



Standing tall

Work nearly done in Guizhou on what will be the world's highest bridge **IMAGE, PAGE 7**



Aromatic adventure

Tea farms in Kenya offer visitors hands-on experience **TRAVEL, PAGE 10**

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2025

Shenzhou XIX crew returns safely to 'beautiful, blue' Earth

By ZHAO LEI
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

The Shenzhou XIX mission astronauts landed safely at the Dongfeng Landing Site in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Wednesday afternoon, wrapping up their six-month orbital journey.

The Shenzhou XIX spacecraft's reentry capsule, carrying the three crew members — mission commander Senior Colonel Cai Xuzhe, Lieutenant Colonel Song Lingdong and Lieutenant Colonel Wang Haoze — touched down at 1:08 pm at the Dongfeng Landing Site, which is located in the middle of the Gobi Desert, after flying more than nine hours on the return journey.

Their return was one day behind schedule because mission planners postponed the landing due to weather concerns at the Dongfeng site.

Following safety checks outside the capsule, ground recovery personnel from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, the home port for all of China's manned spaceflights, opened the hatch of the bell-shaped capsule and conducted a preliminary examination of the astronauts' health condition.

The Shenzhou XIX crew members were then helped out of the capsule and seated on chairs to share their experiences in a live program with a reporter from China Central Television before being taken to medical examination vehicles.

Cai said that he and the other crew members often gazed at the "beautiful, blue" Earth when they were in orbit.

"The mother planet is the shared home for all mankind. The Earth needs all of us to safeguard it," he said. "In this mission, we successfully completed all of our tasks given by the motherland and the people. We will continue striving to contribute to new chapters in China's space cause."

Song said that he was privileged to fly in space for China and that it felt good to return home.

"We are looking forward to seeing our families that we miss so much and also to meeting our comrades who have accompanied us day and night. We wish to express our gratitude for your hard work," he said.

Wang said: "After this mission, I



Ground recovery personnel check the reentry capsule of the Shenzhou XIX spacecraft after its landing at the Dongfeng Landing Site in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Wednesday. Astronauts Cai Xuzhe (above, center), Song Lingdong (above, right) and Wang Haoze (above, left) were all in good condition after their six-month mission in space. **WANG JIANGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY AND MA JINRUI, LI XIN AND LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA**

can now report to my motherland and its people with full confidence: I have the resolve and capability to complete many more challenging tasks. I am deeply convinced that we, Chinese space pioneers, will keep marching farther and farther. We are destined to explore the deeper reaches of space."

After the mandatory procedures were completed at the landing site, the crew members were flown back to Beijing. They will undergo a six-month quarantine and recuperation program, which is a standard procedure for Chinese astronauts returning from space.

The Shenzhou XIX spacecraft departed from the Tiangong space station at around 4 am on Wednesday. The vessel then flew in a return trajectory and gradually

reentered the atmosphere.

Before setting out on their return trip, Cai's team handed over their work to a new crew, transmitted scientific experimental data to Earth and sorted and transferred materials between the station and their spaceship.

Cai and his teammates were launched from the Jiuquan center on Oct 30 and arrived at Tiangong later that day, becoming the eighth crew to inhabit the space station.

After several days of handover work, the crew took over the massive outpost in early November from their peers of the Shenzhou XVIII mission.

They spent 183 days in a low-Earth orbit about 400 kilometers above Earth, completing many scientific and technological tasks as well as three spacewalks, the first of

which set a world record for the longest spacewalk.

With a total of five spacewalks to his credit, Cai now holds the record among Chinese astronauts.

Wang was the third Chinese woman to go to space, after Liu Yang and Wang Yaping, and the first female spaceflight engineer. Before her, Zhu Yangzhu, a male astronaut who took part in the Shenzhou XVI mission, was China's first spaceflight engineer.

Wang is also the only woman in the country's third-generation group of astronauts.

In the next six months, the space station will be manned by the three Shenzhou XX astronauts, headed by Senior Colonel Chen Dong, who arrived at the orbiting outpost on Friday.

Xi: Formulate five-year plan scientifically

President says blueprint for 2026-30 must weigh challenges, aim for stability

By CAO DESHENG
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has underlined the need to take a forward-looking approach, and to consider the impact of the changing international landscape on the country's socioeconomic development, in formulating the next five-year plan for 2026-30.

He said it is important to adapt to changing situations and grasp strategic priorities to work out the 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development in a scientific way.

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 Wednesday in Shanghai when chairing a symposium attended by senior officials from several provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions.

Xi's remarks came as China steps up efforts to fulfill the targets set in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) in the final year of its implementation, and to formulate the next five-year plan.

Five-year plans, which serve as comprehensive blueprints for China's economic and social advancement, outline the goals, strategies and priorities for each planning cycle. Since the launch of the first Five-Year Plan (1953-57), these plans have not only steered China's transformative development, but have also evolved to meet the distinct challenges of each era.

Formulating and implementing the five-year plans in a scientific way is an important experience of the Party in governing the country, significantly representing the political advantage of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Xi said.

In working on the 15th Five-Year Plan, he highlighted the importance of unwaveringly managing the country's own affairs well and remaining committed to expanding high-standard opening-up.

Amid the uncertainties and challenges caused by changes in the

external environment, particularly due to the tariff and trade wars launched by the United States, Xi has said on many occasions that China must manage its own affairs well to counter the unfavorable conditions.

At Wednesday's symposium, he reiterated that the country must take multiple steps to keep employment, businesses, markets and expectations stable, and to effectively stabilize the fundamentals of the Chinese economy.

Xi underscored the need to make greater efforts to coordinate development and security, comprehensively take into account the internal and external risks and challenges, and enhance the system and capacity for safeguarding national security.

Efforts must be made to ensure that the targets and tasks that will be laid out in the next five-year plan are scientific and precise, and will be met as scheduled, he said.

Xi highlighted the strategic importance of developing new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions, saying that the country's development should be driven by technological innovation, with the real economy being the foundation.

He called for comprehensively advancing the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, actively developing emerging industries, and proactively laying the groundwork for future industries to accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system.

Efforts should also be made to enhance the national innovation system and unleash the vitality of various innovation entities, Xi said.

It is important to aim for the forefront of global science and technology, focus on strengthening basic research and enhancing original innovation capabilities, and intensify efforts to make breakthroughs in core and cutting-edge technologies in key fields, he added.

See **Plan**, page 2

Law adopted to promote private economy

By FAN FEIFEI, LIU YUKUN and OUYANG SHIJIA

China's national lawmakers voted on Wednesday to adopt the country's first fundamental law specifically focusing on promoting the private economy, marking a significant step in revitalizing a sector that is key to growth and greatly boosting entrepreneurs' confidence and expectations.

The move has sent a strong signal that China places great emphasis on supporting the healthy and high-quality development of the private sector through legislation, in order to create a fairer, more dynamic business environment and address the pressing concerns of private enterprises, according to experts and company executives.

After more than a year in the legislative process, the private sector promotion law, passed at a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, will take effect on May 20.

The law, which comprises 78 articles in nine chapters, covers areas such as fair competition, investment and financing promotion, scientific and technological innovation, regulatory guidance, service support,

protection of rights and interests, and legal liabilities.

For the first time, "unswervingly consolidating and developing the public sector and unswervingly encouraging, supporting and guiding the development of the non-public sector" and "facilitating the healthy development of the non-public sector and those working in it" are written into the law.

The law explicitly outlines the legal status of the private economy for the first time, with a clear stipulation that promoting the sustained, healthy and high-quality development of the private economy is a significant long-term policy of China.

The NPC Standing Committee's Legislative Affairs Commission said that China's private economy plays a pivotal role in propelling the country's economic development, fostering innovation, boosting employment and enhancing people's well-being. It stressed the necessity to promulgate the law to strengthen legal safeguards for the development of the private economy.

The introduction of the law is a milestone and shows that the country's emphasis on the private sector has been lifted to a new height, said Hong Yong, an associ-

ate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

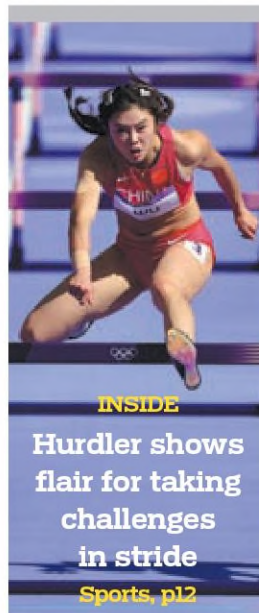
"The law not only consolidates the vital position of the private sector in China's socialist market economy, but also provides private enterprises and entrepreneurs with stable expectations and solid legal guarantees, which will help shore up their confidence and stimulate their enthusiasm for investment and innovation," Hong said.

Implementation of the law will create a fairer, more transparent and more predictable business environment for private enterprises, which will more equally be able to obtain resources and participate in market competition, Hong added.

Furthermore, legislative support will enhance the core competitiveness of private enterprises and bolster their sustainable, high-quality development, Hong said.

Private companies have become a key force behind China's economic ascent over the past decades. They contribute more than 60 percent of GDP, 70 percent of technological innovation and 80 percent of urban employment, official data shows.

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INSIDE
Hurdler shows flair for taking challenges in stride **Sports, p12**
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DELIVERING SOCIAL BENEFITS

Initiatives taken by e-commerce platforms JD and Meituan bring relief to thousands of delivery workers

By LI SHANGYI
lishangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

Major on-demand service platforms in China have been taking gradual steps to provide social insurance coverage for delivery workers.

JD, a Chinese e-commerce platform that launched its takeout delivery service in February, now provides social insurance for its more than 10,000 full-time delivery workers in the sector.

"The platform offers social insurance to me," said Wang Chenguo, a JD full-time takeout delivery worker in Beijing who joined the platform a month ago. "I was informed of the social insurance policy when I signed the contract with JD, and I felt good about that."

On April 3, Meituan, one of China's leading on-demand service

platforms, launched pilot pension insurance programs for its delivery workers in Quanzhou, Fujian province, and Nantong, Jiangsu province. The initiative covers approximately 22,000 eligible delivery riders in those regions.

Different programs
Delivery workers often have flexible working schedules and locations, as well as varied employment relationships. Some have exclusive and long-term employment relationships with platforms, while others work part-time across multiple platforms.

These characteristics have made it difficult for companies to include delivery workers under the current social insurance framework.

See **Riders**, page 3

NATION

VR time travel

Using virtual reality headsets, visitors to Hubei Provincial Museum wander an exhibition hall as they enjoy the immersive VR experience *Time Travel to the Bronze Age* on Tuesday in Wuhan, Hubei province. The 30-minute interactive experience has been curated to mark the 60th anniversary of one of the museum's most prized exhibits — a sword belonging to Goujian, a king of the ancient state of Yue. The VR experience transports visitors back to ancient China some 2,500 years ago. WU ZHIZUN / XINHUA



Report refutes 'lab leak' theory

National Health Commission calls for virus origin tracing to take place in US

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

China has actively carried out open and transparent investigations into the origins of the COVID-19 virus and concrete evidence has dismissed the Wuhan laboratory leak theory, according to a white paper released on Wednesday.

Chinese authorities also called for the next phase of origin tracing efforts to focus on the United States, urging the US to stop ignoring international concerns and to promptly share relevant data.

The white paper, released by the State Council Information Office, said that China has dedicated substantial resources into tracing the origin of the virus with global scientists and consistently upheld open, transparent and scientific methods. The nation has spearheaded

research in key fields covering clinical, molecular and environmental epidemiology, and the tracing of animal hosts while closely cooperating with the World Health Organization.

Key findings were released in March 2021 in a report stemming from a 28-day joint study that was carried out in Wuhan, Hubei province, by Chinese and foreign experts dispatched by the WHO.

The report ruled out the possibility of Wuhan being the natural origin of the virus and ascertained that the theory of the virus coming from a laboratory leak in Wuhan is extremely unlikely.

"To date, no findings have contradicted the conclusions of the study. It is fair to say that the study on the origins of SARS-CoV-2 conducted in China has ended," the white paper said.

The white paper emphasized that the US has refused to examine its own failures in handling the pandemic. Instead, it has shifted blame and

attempted to politicize origin tracing, which undermined international solidarity in battling the pandemic and safeguarding global health.

Detailing a series of questionable events pointing to suspicious, early COVID-19 cases in the US, the white paper said that COVID-19 may have emerged in the US sooner than the public timeline and sooner than the outbreak in China.

"A thorough and in-depth investigation into the origins of the virus should be conducted in the US," it said.

The white paper comes as US politicians have recently restarted pushing the lab leak theory, smearing and attacking China on its COVID-19 response.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, China always shared anti-virus information in an open and transparent way, providing generous and selfless assistance to the global anti-virus fight, winning commendations from the international community," the National Health Commission said in a statement released on Wednesday.

By contrast, the performance of the US in handling the pandemic was poor. "The US government deliberately covered up its domestic epidemic situation, misleading other nations and the WHO in their assessments," it said.

The commission emphasized that sizeable research shows the COVID-19 virus originated overseas and that the next phase of origin tracing should primarily focus on the US, while urging the US to "stop pretending to be deaf and playing dumb" to these concerns.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said during a news conference on Wednesday that the origin of COVID-19 is a scientific question that should be addressed by scientists.

The conclusion that dismisses the lab leak theory as extremely unlikely stems from on-site visits to laboratories and in-depth communications with researchers, and is deemed authoritative and scientific, he said, adding that the conclusion has obtained widespread recognition from scientists and the international community.

Editorial

China's contribution to COVID fight indelible

The only reason why some in the United States are trying to reheat the discredited theory that China is to blame for COVID-19 is that they believe doing so will whitewash the failings of the US administration in its response to the pandemic, and provide another pressure point for its de facto campaign to isolate China after realizing its tariff coercion isn't going to work.

Their China finger-pointing is based on their hope that if they repeat the lie often enough it will somehow become true. In the latest endeavor in this regard, the White House published an article on April 18, misrepresenting China as the source of the virus. This once more demonstrates the obsessive determination of the US to rewrite the history books as fiction.

All the facts related to the fastest-spreading and most extensive global health crisis that humanity has faced in a century are clear, and the repeated attempts to rehash the "China threat" story with different dressings are doomed to failure. The continual helpings of discredited theories about the origins of the virus will likewise be sent back to the kitchen as they are deeply unappetizing, lack any kind of scientific basis and are politically motivated.

That the then US president took to the White House briefing room in April 2020 and encouraged his top health officials to study the injection of bleach into the human body as a means of fighting the virus shows how unscientific the administration's response to COVID-19 was.

With the White House seemingly signaling that its politicizing of the pandemic is simmering on the back burner, the Chinese government released a white paper on Wednesday to present a systematic overview of the facts and China's key achievements in the origin tracing of the virus.

The document, "COVID-19 Prevention, Control and Origins Tracing: China's Actions and Stance", not only sets the record straight as to what, why and when, but also attests to the country's contribution to international cooperation, especially its assistance to those countries most in need, as well as its unwavering commitment to a scientific response.

In a stark contrast with the China-bashers' allegations that are invariably backed by a vague use of the word "reportedly" and their "facts" from anonymous sources, the Chinese document provides a solid foundation of facts related to the whole process of the pandemic that are recognized by the global scientific

community, and the majority of countries.

Reading the document, any person with an open mind can see clearly which country demonstrated a commitment to transparency and responsibility at every stage of the pandemic, and which country left no stone unturned to scapegoat others to hide its own disastrous response.

China lost no time in sharing, fully and without reservation, epidemic updates, prevention strategies, diagnostic and clinical treatment protocols, and its technical expertise, as well as vaccines and protective materials, with the World Health Organization and countries worldwide. By contributing its insights, solutions and strengths to the collaborative global fight against the pandemic, it made every effort to provide much-needed support to the international community.

As the white paper says, China has always applied a science-based approach to the task of tracing the virus origins, actively engaging with the WHO in communication and cooperation from the start of the outbreak. At the invitation of China, the world health body sent two international expert missions to the country to carry out a joint study into the origins of the virus. Their findings were

compiled into a joint study report that was released globally, earning endorsements from both the international community and the scientific community.

Mounting evidence shows the virus appeared in the US earlier than the US official timeline of the pandemic and also earlier than in China. Perhaps that is why the US has never accepted any WHO virus origin tracing study on its soil despite the strong urging of the international community and scientists.

