



### Aiming high

Guizhou alpinist scales Qomolangma, shatters stereotype **HOLIDAY PEOPLE, PAGE 5**



### 'Active aging'

International athletes roll back the years in 'Grannies World Cup' **HOLIDAY SPORTS, PAGE 11**

# CHINA DAILY

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Chinese and international tourists leave the Palace Museum in Beijing on Thursday, the first day of the May Day holiday period. The museum experienced a peak in tourist numbers on Thursday, which was also International Workers' Day. **WANG XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY**

## Foreign tourists helping boost holiday travel surge

By **LUO WANGSHU**  
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China's international passenger transportation sector is expected to reach a new high during the ongoing May Day holiday, driven by steady policy support and surging travel demand, according to government and airport officials.

"During the May Day holiday, both passenger traffic and flight volume are expected to hit their highest levels since the start of the second quarter," Shang Kejia, deputy director of the Civil Aviation Administration of China's Department of Transport, said ahead of the May Day holiday, which began on Thursday and runs through Monday.

Shang noted that destinations such as Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia remain popular among outbound travelers, while inbound tourism is also picking up momentum.

As policies on visa facilitation, transit entry and instant tax refund services continue to improve, the number of foreign visitors to China is expected to grow further, encouraging more international airlines to expand flight operations, she said.

Nationwide, the civil aviation sec-

tor is expected to handle approximately 10.75 million passenger trips during the five-day holiday, averaging 2.15 million trips per day — a year-on-year increase of 8 percent and a record high for the period.

Xu Qing, director of the CAAC's transportation department, said efforts are being made to increase international passenger flights and improve travel convenience for foreign visitors.

According to Xu, Chinese and foreign airlines operated a total of 6,532 scheduled international passenger flights last week, serving 78 countries worldwide.

Airports have also seen a significant uptick in international traffic. As of April 25, Beijing Capital International Airport had recorded more than 5 million international passenger trips this year, representing a 19 percent year-on-year increase, according to Du Tao, an official from the airport's operation control center.

"The boost in traffic comes as the country continues to roll out favorable measures to facilitate easier international travel, including streamlined visa policies and increased flight connectivity," Du said.

He also noted that the surge is

bolstered by the May Day holiday, traditionally one of China's busiest travel periods, with more travelers taking advantage of expanded flight options and improved global access.

Guo Hongfei, a supervisor at the airport's ground service department, said: "To improve the passengers' experience, luggage claim announcements are now provided in several languages, including French, Japanese and Russian."

Beijing Daxing International Airport is also enhancing its multilingual service capabilities. In collaboration with local universities, inquiry counters are now equipped with real-time translation devices and on-site interpretation support in eight languages, including English, French, German and Japanese.

At the airport, foreign travelers can enjoy improved services in payment, communication, transportation, baggage handling, tourism and consultation. All commercial outlets at the airport accept domestic as well as international bank cards, while currency exchange services are available throughout the terminal.

The number of inbound travelers is expected to increase during the holiday, which is supported by

data from tourism agency Trip.com Group.

The group noted that international interest in China has been fueled in part by popular social media content. A recent travel video by US influencer Darren Jason Watkins Jr, better known as IShowSpeed, who has more than 39 million followers, has garnered significant attention online.

According to Trip.com, searches for hotels on the Chinese mainland have surged 200 percent, while inbound tourism bookings increased 173 percent as of mid-April. Major destinations include Shanghai and Beijing, as well as Guangzhou, Guangdong province, with visitors primarily coming from South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Russia.

Shanghai in particular saw a notable rebound in inbound tourism in the first quarter of this year. The city welcomed more than 1.74 million inbound visits from January to March, an increase of 37.1 percent year-on-year. Of these, foreign tourists accounted for nearly 1.26 million, marking a 61.9 percent rise, according to the Shanghai Administration of Culture and Tourism.

Cheng Si contributed to this story.

## Resilience of export firms bearing fruit

Chinese companies tap new products, business models amid trade headwinds

By **ZHONG NAN**  
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Chinese exporters are accelerating digital upgrades, advancing green development and expanding connections with European and emerging markets to offset the impact of the United States' tariff hikes, with transformation efforts already yielding tangible results.

As the US continues to wield tariffs in ways that disrupt the established international trade order, government officials and manufacturers said that China's foreign trade sector remains resilient and well-positioned to navigate external challenges.

Driven by shifting global market dynamics, a surge of new products, business models and trade formats is taking shape in China.

Xiao Lu, deputy director of the department of foreign trade at the

Ministry of Commerce, said that Chinese manufacturers are tapping into the country's comprehensive industrial system and strong supply chain ecosystem to more effectively integrate resources.

"They are pursuing quality for survival and leveraging innovation to tap into more emerging markets, services for foundation-building and branding for improved profitability," said Xiao, who emphasized that the fundamentals supporting the long-term, stable growth of China's foreign trade remain unchanged.

One such company is Zhejiang Minglei Tools Industry Co, an electric tools manufacturer based in Ningbo, Zhejiang province. It saw its export value rise 15 percent year-on-year to 24 million yuan (\$3.3 million) in the first quarter of 2025, according to Ningbo Customs data.

See **Exports**, page 2



A foreign purchaser experiences a go-kart at the 137th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Thursday. **CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE**

## DESTINATION SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Niche market caters to those who prioritize their well-being rather than pursuing conventional tourism

By **YANG FEIYUE**  
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Whenever Qin Shan feels like recharging her batteries after getting tired of the frenzied pace of urban life, she opts for retreats that blend travel with immersive learning experiences.

These retreats, often held in serene locations like Dali and Lijiang in Southwest China's Yunnan province, serve as a unique form of study tourism, combining self-discovery workshops with the refreshing effects of travel.

"I usually take such trips twice a year, and they are the best of both worlds," says the Beijing resident, who is in her 30s.

Unlike conventional tourism, these experiences have enabled her to focus on introspective development through structured coaching sessions that cover self-reflection and experiential learning.

"I have got to take things in perspective — revisiting my personal

values, life vision and current challenges," says Qin, who is a psychological consultant.

She takes a special shine to activities that are designed to foster the mind-body connection, often leveraging the natural surroundings for deeper engagement.

"Escaping urban routines by visiting scenic environments helps me step away from daily stress activators and get my second wind while working through professional hurdles, particularly as I am also an entrepreneur," she explains.

In addition to interactions with professional coaches, Qin says a key draw is the like-minded community.

"Participants are typically open, curious individuals who have enriched the experience with their diverse ideas and offered me inspiration," she notes, adding that group discussions have often led to "energy shifts", leaving her motivated long after the trip ends.

See **Self-improvement**, page 3

## US business community alarmed by tariff impacts

By **YANG RAN**  
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The United States business community has raised the alarm over the Trump administration's ongoing tariff war with China, warning that such policies could devastate more than \$140 billion worth of US exports to China and jeopardize hundreds of thousands of jobs, ultimately undermining US global competitiveness.

The US-China Business Council released its "US Exports to China 2025" report on Tuesday, saying that in 2024, the total value of US goods exports to China was approximately \$140.7 billion, while US services exports to China in 2023 amounted to \$46.3 billion.

According to the report, China remained the third-largest market for US goods exports in 2024 and the sixth-largest market for US services exports in 2023. In addition, China ranks third among all countries in terms of American jobs supported by US exports, with over 860,000 jobs supported by goods and services exports to China.

Despite these significant figures, the report highlights troubling

### \$140.7 billion

The total value of US goods exported to China in 2024

trends and potential future impacts of the tariff war. It notes a 2.8 percent contraction in US goods exports to China in 2024, even as global exports saw slight growth. This data does not reflect the US and Chinese tariff increases enacted in 2025, which are expected to further reduce US exports if they remain in place. The report warns that these trade barriers and escalating tariffs threaten to disrupt years of steady growth in US exports to China.

Since April 12, China has raised additional tariffs on products imported from the US to 125 percent, following the US' consecutive increases in the tariff rate on Chinese goods, which now stands at 145 percent.

The decline in US exports to China is further evidence that US businesses, farmers, ranchers, workers and consumers are reeling from the ongoing trade war between the US and China, said Sean Stein, presi-

dent of the US-China Business Council, a nonpartisan, nonprofit association comprising more than 270 US companies that conduct business in China.

"If these tariffs remain in place, trade between the two countries will fall precipitously, sacrificing billions of dollars of exports and hundreds of thousands of American jobs, potentially destabilizing the US economy, and significantly weakening America's global competitiveness," he said in a news release on the council's website.

Experts pointed out that continued high tariffs would cause US exports to China to plummet, negatively affecting various US industries and related workers.

Luo Zhenxing, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies, said that the current prohibitive tariff levels would have multiple impacts on US businesses.

"The direct impact is a sharp decline in US exports to China," he said. "Moreover, much of US-China trade involves intermediate goods. Chinese retaliatory tariffs increase the production costs for related

American manufacturers, affecting their global exports."

Luo further warned that losing the Chinese market would deprive US companies of economies of scale, leading to higher operating costs and hindering long-term development.

Sun Chenghao, head of the US-European Union program at Tsinghua University's Center for International Security and Strategy, said that export revenue is crucial for US companies' research and development funding.

"Losing the Chinese market will reduce revenue, likely leading to cuts in R&D and hindering new product and technology development, causing a long-term competitive disadvantage," Sun said.

"Moreover, as American goods are priced out of the Chinese market, competitors from Europe, Japan, South Korea and emerging economies will fill the void, gaining market share and becoming stronger globally, further undermining the global competitiveness of US companies," Sun added.

US agriculture will be among the industries hit the hardest, experts said.

Newstand prices:  
US \$1 Canada C\$1  
UK 1.5 EU 1.6  
Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling  
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120  
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat;  
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

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## NATION

## Meeting Xi encourages expat to work harder

By ZHOU WENTING and WU WANZHEN in Shanghai

A French entrepreneur was the only foreign professional to meet with President Xi Jinping in Shanghai on Tuesday, during the leader's tour of an incubator for artificial intelligence startups.

Hanza Boukili, 34, a math teacher at Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Paris Elite Institute of Technology who also runs his own AI startup, was among the researchers who met Xi during his visit to the Shanghai Foundation Model Innovation Center.

The Frenchman said meeting with the Chinese president has motivated him more than ever to succeed in his work.

"During the communication, President Xi's final words were about us, the young people standing in front of him, hold the future in our hands. That made me feel a great sense of responsibility," Boukili said.

"It further strengthened my determination to continue working hard to contribute to society, the country and the world as a whole," said Boukili, who has worked at Shanghai Jiao Tong University since 2020 and started his own business last year at the AI incubator.

Shanghai Foundation Model Innovation Center was established in 2023 and is China's first specialized incubator for developing foundational models for AI.

Boukili's startup focuses on applying AI algorithms to energy conservation and emission reduction.

During his tour, Xi called on Shanghai to accelerate efforts to

build itself into a pacesetter for scientific and technological innovation, saying that the municipality should strive to be at the forefront of AI development and governance.

Boukili said it was a rare honor to be able to have direct communication with President Xi.

"I was bombarded with blessings from fellow teachers, colleagues, classmates and friends after they saw me on the news. Everybody expressed their happiness, pride and support for me," Boukili said.

He added that while his home country of France may have advantages in traditional technical aspects, when it comes to the current development of AI, Shanghai excels in terms of resources, manpower and talent.

"President Xi's words made me feel the responsibility we have, and made us more determined to continue to work harder to do our jobs better, and with more noticeable results," said Boukili.

He said Xi's trip made it clear to him directly how important the development of AI is to the country.

This importance is also reflected in a string of policies in Shanghai as well as nationally that help entrepreneurs more quickly implement their business projects and develop faster, Boukili said.

"Shanghai is a city with diversified economic development, which is excellent when carrying out entrepreneurial plans because it means there are always many target clients of different types," he said.

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## A taste of Tang



Performers in Tang Dynasty (618-907) attire put on a show at the China pavilion of the 2025 Foire de Paris in France on Wednesday. A Chinese culture exhibition is being held at the expo through May 11. U. YANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Strong fiscal, monetary policy support expected in pipeline

PMI drops below 50 mark in April as nation weathers ongoing challenges

By OUYANG SHIJIA and FAN FEIFEI

China's policymakers will likely deploy a stronger mix of fiscal and monetary policy measures to shore up domestic demand and cushion the impact of the volatile United States trade policy, economists said on Thursday, as recent indicators point to pressures from weak external demand.

