyah CEO, said he gets mad when he sees misleading video clips. "It is infuriating to see a whole family sleeping in a car driving on the highway. You want to report it (to the platform)," he said.

Serious traditional media outlets are often caught in the dilemma of whether to adopt a similar sensationalist style. Some analysts believe that social media platforms such as Douyin should ban such

videos as they are dangerous.

Meanwhile, traffic management authorities are starting to issue alerts and warnings for smart driving vehicles.

During the recent Qingming holiday, targeted warning signs appeared on roadsides and highways across Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces as holiday traffic surged.

They read: "Construction barrier ahead, turn off intelligent driver assistance." "Intelligent driving is only an aid, focus is still required for highway driving," and "Driver assistance may involve risks, exercise caution on highways."

Wang, the middle school teacher in Tianjin, acknowledges the role of carmakers and the media, but believes car owners should be responsible for themselves.

"You cannot easily trust those who sell you things to get your money, can you? You are an adult, you cannot rely on others to take care of you. Don't be pampered and do your homework," he said.

A popular choice

Horizon Robotics has forged partnerships with more than 40 automotive brands, including China's top 10 carmakers, and has over 5 million vehicles on the road using its smart solutions.

At the April 18 product launch in Shanghai, Horizon Robotics unveiled new deals with several carmakers including Chery.

A month earlier, Chery announced its plan to make "smart driving" available in various models, with the cheapest one priced around \$10,000.

Other major automakers Geely and BYD have unveiled similar strategies.

"We believe that smart driving should not be a luxury, but a standard feature for all consumers," said Wang Chuanfu, chairman and president of BYD, at an event in February.

Wang said 21 percent of traffic accidents in China are attributable to fatigued drivers, which can be prevented by automatic emergency braking or steering.

BYD, with more than 4 million units sold in 2024 is the country's bestselling carmaker, and its latest move is expected to accelerate the adoption of high-level driving-assist functions in the mass market.

Many industry experts are already calling 2025 the first year of mass adoption of driving-assist functions, which have become a key factor for automakers to stay competitive in the market.

Zhang Yongwei, secretary-general of the China EV 100 think tank, said in an interview in January that at least 65 percent of passenger vehicles will feature Level 2 functions this year.

"The integration of intelligent technologies will move beyond premium vehicles to become accessible in mainstream models priced between 100,000 yuan (\$13,700) and 200,000 yuan (\$27,400)," Zhang said.

A survey conducted by news portal Guancha.cn shows that consumer interest in the technology remains strong, with 83 percent of respondents saying such features would influence their decisions to buy a car.

A McKinsey poll shows that 76 percent of respondents tried "smart driving" in 2024, up from 65 percent in 2023.



TOP NEWS

Escalating tensions

A fire burns on Sunday after an Israeli airstrike in Dahieh, in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon. The attack occurred despite a ceasefire being in effect. There were no reports of casualties. HUSSEIN MALLA / AP PHOTO



Nation tops global ranking of nuclear power capacity

By ZHENG XIN

zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China is set to become a global leader in operational nuclear power capacity by 2030, as it steadily expanding its nuclear energy industry, said experts and company executives.

As of the end of 2024, the country had 102 nuclear reactors in operation, under construction, or approved for construction, with a combined installed capacity of 113 million kilowatts, according to the "China Nuclear Energy Development Report 2025", which was released on Sunday in Beijing at the Spring International Forum on Sustainable Nuclear Energy Development.

This is the first time that China's overall nuclear power capacity has topped global rankings, the report said.

"China's nuclear energy development is entering a new period of strategic opportunities," Yang Changli, rotating chairman of the China Nuclear Energy Association, said at the forum.

"By 2030, the installed capacity of operational nuclear power is expected to reach 110 million kW. Nuclear power will play a vital role as a key substitute for high-carbon energy sources and a mainstay for the stability of the

new power system," Yang said.

On Sunday, the State Council, China's Cabinet, approved the construction of 10 new reactors, including Phase III of the Sanmen Nuclear Power Plant in East China's Zhejiang province, with a combined investment exceeding 200 billion yuan (\$27.4 billion).

This is the fourth year in a row that China has approved at least 10 new reactors, which further demonstrates the key role that nuclear power plays in the country's clean energy transition.

According to the CNEA, China currently has 28 nuclear reactors under construction, with a total installed capacity of 33.65 million kW. It also has 58 operational commercial nuclear reactors, with a combined installed capacity of 60.96 million kW.

"China's nuclear power sector has entered a peak period of large-scale construction," said Dong Baotong, vice-minister of ecology and environment. "With more units expected to be approved in the future, China's scale of units under construction is higher than the combined total of units under construction in countries worldwide."

According to the report, investment in nuclear power engineering construction in 2024 reached a record high of 146.9 billion yuan,

about 52 billion yuan more than the previous year.

CITIC Securities estimated that with the accelerated approval of nuclear power projects, investment in new nuclear power plants in China is expected to reach 231 billion yuan by 2025, which will further stimulate the country's related industry chain and help the country achieve its carbon emission reduction targets sooner than planned.

The State Council meeting on Sunday emphasized absolute safety in nuclear power development, calling for efforts to ensure that nuclear power units are built and operated in accordance with the highest global safety standards.

According to the latest World Association of Nuclear Operators' index on global nuclear power unit performance, China's nuclear power operation safety performance has continued to rank among the best in the world.

Hou Yingdong, an official with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, said at a news conference on Wednesday that China's nuclear power units have been operating with good safety standards for years.

Nuclear power units on the Chinese mainland have been operating safely for over 600 reactor years, he said. A reactor year refers to an operating year of one nuclear reactor.

Hou noted that China's nuclear power plants are all located far from earthquake-prone areas, and the impact of natural disasters such as heavy rain, floods and tsunamis has been fully considered. "The safety of the nuclear power plants is guaranteed in the face of extreme natural disasters," he said.

China has also established the world's largest monitoring network for radiation environment quality, and the radiation environment level around nuclear facilities has remained low for years, according to the news conference.

The China Nuclear Energy Association said that by 2024, China had achieved 100 percent domestic origin for key main equipment for nuclear power and ensured the independent control of key component technologies. It added that the country's independent research and development in the sector continues to achieve new breakthroughs.

The National Energy Administration said earlier that China has been making steady progress on under-construction nuclear power projects, and future power supply growth is likely to come mostly from nonfossil energy sources amid the country's green transition.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Chinese firms to scale back business in US

Survey shows that companies are expanding into emerging markets instead to compensate

By ZHONG NAN

zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

A survey covering more than 1,100 Chinese foreign trade companies found that nearly 50 percent of respondents will scale back their business activities with the United States amid tariff hikes.

The survey results, released on Monday by China's top foreign trade and investment promotion agency, also said that 75.3 percent of surveyed companies are seeking to expand into emerging markets to compensate for the reduction in exports to the US.

The study was conducted recently by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade to analyze the impact of US tariff hikes on Chinese exporters, so that the agency can provide targeted trade promotion services.

Zhao Ping, spokeswoman for the trade promotion council, said at a monthly news conference in Beijing that the frequent changes in US tariff policies have increased uncertainty, making it difficult for Chinese manufacturers to plan for the long term.

Chinese exporters are exploring new markets, boosting domestic sales, strengthening supply chains and adapting to changes, in order to overcome the challenges, she added.

Zhang Sihong, deputy director of the China Foreign Trade Center, one of the organizers of the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, said these moves are part of a broader strategy by Chinese manufacturers to diversify their markets and enhance supply chain resilience.

"Overseas companies are also seeking to strengthen cooperation with Chinese exporters to mitigate the impact of unilateralism on their businesses," said Zhang.

For instance, the second phase of the 137th Canton Fair, which concluded on Sunday, attracted more than 224,000 buyers from 219 countries and regions, the highest number recorded for the same phase in the fair's history.

Wang Li, a researcher specializing in foreign trade at the Beijing-

based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that Chinese companies, faced with mounting external pressures, are eager to reduce reliance on a single market and build more adaptable, risk-resistant business models to maintain steady growth in the long run.

One such company is Shandong Lingong Construction Machinery Co, a manufacturer of wheel loaders and excavators based in Linyi, Shandong province. The value of the company's exports to economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative exceeded 600 million yuan (\$82.2 million) in the first quarter of 2025, accounting for more than 70 percent of its total export value, according to Qingdao Customs data.

"To mitigate risks arising from protectionism in recent years, we have been actively expanding our sales network in emerging markets and establishing partnerships in regions and countries such as Central Asia, Latin America, South Africa and Indonesia," said Zhang Chengwei, head of Shandong Lingong's excavator unit.

Meanwhile, Ningbo Careline Electric Appliance Co, a home appliance exporter based in Zhejiang province, said it has seen strong domestic demand for its newly launched smart air fryer after shifting its focus to the local market earlier this year.

"Amid this year's complex and volatile international trade environment, we responded swiftly to market trends and seized opportunities in the domestic market to expand our sales network," said Yu Xiongwei, the company's president.

In the first quarter, Ningbo Careline's total orders grew more than 20 percent year-on-year, with domestic sales accounting for more than 20 percent of total sales.

Efforts to expand international engagement are also accelerating, as the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade has organized 184 delegations of Chinese entrepreneurs to visit and engage in exchanges with 45 countries and regions since the beginning of this year.

Trade: Triangular dynamic shaping new economic order

From page 1

This accounted for 17 percent of global FDI inflows, making ASEAN the largest FDI recipient among developing regions.

ASEAN now accounts for more than 7.5 percent of global exports and serves as a manufacturing and supply chain hub across sectors ranging from electronics and pharmaceuticals to automotive components and agri-tech.

As traditional trade corridors come under strain, ASEAN offers access to consumer markets, digital innovation and advanced manufacturing ecosystems, while Gulf countries provide ASEAN with much-needed capital investment, energy resources and, increasingly, strategic co-development in infrastructure and green technologies.

What makes all of this so partic-

ularly significant is the convergence of the deepening China-GCC and ASEAN-GCC relationships into a broader trilateral architecture. Many see this triangular dynamic as a path forward amid the global trade fragmentation prompted by tariff regime shifts, supply chain disruptions and growing geopolitical frictions. This emerging framework could evolve into a pragmatic model of economic cooperation that is rooted in infrastructure connectivity, cross-border capital flows and regulatory harmonization.

Initiatives such as joint investment funds, co-managed special economic zones and digitally integrated logistics corridors could provide the building blocks of such a model. Moreover, by prioritizing openness, trade facilitation and investment liberalization, the

China-GCC-ASEAN triangle can strengthen the broader case for multilateralism and reinforce principles of the World Trade Organization at a time when many global institutions are facing severe headwinds. Their combined influence representing over 2.1 billion people and some of the world's fastest-growing economies positions this group of countries not only as regional actors but active contributors to shaping a more inclusive and decentralized global trade order.

A very real story is unfolding across Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Beijing, Jakarta and other capitals in the region where capital and connectivity are increasingly converging. This is visible through a growing network of bilateral energy deals, sovereign wealth fund co-investments, joint infrastructure pro-

jects and digital cooperation platforms. Whether through Chinese participation in Gulf logistics corridors, Emirati investment in Southeast Asian fintech or ASEAN support for cross-border green energy supply chains, each capital is playing a distinct yet interconnected role in shaping a new, multipolar economic order.

As the world edges toward a more fragmented future, the China-ASEAN-GCC triangle may well emerge as a very real framework capable of opportunity and shared prosperity across three of the world's most vital and ambitious regions.

The author is president and CEO of Gulf Analytica based in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Thrills on wheels



Riders compete on Sunday during the NETT Quad and Sidecarcross Championship at the Iron Works Moto Park in Middlesbrough, the United Kingdom. LEE SMITH / REUTERS

Visit: China supports Kenya's efforts to develop its untapped resources

From page 1

On Thursday, Xi assured his Kenyan counterpart that China's supersized market is always open to high-quality Kenyan products, and China encourages more capable Chinese enterprises to invest and start businesses in the East African country.

China is Kenya's largest trading partner and the biggest source of its imports, while Kenya is China's biggest trading partner in East Africa. According to the General Administration of Customs, trade between the two nations grew 8.8 percent year-on-year to reach \$8.82 billion in 2024.

In a social media post, Ruto said that the "Kenya-China strategic

partnership is permanent, people-centered, and continues to deliver practical, tangible, impactful and sustainable win-win situations".

"Our Chinese partners will invest significant resources to improve our road infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, blue economy, green energy, and information and communications technology sectors, among others. These commitments are further evidence of China's resolute support to our efforts to grow our economy, create jobs for our youth, and unlock the untapped resources of our great nation."

Ruto's itinerary included a trip to Ningde, Fujian province, where he visited the company premises of Chinese battery giant Contemporary Amperex Technology, or CATL, and

a poverty alleviation exhibition hall. Ningde is where Xi spearheaded wide-ranging efforts to fight poverty during his tenure as the city's top official between 1988 and 1990.

The Kenyan leader lauded the foresight and persistence of Ningde's present and past leaders for "pulling the hilly metropolis from abject poverty within one generation".

"We endeavor to apply some of these valuable lessons from Ningde, and China in general, to the plan on poverty eradication efforts in Kenya," Ruto said.

According to a joint statement signed by the two heads of state on creating an inspiring example in the all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era, China will support its enterprises in

collaborating with Kenya to develop local healthcare industries, thereby contributing to the better health and well-being of the Kenyan people.

Analysts said that Ruto's China visit offered a crucial opportunity for the East African country to not only reinforce its economic agenda, but also play a more prominent role in South-South cooperation.

Gordon Kachola, a Kenyan foreign policy analyst, said that Ruto's visit to China was instrumental, because it reaffirmed the two countries' commitment to drive cooperation under the BRI.

"There is no doubt that Kenya is a key BRI partner in Africa, having already benefited from major Chinese investments on roads, railways and energy," Kachola said, noting

that the visit served as an opportunity for Ruto to propose ways in which Kenya can implement the outcomes of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit held in Beijing last year.

"With the expanded cooperation between the two nations, Kenyans expect Ruto to use the country's strategic position to unlock opportunities in digital trade, agriculture, the blue economy, health, environmental conservation, education, and the creative economy, especially for youth and women," he added.

Aly Khan Satchu, a leading investment banker in Kenya, said that Ruto's visit served as a framework to boost bilateral projects, particularly under the BRI. The visit also came

amid shifting global geopolitical dynamics and signals a renewed push to reshape the tenets of Kenya-China cooperation, he said.

The Kenyan president's visit was an indication that China and Africa can work together to formulate trade arrangements, which in turn can help them minimize the effects of global trade uncertainties such as the United States' tariff hikes, Satchu said.

Ruto, the surveyor, said that China is like a big brother and a mentor to Kenya.

"From infrastructure to imports, the list of things that China has helped and is still helping Kenya achieve is endless. I and many other Kenyans are hoping that the partnership will continue as long as possible," he added.

Contact the writers at xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

CHINA



Trial phase begins

The newly inaugurated Xinglianlu Bridge in Changsha, Hunan province, began trial operations on Monday. The 5.5-kilometer twin-tower cable-stayed structure spanning the Xiangjiang River is expected to significantly reduce congestion in the city's northern area. GUO LIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Students find how rice tasted two millennia ago

CHANGSHA — A team of students in China recently gave suggestions as to what rice might have tasted like in the country two millennia ago, based on their study of an ancient document. Notably, 60 percent of China's population currently eats rice as a staple food. In their project, which combined historical research and culinary experimentation, the team from the Yuelu Academy of Hunan University in Hunan province cooked rice according to recipes recorded in a bamboo manuscript titled "Shi Fang," an ancient text dating back to the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-AD 8).



Cooking rice from the Western Han Dynasty period has deepened our appreciation for the richness and allure of traditional Chinese culture."

Luo Jiayi, a student from Hunan University

Unearthed from the tomb of Wu Yang, a senior official during the Western Han period in what is today Yuanling county in Hunan, the "Shi Fang" manuscript details methods of preparing and cooking a variety of ingredients, offering insights into early Chinese gastronomy. Dishes such as steamed rice, chicken soup and steamed fish reveal a sophisticated culinary culture.

"In the 'Culinary Culture in Hunan' course, I first encountered the 'Shi Fang' manuscript," said Luo Jiayi, a student from Hunan University. "Through the vivid and intriguing bamboo slips, the ancient foodies from 2,000 years ago came to life before my eyes."

"Cooking rice from the Western Han Dynasty period has deepened our appreciation for the richness and allure of traditional Chinese culture," Luo added.

This endeavor brought together an interdisciplinary team of 10 students from Hunan University and one from China Agricultural University in Beijing, who specialize in history, philosophy, museology, food science and design. They were divided into research, experimental, filming and design groups, aiming not just to interpret ancient texts but also to bring ancient flavors back to life.

However, challenges loomed large. "Many of the bamboo slips are fragmented, and the meanings of some ancient characters have evolved over time," said Xiong Yuxuan, a member of the research group, while adding that cooking duration times were not mentioned in the manuscript, which meant that the team had to keep adjusting their experiments in the course of their research.

Modern conditions also presented difficulties. Today's rice varieties, cooking utensils and fire methods differ greatly from those in ancient times. "While complete authenticity is impossible, com-

bing Han-era techniques with modern technology allows students to tap into ancient wisdom," said Shi Jian, an associate professor at Yuelu Academy, who supervised the project.

For example, the team opted for the traditional rural *zengzi*, a wooden steamer, and clay pots still used in some Chinese villages, instead of the rare ancient *yan*, a specialized vessel for steaming, achieving comparable effects in their cooking process.

Also, to match both the quality and shape of rice cultivated 2,000 years ago, the team, assisted by master chef He Junxian, selected a type of nonglutinous rice resembling that of Han-era Hunan.

After numerous experiments under He's guidance, the students finally refined the process, soaking the rice for half an hour before draining it, then steaming it for 20 minutes, airing it to cool, adding water and steaming again for another 15 minutes.

The result was rice that was loose yet elastic, with a pleasing texture and notably lower sugar content, characteristics aligned with today's healthy eating trends. "The rice recreated according to the 'Shi Fang' manuscript might inspire new culinary innovations in contemporary restaurants," He said.

After tasting the recreated rice, Peter Brian Ditmanson, an American professor at Yuelu Academy, described it as "comfort food." Enthralled by the project, Ditmanson said he would promote the initiative globally through platforms such as TikTok.

The team revealed that they will also seek to restore the use of other ingredients, such as meat and spices, based on the "Shi Fang" manuscript. China is the world's largest rice producer and the birthplace of rice culture. The earliest artificially cultivated rice was grown 10,000 years ago and was discovered in Daoxian county in Hunan.

XINHUA

China meets ecological targets

Minister outlines measures that helped advance progress at legislative session

By HOU LIQIANG
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

China achieved all of its 2024 goals for ecological and environmental improvement, with many targets surpassed, Minister of Ecology and Environment Huang Runqiu said on Sunday.

Huang made the remarks while reporting to an ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, which started on Sunday and will run through Wednesday.

Following a year-on-year decrease of 2.7 percent, the average density of PM2.5 particulate matter in major cities nationwide reached 29.3 micrograms per cubic meter last year, compared to the annual target of 32.2 micrograms, Huang said.

He noted that major cities experienced fairly good air quality — defined as an index below 100 on the 0-500 air quality scale — on 87.2 per-

cent of days last year, up 1.7 percentage points year-on-year and 0.3 percentage points higher than the yearly goal.

The proportion of surface water achieving Grade I, II or III quality levels in 2024 surpassed the 85 percent target set for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, Huang said.

China uses a five-tier system for surface water quality, with Grade I being the best. Water graded at or above Grade III is considered fairly good and suitable for most aquatic organisms.

In 2024, 90.4 percent of surface water was found to be at or above Grade III, up 1 percentage point from a year earlier, marking the first time the proportion exceeded 90 percent, Huang said.

He highlighted the significant progress made in pollution control at Taihu Lake — the country's third-largest freshwater lake in the lower Yangtze River region — and the

Songhua River in Northeast China.

"Last year, the quality of water in Taihu Lake reached the level of being fairly good for the first time in the past 30 years," he said, adding that the Songhua River also rid itself of its lightly polluted status in 2024.

Huang outlined a range of measures that contributed to the progress, including sustained efforts to minimize pollution from coal burning.

In 2024, ultra-low emission upgrades were completed for 130 million metric tons of crude steel production capacity. Additionally, about 2 million rural households in northern China shifted from burning coal to using clean fuels for home heating.