Infectious diseases are the common enemy of humanity. Any attempt to politicize the scientific effort against infectious diseases will ultimately threaten the health and well-being of the entire world, including the very nation engaged in such practices.

The attempts by the White House to manipulate public opinion will never succeed. Both the international community and the scientific community are now savvy to such tricks.

The US administration cannot obscure the truth and people are tired of gagging on the lies it would have them swallow. The US should put out a new menu. One that lists cooperation and collaboration among its offerings. It might find that such an approach can do it a world of good.

Legislation: Support to boost sector's confidence

From page 1

Liu Dian, a researcher at Fudan University's China Institute, said: "The law marks a key step in improving China's market economy system and promoting diversified development. With the implementation of the law, we expect that it will effectively stimulate the vitality of private enterprises and encourage their broader participation in competition and cooperation, thereby contributing to overall economic growth and social progress." "As an indispensable force in Chi-

na's economic and social development, the private economy plays a vital role that should not be underestimated," he added. "It is not only a major source of employment and a key driver of technological innovation, but also a critical pillar in ensuring the stability of industrial and supply chains."

Liu pointed out that the private sector still faces challenges, including financing difficulties and market access barriers. He said that the authorities should focus on deepening financial system reforms, in order to broaden financing chan-

nels for private enterprises, and intensify tax and fee reductions to ease their burden.

Qi Xiangdong, chairman of Chinese cybersecurity company Qi-Anxin Technology Group, said he was very inspired by the adoption of the law on promoting the private economy, and he expressed strong confidence in the future growth of the private economy.

"As we are a technology enterprise with high R&D investment, this law has significantly boosted our confidence, enabling us to focus more on leading in technological innovation, playing a prominent role in driving

industrial upgrade and demonstrating our strength in international competition," Qi said.

He noted that the law concentrates on solving practical difficulties and issues faced by private enterprises through improving investment and financing and fostering technological innovation, and its implementation will be conducive to alleviating the cash flow pressures of enterprises and accelerating the industrial application of technologies.

Cao Yin contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Political Lens

Xi champions young people for Chinese modernization

An article by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on encouraging young people in the new era to bravely take on responsibilities in advancing Chinese modernization, is published on Thursday.

The article by Xi, also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, is published in this year's ninth issue of *Qiushi Journal*, the flagship magazine of the CPC Central Committee.

XINHUA

Development bank head forecasts 'golden decade'

By SHI JING in Shanghai
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

The New Development Bank, the multilateral financial organization that promotes the development of emerging markets and developing countries, is set to enter another golden age as it advances its investment in infrastructure and innovation with China's continued support, said Dilma Rousseff, the bank's president.

She made the comment in an interview after President Xi Jinping's visit to the bank's headquarters in Shanghai on Tuesday.

President Xi defined the NDB's first decade from its establishment in 2014 as "a golden decade", with the bank approving 120 projects and investing \$40 billion in that time, according to Rousseff.

Xi suggested that the NDB continue to adhere to the principles that created the bank, which involve investing in the countries of the Global South and the BRICS countries. It should invest in areas, including digital and social infrastructure, that will make a difference in developing countries and emerging economies, said Rousseff, quoting Xi.

The Chinese president underlined the importance of continued investment in innovation and technology, and that the NDB should grow into a modern bank by using all possible digital instruments available, including artificial intelligence and big data.

By keeping the NDB's commitments, as Xi has suggested, the bank will head for "the second golden decade", she added.

"President Xi Jinping is extremely clear about the direction a bank like the NDB should take. This is a bank that was created for and within a multilateral conception... It is the first bank made for the Global South," she said.

The NDB was founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in 2014 with the purpose of mobilizing resources for infrastruc-

ture and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries. It was formally opened in July 2015.

In 2021, the NDB began expanding its membership and admitted Bangladesh, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay as its new member countries.

Rousseff said the NDB is firmly committed to investment in decarbonization, science, technology and innovation, the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters, and fighting climate change.

The NDB is now the world's largest issuer of panda bonds, or yuan-denominated bonds issued by overseas institutions in the Chinese onshore market. It has issued a cumulative 68.5 billion yuan (\$9.4 billion) of panda bonds, with the latest issued in early April. The 3-year 7-billion-yuan panda bond received over 9 billion yuan in orders during the bidding process, showing strong investor demand and confidence in the NDB.

Given the current global market volatility, Rousseff expressed to President Xi her great respect for the firm and calm support, as well as the reaffirmation of its own sovereignty that China has shown over this time.

Over the past few years, the NDB has received support from China in all aspects, according to Rousseff. One example is that the renminbi is the bank's second most important currency, while it is increasingly looking to finance in local currencies. At present, the bank has 24 percent of financing in local currencies.

However, the participation of the Chinese system is not limited to local currency. The NDB is also supported to do swaps, or the derivatives that help parties manage risks. Chinese financial institutions have provided guidelines so that the NDB can make its regulatory frameworks more compatible with those in China, she said.

Last haul



Fishermen unload the season's last catch of freshly netted fish in Beihai, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Wednesday. From Thursday, most of China's sea areas begin their annual summer fishing moratorium. CHEN GUANYAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Plan: Well-being, common prosperity crucial in drafting

From page 1

Noting that Chinese modernization entails achieving socialist modernization with common prosperity for all, Xi said that in planning the economic and social development for the 15th Five-Year Plan period, it is crucial to uphold the principle of ensuring and improving people's well-being through development, and to steadily advance common prosperity.

He emphasized the need to study and implement effective measures to

promote coordinated development among various regions, consolidate and expand achievements in poverty alleviation, advance rural revitalization on all fronts as well as urban-rural integration, and steadily increase the income of urban and rural residents.

It is essential to introduce a series of balanced and accessible livelihood policies and measures, and make efforts to address urgent issues and the immediate concerns of the people, Xi said, adding that all policies and measures must be pragmatic and effective.

COVER



Top left: JD delivery worker Li Hualu displays a notification that says he now has full social insurance and a housing provident fund on March 6 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Local media reported that he was the first delivery rider to enjoy such benefits in the city. BU ENSA / HANGZHOU DAILY
Top right: Parcel and food delivery workers enjoy a group birthday banquet organized by the workers' union of a community in Hefei, Anhui province, on April 16. ZHAO MING / FOR CHINA DAILY
Above left: Delivery workers who are recently employed conduct a health checkup at a community health center in Linyi, Shandong province, in October. ZHANG CHUNLEI / FOR CHINA DAILY
Above right: Riders participate in a tug-of-war during a games event organized by a local community in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on April 15. XU GUOLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Riders: Changes may reshape platform economy

From page 1

Last year, China had around 15 million delivery workers, a 15.38 percent increase from the previous year, according to the blue-collar employment survey report by the research center of new forms of employment.

To protect laborers, China's social insurance system includes five major components: pension, as well as medical, unemployment, occupational injury and maternity insurances. Premiums are usually shared between employers and employees.

At the end of February, JD announced that it would begin covering full social insurance plus a housing provident fund for all full-time takeout delivery workers starting March 1, becoming the first platform to take this step. The company has also been providing similar coverage for its express delivery personnel.

According to JD, the platform covers the full cost of social insurance premiums to ensure that delivery workers' take-home income remains unaffected. The policy applies to both current and new employees with formal contracts.

As of March, JD employed around 10,000 full-time takeout delivery workers. The company also announced that it would provide accident and health insurance for its part-time couriers.

On April 15, JD announced that it would employ at least 50,000 full-time takeout delivery workers during this quarter and promised to provide them with full social insurance and housing provident fund.

Meanwhile, Meituan, which has over 820,000 active delivery workers, has adopted a different approach to fulfill its promise. It launched pilot pension programs in two cities.

These pilots are based on the national social insurance policy for flexible workers. Under the program, delivery workers whose monthly income meets the local minimum contribution base and who have met this threshold for at least three out of the past six months can receive a 50 percent subsidy from Meituan toward their pension premiums. Riders can also choose to contribute in their city of employment or their hometown.

In Quanzhou, one of the pilot cities, the pension contribution base for flexible workers is set at 4,433 yuan (\$608) per month. Since pension premiums account for 20 percent of income, the total contribution for workers whose income is at this level will be 886.6 yuan. Under Meituan's new policy, the rider pays 443.3 yuan, and the company pays the other half.

"The program has no qualification requirements, no location restrictions, no minimum working hours or order delivery volume, and no limitations on delivery type," Meituan announced on its official WeChat account.

As long as workers meet the national standards for flexible employment insurance, they are eligible to participate in the pension program, and there is no need to sign any commitment or contract, according to Meituan. Riders who voluntarily pay the premium in a given month will automatically qualify for the platform's subsidy.

Sense of security

Li, a 41-year-old Meituan delivery rider who asked to be identified by his surname, has been delivering for six years in Beijing. "We have traffic accident insurance, but so far I have not heard about the social insurance policy," he said.

Even though the pension premium would be subtracted from his salary, Li said that having social insurance would give him a sense of security.

Feng Yi, director of the research institute under Zhesang Asset Management Co, remarked, "Reform doesn't happen overnight, but JD's decision to provide social insurance for its delivery workers has helped drive industrywide change."

"As temporary workers in the delivery industry are transitioned into formal employees, they gain more motivation to improve service quality," Feng said. "This transformation encourages the industry to shift its focus from cost and speed to quality and service."

This shift in the delivery sector is also expected to accelerate the platform economy's move toward more standardized and people-centered development, according to Feng.

Cheng Kai, a delivery rider with eight years of delivery experience in Beijing, works for multiple platforms, including JD and Eleme, another major player in the on-demand service industry.

"While working for multiple platforms means a lack of stable social insurance from one employer, it is more flexible and enables me to access more orders," Cheng said.

A 46-year-old part-time delivery rider surnamed Dang who has been working with Dada, a delivery platform partnering with JD, for over a year, said that his social insurance is covered by another company he works for. "I am willing to shift my social insurance contribution to the delivery company and quit the other job if it offers the policy because delivery work is more flexible."



Top: A delivery worker hauls a full tricycle of goods in Shanghai on April 10. **Above:** Delivery workers have a break while waiting for orders in Qingdao, Shandong province, in November. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Challenges, benefits

According to a survey conducted by the National School of Development at Peking University, which gathered responses from over 30,000 delivery workers, only 10 percent accept the current proportion of social insurance relative to their income.

The survey revealed that if delivery riders are obligated to contribute to social insurance, 23.5 percent were not willing to pay, and 38.9 percent were only willing to contribute less than 5 percent of their monthly income.

Delivery riders tend to prioritize cash flows, with social insurance ranking behind income and job flexibility in terms of importance.

Last year, the average monthly income of delivery workers in China reached 7,469 yuan, placing them among the top tier of blue-collar occupations, alongside truck drivers and housekeepers, according to the blue-collar employment survey report.

Zhang Chenggang, director of the research center of new forms of employment, said, "On one hand,

Zhang and his peers, mostly aged between 18 and 21, are among the youngest workers in the delivery area in Beijing. Many of them said they knew little about social insurance.

Voluntary contributions to social insurance based on the flexible employment system may not be able to motivate workers to participate and stabilize the labor force if delivery workers have low expectations for long-term benefits and a low willingness to participate, according to Zhang Chenggang.

"JD's model emphasizes comprehensive social insurance coverage under full-time employment relationships, indirectly channeling part of the value created by the platform back to front-line workers through social insurance," Zhang explained. "Meituan's model focuses more on flexibility, gradually improving workers' welfare levels while maintaining the employment scale."

"Regardless of which model is adopted," Zhang concluded, "both will reshape the income distribution landscape within the platform economy."

The new forms of employment refer to flexible work arrangements that rely on digital technologies such as the internet and artificial intelligence. These jobs are often carried out in a decentralized way through platforms.

The new forms include delivery workers, livestreamers and housekeepers. According to estimates, the scale of new forms of employment in China has reached 84 million people, with an estimated 3 to 5 percent annual growth rate, the report said.

However, flexible working conditions come with trade-offs, including high risk on roads, lack of holidays and long on-call hours for delivery workers.

Many in the gig economy also face ambiguous labor relationships, which often leave them without access to social insurance.

In recent years, China has stepped up efforts to protect the rights of laborers in new forms of employment from different aspects.

Changing job patterns

In November 2024, the National Trade Union and four other departments issued guidelines to regulate the negotiations between platforms and laborers in new forms of employment, covering key issues such as remuneration methods, work breaks and workplace safety.

In January, the Society Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, along with eight other departments, released documents aimed at improving services and

management for delivery and express workers. Proposed measures include creating delivery-friendly environments in residential communities, shopping malls and office buildings.

Zhang, the 18-year-old deliveryman, said: "Many restaurants offer discounted meals for us. We can get the meal as we are in delivery uniforms."

"However, some office buildings and residential areas still do not allow us to enter," he added.

The 2025 Government Work Report noted that the Chinese government will strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of workers in new forms of employment and expand the pilot programs for occupational injury insurance.

Wang Xiaoping, minister of human resources and social security, said that by the end of 2024, the national basic pension insurance covered 1.07 billion people.

While China has one of the world's largest social insurance systems, there is still a large gap to cover the entire labor force in the country, especially the large-scale flexible workforce. Both the government and companies are trying to address the issue.

The system will adjust to the changes in employment forms by exploring and improving contribution methods, so that more individuals in new forms of employment can be incorporated into the employee social insurance system and enjoy a higher level of protection, according to Wang.

Zhang Chenggang emphasized that the key is to design a sustainable social security system tailored to China's national conditions, one that protects the laborers' rights without hindering employment. He stressed that the system should ensure a fairer and more reasonable income distribution.

"The ultimate goal is for everyone participating in economic activities to receive returns commensurate with their contributions, enjoy the opportunity for dignified labor and a respectful retirement, and truly realize the development philosophy where the fruits of development are shared by all," said Zhang.

Feng regarded this move of platforms providing social insurance for delivery workers as a transformation that aligns laborers' rights more closely with enterprise development.

"As millions of people working in flexible forms gradually become included in the social security system, the overall welfare of workers will improve," Feng said.

DOCUMENT

Covid-19 Prevention, Control and Origins Tracing: China's Actions and Stance

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China
April 2025

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Preface

The Covid-19 pandemic caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) stands as the fastest-spreading and most extensive global health crisis that humanity has faced in a century. It was also the most challenging public health emergency to contain and manage since the 1918 flu pandemic. From the onset of the pandemic, China prioritized lives and health above all else, and implemented comprehensive, science-based and effective containment measures. With over 1.4 billion people uniting as one and displaying extraordinary tenacity and dedication, a formidable defense line was erected against the virus. This collective effort of the whole nation enabled China to withstand multiple waves of outbreaks and emerge victorious from the crisis – a historic feat for a populous nation like China.

In the face of the challenge, China championed the cause of a global community of shared future and a community of health for all, and demonstrated a commitment to openness, transparency and responsibility at every stage. The country lost no time in sharing, fully and without reservation, epidemic updates, prevention strategies, diagnostic and clinical treatment protocols, and technical expertise, as well as vaccines and protective materials, with the World Health Organization (WHO) and countries worldwide. By contributing its insights, solutions and strengths to the collaborative global fight against the pandemic, it made every effort to provide support to the international community.

As a major country that shoulders its responsibilities, China has always applied a science-based approach to the task of tracing the virus origins, actively engaging with the WHO in communication and cooperation from the start of the outbreak. At the invitation of China, the WHO sent two international expert missions to the country to carry out a joint study into the origins of the virus. These missions were staffed by authoritative experts across relevant disciplines who conducted site visits, interviews, and extensive data collection and analysis with the utmost dedication, diligence and professionalism. Their findings were compiled into a joint study report that was released globally. With its rigorous and scientifically sound conclusions, the report earned endorsements from both the international community and the scientific community.

The Chinese government is releasing this white paper to present a systematic overview of China's key achievements in tracing the origins of SARS-CoV-2, to attest to its contribution to international cooperation in the response to the global pandemic, to advance scientific endeavors and foster global collaboration in this critical domain, and to expose the mismatched pandemic response in the United States.

I. Contributing Chinese Wisdom to the Study of the Origins of SARS-CoV-2

1. China's Efforts in Tracing the Origins of the Virus

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, China has consistently dedicated substantial resources to collaborative studies into the origins of the virus, involving both Chinese and international scientists. Upholding its international responsibilities with openness and transparency, the country spearheaded research initiatives in critical fields such as clinical epidemiology, molecular epidemiology, environmental epidemiology, and the identification of animal hosts. Demonstrating a strong sense of global responsibility, China closely collaborated with the WHO on the study of the virus origins, and in 2020 and 2021, invited WHO expert missions to China to carry out a joint study into this field.