Key areas of focus, they said, should include spurring consumption, accelerating infrastructure investment and stabilizing the property market, with potential moves such as raising the fiscal deficit ratio with more fiscal spending, additional issuance of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and providing targeted support for struggling enterprises.

Their comments came as data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Wednesday that China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector dipped from 50.5 in March to 49 in April, below the 50 mark that separates expansion from contraction.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said the reading was dragged down by the unwarranted tariff policy of the US and a seasonal lull following a busy March.

"With exports to the US likely to fall significantly in the short term,

domestic demand will increasingly become the main support for the manufacturing recovery," he said. "We expect China's manufacturing PMI to remain in contraction territory in May but possibly rebound to around 49.5 as pro-growth policies kick in."

Wang also flagged the rising likelihood of monetary easing. "Based on past trends, if the PMI remains in contraction for two consecutive months, the probability of a policy rate cut increases significantly. Given the current external environment, property woes and price trends, the second quarter is ripe for cuts in both the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates."

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said more work was needed to stabilize the economy. "To cope with these unprecedented challenges, China needs to take bolder moves to clean up the mess in the property sector, support consumption in a more sustainable way by reforming the pension system and fix the fiscal system to better protect business owners," Lu said.

Despite mounting pressures, the NBS data showed that the gauge for manufacturers' expectations for production and operation stood at 52.1 in April, suggesting strong optimism and confidence.

Chen Han, general manager of Shantou Qilong Toys Co, an export-

oriented toy manufacturing enterprise based in Guangdong province, expressed confidence in the prospects of the Chinese economy and toy manufacturing industry, saying the rapidly evolving artificial intelligence will significantly bolster technological innovation, product iteration and industrial upgrading in the homegrown toy sector. "We will design more customized products in accordance with the preference of local consumers," he added.

The toy maker is expanding sales channels to reach more domestic consumers by leveraging e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba's business-to-business online trading site 1688.

Chen noted that his company's production was relatively stable in March, but the number of orders in April declined. He expects more supportive measures for small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in foreign trade, including fiscal assistance, tax and fee reductions to ease their burdens.

Wang Qing, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Finance and Banking, said it is advisable for policymakers to "fully leverage more proactive fiscal policies," suggesting an additional issuance of 2 trillion yuan (\$275 billion) to 3 trillion yuan in special treasury bonds this year.

To boost consumption, he proposed both short-term and medium- to long-term moves, including issuing consumption vouchers, supporting private enterprise develop-

ment, optimizing income distribution and using State-owned asset returns to support consumer spending. "Efforts should also be made to stabilize the property, stock and foreign exchange markets, and provide targeted support for foreign trade enterprises," Wang said.

A recent report from DBS Bank showed that although China faces challenges including property distress and great power rivalry, there is the wherewithal to deal with them, ranging from a generally high level of trust toward institutions to sufficient financial buffers.

Ji Mo, chief China economist at DBS Bank (Hong Kong), said: "When the tariff policy becomes clearer — especially toward the end of the second quarter — the Chinese government is expected to roll out a series of measures that will go beyond monetary policy, with a particular focus on fiscal policy and targeted support for specific industries."

"If the economy experiences significant downward pressure, we may once again see strong policy backing for traditional pillar sectors such as real estate and infrastructure, particularly in the latter half of the year, around the end of the third quarter or the beginning of the fourth," she added. "The government's resolve to keep the annual GDP growth rate around 5 percent is very strong."

Liu Zhihua contributed to this story.

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## Puppy power



A robot dog carries supplies up stairs at Laojun Mountain scenic area in Luoyang, Henan province, on Wednesday. Equipped with advanced artificial intelligence algorithms and sensors, the robot can carry a load of up to 120 kilograms while at a standstill and a load of 40 to 60 kg while on the move. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Exports: Canton Fair helps build trade links

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During the first phase of the 137th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, in mid-April in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, the company prominently displayed several newly designed, lightweight power tools tailored for European customers, and it established deeper cooperation intentions with clients from Central Asia and South America.

"Faced with mounting external pressures, we made a fresh attempt to expand into the European home appliance market this year," said Liu Hui, Zhejiang Mingle's sales director. "In response to rising labor costs and the increasing demand for household power tools in Europe, we have developed new models featuring external battery cells, offering a lightweight design that also meets the European Union's latest environmental regulations."

Propelled by China's soaring trade value with emerging markets, Agco (Changzhou) Agricultural Machinery Co, a tractor and generator manufacturer in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, recorded exports to South Africa totaling 14.74 million yuan between January and March, up 212.1 percent year-on-year, according to Nanjing Customs.

"Rising demand for agricultural

machinery in emerging markets is driving strong sales of our fuel-efficient equipment and digital solutions, particularly in Brazil, Egypt and Indonesia," said Zhang Yaqing, the company's head of logistics.

Highlighting that China's expanding network of trade partners is becoming a new driver of export growth, Mei Xinyu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said a more diversified market landscape is taking shape at a faster pace.

That sentiment is in line with the latest data. China's trade with countries such as Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom saw robust growth in the first quarter, while its trade with economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative grew 2.2 percent year-on-year to 5.26 trillion yuan, accounting for over 51 percent of the total, data from the General Administration of Customs shows.

To further support manufacturers in exploring diversified markets and mitigating the impact of unilateralism, the China Foreign Trade Center, the organizer of the Canton Fair, announced on Thursday that the ongoing 137th Canton Fair will offer a 50 percent reduction in booth fees for exhibitors in the export section. The discounted amount will be refunded through the original payment channels.

## Chinese investors race to buy gold amid uncertainties

By LIU YUKUN

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With global gold prices hitting historic highs 20 times in the first quarter, China's investment demand for the precious metal has surged, positioning the country as a pivotal force driving global gold investment growth, said the World Gold Council on Wednesday.

As of Thursday, the price of gold was around 765 yuan (\$105) per gram.

Ray Jia, research head of the council's China arm, attributed the soaring investment demand to the record-shattering gold price rally, escalating trade tensions and the underperformance of other assets. Expected currency depreciation also drove demand for gold as a safe haven, he said.

"We expect gold investment demand to stay robust in the second quarter as trade tensions, worries about global economic growth and expectations of central bank rate cuts persist, further bolstering its allure for investors, Jia said. "Looking ahead, gold prices are poised to

remain a key driver of gold investment. Should the upward momentum continue, a rise in gold prices could attract more buyers, with any short-term corrections potentially viewed as buying opportunities."

According to the council's data, inflows of gold exchange-traded funds in the Chinese market hit a record high in the first quarter, at around 16.7 billion yuan, equivalent to 23 metric tons of physical gold.

The soaring prices and unprecedented inflows have propelled both the total assets under management and total holdings of gold exchange-traded funds to break historical records, reaching highs of 101 billion yuan and 138 tons, respectively.

Another major part of gold investment — gold bars and coins — also saw surging demand in China in the first quarter to stand at 124 tons, a growth of 12 percent year-on-year and 48 percent quarter-on-quarter — its second strongest quarter on record.

The World Gold Council said this performance was particularly impressive given the year-on-year



We expect gold investment demand to stay robust in the second quarter."

Ray Jia, research head of the World Gold Council's China branch

growth is built on an already-strong Q1 performance in 2024. In volume terms, the council said China was by far the largest contributor to the global year-on-year rise, accounting for 38 percent of total first-quarter bar and coin investment.

As investor attention was drawn toward pure gold investment products, gold jewelry demand saw a sharp decline in China. The council said the demand of 125 tons marked a five-year low for the first quarter — traditionally the seasonal high point for China's gold jewelry market — 19 percent below the 10-year quarterly average. It said

demand in value terms was more resilient, down just 6 percent year-on-year at \$12 billion.

"An increasing number of consumers in China preferred lighter weight, more affordable items," said Wang Lixin, regional CEO of the China branch of the World Gold Council, adding a reason might be given for the soaring gold prices, customers are reluctant to spend more on craftsmanship costs for their accessories.

Liu Yan, vice-president of Yuyuan Jewelry and Fashion Group, the parent company of renowned gold brand Lao Miao, said high gold prices have led some consumers either to delay purchases until there is a price pullback or choose lower-weight gold jewelry.

Deng Ronghua, general manager of Chow Tai King Jewelry, said: "In the past, sales were primarily driven by larger gold jewelry items, whereas currently, lighter products are outperforming, with customers typically spending between 2,000 and 3,000 yuan on average. Moreover, businesses engaged in gold recycling have achieved favorable outcomes."

# COVER



**Above:** A tutor demonstrates wirework to students at the Sino-Foreign Enamel Gallery in Beijing. **Right:** Adults join a class on enamel works from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) at the gallery. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From page 1

Qin's preference has been part of a growing trend among urban professionals seeking purpose-driven trips that offer more than just sightseeing.

Those adults often select destinations and programs aligned with specific topics they'd like to explore.

Although such learning and travel experience involves higher costs, Qin has viewed them as investments in her well-being and professional development.

Hu Juehong has developed a niche study tourism market catering to those who prioritize self-improvement over conventional tourism. She left her corporate training role at an auto company in 2019.

Hu first established the Juezhi Academy in Ningbo, East China's Zhejiang province. The facility began as a traditional coaching firm for auto executives.

Yet, client feedback revealed a dilemma.

"Employees would joke, 'Why drag us to military-style team-building on weekends when we're already exhausted?'" she recalls.

This sparked her pivot.

Partnering with Singapore-based EQ World that delivers Enneagram (examining core beliefs) and emotional intelligence programs, she designed retreats where managers could punch stress away in wheat-field boxing sessions, realign their minds through sound baths with Tibetan bowls, and debate AI strategy by day before unwinding in ancient-looking lantern-lit alleys by night.

As workplace stress after the COVID-19 pandemic mounted, her arrangement evolved into something of "healing study tourism," which has been popular among overworked professionals.

"They have quite enjoyed our curated blend of skill-building, emotional release, and cultural immersion designed to combat burnout," Hu says.

## Self-improvement: The road to personal growth



**Left:** Hu Juehong's Juezhi Academy has received rising number of adults who seek Enneagram and emotional intelligence experiences. **Right:** Wirework and mineral pigment filling are highlights of enamel learning at the Sino-Foreign Enamel Gallery in Beijing.

Since 2023, enrollments to her program have surged 300 percent, with auto and tech firms like Geely allocating budgets once reserved for hard-skills training to these hybrid escapes, she notes.

"It's about hitting pause," Hu explains.

"Urban professionals don't just need vacations, they need journeys that rebuild their capacity to think and lead."

Hu owes the success of her busi-

ness to responding to specific workplace anxieties — the relentless rat race and the isolation of entrepreneurship.

Even some local authorities now tap her for public initiatives, like the Ningbo human resources and social securities bureau offering her aromatherapy techniques to strained office workers.

The market's demand has Hu believing that her business is more than a post-pandemic fad.

She is now preparing to expand beyond Zhejiang, as her clients have given her positive feedback.

"It's my understanding that they now view travel not as escape, but as intentional space to heal, grow, and return stronger," she says.

In January, the State Council, China's Cabinet, released a list of measures to foster new growth points in the culture and tourism sectors, and boost related consumption. It has given the sec-

tor a shot in the arm.

Gao Lili, vice-curator of the Sino-Foreign Enamel Gallery in Beijing, says the gallery is planning to expand its efforts in promoting online teaching to impart the charm of the art form.

Since 2016, the gallery has served as more than a museum that offers a close look at the delicate enamel works and transforms into a vibrant platform for the public to pick up skills behind enamel art.

A hallmark of the gallery is its immersive learning programs, which range from introductory experiences to long-term artisanal training. These include both high-temperature and low-temperature cloisonne techniques, allowing participants to explore the complete process, from wire setting to enameling, firing and polishing.

"We have programs where participants can go through the full crafting process of cloisonne," Gao says.

"Some of our standout programs include a buy-back model — if a student creates an exceptional piece, we purchase it," she adds.

Not limited to single sessions, the gallery offers residency-style experiences where learners can stay at the gallery's workshop for extended periods.

"Some people spend a week, or a month, here to complete more intricate pieces," she observes.

Early workshops catered primarily to children and student groups, particularly those traveling to Beijing. Adults accounted for less than 10 percent of participants at the time. But things have shifted.

"Now, about 30-40 percent of our offline learners are adults, and online, it's higher — up to 50-60 percent," Gao says.

The gallery's adult learners are a diverse and passionate group. Many are designers, educators, traditional culture enthusiasts, or professionals seeking to expand their skills, she points out.

The driving factors for adult participation vary.

Some are drawn by a deepening appreciation for intangible cultural heritage, while others look for stress relief or creative inspiration, she explains.