Nationwide, 17,000 kilometers of sewage pipelines were constructed or renovated last year. Black and odorous water bodies were eliminated in cities at and above the prefecture level, and 80 percent of such water bodies in county seats were cleaned.

Huang also said that 1,440 tailings ponds in the Yangtze River Econom-

ic Belt and 360 such ponds in the Yellow River Basin were effectively treated.

Despite the progress, Huang emphasized that improvements in ecological and environmental quality are not yet fully consolidated and that China still faces significant challenges in advancing its Beautiful China Initiative.

This year, the ministry will focus on "deepening reform of ecological civilization institutions and making concerted efforts to cut carbon emissions, reduce pollution, expand green development and pursue economic growth," he said.

He stressed China's commitment to coordinating ecological and environmental protection with green, low-carbon development.

"While consistently advancing the battle for blue skies, clear waters and clean soil to ensure steady and continuous improvement in ecological and environmental quality, the country will accelerate a thorough transition toward eco-friendly socioeconomic development," Huang said.

Atomic energy draft law submitted for review

By LI MENGHAN
limenghan@chinadaily.com.cn

China aims to complete its emergency management system for atomic energy accidents in order to support the sound and sustainable development of the atomic energy industry, according to a draft law under review by Chinese lawmakers.

The 59-item draft atomic energy law, submitted on Sunday to the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, includes new provisions on emergency plans and drills to enhance the country's ability to prevent and respond to atomic energy accidents, said Luo Yuan, a senior official with the NPC Constitution and Law Committee.

The draft mandates the establishment of a national atomic energy emergency coordination committee which will be responsi-

ble for organizing emergency management efforts, coordinating the formulation of a national emergency plan and implementing a graded management strategy for accident response.

It also requires relevant State Council departments, local governments at all levels and nuclear facility operators to draft emergency plans in compliance with the law, conduct drills and participate in emergency response activities.

In the event of an atomic energy accident, emergency response measures must be promptly initiated, with strict prohibitions on delays, cancellations or false reporting, the draft says.

The draft encourages the creation of an atomic energy accident emergency preparedness fund to ensure necessary funding for preparedness and response efforts.

To prevent atomic energy acci-

dents, the draft stresses prioritizing safety in research, development and utilization.

Operators of nuclear materials, nuclear facilities and other radioactive substances must take measures to prevent theft, damage, unauthorized access and illegal transfer, guarding against nuclear terrorism.

A national system for accounting and control of nuclear materials would be established. Operators involved in holding, using, producing, storing, transporting or disposing of nuclear materials must obtain relevant certificates, according to the draft.

China's support for nuclear technology research and development is also rooted in a commitment to atomic energy safety, the draft states. For instance, in the case of controlled thermonuclear fusion — hailed by Luo as an optimal energy solution — the draft suggests fostering scientific research while estab-

lishing a specialized supervisory and management framework tailored to its unique characteristics.

It also outlines a graded management system for fuels and devices used in controlled thermonuclear fusion.

"Currently, China has established a complete atomic energy industry chain and made notable advancements in atomic energy and its technologies," Huang Haihua, spokesman for the NPC Standing Committee's Legislative Affairs Commission, said at a news conference on Friday.

He added that the formulation of the atomic energy law is intended to present China as a responsible nuclear power. It would help convey China's commitment to international obligations and promote the concept of high-quality, safe, healthy and sustainable development in the atomic energy industry.

What they say

Editor's note: The State Council Information Office held a group interview on Monday in Beijing on strengthening heritage conservation to carry forward Chinese civilization. Five representatives from the field of cultural relics protection share their stories.



I have worked as a Great Wall protector for six years and my family members are highly supportive of the work I do. Once I sprained my ankle when going downhill and saw it swelling up. My husband said, "You stop patrolling it today, I will do it for you." That made me feel very happy. I love the Great Wall, so do

my family members and villagers... I feel the Great Wall serves as a great symbol of spirit. As a protector, I will safeguard it like I protect my home.

Liu Hongyan, a Great Wall protector in Shixia village, Badaling town, Yanqing district, Beijing



Participating in the national census of cultural relics twice, I have found that local people are actually the primary protectors of cultural relics... When our team reaches villages and tells the people that we are there to take the census of Karez well systems, they happily gather people who are

familiar with the systems to share details about basic situations, history and evolution, protection and use of the systems... They support our protection of cultural heritage with their concrete actions.

Wang Long, an associate researcher at the Academia Turfanica in Turpan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region



In recent years, breakthroughs have been made in archaeological studies in the Xizang autonomous region in Paleolithic and Neolithic eras and the Metal Age... Recent discoveries have pushed the timeline of the Paleo-

lithic era in Xizang from not exceeding 10,000 years in the past to ranging from 100,000 years to 10,000 years ago. Some people believed the areas in Xizang, with high altitude, extreme coldness and lack of oxygen, might be inhabitable for human living and we could not find such early sites in Xizang. But that's not true.

Shargan Wangdue, deputy director of the Institute for Conservation and Research of Tibetan Cultural Relics in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region

Working as a tour guide for more than two decades, I have a deep feeling that we are not only promoters of culture, but also protectors of cultural relics. Therefore, when training tour guides, I require them to integrate ideas



of protecting the relics in their explanation of the splendid Dunhuang culture, so that visitors can gain a concept of protecting cultural relics and understand their fragility, preciousness and non-renewability.

Song Shuxia, deputy director of the cultural promotion department at the Dunhuang Academy in Dunhuang, Gansu province

As a frontline researcher, I have deeply felt that when working in Cambodia, good international cooperation and communication have given me confidence, strength and a strong sense of



responsibility regarding cultural relics protection. Therefore, I have set high standards for my work in restoring ancient buildings in Cambodia, and been strict with the quality and safety of our projects and carefully measured every stone architectural component and artifact unearthed. I want to give full play to China's cultural relics protection techniques and ideas in the Angkor Wat temple complex.

Liu Hanxing, a researcher at the China Academy of Cultural Heritage in Beijing

WANG RU

CHINA

Beijing's tourism map shows yearlong cultural events

By DU JUAN
dujuan@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing, the Chinese capital known for its rich culture and long history, is stepping up efforts to attract more residents and tourists by showcasing its unique charm and modern allure through a series of consumption upgrades.

Chen Lijuan, who recently visited the Yuandadu Relics Park in Chaoyang district, said it was her first time rowing a boat in the city, gliding across clear water bordered by blooming *Malus spectabilis* trees, also known as Chinese crabapple trees.

"It's especially beautiful, creating a picturesque scene," said Chen, who brought her daughter to experience boating while enjoying the warm spring flowers.

This year, Yuandadu Relics Park, also known as the Yuan Dynasty Capital City Wall Site Park, introduced flower-decorated boats for the first time, offering visitors a romantic flower-viewing experience that has drawn many like Chen.

According to official data from Chaoyang district, the park welcomed more than 521,700 visitors in the first half of April, averaging around 52,200 daily, a 20.3 percent increase compared with the same period last year.

In Beijing, three parks are best known for their blossom festivals: Yuandadu Relics Park, Beijing Yuyuantan Park and China National Botanical Garden. In the past, parks typically closed around 9 pm.

In 2024, Chaoyang district took the lead in making Yuandadu Relics Park boundaryless by removing its walls and 19 gates. With no more closing times, visitors can now enjoy flower viewing whenever they wish.

To further enhance the experience, the park has organized leisure markets, performances and food stands during the blossom season.

"We have put over 10 adorable cars in the park, offering coffee, wine, food and blossom-themed



Above: Visitors interact with Shu Bao, the World Games 2025 Chengdu mascot, at a sports-themed street blending 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics heritage and offering sport-related products, educational activities, and recreational experiences in Beijing on Sunday. CUI JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY **Left:** Tourists enjoy the blossoms on flower-decorated boats at Yuandadu Relics Park in Beijing in April. WANG JIAYUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

cultural products, aiming to bring convenience and a poetic time for visitors," said Zhang Hongtao, director of Yuandadu Relics Park.

Beyond flower-viewing upgrades, other cultural and entertainment activities in Beijing are also enhancing their services.

For example, the just-concluded Beijing International Film Festival offered moviegoers discounts at designated restaurants and malls with purchased tickets, along with free drinks at some bars. Many cin-

emas also handed out limited-edition posters as souvenirs for fans.

"This year's festival gave me a comprehensive experience. Apart from watching movies, I enjoyed many different pleasures, like dining, souvenir shopping and making friends at after-movie events," said Wang Xu, a movie fan who traveled from Hebei province. "Everything is more convenient and enjoyable."

More exciting experiences are also planned for Beijing throughout the year.

Last week, Beijing State-owned Assets Management Co announced key public events planned for the year. According to the company, the National Stadium is expected to host more than 50 large-scale performances, such as concerts, throughout the year, with an estimated audience of more than 2.8 million — potentially setting a new record.

The National Aquatics Center will also host several art exhibitions, creating an immersive cultural and leisure space for residents and visitors.

Guangdong first to issue judicial policy on IP disputes

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
and LI WENFANG in Guangzhou

Guangdong's top court has issued China's first judicial policy on artificial intelligence and intellectual property, clarifying responsibilities in copyright disputes involving AI-generated content. The guidelines stress case-by-case analysis to balance rights protection with industry development.

The Guangdong High People's Court released a special document requiring judges to properly handle disputes over ownership of content generated by DeepSeek and related AI systems in the coming months.

According to the Opinions on Promoting Artificial Intelligence Technology Innovation and Industrial Development through High-Quality Intellectual Property Trial Work, judges must accurately define the nature and ownership of AI-generated content, rigorously examine evidence and assess human creative contribution during trials.

The document, issued late last week, states that ownership should be determined based on the law,

contractual agreements, substantial contributions, intellectual investment and related factors.

The opinions aim to explore property incentive mechanisms to support the development of a world-leading AI content industry. They also seek to support the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area international science and technology innovation center, strengthen judicial guidance for AI integration, unleash the "AI+" effect, drive AI empowerment across industries and advance the intelligent upgrade of Guangdong's manufacturing sector.

In addition, the opinions aim to refine judicial standards for the certification and benefit distribution of AI innovations, protect the rights of scientific and technological innovation personnel, and promote cooperation mechanisms with clear rights, obligations and balanced benefit distribution.

The document further outlines efforts to develop infringement and liability rules suited to AI development, clarify reasonable duty of care boundaries and maintain a

balance between rights protection and industrial growth.

It is the first local judicial policy guiding judges in handling cases involving ownership rights or interests in AI-generated content.

Wang Xiaoming, chief judge of the intellectual property division of the Guangdong High People's Court, said courts across Guangdong last year adhered to the principle of "truly protecting innovation, protecting true innovation." They promoted the integration of judicial protection and technological innovation, strengthened forward-looking guidance on laws and policies, enhanced the protection of high-tech achievements, and explored new business judgment rules, he said.

Wang said courts will continue to release more typical intellectual property protection cases to promote new quality productive forces and properly handle emerging issues involving cloud storage, artificial intelligence and virtual property, offering clear and predictable behavioral rules for innovative entities.

Guan Zhen, director of the

Guangdong AI4C Artificial Intelligence Application Research Institute, said he supports the introduction of the opinions, which encourage development in accordance with laws and regulations.

The document will help protect intellectual property rights, create a favorable environment for innovation and technological advancement, and prevent risks, Guan said. Ye Shibao, senior attorney at All-Bright Law Offices in Guangzhou, said the opinions encourage and guide market players to agree in advance on rights and obligations through commercial contracts in activities involving AI-generated content, facilitating business promotion and goal achievement for all parties.

The document was issued as the AI industry experiences rapid growth, with a rising number of cases reported in Guangdong involving the ownership or interests of AI-generated content.

Contact the writers at
zhengcaixiong@
chinadaily.com.cn

Much-awaited cruise ship set for final work

Floating ceremony held in Shanghai ahead of vessel's outfitting procedures

By ZHAO LEI
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

141,900 metric tons

The weight of the second domestically-made large cruise ship, *Adora Flora City*

China's second domestically-made large cruise ship, *Adora Flora City*, reached a crucial point in its construction work on Monday, moving closer to its scheduled delivery in 2026.

China State Shipbuilding Corp, the world's largest shipbuilder, said in a news release that water started to be pumped into the vessel's dry dock early Monday morning, soon floating the ship.

A floating ceremony was held after the process at Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding, a CSSC subsidiary and the vessel's construction contractor.

According to rules in the shipbuilding industry, floating is one of the most important stages in any large cruise ship's construction work because it allows for the examination and testing of the vessel's hull and hardware already mounted. Completion of this stage means the ship is ready for outfitting procedures and the following mooring tests.

As the second to emerge from China's relentless struggle to independently build large cruise ships, which have been recognized as the most difficult and sophisticated among all types of civilian ships to design and construct, *Adora Flora City's* construction started in August 2022 at Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding, with a planned delivery time around the end of 2026.

Compared with the first domestically-built large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, the second vessel boasts optimized designs and a larger size.

The 141,900-metric-ton *Adora Flora City* is 341 meters long, 174

meters longer than the first ship. In addition, the vessel has 19 more guest rooms, taking the total number to 2,130 rooms that can accommodate a maximum of 5,232 passengers. Its public areas will also be larger than those on the first ship.

Thanks to technical innovations, the new ship's building process has been faster than that of the *Adora Magic City*, according to engineers.

Pan Lei, a senior engineer at Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding, said that through the building of *Adora Magic City*, Chinese engineers had accumulated a great deal of experience and know-how that have helped a lot in the new vessel's construction.

Once put to service, the cruise vessel will take Guangzhou of Guangdong province as its home port.

The *Adora Magic City* started construction at Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding in October 2019. It was basically completed in July 2023 and began to carry out sea trials. In November 2023, the gigantic ship was commissioned for formal operations and is based in Shanghai.

Since its maiden voyage in January 2024, the cruise vessel has completed more than 100 voyages, servicing more than 350,000 guests, according to CSSC.

Li Junfeng in Shanghai contributed to this story.

Winning moment



A rider and his horse after winning a racing competition in Damshung county, Xizang autonomous region, on Sunday. The race, part of a series of annual equestrian events, was held from April 23 to Monday. The event saw 403 horses competing in 12 events.

TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA

Controlling blood glucose advised in fighting diabetes

By CHEN MEILING
chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

Fasting blood glucose levels among Chinese adults have been increasing, signaling potential health risks, experts say.

A study recently published in *Nature Communications* by a team from Fuwai Hospital at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences found that from 2010 to 2018, the average fasting blood glucose levels rose from 5.7 mmol/L to 5.9 mmol/L among men aged 25 and older, while levels among women increased from 5.6 mmol/L to 5.8 mmol/L.

According to the 2024 Chinese Guidelines for Diabetes Prevention and Treatment, the normal FBG reference range for healthy individuals in a fasting state is 3.9 to 6.1 mmol/L. An FBG level exceeding 7 mmol/L may indicate diabetes.

The study, based on a survey of 790,000 adults, also showed that in 2018 an estimated 498,600 cardio-

vascular disease deaths among people aged 25 and older in China were attributed to high FBG — an increase of nearly 150,000 deaths, or more than 40 percent, compared with 2010.

As living standards continue to improve, so does the intake of carbohydrates, fats and sugar, leading to overweight and obesity, said Zhang Jinping, chief physician in the endocrinology department at China-Japan Friendship Hospital in Beijing.

"Especially, visceral fat buildup can cause insulin resistance and raise blood sugar levels," she said. Lifestyle habits also contribute, including prolonged sitting at work, staying up late, irregular eating and lack of exercise, all of which can impair pancreatic islet function and the body's ability to regulate blood glucose, she said.

At Zhang's hospital, outpatients whose FBG exceeds 5.6 mmol/L are advised to undergo diabetes screening. "Half of people with high FBG

will develop diabetes within 10 years," she said.

Zhang Man, deputy secretary-general of the nutrition literacy branch of the China Association of Health Promotion and Education, said long-term unmanaged high FBG can lead to multi-organ damage, including kidney failure, vision loss due to retinopathy, and limb numbness or pain from peripheral neuropathy.

"It may even trigger life-threatening acute conditions such as diabetic ketoacidosis, heart failure or renal failure," she said.

Controlling hyperglycemia requires a comprehensive approach, including lifestyle interventions, blood glucose monitoring and, if needed, hypoglycemic medications. Key measures include reducing intake of refined carbohydrates, increasing consumption of high-fiber foods such as whole grains and legumes, and engaging in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week. Maintaining a healthy

body mass index between 18.5 and 23.9 and regularly monitoring blood glucose levels are also recommended.

"Adults over 40 should check FBG annually. High-risk groups, such as people with obesity or a family history of diabetes, should be screened every six months for early detection," Zhang said.

Zhou Xianghai, deputy director of the endocrinology department at Peking University People's Hospital in Beijing, explained that an FBG level between 6.1 and 7 mmol/L is considered impaired fasting glucose. Two consecutive tests showing FBG levels equal to or above 7 mmol/L confirm a diabetes diagnosis.

"Now many physical examination programs include FBG testing, so more people can detect the risk of developing diabetes early, even before symptoms like excessive hunger, thirst, urination and weight loss appear," she said.

However, Zhou said the public need not panic. She suggested using

the Chinese Diabetes Risk Score — which factors in BMI, blood pressure, waistline and family history — before conducting further tests like FBG, glycosylated hemoglobin and oral glucose tolerance tests.

Routine use of a home glucometer is necessary only for patients already diagnosed with diabetes, she added.

China has seen a sharp rise in diabetes prevalence in recent years. According to the Report on the Nutrition and Chronic Diseases Status of Chinese Residents (2020), the diabetes rate among adults aged 18 and older rose from 9.7 percent in 2012 to 11.9 percent in 2018, making China home to the world's largest diabetes population.

The report also noted that the rates of diagnosis, treatment and control remain low: only 38 percent of cases are diagnosed and 34.1 percent treated.

China's trend mirrors the global surge in diabetes, with prevalence rising from 7 percent to 14 percent between 1990 and 2022, according to World Health Organization estimates. Over the same period, the

number of cases climbed from 200 million to 830 million.

In 2021, diabetes and related kidney disease caused more than 2 million deaths worldwide. High blood glucose accounted for around 11 percent of cardiovascular deaths, WHO data show.

"To bring the global diabetes epidemic under control, countries must urgently prioritize the prevention, diagnosis and management of diabetes, as well as the prevention and management of risk factors such as obesity," said Martin Taylor, WHO representative to China.

Measures should include regulating unhealthy foods, taxing sugary products and improving access to affordable, healthy food and physical activity options, he said.

Taylor also emphasized the importance of early screening and management for high-risk individuals, including those with prediabetes.

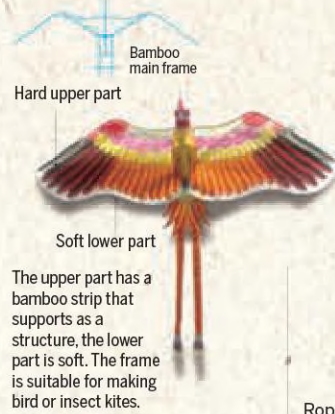
"Countries should go beyond universal insurance by implementing national diabetes programs that ensure continuous care, reliable medicine supplies and patient support," he said.

VISUAL



THE FIVE KITES

SOFT-WINGED KITE



The upper part has a bamboo strip that supports as a structure, the lower part is soft. The frame is suitable for making bird or insect kites.

Editor's Note: Using a blend of words and visuals, this series explores unique communities and reveals the heart of China through food, architecture, craftsmanship, landscapes and traditions.

BUNCH-SHAPED KITE

It is made up of several kites of the same or different kinds connected one by one by string.

HARD-WINGED KITE



The wing-shaped frame is made up of two strips of bamboo placed horizontally, leaving a hole in the middle for the wind to pass through. Wings, both top and bottom, have bamboo supports.

PLANK-SHAPED KITE



In the shape of a plank, it has a flat structure with a frame around it. Its assembly is simpler and it's easier to fly, which makes it one of the most used kites.

TUBE-SHAPED KITE



This kind of kite, composed of several connected wind receiving sides or "tubes", has a structure of distinct dimensions.