In July and August 2020, Chinese experts held preparatory consultations with their WHO counterparts concerning cooperation in scientific research on virus origins tracing in China, and together outlined the "WHO-convened Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part – Terms of Reference". From October to December 2020, Chinese scientists held four virtual meetings with a WHO-assembled team of international experts to share updates on global SARS-CoV-2 origins research and to align methodologies for the joint study.

In January and February 2021, a 28-day joint study was conducted in Wuhan, China, by a team of 17 Chinese experts and 17 international experts from the WHO, the World

Organisation for Animal Health (Office International des Epizooties) and several countries. On February 9, the joint team held a press conference to announce key findings from their study.

On March 30, 2021, the WHO organized a member state information session and press conference to present the findings about the origins of the virus and published the "WHO-convened Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part – Joint WHO-China Study" on its website.

From 2021 onward, the WHO started to build a Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO). Meanwhile, China has allocated resources to advance comprehensive and in-depth research and analysis in epidemiology, molecular epidemiology, animal and environmental studies, and laboratory audit, as outlined in Phase 2 of the "Joint WHO-China Study". Chinese scientists have shared progress and findings with the international scientific community and other professionals through reports to the WHO and SAGO or papers published on Chinese and international academic journals.

To date, no findings have contradicted the conclusions of the "Joint WHO-China Study". It is fair to say that the study on the origins of SARS-CoV-2 conducted in China has ended.

The WHO-convened global study of origins of SARS-CoV-2: China part has produced extensive research results. Its methodology and scientific findings have laid the foundations and provided guidance for similar efforts in other countries.

Tracing the origins of SARS-CoV-2 is a scientific endeavor that must not be politicized or exploited as a means of stigmatization by any country. The global community should encourage research institutions and professionals of all countries to share evidence and conduct systematic studies. Above all, pandemic prevention should be a priority, as similar outbreaks in the future could pose another catastrophic threat to human health and security.

2. China's Open and Transparent Updates on Its Findings Regarding the Origins of the Virus

In 2020, a study on the time to the most recent common ancestor of SARS-CoV-2, conducted by scientists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and collaborating teams, indicated that the outbreak in Wuhan likely occurred between mid-November and early December 2019. This timeline aligns closely with the onset date of the first reported Covid-19 case – December 8 of that year.

After the joint WHO-China study concluded in 2021, Chinese scientists made another spatiotemporal distribution analysis of 76,000 screening records from medical institutions and 174 early confirmed cases. The analysis revealed no evidence of unusual clusters of respiratory illnesses in Wuhan between October and early December 2019.

In a 2022 serological and epidemiological study, Chinese scientists detected no specific antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 in 43,850 blood donation samples collected in Wuhan between September 1 and December 31, 2019. These findings provided evidence that the virus was not present in Wuhan prior to December 2019.

A number of research teams in China conducted systematic testing on more than 80,000 samples collected from bats, pangolins, wild birds, wild boars, raccoon dogs, and other wildlife, as well as livestock and poultry across the country. Sample collection spanned from 2017 to 2021, and the analyses detected no evidence of SARS-CoV-2 circulation in these animal populations. Additionally, in early 2020, scientists from the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences screened bat species in Wuhan and its surrounding areas and found no virus genetically related to SARS-CoV-2. These findings effectively ruled out the possibility that this virus originated from local wildlife in the Wuhan vicinity.

In 2023, a paper published by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention showed that all 457 animal samples collected from the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in the early stage of the epidemic tested negative for SARS-CoV-2, while 74 out of 923 environmental samples from the market were positive. Genomic sequencing of three isolated viral strains revealed 99.9-100 percent genetic identity with early Covid-19 cases, indicating that viral shedding by infected individuals was the likely source of contamination in the market environment.

Source tracing of outbreaks in clusters in locations other than Wuhan between 2020 and 2022 revealed the likelihood of introduction from overseas through cold-chain transportation. In June and July 2020, new outbreaks emerged in Beijing's Xinfadi Agricultural Products Wholesale Market and Dalian, Liaoning Province. It is worth noting that prior to these outbreaks, no new cases had been confirmed in Beijing and Dalian for 56 and 111 consecutive days, respectively. In addition, Beijing's early cases were primarily

concentrated among stallholders from the aquatic products section in Xinfadi market, while those in Dalian involved aquatic product processing workers in a seafood company. Several tracing investigations indicated that the virus originated from other countries and regions and subsequently entered China via cold-chain transportation.

On September 24, 2020, two stevedores in Qingdao, Shandong Province were diagnosed with Covid-19. The two cases had no travel history or contact with other confirmed cases. The only epidemiological link was their involvement in handling the same batch of imported frozen food products on September 19, 2020. Several samples from the outer packaging of the frozen food products tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acids. Whole genome sequencing confirmed that the virus detected on the packaging was the source of infection for the two cases, and viable virus from the packaging was successfully isolated and cultured. This marked the world's first successful isolation of viable SARS-CoV-2 from cold-chain food packaging, demonstrating cold-chain transportation as a transmission pathway for SARS-CoV-2.

Given that the early confirmed cases in Wuhan were concentrated in the aquatic products section of Huanan market, there is a possibility that the outbreak in the market at the end of 2019 was introduced to China from abroad via cold-chain transportation.

These findings were published in the "Joint WHO-China Study" and international journals including *The Lancet*, *Nature*, *Cell*, *National Science Review*, *Scientific Reports*, and *Virus Evolution*. With solid laboratory data supporting the likelihood of four possible introduction pathways, the study concluded:

- Direct zoonotic spillover is considered to be a possible-to-likely pathway;
- Introduction through an intermediate host is considered to be a likely to very likely pathway;
- Introduction through cold/food chain products is considered a possible pathway;
- Introduction through a laboratory incident was considered to be an extremely unlikely pathway.

China's fully open and collaborative stance demonstrates its commitment to scientific principles and integrity, and its responsibility for building a community of health for all.

China has actively participated in global virus origins-tracing efforts with the greatest sincerity, as it firmly upholds that the truth does not lie in premature accusations but in meticulous data-based verification. Through systematic epidemiological investigations, molecular tracing, animal host screening, and studies on cold-chain transmission, the possibility of Wuhan being the natural origin of SARS-CoV-2 was scientifically ruled out. These efforts have provided the global scientific community with critical empirical evidence and established a research paradigm for future studies.

II. China's Contribution to the Global Fight Against Covid-19

Public health emergencies are a universal challenge confronting humanity and require a joint response from all countries. After the onset of the epidemic, China shared the epidemic information with the WHO and the international community in a timely manner, and provided the genome sequence of the virus. It also invited WHO international expert missions to the country to conduct a joint study into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, shared without reservation its effective measures for prevention, control, diagnosis and treatment, and did all it could to provide massive supplies and extensive aid to the international community. The vision of a global community of shared future guided China's broad international cooperation. The country's significant contribution has given a strong impetus to the global fight against Covid-19.

1. Sharing Information Without Reservation

When Covid-19 struck, in the face of this unforeseen and unexpected public health emergency, China released information in a law-based, timely, open and transparent manner, kept the international community informed of the evolving situation in the country, and maintained close communication with the WHO, and the US and other relevant countries and regions.

On January 8, 2020, China identified the pathogen. On January 9, it briefed the WHO on its domestic epidemic situation and its progress in etiological identification. On January 12, China submitted to the WHO the genome sequence of the virus, which was published by the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data. It provided the international community with a scientific basis for the prevention and control of the

pandemic, and for research into and development of vaccines and diagnostic reagents. From January 3, 2020, China began to update the WHO, relevant countries, and regional organizations on the epidemic situation on a regular basis.

While sparing no effort to contain the virus, China demonstrated a keen sense of responsibility for life, its own people, the international community, and posterity, by establishing a rigorous, professional and efficient information release system to enable timely and authoritative updates. China's information release was unprecedented in terms of scope, efficiency and intensity. China enacted robust information release mechanisms and provisions to prohibit withholding information, underreporting, or delay in reporting cases of infection.

On December 31, 2019, the Wuhan municipal government began to release epidemic information in accordance with the law and increased the frequency of communications step by step. Beginning on January 21, 2020, the National Health Commission (NHC) provided daily updates on its official website and its social media platform with nationwide case numbers from the previous day. From February 3, 2020, the NHC began to release information simultaneously on its English-language website.

China established a tiered news release system. By May 31, 2020, the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism and the Information Office of the State Council had held 161 press conferences, during which over 490 officials from more than 50 government departments answered over 1,400 questions from Chinese and foreign media. One hundred and three press conferences were held in Hubei and 1,050 in the other provinces over the same period.

The official Chinese and English websites of the NHC, together with its social media platform, established special sections to release daily updates, interpret policy measures, brief on domestic progress, share knowledge on the virus and its prevention, and dispel rumors.

China shared with the world its successful approach to fighting the pandemic. On the evening of February 24, 2020, the WHO-China Joint Mission on Covid-19 held a press conference in Beijing. Dr Bruce Aylward, team leader of the joint mission and senior advisor to WHO director-general, observed that the global community was not yet ready in mindset or with the materials to implement the measures that had been employed in China, which had proved to be successful in containing Covid-19.

On March 12, 2020, China and the WHO held a joint international briefing on China's experience in Covid-19 prevention and control, which received a positive response. The WHO spoke highly of China's rigorous containment measures on many occasions, saying that it had set a new benchmark for the world and calling on all affected countries to draw on China's experience.

In 2020, China conducted more than 70 Covid-19 prevention and control exchanges with international and regional organizations including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Caribbean Community, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as countries including the Republic of Korea, Japan, Russia, the United States, and Germany.

In the first half of 2020, China shared with more than 180 countries and over 10 international and regional organizations its diagnosis, treatment and control protocols in three foreign languages. It built an expert database for international cooperation, and on a frequent basis organized highly experienced public health and clinical experts to share their approaches to prevention and control as well as diagnosis and treatment. Sharing Covid-19 prevention and control knowledge, training videos, updated technical guides, and latest research results, China's online information center for Covid-19 prevention and control attracted a global audience of more than 200,000.

Concerning the study of the origins of SARS-CoV-2, China has been committed to a science-based, open and transparent approach, actively supported and engaged in the effort, while opposing political manipulation in any form. To date, China is the only country that has invited multiple WHO international expert missions to conduct joint studies on its territory, and is the only country that has organized its experts to share with the WHO its virus origins-tracing progress on multiple occasions.

China has shared the largest collection of data and research results and contributed the largest share to global SARS-CoV-2 origins-tracing efforts. Members of the WHO international expert missions have emphasized on many occasions that during their visits to China, they were able to access all the localities, interviewees and files they had

planned to access, and that China's information openness and transparency far exceeded their expectations.

The international community widely acknowledges that the Chinese side has fully, timely and effectively fulfilled the obligations prescribed by the International Health Regulations (IHR) through prompt and extensive actions rarely seen anywhere in the world. In the US, some politicians, ignoring China's communications, manipulated origins tracing of the virus for political ends. This has not only delayed their country's pandemic response, but also severely undermined the global effort and exacerbated the spread of the virus.

2. Assisting in the Global Fight Against Covid-19 with All Resources Available

As a developing country with more than 1.4 billion people, China has done all in its power to provide assistance to the international community, even as it faced the tremendous pressure of pandemic control itself. At the beginning of the pandemic, China provided two batches of monetary support totaling US\$50 million to the WHO and actively helped its Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund to raise funds in China.

In 2020, China organized 38 medical expert teams and sent them to 34 countries to assist in pandemic control. They visited 405 medical facilities, held 907 technical support sessions and 540 meetings, gave 306 interviews to domestic and international media, and held 461 training sessions for over 1.65 million trainees.

Since 2020, China has sent more than 3,000 medical workers in 176 teams on foreign aid missions to 57 countries. They have held more than 900 training and health education sessions of various types for over 67,000 local trainees, published over 6,000 notices and guides on epidemic prevention and self-protection in multiple languages, and treated 28,500 overseas Covid-19 patients. Heads of state or government from 11 countries have conferred medals on the medical teams, and over 2,300 members have received awards and commendations from the governments of recipient countries, and Chinese embassies and consulates abroad.

The sudden onslaught of Covid-19 triggered a dramatic surge in China's demand for anti-epidemic materials and imposed strain on the supply of personal protective equipment. China acted immediately to expand the production of medical supplies. Many Chinese companies answered the call of the government. Workers gave up their holidays for the Chinese New Year and worked overtime to produce large quantities of medical supplies, including masks, protective suits, and testing kits, to support the fight against Covid-19. By the end of February 2020, China's daily mask production had reached 116 million. In particular, in nine days from February 21 to 29, its daily production of masks shot from 4.3 million to over 100 million. This laid the groundwork for China to provide supplies and aid to the global fight against the pandemic.

Though the domestic supply of materials for epidemic prevention and control remained tight and China was still struggling to meet surging demand, the country tried every possible means to provide support and convenience for other countries in purchasing such materials. To make arrangements for orderly exports of protective materials, it smoothed the channels for supply-demand docking, organized logistics, transport, and the supply of goods, and accelerated customs clearance. From January 2020 to May 2022, China supplied over 4.6 billion protective suits, 18 billion testing kits, and 430 billion masks to 15 international organizations and 153 countries, including the US, thus alleviating the global shortage of supplies needed to combat Covid-19.

Vaccines are a powerful weapon against Covid-19, as well as a scarce public good. China was the first country to commit to making Covid-19 vaccines a global public good, to support the waiver of intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines, and to work with other developing countries to produce Covid-19 vaccines. To bridge the vaccination gap, China joined the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility and provided vaccines to other developing countries.

Since the end of 2020, China has provided over 2.3 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organizations. The Chinese government has delivered on its commitment to the world, and China has provided more vaccines to the international community than any other country. One out of every two Covid-19 vaccines used around the world was made in China. The first batches of vaccines received by many countries, especially developing ones, were from China, which also supplied most of their vaccines.

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China has spearheaded initiatives to expand international cooperation in combating Covid-19 and strengthen global health governance. It has firmly supported the WHO in playing the leading role in this global response and called on the international community to give it more political and financial support. China has made consistent efforts to reinforce communication with the WHO, conducted exchanges and cooperation with other countries on research into virus origins tracing, medicines, vaccines, and detecting, shared scientific research data and information, and joined in collaboration to study prevention, control and treatment strategies.

From April 2020 to October 2022, through sound and effective Covid-19 prevention and control measures, China succeeded in containing more than 100 outbreaks caused by different variants of the virus. By doing so, it protected the health of over 100 million people, safeguarded public health security, and provided resolute support for the global fight against the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed deficiencies and loopholes in the global health governance system. China calls for the building of a community of health for all and promotes the establishment of sound mechanisms for international cooperation, including a long-term financing mechanism for global public health security, a monitoring, early warning, and joint response mechanism for threats, and a mechanism for reserving and allocating resources. China supports strengthening and leveraging the roles of the United Nations and the WHO, and improving global health governance capacity.

China has sent delegations to the WHO and taken an active part in its review of issues regarding the prevention of, preparedness for, and response to public health emergencies of international concern, the implementation and amendment of the IHR, and negotiations on a pandemic treaty. Top-level Chinese experts have been members of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response and the Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens that were established under the auspices of the WHO. By providing expertise and engaging in discussions, they contributed Chinese perspectives, solutions and strengths to building an efficient and sustainable global public health system for the benefit of all humanity and fortifying defenses for the lives and health of all.

Committed to its people-centered development philosophy, China has devoted itself to improving medical services, channeling more resources to the medical and education sectors, and ensuring that social and economic development benefits all the people. The average life expectancy of the Chinese people has steadily increased, from 77.3 in 2019 to 77.93 in 2020, 78.2 in 2021, 78.3 in 2022, and 78.6 in 2023. Thanks to China's sound and proactive strategy for Covid-19 prevention and control, the health status of the Chinese people did not stagnate or regress, but instead continued to improve.

III. The Mismanaged Response of the US to the Covid-19 Pandemic

The slow and ineffective US response during the early stages of the outbreak set an appalling example to the international community and made the US performance in handling the pandemic the worst of all countries. Instead of facing this issue squarely and reflecting on its shortcomings, the US government has tried to shift the blame and divert people's attention by shamelessly politicizing SARS-CoV-2 origins tracing. It has severely undermined joint international efforts in the fight against the pandemic and become a weak link in global public health governance. Despite domestic criticisms of its inaction or meddling, the US government has refused to examine its poor performance; rather, it has doubled down on its attempt to evade responsibility. This will inevitably do further damage to its capacity to deal with future public health crises.