"Many adults find the process therapeutic," Gao says. "There's a sense of decompression through hands-on work. Some discover new ideas to apply in their professional lives."

To date, the gallery has offered customized courses for children and adults.

"Children's workshops are primarily experience-based: We have to balance hands-on learning with safety," says Gao.

"Adults, however, get more structured, detailed processes, and elements of design and customization."

She emphasizes the importance of personalization in adult programs, noting that frequent participants crave deeper, more engaging content. "For adult learners, we consider their professions or specific interests and adjust course content accordingly."

Speaking about the biggest pull for the students, Gao says it's "the amazing transformation during firing."

"Before firing at 850 C, the colors are dull and grainy, but afterwards, they turn into smooth, glassy finishes," Gao explains with enthusiasm.

"It's like ceramics — what goes into the kiln is uncertain, and what comes out can be stunning or flawed. But the surprise is what makes it magical," she says.

## Village offers a playful way to learn about nature

By YANG FEIYUE

Kindergarten students ran wild with polychromatic kites in the vast paddy fields in Changqin village, in Jiaxing city, East China's Zhejiang province, in mid-April.

It was a school day, but the children were able to go out of the classroom to have a special learning experience in the open air.

One of them, six-year-old Xiao Rui, exuberantly introduces to his peers and teachers his handmade kite, on which he has painted a racing car zooming through a little forest.

"It feels great that I made something that can fly in the sky," Rui says with pride.

Right after the kite session, he and his classmates went on to explore what the countryside has to offer, such as sketching before the paddy field and making rice milk coffee in the village.

They are among a rising number of students who have sought experiences in the Yuliwendao program initiated by Xiangli Maik, a company focusing on integrating rural culture with travel.

"We've seen more than 10,000 participants every year," says Jiang Yefei, co-founder and general manager of the company, which has spearheaded rural study tourism initiatives since 2023.

The Yuliwendao program reconnects urban visitors, especially fami-



**Left:** An instructor helps students make kites at a rural study tourism facility in Changqin village, Zhejiang province in April. **Right:** Children showcase the finished kites amidst the farmland before flying them in Changqin. PHOTOS BY YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY



lies, with agrarian traditions via hands-on experiences like rice cake crafting, rice milk coffee workshops, and mud-fishing in paddy fields. "Our philosophy is from knowledge to nourishment — learning through doing," explains Jiang, noting how activities subtly embed lessons about crop cycles and cultural, social, and economic practices related to the production and consumption of food.

When Jiang's team first surveyed Changqin village, they found vacant houses and minimal infrastructure. Through government collaboration, they transformed derelict spaces

into immersive learning environments, including a re-purposed pigsty being turned into a ceramics studio, while idle farmland now hosts more than 10 study programs.

Their approach prioritizes light-touch education, avoiding classroom-style lectures in favor of kinetic learning.

"For instance, children grind rice into paste while our tour guides explain grain cultivation, bridging urban-rural knowledge gaps," Jiang says.

Jiang left his corporate career in luxury hotels and real estate about three years ago to launch rural study

tourism programs in Jiaxing's countryside, when he found the appealing pastoral charm of villages and the disconnections of urban residents with farming culture.

"Many children growing up in the cities don't know exactly how rice is produced step by step," notes Jiang, adding that rural areas are ideal to fill the void.

The designed experiences by his team immediately got the attention of family travelers and schools from neighboring areas.

"They have shown a strong interest," Jiang says. "Some parents are not just satis-

fied with the knowledge their children picked up, but take pride in enjoying the works their children delivered, such as the rice milk coffee," he adds.

Additionally, a rising number of corporate clients have paid premium rates for his "forest bathing" and "rice paddy meditation" sessions, in collaboration with professionals.

"Adults need nature therapy as much as kids need education," Jiang notes.

To date, his business has seen 40 percent repeat visitation rate among the customers.

A kindergarten teacher, Wu Ruo-

yun based in Jiaxing, has witnessed firsthand the transformative power of the rising number of study tourism programs like Jiang's.

"In the classroom, we might be only able to show pictures of rice plants and talk about growth cycles," she explains.

Yet, watching her students wade into ankle-deep water to transplant seedlings and feel the mud between their toes, "that's when real understanding takes root," she says.

She notes remarkable changes in her students: The shy child who proudly displays mud-caked hands, the energetic boy who sits patiently weaving reeds into baskets, the entire class buzzing with questions after watching traditional fishing methods.

"These aren't just field trips," Wu emphasizes.

"They're bridges between urban and rural, young and old, modern education and traditional knowledge," she adds.

With the country's supportive rural revitalization and study tourism policies, Jiang is positive that more potential in his business is yet to be tapped.

So far, he plans to expand from day trips to 3-day camps, partnering with woodcraft masters and artists for integrated curricula.

"Study tourism isn't just for kids," he emphasizes.

"Adults crave reconnection with the nature and tradition too."

## WORLD

## Continent urged to promote free trade

By EDITH MUTETHYA  
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In light of the tariffs imposed by the United States and the global economic shifts, experts are of the view that Africa should focus on the African Continental Free Trade Area, or AfCFTA, to promote intra-African trade, reduce reliance on external markets, and foster economic growth and integration.

They are calling for aggressive implementation and operationalization of the agreement, noting it presents a unique opportunity for the continent to build resilience from within.

So far, 54 African countries have signed the agreement of AfCFTA, of which 48 have ratified.

Aly-Khan Satchu, the founder of Rich Management, an investment advisory firm based in Nairobi, said African countries should encourage internal African-generated impulses like AfCFTA for growth.

Satchu said Africa should encourage less on external impulses specifically the African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, a trade program that provides duty-free access to the US market for the qualifying sub-Saharan African countries, which is set to expire at the end of September with uncertainty over its renewal.

"African policymakers have laid out a road map but in the final analysis, it's about walking the path and not just talking the talk. There has been a tremendous amount of talk but very little walk for a while now," he said.

According to the World Economic Forum, rather than lamenting about rising tariffs and vanishing aid, this should be a wake-up call for Africa to shift gears — look inward with pride, deepen cross-border collaboration, and build the continent with bold intent.

"Given the continent's rich mineral resources and ample potential to contribute to the global economy, this is Africa's moment to wake up," the organization said in a recent statement.

## Unlocking potential

"African countries can unlock new economic opportunities across borders by lowering trade barriers among member states and improving regional infrastructure."

James Shikwati, director of Inter Region Economic Network, a Nairobi-based think tank, said African countries should accelerate efforts in addressing obstacles that hinder full implementation of the AfCFTA, including agreement on goods that should be traded within Africa either without or with low tariffs.

This is in addition to accelerating agreement on the rules of origin, which is aimed at preventing foreign countries from taking advantage of the AfCFTA to bring goods to a certain country and export them freely across the continent.

Another key action should be putting in place an effective industrialization strategy to ensure Africa adds value to its products for use across the continent.

Shikwati said the ongoing global economic shifts are pointing to the fact that Africa is the future market. This is because the continent is projected to have close to 4 billion people by 2100, of which nearly 60 percent will be below 20 years of age, meaning a vibrant youthful market.

He said Africa is the least industrialized and has over 60 percent of critical mineral resources required to drive electric vehicle battery manufacturing for instance.

"The AfCFTA is therefore well positioned as a platform for that expected future market," he said.

"But there has to be an intentional investment in industrialization, intentional guidelines on how the minerals resources will be exploited."



Bill Einreinhofer (third from left), a three-time Emmy award-winner, and his team: Ziheng Wang (second from left), Daniel Hernandez-Alonzo (center), Evgenia Vlasova (third from right) and Theresa Loong (second from right) pose for a photo during the premiere of *Your Serve or Mine*, a documentary about the history and legacy of Ping-Pong Diplomacy between China and the United States, at the New York Film Academy Theatre on Wednesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Documentary revisits ping-pong days of 1971

By MINLU ZHANG in New York  
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In April 1971, American ping-pong player Glenn Cowan boarded the wrong bus during the world championships in Nagoya, Japan. He missed the US team's bus and got on the next one, only to find himself on the Chinese team's bus.

At that time, US-China relations had been hostile for decades. On board the bus, Chinese player Zhuang Zedong saw the unfamiliar American, stepped forward and introduced himself.

"They didn't speak each other's languages, but somehow they were able to communicate because they tried. And their picture was taken and traveled around the world. They started a dialogue between America and China that continues today," film producer Bill Einreinhofer told China Daily.

Einreinhofer, a three-time Emmy Award-winning producer, documented the period of history in his new film *Your Serve or Mine*. The encounter led to what became known as Ping-Pong Diplomacy.

The group of nine US table tennis players embarked on a milestone journey to China, helping break the ice between Beijing and Washington and laying the groundwork for the eventual establishment of diplomatic relations.

Ping-Pong Diplomacy "was the starting point for a back-channel

way that two countries with profound differences could find some way to communicate, some way to talk outside of the glare of the media," Einreinhofer said.

The documentary is now streaming on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the US. The New York Film Academy (NYFA) hosted a premiere for the film on Wednesday.

"The underlying message of the film is that, in fact, even if we are coming from very different cultures and very different places, there are some similarities," Einreinhofer said.

Ping-Pong Diplomacy unfolded around the time that Einreinhofer was in high school. And he could remember very little about it. "People don't know about this anymore. They either forgot or they were too young. They never heard about it," he said. So Einreinhofer started researching and realized "how profound that moment in history was".

"At the same time, I wanted to take the lessons from the past and see if there was a way to apply them today. That's when I discovered how powerful it can be when college and university students from China and the US visit each other's countries.

"They can play a really important role in helping both sides better understand one another and in creating a line of communication that might not exist otherwise," Einreinhofer said.

The documentary also tells the

stories of present-day people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States, focusing on international students.

Roxanne Roman is one of the characters in the documentary. She was a Schwarzman Scholar at Tsinghua University in Beijing in 2018, and is a graduate of NYU Shanghai.

"It is really great to see that there's still a lot of effort and desire in working on people-to-people relations, especially in times of tense relations. So I think, in a really chaotic time, it really resonated with some of the messaging, still trying to find ways to talk, to relate and to be interested in different cultures and in each other," Roman told China Daily.

"Whether from the perspective of a scholar or as an individual, it's been a great opportunity for exchange and personal growth. During the production of the film, I also shared what my own life is like ... what it means to live in the US and how it's different. These differences can offer new insights for others in the future," Ziheng Wang, associate producer of *Your Serve or Mine*, told China Daily.

The documentary "highlights the power of people-to-people connections, the kind that continue today through exchanges of students, educators and professionals across all fields," Joy Zhu, executive vice-president for the China region at NYFA, said at the premiere.

## Germany's new govt gets nod from coalition partner

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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Germany's new coalition government and chancellor will be formally approved early next week after the final piece of the political jigsaw was put in place when the Social Democrats, or SPD, voted in favor of the coalition agreement.

The Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union of chancellor-elect Friedrich Merz, known as the CDU-CSU, won the largest share of the vote in February's parliamentary election, ahead of the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, and the SPD, which trailed in third place with its worst result in decades.

Merz's center-right party ignored the AfD as a potential coalition partner and instead talked with the SPD, which on Wednesday confirmed that in a vote of its members, nearly 85 percent had backed the agreement.

One of its terms will see SPD leader Lars Klingbeil appointed vice-chancellor and also finance minister. Voter dissatisfaction with the SPD's previous leader and former chancellor Olaf Scholz was one of the main reasons blamed for the poor electoral results, but Klingbeil has largely managed to escape blame and was prominent in the coalition negotiations.

Jens Suedekum, a professor of international economics at Dusseldorf's Heinrich Heine University, told the Financial Times newspaper that Klingbeil, whose priority

will be to draw up a budget for this year and next "likes to be seen as the adult in the room. The guy who makes sure that the federal government acts responsibly".

Klingbeil's political background is mainly in foreign affairs, rather than finance or economics. He is regarded as one of the more conservative members of a predominantly center-left party, and has recently spoken out against the United States tariff program and in support of boosting Germany's military capabilities.

The coalition agreement is due to be formally signed on Monday, with Merz's election as the 10th chancellor scheduled for Tuesday, and in the run-up to those events, more key cabinet appointments will be made, with the SPD having been given seven seats to fill, including the key ministries of defense and labor and social affairs.

The CDU-CSU has put forward migration hard-liner Alexander Dobrindt as interior minister, and Johann Wadepuhl, a strong supporter of Ukraine, as foreign minister.