BEHIND WEIFANG KITES

CARNIVAL OF COLORS

Kite festival in Weifang promotes Sino-foreign exchanges

By ZHAO RUIXUE and TIAN CHI in Weifang, Shandong

The skies over Weifang burst into a carnival of colors this week as the 42nd International Kite Festival took flight on April 19 in the coastal city in Shandong province. Imagine looking up to see a 200-meter-long dragon-head

kite, a dancing octopus, a floating carrot, or even a flying car — this is where creativity literally soars. A total of 257 teams from 51 countries and regions turned the sky into their playground, with visitors cheering as everything from traditional designs to wacky modern creations took to the air.

The event this year featured 58 activities, ranging from kite competitions and cultural tourism promotions to sports events and economic and trade collaborations.

Weifang is using its global influence in kiting to establish friendship all over the world, realizing "ancient and modern dialogue" and "Sino-foreign exchanges", Hans Peter Boehme, vice-president of the International Kite Federation, said at the festival's opening ceremony. "Kiting in general is promoting

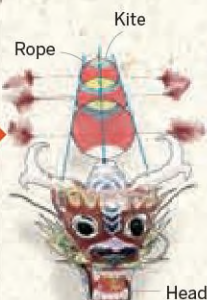
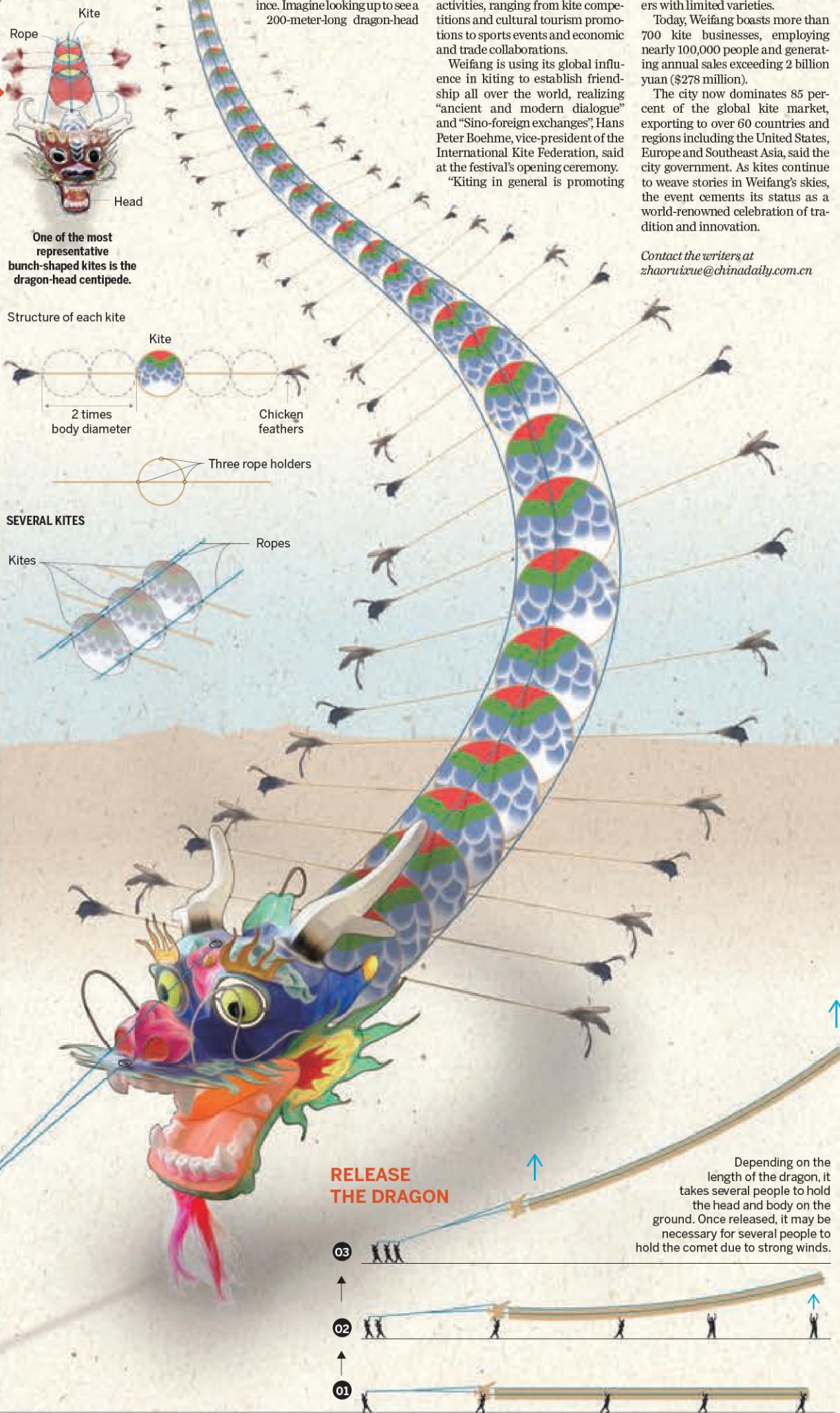
the integration and development between different cultures in the world," he said.

Over the past four decades, Weifang's kite industry has soared to new heights, evolving into a vital economic driver. In 1984, when the first festival was held, the city had just over 20 small kite manufacturers with limited varieties.

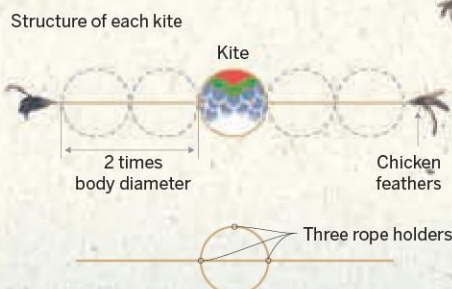
Today, Weifang boasts more than 700 kite businesses, employing nearly 100,000 people and generating annual sales exceeding 2 billion yuan (\$278 million).

The city now dominates 85 percent of the global kite market, exporting to over 60 countries and regions including the United States, Europe and Southeast Asia, said the city government. As kites continue to weave stories in Weifang's skies, the event cements its status as a world-renowned celebration of tradition and innovation.

Contact the writers at zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn



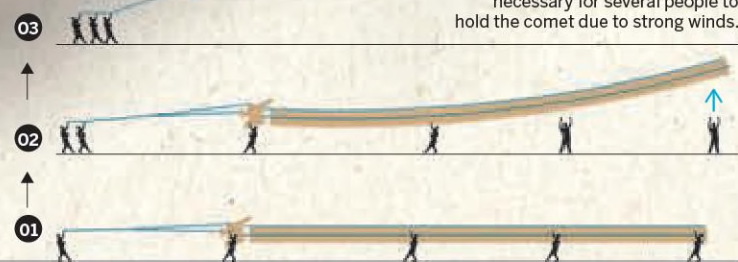
One of the most representative bunch-shaped kites is the dragon-head centipede.



SEVERAL KITES



RELEASE THE DRAGON



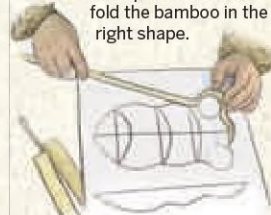
Depending on the length of the dragon, it takes several people to hold the head and body on the ground. Once released, it may be necessary for several people to hold the comet due to strong winds.

MAKING A KITE

Detailed steps on the traditional design and making of a Chinese kite

01 PLANNING

A blueprint is used to fold the bamboo in the right shape.



02 SHAPING

To bend the bamboo strip is used fire to prevent the bamboo from breaking.



03 CUTTING

Once the bamboo is folded into the required shape, it is cut into smaller strips.



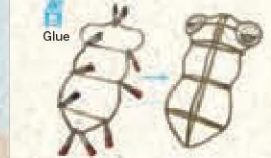
04 POLISHING

The edges are polished to give uniformity to the strips.



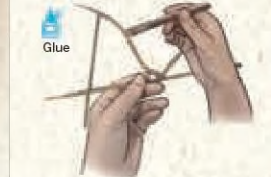
05 JOINING

The strips are attached as indicated in the sketch and fixed with glue and tweezers.



06 STICKING

The bamboo structure is covered with glue and then glued to the paper.



07 PAINTING

Drawing and painting on the pattern designed previously.



08 ASSEMBLING

All parts of the kite are assembled.



09 FLYING



Finally, the kite is flown to check if the structure and length of the ropes that hold it work well.

WEIFANG

People in Weifang have kept the customs of making kites held high for generations. Host of the world's largest kite festival, the city is sometimes referred to as the "kite capital of the world".



WORLD KITES

Flying kites is something that has taken hold in many countries in the world throughout history. Various countries have different customs and traditions around kites, making each uniquely distinct.



The culture of kites is spread all over the world, these are samples from some countries exhibited in the Weifang Kite Museum.

WORLD

US levies a political ploy, 'irrational', analysts say

By ZHENG WANYIN in London
zhengwanyin@mail.chinadailyuk.com

The United States' "reciprocal tariffs" are irrational and a political ploy to shift blame for its self-inflicted losses, experts say, noting such a trade policy would ultimately harm the US itself.

Jostein Hauge, an assistant professor at the University of Cambridge's Centre of Development Studies, said the intention behind the tariffs is to reduce the size of US trade deficit, revive domestic manufacturing, and force other countries to the negotiation table for deals favoring US interests.

However, whether these goals can succeed remains questionable, especially if US President Donald Trump continues his current path, Hauge said.

"There is not much of a strong economic rationale or logic behind this. If he were serious about reviving American manufacturing, he would couple the tariffs with meaningful industrial policies or subsidies, and would also have more consistency."

"The way he is going — increasing the tariffs and reducing them — is very volatile. This creates huge uncertainty in the investment climate for both the US and foreign firms potentially wishing to invest in the US."

"We are going to see, most likely, investment rates going down, causing global economic turmoil. We are even seeing that travel into the US is going down quite drastically."

Radhika Desai, a professor in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba in Canada, and a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, said the Trump administration attempted to blame other countries for problems that are, in fact, self-inflicted by the US.

It harbors the fantasy of restoring tariffs as a primary source of government revenue to make up for income and corporate tax cuts, Desai said.

The US manufacturing decline and outsourcing are more of a result of deliberate policy choices that the US had been aware of, and even happy about, both experts said.

"Capital has been given the freedom to do whatever it likes," Desai said.

"What capital has chosen to do is, instead of sourcing goods that they want to sell to the American people from American companies that have higher labor costs, they have decided to source them from elsewhere ... Instead of increasing productivity in other ways, which will allow capitalists to pay good American-level wages, they have preferred to have things produced by cheaper labor."

"That is what has caused the deindustrialization of the US. There have not been any countries cheating them."

Taking China's leading position in manufacturing as an example, Hauge said that other countries have been "very willing" to allow its rise — including the US, whose corporations have invested heavily in China and whose consumers have benefited from made-in-China products.

"Why has China achieved this? Obviously, we need to credit China's industrial policies ... China's integration into the global economy has not been something that China has forced onto other countries," Hauge said.

New economic order

Looking ahead, Hauge warned that the tariffs could deal a serious blow to the global economy, likely triggering a recession, with the Global South in the firing line. Meanwhile, he also suggested the possibility of more equally shared global prosperity in the event of US withdrawal.

"Now, we are seeing that more and more countries are building relationships that don't necessarily involve the US. We are seeing a move toward a new international economic order where we don't have one country on top, but where power is more equally distributed," he said.

"The US will still have a lot of power ... but if there's something positive to take away from all this havoc — the US might have less economic influence — then we'll see a world economy of more shared prosperity."

Desai echoed: "Trade will continue expanding, and hopefully that will expand as something that will enable the development and industrialization of more and more countries ... and I think China can also be a vision of how trade should be organized."

Silent tribute



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney pauses for a moment of silence after lighting a candle at a memorial honoring victims of a vehicle attack in Vancouver on Sunday. Prosecutors have charged 30-year-old Kai-Ji Adam Lo with murder for killing at least 11 people and injuring dozens after he rammed an SUV through a crowd at a Filipino community festival on Saturday. SEAN KILPATRICK VIA AP

ASEAN eyes united response to tariffs

Nations begin talks with Washington as experts suggest looking at China market

By PRIME SARMIENTO
in Hong Kong
prime@chinadailyapac.com

Southeast Asian countries have begun bilateral talks with the United States as the trade-dependent region grapples with potential effects of high tariffs and growing protectionism.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam have either started or expressed interest in conducting negotiations, while leaders within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have urged leveraging their strength as a bloc to negotiate with Washington.

Suthiphand Chirathivat, a professor emeritus of economics at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, said ASEAN countries should "stand together for the best for all".

Sonal Varma, a chief economist at Japanese investment bank Nomura, said ASEAN countries will seek negotiations to "address some of the shortcomings of the existing (trading) system, but without causing too much damage to everyone".

Varma also sees an increase in intra-regional trade, saying ASEAN members "will need to open up their markets ... to trade more with each other".

Lowering both tariff and nontariff barriers, she added, will boost trade and investment within the bloc, while enabling it to tap into markets beyond the region.

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said on Thursday that ASEAN has agreed to work together to bolster the group's bargaining power in dealing with tariff hikes. Following her meeting with Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet, Paetongtarn said the two sides talked about a possible framework for cooperation among ASEAN countries.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim called for a "united regional front" shortly after the US launched the "reciprocal tariffs" on April 2.

On April 9, Washington announced a 90-day pause on the tariff hikes, which has spurred most of its trading partners, including ASEAN countries, to hold bilateral negotiations with the US.

Noting possible economic repercussions from a US tariff hike, ASEAN economy ministers said they will boost intra-ASEAN trade and investment and remain committed to the bloc's rule-based trade. They also expressed "common intention to engage in a frank and constructive dialogue" with the US, according to a joint statement issued on April 10.

Collective strength

Julia Rohnifard, a senior lecturer at the School of Law and Governance at Taylor's University in Kuala Lumpur, said calls for ASEAN's collective action have shown that leaders know they are stronger as a bloc and they have "the political impetus to actually put into practice measures that will allow them to leverage on their collective strength".

Indonesia and Malaysia have sent respective delegations to negotiate with their counterparts in the US.

Airlangga Hartarto, Indonesia's coordinating minister for economic affairs, said on Saturday that Indonesia prioritizes the principles of fair and balanced trade. The two sides have agreed to conduct further discussions, he added.

Malaysia's Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Zafrul Aziz said the US and Malaysia have discussed enhancing US-ASEAN cooperation

by leveraging Malaysia's rotating ASEAN chairmanship to foster regional stability and advance shared economic goals.

The meeting between the Thai delegation and the US was postponed indefinitely. Paetongtarn said Washington wanted her country to review and revise certain measures before negotiations could proceed.

Vietnam launched negotiations with the US with a phone conversation on Wednesday between US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Vietnamese Minister of Industry and Trade Nguyen Hong Dien.

Both sides agreed on the importance of making swift progress toward reciprocal and balanced trade, according to a report filed by the daily Viet Nam News.

During his visit to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia earlier this month, Chinese President Xi Jinping and other state leaders emphasized that countries should promote universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, facilitate multilateral trade and investment, and reject unilateral trade restrictive measures.

Amitendu Palit, a senior research fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, said Xi's visit is significant as China, like the US, is a major trade partner of ASEAN.

With high US tariffs making it difficult for a trade-dependent region to export to the US, Palit said ASEAN countries are at least assured of having China as another market for their goods.

Suthiphand of Chulalongkorn University said US tariff hikes may further strengthen relations between ASEAN and China.

"China has a super large market, and its scale of industries is also competitive across the world," he said.

Yang Wanli in Bangkok contributed to this story.

Iran port blast toll rises to 46

DUBAI — Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sunday visited those injured in a huge explosion that rocked one of the country's main ports, as the death toll rose to 46.

New videos showed an apocalyptic scene at the still-smoldering Shahid Rajaei port outside Bandar Abbas in southern Iran's Hormozgan Province.

A crater that appeared meters deep was surrounded by burning smoke so dangerous that authorities closed schools and businesses in the area. Containers appeared smashed or thrown as if discarded toys, while the burned carcasses of trucks and cars sat around the site.

"We have to find out why it happened," Pezeshkian said during a meeting with officials aired by state television.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei separately offered his condolences over the blast — and left open the possibility that sabotage caused the explosion.

"It is the duty of security officials and judicial authorities to conduct a thorough investigation to detect if there's been any negligence or deliberate acts that have caused this and to follow this up according to regulations," a statement in his name said.

Mehrdad Hassanzadeh, the crisis management director for Hormozgan Province, gave the latest death toll, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Officials have said more than 1,000 people were injured, with Hassanzadeh noting most had since been released after treatment.

Only "120 wounded are still in hospital", Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni, who is in the area, told state TV on Monday.

Blamed on 'negligence'

He added that "culprits have been identified and summoned", and that the blast was caused by "shortcomings, including noncompliance with safety precautions and negligence".

Previously, The New York Times quoted a person with ties to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss security matters, as saying that what exploded was sodium perchlorate — a major ingredient in solid fuel for missiles.

Defense Ministry spokesman Reza Talei-Nik later told state TV that "there has been no imported or exported cargo for military fuel or military use in the area".

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

RUSSIA

Putin declares May 8-10 ceasefire with Ukraine

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday declared a three-day ceasefire in the conflict with Ukraine next month to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies in World War II. The Kremlin said that Putin has ordered the full cessation of hostilities on "humanitarian grounds" for the Victory Day on May 9. The 72-hour ceasefire would run from the start of May 8 to the end of May 10, it said, and Russia called on Ukraine to join it as well. In the event of violations by the Ukrainian side, Russia's armed forces would give an "adequate and effective response", the Kremlin said.

IBERIAN PENINSULA

Spain and Portugal hit by major power outage

Spanish power grid operator Red Eléctrica said it was working with energy companies to restore power after large parts of Spain and Portugal were hit by a power outage on Monday. E-Redes, a Spanish electricity grid monitoring company, said in a statement it was working on reestablishing connection in phases. Spanish radio stations said part of the Madrid underground was being evacuated. There were traffic jams at Madrid city center as traffic lights stopped working, Cadena Ser radio station reported. The Portuguese police said traffic lights were affected across the country, the metro was closed in Lisbon and Porto, and trains were not running.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

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WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108 529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2968

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6E8

Tel: 416-481-5706

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Chinese overseas students share stories of growth

By MINGMEILI in New York
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Young Chinese international students shared stories of their journey in a contest about their experiences in the United States.

More than 30 stories were recognized in the "Breaking the Cocoon: My Study Abroad Journey in the US" contest hosted by the Chinese Consulate General in New York on Saturday.

Chinese students shared their struggles, growth and the bridges they built between China and the US, finding friendship and a deeper sense of belonging across cultures.

One of the youngest awardees, 8-year-old Yao (Lyndon) Hanxing, spoke of his journey at the United Nations International School in New York. Of his 21 classmates from across the world, Yao was the only student from China.

Facing language barriers and an unfamiliar environment, Yao gradually found his place with the support of his teachers and peers. He wrote eight stories that recorded his journey, telling how he was touched by an animated film, *The Wild Robot*. He said that the story of a robot learning to survive in an unfamiliar world mirrored his own experience.

Yao challenged himself to read the sequel, *The Wild Robot Escapes*. Though nearly every page presented new vocabulary, Yao said he pressed on, taking notes, analyzing characters and eventually delivering an English presentation that earned warm applause.

"All growth begins with challenging yourself," he told China Daily.

Yao also shared his Chinese heritage with his classmates, teaching them to write the character fu (fortune) during Chinese New Year and Chinese Day at the UN. Also, Chinese

films like *Ne Zha* and *Detective Chinatown 1900* left him with a lasting impression of his own background. From *Ne Zha*'s fight against prejudice to the struggles of early Chinese immigrants, Yao said he felt inspired and proud.

"I am lucky, and I'm one of the youngest storytellers," he said. "Studying abroad today, I'll have better opportunities, a broader vision and the strength of my homeland behind me."

Zhang Zhijian, 19, a New York University student from China, also shared the story of finding himself and getting along in a multicultural environment.

He said he at first felt shy and was relatively silent in class, mirroring many students' concerns that language, accent and grammar can make them uncomfortable about speaking up.

"I can understand the conversation,

but I feel like being quiet is my firewall," he told China Daily. "I tried to be brave and opened a window on the wall. I raised my hand and the professor picked me."

Zhang said at first he felt nervous and made mistakes, but the entire classroom respectfully encouraged him to express his ideas patiently, so he opened up and grew more confident.