At the end of 2024, when cases of human infection with highly pathogenic avian influenza emerged in the US, it did not share the information with the international community. It then cut off reporting channels to the WHO and stopped updates on its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at the beginning of 2025. This shows that it was in fact the United States that covered up the truth of the epidemic.

1. Failure to Provide a Timely and Effective Response to Covid-19

In January 2020, the US was aware that an epidemic of a novel coronavirus was spreading quickly within its borders. Choosing to downplay the severity of the epidemic, the US government on multiple occasions compared Covid-19 to the flu, saying that it would disappear automatically one day. It also accused the WHO of overestimating its fatality rate, and advocated the use of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin as "wonder drugs" without solid scientific evidence. This led to drug abuse and delayed the proper treatment of patients.

The US government also systematically deprived its citizens of the right to be informed of updated pandemic information. From March 3, 2020, the US CDC stopped releasing key data on Covid-19,

including test results tallies, on the grounds that its information might not be "accurate". Over the next three years or so, people in the US could only access information about the epidemic from estimated data collected and reported by non-governmental institutions such as the Johns Hopkins University.

By mid-April 2020, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in the US had exceeded 660,000. However, with an eye on the upcoming presidential election, the incumbent administration announced that the pandemic had "passed the peak", rushed to roll out plans to reopen the economy, and swore to quickly bring life back to normal. To this end, some politicians refused to wear masks in public — they were among the first to defy pandemic control protocols — and undermined sensible precautions, such as mask wearing and social distancing, by portraying them as matters of individual choice. This further desynchronized the pandemic prevention and control efforts of the US.

Addressing the malfunctioning US government response in the early stages of the pandemic, one American economist commented that from the moment the pandemic was first identified, the US president and his team had downplayed the crisis and ignored basic and widely known public health guidelines. He urged the US government to examine the available data, identify the failures, and call out its relentless misinformation.

Covid-19 overwhelmed the costly and profit-driven US medical system, and vulnerable groups such as the impoverished, ethnic minorities, and senior citizens were the first to be abandoned in treatment. According to an Associated Press report in June 2020, of every 10 deaths in the US, eight were people over 65 years old. The American people's rights to life and health were in no way being guaranteed on an equal basis.

Data from the US National Center for Health Statistics shows that average life expectancy in the country fell from 78.8 in 2019 to 77 in 2020, and further declined to 76.1 in 2021, a decrease of 2.7 years from 2019. Despite an increase to 78.4 in 2023, average life expectancy in the US still remained far below that of most developed countries (82 years), and also lower than that of China. America's ill handling of the pandemic has caused enduring pain to American families and society, ultimately damaging the immediate interests and health of its own residents.

The US president thwarted the pandemic prevention and control efforts of professional agencies, local governments, and the public in the belief that this would secure gains in the presidential election. Ultimately, they failed in both the pandemic response and the election. Its errors in its early epidemic response were addressed in an article from a US media outlet, "One country stands alone, as the only affluent nation to have suffered a severe, sustained outbreak for more than four months: the United States."

After the Democratic Party came to power, the US government adjusted its pandemic response policies; however, a political pandemic of "partisanship over life" was spreading. Some politicians from the defeated Republican party began to encourage and spread vaccine conspiracy theories, inciting resistance to and skepticism about vaccines among the public. Their manipulation of public sentiment severely weakened the country's pandemic prevention and control.

In June 2022 when the Omicron variant reached its infection peak, only 67.2 percent of the US population were fully vaccinated with two doses, ranking last among the G7 countries and 59th globally.

There were also numerous local administrative and judicial actions that undermined pandemic containment efforts. Insisting that citizens should be "free to choose", the state administration of Florida demanded schools across the state to reopen, leading to widespread infection among teachers and students. In April 2022, a federal judge in Florida ruled that the CDC's prolonged mask mandate for public transportation was "unlawful". This rampant political virus saw the US become the worst-performing country in the fight against the pandemic.

CDC data released in May 2023 revealed that deaths caused by Covid-19 in the US totaled 1.13 million, accounting for 16.4 percent of concurrent global deaths reported by the WHO. By March 2025, at least 1.22 million Americans had died of the virus. These figures were out of alignment with the overall population size, economic strength, and level of medical technology of the US, and were indicative of its ineffective and unscientific response policies. According to a public opinion poll conducted by Axios, over 50 percent of Americans believed that public health officials lied about the effect of vaccines and masks in preventing the spread of the virus and that the government did not make the health and wellbeing of citizens a priority.

The US not only botched its own response to Covid-19; it also obstructed and sabotaged international cooperation in various ways. The deliberate concealment of information by the US government misled other countries and the WHO in the research and analysis of Covid-19 trend.

In March 2021, the US government publicly announced that it would take an "America First" approach in vaccine supply and vaccination, promising only surplus stocks

for other countries. Its massive procurement and stockpiling of vaccines resulted in enormous waste.

According to US CDC data, from December 2020 through May 2022, more than 82.1 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines, or 11 percent of the total distributed by the federal government, were discarded in the US. Tolerating reckless waste at home, the US kept hoarding excess vaccines and agitated vaccine nationalism. Its empty promises of vaccine supply to the international community were followed by a smear campaign to discredit China's vaccines.

The excessive vaccine stockpile and waste in the US benefited no one, and its approach came under criticism domestically. A business leader in the US said in an interview in December 2020, "the extreme idea that everybody should die until we have the very last American vaccinated, that's hardly the appropriate response." In May 2021, a US think tank released a reality check on the pandemic, criticizing the US for its hesitancy to assist other countries in fighting the pandemic, which would lead to the US "being seen as selfishly isolationist in a time of immense need".

The delayed and inadequate response of the US to the pandemic was not a failure by chance. One of the causes was a steady reduction of budget and staff in US public health agencies long before the outbreak. According to national associations of health officials of the US, from 2008 to the pandemic outbreak, almost 60,000 employees of local public health agencies in the US, about a quarter of their workforce, were laid off, and the budget of the CDC for these agencies was cut by 30 percent compared to 2003.

2. Shifting Blame for the Ineffective US Pandemic Response

The US has made China the primary scapegoat for its own mismanaged Covid-19 response. The US government's indifference and delayed actions wasted the precious time China had secured for the global fight against the pandemic. To avoid culpability for its own failures, the anti-China bloc in Congress has led the charge in deflecting blame by repeatedly introducing legislative proposals that accuse China of hindering the US pandemic response.

On March 16, 2020, the US government finally issued the long-overdue guidelines on travel restrictions and social quarantine, and for the first time admitted that the country could face an economic recession as a result of the pandemic. The following day, it coined and began to use the term "Chinese virus" in an explicit attempt to redirect public discontent at home. On March 24, during a G7 foreign ministers' virtual teleconference, the US secretary of state pressured his counterparts to adopt the term "Wuhan virus" when referring to SARS-CoV-2. This request was rejected by other member states, and the conference ended without a joint statement.

In September 2020, the US delegation tabled its stigmatizing "Chinese virus" statement at the United Nations General Assembly, prompting criticism from UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Reflecting the collective concerns of member states, he warned that populism and racism in response to the pandemic would only exacerbate the crisis.

These scapegoating tactics of the US government triggered a wave of hate crimes against Asian Americans. In response, the House of Representatives passed a resolution, condemning terms such as "Chinese virus", "Wuhan virus", and "Kung flu" as fuel for racism.

In 2021, the US government directed its intelligence agencies to launch a 90-day investigation into the origins of SARS-CoV-2. At the end of August, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) released an unclassified summary of its intelligence assessment. While the report was rife with unfounded allegations against China, it had to concede that there was insufficient evidence to support the "Wuhan lab leak" hypothesis.

The US allegations are entirely baseless; even its own institutions and authoritative experts have repeatedly debunked the misconception that the virus originated in China. But their findings and evidence have been deliberately suppressed and concealed by the US government. Between 2020 and 2023, three US entities — the Los Alamos National Laboratory (under the Department of Energy), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the ODNI — independently concluded in separate reports that the Wuhan Institute of Virology had maintained strict biosecurity protocols, and ruled out the possibility that the lab had engineered the novel coronavirus. However, not a single one of these findings has been accepted by the US government. Instead, they have been selectively ignored and concealed.

The Covid-19 pandemic is the common enemy of all humanity. It requires all nations to join forces in response and support each other. On February 8, 2020, as other countries actively supported China during its initial epidemic outbreak, the US State Department also announced US\$ 100 million in assistance. However, to date, that pledge has not been honored.

In contrast, despite the US failure to keep its promise, China still extended substantial aid when the US was in need. On April 1, 2020, National Public Radio aired a record-

ing of the US president himself, admitting that China was providing the US with 80 tonnes of medical supplies, including 1.8 million masks, 10.3 million pairs of gloves, and millions of other items.

According to a report by a US media outlet on January 29, 2021, China provided medical supplies valued at US\$12 million in March and April 2020. Notably, Zhejiang Province alone sent 11 million masks to 12 US states, including Indiana, with which it has forged a friendship for over 30 years.

However, some US politicians showed no appreciation for China's magnanimity and generosity. Since they could not conceal China's aid to the world — including their own country — they smeared it as "mask diplomacy" aimed at influencing the international community. The US was unwilling to assume its responsibility to help other countries, yet it was opposed to China stepping up with such initiatives. Its approach was neither serious nor dignified.

The US has made the WHO another target of blame.

On January 29, 2020, following his visit to China, WHO director-general commended China's efforts and transparency at a press conference in Geneva. At that time, the WHO had continuously issued alerts to the international community — including the US — to the threat of a larger-scale pandemic.

On April 10, 2020, the US government, which had previously downplayed WHO warnings, accused some American media, WHO officials, and opposition politicians of failing in their duties on pandemic response. On April 14, the US announced a temporary suspension of funding to the WHO, citing the organization's alleged failure to fulfill its obligations.

On May 20, the US declared that it had sent a letter to the WHO, demanding the organization to make "major substantive improvements" and demonstrate "independence from China" within 30 days; otherwise, it would permanently freeze funding and reconsider its membership in the organization.

Just nine days later, the US announced that it would withdraw from the WHO because of the organization's failure to adopt these "urgently needed" reforms.

The editor-in-chief of the authoritative medical journal *The Lancet* condemned the unscrupulous US action of blaming and defunding the WHO as an "appalling betrayal of global solidarity" and called for every scientist, every health worker, and every citizen to resist and rebel against this betrayal.

In 2021, the US government reversed the decision to withdraw from the WHO and pledged to resume its obligations. However, on January 20, 2025, the new administration made the farcical announcement that it would once again withdraw, citing the organization's mishandling of the pandemic and its inability to demonstrate independence from China's influence.

American public health experts and institutions were also made scapegoats for some politicians.

In April 2020, Anthony Fauci, an eminent infectious disease expert and member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, revealed during a CNN interview that the White House had repeatedly rejected pandemic prevention proposals such as social distancing. The US government immediately denied his statement, sparking calls to "fire Fauci" among its Republican supporters.

Even after the 2020 presidential election, some politicians persisted in attacking public health experts and institutions. They trumpeted accusations in Congress and the right-wing media, alleging that the NIH had funded China's gain-of-function research on the virus. A number of US experts and scholars suffered from political attacks and suppression. Their regular research funding was suspended, and they were subjected to intense questioning at hearings. A Fox News host denounced Fauci publicly on the basis that "the guy in charge of America's response to Covid turns out to be the guy who funded the creation of Covid", while a former White House trade adviser labeled Fauci "the father of the actual virus" who had allowed China to "engineer a virus".

3. The Politically Motivated Missouri Lawsuit

Since the first half of 2020, some organizations and individuals in the US, including the Missouri and Mississippi state governments, have initiated groundless lawsuits against China, holding China accountable and seeking damages for losses resulting from the pandemic. They have made spurious allegations — that SARS-CoV-2 originated from a lab leak in the Wuhan virology institute, that China concealed pandemic information from the world, and that China hoarded medical supplies.

On March 7, 2025, local time, the US District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri ruled that China must pay Missouri US\$ 24.49 billion in compensation for Covid-related losses, plus accrued interest. This kind of vexatious litigation, orchestrated by state governments, is a politically motivated farce that violates basic legal principles. China rejects such proceedings and will never accept a judgment delivered *in absentia*. Disregarding basic facts and violating fundamental legal norms is an affront to the sovereignty and dignity of all nations and to the international rule of law.

According to the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in international law, the policies and measures adopted by the Chi-

nese government for epidemic prevention and control constitute sovereign acts of state which are immune from the jurisdiction of US domestic courts. The Missouri judgment violates this foundational principle.

The allegations in the Missouri judgment — that China concealed pandemic information from the world and hoarded medical supplies — are completely unfounded. They are based on fabricated evidence provided by the state government of Missouri that has no legal validity. Even under US law, the judgment violates legal, regulatory, and judicial norms concerning the admissibility of evidence, the burden of proof, and the requirement to demonstrate causation.

At the early stage of the pandemic, China provided clear and timely information to the international community. It adopted an open and transparent approach by immediately releasing relevant information to the world, and it honored its responsibilities as a major country by providing assistance to nations throughout the world — including the US — with no strings attached. China was the world's major provider of anti-pandemic supplies.

In contrast, the Missouri state government's incompetent response to the pandemic resulted in its Covid-19 mortality rate ranking among the highest in the US. Now, the state government is trying to shift the blame for its failure, which is both irresponsible and unethical. China will never accede to demands for compensation founded on baseless allegations. China made a significant contribution to the global fight against the pandemic, and deserves recognition and fair treatment, not baseless blame, much less demands for compensation. The Chinese government does not recognize or accept this absurd court judgment and will take resolute countermeasures in defense of its legitimate rights.

4. Evidence Pointing to the US as the Origin of Covid-19

Numerous studies have shown that SARS-CoV-2 originated outside China. Research and analysis conducted by the US CDC and NIH indicate that prior to the outbreak in Wuhan, multiple regions in the US recorded positive SARS-CoV-2 test results and other evidence of the virus.

From May to October 2019, Virginia reported 19 respiratory disease outbreaks, a significant increase from the 13 and 15 outbreaks recorded during the same period in the previous two years. Laboratory tests were unable to identify the causes of some cases. In July 2019, two communities in northern Virginia reported outbreaks of pneumonia with unknown causes, which local media suspected to be "a mystery virus". A total of 54 people exhibited symptoms such as fever, coughing, and feebleness, resulting in two deaths. That same month, the Fort Detrick Biological Laboratory, located just one hour's drive from the affected area, was suddenly shut down.

In 2019, a number of US states reported mysterious "e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury" cases. The symptoms were highly similar to those of Covid-19, including coughing, shortness of breath, and fatigue, with some resulting in severe lung damage. Illinois and Wisconsin reported their first cases in March 2019, and the number of cases peaked in August and September. This surge led to a total of 2,807 hospitalizations, including 68 deaths, across the US. The first death was recorded on August 23, 2019.

According to data from the US CDC, sporadic cases of "flu" began to appear in South Carolina as early as September 2019. Beginning in November, a widespread "flu" outbreak was recorded over a six week period in the area. Data from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control revealed that in the first week of December 2019, hospitalizations related to "flu" had increased by 41 percent year-on-year. When testifying in a House hearing related to Covid-19, then US CDC director admitted that some Covid-19 deaths had been misdiagnosed as flu in the US.

The US CDC data indicates that the first confirmed Covid-19 case in Florida was on March 1, 2020. However, according to the data on 171 Covid-19 patients published on the Florida Department of Health (DOH) website, the earliest confirmed cases were in January 2020. Most of these individuals reported no international travel history, suggesting that the virus was already circulating in local communities at the time. This crucial information about the timing of their diagnosis has since been deleted, and the then data chief at the Florida DOH was fired shortly after.

A US CDC study revealed that out of 7,389 serological survey samples collected from nine states between December 13, 2019 and January 17, 2020, 106 were SARS-CoV-2 antibody positive. This suggests that the virus existed in the US before the first official case was identified. Similarly, the NIH "All of Us" Research Program tested 24,079 blood samples collected from participants across 50 states between January 2 and March 18, 2020, identifying nine containing SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. The two earliest were collected in Illinois and Massachusetts on January 7 and 8, and seven out of the nine predate the first officially reported SARS-CoV-2 infections in Illinois, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Mississippi. These findings show that SARS-CoV-2 was circulating across the US at a low level as early as December 2019, well before the first official cases were recorded.