On his personal website, Wadepuhl says "My main focus is on transatlantic relations and NATO, relations with China and Russia, as well as the Balkans and the Middle East", and in a recent interview with German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, when asked about Ukraine, he said, "I think it must be clear to everyone involved. ... that we stand by Ukraine's side."

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## Thousands protest across US against Trump policies

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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Tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets under the banner "May Day Strong" in Washington DC and cities across all 50 states on Thursday, marking May 1 with widespread protests against the second-term policies of US President Donald Trump's administration.

In the nation's capital, demonstrators gathered at Franklin Square near federal buildings and marched to Lafayette Square at the gate of the White House, chanting slogans like "We Are the Majority, They Are the Minority" and "No Justice, No Peace", and waving handmade signs. Messages ranged from "Protect Medicaid and Social Security" to calls for union protections and immigrant rights, reflecting the diverse coalition mobilized by the 50501 movement since its emergence from online forums earlier this year.

The number 50501, symbolizing "50 states, 50 protests, 1 movement", as a decentralized grassroots movement, largely organized the "National Day of Solidarity" protest across the US, mostly on May Day. The protest events, right after



I think that the greatest notion is [against having] more than 1 percent of the population control 99 percent of the wealth in America."

"DH", a teacher who attended the May Day protest in Washington DC on Thursday

the administration's first 100 days, merged traditional International Workers' Day themes with opposition to the second Trump administration's actions on immigration, federal agencies, social programs and perceived threats to democratic norms.

Many participants, like "DH", a protester from Northern Virginia who asked to be identified only by his initials, described their presence as a defense of fundamental rights. He emphasized concerns over "wealth inequality, protection of democracy and the people's right to

speak their voice, no matter what".

DH, who is a teacher, specifically connected the May Day protest to the historical struggle for labor rights. "Part of the Trump administration is very anti-labor union, and the unions are what gave us weekends and holidays and benefits, protected people from child labor, protected people from having an unsafe workplace," DH told China Daily. He said that the labor unions are one of the few remaining groups in society that can push back.

"I think that the greatest notion is [against having] more than 1 percent of the population control 99 percent of the wealth in America," he said. "It is nice to see that everybody's rallying around that."

Immigration policies were among the major focal points.

Michelle Petrie, a retail worker participating in the demonstrations, criticized "the cruel treatment of people who've come to live in this country from other countries". She carried a butterfly model, explaining its significance to China Daily.

"May Day is International Workers' Day. ... And the butterfly symbolizes, like, freedom," she said. "Also, this kind of butterfly is a

monarch that migrates. ... And so, it's a sign of those things: immigration, beauty, freedom."

Petrie said the economy is "in the toilet" and predicted growing public anger.

Betty Lee Hawks, a retired 35-year federal employee who worked at the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health, told China Daily that she was concerned about the functioning of the federal government itself and the impact of policy changes on specific communities. Hawks specifically criticized efforts to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

"What gets rolled under that umbrella is decades of work to deal with health disparities," she said, explaining that the work addressed differences "in the incidence of disease and how people access services".

Hawks noted that historically, research data, particularly from clinical trials, skewed heavily toward white males, leaving gaps in understanding health outcomes for women and racial and ethnic minorities.

Efforts since the 1990s to include these groups were vital, she said,

because "when you raise the health status of people who have historically been disadvantaged, you actually bring up everyone's health".

Hawks accused the administration of undermining this progress, citing staffing reductions at her former Office of Minority Health within HHS and actions impacting the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities at NIH. "That is not an executive power. It's really up to Congress," she said.

Hawks also disputed the administration's economic claims, including tariffs. She added that immigrant labor played a vital role in the US economy.

The 50501 movement, leveraging social media platforms like Reddit, Instagram and TikTok, coordinated more than 1,000 events nationwide, according to its website.

The information from its website also showed that while Washington served as a central hub, actions varied widely, from traditional marches in New York and Seattle to community service projects like food drives in Southern California, aimed at supporting those affected by recent wildfires and economic hardships, attributed partly to the administration's tariff policies.

## PEOPLE



**Left:** Huang Chunyan displays a photo of her and her daughter on top of Mount Qomolangma, the world's highest peak, also known as Mount Everest, on May 22, 2017. **Right:** Huang and other mountaineers head for the North Col camp as part of their training to summit Qomolangma on May 17, 2017. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



By LI PEIXUAN  
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For Huang Chunyan, 43, summing Qomolangma in 2017 was a statement against gender bias in her small hometown village. Now, she is leading eight teenagers, five of whom are female, back to Qomolangma — also known as Mount Everest in the West — to help blaze steep new trails where “impossible” was the previous mantra.

Born in an impoverished village in Guizhou province, Huang was repeatedly told that a woman's fate was to rely on men. She resolutely resisted this way of thinking, ever since she was young. Mocked for aspiring beyond traditional domestic roles and often asked “What can a girl achieve?”, she found solace in the nearby mountains.

“Wildflowers soaked in sunlight taught me resilience. In the mountains, I felt powerful, like anything was possible.”

Childhood escapes to forested mountains bred in her a defiant spirit that led to her making a vow to herself. “I will stand on the world's highest point to prove that women can achieve greatness just as men.”

Over the decades, Huang transformed herself from a village girl into a professional alpinist. After enduring over a decade of rigorous training, passing numerous tests and saving 530,000 yuan (\$73,000) to cover the costs of climbing Qomolangma, she earned a place in a 2017 Qomolangma expedition team of 21 members, including three women.

Yet the journey nearly ended before it began.

From the moment she entered the Qomolangma base camp, Huang began experiencing severe physical issues: her monthly women's issue arrived early, her eyes turned bloodshot and her body swelled. She even began coughing up blood, while her weight plummeted 10 kilograms. Despite always being healthy, Huang fell ill, and doctors couldn't find the cause.

Despite worsening symptoms, she refused to abandon the ascent. “If I fail this battle, I'll be condemned to a lifetime beneath others' scorn, never to rise again, because opportunities to summit Qomolangma are incredibly rare and costly. Missing this chance means I might never get another, especially as I grow older,” she said.



Guizhou mountaineer leads fellow female climbers up Qomolangma, world's highest peak

Huang and other mountaineers tread through a snow slope on Qomolangma. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Coping with her aching body through sheer willpower until the final moments, a miracle occurred at the last moment — her illness abruptly vanished, leaving her unexpectedly revitalized. Then, inching up the icy slope like a famished wolf as she wrote in a later book, she ascended to the 7,028-meter North Col, securing her qualification for the attempt to reach the peak of the world's highest mountain.

At the North Col camp, the guides had not prepared a tent for her because they didn't think she would manage to get there based on her physical condition. Therefore, they borrowed an old tent from another team for her to seek shelter in.

However, it was the old tent that made her realize that her previous prolonged suffering stemmed from an allergic reaction to her previous tent's materials. Her symptoms subsided considerably after taking



Huang Chunyan (left) and Chen Yan, a member of the Guizhou Climbing Team, display a Chinese national flag at the North Col camp of Mount Qomolangma, which is at an altitude of 7,028 meters. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

leave of the offending shelter.

From then on, her health steadily improved, and she continuously surpassed other climbers. Ultimately, she ascended to the “throne atop the world in high spirits, just as a queen,” and witnessed the sunrise from there, as written in her book.

Once Huang reached the summit, the media rushed to cover her achievement, and news spread across Guizhou. The provincial government sent officials from the sports bureau to the Qomolangma base camp to read a congratulatory letter to Huang along with another Guizhou team member who also successfully summited.

“I felt immense pride at that moment. After descending the mountain, the red carpets, flashlights, flowers, wine, applause and praise all felt like scenes from a movie, passing by me. It seemed both distant and close at the same time,” she recalled.

Today, Huang's family treats her

so well that she has no complaints — a marked shift from the skepticism of relatives who still cling to traditional gender norms. “Change will require generations of women rising up,” she said.

As news of her accomplishment hit the press, Huang was leading eight teenage climbers on another expedition to the world's highest summit. This time, the female members were no longer three out of 21, but made up five of eight hardy alpinists.

Huang said that although there may be a certain disparity in physical strength between women and men, she believes that many essential characteristics of mountaineering give women an advantage in the sport.

Climbing Qomolangma is more like a marathon than a sprint. It tests endurance and patience. It requires breaking down grand goals into practical steps, maintaining patience, progressing steadily, turning adversity into positivity and staying focused on the ultimate objective until it is reached, said Huang.

Unlike long-distance running, high-altitude climbing involves life-threatening risks. It requires strong willpower and a calm mind for critical decisions. Ed Viesturs, one of the most outstanding high-altitude mountaineers in the United States, once turned back when getting very close to the Qomolangma summit due to a danger that intuition and experience warned him about, as reported by Shanghai Observer.

Huang noted that women climbers she knew were usually calm, patient and humble, with relatively less desire to conquer or compete, yet deeply powerful. With their great inner strength, they steadily progress toward their goals.

“I was built to be a mountain, not a creek; rising to the high peaks with the small valleys at my feet,” reads part of an inspirational slogan at Huaping Girls High School in Lijiang, Yunnan province, founded by educator Zhang Guimei, which powerfully echoes the convictions Huang has upheld throughout her life.

“Society's biases are the real mountains we must climb,” Huang said, as her team prepared for their ascent. “But when you stand atop Qomolangma, you realize no barrier is insurmountable.”

As dawn broke over the Himalayas, Huang gazed at the horizon — a woman once told that she'd never rise so high, now lifting others to new heights.

## Setting ropes and mapping crevasses, brave summiteer keeps fellow valiants safe

By LI PEIXUAN

Each year before the climbing season, a specialized team organizes Qomolangma's ascent. They brave howling winds to anchor lifelines across jagged cliffs, forging a secure passage for climbers from the four corners of the world. They are the climbing route-fixers up and down Qomolangma — also known as Mount Everest in the West.

Dorji Tsering, deputy leader of the route-fixing team on the north face of Qomolangma, while pointing to the mist-shrouded peak above, said: “Below an altitude of 7,028 meters, the terrain undergoes drastic changes every year after the melting of snow and ice. Therefore, the route needs rerouting each year.”

The ropes used in fixing are mostly static ropes with a load capacity of over four metric tons. Although durable, they are replaced annually for safety, he added.

“Setting ropes and ladders on Qomolangma is both critical and dangerous,” said Dorji Tsering. “Using bottom-up systems, our team ascends ice walls and rock faces, replacing ropes while mapping crevasses and avalanche terrain — all to pave a safe route for guides and climbers through the

mountain's ever-shifting perils.”

All the team members have undergone rigorous training at a mountaineering school, where they learned to predict potential avalanches, hidden ice crevasses, rock-falls, icefalls and other skills.

“Experience is a more precise detector than instruments sometimes — hidden crevasses often masquerade as flat snow surfaces, with only subtle indentations hinting at the deadly traps beneath.”

The team members are selected from guides who excel in physical fitness and technical skills, capable of undertaking the crucial task of fixing routes, Dorji Tsering said.

While fixing routes, each member carries a 200-300 meter-long rope weighing 8-12 kilograms, along with specialized equipment like ice screws and ice axes. Their overall burdens tip the scales at about 25 kg as they advance from an altitude of 6,600 meters toward the summit at 8,848 meters.

In addition to experience, they employ various methods to facilitate the route-fixing process. The team starts from 7,028 meters and secures a route up to 7,790 meters. Supplies like oxygen tanks are then delivered to the 7,790-meter level along the route. The team rests and uses oxy-



**Left:** Dorji Tsering climbs along a rope on Mount Qomolangma. **Right:** Dorji Tsering sets up a climbing hook during a route-fixing mission on Mount Qomolangma. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

gen as needed. They then continue to 8,300 meters, with supplies delivered again later, advancing in cycles, Dorji Tsering explained.

For the route, Dorji Tsering said it must be fixed well as many climbers from China and abroad will follow it to the summit. The professionalism of China's fixing team is thus showcased to climbers worldwide.

As deputy leader, Dorji Tsering faces immense pressure and decision-making responsibilities

beyond basic route-fixing tasks.

“After noon, the weather on the mountain can change abruptly. Every decision impacts the fate of the entire team,” said Dorji Tsering.

In selecting team members, Dorji Tsering said integrity is the foremost criterion. High-altitude route-fixing relies on team cooperation. Any individual acting against commands or operating alone can jeopardize the entire team's safety. Therefore, candidates are usually observed for two

to three years in advance.

Dorji Tsering said one of his duties is to keep a close watch on every member of the team during the fixing process.