He also shared his story as an international student, filming a short project on the topic, which also helped his classmates understand him more.

"I don't want to be the silent one. I want to share my thoughts and ideas with my local classmates," he said. "Communication is not only a bridge between people but also between nations. And the building of that bridge starts with us, the students studying abroad."

Chinese students like Hua Yucang, 28, of the University of Pennsylvania,

also played a part in cultural exchanges between China and the US.

Hua told of working at the Penn Museum and helping children to understand Chinese ceramics.

"I believe one of my strengths is my ability to connect with younger audiences," he told China Daily. "When I teach middle and high school students about Chinese history, crafts or cultural anecdotes, I often draw comparisons with American examples at a similar level. ... I can really feel their curiosity and interest in China."

The Chinese Consulate General in New York received 122 submissions from Chinese students studying within its consular district, including those enrolled at local universities, higher education institutions and international organizations such as the United Nations, Chinese Consul General Chen Li said.

BUSINESS

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Ample arrows in quiver to ride out storm

Official: China has 'abundant policy reserves' to act rapidly amid tensions

By OUYANG SHIJIA and TAN GUOLING

China is preparing to roll out a series of incremental policy measures to stabilize the overall economy, with policymakers signaling stronger fiscal, monetary and consumption-boosting initiatives on Monday as part of its larger drive to reinforce recovery amid external headwinds.

"We will continue to enhance policy research, ensure sufficient contingency plans, refine the policy toolkit for stabilizing employment and the economy, and promptly introduce incremental policies in reserve in response to evolving situations," said Zhao Chenxin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission.

Although the foundation for economic recovery is not yet solid amid mounting pressure from external shocks, Zhao emphasized that China has "abundant policy reserves" and "ample policy space" to act swiftly.

"We will accelerate the implementation of measures aimed at stabilizing employment and the economy," he said at a news conference in Beijing. "We will intensify efforts to ensure the effective implementation of established policies, including boosting consumption, full utilization of this year's 5 trillion yuan (\$685.22 billion) national-level investment funds and accelerating the establishment of a national venture capital guidance fund. Most of these measures are scheduled to be rolled out in the second quarter."

Looking ahead to the full year, Zhao struck a confident tone despite challenges ahead. "No matter how the international situation evolves, we will stay focused on our development goals, maintain strategic resolve and concentrate on managing our own affairs well," he said.

This year, China is placing a priority on expanding domestic demand, as it seeks to cushion the impact of the US tariff hikes.

Zhao said China possesses substantial potential in expanding domestic demand, highlighting clear strategies with approaches including raising incomes for low and middle-income groups, vigorously boosting consumption, expanding effective investment and

strengthening domestic circulation.

He added that China recently allocated the second batch of funds for this year's consumer goods trade-in programs, with the first two batches totaling over 160 billion yuan. About 140 billion yuan in subsequent funding will be allocated based on local fund utilization processes, while new initiatives will include establishing a childcare subsidy system and strengthening support for service consumption sectors and eldercare.

Regarding smoothening domestic circulation, Zhao said China will accelerate building a unified national market, launch a six-month campaign to rectify market access barriers, expedite the legislative process for the private economy promotion law and assist foreign trade enterprises in expanding the domestic market.

China's policymakers have emphasized the need to coordinate domestic economic work amid international economic and trade tensions, with efforts focused on stabilizing employment, enterprises, markets and expectations, according to the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee held on Friday.

To implement the measures mapped out by the tone-setting meeting, Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce, pledged to introduce detailed measures to further enhance consumption's role in driving economic growth, leveraging China's robust domestic market to better counter external risks and challenges.

On the monetary policy front, Zou Ian, deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, said the central bank will pursue more proactive macroeconomic policies and implement an appropriately accommodative monetary policy in line with the Political Bureau meeting.

"We will lower the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates at appropriate times based on domestic and international economic conditions and financial market developments, and maintain ample liquidity," Zou said.

Contact the writers at ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn



The booth of Mercedes-Benz during an auto show in Shanghai. REUTERS

Chinese tech to aid global smart cars

By LI FUSHENG lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Global carmakers are racing to leverage local Chinese technology, particularly smart in-car functions and advanced driver assistance systems, to sharpen their competitive edge in the world's largest and also fiercest auto market.

"A number of carmakers have become more proactive in embracing China's R&D and technological strengths. We saw them acknowledge the current competitive advantage that Chinese companies hold," said Paul Gong, an automotive industry analyst at UBS.

German carmaker BMW said on Sunday that it is integrating Chinese AI model DeepSeek into vehicles sold in China, with the feature to be available from the third quarter of this year.

"Artificial intelligence is a prime area for future cooperation and perfectly demonstrates how we are building out our local anchoring," said Oliver Zipse, chairman of the board of management of BMW Group.

The carmaker said DeepSeek will become standard across its latest China-made Neue Klasse models that are expected to roll out in 2026 from its production base in Liaoning province.

BMW has also unveiled two China-exclusive AI agents for the Neue Klasse models, "Car Genius" and "Travel Companion", in partnership with Alibaba.

The first, working as a digital manual, answers questions about the car itself, such as how to activate one function or another, while the other can offer tips on destinations and plan trips.

Mercedes-Benz unveiled its long-wheelbase CLA last week at the Shanghai auto show, which features the Doubao large language model from ByteDance.

This allows its in-car virtual assistant to offer more interactive, local features such as searching for restaurants or streaming digital content.

"Together with our local team and partners, we aim to offer the best-fit products to Chinese customers at China speed and to the Mercedes-Benz standard," said Oliver Thoene, a member of the board of management of Mercedes-Benz Group AG.

Driver assistance systems, which are better known as smart driving, are another area that overseas carmakers are highlighting in their cooperation with local Chinese companies.

Sino-German joint venture FAW-Audi unveiled its A5L sedan at the Shanghai auto show, which is the first gasoline-powered model in China to have the driver assistance system from Huawei. Its electric Q6L e-tron SUVs will feature the system as well.

Li Fenggang, executive vice-president of FAW-Audi Sales Co, said Audi approached Huawei five years ago for cooperation.

"We realize that Chinese customers want such technology. As a premium brand, we wanted to work with the best partner in this field, which is Huawei," said Li.

Another Chinese smart driving company Momenta announced on Thursday it had reached deals with six major auto brands, primarily overseas ones, including GM's Buick and Cadillac, Toyota and Honda.

Honda said it will "leverage Chi-

nese technologies to swiftly deliver products that meet the expectations of customers in China", saying that technological innovations in the areas of electrification and intelligence are advancing rapidly.

Volkswagen, the most popular overseas brand in China, has gone even further by investing in local smart driving company Horizon Robotics in 2022.

The deal, which is Volkswagen's largest single investment in China, allowed it to have a stake in the startup and also to build a joint venture with the company.

The products developed by the joint venture, Carizon, will be available in Volkswagen models in China from 2026.

"We are in deep collaboration with Horizon Robotics and other Chinese tech leaders to ensure our products meet the unique demands of the Chinese market," said Stefan Mecha, CEO of Volkswagen China Passenger Cars Brand.

Ola Kaellenius, chairman of the board of management of Mercedes-Benz Group AG, sees a growing role for China beyond the domestic market. "We see this (R&D in China) as a source of inspiration not just to delight the customers in China but to use what we learn and innovate here also for the rest of the world," he said.

UBS auto analyst Gong said China's role has evolved over the past years for global carmakers.

"China has evolved from a market with potential to the largest and most profitable market, then into the most competitive manufacturing hub, and gradually into a training ground and fitness center — and now, into a 'brain', the core of research and development," he said.

Macro measures to counter difficulties

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's economy will likely stabilize for the rest of the year despite mounting global uncertainties, economists said on Monday, adding that stronger macroeconomic adjustments and deepened reforms are needed to counter external headwinds and reinforce domestic demand.

"It is necessary to step up unconventional countercyclical adjustments, and make full and good use of a more proactive fiscal policy and an appropriately accommodative monetary policy," Huang Hanquan, head of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said at a seminar on China's economic situation and trends held by the academy in Beijing.

Huang called for frontloading of fiscal stimulus measures, speeding up the issuance and use of local government special bonds and ultra-long-term special treasury bonds, and ensuring funding for local regions to stabilize growth.

On monetary policy, he urged timely cuts in the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates, maintaining ample liquidity and increasing support for the real economy, adding that it is also necessary to introduce new structural monetary policy tools to support technological innovation, boost consumption and stabilize foreign trade.

Notably, Huang highlighted the need to boost domestic demand, especially spurring consumption, such as raising incomes for middle and low-income groups, spurring consumption of services in areas like education, healthcare, eldercare, culture and sports, and clearing restrictions hampering consumer spending. Efforts should also be made to help struggling enterprises, ensure people's livelihoods and deepen reforms to unleash development momentum, he said.

Guo Liyan, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research's economic research institute, highlighted China's economic resilience despite facing pressure from weaker external demand.

"Economic stability and improvement are the main trends, favorable conditions are increasing, and the key is to effectively implement the existing package of incremental policies and plan new measures as needed to turn positive factors into actual development momentum," Guo said.

The National Bureau of Statistics said China's GDP expanded 5.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, beating market expectations and making a good start to the year amid the impact from US tariffs.

"Looking ahead, China's economy is expected to maintain stable growth, with further strengthening of new growth drivers and the continuous emergence of new growth points," Guo said.

She called for deeper reforms to nurture new growth engines. "The key is to focus on building a unified national market, relying on reform and innovation to cultivate and strengthen new momentum, and making breakthroughs in critical areas."

Guo Guannan, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said China should launch a batch of quick-transmission, highly effective reforms to guide expectations, boost confidence and enhance the upward trajectory of the economy.

She said "current consumption demand is insufficient", with retail sales growth still below pre-pandemic levels.

Solar, wind together beat coal capacity in Q1

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's combined installed capacity of wind and solar power surpassed that of coal power for the first time by the end of the first quarter, marking a significant milestone in the country's energy transition, the National Energy Administration said.

As of end-March, the installed capacity of wind power and solar power nationwide increased by 17.2 percent and 43.4 percent year-on-year, respectively, with the combined installed capacity historically exceeding thermal power, said Xing Yiteng, deputy director-general of the department of development and planning of the National Energy Administration.

The proportion of national non-fossil energy consumption rose by 1.5 percentage points compared to the same period last year, he said during a news conference held in Beijing on Monday.

Industry experts believe that China, as the world leader in electricity production from such energy sources,

has been prioritizing renewables in its energy strategy.

The rapid growth of China's renewables is particularly evident in the solar sector, which is poised to reach unprecedented levels, said Zhu Yicong, vice-president of renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

Rystad Energy predicts China's solar photovoltaic capacity to shatter previous records, projecting it to surpass a staggering 1,000 gigawatts by mid-2025.

As wind and solar power continue their rapid growth, their combined capacity surpassing coal power will become a regular occurrence, the NEA said.

According to a recently released report from the China Electricity Council, as the nation accelerates its energy transition, the share of coal power capacity in all Chinese provincial-level regions fell below 50 percent as of the end of March. Alongside the increase in generation capacity, investment in power grid projects also saw rapid growth. The report attributed this surge to the large-scale

integration of new energy sources, upgrades to grid digitalization and intelligence, and the construction of major projects like ultra-high voltage transmission lines.

In the first quarter, investment in power grid engineering reached 95.6 billion yuan (\$13.19 billion), a year-on-year increase of 24.8 percent. Investment in grid equipment saw an even sharper rise, growing by 59.5 percent, it said.

Looking ahead, the report forecasts that China's macro economy will maintain steady growth in 2025, driving stable and relatively fast growth in electricity consumption. Total electricity consumption across the country is expected to reach 10.4 trillion kilowatt-hours, an increase of around 6 percent year-on-year. The maximum peak load is projected to be around 1.55 billion kW, it said.

By the end of 2025, non-fossil fuel power generation capacity is expected to reach around 2.3 billion kW, accounting for over 60 percent of the total installed capacity. The report predicts that the share of coal power in the total installed capacity will fall



A wind farm seen in Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. WANG ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

to about one-third by year-end.

Beyond its massive buildout of solar and wind power, China is also making significant strides in the development of hydrogen, becoming the world's leading hydrogen producer and consumer with annual production and consumption volume exceeding 36.5 million metric tons in 2024, said the administration.

The country holds a dominant position in the global renewable hydrogen sector, accounting for

over half of the cumulative worldwide production capacity, which surpassed 250,000 tons per year by the end of 2024, it said.

This rapid growth positions China as a leading nation in the development of renewable hydrogen and related industries. The country places high importance on the hydrogen sector, implementing top-level design, formulating industrial policies, and actively promoting technological innovation, it said.

Briefly

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or

the yuan, strengthened 23 pips to 7.2043 against the US dollar on Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

China's lottery sales up 4.7% in March

China's lottery ticket sales rose 4.7 percent year-on-year to 58.22

billion yuan (\$8.08 billion) in March, data from the Ministry of Finance showed. Sales of lottery tickets to support the country's welfare system reached 19.2 bil-

lion yuan last month, marking an increase of 1.7 percent from a year earlier.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



Business executives engage in interactions during the 2025 Suzhou Global Investment Promotion Conference in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Suzhou's magnetic pull on investment stronger

AIIB 'highly optimistic' about city's future development

By LI JIAYING
lijiaying@chinadaily.com.cn

Foreign investment in Jiangsu province's Suzhou is gaining strong momentum as offshore enterprises further deepen their presence, drawn by the city's dynamic economy, favorable policies and vibrant innovation ecosystem, said senior executives and industry experts.

"The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank remains highly optimistic about Suzhou's future development and hopes to deepen cooperation with the city across multiple sectors, such as infrastructure construction, green development, digital economy and new energy," said Jin Liquan, inaugural president and chair of the board of directors of the AIIB.

As one of the nation's leading cities in reform and opening-up, Suzhou has long demonstrated remarkable strength and vitality in areas such as innovation, industrial upgrading and urban development, Jin said.

Jin made the remarks at the 2025 Suzhou Global Investment Promotion Conference, which began on Saturday. Now in its second edition, the event attracted more than 1,200 participants from both traditional foreign markets — including North America, Europe, Japan and South Korea — and emerging economies such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa.

"Suzhou is more than just a

location, it is home to one of our most important global manufacturing and innovation sites," said Roy Jakobs, CEO of Dutch multinational health technology company Royal Philips.

Jakobs said Philips has established in Suzhou its only comprehensive imaging product base worldwide, along with its global business services center and research and development center. Notably, Suzhou's medical imaging base accounts for two-thirds of Philips' global CT (computerized tomography) production, he said.

Official data showed that to date, Suzhou has attracted over 19,000 foreign-invested enterprises, among which 178 are Fortune Global 500 companies. They have invested in nearly 500 projects in the city.

Today, foreign investment in Suzhou stretches far beyond traditional factory setups, with multinational players increasingly establishing R&D centers and regional headquarters. Official data showed that to date, 227 foreign enterprises have been recognized as provincial-level regional headquarters or functional institutions.

For example, Suzhou hosts the largest number of Panasonic's subsidiaries in China, covering cutting-edge businesses such as space solutions, automotive intelligence and smart manufacturing.

"Suzhou is not only a manufacturing hub for Japanese enterprises, but is also steadily emerging as a global center for innovation," said Tetsuro Homma, executive vice-president of Panasonic Holdings Corp, at the conference.

In the first quarter, Suzhou's actual use of foreign capital reached \$3.53 billion, up 9 percent year-on-year, while reinvested

profits totaled \$825 million, a 21.9 percent increase, according to government data.

"Suzhou's comprehensive innovation capabilities rank among the best nationwide, bolstering foreign investors' confidence to expand their footprint here," said Tu Lifeng, deputy director of the Soochow University Think Tank.

"The surge in foreign investment reflects Suzhou's advantages in business environment, talent development, funding support and ecosystem building," Tu said.

At this year's investment promotion event, Suzhou signed 417 projects worth a combined 341.57 billion yuan (\$46.9 billion), spanning next-generation information technology, high-end equipment, new materials, new energy vehicles, biopharmaceuticals and artificial intelligence.

During last year's event, 367 projects totaling 373.54 billion yuan were signed. As of April 1, 260 of those projects had broken ground, a commencement rate of 70.8 percent, with 105 projects already in production and use, a utilization rate of 34.8 percent.

"Looking ahead, Suzhou will continue improving trade facilitation, market access, and living and working convenience, while fostering a transparent, stable and predictable policy environment to help businesses access both domestic and international markets," said Liu Xiaotao, Party secretary of Suzhou.

Since the beginning of the year, Suzhou has signed nearly 900 new investment projects with a total investment exceeding 600 billion yuan. Global industry leaders such as Linde, Continental AG and Mitsubishi Motors have all increased their investments in the city.

Taste of spring dishes out a golden opportunity for nation's eateries

By ZHENG YIRAN
zhengyiran@chinadaily.com.cn

It's midday on a balmy Sunday. At a hotpot camping restaurant in the Pudong district in Shanghai, demand exceeds available seats. People line up to camp and eat hotpot in good weather. According to Haidilao, its operator, the average daily number of visitors to its camping outlet surpasses 500.

In Beijing, Nanjing and Anhui province's Ma'anshan, Haidilao's hotpot camping restaurants are also packed.

This is the charm of the spring economy, when the consumption is boosted by seasonal ingredients, such as spring bamboo shoots, shepherd's purses and broad beans, along with some outdoor activities, such as camping and hiking.

Now, as the spring approaches its end in China, the nation's catering enterprises are taking their last chances to dig for more golden nuggets as the spring economy underpins consumption demand.

The company said the idea of combining hotpot and camping came as it found out that hotpot camping outlets have become a new darling of diners to spend their weekends and vacations. For them, instead of going for long travel, an easy day trip to the city's suburbs, going camping and eating hotpot, is a good way to relax.

"As soon as I knew of the idea of hotpot plus camping, my friends and I drove 45 kilometers to the suburbs in Beijing, to 'embrace spring'. Stressed out all week from work, there is nothing greater than camping while having hotpot with friends, enjoying the beautiful scenery in the spring," said Liu Zhifang, a 30-year-old hotpot lover in Beijing, who spends an average of 4,000 yuan (\$549) on dining out per month.

To cater to the core needs of the consumption end, catering enterprises are upgrading their menus and services."

Zhu Danpeng, independent food and beverages analyst

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that in the first quarter, sales in China's catering industry surpassed 1.4 trillion yuan (\$191.8 billion), up 4.7 percent year-on-year.

Apart from the government's favorable policies, the theme of spring also greatly triggered the vigor of food and beverage consumption, said the China Cuisine Association.

According to a report from catering market observer canyin88.com, in March, the national catering industry prosperity index rose significantly from 114.9 in February to 157.8, a month-on-month increase of 37.3 percent, reaching the highest point in nearly six months.

The robust growth indicated the comprehensive recovery of consumption momentum and the further release of vitality in the catering market, said the report.

Zhu Danpeng, an independent food and beverages analyst based in Guangzhou, said: "There are a lot of seasonal ingredients in spring. To cater to the core needs of the consumption end, catering enterprises are upgrading their menus and services. In this way, consumers are offered a sense of ritual of 'tasting the spring', while enterprises are offered great

business opportunities."

Triggered by the spring economy, a bunch of restaurants launched special dishes and services, adding seasonal ingredients into their spring menu, so as to satisfy consumers' taste buds.

For example, the Hepingmen outlet of Peking roast duck chain Quanjude launched a special dish — steamed shrimp on egg white mixed with fresh peas.

"Spring is the best tasting season for fresh peas. The peas' sweet and crispy texture complements the chewy shrimp, in line with 'spring freshness'. Meanwhile, the color of the dish is green colliding with pinky white, satisfying consumers' pursuit of a sense of ritual of 'spring limited edition'," said Wu Yurui, executive chef of the Hepingmen outlet of Quanjude.

The Nanjing Dapaidang restaurant chain included wild vegetables, mandarin fish, clams, Margarya melanioides and lobster with Huadiao rice wine in a beautiful infusion of spring flavors for its spring special menu. After the meal, the restaurant offers diners orychoaphragmus violaceus (Chinese violet cress) seeds and a small shovel, so that diners can plant "their own spring" at home.

The restaurant has stuck for years to launching seasonal series of dishes, because it aims to serve its diners with food and taste that can reflect the change of seasons, said Nanjing Dapaidang.