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WORLD/DOCUMENT

Manufacturing rebound in US faces obstacles

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
in New York
belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

US President Donald Trump has vowed that tariffs will help boost investments in factories and restore manufacturing jobs to regions like the Midwest, which relied on such work decades ago.

“Pandemic-driven shifts have already created hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and now we are seeing increased demand for digital skills that need to be met or risk further widening of the talent gap.”

Manufacturing Institute President Carolyn Lee

In some parts of the country, like the Rust Belt, manufacturing provided millions of jobs in the years after World War II, especially for men without a college degree.

“The president wants to increase manufacturing jobs here in the United States of America,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in April. “He wants them to come back home.”

While manufacturing jobs in the US accounted for about 22 percent of the workforce in 1979, they dwindled to 8 percent last year.

New manufacturing workers also would have to be trained to work in modern, digital factories, according to one expert.

“Manufacturers recognize that the workforce is evolving,” Manufacturing Institute President and Executive Director Carolyn Lee said in a statement. “Pandemic-driven shifts have already created hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and now we are seeing increased demand for digital skills that need to be met or risk further widening of the talent gap.”

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told CBS News on April 6: “The army of millions and millions of human beings screwing in little screws to make iPhones — that kind of thing is going to come to America.”

“The tradecraft of America, our high school-educated Americans, the core to our workforce, is going to have the greatest resurgence of jobs in the history of America, to work on these high-tech factories, which are all coming to America,” he said.

The Trump administration has said repeatedly that it aims to lessen dependency on foreign countries.

Since the 1980s, much manufacturing has moved to Asia, to take advantage of lower costs. Asian countries have put manufacturing at the heart of their operations for decades.

In 2020, manufacturing jobs in China accounted for approximately 28.7 percent of the workforce — a number similar to the heyday of US

manufacturing nearly five decades ago.

Additionally, China has invested heavily in automated factories and has more of those than the US, Germany and Japan, The New York Times reported. The United States ranks 10th among the most automated countries in manufacturing.

In North America, robot density is 197 units per 10,000 employees — up 4.2 percent, the International Federation of Robotics said. The cost of robots also has dropped.

US manufacturing is facing other changes. Baby boomers who had been stalwart workers are retiring. Younger people prefer to go to college rather than work in manufacturing, data shows.

Immigrant workers are not as readily available due to Trump administration policy changes. That could lead to 1.9 million unfilled manufacturing jobs by 2033, according to a 2024 report by Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute.

There were 482,000 manufacturing job openings as of February, according to the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

Mary Lovely, a professor emerita of economics at Syracuse University and senior fellow of the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington DC, told China Daily that tariffs are often touted by politicians as a good idea because they contend “that China has not adhered to global trade rules by unfairly subsidizing its manufacturing sector.”

“This view leads people to think that trade is unfair to domestic producers and workers and to see tariffs as justified,” she said.

The National Bureau of Economic Research noted in 2024 that “the trade-war has not to date provided economic help to the US heartland: import tariffs on foreign goods neither raised nor lowered US employment in newly-protected sectors and retaliatory tariffs had clear negative employment impacts.”

The US Bureau of Economic Analysis reported on Wednesday that the economy shrank at a 0.3 percent annual rate from January through March, the first drop in three years. Last year, the economy expanded at a 2.4 percent rate.

Consumer spending also slowed in the first quarter, growing at a 1.8 percent annual rate, down from 4 percent in October through December 2024.

Several companies have announced billion-dollar investments in American manufacturing.

Johnson & Johnson said in March it plans to invest \$55 billion in US manufacturing.

Apple said in February that it will spend \$500 billion over the next four years, CEO Tim Cook said in a statement: “We’re proud to build on our long-standing US investments.”

IBM said on April 28 that it will invest \$150 billion in US manufacturing over the next five years.

Hyundai announced in March a \$21 billion investment in domestic manufacturing until 2028.

Honda Motor said it will move production of the Civic Hybrid hatchback to the US from Japan.



Chug with a smile

Locomotive Thomas begins operations on the Oigawa Railway in Shimada City, Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan, on Wednesday. *Thomas & Friends* is a British children's TV series based on *The Railway Series* books, which celebrate its 80th anniversary this year. Some events commemorating the anniversary are scheduled to be held across the country during the Golden Week. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP

More China-EU exchanges urged to strengthen ties

By **ZHANG YUNBI**
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

China's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday called on the European Union to meet with China halfway, and said Beijing welcomes members of the European Parliament to visit China more often.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun made the remarks when asked about US and European media reports on Beijing's potential plan to lift sanctions imposed in 2021 against five EU lawmakers for their comments attacking China's human rights record.

“China-EU legislative body exchanges are an important part of China-EU relations,” Guo said at a regular news conference in Beijing.

“We hope the two sides will meet each other halfway, strengthen their exchanges, and welcome members of the European Parliament to visit China more often and see for themselves,” he added.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the EU.

Guo said that currently “China-EU relations are showing a benign, improving momentum.”

“The two sides are facing important opportunities for the development of bilateral relations,” he said.

He noted that China-EU economic and trade cooperation enjoys complementary advantages and mutual benefits.

“As the world's major economies, China and the EU will inject valuable stability and certainty into the world economy and global trade by jointly safeguarding the multilateral trade system and promoting trade liberalization and facilitation under the current situation,” he said.

Wang Lingjun, vice-minister of the General Administration of Customs, told reporters at another news

conference last month that China and the EU are each other's most important trade partners.

In the first quarter of this year, China's imports and exports to the EU totaled 1.3 trillion yuan (\$179 billion), up 1.4 percent year-on-year, Wang said.

Cai Run, head of the Chinese Mission to the EU, told a friendship event on Monday that China-EU relations have weathered changes in the international arena over the past 50 years and have continued to move forward.

The two sides “have achieved mutual success and have illuminated the world,” he said.

Revived land laws spark racism concerns

By **RENA LI** in Los Angeles
renali@chinadailyusa.com

A surge of state-level legislation aimed at restricting foreign land ownership is drawing sharp criticism from civil rights groups and legal experts, who warn the measures echo early 20th-century “alien land laws”. Framed as national security measures, the laws primarily target individuals from countries like China, raising concerns about discrimination and racism.

Speaking at the recent annual Committee of 100 conference in Los Angeles, a prominent gathering of Chinese American leaders and experts, Robert Chang, professor at the University of California, Irvine School of Law, warned that these laws represent a dangerous revival of xenophobic legal traditions once used to target Asian immigrants in the early 20th century.

“Even though these laws lost their force as racial bars to naturalization were lifted, first for Chinese in 1943, then for Filipinos and South Asians in 1946, and finally for all races in 1952, they were never struck down as unconstitutional,” said Chang, who holds the Sylvia Mendez Presidential Chair for Civil Rights. “And that silence has left a legal door open.”

Chang pointed to historical cases such as *Harris v. Thompson*, in which the Washington State Supreme Court claimed that foreign land ownership posed a threat to food security and national safety, a rationale

he described as a “trope of economic and national threat” used to disguise racial prejudice.

The legal basis for these laws remains largely unchanged. In Florida, a 2023 legal challenge to a new land ownership restriction was dismissed by a federal district judge, who cited a 1923 US Supreme Court decision as support for the law's constitutionality.

“That's why this fight is urgent,” Chang said. “History doesn't stay buried. If we don't confront and undo the legal foundations of these laws, they come back, sometimes dressed in a new language, but with the same targets.”

Vague language used

Wong also criticized the vague language of these modern laws. “In Florida, it's ‘countries of concern’. In Arkansas, they cite the ‘International Trafficking in Arms Regulations’. These lists include several countries, but in practice, they're being used to target Chinese people. It's not subtle,” he said. “They claim it's not about race, but that's clearly who they're going after.”

Texas has become one of the most visible battlegrounds. Senate Bill 17, now advanced as House Bill 17, seeks to restrict property ownership by nationals from several countries including China. The bill recently passed out of the House Committee on Homeland Security and is now headed for a vote on the House floor.

Retired Texas State Representative Martha Wong, a founding

member of the Texas Asian Republican Assembly, testified against the bill and stressed the importance of civic engagement.

Wong also suggested using social media platforms like WeChat to help mobilize Asian Americans to testify. “It's so important for you to speak out — publicly, by email, text, or even a handwritten note. That's how you become part of the process,” she said.

Texas State Representative Gene Wu has been at the forefront of organizing resistance against House Bill 17. “Everyone thought someone else would take care of this,” he said.

“But as I warned, if we didn't act immediately, the bill would be on the governor's desk in two weeks.”

Wu recalled the historical lesson of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first US law to ban immigration based on race and nationality. “Don't forget, for most of the 20th century, our people were banned from this country,” Wu told the audience. The issue has extended far beyond Texas, according to Wu.

Since 2021, 42 states have introduced 323 bills aimed at restricting property ownership by foreign entities, with 22 states enacting 38 such laws — 17 of which became laws in 2024.

These measures often target individuals from countries designated as “foreign adversaries”, including China, and have raised concerns about potential discrimination against Chinese Americans.

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

Subscription: 212-537-8899

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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: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA / TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

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A study by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service under the US Department of Agriculture found that of 241 samples taken from white-tailed deer before January 2020, one tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. This indicates that the infection was already present in the deer population as far back as 2019.

From January 2015 to June 2020, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported 28 lab incidents involving genetically engineered microorganisms to the NIH. Six of these incidents involved various types of genetically modified coronavirus. Eight researchers might have been infected, yet only one was placed in quarantine. The university, NIH, and CDC all declined to disclose the incident reports to the public. An expert associated with The Lancet suggested that novel coronavirus

might not have come from nature, and instead likely came from an incident that occurred in a US bio-technology lab.

Between 2006 and 2013, the US reported at least 1,500 serious laboratory incidents involving coronaviruses and other highly dangerous pathogens linked to diseases such as SARS, MERS, Ebola, anthrax, smallpox, and avian influenza. As recently as November 6, 2024, 43 lab monkeys escaped from a South Carolina research facility. There have been recurring laboratory incidents in the US, and the management of labs is a cause for concern. What were the real reasons for the shutdown of the Fort Detrick Biological Laboratory in late 2019? The US owes the world an explanation.

These questionable events all suggest that Covid-19 may have emerged in the US earlier than the US official timeline, and earlier than the out-

break in China. A thorough and in-depth investigation into the origins of the virus should be conducted in the US.

On April 18, 2025, the White House website published an article yet again misrepresenting China as the source of Covid-19. This once more demonstrates the obsessive US determination to politicize virus origins tracing. These attempts to manipulate public opinion will never succeed — the scientific community and the international community are increasingly immune to the incessant falsehoods of the US side.

Conclusion

Addressing the global Covid-19 pandemic is a serious scientific issue that bears on the health and wellbeing of all humanity. Committed to the principles of science-based approach, openness, and transparency, China has actively conducted and

participated in virus origins tracing. The “WHO-convened Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part – Joint WHO-China Study” is the result of the collaborative study by Chinese and foreign experts. It distills the collective insights from the joint mission and has earned widespread recognition from both the international community and the global scientific world. The contributions of these experts merit respect, and their conclusions cannot be denied.

While unrelenting in its domestic efforts to contain the virus, China has unreservedly shared its experience to facilitate global pandemic control, done all it could for international anti-epidemic cooperation, fulfilled its international responsibilities, and demonstrated its ethical commitment as a major country.

Despite being the world's largest economy and most developed country, the US failed to make contribu-

tions commensurate with its capabilities. It sabotaged collaborative global efforts to address the crisis, and left its own people as the primary victims of the fallout.

The US should cease from shifting blame and evading responsibility, stop finding external excuses for its internal malaise, and genuinely reflect on and overhaul its public health policies. The US cannot continue to turn a deaf ear to the numerous questions over its conduct. It must promptly respond to the legitimate concerns of the international community, proactively share with the WHO data on its early suspected cases, disclose information about Fort Detrick, its global network of biological laboratories, and the so-called research conducted there in, and provide a responsible account to the global public.

Infectious diseases are the common enemy of humanity. Any

attempt to politicize the scientific effort against infectious diseases, or to fabricate misinformation in order to attack other countries for self-serving purposes, will ultimately threaten the health and wellbeing of the entire world, including the very nation engaged in such practices.

The global fight against the Covid-19 pandemic provides incontrovertible evidence that major countries must fully assume their international responsibilities and actively engage in building a global community of shared future. This follows the trend of the times and is the right way to address common challenges and build a better world. China will continue to work with all nations in advancing global public health and good governance, and contribute more proactively to preventing new infectious diseases in the future.

XINHUA

IMAGE

Labor behind the world's tallest bridge in Guizhou



Workers operate on the catwalk at the construction site of the Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge in Guizhou province on Sept 11, 2024. LEI SHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



The construction of the Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge is underway in Guizhou province on April 21, 2025. YANG JIALIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Workers perform high-altitude operations on the Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge in Guizhou province on Sept 11, 2024. LEI SHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge in Southwest China's Guizhou province will open in the second half of 2025 and become the world's tallest bridge.

After completing the main structure on Jan 17, bridge builders have continued working high above the ground ready for the completion of the milestone project.

The bridge is a key project on the expressway that links the Liuzhi special district of Guizhou's Liupanshui city and Anlong county of Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture in Guizhou.

With a main span of 1,420 meters and a height of 625 meters above water level, the Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge, once completed,

will be the world's highest bridge and the longest-span mountain bridge.

The bridge will reduce Liuzhi-Anlong travel time from 3 hours to 1.5 hours, facilitating resource connectivity and economic development in Guizhou.

At the project's inception, the average age of the project management team was 28, with over 90 percent being under 35. Young workers have been integral in many challenging tasks, from the initial survey team braving high temperatures, dense forests, and cliffs in the summer of 2020, to welders completing millimeter-precision welding in strong canyon winds.

Wang Songyu, the deputy project manager, recalls crews working

around the clock in shifts in order to complete the main tower top-off. "It was like passing the baton," Wang said. "The sound of the late-night meal delivery truck rolling over the steel plates is unforgettable."

Faced with extremely heavy bridge segments and canyon winds that sometimes exceeded force 12 on the Beaufort scale, the construction team independently developed heavy-duty climbing scaffolding and a smart cable hoisting system based on positioning from the Beidou satellite, capable of lifting steel truss girders weighing up to 215 tons with millimeter precision.

The welding requirements for the bridge project are stringent. Welders must hold a national certification. To address porosity in welds caused

by strong canyon winds, the construction team innovated a wind-proof welding technology.

The bridge will feature a high-altitude glass observation deck and cliffside walkways, and create a one-hour tourism circle with nearby attractions like Huangguoshu Waterfall. The builders have constructed the bridge and incorporated scenic walkways.

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge and the integrated tourism development projects will be completed and operational simultaneously, becoming China's first bridge complex combining sightseeing, sports experience, and tourism services.

CHINA DAILY



A photo shows the Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge under construction in Guizhou province on Sept 11, 2024. LEI SHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

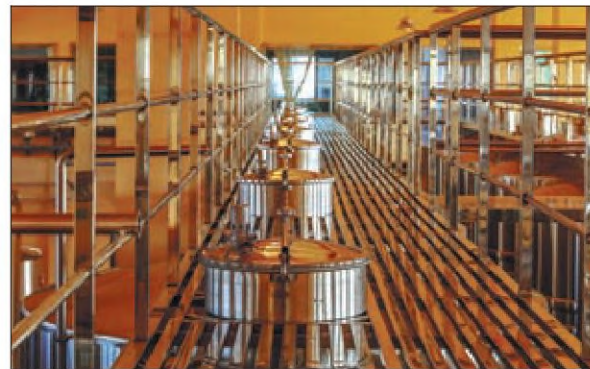


Workers operate on the Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge in Guizhou province on Sept 11, 2024. LEI SHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Workers cooperate on the nearly completed Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge in Guizhou province on April 21, 2025. ZHANG JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

TREND



From left: Ren Yi Yuan Vineyard covers 120 hectares, growing nine varieties in the Jinshan subregion on the eastern foothills of Helan Mountain in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. The oak barrels used by the winery for aging wine. The winery produces about 500,000 bottles a year. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

No two vintages are ever quite the same — even with the same wine, a shift in climate from year to year subtly transforms the flavor of the grapes. But in the hands of a talented winemaker, even a tough harvest can yield something remarkable.