In the deadly zone with oxygen levels less than one-third that at street level in Beijing, he silently assesses their physical limitations through the speed of their eye focus, the extent of the purpling of their lips and the strength of their voices. If any signs of overexertion are

detected, emergency measures will be immediately taken.

Dorji Tsering, though he has reached the summit of Qomolangma 18 times, maintains a reverent attitude.

“Individual heroism is unacceptable, and the safety line must not be crossed.”

That being said, fixing the route is still a life-threatening job. To avoid worrying their families, team members often conceal their work schedule from them and finish their job without much fanfare, Dorji Tsering said, adding that in reports about climbing Qomolangma, the fixing team often goes unnoticed. When reaching the summit, they receive no accolades from the world and can only quietly feel proud of their accomplishments.

Dorji Tsering's journey with the fixing team began in 2006 when he ascended Qomolangma as a guide with a foreign team, and was impressed by the fixing team's professionalism. The team leader admired his physical capabilities and encouraged him to enhance his skills.

After around two years of preparation, he joined the team in 2007. Driven by passion and perseverance, he became the deputy leader in 2020.

## READ



**Left:** An aerial view of a panda-themed tourism train in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on March 28. The train provides dedicated services to senior passengers, with 68 percent aged 60 and above. FEI SITONG / XINHUA



**Top right:** Passengers wave goodbye from a carriage of a tourism train at Tianjin Railway Station on March 15. The 12-day journey passed through scenic spots in Jiangxi, Hunan, and Guangdong provinces. TONG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE **Bottom Right:** Passengers enjoy delicacies aboard a tourism train in Nyingchi, Xizang autonomous region, on March 26. Over 300 tourists from across the country embarked on a journey to explore the salt lakes, snow-capped mountains and grasslands of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. QI ZHIYUE / XINHUA

## Success for 'silver-haired' tourism trains

By LUO WANGSHU  
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As soon as she boarded the tourism train in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, in mid-April, 62-year-old Que Chunying felt as if she had stepped back in time and returned to her youth.

"It's been such a long time since I've heard so many old songs from my era. I've met so many peers onboard. We can talk about our lives, sing familiar songs together and I've made a lot of new friends," Que said, describing the six-day journey as "a wonderful time".

She was particularly fond of the onboard cultural performances which featured traditional Chinese folk songs, dances and calligraphy demonstrations. "When the medley of classic songs started, everyone got so excited," Que recalled. "By the end, it turned into a group chorus—even the shyest passengers started to hum along."

Que is among a growing number of seniors who enjoy taking "silver-haired" trains, where scenes like hers are becoming increasingly common.

### 'Silver-haired' trains

Designed for comfort, convenience and culture, these tourism trains cater specifically to elderly travelers. Known for their slower pace and curated routes, they are part of a growing trend among China's aging population.

The "silver-haired" tourism trains, linking multiple scenic sites along the route, are usually regular speed trains. They have gained tremendous popularity among seniors, thanks to features such as a relaxed travel pace, multiple scenic stops, safety, convenience and affordability.

Each train journey typically spans several days and includes stops at major tourist destinations. For example, the Beijing to Xinjiang route passes through Ningxia Hui autonomous region and Gansu province, connecting scenic spots such as Zhongwei, Zhangye, Jiayuguan and Turpan. The trains stop at those railway stations along the route.

Upon arrival at each station, buses are ready to take passengers directly to the tourist sites. Meals are arranged at local restaurants, and at night, travelers return to their assigned sleeping berths onboard—making the train both a mode of transportation and a mobile "home base". Travelers can also choose to stay in hotels, instead of on the train, in order to enjoy the local culture and atmosphere accordingly.

Prices vary depending on the route and amenities, ranging from less than 1,000 yuan (\$136.75) to more than 70,000 yuan per person. Different services are provided: premium—which usually costs more and provides a more luxurious and comfortable experience; and economy—which is designed for customers on a tighter budget. All types of trains, regardless of service chosen, are remodeled for elderly accessibility.

As of now, 18 regional railway companies across the country have launched 75 tourist train routes, covering nearly all parts of China's railway network and reaching most major tourist cities nationwide.

Compared to planes or buses, many elderly passengers say that trains offer a better fit for their slow-paced lifestyle and provide greater comfort. They also feel that these trains now fully meet their travel needs.

Take 82-year-old Xiong Qiwen, for example. He joined a six-day journey from Jiangxi province to Fujian province last month.

"The itinerary was well-paced. I had enough time at each stop to soak in the scenery and local culture," he said. His route included major popular tourist sites across Fujian, such as Fuzhou's Three Lanes and Seven Alleys and the UNESCO-listed Wuyi Mountain.

Granny He from Beijing is a loyal customer of the service.

In March, 63-year-old Granny He took the tourism train traveling from Beijing to the provinces of Jiangxi, Hunan, and Guangdong province over 12 days.

"This was my third time on a "silver-haired" train," she said. "We get off the train for one or two nights during the trip and stay at local hotels. I only need to pack basic toiletries and a few clothes since I can leave my heavy luggage on the train. This saves us elderly travelers a lot of effort ... I don't have to carry my heavy luggage everywhere, and I feel safe knowing medical staff are on board."

### Rise of the 'silver economy'

The train services are part of China's strategy to grow the "silver economy"—turning the challenges of an

In 2024, the number of tourist trains reached a record high of 1,860



By matching the flexible schedules of older travelers, we can use the trains more efficiently during off-peak times, better meet the travel needs of seniors and help boost both investment and consumption."

Kong Dejun, senior official at the Ministry of Commerce

aging society into economic opportunities.

China had more than 310 million people aged 60 and older at the end of last year, accounting for about 22 percent of the total population.

To meet rising demand from this sector, the government introduced a

dedicated action plan in February to expand "silver-haired" train services. The plan, jointly issued by nine ministries including the Ministry of Commerce and China State Railway Group, highlights the significance of these trains in stimulating consumption, supporting growth and improv-



Passengers play Chinese chess aboard a "silver-haired" tourism train departing from Nanchang in Jiangxi province and heading to Fuzhou in Fujian province on April 13. LI JIAHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing people's livelihoods.

"This is an initiative with a big impact," said Kong Dejun, director of the Department of Trade in Services and Commercial Services at the Ministry of Commerce.

He noted that such innovative tourism services have stimulated consumption.

With trains covering multiple destinations on one route and integrating food, lodging, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment along the way, they are particularly appealing to senior passengers, he added.

He also noted that the tourism industry can use such train services to encourage more people to travel, as some less-known sites along the route can be promoted to attract different types of tourists.

"Moreover, the increasing number of senior-friendly tourism trains can make better use of China's railway system," said Kong. "By matching the flexible schedules of older travelers, we can use the trains more efficiently during off-peak times, better meet the travel needs of seniors and help boost both investment and consumption."

### Service upgrades

China's rail network now stretches over 162,000 km—including 48,000 km of high-speed rail, the longest in the world. Over 4.08 billion passenger trips were made via the railway network last year in China, highlighting the potential growth opportunities of tourism trains.

"Tourism trains have been developing for over twenty years in China. In the past, they couldn't operate on a large scale because the existing rail lines didn't have enough capacity. But in recent years with the rapid growth of high-speed rail, the railway network has expanded greatly, mak-

ing it much easier for tourist trains to operate on a larger, market-driven scale," said Zhu Wenzhong, an official with China State Railway Group.

"In recent years, we have seen a rapid development of the operation of tourism trains. The number of such trains reached a record high of 1,860 in 2024, nearly a 50 percent increase from 2019. Most passengers—about 80 percent—are seniors," he said.

Popular routes include Xinjiang, Yunnan and Heilongjiang, with about 1 million tourist trips last year, he noted.

"Seniors are becoming the major clients to ride tourist trains," he added.

To better serve elderly travelers, all trains use air-conditioned coaches and offer tailored services. Menus are designed with senior nutrition in mind, while medical personnel and common medications are also onboard. Larger seats, handrails, emergency call buttons and wheelchair-accessible layouts further ensure passenger safety and comfort.

Train activities include music, reading and chess, while health consultations, blood pressure checks and emergency care are also available.

"We offer healthy meals onboard, managing salt, sugar and oil intake. High-fiber and high-protein options ensure a balanced diet for passengers with conditions such as hypertension and diabetes," said Zhao Huaying, a business manager at China Railway Travel Group's tourism train division. "Dedicated medical support is also provided."

Each tourism train is staffed with medical personnel capable of handling common health emergencies such as cardiac events or injuries. Medical kits and emergency call buttons are installed for added safety, train conductor Zhang Wenquan said.

"My husband and I are traveling far from home, and we feel so reassured with this level of care," said 78-year-old Feng Zhongmei from Nanchang, who traveled to Fujian on a tourist train.

In addition, the "silver-haired" tourism trains also welcome young people and family outings are also one of the major options.

Passengers can gain detailed information about specific tourism trains via the 12306 app, with departure times, prices and itineraries provided.

### Promising future

China's railway operator has made a great effort to expand the service, which is undergoing a three-year development plan, with over 100 premium tourism routes and 160 elderly-friendly trains scheduled to be launched by 2027, with an annual operation of more than 2,500 tourist trains.

"Now that I'm retired, I can finally slow down and see the world," said a 61-year-old passenger surnamed Mu, a former university professor, enjoying his journey in the carriage.



Passengers and workers pose for a photo on a tourism train departing from Nanchang on April 13. LI JIAHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

# IMAGE



Yingzhaji, a college graduate, wears traditional clothing while explaining Eya's architectural conservation efforts to her followers. "We restore old buildings to maintain their original style," she says.

PHOTOS BY ZHONG YUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Livestreaming showcases village's ancient traditions

Global awareness of unique culture, heritage boosted by modern technology

**E**ya Village, located deep in the mountains of the Muli Tibetan autonomous county of Liangshan in the Sichuan-Yunnan border region of China, is known for its unique honeycomb-like architecture. The village, which is primarily inhabited by the Naxi ethnic group, preserves ancient farming practices, Naxi customs, Dongba papermaking and caravan culture.

Once isolated, the village is bridging the gap between tradition and modernity through livestreaming, led by female villagers.

On a misty March morning in 2025, Kemi films her family's traditional routines of their farmland. Her 20,000 followers tune in to witness their daily life.

Nearby, Jixiao broadcasts Dongba priest Yingzhacili writing Dongba script, a fading cultural treasure, on handmade paper. Though initially unfamiliar with the texts, Jixiao vows to learn, hoping to spark wider interest. "Livestreaming is a new way to keep our culture alive," says Yingzhacili.

By the Longda River, 23-year-old

Wazhi showcases water mills grinding grain.

Meanwhile, "internet celebrity" Azierguma's online shop sells local handicrafts and herbs, earning over 200,000 yuan (\$27,351) last year.

With nearly 140 women now sharing Eya Village's stories, their videos capture everything from seasonal farming to historic caravan routes, painting a vibrant picture of rural vitalization.

Through their lenses, ancient traditions in the village are finding a global audience, proving that even the most secluded villages can thrive in the digital age.

CHINA DAILY



Azierguma, one of Eya's top influencers, runs an online shop selling local products.



Inspired by fellow villagers, 22-year-old Jima recently started livestreaming and already has 2,000 followers.



Wazhi broadcasts from a small water mill, showing how villagers grind grain in the traditional way. Her two years of experience have earned her 170,000 fans.



In the Dongba Culture Center, Jixiao films Dongba priest Yingzhacili writing ancient Dongba script. Though still learning, she hopes to inspire interest in this fading art.



Kemi documents her family's daily farming routines, offering a window into Eya's agricultural traditions.

# TREND



Left: A resident forages on the beach of the Yangtze River in Wuhan, Hubei province, on April 4. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: Five Beijingers enjoy a picnic featuring fresh Longstamen onion bulbs they foraged during their hike in Beijing's Huairou district in April 2022. ZHAO YIMENG / CHINA DAILY

## Foraging adds natural flavor to fresh dishes

With arrival of spring, Beijingers head to suburbs to gather wild vegetables

By CHEN LIANG  
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Foraging, the act of sourcing food from natural, unspoiled environments, serves as a captivating means of culinary exploration. While no longer a necessity for sustenance in modern times, foraging is a complete food adventure that involves hiking, farming and procuring unique ingredients, and has evolved into a healthy escape for city dwellers seeking respite from the daily hustle and bustle of urban life.

Traditionally embraced by the country's seniors, foraging for wild vegetables has developed into a trend, its popularity propelled by the reach of social media platforms.

The hashtag "foraging wild vegetables" on popular short video platform Xiaohongshu has garnered 200 million views and sparked over 900,000 discussions.