Although tasting spring freshness has become more popular among diners, experts said enterprises should still stick to their original intention of cooking.

China's catering industry has entered a quickly expanding and rapidly evolving stage. While featured products and seasonal products are critical to their growth, restaurants should still focus on food itself and the way it is cooked, in order to maintain long-term development, Zhu said.



Solid frame

An 80-meter 745-metric-ton steel truss girder is installed at a renovated bridge along the Xinyi-Changxing Railway after employees from China Railway Construction Corp managed to push the girder 10.65 meters into its designated position using hydraulic jacks. The railway is being renovated by CRCC's 24th bureau to facilitate the development of the Suqian-Lianyungang Waterway Project in Jiangsu province. The project is on track for full navigation by the end of the year and will further improve cargo links between inland areas and Lianyungang Port, enhancing Jiangsu's role as a key trade hub. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Future calling

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Travel bags are out for May Day holiday

Slew of favorable policies for inbound visitors encouraging more people to come to China

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

China is expected to see an influx of inbound tourists as well as rising numbers of domestic travelers during the upcoming May Day holiday that starts May 1, and bookings ahead of the period have surged as travel fervor heats up.

During the five-day holiday, the daily volume of cross-regional personnel exchanges is expected to top 260 million passenger trips, according to an estimate by the Ministry of Transport.

China's favorable policies that allow overseas visitors to get tax refunds right after purchases at designated stores nationwide are encouraging more people to visit the nation. For the May Day holiday, the booking volume for inbound travel products has already surged over 170 percent year-on-year, according to Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency.

"Inbound tourism has entered a new stage of prosperous growth, fueled by China's increasing opening-up to the outside world. More public cultural and leisure venues in the country have become new places that meet the diverse and personalized demands of inbound tourists," said Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy.

"Data indicate that factors such as sustained growth of the Chinese economy, the country's huge population, and abundant natural and cultural resources will support the long-term growth of the tourism economy, and the domestic tourism market is steadily moving toward a new cycle of prosperous development," Dai said.

As part of its latest moves to boost consumption, China plans to further expand its unilateral visa-free entry policy in an orderly manner, and better leverage the role of tax refund stores and tax refund policies by opening more such stores and optimizing tax refund procedures for overseas visitors.

China will accelerate the transformation of five major cities — Shanghai; Beijing; Guangzhou, Guangdong province; Tianjin; and Chongqing — into global consumption centers on par with New York and London, and create globally attractive retail environments.

Last year, the number of inbound foreign travelers who visited the abovementioned five cities doubled from that in

2023, said the National Immigration Administration.

"In those five cities, the number of tax refund stores for overseas visitors accounted for 60 percent in the country last year, and total sales made up for over 70 percent of the value nationwide," said Li Gang, director-general of the department of market operation and consumption promotion of the Ministry of Commerce, during a news conference earlier in Beijing.

For the May Day holiday, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Russia, Malaysia, Thailand and the United States have been listed among the top source countries for inbound tourists, and their top destinations in China include Shanghai; Beijing; Guangzhou and Shenzhen of Guangdong; Chengdu, Sichuan province; and Chongqing, Trip.com found.

"In late April and early May, Japan also celebrates several public holidays and employees get those days off from work. During this year's May Day holiday, the booking volume of inbound travel products made by Japanese tourists has nearly doubled year-on-year," said Shen Jianli, a senior researcher with Trip.com.

Meanwhile, Chinese travelers have continued to show enthusiasm for overseas trips, and they are expected to visit over 1,300 cities worldwide, up by more than 290 cities over the same holiday period last year, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

Fueled by favorable visa policies issued by multiple countries to Chinese visitors and the launch of more international flights, some short-haul and mid-haul overseas destinations have become hot choices for Chinese consumers, and many employees have asked for a few days off from work to combine with the current holiday period.

For the May Day holiday, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand and Singapore have seen robust bookings of hotels by Chinese mainland travelers. Emerging destinations such as Qatar, Austria, Kazakhstan, Nepal and Norway have seen rapid growth in hotel bookings, thanks to their unique tourism resources, Trip.com found.

In addition, Chinese travelers have



Above: Two German tourists on a trip to Jiayuguan, Gansu province, on Sunday. LANG BINGBING / XINHUA
Below: Tourists ride camels at a scenic area in Dunhuang, Gansu province, on Saturday. ZHANG XIAOLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

become more interested in taking chartered tours, and the overall booking volumes of chartered tours during the holiday have grown by nearly 25 percent year-on-year. Particularly, bookings for such tours to Japan have jumped by 60 percent on a yearly basis, Trip.com said.

Still, many tourists tend to book their travel products at the last minute, instead of in advance, and the tourism market is likely to see more significant changes, said Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

Viewing cherry blossoms tops the list of activities this year, and a large number of Chinese visitors are opting for flower viewing tours.

"Viewing cherry blossoms in Japan has been popular since the start of the season this spring. Despite the season coming to an end in most areas of Japan, Chinese tourists have remained passionate about traveling to Japan," said Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu.

Lily Wang, a 30-year-old office employee in Shanghai, plans to fly by domestic budget carrier Spring Airlines to Saga, Japan,

during the May Day holiday. She said she has visited Japan multiple times and found its charm unique during each such visit.

"Extra direct flights have been launched between China and Japan, especially between Shanghai and some niche Japanese destinations, and the travel package comes at a good price, making it quite convenient for travel," Wang said.

Meanwhile, Chinese consumers' demand for domestic tours is also rising sharply, and residents from top-tier and second-tier cities remain the backbone of those who plan to travel.

With vibrant spring days around and temperatures rising across China, cities in the southern part of the country such as Wuxi, Jiangsu province; Hangzhou and Shaoxing in Zhejiang province; and Wuhan, Hubei province; are expected to welcome more tourists, Tuniu said.

Northern coastal cities such as Qingdao and Weihai in Shandong province, and Dalian, Liaoning province, are also expected to welcome more tourists, Tuniu said.

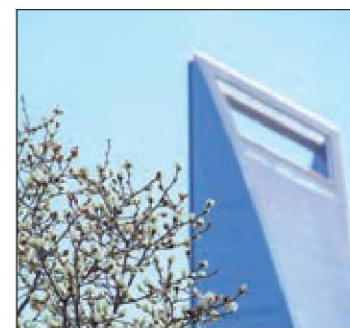
A surge in travel demand has also driven business growth for airlines, and carriers are launching new flights or adding frequencies on existing routes to cater to growing numbers.

For instance, Tianjin Airlines has launched flights connecting Yantai with Dalian, Hangzhou, and Ningbo, and the one-way flight ticket rate is as low as 300 yuan (\$41.2) per person.

In Northwest China, Tianjin Airlines has launched multiple cross-regional routes with Xi'an, Shaanxi province, as its hub, such as routes connecting Xi'an with Songyuan, Jilin province; Rizhao, Shandong province; and Taizhou, Zhejiang province.

Hong Kong-based carrier Cathay Pacific Airways launched direct flights connecting Hong Kong and Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, starting Monday.

The new four-flights-per-week return service will take the airline's passenger network in the Chinese mainland to 20 destinations.



Magnolia blossoms are pictured in Lujiazui, Shanghai, on March 18. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

Opening-up of services sector being accelerated

BEIJING — China is accelerating the opening-up of its services sector through measures such as fast-tracking the implementation of pilot projects, expanding related coverage, and enhancing stress testing and the replication of successful practices, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Against the backdrop of rising unilateralism and protectionism globally, China's push to expand voluntary opening-up in an orderly manner represents its concrete efforts to inject more certainty and stability into the world, Ling Ji, vice-minister of commerce and deputy China international trade representative, said recently at a news conference.

China's State Council recently approved a plan that aims to expand comprehensive pilot programs to accelerate the services industry's opening-up, which includes 155 pilot tasks across key areas such as the opening of key services sectors and the promotion of industrial innovation and development, Ling said.

Specifically, pilot tasks include removing foreign ownership limits in services areas such as app stores and internet access within the telecommunication sector.

In the healthcare sector, pilot tasks include supporting foreign doctors in opening clinics in China, allowing overseas medical professionals to practice in the country on a short-term basis, encouraging the establishment of foreign-funded nursing schools, and permitting the creation of non-profit medical and senior care institutions through donations.

In the financial sector, pilot tasks include supporting the development of international factoring services and attracting overseas insurance companies, sovereign funds, pension funds, certification and verification agencies, and environmental, social and governance funds to provide financing, investment and technical services for green projects.

In the commerce, trade and cultural tourism sectors, foreign-invested travel agencies will be allowed to offer outbound tourism services, while the transportation sector will explore new multimodal transport models to support the export of new energy vehicles and power batteries, Ling said.

Since 2015, China has given approvals to 11 provinces and cities, including Beijing and Hainan, to carry out pilot programs, continuously expanding institutional opening-up with regard to rules, regulations, management and standards. This is fostering a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, and is providing foreign-invested enterprises in China with diverse application scenarios and a stable, open policy environment for investment and operations.

The newly released plan says that nine additional cities, including Ningbo and Xiamen, will be permitted to carry out comprehensive pilot programs.

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, noted that the nine cities boast relatively high levels of openness in the services sector, as well as unique industrial characteristics, with some specializing in lifestyle services and others focusing on productive services, which will facilitate differentiated exploration.

The services sector is a key area for foreign investment in China. In the first quarter of the year, the actual use of foreign direct investment in the services sector totaled 193.33 billion yuan (\$26.83 billion), accounting for more than 70 percent of the country's total FDI, according to the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce.

In 2024, the 11 provinces and cities participating in the pilot programs attracted 293.2 billion yuan in FDI in the services sector, accounting for roughly half of the national total in that category.



It's 'bean' a long journey for a cup of coffee!

CHONGQING — From the volcanic soil of Colombia's Andes Mountains to the bustling streets of Chongqing in Southwest China, a humble coffee bean embarks on a transcontinental voyage.

Fermented, roasted and transformed into aromatic brews, these beans took center stage at the 2025 Chongqing International Coffee Festival, which concluded recently in the city's Yuzhong district.

Over three days, 210 coffee-related brands from 18 countries and regions, including Colombia, Italy, France, the Republic of Korea and Vietnam, as well as 23 domestic provinces and cities, showcased innovations in coffee experiences and trade. The event saw on-site procurement deals exceeding 50 million yuan (\$6.94 million).

Colombia, this year's guest of honor, highlighted its growing ties with China. "It's so important to continue the coffee adventure in China, which is currently our sixth-largest market, but with enormous potential," said Santiago Gamboa, minister-counselor of the Colombian Embassy in China.

At the festival, visitors sampled freeze-dried Colombian coffee in flavors ranging



A staff member makes coffee in a commercial complex reconstructed from an old building in Chongqing in 2022. TANG YI / XINHUA

from vanilla to caramel and amaretto. "China's imports of unroasted Colombian coffee beans hit a record high last year, with arabica varieties becoming especially popular," said Xuan Xiuli, head of the China operations of Buencafe. The brand, which entered the Chinese mainland in 2024, is now expanding westward from coastal regions.

China's Customs data reveal that the nation's net coffee imports surged by 130,800 metric tons from 2020 to 2024, a

6.53-fold increase, with an annual growth rate of 65.7 percent.

Chen Zhenjia, secretary-general of the Asia Coffee Association, said that China's per capita consumption remains at 16 cups yearly, compared with the global average of 240, indicating the huge growth potential while the country becomes a new engine of global coffee consumption.

The boom also uplifts farmers abroad. In Colombia's Huila region, grower Stefany

Martinez Gonzalez harvests beans at 1,800 meters above sea level, which journey to Chispa Xunta Beijing Trading Co Ltd for processing.

"By partnering with family farms, we've developed cost-effective specialty beans, helping farmers improve quality and profits," said Sun Yuxi, the firm's coffee trade manager.

Wu Jiahang, with the Colombian Coffee Growers Federation, said that to cater to China's diverse palate, Colombian producers experiment with novel processing techniques and bean varieties.

In Chongqing, a city now dotted with over 3,200 coffee shops, ranking among the top 10 nationally, beans from Yunnan, South America and Africa tempt customers with their unique aromas.

"By leveraging the advantages of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, the China-Europe Railway Express and the New International Land-sea Trade Corridor, Chongqing has been deeply connecting with domestic and international coffee production areas and is becoming a new highland for domestic coffee exhibition and trade," said Ma Lihua, director of the strategy development advisory department of real estate giant Cushman & Wakefield in Chongqing.

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COMMENT

Editorials

White House unable to accomplish its goal but more than capable of ruining things

Although the US administration continues to brag about how the US economy is becoming stronger due to the policies it has introduced since it took office on Jan 20, it seems it is standing alone with only its shadow for company.

US President Donald Trump has the lowest 100-day job approval rating of any president of the United States in the past 80 years, amid broad fears of a looming recession, according to a new ABC News/Washington Post/Ipsos poll. Seventy-two percent of respondents said they think it's very or somewhat likely that his economic policies will cause a recession in the short term.

Seventy-three percent said the economy is in bad shape, 53 percent said it's gotten worse since Trump took office and 41 percent said their own finances have worsened.

On the administration's tariff policy, which is harming both the US economy and the US' relations with other countries, 64 percent said they disapprove.

In particular, 62 percent said prices, which as a candidate Trump pledged to curb, are rising; 71 percent said they see his tariffs as a negative factor in price inflation; and 67 percent said they disapprove of his handling of the recent turmoil in the stock market. The S&P 500 is down 8.7 percent since Trump took office.

Although the Democratic Party remains out of favor, which is the one silver lining for the administration, the White House is like the player on the pitch confused by the game, while for those watching all is clear.

The administration's tariff-centered economic policy is unsustainable, yet rather than admit that, it continues to brag about the "endless wins" it has produced. It backs up this claim by overstating the losses and anxieties it has caused other economies, as if their losses are the US' gains, and that their anxieties prove the correctness of its policy.

A vivid example is that US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said recently China's export-reliant economic model is "unsustainable" and harms both China and the rest of the world, implying that the US is actually doing China a favor by pressing it to shift away from the "export-led manufacturing growth" as Beijing wants.

"China needs to change. The country knows it

needs to change. Everyone knows it needs to change. And we want to help it change — because we need rebalancing too," Bessent said in a speech at the Institute of International Finance in Washington on Wednesday. His message was that if Beijing accepts the medicine the US is offering it can have an "opportunity for a big deal" on trade with the US.

At the same time, the Treasury chief maintained that "America First does not mean America alone," a comment that comes after The Wall Street Journal reported the Trump administration is considering slashing tariffs on China to de-escalate tensions between the two largest global economies.

The reason why Bessent tried to rope in other countries in that way is because the US administration has been left alone by acting on its policy of might makes right and its belief that relations with other countries are a zero-sum game.

Beijing has no intention of taking the US bait. If the US administration wants a deal with Beijing it needs to remove all the additional tariffs it has imposed on China to pave the way for negotiations.

Beijing does not share Bessent's pessimism about the outlook for the Chinese economy. And rightly so. In the first quarter of this year, China's GDP grew by 5.4 percent year-on-year, better than market expectations. In particular, net exports contributed 38.9 percent to GDP growth in the first quarter, reaching the highest level since quarterly statistics were available in 2009, thanks to its efforts to diversify its trade partners and upgrade manufacturing.

That many economies are taking the initiative to strengthen their economic and trade ties with China also gives the lie to the latest incarnation of the "China collapse" theory that the China hawks never tire of peddling in the mistaken belief that if they say it often enough then it will somehow come true.

The tariff war was launched by the US, and it is the US that should put an end to it by opening the door for talks. China's position is consistent and clear: it will fight, if fight it must; but it is willing to talk if the US shows its sincerity. That means it should cease its attempted intimidation in favor of dialogue and negotiations based on equality, respect and mutual benefit.

Manila should not let mistakes become an error

Manila is once again behaving like the toad that wants to eat a swan. In the latest attempt to infringe upon China's territorial sovereignty and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, six individuals from the Philippines illegally landed on China's Tiexian Reef in the South China Sea, disregarding warnings from the Chinese side.

China holds indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands, including Tiexian Reef, and the adjacent waters, and the China Coast Guard said on Sunday that it had warned the Philippines to stop the infringements, and that officers had conducted on-site verification and enforcement measures according to the law.

The incident was just the latest violation of China's territorial integrity and maritime interests in the South China Sea by the Philippines that have become increasingly frequent in recent years, thanks to the encouragement given to Manila by Washington. Apart from Tiexian Reef, the Philippines has also made similar encroachments on China's territorial rights with regard to Huangyan Island, Ren'ai Reef and Niu'e Reef.

By sending people to illegally land on Chinese islands and islets and build constructions there, Manila may think that as time goes by its unlawful activities will help it gain "actual control" of the Chinese territory and consolidate its ill-grounded territorial claims in the South China Sea.

But this is wishful thinking. China has repeatedly said it will not back off from defending its sovereignty and maritime interests. Instead, in response to the constant provocations from the Philippines, the People's Liberation Army and Chinese law enforcement authorities have increased their vigilance and stepped up their law enforcement activities in the South China Sea.

That Manila's latest move came amid the ongoing massive military exercises being jointly staged by the US and the Philippines until May 9 highlights the degree to which Manila is behaving as if it has no experience and no wisdom by trying to take advantage of the US' heightened focus on the region for its land grabbing. It may

think that success will make it a king, but its actions only reveal it to be a bandit.

Such war games do not send a positive signal that Manila and Washington are acting in the interest of regional peace and stability. Instead, they only increase tensions in the South China Sea and sabotage regional efforts to build lasting peace and stability in the waters.

A survey report by the Ministry of Natural Resources released on Friday indicates that the Philippines should also be held accountable for the ecological decline at Tiexian Reef in recent years. The report finds human activities, especially the Philippines' persistent and illegal construction on nearby Zhongye Island, are one of the factors behind the deterioration of the coral reef ecosystems of Tiexian Reef.

Chinese researchers also found that foreign fishing boats, including those from the Philippines, were conducting illegal fishing activities in waters near Tiexian Reef. This, together with the Philippines' illegal construction on Zhongye Island and the related discharge of wastewater, has damaged the coral reef ecosystem surrounding both the island and the reef.

Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that the illegal and provocative moves taken by the Philippines in the disputed waters are posing a grave threat to the natural environment of the South China Sea as well as regional peace and stability.

Manila should realize that it is like the proverbial duck that Washington is forcing onto a perch, and that by continuing with its provocations it is only inviting ruin to the region, as has been seen in other parts of the world recently. But while it has been told this a hundred times, it seems it still has no understanding.

The provocations of the Philippines will come to no avail. China will continue to respond to any encroachments on its territorial sovereignty or maritime rights and interests, and act to prevent troubles before they occur.

Beijing's call for the Philippines to immediately cease these infringements is not just a demand that it respect its sovereignty but a plea that Manila work to preserve peace and stability for the good of all in the region.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Guizhou poised to become major player in global digital economy

Guizhou province in Southwest China has emerged as a national computing network hub. There is now ample evidence to show that the "east data, west computing" project, which means "computing the eastern region's data in the west" of the country, encompasses not only technology transfer, but also the restructuring of production. Guizhou is evolving from being a follower to a leader in the field of computing, setting a new paradigm for other western provinces in China.

Since being designated as a national computing power hub in May 2021, Guizhou has made giant strides in expanding its computing power. By late 2024, its gross computing power had doubled, exceeding 57 EFLOPS (57 quintillion floating-point operations per second), among which intelligent computing accounts for over 90 percent, transforming Guizhou into one of the top intelligent-computing provinces in China.

With clustered intelligent computing centers, including the Huawei Ascend Computing Center, Guizhou has transformed itself from being a "data storage warehouse" to becoming a "computing engine".

With a considerable number of data centers, Guizhou is poised to build an industry chain centered on computing power and data.

Guizhou has issued 26 incentive policies to promote its development as a national computing hub, and

expanded the scope of incentives to attract enterprises from regions such as Guangdong and Sichuan provinces and Beijing to start computing-related businesses in the province. It is planned that it will continually expand its computing capacity based on the clustered data centers in Gui'an and aggregate resources and computing power.

By late 2024, Guizhou had provided 23 percent of the country's total computing power, and had completed computing transactions worth 11.35 billion yuan (\$1.56 billion). It is currently developing diverse application scenarios, and actively cultivating clustered data centers, intelligent terminals and data applications — all with the aim of all three reaching a scale of 100 billion yuan respectively.