Kang Kai, a rising star on China's wine scene, proves exactly that. His Renyiyuan Tao Cabernet Sauvignon — both the 2019 and 2020 vintages — took home awards at the 2025 Wynn Signature Chinese Wine Awards, impressing an international panel of judges despite the vastly different growing conditions of the two years.

The 2020 vintage was the standout, sweeping four major honors: Best Wine of China, Best Red Wine, Best of Ningxia, and Best Cabernet Sauvignon.

Born in 1995, the winemaker at the Ren Yi Yuan Vineyard in Ningxia's Helan Mountain region, also made history as the inaugural recipient of the newly introduced Best Young Winemaker award — becoming the biggest winner of the night.

The awards ceremony, organized by Wynn Signature, Wynn's exclusive lifestyle brand, was held in April in Macao with support from the Macao Government Tourism Office.

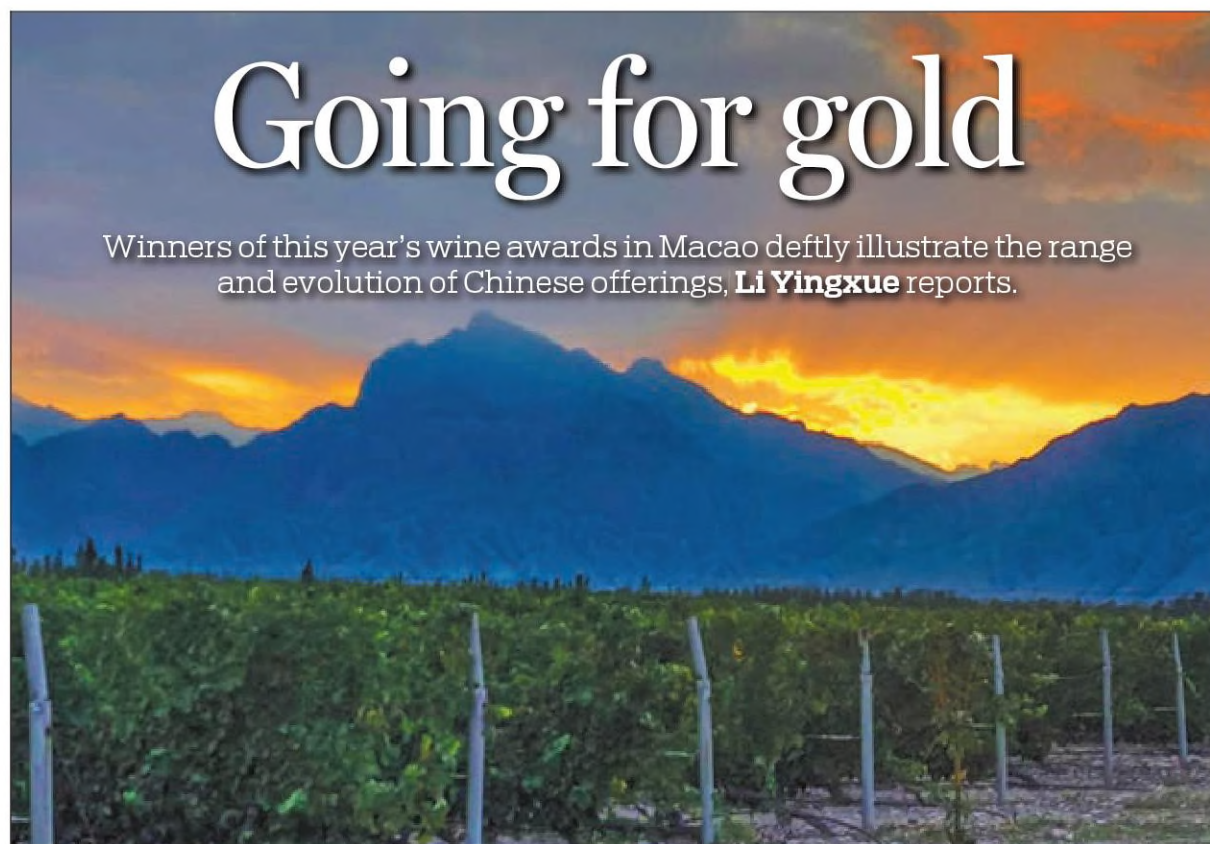
"Our vineyard is located in the Jinshan subregion of the eastern foothills of Helan Mountain in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region — a boutique, high-quality wine-producing area," Kang says. "While we're not yet as well-known as some of our peers in the region, this recognition for Best Young Winemaker affirms our dedication to quality."

"Our owner always says it's okay if costs are higher or yields lower, as long as every bottle reflects our commitment to quality."

Kang says that 2019 was a particularly favorable year for winemaking in Ningxia. With moderate rainfall and ample sunshine, it is widely regarded as one of the region's best vintages. "Many of our other wines from that year also showed excellent flavor," he says. "This is thanks to the terroir and geographical advantages of Ningxia. Our vineyard is located in the heart of the region — one of China's largest contiguous wine-producing areas, and among the most awarded regions internationally."

In contrast, 2020 was colder, with a longer growing season. The phenolic compounds in the grapes developed more slowly, pushing harvest to about two weeks later than the previous year.

Kang saw this as an opportunity to make a wine that truly expressed the year's unique character. During vinification, he reduced pump-overs and cap management to better preserve the fruit aromas, and shortened the post-fermentation maceration period to allow for a slower, more delicate extraction of tannins and phenolics.



Ren Yi Yuan Vineyard had its first grapes planted in 2010 and began full operations in 2019. Wines from the vineyard earned more than 50 accolades in different competitions from home and abroad.



Left: Kang Kai started in the wine industry in 2019. Right: Initially a cellar worker he became a winemaker. Kang (middle) won Best Young Winemaker at the recent Wynn Signature Chinese Wine Awards.



"The 2019 vintage is richer and fuller, while the 2020 is more elegant in aroma, with balanced acidity, good structure, and refined tannins," he says.

Kang didn't begin his career in wine. He originally worked in petrochemicals before making a complete career shift in 2019, starting from scratch as a cellar worker. Through hands-on experience, he learned the craft and fell in love with wine.

The Ren Yi Yuan is barely any older

than Kang's winemaking career. It planted its first grapes in 2010, finished the winery in 2018, and began full operations in 2019.

The 120-hectare estate now grows nine varieties and produces about 500,000 bottles a year. Kang reflects a vision of creating a time-honored brand rooted in heritage. "It promotes Confucian values of benevolence and virtue, and reminds us of our commitment to making wines that represent the Chinese terroir

with care and excellence."

The winery's architecture emphasizes design and cultural symbolism. Its labels are traditionally Chinese in style — the award-winning bottle features a depiction of Laozi, a key Taoist figure, riding an ox.

"Laozi promoted the harmony of nature — and that's what we aim for in our winemaking, an expression of the land," Kang explains. Another label features the legendary musicians Boya and Ziqi, further tying

the wine to cultural heritage.

In addition to grape growing and winemaking, the winery now includes a tasting area and is building a second-phase tourism project. This will include guesthouses and Ningxia cuisine, and is expected to open in the second half of this year.

"We're developing a 3,000-square-meter space, plus five space capsule-style guest rooms nestled among the vines — open the window and you'll see the vineyard stretching right outside," Kang says.

Kang isn't a newcomer to winning awards. Just last year, wines from the estate earned more than 50 accolades in different competitions. The 2019 vintage, one of their earliest, underwent 15 months of aging and over two years of bottle maturation before launching in September 2022. It has since won more than 30 domestic and international awards.

The 2020 vintage, on the other hand, had not even been officially released when it won big. It was the first time Kang had entered the wine into a competition — and it came away with top honors.

"We were surprised by the win," Kang says. "Now we're labeling the wine and preparing for release. Competing isn't about chasing trends. With 120 hectares under

vine, our goal is to focus on quality and reach more drinkers."

"Recognition from the judges affirms our standards, and we also hope consumers will be the ultimate judges of our quality."

It was no easy feat for the yet-to-be-released wine to take home the top award. The judging panel chose it from around 900 entries submitted by nearly 200 top wineries, following a week of blind tasting and scoring.

The competition followed international standards, with a 27-member jury that included 10 Masters of Wine, 3 Master Sommeliers, and one expert with both titles.

The Helan Mountain Special Reserve Chardonnay 2021 received two honors: Best White Wine and Best Chardonnay. The Domaine Franco-Chinois Reserve Marselan 2012 was awarded both Best of North China and Best Marselan, and the Tiansai Sparkling Wine 2017 earned titles for Best of Xinjiang and Best Sparkling Wine.

One of the judges, Australian wine industry veteran Iain Riggs, has judged wines in Australia, Shanghai, California, and London. Reflecting on the Chinese Wine Awards, Riggs calls them unique because of their exclusive focus on domestic wines.

"When I first judged in Shanghai, there were very few Chinese wines. By the time I finished, they had grown significantly. Then, everything stopped. Coming back last year, we had 700 Chinese wines. This year, it's 900," he says.

He has observed a shift in judging outcomes. "Last year, 50 gold medals were awarded out of 700 wines. This year, the number of entries rose, but the number of golds fell. That's partly due to vintage challenges in 2021 and 2022, and partly because judging has become stricter — we're not just handing out golds."

The Renyiyuan Tao Cabernet Sauvignon 2020 clearly stood out. "When judging, you look at color, aroma, and flavor. This one wins on all three," Riggs says. "The color was vibrant and fresh, even after five years. The aroma was full of blackberry, cassis, and a hint of tobacco and cedar from the oak. Slightly high in alcohol, but well-balanced. It'll age beautifully."

The Australian has witnessed a significant transformation in Chinese winemaking. "From 2011 to 2020, the market favored big reds with heavy oak and tannins. Now we're seeing more finesse — lighter styles, lower alcohol."

He says that the younger generation around the world, including in China, are turning away from their parents' drinking preferences. "They want to enjoy a meal with a lighter style of wine"

Contact the writer at liyixue@chinadaily.com.cn

Grape expectations as domestic beverage raises a hearty cheer

By LI YINGXUE

In 1972, winemaker Guo Qichang received an invitation from the Shacheng winery in Huailai county, Hebei province. Located in one of China's earliest grape-growing regions, the winery hoped that Guo could help improve quality and assess its grape varieties.

Two years later, while attending the Canton Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Guo was struck by the differences between Chinese wines and their international counterparts.

At the time, most domestic wines were sweet, made from local grape varieties, and sealed with tamper-proof or crown caps. Meanwhile, international wines were largely dry, produced from globally-recognized varietals, and sealed with corks.

The gap revealed not just a difference in taste, but a divergence in

winemaking philosophy. Guo returned from the fair with a clear plan: to transform Chinese wine and align it with global standards.

In 1976, after years of research and experimentation, Guo and his team succeeded in producing China's first dry white wine. It marked the beginning of a shift away from traditional sweet wines toward the dry wines favored on the international market. It also set in motion a broader diversification of domestic wine production.

That transformation is still unfolding today. At this April's Wynn Signature Chinese Wine Awards in Macao, the growing diversity and quality of Chinese wines was on full display.

Wines made from Chardonnay, Viognier, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Dragon's Eye, and the increasingly distinctive Marselan — all produced in China — were honored by an international panel of judges.

The awards included red, white, rose, and sparkling wines, underscoring how far the industry has come.

Guo's son, Guo Songquan, who helped his father make the pioneering dry white, says that in 1979, the winery exported 90 cases (12 bottles in each) of the wine, and earned a national gold quality award.

Encouraged by the recognition, the team continued to push the envelope. In 1983, they produced China's first dry red wine at the Changli winery in Qinhuangdao, Hebei — an area which, like Bordeaux, lies on the 39th parallel, and is ideal for winemaking.

"At the time, every step was a technical challenge," Guo Songquan says. "Today, seeing the wide variety of Chinese wines, I feel proud. Our industry has moved from technical advancement to a broader vision. I believe Chinese wine will be known and respected around the world."

China's journey with winemaking began much earlier. According to Professor Zhan Jicheng of the China Agricultural University, industrial-scale production dates back to 1892, with activity in Henan province, Shanxi province, Shandong province, and Beijing.

But war and instability hindered development. After 1949, state-owned wineries were established in regions like the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Anhui province, and Shandong to revive the sector.

The 1980s proved pivotal. Large-scale enterprises emerged, and the structure of the wine industry began to change. Changyu shifted from a public-private enterprise to a listed company in Hong Kong. In 1980, Dynasty became China's first Sino-foreign joint venture winery. Great Wall soon followed.

According to Zhan, by the 1990s, dry reds were on the rise, driving

strong market demand. The early 2000s saw rapid expansion, with production spreading westward from the traditional hubs of Shandong, Hebei, and Tianjin, to the central and western regions. Today, the original regions still account for nearly half of the country's wine production, Zhan says.

Since 2016, however, total wine output has declined — particularly among large-scale producers. But Zhan says that the data may not tell the full story because many boutique wineries fall outside official statistics due to their smaller scale.

"In recent years, boutique wineries have flourished," he says. "Their numbers are growing, and their quality is improving fast. We're now seeing Chinese wines regularly winning international awards. Chinese wine is becoming a meaningful part of the global wine conversation"

This year's Chinese Wine Awards highlighted that shift, with both

established and emerging wineries among the winners. "It showed the growing diversity of Chinese wine," Zhan says.

One gold medalist, Petit Mont Baima Snow Mountain Degin Cuvee Prestige 2023, came from independent winemaker Ma Jie, who owns neither a vineyard nor a winery.

"I see more people becoming independent winemakers, which is great," Ma says. "It means young people can enter the industry and create wines in their own style."

Still, he acknowledges the challenges. "Independent winemakers face higher costs and more hurdles with communication than big wineries," he says. "But we all need to stay focused on quality"

From the first bottle of dry white in a Hebei winery to today's award-winning vintages, the story of Chinese wine is no longer one of imitation — but of innovation, ambition, and growing global recognition.

BIZ LIFE

Chagee marches ahead in latest overseas push

For Chinese tea beverage brands, supply chain capabilities to be key factor in continued success of global expansion

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Chagee Holdings Ltd, a leading Chinese premium tea beverage brand, made its debut on the Nasdaq stock exchange on April 17, signaling the company's global expansion drive and mirroring the rising presence of Chinese tea drinks overseas.

Since its founding in 2017, the company has envisioned creating a global brand, said Zhang Junjie, founder, chairman and CEO of Chagee.

"This is just the beginning. We will continually support healthy lifestyle choices, drive industry innovation, and deliver on our mission of creating connections every day with tea," he said.

The beverage chain raised about \$411 million by issuing 14.68 million shares, giving it a market capitalization of \$7.66 billion as of the close of trading on its first day.

Chagee is also preparing to open its first North American teahouse in Los Angeles.

Founded in Yunnan province in Southwest China, Chagee initially developed at a measured pace before pivoting toward international markets.

Its first overseas store opened in Malaysia in 2019, a move that signaled the beginning of its "tea + culture" global strategy. The company operated 156 stores overseas by the end of 2024. It plans to open 1,000 to 1,500 new stores globally this year.

Unlike several competitors who thrived on trends like cheese tea or fruit tea, Chagee focused on original leaf fresh milk tea, building a niche with its streamlined, efficient, and quality offerings.

The company's rapid growth was supercharged by capital injections from prominent investment firms, enabling its expansion across the country and beyond.

As of the end of 2024, Chagee operated 6,440 stores worldwide — 6,217 of which were franchises — representing an 83 percent increase from the previous year.

Its 2024 GMV (Gross Merchandise Volume) surged 173 percent year-on-year to 29.5 billion yuan (\$4.04 billion), with average monthly GMV per store in China hitting 5.12 million yuan.

Its annual revenue reached 12.41 billion yuan, while net profit came in at 2.52 billion yuan — translating to a net margin of 20.3 percent, significantly above the industry average.

Chagee's success has largely been driven by its "top single product" strategy.

By eliminating lower-performing categories and focusing on a core set of offerings, Chagee has been able to boost efficiency and reduce complexity. Its proprietary machines can prepare drinks in as little as eight seconds.



Above: Workers of Heytea make beverages in New York on March 8. LIAO PAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Left: A view of a Mixue store in Jakarta in November. XU QIN / XINHUA

In 2024, 91 percent of Chagee's GMV in China was generated by its signature fresh milk tea series, with 61 percent of sales attributed to just three products.