The vibrant community "We All Love Foraging Wild Vegetables" on Douban, a leading Chinese review platform, is buzzing with activity. Members share their bountiful harvests from various corners of the country, featuring delights such as freshly plucked bamboo shoots from Nanjing, Jiangsu province, the delicate curls of young ferns from Guangdong province, and the tender leaves and blossoms of Chinese violet cress from Beijing.

Because winter is long and gloomy and spring is brief and elusive in Beijing, residents of the capital seize every opportunity and find myriad reasons to venture outdoors and explore the city's nature. Among these pursuits, foraging stands out.

On grassy slopes, along verdant banks of rivers, or in open expanses of parks on the outskirts of Beijing, the sight of foragers equipped with putty knives and plastic bags has become a familiar scene.

### A taste of spring

"We started our foraging season in mid-March," said a woman surnamed Zhang, who works with a State-owned company in Beijing and chose not to tell China Daily her full name.

Along with her husband and their sixth-grade son, she shares a passion for hiking and often explores the hills on the outskirts during weekends. Zhang keeps an eye out for any signs of plant growth while they are on their hikes.

"In earlier spring, I started searching for *jicai* (shepherd's purse) in the wildness," she said. "For people from South China like us, it is one of our favorite wild vegetables and also one of the earliest plants to sprout in Beijing. The thought of *jicai* dumpling soup makes my mouth water."

She said that she and her husband are not real foragers. The primary allure of foraging for them is the opportunity to enjoy seasonal vegetables. "Spring vegetables are fresh and nutritious," Zhang said.

She enjoys serving wild vegetable dishes, which offer a "distinctive taste of spring". The real foragers of the family are her mother and parents-in-law. The three senior members of the family share a hobby — collecting wild vegetables.

On a Saturday in March, the couple drove their parents to "our secret valley" and set the seniors free. The couple foraged for a while and then prepared their lunch at their camp site. "Foraging can be quite demanding, and I tend to tire quickly," Zhang said. "But our parents are truly adept at identifying and collecting wild vegetables. In just one day, they managed to harvest more than 10 kilograms of *jicai*."

After the outing, the family can enjoy *jicai* dumpling soup for a few meals, she said.

In early April, shepherd's purse, a flowering plant in the mustard family that grows all over the world and is one of the most common wildflowers on Earth, started flowering. The wild vegetable's leaves grew too ripe and firm to eat. Zhang turned her attention to Chinese violet cress, which is native to northern and southeastern China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

She had never treated it as a wild vegetable until a friend told her that it is actually a healthy vegetable. The family foraged Chinese violet cress during a weekend last month, and didn't have to drive far from downtown Beijing.

"The flowers are everywhere," Zhang said. "We carefully selected tender buds and leaves from the upper parts of the plants along the Wenyu River bank. Following a rainfall, more new leaves and buds will sprout from the plants."

At home, Zhang briefly blanched the wild vegetable in boiling water before stir-frying it for a minute or two and seasoning it with soy sauce. "The flavor is simply delightful, a lit-



From top: Shen Xiaohong forages at a patch of green in Beijing's Shunyi district. Lin Shu picks tender parts of Chinese violet cress along the Wenyu River. A farmer sells wild vegetables she foraged at the entrance of a scenic area in Beijing's Haidian district.

PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

tle reminiscent of tender pea shoots," she said.

### Enjoying the process

However, foraging offers more than just culinary benefits. While a few foragers in Beijing view it as a simple form of exercise, others simply relish the act of hunting for different edible plants, finding joy in the search itself.

"The entire process is like doing repeated deep squats," said Shen Xiaohong, a retiree living near the

Beijing Capital International Airport. "Your heart rate increases, and if you go in the morning, the sun warms your back. So I consider foraging a proper morning exercise."

She rarely ventures outdoors solely for foraging; instead, she incorporates it as a side activity during her morning walks. And she doesn't consume all of her harvests with her husband; instead, she shares them with friends in her neighborhood.

During weekend visits, her daughter, a young office worker,

accompanies her mother on these walks and sometimes forages alongside Shen.

She can have a break from the constant pressure of work and digital distractions, Shen said. "While foraging, she doesn't have to check her phone or work messages for hours," the mother said.

Wu Feng, a 40-year-old office worker in Beijing, started foraging in the spring of 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of travel restrictions, the outdoor enthusiast spent a lot of his spare time exploring the wilderness in Beijing.

While visiting Baihua Mountain scenic area, he met local women foraging in the forests, "collecting a kind of big tender leaf similar to lettuce".

"They told me it can be eaten with barbecue beef," Wu said.

At Yudushan Mountain in Beijing's Yanqing district, he met a ranger who picked young leaves of a wild pea flower on his regular patrol around the scenic area. "It would add a dish to his lunch," Wu said.

Wu was intrigued by foraging. Lacking any knowledge of edible wild vegetables, however, he didn't try.

Then one day, he visited a valley with his son and Lin Shu, the family's nanny. They stumbled upon a patch of pine forest. Lin, a 55-year-old rural woman who hailed from Hebei province and had migrated to Beijing for work, identified a type of "wild green onion", an edible vegetable she used to forage back in her hometown.

"She gathered a bag of the wild vegetable, stir-fried it with minced meat and mixed the meat sauce with noodles," Wu said. "It was a memorable culinary delight."

Lin is quite knowledgeable about wild vegetables in North China and has taken on the role of teaching her employer about these edible plants.

Wu has learned how to recognize a variety of common wild vegetables in Beijing, knowing that the wild onion is actually Longstamen onion bulb, or Chinese garlic, the leaves the women foraged on Baihua Mountains are a species of chrysanthemum distributed in forests in North China, and the wild pea flower from Yudushan Mountain is two-leaf vetch.

While on outings, he selectively forages, waiting for the right moment to gather wild vegetables. "I am quite picky when it comes to wild vegetables," he said. "I only choose those that grow in clean environments, ensuring they are fresh with the most tender leaves."

He usually forages each species of wild vegetable only once in a season. "The plants grow truly fast in the spring," he explained. "In a week, they become fresh and tender and one or two weeks later, they mature and firm up. So after gathering a portion for a taste, I will leave them alone."

He said that the slow, methodical nature of foraging allows him to immerse himself in nature. "Distinguishing wild vegetables from weeds requires keen observation," Wu said. "There are moments of surprise and reward. It's a process I truly enjoy."

### Safety concern

Along with a rise in the number of foragers, Wu said he found that certain species of wild vegetables have grown scarce in their natural habitat. "Last year I found very little Chinese garlic at the site I foraged in 2021," he said. "I didn't gather any."

He said that he has never foraged in parks or scenic areas such as Yudushan Mountains or Baihua Mountains, nor has he gathered any unfamiliar species. "So many plants look just too similar," Wu said. "It's crucial to be cautious about the safety of foraged plants."

His opinion was echoed by Luo Chunyu, a manager at City Lixin Forest Park in Beijing's Tongzhou district.

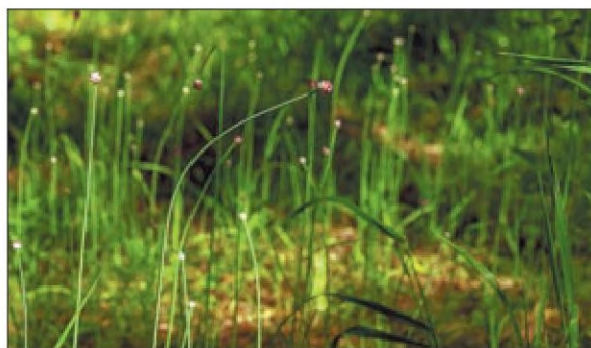
He warns against foraging in parks. "These plants are part of the landscape and help prevent soil erosion. Foraging can damage the greenery and lead to bare patches," he told Beijing Traffic Radio recently. "Also we use pesticides for pest control, which can be harmful if ingested."

To ensure safety, Shi Jun, a botanist from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, advises caution. He told Beijing Traffic Radio that many wild plants carry toxins.

"If you taste something bitter or numbing, it's likely toxic. Stop eating immediately and seek medical attention with a sample of the plant," he said.

Shi also emphasizes the wisdom of our ancestors, who spent millennia identifying safe, nutritious plants to cultivate. "Our ancestors spent 8,000 years domesticating safe, nutritious crops," he said. "Why gamble on wild greens when markets sell guaranteed-safe veggies?"

Wu said that a modern forager should be environmentally sensitive. "Anyway, foraging is not about the food. It's about slowing down, touching soil and knowing the plants living near you."



Three common wild vegetables found in Beijing (from left): Longstamen onion bulb, the Chinese violet cress and dandelion. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

## BIZ LIFE



# New landmarks in Shanghai sweet home for brands

Gateway city's opening-up effort bears fruit as Hongqiao intl hub now a magnet for biz, consumers

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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Shopping at the ZZER second-hand luxury consignment store in Hongqiao has become something of a habit for 27-year-old Zheng Tingting, as she travels frequently from her hometown of Yancheng in Jiangsu province to Shanghai for business reasons.

Providing shoppers with various vintage luxury goods offered at appealing prices, the store is located near an exit of the subway station in the Hongqiao transportation hub, where passengers don't mind taking a few extra steps to check out what products are in stock.

"It only takes a five-minute walk from Exit C of the metro station to get to the store and you can easily spend three or four hours there, often finding things that you have been searching for a long time," said Zheng, who recently bought another handbag from the store.

The store was a bold attempt by ZZER, or *zhi'er* in Chinese, as it used to mainly sell second-hand luxury goods via e-commerce. Then, in December 2022, ZZER opened the brick-and-mortar store near Hongqiao station and attracted more than 100,000 shoppers within the first six months. The company consequently expanded the initial 3,000-square-meter store to nearly 10,000 sq m in August 2023, and has thus far sold over 100,000 goods, from more than 5,000 international brands.

Zhu Tainiqi, ZZER's founder, said he once thought that only online users would come to the offline venue. To his great surprise, however, consumers from all over China, and even those from Europe, the United States and South Korea, have visited the store, and some of them are now frequent customers.

The upgrading work of the underground business area at The Hub Mall in Hongqiao, where ZZER's store is located, was completed in March, which Zhu said should help attract more customers.

The Hub Mall, covering a construction area of 380,000 sq m and comprising shopping areas, office buildings, a performance center and hotels, receives about 100,000 visitors on a daily basis. More than half of them are from neighboring cities such as Suzhou and Nanjing in Jiangsu, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province and Hefei in Anhui province.

International brands making their China debut by launching stores at The Hub Mall have served as a magnet to consumers. About 52 brands opened regional or national first stores in The Hub Mall last year, accounting for 40 percent of the total number of newly opened stores at the mall in 2024. This has helped the mall consolidate its position as Shanghai's first shopping destination for travelers, according to The Hub Mall's management team.

As understood by Liu Min, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, the uptrend of launching first stores can kindle new activities in the city's landmarks. This not only boosts consumption at restaurants and hotels, but also facilitates the concentration of businesses.

The opening of first stores can also



**Top:** An image shows the exterior view of the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai), a major venue for the China International Import Expo located in the Hongqiao International Opening-up Hub. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

**Middle and Above:** Visitors browse imported goods at pavilions of Turkiye (middle) and South Africa (above) at Greenland Global Commodity Trading Hub in Shanghai in November. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**13 percent**

growth in trade value of goods of the Hongqiao International CBD, part of the Hongqiao International Opening-up Hub

nurture new business models. On a broader perspective, the presence of more first stores in the city has exemplified industrial upgrading and innovation at the consumption end. A new balance between supply and demand can be reached by introducing more first stores, Liu said.

The number of arrivals at the Hongqiao transportation hub — comprising terminals of an airport, high-speed railways, bus and metro lines — reached a record 438 million in 2024, equaling 1.2 million travelers daily. The number of travelers served by Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport reached 47.97 million last year, a new high.

A good example of how events can increase foot traffic was seen during the Puff Up Bread Festival held at The Hub Mall in late September 2023, the first of its kind to be held in the eastern part of China. On the first day, about 120,000 visitors participated in the festival and all of the bread prepared by the attending bakeries that day — 70,000 packs — were sold out. About 30 percent of the consumption that day was made by visitors from nearby cities.

Actually, translating the

Tong University, the Hub's function is reflected by the integration of industrial chains and the facilitation of more consumption.

The presence of more leading retailers has helped with the achievements. Chinese sportswear giant Anta held a groundbreaking ceremony for its global retail headquarters in the Hub in December. Home appliances major Midea is expected to see its global innovation center located in the Hub accommodate the first employees in the second quarter of the year.