Innovation has replaced resources as the province's primary driving force. Application scenarios have stimulated demand and services. In recent years, Guizhou's computing power has gained popularity among film-making teams in eastern regions. The major operator of the Gui'an Supercomputing Center has helped render more than 50 films including *The Wandering Earth*, *Deep Sea* and *The Three-Body Problem*. Notably, over 40 percent of the special effects shots in the popular animated film *Ne Zha 2* were rendered using computing power generated in Guizhou.

Nevertheless, Guizhou still faces

challenges, namely, insufficient endogenous technological advancement, shortage of high-end talents and poor regional coordination. For this reason, Guizhou is sparing no effort to cultivate local innovative teams through projects such as "scientist workstations" and "university-enterprise joint laboratories". The Gui'an Supercomputing Center, for example, has supported research computing for universities and research institutes in Guizhou in fields such as biomedicine, artificial intelligence and industrial simulation.

The province's financial authorities guide financial institutions to enhance coordination between the government, finance, and enterprises, thereby assisting sci-tech businesses to secure finance and foster innovation. By last September, the province had 11 bank branches specializing in sci-tech financing, with outstanding loans to technology-based enterprises totaling 99.84 billion yuan, an increase of 2.32 billion yuan compared to early 2024. Notably, loans to high-tech enterprises amounted to 83.38 billion yuan, up 29.82 percent from the start of 2024.

If Guizhou achieves its goal of building China's largest computing clusters by the end of 2025 as planned, it is poised to become a prominent player in the global digital economy, and better support the country's modernization.

— YANG JUN, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

US steaming full speed ahead into difficulties

The Office of the United States Trade Representative announced last week that it will impose high "port fees" on ships built and operated by China, and the relevant measures will take effect from mid-October this year. As the fleets of major global shipping companies generally use ships built in China, this move has caused concern in many industries in the United States.

That's why the US administration's plan has been widely questioned by US industry insiders.

According to the Financial Times, the US liquefied natural gas industry recently warned the Donald Trump administration that the US currently has no ability to build liquefied natural gas ships, and the imposition of "port fees" on Chinese ships cannot promote domestic shipbuilding in the US.

In a lobbying letter to the US government this week, the American Petroleum Institute stated that US liquefied natural gas producers cannot comply with the new regulations of the Office of the US Trade Representative. There are no liquefied natural gas ships built in the US, and US shipyards have no ability to build new liquefied natural gas ships before 2029. Therefore, the "port fee" regulations will significantly increase the cost of ships.

The APTI's worries are justified as the US government may take further measures in the future to use similar trade means to suspend export licenses. The group warned in the letter that the rules would only undermine the dominance of US producers in the

LNG industry and undermine the US strategy to "consolidate its position as a global energy superpower".

The US LNG industry also asked the US administration to exempt crude oil and refined oil products such as gasoline and liquefied petroleum gas from shipping tariffs, arguing that such fees would disrupt supply chains and hit industry competitiveness.

The US surpassed Australia in 2023 to become the world's largest LNG exporter, exporting about 337 million cubic meters of LNG per day last year. The industry generates \$34 billion in exports for the US each year and has become the centerpiece of the Trump administration's "energy dominance" agenda.

The Office of the USTR issued a notice on April 17 announcing that it would charge Chinese shipowners and operators a "port fee" of \$50 per net ton per voyage from mid-October, and increase the fee by \$30 per net ton each year over the next three years. For Chinese-built ships used by operators from other countries, the fee will be \$18 per net ton or \$120 per container, and gradually increase over three years. It also announced that the US government will launch a second phase of measures in three years to restrict the use of foreign ships to transport liquefied natural gas to boost the US shipbuilding industry.

But the port fee policy and the plan to restrict US companies using foreign LNG tankers are both divorced from reality, as the US now lacks the ability to build LNG ships, which

cannot be built in a short time.

Currently, Chinese-made ships account for about 7 percent of the world's active LNG fleet, but Chinese shipyards have been expanding their market share, accounting for about 28 percent of LNG ship orders.

As some US observers said, the US cannot build new LNG ships before 2029, as shipyards now have neither the experience nor the technology to do this. US LNG industry insiders also pointed out that the US administration's requirement to "use US-built, US-flagged ships to transport US liquefied natural gas" is simply not feasible, as the US companies do not have such ships and it takes decades to build them, which makes it impossible for the US LNG and transportation industries to comply with such regulations.

As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said, the US measures such as levying port fees and imposing tariffs on cargo loading and unloading equipment are harmful to both sides, pushing up global shipping costs and disrupting the stability of the global production and supply chains. The policy will also increase inflationary pressure in the US, harm the interests of US consumers and companies, and ultimately fail to revitalize the US shipbuilding industry. The US should immediately stop its wrong practices. If it presses ahead with its "port fee" policy, China will have no choice but to take necessary measures to defend its legitimate rights and interests.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huxin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/moblie/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 70 436 2812 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

COMMENT

Witada Anukoonwattaka, Yann Duval and Rupa Chanda

Asia-Pacific facing disruption of value chain

Policy uncertainty reigns supreme since the United States' "Liberation Day" when it unveiled sweeping tariffs on April 2 while introducing a two-tier tariff regime comprising a 10 percent universal baseline tariff and elevating country-specific tariffs of up to 50 percent, targeting 57 countries — including many in the Asia-Pacific. Although the country-specific tariffs were suspended for all countries except China on April 9, subsequent signals have been mixed. While product exemptions were expanded to include certain electronic goods, the US also launched new Section 232 investigations into imports of semiconductors and pharmaceuticals. These developments suggest the potential for further unilateral trade actions and underscore the persistent uncertainty in the global trade environment.

These shifting trade dynamics carry important implications for the Asia-Pacific, where deep integration into global value chains — characterized by high reliance on imported inputs — intensifies both direct and indirect exposure to the US' evolving tariff measures.

Direct exposure occurs when a country's exports to the US are directly subject to tariffs. The actual burden can be heavier than the announced tariff rate because tariffs are applied to the full shipment value, even when much of it comes from imported inputs. For example, only \$51.5 of Cambodia's \$100 textile shipment to the US is domestically produced. A 10 percent tariff on the full value translates into an effective 23 percent tax on Cambodia's actual contribution. The Economic and Social Commission



Governments across the Asia-Pacific must be prepared to deliver tailored support to companies and workers as global value chains continue to evolve.

for Asia and the Pacific's Regional Integration and Value Chain Analyzer shows that while most Asia-Pacific economies are subject to the same 10 percent baseline tariff, many face an effective tariff burden exceeding 15 percent.

Indirect, or pass-through, exposure arises when a country exports intermediate goods or services that are later embedded in another country's exports to a tariff-imposing market. For example, in 2022, Bangladesh exported approximately \$8.2 billion in textiles and textile products to the United States, with about one-third of that value derived from upstream trade partners. Notably, US firms themselves, along with firms in China, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, are key contributors to Bangladesh's textile exports — getting indirectly exposed to US tariffs on those exports.

The impact of US tariffs is expected to vary across the Asia-Pacific. Economies

with high direct export exposure — such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand — could face significant trade-related contractions, with direct exposure accounting for 3 to 11 percent of GDP if the April 2 tariffs were reinstated. Indirect exposure through global value chains may also dampen growth in upstream economies supplying raw materials, parts and components. For example, Negara Brunei Darussalam, Mongolia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, and Singapore could see indirect exposure equivalent to approximately 1 percent of GDP. In contrast, economies with larger domestic markets or more diversified export structures — particularly those with strong service sectors — are better positioned to absorb the trade shock.

For both policymakers and industry leaders, identifying the source of vulnerabilities is essential for crafting targeted and forward-looking responses. These strategies should not only aim at mitigating current risks but also strengthening long-term economic adaptability.

Evidence-based analysis is essential for guiding targeted support. Sectoral data highlights how Thailand is indirectly impacted through its upstream supply chain linkages with Vietnam. The most vulnerable among Thai manufacturing sectors are leather and textiles, food and beverages, and other light manufacturing, electrical equipment. This insight suggests that coordination between Thailand and Vietnam focusing on these industries could mitigate shared risks and enhance resilience.

Beyond bilateral efforts, regional coordination with supply chain partners is

essential to address short-to-medium term challenges. This is particularly important because relocating supply chains requires long-term planning guided by infrastructure, labor, innovation capacity and regulatory stability — not just short-term tariff shifts.

Strategic uncertainty remains high too, as no country is fully shielded from tariff exposure. In the current unpredictable global trade environment, companies will remain cautious about investing or re-configuring supply chains.

Governments across the Asia-Pacific must be prepared to deliver tailored support to companies and workers as global value chains continue to evolve. Informed domestic and international policies require sector-specific assessments. In this context, ESCAP's TINA tariff simulator offers a valuable tool for preliminary assessment of Asia-Pacific tariff exposure.

Policy priorities include targeted support for affected small- and medium-sized enterprises and export-oriented firms; re-skilling and adjustment support for impacted workers; incentives to diversify exports and reduce market concentration; and bilateral and regional cooperation to maintain supply chain continuity.

Witada Anukoonwattaka is economic affairs officer, ESCAP; Yann Duval is chief of trade policy and facilitation section, ESCAP; and Rupa Chanda is director of trade, investment and innovation division, ESCAP.

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



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

Young talents need nurturing to drive rural vitalization

The central authorities, in early April, released a 10-year plan for rural vitalization. The plan targets the nation's agricultural development and food security, as well as providing the country's 700 million rural population with a decent life.

According to the plan, by the end of 2035, basic modernization is to have been achieved, not only in agricultural production but also in rural life. By then, national food security should stand on a more solid footing, the country's global agricultural competitiveness should be greatly enhanced, new technologies should be widely adopted and the urban-rural development gap remarkably narrowed.

The plan also serves as a road map by detailing development priorities and the government's support policies, practical approaches and phased goals.

Given the central authorities' strong governance ability and its impressive record in fulfilling its pledges in the past decades, I have little doubt that the goals will be reached or even surpassed within 10 years. Nevertheless, I would like to call the government's attention to one point — how to encourage young people to take agriculture as their career and live in the comparatively less-developed rural areas.

The plan highlights scientific innovation, seed technology, precision farming and digital agriculture. All these involve big data, artificial intelligence and satellite monitoring — technologies that can only be handled by talents and young farmers who have a good education and special training.

Only when these young people are convinced that they can earn more in farming will they decide to quit their city jobs to return to the countryside.

As of now, one can hardly see any young people working in their home villages as farmers. They have gone to towns and cities to find better-paid jobs. Visiting villages in China, one is confronted with mostly elderly people and school-age kids. A typical rural model is that the grandparents take care of their grandchildren whose parents work in cities and towns to support the family. The grandparents may work on their small plots to grow crops and vegetables for their own consumption, or they may just leave the plots abandoned. They can't make much money out of farming on the small plots anyway.

Agricultural modernization cannot be achieved by pinning hopes on the elderly or the kids who now live in the rural areas. Only when young workers are willing to return to the rural areas will there be enough well-educated people to operate the different agricultural machineries and manipulate drones that are becoming more and more popular. Only when these young people are convinced that they can earn more in farming will they decide to quit their city jobs to return to the countryside.

China has more than 30 agriculture universities and about the same number of higher learning institutions that have agriculture colleges. Though thousands of agriculture-majored students are graduating each year, the majority of them choose to find jobs in other fields rather than in agriculture. They have good reasons to do so. First, the pay for an agro-technician is not attractive enough and a graduate can easily earn more even by working as a delivery person. Second, the working and living conditions are hard when working in rural towns and villages. The two deficiencies join hands in pulling agro-technicians down the ladder of social status.

I tried to play safe when I said that a majority of agriculture majors refused to take jobs connected with agriculture. In fact, a young man, who majored in plant protection in university, told me that of 120 students in his major, only six are now engaged in jobs related to their majors with two teaching in universities after obtaining a PhD and the other four working in town shops selling seeds and pesticides. What a waste of talent resources.

According to the 10-year plan, China in the next decade will build world-class agricultural research institutions and promote closer collaboration between research hubs and major agricultural regions. The country has great demand for the innovations that the hundreds of top-notch scientists can produce in the labs, with thousands of agro-technicians applying their research results. Millions of well-educated skillful young people can turn seeds into crops.

Measures have to be taken to make agriculture an attractive industry in terms of both profits and benefits. A mechanism has to be designed to make agriculture-related jobs well-paid ones. Only when agriculture majors are willing to take jobs in agriculture and only when young people are willing to take farming as a career, will rural vitalization fulfill its potential.

Yang Yaoyuan

Eastern wisdom seen through China-Vietnam cooperation

President Xi Jinping's visit to Vietnam among other countries in Southeast Asia in mid-April is significant because this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam. Through the changing times the two neighboring socialist countries have maintained strategic stability in bilateral relations.

As the world enters a new phase of industrial restructuring, technological revolution, and geopolitical shifts, the deepening of China-Vietnam relations is not only crucial for both countries but also emerging as a model for South-South cooperation.

President Xi's visit deepened political trust and expanded comprehensive cooperation, which will promote the building of a community with a shared future between the two countries. According to a joint statement, China and Vietnam will strengthen cooperation in political trust, economic and supply chain cooperation, cross-border infrastructure, dispute management and security cooperation.

In 2024, bilateral trade between China and Vietnam reached \$260.65 billion. China has been Vietnam's largest trading partner for 20 consecutive years, while Vietnam has become China's fourth-largest trading partner.

As China transitions to a more technology-intensive manufacturing sector, Vietnam has absorbed labor-intensive industries, creating a synergistic model of "research and development in China plus manufacturing in Vietnam". China supplies 70 percent of Vietnam's imported integrated circuits, while Vietnam exports smartphones and textiles enhanced with Chinese technology.

Their cooperation goes beyond simple complementarity. LONGi Green Energy, China's leading solar panel manufacturer, has established a smart photovoltaic industrial park in Bac Giang province of Vietnam, promoting Vietnam's new energy sector. Meanwhile, Vietnamese electric vehicle brand VinFast uses batteries from China's CATL for products sold in the European market.

The two countries have also signed agreements allowing Vietnam to export fresh coconuts, frozen durians and farmed crocodiles to China.

In 2024, Vietnam's trade deficit with China reached \$82.8 billion. The technological gap and value-added disparity between China's exports of machinery and integrated circuits and Vietnam's exports of consumer goods underscore Vietnam's urgent need for



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

The two countries will leverage their potential in manufacturing electronics, textiles, and auto parts to upgrade industrial chain collaboration.

industrial upgrading.

Meanwhile, the friendshoring strategies adopted by the United States and Europe, under which supply chains are rerouted to politically and economically safe countries, are creating competition for China in electronics and textiles.

Samsung investing billions of dollars in Vietnam and the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement are also reshaping regional industrial chains.

China and Vietnam thus need to adopt deeper cooperation models. In 2024, China imported 20.06-billion-yu-

an (\$2.75 billion) worth of Vietnamese fruits such as durian, jackfruit, and dragon fruit through the Youyi Pass on the China-Vietnam border in Pingxiang, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

China-Vietnam relations are developing within the framework of ASEAN regional cooperation. The China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0, negotiated in 2024, includes zero tariffs on digital products and cross-border data flow rules for the first time.

Meanwhile, a smart agriculture plan under the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism is building a food security network. From January to August 2024, the alignment of the Two Corridors and One Economic Circle with the Belt and Road Initiative attracted \$1.97 billion in Chinese direct investment to Vietnam. Cooperation is promising in electronics and green energy, too.

China and Vietnam also signed a memorandum of understanding in

cross-border e-commerce with unified consumer protection standards, including online arbitration platforms for cross-border disputes. The Lancang-Mekong Environmental Cooperation Strategy and Action Framework (2023-27) explores ecosystem management and biodiversity protection cooperation.

What's more, China and Vietnam will work hard on dispute management and security cooperation. They have organized joint patrols and established a direct military hotline in the Beibu Gulf area. They will increase restraint on the South China Sea issue, enhance border management, combat cross-border crime, and facilitate border trade. Both sides agree to deepen high-level defense dialogues and cooperation, jointly maintain regional peace, and oppose hegemonism.

China and Vietnam can make the best of opportunities by incorporating Chinese-style modernization into Vietnam's Doi Moi (renovation) policies. Deeper cooperation in cross-border infrastructure will reduce trade logistic costs, making them good models for ASEAN connectivity.

The two countries will leverage their potential in manufacturing electronics, textiles, and auto parts to upgrade industry chain collaboration. Creating a regional supply chain alliance can elevate their position in the global supply chain and expand their market.

Deeper cooperation in dealing with climate change, green energy, digital transformation, and smart agriculture is also important for the two countries.

At a time when the world stands at a critical crossroads, the 75-year development of China-Vietnam relations proves that socialist neighbors can transcend geopolitical competition traps and create new cooperation paradigms through communication.

Bilateral relations are transitioning to a new type of international relations, demonstrated by the 15-minute customs clearance at smart border ports, joint ecological governance in the Red River Basin and rule-making on the Digital Silk Road, etc.

The community of shared future between China and Vietnam will not only benefit their peoples but also provide Eastern wisdom for the progress of human civilization.

The author is the deputy director of the School of International Relations at Beijing International Studies University. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

WANG HENG AND YU GUIZHANG

Orderly evolution

Asian and African countries are becoming principal forces in reshaping the global governance architecture

The year 2025 marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference. In 1955, 29 Asian and African countries and regions gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to collectively enunciate a strong anti-colonial and anti-imperialist stance, thereby bringing the "Third World" onto the international political stage for the first time. This historic political consensus signaled the beginning of a new era in which post-colonial Asian and African nations actively participated in international affairs and the development aspirations of the non-Western world were integrated into the global governance agenda. The spirit of "solidarity, friendship and cooperation", and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, as advocated by the Bandung Conference lent a theoretical foundation to the independent diplomatic policies of Asian and African countries and a powerful Southern voice in a world recovering from the devastation of war and colonialism.



Wang Heng



Yu Guizhang

Since the Bandung Conference, international relations have undergone profound changes. The world is now experiencing acute peace, development, security and governance deficits. These have allowed multidimensional global crises to arise that disproportionately impact countries of the Global South, especially those in Asia and Africa. On the one hand, escalating geopolitical rivalries and emergent conflicts are unfolding against a backdrop of simultaneous multipolarization and regional bloc formation, narrowing the strategic space for the peaceful development of Africa and Asia. On the other hand, many Western powers continue to strengthen technological barriers, impose trade restrictions, and, through their domination of the financial governance mechanisms, perpetuate structural inequalities within the international system and widen the global North-South divide. Additionally, transnational challenges such as climate change, food security and energy transitions are increasingly global in nature, yet the Global South remains underrepresented in shaping the governance frameworks in these areas. These challenges not only test the resilience and development capacity of the Global South but also underscore the enduring relevance of the Bandung Spirit in mobilizing collective responses and driving reform in global governance.

Against this backdrop, Asian and African countries are transforming from mere peripheral recipients of the international order to co-builders and leading actors in global governance. Especially in recent years, under the impetus of initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the BRICS cooperation mechanism, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, exchanges between Asia and Africa have grown more frequent and the cooperative ties between them more robust. This has facilitated a shift in their cooperation from conceptualized political unity to institutionalized practical collaboration. Such a transformation reflects a strategic leap in the relations between Asia and Africa from political trust to development synergy. In the face of profound changes in the international order and the resurgence of hegemonism and unilateralism, African and Asian countries are accelerating their efforts to transcend the limitations of Western-centrism and are becoming principal forces in reshaping the global governance architecture.

In terms of tangible outcomes, the 70 years since the Bandung Conference have witnessed African and Asian countries playing an increasingly vital role in international affairs. Economically, they have achieved remarkable growth. According to World Bank data, as of 2024, the combined economies of Asian and African countries accounted for over 61.2 percent of global GDP and contributed 76.5 percent of global economic growth over the past decade. Cooperation mechanisms have also matured, with platforms such as the FOCAC, the China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (10+1) mechanism, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank providing robust institutional support for long-term partnerships. In terms of development philosophy, initiatives such as a community with a shared future for mankind and the three global initiatives (the Global Development, Global Security and Global Civilization initiatives), extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and the principles of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith approach have offered new frameworks for institutional design and discursive expression in the Global South's engagement with global development.