One standout item, *bo ya jue xian*, or jasmine green milk tea, sold over 600 million cups as of August 2024, more than 300 million of which were sold in 2024 alone.

This product strategy also enables a highly efficient supply chain. Cha-

gee reported logistics costs of under 1 percent of its global GMV, and inventory turnover of just 5.3 days — the fastest among major Chinese tea drink brands.

Despite its success, Chagee faces emerging challenges.

The company's prospectus revealed that same-store GMV growth slowed in the second half of 2024, declining 18.4 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter. Ana-

lysts attribute the slowdown in part to market cannibalization from the rapid opening of new stores in the same areas.

To diversify and maintain momentum, Chagee has launched a sub-brand, "Chagee freshly brewed", which focuses on premium Chinese tea.

With three pilot stores opened in Shanghai and prices ranging from 13 to 22 yuan, the brand is testing

new waters. However, similar "tea space" concepts by competitors like Heytea and Nayuki have struggled to achieve scalable success.

With China's new tea drink market growth expected to slow from 44.3 percent in 2023 to 12.4 percent in 2025, according to the 2023 new tea beverage report released by the China Chain Store and Franchise Association, leading brands are increasingly turning to overseas expansion.

Independent food and drink industry analyst Zhu Dapeng said that supply chain capabilities will be the decisive factor in the success of global expansion.

"Models, prices, and products can all be replicated, but building a global supply chain is a long game. Only companies with fully integrated supply chains will thrive," Zhu said.

Chagee's overseas strategy also hinges on cultural adaptation while retaining its core identity. In Southeast Asia, for example, it aligns with local tastes by using familiar milk-tea combinations, such as oolong or jasmine tea with premium milk. This cultural resonance has contributed to positive reception abroad, said Zhu.

The company has built a strong brand identity by fusing traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern design. Its visual branding draws on cultural symbols such as Peking Opera masks and the Ancient Tea Horse Road in Yunnan province, while store interiors balance traditional motifs with minimalist modernity, appealing to young, culturally minded consumers, he added.

Chagee enters the global stage as part of a broader wave of Chinese tea brands expanding abroad.

Heytea opened its first overseas store in Singapore in 2018 and has since moved into markets such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States, opening more than 70 stores overseas.

Meanwhile, Mixue Group has established over 4,800 overseas locations and is the world's largest ready-made beverage chain by number of stores. Mixue built four local distribution centers and plans to continue to expand its logistics facilities in four countries in Southeast Asia.

Other players like ChaPanda have also entered the fray. ChaPanda has emphasized localization, rapidly opening multiple outlets overseas since last year and adjusting its menu to cater to local preferences.

The company now has 18 overseas stores and is pushing forward with its global strategy in markets including South Korea, Thailand, and Spain. The company's 2024 financial results, released in March, showed that its revenue reached 4.92 billion yuan, with the number of stores growing by 7.6 percent.

“Models, prices, and products can all be replicated, but building a global supply chain is a long game. Only companies with fully integrated supply chains will thrive.”

Zhu Dapeng, independent food and drink industry analyst

\$7.66 billion

market capitalization of Chagee at close of first day of trading

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

Nestle aims to tap into high-quality coffee experiences

Global food and drink company Nestle is doubling down on its coffee strategy in China, aiming to capture the growing appetite for diverse and high-quality coffee experiences among Chinese consumers.

Jiang Haiying, senior vice-president of Nestle Greater China Region and head of the coffee business unit, said the growth potential of the Chinese market has "strengthened our commitment to accelerate our coffee business in China".

Jiang said that the company's Asia, Oceania, and Africa (AOA) region holds high expectations for its performance in China, expressing confidence that the market will continue to deliver sustained growth.

She said that Nestle Coffee will pursue "bigger, fewer and better and more focused innovation projects", targeting cutting-edge trends in Chinese consumer behavior and coffee consumption to drive the next wave of expansion.

According to Nestle's 2025 first quarter results report released on April 24, the company's global coffee business achieved growth of 5.1 percent year-on-year.

Data from the China Coffee Industry Report 2024, jointly released by the World Federation of Chinese Catering Industry, show that although China's coffee exports hit a record low of 20,000 metric tons in 2023, imports grew by over



Nestle Coffee's booth at Bakery China 2024 in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

20 percent, reflecting surging domestic demand.

Coffee consumption in China has jumped 167 percent over the past decade, reaching 350,000 tons. The market has shifted from being dominated by instant coffee to a more diversified landscape, with freshly brewed coffee and retail coffee emerging as core segments.

Research institute Mintel Group forecasts that the retail value of instant coffee will reach 12.47 billion yuan (\$1.7 billion) in 2023, up 5 percent year-on-year, and expects it to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.3 percent to reach 16.9 billion yuan by 2028.

Despite intensifying competition, instant coffee remains relevant due to its convenience, though it now faces pressure from both on-premise and retail coffee.

Marta Zhang, senior research analyst at Mintel, said, "Proactive innovation and the ability to offer holistic value — ranging from taste and health benefits to emotional and social impact — will be key differentiators for brands."

Nestle continues to lead the instant coffee segment in China, according to Mintel, thanks to its wide product portfolio and strong brand equity.

While new entrants and on-premise brands are rapidly expanding their retail presence, Nestle's recent innovation push aims to stay ahead of emerging consumer expectations.

Other leading instant coffee drink brands include JDE Peet's, the Saturnbird Coffee, and Trung Nguyen Group Corp, according to Mintel.

On April 17, Nestle Coffee unveiled a major upgrade to its classic 1+2 formula. In response to growing health consciousness and diversified flavor preferences, the brand is introducing a coffee concentrate with a coconut flavor, blending a rich coffee taste with tropical refreshments.

The move aligns with findings from the 2024 monitoring report by iResearch, which identified coffee concentrate as the fastest-growing segment.

The food and drink company is also expanding its ready-to-drink coffee offerings with new flavors such as the osmanthus *longjing* latte and coconut latte, designed to appeal to consumers in outdoor and mobile settings.

The upgraded line includes sugar-free Americano, iced coconut Americano, and its signature Americano, catering to evolving tastes and consumption scenarios — from home and office use to on-the-go lifestyles.

As more Chinese consumers embrace coffee not only as a beverage but as an emotional experience and part of daily life, the company is betting that innovation, health-conscious offerings, and scenario-driven product design will fuel the next phase of its growth in China's dynamic coffee market.

TRAVEL

By EDITH MUTETHYA

in Nairobi, Kenya

edithmutethya@chinadaily.com.cn

Traditionally a major agricultural product for export, tea has increasingly taken on a new role in recent years for Kenya. From the historic tea estates of Kiambethu Farm, pioneering purple tea farm of Gatura Greens to scenic tea plantations of Kericho, this East African country offers tantalizing tea tourism, giving visitors a unique opportunity to understand what makes its brew special.

Kenyan tea has gained popularity across the globe due to its distinct flavor and aroma as well as its bright liquor color, making it a popular choice for tea drinkers and tea blends.

Tours to the farms, therefore, offer visitors an educational experience of understanding Kenyan tea, participating in tea picking, tasting the beverage as well as getting insights into local culture. They can also visit factories to learn about tea processing.

Oldest farm

Located 34 kilometers northwest of the capital Nairobi, on the edge of the Great Rift Valley, about an hour's drive, Kiambethu is the oldest tea farm in Kenya, providing visitors with a glimpse into the early days of tea cultivation in the country. It was established by Arnold Butler McDonnell in 1910.

McDonnell was the first person to grow, make and sell tea commercially in Kenya, marking the establishment of an industry that currently churns out the country's biggest export product and a major source of foreign exchange. Tea contributes 23 percent of total foreign exchange, according to the Tea Board of Kenya.

McDonnell sold his first tea harvest in 1926 to Mabroukie tea factory, marking the beginning of commercial tea production in Kenya. The factory was built by Brooke Bond Kenya in 1924, which played a key role in developing the tea industry in the country through establishing major tea factories and plantations.

In the 1970s, Brooke Bond Kenya expanded its activities to tea estates, factories and hotels and later changed its name to Unilever Tea Kenya.

When McDonnell died in 1970, his eldest daughter Evelyn Mitchell took over the management of the farm and introduced guided tours in the 1960s. When she passed away in 1998, her daughter Fiona Vernon followed in her footsteps and carried on with the guided tours to date.

Vernon said over the years, the farm has been downsized from its original 350 acres (142 hectares) through sale and inheritance, to 30 acres, of which two are devoted to tea and 12 are indigenous forest.

A tour of the farm starts at 11 am by having a cup of tea or coffee over which the history of the farm and the process of making tea is outlined.

The visitors then proceed to the tea farm where they are taken through how tea plants are nurtured, how tea is picked, grown, fertilized and pruned. They then come back to the house for another cup of tea or coffee and homemade cookies.

Depending on the weather and the size of the group, the visitors sit in the garden, where they get a description of how tea is processed at the factory.

After that session, visitors are taken for a short walk to the farm's indigenous forest by a Kenyan guide who identifies the plants and explains how they are traditionally used. The tourists can also spot colobus monkeys and a wide variety of birds and flowers.

They then return to the house to enjoy a pre-lunch drink on the verandah with sweeping views of the tea fields and the expanse of the Ngong Hills if the sky is clear. A four-course buffet lunch is then served to conclude the tour.

"We usually offer tours from Thursday to Sunday each week. Sometimes we get 50 visitors," Vernon said, adding that the tour fee is \$36 per adult covering tea talks, drinks and lunch, \$18 for children aged 12 years and under and free for five-year-olds and below.

She said December to March is the peak season, during which they are sometimes compelled to turn down requests because their online booking system takes a maximum of 40, a number they can comfortably accommodate per day.

Vernon said in addition to local visitors, they receive international tourists from the US, European countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany and France, China, and Japan.



Workers pluck hard leaves from tea plants. This process helps stimulate the growth of new shoots by encouraging dormant buds to develop. PHOTOS BY WANG YUXI / CHINA DAILY

Kenya's bush-to-brew tours

Visitors fuel a thriving tea tourism industry in the East African country



Above: A worker displays younger, more tender leaves that are preferred for tea production. **Below:** Fiona Vernon is currently managing Kiambethu Tea Farm, ensuring that its legacy continues to thrive.



Sprawling lush tea plantation in Limuru in Kenya's Kiambu County.



Vernon's home built by her grandfather Arnold Butler McDonnell lies within the farm.



We did a bit of research, went around to see what other Kenyans were doing on agri-tourism and then crafted our own tourism around our tea."

Cathryn Karanja,
granddaughter of a local
tea farmer

She said COVID-19 pandemic was their biggest challenge as the number of tourists reduced significantly, terming changing weather patterns as the other.

"Tea production is weather-oriented. If there is inadequate rainfall, the quality of tea is usually poor," Vernon said, adding that the advantage lies in the region's high altitude.

Gatura Greens

Located about 60 kilometers northwest of Nairobi on the slopes of the Aberdare mountains, a 70-minute drive, Gatura Greens is home to the first purple tea farm and a cherished tour that offers an authentic

experience, including tasting over 10 different types of tea.

Though agri-tourism started in 2020, the 60-hectare farm's history dates back to 1958, when Bedan Kinyanjui planted his first tea bush, becoming one of the first few black people in Kenya allowed to plant tea for commercial purposes then. In 2008, it became the first commercial purple tea farm in Kenya.

The name Gatura Greens was coined in 2020 when tourism was included, by Cathryn Karanja, Kinyanjui's granddaughter.

After years of tea farming, Karanja said the family felt a need to diversify and expand their offerings beyond just growing and selling tea.

That's when the idea of tea tourism was born.

"I studied in South Africa and used to like wine tours and so I pitched that idea to my family. We did a bit of research, went around to see what other Kenyans were doing on agri-tourism and then crafted our own tourism around our tea," Karanja said.

While many businesses were forced to close shop during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gatura Greens saw an opportunity to venture into tea tourism and indeed, business thrived.

"We had an open area and could arrange dining in the garden, so we were permitted to do the tours," she

said, adding that business picked up fast because people were desperate for options to get out of home.

She said Gatura Greens tourism is immersive, where visitors get hands-on experience by picking the tea themselves and processing it all the way until it's a finished product, which they keep as a souvenir. Visitors also get an opportunity to taste all types of tea made at the farm's cottage factory.

The tours start at 9:30 am with a breakfast treat of tea and scones, as the host takes them through the farm's history. The guests then head to the purple tea field, where they are guided through the art of tea picking.

This is followed by hands-on processing which involves roasting the delicate tea leaves, hand-rolling, drying, and finally packaging it. They also get an opportunity to taste all the available tea varieties.

The guests then go for a nature walk through a lush bamboo forest, leading them to a waterfall where they can take a refreshing swim, letting the cool waters wash over them as they bask in the natural beauty of the serene haven. The day is then crowned with a farm-fresh three-course meal.

For those who would like to spend the night, there is a farmhouse that offers overnight accommodation for 12 people and a camping ground, that lets the guests experience the gentle rustle of tea leaves as they sleep.

Karanja said plans are underway to increase camping facilities in the farm in response to requests by guests, as well as start hosting retreats. They also plan to expand product range like venturing into purple tea-made cosmetic products.

The tour price is \$32 for adults and \$15 for children. Residents on the other hand pay \$38 per person and \$19 for children. Non-residents pay \$45 per head while children pay \$25. Children under five years are not charged.

The ticket fee covers the tour, lunch and tea tasting at the farm. At the end of the tour, visitors can shop for any farm product that they have liked throughout their experience.

Karanja said per day they take a maximum of 30-40 people and a minimum of four depending on the season and the particular day.

"Our peak season is June, July, and August and non-rainy seasons for Kenyans. Many people visit over the weekends," she said, adding that they have been receiving a lot of company retreats.

Karanja said there is more growth potential for tea tourism in Kenya, urging farmers across the country to try and offer unique experiences in their farms. She also called on tour operators to include agri-tourism in their packages.

Scenic lush

Nestled in the heart of Rift Valley, 256 kilometers southwest of Nairobi, Kericho is home to some of the country's scenic lush and green tea plantations. The region is popularly referred to as "the tea capital of Kenya" due to its vast tea fields. It is also the largest producer of tea in Kenya.

Established at the inception of the tea industry in Kenya in the 1920s, Kericho tea plantation spans vast hectares of land.

Driving through the winding roads, the rolling green hills of the tea plantations create breathtaking picturesque landscapes.

The region offers tourists a thrilling adventure and tranquility amid nature as they also experience local culture.

There are also many factories in the region where they can visit to learn about tea processing.

Due to the vast tea fields as well as efforts to reduce labor costs and increase efficiency, mechanical tea harvesters are used in Kericho. Hence, visitors can also watch the interesting machine at work and compare it with the conventional way of picking tea by hand.

Kericho Tea Estate was the first tea plantation globally to become Rainforest Alliance Certified.

Kericho is a prime location for tea cultivation in the country due to its ideal climate characterized by warm and temperate conditions, consistent and abundant rainfall, as well as its deep alluvial soil. The region also enjoys a high altitude of 1,500-2,700 meters.

All these characteristics contribute to the high quality and unique taste of the tea produced in the region.

Lipton Tea Gardens and Browns Investments PLC, both United Kingdom-based multinationals, own the largest tea plantations in Kericho covering 14,100 hectares and 12,000 hectares respectively.

SPORTS

SOCCER

Bodo/Glimt revels in historic run to Europa semifinals



Bodo/Glimt's players celebrate during a penalty shootout against Lazio following their UEFA Europa League quarterfinal. AFP

PARIS — Bodo/Glimt's historic run to the semifinals of this season's Europa League has not happened by chance. It's a remarkable success story that has been years in the making.

On Thursday, the club from just north of the Arctic Circle will become the first Norwegian team to play in the semifinals of a major European competition when it takes on Tottenham Hotspur in the first leg of their last four tie.

It is a stunning achievement for a side from a town with a population of barely 50,000 and situated almost 1,200 kilometers, or 16 hours by road, north of Norway's capital Oslo.

What should be a frozen soccer backwater has been placed firmly on the map thanks to the performances of Kjetil Knutsen's team over the last half-dozen years.

On April 17, Bodo/Glimt — "glimt" means "flash" in Norwegian — pulled off its most stunning result yet, when it beat Lazio on penalties in Rome in the Europa League quarterfinal.