Various electric vehicle makers such as Li Auto and BYD have set up operations in the CBD. The launch of hotel brands including Cordis and Shangri-La has helped to facilitate the overall consumption environment, local officials have said.

Jin Xiaoming, head of Shanghai's Qingpu district, which is involved in the Hub, said thanks to the participation of industry leaders, Qingpu's overall retail sales surged by 14.9 percent last year. By integrating cultural, tourism, business, sports and agricultural sectors, the large transportation traffic in Hongqiao helped Qingpu's tourism income rise by 7.7 percent in 2024.

More retail space is underway to provide comprehensive shopping experiences. With a total construction area of 260,000 sq m, the In-city Mega shopping mall located in the Hub's Qiantan area is expected to open by the end of the year, accommodating over 350 brands. The new shopping mall is located just opposite the 20,000 sq m membership store Costco, which was also the brand's first on the Chinese mainland.

The China International Import Expo (CIIE), an annual event held at the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) located in the Hub, has also played an important role in introducing more products into the Chinese market.

Greenland Global Commodity Trading Hub, a major "6+365" exhibition and trade platform recognized by the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, has set up 68 national pavilions, offering various imported products, since it went operational in November 2018.

Another similar platform, Hongqiao Import Commodity Exhibition and Trading Center, was put into operation in 2019. Currently, more than 85,000 products provided by over 6,000 brands from 120 countries are available at the center.

The center has now set up 33 branches nationwide, through which goods from all over the world can reach a wider range of consumers in China. Its two branches in Suzhou saw a combined sales revenue exceeding 200 million yuan in 2024.

Companies have debuted new products and opened their first stores via the CIIE, which helped to release more consumption potential in the Chinese market, said Liu Tao, a researcher specializing in market economy at the Development Research Center of the State Council.

By further improving the CIIE's bonded exhibition, international purchase and investment services, more brands will be attracted, which is conducive to the upgrading of China's consumption structure, he said.

## Stronger infra support, favorable policies make metropolis more attractive

By SHI JING in Shanghai

For a very long time, people living in eastern Shanghai's Pudong New Area have been yearning for a railway station. And 34-year-old Zhang Xiaolu is one of them.

"It takes us at least one hour to get to Hongqiao Railway Station by taxi, while going by metro is even longer — two hours. This has been a pain for us when we plan family trips, especially for the neighboring cities," she said.

Hopefully in two years, such a dilemma will no longer be a headache for Zhang. Shanghai East Railway Station, which is 5 kilometers from Shanghai Pudong International Airport, is scheduled to become operational in July 2027. After the completion of the new railway lines being built to link this upcoming station, people living in Pudong will be able to reach Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in 40 minutes.

Therefore, Zhang was more than a little excited to learn that the station building entered the main construction stage in mid-March. She drove there one week later and shared pictures of the construction site on her social network account.

The new railway station is just one link to the extensive transportation network anticipated in the wider area of the Shanghai Eastern Hub International Business Cooperation Zone. With a planned 0.88 square kilometers, radiating to a wider 510 sq km in neighboring cities, the zone will include high-speed train, airline and metro services.

International travelers will also benefit from the easier transportation connections, and, more importantly, the policy breakthroughs, which can be first anticipated from the eastern part of the zone, or the pilot start-up area.

According to the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, overseas business travelers landing at Shanghai Pudong International Airport will be allowed to enter the pilot start-up area by only presenting their international travel documents, any required health documents and a valid invitation from the Zone's administration. No Chinese visa is required under such circumstances. These travelers can stay within the area for 30 days for business activities, with an extension of stay allowed. If they wish to visit other parts of China, they can apply for a visa at the port visa authorities.

"An unprecedented opening-up level can be anticipated at the pilot start-up area. It will facilitate international business exchanges, gather various service resources and promote the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region," said Zhu Min, head of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce.

Upon the closed operation of the pilot start-up area, which is scheduled within the year, multinational companies' regional headquarters and other international institutions can find their short-term business stay here more convenient, said Zhu.

Meanwhile, high-end exhibitions, including foreign-related economic and technological ones, will be held in the pilot start-up area. Universities from home and abroad, research institutes, multinational companies and industry



With Pudong connecting to the rest of the world, Hongqiao plays a pivotal role in revitalizing the internal resources. Close ties between these two places can help achieve the highly efficient dual circulation."

Tang Zilai, professor from College of Architecture and Urban Planning at Tongji University

associations will be encouraged to provide training in the area, with professional training for the operation of large-scale medical equipment and aviation flight simulation serving as major highlights, he added.

As China's first special zone of its kind, Shanghai Eastern Hub International Business Cooperation Zone should "create highly convenient platforms facilitating international business exchanges" upon its completion of construction in 2030, according to its framework plan approved by the State Council in February 2024.

According to officials from the General Administration of Customs, the Zone is not a simple replication of any kind of special zone. On top of the management rules implemented in comprehensive bonded zones, Customs supervision zones and limited areas of ports, the new zone in Pudong has introduced more measures to facilitate the entry and exit of people.

In other words, while opening-up policies used to focus on the flow of goods, the flow of people has been the new focal point of the new zone, they said in a press conference in late February.

During a visit to the new zone in February, Shanghai's Mayor Gong Zheng said that a higher level of opening-up and more pioneering institutional innovations should be promoted here, as it is defined as one of the areas showing the highest level of opening-up in the country.

The Zone should attract more talent, capital, technologies and industries from all over the world to develop the high-end service industry and translate the large transportation traffic into incremental economic drivers, he said.

Discussions about the relationship between Pudong and Hongqiao, the latter which now accommodates one international airport and one railway station, have been on the rise with the advent of the Shanghai East Railway Station. But Tang Zilai, a professor from the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at Tongji University, considers them "the two wings of Shanghai".

"With Pudong connecting to the rest of the world, Hongqiao plays a pivotal role in revitalizing the internal resources. Close ties between these two places can help achieve highly efficient dual circulation," he said.



An aerial view of the construction site of Shanghai East Railway Station. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

## TRAVEL



The Lingshan Island in Qingdao, Shandong province, stands out as an example of harmonious coexistence between ecological conservation and tourism development. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Escape the city, embrace shores and slow living

Qingdao's island havens blend untouched beauty with mindful tourism, offering serene retreats of conservation and exploration

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan  
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As infrastructure continues to improve, making it easier to access inhabited islands, more people are choosing to travel to these serene destinations to escape the urban rush, embrace unspoiled natural beauty, soak in the laid-back atmosphere, and experience a slower pace of life distinct from their daily routines.

Qingdao, a coastal gem in East China's Shandong province, is renowned for its captivating islands, which have emerged as prime destinations for vacationers and those seeking a wellness retreat. Lingshan Island, nestled in the Qingdao West Coast New Area, stands out as an example of harmonious coexistence between ecological conservation and tourism development.

In 2024, the Lingshan Island was designated a national 3A-level tourist attraction, marking it as the city's first island-type tourist spot. This achievement has catapulted it to visitors' must-see lists.

As the tallest island in northern China, the Lingshan Island is approximately 10 kilometers from the mainland. Its slender shape covers an area of around 7.66 square kilometers and houses a population of 1,000 residents. The island's allure lies in its unspoiled natural landscapes and rich biodiversity.

Bao Deqiang, an official of the Qingdao West Coast New Area ecological authority, noted that Lingshan Island maintains an impressive 80 percent forest coverage and serves as a crucial migratory stop for over 300 bird species annually.

"The island's bay area is a biodiversity hotspot, housing more than 260 animal species and 28 plant varieties. Flocks of gulls add a lively touch to the ecological scenery," he said.

For visitors, the Lingshan Island offers an immersive encounter with nature. As the golden hues of dusk wash over the island, visitors find themselves letting go of daily anxieties, immersed in the island's serene beauty.

At the island's historic lighthouse, visitors can take in breathtaking panoramic views of the sea and coastline. For those craving adventure, trails wind along rugged volcanic rocks and ancient melaleuca formations — silent witnesses to the island's volcanic past.

Among the island's many natural wonders, the dramatic Tiger's Mouth

Cliff captivates with its jagged silhouette, resembling a roaring tiger's maw, while the legendary Trial Knife Stone invites curiosity with its unique shape.

The island's bed-and-breakfasts, surrounded by mountains and sea, offer guests a front-row seat to watch the sunrise over the ocean from the comfort of their rooms.

These B&Bs are well-equipped, featuring a public restaurant, outdoor dining areas, various-sized pavilions, a children's play area, and amenities like beachcombing tools and children's toys.

Visitors can unwind under the starry sky, soak in the mountain-sea views, and enjoy the sea breeze complemented by a cold beer and fresh seafood.

"The Lingshan Island is a pristine, untouched island. Tourists come here to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. They enjoy coffee, watch the sunset, and truly relax," said Ren Xiangdong, a local B&B owner.

One of the most striking features of the Lingshan Island is its commitment to ecological conservation. Its carbon dioxide emissions hit negative 1,333 tons in 2021, making it China's first carbon-negative sea island, according to the China Quality Certification Center.

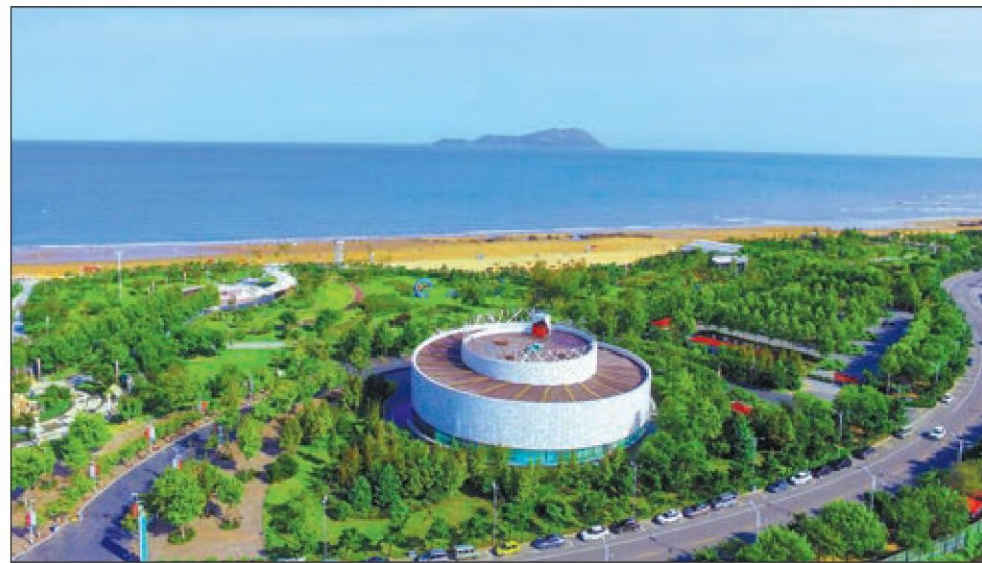
This achievement is the result of years of dedicated efforts. In recent years, the island has undergone a green transformation, embracing low-carbon development through overhauling residents' lifestyles and upgrading industries.

In 2020, the island launched an initiative to switch from coal to electricity for winter heating. "In the past, we used coal-heated stoves for heating, which made the village smell of coal smoke and posed safety hazards. With electric heating, our homes are warmer, cleaner and more comfortable," said Teng Yanfang, a local resident.

In addition to reducing carbon emissions, the local authorities have been focusing on increasing carbon sinks. The Lingshan Island has implemented a carbon inclusion incentive mechanism across the island, developed a WeChat mini-program for carbon inclusion activities, and established a carbon points exchange system.

The area has designed 24 carbon points application scenarios, such as "taking trash off the island".

"Residents and tourists can exchange their points for eco-friendly products like canvas bags and solar-powered



A park at the Lingshan Island. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Tourists have a leisure time at the Lingshan Island. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

chargers at the low-carbon store," said Li Wenhui, deputy director of the Lingshan Island Provincial Nature Reserve Management Committee.

The carbon inclusion incentive mechanism has inspired public participation in carbon reduction actions, she added.

"So far, it has attracted nearly 20,000 residents and tourists, who have exchanged over 5,000 ecological products," said Li.

After the island's ecological restoration project was approved with a planned investment of 515 million yuan (\$70.6 million) in 2022, the area started construction the following year, focusing on increasing vegetation coverage, restoring ecosystems and maintaining biodiversity.

The nature reserve has restricted fuel vehicles, promoted clean energy and protected its over 80 percent forest cover. It has also established a three-tiered protection model, a digital monitoring system, the first island environmental court in Shandong, and an ecological compensation fund to encourage public participation.