Among these, China-Africa cooperation stands out as a contemporary manifestation of South-South solidarity and a living embodiment of the Bandung Spirit. From jointly opposing imperialism and colonialism to voicing independent aspirations at the Bandung Conference, and now advancing multifaceted cooperation through the FOCAC, China and African countries have

cultivated a multilayered partnership. Noteworthy examples include the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya, which has significantly improved local infrastructure and created over 46,000 jobs; the Silk Road e-commerce initiative, which has empowered small and medium-sized enterprises in African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria and Rwanda to expand into international markets; and the China-aided Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters project, which has bolstered the continent's public health capacity in response to pandemics.

These forms of cooperation not only respond to the pressing needs of African countries, but also embody the principles of "sincerity, real results, amity and good faith" that underpin China-Africa relations, as well as the Bandung Spirit, thereby advancing the China-Africa community with a shared future to a deeper and more substantive level. Of particular significance is the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus, released in March 2024 during the 13th Meeting of the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, which stands as the first internationally recognized consensus independently initiated by Global South countries. This milestone breaks from traditional, North-dominated development models and reflects a growing consciousness among Southern nations regarding their development autonomy.

These achievements collectively demonstrate that the Bandung Spirit still remains a vibrant and relevant force in renewing and invigorating the contemporary Afro-Asian relations, which, in their evolving institutional forms, cooperation models and intellectual foundations, are redefining the role and significance of the Global South in the global governance order. Looking ahead, Asian and African countries are poised to further embody the Bandung Spirit by promoting win-win cooperation, strengthening institutional frameworks and building consensus around inclusive development. In doing so, they will continue to serve as critical drivers of the global order transformation, working together to steer global governance toward a more just, inclusive and sustainable future.

Wang Heng is chair of the Institute of African Studies and vice-president of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University. Yu Guizhang is a research assistant of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University. The authors 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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LETLHOKWA GEORGE MPEDI

Case in point

China's moves to put AI within a legal framework offer guidance and inspiration for other countries

The Global South is often dismissed as being on the margins of global affairs and relegated to having a passive role, particularly in the sphere of artificial intelligence. But this is not so. China has made formidable progress in the development of AI and its regulation, and other Global South countries stand to learn and benefit from this shift.

Historically, the law has been a largely reactive tool. However, in the age of AI, it cannot remain so. It is such a profoundly transformative technology that it is imperative to anticipate the changes it can bring, for good or for ill. While AI has paved the way for significant advancement, the caveat is that it is also increasingly being used to do harm. The regulation in the sphere of technology is increasingly being pushed. New regulatory initiatives offer workable answers to these ethical problems. However, these must be carried out carefully to leverage AI's advantages while reducing its hazards. But it is essential to continue exploring this junction since it will ultimately determine how justice is perceived and provided in the modern world. As we navigate this transformative era, it is imperative for legal systems to strike a delicate balance: embracing innovation while upholding the principles of fairness, accountability, and transparency.

Much of this technology is still in the infancy stage, and thus, the legal responses are just being crafted. However, China's laws are notable in this regard. China is a global leader in AI development and regulation because it has implemented a proactive approach to ensure both security and the ethical use of AI.

In July 2023, China outlined policies to regulate its domestic AI sector in a bid to balance government oversight with support for companies to become viable global competitors. This is still billed as the most comprehensive set of AI guidelines outlined so far. The government's AI regulation strategy is based on concerns about potential misuse, such as disinformation and cyberattacks, as well as ethical risks such as discrimination and privacy violations. The 24 guidelines include measures that will require platforms providing AI services to register them and undergo a security review prior to public release. The Chinese

government will mandate labels for artificially created content. Additionally, the measures require that all data and foundation models should be sourced from legitimate sources that respect the intellectual property rights of the creators, have appropriate consent and don't undermine user privacy. Similarly, the guidelines will hold service providers accountable for anything created through their platform.

China's AI regulation follows a structured framework covering data compliance, cybersecurity, algorithm oversight and ethical governance, with key laws such as the Personal Information Protection Law and the regulations on network data security management. For years, Beijing has prepared the foundation for these regulations. In 2017, the State Council, China's Cabinet, released an AI roadmap in which it prioritized the advancement of this technology and established a schedule for implementing the governmental rules. As a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Matt Sheehan argues: "China is regulating AI, and the rest of the world would be wise to pay attention." His analysis found that these policies emerged through a dynamic process involving bureaucrats, academics, technologists and public debate.

Moreover, China's AI governance evolved in response to real-world challenges, such as algorithm-driven content moderation and the rise of deepfake technology. These developments were filtered through academic discourse before being shaped into concrete regulations. The policymaking process was iterative, starting with corporate penalties and culminating in detailed regulations. Following the release of generative models in late 2022, China also moved swiftly to regulate generative AI, reflecting shifting priorities between legal governance and AI development. Future regulations will continue to shape global AI governance as China pushes its AI technology into international markets and influences global regulatory frameworks.

Arguably, understanding China's AI policymaking is essential for grasping the broader trajectory of AI governance worldwide, particularly as the country's AI regulations are being implemented in a timely manner. For example, the African Union Development Agency published a draft policy regarding AI regulation in February 2024, with official endorsement expected this year. The policy

includes industry-specific recommendations aimed at reviewing AI systems, providing regulatory oversight and forming AI councils. The AU draft policy encourages members who do not have policies in place to adopt this policy, while members who already have AI regulations in place should review and align their policies accordingly. While this is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, we need to be more purposeful and comprehensive in our approach. Importantly, in this regard, there must also be a shift from rhetoric to policy. It is in the context of China's evolving policies that emerging economies can better understand how to develop regulatory systems that support technological advancement while safeguarding societal interests.

China's approach emphasizes the need for proactive regulation, a balance between innovation and control, and locally adapted policies. China demonstrates how other developing nations can shape AI governance to serve their interests rather than solely adopting other models — an important consideration given the history of the Global South. This approach encourages nations to foster local AI ecosystems.

China's engagement with global AI discussions speaks to the potential for cross-border cooperation, where nations in the Global South can share strategies and regulatory frameworks to navigate AI's challenges together. As Jamila Venturini, the co-executive director of Digital Rights, a Latin America-based non-profit organization, outlines: "To build a proper agenda to tackle the issues that actually concern Global South contexts and populations, it will be necessary to include those who are most affected by AI developments, as well as the ones who could benefit more from it and who may have relevant proposals to be considered." Of course, pockets of the Global South have to catch up in many instances, but regulation should not wait. As Sheehan states, "[we] can learn from Chinese regulators to be targeted and iterative" in our approach. And, I would add, proactive.

The author is a professor of law, vice-chancellor and principal at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, and the co-author of the book Artificial Intelligence and the Law. 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.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Almost anyone who visits the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province, finds themselves — quite literally — standing at the feet of a colossal 35.5-meter-high Buddha, carved from the region's iconic sandstone. Looking upward, visitors follow the gentle drape of his robe — its lower edge adorned with intricate dragon patterns, past the platform of his protruding knees where his lower arms rest, and up to his broad chest, softly folded chin, and tranquil visage. This awe-inspiring statue, which took 12 years to complete, stands as a silent testament to the power and ambition of one remarkable woman: Wu Zetian (624-705), the only female monarch to rule China.

In 690, after seven years of wielding power behind the scenes, Wu boldly seized the throne for herself, deposing her own son. To cement her legitimacy, her supporters portrayed her as the living embodiment of Maitreya Buddha, believed to be the future Buddha of the world in all Buddhist traditions. Temples were erected, and grottoes carved in his honor, serving as powerful symbols of visual propaganda. Against this backdrop, the construction of the monumental Buddha began in 695.

According to the local tourism bureau, with its towering height, the statue is today the tallest in Dunhuang and the third-tallest of all stucco sitting Buddhas in China.

Many believe that Wu Zetian was as much a product of her own ambition and political acumen as she was of her time. She rose to power during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), a golden era in Chinese history noted for its cultural brilliance, military strength, and exceptional openness. The Tang empire's military prowess ensured the stability and security of the vast ancient Silk Road network, allowing trade and travel to flourish.

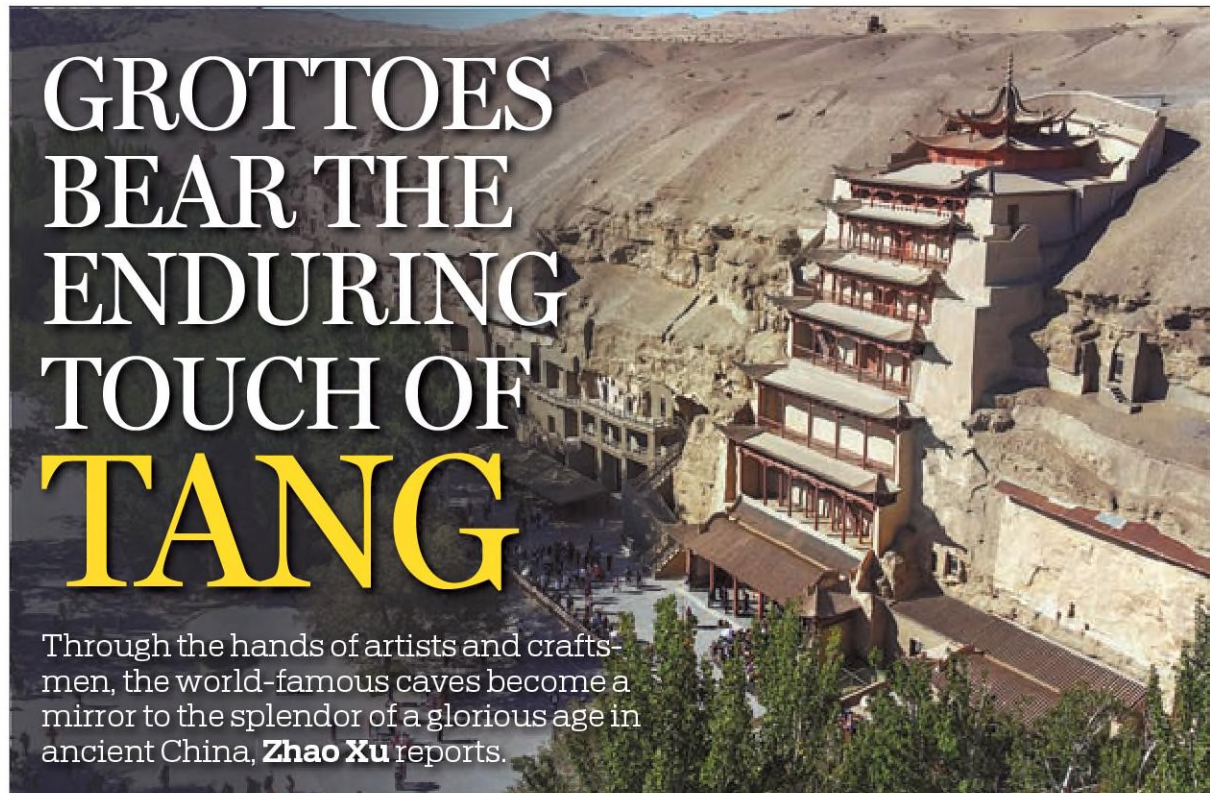
Dunhuang, a vital oasis along this route, thrived as a cosmopolitan hub where merchants, pilgrims, and envoys converged.

"It's no surprise that, although grotto carving in Dunhuang began in the mid-fourth century, it wasn't until the Tang Dynasty that large-scale, fervent construction truly took off," says Zhong Na, a senior on-site tour guide, referring to the fact that out of the 735 existing Buddhist caves in Dunhuang, 236 have been dated to the time of Tang. "Many of these caves were commissioned by individuals involved in Silk Road trade. For them, carving a grotto was an act of devotion — an offering to the Buddha in hopes of securing divine protection on the unpredictable and often perilous journeys they faced."

This collective endeavor — carried out by legions of artists and craftsmen, many likely trained in workshops in the Tang capital of Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an in Shaanxi province) — transformed Dunhuang's caves into a vivid, enduring photo book of the Tang Dynasty, preserving its splendor long after the glow of its prestige dimmed.

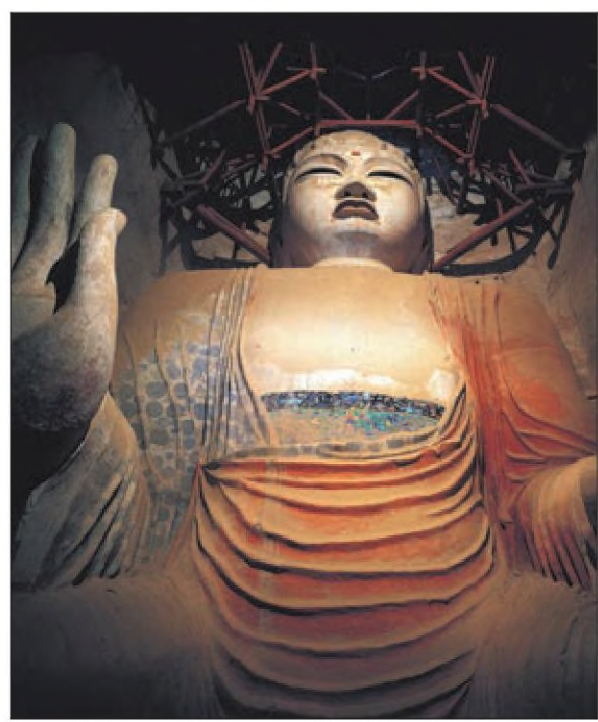
"We have every reason to believe that as the muralists brushed visions of paradise onto the plastered sandstone walls of Dunhuang, they were not only reaching for the celestial, but recalling the earthly splendor of Chang'an," says Zhong. "There, magnificent Buddhist temples rose amid the heady scent of incense — burned by the devout and brought there by Sogdian merchants, along with glittering jewels, exotic spices, and their spirited dances."

These wooden-structured temples found their way into the murals of Dunhuang, along with imperial canopies once used to shield emperors from the sun, ornate incense burners, and tree-shaped lampstands aglow with flickering candles. Such details, depicted on the walls of Cave 172 (all existing Dunhuang caves are numbered), have led some to speculate that the scene portrays Chang'an on



GROTTOES BEAR THE ENDURING TOUCH OF TANG

Through the hands of artists and craftsmen, the world-famous caves become a mirror to the splendor of a glorious age in ancient China. **Zhao Xu** reports.



Above left: Measuring 35.5 meters in height, the Giant Buddha in Cave 96 bore witness to the power and ambition of Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). PHOTO COURTESY OF DUNHUANG ACADEMY **Top:** The multi-level, pagoda-like wooden facade, built to protect the Giant Buddha, has become an iconic feature of the Mogao Caves. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Above right:** The Bodhisattva depicted in Cave 57 of early Tang Dynasty exudes feminine beauty. PHOTO COURTESY OF DUNHUANG ACADEMY

the 15th day of the Chinese New Year, bathed in festival lights as it celebrated the Lantern Festival.

Throughout history, religious worship has rarely existed in pure silence, and Dunhuang was no exception. At this cultural crossroads, traditional Chinese instruments blended with those introduced via the ancient Silk Road, played by celestial beings floating above realms of Buddhist bliss. Their music must have followed the rhythm of twirling dancers who, as part of the scene, spin gracefully on ornate round carpets — much like Sogdian performers at lavish banquets in Chang'an.

"The frescoes' historical value can never be overestimated given the fact that few Tang Dynasty paintings, and ever fewer pieces of architecture, have survived to this date," says Zhong.

Her point was amply illustrated by Liang Sicheng (1901-72), considered by many "the father of modern Chinese architecture," and his equally talented wife Lin Huiyin (1904-55), a writer, poet and arguably the first female architect in modern China.

While poring over *The Illustrated Catalogue of the Dunhuang Caves* in 1937 — compiled by French Sinologist Paul Pelliot, who had visited Dunhuang in 1908 — Liang was captivated by a fresco titled *Wutai Mountain Map*.

Measuring 13 meters long and 3.6 meters wide, it was painted around the mid-10th century, roughly four decades after the fall of Tang Dynasty, to present a sweeping view of Wutai Mountain, a major pilgrimage site in Chinese Buddhism.

Whoever had created the bird's eye view had clearly marked and named 196 locations on the mural — including a certain Foguang Temple, which appeared to match one he had come across in archival materials shortly afterwards. Foguang literally translates to "the light of Buddha."

The couple wasted no time in journeying to Wutai Mountain, where, with the help of local monks, they succeeded in locating the main hall of the actual Foguang Temple. There, an ink inscription on a beam confirmed its dating to the Tang Dynasty.

"Until then, it was widely believed

that no Tang Dynasty wooden structures had survived in China. The couple's discovery overturned that assumption — and they wouldn't have made it without that mural, painted on the western wall of Cave 61 in Dunhuang," Zhong says.

True to its name, *Wutai Mountain Map* illustrates two pilgrimage routes leading to the sacred mountain — one stretching from present-day Taiyuan in Shanxi province, and the other from present-day Zhengding county, Hebei province — covering approximately 160 and 260 kilometers, respectively. The map vividly portrays everything and everyone along these routes, from peasants trudging home with bundles of firewood, to lay believers erecting thatched tents in quiet valleys for moments of temporary meditation, and foreign envoys, their camels and horses laden with tributes, making their way toward a mountain temple.

The topography, rendered primarily in green and light brown, evokes the aesthetic of *qinghu shanshui* — the "blue-and-green landscape" style

of Chinese painting that emerged in the 5th century and flourished during the Tang Dynasty.

"The colors all come from natural pigments — turquoise for green, lapis lazuli for blue, cinnabar for red, kaolin (also known as Chinese clay) for white, and real gold for the gleaming gilt," says Zhong.

One figure who has received more than a few touches of gold is the Bodhisattva depicted in Cave 57 of the grottoes. Lavishly accessorized with gold bracelets and necklaces, as well as a gilded headdress the rich luster of which dances against the luminosity of her faint vermilion-colored skin, the Bodhisattva embodies the ideal of female beauty during the Tang Dynasty.

According to Zhong, as Buddhism made its way from India to China, the princely male image of the Bodhisattva gradually transformed into a more graceful and nurturing feminine form. Guanyin — the Chinese name for the Bodhisattva — literally means "One Who Hears the Cries of the World," a title befitting her divine role as the Goddess of Compassion. This



Fan Jinshi, a noted Dunhuang expert and former director of the Dunhuang Academy. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

transformation became especially pronounced during the Tang Dynasty, a time when women, as often seen in open and cosmopolitan societies, began to attain greater social standing.

The trend was exemplified by the political ascent of Wu Zetian, who rose to heights unobtainable if not unimaginable for women both before and after her. Like any shrewd power player, Wu understood the importance of offering hope to her subjects. It was no coincidence, then, that she aligned herself with Maitreya — the future Buddha — who, according to Buddhist belief, will descend upon the world 5.67 billion years after the nirvana of Shakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism, to bring abundance and peace to all.

Today, on the side walls of Cave 96, where the Giant Buddha sits, small holes remain clearly visible — believed to have been drilled to support the scaffolding essential for the statue's construction. These holes were first identified by renowned Chinese archaeologist and Dunhuang scholar Peng Jinzhang (1937-2017). His wife, Fan Jinshi — now 87 — is also a distinguished Dunhuang expert and former director of the Dunhuang Academy, China's premier institute dedicated to the preservation and study of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"Contrary to popular belief, Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin had never set foot here, yet they were able to make that discovery solely by studying the fresco — a fact that speaks volumes about the map's remarkable accuracy. Thanks to it, we are able to glimpse what Mount Wutai once was — quite different from what it is today," says Fan.

According to Zhong, much of the giant Buddha visitors see today is the result of repeated repairs and repainting over the past millennium — the dragon pattern on the robe was unmistakably from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). In fact, the Buddha lost both hands in earthquakes over the centuries, and they were only restored during a major repair effort led by the Dunhuang Academy in 1987.

"These efforts demand just as much — if not more — attention from the artists and artisans involved. The only difference is perhaps that, in the latter case, the reverence is directed more toward history," Fan says.

"For those intent on finding the most authentic Tang elements, they should look down as hard as they did up," says Zhong, noting that the Buddha's feet remain original to the Tang era. Generously shaped, they are as full and grounded as the boundless hope that must have stirred the hearts of those who toiled on the scaffolding — year after year, for 12 long years — to breathe life into this sublime vision.

Ma Jingna contributed to this story.