It won 2-0 at home in the first leg a week earlier, thanks to two goals by Ulrik Saltnes, albeit only after snow from a blizzard had been cleared off the pitch at its 8,200-capacity Aspmyra Stadion.

The team then weathered the storm on the pitch in Italy to progress in the shootout and set up the tie with Tottenham.

Spurs are an underperforming Premier League giant and were the ninth-richest club in the world last year, with revenue of 615 million euros (\$702 million) according to analysts Deloitte.

Bodo/Glimt, meanwhile, saw revenue reach 60 million euros last year, up from a budget of 4.2 million euros in 2017, the club's CEO Frode Thomassen told the website Calcio e Finanza.

"The club has gone from being a small second division team in Norway to probably having the most solid financial platform in the country in the last seven to eight years," he said.

In 2017 it was promoted to Norway's top tier, the Eliteserien, a competition which had been dominated for three decades by Rosenborg of Trondheim.

No stars, but stability

Bodo/Glimt was runner-up in 2019, before winning its first title in 2020. It has now won four of the

last five domestic championships.

That form has seen it become a regular in Europe under Knutsen, who took it to the quarterfinals of the Europa Conference League in 2022, notably beating Jose Mourinho's Roma 6-1 in a group game and eliminating Celtic.

It has had three failed attempts to go beyond the qualifying rounds of the Champions League, but there have been glamor ties against Arsenal, Ajax and Manchester United.

Now, reaching a semifinal means it has eclipsed Rosenborg, who got to the Champions League quarterfinals in 1997.

"I don't believe in miracles, I believe in our journey," said Knutsen after ousting Lazio.

Knutsen, 56, took over at the beginning of 2018, promoted from his role as assistant, so has been there throughout an astonishing seven years of success.

Star players in the current team include Danish forward Kasper Høgh and experienced midfielder Saltnes, who has spent his whole career at the club.

Others have come back, like Norwegian international winger Jens-Petter Hauge, who went to AC Milan in 2020 and won the Europa League with Eintracht Frankfurt in 2022, but returned home last year.

Midfielder Patrick Berg, whose father and uncles played for Bodo/Glimt, also came back after a spell at Lens in France in 2022.

It is not a team of stars, but it has enjoyed success by keeping its squad together, and keeping its coach.

"Our main focus is on performance, rather than player deals," Thomassen told Calcio e Finanza.

"This has been made possible thanks to the financial support from UEFA competitions, which have become crucial for the club's long-term growth."

This season's European run has already been worth about 20 million euros in prize money for a club which is currently planning to move into a new 10,000-seat stadium, the Arctic Arena, in 2027.

The future looks bright, and so does the present, with 3,000 Bodo/Glimt supporters set to back their team against Tottenham in London on Thursday.



Arsenal's Mikel Merino (bottom) is tackled by Paris Saint-Germain's Portuguese midfielder Joao Neves (right) as PSG's Brazilian defender Marquinhos (center) clears the ball during a UEFA Champions League semifinal first leg match in London on Tuesday. AFP

Arteta urges Arsenal to deliver 'special' fightback against PSG

Enrique, wary of Gunners threat, tells his charges 'nothing is in the bag' yet

LONDON — Mikel Arteta urged Arsenal to produce a "special" fightback against Paris Saint-Germain, after Ousmane Dembele fired the French side to a 1-0 win in the Champions League semifinal first leg on Tuesday.

Dembele struck in the fourth minute at the Emirates Stadium, and Arsenal was unable to haul itself level in a tense clash featuring several missed chances from both teams.

PSG wasted two golden opportunities to take firm control of the tie in the closing stages, as Goncalo Ramos hit the bar and Bradley Barcola shot wide from close range.

Arsenal also had its moments after a slow start, with PSG keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma making two superb saves to deny Gabriel Martinelli and Leandro Trossard.

In contrast to the previous two rounds, when Arsenal established substantial first leg leads en route to knocking out PSV Eindhoven and Real Madrid, the Gunners will have to do it the hard way this time.

They head to Paris for the second leg on May 7 knowing an epic performance is required to book a place in their first Champions League final since 2006.

Arteta, whose club has never won the Champions League, saw enough in the first leg to believe it is far from impossible for Arsenal to leave the Parc des Princes with a victory.

"We are at halftime, and my message is exactly the same as it was after we beat Real Madrid 3-0 in the first leg of the quarterfinal," he said.

"We have to go to Paris and win the game, and we are more than capable of doing it."

"If you want to win the Champions League final, you have to do something special, and we are going to have to do something special in Paris to be there. We still have a lot of chances to be in that final."

In the first half, Arsenal was in danger of becoming the latest English team to be blown away by PSG.

But, Arteta made an unspecified tactical switch that he said helped regain control against a PSG side that had already eliminated Liverpool and Aston Villa, as well as beaten Manchester City in the league phase.

'The margins are so small'

"We had one issue. We corrected it after 15 minutes and we turned the game around. There was something very specific with the way we were playing that we had to get right," he said.

"We had two one-on-ones with Donnarumma, and if they go in, it is a different story."

"But, he made the saves, and that's the difference in the Champions League. The margins are so small, and it didn't go our way."

PSG is also bidding to win Europe's elite club competition for the first time, and this was a significant step towards that target.

While the tie is far from over, Luis Enrique's team has the advantage, and showed enough quality in pos-

French champion pragmatic despite win

Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique hailed his "incredible" team after Ousmane Dembele's early goal gave his side a 1-0 first-leg away win against Arsenal, but insisted there would be no euphoria in their ranks ahead of next week's return fixture.

"I think we showed the mentality that we show in every match, and that mentality is a great pleasure for me to see as coach of Paris Saint-Germain," the Spaniard said.

Dembele's goal was all that separated the teams, although substitute Goncalo Ramos hit the bar late on, while Mikel Merino had an effort disallowed for offside at the other end early in the second half.

"I can't complain, because it was a game with a lot of strong emotions," Enrique said when asked if he regretted Ramos not converting his late opportunity.

"It is difficult to play in that atmos-

phere, which was incredible. I think the goal early in the game was important for our confidence, and I am happy, because you can win or lose a game, but the mentality and ambition that our team shows is incredible."

PSG now knows that a draw in Paris next week will be enough for it to advance to a second Champions League final in its history, a year after it lost to Borussia Dortmund in the final four.

"The players will not get carried away," insisted Enrique, who won the Champions League as coach of Barcelona in 2015.

"They know how difficult it is to win a game like this. We need to try to control our emotions, and play our game in front of our supporters; make the most of the strength they give us. It will be tight, but we will be ready."

AFP

session to suggest that it is capable of adding to its lead in Paris.

"There was an incredible atmosphere inside the stadium, it was deafening, but we got off to a wonderful start and the early goal gave us a boost," Enrique said. "The game was littered with chances. It could have been better, it could have been worse. We had 10 or 15 minutes when Arsenal could have snatched the game away, but it didn't happen."

As a long-time mentor of Arteta's, and a firm admirer of his team, Enrique has no intention of underestimating the north Londoners in

the second leg.

"It is mission accomplished for this evening, but our objective is to win the second leg at home," he said.

"With Arsenal, we cannot let our guard down or be complacent, because they can score quickly, and then we are back to square one."

"They are a team that, with a goal, can completely rewrite history in a second. Nothing is in the bag. We need to win when we are at home, because Arsenal now have nothing to lose."

AFP

BASKETBALL

After record-setting first round, Cavs believe they're just getting started

MIAMI — Kenny Atkinson didn't need a few months, or a few weeks, or even a few games, before figuring out the potential of the Cleveland Cavaliers.

He needed two practices.

Go back to training camp in Bradenton, Florida. The Cavaliers were in Day 2 there, and one of Atkinson's assistant coaches offered some early observations that have stuck with Atkinson for the seven months that have followed.

"He said: 'We're skilled, we're smart and we play really hard.' That was the immediate feedback," Atkinson, in his first year coaching the Cavaliers, recalled this week. "Those three things stood out. Your first impressions count, I guess."

Those impressions were spot on, too.

Skilled, smart and hard-playing sums up the Cavaliers quite nicely, it turns out. They're headed to the Eastern Conference semifinals against Indiana. The top-seeded Cavs simply dismantled the Miami Heat in a four-

game sweep in Round 1; Indiana ousted Milwaukee in five games, clinching the series with a 119-118 overtime win on Tuesday night.

Indiana went 3-1 against Cleveland this season, though two of those wins came in the final week of the season — and, to be fair, the Cavs, who had long clinched the East's No 1 seed, weren't exactly playing their postseason lineup.

"We have a challenge coming up," Indiana's Myles Turner said in the televised postgame interview after ousting the Bucks. "But, we're going to celebrate this one tonight."

The margin of victory in the Cavs-Heat series was 122 points, the most one-sided matchup in NBA playoff history. The margins of victory in Games 3 and 4, both on the road were 37 and 55 points, respectively.

"They're going to be on probably a long run right now," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said when Game 4 ended, tipping his cap to the Cavs. "They're well-coached. They have a group that fits and plays the right

way. So, we were humbled — but they had so much to do with a lot of how we looked."

And Cleveland has done this to teams all season. OK, maybe not to this extent; the 55-point win in Game 4 was Cleveland's largest this season, and the 37-point Game 3 win is now tied for its fourth-largest victory of the year.

But, this Cavs team is doing something that not even the LeBron James teams in Cleveland did. Cleveland's average margin of victory this season is now 10.5 points per game, on pace to be the best in franchise history. Only nine teams have made it through a regular season and the playoffs with such a margin.

Cleveland star Donovan Mitchell was sitting with Cavs rookie Jaylon Tyson during the Game 4 runaway. His message was simple: "This is your first playoff series, and this (stuff) isn't normal," he said.

"We have a bigger goal in mind," Mitchell said. "For us, it's understanding that this is special. We've

been doing special things all year. But, we didn't come here just to sweep in the first round and get to the second."

The Cavs are 68-18 so far this season, including playoffs. There are two teams in Cleveland history that won more games in a full season: The 2008-09 team went 76-20, and the 2015-16 team — the NBA champions that season — went 73-30.

They'll be favored in Round 2. They're riding high right now, too. A team that had winning streaks of 16, 15 and 12 games this season — the second team in NBA history to do that, joining the 2006-07 Dallas Mavericks — is rolling, just like it has been since pretty much the start of that Bradenton training camp.

"There's a fit and a feel. They know how to play," Atkinson said. "I don't think we're, like, super-athletic, but we've got a lot of guys who know how to play."

And how to win, too.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



The Cleveland Cavaliers bench reacts during the second half of Game 4 in their NBA first-round playoff series against the Miami Heat on Monday. AP

SPORTS

Tracking Success delivers the inside story for global sports fans, exploring what makes elite performers tick, and providing insight into their biggest and most intriguing moments on and off the field of play.

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DOWN HER OWN LANE

Flamboyant sprinter, Wu Yanni, has learned to take challenges in her impressive stride

By LI YINGXUE

liyixingxue@chinadaily.com.cn

A confident shoulder shake, a fingertip tap to the brow, and a point to the sky — hurdler Wu Yanni's signature pre-race ritual is as bold and unmistakable as she is. Some online critics say it's too much, but Wu remains unapologetically herself.

"Every athlete has their own way of getting into the zone. For me, this routine sparks my fighting spirit and reminds me to believe in myself," she said.

At 27, Wu's journey has been just like her trademark gesture — full of resilience, flair and fearless self-expression. Despite setbacks and criticism, she's stayed true to who she is, charging ahead with a combination of grit and grace.

From silver at the 2023 Chengdu FISU Games, to breaking an 11-year national record in the 60m hurdles at last month's World Athletics Indoor Championships in Nanjing, Wu continues to climb.

Her 8.01-second finish in the semifinal of the indoor championships not only etched her name into the record books, but also marked a turning point — one that crowned her Asia's best on March 27 and lifted her to 26th in the world at that time.

That same day, her image lit up the splash screen on Weibo.

"The version of me giving everything on the track — that's the one I love most," Wu said with a smile.

Highs and lows

The past two years have been anything but smooth. A false start disqualification at the Asian Games in Hangzhou cast a shadow over her 2023 season, and the disap-

pointment lingered. But, Wu didn't give in. Instead, she regrouped and recalibrated — a move that paid off with her national record in Nanjing.

"These past two years have had more lows than highs, and coming back from those lows hasn't been easy," Wu said.

"But, I'm grateful to everyone who supported me — fans, friends, and family!"

She credits the sport itself for shaping her. "Without track and field, no one would know who I am," Wu reflected. "This sport mirrors life. When you're down, you see how people treat you. And when you rise again, you see it just as clearly."

Her choice to race in full makeup has sparked online debate, but Wu shuts out the noise.

"You can't meet everyone's expectations. You can only do what you believe in," she said. "The road you walk, and the things you go through — those are your own unique experiences. To live a full life, you don't need to listen to the opinions of others."

At the indoor championships, she stepped onto the track dressed as the titular character from *Alita: Battle Angel*, a film that she said moved her deeply. "The story inspired me — perseverance, strength, and transformation. I wanted to bring that energy to the track and pass it on."

Finding her path

Born in 1997 in Fushun county, Zigong, Sichuan province, Wu was a lively child, often leading the neighborhood kids in games. Her mother enrolled her in piano and *guzheng* (a traditional Chinese zither) lessons, but her restless nature didn't suit quiet pursuits — she even broke the instruments. Dance became her first passion, but a local sports meet in 2009



FACTFILE

Name: Wu Yanni
Age: 27
Height: 175 cm
Birthplace: Zigong, Sichuan province
Event: Athletics (100m Hurdles/60m Hurdles)
Achievements: 2020-21 National Championships; Gold

2023 FISU World Universiade; Silver

2024 World Athletics Continental Tour, Osaka; Gold



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would change everything.

After winning the 100-meter title, she caught the eye of a coach who urged her to pursue track. Her family was hesitant, but Wu knew she had found her path.

Hurdling wasn't love at first sight, just for fun — it was her coach's passion that drew her in. Slowly, it became her own.

In 2014, the passing of her grandfather hit her hard, but also gave her new resolve. Just a year later, she claimed her first national title at the Youth Games. From there, the momentum never stopped — multiple national wins, Universiade silver, and a place at the Paris Olympics.

Wu's Olympic debut didn't unfold as she'd hoped. She didn't make the semifinals in Paris. In the aftermath, she spoke with honesty: "I was aiming to break the national record in Paris, but, because of my own issues, I didn't run the race I wanted. It was a big disappointment," she said. "Still, Paris gave me experience — and every race is a chance to learn."

She's already looking ahead. "I hope to make up for my performance in Paris at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028," Wu said.

While Wu was hard on herself, her mother, Xiong Yan, felt only pride. "To compete in the Olympics is already deeply meaningful for a professional athlete," said Xiong, who was once a track and field athlete herself. "She chased her dream on that purple track."

Pushing to the limits

Besides her mother, behind Wu is a close-knit support team that has been with her through every high and low.

Following the Asian Games, her coaches revamped her training plan ahead of the 2024 World Indoor Championships in the Britain — a shift that helped pave the way

for her Nanjing breakthrough.

"Sometimes I really don't want to train — I'm exhausted," Wu said. "But, the team keeps pushing me. You've got to break your personal best, you've got to break the record," they say. That energy motivates me. And I try to give that energy back, too."

Among her closest collaborators is her fitness coach Lo Wing-ye, who began working with Wu in April 2023. "I've never trained an athlete at this level before," said Lo, who was previously a coach with the Hong Kong team. "But we've developed a rhythm. Sometimes just one word is enough — we understand each other."

Lo's training plans have pushed Wu to her limit. "She sometimes collapses on the track after a session," Lo said. "But that's what it takes to break records."

That moment finally came in Nanjing. In the women's 60m hurdles semifinals, Wu clocked 8.01 seconds — just enough to break the national record set in 2014 — but she wants more.

She cried after the race, but remained unsatisfied. "I trained so hard this winter — worked on my starts, my strength, my speed. Honestly, this still isn't the result I'm after," she said. "I want to go sub-eight seconds. That's my real goal."

With the National Games on the horizon, Wu's target is clear. "My biggest dream is still to perform on the international stage — make the top eight at the Olympics. But, the National Games gold — I lost it. I need to get it back," she said.

And she'll be running with a signature look — her short-cropped hair. "People say I look 10 years younger with it," she laughed. "This 'battle angel' look is staying. I hope everyone cheers me on when they see me at the National Games."