Additionally, carbon-sink fisheries and marine ranches have been developed.

"The zone will continue to pursue green, low-carbon, and high-quality development, creating a model for ecological protection and sustainable development," said Sun Bin, director of the Lingshan Island Provincial Nature Reserve Development and Protection Center.

These efforts have not only preserved the island's natural beauty but also attracted a growing number of tourists who appreciate the delicate balance between development and conservation.

"In recent years, the ecological environment on the island has been getting better and better. Many tourists are attracted by the 'Carbon-Negative Sea Island' brand," said Wang Huajuan, a resident of Lingshan Island and also a homestay owner.

"We have also been constantly upgrading our homestay from hardware to service, hoping to provide tourists with a better experience," she said.

Qingdao's island charm extends beyond the Lingshan Island. The city is home to over 120 islands, each with unique characteristics.

On the Zhaitang Island, visitors can immerse themselves in the traditional fishing lifestyle. They can stay in cozy B&Bs, explore the island's legends, which tell stories from 2,000 years ago, watch sunsets by the rocky shores, or join in traditional fishing activities.

The Zhucha Island, a 300-year-old fishing village off Qingdao's coast, offers unique volcanic landscapes and pristine beaches. The island boasts numerous scenic spots, including the rare and well-protected crater landform and karst flow in Qingdao, as well as naturally formed fishing platforms, turtle hatching sites, and Yuanyang Cave.

The Zhucha Island also provides luxury resorts with high-end amenities like sky pools, spas, and fine dining restaurants, promising an even more luxurious experience.

"There's no commercial hustle and bustle here, just pure island charm," said a tourist surnamed Zhang from Jinan.

"We arrived by boat early in the morning. My husband went fishing, while I took the kids to watch the sunset and collect shells by the rocks. This kind of slow-paced travel experience is really hard to find," said Zhang.

"The rise of island tourism in Qingdao is a testament to the successful integration of ecological conservation and sustainable development," said Sun, director of the Lingshan Island Provincial Nature Reserve Development and Protection Center.

Sun Qi contributed to the story

# SPORTS



The 2025 "Grannies World Cup", held last month in South Africa, welcomed teams from as far afield as the United States, France and Togo. AGENCIES



Players of the New England Breakers from the United States lift the "Grannies World Cup" in celebration after beating France's Les Zarnies Foot on penalties in the final on April 5 in Tzaneen, South Africa. AFP

## SOCCER

# Goal-den oldies are on top of the world

Sore knees, selfies and a sexagenarian goal machine: The recent Grannies International Football Tournament had it all

Mbele Nonhlanhla laced up her silver soccer boots as her coach shouted encouragement to players with creaky knees, stiff backs and labored breathing in a dressing room in South Africa's far north. At 63, wearing number 10 and sporting brown-dyed hair, the grandmother of seven was far from your typical soccer player when she stepped onto the field for her first international tournament. "I feel like a superstar," Nonhlanhla grinned, revealing a missing tooth. "They call me the goal machine."

Her team, Vuka Soweto, hails from the renowned Johannesburg township of the same name. It had joined more than a dozen others from across Africa and beyond to compete at the Grannies International Football Tournament in South Africa's northern province of Limpopo in April. The four-day "Grannies World Cup" was held in a stadium with sweeping mountain views. The 30-minute games were played in two halves at a slow, but purposeful pace, between teams from as far afield as the United States, France and Togo. "It is all about active ageing,

Whether we win or lose, it is all about coming here and staying fit," said 62-year-old South African Devika Ramesar, a mother of two and grandmother of five. Until the week of the tournament, the Liverpool fan had never stepped onto a soccer pitch. Kenyan striker Edna Cheruiyot only had two months to learn the "long list" of the game's laws before her debut on April 4, when she scored her only goal. She took selfies to remember her first ever trip abroad and to send to her grandchildren.

### Unfair pressure

"I feel nimble. This is the lightest I have been since my first child in 1987," Cheruiyot said, adjusting the blue headwrap covering her graying hair. At 52, she is a youngster within her team, the oldest player of which — Elizabeth Talaa — is 87. The idea for the tournament arose in 2007 as a way to improve the health of local women, said founder Rebecca Ntsanwisi, 57, who is fondly called Mama Beka. It came out of her sense of personal challenge following a cancer diagnosis that once bound her to a wheelchair. "The older women need to come together and enjoy. We are neglected," she told reporters outside the home where she lives with her ageing parents.

She hopes to host the next tournament in Kenya in 2027. In South Africa alone, almost 40 percent of children live in households headed by their grandparents, according to government statistics. This is mainly attributed to poverty, cultural traditions and urban migration. But grandmothers should not be saddled with the responsibility of raising their grandchildren, Ntsanwisi said. "This is our time to enjoy and relax," she said. "I will die knowing that I did something."

### Rolling back the years

Chris Matson, 67, took the advice to heart, and traveled from the US determined to "enjoy every second of the tournament." "I did not play when I was little, so to do it now is wonderful," said the bubbly goalkeeper for the winning American New England Breakers team, who also took the golden glove. "I have something precious to take home," she told reporters, cradling her first ever trophy. The team doctors, however, earned their keep. The aches and pains of the elderly players needed constant checking, South African team medic Diana Mawila said. Some members of her Vakhegula team had to be moni-

tored for high blood pressure before every game. Vakhegula Vakhegula means "grandmothers grandmothers" in the local Tsonga language, and is a nod to the national men's team, Bafana Bafana or "boys boys". But, the team disagreed with the medic's assessment and burst into heartfelt laughter. "We are fit!" captain Thelma Ngobeni said, balancing a packet of maize flour that players received after the games on her head. "It is not about winning or losing. All that matters is that we showed up, had fun and did our best," she said.

Nonhlanhla's goal was more ambitious. A dream of making it big in soccer was within reach, she said. "It's never too late to achieve your childhood dreams. "I don't see anything stopping me," she added, walking out of the tunnel to face France. In a scene mirroring professional soccer, the vuvuzela-blowing crowd erupted into wild applause as the teams entered the stadium hand-in-hand with young mascots, and, again after the national anthems. "I'm halfway there, right?" Nonhlanhla smiled.

AFP



Supporters dance in the stands as they watch the final match of the Grannies International Football Tournament. AFP



A spectator watches on in anticipation during a match at the "Grannies World Cup" in Tzaneen, South Africa. AP

## SPORTS

MOTOR SPORTS

# Chinese driver's late stage rally

At age 49, Lu Jin achieves lifelong dream with maiden race appearance



China's Lu Jin poses with his Honda Fit before the start of the KNRC Safari Rally Kenya, the third stop of the 2025 FIA World Rally Championship, on March 20. XINHUA

Lu Jin had been waiting for this moment for 32 years. As his gray Honda Fit, sporting No 111, roared across the finish line of the KNRC Safari Rally Kenya, the third stop of the 2025 FIA World Rally Championship, in late March, Lu's childhood dream of competing in an international rally had finally come true.

For his maiden race on a World Rally Championship course, Lu, the sole Chinese entrant at the rally, shed 9kg to meet the event's 72kg weight limit, subsisting on three small bowls of noodle soup a day, and fighting off hunger with water and occasional bites of chocolate. The rigors of preparing his car also helped him reach the required weight in just 25 days.

Across the week that included the four grueling race days, Lu got barely 24 hours of sleep in total. However, for all this effort and sacrifice, neither the clock, nor the scoreboard mattered to him — the only thing that did was simply crossing the finish line.

Lu's passion was sparked in the late autumn of 1993, when he watched his first-ever motor sports event — the Hong Kong-Beijing Rally — in Shijiazhuang, capital of North China's Hebei province.

"I was blown away, as if seeing a UFO touch down," recalled Lu, now aged 49.

The sight of the cars, piloted by

legends like Colin McRae and Lu Ningjun, thundering toward Shijiazhuang's city center with the blinding beams of their headlights piercing through the dusk, remains etched in his memory.

The sport became an obsession ever since. Upon coming of age, Lu acquired his driver's license to aid the family business, learned the art of car repair from his father, and secretly honed his skills in motor racing.

Without formal training, he pored over videotapes of Jimmy McRae — father of 1995 World Rally Champion Colin McRae — coaching Lu Ningjun, one of China's most battle-tested rally drivers.

Unable to afford a turbocharged four-wheel drive, Lu Jin perfected his drifting in a small pickup truck. With no qualification to compete officially, he drew tracks at a driving school, and used rented cars to race with friends.

"If you ask me whether I had any other dreams back then, the answer is no," said Lu, whose life still revolves around cars to this day.

A driving instructor, a custom car shop owner, a car review columnist, a drifter on contract, and a motor sports event organizer — Lu carries a wealth of experience in the automotive realm, along with provincial and national accolades in drifting and short-course racing.

But, a spot in the international



In 28 days, with the help of four Kenyan mechanics, Lu converted a stock vehicle into an FIA-compliant rally car. XINHUA

paddock had long eluded him. His bid for the 2024 Safari Kenya Rally fell through at the last minute due to a delayed parts shipment. This year presented a fresh opportunity thanks to an easing of the entry rules.

From designing parts and liaising with overseas factories, to managing shipping, assembly and certification, Lu handled every detail personally. In 28 days, he converted a stock two-wheel drive Honda Fit into an FIA-compliant rally car, with the help of four local mechanics.

His residence, located over 200 kilometers northwest of Kenya's capital Nairobi, doubled as his garage.

Days of refitting the car, to him, felt like "being a monk in a temple", something he says only those who truly know automobiles would understand.

"Motor racing pushes you to constantly set new goals," said Lu. "I've

been through it all — rollovers, crashes — everything. I built this car, bolt-by-bolt, with my own hands. I trust it, and I believe in myself to control it," he smiled.

"I'm not aiming to be the fastest, and I don't want to wreck the car. Just to finish the race — that's the biggest success I crave."

With Lu competing in the local 2WD category, the 2025 race spanned 1,397.91km, including 21 special sections over 383.1km, and traversed terrains of mud, rock, grassland, fesh fesh (sand that has been worn down from its typical granular consistency, into dust like particles that closely resembles talcum powder) and water crossings. Held during Kenya's rainy season, the unpredictable weather added further challenges.

"It was very difficult to judge the grip level, and what's coming next.

The rain came so heavy, and it changed the conditions so quickly," Toyota's Welsh driver Elyn Evans told reporters after winning the main WRC rally.

Punctures, loss of control, spins and technical issues plagued the elites. Among the lower-ranked underdogs, debutant Lu was not spared from such thorny challenges, either. A wiring issue caused a gearbox malfunction, forcing him to lose the second day to repairs.

Fortunately, the rally's rulebook allows previously retired contenders to rejoin the race.

When Lu returned on the third day, the 26.97km "Sleeping Warrior" stage dealt another heavy blow.

Half-meter-deep mud pits, dense water holes and jagged rocks formed a series of damaging obstacles.

Lu and his pit crew labored until 2 am to ensure the car could race again the next day.

Six hours later, the final leg kicked off. Fortunately, Lu hit his peak on the section he had most longed to conquer — Hell's Gate.

Hell's Gate National Park earns its name from a narrow break in the cliffs. Within it lies a 10.53km stretch of track that serves as the last stage before the finish line, marked by steep slopes, blind corners and deep sand.

"Once you make it safely down the mountain, a long straight awaits,"

Lu said. "Then, it's all about going full throttle."

Flying at speeds up to 150km/h, with the engine's thunderous growl filling his ears, Lu said he just focused on the revs, with nothing else crossing his mind.

As he cut the engine at the finish line, 32 years of passion, a month of relentless preparation, and four sleepless days coalesced into a simple yet meaningful result — a finisher's trophy.

In a sport where Finland's sensation Kalle Rovanpera became the youngest world champion at just 22, Lu felt no regret over his modest, late-blooming breakthrough, but only a quiet pride in staying true to his own pace.

"Motor racing requires time and experience. When everything matures, that's when you can try, and the results are reliable. Rallying is not for fun, but a real battle that requires careful planning," he said.

Will he come back again? "Of course! Why not?" Lu responded. "I already have a plan. From May, we'll begin rebuilding the car. By next year, I'll make sure it can keep pace with the four-wheel drive ones."

XINHUA



Lu's childhood dream of competing in an international rally finally comes true after finishing the KNRC Safari Rally Kenya alongside his local co-pilot, Michael Kirui. The rally spans 1,397.91 kilometers through the African nation, traversing different terrains like mud, rock, grassland, fine sand and water crossings in unpredictable weather. XINHUA