Contact the writer at zhaoxu@chinadaily.com.cn



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The fresco, *Wutai Mountain Map*, in Cave 61 features 196 marked and named locations, including the Foguang Temple (highlighted in red). PHOTO COURTESY OF DUNHUANG ACADEMY

CULTURAL HERITAGE



Left: Chinese soldiers outflank the enemy from the side and rear during the Battle of Xinkou in Xinzhou city, Shanxi province, in 1937. **Middle:** At the Taiyuan railway station, residents from Taiyuan, Shanxi, see soldiers off to the frontline. **Right:** The battle became an important chapter in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A history of resistance

Battle site set to burnish its revolutionary credentials by recounting the events more succinctly, report **Wang Qian** and **Zhu Xingxin** in Xinzhou, Shanxi.

Located 25 kilometers north of Xinzhou city, Shanxi province, the Battle of Xinkou site — a cluster of 47 weathered caves carved out of cliffs in 1935 — bears silent witness to a 23-day clash in 1937 that became an important chapter in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45). Kuomintang and Communist Party of China soldiers fought here together, effectively blocking Japan's southward advance, causing the invading army to suffer heavy losses.

As the country marks the 80th anniversary of the victory, local authorities have been enhancing efforts to honor the site's history and highlight its educational value by shining a spotlight on its united front against invaders and their battlefield heroism.

"The battle was a master class in tactical synergy," 63-year-old Zhao Yushun says.

For the volunteer guide, the Battle of Xinkou is more than a historical event, it's part of his family legacy. Zhao's grandmother, Liu Huan'e, risked her life as an underground informant for the Eighth Route Army led by the Communist Party of China. "Her defiance against Japanese brutality inspired my father, a soldier, and later, me," he adds.

Over two decades, he has collected artifacts and oral accounts to preserve stories of the battle, where the Chinese people united to resist the invaders.

Located between the Taihang and Lyuliang mountains on a crucial route where railways, highways and rivers converge, Xinkou is the gateway from northern Shanxi to Taiyuan, and according to Zhao, was the last line of defense in protecting the provincial capital.

In early October 1937, Japanese forces under Commander Seishiro Itagaki swept southward from Daixian county in Xinzhou, attacking Yuanping and Xinkou with the aim of pushing straight toward Taiyuan. What followed was the largest defensive battle led by the Chinese army on the North China battlefield during the War of Resistance. As Kuomintang commander Wei Lihuang led frontal defenses, CPC



A bird's-eye-view of the Battle of Xinkou site, which has a cluster of 47 weathered caves that were used as command centers, field hospitals and stables for cavalry during the war. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY



Zhao Yushun, a 63-year-old volunteer guide, walks by a memorial wall of the heroes in the Battle of Xinkou.

leader Zhu De coordinated guerrilla strikes behind enemy lines. From mobilization to decision-making and command, every major

strategic deployment and tactical execution was carefully coordinated, both at the front and behind enemy lines. This ensured close

cooperation between different military units, and between the frontal battlefield and guerrilla fighters, which paved the way for the heroic, monumental struggle against the Japanese invaders.

The Battle of Xinkou lasted from Oct 11 to Nov 2. Repeated enemy assaults were repelled, thwarting its aggressive attempts to break through. Whether on the front or in guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines, everyone, from high-ranking officers to ordinary soldiers, fought with unrelenting courage to defend the country, and for national independence and liberation.

"The sacrifices here underscore how hard-won our peace was," Zhao says, adding that this is also the reason why he has taken it upon himself to share the stories of the battle with the next generation, as well as the patriotism and perseverance of those who fought.

Today, the 47 caves — 15 in Hongya Bay and 32 in Hougou — have been restored, their original roles as command centers, field hospitals and stables for cavalry etched into local memory. Since 2015, four major renovations have stabilized the caves using flood barriers.

"The area often experiences heavy rain, which used to cause water levels to rise halfway up the cave dwellings, so a flood control channel was built to help protect them," says Feng Guodong, deputy head of the district's cultural heritage protection bureau. "Now, the site is better preserved."

Nearby 204 Heights, a strategic choke-point where some of the fiercest combats occurred, remains scarred with trenches. In September last year, a 2.6-km trail, including a 1-km wooden walkway and 1-km gravel path, was created to allow visitors to

retrace the steps of the heroes.

"Schools organize trips for primary and secondary students to walk this heroic path, and engage in patriotic education to appreciate the harshness of war, as well as the sacrifice and efforts responsible for the good lives we lead today," says Yin Bin, Xinkou county Party secretary.

Although listed as a provincial patriotism education center in 2005, and designated as a national key cultural relic protection unit in 2019, recognition of Xinkou's historical significance still lags, according to Zhao Wenjun, deputy director of the cultural and tourism bureau in Xinfu district, where the site is located.

"The Battle of Xinkou is a significant symbol of efforts during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and left key cultural heritages in Xinfu district. However, recognition and attention on it from the public is insufficient. We need to better promote and uphold its revolutionary spirit," Zhao Wenjun says, adding that the next step is for the site to improve the protection and revitalization of its cultural heritage, preserving and developing it for wider appreciation.

"We want to build a memorial hall, a museum for the artifacts, and a reception room. We will also collect items used in the battle," Zhao Wenjun says, adding that as this year marks the 80th anniversary of China's winning the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, local officials will try to get government funding for the site.

As Shanxi leverages Xinkou's untapped potential, Zhao Yushun is happy that more people are coming to the site and learning about its history.

"I want to pass on stories of blood and fire to the next generation, spreading the spirit of patriotism and relentless self-improvement to more people," he adds.

Contact the writers at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn



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All-digital museum has wartime storytelling updated

By **WANG QIAN** and **ZHU XINGXIN** in Changzhi, Shanxi

Unlike traditional institutions, the museum dedicated to the Eighth Route Army in Wuxiang county, Changzhi, Shanxi province, tells history in an innovative way, illuminating the past through modern technology. With no physical artifacts to display, it offers instead a dynamic, "growing" exhibition space powered by artificial intelligence and real-time data updates.

Opened in October 2024, the museum makes use of cutting-edge technology to bring history to life, and has attracted more than 24,000 visitors so far, according to the museum statistics. Visitors can interact with digital recreations of revolutionary heroes, listen to artificial intelligence-narrated stories, and even step into virtual battlefields. Known as one of the centers of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and as one of the bases of the Eighth Route Army led by the Communist Party of China, Wuxiang was once a military headquarters, which explains the museum's location.

"This isn't just a museum, it's a revolution in how we remember history," Ye Jian, the exhibition curator, says. "We call it a 'growing' museum



Left: Visitors take photos of the screen telling stories of the Eighth Route Army led by the Communist Party of China at a museum in Wuxiang county, Changzhi, Shanxi province. **Right:** Unlike traditional ones, the museum showcases the history through modern technology, including artificial intelligence and virtual reality. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

because its database is continuously expanding, and has grown from 10 million Chinese characters to 30 million in four months."

The database powers 17 digital exhibits related to people, locations, and events.

Upon entering, visitors are greeted by a dynamic display of key moments of the Eighth Route Army's legacy. In the Heroes of Taihang section, 40 colored portraits of local heroes — like Wang Jiujuan, who disguised herself as a man to fight, and Wang Lai-

fa, who made and laid hundreds of landmines as the plucky village attempted to repel the Japanese invaders — come alive through AI. Their eyes blink, they smile warmly, as if bridging the past and present.

"We wondered if the photos might be too blurry, or if they wouldn't look like real people," Ye says, adding that their concerns were dispelled when they saw the reaction of the grandson of an Eighth Route Army soldier as he watched the AI-generated photo of

his grandfather come to life. "Standing before these portraits, I felt like I was seeing real people and their stories," Wang Kexin, a visitor to the exhibition, says.

Among the portraits are a few blank frames, which commemorate unknown heroes, according to Ye. "We may not have their faces, but we leave space to honor them."

For the curator, another highlight is a digital map pinpointing 1,190 historical sites, with immersive 3D battle recreations.

Clicking on the touchscreen, visitors will learn that eight brigades, 31 regiments, and 378 generals fought in Wuxiang, whose stories are commemorated. There is also visualized data about 30,000 Shanxi martyrs, with interactive charts showing their ages and locations of death.

"Li Aimin and Han Fuxiang were only 14 when they died — Wuxiang's youngest martyrs. About 85 percent of the dead were aged between 19 and 30. So many young people, lost too soon," tourist Li

Fang says, tracing the screen.

Meanwhile, a digital guide in an Eighth Route Army uniform called Yang Hongxing is a focus of curiosity.

"It is a digitized system we developed using digital technology to promote Red (revolutionary) culture. By interacting with the avatar, visitors can learn about the revolutionary history of Wuxiang," Ye says.

To engage the tech-savvy, the museum proposes new ways of exploring the Red culture. Visitors can generate custom-designed wartime posters in real-time, read e-books like *Landmine Warfare*, participate in quizzes by tapping on desktop screens in a classroom, scan QR codes to leave messages, and create personalized videos in the tribute theater.

"Digitization isn't just about technology, it's about connecting Red culture to today's young visitors," Ye says.

With Red culture at the root and soul of Wuxiang, Wang Shuwen, head of the county, says this year, local authorities will continue to enrich cultural and tourism offerings, improve the quality of tourism services, and enhance Red tourism, in the hopes of creating a national demonstration zone for the integrated development of Red culture tourism.

LIFE



From left: A visitor feeds a horse at the Horse Coffee that brings together the aroma of steaming espresso and equine therapy in Henggang village, Jiashan county, Jiaxing of East China's Zhejiang province; The cafe's welcoming exterior; Guests enjoy drinks at the cafe. PHOTOS BY YANG FEIYUE AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The morning sun gilds the rice paddies of Henggang village as a white pony with the name tag "Mario" eagerly nudges a customer's cappuccino with its nose.

This is no pastoral daydream but rather, it's the carefully curated reality of Horse Coffee, a countryside startup in the village in Jiashan county, Jiaxing city, Zhejiang province, where the aroma of steaming espressos is blended with equine therapy.

Since it opened two years ago, the cafe has pulled in visitors from neighboring cities, including Shanghai, which is about an hour's drive away.

"We've never paid for advertisements, customers send their friends and colleagues our way through word-of-mouth," says Li Xuewen, founder of the cafe.

Weekends bring license plates and at peak times, her business serves more than 600 drinks to leisure-seekers in Henggang, the woman in her 30s says.

Born and raised in Jiashan, Li studied preschool education at college but began her career in the concrete jungle, where she spent seven years making viral content for brands.

"I was tired of burning myself out, working like cattle in a cubicle," she laughs.

Her escape route emerged unexpectedly during a 2022 visit to Henggang. The village immediately tugged at her heartstrings.

"The serene courtyards, well-developed infrastructure, and sur-

Grounds for success

Cafes, restaurants and homestays capitalize on beauty of renovated village as its reputation grows, **Yang Feiyue** reports in Jiaxing, Zhejiang.

rounding rice fields were exactly the pastoral landscape I had always imagined," she says.

Without blinking, she rented a single-story farmhouse.

"It felt closer to the essence of rural life I was originally looking for," she says.

With the house secured, Li decided to give it a new identity as a village cafe, in keeping with her own love of coffee.

"But a cafe that only sells coffee won't survive these days, so we have to offer something of emotional value," she says.

With seven years of experience in the media, Li has a keen sense for building viral brands and turning online traffic into lasting, real life engagement.

She made a point of studying other nearby cafes and deliberately filtered out cookie-cutter concepts. Then, she spotted her niche.

"Coincidentally, I also keep a horse — and that's when the idea hit me: Why not combine the two?"

The cafe's concept is simple. Li pairs coffee with hands-on interaction with horses.

Patrons can book 58-yuan (\$8) pony play sessions to groom Mario or to ride Oreo, a chocolate-colored dwarf horse, along the dykes that thread through fields of golden grain.

"It proves right that city dwellers don't just want coffee, they crave experiences they can't get downtown," Li says.

She shares stories about the cafe online and has more than 70,000 followers on her Douyin account. Her goal for the year is for sales to break 2 million yuan.

Li is one of the enterprising spirits that have been drawn to Henggang since it was transformed from a typical underdeveloped village into an environmental getaway more than a decade ago.

Once a major hub for pig farming, Henggang faced significant challenges from pollution resulting from animal husbandry.

In 2013, local authorities launched reforms that gradually shut down livestock sheds and poultry enclosures, and restored the land to its original agricultural use.

The transformation not only reclaimed the landscape, but also injected fresh green momentum into its development.

"The smelly air has given way to the scent of flowers, and mud lanes

to well-paved roads," says Ma Dongmei at her restaurant, which she launched, in Henggang.

A village native, Ma previously worked at a highway toll station for 10 years before losing her job in 2020 when the station was closed.

Facing unemployment during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, she spent several months at home before noticing the growing popularity of her village as a tourist destination.

Recognizing the lack of dining options, the woman in her 40s decided to open her own agritourism business later that year, starting with a small barbecue area on her family's former vegetable and fruit plot.

She had no prior experience of hospitality but drew inspiration from visits to other homestays during her travels.

She began modestly with a few tents for barbecues, catering mostly to visitors from nearby areas. As demand grew, she expanded the space, eventually being able to accommodate large groups, including school study-tour groups of up to 800 people.

Her menu has evolved to include rice dishes with seasonal ingredients like salted meat, broad beans, and water chestnuts that are

cooked outdoors, which have become a hit with families seeking parent-child activities.

She owes the success of her entrepreneurial initiative to the transformation of her village, which has had its infrastructure upgraded and its homes painted a uniform white.

As the village's first restaurant, Ma's venture filled a gap in the market.

Despite challenges like a typhoon in 2023 that destroyed the tents, she rebuilt and continued to thrive, leveraging word-of-mouth, as well as online platforms like Meituan, for bookings.

Today, she not only supports her family but creates seasonal jobs for local women during peak periods.

While she doesn't offer lodging, she works with nearby homestays to refer guests. Her income now greatly surpasses her toll station wages, though she remains modest about future plans, and simply hopes for continued growth.

Yen Enchuan, a 70-year-old entrepreneur from Taiwan, settled in Henggang five years ago after spending three decades in the Chinese mainland — first in Shanghai and later in Zhejiang, where he initially worked in real estate development.

When the property market

slowed, he turned to rural tourism, drawn by the village's potential and his own retirement aspirations.

Despite opening his homestay just as the pandemic hit in 2020, business remained stable.

In May 2023, he expanded with a restaurant serving Taiwan cuisine, catering primarily to corporate clients from nearby companies and Shanghai-based visitors.

Yen says that success in rural hospitality requires more than seeking profit. It demands a genuine connection to the environment.

The village's proximity to Shanghai and its post-transformation charm convinced him to invest.

He leased seven houses, converting two into homestays with 10 rooms, while the others are dining spaces or host collaborative projects.

His sprawling 3,000-square-meter garden with tropical trees and plans for a rustic bread oven for pizza-making have created a rural-urban contrast that attracts corporate team-building groups.

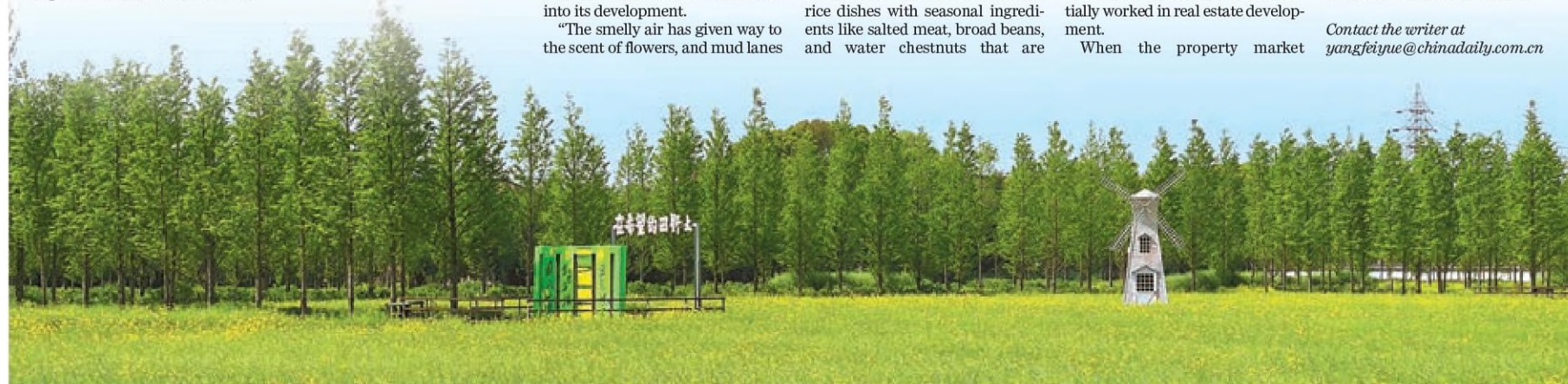
"Our homestay has this little river flowing right in the front ... with rolling hills behind us, it creates exactly that pastoral setting I've always dreamed of having," Yen says.

Yen has brought his heritage to the village.

Now semiretired, he focuses on fine-tuning guest services and investing in small-scale improvements.

"I take pride in what Henggang has become," he says. "And I hope one day Henggang will be proud of what we've built here together."

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn



Henggang has transformed from a typical underdeveloped village to an ideal ecological getaway. YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY

Shanghai bookstore opens new chapter

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai
zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Eager readers gathered in front of 401 Fuzhou Road on the morning of April 19, waiting for the grand reopening of the Shanghai Ancient Bookstore, which had been closed for 467 days undergoing renovation.

"I live in Pudong, and took the ferry across the Huangpu River this morning," a man surnamed Cai said.

Entering the bookstore at 10:30, he walked straight to the used books section on the third floor to browse old Chinese comic books.

"My dad used to buy me these books when I was a child," he said. "A few years ago, I came upon some old copies, and began to build a small collection of my own. ... There are still new prints coming out, but somehow they lack the authentic flavor of originals. People say they will increase in value some day, and I surely hope that is so, but I like them anyway, even if they don't."

The Shanghai Ancient Bookstore was set up in May 1956 as one of the first specialized bookstores since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, according to its general manager Shi Hongying. Over the decades, it has played an important role in buying, restoring and publishing reprinted editions of ancient books, and in researching and studying ancient books, she says.

In January last year, the store closed its doors and underwent its first complete refurbishment since it moved from 424 Fuzhou Road to 401 in 2006.

The road in downtown Shanghai is also known as Si Malu, or Fourth Road, and was a cultural hub in the early 1900s when bookstores, stationery shops, and publishing houses opened along its length. Today, Fuzhou Road is still home to a number of famous bookstores. Aside from the Shanghai Ancient Bookstore, there is also the Shanghai Foreign Languages Bookstore, and the Shanghai Book Mall, the largest bookstore in the city.

The renovated store carries 50,600 titles, mostly books about traditional Chinese culture, alongside more than 1600 traditional thread-bound editions in a 3,000-square-meter space spread over six floors.

Following renovation, it has opened its roof terrace for the first time, using it as an outdoor market for used books. The bookstore hopes to make the market a regular event on weekends as long as the weather permits, according to employee Kang Xun.

A dozen well-known book lovers and collectors were invited to the first market and put up stalls of their own on the terrace. Among them was Zheng Youhui, an ink painter and granddaughter of Zheng Yimei, a famous Shanghai writer and scholar, who died in 1992. She was selling old copies of her grandfather's essays published in the 1940s, new editions of his work she has illustrated herself, and signed copies of books by other celebrated Shanghai authors.

"From my grandfather on, all

four generations of our family have been booklovers," she says. After retiring in 2010, Zheng Youhui has taken over the job of sorting and editing her grandfather's work from her father. She has had more than a dozen new editions published.

"I attend book market fairs whenever I can," she says. "It is great to meet people who share the same passion for reading and cultural heritage."

An annual survey on book reading in Shanghai released on April 23, the World Book Day, showed that its residents have a great love of books and reading. The municipal administration for press and publication has conducted an annual survey of reading habits for the last 13 years.

This year's survey revealed that more than 97 percent of Shanghai residents read last year, each averaging 10 books. Digital books have taken over from print to become the most popular format, and there is increased interest in trading and collecting secondhand books.



From top: Readers browse through the Shanghai Ancient Bookstore when it reopened on April 19, after its first makeover in almost 20 years; A secondhand book market is held on the bookstore's roof terrace each weekend. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY